

Storytelling Organization Complexity

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Note: these are ideas to help people doing working, such as in E:CO (Emergence: Complexity & Organization Journal) on complexity and story. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) book *Thousand Plateaus* provides 8 theroms of deterritorialization that can be adapted to storytelling organization

Storytelling Organization is the interweave of storylines that spiral into complexity (Boje, 1991, 1995). A spiral is a circling with an outer circle and an inner circle, and circling in between. Storytelling complexity is not the same as cacophony; the telling is not without rules for the spiral that Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 113-114) specified. In terms of storytelling these can be stated as followed:

- ◆ Rule 1: In storytelling, do not overstep the outermost circle of the spiral.
- ◆ Rule 2: In storytelling to not approach the innermost circle of the spiral.
- ◆ Rule 3: Stories deterritorialize at different speeds; stories detach from place, village, group, individual or organization.
- ◆ Rule 4: Stories have different thresholds, maintaining relations between the circles of the unfolding spiral, before suddenly there is transformation.
- ◆ Rule 5: Deception is fundamental to the storytelling spiral.

One does not just speak or tell story in words or in written text; one lives story, living out what I will call “storylines.” Organizations are traversed by storylines of individuals, groups and the environment of other organization and societal storylines.

Global capitalism has been called a process of deterritorialization of what were once local or regional territorial markets. The deterritorialization is a process of normalization, a move to Empire's “transspatiotemporal unity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 459). Marx also saw capitalism as the “advent of a single unqualified and global Subjectivity” (per Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 452). Global capitalism is also a way of storying a myth of global progress; one that is resisted by storying globalization as a road to the bottom. States are territorially nationalistic, and increasing the multinational corporations make earth the object of higher unity of so-called “free market forces.”

Globalization is not considered the free play of territories; “Capitalism, on the other hand, is not at all territorial, even in the beginning” (p. 454).

In this essay I want to extend storytelling to include the deterritorialization forces of globalization, and look, as well at processes of territorialization, and reterritorialization.

Territorialization, Reterritorialization and Deterritorialization Deleuze and Guattari (1987) develop a semiology around index, icon, and symbol we can apply to storytelling; they tie index, icon and symbol specifically to territorialization, reterritorialization, or deterritorialization. Some stories are territorial; they *index* places, people, and events locally. Other stories are reterritorial; they become *icons*. And there are stories that are deterritorial; they become *symbols*. Each story is a regime of signs with content and expression. There can be a rigidity of expression as well as content or much more supple forms of storytelling. What is shocking is that the two assemblages (content & expression) in storytelling are not principally linguistic (p. 111). Stories viewed as a regime of signs is a semiotic systemicity of forms of content and forms of expression, a double assemblage.

“Reterritorialization must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality; it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized serves a a new territoriality for another, which has lots its territoriality as well” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 174).

Each story is a signifying regime, a spiral of circulating signs, relating to other signs. There is a complex story fabric of circulating stories, and dead stories waiting to return from the grave. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987: 113) spiral theory clearly builds upon Nietzsche with more than “a hint of the eternal return.”

Storytelling is all about storylines. And there are many types of storylines. Some storylines follow the narratology tradition and become rigid, even petrified regimes of signs. Other storylines are suppler, clearly not in the majority, yet are sometimes able to crack the rigidity of other storylines, and become deterritorializing. A story is a regime of signs with rigid or supple storyline; each refers to other storylines, to other signs.

No story is ever over and done; story ending is a performance illusion; a story is always ready to leap from the grave and regain its place in the signifying fabric on

contemporary storytelling. A dead story reborn can deterritorialize the story fabric or reterritorialize along rigid storytelling lines.

This brings us to the complexity of storylines. A pre-story begins to signify before anyone knows what it is signifying. I call pre-stories that are potentially transformative of social systems, antenarratives. A quite supple antenarrative is both prestory and a bet that some rigid storyline is going to change. What if the boss looks at you in a strange expression? What if “they are whispering behind your back when you arrived at the office” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 112)? What do these antenarrative expressions mean? Their content is certainly abstracted, quite tersely performed, yet with limitless significance. Antenarration glides beneath the chain of possible signifiers and “specific forms of contents dissolve in” them (p. 112).

