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# Down to earth: Gaia storytelling and the learning organization

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – In accordance with Latour, this paper aims to respond to the call for a “down-to-earth” post-learning organization approach to sustainability, which is critical of Senge’s conception of learning organization (LO).

**Design/methodology/approach** – “Gaia storytelling” is used to define a LO that is “down-to-earth”.

**Findings** – Gaia is understood through the notion of a critical zone, which foregrounds the local and differentiated terrestrial conditions in which life on Earth is embedded.

**Practical implications** – Gaia storytelling implies perceiving LO as a network of storytelling practices enacted and told by unique creative citizens. Such an organization sustains and grows through several entangled storytelling cycles that allow Gaia to shape learning.

**Social implications** – The article distinguishes five different storytelling cycles as a way to explore how the Gaia theater cycle connects to other cycles. The four other cycles are: Gaia thinking, explorative, creative and Gaia truth-telling.

**Originality/value** – A Gaian LO is a new beginning for LO.

**Keywords** Learning organizations, Storytelling, Critical zone, Gaia, Storytelling cycles

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

This article responds to the call in this special issue for envisioning a post learning organization (LO) (Hsu, 2021) through developing the term “Gaia storytelling.” It is based on



Bruno Latour's idea of getting "down-to-earth." We produce an ecological and socially equitable approach to learning based on citizenship of Gaia. We answer the question in the call, "learning in the name of what?" (Hsu, 2021) by developing five storytelling cycles for learning for Gaia. These five cycles replace Senge's five learning disciplines presented in *The Fifth Discipline – The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Senge, 1990).

Originally, the LO was inspired by Argyris and Schön's notion of organizational learning (OL) (1996) and aimed to correct the errors emerging from the silos of the bureaucracy (Jørgensen *et al.*, 2019). LO was thus framed within OL discourse (Pedler and Hsu, 2019) and has a longer history [see Örtenblad (2019) for an overview of contemporary debates on LOs]. This history includes perspectives that focus on institutionalizing learning in organizational routines (Levitt and March, 1988); technical-rational perspectives of learning in which focus is on mental and cognitive processes (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1999); and a sociocultural understanding of learning in which the focus is on the transmission of tradition through social participation and reification (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). These approaches to LO/OL are all anthropocentric in that they focus on either rational or social processes, while ignoring place and nature.

For us, applying the idea of getting down to earth entails rethinking the relations between organizations, learning, place and nature. Contemporary perspectives on sustainable learning are framed as a matter of balancing profit, people and the planet (McAteer, 2019, p. 29) in regard to sustainability and the economy. We believe that a new language is necessary when speaking about sustainable organization and learning. Such a language, we argue, must explicitly frame sustainability as the new grounds for action. Arendt's (1998) notion of storytelling as political action is helpful for reframing the organization as a collaborative space in which free actors can come together for collective action. Furthermore, using Latour's notions of Gaia and "the Terrestrial" in combination with Arendt's notion of storytelling allow us to frame a politics of sustainability as a new ground for LO. The subsequent term, Gaia storytelling, entails learning cycles that are initiated from a deep sense of belonging and rootedness in communities, places and nature's life cycles (Jackson, 2013; Jørgensen, 2020). Such learning cycles, we argue, imply participatory ways of organizing and learning.

Gaia storytelling integrates the complex relations between space and place through the ways in which people story the world for the purpose of initiating collective action aimed for a world in which life can flourish. Our research question is: How can we reconfigure LO as a Gaian LO? Our answer is that Gaia storytelling frames organizing and learning as collective practices that afford the political engagement and responsibility of unique and emplaced citizens of Gaia. Next, we elaborate on the notion of Gaia as an alternative framework to discuss LO. This leads us toward developing the term Gaia storytelling for reconceptualizing LO. We then develop five different storytelling cycles that replace Senge's five learning disciplines. On occasion, we disrupt the reading by giving Gaia a voice through the character "Princess Gaia" to help keeping us grounded.

