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by

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& Riitta Kyllönen

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Qualitative Sociology Review

Volume II, Issue 1 – April 2006

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Editorial Introduction: Special Issue – “Biographical Sociology”

This Special Issue presents some new developments in the area of Biographical Sociology – a field that has shown great expansion within the discipline and other social sciences. The Issue presents a selection of articles, which pick up a number of important shifts in the study of biography and should benefit readers who are already engaged in the field as well as those who are new to such study. We feel that the articles not only demonstrate some key methodological, theoretical and epistemological developments in the field but also push the boundaries of Biographical Sociology in raising important issues, questions and insights in relation to different substantive areas.

We have not sought a precise definition of Biographical Sociology. However, our approach has been informed by a number of conceptions of the individual-society relation. Biographical Sociology, in general terms, can be said to be an attempt to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future (Roberts, 2002: 1). An emphasis on the “biographical” in sociology is not simply the study of the individual life. Following Mills, we would argue that Biographical Sociology has a “task and a promise” in employing an “imagination” which:

enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals... enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society... [and] between ‘the personal troubles of milieu’ and ‘the public issues of social structure’. (Mills, 1970: 11, 12, 14)

The challenge to the separation of single lives and social structure:

involves sociologists questioning and indeed rejecting conventional sharp distinctions between structure and action, and relatedly, individual and collective, as presenting an over-dichotomised view of social life. It means rejecting any notion that a ‘life’ can be understood as a representation of a single self in isolation from networks of interwoven biographies. (Stanley and Morgan, 1993: 2)

The exploration of the interplay of biography, history and structure is central to a Biographical Sociology. Conceptualisation of the social world primarily according to structure would omit the essential attention to “human joy and suffering” (Plummer, 2001: 6). A Biographical Sociology entails a “critical humanism” – “a longing for social

science to take more seriously its humanistic foundations and to foster styles of thinking that encourage the creative, interpretive story tellings of lives – with all the ethical, political and self-reflexive engagements that this will bring” (Plummer, 2001: 1).

The context of the current Special Issue is the contemporary position of the social sciences, which are facing a great challenge in analysing rapidly changing social and cultural horizons. We are not alone in arguing for a need to develop new vocabulary, concepts and categories, which would better grasp a social life that is less and less understandable through the old ideas and frameworks. Social research is attempting to meet the need to renovate its analytical tools and practices in order to produce more pertinent knowledge about the increasingly complex world. The question here is – “What has biographical research to offer in this task”?

The concerns of the Special Issue are twofold. First, to provide work that demonstrates the variety, strengths and developments within current Biographical Sociology. Secondly, to give a consideration of contributions from related disciplines that point out ways in which Biographical Sociology can benefit from work outside the discipline of sociology, and in turn, identify areas of possible collaboration.

Overview of the Special Issue – “Biographical Sociology”

The articles presented in this Special Issue reflect the new directions that are occurring in the field, following the “linguistic”, “narrative”, “performative”, “visual” and “digital” “turns” that have occurred in qualitative sociology and the wider discipline. In particular, the articles raise issues of representation and language, including the possibilities brought by digital technology and performance/aesthetics. The articles demonstrate the rewards and challenges of interdisciplinarity and the cross-fertilization of ideas and the influences from discourse, translation studies and artistic practice for a Biographical Sociology. Analytically, the articles focus on issues of identity “work”, “belonging” and “voice” in relation to text and to audiovisual data. And finally, they show new methodological developments – for instance, from participatory research, “relational aesthetics”, and “narrative-discourse” analysis. An interesting general feature of the articles is that they each draw on a number of these themes in pointing out theoretical and methodological ways forward for Biographical Sociology. While the focus of the articles is the possible contribution, for instance, of digital or art/performance for biographical research and theorisation, they also have implications for qualitative sociology – and for sociology and other disciplines more generally.

The articles offer contributions for expanding or transcending the borders of the traditional transcript based materials and the textual form of representation and analysis, towards *audiovisual* text, sound, and visual forms and practices. The promise of digital technologies relate to different phases of the research process in biographical research – indeed, for disrupting the traditional “linear” notion of the research process itself by an ongoing “dialogical” approach including the “researched”, researcher and audience. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, as an online journal, is well-placed to explore further the vast potential of new technologies – some indicated here – for biographical work and qualitative sociology as a whole.

Bogusia Temple, in her article “Representation across languages: biographical sociology meets translation and interpretation studies”, confronts the neglected issue

in biographical research of using a language that is not the same for those who have spoken, the researcher and the intended audience. She draws upon researchers' work within translation and interpretation studies which is exploring the complex issues arising from "representation across languages". Various writers are challenging the bases of moving across languages, commonly into English, and offering a number of stimulating ideas. Using her own cross language research Temple assesses the work in translation and translations studies and the questions they raise for Biographical Sociology – in terms of the assumptions made in "translating" speech/texts, and associated issues that arise for meaning and representation.

Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton outline a "narrative-discursive" approach and its contribution to interviewing and interpretation within Biographical Sociology. They see "biographical work" "as part of the ongoing, interactive process through which identities are taken up". Their article "Biographies in talk: a narrative-discursive research approach" is based on analyses of "biographical talk" from postgraduate Art and Design students and their "identity work". The students employed "discursive resources", including "interpretive repertoires" and "canonical narratives" in relation to "troubled identities". Taylor and Littleton's perspective centres on the reflexive work of the speaker in forming a biographical narrative - previous versions are both a "constraint" and a "source of continuity".

Maggie O'Neill and Ramaswami Harindranath argue for the potential of combining a biographical approach with participatory action research (PAR) with reference to understanding the lived experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. In "Theorising narratives of exile and belonging: the importance of biography and ethnomimesis in understanding asylum" the authors discuss the use of biographical materials in PAR as a means to talk back against othering stereotypes and myths created of refugees by the dominant knowledge/power axis. Through critical theory building the article contributes to cultural politics aiming towards a vision of social justice.

John Given's article "Narrating the digital turn: data deluge, technomethodology, and other likely tales" gives an indication of the dramatic transformative possibilities that digital technologies will have in the social sciences and in particular in studying "biographical narratives". Given argues that the development of digital technologies further enhances the interdisciplinary nature of the study of biographical narrative and helps crossing the border between quantitative and qualitative approaches. The article discusses the wide range of theoretical and methodological developments that all phases of the research process may go through – departing from what usually constitutes data, methods of analysis and ways of dissemination.

Kip Jones investigates the aesthetic basis for a new performative social science and the implications of this search for "biographic narrative" research. In his article "A Biographic researcher in pursuit of an aesthetic: The use of arts-based (re)presentations in 'performative' dissemination of life stories" he draws upon the influential work of Bourriaud on "relational aesthetics" – which is based on the notion of "relational art" as encompassing social interaction within social settings. Using an example of biographic narrative interviewing from his own work he shows the inter-subjectivity of such interaction and seeks to show how Art as a social exchange can

inform the construction, representation and dissemination of biographical narrative stories.

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Representation across languages: biographical sociology meets translation and interpretation studies

Abstract

Biographical approaches are increasingly being used with people who speak and write a range of languages. Even when an account is originally spoken, the final version usually ends up written in the language used by the majority of the population. Researchers have shown that adopting a language that is not the one an account was given in may change how someone is perceived. Yet little has been written by sociologists using biographical approaches about the implications of moving accounts across languages. Researchers within translation and interpretation studies are increasingly tackling issues of representation across languages and developing concepts that can usefully be applied in biographical research. They question the assumption that accounts can be unproblematically transferred across languages and argue for strategies and concepts that “foreignise” texts and challenge the baseline of the target, usually for these writers, English language. However, these concepts bring issues of their own. In this article I examine these developments and give an example from my own cross language research that show that these concepts can begin to open up debates about meaning and representation.

Keywords

cross language research; biography; narrative; translation; interpretation

Introduction

Before the armoured divisions have withdrawn from the city limits, while the soldiers are still patrolling the streets, English teachers will be facilitating the policies that the tanks were sent to impose (Julian Edge referring to the American led invasion of Iraq in 2003, quoted in Gaffey, 2005).

Writers across a range of disciplines, including sociolinguistics, philosophy, biography, sociology and anthropology, argue that language matters in a multitude of ways (Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1976, 1987; Barthes, 1977; Smith, 1982, Bourdieu, 1991; Spivak, 1992; Bhabha, 1994; Roberts, 2001). Gaffey (2005), for example, points to the integral role of language in the formation of personal and distinctive cultural meanings and identity and to its economic and political role, as shown in the

quote above. In this paper I argue that sociologists using biographical approaches across languages would benefit from work that has been done in the translation and interpretation literature. I begin with a brief examination of the epistemological debates within biographical research and translation and interpretation research, noting similarities in recent developments. I then relate some of the issues that come out of these debates to a research project that I worked on. This article is from the perspective of what translation and interpretation studies have to offer biographical approaches. There are many instances when the reverse applies and I point some of these out. The examples I give discuss interpretation and translation into English but the points made about representation apply whatever the original language used and the language of the target audience.

I take as my starting point Roberts' (2002: 176) definition of biographical research as "research undertaken on individual lives employing autobiographical documents, interviews or other sources and presenting accounts in various forms (e.g. in terms of editing, written, visual or oral presentation, and degree of researcher's narration and reflexivity)". This definition has the advantage of being inclusive. There is no consensus on the boundaries between terms such as narrative, biography, life history or life story and researchers use the terms in overlapping and different ways. Roberts shows the benefits of including research that spans across differently labelled research to learn from the debates rather than to try to adjudicate between definitions of what constitutes a particular kind of research. He documents some of the debates that have been tackled by these exchanges. For example, he has shown how biographical research has benefited from multi-disciplinary approaches in areas such as the role of memory, the significance of time and concerns over representation and referentiality. Moreover, when carrying out research across languages or translating in order to enable a new audience to appreciate works they could not read themselves in the original language, it is counter-productive to prescribe definitions of what can be included as biography or life history or narrative. It would, in effect, be another form of closing down perspective and dialogue to understanding difference.

Roberts points out that in many of the social sciences the result of the recent "cultural or linguistic turn" has resulted in an emphasis on language and representation and the detailed analysis of "texts". This he feels has "produced a diminution or disappearance of the creative, active role of individuals" (Roberts, *ibidem*: 4). This tendency is also evident within translation and interpretation studies but has been challenged by researchers who question the non-problematic acceptance of referentiality within written and oral accounts of lives and who go on to analyse the way language is used to create, challenge and change people's lives (see below). In this view language is more than text alone and the focus moves to discourse and how people create and describe their social worlds. Moreover, within cross language biographical sociology, concerns over language and representation have been *under scrutinized* in terms of the languages used and how accounts relate, if at all, to the lives of people who do not use the language of the target audience (see here also Fantini, 1995).

Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf (2000: 13) note the influence of translation within debates on biographical methods and acknowledge the effect that editing may have in "flattening out" cultural and philosophical differences. Authors within their collection of papers begin to address some of these concerns. For example, Andrew Cooper's (2000) contribution directly discusses comparative biographical research and Corinne Squire (2000: 205) spells out the importance of foregrounding structures of language.

In a similar way, Coupland, Sarangi and Candlin (2001) discuss the value of cross-disciplinary research in relation to sociolinguistics and the role of language. They argue that there is now an “intellectual climate that is, more than ever, open to the theoretical interchange between linguistic and social research” (Ibidem: xvi). Munday (2001) makes the same point. In this article I argue that researchers using biographical approaches would benefit from research carried out in translation and interpretation studies that is concerned with just such structures and their effects on representation.