For studies of organizational complexity, storytelling is highly relevant; indeed storytelling can be the spur of emergence, complexity and transformation. Some highly supple story lines can become the monster force of change, bringing about changes in the most dominant and rigid storylines of the organization. “Rigification” (p. 205) of a story line is always taking place; while simultaneously there can be lines of story flight. The lines of story flight are unpredictable: some revert to the dominate storyline; others demolish the rigid storyline; and there are many that tumble into the black hole of oblivion.

Each individual lives their storylines; uniting with a work storyline. There are clandestine storylines that can erupt from secrecy to destroy a rigid storyline. Some clandestine supple storylines are monster forces of change; others remain dormant for ever so long. Some dirty little secrets can be an embarrassing “megaspectacle” upheaval to a rigid storyline (Best & Kellner, 2001).

To summarize the options: Storylines can take flight and transform a rigid storyline, or take flight and fall into step with a rigid storyline, or just bounce off the wall and fall into the black hole. Of course, even falling into the abyss, there can be a revival, a resurrection of a dead storylines in ways that deconstruct contemporary storylines. Storylines are not easy to sort out, because they do not follow mechanistic or organic system theory rules. We have to move to a more languaged sense of what organization systemicity is all about.

Contextualism I think this process of how supple antenarrative storylines potentially and continually disrupt rigid storylines, or become assimilated into some rigidly reassembled storyline is quite relevant to Pepper's (1945) "contextualism" theory. The root metaphor of contextualism is what I am calling the 'storyline.' The storylines are more accurately bundles, aggregates of storylines, and rigid storylines can decompose, unravel, and re-ravel with disaggregates of emergent, more supple antenarrative storylines. This stranding and re-stranding, moving around blocks is essentially what Pepper's contextualism theory shares in common with Deleuze and Guattari's territorialization, reterritorialization, deterritorialization theory.

Sorting out the complexity of storylines in storytelling organizations is not easy. It can happen that in the complex story fabric of a storytelling organization, one's supple antenarrative storylines is someone else's rigidly plotted narrative prison. And "there is no assurance that two lines of [story] flight will prove compatible, compossible" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 205). Even two supple or two rigid storylines may have problems interweaving. A storyline of one group's line of flight from a rigid storyline may work to the benefit of the storyline of another group, or block it, composing a rigidity that is an imprisonment. In storytelling complexity, it is as if two supple storylines are caught between two passage points, and any butterfly effect can trip them one way or the other; that is, become transformative, or merge and then revert to or dissolve into storyline rigidity.

I am interested in supple storylines that operate by "relative deterritorialization: and can permit as well reterritorializations that "cause reversions to the rigid" storylines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 205). It is possible to begin story inquiry with a supple storyline. But, the rigid storylines are so much more accessible; one can also start with them. Perhaps initially the supple storylines are not apparent; they may be awaiting the opportune moment, the hour when they can deterritorialize a rigid storyline, cracking it, deconstructing it, even exploding its façade, its secrecy revealed.

I think there are story wars and certainly story battles. Why else do Wal-Mart, Nike, and McDonald's have war rooms. Unionize at a local Wal-Mart and the war room dispatches its SWAT team of storytellers; let the athletic department context the Nike war room about a demonstration against the Swoosh, and a team of storytellers is dispatched;

let a community object to yet another McDonald's or to the claims about fast food being so healthy, and their war room dispatches Ronald to lead employees, parents, and children in some fitness training exercises. When a multinational corporation is storied in ways it does not appreciate, a war room forms; once formed they are never dismantled.

Next, we discuss the relative importance of storyline types.

There are supple and rigid storylines. Both are important. Yet, is it the supple storylines that crisscross, interweave, and crosscut the more rigid storylines, and have the potential for transformation. The rigid storylines, as Barbara Czarniawska (2004) says, become petrified. This process of story petrification, I think is less important than supple storylines of antenarration, the bet a pre-story can be transformative (Boje, 2001: 1); yet, both are important and form the dynamics of complexity, of territorialization, reterritorialization, and deterritorialization.

