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COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE at work

Understanding Organizational Narrative-Counter-narratives Dynamics: An overview of Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO) and Storytelling Organization Theory (SOT) approaches

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Abstract

There is a rich tradition of studying narratives in the fields of communication and language at work. Our purpose is to review two approaches to narrative-counter-narrative dynamics. The first is ‘storytelling organization theory’ (SOT), which interplays western retrospective-narrative ways of knowing with more indigenous ways of knowing called ‘living stories’, ‘pre-narrative’ and ‘pre-story’, and the prospective-‘antenarrative’ practices. The second is the communication as constitutive of organization (CCO) approach to narrative-counter-narrative. Both SOT and CCO deconstruct dominant narratives about communication and language at work. Both theories revisit, challenge, and to some extent cultivate counter-narratives. SOT seeks to go beyond and beneath the narrative-counter-narrative ‘dialectic’ in an antenarrative approach. CCO pursues counter-narratives as a useful tool to make tensions within and between organizations and society, salient as they may contest or negotiate dominant narratives, which hinder the organization from benefitting from less powerful counter-narratives.

1 Introduction

What are the dynamics between and beneath narrative, their counter-narratives *and* their communicative capability to stabilize and destabilize work organizations? We make contributions to two theories: (1) ‘storytelling organization theory’ (SOT), which treats the antenarrative level beneath narrative/counter-narrative as the basis of organization and work communication, and (2) ‘communication constitutes organization’ (CCO), which considers narrative-counter-narrative as an essential part of meaning-construction in organizations (Kuhn 2005, 2006, 2016). Cooren and Taylor (1997) developed CCO so that counter-narratives can be understood as confronting authoritative organization and work practices (Kuhn, 2016, p. 22). Previous studies of SOT and CCO have not addressed their similarities and differences, yet both purport to address counter-narrative studies (Bamberg, 2004; Bamberg & Andrews, 2004).

We will explore ways that the two approaches can integrate in an understanding of counter-narrative. For example, both SOT and CCO treat counter-narratives as an ever-present opposition to dominant organization narratives. On the one hand, a dominant or petrified narrative is what holds together strong, long-lived corporate cultures (Czarniawska, 2004). On the other hand, dominant narratives can reduce the creative potential of people at work, and marginalize polyphonic identity (Bakhtin, 1981). We therefore want to focus on ways SOT has adaptive and generative potential (Boje, 2001, 2011, 2016).

Our article is structured as follows: We begin with a short outline of the emergence of the main concepts ‘counter-narrative’ and ‘antenarrative’ in various contexts and interrelations. We include representative definitions of narrative and story. Then, we turn to an overview of SOT and CCO. We end with ways in which these two approaches can contribute to a greater understanding of the narrative-counter-narrative dynamics that are ever-present in complex organizations.

2 The Rise of Counter-narratives at Work

Previous research on counter-narratives can be traced back to the last decades of the 20th century. There is a general agreement among scholars that counter-narrative is relational by nature in the sense that its meaning derives from an interrelation with other narratives and stories (see e.g. Lundholt 2017; Frandsen et.al. 2017b). Due to its interdisciplinary nature the concept has been applied within various disciplines particularly in the fields of history (see for example Funnel 1996; Mordhorst 2008) and cultural studies (particularly race-related issues). In 1988, Lipsitz published the article ‘Mardi Gras Indians: Carnival and Counter-Narrative in Black New Orleans’, and in *Time passages: collective memory and American popular culture* (1990) he applied the terms ‘counter-memory’ and ‘dominant narratives’. Lucaites & Condit (1990) talked about ‘Counter-cultural rhetoric in the martyred black vision’, and Roe (1995) called for and suggested counter-narratives to development narratives in the article ‘Except-Africa: Postscript to a Special Section on Development Narratives’.

With their publication ‘Narrative Inversion as a Tactical Framing Strategy: The Ideological Origins of the Nation of Islam’, Acevedo et al. (2010) contributed with a counter-narrative strategy of narrative inversion. In 2012 Amah explored the counter-narratives of African American students considered “non-high performing” and/or “non-college bound.” Godley & Loretto (2013) studied how counter-narratives are fostered through pedagogical and conversational moves among African American students. In their chapter ‘Ka Whawhai Tonu Mátou: Indigenous Television in Aotearoa/New Zealand’, Smith & Abel (2014) assessed Māori Television’s ability to challenge the orthodox representations of this contemporary settler nation by presenting a counter-narrative of New Zealand national identity.

