STRATEGY RETOLD: TOWARDS A NARRATIVE VIEW OF STRATEGIC DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Using narrative theory, this paper explores strategic management as a form of fiction. After introducing several key narrative concepts, it discusses the challenges strategists have faced in making strategic discourse both credible and novel and considers how strategic narratives may change within the "virtual" organization of the future. A number of narratively oriented research questions and methodological suggestions are provided.

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STRATEGY'S CHANGING STORY

Looking back, it appears the field of strategic management had an enchanted childhood. Two decades ago, "planning could do no wrong" (Mintzberg, 1994: 4). In the midst of studies demonstrating positive planning-performance relationships (Ansoff et al., 1977; Herold, 1972; Thune & House, 1970), it was common to see planning-as-panacea statements like, "the top management of any profit seeking organization is delinquent or grossly negligent if they do not engage in formal, integrated, long-range planning" (Karger & Malik, 1975: 64). Business school departments fought over who should and could use the term "strategy": management, marketing, finance, human resources, and operations faculty all eagerly appropriated the name.

Nowadays, it appears strategy's "golden boy" image has receded a bit. Mirroring longstanding concerns with competition, forecasting, and fit, the field itself has become a highly contested and questioned site, one riddled with competing models, "whither now" conferences, and effectiveness disputes. In the wake of numerous problematizing studies (e.g., Boyd, 1991; Gimpl & Dakin, 1984; Grinyer & Norburn, 1975; Hurst, 1986; Mintzberg & Waters, 1982; Mintzberg, Brunet, & Waters, 1986; Quinn, 1980; Sarrazin, 1977; Wildavsky, 1973), several respected theorists have called for reconceptualizing the strategic enterprise (cf. Mintzberg, 1994: 91-214; Prahalad & Hamel, 1994).

Taking a Narrative Turn

We too think the field might benefit from some redefinition. As narrativist Wallace Martin puts it: "By changing the definition of what is being studied, we change what we see; and when different definitions are used to chart the same territory, the results will differ, as do topographical, political, and demographic maps, each revealing one aspect of reality by virtue of disregarding all others" (1986: 15). In particular, we are interested in examining strategy as a form of narrative. Our goal is not to replace current strategic thinking, but to provide theorists and practitioners with an additional interpretive lens. Though the "narrative turn" has become increasingly popular in other organizational arenas (e.g., Boje, 1995; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1996; Hatch, 1994; O'Connor, 1995; Roe, 1994; Rappaport, 1993), we believe it is particularly applicable to strategy. If "storytelling is the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders" (Boje, 1991: 106), then surely strategy must rank as one of the most prominent, influential, and costly stories told in organizations. While some researchers have discussed ways in which strategic texts and authoring processes act as sequentializing sensemaking devices (e.g., Quinn, 1992; Weick, 1995), few have systematically described strategy using formal narrative concepts or models.

Among its various attractions as an approach for studying strategy, narrativity emphasizes the simultaneous presence of multiple, interlinked realities, and is thus well positioned for capturing the diversity and complexity present in strategic discourse. As Weick states: "Stories allow the clarity achieved in one small area to be extended to and imposed on an adjacent area that is less orderly (1995: 129)." Compared to other "artful" metaphors of strategy (e.g., Andrew's 1971 "strategist-as-architect" or Mintzberg's 1987 "strategy-as-craft" and "strategist-as-potter"), narrative highlights the discursive, social nature of the strategy project, linking it more to cultural and historical contexts (cf. Smircich & Stubbart, 1985): it asks why some strategic stories are more or less popular and how popularity might be linked to other narrative forms circulating in

society. It also addresses how leaders are able to fashion stories that "concern issues of personal and group identity" (Gardner, 1995: 62) and that "transplant, suppress, complement or in some measure outweigh, the earlier stories, as well as contemporary, oppositional 'counterstories'" (Gardner, 1995: 14) that hold social groups together.

Accordingly, a narrative approach can make the political economies of strategy more visible (cf. Boje, 1996): Who gets to write and read strategy? How are reading and writing linked to power? Who is marginalized in the writing/reading process? It can also call attention to strategy's rhetorical side: how do rhetorical devices function to increase (or undermine) strategic credibility? How are rhetorical dynamics used to "authorize" strategy and mask its subjectivities?

From a practitioner viewpoint, a narrativist stance can encourage exploration of strategic issues in more personally meaningful ways (Wilson, 1979: 4). Through referral to classic archetypal figures and motifs (e.g., the hero, martyr, or wanderer), it might provide a deeper sense of meaning and purpose than can be achieved through, for example, spreadsheet modeling. Inasmuch as questions of "voice" and "style" are raised, reflexivity can be increased.

Some Informing Narrative Voices

Among literary theorists, narrative has gradually become a key platform for locating and discussing storied accounts, whether those accounts be past or future oriented, written or spoken, fact or fantasy, short story or novel (cf. Chatman, 1978; Martin, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988). As an interpretivist approach (cf. Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hiley et. al., 1991), narrative theory "issues not in laws like Boyle's, or forces like Volta's, or mechanisms like Darwin's, but in constructions like Burckhardt's, Weber's, or Freud's: systematic unpackings of the conceptual world in which condottiere, Calvinists, or paranoids live" (Geertz, 1980: 167). It draws extensively from literary criticism, rhetorical theory, aesthetics, semiotics, and poetics; its writers are as concerned with artistry as they are with content and categorization.