## Gaia as the new, new principle for sustainable organizations

Our world is not feeling well. Our Mother Earth, who we assume nourishes, cures, and protects us, will not be able to fulfill her task for much longer. She is out of balance. In the era of the Anthropocene, we human beings, the Anthropos, the son of man, claim to have a huge impact on the development of our planet. Every action we take implies a reaction that is unpredictable. We are inevitably bound. Today, this bound between Gaia and us human beings is at stake. (Princess Gaia)

Organizations are becoming increasingly aware that they must respond to sustainability challenges. In recent years, discussions of what organizations should do in relation to sustainability have been organized around the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). LO has also been reworked to address these challenges. The original LO suggested a framework for working systematically with learning in organizations by categorizing four learning disciplines under the fifth discipline, “systems thinking” (Senge, 1990, pp. 12–13). The challenges addressed by LO were the effect of typical problems associated with modern hierarchical bureaucracies and divisions of labor. For example, the need for systems thinking was actualized by sub-optimization and a lack of shared identity among members. Systems thinking was introduced to help weave together an organization more effectively from its different parts. This involved personal growth and learning (“personal mastery”), changing our basic understanding of the world (“mental models”), energizing learning through a “shared vision” and allowing members to learn together from practices in which they each play a part (“team learning”).

Senge and colleagues have suggested a new LO that explicitly addresses sustainability. They argue that sustainability entails a transformation of learning from being profit-oriented toward shaping a sustainable and flourishing world for life (Senge *et al.*, 2011, p. 19). However, the method also requires being able to see the whole picture through systems thinking (Senge *et al.*, 2011, pp. 28–29). This time, the focus is on learning that emerges from “seeing the organization as part of larger systems,” through “collaborating across boundaries” and through “creating solutions instead of simply reacting to problems” (Senge *et al.*, 2011, pp. 44–51). Thus, this second LO uses sustainability to extend systems thinking, but is otherwise framed within the same discourse as the first LO. This implies that this LO is likely to reproduce the problems concerning unsustainability. Instead, we suggest giving an active voice to the multiple agencies of nature such that these agencies become constitutive to the organizations, rather than being something we need to adapt to.

A truly necessary revolution would start from the idea that that humans are unique but perhaps not as different as we used to think, which is a point made toward the end of Senge *et al.*’s book (Senge *et al.*, 2011, pp. 292–293). However, this entails developing a fundamentally different ontological understanding of humans than the one provided by systems thinking. We should not only care for nature as a necessary context for our actions. Nature is the process of living multiple agencies through which we recreate ourselves as terrestrials among other terrestrials (Gleason, 2019). Thus, we need to change how we enact nature in our practices to act with multiple and complex agencies. This is necessary for providing an effective and sustainable post-LO that breaks away from the anthropocentrism that features in initial LOs.

Our inspiration here is Latour’s discussions of Lovelock’s (1995) Gaia hypothesis. For Latour, Gaia belongs to a vision of politics in which he considers “the Terrestrial” to be a new dominant attractor (Latour, 2018). He adopts this term as an attempt to overcome the duality of human and non-human agencies and to emphasize the interdependency of agencies (Gleason, 2019). This follows from an awareness of how life unfolds through an entanglement of a multiplicity of agencies that primarily lay on the top of the Earth, in the critical zone (CZ) (Arènes *et al.*, 2018). Gaia is the living and organic CZ of human and non-human agents and organic and inorganic matter that moves and modifies life (Arènes *et al.*, 2018). For Latour, CZ is a much better way of comprehending the entangled complexities of life than the image of the blue planet seen from space.