The interdisciplinary texture of counter-narrative is moreover evident when gazing at the wide range of studies where the concept is applied covering both traditional and recent genres or themes such as social media (Tiidenberg & Cruz 2015), radicalization (Ginkel 2015), digital storytelling (Lenette & Brough 2013), photographs (Poddiakov 2004), law (Barton 2007; Hewitt 2005), crime (Page 2014), film (Abu-Remaileh 2014) and childrens’ literacy (Rogers & Brefeld 2015).

In a recent edited volume *Counter-Narrative and Organizations* (Frandsen, Kuhn & Lundholt, 2017), the concept of counter-narratives is considered within an organizational context providing various understandings of the binary relation between master narrative and counter-narrative. In that volume, Jensen, Maagaard and Rasmussen (2017) claim that the very existence of a master narrative “depends on there being implicit variations, alternative ways of interpreting and telling that are to be controlled, suppressed or silenced — *mastered*” (p. 87). Gabriel (2017) terms the reciprocal relation between counter- and master narrative a ‘co-creation’ and observes that “counter-narratives can and often do turn into master narratives, once they have started to spawn counter-narratives of their own” (p. 211). Czarniawska (2017) explains the relation as follows: “some narrative has been chosen (or enforced) as the official one, or the legitimate one, or the correct one; but there are others that defy and contradict it” (p. 196). Boje (2001, pp. 71-72) contends that stories react to “counter-story” in story and time weak and strong-tie networking within ‘storytelling organizations’ and their connections to their environment.

There are particularly two extensive studies scholars within the field of counter-narrative have paid particular attention to. The first study is *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* by Nelson (2001) who paid attention to certain groups of people (e.g. Gypsies, mothers, nurses, and transsexuals) by contesting their identities as viewed by others. The second study is *Considering Counter-Narratives* by Bamberg and Andrews (2004) who focused primarily on how individuals use their own life stories of personal experience (e.g. narratives about maternal influence, dealing with failure in infertility treatments, and older women and sexuality), to position themselves in relation to dominant and/or master

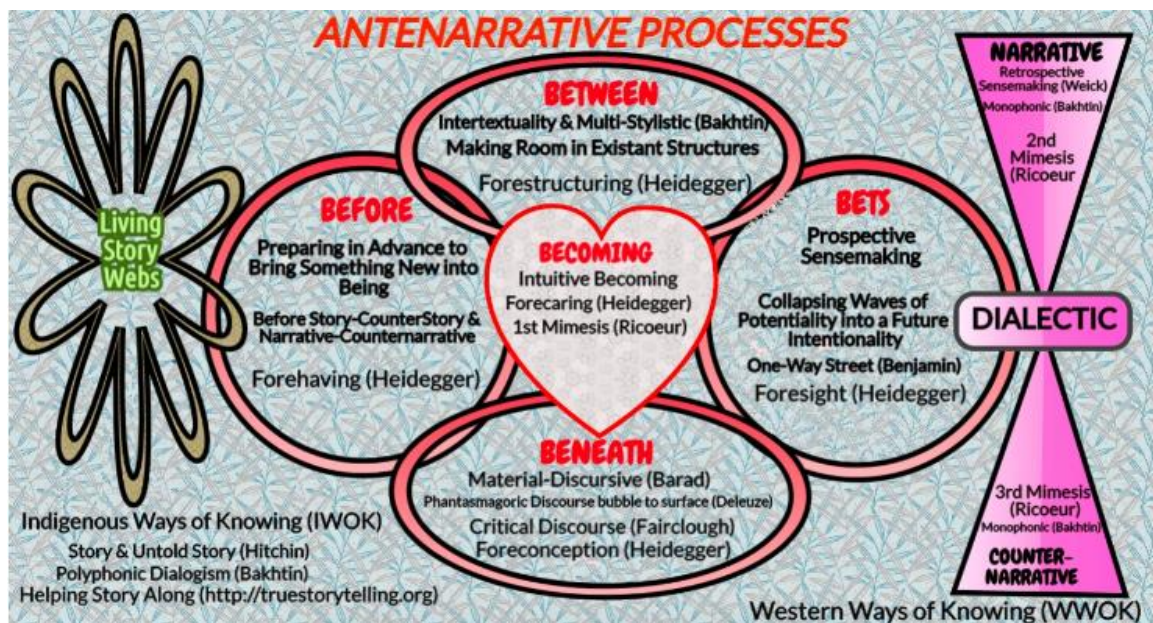
narratives. Bamberg and Andrews (2004, p. 1) defined counter-narratives as a concept that “only make sense in relation to something else, that which they are countering. The very name identifies it as a positional category, in tension with another category.” They stated that, the “something else” that they are countering has often been referred to as a ‘master narrative’, a concept first termed by Lyotard (1984) as ‘grand narrative’. This ‘other category’ has been referred to by terms such as ‘core story’ (Larsen, 2000) and ‘master stories’ (Deuten and Rip, 2000). Boje (2001) introduces the term ‘dominant story’ and is furthermore concerned with the concept of ‘antenarrative’.

