

*Chapter 2*

## ARTISAN STORYTELLING AND MANAGEMENT 'DISPOSITIFS'

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### ABSTRACT

The chapter is concerned with the conditions of storytelling in organizations. More specifically, we explore the conditions for the creation of subjectivity in an era where the development of management rationalities (dispositifs) has reached new heights. The question posed is how this affects the possibilities for the creation of the 'I'. We develop the term artisan storytelling as a means to resist potential enslaving patterns in contemporary society. The argument is to create a counter-dispositif, which allows for the configuration of a more meaningful 'I' in organizations. Artisan storytelling entails an image of work as craft and expression, and moreover that plurality becomes the condition for political action. We draw out three implications in relation to management: (1) to focus on the creation of multi-voiced practices, (2) that these practices should be informed by an ethics of responsibility, and (3) that organizations must work with storytelling diagnostics in order to continuously move towards the new.

**Keywords:** Artisan storytelling, dispositif, multi-voiced practices, ethics of responsibility, storytelling diagnostics

'Cause I see my people trying to drown the sun; in weekends of whiskey sours;  
Cause how many times can you wake up in this comic book; and plant flowers?'

(Rodriquez, *Cause*, 1971)

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## INTRODUCTION

In a small postscript, Gilles Deleuze describes a development in the Western Capitalist world from 'disciplinary societies' towards 'societies of control' (1992b, p. 4). He remarks that there is no need to ask, which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for within each of them liberating and enslaving patterns confront one another. He concludes that there '... is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons' (1992b, p. 4). In this chapter, we present the concept of artisan storytelling as a counter-movement towards dominant management rationalities, which we refer to using the Foucauldian term *dispositif*.

Artisan storytelling contains the image of the work of craftsmen, not laborers. Artisan storytelling suspends *dispositif* by inviting us to delve deeper into the entangled differential and multi-voiced moment through a direct passionate engagement and involvement with the material world. It implies an awareness of self in relation to human and non-human others and thus implies a critical position concerning the power relations embedded in everyday life.

The article is structured in three different steps. First, we sketch the field in which the theme becomes relevant in the first place. This involves a reflection on dominant contemporary regimes of power in organizations and their effects on storytelling. The section takes as its starting point the proclamation of the end of storytelling (Benjamin, 1999), which is then discussed in relation to the work of Giorgio Agamben (2005, 2009) and Gilles Deleuze (1992a, 1992b).

Second, the notion of artisan storytelling is developed from the work of Benjamin, and is reconfigured using insights from Barad's (2007) agential realism. We argue that ethics is embedded in the unique characteristic of storytelling. When applied to organizations, it is a tribute to another meaningful life in organizations and implies a specific relation of responsibility for the world's becoming.

Third, we draw the implications of artisan storytelling in relation to management. We focus on three recommendations: (1) multi-voiced practices, (2) ethics of responsibility and (3) storytelling diagnostics.

## WHAT IS A DISPOSITIF? AND WHAT ARE ITS EFFECTS?

In 1936, Walter Benjamin proclaimed the end of storytelling. Standing at the dawn of World War II, he reflects back on the First World War as an example of modernity's destructive forces of one of the most natural instincts of human kind; the ability to tell stories. The essay on the storyteller, Nikolai Leskov, is at once a beautiful tribute to the art of storytelling and a dark critical essay on modernity's brutal destruction of it. Benjamin states as a starting point of the essay that "... the art of storytelling is coming to an end" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 83) and that "[s]omething that was inalienable to us...the ability to exchange experiences" is taken away from us (p. 83). In addition, he argues that experience has fallen in value (p. 83).

Benjamin (1999, p. 107) thus puts the critical spotlight on the workings of modern forces of production and the storyteller as "...the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself". We see his essay as a critical reflection on how the politicization and technologization of the human body destroys storytelling, understood as a 'true' realization of

human life itself. For Benjamin, the effects of this politicization and technologization were nowhere more evident than in the experiences from World War I, where men returned from the battlefield poorer in communicable experience; never had "...experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 84).

For him, the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were the ages where experience, subjectivity, intimacy, community, and responsibility were subjected to and replaced by the obedience and disciplining of the human body to larger systems, doctrines, and ideologies, such as the nation, the state, and the modern organization. The First World War is mentioned as an extreme example in which the human body was reduced to nothing more than a mere political instrument. Little did Benjamin know that this extreme example was soon to be overshadowed by another extreme example: World War II, the Holocaust, and mass genocide. These are some of the most extreme examples of an almost complete dehumanization, in the sense that people were forced to play roles in which they could no longer recognize themselves and their own substance (e.g., Levinas, 1991, p. 21).

Seven decades later, Giorgio Agamben speaks of processes of desubjectification accomplished through other instruments of power; namely, those of modern organizations and the modern state. The point is not that the state and organizations are replicas of Nazism in terms of what they produce. Rather, the instruments of power of the modern organization share certain similarities with the instruments of power employed by totalitarian states in the tendency to attempt to erase 'the human face', or to objectify human beings and reduce them to instruments of power and economic production in the name of another discourse; namely, capitalism. They also have important similarities with regards to the overwhelming interest in the management and control of human life. Agamben describes these processes of desubjectification through the workings of the Foucauldian term "dispositif". Below we will delve into this term and ask what it is.