Some researchers within biographical research have directly tackled issues of representation and language (Riessman, 2004; Temple, 2002; Temple and Edwards, 2002; Temple and Young, 2004) but the surface has only just been scratched in terms of the potential benefits of a debate between biographical sociologists and researchers interested in translation and interpretation studies. Alongside this insistence on the importance of language, there is a growing body of research in England with people who speak languages other than English. Within health, social care and housing research there is a rapidly growing volume of research using biographical approaches on, and sometimes with, people whose first language is not English. It is, however, still rare within this research to find any engagement with issues of representation across languages (see for example Bagnoli, 2004; Corsten, 2005; Scheibelhofer, 2005). In part this is because “the language issue” is seen as a technical concern rather than an issue of voice and representation.

Common ground? Epistemological debates within translation and interpretation studies and biographical sociology

Debates within translation and interpretation on the status of research mirror similar debates within biographical sociology. This is evident in reading Roberts (2002), the edited collection by Schaffner (2004) and that by Chamberlayne et al. (2000). Within auto/biographical and narrative research issues of representation, reflexivity and voice have been addressed by Stanley (1990; 1994), Gubrium and Holstein (1998) and Riessman (1993, 2000), amongst many others. Stanley, for example, developed the concept of the “intellectual auto/biographies”, which she defines as:

....an analytic (not just descriptive) concern with the specifics of how we come to understand what we do, by locating acts of understanding in an explication of the grounded contexts these are located in and arise from.
(p. 62)

Elsewhere (Temple, 1997) this concept has been linked to the translation and interpretation field as a way of introducing reflexivity into cross language research. I position my biographical research within broadly defined interpretative/social constructionist/deconstructionist traditions of research as discussed for example by Chamberlayne et al. (2000), Derrida (1976, 1987), Harding (1987), Alcoff (1991) and Temple (1997), Edwards (1998), Overing (1987), Simon (1996) and Venuti (1995, 1998, 1993/2000) within translation and interpretation. This epistemological position acknowledges that there is no way to make “objective” knowledge claims from outside of your position in the social world. It does not mean that there is no reality. As Roberts (2002: 49) states, “while texts are not ‘purely’ referential, they are constructed within or mediate reality”. Gee (1999) focuses on the importance of Discourses with a capital D rather than on written or spoken words out of context:

...that is, different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language 'stuff', such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others. (p. 12-13)

In relation to translation, writers such as Derrida (1976, 1987) concur with the position that all translation is conditional, that is, it depends on the context it is written within. Simon (1996) sums up well this position:

The solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to social realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are 'the same'. These are not technical difficulties, they are not the domain of specialists in obscure or quaint vocabularies. They demand the exercise of a range of intelligences. In fact the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value. (p. 137-138)

Within interpretation there are similar approaches (see Wadensjo, 1998; Roberts C., 2001). For example, Wadensjo (ibidem) analyses talk not as narrowly prescribed text but as interaction. These authors allow for epistemological and methodological differences within and across disciplines and view the exchanges as beneficial.

However, just as some researchers using biographical methods still seek to position themselves as outside of the text they produce, much current interpretation and translation practice attempts to remain "faithful" to the language structures of the target audience and encourages the use of one baseline, usually for these writers English (see for example, Esposito, 2001 and Pham and Harris, 2001). This has been challenged as silencing alternative ways of constructing the social world through language. For example, Venuti (1995, 1998) wants to send the reader abroad by what he calls "foreignization" of texts rather than standard translation practice that "domesticates" and tames texts for readers. My arguments and examples are around translations into English but the issues arise in all cross-language research. I return to the concept of foreignization in my research below.

Venuti's (1998) work on the domestication of text and the role of the academy and publishers in how translation is approached is relevant here:

The popular aesthetic requires fluent translations that produce the illusory effect of transparency, and this means adhering to the current standard dialectic while avoiding any dialectic, register or style that calls attention to words as words and therefore pre-empts the reader's identification. As a result, fluent translation may enable a foreign text to engage a mass readership.... But such a translation simultaneously reinforces the major language and its many other linguistic and cultural exclusions while masking the inscription of domestic values. Fluency is assimilationist, presenting to domestic readers a realistic representation inflected with their own codes and ideologies as if it were an immediate encounter with a foreign text and culture. (p. 12)

Venuti (1995: 34) argues that translators should flaunt their partiality instead of attempting to conceal it. He calls for resistancy where the text is non-fluid or estranging in style and is designed to make the translator visible. His translation project seeks to emphasize identity and ideological stance. He states that "the point is to use a number of minority elements whereby one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming" (Venuti, *ibidem*: 11).

In a similar way, Spivak (1993) argues that standard translation practice obliterates the significance of language difference as everyone is portrayed as the same:

In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of *translatese*, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. (p. 399 - 400)

Spivak believes that the local context of production and the history of interaction of languages are important for the researcher (see also Roberts C., 2001: 331). Issues of representation are present in all research. However, these writers argue that in cross language research the languages themselves form part of the context of interpretation with hierarchies of representation between them. Spivak (1992) has shown that the relationship between languages forms part of the process of constructing meaning. This relationship, she argues, should form part of the debate about representation. Rather than respecting the norms and expectations of readers or listeners (Viezzi, 2005) there may be a case for disrupting and challenging these.

There are benefits for biographical sociologists in engaging with this translation and interpretation literature. As Fantini (1995: 152) argues "Those who have never experienced another culture or labored to communicate through a second language are, like the goldfish, often unaware of the milieu in which they have always existed". There are also benefits for the researchers within translation and interpretation studies in immersing themselves in developments within biographical sociology on inter-textuality and audience/readership (for example Roberts, 2002; Stanley and Morgan, 1993), as well as from debates around memory and representation (Skultans, 1998; Passerini, 1992; Tonkin, 1995). I explore this briefly below.

Biographical researcher, interpreter and translator: lessons from a research project

In the research described below, I use the concept of foreignization (Venuti, 1998) and *translatese* (Spivak, 1993) in relation to biographical research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the experiences and understandings of people who need interpreters to access services (Alexander, Edwards and Temple, 2004). The researchers looked at the views of fifty people in Manchester and London from Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Kurdish, and Polish groups who needed interpreters in order to use social care and other services. Researchers were employed to carry out the interviews in the participants' preferred language. They provided translated transcripts of the interviews in English. The five minority ethnic groups were chosen to include a range of established and recent migrant views. Given these different migrant histories, each group had access to varying formal and informal networks of people who could act as interpreters.

The approach in the research is narrative (Roberts, 2002; Riessman, 1993; Gubrium and Holstein, 1998). There is no consensus about what a narrative approach looks like (see Roberts, 2002 for a discussion). I have described above my position in relation to the status of biographical research and within this narratives are one way in which people construct accounts that they position themselves within to persuade researchers of a particular point of view. My analysis of narrative is akin to that of Riessman (1993) and Gubrium and Holstein (1998) in its concern with both the structure and content of people's accounts. The researchers believe that decisions about who to use as an interpreter depend on the constraints and resources available to people and these vary within and across language communities and that a narrative approach can include discussions of context dependent perspective.

The project had a built in recognition of the active role of interpreters/translators who were employed as researchers on the project, particularly around the concept of intellectual auto/biography described above. They were briefed before the project began on its aims and trained in issues in interpreting and translation. Participants were asked to tell us about how they had come to England, why and about their lives in England. They were then asked questions about their use of formal and informal interpreters, their links to communities and how their views related to their experiences since arriving in England. Each interview was followed by a de-briefing session with the researcher, part of which included discussion of concepts/words that had caused difficulty or that the researchers felt potentially signalled different meanings across languages were discussed. After the research had finished each researcher was interviewed about their views on the topic and their social and political position within their language community, if any. This was in the spirit of reflecting on everyone's role in the research and discussing representations we were making in our research (Stanley, 1990; Temple, 2002; Temple and Young, 2004).

I carried out the narrative interviews in Manchester with Polish people who needed interpreters. The interviews were recorded and transcribed from Polish directly into English. In this article I give a few examples of my translation choices to point to the advantages and also to signal some of the issues in working this way.

The first example is from an interview with Anita Topolska (name changed). She had originally arrived seeking asylum and then stayed as an economic migrant. She was in her thirties and lived with her three children in social housing. Her husband had recently left her. She described her life in Poland as one of poverty with no future. She had English lessons when she first arrived but found them impossible to fit in with her job in a residential home and looking after her children, especially during the holidays. She then described her experiences in England. Her narrative could be read in relation to discourse (see below) in the media concerning the "deserving asylum seeker". There were a number of newspaper articles that were widely discussed amongst Polish people that gave the impression that people seeking asylum were invading England and becoming a drain on health and social care services. There was also concern amongst Polish refugees who had arrived after the Second World War that recent arrivals from Poland were more interested in marriage and economic migration than fleeing persecution. Anita was aware that these feelings were being expressed and set her account against this backdrop to try and persuade me that her claim was "genuine". She pointed out that she had tried to learn English and did work in England but has also had problems settling in here. Referring to her recent experiences in England she said:

At first...at first...it was mixed. I work with English people. There are no people...yes...there is one lady at work who bothers me [*dokucza* – bothers, annoys, bullies, spites, torments?]. Because I don't know how to speak, read or write much English. There is one such lady. But everyone has a problem with her.

My first translation of her words was:

The beginnings...the beginnings were mixed. I work with the English. There is not that kind of people...yes...there is one lady at work...who bothers me [*dokucza* = annoys, bullies, spites, worries, vexes, torments?]. Because I don't speak, read, write much English ...There is one lady...with that woman everyone has problems.

I had chosen “bothers” because I felt that she was indicating that this woman at work did not particularly single Anita out and that in comparison with her experiences in Poland she saw those in England as less severe. The word “bother” as a translation of *dokucza* was also a result of the connections in my mind with the way it had been used when I was a child. Godard documents this connection between the experiences of the translator and the choice of words used in translation. She describes translation as an “ongoing appeal to memory” (quoted in Simon, 1996: 24). Developments in biographical research around memory discussed by Roberts (2002) could usefully be developed here in relation to the processes involved in trying to transfer meanings across languages.

The choice of suitable word or concept equivalence is integral to interpretation/translation and is rooted in the experience of the translator/interpreter. It cannot be solved by technical manoeuvres such as back translation. A range of words can be chosen to translate *dokucza* into English. They could all be judged to be “correct” and readers can discuss whether they agree with my choice. However, in most translated texts they are not given any choices.

The second example is from an interview with Irena Zielonska who was a Polish Roma seeking asylum. She was in her late 40s. She described why she came to England:

They bullied us terribly all the time [can mean annoyed, worried or tormented but choose bullied when she described what they had done]. We were attacked [or assaulted] at home. My husband had his head cut open twice. He had his arms broken.

This translation provided difficult for a variety of reasons. The first reason was the connotations that I felt *dokucza* has for me (see above) and the way I had translated previous interviews such as that of Anita discussed above. Could I use the same word to indicate experiences that differed so much? Also, I did not recognise the word she used initially to describe the boys she said were involved. She went on to describe them as “the bald ones”, referring to the rise of nationalistic skinhead gangs in Poland who attacked Polish Roma. My knowledge of the Polish language is one that has developed by talking mostly with people who came to England after the First World War. There are differences in language use within the “Polish community” that influenced the way I spoke to Irena and how I phrased questions and probed her answers. A translator brought up in Poland may have worked differently with the Polish language in this interview, but could come across similar issues around language use in talking to people who had lived in England for many years.

Following Venuti's (1998) call to foreignise translation and Spivak's (1993) warnings about translatability and challenging expectations of a common baseline of understanding, one of my initial attempts to keep the structure of what Irena said resulted in the following:

They did not give us to live the boys.... Terribly us they bullied [annoyed, bothered, tormented]. They attacked us in our home. My husband had twice his head cut open. His arms he had broken.

The choice of "bullied" here was made in part as a result of connecting this account with that of Anita's recent experience in England. My own memories of word use and my "translation history" have both been relevant to the final product. However, the relation of translation histories and the role of inter-textuality have rarely been the centre of attention in translation studies in the way that the experiences of researchers within biographical sociology have been.