Given that definitional work often constitutes a primary dynamic within literary circles, it is not surprising that there has been much debate over just what the term narrative means (e.g., do poems and screenplays count? Folktales? Individual sentences? cf. Genette, 1988: 13-20; Martin, 1986: 15-30; Rappaport, 1993). Some theorists adopt a "structuralist" view which stresses ordering and continuity. For example, Robert Scholes defines narrative as "the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time. (Scholes, 1981: 205)." Others have shifted towards a "communication" perspective, where readership and interpretation are as important as structure or authorship (cf. Booth, 1983; Iser, 1989). Here, we follow this latter trend by using the terms narrative and story to refer to thematic, sequenced accounts which convey meaning from implied author to implied reader. Within this perspective, hermeneutic, parts-to-whole thinking constitutes a central focus, as Donald Polkinghorne explains:

> Narrative is a form of "meaning making." . . . Narrative recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts of the whole. Its particular subject matter is human actions and events that affect human beings, which it configures into wholes according to the roles these actions and events play in bringing about a conclusion. . . . The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent

and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole. (1988: 36)

More than many other approaches, narrative theory assumes that subjective, heterogeneous interpretations of texts are the norm; different readers are assumed to "get it" differently, depending on their history, values, or even which side of the bed they rise from. Accordingly, we consider our discussion of the strategy field simply one of many possible interpretations, one fashioned not as testable truth but rather provocative optique, a view that opens up new trains of thought.

Implied in the above discussion is that narrativity encompasses both the telling and the told; it can be applied both to strategizing and to strategies. Extant, formalized (and perhaps realized) strategies can be examined as artifacts: their rhetoric, tropes, metaphors, and sequencing can be identified, compared, and evaluated in various ways. Strategy can also be examined as a narrative process, one in which stories about directionality are variously appropriated, discounted, championed, and defended. This view asks "How do people make sense of and narrate their notions about directionality? When does a strategic story stay the same and when does it change? How does it survive "register" changes-alternating between the printed and the auditory, the formal and informal, or between intrafirm and industry levels?

Yet as Martin (1986) and other recent theorists have argued, texts and authoring processes are inextricably intertwined-how strategic stories are constructed shapes their form. And the availability of various textual forms affects the process of strategic authoring. Thus, in the sections that follow we meld considerations of strategies and strategizing. First we identify strategy as a particular kind of narrative. Then, using an analytic scheme derived from the Russian Formalists (a literary theory group), we examine some of the twists and turns strategic discourse has taken over the years. Finally, indulging in a bit of predictive fin-de-siècle thinking, we consider some future narrative possibilities in light of emerging postindustrial organizational thought.

STRATEGY AS A TYPE OF NARRATIVE

Traditional conceptualizations of strategy have tended towards notions of fit ("How might we fit into this or that environment"), prediction ("What is ahead? Where will we be then?") and competition ("How might we 'rule the roost,' survive within the 'pecking order,' or gracefully 'chicken out'?"). In contrast, a narrative view of strategy stresses how language is used to construct meaning; consequently, it explores ways in which organizational stakeholders create a discourse of direction (whether about becoming, being, or having been) to understand and influence one anothers' actions. Whereas traditional strategy frameworks virtually ignore the role of language in strategic decision making, a narrative approach assumes that tellings of strategy fundamentally influence strategic choice and action, often in unconscious ways.

As a narrative form, strategy seems to stand somewhere between theatrical drama, the historical novel, futurist fantasy, and autobiography. Inasmuch as it prescribes "parts" for different characters, it leans toward the dramatic. Its traditional emphasis on forecasting aligns it with visionary novels having a prospective, forward looking focus. And when emergent, retrospectively focused strategies are considered (e.g., Mintzberg 1994: 24-27; Quinn 1980; Weick, 1979), a sense of historical narrative is invoked.

Regardless of the particular narrative camp a strategy lies in, however, it can be considered a form of fiction. By fiction, we mean that which is created, made up, rather than something which is false. As Bubna-Litic (1995) has argued, strategy is fictional no matter which of Mintzberg's "Five P's" is considered (strategy as plan, ploy, pattern, position, or perspective; cf. Mintzberg, 1987); it is always something that is constructed to persuade others towards certain understandings and actions. While this is probably obvious for prospective, forward-based strategy, even emergent strategy can be considered fictional: to identify an emergent strategy requires labelling specific organizational actions as "strategic" (not just financial or operational), highlighting, juxtaposing, and linking them in certain ways, convincing others that this is the way things have happened, and that this account should be the template from which new actions should be considered. In other words, strategists working from an emergent perspective enact fictional futures from creative interpretations of the past (cf. Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Weick, 1995: 30-38).

As authors of fiction, strategists are subject to the same basic challenge facing other fictionalist writers: how to develop an engaging, compelling account, one that readers can willingly buy into and implement. Any story the strategist tells is but one of many competing alternatives woven from a vast array of possible characterizations, plot lines, and themes. If we accept the notion that map reading is as important as map making (Huff, 1990; Weick, 1990), then the strategist's problem is as much one of creating an inviting cartographic text as it is highlighting the right path. Gardner (1995) makes this point in his study of 20th century leaders, when he says:

> The formidable challenge confronting the visionary leader is to offer a story, and an embodiment, that builds on the most credible of past syntheses, revisits them in light of present concerns, leaves open a space for future events, and allows individual contributions by the persons in the group. (p. 56)

From a narrative perspective, the successful strategic story may depend less on tools like comprehensive scanning, objective planning, or meticulous control/feedback systems and more on whether it stands out from other organizational stories, is persuasive, and invokes retelling. What the story revolves around, how it is put together, and the way it is told all determine whether it becomes one worth listening to, remembering, and acting upon. Thus, strategic effectiveness from a narrative perspective is intimately tied to acceptance, approval, and adoption. Further, this approach problematizes unitarist notions of strategic success—it asks us contextualize success, to view success as a social construction that is tied to specific cultural beliefs and practices (e.g., is success in the Ben & Jerry's story the same thing as success in the Microsoft story? Did competitive success mean something different prior to Porter's 1980 work?).

