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Résumé de l'article

The article reports an empirical inquiry into the rhetorical use of master/counter juxtapositions in narrating an ongoing scene of political action. Drawing on the studies of institutional interaction, it investigates the institutional setting of public political speeches, focusing on the empirical example of Donald Trump's public speech in the rally after the election results and just before the violent invasion of the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. My research approaches master/counter positioning as a multilayered relational constellation of identifications mobilized in the telling and deployed strategically for specific institutional purposes. I am interested in counter-narratives as interpretative discursive frames superimposed on surrounding socio-material circumstances to refute an alternative (pre-existing and prevailing) interpretation of reality. My take on the concept as a multifaceted rhetorical resource subsumes the aspects of an act of contestation, a breach of cultural orders, and a mission towards emancipation, albeit in a slightly modified version of the conventionalized definitions. In the context of political interaction, that is, in institutional activities connected to ongoing processes in policy-making and governance, counter-narratives are world-breaking but they are also world-making in a decidedly concrete consequential manner, firstly, by building on institutional continuities, virtues, and legitimacies, and secondly, by addressing recipients as co-actors, projecting identifications on them and expecting them to assume a role in the political participation field at hand. Applying tools from small story research, membership categorization analysis, epistemic governance and narrative positioning analysis, I explore the purposeful evocation of contrastive storylines in political rhetoric. The article aims to shed light on the argumentative use of counter-narratives in a political line of action.

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SPECIAL ISSUE:
CONSIDERING POLITICAL COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The Political Poetics of Contrastive Identifications: Scripting Ongoing Events Through Master/Counter Positioning in Populist Political Speech

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The article reports an empirical inquiry into the rhetorical use of master/counter juxtapositions in narrating an ongoing scene of political action. Drawing on the studies of institutional interaction, it investigates the institutional setting of public political speeches, focusing on the empirical example of Donald Trump's public speech in the rally after the election results and just before the violent invasion of the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. My research approaches master/counter positioning as a multilayered relational constellation of identifications mobilized in the telling and deployed strategically for specific institutional purposes. I am interested in counter-narratives as interpretative discursive frames superimposed on surrounding socio-material circumstances to refute an alternative (pre-existing and prevailing) interpretation of reality. My take on the concept as a multifaceted rhetorical resource subsumes the aspects of an act of contestation, a breach of cultural orders, and a mission towards emancipation, albeit in a slightly modified version of the conventionalized definitions. In the context of political interaction, that is, in institutional activities connected to ongoing processes in policy-making and governance, counter-narratives are world-breaking but they are also world-making in a decidedly concrete consequential manner, firstly, by building on institutional continuities, virtues, and legitimacies, and secondly, by addressing recipients as co-actors, projecting identifications on them and expecting them to assume a role in the political participation field at hand. Applying tools from small story research,

membership categorization analysis, epistemic governance and narrative positioning analysis, I explore the purposeful evocation of contrastive storylines in political rhetoric. The article aims to shed light on the argumentative use of counter-narratives in a political line of action.

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL PREMISES

On January 6, 2021 thousands of Donald Trump supporters invaded violently into the United States Capitol Building after Trump had given them a speech and exhorted them to protest against the allegedly fake election result proclaiming Joe Biden's victory in the recently reported presidential election. The mob action resulted in the death of five people. One hundred and seventy-four police officers were injured and four police officers involved in the events committed suicide within the following year. The ensuing financial damage amounted to over two million dollars. The invasion has been described as unforeseen, unimaginable, and almost surreal. Yet, it did happen, through the deliberate actions of a large number of people. This article is motivated by an interest to explore the details of discursive exchange preceding these events.

