Introduction

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Organizational Storytelling

It is often argued that human lives are imbued with stories and storytelling. Common sense of research converge to suggest that stories do more than describe the sequence of events (Campbell, 1976). Story offers a space to vent emotions and collectively examine the word around us (Gabriel, 1995). Indeed, in our stories we find means to metaphorize reality. It is through stories that we can work to both secure or change such realities as story provides a means to challenge, change or preserve deeply rooted meanings, inherent in our fictions and myths, across generations (Armstrong, 2005/2006).

Contemporary organization and management studies scholars have increasingly realized the importance of stories to organisational life. In organizations, stories are around us as our creations, companions and oppressors (Boje, 1991, 1995; Gabriel, 2008; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Sims, 2003;). Thankfully, stories and storytellers come in all sorts of shapes and sizes and the work of story cannot be fixed or held down in particular places. Stories of success and failure are mirrored by organizational narratives of conquer, progress or decline. Stories that attempt to overpower and control have counter stories that attempt to release and liberate. In such a melee of tales, storytelling shapes organizations (Boje, 2011).

Even where organizational stories appear to consist of a relatively limited range of themes (Martin, Feldman, Hatch & Sitkin, 1983), they seem to have potential to fulfil a number of purposes. Research from different traditions has revealed how stories may serve as devices for mapping the territory of organizational sensemaking (Wilkins, 1984); disseminating knowledge (Campbell, 1972/1988); expressing deeply embedded organizational mythologies (Kostera, 2008); and glorifying past and/or future organising ethos (Ybema, 2004). However, that is not an end to it, since somewhat shifting of research attention, stories have been revealed as technologies contributing to the formation of identity (Bamberg, 2010). Stories are at work in overtly managed spaces of organisation enforcing control and performing resistance (Wilkins, 1983) and at work in psychic landscapes, including unmanaged spaces (Gabriel, 1995).

It is evident that stories provide means to make sense of human experiences (Sole & Wilson, 2003), shape individual lives (Sims, 2003) and access the worlds of others (Rennie, 1994). Crucially, by bringing external cogence and coherence to convictions, stories provide resources that shape appropriate responses to the stories and work of other people (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995).

The criticality of the diverse approaches to story and storytelling is inherent in their intention to reveal the storyteller's strategies and hidden agendas, the mechanisms employed in creating stories or the unintended consequences which telling certain stories may entail. Hence, criticality resides in the ability to illustrate the politics of story

whether that is from a position where story-politic contexts are considered subject to limits (Gabriel, 1995) or conceived as more open and 'messy' (Boje, 1991, 2006).

However, to date, research on storytelling typically focused on those stories the content of which is known from the start or *can* be revealed to the reader in the course of interpretation. The stories in question were somehow made explicit. Their authorship, even if multiple, was in principle discernible. We think that these (tacit) assumptions regarding storytelling should be problematized. Our goal is to provide an initial reflection on those experiences and emotions which for many reasons never entirely made it to the surface, which were not (fully) formulated and 'read' as stories, or which, despite appearing were ignored.

Our area of inquiry is a difficult one, yet not paradoxical – whether expressed, experienced, read or not, it is evident that there are untold interactions between individual and social worlds. The neglected, edited out, unintentionally omitted or deliberately left silent stories, provide blank spots – potential reference points on the map of organizational sensemaking that are no less indispensible to the map reader than those 'realities' which can be made explicit with current resources. Untold story research begins at the edges of current story research and attends to the emerging challenges in the field. Consequently, playing out the means to map 'blank spots' on the research agenda will inevitably challenge the limits of current analysis and possibly the politics of research conventions. The mature research offers a point of departure to reconceptualise

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story and story research through the very idea of 'untold'. In their own way untold stories may hold one key to making the complexity of the social world more comprehensible.

Untold Stories

To acknowledge the storytelling perspective means to denaturalize the ways in which the social world is typically construed by us and for us. As the focus is the social world, social context is inevitably a core concept and problem. Consequently, denaturalising story poses certain challenges that are shared across social studies of action and meaning. Understanding human actions through stories and storytelling entails not only comprehending underlying intentions of story and teller by reference to a context as surrounding matter, but also examining context as relationships of social experience and thought worlds (as generative social interactions [Schütz, 1973; Kristeva, 1986; Berger & Luckman, 1967]). Hence, it is through story interactions in context that we offer justifications and rationales for action and examine consequences. In (story) research, tracing story interactions, justifications and rationales provide means to enhance contextual understanding (Garfinkel, 1984).