Many of you only see me as the Blue Marble, which you can see from outer space. You call me Spaceship Earth and I am somehow too big to be steered by my crew, you. You are overwhelmed and seem to forget that I am much more than what you can see from the orbit, when you become

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aware of my 196.9 million square miles of – let me call it – skin. If you look closer at this layer or skin, it stretches all the way from the tops of the highest trees down into the deepest layer of soil and rock, right here around you. This is the so-called critical zone. Depending on how big humans consider one critical zone to be, there might be hundreds of millions of them. I, Gaia, am any Critical Zone you can think of. And I am of course the very critical zone you live in. (Princess Gaia)

Gaia implies that we must leave behind the ontology of “nature as a universe,” which has governed the modern era, in favor of perceiving “nature as a process” (Gleason, 2019). We are part of nature through the places in which we are born, live, eat, imagine, dream, desire, create and tell stories. Other terrestrials, landscapes, forests, soil, mud, sand, water and the locally specific flora and fauna are entangled parts of our becoming. These agencies are, thus, both physical conditions for our existence and important factors in our practices and identities.

According to Latour, as we have never given Gaia the central position that she deserves in politics, she must now become a central actor that brings us “down to earth” (Latour, 2018). We are moved toward this ground because this ground is no longer firm and stable. The point is not that Gaia has not always been alive, dynamic and moving. The instability and disequilibrium that Gaia creates is what separates the Earth from all the other globes that we know of (Lovelock, 1995). However, because of human actions, changes have accelerated to a degree that beautiful Gaia is being turned into plastic lakes and acidified oceans, blue skies are becoming smoggy, human bodies filled with antibiotics and pesticides, forests are turning into deserts and so on. CZ highlights the enormous complexity of entangled agencies of the terrestrials that reshape and modify life differently depending on place. Gaia, understood as CZ, is herself composed of a multiplicity of local, different and entangled CZs, which react differently to interferences such as global warming, acidification and fracking.

That Gaia has her own agency implies that we need to come to terms with the innate aliveness of all matters on mother Earth, as well as our own embeddedness as “ordinary critters” within this aliveness (Haraway, 2016). We suggest that facing Gaia entails an ontological call for a *new* new world (Latour, 2017); one that replaces the last new world – the Modern world where classical physics and systems thinking were integral. However, even if Latour’s notion of Gaia is inspired by Lovelock, Latour’s notion of Gaia as a CZ is also distinct from Lovelock’s notion. Lovelock (1995, p. 119) suggests the following three principles for living with Gaia.

- The most important condition of Gaia is to maintain constant conditions for all terrestrial life. This tendency should be as pre-dominant as it was before man’s arrival on the scene.
- Gaia has vital organs at the core, as well expendable or redundant ones mainly at the periphery. What we do to our planet may depend on where we do it.
- Gaian responses to changes for the worse must obey the rules of cybernetics, where the time constant and the loop gain are important factors.

The difference is thus that Lovelock makes the case for what we, inspired by Foucault (2003), might frame as a “climate governmentality,” in which states should conduct the actions of its citizens toward sustainability. This corresponds to the climate science approach in which, for example, the nine planetary limits cannot be exceeded (Rockström *et al.*, 2009) without jeopardizing Gaia’s vital organs. Latour’s reading of Gaia is more local and “ANT” – like where ANT both refers to actor–network theory and can be used

metaphorically for the myriad of small agencies that untiringly reshape and modify local places (Latour, 2007). Climate governmentality is consistent with the image of the blue planet. For Latour, Gaia means putting our feet in the ground of CZs in the metaphorical sense that we should shape our horizons of climate from this ground. Latour's notion of Gaia opens a space for local climate responsibility. Latour's Gaia thus opens a comprehensible space for climate action for citizens, entrepreneurs, small businesses and local municipalities.

### **Gaia storytelling and the learning organization**

Storytelling is important for our purposes of shaping a new Gaia take on LO. For Arendt, storytelling comprises the ways in which we transform our inner experiences and appear before others (Arendt, 1998, p. 50). In this sense, storytelling is considered a political act that always takes place between people. More specifically, people express their motivations, intentions and interests before others through storytelling (Jørgensen, 2020). Tassinari *et al.* (2017) argue that for Arendt, storytelling is the only true form of political action. It is important for opening up spaces and creating dialog, communication and collective action in the web of human relations (Arendt, 1998, pp. 184–185). This is different from the process of thinking, which Arendt claims takes place in solitude (Arendt, 1971).