I have found Pavlenko and Lantolf's (2000) analysis of Eva Hoffman's (1989) move from Poland to North America particularly relevant here. Hoffman (1989: 107) writes about her "inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself....Nothing comes". They write about the ties between language and Hoffman's "self" and of the changes to "self" that having to speak English brought about. This is a reflexive exercise that examines changes in language use and representation of ideas and persona. It does not involve assumptions that the languages involved provide deterministic clues to meaning but allow the writers to discuss possibilities. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2004) tie Pavlenko and Lantolf's work to that of theorists such as Vygotsky (1986) and Bakhtin (1984) and quote Vygotsky:

Thought is not merely expressed through words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect with something else, to establish a relationship between things. Every thought moves, grows and develops, fulfils a function, solves a problem...Precisely because thought does not have its automatic counterpart in words, the transition of thought to word leads through meaning. (p. 85)

However, meaning is not tied to a particular language and we cannot identify "Polish" and "English" traits and meanings within translations. Changing the language we speak may change how we see the world and the language we use is relevant to how we situate ourselves within our social worlds and within translations, but not in any deterministic exercise of meaning attribution. Biographers who translate or interpret other people's lives across languages have a difficult and often unrecognised balancing act between denying the importance of the language used and implying that language is tied to meaning in a deterministic way. This is the balancing act that Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) attempt but which is neglected in cross language biographical research.

It seems ironic that the research was with people who struggled to express what they needed in English and yet we had to produce written accounts showing them as fluent English speakers. Even after some "tidying up" of the quotes one article reviewer stated that our research might not be trustworthy as the English grammar in the quotes was questionable.

Solutions or more issues?

Researchers have suggested techniques that they argue would address my dilemmas, for example, back translation and using professional translators (see for example Esposito, 2001; Pham and Harris, 2001) to check whether a translation is “correct”. The problem with this is the wealth of research and the examples above that show that there are many words that the translator can choose to select from and the “same” words may have different connotations across languages. Also, in reference to Anita and Irena such a position ignores the reader/listener. As described above, they both, from my perspective, set out to convince me of the legitimacy of their asylum claims. This is the perspective I translated from and how I represented them. There was information given to me outside of the interview from a variety of sources, including the participants themselves, which led me to view the data in this way. Readers, including “back translators” judge the accounts from within a different context but still face the wealth of word choices I did, with possibly different connotations for them.

I am not arguing that engaging in debate with a translator or interpreter solves representational issues. The employment of community researchers, key workers, and bi-lingual workers in service development and research per se does not solve issues of representation but raises questions about how that person was chosen, whom they represent and how accountable they are (Temple, 2002). Twine’s (2000) points about the difficulties of attributing insider and outsider positions within accounts are relevant here. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2004) also review the evidence that beliefs, attitudes and values are tied to particular languages and demonstrate the problematic nature of this assumption, particularly in relation to bilingual speakers.

In her research with childless women in India, Riessman (1993) recognises that how something is said is as important as what is said and that she cannot reproduce a “correct” representation across languages. She argues that in this particular research, as she is unable to speak the language and can’t re-produce the structure in her written text, she will not try:

Attention to certain formal aspects of language – precisely *how* something is said and lexical choice – requires verbatim materials in the speaker’s language. Instead I create structures from the interview texts to convey the sense I’ve made. A kind of textual experimentation, I use poetic stanzas (groups of lines about a single topic) and other units of discourse...as rhetorical devices to make my analysis of the organisation of a story clear for the reader. (p. 131)

She uses textual experimentation to make clear that this is her way of constructing the written account. Riessman worked with an interpreter in the interviews but produced her own written account. Her choice reflected her desire to carry out the interviews herself and to make her role in the research clear.

However, approaching this from a perspective such as that of Spivak (1992; 1993 and Venuti (1995, 1998), it could be argued that Riessman’s choice to abandon any attempt to re-produce the structure of an account in a language she did not speak, and my own neat and tidy quotes in reports for funding bodies, are both forms of colonialism and domestication of texts that erase the interpreter/translator from the picture as soon as possible. The structure and presentation of the words of a woman, from India or Poland, read as if they are English speakers. My many versions of translations, and those of the other researchers on the interpreters

research, end up as one version with words/concepts presented as if there were no choices to be made. Alternative words and explanations of choices are not given for readers to discuss.

There is evidence that researchers cannot control what a text represents as the reader and listener is also active in constructing meaning (Venuti, 1998; Smith, 1982; Derrida, 1976, 1987). As all translators construct identities of “others” for domestic audiences within text (Venuti, 1998) there is an issue here about readership and possible re-enforcement of negative stereotypes when translators choose to foreignize texts with different styles and grammatical practices that are not those of the target language (see here discussion by Standing, 1998 on what happens to how people are “seen” in accounts in research that is not tidied up). This is well illustrated in the field of interpretation by the work of Sandra Hale (2002). She found that court interpreters constantly alter the style of witnesses’ answers and potentially influence the outcome of cases. Style is important and using hedges and fillers such as “you know” may be important for evaluating witness credibility in that they give an impression of vagueness.

Not tidying up accounts therefore also has consequences. People may look “incoherent” and “shady”. We all paint a picture of people with the words we use and even though we cannot determine the way readers will read our accounts we have to be aware of the dangers of re-enforcing stereotypes. Readers expect written accounts to be logical, consistent and well thought out, whilst oral exchanges do not have to live up to these strictures (Oates, 1999). Writing down oral accounts raises questions about which conventions researchers follow. Whilst thwarting some expectations by trying to “foreignize” written accounts issues of representation remain.

Conclusion

Biographical sociology and research into translation and interpretation both make valuable contributions to debates about representation of people’s accounts. Within both researchers debate issues of referentiality, that is the connections texts make with social reality. However, within biographical research there is an almost complete absence of debates about the influence of the language used, and the effects of structuring accounts using a language baseline that is not that used by the participants in the research. The other side of the coin is that within translation/interpretation research there is an equal silence about inter-textuality, discourse and memory as contexts for understanding.

I have discussed some of the concepts, such as intellectual auto/biography and foreignization, that could usefully be applied to cross-language biographical research and noted that they do not “solve” issues of representation. However, they may be tools that could be applied to begin to question expectations that people who speak and write languages other than the one used by the majority in the country understand the world in exactly the same way. I am not arguing that meanings are tied to particular languages but neither is the language used completely irrelevant, as the quote at the beginning of this article shows.

Which approach a researcher chooses is in some measure influenced by the resources they have, the purpose of the written text and by academic and publishing traditions. As Venuti (1998) has argued persuasively, both academic life and the publishing world effect how research is produced. The assumption within publishing is that there is an “original” author and a translator who is “faithful” to the author’s

intentions. The translator is not seen as an active author of a written account. A “correct” and tidy translation is important in publishing. In research the translator’s task is again seen as remaining faithful to the “original” and not questioning the privileged status of the target language. Researchers who try to break out of this mould are restrained by these limits. Their solution is often to present what is likely to be accepted in the arena they are writing for and to leave epistemological/methodological debates for other occasions. A brief reference to “methods” around language is all that is often possible. However, this is at least a recognition that there is something to debate around language difference and is preferable on epistemological and methodological grounds, I have argued, to the view that translation and interpretation are neutral processes and there is no need to discuss issues of representation across languages.

In this article I have argued that language and discourse should be central elements for both cross language researchers within biographical sociology and researchers within interpretation and translation studies. Venuti (1998: 13) describes what he calls an ethics of translation that aims “to alter reading patterns, compelling a not unpleasurable recognition of translation among constituencies who, while possessing different cultural values, nevertheless share a long-standing unwillingness to recognize it”. The aim of such an approach is to “decenter the domestic terms that a translation project must inescapably utilize” (Venuti, *ibidem*: 82). He argues that “this is an ethics of difference that can change the domestic culture” (Venuti, *ibidem*: 82). This plea for recognition of difference is why I prefer to engage in debates around versions of translations rather than ignore representational issues or dismiss them as insoluble. It is a view of translation that is based on a decision to try to discuss possible differences in meaning across languages. Using Fantini’s (1995) terminology, it is about exploring the nexus between language, culture and world view. This is an ethical, methodological and epistemological position, but one that is restrained by academic publishing norms. Sometimes researchers have to present people in a report as if they were fluent speakers of the target language. This is a judgement call and depends in part of the willingness of publishers and funders to accept that neatness does not imply “good” research. Biographical sociology has neglected developments that could help examine issues of representation in cross language research. This is not to say that translation and interpretation studies have the solutions to these issues, just that the field can open up debates about world views and perspectives.

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Biographies in talk: A narrative-discursive research approach

Abstract

This paper demonstrates the contribution a synthetic narrative-discursive approach can make to understanding biographical work within a research interview. Our focus is on biographical work as part of the ongoing, interactive process through which identities are taken up. This is of particular interest for people who, for example, are entering a new career and can be seen as “novices” in the sense that they are constructing and claiming a new identity. Following a discussion of the theoretical and methodological background in narrative, discourse analytic and discursive work in social psychology (e.g. Bruner, 1990; Edley, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998), the paper presents an analysis of biographical talk from an interview study with postgraduate Art and Design students. Our interest is in their identity work, including biographical work, as novices in their fields. The analysis illustrates the approach and the key analytic concepts of, first, shared discursive resources, such as interpretative repertoires (e.g. Edley, 2001) and canonical narratives (e.g. Bruner, 1991), and, secondly, troubled identities (e.g. Wetherell and Edley, 1998; Taylor, 2005a). It shows how speakers’ biographical accounts are shaped and constrained by the meanings which prevail within the larger society. For our participants, these include established understandings of the nature and origins of an artistic or creative identity, and the biographical trajectory associated with it. The particular focus of our approach is on how, in a speaker’s reflexive work to construct a biographical narrative, the versions produced in previous tellings become a constraint and a source of continuity.

Keywords

narrative-discursive, discursive resources, identity trouble, creative identities, novice identities

Introduction

Our starting point for this paper is a concern with people’s identities as complex composites of, on the one hand, who they create themselves as and present to the

world, as a way of “acting upon” it (Plummer, 2001: 4), and on the other, who that world makes them and constrains them to be. The focus of our research is biographical talk. Our assumption is that this is shaped by both the unique circumstances of people’s lives and the meanings in play within the wider society and culture. These meanings include established categorisations of people and places (see e.g. Taylor, 2001), values attached to particular categories (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003), and expected connections of sequence and consequence (Taylor, 2003). The approach we present for investigating them builds on a well-established body of work in social psychology including discourse analysis and discursive psychology (e.g. Edley, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Following narrative analysis in psychology (e.g. Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1994), our approach introduces an additional focus on a personal biography or narrative as a version of the speaker’s ongoing identity work across different interactions. We understand this biography as a situated construction, produced for and constituted within each new occasion of talk but shaped by previously presented versions and also by understandings which prevail in the wider discursive environment, such as expectations about the appropriate trajectory of a life.

The particular contribution of the narrative-discursive approach we present is to show more exactly how this wider discursive environment is implicated in speakers’ biographical talk. The materials analysed are recordings and transcripts from interviews. An interview-based research project is presumed to be a context which selects for and makes salient shared features of participants’ lives. A research interview is also taken to be a situation which is recognisable to participants and one to which they can bring certain expectations. We propose that a narrative-discursive analysis of interview material can explore the commonalities in participants’ biographical talk, for example of established meanings and life trajectories which are seen as typical; in addition, it can show the identity work through which these available meanings are taken up or resisted and (re-)negotiated thereby resourcing the construction of a personal identity which accommodates the particular biographical events and life situation of the speaker. The approach therefore offers a way of investigating the social nature of biographical talk.