Trump's speech has attracted considerable analytic attention in various disciplines. From a realistic angle, for example in legal science, the speech has been analyzed from the aspect of whether Trump's speech was guilty of inciting a riot at the Capitol (Conklin, 2021). Others have argued for taking into account the broader socio-cultural context behind the speech, the changing political attitudes in the U.S. (Taylor, 2021), or the colonial heritage of the American past (Jordan & Dykes, 2022). The speech has been scrutinized and categorized as fraudulent speech and hate speech rather than as primarily a political speech (Hamed, 2022; Henricksen & Betz, 2022). There has also been interest in the psychological mechanisms contributing to the persuasiveness of the speech (Lee et al., 2022) and in the intermedial dynamic between online Twitter messaging and the offline speech on site (König, 2023). More discourse analytically, the speech has been analyzed from the perspective of denigrating speech (Valcore et al. 2023) and toxic leadership within social identity theory (Ntonis et al., 2024), both of which promote hatred and violence. Since coming to power in 2016, Trump's overall style of speech has prompted research on their common features and grammar (Fanani et al., 2020;

Febriana & Fajariah, 2018; Reyes & Ross, 2021; Rong, 2021; Wang & Liu 2018;), forms of power (Krasner, 2023; Reyes 2020), racist, separatist and colonial connotations (Asif, 2023; Hall, 2021; Ivana & Suprayogi, 2020; Kadim, 2022; Lacatus, 2021; Schaefer 2020), and specific linguistic features, such as hyperbole (Abbas, 2019), commissive speech acts (Gea, 2020), offensive language (Al Dilaimy et al., 2022), emotionally driven language (Hidalgo-Tenorio & Benitez-Castro, 2022), and euphemisms (Begzjav & Nyamsuren, 2023).

My research comes closest to the interest in discursive strategies mobilized in talk to further the political aims of the speaker. Specifically, I am interested in the usability of counter-narrative positionings as an argumentative resource in political rhetoric. Donald Trump is an eccentric figure and the case of Capitol Hill is an extreme one. Yet, my interest lies neither in the uniquenesss of the speaker nor the case. Instead, the case in focus serves to illuminate rhetorical means to regulate the goal-oriented organization of time and evaluative identifications through narrative resources. The case of Capitol Hill 2021 vividly highlights the consequentiality of narrative address when tales are mobilized in the framework of political action. I set out to ask how counter-narrative tools function in the context of populist rhetoric, and how they manifest in the case of Trump's speech of January 6. To shed further light on the means of political persuasion, I investigate how counter-narrative orientations can be used to evaluate and instruct action. How may the juxtapositional identifications embedded in counter-narratives end up shaping political interaction? I am also interested in exploring how master relates to counter, how this relation evolves and how it manifests in discourse?

My article aligns with the idea that asymmetry between master and counter-narratives is not a pre-given cultural order. The asymmetry between them is situational and embedded in the activity context at hand in various ways. Similarly, master and counter-narratives do not carry a set of pre-structured actor positions. Instead, master and counter-narrative resources can be mastered reflexively to enact occasioned positionings which serve the situated purposes of the speaker (Hyvärinen et al., 2021). Everyday storytelling tends to center on counter-narratives as they entail more tellability than the expected flow of events (Hyvärinen, 2020). Consequently, counter-narratives more typically appear in articulated form, whereas master narratives often appear as an allusive counterpart against which counter-narratives are projected. Interestingly, in political rhetoric an unexpected breach in canonicity (Hyvärinen, 2016) can be further processed and turned into a disturbing violation against institutional structures and actors.

The metatheoretical premises of my take on counter narratives are rooted in a combination of Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical sociology,

Herbert Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism, and Harold Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological views on participants' orientation and sense-making in ongoing activity frameworks: firstly, to approach an occasion of social action as an arena structured by multiple simultaneous frames (including a shared socio-material frame, an institutional frame, and a discursively managed ideational frame) which actors need to coordinate to take action in the scene (Goffman, 1974); secondly, to emphasize the interpretative procedure involved in any human action and self-conception (Blumer, 1969); and thirdly, to note the reflexive nature of mutually accomplished activities and tasks for action (Garfinkel, 1967).

The analytic interest of the paper is firmly rooted in the research field of discursive institutionalism, focused on the power of persuasion in political debate (Schmidt, 2008; Alasuutari, 2015). Discursive institutionalism puts emphasis on the role of local actors and discursive practices in bringing about the processes of policy-making and governance. As a research program it underlines the role of ideas in constituting political action, the centrality of deliberation for democratic legitimation, the construction and reconstruction of political interests and values, and the dynamics of change in history and culture (Schmidt, 2008, pp. 305). Discursive institutionalism is interested in ideational power: the capacity of actors to promote political claims by persuading other actors of the cognitive validity or normative value of their views through the use of ideational elements (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016, pp. 323-326). Persuasion is practised through intersubjective meaning structures that agents both draw on and battle over, to give meaning to their material and social circumstances (Schmidt, 2017, pp. 10).