For Arendt, storytelling expresses the unfolding of the highest form of human and political life. It is the activity by which we are reborn in action. Through stories, people confirm their identities as people who are unique and have specific opinions and talents. Second, through being confirmed as actors whose actions and opinions matter, “rootedness” and “belonging” to people, communities, organizations, places and nature are confirmed. Consequently, Jackson (2013, p. 49) proposes that what is at stake in storytelling is “emplacement” instead of “emplotment.” The latter captures how a chronological sequence of events is transformed into a story. It mediates the relations between pre-understanding, understanding and after-understanding (Cunliffe *et al.*, 2004), and is concerned with the establishment of continuity between past and future. In comparison, emplacement is about (re)creating and (re)negotiating our belonging to urban, rural and other man-made material places but also forests, soil, fields, rivers, streams, lakes, hills and mountains and other natural places.

As storytelling is enacted in the spaces in-between, it entails responsibility for our terrestrial contemporaries, predecessors and newcomers. Therefore, space is not only human, but also incorporates the material affordances of places in ways in which space and place are entangled and conditional upon each other (Serres, 1995). To use a notion from Barad (2007), place (i.e. Gaia) “cuts” and enacts lived spaces of terrestrials into being, as well as the other way around (Strand, 2012). Learning, as a new beginning, is constructed from the spatial relations enacted from and by the material configuration of place (De Certeau, 1984). Learning relies on people, concepts, artifacts, geographies and landscapes as well as water, air and life itself. According to Arendt, true storytelling relies on the courage to express one's intentions and who you are. Such action comes forward when we are with others without being for or against them (Arendt, 1998, p. 180). A critical point, however, and the reason why we need risk taking in such spaces, is that power and surveillance, along with collective action, also work through practices of revelation and visibility (Marquez, 2012). When we “cut” storytelling through Gaia, such courage and risk-taking becomes even more outspoken because we are then speaking and acting as terrestrials in an anthropocentric world that is often hostile to change.

Gaia implies transforming Arendt's notion of storytelling into a more terrestrial understanding, whereby humans and non-humans are considered equal. Arendt emphasized

the superiority of humans despite arguing that the eternal recurrence is the highest principle of being (Arendt, 1998, p. 97). For her, only humans could act and transform the world (Totschnig, 2017). In contrast, Haraway (2016, p. 10) uses the term “multispecies storytelling” to capture how multiple terrestrials, species and agencies communicate, interact and modify life. This perception expands Arendt’s ideas of appearance and plurality and suggests that the unfolding of life is itself an existential condition for all terrestrials. Furthermore, Gaia is considered to have her own agency.

Gaia storytelling entails a new beginning for the LO. Jørgensen *et al.* (2019) argue that Senge’s original LO was a technical device for intervening in and optimizing organizations. They further argued that second generation LO emphasized individualization, competitiveness and performance consistent with a neoliberal narrative of “globalization.” They imagined that a third generation LO would incorporate ideas of democratic participation and would be a creative and dynamic space made up by free actors. Such participation does not, however, become whole without such storytelling being entangled with the life conditions of the ground upon which people stand.

For Arendt, storytelling is conditioned on freedom. To act and to be free are one. However, this is not freedom from all others because freedom can never be thought of as being independent from interdependence (Arendt, 1961). We are born into and live in a state of interdependence of nature, trees, water, air, animals, biodiversity and other people. Freedom is thus an obligation to others that we cannot refuse. Gaia can imprison us and enact our future. Furthermore, we can be excluded from participation in communities. Freedom requires political rights, access to education, culture, participation in political processes, health care and so forth, according to Butler (2006). It also requires clean water, air, green areas, forests, hills, lakes and mountains.