The initial sections of the paper outline the theoretical background drawn from psychology, specifically discourse analysis, discursive psychology and narrative psychology. This includes the notions of discursive construction and rhetoric, and the speaker as active and reflexive. We present our narrative-discursive approach as a development of the synthetic discursive psychological approach outlined by Wetherell (1998). Drawing on examples from previously published studies, we then discuss the sense in which talk is understood to be social, as a preliminary to the methodological discussion in the following sections. We go on to illustrate the narrative-discursive approach using material from a new research project, *Creative Journeys*, conducted with postgraduate Art and Design students in 2005. Our interest in this project is in the ways that prevailing understandings shape and constrain the talk through which a speaker constructs an identity as a creative person, including a personal biography. Our discussion of the project includes our rationale for collecting data through research interviews, and a detailed description of the process through which the transcribed interview materials are analysed. We then present an analysis of the interview material to show participants’ use of discursive resources, including interpretative repertoires (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998) and “trouble” (Taylor, 2005a, 2005c; Wetherell, 1998) in their work to construct a creative identity.

The theoretical background: construction, rhetoric and reflexivity

Our narrative-discursive approach to biographical talk assumes that talk is constitutive. This is a basic premise of discursive psychology, originating in ethnomethodology and Foucauldian theory (see Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987 for discussions of this background). The assumption is that meanings are not the stable properties of objects in the world but are constructed, carried and modified in talk and interaction. Following from this, people's identities are also understood to be performative: constructed and enacted in their talk (Abell, Stokoe, and Billig, 2004).

A further assumption is that a speaker is active in this identity work which is an ongoing project that includes constructing a personal biography (Gergen, 1994; see also Mishler, 1999). However, identities are also social because they are resourced and constrained by larger understandings which prevail in the speaker's social and cultural context. Our interest as analysts of biographical talk is in how these larger understandings shape biographical work and their implications for how people construct accounts of both their previous experience and the possible future trajectories of their lives. In this and the next two sections, we discuss these points in turn, as a preliminary to more detailed methodological discussion and data analysis.

The constructed nature of a personal biography, as an account of the past which does identity work for a speaker is discussed by Reynolds and Taylor (2005). They suggest that single women telling their life stories structure their personal narratives to orient to an established sequence and narrative form, the "dominant coupledness narrative". This is the story of a life which progresses through the stages and events of coupledness, such as courting, getting married and becoming parents. This established narrative is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) echoed and challenged by the "women alone" in the way they tell their own stories, for example, to present an alternative progressive narrative of personal development and inner growth. The analysis considers the work which is done by the biographical talk.

This kind of 'talking against' established ideas is what Billig calls "rhetorical" work (Billig, 1987). It suggests that talk is not just an interaction with the other person(s) present but takes place on several levels simultaneously as a speaker also responds to imagined or previously experienced audiences and criticisms. For example, an analysis of the talk of New Zealanders in Britain (Taylor and Wetherell, 1999) shows how in answering an interviewer's questions about their own lives, speakers were also taking up positions in ongoing political debates around land claims by the indigenous Maori people and contests to the established historical narratives of European colonisation and settlement.

Corresponding to this conception of talk as shaped by several (potential) interactions and contexts is the notion that identities are complex. Postmodern theorists challenged simplistic analyses which reduced people to single identity categories ("black", "female") and ignored how fragmentary identities intersect (Rattansi, 1995). In addition, discourse analysts and discursive psychologists emphasise that identities are multiple and occasioned, with a particular focus on how people are positioned in talk (e.g. Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). However, this kind of approach has been criticised for understating the continuity of identity (e.g. Crossley, 2000)¹. Analysts of life stories (e.g. Linde, 1997; Schiffrin, 1997) consider how participants' biographical narratives are shaped in the telling, possibly over the course of an extended interaction rather than in successive turns of conversation. A narrative-discursive approach unites these concerns, looking at a biographical narrative as a situated version of previous tellings, which is constructed as part of a speaker's identity work.

A synthetic narrative-discursive approach

Our approach is “synthetic” in the broad sense proposed by Wetherell (1998) in that a speaker is assumed to be positioned by others as having a certain identity but also actively to position her or himself; in other words, identities are both conferred and actively claimed and contestedⁱⁱ. However, our approach does not share the discursive psychological concern with the detail of turn-taking. Wetherell’s interest is in how the subject positions are made available and taken up in the turn-by-turn of the immediate interaction. It considers a person-in-situation but not a personal biography in the sense of connections between the series of temporally-linked situations which constitute an individual’s unique experience. Our argument is that an expanded, discursive and narrative focus is needed to explore the possibilities and constraints which speakers bring to an encounter from their previous identity work, or, in other words, how they are positioned by who they already are (Taylor, 2005b).

In our approach, we do not look for a narrative in a single extended stretch of talk which has perhaps been elicited by a single question (cf. Labov and Waletzky, 1967/1997; Schiffrin, 1997). Our focus is not on the kind of structure explored by Labov and Waletzky (although an analysis might also consider this: cf. Reynolds and Taylor, 2005) but in the sequential or consequential structuring of the version of a personal biography produced in a particular interaction, in this case, the research interview. This structuring appears in the details of talk, for example, in brief references to past and future (Taylor, 2005b), memories (Taylor, 2001) and the unfolding of a life story (Reynolds and Taylor, 2005). In addition, we explore the discursive resources which establish possibilities and constraints for a speaker’s identity work. We share with Linde (1997) an interest in how personal narratives are in part shaped by collectively held narratives. However, our interest is not in the narratives of a bounded collective, such as those which Linde discusses in relation to institutional memory. We would also agree with her emphasis on re-telling, as in her statement that “The life story is ...comprised ...of the most significant narratives of a speaker’s life, which are told and retold, reinterpreted and reshaped for different situations” (Linde, *ibidem*: 283). We look at how a version of a life story functions for a speaker in a particular interaction, for example, to support a claim to an identity as a creative person, and how understandings prevailing within the wider society facilitate or constrain such identity work, for example, because of the “trouble” a speaker may have in reconciling it with other identity claims or positionings given by her or his life circumstances.

This does not necessarily assume that speakers have met before. At the outset of any encounter a person is always already positioned. For example, her appearance and the circumstances of the meeting “tell” something about who she is, as do any references to past life and experiences. In addition, since most people in most circumstances are not attempting to present wholly new identities or deny their pasts, the versions which have been presented in previous interactions and tellings to others become what Davies and Harré have called the “cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography” (Davies and Harré, 1990: 49). Taylor (2005b) argues that:

these prior positionings are a constraint on a speaker’s identity work because they trouble new positionings which can appear to be inconsistent with them. They establish limits to the range of identity work which can take place within any occasion of talk and thereby create continuity across occasions of talk and a likelihood that patterns will be repeated. (p.48)

These patterns are explored in a narrative-discursive analysis. Our narrative-discursive approach therefore expands discursive psychology's conception of the active speaker to include her reflections on her ongoing and previous identity work and her awareness of consistencies and contradictions. This is not to say that identity is, or can be, wholly coherent and integrated. There are inevitably differences and disjunctions, for example between who I am and who I have been, and between who I am in different roles and contexts. Some inconsistencies are tolerable. Some I am unaware of, although a new experience may draw my attention to them. However, certain inconsistencies may require explanation or repair: they create "trouble" in identity work (Taylor, 2005a; Wetherell and Edley, 1998).

Talk as social

The foci of a narrative-discursive analysis are given by our assumption, following discourse analysis and discursive psychology, that talk is not as a purely individual product or expression but is social, in several senses. The first is that talk is situated. Following Billig (1987), our approach considers talk, and a speaker's identity work within that talk, as taking place in a more complex aggregate of contexts. These include the immediate interactive context, such as an interview, and the larger context invoked in rhetorical work, including what Mishler (1999: 18) calls the "social and cultural frameworks of interpretation", that is, the prevailing meanings and assumptions given by the speaker's society and culture(s). This complexity of context and possible foci is the reason that a story, even an often repeated one that is part of a personal biography, will vary with the occasion of telling, as already discussed. Our analysis looks at how a biography is constructed by a speaker.

A second way in which talk is social is that speakers necessarily use a common language which includes accrued ideas and associations. These pre-exist any particular occasion of talk and can be understood as resources for it. For example, women talking about where they live refer to the established identities and associations of specific places (Taylor, 2003). They also invoke a common and recognisable narrative of a long-term family connection to a place of origin, the "born-and-bred narrative"; this can also be referred to in a speaker's work to position herself differently, as a person who lacks such a connection to her place of residence and therefore does not belong. This kind of identity work can only make sense to speaker and hearer because of the established interconnections of meanings and associations. These discursive resources are discussed by some analysts as interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edley, 2001). They can also be discussed in terms of expected connections of sequence and consequence which create narrative structure and trajectories, like Bruner's "canonical narratives" (Bruner, 1987). They are a second focus of our analysis.

Another social aspect of talk is the constraints which operate on it. There is an onus on speakers to be consistent, both with their own previous identity work, as already discussed, and also with what is more generally recognised and expected. Unexpected associations or connections become a source of "trouble" which requires repair (Wetherell, 1998). Taylor (2005a) discusses the example of a woman who had emigrated as a child. Her identity in the new country was "troubled", even after many years of residence, because her accent marked her as different.

Methodological background: The *Creative Journeys* research project

The previous sections presented the theoretical background to our narrative-discursive approach, from discourse analysis and discursive psychology. The focus of the next three sections is methodological. We will discuss data collection and analysis with reference to a current research project, *Creative Journeys*. The idea for this project came out of our previous research on identity and life narratives (e.g. Taylor, 2001, 2003) and the creative experience of music students (Wirtanen and Littleton, 2004). Our aim was to investigate the identity work of novices in creative fields, including biographical narratives constructed by speakers. Our participants were postgraduate Art and Design students at a prestigious London college. A postgraduate qualification is widely recognised as a professional entry pointⁱⁱⁱ to a career in this field. In choosing to undertake an expensive and demanding postgraduate course, the students could be seen to be confirming a commitment to a longer-term career in Art and Design and an associated identity as a professional in a creative field. They were therefore at a threshold point appropriate to our interest in exploring their identity work as novices in the sense that they are constructing and claiming a new identity. We suggest that it is likely that novices have special difficulty in weaving together established and personal meanings and their identity work may be particularly fragmented. Because of this, novice talk is an especially appropriate site for looking at how a creative identity is taken up (Taylor and Littleton, 2005).

Our first contact with our participants was through the college. Students were invited to an interview about creative work and creative identities, including “the paths that people follow in art and design” and “when, how and why people make key decisions along this journey”. Twenty nine volunteers, studying a wide range of postgraduate courses^{iv}, were interviewed individually by our researcher, a qualified female art therapist. The interviews were informal and followed a general list of questions about each student’s work, background in art and design, influences, current life and expectations for the future. Each interview lasted about an hour. Participants were assured confidentiality and asked to sign a form giving consent for extracts from the transcripts to be used in academic papers and publications. The participants were paid a nominal sum for their time (£20).

Research interviews as data collection

Some discursive theorists (e.g. Potter and Hepburn, 2005) have criticised the use of material collected in research interviews as data. Most of the criticisms are based in the conversation analytic notion of “naturally occurring data”^v (e.g. Schegloff, 1997). This argument against interview material is broadly the same as the conventional criticism of “leading questions”, namely, that the participants would not have talked about the research topic, or talked about it in the way they did without the researcher’s guidance, so the feature being studied has actually been produced by the method of data collection.

A contrary argument is that an interview is a form of interaction which is as natural as any other and is widespread in Western societies (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). It can be argued that an interview becomes a conversation. Somewhat differently, Shakespeare (1998) suggests that the research interview has its own conventions which are familiar to participants. Further to this, we would argue that interviews are culturally rooted communication situations in which meanings are reinforced, challenged and negotiated between interlocutors in the ongoing

interaction (Westcott and Littleton, 2004). Taylor (2001) suggests that a research interview not only makes certain topics salient, but participants may volunteer to be interviewed for a project because their life circumstances make a research topic (such as the importance of where you live) a current concern or special interest. This also suggests a new interpretation of a research interview, as a congenial performance context for first person narration which speakers find pleasurable (Redman, 2005; Taylor, 2005). Another defence of research interviews derives from the point made earlier about versions of talk. If it is accepted that situated talk may be a new version of what has been said before, different in detail from previous tellings rather than a wholly original, never-before-expressed innovation, then the talk produced in a research interview can be analysed as part of the ongoing project which is the speaker's identity work. This could also suggest that a research interview can be an appropriate context for speakers to rehearse new versions, making it a particularly attractive context for the novice identity work which is our interest (Taylor and Littleton, 2005).

