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3 Narratives in social research: Researching narratives across media

In this and the next chapter, we provide some examples of narrative methods being employed successfully in six different fields of social science research. We want to give you a 'road map' through some applications of narrative research, to show you what this approach can, and cannot, deliver. Each of the examples has been written by a researcher who has worked in the specific field for many years. In the later chapters of this book, we will also call on these examples, when we consider the uses of challenges to and criticisms of narrative research. We do not expect you necessarily to read all these examples at this time. But we will refer back to them as we proceed through the rest of the book.

We have assigned the examples to two chapters, each with a specific contemporary significance within narrative research: narratives as they appear within and are researched in different media and narratives in their relations to power and resistance. As you will remember from our discussions in earlier chapters on what narratives are, where to find narratives, and narrative contexts and 'counter-narratives' in particular, both these foci are central to current narrative research debates.

As we have seen earlier, the issues of what we consider to be narratives and where we look for them are important in contemporary narrative research. They have implications for how we will choose to address narratives, because different research and analytic methods need to be brought into play when the 'texts' in question are, for instance, oral or written, or enacted through the body, visual media or online, digital media. Moreover, our theoretical understanding of narrative has to change if we are going to investigate it within non-verbal stories, or across different sorts of texts that may be seen as together constituting a 'storyworld' (Herman, 2004), and if we are going to take narrative media themselves seriously, rather than treating those media as unproblematically understood by us all and as constituting narratives in similar ways. The following sections on recent narrative research in relation to the body, visual narratives and narratives

and new media demonstrate these methodological and theoretical shifts in the research field. The sections progress from considering the body, which has always been an integral but often-overlooked part of the personal narratives that form the basis of much social research; through examining visual narratives, which have played an increasingly powerful part in people's lives and stories since the nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments of print, photographic and broadcast media; to a focus on digital narratives, which are more and more central to people's personal and social lives as access to digital media expands.

A. Narratives and the body

This chapter section addresses the much-researched field of narratives about the body, but it interprets this field broadly, to include narratives focused on bodily metaphors or analogies and narratives that use the body as part of their representational strategies, for instance, through tone of voice, gesture and silence. The chapter section points up the importance of a specifically *narrative* analysis of the body in such representations, if we are to understand fully the meanings that the body carries within people's lives.

In much narrative research and theory, the bodies of both the storyteller and listeners as well as of the characters appearing in the story are taken for granted. Bodies are something that are always assumed to be there without having to be noticed, mentioned or commented on. It is only when the body becomes relevant to what is happening in the story that it merits descriptions and comments. In some cases, for instance, those of narratives about illness, or bodily transformations, or of physical disabilities, the body is a particularly salient aspect of verbal narratives. Alison Lapper's autobiography, *My life in my hands* (2006), beginning with her life as a severely physically disabled child in the 1960s, proceeding through to her work as an artist and a mother, is one instance. Oscar Moore's *PWA: Looking AIDS in the face* (1996) is another example of autobiographical writing in which the body cannot be escaped from. However, bodies have a more ubiquitous, though less remarked, presence in narrative materials, also.

In social-scientific research, stories are often collected either from interviews or from recordings of everyday situations. That is, stories are gathered in situations where the participants in the storytelling event are

bodily co-present, making it possible for the participants to construct the meaning of the stories through use of bodies as semiotic resources. Hence, in these situations it is often valuable not only to focus the analysis on the narrative as text but also to include the telling of the story, the ways tellers and listeners interact and in particular how they use their bodies as a resource in the telling (Goodwin, 2003; Kendon, 1990).

Both the storytellers and the listeners can use bodies in several ways: the body becomes an instrument for telling the story, for re-presenting events and actions (for further discussion about embodiment and storytelling, see L.-C. Hydén, 2013).