An LO inhabited by Gaia storytellers involves a view of its members as citizens of societies and communities, but also of nature. Such Gaia citizenship and kinship are the foundation of this new LO. This also implies that we must reimagine LO as a democratic space in which other organizational stakes can be voiced. Gaia storytelling thus involves deconstructing the aligned hierarchical LO with the purpose of reorganizing it into networks of responsible groups, communities and people. In the Gaian LO, organizing is a multiple, varied, dynamic and fluid process that emerges from the co-constructed actions of whole beings such as craftsmen, artists, writers, teachers and professionals that embody the agencies of places in their words and actions. A Gaian LO is therefore based on the responsibility and plurality of free actors, not discipline and strategic alignment.

### **Gaia storytelling practices for sustainable learning**

To engage in Gaia storytelling is to assume responsibility for the rebirth of life itself. This obligation to Gaia needs to be a pervasive part of learning activities in organizations. Thus, Gaia should be the anchor for a concrete, dynamic and complex story of the heterogeneity and responsiveness to life on Earth. True storytelling (Larsen *et al.*, 2020) involves a true relationship with Gaia and entails that we as actors and participants of LO are vital parts of future life practices from within the CZ. The call to get us down to earth involves radical re-grounding, which can be metaphorically captured as making the world “flat” again. This implies reorienting ourselves from the local sites of our engagements and how they tangle with Gaia. Such engagement entails feeling, sensing, touching and breathing Gaia to imagine how multiple forces and agencies around, within and through us diffract and refract and give birth to new appearances (Latour, 2017, 2018).

How can we enable storytelling for Gaia? Inspired by Sparre and Boje, we suggest a three-fold matrix for sustainable development that relates Gaia in the form of the 17 SDGs,



cooperative partners and organizations and participatory action research practices as entangled relations (Figure 1).

Through participatory action learning, this model connects people, economic activities and technologies around Gaia’s life cycles. The matrix constitutes a basis for remaking the world using storytelling cycles through which the politics and material practices of an organization can resonate with Gaia. Material practices connect the matters of resource use and production with people and organizations across time and space. The rework of such practices requires the creative imagination of actors, that is, storytelling. Such creative imagination is not afforded through monitoring, controlling and managing learning. Creativity and innovation require the same process of maturation by which beautiful appearances emerge in their natural rhythm. There is no exterior or uniform principle of Gaia – a flower becomes from within its entangled state of becoming with Gaia. The acceleration we are currently experiencing, in which we must run faster and faster to stay in the same place (Rosa, 2020) is destructive.

We suggest five different storytelling cycles for creating organizational practices that resonate with Gaia. Importantly, such cycles allow people to tell stories of “who” they are instead of “what” they are (Arendt, 1998, p. 180). The people in a Gaian LO are artists and artisans who put some personality and uniqueness into what they do. The five storytelling cycles replace the five original disciplines of Senge’s LO. The cycles are entangled but organized as part of a “theater cycle,” which collects the other cycles and thus replaces systems thinking. “Thinking with Gaia” is a spiritual cycle that entails a Gaia mode of personal mastery. Through “creative” and “explorative” cycles, we explore new ideas and understandings of practicing Gaia in the organization. These cycles replace mental models and team learning. Finally, “the truth-telling cycle” is the cycle in which we create a shared vision within and across organizations through dialogical encounters with stakeholders. The five cycles collect Gaia, body and mind, with business practices. In alignment with the ideas of Boje and Jørgensen (2020), a Gaian LO situates storytelling and places in the heart of business modeling.