2.1 What is Antenarrative?

Antenarrative can be defined as the double meaning of ‘ante’, (1) ‘ante’ as the before-narrative & pre-story processes constitutive of narrative, and (2) ‘ante’ as the ‘bets on the future, through prospective sensemaking. Boje (2001): “Antenarrative” is defined as “the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation, a bet” (p. 1), a very improper story can be transformative (p. 4).

The antenarrative process approach began by addressing the ‘before-narrative’ and the prospective sensemaking ‘bets’ on the future (Boje, 2001). Weick (2012), after years of preferring only retrospective narrative sensemaking (Weick, 1995), came out supporting the potential of prospective antenarrative sensemaking. More recently antenarrative inquiry has developed further the concepts of the beneath (the foreconceptions), the between (forestructuring) processes, and the becoming (forecare). For this model (known as 5B), antenarrative methods were worked out (Rosile et. al., 2013; Boje, 2014):

Figure 1 Antenarrative processes (Boje, 2018)



The figure illustrates how living/counter-story webs and grander narratives/counter-narratives interplay through the 5 B's of antenarrative, namely Before, Beneath, Between, Bets and Becoming. Antenarrative is defined as processes *before*-narrative, *between* narrative and counter-narratives, *beneath* them, *bets* on future, and the *becoming* of care for what can and ought to be (Boje, 2001, 2008, 2011, 2015; Boje and Henderson, 2014; Haley and Boje, 2014; Boje, Haley and Saylor, 2015; Henderson and Boje, 2015; Svane and Boje, 2015). What these definitions suggest is that while narratives imitate action with a beginning-middle-end linear plot, there are counter-narratives with rival linear plots, and antenarratives that are more fragmented, nonlinear, partial, and lack the coherence of a narrative or antenarrative.

Haley and Boje (2014) included antenarrative in their study of McDonald's. Boje, Haley, and Saylor (2016) then applied it to Burger King's antenarrative processes. The most recent antenarrative work addressed its relation to counter-narrative in different cross-cultural contexts (Boje, Svane, & Gergerich, 2016). See Vaara, Sonenshein, and Boje (2016) for a review of how narrative and antenarrative have been related in theory and empirical work.

3 What is the relation of antenarratives to counter-narratives?

The answer has to do with rhythms, those everyday mundane repetitions of events. These rhythms spatialize, temporalize, and matter in organizations.

The antenarrative approach is particularly focused on sociomateriality, and draws upon work on assemblage (Boje & Henderson, 2014; Henderson & Boje, 2016; Boje, 2016). Antenarrative includes the everyday *space* and time and the assemblage of things that *matter* is full of rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004). In Baradian work this is known as inseparability of *spacetime mattering*. Organizations *spatialize* their world, *temporalize* their history and strategic future, and order the things *mattering* (equipment, technologies, tools, etc.). Lefebvre (2004, p. 6) stresses how there is “no rhythm without repetition in time and in space” and that “differences” matter. Antenarrative analysis privileges the instant (the blink of the eye), not the duration of the moment (Bergsonian *durée*).

In short, narratives of progress are dialectic to counter-narratives, which point out or contribute to progress undone. We turn now to the first of two major approaches to understanding the dynamics of narrative-counter-narrative, the ‘storytelling organization theory.’ This is followed by the ‘communication as constitutive of organization’ theory.

4 Storytelling Organization Theory (SOT)

‘Storytelling Organization Theory’ (SOT) began with work by David Boje (1991) in the office supply study, where storytelling is asserted to be the primary sensemaking device of organizing in the storytelling organization. Boje (1995) continued SOT work in his study of Disney as a Tamara-land of storytelling processes, spatially and temporally situated in organizing and organization.