In studying how authors create effective stories, narrative theorists have developed a number of explanatory frameworks (cf. Martin, 1986). Here, we have chosen to work with a model first put forth by Victor Shklovsky (whose ideas were further developed by other members of the Russian Formalist circle-cf. Bann & Bowlt, 1973; Lemon & Reis, 1965; Matejka & Pomorska, 1971). His deceptively simple approach tends to underpin several other narrative frameworks, thus providing a possible foundation for future work. It can also be applied to many kinds of narrative, an important point given that strategic discourse tends to adopt a variety of forms.

Essentially, Shklovsky argued that all effective narrativists manage to achieve two fundamental outcomes: credibility (or believability) and defamiliarization (or novelty). To be successful, authors must 1) convince readers/listeners a narrative is plausible within a given orienting context, and 2) bring about a different way of viewing things, one which renews our perception of the world. Of the two, credibility has received the most attention, especially from rhetoricians (cf. Chatman, 1978: 48-52 on verisimilitude and Martin, 1986: 57 on realism). Defamiliarization, though historically ignored in some narrative circles, has recently garnered more attention (cf. Martin, 1986: 47-56). Together, these arenas form a kind of dialectic: extremely credible narratives tend towards the mundanely familiar, while highly defamiliarizing narratives often lack credibility (at least when first introduced). Thus, Shklovsky maintained that authors must continually reconsider and rework each area in light of the other if an effective narrative is to arise. We consider each of these in more depth.

STRATEGIC CREDIBILITY

Because strategies cost so much to create and implement, their credibility is of paramount importance to organizational stakeholders-consequently, strategists find themselves having to disguise the inherent fictionality of their stories. After all, who (aside from Disney or Spielberg perhaps) wants to think they are merely playing out a clever tale, especially when great sums may be at stake? In the scene where the strategist tries to convince skeptical and impatient rein-holders (whether boards of directors, tribal elders, union leaders, or local lynch mobs) to accept the plan, rarely does s/he get away with saying "Trust me . . . it's true, it'll happen." Instead, a myriad of tactics are drawn upon to invoke a sense of strategic realism and facticity. Like Barley's (1983) funeral directors, who artfully use makeup and posing to convince mourners the corpse is only sleeping, skilled strategic authors employ (often nonconsciously) various narrative devices to make strategic bodies appear as something other than made up. Materiality, voice, perspective, ordering, setting, and readership targeting are among some of the key devices used. We suggest that the more unusual and far-reaching the strategy, the more these devices will be adopted. Conversely, they will be used less when the strategy is a familiar one.

Materiality

Narrative materiality refers to a story's physicality, either literally (e.g., long accounts take up more space than shorter accounts) or figuratively (e.g., narratives that focus on touchable phenomena instead of abstract concepts). We suggest that many strategies find their way into print (normally as strategic plans) not only because this makes them clearer or more accessible, but also because printed strategies have more concreteness, and thus seem more real than oral accounts (cf. Martin, 1986: 38). Computerized accounts are more enduring than spoken ones, and voluminous, printed, and attractively bound strategies more concrete still. Once printed, a strategy assumes an undeniable corporeality.

Today's strategic authors go even further with this than their predecessors: by coupling written accounts with computerized, screen-based ones that allow cinematic imitation (e.g., dissolving slides, words scuttling across the screen, colorful backgrounding, etc.) strategists are able to associate their stories with film and television, media that possess high currency and credibility in our society. Projected onto the screen, strategic titles and directions assume a larger-than-life presence, becoming unavoidably fixed in our gaze. The strategy receives the same privileged viewing status accorded films: the lights go down, we adopt comfortable viewing positions, take in the show, and if the

presentation is aesthetically satisfying, soften or forget any objections to content. Ironically though, if a strategy is presented too cinematically, its fictive, theatrical nature may show through; thus, convincing strategy presentations stop well short of full cinematic emulation.

Though much strategic work ends up as some form of print, what is overlooked is that most significant organizational discourse is communicated verbally (Boje, 1992; Mintzberg, 1980). What works for written narrative tends not to work for spoken accounts (as anyone who has tried to read articles aloud can attest-cf. Scholes and Kellogg, 1966). To be effective, verbal narrators need to consider meter and rhythm. Repetitive motifs which would be considered redundant in written works are often used in spoken accounts to group action patterns, facilitate recall, and create emphasis e.g., in Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, the motifs "I have a dream that one day..." and "Let freedom ring..." are used throughout to emphasize a number of themes). Such motifs allow the story to be told in various ways without compromising its essential character. Good verbal narratives are easily telescoped; that is, they can be expanded or shortened into "terse tellings" (Boje, 1991) and still retain their essential character. Verbal narrators also rely on facial expression and body movements to convey meaning, something which is seldom, if ever, accounted for in written strategies.

Taken together, these points may be an unrecognized reason why strategic narratives sometimes fail: they have been unwittingly tailored in the wrong cloth. They have been crafted for paper and reading when instead, given that strategic discourse is often a verbal affair, they should have been fashioned more for speaking and listening. This suggests that strategists and strategy researchers might attend more to differences between verbal and written strategy formulation.