A Gaian LO is not fixed and has no boundaries. Instead, it moves, breathes, contracts and expands in a living dynamic symbiosis with its natural, material and social community. We



Figure 1.  
A three-fold matrix  
for sustainable  
development

Source: Sparre and Boje (2020)

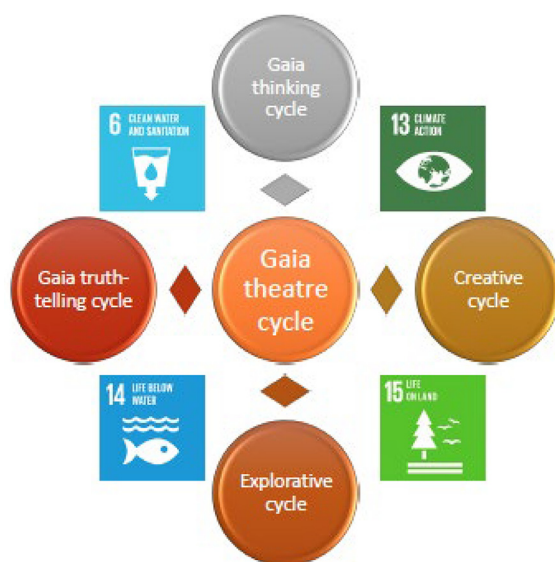
use the term cycle because, unlike a circle, it contains some degree of repetition and change. Such storytelling cycles reframe change or project management from being a technical matter of concern to a question about disclosing and revitalizing who we are. The term “cycles” further implies that learning is an iterative and continuous process, like other recurrent and refractive processes of nature. The model below depicts the idea of how the Gaia storytelling cycles revolve around the cycle of theatres (Figure 2).

### Five Gaia storytelling cycles

Living in the moment from deep within is what we call intrinsic. When we act intrinsically, we act from within ourselves and follow a deeper purpose – we are inspired and visionary. In being visionary, we are deeply rooted in trust. We are imagining the most beautiful of all worlds. We are in resonance with ourselves, connected, or even conciliated with ourselves and our actions and the world around us. We are acting based on the notion of love. Plus, we are actually loving the whole process of being and doing. (Princess Gaia)

#### *Gaia theater cycle*

The Gaia theater cycle collects what sustainable learning is all about: to create a set of living, substantial stories that can be seen and heard as valid and worthwhile stories. By collecting the different cycles into one, this cycle serves the same purpose as the fifth discipline in Senge’s LO. The ancient Greeks and Romans saw theater performances as important political spaces for creating images and new realities. Representing organizations such as theaters is consistent with the idea that strategies, practices and business models are the organization’s way of configuring and collecting dispersed fragments of time, space and matter into a story. Playing theater involves scripting, staging and interrelating performances. It involves materiality and the use of artifacts and objects in places and landscapes. Until the moment of truth – when the actual performance takes place before an audience – playing theater involves experimentation, creativity, learning and self-



**Figure 2.**  
Five Gaia storytelling  
cycles



consciousness. Instead of being knowledge consumers, you become a knowledge creator (Sparre, 2020). Throughout different stages, the theater is filled with opportunities to create new insights and reflections about our identities and practices.

The story performed in the theater is based on an “antenarrative” script (Boje, 2001; Boje *et al.*, 2016). The script imagines and visualizes a future, which is not yet finished but open for interpretation. If the scripts become too linear, we would not have any playground. If we do not have a vision, we would not have any direction. Furthermore, even if there is a script, the enactment of this script is participatory and dialogical. The theater cycle is a setting in which Gaia organizing is rehearsed and learned in an embodied fashion. It may involve many parallel processes and loops where each part of the overall performance is re-scripted, modified and changed. The participants in the Gaian LO play different parts as authors, actors, scenographers, designers, digital tool makers and so forth. Importantly, we play by connecting materials and practices into a powerful story that is lived and becomes one with Gaia – the stage upon which the organization is performed.

#### *Gaia thinking cycle*

This cycle helps people connect with Gaia in an existential sense. It is developed through reading Gaia and thinking through one another (Barad, 2007). Thinking with Gaia is a practice of a deep personal story rework in which the person sensitizes her situational awareness of Gaia to discover, sense and embrace the beautiful, the good, the truthful and the just. Thinking is based on Arendt’s deep two-in-one dialogue that a person has with themselves (Arendt, 1971). It is an active process that takes place in solitude or when we are in the company with another self, that is, a “friend” (Arendt, 2003, p. 98). Such thinking is, according to Arendt, necessarily organized around what we love (Arendt, 1971). In the Gaian LO, such thinking takes a particular form in that the two-in-one dialogues are nurtured by connecting with familiar and beloved non-human friends like the old oak tree in your garden, the water pond in your hometown, the soil of your own tomato plants or the animals of your neighbor or family. For such a two-in-one dialogue to become meaningful, sensitivity toward the vibrant matters of nature is required. Imagination is also required to convey what, for example, a tree, a river or a dog is telling us.