To answer the question, we have to clear away some of the misunderstandings associated with the term. Some of them stem from a problem of language. When the term *dispositif* is translated into English, the term *apparatus* is often used. Agamben's Italian term '*dispositivo*' becomes translated into *apparatus* so the title of the English translation of his essay becomes 'What is an Apparatus?' The translation of Gilles Deleuze's essay on the topic is more appropriately entitled 'What is a Dispositif?' However the translator makes a note arguing that there is no straightforward way of translating *dispositif* into English, so throughout the text he uses the notion '*apparatus*' or '*social apparatus*' with the notion of *dispositif* in brackets.

We prefer to stick with the term *dispositif*. In a lecture named *What is a Dispositif?* (2005), Agamben declares that he is not satisfied with the English translation. He prefers something closer. He has therefore proposed what he admits to be a rather monstrous translation of *dispositif* into '*dispository*'; an astrological term that embodies all the forces and influences that the planet exerts on the individuals restraining them in all possible ways. Even if it is probably meant as a sarcastic comment, it does capture how Agamben thinks of a *dispositif*; a term that embodies the forces and influences that restrain individuals. *Dispositif* in other words denotes the forces that control and restrain the living beings (Agamben, 2005, 2009).

Dispositif is thus employed as an act of governance and management. It denotes a set of management rationalities that is employed with the intention of governing individuals – to conduct conduct (Dean, 2008). Agamben takes the term *dispositif* from Michel Foucault, and he summarizes in three points Foucault’s understanding of what a *dispositif* is.

- It is a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, linguistic and non-linguistic, under the same heading: discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, and so on. The apparatus (*dispositif*) itself is the network that is established between these elements.
- The apparatus (*dispositif*) always has a concrete strategic function and is always located in a power relation.
- As such, it appears at the intersection of power relations and the relations of knowledge (2009, pp. 2-3, brackets added).

Agamben performs a brief genealogy of the term in Foucault’s work. For example, Agamben shows, through the work of Hyppolite, how Hegel used the associated term ‘positivity’ as a ‘proper’ place between the opposition of ‘natural religion’ and ‘positive religion’. The former is concerned with the relation of human reason with the divine, positive, or historical religion and encompasses the set of beliefs, rules, and rites that are externally imposed on individuals. Positive religion implies feelings impressed through constraints on souls; “these are actions that are the effect of command and the result of obedience and are accomplished without direct interests” (Agamben, 2009, pp. 4-5).

According to Agamben, Foucault borrows the term ‘positivity’ - as the name young Hegel gives to the historical element - to his own problem that he sees as a decisive problem: “the relation between individuals as living beings and the historical element”. The historical element (positivity) is here “...the set of institutions, of processes of subjectification, and of rules in which power relations become concrete” (Agamben, 2009, p. 6). Thus, Foucault puts the spotlight on the concrete modes where the positivities (*dispositifs*) “...act within the relations, mechanism, and “plays” of power” (p. 6).

*Dispositif* thus refers to a set of practices and mechanisms that has strategic intent in terms of the disciplining of the human body and implies a process of subjectification. It is “... a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient – in a way that purports to be useful – the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings (Agamben, 2009, p. 12). Agamben uses the term to denote practically anything that has this capacity in some way. Not only does *dispositif* refer to certain institutional arrangements such as prisons, madhouses, schools, factories, professions, and so forth, but also everyday technologies and techniques like the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, navigation, computers, mobile phones, etc. (Agamben, 2009, p. 14).

The critical question of power raised here is thus how power operates as management rationalities guiding and constraining individuals towards proper conduct. A *dispositif* is a management technology exercised on living beings with the aim of conducting conduct. As such it denotes a particular *mode* of power that partakes in a relational and entangled power game and struggles between different forces going on in everyday life. Nevertheless, it does not describe actual states of affairs in everyday life; rather it describes the discourses,

techniques, procedures, institutions, etc. – and the complex network between these elements – that seek to prescribe how things should be done, not how they are.

Turner (2014, see next chapter in this volume) notes, that Foucault was concerned with writing a material history of rationalities. Therefore, we should be careful not to confuse *dispositif* with power. It is not the same. *Dispositif* is an entangled multilinear ensemble of lines of visibility, lines of enunciation, lines of force, and lines of subjectification (Deleuze, 1992a, pp. 159-160). They form the major aspects Foucault was concerned with: *knowledge* (lines of visibility and lines of enunciation), *power* (lines of force), and *subjectivity* (lines of subjectification).

Power analysis plays a specific role here in being directed towards disentangling these lines thereby writing this history of differentials. Foucault's 'definition' of power is therefore much more akin to a play of differences exercised within each and every situation. Foucault notes that power must be understood as

'...the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies' (Foucault, 1993, pp. 333-334)

He continues by stating that '...it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable' and that 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (Foucault, 1993, p. 334). The analytics of power he proposes is thus guided towards understanding and disentangling the play of differentials, which reveal, through his historical analysis, that a *dispositif* as multi-linear ensemble is not a given and fixed thing but is constantly changing, drifting and on the move (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 159), and that they are the result of specific power relations at work in specific historical, material, and geographical circumstances.

This means that *dispositifs* aim to centralize, govern, and control conduct but the play of different forces inherent in specific circumstances always twist, resist, support, conform, modify, or change with every utterance and act. While *dispositif* is the name one attributes to particular rationalities aimed towards governing conduct, the actual conduct itself is a result of the play of different forces. The *dispositif* is an entangled multilinear ensemble. So is the effect of *dispositif* on everyday life. There is no linear relationship here. We thus prefer to stick with the term *dispositif* to denote particular sets of rationalities (conduct of conduct) within an entangled play of different forces inherent in any situation (actual conduct).