With respect to narrative content, credibility can be obtained through reference to material, here-and-now phenomena. Thus, authors who concoct unusual stories often take pains to create characters who embody familiar values, outlooks, and mannerisms (for instance, science fiction characters encased in chitin and living in far off galaxies often have personalities remarkably like our own). The Body Shop provides a strategic example of this-when first introduced, the Body Shop's eco-based strategy was quite unusual (cf. Roddick, 1991). Consequently, the texts which conveyed it incorporated many descriptions and pictures of local production sites and organizational stakeholders. Further, the company's founder, Anita Roddick, continues to provide highly personalized accounts of her dealings through instore and Internet publications which enable readers to identify more closely with the company, to see its actions as extensions of normal human beingness. Similarly, Lee Iacocca managed to secure strategic credibility by becoming a personal, living embodiment of Chrysler during its time of crisis (cf. Abodaher, 1982). Through some skillful maneuvering and impassioned, highly personalized stories, Chrysler became reified into an entity having a sense of personal loss, pride, and hope. As a faceless corporation, it had little chance of securing a government bailout. But as a hurt, living being, its plight seemed more cogent, and its rescue more acceptable.

Voice & Perspective
Working from the narrative analytic scheme developed by Genette (1980), Mary Jo Hatch (1994) suggests applying two credibility dimensions to organizational discourse: perspective and voice, or "Who sees" (i.e., is an internal or an external perspective used?) and "Who says" (i.e., is the narrator a character in the story or not?). Often, traditional

strategy narrative is told from an singular external perspective, with the author(s) excluding themselves from the story line (as with this sentence). Univocal, third person telling creates a sense of objective neutrality: the reader thinks (or is meant to think) "This is clearly an unbiased, rational point of view." The "implied author" (the one ostensibly narrating the story) appears distantly all-knowing, the narrative a statement of truth (Burke, 1969; Elmes & Costello, 1992). Like the omniscient camera angle used in classic cinema, such texts tend to lure readers into forgetting that strategic information has been culled from many sources, and that the view adopted is but one of many possibilities.

In a related vein, written strategic narratives are frequently "plain" (Cicero's category for speech designed to enhance clarity-for more information on Cicero's scheme, see Burke, 1950) as opposed to tempered (speech designed to stimulate interest) or grand (designed to provoke emotion and move an audience to a new position). To enhance perceptions of objectivity, strategic plans tend to erase individual, peopled identities (cf. Gilbert, 1992). Sarah, Sean, and Sally become "Finance," a known customer becomes part of last year's "33% increase." People connected with the company are fashioned into faceless entities discussed in aseptic, "businesslike" language. Strategies "cloaked in the drab garments of business plans" (March, 1995: 436) tend to result in seemingly safe narratives.

Bakhtin (1981: 409) contends this style first developed within the Greek romances as a way of coping with the "heteroglossia" (diverse languages and customs) present in their society. It was developed further during medieval times (e.g., within the chivalric romance), again as a response to conqueror-induced heteroglossia. Perhaps it is little wonder the style continues to be used in the planning work of large diverse corporations, ones where heteroglossic differences among functions, divisions, and various internal and external stakeholders prevail. A plain, depersonalized style keeps a strategy from seeming to be allied with any particular group or person; it seemingly arises from nowhere and, in its presumption of commonality, appears directed everywhere. Yet distant, impersonal strategic narrative can also lower reader involvement. As Martin argues: "When they have no clues about the author's opinion of what he presents, readers and critics are often at a loss to know what the story means or how to evaluate it" (1992: 22).

Ordering & Plots
A subtle credibility technique consists of ordering strategic narratives according to familiar plotlines: as with cinematic emulation, this associative approach helps deflect attention away from the narrative's fictionality. Many strategic narratives seem to follow a simplified variation of either the epic Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1973) or romanticist form (Jeffcutt, 1994). Within the epic form, the hero/company finds itself confronting a number of enemies and/or obstacles, and, should everyone in the company manage to pull together, the company will emerge victorious with increased market share, profits, and job security. Hopeful, happy endings are almost always explicitly or implicitly present. Strategies fashioned using the SWOT model (cf. Andrews, 1971) often have this nature: opportunities represent "the call", while threats become antagonists. As strengths are employed and weaknesses transformed, the protagonist becomes a hero.

Romanticist plots are enacted when the company is portrayed as recovering from a fall from grace, one stemming perhaps from excessive growth or divergence from the founder's vision. Many downsizing efforts appear to embody this form: "We've gotten

awfully fat. We'll battle our bulge, find our core self, and emerge a slimmer, wiser, more attractive company." Whereas the Hero's Journey results in a new self/company, the romantic plot augers a return to or rediscovery of a purer self, one obscured perhaps, but there all along. As with the Hero's Journey, an ascetic emphasis is often evident in the texts we have seen, with company stakeholders being asked to undergo hardship and perhaps penance of some sort.

Readership
From the perspective of reader/response theory (cf. Iser, 1989), the meaning of a text resides not just "in the text itself" nor in the "author's intent" but also in the "backgrounds and experiences" that readers bring to the text and how "these color their interpretations of the text" (Yanow, 1995: 2). The interplay of text, author, and reader suggests that the interpretation of a text is both pluralistic-reflecting the author's intent and the reader's construction of meaning-and dynamic.

For executive strategists trying to create homogeneous "designer cultures" (Casey, 1995: 135) or "monolithic identities" (Olin, 1989: 82-97), this interplay and dynamism among text, author, and reader presents a problem. We suspect that much of the "professionalization" of today's managers works to standardize readers' responses; "model readers" are created (cf. Martin, 1986: 160-172) who can interpret text as the authors intend it (see also Casey, 1995: 138-182). The model strategic reader has mastered a variety of codes (e.g., MBO, TQM, KPI, the 4 P's of marketing, the 5 P's of strategy, the 7 S's of McKinsey) and understands the logics inherent in forecasting equations, budgeting systems, and environmental analysis frameworks.

