

Excerpted from: Introduction to Narrative Methods

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Every once in a while, someone interrupts the flow of experience and asks you to give an ACCOUNT of WHAT IS GOING ON? Your mind races, experiences come to mind, a plot thickens, and you begin to speak, and a story is told. You are living experience before narrating it, before someone requires you provide a story with the coherence of beginning, middle, or ending. And then it is out there, but you know it is only ONE WAY to tell the story. Others will have their ways. You never know the WHOLE story (there is none). The Story never finishes, it keeps unraveling, keeps coming undone, and keeps getting RESTORIED. Story is an "ante" state of affairs existing previously to narrative; it is in advance of narrative. It answers the question "what is going on here?" And the FIRST STORY is told. Ante is also a bet, something to do with gambling and speculation. You BET you can TELL A STORY THE FIRST TIME. "There are implicit rules in storytelling (who can tell it, to whom, and where)" (Boje, 1991a: 124). You can not just CONSTRUCT a story and tell it to just anyone. Antenarrative is about the [TAMARA](#) of storytelling (Boje, 1995). In *Tamara*, Los Angeles' longest-running play, a dozen characters unfold their stories before a walking, sometimes running, audience. They are trying to find out "who done it?" They want to find out the story that has yet to be figured out.

Traditionally story has been viewed as less than narrative. Narrative requires plot, as well as coherence. To narrative theory, story is folksy, without emplotment, a simple telling of chronology. I propose "antenarrative." Antenarrative is the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted, and pre-narrative speculation, a bet. To traditional narrative methods antenarrative is an improper storytelling, a wager that a proper narrative can be constituted. Narrative tries to stand as elite, to be above story. The crisis of narrative method in modernity is what to do with non-linear, almost living storytelling that is fragmented, polyphonic (many voiced) and collectively produced. My response is to stretch traditional approach by including what I call "antenarrative" methods. The focus is on the analysis of stories that are too unconstructed and fragmented to be analyzed in traditional approaches. The postmodern and chaotic soup of storytelling is somewhat difficult to analyze. Stories in organization are self-deconstructing, flowing, emerging, and networking not at all static.

The fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, and unplotted, and improper storytelling, is what I mean by the term "*antenarrative*."

To translate story into narrative is to impose counterfeit coherence and order on otherwise fragmented and multi-layered experiences of desire. As Weick (1995: 128) puts it "When people punctuate their own living into stories, they impose a formal coherence on what is otherwise a flowing soup." White (1981:251) also observes that narrative theory is a finalization that "transforms events into historical facts by demonstrating their ability to function as elements of completed stories." Antenarrative is never final; they are improper [stories].

Stories are "antenarrative," when told without the proper plot sequence and mediated coherence preferred in narrative theory. These are stories that are too unconstructed and too fragmented to be captured by retrospective sense making. "The important point" says Weick (1995: 27) "is that retrospective sensemaking is an activity in which many possible meanings may need to be synthesized, because many different projects [stories] are under way at the time reflection takes place" (additions, Boje). There is an implicit bet that such retrospective form may emerge, but it does not always take place. More sensemaking keeps displacing closure.

The Kernaghan Antenarrative, starring Kathie Lee Gifford, is an example of antenarrative that happened in April 1996, when labor activist Charles Kernaghan, studying sweatshop situations of U.S. corporations in Central American, since 1990, decided to craft a story that would embarrass, not only brand labels but also media stars, whose clothing was made in sweatshops. In May 1996 media personality Kathie Lee Gifford was the protagonist of the story, crying on national TV, claiming character defamation, as Kernaghan's antenarrative circulated through the storyteller's network. The unseen heroes, of course, are the young women making her Wal-Mart clothing line in sweatshops in Honduras and a few blocks away from the TV studio televising the Regis and Kathie Lee talk show. As Kernaghan (1996) describes his first encounter with Kathie Lee:

We took the Honduran child worker to meet with Kathie Lee at Cardinal O'Connor's residency in New York city on June 5. It was the first time I met her. She came with attorneys and public relations people.

Kathie Lee asked Wendy, the child from Honduras, what it was like to work in the factory. Wendy, a 15-year old, was making Kathie Lee pants. She said - "We get there at 8:00 in the morning. We work until 9:00 at night. It is very dangerous when we come out. There is a poor neighborhood. We get in groups and we run home". She described what it was like to live with eleven people in one room and how she earned 31 cents an hour. She described being searched, about how she would have to raise her hand to use the bathroom how she was called a shithead and a whore for not working fast enough, the threats, the lack of water, working under armed guards, the place being as hot as an oven.

As the story began to circulate in the tabloids, Entertainment Tonight, and a score of daily newspapers, a public outcry arose to do something about the women earning slave wages in sweatshops, making movie and sports personalities and American transnational corporations rich. On August 2, 1996, President Clinton invites a group of industry, labor, and human rights leaders to the White House to form The Apparel Industry Partnership. After a split between the union and corporate AIP partners, the union and NGOs withdraw, and the AIP becomes reborn as the Fair Labor Association (FLA) on April 14, 1997. See Kernaghan, Charles (1996) CCR interview (transcript) with Kernaghan
<http://www.citinv.it/associazioni/CNMS/archivio/strategie/kernaghan2.html>

Most antenarratives do not catch on. They are like those bets at the Casino. But a few do, and become the stuff of not only urban legend by organizational and social transformation.

for more information on David Boje's theories:

http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/papers/narrative_methods_intro.htm