What does the concept of *dispositif* have to do with the end of storytelling? For Agamben, the subject is the result of the relation or actually the relentless fight between living beings and *dispositifs* (Agamben, 2009, p. 14). He argues that the modern capitalist society is characterized by an almost boundless growth of *dispositifs*. The phase we live in is actually characterized by "... a massive accumulation and proliferation of *dispositifs*" (Agamben, 2009, p. 15) that carry with them repetitive processes of desubjectification. *Dispositifs* do not,

in themselves, imply desubjectification. However, what is particularly problematic about the dispositif of our times is however that they do not (re)install a subject.

Consequently, we are witnessing the aimless motion of a machine that is incessantly leading us to a new kind of catastrophe (Agamben, 2009, pp. 23-24). These processes of desubjectification, according to Agamben, are distinctive characteristics of the modern dispositifs because earlier dispositifs acted as a technology of the self where the reinstallation of this self was the goal. Instead, processes of subjectification and desubjectification seem to have become reciprocally indifferent and the truth of the subject is no longer at stake.

As such, modern dispositifs act through massive processes of desubjectification where dispositifs do not lead to the composition of new subjects except in larval or spectral forms (Agamben, 2009, pp. 21-22). What we witness are increasingly inert social bodies wandering around without any real purpose and identity. Politics has become a meaningless activity in the sense that it used to presume the existence of subjects and real identities like the workers' movement, the bourgeoisie, the democratic citizen, and associated terms like human rights, environmental issues, ethics, and so forth.

Instead, politics has given away to the complete triumph of dispositifs, which he calls '...a pure activity of government that aims at nothing else than its own replication' (Agamben, 2009, p. 22). In other words, Agamben paints an image where government, and in our case management, does not serve real purposes anymore, and where it has lost connection to what is meaningful in life. Government is running around in circles chasing its own tale; the same with management. Agamben argues that in our time, subjectivity is wavering and losing its consistency and what is pushed to the extreme is the masquerade that has always accompanied personal identity. He concludes that we are among the most docile and cowardly that have ever existed in human history (Agamben, 2009, p. 22).

In sum, Agamben's reading of Foucault is considerably critical and dark. And he has undoubtedly very important points to make. Just think about the tea-party movement in the US, the marked indifferences between the real content of left and right wing policy, and the reality show of politics with spin-doctors, polls, viewer rankings, and debates that are so utterly indifferent. As such, it is a reminder of how bad it can go and has gone in certain areas. Nevertheless, we should also be careful not just to accept the conclusion with the inevitable effect that our analyses will turn into a desubjectifying gaze on people.

Furthermore, Agamben does not do complete justice to Foucault's work. In particular, he is biased towards focusing on the constraints imposed by dispositifs on societies and people and tends to overlook the enabling and positive aspects of Foucault's thinking in terms of power (e.g., Foucault, 1979). True, dispositifs like schools, factories, professions, and everyday technologies and techniques like the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, navigation, computers, and mobile phones have had their constraining effects on human beings. On the other hand, it is also obvious that they have contributed to making many things possible (see also next section).

So, the value of Agamben's work is to open up our eyes for potentially undesirable effects of today's advanced technological world. Danish philosopher Knud E. Løgstrup has said (1997, p. 18) that we cannot imagine how miserable life was in the pre-industrial world. He argued that as long as technology served against poverty the use of technology did not give rise to ethical considerations. Today, however, the situation is obviously different. Potential undesirable effects that go beyond our imagination, often accompany the use of

technologies for achieving more and more economic growth and luxury in today's prosperous Western world.

Løgstrup characterizes work in a capitalist society as a 'closed circuit', which has no purpose outside of itself. The purpose of the system is only to sustain itself. We live to work in the capitalist society. There must, however, be a higher purpose to work, otherwise these closed circuits/rationalities will risk using up the limited material resources of our planet and in the process it will destroy valuable natural sites. Such destruction is irreversible as far as we know.

These potential undesirable effects include the destruction of the ozone layer, forests and fauna, biological systems, and so forth (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 18-20). Further, while people are better off economically, psychologically they have deteriorated (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 22). Economic growth has been accompanied by a steady increase in the number of people with psychological conditions like stress, depression, burnout, and so forth. In opposition to the closed circuit of work (and others), Løgstrup insists on the primacy of "open areas", such as nature, and also education. They are open in the sense that it is from these areas that we can create meaning. In other words, we can re-subjectify ourselves through insisting on meaning from these areas.

The problems concerning destruction of meaning and of the world are some of the problems that Agamben's work signposts. They are linked to the massive accumulation and explosion of dispositifs of our times, which creates specific and critical conditions for the configuration of subjectivity. This explosion of dispositifs is in our view linked to newer forms of domination, which Deleuze (1992b) labels 'societies of control'. In the next section, we will describe its characteristics in more depth and then return to the question of subjectivity.

## **SOCIETIES OF CONTROL**

For Deleuze, societies of control are replacing disciplinary power. The difference is that the dispositifs that characterize newer forms of dominations do not work in or define closed and confined systems but are much more network-like and fluid. They do not work through discipline but through self-governance and control. They do not materialize in well-defined functions and classes. Instead, these newer forms of domination are never here, there or anywhere (at the same time as they are everywhere) and maybe, at best, they should be described as the tacit interiorization and socialization into a global market economy and its exchange rates as highly unstable control mechanisms for assessing and evaluating worth in terms of who you are and what you should strive for.