The analytic process: Patterns in data

The interviews with our participants were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. A narrative-discursive analysis is a detailed, sometimes laborious approach. Like other discursive analytic approaches used in psychology, it is, in Wooffitt's definition, a "bottom-up" approach in that the "goal of analysis is to describe the organisation of actual language practices, unencumbered in the first instance by theoretically derived characterisations of their import or nature" (Wooffitt, 2005: 154). The approach shares the classic ethnographic purpose of making the familiar strange, in this case through a process of sorting and sifting to uncover features of the data which were not necessarily apparent on an initial reading or listening. These may then be related to other writers' theorising and discussions; however, the analysis is initially data-driven and involves examining the details of talk rather than the overall story of, say, the speaker's biography.

The findings are an interpretation based not on a single interview or one participant's talk but on the analyst's immersion in the larger body of material as data, and the search for patterns across it. These patterns are discussed in terms of discursive resources. The data extracts presented in research texts will therefore be illustrative of these larger patterns rather than a presentation of all the data analysed (as is sometimes claimed for discursive psychological and conversation analytic studies). However, any pattern will also be considered within the unique context of a particular occasion of talk, for the work it does there.

There are two aspects or tasks to the analytic process. These are not "stages" because, as in any qualitative analysis, the process is not straightforwardly sequential but inevitably iterative, although it is systematic in that it involves rigorous reading, re-reading and sorting to ensure that all the transcribed material is considered. One task for the analyst is to look for common elements which occur across different interviews and also at different points in the same interview. As already noted, these are discussed in terms of discursive resources which pre-existed an individual speaker's talk. The second task is to consider a resource within the context of a particular interview and the biographical details the speaker presents there, in order to analyse the identity work accomplished by the use of the resource and also the possible "trouble" (Taylor, 2005a; Taylor, 2005c; Wetherell and Edley, 1998) the resource gives rise to. It can be relevant here to look at contrasting or

“deviant” cases (Silverman, 2000: 107). In a conversation analytic study, an example which does not conform to a pattern can sometimes demonstrate participants’ own awareness or “normative expectation” (Wooffitt, 2005, p.61) that such a pattern exists. In our approach, as the analysis we present will show, contrasting cases can indicate the use of an alternative resource, perhaps because it can be more easily reconciled with how the speaker is already positioned, for example, in the versions of a biography presented in previous tellings.

The narrative-discursive approach retains from psychology an emphasis on detailed analytic procedures which is perhaps less common in other social sciences. However, it is interpretive and does not claim the same complete or correct status for its findings as analyses in some other areas of psychology, including discursive psychological work which is based on conversation analysis^{vi}. As already noted, our approach does not particularly consider the kind of extended biographical talk which is of interest to life history researchers and others (see Plummer, 2001 for an overview). Instead, it analyses the emergent biographical details and the ways that these are mobilised and harnessed to support speakers’ broader ongoing identity projects.

A narrative-discursive analysis of biographical work

Following these detailed discussions of theory and methodology, we now present a narrative-discursive analysis of material from the interviews with Art and Design students. The analysis is illustrative, in that it shows how we use analytic concepts proposed by discursive and narrative psychologists: discursive resources (specifically, interpretative repertoires, following Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998, and canonical narratives, following Bruner, 1987) and “trouble” in identity work (following Wetherell, 1998; Taylor, 2005a, 2005c). However, it also fulfils a larger aim, in that it shows how these speakers’ biographical talk is shaped by established and recognisable ideas about a creative life and identity. The influence of the understandings which prevail in the larger social context is shown in the first analysis below. In the second, we “correct” the common misunderstanding that discursive construction is infinitely flexible, by discussing the constraints on one speaker’s talk which derive from conflicting understandings given both by the larger context and that of her family. Our analysis shows the ‘trouble’ in her work to construct a past and future biographical trajectory compatible with an identity of creative success.

Constructing an artist’s biography

The students were asked how they first became interested in Art and Design, and what their early experiences and influences had been. Their answers of course varied in the details but there were several detectable patterns, illustrated in the following selection of extracts^{vii}:

(Extract a)

I think it’s probably the same old story the young age type of thing and I mean I was always making things

(Extract b)

I always liked to draw and I was always very creative

(Extract c)

my father was always travelling so I was a lot alone with my mum and we would sit there and draw and she would play a guitar

(Extract d)

I come from quite a creative family although my parents don't do anything creative they you know encouraged creativity and my grandma did watercolour painting my granddad on my dad's side did cartoons he was good at drawing as well but none of them really did anything professionally with it

(Extract e)

there are no artists or something in my family but I was always interested actually yeah

It is possible to identify a number of interpretative repertoires (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998) in the interview material which these extracts illustrate. Edley (2001) defines an interpretative repertoire as "a relatively coherent way ... of talking about objects and events in the world" (Edley, *ibidem*: 198). The term can therefore refer to meanings which are grouped by commonsense association rather than, necessarily, logic or rational argument. The reference in Extract a to "the same old story" indicates the speaker's awareness of the established and recognisable aspect that what is being said, and this recognisability is part of the nature of a resource. The particular resource illustrated in Extracts a, b and e is one we would label the "prodigiousness" repertoire. It is a group of references to having an early interest and talent in art and design.

There were also many references to a family member who had creative talent and interests. Sometimes it was implied that this person had been an influence on the student taking up creative work, whether through direct encouragement or indirectly by their lived example. We refer to this as the "creative milieu" repertoire and it can be seen here in Extracts c (in the reference to "my mum") and d (the "parents"). Alternatively, the family member could be cited as evidence of an inherited aptitude for art and design, as in Extract d (the grandparents): We refer to this as the "creative inheritance" repertoire. The same repertoire can be seen in Extract e. In contrasting the claim to an early interest ("always") with the point that there were no artists in the family (in the use of "but"), as if this is surprising, the speaker is invoking the same commonsense logic that a creative interest can be inherited.

All three repertoires (prodigiousness, creative milieu, creative inheritance) do identity work because they present, in a minimal way, the speaker's claim to be a creative person. In addition, the use of three repertoires, separately and together, is part of a different kind of pattern in the talk, the construction of a narrative or general storyline for the speakers' biographies, of development from an early starting point, possibly with an implied extension of this progression into the future. This is a story of an early start and enduring, long-term involvement, whether through interest or aptitude, which recognisably works in everyday talk to ratify a claim to be a certain kind of person, in this case someone creative or artistic. We would suggest that this is an example of an established, in Bruner's term "canonical" narrative (1987). It does identity work for these speakers because it is part of a recognisable biography, one which might be referred to as a "portrait of the artist as a young person". Interestingly,

a reference to an early starting point was mostly presented to support a claim to a general identity as an artist or creative person. The specific field in which the students were working (such as painting, sculpture, photography or animation) was often presented unproblematically as a relatively recent interest. Many students had changed field (for example, from sculpture to animation) or avoided positioning themselves within a single category of creative work ("I don't think I'm completely a painter I make objects as well"). This may have reflected the commitment of the art college to encourage students to work across discipline boundaries.

Why do we refer to this biographical narrative as a "construction" rather than simply a telling of "how it was?" We are not denying the referential quality of talk or questioning the "truth" of these accounts in ordinary terms, as if they were presented insincerely or with an intention to deceive. However, we are interested in them as retrospective constructions, shaped in the talk for the particular purposes of the current interaction. This is a starting premise of the approach we are using, as discussed, and as such cannot be "proven" within the data. However, it is interesting to note that some of the examples of the "prodigiousness" repertoire are somewhat tenuous in that they are activities which would not have been special to these children but common to most of their peers, for instance, at the same schools, many of whom presumably did not go on to study Art and Design. An example can be seen in the following extract.

(Extract f)

I guess it's something that I was always good at you know I was always told that I good at as well and yeah I drew a lot of cartoons when I was a kid I remember painting in play group and enjoying it and being praised

The narrative of "artist as a young person" did not appear in all the interviews. Its absence prompted us to re-examine interview material in search of other patterns. This is an example of the use of contrasting cases to guide an analysis, as already discussed. There is more than one way to construct any identity, including as an artist and an alternative can be seen in the talk of two speakers who explicitly denied any early interest or aptitude. Here is an extract from the first of them:

(Extract g)

I found it really difficult to paint and to draw I mean I could do like the school level ... and now I find it really difficult and somehow to paint and I didn't feel really like that I had much talent or stuff I had just worked a lot there and wanted to do some more to improve my stuff I was more interested in just in the idea that I could work independently it was not so much that art it was just um be by myself and work with my own things without any technique or just with my own material and somehow develop my own material

In this extract we can see a different repertoire being invoked, of art as a solitary activity ("just be by myself and work with my own things") and with the demanding project ("worked a lot") of developing something new and original ("my own material"). Again, these are recognisable associations which come together in a particular image of the artist, as someone inspired but independent and distinctive. A second speaker also invoked this image, describing a narrative of becoming an artist through being different to everyone around him. He described how he grew up in a village and from "quite early" felt that he didn't want to stay there and become part of

(Extract h)

a community of people that are having girlfriends and living or having a flat like in a ten kilometres area or something or quite close and I had this feeling that I didn't really fit into this

He goes on to say

(Extract j)

I don't know if it's already creativity or but I already had this feeling that I didn't want to be like the others I think that's maybe one of the first type of creativity because I think that all my work now and the way I live as well is all led by or pushed by this idea of want I don't want to be like everybody else

These two speakers can therefore be seen to construct a claim to a different but equally recognisable identity as an artist, in this case as an independent person living an unconventional life.

Trouble in identity work

The analysis presented up to this point could be taken to suggest that talk is infinitely flexible and speakers can construct or claim any identity they want. This is a common misinterpretation of the notion of discursive construction. It misses an important point of this and related approaches, namely, the constraints on talk. Our analysis in this section shows why a speaker is not "free" to claim any identity; her identity work is constrained. We discuss the nature of this constraint and how it appears in our analysis as "trouble" (Taylor, 2005a, 2005c; Wetherell, 1998).

One set of constraints on the identity which a speaker can construct or claim derives from the social nature of resources. A theorist of written rather than spoken biography makes this point elegantly in a discussion of the limited range of narratives available for "writing a woman's life" and how these act on the biographer and women themselves. Heilbrun (1988: 17) suggests that "women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over their own lives". In the terms we are using, there are no resources for certain kinds of life stories or the identities that might be associated with them. For example, Heilbrun (ibidem: 20) suggests that the available narratives of women's lives emphasise "safety and closure" rather than "adventure, or experience, or life", and marriage and family over work and public life as a source of fulfilment. In the terms of the narrative-discursive approach presented in this paper, the identities of either an ambitious woman or a professionally successful married woman are "troubled" because the established associations of their different elements ("woman" and "ambition", "professional success" and "married woman") are not easy to reconcile. This is not to say that these identities can never be constructed, but they are likely to need repair, such as repeated restatement and explanation to counter expectations of something different.

Heilbrun's example draws attention to the possible gendered nature of trouble (see also Taylor, 2001, 2005a, 2005c). However, this is not the focus of our current analysis (although it is a point for further investigation in our data). The point for attention in the next extract is how a speaker's identity work may be troubled because different resources cannot be reconciled. The extract is taken from an interview with a young woman who was just at the point of completing a postgraduate course. She had been successful in her career up to this point (for example, in being accepted to study at prestigious art colleges for both her undergraduate and

postgraduate courses) and her discussion of her work conveyed her enthusiasm for art and her involvement. However, she also expressed uncertainty about her future commitment to Art and Design. In the interview she mentioned a member of her family who had wanted to be a painter but could not make a living and had given up art for a successful business career.