Recent work by Linda Hitchin and colleagues show that there are ecologies of untold stories as well as story fragments antecedent and pre-ontological to organizational stabilized narratives (Izak, Hitchin, and Anderson, 2015; Hitchin, 2015; Izak and Hitchin, 2014). Hitchin (2015) develops Boje's (1995) earlier work in Tamara-land storytelling organization theory, contributes to antenarrative theory, by focusing on the impact of untold stories. Hitchin (2015) asserts that untold stories are “boundless magnitude and scale” generatively in organization relations, in spacetime mattering of Tamara-land. Beneath the narrative-counter-narrative dynamic, and constitute of it, Boje's focus is on ‘antenarratives’. Ante has the double meaning of ‘before’ narrative and counter-narrative, and it is ‘bets’ or ‘antes’ on the future.

Boje (2008, p. 250) asserts that ‘counter-story’ plays an important dialectical role in ‘storytelling organizations’, and that “counter-story and counter-narratives: are both dialectical and dialogical” (p. 176) in ways that are “centripetal (story control) and centrifugal (counter-story amplification)” (p. 58). The difference is (living) stories (an indigenous understanding) is always in the middle, without the compunction of a beginning or ending. In living stories, the telling is terser, less coherent than western narrative, because the indigenous community contexts are implicit. In Chandler's M-form historical investigations, “Narratives of progress rest on the metaphysical illusion that the world is getting better and better. A counter-narrative in each period has its ideals. Sometimes it is progress. Other times it is the chaos of Enron or WorldCom” (Boje, 2014, p. 146).

4.1 What is Tamara-land?

In Tamara-land theory (Boje, 1995), each new teller edits the original performed story others are telling by inserting their own trope, metaphor, characterization, and/or emplotment. This indifference to the *in situ* living story performance, privileges a quieten a passive non-telling of untold stories. Tamara-land theory situates story work enactment in the political, by embedding buildings, rooms, and landscape of the spatial and temporal shifting contexts of organizations. In organizations, bigger than the one room schoolhouse, participants in ongoing storytelling are not all in the same room, at once.

Rather people in organizations, as in a Tamara play, are not one audience, in one room, witnessing enacted story performances. In the ‘spacetime mattering’ of organizations, some people are in a particular room, while others are in their own rooms, or in corridors, parking places, etc. distributed spatially and temporally. People in Tamara-land must decide which room or hallway to be in, whom to follow, to trace the shifting meaning of stories told in one room and

another room. You cannot as an individual be in all the storytelling rooms, at once, so choices of when and where to be, matter to meaning-making.

Tamara-land raises the specter of the ‘sociomaterial’ over against the naïve fantasy that storytelling is situated in one room, at one time, with all participants in the role of passive audience. The play, ‘Tamara’, takes place in a mansion, or as in ‘Big Story Conference’ in the offices of Steel Case Corporation in Los Angeles. Most organizations have people distributed spatially across many office locations. This raises the theoretical concern for the ambiguity and uncertainty of storytelling spread out spatially in different rooms (and corridors), different floors, different buildings, and within those sites, at different times.

The hierarchic organization cannot unilaterally control the narrative, since storytelling is simultaneous, and this includes the politics of who gets to tell an organization narrative, and the majority of untold stories. In sum, in Tamara-land storytelling organization theory, locational position (place), timing, and physics of not being able to be in every room of storytelling enactment, at once is an essential sociomaterial landscape, and situation of the storytelling, and the politics of theatre as actors and audience generate self-organizing trajectories.

Hitchin and colleagues, focus on ‘untold’ stories’, their multiplicity, and sociomateriality in ‘ agential real’ of spacetime-mattering (Barad, 2003, 2007, 2011; Boje and Henderson, 2014; Henderson and Boje, 2015; Strand, 2011) of organizations. Antenarrative is beneath, before, between, and bets on the future constitutive of narrative-counter-narrative dynamics. Antenarratives are attractors, fractals, virtual fragments, stings, flux contingencies, complexity, contradictions, and the forever inability of obtaining consensus, synthesis or harmony between untold and fragmented stories and the overarching, dominant, representational narratives. Hitchin (2015, p. 214) connects antenarrative processes to ‘untold stories’ in an Actor Network Theory (ANT) perspective. Antenarrative and ANT share a concern with “socio-material relationships, energy, action, and situations” (Hitchin, p. 214).

Boje’s (2014) purpose is to declare that the relationship of ‘pre-stories’ (and untold stories) to ‘told narratives’ of organizations is a ‘*dialectical*’ development kind of relation between unbounded localness of untold stories and more privileged organization narratives. His contention is that antenarratives are a level of communicative action below the narrative-counter-narrative (& story-counter-story) dialectical dynamic. While there needs to be greater research and theory attention to the dialectical relation between locally occurring untold stories (i.e. the stories that people or organizations refrain from telling) and the kinds of summative or representative post hoc narratives of research findings, there also needs to be a focus beyond and beneath dialectical oppositions.