The model reader presumes the existence of model languaging and authorship. Regardless of content, narratives couched in a model style are automatically conferred a level of legitimacy not given other texts-they gain credibility by recognition. In particular, texts derived from and offering expert recipes-e.g., Andrew's (1971) relatively simple SWOT model, or the more elaborate models of Ansoff (1965), Hofer & Schendel (1978), and Porter (1980)-are conferred a halo of authority, the strategic equivalent of Good Housekeeping's Seal of Approval. Whole nations have swallowed strategic tales on this basis (cf. Crocombe, 1991).

STRATEGIC DEFAMILIARIZATION

The second part of Shklovsky's scheme involves a narrative's distinctiveness, its novelty. As mentioned earlier, the effective narrative causes us to see things in new and different ways: narratives that are credible but overly familiar are unlikely to garner much attention. Whereas many of the credibility techniques described previously possess a certain timelessness, such is not the case with defamiliarization. Any defamiliarizing perspective or device, no matter how initially exciting and captivating, becomes familiar, mundane, and tiresome with time.

Applied to strategy, this means that strategic narratives have shelf lives; use-by dates which require a steady influx of new perspectives. With respect to the strategy creation process, changing venues may serve an important defamiliarizing function. Organizational executives often go to great lengths to hold off-site strategy sessions, saying, "To be creative, we need to get away from our day to day distractions" (or, if off-site sessions have been used for awhile, in-house strategizing may come back into vogue). Changing venues symbolizes a desire for change in the ongoing organizational story. With respect to narrative content, novelty may be created through periodic shifts

in orienting strategic problems. Thus, competitors may be assigned the antagonist role for a year or two, only to be replaced by issues of quality, mergers, or governmental compliance. Relative to strategy narration, the need for defamiliarization helps explain the rapid adoption of presentation formats that are both novel and credible (e.g., the computerized screen presentations described earlier), even though such formats often require considerably more effort than established presentation methods.

Defamiliarizing Strategic Theory
More broadly, we suggest that various strategic theoretical frameworks succeed one another because organizational readers have shifting preferences and attention spans, and not because of some Darwinian progression towards an ultra-fit theory. In other words, the currency of today's strategic models may have less to do with accuracy or predictability than with their appeal to current tastes and interests.

A brief genre-based review of strategic thought may help illustrate this point. Here, we adopt Fredric Jameson's (1981: 145) definition of the term "genres", seeing them as "ad hoc, experimental constructs, devised for a specific textual occasion and abandoned like so much scaffolding when the analysis has done its work" (quoted by Martin, 1992: 55). The genre concept refers to unique ways of constructing and representing texts. Narratives crafted in particular genres have stylistic signatures, distinctive combinations of content and structure (for instance, the "lone hero" emphasis in Westerns or the relational focus of Romance novels). Mintzberg's discussion of "strategy schools" (1994: 2-4) suggests no less than ten genre possibilities. Here, we consider just three: his Design, Planning, and Positioning schools, which we have relabelled the Epic, Technofuturist, and Purist genres.

Epic & Technofuturist Narratives
Though the Epic and Technofuturist genres developed side-by-side, they offer two very different narrative possibilities. The Epic genre (represented by Learned, 1965, and later championed by Andrews, 1971) has traditionally been concerned with interpretation: How are particular events and issues to be interpreted in light of key organizational principles? The SWOT model (in various guises) also plays a fundamental role in this style. As discussed earlier, organizations following it become epic journeyers, systematically navigating towards opportunities and away from threats. Working with strengths and weaknesses results in various heroic characterizations. This process tends to result in relatively concise, "decisional" accounts of various SWOT-based choices and their implications (Mintzberg, 1994: 36-39).

Whereas the Epic genre uses "a few basic ideas to design strategy" (Mintzberg, 1994: 36), the Technofuturist genre (beginning with Ansoff's 1965 work and continuing with Steiner, 1969) has become known for its complexity and extraordinary attention to detail. Focusing more on time (particularly on temporal sequencing) and less on organizational characterization, the analytical schemes of this genre result in comprehensive, futuristic texts filled with detached, "quasi-scientific" forecasts (cf. Mintzberg, 1994: 40-49). These stand in marked contrast to the value-laden, politically sensitive narratives of the Epic genre. Whereas Epic accounts rely on hierarchically-based authority to achieve adoption (policy making is usually the prerogative of senior executives), Technofuturist narratives, taking a positivist orientation, use scientific referencing to achieve credibility (e.g., Ansoff & Sullivan, 1993).

During their inception, both of these genres were highly regarded; each provided unique, interesting, and credible solutions to the problem of organizational direction-setting. Yet their wide-spread adoption proved their undoing. Once the thrill of newness wore off, various shortcomings were identified. With the epic model, it became unclear how strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were to be identified; what one executive termed a strength (e.g. a seasoned, like-minded workforce), another would label a weakness (e.g., a worn out, overly homogenous workforce). The technofuturist genre became experienced by users as inordinately complex, hard to follow, and expensive to support (cf. Mintzberg, 1994: 35-90). By the mid 70's, both genres had lost their lustre and become stale; strategic readers began chorusing, "Yes, but haven't we seen all this before?"

Purist Narratives
This helps explain why the next genre-the Purist style-achieved such rapid popularity. It was everything the Epic and Technofuturist genres were not. Represented by the work of Miles and Snow (1978) and Porter (1980), the Purist genre offered a defamiliarizing, relatively atemporal, character-based narrative. It enticed authors with ready-made identities, strategic purity, and a guarantee of sorts: the company able to choose an ideal strategic type, conform to it, and avoid joining Porter's "stuck in the middle" muddlers or Miles & Snow's directionless "reactors", would earn "above-average returns in its industry despite the presence of strong competitive forces." (Porter, 1980: 35). The issue of strengths and weaknesses could also be resolved: "Though a firm can have a myriad of strengths and weaknesses vis-á-vis its competitors, there are two basic types of competitive advantage a firm can possess: low cost or differentiation. The significance of any strength or weakness a firm possesses is ultimately a function of its impact on relative cost or differentiation (Porter, 1985: 11)."