Accordingly, the new network of dispositifs constituting societies of control are potentially more terrifying than older forms. While disciplinary power operated through creating environments and spaces of enclosure, societies of control are operating through ultra-rapid forms of free-floating control. The disciplinary society ordered things and had, as one of its main purposes, to regulate, to concentrate, order in time, and so forth, and it had the effects of molding individuals into relatively confined time-spaces like functions and classes (Deleuze, 1992b, pp. 3-4).

In societies of control, the picture is much more blurred. Here the factory has been replaced by the corporation, which works in a fundamentally different way. The corporation presents the "...brashest rivalry as a motivational force that opposes individuals against each other. Salaries are given according to merit and just as the corporation replaces the factory, perpetual training replaces the school and continuous control replaces the examination" (Deleuze, 1992b, pp. 4-5). In fact, 'corporation' is introduced at all levels in the school system (p. 7); from kindergarten to university.

In disciplinary societies, we were always starting again in confined and stable systems like the school, the barracks, or the factory. In societies of control, we are never finished with anything. According to Deleuze it is perhaps 'money' that expresses the distinction between the two societies best "...since discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold in as numerical standard, while control relates to ever floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies" (1992b, p. 5).

So, the phrase 'societies of control' expresses a control based on the continuous assessment of people in relation to value, which in turn relates to a free-floating market. Value is highly variable and fluctuates according to exchange rates, expectations, and stock markets. It describes a society where our traditional stable institutions like the family, the private or state owned factory, and the nation-state have given way to global capitalism and global markets that transgress and undermine national and regional boundaries and policies.

The corporation, it is argued, is not interested in production. This is relegated to the third world. Instead, it buys the finished products or assembled parts, which it wants to market and sell as part of a service. In societies of control, our traditional institutions like the family, the school, the army, or the factory are no longer distinct spaces that converge towards a private or state owner. They are coded figures that are deformable and transformable of a corporation of stockholders (Deleuze, 1992b, p. 6).

In Deleuze's opinion, societies of control are not characterized by specific archetypes of individuals belonging to a particular class or function. What we have is 'dividuality' instead of 'individuality', where the former refers to a multiplicity of subject formations. The end result is terrifying:

'The conquests of the market are made by grabbing control and no longer by disciplinary training, by fixing the exchange rate much more than by lowering costs, by transformation of the product more than by specialization of production. Corruption thereby gains a new power. Marketing has become the center of the "soul" of the corporation. We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world. The operation of markets is now the instrument of social control and forms of impudent breed of our masters. Control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also discontinuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous. Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt' (Deleuze, 1992b, p. 6).

The most terrifying element of this system of domination is not an identifiable 'monster' that oppress us, but rather the ever accelerating pace and speed by which the conditions of living can be changed from one moment to the next and the accompanying threat of not being able to catch up. Our worth is measured and assessed throughout our lives. We are at a burning platform all the time. It is akin to a society diagnosed with ADHD. We can never sit still since we are never finished with anything. We are always working because the boundary

separating work and private life has been dissolved. We always have to look for new projects, which will host and add value to our competencies.

The protection that more stable structures and institutions provided is increasingly dissolved and we are exposed to serious threats, problems, and challenges all the time. The university is in the hands of corporations; the schools are in the hands of corporations. Market value is what counts. As researchers, we are talking about rankings, BFI-points, citation index, articles in pipelines, and the market value of research. The general model of domination, capitalism, has been accepted as 'the' model. In this way, money has interfered in the manner by which we live our lives and how we organize our relations to others to a hitherto unprecedented degree.

This relates directly to Agamben's critical observations, since a veritable explosion in the number of management dispositifs has accompanied the development towards societies of control. Maybe we can say that we live in the age of management to the degree that there is almost an obsession with management. Management matters to such a degree that it almost seems to be the solution to any problem in society today. In any case, management has reached new heights and more and more areas are coming under the remit of and being subjected to management.

With the increasing interest in management come different discourses on management, management techniques, procedures as well as institutions ensuring the development of the discipline both within organizations (HRM-departments) and outside organizations (universities, business schools etc.). In organizations, people are measured more often and to a far greater extent than previously; their performance, their personality, their changeability, employability, ability to collaborate, to communicate, etc. Even in traditional public service organizations like schools, kindergartens, hospitals, the police, military, and universities, strategic management has also taken over.

As employees and citizens, we are 'surrounded' by a complex network of dispositifs to a higher degree than ever before. Furthermore, more and more aspects are being considered part of management. Today, management is not only about the ability to do strategic decision making. Focus is also on communication, coaching, change management, strategic human resource development, accounting, and performance management, etc. Managers are also subjected to life-long learning where they constantly have to improve their ability to manage.

As such, dispositifs captures a phenomenon of extreme importance in contemporary organizations. The effects of dispositifs are widespread and pervasive in terms of what is considered true and just. They are also of significant importance in relation to the configuration of identity and subjectivity. We are living in an age characterized by a massive accumulation of dispositifs, governing, guiding, and developing us in the right direction and keeping us on our toes.

Nonetheless, even if this were the case, it would be a mistake to conclude that we have witnessed the end of storytelling and that our lives carry with them repetitive processes of desubjectification. As noted by Arendt (1958) there is always room for action. It is necessary to keep in mind that dispositifs do not describe life as it emerges, but prescribe life, as some think it should be lived. The foregoing descriptions of newer forms of domination are attempts to capture dominant relations of power that have an important effect on human life but they do not, and perhaps cannot, define life itself. There is always resistance.