For example, *post hoc* interviewing techniques popular in grounded theory (GT) face a serious problem of induction because grounded theory (GT) does not address or “conceptualize story as situated performance and practice” (Hitchin, 2015: 215). Boje (1991, 2001, 2014) stresses the *in-situ* storytelling practices and the unstoryable (or untold stories) rather than stories or narratives recounted in interview methods. The GT problem of induction and recounting interview responses, that are then renarrative by acts of researcher reflexivity and coding is problematic. One alternative is the study storytelling *in situ*, in, Tamara-land ethnography. Other alternatives would be through video recordings and following interaction analysis.

Boje favors more ontological approaches to get beyond the inductive fallacy Achilles’ heel of GT, and beneath dialectic polemics. Dialectics has two main approaches. First is the often-used thesis-antithesis synthesis. However, this does not work out in complex organizations because in the narrative-counter-narrative interplay, the synthesis rarely happens. Second approach to dialectics is ‘the negation of the negation’. It does not assume synthesis and is not always teleological. Rather, as Hegel put it, there is a ‘negation of the negation.’ Adorno, saw ‘negation of the negation’ as without spirit or teleological-synthesis. Adorno called it ‘negative dialectics’. There are other ‘negation of the negation’ approaches, such as Žižek’s (2012) revival of Hegelian dialectics for current times, Heidegger (1927/1962), who revised Hegelian dialectical approach in a new theory of time, and a few others.

For example, Heidegger (1927/1962, section #432) from the beginning to the end of his book challenged Hegel: “Hegel can no more provide dialectical grounds for such a priority than he can for the ‘circumstance’” that the ‘now’ turns up precisely in the point posits itself for itself.” Rather than now-as not-yet, now-present, or no-longer, for Heidegger, “time is ‘*intuited*’ becoming—that is to say, it is the transition which does not get thought but which simply tenders itself in the sequence of ‘nows’” in Hegel’s time which is beyond the “stream of time” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, #431-432).

4.2 *What is Negation of the Negation Dialectic?*

It is an endless echoing negation of the negation that is itself negative. ‘Not not Being’ is the equivalent of saying “it is *in itself* negative” (Henrich, 2003, p. 218). Henrich (2003, p. 316) explains the negation of negation dialectic as Hegel’s conception of the notion of ‘life’. By contrast, for Heidegger, negation of negation dialectic is a notion of fore-caring in advance of good conscience, where an evil fore-caring is always a potentiality.

4.3 *The Politics of Explanation*

Hitchin stresses the politics of method, and problematizes inductive reflexive explanation that depoliticizes the organization situation. The untold story calls for researcher attention to sociomateriality and the “deep field ethnographic study” of locally situated storytelling practices, the politics of storytelling, and problematizes the researcher-author ‘restorying’ or ‘renarrating’ people’s locally situated untold story, story fragments, and living story webs of relations (i.e. microstoria) --- into a ‘representative’ or ‘abstracted’ narrative. GT uses ‘reflexive’ inductive practices combined with positivistic coding rituals by the researcher to restory (or renarrate) and substitute a narrative for the flux, entanglement, and boundless magnitude and scale of untold stories. The result is the creation of the researcher’s own narrative fiction for untold stories, story fragments, and living microstoria. This practice in GT leaves the researcher open to “criticisms of ventriloquism”, “delusion”, “bad fiction”, and “epistemological hypochondria” (Hitchin, 2015, p. 216).

Hitchin’s and Boje’s work on untold stories, emphasizes a sensitivity to the localness, to space and time relations of Tamara-land antenarrative, and quantum story fragments that problematize elite grand narratives, or researcher’s substituted representational narratives (as used in GT inductive reflexive & positivism coding schemata).

Here we would like to extend Hitchin, by looking at dialectic relations of untold stories to such representational (retrospective) narrative. Hitchin proposes four theoretical deductive premises of Tamara-land and quantum storytelling theory in their relation to ANT and untold stories.

Fragment 1: After Method

ANT agent positions in network of organization relations raises awareness of theorists to the politics of method. People in organizations exist in Tamara-land landscape (spacetime mattering) in which the resulting phenomenon of storytelling has “multiple, heterogeneous entanglements processing multiple threads and possibilities” (Hitchin, 2015, p. 227). The dialectics include the challenge of the illusion of ventriloquist or virtuoso narrative representations and the living story and untold story webs that can be partly studied using ethnographic methods. “Quantum stories” in Boje’s work are combined by Hitchin (2015, p. 221) with ANT assemblage of actors, actants, and things in moving and shifting networks that include “boundless and innumerable untold stories” for every narrative or counter-narrative.

