Introduction

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Narrative is a mode of communication that is essential both to social life and to defining humanness (Fisher, 1987). "Narratives connect past, present, and anticipated future, rendering a life-in-time sensible in terms of beginnings, middle, and endings" (McAdams, 1996, 298). Through such connections, narratives provide a sense of causality and order in what might otherwise appear to be a random series of events in our daily lives. Their prevalence and utility led MacIntyre (1984) to conclude that "Man [*sic*] is in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially is a storytelling animal (p. 216). Narratives, in other words, are powerful sense-making and order-producing devices; for many social theorists, they are at the center of the development of the self (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991).

The influence of narrative is not, however, limited to explanations of personal identity. Scholars have long relied on narratives for understanding the existence and practice of organization. From such a perspective, narratives do not exist merely *in* organizations, but are instead *constitutive of* the organization; organizations are not best understood as collections of people or sets of contracts, but as *storytelling systems* that are performed into existence (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1995; Czarniawska, 1998). Research in this line of thought has demonstrated the role of narratives in generating organizational-level identities (Coupland & Brown, 2012), inspiring member identification (Humphreys & Brown, 2002), establishing a community memory (Linde 2009), shaping nostalgic and postalgic oriented cultures (Ybema 2004), generating collective sense-making in ambiguous environments (Abolafia, 2010), inducing organizational change (Doolin, 2003; Dunford & Jones, 2000); and maintaining an

unmanaged terrain of resistance (Gabriel 1995) among the organizational members. Narrative scholarship has, in other words, been productive and influential in examining organization.

The present volume sees the substantial and well-established narrative tradition in organization studies as a point of departure. Much of the work foregrounding narrative assumes—drawing, often implicitly, from formalist and post-formalist models of textuality (the likes of Propp, Todorow, Barthes, and Bakhtin)—that narratives (a) produce a relatively linear causality in the sequences of beginnings, middles, and endings that comprise their plot, and (b) that structural conflicts between characters drive the storyline. What tends to get obscured in such analyses are considerations for how some narratives gain dominance over others; how narratives intersect, relate to, challenge and re-enforce each other; and how actors 'inside' and 'outside' organizations co-construct narratives.

To address issues such as these, we must complicate our understandings of narratives and organizing. Contemporary organization studies research frames organizing as complicated, where tension, paradox, contradiction, disorder, and change standard characterizations of organizing—not deviations from some more 'normal' ordered state (Law, 1994). Gradually, scholars of narrative have brought this conception of complexity into their work, highlighting the fragmented, subtle, untold, and a-rational character of narration and organization (Boje, 2014; Czarniawska, 2008; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Linde 2009, Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). Another way of saying this is that, drawing upon the notion of *counter-narrative*, we wish to tell a different story. To begin down that path, we must first clarify what we mean by the notion of counter-narrative.

Conceptualizing Counter-narratives

At base, counter-narratives are "the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance to, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (Andrews, 2004:

1). The most common distinction pointed up among those who use the notion of counter-narratives is between a preferred organizational story and an alternate vision, one that seeks to contradict or defy the authoritative version: "counter-narratives only make sense in relation to something else, that which they are countering. The very name identifies it as an oppositional category, in tension with another category" (Ibid.). The narratives that counter-narratives counter are variously referred to as "dominant" or "master narratives" (also variably called plotlines, master plots, dominant discourses, or simply story lines or cultural texts).

Literature drawing upon the concept of counter-narratives has, to this point, examined how individuals or groups who deviate from the cultural norms. With *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair,* Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2001) focused on the stories of groups (e.g. Gypsies, mothers, nurses, and transsexuals) whose identities have been defined by those with the power to speak *for* them, and she considered identity in the light of how these groups are viewed by others. Similarly, in a collection that has become one of the most recognized contributions within this emerging field, *Considering Counter-narratives* (Bamberg and Andrews 2004), the authors pay attention to the use of counter-narratives by individuals to position themselves in relation to dominant and/or master narratives in society.