- i. The *voice* is one of the most central bodily resources, although often taken for granted. The voice that presents the verbal story is almost never a neutral, mechanical voice, recapitulating a textual script. Rather the voice is used in order to differentiate between different positions in the story: between various characters and their specific traits, as well as foregrounding the narrator guiding the listeners through the story. The voice can be full of warmth as well as sarcasm or other emotions, adding further meaning to the verbal text of the story, sometimes adding ironic comments or questions. Transcription can only go so far with conveying characteristics of voice. Changes in pitch are sometimes marked with up or down arrows, loudness with capitals. Pauses, an important aspect of voice, may be indicated by second measurements in brackets – for example, (2) to indicate a two-second silence. Non-verbal aspects of voice are frequently noted too, bracketed in specific ways to indicate that they are not part of the verbal record, for instance with [laughs] and [sighs]. However, researchers most interested in voice tend to work with the sound record, rather than with transcripts.
- ii. The hands are used for *gestures*. Participants in storytelling events often sit or stand together in such a way that an interpersonal space is formed between them. This space can be used by all participants for gesturing. Some gestures are indexical, pointing out certain persons, tracing a movement in space. Other gestures use the interpersonal space in order to outline objects or aspects of objects and characters. Still other gestures are more conventional, displaying a peace sign or an 'OK' sign. Again, such

gestures are hard to convey in written transcription. Researchers most attentive to them tend to use video data and may refer to time codes on their video records rather than trying to capture visuo-spatial elements verbally.

- iii. Also other parts of the body are used, in particular eyes. Participants use their *gaze* to underline points, to signal interest and so on. The eyes together with the rest of the face are used for signalling surprise, joy or interest. The *positioning of the body*, for instance, moving closer to other participants, may indicate closeness and intimacy.
- iv. Both listeners and tellers are often caught up in *emotions* that emerge from the story, laughter and sorrow as well as feelings of wrongdoing or anger. Emotions are bodily stated, not only felt but also shown in various ways for the other participants to note, observe and share.
- v. The body may be involved in more subtle ways as when *memories* are recalled. Although memories often are thought of as images, modern neuro-cognitive research shows that memories are better thought of as modal fragments spread in a vast neural network involving most parts of the brain. This means that all the body's senses – from motor memories to visual and smell memories – become involved both in telling stories about autobiographical memories as well as when listening to and sharing memories.

But bodies are not only present and used in the telling of story. Bodies are also re-presented in the storyworld as what we could call the *narrative body*. That is, most stories involve characters and (most) characters have bodies. When focus is something other than the character's actual body, the body is taken for granted. As listeners we tacitly assume that characters not only have bodies but that these bodies obey the same physiological and physical laws as all other bodies: persons cannot fly on their own and need to eat and sleep, and so on – although this is not stated explicitly in the story.

In many stories, especially in autobiographical stories, the content or theme of the story may be body related, as when a person falls ill, is hurt, or a child grows and develops, or the body changes in other ways. It is when the body changes or is changed that the body or aspects of the body will stand forward as noticeable, as problematic or in some other way

both for the body's owner and for other persons at that point. The body is no longer something that can be taken for granted or presupposed. Bodily changes are something that demand comments and accounts. As a consequence, 'the body' is divided into the actual present body and the narratively re-presented body. This makes it possible for the owner of the body and others to comment on his or her own body as if it no longer belongs to or is a part of him or her.

When body becomes thematized in the story, it must be explicitly represented, either by using the present physical body and pointing at it and showing wounds or changes or by discursively describing the body using, for instance, metaphors or by using the body as a metaphor for describing and characterizing events.

Storytellers have an interesting possibility here, namely using the storytelling event as a way to position the body of the actual storyteller in relation to one or several narrative versions of this body. The storyteller may even position his or her actual, physical and present body in relation to a different body that is severed from the actual body. This makes it possible to claim or dis-claim previous bodies and previous identities in the present and in relation to the present body, and even to claim future bodies and identities in the present (something children often do when they talk about who and what they want to become or look like later on in life).