Storylines operate in context, are more than sensemaking devices (sensemaking currency, I called them), and are more than in-place metering devices measuring complexity (stories researchers collect in interview protocols). No, storytelling is complexity. Storytelling is a systemicity of the storytelling fabric, theorized as the spiral of the eternal return. And storytelling is ontological, reality-changing, reality-transforming, and reality-deterritorializing. Each individual lives their storylines, and fits or misfits their storylines to storylines of some organization with their work, shop, or otherwise participate. We do not follow our storylines, we create a storyline, we join with a storyline, and we are overtaken and assimilated by a storyline. The storyline is running; the supple ones are nomadic, finding new paths, picking up and jettisoning context. The organization is escaping in lines of storied flight, inventing new storylines that are expected to deterritorialize the dominant storylines. The line of flight is not an epistemology; it is not imaginary; it is highly practical, an active resistance.

There is infiltration of supple storylines into the micropolitics of rigid storylines. This is not the duality of rigid and supple storylines; they de-bundle, they are aggregates of storylines, and the strands can intermingle, become emergence composite storylines. There is nothing more practical than a supple storyline. There is this battle of storylines; the rigid story lineament is run through by supple storylines.

A storytelling inquiry into the storytelling organization is a tracing of the rigidified and the supple storylines, their battles, their intermingling. Storylines occupy territories, begin in place and time, begin with people who own rights to their telling, to their expression, and even their content. With reterritorialization, story ownership rights become less clear. And with deterritorialization, the root ownership by some territory are crosscut or completely cut. Storylines can occupy points and positions in some closed system of territory, then escape and diversify, deviate, and intermingle in more open system reterritorializations, and then there is the globalization of the deterritorialization, and the counter-moves of local resistance to globalization. The story fabric of a complex organization is crisscrossed by storylines, some inscribed in territories, others part of reterritorialization, and some doing relative deterritorialization. Indeed a complex storytelling organization, one that is polyphonic and polylogical, with battles of rigid and supple storylines is quite the rhizome.

Rigid storylines can transform by acts of degeneracy, by becoming lines set a drift, deviating from the rigidity of their content and expressivity; becoming some different regime of signs. Organizations mimic the storylines of other organizations, especially the rigid storylines; that can become an act of reterritorialization. Some organizations have specific indexes in inventing territorial storylines.

Organizations are traversed by storylines, more accurately by “bundles of lines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 202). We story analysts may be more interested in certain kinds of storylines than in others. Perhaps a storyline that is considered more strategic. Yet, we notice storylines that emerge (sprout up) suddenly or slowly, as if by chance.

Each storyline is a bundle of storylines that de-weave, reweave, or unweave. The storylines in a multinational corporation are already complex. The customary storylines run into counter-storylines. The storylines imitating other organization’s storylines run into invented storylines taking flight from mimetics. These storylines crisscross, interweave, and compose the complexity of the story fabric. The storylines compose our identity, and the façade of the organization is no less than a crisscross of supple and rigid storylines. The following eight rhizomatic theroms can be related to storytelling organizations and to their complexity processes.

The Rhizome Theroms

1. “One never deterritorializes alone; there are always at least two terms” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 175). In storytelling, the two terms are rigid and supple storying. And each of the two terms (rigid & supple) reterritorializes on the other. There is a set of complementary reterritorializations between rigid and supple storylines in complex organizations, and at the macro level of globalization and its resistance.

2. “The fasted of the two elements or movements of deterritorialization is not necessarily the most intense or most deterritorialized” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 174). Supple and rigid storylines deterritorialize at different speeds. The intensity of deterritorialization of a rigid storyline must not be confused with speed of the supple storylines. The fasted spreading supple storyline many lack the intensity of the slowest.