This genre relies heavily on external experts for archetypal templates. The most popular templates have produced "round" characterizations (i.e., complex, rich, "alive" portrayals-cf. Chatman, 1978: 75-76). For instance, Porter's "Cost Leaders" and Miles & Snow's "Defenders" have tough, conservative (if not somewhat dour) personalities; others are more relational and chummy (e.g., Porter's "Focusers"). Some types, such as Miles & Snow's "Prospectors" and Porter's "Differentiators" provide companies with a built-in source of ongoing defamiliarization. Like novelists' use of naturally wandering protagonists to effect novelty (e.g., traders, hobos, and footloose adolescents who encounter unusual people and places-cf. Martin, 1986: 48), "wanderer" strategies provide an acceptable way of securing ongoing organizational attentiveness. As Miles & Snow state: "A true prospector is almost immune from the pressures of a changing environment since this type of organization is continually keeping pace with change and, as indicated, frequently creating change itself (1978: 57)."

Again, the widespread adoption (and concomitant scrutiny) of the Purist genre created dilemmas which ultimately undermined its appeal. With so many strategic types to choose from, readers became confused-whose typology was right? The best? How did other types such as Mintzberg's (1983) professional bureaucracies, Peters & Waterman's (1982) tight/loose knits, and Kets de Vries & Miller's (1984) neurotic misfits factor in? And was being stuck in the middle really so bad?

Since then, other contending frameworks have arisen, all employing some means of defamiliarization. For instance, Chen & MacMillan's (1992) "Action/Response" approach returns to the temporal focus of the Technofuturist genre, but adopts a very

short time horizon. Using the strategic event as a primary unit of analysis, time in these narratives is measured in months and even weeks. Competitor moves indicate when the stopwatch is to be started and speed of response is critical. Because this approach fits well with readers' perceptions of increasing environmental unpredictability, it also achieves a kind of innate credibility. On the other hand, visioning approaches (e.g., Collins & Porras, 1991; Nanus, 1992) reflect a renewed interest in distant events, but in an "imagining" way (contrasting with the deterministic, predictive view of the Technofuturists).

BETTING ON THE FUTURE

Our brief journey into strategy-as-fiction naturally raises questions about upcoming genres and narrative devices. What forms will strategic narratives take next? Is the strategy field heading towards "bankruptcy" (as suggested by Hurst, 1986), or in the midst of shifting to a new, credibly defamiliarizing form? Drawing upon the "Fin de Siècle" issue of Organization (Volume 2, #3/4, 1995), it appears that organizations of the future will be even more fluid and permeable than today's. As James March (1995: 428) notes, "The most conventional story of contemporary futurology is a story that observes and predicts dramatic changes in the environments of organizations." Accelerating changes in information technology and global politics will result in greater linkages and movements between organizations with a concomitant rise in knowledge-based competition. Surrounded by an ever-growing pool of unpredictable, rapidly fleeting opportunities, tomorrow's organizations will need to rely more on quick-thinking, knowledgable employees who can attend to environmental shifts and work innovatively with paradox. Within strategic narratives, the question of "who" (or characterization) will become more important, with particular emphasis being placed on actors' knowledge, both within and between organizations (March, 1991; 1995). "Who knows what?" will become a dominant strategic question.

The move away from "individualist, monological" organizations (Gergen, 1995: 523) to "virtual" or "throw-away" ones (March, 1995: 434) will require narratives that can cope with blurred organizational boundaries (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992), dispersed intelligibilities, diverse realities, disrupted chains of authority, and erosion of organizational autonomy (Gergen, 1995: 524-526). Singular readings of strategic narratives, where model readers arrive at like interpretations, will increasingly be a thing of the past (cf. Boje's, 1995, discussion of the "Tamara" organization. See also Gergen, 1992). In addition, the growing preponderance of "encounter" based organizations (Gutek, 1995) in which ongoing relationships are replaced by short term, one time encounters, will necessitate narrative structures that can adapt to rapidly changing discourses and varied readers.

Many of the credibility devices described earlier will lose their potency in such settings. The printed word, reliance on omniscient perspectives, and familiar plots will have less sway in organizations where print is cheap and knowledge is rapidly changing (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; March, 1991; Senge, 1990), where distributed leadership is prized over centralized authority (Barry, 1991), and which enact parallel, seemingly unrelated storylines (Boje, 1995). Conversely, credibly defamiliarizing strategic narratives will be those that embody and reflect these emerging trends.

Changing Patterns of Authorship

We imagine that the tomorrow's strategic authors will be more concerned with creating engaging, lively, and artful stories, reflecting increasing competition for stakeholder

attention spans and reduced "airtime". Spoken accounts may become more popular as well: stakeholders overloaded with email and written documents are likely to take greater notice of verbally delivered accounts. It may be that strategists will rely on multiple stories that can be told quickly, easily, and joined in a variety of ways (instead of centralized monolithic accounts).

Reflecting the increased value being given to particularized knowledges of individuals and groups, such narratives will necessarily respond to calls and guidelines for more participative planning (cf. Kanter, 1983; Quinn, 1992; Weick, 1995). Just as Burgleman's (1983) study of internal corporate venturing suggests that middle managers deep within the organization can influence the "corporate concept of strategy" (p. 241), so stakeholder success at influencing directionality of the firm will depend less on their level within the firm and more on their "conceptual and political capabilities" (p. 241), i.e., how well and to whom their stories are told.