The epistemic governance approach (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2014) follows the interests of discursive institutionalism in investigating how actors work on discursive claims aimed at influencing other actors' conceptions about reality on the level of 1) ontological assumptions, 2) actor identifications, and 3) cultural norms and values. Epistemic governance centers on the rhetorical means to process the ideal of "rationality" by making use of pre-given cultural knowledge. My research likewise places active agents, discursive practices, and definitional struggles at the core of political processes. However, it elaborates the field further by spotting and exploring unmapped areas in the fine art of political argumentation, enhances its theoretical precision and gains a better analytic grasp of the effective dynamic afforded by narrative resources in occasioned signification. I also wish to put more emphasis on the interactional set up of argumentation. It is not merely a culturally oriented mind and a culturally oriented claim that meet up in persuasion. Drawing on the concept of participation framework (Goffman, 1981; Goodwin, 1987), to topicalize any acute situation in politics entails identifying the key actors

involved (Rautajoki, 2012). Importantly, actors are named, characterized, and profiled in regard to the ongoing activity framework with its own institutional goals, restrictions, ideals, identities, and expectations (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Arminen, 2005). My research approaches democratic life as an interactional accomplishment located within specific discursive spaces, moments, and sedimentations (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2007, pp. 189). The "field of action" instantiated in public political discourse connects to an imaginary structure of a public sphere as an indefinite arena for political opinion-formation on issues of common concern among unknown others (Habermas, 1989; Taylor, 2004; Rautajoki, 2009). Thus, "the field of participation" here extends the immediate situation at hand and orientates to other actors as co-participants in a larger frame of shared socio-material circumstances (Rautajoki, 2023).

For a politician speaking in public, the maintenance of institutional legitimacy is an integral and continuous part of institutional performance (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2018; Rautajoki & Pi Ferrer, 2020). In this effort the actors need to handle the "background ideational abilities," to manage the coordinates and competencies of the institutional site of action. These coordinates constitute the institutional frame of action involving any actor in the situation. But alongside those competences a political actor is left with "foreground discursive competencies" which leave room to maneuver, to act on changing or maintaining the institutional surroundings through discourse. (Schmidt, 2008). In the context of political speeches, the latter comes close to the interpretative ideational frame materializing in the discursive descriptions of the political scene at hand. This contingent and constructionist side of rhetoric calls for more analytic attention.

My article pays attention to discursive work around the "occasioned scene for political action." The definitional perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969) sheds light on the relevance of this perspective by emphasizing that human beings act towards things in the world on the basis of the meanings they attach to them through a process of interpretation (ibid. 2-5). This means that each actor needs to interpret whatever factors there are in the situation to work out a course of action in regard to them (Collins, 1988, pp. 268-269). For Blumer, meaning is a social product derived from social interaction and shaped by a mutual exchange of people actively interpreting the social and natural world. Thus, to have any reality, the physical surrounding of the world has to be defined.. It is not responded to directly but through a social understanding of reality, producing a world composed of "objects", not of things in themselves (Blumer, 1969). This interpretative factor can be utilized in political rhetoric in the discursive portrayal of ongoing events, suggesting images and interpretations of the scene.

My article argues that narrative resources provide a crucial strategic tool with which to structure political scenes of action, including the characters and causal beliefs associated with them (Rautajoki, 2023). Storying is known to be a basic human means to come to terms with time, process, and change (Herman, 2005). Narratives create storyworlds (Herman, 2002) serve evaluative functions, make propositions, contest and are contested in return (Phelan, 2008). Moreover, narratives carry a structural logic which guides interpretations in the form temporal sequentiality and triggers inferences on causality, consequentiality and embodied experientiality (Fludernik, 1996; Walsh, 2018). From this angle, counter-narratives appear as counter-interpretations of events, contesting an alternative interpretation of reality. This is very much in line with the definition according to which counter-narratives are distinguished by "an illocutionary force" to counter the background assumptions of another alterative narrative (Bamberg & Wipff, 2020). In the real-life political context, such narrative elements together with the act of contestation can be harnessed to furnish interpretations of the ongoing political situation at hand, the rhetorical art which the article refers to as "political poetics."