Telling stories not only involves a positioning of the actual physical body of the storyteller in relation to bodies in the storyworld, that is, the entirety of media and texts involved in the story. Storytelling also directly engages the bodies of both the teller and the listener. In the speech situation, the relation between teller and listener changes as soon as the story begins. The teller and listener disengage from each other and their joint engagement is turned to the storyworld. In other words, although the participants still are aware of each other in the speech situation, their joint attention is tuned to the storyworld. They have become transported to the storyworld from the here and now of the speech situation. This transport is not only a journey of the mind but also includes the participants' bodies. The participants are transported to the storyworld through the performance of the narrative and this transportation is embodied.

For the teller and listener, this means that they redefine their relation and the way they understand and interpret especially the teller's bodily

movements. The teller's voice, gestures and other bodily movements have become subjugated to the events in the storyworld and only serve to communicate what happens and to comment on these happenings. The listener's body closely follows the same events and registers all dramatic turns, tragic evolvments, suspense and sudden changes of luck. The listening to stories is an embodied process: tragic or comedic developments are not just registered cognitively, but above all bodily by the listener as well as by the teller. Both participants are immersed in the storyworld. This creates an emotional involvement in the storytelling and listening. When the events in the storyworld induce suspense the heart's rate increases, tragedy results in tears and jokes result in laughs and rocking bodies. So, being 'transported' to the storyworld implies that the listener is bodily subjected to the events inside the storyworld.

B. Visual narratives

In the previous section, we have seen the many ways in which the body is a neglected but at the same time important and even ubiquitous element of the practice and content of narrative research.

In a similar way, this section of the chapter explores another resource, visual presentation and representation that has a fundamental presence within everyday life: that both presents the self and tells about life. Visual narratives surround us, particularly, in many contemporary national contexts, through popular media. We progress daily through the narrative spectacles of markets and shopping malls, churches and other places of worship, museums and theme parks, factories, offices and graveyards. Photographs mark out our life stories from birth through marriage to, sometimes, death; they chronicle holidays, parties, celebrations and disasters. We watch film and television narratives regularly, and may also make our own moving-image records of our lives. We scan newspaper and magazine stories, ads, fliers; we composite visual images into albums, scrapbooks and commonplace books. Even in written materials, the visual has a powerful place. We may read filmically, whether or not the text is written like a film. Images from a written text may fall out of it like photographs, or may sketch or compose themselves in our understanding like drawings or paintings. Interestingly, bodies are often central to the kinds of visual images (still and moving) that are used in popular and everyday narratives. Equally, as noted above, the body itself presents visual cues

and is also a site for visual work such as tattoos, and visual readings of, for instance, dress and hair styles.

Visual methodologies in social research have grown significantly in popularity since the latter part of the twentieth century. Alongside this growth, it is not surprising to find that there has been rising interest in visual narrative research. Relatively early on, some researchers realized the potential of visual technologies as an aid to storytelling. The video diary was one such technology (see Rich and Chalfen, 1998) and so was the hand-held instamatic throw-away camera: research participants were provided with such cameras and encouraged to record and document their own lives or aspects of them (e.g. Wang et al., 1996). In these early examples, researchers realized that using such techniques provided a means by which participants could be given some control over research data and where the data might more 'authentically' relate to their own experiences as opposed to being filtered through the research relationship of the interview. Visual narrative methods were often seen as an emancipatory aspect of research. In fact, researchers remained in control, directing what they wanted (even if broadly defined) and also interviewing respondents about their images afterwards, and thus reinscribing more traditional research power relations (see Chapter 4, Section A where participatory research of this kind is discussed).

As with written texts, visual materials in narrative research can be found or elicited by the researcher. If elicited, they are part of a research relationship – often, as we have seen, in combination with interviews. It is likely that both the production and use of elicited images (in the main, still photographs) will be around a particular topic in people's lives. However, it has also been recognized that existing images, photographs, drawings and paintings can be a rich resource for narrative research. We know that many artists have painted often very personal aspects of their lives, the spaces which they inhabit, family members and selves. Researchers such as Tamboukou have found rich sources of narrative within the letters and paintings of Gwen John (Tamboukou, 2010a), and similarly in the work of Dora Carrington (Tamboukou, 2010b). Others have argued that the paintings of Frida Kahlo, and the illustrated nature of her diary, are rich sources of life narratives, with relationships, emotions and experience in visual evidence (Yang, 2002).