(Extract k)

He tried to be a painter for about a year or two and he realised he couldn't make any money out of it and he just dropped it and went on to try and be a businessman

This story offered a narrative sequence in which art or creative work is attempted then put aside for success in a different kind of work. This story could be seen as a local resource which is available as part of her family culture.

She also referred to a more general narrative of the established structure for a career and life narrative which shaped her family's expectations of an appropriate trajectory for her life. As she describes it

(Extract l)

there's kind of this perception that you do your BA that's after A-levels you do your three year BA and then you get a job whereas the fact that I've done a Foundation^{viii} and three years BA and two years MA that's already like 6 years so they were already thinking Well you'd better hurry up when are you going to get a job you're going to be 30 before you get a job

A number of theorists and researchers have challenged the assumption that a life is structured in this way, as a progression through discrete steps or stages (e.g. Mishler 1999), but the relevant point about this narrative structure is not its confirmed (in)accuracy as a description but its established and recognisable status. It is a canonical narrative (Bruner, 1987) which depicts a notion of how a life "should" unfold, or at least one way for it to do so. Many of the art students discussed the financial and professional uncertainty of a career in Art and Design and the impossibility of achieving this kind of certain progression (A larger point, which is outside the scope of this paper, is whether in contemporary Western society any career choice and qualification guarantees a job and a continuing progression through stages). This speaker has reached the end of her course without a definite offer of future work, either salaried or commissioned. Her situation was not unusual among the students. However, there is conflict between the trajectory of her life so far and that expected by her parents, and this makes it difficult for her to envisage her future. In addition, the family narrative of the painter who failed weakens any claim she might make to be an artist because of its implication that this identity is fragile and inevitably illusory. The student herself presents a possible resolution of the conflict, and one favoured by her family, which is to train as a secondary school art teacher. However, she postpones this decision, at least on the occasion of the interview, saying she will probably take a year to think about it. The following extract suggests that this is an attempt to step outside the narrative her parents favour without making a definite choice of the alternative, or alternatively to reconcile the two:

(Extract m)

I think if after a year I haven't it turns out I haven't actually done much I've just whiled away the time then I think I probably go back to the teacher training

The emphasis on going “back” to teacher training evokes a fallback position but also the failed painter’s narrative in that teaching is a link back to a career that would be sensible, as if her (successful) art work has been a diversion or time out from “real life”. In the terms we have presented both the established cultural narrative and the local family narrative of the painter trouble her claim to an identity and a future as an artist.

There are further points for investigation in this material^{ix}. As already noted, one of these is gender. It is noticeable how this student’s situation fits with Heilbrun’s analysis in that the trouble is linked to a lack of safety and closure. Another is class. The student’s parents were relatively affluent and had subsidised her study of art, but this position of apparent privilege became a constraint because of both her financial dependence and their expectations about an appropriate and attainable level of financial security. These points will be explored more fully in future analyses. The particular interest here is in the conflict between the kind of open-ended trajectory which might accommodate the uncertainty of an Art and Design career and the narrative structure of her family’s expectations, and the implications of this conflict for the speaker’s identity work.

Concluding remarks

With its focus on the situated construction and performance of identity and personal, reflexive biographical work, the synthetic narrative-discursive approach presented in this paper offers a distinctive means of exploring both the commonalities in participants’ biographical talk and the implications of prior tellings, established meanings and expected trajectories for the identity work of individual speakers. It therefore makes two distinctive contributions to the study of biographical talk over, say, more established discursive psychological approaches which have been taken up in sociology (e.g. Edley, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

The first contribution is that the approach extends the analytic focus beyond the immediate interactive context. It acknowledges the continuity of a speaker’s reflexive project to construct a biography and the links across the multiple occasioned and situated tellings of “who I am”. In doing this, the approach addresses a common criticism of discursive approaches, that they overemphasise “flux, variability and incoherence” and fail to recognise continuities in the narrating of a life (Crossley, 2000: 528).

A second contribution is that the approach extends or expands the notion of discursive resources. In addition to the broader cultural resources, such as canonical narratives and interpretative repertoires, it shows how more local resources are implicated in the construction of a personal biography. As well as the versions produced in previous tellings, these may include the resources in play within, say, the local culture of the family, as illustrated here in the family story of the failed painter which resources the young woman artist’s biographical talk. Both points have implications for the nature and scope of future research, suggesting a need for work that is sensitive to the interplay of local and wider discursive resources as well as the flux and continuity in novices’ biographical talk.

Endnotes

- i See also Wetherell, 2003 for a discussion of this point.
- ii Some discourse analytic studies (e.g. Wetherell and Potter, 1992) have emphasised the established meanings and ongoing debates, including ongoing political contests, which are both the wider context of talk and the resources available to be taken up in any particular interaction. In this kind of work the term “discourse” is used with strong Foucauldian associations. Other work in discursive psychology has followed more closely on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (e.g. Edwards and Potter, 1992) and emphasised the context constituted by the immediate turn-by-turn interaction, evoking the sociolinguistic use of the term “discourse” to mean talk or conversation. Wetherell (1998) proposes a “synthetic” approach which bridges the two.
- iii See the report of the National Arts Learning Network <http://www.arts.ac.uk/naln.htm>
- iv Selection of the participants was based entirely on their availability for interview during the period when the data collection was conducted, May-June 2005.
- v This concept can itself be criticised for the implication it carries that there can be a “natural” setting in which “true” psychological functioning and processes are revealed. We would argue, instead, that all contexts for studying these are constructed.
- vi This point is discussed more fully in Wetherell 2001.
- vii The extracts have been transcribed to include the irregularities of ordinary speech. They have not been divided into sentences or otherwise shaped to conform to the conventions of written text (e.g. with full stops or commas). (...) indicates that several words or lines have been omitted. Underlining indicates emphasis.
- viii A foundation course is normally a year long.
- ix The data analysis for this project is still at an early stage.

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Theorising narratives of exile and belonging : the importance of Biography and Ethno-mimesis in “understanding” asylum

Abstract

The article explores the use and importance of taking a biographical approach to conducting participatory action research (PAR) with asylum seekers and refugees in order to: better understand lived experiences of exile and belonging; contribute to the important field of Biographical Sociology; provide a safe space for stories to be told; and in turn for these stories to feed in to policy and praxis.

The authors' combined work on the asylum-migration nexus, the politics of representation and participatory action research methodology (PAR) as ethno-mimesis¹ argues for the use of biography to contribute to cultural politics at the level of theory, experience and praxis, and is constitutive of critical theory in praxis. PAR research undertaken with Bosnian refugees in the East Midlands and Afghan refugees in London will be the focus around which our analysis develops.

We develop a case for theory building based upon lived experience using biographical materials, both narrative and visual, as critical theory in practice towards a vision of social justice that challenges the dominant knowledge/power axis embedded in current governance and media policy relating to forced migration.

The dominant power/knowledge axis related to forced migration is embedded in current (New Labour) governance and re-presented in some media texts as identified below. New Labour governance is symbolised in the competing discourses of a) strong centralised control and b) more open systems, network and partnership based governance (Newman, 2003: 17-23; Clarke, 2004; Lewis, 2000). Open systems are made up of partnerships and networks – “joined up government”, “that transcends the vertical, departmental structures of government itself” (Newman, 2003: 20). to develop or foster a consensual style of governing. Progressive governance is defined by Newman (2003:15) as involving a significant shift from governance through hierarchy and competition to governance through networks and partnerships with an emphasis upon inclusion. Progressive governance involves the production of techniques and strategies of responsabilisation of citizens operationalised through the development of networks, alliances, and partnerships, with a strong focus upon active citizenship. Thus, spreading responsibility for social control to non state

agencies and “communities” (Garland, 2001). In relation to forced migration/asylum discourses around the exclusion of the “other” (involving criminalisation, detention and deportation) and the maintenance and control of borders (developing ever more tighter controls on entry and asylum applications) exist in tension with discourses that speak of human rights, responsibilities and possibilities for multi-cultural citizenship especially in the community cohesion literature. There is a conflict at the heart of New Labour’s approach to asylum policy linked to the “alterity” of the asylum seeker that promulgates hegemonic ideologies and discourses around rights to belonging and citizenship, perceived access to resources (redistribution) and misrecognition fostering suspicion of the “stranger”. Alongside discourses of fairness and rights to enter and seek refuge, there exist regressive discourses that water down the vitally important actual and symbolic 1951 UN convention, and foster a split between “bogus” and “genuine” refugees, making it extremely hard to seek asylum in the UK.

Keywords

biography, ethno-mimesis, PAR, asylum, social justice, cultural politics, politics of representation, media

Introduction

How do we come to understand the lived experience of “asylum”, exile and processes of belonging in contemporary western society? Through the mediated images and narratives of mass media institutions; advocacy groups and networks; and academic research.

The media politics of asylum can be interpreted through the weaving together of legal, governance and media narratives/messages for general consumption. As pointed out by the Article 19 (2004) researchers in their recent report on media coverage of asylum seekers, the main problem lies with the relentless repetition and overemphasis of precisely those images that reinforce particular stereotypes and a failure to source more diverse images to illustrate the many other aspects of the asylum issue. A major contributor to this is what has come to be known as “dog whistle journalism” (Bailey and Harindranath, 2005), which, as Ward explains, is “the discussion of policy issues in an outwardly reasonable language, but one using words and phrases that are calculated to carry a different message to the target audience” (Bailey and Harindranath, *ibidem*: 28). The phrases “outwardly reasonable language” and “the target audience” are particularly revealing of the relations between journalistic discourse, social imagination, and immigration policies. In all three spheres the asylum seeker is represented as an undesirable alien, occasionally represented as a possible threat to national sovereignty and security. Ward’s argument that the journalists’ coverage of the infamous “Tampa affair” in Australia in 2001 became “part of a carefully calculated Liberal Party strategy to revive its flagging electoral stocks ahead of an imminent federal election” (Ward, 2002: 22), and similar research in the UK (for example, Kundnani, 2001) likewise prompt two concerns that are relevant to this essay. Firstly, the continual use of terms such as “illegal” and “bogus” entrenches them as part of the popular media discourse on asylum seekers, thus contributing to the stereotyping referred to in the Article 19

report (see also Mihelj, 2004). Secondly, the nearly complete absence – apart from a few exemplary reports and television documentaries – of an alternative voice from the perspective of the refugee or asylum seeker raises important ethico-political issues relating to the politics of representation, democracy, and immigration.

Much of the knowledge generated by advocacy groups, organisations, self organised groups and services supporting asylum seekers and refugees provides much needed alternative voices, dispelling myths, and promoting better understanding and knowledge. The knowledge generated is also subject to media representation and this tends not to be constituted by the voices of refugees and asylum seekers. Thus asylum seekers and refugees are represented by others, such as NGO's, advocacy and support groups. Organisations such as Refugee Action, the Refugee Council, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles and the Refugee Council of Australia are exemplars".

Academic research across a range of disciplines has contributed much to our understanding of "asylum", exile and processes of belonging. Bauman (1992) has written eloquently about the role of the sociologist as interpreter rather than legislator and, moreover, that this interpretive role takes up the mutual understanding of diverse communities, valuing plurality of cultural traditions, subcultures and fostering tolerance of diversity as well as making the unfamiliar familiar.