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

My empirical data consist of a case study of the public speech by Donald Trump preceding the Capitol attack in the US in 2021. I analyze the written transcription of the speech given by him at a rally on the Ellipse in Washington, D.C. The gathering originated in the social media and comprised thousands of Trump supporters. The case example is exceptional and extreme, but it serves to illustrate the consequentiality of moral address and discursive identifications mobilized in the ongoing time frame of political action. Similar "dramaturgical consequentiality" (Rautajoki, 2012) is, to a larger or lesser extent, present in any discursive act targeted to guide the inferences, affiliations, and activities of political co-actors. I will get back to the question of generalizability in the conclusions.

The core concepts in my take on counter-narratives are those of moral orders and identifications as a source of signification. I am particularly interested in two discursive tools, the "moral casting" of participants, that is, the evaluative organization of actors in the political scene at hand (Rautajoki 2012; Rautajoki & Hyvärinen, 2021), and the "relational scaffolding" of justifications, that is, the ways of placing actors in obliging interrelations with one another in interactional encounters (Rautajoki, 2022; Rautajoki & Fitzgerald, 2022). In this view, a scene of moral disorder motivates counter-narrative telling. As a serious breach, it also

enhances the tellability of the story. A normative breach is first postulated and populated with actor identities, then treated as something to be addressed and responded to in the form of a narrative. My empirical example demonstrates how the normative orders of the institutional setting can function as an important rhetorical asset and a point of reference to regulate master/counter signification in political narration. The effects of narrative evaluation enacted through moral casting structure the scene of political action on three levels: 1) they signify the on-going time frame (storying reality), 2) they prompt responses and activities on the part of the recipients (normative ordering of opinions and affects), 3) they provide loci of identification for participants (producing culturally contextualized identities in which to engage).

Narratives in political communication are seldom full-length coherent stories. They rather appear in the form of small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) as fleeting narrative orientations launched in the middle of argumentative discourse. For example, future-oriented small stories may appear as justification in debating the state budget to object challenge a policy proposal due to its anticipated negative consequences for an abstract of an individual citizen (Rautajoki, Hatavara & Hyvärinen, 2023). I apply the perspective of epistemic governance in exploring the aspects of claims made in political persuasion, only concentrating specifically in the rhetorical force invested in occasioned identifications, thereby combining it with narrative positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997), the relational work to build identities on the three levels of 1) story, 2) interaction, and 3) cultural context in conversational storytelling. I also make use of membership categorization analysis (Sacks, 1972), assuming a cultural device members use for recognizing and interpreting social actors, operating as rich "cultural inference making machines" (Sacks, 1995), impregnated with attributes, expectations, and mutual interrelations which can be harnessed to construct moral orders (Jayyusi, 1984). One way of accomplishing moral inferences is through the evaluative organization of relevant actors on a temporal continuum, referred to as the moral casting of participants (Rautajoki, 2012).

The double temporality of narratives, which structures the three levels of positioning, is an important resource in political argumentation (Björninen et al., 2020). In this research, I am not so interested in the stance-taking of a politician as such, but in the discursive tools to try and contest the opponents and guide the direction of political process. I focus specifically on second person address, that is, the recipient-obliging aspects of discursive strategies. The concept of "relational scaffolding" (Rautajoki, 2022) depicts how an occasioned

interpretation of events assumes persuasive functions and justifies decisions by drawing normative interconnections between characters in the time of the told and the participants at the moment of telling. This poetic art of persuasion is the analytic target to be carved out in the article.

Observations on the strategic use of counter-narrative tools in political speech

The analysis of the speech is divided into a close examination of three extracts, each of which highlights the political usability of counter narrative resources in political argumentation. The examples introduced in the analysis exhibit the functionality of the tool from the angle of antagonistic constellations, normative fueling, and a heroic fight for justice. The first extract is from the beginning of the speech. In this extract I want to draw special attention to the - question of "who", that is, to the constellation of actors in the scene of action under interpretation.

Data Example 1: The moral casting of us and them in the political scene of action

1 "All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by emboldened radical-left
2 Democrats, which is what they're doing. And stolen by the fake news media.
3 That's what they've done and what they're doing. We will never give up, we will never concede. It
4 doesn't happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved."
5 "Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore and that's what this is all about.
6 And to use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with: We will stop the steal."