The degree to which any rationale can be sustained by popular reception depends on particular social expectations with which justifications are (or are not) aligned. Both social sensemaking frameworks (such as 'rationality') and meanings produced within them can be approached in terms of narratives (Reed, 1999; Macintyre, 1981/1990, respectively). The repertoire of narratives or stories legitimized within and by such frameworks can be varied, but not infinite (Czarniawska, 2004) and therefore it may

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provide a key insight into the context of stories' production. The 'success-despite-obstacles' organizational story, for instance, will be sustained by its listeners provided that they share the notion of 'success' with the storyteller who, for example, may or may not qualify as such a government bailout covered by taxpayers' money. Similarly, a 'sacrifice story' may or may not be applauded depending on the current social weightings of particular values being saved and sacrificed (vide human offerings to gods in ancient Carthage or Warsaw upraising), and 'social progress story' may also be booed if the voices of those who were sacrificed in its name start to be heard.

However, we must also attend to the problem of criteria. Not only can criteria for 'acceptable' storytelling be themselves construed as stories, but also factors which shape criteria and carry their authority can also be rendered as narratives; as in the case of scientific paradigms (Czarniawska, 1995), or social agendas (Reed, 1999). Consequently, hidden under a story are precepts, tenets and beliefs that precede decisions over how to arrange story-making ingredients and align them in a particular way. Which stories will appear and which will not depends on other stories, those which became expressed in the form of criteria for a particular form of storytelling. But these stories may become un-told, the criteria may change, the river-bed of thoughts may shift (Wittgenstein, 1969). Hence, not only very few stories get to be told, but also those that do, render a number of other untold. 'Telling' a story supplements the potentiality of an untold story to remain so. Whether such a 'supplement' merely adds a new ingredient to the untold or replaces it, seems not as much 'undecidable' (Derrida, 1976) as rather context-dependent, since stories may be variously constructed.

Typically, social scientists enjoy clarity and like to 'tell' their stories with confidence, indeed the very notion of academic argument tends to be struggle over the story. However, the same is not the case for managerial phenomenon where lack of clarity provides the space for managerial reproduction and action. It might seem that the only way in which a managerial phenomena such as motivation, teamwork or strategy can be listened to attentively depends on ensuring that none of the multiple renditions of the phenomenon is in any sense 'final'. The space for reinterpretation and reformulations is not empty; on the contrary it is populated with multiple elements (interpretations, arguments, topics) which were discarded, forgotten, rejected or which were never arrived at. These resources can be now mobilized into new forms or, more likely, reformulations of the existing ones. They may not be 'told', but they make 'telling' possible. The abundant ontology of the untold is not more problematic than human imagination itself, inasmuch as both enable creative sensemaking.

Into the Untold

How can we talk about the 'untold'? We would like to suggest that possibilities are numerous. In fact, taking literary and cinematic fictions as reference points, when it comes to storytelling, we should expect that plots will unfold around organizational stories which are not-told. Take for example, William Faulkner's *Yoknapatawpha* county saga (see for instance 1929, 1936, 1959). Faulkner employs the tactic of focusing the reader's attention on seemingly insignificant phenomena that appear as asides or spinoffs of the main story. The deliberate literary technique here, is to draw readerly attention to

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fringes or blank spots. If somewhere in the story crime is committed, we are more likely to learn about the texture of leafs in the distant part of the county rather than about any of the expected (normative) details of the crime scene. The crucial plot-driving details are typically enmeshed with immensely developed (rich) descriptions which not only seemingly, but often actually, have nothing to do with the plot kernel of the story. Hardly a surprising turn is we consider that Faulkner's work is often not plot-driven in the first place. The strategy of decentring the storyteller's (and story-reader's) attention away from where the action is may indeed be common. In John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) we are faced with innumerable stories most of which appear as either dead ends or containing marginally important information or facts of **the plot**. The feeling is that the author remains ostentatiously uninterested in telling us anything about the main protagonist's story, in fact he appears to actively resist revealing what such a story might be. A different approach to not-telling-a-story can be found in the works of Mario Vargas Llosa (see *Conversation in a Cathedral*, 1978) or Julio Cortazar (see *Hopscotch,* 1966) who repeatedly undermine the reader's attempts to identify the storyline.