In fact, power and resistance go hand in hand. Indeed, you can see Foucault's work from many different perspectives; as a material history of rationalities, as noted above, but also as a

continuous history of resistances and irrationalities. When Foucault's historical methods are applied in organization studies (e.g., Jørgensen, 2007, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2002) the subsequent histories are not unequivocal histories of domination but rather power games between people working together/against each other, how they make alliances and gain support for their ideas or on the contrary how they resist – in innumerable overt or covert ways – decisions made by others, the technologies used, and so forth.

First and foremost, these histories cannot be written in advance. There is often no logic from what happens from one moment to the next. These are histories of the unfolding of organizational life. They are histories of domination but they are also the histories of (hi)storytellers capable of taking action that lead to something new. Deleuze (1992a) is very clear on this aspect of Foucault's writings in his essay on *dispositif*.

As noted, Deleuze describes a *dispositif* as an entangled multilinear ensemble composed of lines (Deleuze, 1992, p. 159): lines of visibility and lines of enunciation, which make one see and speak (p. 160), lines of force, which come about in any relationship between one point and another and passes through every area in the *dispositif* although the lines of force are invisible and unsayable (p. 160), and finally lines of subjectification. He is, however, particularly interested in lines of subjectification, which he believes was one of Foucault's major discoveries.

He argues that this dimension is by no means a ready-made pre-existing determination but that it has to be made (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 161) and, further, that it is a line of escape.

It is a line of escape. It escapes preceding lines and escapes *from* itself. The self is neither knowledge nor power. It is a process of individuation which bears on a groups and on people, and is subtracted from the power relations which are established as constituting forms of knowledge... (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 161)

Deleuze emphasizes this point several times in his essay. For instance, he notes that we can wonder if these lines of subjectification do not form the extreme boundaries of *dispositifs* and form the sketch of the movement of one *dispositif* into another. In this way, lines of subjectification form lines of fracture that are the entry point into the creation of something new. Deleuze notes that the study of variations in the process of subjectification seems to be one of the fundamental tasks, which Foucault left to those who would follow him (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 162).

Deleuze thus talks about a philosophy of *dispositifs* as a change in orientation towards the new – the variable creativity, which arises out of *dispositifs*. As such, there is big paradox in Foucault's work: on one hand, he seeks to describe contemporary dominant and oppressive power relations; on the other hand, his project is altogether positive in favor of freedom. In this way, Foucault's power analytics is one of the weapons that can be applied against a potential new monster.

Furthermore, it follows from this discussion that there is no need to accept the proclaimed end of storytelling. Rather, the new conditions in society create new conditions – some enabling and some enslaving – for the creation of subjectivity. To focus on the creation of subjectivity within these *dispositifs* is, for us, to focus upon storytelling. It means that, for us, storytelling is one of the weapons that can be applied against the monster because it implies a certain ethics that resist and breaks with the potential desubjectifying threats inherent in dominant contemporary *dispositifs*.

We are of-the-world becomings (see next section) and we do not and cannot stand outside dispositifs just as we do not stand and cannot stand outside the world. We live our lives within dispositifs and have to act within them (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 164). The multilinear ensemble constituting a dispositif is an intra-active material-discursive field (see next section) out of which subjectivities are made in their intra-play with the concrete situations at hand. Subjectivity, as an intra-active accomplishment, is simultaneously an object and instrument of power and a resisting force that leads towards the new. It is potentially an effective weapon because government and management require the production of specific subjects (Agamben, 2009, p. 19) in order to work.

The concept we will present as a principle behind a storytelling dispositif is the concept of artisan storytelling. We will present this concept in the next section. After that, we draw out three implications in relation to management. The three principles are *multivoiced practices*, *ethics of responsibility* and *storytelling diagnostics*.

## ARTISAN STORYTELLING

*Artisan* refers to a person that is skilled at making things by hand. It is used for a worker who practices a trade or handicraft and/or as one that produces something in limited quantities, often using traditional methods (Free Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary). We use it for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a particular image of work not as simple labor but as craft and expression. The image of the artisan is the skilled and careful producer of the world of artificial things, where work is a natural prolongation of her/himself.

Secondly, it provides an image of what we might call a 'whole subject', where words, soul, eye, and hand are brought into connection and together determine a practice (see below). This leads to a third reason, which is the image that storytelling is not a job for the voice alone but is also conditioned and integrated with the specific material conditions of work. Storytelling is closely linked with artisanship in describing how we transpose our experiences, thoughts, feelings, passions, and emotions into a shape fit for public experience (Arendt, 1958, p. 50) in word and action.

Storytelling is closely linked to action and to politics. In fact, it describes the condition of all political life as plurality. Plurality is the condition of political life because humans are all the same in the sense that nobody is ever the same as anyone else that has lived, is alive, or will live (Arendt, 1958, p. 8). This way of conceptualizing the conditions of politics is, however, very different from the general political thinking in management, which assumes that we are the same faceless objects no matter where we come from, what we have done, and what we are interested in.

Together artisan and storytelling describes a particular politics of work, where we actually focus on work as the driving principle of management; that is, as the specific *spacetime* configuration (see later) from where management must emerge as a support for what people want to do in their radical difference. We will elaborate on the term in more detail below.