Increasingly, photographic archives contain amateur personal images as well as those that have been taken either officially or professionally.

Langford (2001), using a Canadian museum collection of albums, some 'found' and of unknown origin, has argued that in their patterns of representation, inclusion and organization, they demonstrate the traditions of orality that have been drawn on by the compilers. These are albums with storytelling embedded in them. There are now collections of 'found' photographs, sourced, for instance, from junk shops, on internet sites (see, e.g., www.foundphotography.com).

In addition, the practice of posting and reposting images such as photographs, but also drawn images and moving-image files, on a wide range of photographic and social networking sites, particularly Tumblr and Pinterest, for popular consumption and comment, has opened up an internet potential for both wider access and new patterns of visually sharing experiences and telling stories. It is now estimated that up to 300 million photographs a day are uploaded onto the social networking site Facebook. Photograph-sharing sites often actively encourage the addition of comments, information and one's own story. Many Flickr users have formed groups around events such as disasters, providing personal storytelling that is now a form of public history (Harrison, 2010), providing documentary and narrative evidence of experience. These sites can, in this way, work as narrative co-constructions: their exchanges of images and texts build narratives that extend beyond individual experience (see Chapter 2, Section C). They are a good example of how dialogic performances between narrators and audience are core aspects of narrative. In them, 'small stories' of individual narrators become 'big stories', co-produced by many narrators (see Chapter 1, Section C).

A further kind of narrative, which is discussed in Chapter 2, Section E, the resistant or counter-narrative, can also be found utilizing visual media. Both Kuhn (1995) and Walkerdine (1991), for example, have used photographs of themselves as children from family albums, as a way of coming to a new understanding of family relationships and lives and their own place within these. Their alternative readings or interpretations of these images now reject the remembered collective narrative that had accompanied them. Photo therapy also re-envisages family and personal relationships by creating new pictures which reject the conventionalized nature of family images. And Jo Spence, a pioneer of photo therapy with Rosy Martin, provides us with another visual counter-narrative in the field of health in her *'My Consultant wouldn't like it'* (1991), a visual account of her treatment for breast cancer that reclaims medical styles of visual images for Spence's

own purposes. Visual counter-narratives operate oppositionally, not only because of the challenges they offer in their content, but also because they challenge traditional uses of visual technologies of communication.

When thinking about using amateur images and visual practices in the research setting, some understanding of how images work in everyday contexts and lives is helpful, since the conventional nature of the production and consumption of images influences both what kinds of images may be found and their significance (Bourdieu, 1990). Images are particular symbolic traces of experience. They tell us some things and not others; they might be considered partial renderings of 'reality' (Harrison, 2002). There is a strong connection between photographs and memory in everyday life. For some people, photographs are the material representation of their memories; for others, they are cues for, or 'triggers' to, making sense of biographies over time. As such, they often require narration storytelling to make them meaningful and to allow those meanings to be available to others. For Barthes (1981: 82), the photograph does not call up the past; rather, it is a form of evidence, 'attesting to what I see existed'. For others, photos do call up the past and then act performatively, constructing their meaning as they are viewed in the present.

There is an important question to be addressed about narrative and visual media. A number of writers have strongly suggested that the story or narrative lies behind or is buried beneath the image. In this argument, visual images are fragments that allow for the construction and reconstruction of auto/biographical and other narratives. This perspective is implied in the above discussion of photos as memory triggers. Berger and Mohr (1982: 107), for instance, suggest it is narrative which rescues the photographic image from its dislocation: 'a way of seeing which requires reassembling of the contexts of experience in which the photograph is embedded, the continuity from which it was taken. Absence is what has to be made present'. This argument might raise doubts about whether or not images do narrate in their own right. Langford, whose work on photo albums we mentioned earlier, suggests that images may indeed have to narrate, since in many albums at least we have no one to fill in the absences, but that the narrative is also already embedded in them.