This volume, *Organization and Counter-Narratives*, attempts to bring the concept of counter-narratives into an organizational context, since we see counter-narratives as an intrinsic – yet unexplored – aspect of storytelling in and around organizations. Focusing on counter-narratives enables us to capture some of the political and social complexities and tensions faced in organizational life. The definitions of 'what constitute a narrative' differs across the chapters, ranging from a sequence of events implying a casual relationship (Lundholt) to a discourse (Norlyk) to any storytelling episodes and narrative performances (Humle & Frandsen). What the chapters in this book share is a view on, and construction of,

'the organization' that emerge from the focus on counter-narratives; the resulting picture is very different from the conception of 'the organization' found in more managerially-oriented literature on storytelling. Using a counter-narrative lens to study organizations implies that 'the organization' is seen as a) constituted in communication and storytelling practices, b) a site of struggle over meaning and identity, c) engaging a polyphony of voices, from organizational members (insiders) and those in the organizational environment (outsiders such as NGOs, the media, consumers, and the like). In short, the role and character of counter-narratives in organizational contexts have been largely in the shadows until now; this book provides an important and necessary nuance to conceptions of narrative and organizing.

A counter-narrative lens on organization

As is the case with narrative studies generally, there are several possible theoretical camps conducive to organizational analyses based on counter-narrative. In this book, two stand out. The first is the CCO (Communicative Constitution of Organization) perspective (Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014) seeks to explain the existence, recognition, practice, power, and modification of organization in explicitly communicative terms. Communication, in a CCO frame, is not merely that which occurs 'inside' a pre-existing organizational container, but is the site and surface through which organization—as verb and noun—emerges, persists, and transforms (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). This perspective has directly inspired several authors in this book (Kuhn; Maagard, Jensen & Rasmussen; Lundholt and Rasmussen). What the CCO perspective brings to the study of counter-narratives is a vocabulary of 'the authoritative text' (Kuhn, 2008), 'intertextuality' (Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012) and 'ventriloquism' (Cooren, 2010) that highlight the performative aspects of, and relationships between, dominant narratives and counter-narratives in organizing practice. The remaining authors (Johansen, Norlyk; Humle & Frandsen, Marita & Boje, Czarniawska and Gabriel) share a

broadly social constructivist (or construc*tion*ist; see Leonardi & Barley, 2008) orientation, where communication, language and stories cannot be reduced to a mirror of 'reality,' but are instead seen as actively constituting organizational realities (see Bruner, 1991).

The counter-narrative lens also highlights the struggles of meanings, values and identities that take place in organizing (Mumby, 1987). Focusing on counter-narratives implies a critical approach, where the communicative processes and storytelling practices are seen as inherently influenced by power. The binary concept of dominant/master narrative and counter-narrative suggests that the dominant narrative holds the power to shape individuals' and organizations' worldviews, identities, and values, yet also that this dominant narrative can be de-stabilized, challenged, negotiated, and changed by counter-narratives representing different worldviews and collective identities. Focusing on counter-narratives enables us to see that meaning is always contested, when different organizational actors and stakeholders cross their (narrative) swords in the aim of shaping their collectives' identities, values and interests. Gabriel´s, Czarniawska´s, and Kuhn's contributions to this book illustrate these struggles over meaning when dominant and counter-narratives clash.

These struggles over meaning described in this volume, however, are more complicated than depicted in much of the counter-narrative literature. The typical view is one of binary opposition, pitting one (dominant) side versus another (insurgent) side. If, as we indicated above, organizations and organizing practices are characterized by a multiplicity of interests, values, and issues, such a simple conception of opposition is unlikely to be helpful analytically (see Rasmussen for this critique). Fortunately, the chapters in this book all suggest that the organization should be viewed as constructed through ever present *polyphony*, where counter-narratives both challenge dominant narratives but also are themselves challenged by *other* counter-narratives (see Humle & Frandsen, as well as Maagaard, Jensen & Rasmussen on this point). Thus as in the story of Pandora's box,