Fragment 2: Ontological Politics

If we move from what Roy Bhaskar (1993) calls the fallacy of monovalent (single) ontology to a theory of multiple ontologies, then we can say that people exist in multiple relating realities of inter-action in Tamara-land landscapes, where “story fragments that are on the move and energetic” in their quantum storytelling dynamics (Hitchin, 2015, p. 227). More robust organizational narratives (and/or robust stories told) are dialectic to living story (localness), fragmented and untold stories that are antenarrative to (before) narrative formation. This flux of fragmented and untold stories is knocking on, interfering in, dialectic within and between multiple realities, of multiple ontologies that are colliding and interacting in and around complex organizations. These dynamic ontological and dialectical politics create sociomaterial agency, where the flux itself is self-organizing.

Fragment 3: Cutting the Network

The concern is with untold stories (and story fragments) that challenge ways researchers are ‘cutting the network’ using an analytic cut, to pull out a landscape of storytelling network relationship for study from multiple interconnected worlds. Each researcher’s analytic cut that creates a particular orientation that changes the situation. As Haraway (1989, p. 331, as cited in Hitchin, 2015) puts it, “one story is not as good as another.” The analytic cut picks up some story fragments and untold story possibilities, while ignoring others. “Inevitably, taking an analytic cut changes the story” (Hitchin, 2015, p. 231). Demonstrating her own cut, Hitchin uses thick description of the entanglements of the terrain she chose to study.

Fragment 4: Avoiding the God-Trick

Trying to untangle a living story web, and its untold stories in a messy situation. In a living story web, one story leads to telling another, and in a relational situation, it leads to an entire community of organizational involvements. When an untold story is told, more are told, and more are untold. Haraway (1998: 115) describes the illusion of the god-trick narratives of techno-scientific world, as follows:

“Vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all perspective gives way to infinitely mobile vision, which no longer seems just mythically about the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice.”

Haraway takes a feminist standpoint on Western science: “History is a story Western culture buffs tell each other; science is a contestable text and a power field; the content is the form” (p. 111). In short, the grand narratives of the god-trick standpoint promise more objective, integrated accounts of techno-scientific world that become techno-monsters.

We turn now to a second way of understanding narrative-counter-narrative dynamics, the theory communication constitutes organization (CCO).

5 Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO) contributions to Narrative-Counter-narrative Dynamics

Considering narratives an essential part of meaning construction in organizations is also shared by Timothy Kuhn (2005, 2006, 2016) who applies the term “authoritative texts” to demonstrate how an organization’s trajectory is authored internally through internal narratives. With outset in the theory concerning the ways communication constitutes organizations associated with the Montréal School (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Taylor, Cooren, Giroux & Robichaud, 1996) – also known as Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO), Kuhn (2017) observes that “If authoritative texts are narratives about the “we,” counter-narratives would be understood as confronting or influencing the authoritative text in organizing practice” (p. 22). As such, the concept of counter-narratives can, according to Kuhn, be viewed as “ever-present components of organizational constitution that always saturate and infuse (i.e., are continually present in) overarching narratives of organization” (p. 18).

Thus considered from a CCO perspective, narrativity is indeed the very basis of sensemaking (Robichaud, Giroux & Taylor, 2004), since the latter always consist of explicitly or implicitly “selecting, naming, or even inventing aspects of a given situation or sequence, aspects that are meant to serve the purpose of the storytelling or storyteller’s interest” (Cooren 2015, p. 39). In other words, even when people do not appear to be telling a story – for instance, when they seem to be simply deploring a situation while proposing solutions – they are, in fact, involved in narrative processes. Selecting and naming aspects of a situation amounts to pointing to what is supposed to *matter* or *count* in a given context and what to do about them.

Narrativity, as Greimas (1987) reminds us, thus always displays normative and polemical dimensions. Telling a story implies that we follow or take the viewpoint of an actor facing a specific problem, opponent or obstacle that s/he is trying to overcome. The moral dimension of a narrative is therefore related to the values that are implicitly or explicitly defended or cherished by this actor. For instance, deploring a situation in which a company’s profitability is suffering while explaining what should be done about it might consist, for a Chief Brand Officer (CBO), of implicitly telling a story in which some obstacles are identified (e.g., lack of concern for the company’s image) and solutions proposed (e.g., investment in branding, marketing, advertising, public relations, and customer services).