Admittedly, such practices are controversial. After all, it is not common to ask people to seek out their spiritual anchor point in nature. However, as Foucault (2005) argued, leadership practice and training began with spirituality. Through connecting and relating to higher purposes and meaning, storytelling is also spiritual. Ethics, which involves spirituality, can never be scientifically verified (Arendt, 1971); yet, the importance of how we relate to ourselves, others and places seems to be affirmed daily in our feelings of emotions of happiness, love, engagement, anger, frustration and so forth. In Gaia thinking, we imagine ourselves to be guided by the particular figurations of nature that enact us before we even think of it (Haraway, 2013). Furthermore, Gaia thinking prepares and collects us and mobilizes our energy and courage for Gaia action. Such thinking is not goal oriented. It instead relies on moments of resonating and being in contact with the vibrancy around us. Answers must emerge and mature freely at their own tempos. Focus and attention, as well as the freedom to allow the mind to sense and perform its movements, is a necessary starting point. Following this, the dedication to embed such a practice in daily routines is needed, to cultivate a steady connection with this level of being with Gaia.

#### *Creative cycle*

The creative cycle is important because we need the creative ability of all actors to create beautiful stories in the theater. Creativity involves the art of making. It entails care and

compassion for the practices in which we are engaged. Even if such activities might be performed in a group or a team, they usually take place in the privacy of an intimate relationship between the material and its creator. Such activities are embedded in the activities of the artist, artisan and the craftsman, who has a dedicated personal relation to both the material involved in the creation and the idea that drives it, and does not colonize nature in their pursuit of making stories. This involves appreciation and care toward the material that one takes from nature for creation. For example, organic is beautiful and creates well-being, allowing for durability and maintenance equally. The founder of Patagonia, Yvon Chouinard, is an artist (Chouinard, 2016). Such storytelling in which objects are made to last, and in which even small activities and objects are artful, is what we must return to (Strand, 2012; Benjamin, 1999). It entails that the practice of making in itself becomes saturated with presence instead of being associated with senseless production and consumption.

The art of making embedded in the creative cycle implies more than the artist's loving care for the activities she is engaged in. It entails awareness and dedicated companionship with Gaia in all stages of creation. Such a creative process is incompatible with specialization and the global division of labor, where we lose sight of the whole process. It is an act of material storytelling (Strand, 2020) in which the materialization of the creative crafting process bears the marks of meaningfulness. In the creative cycle, we have, metaphorically speaking, left the factory floor and moved back into the workshop, atelier and lab.

### *Explorative cycle*

The explorative cycle seeks to create and explore new stories through experimental workshops and alternative setups between multiple actors (Jørgensen, 2020). The explorative cycle thus involves a staging in which participants are invited and encouraged to play, co-explore and co-create new stories. The explorative cycle is linked to Arendt's original notion of storytelling as a new beginning that actors initiate by disclosing their innermost intentions and interests before others. This happens in a space of appearance in which everybody is "equal" in the sense of being persons with unique intentions and capabilities. The emergence of such spaces cannot be guaranteed, but we can create alternative spaces that disrupt ordinary rituals and power relations and allow for plural voices.