polyphony spreads and finds new fractal ways of evolving both dominant and counter-narratives (see Svane, Gergerich & Boje on this point). The counter-narrative approach foregrounds the multiple voices (and not the single managerial voice of the organization) and highlights the intersection between the different narrators both inside and outside that which analysts identify as 'organization.' The chapters here include, for instance, 'the man on the floor (or in the train),' the press, the customers, the NGOs, and the different parties of an organizational merger; in attending to these actors, they encourage analysts to examine the sources of counter-narratives, illustrating how the counter-narrative approach gives voice to those who are part of the ongoing narration of the organization, even if they are not considered 'inside' the organization.

Foregrounding polyphony also encourages a consideration of the intentionality assumed in narrative studies. Although it is common to understand counter-narratives as acts of resistance, competition, or contestation deliberately crafted to effect change in some target (e.g., Harter, Scott, Noval, Leeman, & Morris, 2006; Johnson, 2009), several chapters in this volume (including Margaard et al., Rasmussen, and Kuhn) draw attention to the notion that counter-narratives can *emerge* from the heterogeneous admixture of human and nonhuman agencies brought together in practices of organizing. Such a perspective need not discard the notion that individuals and groups often invent counter-narratives to generate specific effects on sites of power, but additionally suggests that there is likely to be a good deal of indeterminacy and unpredictability in the interplay of dominant and counter-narratives in those tension-filled organizing practices (Cooren & Sandler, 2014; Harter, 2009; Korobov, 2004; Kuhn, 2014; Trittin & Schoeneborn, in press).

Interdisciplinary insights on counter-narratives

This book is the coming together of scholars from different research traditions and disciplinary foundations, but all with the intention of understanding the role of counter-narratives for individuals, professionals and organizations in navigating, challenging, negotiating and replacing established dominant narratives about 'who we are' and 'what we do' as a collective. Counter-narratives became important to us as we found that they could tell us something new about organizational life in an era where traditional forms of organised resistance in the form of unions or consumer boycotts are decreasing (Dean, 2016), but where other forms of resistance still propel struggles over meaning and challenge the dominant ways of 'being' in the world. We see counter-narratives emerging on social media in the form of 'shitstorms,' as well as in an increasingly critical business press that exposes scandals and holds corporations accountable for their conduct. And we see that the unmanaged terrain internal to organizations keeps spurring new formations and practices of resistance. *Organization and Counter-Narratives* is an attempt to highlight the value of focusing on counter-narratives in organization studies, displaying the storytelling nature of organization, the struggles of meanings and the polyphony between organizational insiders and their outside environment.

Organization and Counter-Narratives is the outcome of interdisciplinary insight in counter-narratives, drawing on both humanities and social sciences from three perspectives. The first perspective is *counter-narratives as a theoretical concept*. The book seeks to conceptualize counter-narratives and relate the concept to established traditions and current debates within organization and communication studies. The second perspective is *counter-narratives as an empirical object*. The contributions are grounded in empirical investigation of counter-narratives in and around organizations to arrive at theoretical contributions. As such the volume examines counter-narratives in a variety of organizational contexts - public/private, large corporations/entrepreneurial setups, external and internal of the

organization - to understand the countering mechanisms and their potential. The third perspective focuses on *counter-narrative as a methodological approach*. Narrative methods for understanding organizational problems are well established. However, little attention has been given to enabling, facilitating and analysing the productions of counter-narratives. Counter-narratives may be difficult to grasp for investigation as such narratives are often fragmented, fleeting or subtle, yet the contributions reveal that a methodological focus on the production of counter-narratives provide unique opportunities to locate and expose tensions in and around organizations for theory development.