3. “It can even be concluded from this that the *least* deterritorialized reterritorializes on the *most* deterritorialized” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 174). An antenarrative running from the bottom blue collar level of an organization to the top executive level reterritorializes by word of mouth, but also by gestures of the entire working body, even how tools are used. The antenarrating from the top, is more *facialized* in story work that is in the speeches and documents (and notices) produced by the executives suite. What is facialized to the public, and to regulators is more multi-stylistic composites of various styles of storytelling: architectural, décor, skaz (everyday speech appropriated by corporate advertising), etc. that Bakhtin (1981) describes as stylistic dialogism.

4. Storytelling is an abstract machine (not a physical machine, but machinic). “The abstract machine is therefore effectuated not only in the faces that produce it but also to varying degrees in the body parts, clothes, and objects that it facializes following an order of reasons (rather than an organization of resemblances) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 175). This is the idea that the spectacle of storytelling occurs not just in what is spoken or written, but in the costuming of the body, as well as the gestures of the corporeal body. A good deal of storytelling is about face-saving by the corporation, and this face-saving is a widespread form of organizational storytelling that is barely studied.

5. “Deterritorialization is always double, because it implies the coexistence of a major variable and a minor variable in simultaneous becoming (the two terms of a becoming do not exchange places, there is no identification between them, they are instead drawn into an asymmetrical block in which both change to the same extent, and which constitutes their zone of proximity) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 306). The major dominant storylines coexist with more marginalized storylines (e.g. Boje, 1995). Disney for example, while taking some postmodern turns, does not exchange places with its more modern storytelling processes; in their proximity, but the modern and the postmodern change to some extent, but do not trade places; instead there is hybridity.

6. “In non-symmetrical double deterritorialization it is possible to assign a deterritorializing force and a deterritorialized force, even if the same force switches from one value to the other depending on the ‘moment’ or aspect considered; furthermore, it is always the least deterritorialized element that always triggers the deterritorialization of the most deterritorializing element, which then reacts back upon it in full force” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 307). The deterritorializing force of Wal-Mart’s storylines, for example, that it is patriotic to shop at Wal-Mart, that Sam’s Club serves small business survival, etc. The sexism in hiring and promotion practices of Wal-Mart management is triggering a deterritorialization of its most deterritorializing element, the board room will soon be admitting a woman; we can assume that the feminization of management will react back upon Wal-Mart in full force.

7. “The deterritorializing element has the relative role of expression, and the deterritorialized element the relative role of content (as evident in the arts); but not only does the content have nothing to do with an external subject or object, since it forms an asymmetrical block with the expression, but the deterritorialization carries the expression and the content to a proximity where the distinction between them ceases to be relevant, or where the deterritorialization creates their indiscernibility (example: the sound diagonal as the musical form of expression, and becoming-woman, -chile, -animal as the contents proper to music, as refrains). (p. 307). For example, McDonald’s creates its own language, such as the McJob, which initially meant jobs for the handicapped at

McDonald's. However over time the word changed its content, and dictionaries define McJob as low-paid, repetitive work without much chance of upward mobility.

McDonald's, in part, selected Charlie Bell to replace Jim Cantelupo, who dropped dead, some say from eating the fatty food products. Bell had actually risen from McJob fry clerk to store manager, to regional executive and to CEO; ironically, he too departed the job to deal with medical conditions associated in the public mind with a fatty fast food diet. In sum, content has nothing to do with the term, McJob, and keeps getting displaced.

8. "One assemblage does not have the same forces or even speeds of deterritorialization as another; in each instance, the indices and coefficients must be calculated according to the block of becoming under consideration, and in relation to the mutations of an abstract machine (for example, there is a certain slowness, a certain viscosity, of painting in relation to music; but one cannot draw a symbolic boundary between the human being and animal. One can only calculate and compare powers of deterritorialization) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 307). To use Wal-Mart as an example, there is a certain slowness to becoming unionized. At the hint of union organizing, as we said, Wal-Mart's war room will dispatch the story people. In the recent hurricane, these story people were dispatched to New Orleans, to put a happy face on Wal-Mart, to story how quickly Wal-Mart (as opposed to the State) responds to disaster, to getting products moving. One can calculate and compare the story powers of deterritorialization of Wal-Mart and the president's rate of response to the disaster.

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