Artisan storytelling is derived from Walter Benjamin's famous essay *The Storyteller* (Benjamin, 1999). For Benjamin, storytelling is deeply rooted in local traditions and craftsmanship. The storyteller is oriented towards practical interests; in addition, the source of

storytelling is experience that is passed on from mouth to mouth (Benjamin, 1999, p. 86). Nikolai Leskov– the storyteller that is the subject of Benjamin’s essay – was a writer most deeply rooted in the people. To be rooted in the people is a general characteristic of any great storyteller (Benjamin, 1999, p. 100). With these words, we have begun to elaborate what artisan storytelling is and what the implications of storytelling may be.

Benjamin introduces an important distinction to the literature on storytelling, which, although critical and answerable, works with the presumptions that we are all storytellers and that the stories the we tell are the means by which we create meaning in our lives. The point is that most writers concerned with storytelling in the management and organizational literature work with a more ontological-descriptive account of what stories are and from there develop ethical implications. Benjamin’s storyteller, however, is ethical. We get back to the question of ethics below.

As an example of an ontological-descriptive approach, Jørgensen and Boje (2010, p. 253) note that being is conceptualized as dialogical, plural, and emergent in storytelling. Stories are thus presented as emergent collective constructions developed in and through everyday talk and actions. Storytelling goes on all the time. They are not prepared performances but are natural spontaneous performances in the here-and-now moment of becoming.

Jørgensen and Boje use the term *living story* to capture these spontaneous performances configured through multiple ambiguous story fragments. They develop this notion from Derrida’s notion of story, which, according to him, has no borderlines. Story is at once larger and smaller than itself, entangled in a play with other stories, becoming part of the other, making the other part of itself, etc. (Derrida, 2004, p. 82). We will elaborate a little more on this entangled storytelling by drawing out some implications from Karen Barad’s agential realist account of practices.

Barad (2007, p. 136) argues that practices are not primarily discursive practices but rather emerge from iterative material-discursive intra-activity. The point in relation to storytelling is that stories emerge from the dynamic space-time matter configuration in the here-and-now moment of becoming (Jørgensen & Strand, 2012; Strand, 2012). Barad uses the term space-time matter to denote the intimate mutually constituent relationships of space, time, and matter, where the temporal and discursive aspect does not have the usual upper hand (Jørgensen & Strand, 2014).

The term intra-action denotes that phenomena never exist in themselves, but must always be seen in relation to each other. Therefore, entanglement also means something else than simply intertwined with one another. It hints towards phenomena that lack an independent, self-contained existence (Barad, 2007, p. ix). Intra-action denotes the dynamic mutual constituent forces of meaning/matter and time/space. One implications of this is that stories do not come about from individual storytellers (constituent meaning giving subject) or through interacting storytellers.

Rather, storytellers, storytelling, and the stories they tell are ‘of-the-world’ and they are shaped through iterative intra-activity of complex multi-voiced mutual constituent agencies. Barad’s work thus changes our attention from individual storytellers or interacting storytellers to entangled storytelling where stories are multimodal configurations of the world that emerge from diffractive interferences of material, natural, linguistic, or bodily forces that combine in a mutual constituent relationship whereby the world and its boundaries are enacted (see also Jørgensen & Strand in this volume).

Although, this account of story is ontological-descriptive, its implications fit with Benjamin's account of storytelling as deeply embedded and inseparable from situational characteristics (i.e., spatial, temporal, and material conditions). He remarks (1999, pp. 105-106) that storytelling is "...by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part, which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work. In storytelling, words, soul, eye, and hand are brought into connection with each other and together they determine a practice.

Genuine storytelling is thus about how we are in the world, what we do in this world, and how we relate to other people, nature, animals, material artifacts, and so on. In short, it focuses on how we are engaged in the world's material-discursive practices. Artisan storytelling implies a particular engagement in this world that is contrary to the 'docile' and disinterested engagement imposed by disciplinary power (e.g., Agamben, 1998, p. 3). It is in this way that Benjamin's storyteller is ethical.

He adds several characteristics to what 'real' or 'genuine' storytelling is and, as such, his notion of storytelling diverges from a merely descriptive account. From Benjamin's and Agamben's work we can distinguish *genuine storytelling* from *spectral storytelling*. Whereas the former is deeply rooted in and, indeed, is a natural part of the people's local traditions and practices, the latter is a masquerade and a disguise that conceals a desubjectified self.

Spectral storytelling is something that we have to make up in order to sustain a sense of meaningful life in organizations. It emerges from and it is controlled by the forces of economic production and the control of identities. Spectral storytelling is controlled by dispositifs, and it misses the point concerning the kind of holistic, integrated, and independent life of genuine storytelling, which is a natural, meaningful occurrence, and part of living and doing.

Benjamin locates this kind of genuine storytelling in the milieu of the craftsmen (1999, p. 100), rural, maritime, or urban, and describes it as an artisan form of communication. Artisan storytelling is important for sharing experiences and constitutes a genuine practice where we do not have to convey the pure essence of a thing or phenomenon (Benjamin, 1999, p. 91); a characteristic of the modern scientific form of communication, which Benjamin calls "information". This is important because the modern dispositifs rely on the exchange of information understood as objective, cold, impersonal, non-emotional, and de-contextual statements and facts.

In order for organizations to make decisions, they request reports, analyses, and conclusions, not stories. This is very different from the artisan forms of communications where people do not 'exchange' information but 'share' experiences. The key point is exactly on 'sharing' because it turns our attention to Derrida's notion of stories as entangled and thus being in mutual constituent relationships with each other. Storytelling thrives in milieu of community, mutuality, empathy, and respect. "A man [sic] listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller: even a man reading one shares this companionship" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 99).