Methodological considerations using a counter-narrative approach

The chapters in this book are all based on empirical studies of counter-narratives and each of them is illustrative of the methodological challenges and gains when studying counter-narratives in an organizational context. A specific focus on counter-narratives poses methodological questions of how to access and generate counter-narratives as well as how to analyze and give voice to counter-narratives. Czarniawska (in this volume) questions if it is at all possible to 'find' counter-narratives in real organizations and she turns to fiction to illustrate the fate of counter-narratives. The volume does, however, provide evidence that counter-narratives are quite prevalent both in and around organizations if you look carefully.

Counter-narratives in and around organizations

With the rise of social media, critical consumers, NGOs and other stakeholders have found new venues for voicing counter-narratives and challenging the established dominant narratives. Johansen, Maagaard et al. as well as Lundholt have specifically used empirical data from social media platforms to highlight how organizational identity is contested and (re)negotiated in ongoing conversations about 'who the organization is'. The benefit of social media is the ability to observe the multiple voices come together and intertextually narrate

stories of the organization. Also traditional media, newspapers, radio and television, play powerful roles in constructing either a dominant narrative of the organization as seen in Humle & Frandsen or as an opponent to the dominant narrative, which is the case in Maagaard et al.'s chapter. These chapters dissolve the boundaries of internal and external life of organizations and provide empirical evidence of the role of counter-narratives in organizational identity conversations among so-called 'outsiders' and 'insiders'.

Paying special attention to counter-narratives in ethnographic work of organizational members may, however, prove difficult as the counter-narratives may not be publicly voiced or even well-articulated among the organizational members sharing the counter-narratives. Often counter-narratives may only be told within specific storytelling communities (as in the case of Humle & Frandsen) and thus not shared with others – let alone the curious fieldworker. Posing direct questions about conflicting views or counter-narratives would rarely bring any relevant empirical material forward. That said, the chapters in this book all build on empirical data conducted through interviews *and* observations and are thus a result of 'deep hanging out' (ref). Talking to union members (Humle & Frandsen), having informal conversations over lunch or the water-cooler (Rasmussen, Svane et al, Kuhn), shadowing individuals over time (Rasmus, Svane) or following their training (Kuhn, Norlyk, Svane) may provide cues to counter-narratives contesting the dominant narratives of the organization or simply providing an alternative version of them. Such cues may serve as an important base for further inquiry during interviewing or subsequent observations.

Access and analytical issues

As Gabriel argues, counter-narratives are often part of the 'unmanaged' terrain of the organization. Gaining access to such terrains is thus a matter of role negotiation on the part of the researcher. On one hand, being considered to be 'sent from management' might already

deem the trust building and levelling with participants impossible. On the other hand, being 'sent from management' might also mean that the fieldworker is used strategically by the participants to give voice to their counter-narratives and present these to the management or others in power, while the participants remain anonymous (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, Søderberg, 2006). As such, careful consideration and reflexivity in relation to the role of the researcher is needed to obtain insights to counter-narratives of the field.

Once one moves to the stage of analyzing and writing up the empirical material, new challenges may arise in the quest of understanding counter-narratives in the organizational context. In this book, Czarniawska as well as Norlyk provide insight into the dissonance that may be detected in participants' accounts in the narration of their individual identity. Also, Humle & Frandsen, Lundholt and Johansen provide evidence of the ongoing, contradictory and shifting nature of narratives in the struggle among different parties to manage the meaning of the organizational identity. These multiple voices place a certain demand on the researcher to distinguish dominant and counter-narratives from one another, which may not be an easy task in the local context of fluctuating, opposing, inconsistent and perhaps even self-contradictory narratives intersecting both micro-level storytelling practices and macro-level narratives. Humle & Frandsen, Lundholt and Johansen, nevertheless, show with their empirical studies that certain narratives gain authority and thus the dominant narrative is used intertextually as a backdrop for counter-narratives. The dominant narrative may or may not incorporate these counter-narratives over time (see Kuhn in this volume), yet counter-narratives will always emerge in relation to a dominant narrative. Therefore we may acknowledge Johansen's and Gabriel's argument that counter-narratives in reverse (and ironically) provide legitimacy to the dominant narratives; if there are no counter-narratives there would be no dominant narratives either.