A prominent feature of the talk is an antagonistic us-them division, which becomes evident from the frequent contrastive use of we and they pronouns. References to the content of these categories are indefinite, which makes them influential rhetorically. The exact reference is left for the hearer to conclude. The description of the scene is located in the here-and-now, in the time of the telling (line 1). The key event structuring the scene is a moral accusation, the theft of the election victory. Reference to theft or stealing recurs four times in the extract. The thief, the villain of the scene, is identified very explicitly as radical-left democrats and the fake news media. The actor categories themselves are fairly neutral, yet they are assigned with questionable attributes (Jayyusi, 1984). What is even more crucial and fatal for the moral casting of the scene, is the way they are plotted together with the allusive story about a theft. The villain is caught in action: they have committed a theft of democratic votes and they are committing a theft at the

very moment (line 3). The parallel use of past and present tense cunningly flattens and effaces the division between the two temporal contexts and merges the time of the told together with the time of the telling. The site of a struggle is portrayed by depicting one party, "them," as lying and breaking the rules and the other, "us," not taking it anymore. Thus, us is experiencing a change in the state of mind, which marks a culmination point for anyone identifying with "us" and anticipates a need to react accordingly.

At the end of the extract there is a quotation from "all of you people" (line 6) including an exhortation to take action and right the wrong by "stopping the steal." The pronouns you, we, and they serve as unquestionable metonymic wholes with homologic qualities. Overall, the description of the political scene names and characterizes relevant actors, the key parties in opposition to one another, thus staging a contrastive setting with separate contesting versions of the election results. The act of contestation manifests a juxtaposition between actors on the political game board. This game board is a common one for the contending parties: it postulates a shared socio-material field of action which binds "their" activities together with 'ours' in a way that encourages identity work and obliges the hearer to act. For the recipients of the talk, the utterances provide an orientation with a characterization of the key events of the scene in focus, as well as the constellation and evaluative organization of the key actors involved. That is, the who-question works on identities on the third level of positioning, placing emphasis on evoking identities for participants at present (who are we) and producing interrelational connections to other actors in the political participation field (who are them). In the next extract the focus of the rhetoric is more on the nature of on-going events.

Data Example 2: Fueling normative breach with utter exceptionality and moral disgrace

7   "There's never been anything like that. You could take third-world countries. Just take a look.
8   Take third-world countries. Their elections are more honest than what we've been going
9   through in this country. It's a disgrace. It's a disgrace."
10 "Even when you look at last night. They're all running around like chickens with their heads
11 cut off with boxes. Nobody knows what the hell is going on. There's never been anything like
12 this."
13 "We will not let them silence your voices. We're not going to let it happen, I'm not going to
14 let it happen."

The second extract works on the description of the scene on the first level of narrative positioning (the story) and operates on the aspect of narrative tellability. Counter-narratives are associated with a high degree of tellability which is why in everyday interaction they are articulated more often than master narratives (Hyvärinen, 2020). The description underlines a sense of bewilderment in face of the events being storied and highlights their ultimate exceptionality (line 7), pointing to a breach, or even more strongly a violation of the canonical orders of representative democracy as an institution (lines 8-9). The virtue of honesty is put in parallel with the theft mentioned before. Unflattering comparison to third-world countries follows the colonialist line of talk typical of Trump's rhetoric (Schaefer, 2020). Interestingly, there is a fleeting snippet of a past narrative portrayed as a testimonial type of verification of the chaos going on. It offers a first-hand description of a particularized event from yesterday, of "people running around like chickens with their heads cut off with boxes" (presumably of votes) (lines 10-12). It is a prime example of the functionality of small stories in the context of their use (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008). Unlike the preceding piece of talk, this extract operates in the time of the told and serves as evidence to substantiate the claims made about the political situation. If in the last example the master/counter-positioning took place in the frame of truth, inviting the audience to contest an alternative version of reality, master/counter-positioning here springs from the frame of moral order. It reveals a severe violation of institutional practice and invites the audience to condemn it.