Accessing this 'silent' story existing in the gaps between images, providing narratives of still images, and providing verbal narratives of any visual image, raises a problem of interpretive authority which often seems much more acute across this media divide than it does when materials as well

as analyses are verbal. The viewer or audience may read or narrate stories around images which are not necessarily those intended by their creators.

In practice, most narrative researchers use visual images, whether still or moving, to provide access to the wider story. Hence in Tamboukou's (2010a) study of the artist Gwen John, the narrative analysis combined her letters and paintings to provide the insight into her life, relationships, self and art. Wendy Luttrell's (2003, 2010) work with young women and with migrant children in the United States, Susan Bell's (2009) study of generations of US women living with a reproductive health condition and Cigdem Esin and Corinne Squire's (2013) analyses of the visual autobiographies of people living in East London similarly combine data, in these cases from interview and ethnographic as well as visual narrative research.

There are stories about pictures and stories that lie between and behind them. At any particular time individuals will have a particular relationship to an image or set of images. The meaning of those images can and will change. Memory, narration and the production of the self are all ongoing dynamic processes in the communication and social relationships of everyday life. As with oral or written texts, we may use visual images to access particular experiences or we may be interested in how the image itself works to produce meanings. Whether elicited or found, and using a variety of technologies of production, selection and analysis, image(s) are now established in narrative research, providing a rich source of material within the constraints of photographic and artistic practice. What we need to understand better, however, is how processes of transforming images into words occur. We also have to accept that not all images have value or even potential as generators of narratives. Criteria of validity and guidelines for analysing visual productions narratively still seem to be somewhat elusive. With increasing research in the area, we can expect many more contributions on these issues.

In summary:

- Images are a symbolic representation that can be analysed to reveal the meaning of everyday lives.
- They may be past or present, found or elicited by the narrative researcher.
- They can be a naturalistic resource to understanding a variety of topics, or they may be studied from a constructionist perspective, as topics in their own right.

- Most often narrative research will utilize images as just one component of the research design and will understand them as a means by which narratives can be constructed. Thus, there is usually assumed to be a symbiotic or dialogic relationship between image and written/verbal texts in this kind of research.
- There are still questions to answer around how we should analyse visual productions and where their validity lies.
- Attention will need to be given to ethical dimensions that are particular to visual methods, especially ownership, privacy and publication (for a discussion, see Papademas, 2009; Prosser et al., 2008).

C. Narratives and new media

We have seen in the previous sections how bodies can be implicated in storytelling and how the visual image can convey and/or inspire, even demand, narrative. Both cases suggest how embodied practices and visual media inhabit, sustain and give force to storyworlds. This section considers new media, especially social media, to continue building up our picture of narrative's relation with a range of modalities. These are media where the bodies of narrators and their listeners or readers are not present in the same space, though they may hear each others' voices; narrators and their audiences are not necessarily visually co-present, either, although some digital technologies such as Skype and photo sites enable such visuality. At their most basic, narratives in these media rely on bodies to type and screens to show readable words. And while such narratives may unfold in real time, they often have a longer life and possibilities of multiple readership and dissemination, rather different from those of the body narratives and many of the image narratives considered earlier in this chapter. Nevertheless, as we shall see, some interesting aspects of personal narratives are held in common across these divergent modalities.

How does narrative research, specifically, approach internet-related practices? Qualitative inquiry typically uses the internet as a data-collection tool or as an object of inquiry itself. Internet communication technologies are used to generate data regarding social experience, for example, through online chats or by examining weblogs. Research has also examined the internet itself, for example, decoding websites and interpreting the communication practices supported by internet technologies. Narrative inquiry, however, examines internet-related practices *as* narrative, a

standpoint that leads to distinctive analyses of the co-production of social experience and the internet. Examples of this narrative online approach to be discussed in the present section include accounts of the life course and internet practices, and the convergence of uses of the internet with personal experience narratives.