In other words, this relationship is compassionate and devoid of capital. What is shared is something useful in the form of moral or practical advice – in other instances a proverb or maxim. A storyteller is someone, "...who has counsel for his readers" (1999, p. 86) that is woven into the fabric of everyday life and where the storyteller can reach back to a whole lifetime of experiences (1999, p. 107). Storytelling is thus the means of the oppressed against authoritarian and totalitarian rational language. The resistance lies in the characteristics of the

relationship between people in a genuine storytelling environment and stories' multi-voiced, relational, dynamic, fluid, and non-linear character of here-and-now performances.

In sum, storytelling is a theory of new beginnings by emphasizing the openness of the moment, the plurality of potential interpretations, and the possibility of many different futures. It constitutes a radical theory of changes and development where the focus is twisted from organizations, systems, strategies, and structures to people as potentially creative storytellers with a capacity for action. The appreciation of this difference is at the heart of storytelling. It implies a focus on the development of people in their specific historical, geographical, and material conditions, and their intra-relationalities, prior to focusing on systems, structures, and organizations.

We will now draw out three implications in relation to management.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT**

The three implications we will draw out from artisan storytelling are, as noted, (1) multi-voiced practices, (2) ethics of responsibility, and (3) storytelling diagnostics. We will elaborate on each of in turn, even if they are entangled and must be seen as being mutually constitutive of each other.

### **Multi-Voiced Practices**

The first principle is multi-voiced practices. We advocate looking at some of the storytelling communities that Benjamin identified. These communities should grow out of an intense interest in the actual doings and workings of people as craft and expression. We do not want to be romantic by using the image of the artisan here. For us artisan is an image that captures work broadly speaking, no matter if it is the job of a banker, an engineer, a blue-collar worker, a social worker, a pedagogue, a teacher, an educator, a researcher, a medic, a nurse, a doctor, or some other form of work. Artisan storytelling is a matter of skills, motivation, and responsibility.

The idea of storytelling communities shares some ideas with the communities-of-practice approach and the ideas of situated learning that has been promoted in the last decades by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Note too, that the concept of situated learning emerged out of anthropological studies of craftsmen and the environment in which such skills were acquired. One of Wenger's basic arguments was that communities-of-practice had to emerge from below in order to work properly as a place for professional development.

However, our approach is different in the sense of being more explicit with regards to the attempt to set up other qualitative criteria to the characteristics of a community; concerning, for instance, the artisan approach to work and to plurality as a guiding principle. Wenger's approach is too uncritical for our taste. The model of communities-of-practice, for example, can be used to describe virtually any community: a gang, a case processors, and so forth. This means that Wenger's approach loses its power and become weaker. Furthermore, it seems that the communities-of-practice approach contains a tacit acceptance of, and subjection to,

the dominating power relations in society. This means that there is an unfortunate convergence of modern dispositifs with community thinking.

The principle of multi-voiced practices means, firstly, that management has to unfold in connection with the practicalities of work in its differential material-discursive becoming and, secondly, that people should be engaged and involved in configuring its becoming (and its becoming other-wise—the new—as Deleuze (1992a) calls it). It is clear that it requires other kinds of skills that go beyond the traditional skills a craftsman has; among others because the world of today is characterized by speed of change, as noted previously.

It requires a focus on work in its differential material-discursive becoming, which implies a focus on all the relations that conditions work. In other words, multi-voiced practices requires relational competencies like abilities to collaborate and to communicate because one's work has to be de- and re-configured as it enters into new networks, combinations, and frameworks with others peoples' skills and competencies. It also requires skills in participation in setting up a community with its rules of engagement, shared purposes, and the spatial and material conditions that co-enables the emergence of a community as a storytelling community.

The role of management is thus to configure techniques and methods that enable the kind of participative community that a storytelling community is and to establish the support functions that make high quality work possible.

## **Ethics of Responsibility**

Multi-voiced practices are closely connected to the second principle, which notes that practices should be informed by an ethics of responsibility. It captures a particular position in relation to work and to human and non-human others. In the Western political tradition, human being is traditionally understood as an object, average, and inherently similar to other people. Instead, artisan storytelling calls for understanding human being as unique storytellers that are radically different from me.

This requires the reinstallation of the subject as one who is answerable to community life and the broader globalized networks that are connected to it. The precondition for this is to reestablish a caring and loving approach to what we do, to reestablish it as the work of a craftsman, and as a transposition of our personal stories. It implies acknowledging both the higher purpose of these activities and being present in the moment while engaged in these material-discursive practices.

Levinas (1991) has argued that establishing oneself as a subject means to become responsible to the other. This ethical demand is a radical demand and is present even in the tiniest and apparently most insignificant situations as a basic responsibility for the other (Løgstrup, 1991). It means that in each and every situation, one holds the other's life in one's hand. It implies more than just understanding. Rather, we actively contemplate the other as a being, which counts 'as such'. This is a caring contemplation, rather than a merely neutral "understanding" kind of contemplation (Levinas 1998, p. 20).

As noted by Barad, responsibility cannot however be restricted to human encounters alone but has to be expanded. She argues that the performativity of all human and non-human bodies come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity. In her account of responsibility ethics, we are entangled with human and non-human others. We have the other

in one's skin, in one's bones, belly, heart, nucleus, history, etc. (Barad, 2007, p. 393). Our stories are thus entangled in the sense that multiple materialities, temporalities, and spatialities are threaded through one another.