Communitarian Characterizations
Because organizations are becoming increasingly interdependent, their strategic stories may shift away from a focus on agency (oriented towards self) and towards community (focused on relationships with others). Using McAdams' (1993) framework for classifying narratives (which highlights the agentic/communitarian dimension), we would predict a move away from agentic company characterizations such as warrior, traveler, maker, or sage (e.g. where companies have emphasized taking over other companies, moving into new markets, using TQM as a strategic tool, or acting as industry statespersons). In their place, we would expect more communitarian characterizations such as teacher, humanist, or friend (currently showing up in joint venture networks and "green" organizations).

Changing Archetypes
The archetypes on which strategic narratives are based may also change. According to Bowles (1993), who uses mythical archetypes to situate organizational themes, the sky-god "Zeus can be considered as the ruling archetype within contemporary culture and organizations, where precedence is given to the mental realm of power and will (p. 403)." He also notes that the sky-god position, while conferring a broad view, carries attendant costs: loss of earthly contact and groundedness can result in excessive abstraction; childlike qualities of wonder and creativity are often ignored; and overthrows from rebellious offspring (e.g., Cronus or Uranus) can disrupt the most well-intentioned plans. Given increased attention to the non-rational in organizations (Mumby & Putnam, 1992), concerns over individual welfare (cf. the "Employment Futures" section of the aforementioned issue of Organization), and requirements for innovation (March, 1995), future strategists may find themselves experimenting with archetypal bases that reflect and give rise to greater feeling, sustenance, and play.   For example, a Poseidon-like company would privilege emotional experience, a Demeter-like company nourishment, and a Dionysian company, celebration, individuality, and varied experience.

Polyphonic Strategy
Reflecting trends towards increased workplace diversity and relational concerns (Gergen, 1995), strategic narratives may become increasingly "polyphonic" (cf. Bakhtin, 1984). Though at first glance, the term polyphony suggests the idea of many voices, Bakhtin intended it to refer to the author's position in a text. In polyphonic discourse, the author takes a less "author-itative" role. Above all, polyphonic texts arise from

"dialogical" rather than "monological" authorship; in dialogical authorship, different logics not only coexist, but inform and shape one another. Conversely, in monological authorship, only one logic (the narrator's) is presented. As Morson & Emerson explain:

> In a monologic work, only the author, as the "ultimate semantic authority," retains the power to express a truth directly. The truth of the work is his or her truth, and all other truths are merely "represented," like "words of the second type." . . . By contrast, in a polyphonic work the form-shaping ideology itself *demands* that the author cease to exercise monologic control. . . . Polyphony demands a work in which several consciousnesses meet as equals and engage in a dialogue that is in principle unfinalizable. (1990: 238-239; italics in original)

Polyphonic portrayal appears logically impossible, given that it is the author who creates a text and not the characters. Yet, as Bakhtin delights in pointing out, Dostoevsky managed to pull it off (cf. the book or the film "The Brothers Karamazov"). In Dostoevsky's novels, characters clearly have a life of their own. A pluralous sense of meaning emerges as they exchange views and interactively direct the storyline. And though Dostoevsky's own views are also present (usually articulated by the narrator), his characters often contest them. Not surprisingly, organizationally-based examples of this style are rare; however, Smircich, Calás & Morgan (1992a & b) demonstrate one way of juxtaposing dialogically linked views, while Semler (1993), chronicling workplace democratization efforts at the Brazilian firm Semco, illustrates how polyphonically-oriented planning processes might work.

Creating polyphonic strategic narratives will require that strategic authors assume a more processual role, one which emphasizes listening for diverse points of view (cf. Kanter, 1983 and Quinn, 1992), and representing these in ways that generate dialogic understanding; e.g., presenting a give-and-take dialogue between positions (cf. Hazen, 1993; 1994). Strategists adopting this method would be less focused on promoting their own strategy and more concerned with surfacing, legitimizing, and juxtaposing differing organizational stories. In this role, the strategist's job shifts from being a "decision-formulator, an implementer of structure and a controller of events" to providing a "vision to account for the streams of events and actions that occur - a universe in which organizational events and experiences take on meaning" (Smircich and Stubbart, 1985: 730). Art-based elicitation techniques (cf. Barry, 1994; 1996) might be coupled with logocentric ones to create more nonreductive and emotionally sensitive tellings.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE TALE

We would like to relate a small story, one which we believe illustrates several of the above approaches to strategic narrative construction. It comes from Marjorie Parker (1990), a consultant who facilitated a large scale transformation at Karmoy Fabrikker (a large European aluminum producer).

At the story's beginning, the company was portrayed as having recently overcome a long period of decline. Cost cutting programs and emission controls had begun to reorient what was once "a costly and unclean plant" (p. 7). Perhaps because of these successes, conventional management structures and practices were privileged. Planning systems were conservative and prudent. Whether the people there heeded some outside call towards a new journey is not clear; however, there developed "an expressed restlessness within the organization" (p. 14), a wish for something different, and the top executives

asked Parker to help them find a way to "lift the company to a new plateau." Subsequently, she and they struggled to find a different way to represent the organization. One of the executives happened on the metaphor of a garden, which was seized upon by the others. After giving it some thought, Parker suggested they begin a company-wide, story-based inquiry process centered around the garden metaphor. She was surprised when both the executives and union representatives agreed to her proposal; after all, these were "tough industrial folk" whose work was anything but organic.