In the context of political persuasion, highlighting the severity of moral disorder connects to enhancing among recipients the moral motivation for action. The events are depicted as decidedly counter to normative expectations, which stresses the need to respond. This impression is enhanced by concluding with inserting an agentive "we," hostile "them," vulnerable "you" and heroic "I," who makes a moral promise to protect "you." "I" plays the role of a savior, which seems somewhat ironic as the speaker is *de facto* pleading with his hearers to save him from a defeat in the elections. In the third extract the direct address to the audience gets even stronger.

Data Example 3: Formulating a heroic plot for common line of action

15 "Anyone you want, but I think right here, we're going to walk down to the Capitol, and
16 we're going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women, and we're
17 probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them."
18 "Because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength and
19 you have to be strong. We have come to demand that Congress do the right thing and only

20   count the electors who have been lawfully slated, lawfully slated."
21" I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to
22   peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard."

The moral address of recipients intensifies in the formulations of the last extract, bringing to the fore the second level of narrative positioning in the framework of ongoing interaction. It proposes a line of action for the interlocutor, initially tentatively (line 15), but ends up "knowing that everyone here will soon be the marching to the Capitol" (line 21). The tense is now in the future. The narrative account of a hypothetical scene involving the ongoing time frame flattens and overturns the temporal distance between the time of told and the time of the telling. The contextual difference between these two timeframes collapses. Storying deploys "relational scaffolding" and becomes a sketch of a script for action in ongoing reality. Again, a projection of recipient-involving heroic responsibilities occurs and expects the recipients to respond. Master/counter-positioning takes place in the frame of salvation. There is almost a mythical undertone in the exhortation to action, as if the hearers are sent out to liberate the village by slaying the dragon, whereby the master represents an evil entity with the upper hand in the situation and needs to be fought against. In this picture, submissive obligation to fight back goes hand in hand with an idea of emancipation, which resembles one of the key features associated with counter-narratives, depicted as stories told by those who represent alternative world views in marginalized positions. The future narrative in the speech projects a storyline and anticipates countering activities, a heroic uprising, on the part of the audience here and now. After the introductory *orientation* towards the key events and evaluative actor constellations, and after fueling the moral *motivation* to react, the third counter-narrative strategy provides a map to *navigate* further in the line of political events in real-time physical action.

      Summing up observations witnessed in the analysis, counter-narrative orientations provide a resourceful asset for political persuasion. The usability of master/counter-positioning is not fixed but may assume various forms and angles which surface differently in the argumentation. In reference to truth master/counter-positioning manifests as the rebuttal and targeting of the enemy, in reference to orders it manifests as bewilderment and moralization, in reference to salvation it manifests as agitation to fight the evil. As rhetorical angles they are all available for the purpose of portraying a political scene.

Table 1 – Summarizing the functionality of counter narrative resources in political rhetoric

Frame of reference	Marker of master-counter positioning	Act of persuasion	Core question	Target
Truth	Rebuttal (confronting the opponent) *draws on contestation - master representing the prevailing story	Identification "one's location in the scene"	What & who?	Inferences
Orders	Moralization (fueling the breach) *draws on tellability - master representing the order violated	Motivation "sense of wrong"	Why?	Affiliation
Salvation	Agitation (fighting the evil) *draws on emancipation - master representing the unjust dominant entity	Mobilization "urgent threat to defeat"	Where to?	Action

CONCLUSIONS

The term "political poetics" refers to discursive means of identifying and addressing participants in a timeline, thus characterizing actors, assigning moral status, furnishing time frames with evaluative interrelations and setting goals for co-actors in the political participation field. The political speech analyzed in this article presents an interpretation of events which cultivates a sense of moral disorder. It produces a discursive portrayal of the political scene at hand, which stages a serious violation of normative orders, identifies an enemy and instructs a response to the situation. The events on Capitol Hill were unforeseen. There is no pre-given cultural script or established order to guide them. An additional element is needed to explain what motivated and moved people in the activities committed on site. This points to the fact that creative contingent meaning-making plays a crucial role in the constitution of a political scene. The article has explored the rhetorical force of narrative resources in structuring human-interpretation, especially in organizing evaluative actor constellations in a time frame. The art of "political poetics" evidenced in the data warrants the importance of taking into full

consideration the foreground discursive competencies of a political speaker within the field of discursive institutionalism. No matter how legitimate or culturally shared ideas are, they do not argue or tell stories on their own. To become effective, they need to be weaved into the fabric of occasioned case-specific signification. The outcome of rhetoric is ultimately a combination of background cultural abilities, leaning on commonly shared assumptions, and the competencies to portray emerging events and organize persuasive political scenes of the situation discursively. One can see an example of this in the way Trump is playing with institutional orders and foundational virtues while twisting these narratively to meet his own aims.