Through this narrative, we are supposed to take an actor’s viewpoint – here, the CBO’s – where certain aspects of the situation are valued (e.g. image, reputation, packaging, integration, emotions) while others are disvalued, not attended to or even disqualified (e.g. traditions, operations, differentiation). A CCO perspective also consists of noticing that telling the story of what is happening amounts to translating *what the situation supposedly dictates*: According to this CBO, recovering profitability indeed requires or dictates that investment be made in branding, marketing, advertising, public relations and customer services. Telling a story is therefore a way to express how a situation does, did, should or will evolve.

Counter-narratives, according to a CCO perspective, can thus be identified as any narrative in which alternative ways of making sense of the situation are proposed, that is, alternative ways to show *what the situation dictates, requires or commands*. For instance, a Chief Operating Officer (COO) or a union representative most likely tell a different story where other obstacles are identified (e.g., lack of investment in the operations, narrowness of the target markets, lack of training) and other solutions proposed (investing in operations, training, and R & D). Counter-narratives thus always constitute ways to highlight other actors, other circumstances, other obstacles and/or even other objectives. They constitute alternative ways to highlight what matters or counts in a situation, which means that they usually amount to

following alternative pathways. The ways in which the interactants involved are positioned or position themselves as being affected by principles, values, interests etc. is captured in the so-called ‘constitutive approach’ i.e. the recognition of “the effects by which people in interaction manage to act and speak *for* or *in the name* of specific beings to which they feel (consciously or unconsciously) attached” (Cooren, 2012: 5).

The Constitutive Approach

With the term ‘ventriloquism’ Cooren (2012) captures the activity that consists of someone speaking in the name of an organization embodied in textual agents such as mission statements, annual reports, logos or a press release (2012: 7). In 2014 a conflict evolved between the three organizations Shell, LEGO and Greenpeace. Campaigning against LEGO’s collaboration with Shell, Greenpeace put LEGO’s social responsibility into question which LEGO’s CEO Jørgen Knudstorp defended as follows:

“Our ultimate purpose is to inspire and develop children to think creatively, reason systematically and release their potential to shape their own future - experiencing the endless human possibility - and the overall LEGO® Brand Framework (see <http://aboutus.lego.com/en-us/sustainability/our-approach>).”

According to the ventriloquial approach to communication, Knudstorp is ventriloquized in the press release as he speaks in the name of the organization and reproduces the LEGO Mission (‘Inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow’). As such, the communication contributes to the constitution of LEGO as an organization as Knudstorp evokes the figure of the LEGO brand framework and thereby gives voice to the framework (Cooren, 2010: 137). At the same time, the LEGO brand framework leads Knudstorp to say what he is saying. This reciprocal relation where the ventriloquist regarded as the one who is being ventriloquized has been referred to as ‘oscillation/vacillation’ which is typical of any ventriloquial activity (Cooren, 2010: 138). According to Cooren, “ventriloquism provides a useful metaphor for reconceptualizing communication, as human interactants do not only ventriloquize specific figures but are also ventriloquized (animated) by them (see Cooren, 2010)”. Similarly Greenpeace ventriloquize/is animated by their strategic foundation through different text genres (the movie, report, web etc.):

Goal: to ensure the ability of the earth to nurture life in all its diversity. **Mission statement:** to expose global environmental problems, and to force the solutions which are essential to a green and peaceful future (<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/about/our-core-values/>)

When Greenpeace accuse LEGO of putting sales above its commitment to the environment and children's futures they seek to invoke their mission statement, namely to expose global environmental problems.

With a ventriloquial approach to communication we are able to make the role of organizational texts explicit in communication as they are viewed as interactants at the same level as human interactants. Thus, when Knudstorp in the press release claims to “deliver on our promise of creative play” the ventriloquial approach enables a consideration of the LEGO Play Promise as being animated by Knudstorp as he gives voice to the Promise. Considered from an ‘oscillation/vacillation’ perspective, it is the LEGO Promise that leads him to say what he is saying as he speaks in the name of the Promise and thereby invokes the text, i.e. gives it voice. As such the Promise is lending weight to his statements as the Promise is animated supporting his positioning and decision. The Promise is thus not merely an object referred to by the speaker but rather a text that is invoked and thereby speaks for itself (Cooren, 2010: 137).

As the example illustrates, the oscillation/vacillation perspective adds analytical value as it provides an understanding of individual agency in actual situations and thereby gives access to the origins of counter-narratives in local interactions. This is enabled by the basic premises of CCO scholarship.