The rise of internet-based communication technologies and the related diversification of network multimedia (herein, inclusively, 'new media') have many ramifications for narrative research. There is now extensive research on the social aspects of, for example, the vicissitudes of intimate life conducted via email (Marshall, 2003), the emotional attachments some have for their mobile telephones (McVeigh, 2003), the manner in which e-dating commodifies intimacy (Arvidsson, 2006), how social support can be accessed online when it is not available elsewhere, as in the case of younger lesbian and gay people (Hillier and Harrison, 2007), to name but a few examples from personal life and the new media. Online research is now a standard part of the methodology toolbox for social scientists, even those at the beginning of their research (see, for instance, Hooley et al., 2012). Here we take up the implications of the new media for narrative research via two main themes: using such media to conduct narrative research and researching narratives about the social effects of the new media.

Many researchers have used social media to generate qualitative data. For example, researchers have used internet chatrooms to generate chat-based interviews (see Davis et al., 2004). Others collect online materials such as online profiles, blogs and consumer testimonials for analysis (see Arvidsson, 2006). One important feature of online research is that the particular technical properties and capacities of the media used can have distinctive effects in communication and by implication in narrative practices. One good example is interviewing using internet relay chat technology (chatrooms). Because chat-based interviews often rely on Q and A loops of typed text and because the interviewee and interviewer may not be able to see each other, chat-based interviews can be seen as edited textual performance. In particular, some of the means for regulating turn-taking that exist in face-to-face interaction such as eye-contact and speech cadence – as noted in our previous section on the body and narrative practices – are not readily available in the chatroom. Without turn-taking cues, Q and A rhythm can break down or one thread of Q and A can overlap with another. In addition, interviewee and interviewer can

scan back over what they have typed and therefore repair the interaction and qualify the text. Consider this example of a chat-based interview from research on social media and narrative:

1. Mark says: (9:09:49 PM) what propostion of your friends do you interact with online?
2. Mark says: (9:09:57 PM) sorry spelling – proportion
3. Brad says: (9:10:55 PM) that made me laugh – I havent propositioned anyone online for ages !!!!! I think I have 6 friends on skype – thats it, so not many
4. Brad says: (9:11:19 PM) I email friends from my work at their work during the day but mostly I try to speak to them
5. Mark says: (9:11:27 PM) but is that most of your mates, some or a few
6. Mark says: (9:11:39 PM) you mean people in Sydney
7. Brad says: (9:12:49 PM) a small proportion of my melb [Melbourne] friends are on skype or I email. . . . they're the ones I try to call. If I email them during the day, its mostly to ask specific questions – not to 'catch up' as such
8. Mark says: (9:13:18 PM) do you socialise like this with people in Sydney?
9. Brad says: (9:14:54 PM) no
10. Brad says: (9:15:16 PM) the people I am friends with in Sydney I see at work and sometimes on the weekends but never online
11. Mark says: (9:15:30 PM) thanks for that
12. Brad says: (9:15:56 PM) by the way, I do look at facebook pretty much everyday, very occasionally at work and most nights at home
13. Mark says: (9:16:11 PM) you took the words right out of my mouth ;)
14. Brad says: (9:16:12 PM) so there is an element of communication there
15. Mark says: (9:16:17 PM) tell me more
16. Brad says: (9:16:35 PM) thought I might have !
17. Mark says: (9:16:55 PM) am i that obvious ??
18. Mark says: (9:16:58 PM) thats OK
19. Brad says: (9:18:12 PM) initially I wanted to resist facebook. – as Ive said, i dont 'chat' online with anyone and skype is great for friends overseas and interstate, not really into computers on a whole . . . but found facebook to be a bit of lighthearted fun, and It allowed me to catch up with people i had lost contact with