This interpretive role includes for us creating spaces for the marginalised to speak for themselves. Our central argument here is that PAR/Ethno-mimesis as a methodology and artistic practice offers the opportunity for such groups to represent themselves, without a cultural or political intermediary talking "on behalf" of them. As an exemplary form of auto-ethnography PAR/Ethno-mimesis transgresses the power relations inherent in traditional ethnography and social research as well as the binaries of subject/object inherent in the research process. For the participants involved in PAR are both objects and subjects (authors) of their own narratives and cultures. Crucially, PAR/ethno-mimesis is reflexive and phenomenological but also looks to praxis. As previously argued such renewed methodologies take us "outside of binary thinking and purposefully challenge identitarian thinking. They deal with the contradictions of oppression and the utter complexity of our lived relations...in ways which counter postemotionalism, valorizing discourses and the reduction of the Other to a cipher of the oppressed/marginalised/exploited" (O'Neill et al, 2005:75-6).

It is within this context that we make a case for the role of biographical research linked to participatory action research (PAR) to develop better "understanding" of the lived experiences, lived cultures of exile, displacement and belonging. Such understanding feeds into cultural politics and praxis and may help processes of integration and social justice.

Importance of taking a biographical approach to social justice

Kearon (2005) writes in the journal *Social Justice* about the need to engage with the everyday lives of the socially excluded and potentially criminalised "other", "as autonomous actors with their own mundane, ordinary, and unspectacular sensibilities and structures of feeling" (Kearon, ibidem: 16). In the same volume Greer and Jewkes (2005) stress the importance of creating a "theory of the subject" in the context of media images of social exclusion and the constitution of the stigmatised other. Greer and Jewkes take a psycho-social approach to crime and deviance. Moreover, that "representations of crime, deviance and control illustrate the extent to which sections of the media harbour an apparent obsession with the demonization of

'others' and serve as one of the primary sites of social inclusion and exclusion in late modernity" and that this "is constructed and consumed in such a way as to permit the reader, viewer, or listener to sidestep reality rather than confronting or 'owning up' to it through a process of alienation and demonization, we establish the 'otherness' of those who deviate and (re)assert our own innocence and normality" (Greer and Jewkes, *ibidem*: 29).

If we accept the need for a theory of the subject that engages with the mundane sensibilities and structures of feeling as a counter to the processes of meaning making described above, then taking a biographical approach linked to PAR is a useful way forward. Biographical research and participatory action research methodologies are involved in the production of social justice through knowledge production that is "authentic" or "typical" revealing "social actors' own way of knowing the field" (Fowler, 1996: 12). Drawing upon Bourdieu we can say that PAR produces a "socioanalysis" facilitating "the return of the socially repressed" and thus creates an "archive which contains a genuine popular culture" (Fowler, *ibidem*: 14-15). For Bourdieu (1996) "understanding" involves

Attempting to situate oneself in the place the interviewee occupies in the social space in order to understand them as *necessarily what they are... [T]o take their part...* is not to effect that 'projection of oneself into the other' of which the phenomenologists speak. It is to give oneself a *general and genetic comprehension* of who the person is, based on the (theoretical or practical) command of the social conditions of existence and the social mechanisms which exert their effects on the whole ensemble of the category to which the person belongs. (p. 22-23)

There is a growing interest in narrative theorising and Bruner referenced in Horrocks et al. (2003) defines the self, in part, as a "library of stories" and what matters is "that we try to characterise people's lives...there is an acceptance of the need to look at how people actually live and make sense of their lives" (Horrocks et al, *ibidem*: xv). For Ian Craib (2003: xvi) emotional life is complex and contradictory and too disruptive to be grasped in a coherent way, thus we tell ourselves stories to ease our anxieties". Moreover, as Roberts (2003) has shown the narratives we construct are subject to "repetition and revision". Individuals are constantly engaged in rewriting the self. For Roberts, telling our stories through narrative practices is an "artistic endeavour" that enables us to "do" coherence. Some narratives can help us; others as Craib documents, can keep us passive and "separate people from the authenticity of their lives" (Craib, 2003: 1).

Key aspects to consider in life history/biography research (as explored by these authors) include: the importance of memory and forgetting; life as a psycho-social project; recurrence, time and space, and the fact that micrology can throw light on broader structures and processes. Svensson (1997) writes about the power of biography as a way to order "life and time just as a map orders the world and space...We live in a biographical era...Both life and time are biographically ordered in modernity...we shape the present against the background of our earlier life history and with our sights set on the future" (Svensson, *ibidem*: 99-100). Moreover, that biography has a therapeutic power, creating forms of subjectivity within particular discourses linked to what Giddens has called "the project of self". For Svensson, the power of memory and the ability and opportunity to document life in narrative form combine to produce the conditions for making one's biography.

Biographical research is involved in the production of meaning, and offers resistance to the dominant power/knowledge axis related to asylum and refuge in the

current politics of representation we find in some media messages and images. Biographical research can do this in the production of alternative and renewed narratives that generate social knowledge to inform, raise awareness and empower. Ultimately biographical research counters the sanitized, demonized or hidden aspects of the lived cultures of exile and belonging as well as the normative, stereotyped stories we access through some mass media institutions. In so doing biography research helps to produce knowledge as a form of social justice.

Examining the relevance of biography to social justice involves engaging with the question of what constitutes social justice. As suggested in O'Neill et al. (2005: 75-76), the concept of social justice is neatly summarised by Cribb and Gewirtz (2003), drawing upon but extending models developed by Nancy Fraser (1997) and Iris Marion Young (1990):

- distributive justice, which includes concerns about what Fraser calls economic justice and is defined as the absence of exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation;
- cultural justice, defined (by Fraser) as the absence of cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect;
- associational justice, defined as the absence of "patterns of association amongst individuals and amongst groups which prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect the conditions within which they live and act" (Power and Gewirtz, quoted in Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003:19).

A holistic understanding of social justice combines "distributive, cultural and associational justice, and ways of stranding these together - through, for example, the combined effects of *affective change* and compassion; *new cosmopolitanism* and inter-cultural bridging; and practical steps towards *redistribution*, *recognition* and facilitating the voices of marginalized to be listened to" (Cribb and Gewirtz, *ibidem*). Social justice is re-produced through participatory democracy.

Communicative ethics and participatory democracy

In his influential essay on "the politics of recognition", Taylor (1994) combines two different meanings of the term "recognition": that of equal recognition, in terms of equal rights and dignity for all citizens in a multicultural society, and recognition of difference that discerns and acknowledges the distinctiveness of cultures. Central to his argument is that both types of recognition are crucial to a multicultural liberal democracy. For our present purposes, his insistence on a dialogic model of identity as formed through intersubjective "webs of interlocution" is particularly pertinent, as misrecognition, in the form of unequal power relations in the dialogue, has severe psychological and social consequences. The sameness-difference dialectic intrinsic to his notion of recognition and the centrality of "locution" to it asserts the significance of the politics of representation. Representational failures and injustices inherent in the status quo largely stem from the marginalisation of subaltern voices and alternative biographies and histories. Crucially therefore, the politics of recognition has to be informed by and premised on the politics of subalternity, in the form of recuperating biographies and experiences that provide alternative narratives. In the present case, those biographies refer to the life-histories of refugees and asylum seekers that challenge the stereotypical images of them as "undesirable" "bogus", or "scroungers" in dominant discourse.

Benhabib (2002) too, insists on a dialogic relationship between different perspectives inspired by diverse cultural formations and value systems in her vision of a genuine participatory democracy. This underpins her argument against what she sees as the unproductive dichotomy between universalism and relativism. A genuine participatory democracy includes a constant renegotiation of “universal” rights. In the place of alleged incommensurability and untranslatability between cultures – in other words, relativism – she pleads for an inter-cultural dialogue in which cultures are “polyvocal” instead of being complete or coherent wholes. Representation is therefore crucial in her vision of participatory democracy too, as the dialogue is founded on an ethics of communication in which participants have equal voice. “Politically, the right to cultural expression needs to be grounded upon, rather than considered alternative to, universally recognised citizenship rights” (Benhabib, *ibidem*: 26). Benhabib’s formulation of the ethics of dialogue that is central to the functioning of a participatory democracy once again necessitates the presence in the public sphere of the narratives of marginal communities, narratives whose very exclusion constitutes marginality – in our case refugee groups – as alternatives to mainstream or dominant representations. Implicated in both Taylor’s conception of the politics of recognition and Benhabib’s promotion of inter-group dialogue is social and political justice in a democracy.

Intrinsic to this formulation of justice and democracy is the issue of narrative as cultural politics. Deborah Battaglia’s (1995) argument about narratives of self-making is useful in linking Taylor’s discussion of “misrecognition” with Benhabib’s social justice and democratic participation, and also underlines the need for refugee communities to express or represent their stories in opposition to the media representations mentioned above, as the latter can potentially be damaging to the formation of their selves. For Battaglia “there is no selfhood apart from the collaborative practice of figuration. The ‘self’ is a representational economy: a reification continually defeated by mutable entanglements with other subjects’ histories, experiences, self-representations; with their texts, conduct, gestures, objectifications” (Battaglia, *ibidem*: 2).

The right to speak, be heard and recognised are central aspects of “social justice” and feed in to cultural politics. Narrative as cultural politics can challenge exclusionary tendencies, promote resistances and transformations by creating spaces for voices and alternative discourses. A paper by Helia Lopez provides a good example of biographical narrative as cultural politics. Helia (1998) writes powerfully on the experiences of marginalisation, internal exile and the politics of return.

One can become an exile even while remaining on ones own soil...After 11 September 1973, I became part of the defeated sector of Chilean society. Our politics creeds, ideologies, values, ways of life, everything we believed in were devalued and stigmatized...I was left deprived of any social value. (p. 189)

Her experiences are charted in relation to her particular gendered experiences involving the discursive production of her “self” in exile. Helia’s husband was sent to Puchuncavi concentration camp and she lost her post at the University of Chile. She describes her life as straddling two Chile’s – the old and new order.

This was exile without moving. Almost all that I identified with was destroyed. Even space ceased to have the same meaning for me as it became *their* domain for their repressive practices. I was scared of the ‘soil’

(streets beautiful countryside, rivers and sea) as there were always people being arrested, tortured or even killed there. Chile was my country of origin but ceased to be my home. Internal exile constituted a rift between past and present within myself and as a social actor in my own physical environment. Home was being destroyed. My private sphere belonged to the marginalized society and became dominated by the horrors of brutality that followed the coup. Imprisonment, disappearance, harassment and torture became the new experiences in my family's life. (p.190)

When her husband was released from prison they left Chile under a programme that helped Chilean men (political prisoners) find scholarships and visas. The gendered dynamics of heteronormativity meant that Helia could only apply for a visa and scholarship on the basis of her husband's political status as the aid agencies oriented their programmes to rescuing "heads of families", thus the "indirect repression women endured was ignored" but also, women have less chance of obtaining refugee status in their own right (Helia, 1998: 191). The gender specific experiences had huge impact upon Helia's life in exile. Internal and external exile involved a form of bereavement including political defeat and abandonment. "Overqualified" for most jobs she applied for and by now a single parent, social problems such as isolation, lack of support and lack of extended family impacted upon her and she decided to return. Writing the article as a now "failed returnee" she writes about the collective silence in a country stricken with the horrors of military dictatorship and her attempts to assimilate "and not disturb the fragile democracy by remembering the past" indeed, she had to "conceal and sometimes renounce her hard won gender identity" (Helia, *ibidem*: 196-7).

This short account of Helia's biographical journey is strongly indicative of the constructions and articulation of self identity in exile (internal and external), the psychosocial meanings and experiences of exile, and gender politics and dynamics. In the short article we access a rich account of loss, exile, power relations – familial, political, gendered - and the becoming of the "self" in the context of a life and search for both expressing and transcending the pain of exile through narrative; and this "recuperating narrative" becomes a political tool – raising awareness, producing knowledge and recognition.

Biography and PAR/Ethno-mimesis – towards social justice

Research methodologies that create spaces for the voices and images of the subaltern - refugees and asylum seekers - through narrative methods can serve not only to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes and hegemonic practices, but can produce critical texts that may mobilize and create "real" change.