Premises of CCO Scholarship

In the CCO movement the implications of considering organizations as communicatively constituted is studied. Cooren et al. (2011: 1151-1152) sum up six basic premises for the various strands within CCO scholarship:

1. It studies communicational events: If organizations are communicatively constituted one should examine what happens in and through communication to constitute, (re)produce, or alter organizational forms and practices.
2. CCO scholarship should be as inclusive as possible about the meaning of communication: meaning formation is not limited to texts but extends to other forms of agency for instance technology or architecture.
3. Communication is perceived as co-constructed or co-oriented: “any performance is as much the product of the agent that/who is deemed performing it as the product of the people who attend and interpret/respond to such performance” (1152).

4. Who or what is acting is always an open question: As CCO Scholarship not only focuses on human agency but also includes other forms, an inclusive approach as to what or who is taking part in the constitution of organizational processes is a prerequisite.
5. CCO Scholarship never leaves the realm of communicational events: A such there is nothing beyond the communicative process. Rather “it is *in* communication that figures make a difference (or not) through the way their action is negotiated, imposed or debated” (1153).
6. Organizing and organization are mutually constitutive: CCO scholarship does not favor one over the other as they are interdependent.

As the 6 basic premises reveal, CCO Scholarship see “the production, destruction, and transformation of meaning as connected to the indeterminacy, ambiguity, and power inherent in all language” (1154). As communication concerns the transformation of meaning, counter-narratives can be viewed as the result hereof. Thus, the premises viewed from a counter-narrative perspective implies that:

1. the study of counter-narratives should not be restricted to language and discourse or to specific situations
2. the formation of counter-narratives does not only occur in texts but may also be conveyed, constituted or incarnated through e.g. looks, gestures or behavior.
3. the meanings that emerge from a counter-narrative are not necessarily isomorphic with the original intentions
4. to fully understand the concept of a counter-narrative, the analysis should not be limited to human agency but should also include the ‘what’ of a communication (e.g. textuality and technology)
5. the analysis of counter-narratives should be limited to the realm of communicational events and thus include a consideration of all the figures participating in the co-construction and co-constitution of an (organizational) situation

As CCO scholarship refuses to choose between studying how people get organized and how organizations come to be reenacted and reproduced through these activities, studying counter-narratives should consider the reciprocal relation between the two and therefore not favor one over the other.

6 Conclusions

Our contribution has been exploring counter-narratives from both SOT and CCO in order to reveal how they may constitute alternative pathways of understanding the dynamics of narrative-counter-narrative against more traditional approaches. This insight carries along a deeper understanding of language and communication behavior of people at work in organizations.

An antenarrative approach to storytelling organization focuses on what is antecedent to narrative-counter-narrative, while communication constitutive of organizations takes a linguistic and textual approach to what is constitutive of narrative-counter-narrative dynamics.

Antenarrative is pre-narrative, and pre-story.

Antenarrative analytics look at linear-narratives in relation to cyclical time. Linear time such as clock time is a mechanistic rhythm, that of teleological progression (Haley and Boje, 2014). Lived time, by contrast, is more cyclical, the repetition of actions, imitated in different sort of storytelling. The focus of antenarrative analytics is to look at the relationship between the linear and nonlinear, the coherent and fragmented storytelling. Narratives that center attention on a linear pattern can be opposed by counter-narratives stressing a different sequence. Antenarrative analytics problematizes both narrative and counter-narrative, for the danger of errors and omissions, leaving out the play of differences, being too focused on linear progress and coherence. Further, most narrative work stresses retrospective sensemaking since Weick’s (1995) seminal work.

Organizational sensemaking considers according to a CCO perspective organizations “not as a given, but as emerging in, and indeed constituted by or incarnated in local episodes of communication. What this means is that organizations are constantly (re)produced, (re)incarnated, and (re)embodied in local interactions, and thus subject to change and renewal” (Cooren et al. 1158). Considering organizational sensemaking as emergent, provides a solid foundation for understanding the emergence of counter-narratives not only through human actors but also as evolving around non-human agency. CCO scholarship contributes with an understanding of how counter-narratives are constitutive of organizations on its own premises.

7 Future research potentials

The paper inspires to several avenues for further research. One could be to examine and discuss data collection methods and concrete methods for analysis together with analysis examples in order to discuss similarities and differences between SOT and CCO together with cross-contaminating and methodology stimulating potentials. Another could be more performative oriented in the discussion of how insights from both approaches (separately and in combination) can stimulate organizational reflexivity and transformations: How to foster spaces for co-creation of new stories and counter stories and perhaps a ‘new’ relationship between the researcher and the researched in organizational storytelling processes.

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