Responsibility, therefore, implies recognizing, appreciating, and taking responsibility for the human and non-human others that are threaded through one another in each and every situation. In Barad's account, responsibility means an "... ongoing responsiveness to the entanglements of self and other, here and there, now and then" (Barad, 2007, p. 394). Ethics thus transcends each and every situation including organizational situations. We can never state clearly what a right response would be. What counts, however, is that we have these kinds of conversations and reflections and that they materialize in what we do and how we relate to human and non-human others.

In an ethics of responsibility, it is the development of human and non-human others in their differential material-discursiveness that counts prior to systems, structures, and organizations. In this way, it is different from particular branches of business psychology, where we find concepts and methods that, from the premises of positive psychology (e.g., appreciative inquiry, coaching etc.), promise a happy joint venture of personal and organizational development.

What is problematic here is that the fix point of such development is almost always the organization, which is seen as a higher 'god' (e.g., Jørgensen, 2010). The history of organizations, however, shows a remarkable record of the sacrifice of the other. In an ethics of responsibility, it is the other as such that counts. It is from this perspective that we can begin focusing on creating shared values in the form of business models that lead to mutual economic, social, human, and environmental benefits.

## **Storytelling Diagnostics**

The last principle mentioned here is called *storytelling diagnostics*, and is important in relation to the capacity to participate in storytelling communities. It relates to a distinction in Deleuze's analysis of Foucault between the current and the historical, where history is the archive and that which we are and what we are ceasing to be, while the current is the new; what we are in the process-of-becoming (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 164).

Deleuze argues that we have to untangle the lines of the recent past (the archive) and those that belongs to what we are in the process of becoming (the present); the analytic (the archive), and the diagnostic (the present) (Deleuze, 1992a, p. 164). What this means is the use of history, or of historical analyses, as a diagnostics of the present; "acting against time, and thus on time, for the sake of a time one hopes will come" (Nietzsche, cited in Deleuze, 1992a, pp. 164-165). In this context, it means to untangle the lines of contemporary dispositifs in order to obtain a critical reflective position to them for the sake of the future.

We are looking for methods that bring about a consciousness in terms of making us aware of the politics of power relations that have brought us to where we are today, and which affect how we think and act in the present. It involves both personal critique – diagnostics directed towards ourselves and why we think and act the way we think and act; and social critique – diagnostics of the social relations we are part of. In both cases, we delve into the movement of the differential material-discursive practices of which we are part to gain this kind of critical awareness of ourselves and move towards the new.

As such, storytelling diagnostics comprises of a huge variety of technologies of the self that are aimed towards untangling the lines of our present for the benefit of the future. These involve, for example, portfolio techniques, personal development plans, coaching, material story labs (Strand, 2012), and so forth. The important principles are to use these techniques to question what we have come to take for granted, why we do what we do, and why we think the way we think. We will not go through all the possible means by which we can delve into our stories. We will mention a few principles.

What we are looking for are methods that seek to de- and re-configure stories. It involves a political and suspicious question of any truth and morality claim. It involves question like: how do I/we frame the world in my speech and actions; why do I/we frame it in this way; from what position do I/we speak and act; from where do our speech and actions gain its legitimacy; and what positions are possible to occupy for others in relation to this speech and action. These questions are especially derived from archaeological analysis (Foucault, 1995, see Jørgensen, 2007, p. 59). These questions are important in order to see what is required to reconfigure the future, where we ask questions like (1) who I am/we are, (2) where I/we want to go, (2) how I/we move from who I am/we are to where I/we want to go.

Secondly, it is important not only to integrate more modalities in this learning environment. There has been an emphasis on language, conversation, and dialogue in relation to such conversations, while the potentiality of working with space, bodies, and materiality has been overlooked. Language and dialogue have their shortcomings and working with these other modalities often provides other interesting insights and give a more holistic view of our selves.

## CONCLUSION

Is storytelling, then, an efficient weapon against contemporary dispositifs? The chapter remains inconclusive on this question, and it has to be so. Nobody knows what the future will be like. We can never once and for all overcome the inherent threat of our stories being part of the spectacles of capitalism. Maybe we are not 'real' rebels. Maybe we are partly spectacle and partly 'real.' But to answer the question in any absolute term is not the right way to approach the question.

The really important thing is that we have these kinds of conversations with ourselves in the first place; that we try to be critical of ourselves and the practices that we are part of, and which we see every day. This is important even if we ultimately cannot escape our material-discursive practices. If we were not critical of how we think and what we do, we would never make any progress and would be forever doomed to be mere puppets of power.

Storytelling is an attempt to bring human qualities back into organizational living and to fill in a 'void' created by modern governance and management principles. We can guess what Agamben's conclusion would be; namely, that we would move on 'enemy ground' in the sense of being up against an almost totalizing network of dispositifs, including ourselves as techno-scientific of-the-world creatures, who are constantly led astray and seduced into docility.

And, as noted, he has a point. On the other hand, the conclusion is unacceptable because we cannot use it for anything other than acknowledging the major forces that we are up

against. Our point is that we need an alternative way and storytelling is a perhaps modest contribution. Since resistance is unorganized and scarce, our activities may be seen as only drops in the ocean or even may be seen as a spectacle with no substance. Conversely, all beginnings are lowly and have to start somewhere.

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