What to gain from a counter-narrative approach

Despite the methodological challenges of focusing on counter-narratives we also argue that much is to be gained. Turning a blind eye to counter-narratives leaves us with a rather one-dimensional understanding of organizational phenomena of any kind. All the chapters in this volume demonstrate that counter-narratives are an integral part of storytelling practices in and around organizations (as well as in the organizing practices beyond any given organization) and that, accordingly, counter-narratives exercise substantial influence on authority, meaning and identity in organizational life. Advocating for new empirical and theoretical insights on counter-narratives that embrace the complexity and controversy of organizational life, our hope is that this volume appeals to those who identify broadly with narrative, constructivist, or CCO approaches to understanding organization. We welcome those who are familiar with these traditions—and also new generations of scholars who only just have found their ways to narrative research—to join us on an explorative journey into the organizational world of counter-narratives.

The organization of the book

With these considerations in mind, *Organization and Counter-narratives* initiates this explorative journey with various theoretical and empirical contributions.

Timothy Kuhn presents a vision of counter-narrative-inspired organizational development that expands the potential utility of counter-narratives in organizational analysis in `Communicatively Constituting Organizational Trajectories Through Counter-Narrative´. The chapter reveals that counter-narratives are not necessarily diametrically opposed to the master narrative, to the authoritative text; in fact, they are likely to emerge together and find their meanings in struggles over authorship of a collective's trajectory. This chapter, therefore, demonstrates that counter-narratives are highly relevant concepts for those who wish to

develop explanations of organizational persistence and change, topics that broaden considerably counter-narratives' conceptual purchase in organization studies.

Marianne W. Lundholt examines the evolvement of counter-narratives in organizational crisis in the chapter `Counter-narratives and organizational crisis: How LEGO bricks became a slippery business´. With outset in Greenpeace' campaign against the partnership between Shell and LEGO A/S in 2014, the chapter indicates that in order to understand the interrelation between intertextuality and counter-narratives, it is necessary to go beyond the traditional understanding of intertextual relations. Moreover, the chapter points to the fact that organizations should pay careful attention to their own texts (i.e. organizational strategies) and actions when diagnosing organization's crisis vulnerabilities.

Trine S. Johansen explores digital processes of organizational identity construction in the intersection between organization and market in her chapter `Countering the 'Natural' Organizational Self on Social Media´ by using narrative as a theoretical and methodological lens. The purpose is to understand the ways in which online interactions produce counter-narratives that contrast, challenge and contradict organizational self-narration in light of market place skepticism and cynicism. The study identifies three strategies of counter-narrativizing (authenticity, legitimacy and irony) based on juxtaposing pairs of opposites. Moreover, it suggests counter-narration to be a natural consequence of organizational self-narration pointing to an understanding of counter-narratives as key contributing factor in organizational identity construction.

Astrid Jensen, Cindie A. Maagaard and Rasmus K. Rasmussen explore the interaction of master and counter-narratives in interpretations of abstract company policy in `"Speaking through the other": Countering counter-narratives through stakeholders' stories´. The authors' use personal narratives by stakeholders to ventriloquize a managerial master-narrative as a

response to critical counter-narratives about CSR. The chapter contributes to an understanding of ventriloquism as a narrative activity by which positions are made concrete through temporal structures involving specific people and specific actions. Using the concept of ventriloquism in a dialogic perspective on the interaction of master and counter-narratives, the authors demonstrate how counter-narratives influence the dynamics by which managerial control of the master-narrative is maintained.

Didde Humle and Sanne Frandsen study the role of dominant and counter-narratives in organizational identity formation processes in their chapter `Organizational identity negotiations through dominant and counter-narratives´. Based on a case study of the highly contested organization E-rail – a European Rail Service, which faces persistent criticism from media, politicians and customers – the chapter concludes that the counter-narratives of the ticket inspectors make room for multiple and sometimes even opposing understandings of organizational identity to co-exist. These multiple understandings of organizational identity make it possible for organizational members to perform and pursue different storylines, while simultaneously establishing and maintaining a sense of continuity and stability around their organization and work.