20. Brad says: (9:18:43 PM) you're not obvious . . . i guess its just the natural place to go !!!!!;)
21. Mark says: (9:18:52 PM) sure
22. Mark says: (9:19:08 PM) tell me more about facebook, why the resistance and now the attraction?
23. Brad says: (9:21:32 PM) I tend not to go for the latest fad. . . . Im pretty sceptical about most 'popular' things, I hadnt gotten into myspace or friendster or bebo or any of those things prior to facebook, in fact Ive never visited any of those sites. I think facebook is funny, some people appear so desperate to 'impress' by way of the number of 'friends' they have, or the mindless and ongoing commentary of their boring
24. Brad says: (9:21:43 PM) lives through their states updates. . . .
25. Mark says: (9:22:00 PM) so it's funny?
26. Brad says: (9:22:37 PM) I like the fact that you can see peoples photos, I have lots of friends who are travelling and/or live overseas, so its nice to actually 'see' them, where they are and what they're doing. . .
27. Mark says: (9:22:51 PM) right
28. Brad says: (9:23:08 PM) funny in the sense that they seem to try SO hard. . .not funny haha !

(This research was conducted by Mark Davis with a Faculty of Arts New Researchers Grant, Monash University)

Mark and Brad are seen here to correct their spelling and typing errors and at times a sequence of Q and A begins before another has started. Mark and Brad both appear to attend carefully to the logic of the interaction, which occasionally verges on escaping them. See in particular lines 12–21, where Mark and Brad begin to discuss Facebook interspersed with a thread of interaction concerning Mark's 'obvious' line of questioning.

It is important to note that due to the rapid changes in the technical capacities of social media and the expansion of social research methods using these, chat-based interviewing is only one among many choices, including, for example, skyping and asynchronous email interviews; each of these bring with them their own challenges and possibilities for the negotiation of meaning. What chat-based interviewing foregrounds, though, is the necessity for collusion and therefore the necessarily collaborative dimension of narrative practices. The extract suggests that Brad's story

of life with social media is present, though not obviously. There is a staccato, telegraphic quality to his account, expressed as it is with generally short statements gradually accumulating into a whole. Brad organized his narrative practice in a way that suited the online chatroom environment. Also, Mark and Brad had to collaborate on fashioning meaning through what the chatroom environment made possible. Mark and Brad collaboratively offer, clarify and revisit information and meanings that support the unfolding story. Narrative practice in general is shared, dialogical labour (see Chapter 2, Sections C and D), but chat-based narrative practice makes such collaboration very obvious, even necessary. Chatters have to help each other to ensure that the narrative logic does not get lost in the technology of the chatroom. Chat-based interviewing reveals and intensifies the collaborative aspects of narrative practices.

Chat-based interviews also collapse writing and reading into the interview event in a specific way, with ramifications for narrative research. In other narrative practices, writing and reading are rarely part of the same communicative event; these come later with transcription and the preparation of written interpretation. Chat suggests the collapsing of interviewing, writing and reading into one deceptively simple communicative act or, at least, the telescoping back into the interview itself of the commencement of written interpretation tied to narrative production. As such, chat-based interviews, and undoubtedly other uses of social media, intensify the familiar in narrative practices and give them novel inflections, offering new dimensions to inquiry about the narrative organization of life with social media.

In addition to analysing implications for narrative practices, the effects of social media can be addressed narratively. For instance, Facebook is regularly discussed in news media in connection with problems such as addiction, bullying and invasion of privacy. Either explicitly or implicitly, Facebook is seen to be corrosive of social life, either because of what it is or because of what it makes possible. If we take a narrative approach however, such assumptions can become narrative research objects in themselves and be examined, not just for their truthfulness, but in terms of the effects they have on how online life is experienced (Davis, 2011). In this way, we turn to narratives on social media, that is, how social media are experienced and with what joys and disappointments, possibilities and constraints.

Of particular interest in this experiential approach is how and with what effects storytellers make themselves subjects of their own stories. In

the following example, taken from the same research as Brad's interview extract, discussed above, Diana assumed the position of an ordinary, sensible, internet user:

Interviewer: Is there anything about your internet use that we've missed?