Although hiding a story away from the reader may appear to be a hallmark of our times, such textual tactics can be traced back to Cervantes (1615/1950), Potocki (1815/2008) and to some extent Homer. Unsurprisingly, cinema recurrently employs similar storytelling tactics. In the culminating scene of Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975), the camera ostentatiously turns away from the action to show us the empty space outside and leave us wondering what occurred. In *Blow-up* (1966) by the same director we are once again reminded about the precariousness of a story – as implied in the final scene, we

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have to decide for ourselves whether the story (of a murder) was told to us or not. Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) develops along the lines of a conspiracy-buster movie, only to take a drastic turn towards espousing a near metaphysical incapacity to grasp the actual story, which always eludes both the viewer and the protagonist. Perhaps less sophisticated non-telling unfolds in *The Divide* (Gens, 2011), which starts with the apparently apocalyptic scenario in which a city (or a country, or the whole planet) is under threat, but upon the conclusion of the first scene we find our protagonists in a cellar which (spoiler alert is in place) they practically never leave for the rest of the movie. They are vividly interested in what happens outside, and so are we, but this story is never revealed to us. Finally, in what may be one of the most explicit references to 'untold stories' in the history of cinema, Dalton Trumbo's antisystemic *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971) places the main protagonist in the position of losing any means to communicate with the external world and still having an intense inner life. It is not as much an inability to tell the story that is implied here, but rather the fatalistic conviction that some, even most beautiful stories may be ignored, and that there is nothing we can do about it.

Our interest in the untold is not motivated by epistemological scepticism, quite the opposite: we believe there is a great deal to explore in the 'realities' which remain hidden from us. Importantly, one can recently observe how organization scholars become inspired by such absent presences. The increasing multidisciplinarity in approaching organizational realities (Biehl-Missal, 2012) is to some extent underpinned by disenchantment across the social sciences with structuralist renditions (Lyotard, 1992). One path that work has taken is evident in emerging reconceptualisations of organization

in terms of 'liquidity' (Bauman, 2000) or 'transparency' (Gabriel, 2005). These reconfigurations appear to overcome the postmodern stalemate and grasp recent social dynamics in a creative manner. Another path pursued by social theorists is to construe social interactions in non-representational terms (Cadman, 2009; Thrift, 2007), as witnessed by recent popularity in the field of management and organization studies of such non-categories as 'liminality' (Beech, 2011; Cunha & Cabral-Cardoso, 2006) and 'uncanniness' (Royle, 2003).

Significantly, such reconfigurations are proving valuable across organization studies and climates for organization theory are changing. In this connection, a Special Issue of *Organization Studies* committed to exploring the 'White Spaces of Organization' has particular relevance (O'Doherty, De Cock, Rehn & Ashcraft, 2013). One of the contributors discussed the importance of structures, especially the invisible ones – the *white spaces* evoking Malevich's 1918 painting 'white on white', a Russian purist's asymmetrical square study in white. Working with simplicity this political study struggles for purity and in the process reveals necessary textures, shades and discernible traces of the artist's hand and brush strokes at work in the 'pure'. Ironically, close attention to purity of whiteness revealed infinite variety rather than bounded pureness. Employing the trans-sensual notion of 'Sites/Sights', O'Doherty et al. investigate space and spatial experiences by unravelling concepts. In this case un-ness is analytically useful. Here, whiteness reveals otherwise invisible/unseen structures shown to be hidden agents of organizational domination and control (Conellan, 2013); uncomfortable and unfamiliar, or revealed as 'strangely familiar', spaces and objects inherent in the ones we take for

granted (Beyes & Steyaert, 2013); and the spatial dispersion and mobility of geographically un-fixed organizations framed in terms of ephemeral ecologies and experiences of 'non-places' (Costas, 2013).

Clearly, the organizational importance of 'meaningful absences' does not end with emotions, spaces and places. For better or worse, the conviction that organizations can be perceived as infinite entities or described in multiple terms has gathered force and it is this interest in un-ness and un-concepts that we seek to continue here through 'untold stories'.

Why Study Untold Stories?

When the first specimens of Platypus were sent to England in late 18th century the creature was generally believed to be a hoax – a mole with a duckbill attached to it (Moyal, 2002). Natural historians who first examined the Platypus' body sought evidence of stitching on this fantastic creature. The search for stitches may have been natural: historians actively attempted to undo the platypus' existence and their disbelief was based on an un-awareness that the 'story' of their emerging discipline was more complicated than they thought. The fantastic unscientific platypus and the rational effort to un-find the creature is nicely illustrative of potential inertia in imaginative rational thought and inflexibility in cherished classifications and dualisms (O'Doherty, et al., 2013).