In the context of a socio-material political process, the poetic characterization of actors acquires a politically consequential meaning. The dramaturgical portrayal of the political scene is actor-dependent and only becomes effective through the ultimate acts of interpretation by active and reflexive individuals in the receiving end of the discourse. Nothing in politically persuasive narrative positionings is deterministic. Political rhetoric, however, has the capacity to intervene in interpretations by staging an 'occasioned scene for action' through discursive means which work to map normative orders, attune affiliations, and portray relational sceneries to guide subsequent choices of action. Political poetics does not only build characters in the story or identify the teller but prompts an identification on the part of the audience and works for this purpose across all levels of narrative positioning. One way to enhance the address is by flattening the distance between temporal contexts. Past, present and future time are infused in the narration to consolidate the interrelations between actors, whereby 'our good is dependent on their bad'. The incentive to take a stance, pick a side and make a move in a political process arises from the sense of moral disorder staged in the rhetoric. Through the consequentiality of inferences political poetics works to regulate proceedings (opinions, affiliations, activities) in the audience-involving political participation field. At worst it allows a popular politician to become a discursive puppet master who sketches out scenes at the extreme of his imagination. Once the imagery of actor constellation is launched, the element of contingence is susceptible to misuse. Morally evaluative relational identifications instantiate profiles and bear endurance which can be played on and repurposed in further narratives.

Counter-narrative positioning provides a rich rhetorical resource for political communication. Countering *per se* fits well with the argumentative framework of political action which sets out to discredit the opponent, convince the audience, and steer the direction of political events. Counter-narratives enable a dramaturgical set-up for contrastive inferences, justifications, affiliations,

antagonism, and future activities in an ongoing political process. Counter narrative resources can be harnessed to produce a sense of moral disorder, map a contrastive constellation of actors with one's location in the social scenery and raise an urge to fight against that disorder. The multilayered moral casting of participants is accomplished through organizing actors, evaluations, and concrete instructions. The narrative about a theft is allusive and reductionist, yet relatable and highly consequential. It invites people at present to identify with and engage in a heroic story, whereby the key criteria for judgement are not those of factual accuracy or rational calculation but a sense of connection and personal meaning. The "storyline" of the speech (Davies & Harre, 1990) portrays a continuum of interpretative projections which justifies radical resistance through marketing empowerment, agency, and moral superiority for the recipients. Of course, given the turn of actual events at Capitol Hill that day, the tool of counter-narratives ended up playing a role in authoring and scripting real-time action materializing in radical acts of violence. As a tool that can transform "the space of possibilities" (Meretoja 2018), it can be used for many purposes. It is processually embedded context-sensitivity that matters in analysing what actors make of counter-narratives in social practices (Bager et al. 2021).

Applying the concept of counter-narrative in the analysis of political communication brings many gains. Empirically, it enlightens the awareness of narrative strategies in political persuasion and provides tools to explicate their dynamic. The case analyzed was a piece of "communicative discourse" from a politician to the public (Schmidt 2008). As a case it is exceptional but not singular. Assuming that human beings make inferences, evaluations and choices on activities by the way their interpret the situation (Blumer 1969), it is to be expected that the *occasioned transformable relationality* of political poetics is in play in various contexts of political communication. Besides political speeches, the functionality of the toolkit appears in the uses of parliamentary debates (Rautajoki et al. 2023), current affairs media (Rautajoki 2023) and political activism (Sigurdardottir & Rautajoki 2024). One can find counter-narrative resources, aimed at guiding political conceptions, moral motivation, and socio-material navigation trafficking across these arenas. Methodologically, the concept of counter-narrative helps in detailing the array of ideational elements deployed in political rhetoric, thus illuminating the trajectory of political poetics from identifications to evaluative constellations, obliging interrelations and projective positionings. Theoretically, the concept highlights the relevance of maintaining a dramaturgical view of discursive sceneries and narrative storyworlds in politics, providing insight into why narrative resources are effective in political debates in the first place.

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