Diana: I don't think so. I'm really boring with the internet.

Interviewer: Why do you say that? What do you mean by that?

Diana: I don't know. Just that I use the same sites all the time and that usually it's probably more the productive types of the internet. I don't really play games. I mean, I download probably just a couple of things here and there but I'm not someone who's on Youtube and watches umpteen whatevers on Youtube. I think the last thing I watched on Youtube was Obama's victory speech. That was probably the first thing I, so that's basically, I hadn't looked at anything on Youtube for 12 months.

Interviewer: It is important for you to not waste time?

Diana: I don't know. And this is rare probably, maybe where I do differ from other people. I guess I prefer to do other things. So I prefer to be active. I'm someone who likes to go to the gym. Some people hate going to the gym they think it's the worst way to spend an hour in their life. If I've had a long day at work and I want to de-stress I'll go to the driving range and hit golf balls. I'm not going to sit on the internet to Facebook people. And like I said that's probably just my personality more than anything else. But at the same time I still kind of dabble and I absolutely understand the social networking. It's just not something that is as big in my life as maybe I see it in other people's lives. Where they're sharing everything they do.

[later]

Like I said I think I'm pretty boring so I don't know. Maybe it's just a situation where I see how it can benefit me is how I utilise it. And that's just because luckily I've grown up having other interests and having a really good balance which makes me appreciate time outside and being active and all of those sorts of things. Whereas probably people who've always grown up with the internet and it's part and parcel of, like what TV is to other people, maybe like the older generation where it's just what you do. You don't even think about how much time you're spending watching TV and what you could be doing elsewhere. So again I have no idea how you'd come up with any answers to bring that balance back.

In this account, Diana makes reference to the idea that some, perhaps many, uses of social media are not productive. The account is also marked by the historical event of Obama's inaugural speech. The reference to Obama's election attaches Diana's account of her use of Youtube with history, suggesting the interplay of social change and social media. The event is said to have been momentous enough to force Diana onto a part of the internet that she regarded as not generally useful for her. Diana's preferred position as a social media user was disembedded by events, suggesting the mixing of historical contingency and volition.

The account is also figured around the kind of social media-user Diana took herself to be. Diana used 'boring', not in a self-deprecating way, but rather as a way of pointing out that the practices of others, different to hers, might be more noteworthy or interesting cases of the effects of the internet in everyday life. Diana thus brought in, subtly, canonical narrative on social media effects. Her account pointed to changed possibilities for how one's life can be lived, via social networking sites, Youtube and so on, but as a matter of how one conducts oneself. 'Boring' was used here to code for an engagement with social media possibilities in the manner of restraint and practicality. In this view, the less boring were in effect made to seem 'unproductive'. Brad, discussed above, took a similar strategy of distinguishing himself from Facebook users who try hard to appear amusing and regarded himself as 'pretty sceptical about most "popular" things'. Diana and Brad shared an interest in resisting what they saw as the negative effects of social media. These accounts suggested that online existence, for Diana and Brad at least, is figured around establishing oneself as a self-aware, critically engaged online citizen.

Narrative inquiry through and on social media presents many possibilities. Online communication reveals and intensifies the familiar in narrative inquiry along with suggesting new modes and terrains of investigation. Online chat and narrative can be recognized as determining each other and chat is tellingly illuminating of the collaborative labour needed to sustain narrative practices, online or elsewhere. Narrative makes it possible to articulate the canonical stories of the social changes attributed to social media with the personal storytelling of online life. This approach provides new vantage points on social media, including the examples explored here of consumers being critically aware of the kinds of online citizens they wished to be. In this mode of inquiry, narrative offers one means of bringing

into focus the historically contingent, practical and ethical considerations of everyday life with social media.

The case studies in the chapter to follow develop these perspectives on history, practice and ethics. They do so by moving beyond everyday experience to consider narrative's connection with power and oppression, in particular, violence, gender, sexualities and activism.