Indeed, our goal is not to propose a 'science of the untold' with its rules and divisions, but to suggest that there is more in a story than meets the eye, ear or any other sense organ. For, naturally, the 'untold' is not an auditory only (non) phenomenon.

Human interest in that which is absent is not new. The capacity to recreate an object in another space, which does not yet contain it, to re-present it, is the basic precondition not only for artistic conduct, but also for mathematics, music as well as (among other) writing and language. It is abstraction that enabled humans to create symbolic order in which most objects can be substituted by signs, and which in its turn makes it much easier to accumulate them and trade them. Abstracting from an immediate context, and therefore relating to something which is not immediately in front of us, is the feature distinguishing *Homo sapiens* from a great majority of animals. No wonder that discussing, describing or theorizing about things which do not form the object of immediate intersubjective experience consumed an immense amount of time in human history, became an unspoken paradigm of social sciences and an increasingly important aspect of the natural ones. To relate to that which either is not there or is only for us (and perhaps a group of others, if we are fortunate) enabled humans to create not only science and art. This human capacity to story out from immediate contexts is the bedrock for any economic and institutional order which we create.

We commence our inquiry (Part I) with the reflection on the ecologies of the untold: the interconnected and varied strategies enabling to discuss organizational stories which have not been told. We open with David Sims' inquisitive exploration of storytelling, the

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narrative accomplishment of which may come, paradoxically perhaps, at the expense of presence. David Rae and Angela Lait in their separate chapters analyze the construction of 'untold' narratives and spaces which these occupy within organizational framework, thus creating a room for alternative paths of inquiry: Rea's 'momentary perspective' and Lait's role of explicit and untold stories in our cognitive processes. Bridging the themes of general exploration of the ecologies of the untold and bringing particular organizational untold stories to the fore Monika Kostera and Jerzy Kociatkiewicz propose a paradigmatic shift in marketing by reorienting customer relationship strategy towards attraction rather than seduction. Such step, according to the authors, could be enabled by opening communication channels towards the thought provoking and gender-liminal androgyne imagery – so far implicit and untold aspect of marketing. Part II of the volume focuses more explicitly on the potential social and political aspects of not-telling or actively untelling certain sets of stories, as well as not performing or un-performing realities which surround them. In this vein, Lucia Garcia-Lorenzo, Lucia Sell-Trujillo and Paul Donnelly explore the implicit stories of 'necessity entrepreneurs', inviting us to reconsider the association of entrepreneurial figure with wealth and internal motivation, thus evoking more heterogeneous picture of entrepreneurship affecting political discourses. Maria Daskalaki, Alexandra Saliba, Stratis Vogiatzis and Thekla Malamou introduce performative and socially transformative aspects of enacting the stories which due to multiple social, political and economic factors might have so far remained untold. Tom Boland and Ray Griffin delve into non-agentic silences surrounding the (non) actions associated with prolonged state of unemployment, and attempt to render the non-stories which surround it graspable as narratives by producing socially-conscious

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imaginative narrative understanding of unemployment. Through the relevant textual vehicles offered by Beckett and Kafka the sensitive themes of meaninglessness, nothingness and waiting are explored and translated into a societal narrative. What it means for storytellers to leave their stories untold or have them silenced is explained by Mónica Colón-Aguirre in her exploration of selectively shared stories among reference librarians and by Vaughan Roberts' rendition of the (again) selective manner of bringing certain stories out of the untold abyss of the Church of England's narrative pool. While most contributions in this section emphasize the non-appearance of a story or reflect on the lack of storytelling resources, Gillian Hopkinson on the somewhat more reassuring note, discusses the alternative for untold stories to come into existence. Finally, in Part III, Linda Hitchin provides a methodological reflection on researching the untold and its relationships to the typically more explicit aspects of organizational life.

While we believe that the eleven contributions selected for this volume aptly grasp diverse aspects of untold stories in manifold organizational frameworks, we are also conscious that we can only hope to pose a question rather than provide the answer. Hence, the current work is designed as a preliminary study of the area rather than as a final rendition of this (yet untold) organizational story.

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