Following an introductory conference, in which the company's story was told using garden-based company sketches (produced by a local art teacher), a change group, called The Garden Committee, was formed. The group facilitated a series of story-telling sessions-the "Garden Seminars." Here, people in the company were asked to liken the important parts of their work to a garden-what kind of plants would their departments be? How had they grown? How did they compare to the other plants? What was the garden like as a whole? Was it a decent place to be? A "Guide to Gardening" was developed by the training department to suggest discussion topics, using gardening terms. Through this process, hundreds of stories were told and recorded. Forums were developed whereby stories could be listened to and compared.

At first, all that was apparent was how different the stories were. The emerging narrative was chaotic, a true pastiche. From this, people in the company started asking how things might be different. How could this garden be made beautiful, more cohesive? New story elements were suggested, compared, and joined. Characters were introduced, changed, and erased. Different themes and plots were considered.

Through these tellings, people in different parts of the organization came to contextualize their work, to interrelate it more. More connections between smelting and extrusion, storage and advertising, architecture and customer perceptions were fashioned. Story-telling groups were rearranged so these stories could be told to different people and in different ways (quite a few stories were converted into songs and skits). Gradually, the repeated tellings seemed to come together in a complex, dialogical way (with many interconnected yet separate tales having been told). The new directions embodied in the overall narrative became touchstones for changes in day-to-day actions. While we make no claims for a cause and effect relationship in this story, it is interesting to note that the company subsequently emerged as a world leader in aluminum production, a happy ending to the tale. They seemed quite satisfied with how their garden had bloomed.

While our telling of this tale is very condensed, it illustrates how a polyvocal, pluralous, and possibly polyphonic approach to strategy might be enacted. The process used here encouraged multiple readings of the organization. Polyvocality occurred through multi-authoring of texts. Mythic, archetypal elements were accessed through the garden metaphor; participants managed to connect their work to earth, sky, and water, both through likening these elements to production processes and through reassessing the relationship of their company to their actual natural environment. Respectful juxtapositioning of seemingly conflicting perspectives generated a type of polyphonic discourse which led to a sense of dynamism and realism (in that the organizational life there consisted of many contradictory views).

AN ENDING (AND BEGINNING)?

Bringing our own narrative to a close, it seems to us the strategy field is on the verge of some major shifts. Future strategic narratives are likely to be as different from previous ones as Roger Rabbit is from Mickey Mouse. Expressing multiple, possibly conflicting viewpoints, these narratives will probably be more choral-like, three dimensional, self reflexive, and dynamic.

In light of these changes, we believe the adoption of a strategy-as-story perspective has a great deal to offer. Drawing from a rich and varied tradition, the narrative view provides a number of platforms for examining upcoming strategies. While we have concentrated on Shklovsky's scheme, other promising explanatory frameworks are discussed by Chatman (1978), Martin (1986), and Polkinghorne (1988).

In suggesting that strategic success is closely linked to narrational needs of authors and readers, narrative theory urges researchers to attend more closely to the sociocultural contexts from which strategies arise. Do some strategic narratives fit the times better than others; i.e., are there prevailing social and political narratives that foster some strategic narratives and not others? For instance, the rise of technofuturist strategic discourse may have been tied to broader social movements, such as the space race.

How employees and managers engage in strategic story-making-what they borrow and reject from mainstream thinkers and how they make sense of the process as they go-has implications for understanding what makes a strategic genre credible and fresh and how it does or does not help them navigate the murky waters of post-industrial organizational life. Watson's (1994) ethnographic study of managers in a failing British telecommunications company is a noteworthy example of this type of research.

As suggested earlier, a narrative view can be helpful in studying the power and politics of strategy. We have suggested that rhetorical analysis can reveal how strategies (and strategists) assume authority. It might also be used to study "deauthorizing" efforts (e.g., empowerment strategies, or downsizing movements). Discourse analysis (cf. Fairclough, 1995) of top management teams might provide insight into how strategic tellings in one "power arena" (Clegg, 1990: 85) interrelate with tellings elsewhere. What happens when the tropes and constructions used by one group conflict with those used by others? For instance, executives often resort to war or sports metaphors when discussing strategy (cf. Hirsch & Andrews, 1983); yet these constructions may be meaningless for other organizational stakeholders, who then may discount, challenge, reauthor, or ignore what they have heard. How are conflicting strategic stories reconciled (e.g. corporate vs. legislative characterizations of contested events; cf. Cook & Barry, 1995)? From a postmodernist perspective, a narrative view can also reveal how organizations become imprisoned by their strategic discourse—deconstructive analysis might be used to show how alternative meanings and constructions are silenced in favor of a dominate story, and suggest who benefits and who loses through such silencing (cf. Boje et al, 1996).

A narrative view also invites a number of hitherto unasked, but potentially important questions. For instance, how do strategic stories and their interpretations shift as an organization matures? In our limited experience, it seems entrepreneurs and senior executives tell very different tales. Similarly, employees in diverse functional areas (such as marketing and accounting) seem to read and interpret strategic stories quite differently. How do stories told about formal strategies arise, circulate, and come back

to affect the formal strategy? Semiotic and ethnographic techniques used by other organizational theorists may prove useful here (e.g., Barley, 1983; Fiol, 1990; Kunda, 1992).

From a pragmatic perspective, how helpful is it to have competing stories and themes running-when do they provide an engaging sense of tension and when do they create alienation? Do certain kinds of strategic stories predict efficacy more than others (as McAdams', 1993 work would suggest)? When are metaphorically rich strategic narratives (cf. Morgan, 1986) better than more factual ones?

To conclude, we believe we have merely scratched the surface of what appears to be a many-layered area of inquiry. While we have tried to articulate some narrative possibilities, the stories that come to be, the rendering of those stories, and the sense that is made of them by strategy researchers and practitioners will ultimately become a narrative in its own right. Or so our story goes.

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