Marita Svane, Erika Gergerich and David M. Boje present a quantum storytelling framework for analyzing and theorizing cross-cultural change of fractal narratives and counter-narratives in their chapter `Fractal Change Management and Counter-narrative in Cross-Cultural Change´. The antenarrative process of fore-caring inquiry is suggested as an approach to managing cross-cultural fractal change. Their contribution lies in developing an understanding of the subterranean 'fractal' patterns between antenarratives out of which narratives and counter-narratives interplay is affected. The authors develop a fractal analytic theory of and methods for understanding this dynamic interplay in its cross-cultural sociality.

The two cases they develop are firstly the cross-cultural aspects of a merger, and secondly, the cross-cultural dynamics of homeless and home-full in American society.

Birgitte Norlyk contributes with an interdisciplinary framework of narrative, discourse and identity with the chapter `Designer or Entrepreneur? Counter-Narratives in the Professions´. Norlyk explores the professional counter-narrative of a group of professional designers taking part in a course on business and entrepreneurship. The chapter illustrates how designers' discourse, metaphors and framing devices contribute to a professional counter-narrative that supplies designers with a means of resistance in their meeting with the dominant master narrative of business and entrepreneurship. Based on thematic narrative analysis, the analysis identifies four main themes that constitute designers' counter-narrative of artistic integrity: experiences of violence and force, experiences of conflicts of identity, experiences of the enemy and experiences of entrapment. The chapter concludes by relating counter-narratives to the emergence of hybrid identities in the professions.

Rasmus K. Rasmussen's chapter ` Re-thinking counter-narratives in organizational analysis: master narratives-as-authoritative texts´ examines the potential of the counter-narrative framework as an analytical device in organizational analysis by re-rethinking master narratives as authoritative texts. Departing from a case with two competing master narratives, rather than a master opposed by a counter, the chapter demonstrates how organizational power struggles can be conceptualized as discursive struggles between master narratives as authoritative texts.

Barbara Czarniawska provides an excursion into the world of fiction with an illustration of three cases of counter-narratives in organizational settings in her chapter `The Fate of Conter-narratives: In Fiction and in Actual

Organizations´. The first novel is Joyce Carol Oates' *Mysteries of Winterthurn* (1984), in which the detective finds the proper solution of murder puzzles - but to no avail, as it counters the established institutional thought order. The second is a novel by Joseph Heller, *Something happened*, written in the late 1960s (1966/1975), when this institutional order should have been modernized but had not and organizations vastly improved but had not. The third is David Lodge's *Nice work* (1988), in which a post-modern researcher obtains access to a company and tries to launch her narrative, which runs counter to that of the manager. The result is a proper dialogue between the two protagonists, which could be a model for meetings of narratives and counter-narratives in actual work organizations.

Yiannis Gabriel argues in the chapter `Counter-Narratives, Master Narratives and Narrative Ecologies: The Case of Nostalgic Stories and Conspiracy Theories´ that narratives and counter-narratives depend on each other, need each other and co-create each other. By examining two particular types, nostalgic stories and conspiracy theories, Gabriel proposes that narratives and counter-narratives are elements of narrative ecologies and proposes a number of distinct narrative ecologies fostering different configurations of narrative patterns.

The publication of *Organization and Counter-Narratives* originates from research initiated by the Center for Narratological Studies, University of Southern Denmark – an interdisciplinary research center founded in 2003. The aim of the center is to examine the role of narratives in different communicative contexts. Currently the research group is interested in counter-

narratives in and around organizations. In November 2014 the center hosted a seminar with outset in this topic with Timothy Kuhn and David Boje as keynote speakers. The seminar became the groundwork for the publication of this volume.

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