Tassinari *et al.* (2017), for example, used puppet theater and plug social TV to collect and mobilize citizens, students, workers, businesspeople and public officials, and create other stories of the future in the cities of Seraing and Milan. Strand (2012) uses artifacts, sandboxes and Feng Shui-inspired practices to create new and more sustainable stories and material practices in a deafness-blind center in Aalborg (Strand, 2018). Participants in such spaces are adventurers, explorers, artists, artisans, craftsmen, poets, writers, seafarers and any other unique creative citizens who extend themselves beyond their ordinary discrete functions and the positions they inhabit in everyday life.

Explorative Gaia storytelling spaces always break with existing mindsets in containing something new and in expressing the unique, creative and reflexive intentions of Gaia citizens. In such explorative spaces, we tangle with others, and the material affordances of our surroundings, as important tools for exploring new stories. Gaia storytelling implies that equality is extended to all terrestrial companions (Haraway, 2016). This happens when citizens' voices are shaped through the contours and characteristics of the surrounding CZ. Such explorations require courage and openness in that our innermost stories of relation and belongingness become subject to dialogue and collective action.

*Truth-telling cycle*

Gaia truth-telling cycles evolve around dialogues and conversations with stakeholders to mobilize support and legitimize Gaia actions. Through truth-telling, Gaia storytelling is located at the inter-play between organizations and their customers, competitors, suppliers, citizens, banks, employees, non-governmental organizations, public authorities and other stakeholders. The truth-telling cycle thus focuses on the processes through which organizations communicate and manage their responsibilities to Gaia, society and the community.

We are inspired by [Tamboukou's \(2012\)](#) reading of Foucault's notion of parrhesia. Thus, speaking the truth is not about assertion or correspondence, but frankness. Second, truth-telling involves risk-taking and speaking on behalf of marginalized voices like Gaia. Finally, telling the truth is a duty. Gaia truth-telling involves communicating and having a dialogue with stakeholders from the point of Gaia as a new sovereign. Such truth-telling involves renegotiating relations and positions through iterative learning cycles, whereby we push the organization toward emplacement within Gaia's life cycles without jeopardizing its emplacement within communities, societies and economies. A Gaian LO also lives and breathes through its relations with stakeholders. Having spaces for communication and dialogue with these stakeholders is crucial for renegotiating relations, while also obtaining a common horizon.

However, Gaia is the new sovereign, and strategies for managing responsibilities cannot put her in jeopardy. Two examples of Gaia truth-telling are identified. The first involves "ideological" positioning, where organizations are built from Gaia. Embedded in such storytelling is a clear political standpoint and ideology of being a citizen of Gaia. Such organizations are not built for profit as a first priority, but for co-creating and shaping a good life. The second narrative is an "emplacement" narrative. The purpose of such strategic storytelling is to emplace organizations within Gaia's CZs. It also entails a clear political standing point of sustainability but, in contrast to the ideological position, emplacement is a matter of re-storying historical and material relations to Gaia in an iterative fashion. This strategy is pragmatic because it acknowledges that organizations are generally unsustainable because of their history and position. It also implies that the move toward sustainability is gradual and muddy. Nonetheless, this approach is also integrated, coherent and holistic.

**Conclusions**

This paper has outlined a new beginning for LO through Gaia storytelling. A new vision has been established in which storytelling is central for reconfiguring our relations to place and its multiple agencies. The path toward a Gaian LO is long and requires courage. However, we are convinced that the celebration of life itself, which is inherent to a Gaian LO, can create a richer future for humans on Earth, as well as for many other terrestrials. As our suggestions are radical, we have deliberately tried to play with language: Gaia storytelling, the terrestrial, appearance, citizenship, learning cycle, theater and truth-telling. Responding to a call from [Pedler et al. \(2019\)](#), Gaia storytelling is an attempt of creating a new language necessary for shaping an alternative LO, which is capable of creating an ecologically healthy planet. Gaia storytelling thus moves organizations from *EGO* to *ECO* ([Pedler et al., 2019](#)). The Gaia storytelling cycles create spaces from which we can imagine and create new prospective antenarratives ([Boje and Rosile, 2019](#)). We, however, do not perceive the Gaian LO as an amendment to LO but as a new beginning, a post LO.

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