In this paper we develop further our work in progress on renewed methodologies for writing/doing ethnography in the 21st century. To date this work has sought to develop hybrid texts, by drawing upon the inter-relation/inter-textuality between art (the "outside of language") and ethnography - as ethno-mimesis. Representing life-history research through art forms can create multivocal, dialogical texts, and can make visible "emotional structures and inner experiences" (Kuzmics, 1994: 9) which may "move" audiences through what can be described as "sensuous knowing" or mimesis (Taussig, 1993). This method privileges the voices of those involved and triangulates these voices with cultural texts re-presenting and imagining lived experience through "feeling forms" (Witkin, 1974). Thus, interpretive ethnography grounded in the stories of the co-creators of the research (participatory

action research - PAR) rooted in critical theory is pivotal to the methodology and a politics of representation.

Fals Borda defines PAR as anticipating postmodernism for PAR drew on a range of conceptual elements to guide fieldwork "Marxism, phenomenology, and classical theories of participation, including action" (Fals Borda, 1999: 1) and yet went beyond them. Fals Borda defines PAR as *vivencia* (life experience akin to Husserl's "Erfahrung") "necessary for the achievement of progress and democracy and as a complex of attitudes and values to give meaning to our praxis in the field" (Fals Borda, ibidem: 17).

PAR is a social research methodology, which includes the stereotypical subjects of research as co-creators of the research. It creates a space for the subaltern to become involved actively in change or transformation. PAR is rooted in principles of inclusion (engaging people in the research design, process and outcomes); participation; valuing all local voices; and community driven sustainable outcomes. PAR is a process and a practice directed towards social change with the participants; it is interventionist, action-oriented and interpretive. It involves a commitment to research that develops partnership responses to developing purposeful knowledge (praxis); includes all those involved where possible, thus facilitating shared ownership of the development and outcomes of the research; uses innovative ways of consulting and working with people and facilitates change with communities and groups.

Thus PAR provides safe spaces for dialogue; in Benhabib's terms an "ethics of communication", fostering polyvocality and involvement in producing knowledge as well as action and in so doing can contribute to social justice.

Biographical narratives can heal, empower, challenge and transform our relationship to the past and the future. They are also important psycho-socially, as we have documented, as narratives of self making, fostering ethical communication, producing counter hegemonic discourses and critical texts that may mobilize change.

The process of memory making is important to how we produce biography. Winter and Sivan (1999) document the process of recollection in relation to memory traces. Most experiences, we are told, leave "long term memory traces, recorded in our *episodic memory* system – the system which encodes 'what happened'". Furthermore, "*autobiographical memory* appears to be the most enduring kind of memory...combat experience is particularly dense because it is personal and dramatic. Harrowing moments are denser still" (Winter and Sivan, ibidem: 12). Kuhn (2000) discussing memory work in *Memory and Methodology* suggests that memory work involves an active staging of memory; a questioning attitude to the past and its reconstruction through memory; and questions the transparency of what is remembered. And, takes what is remembered as material for interpretation.

In acknowledging the performative nature of remembering, memory work takes on board productivity and encourages the practitioner to use the pretexts of memory, the traces of the past that remain in the present, as raw material in the production of new stories about the past. These stories may heal the wounds of the past. They may also transform the ways individuals and communities live in and relate to the present and the future...how we use these relics to make memories, and how we then make use of the stories they generate to give deeper meanings to, and if necessary to change, our lives now. (Kuhn, ibidem: 186-7)

Below we provide two examples of biographical narrative produced (in earlier PAR/ethno-mimetic research by one of the authorsⁱⁱⁱ) through sharing memories of exile, displacement and belonging and then re-producing these memories artistically, creatively in firstly poetic form and in the second example an installation was digitally photographed and anchored with two short pieces of biography from the maker. The pieces were part of an exhibition that brought together work by an Afghan micro-community in London and a Bosnian community in the Midlands, and which toured community centres, community galleries and two universities in the Midlands. The exhibition was launched at an arts centre in London where both communities of participants came together to speak and celebrate the public launch of their work. The examples, we propose, raise awareness and “understanding” (in Bourdieu’s sense) that take us some way towards fostering a holistic sense of social justice. Conducting PAR/ethno-mimesis that includes the telling of biographical narratives with the participation of refugee groups, micro communities, and asylum seekers can be transformative across many levels of praxis. For example, the work with the Bosnian community was transformative across three levels of praxis.

First level – *textually* – through: documenting lifestories as testimony to the suffering, exile, and forced displacement they experienced at the hands of soldiers, civic officials, friends (for some family members) and neighbours; and the experience of exile – both internal and external. Second level – *visually* - through producing art forms to re-present their life story narratives, saying the “unsayable”, challenging normative media representations and producing auto/biographical visual and poetic texts to re-present their lives and experiences as lived. Third level – *practically* - together the combination of the visual and textual elements supports and fosters practical (real) processes of intervention and transformation for both the producers/creators and audiences. Presenting their work in community venues in their neighbourhoods (and others), inviting local communities to attend and share food and music involved what Hussain has called “inter-cultural bridging”.

Thus, contributing to social justice distributively, culturally and associationally. Distributively, the avoidance of exploitation, and economic marginalisation was facilitated by the research grant funding. The funding enabled community members to take part by paying for resources, time, transport, community centre venues, materials, fees for a community co-researcher and artists to work on the project. Culturally, recognition was fostered through the sharing of the Bosnian narratives and the visual and poetic re-presentations with a broad audience – students and academics, local neighbours and neighbourhoods – city centre community gallery spaces. Associationally, in the process of conducting this work important community development outcomes were achieved such as raising the community’s profile in the city and indeed region, building bridges with local people in their neighbourhood, thus overcoming “patterns of association which prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect the conditions within which they live and act”. The combined effects included *affective change* (compassion); *inter-cultural bridging* (cosmopolitanism); and practical steps towards *redistribution, recognition*.

Two examples of this work are presented below. Key themes emerging in the narratives include memories of the deterioration of one’s lifestyle and culture – similar to the internal exile documented by Helios Lopez Zarzosa, and overwhelmingly themes of loss, death, destruction. “Losing one’s country means losing everything”. Losing self-esteem, status – who you are is based on what you have now (often very little), not on what you once were or where you have come from. Significant too is the importance: of family – being a family, traditions and rituals, and losing family members in flight or because of war, and imprisonment, including torture; of

language and communication to feeling safe and experiencing a sense of belonging; of peace and reconciliation and of community networks and support, settling and building communities in the host community/country; and of safe spaces and the opportunity to re-build lives.

IN THE NAME OF KABUL^{iv}

*My presence is here but
My heart is in the alley-ways of Kabul
My tongue utters its name
My lips sing a song of Kabul
The trees are shrouded in inky-blue,
Years, months, weeks, days, mourning Kabul
Oh traveller! Traverse my town silently
For in mourning is Kabul
He who is cognisant with its streets, its palaces
Murmurs 'Where am I?' Kabul*

WAR AND REMEMBERING

Fahira - on the theme of good neighbours:^v

Our life was like hell. On one occasion they just picked up my husband and took him away and it was for seven days that I did not know where he was. After the seven days that he was missing one day they just chuck him out like a bag of potatoes. He was all covered with the bruises. We thought he is not breathing he's dead... Then the convoy started and we had to sign in if we wanted to leave the country. People were very scared, sometimes it would happen that people were leaving with the convoy and sometimes the whole convoy would disappear. No one would know where it had gone...We very lucky because our building was locked. There were lots of Serbs in the building but in the end they were on our side. We were very good friends with the people who lived in our building and I must say that they saved us. Even nowadays we are still in touch...There were some Serbian people who were killed because they were hiding Muslim and Croatian people. They were against the war. I think it was so tragic that ordinary people were not able to do anything about the whole situation.



This image was developed by Fahira Hasedic with the support of Karen Fraser, City Arts, as part of the Global refugees: exile, displacement and belonging research project, funded by the AHRB.

Conclusion

Taking a biographical approach when conducting PAR with asylum seekers and refugees contributes to the field of biographical sociology by providing a safe space for stories to be told and by fostering social justice – associational, cultural and distributive. PAR as ethno-mimesis is both a practice and a process aimed at illuminating inequalities and injustice through socio-cultural research and analysis. In addition, it also seeks to envision and imagine a better future based upon a dialectic of mutual recognition, ethical communication, respect for human rights, cultural citizenship and democratic participatory processes.

The sharing of collective responsibilities is a moral imperative in current times. Clearly there is an urgent need to develop interventionary strategies based upon collective responsibility and what Benhabib (1992) has called a “civic culture of public participation and the moral quality of enlarged thought” (Benhabib, *ibidem*: 140) in response to what has been called the global refugee crisis.

How can biographical research and ethno-mimesis address this? Recovering and re-telling people's subjectivities, lives and experiences is central to attempts to better understand our social worlds with a view to transforming these worlds. Such work reveals the daily struggles, resistances, strengths, humour of people seeking asylum as well as knowledge and better understanding of the legitimisation and rationalisation of Power, Domination and Oppression.

Biographical work re-presented poetically, visually as well as textually can help to illuminate the necessary mediation of autonomous individuality and collective responsibility. Drawing upon Shierry Nicholsen's work the photograph and poetic text presented here have the capacity to arouse our compassion whilst not letting us forget that what we are seeing is socially constructed meaning. Through re-presenting the “unsayable” the image/poetry help to “pierce us”, bringing us into contact with reality in ways that we cannot forget. Ways that counter the instrumental

thinking that underpin the hegemonic anti-asylum discourses represented through dominant power/knowledge axis and re-presented in some media discourses.

Biographies help us to understand the processes, structures and lived experiences of citizenship and lack of citizenship; and the experiences of humiliation and abandonment (dominant experiences for some asylum seekers/refugees). They highlight the importance of engaging with the subaltern other, creating spaces for voices and narratives to make sense of lived experience, trauma, loss, but also the productive dimension of rewriting the self. This productive dimension is articulated well by Roberts as “the return to nodal points in life where significant meanings are sought as the individual tries to uncover and decipher the coherence of their lives... Life historical knowledge is reformulated in the re-creation of the self, as both an interpretive and recollective process” (Roberts, 2003 : 21). Thus, a politics of representation informed by a politics of subalternity and Biographical Sociology can provide alternative narratives and praxis (purposeful knowledge) that may feed into public policy and ultimately help to shift the dominant knowledge/power axis embedded in current governance.

Note

The Image and poem were produced with permission from the artists as part of the AHRB “Global Refugees: exile, displacement and belonging” project led by Maggie O'Neill. The poem was published in the exhibition booklet *'Global Refugees: Exile, Displacement and Belonging: Afghans in London'*. Exiled Writers Ink! facilitated the creative writing workshops and translation of the poem. City Arts Nottingham facilitated the production of art works.

Endnotes

- i Ethno-mimesis is the combination of socio-cultural research (life history interviews) and the re-presentation of the life history narratives in artforms (photography, poetry, and creative-writing) to produce alternative ways of re-presenting the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. (see O'Neill, 2001, 2004).
- ii See www.refugee-action.org.uk; www.refugeecouncil.org.uk; www.refugeecouncil.org.au; www.ecre.org
- iii The PAR/ethno-mimetic research involved telling biographical narratives and for some re-presenting these narratives in visual artistic and poetic form. The research was conducted with an Afghan micro- community in London and a Bosnian community in the East Midlands (1999-2002) funded by the Arts and Humanities Board (AHRB). Biographical narratives were documented with the support of community co-researchers using the principles of PAR
- iv Baring Kohdamani was a professor at Kabul University before his exile to the UK. This excerpt from his epic poem was translated by community co-researcher Suhaila Ismat and Jennifer Langer (Director of exiled writers ink). Reprinted here from the exhibition booklet. The AHRB funded the research.
- v Fahira decided to document the life saving gesture from her Serbian neighbour, told in her biographical narrative, and produce an installation to thank her

neighbour - a box full of good things to send back to say thank you - a reminder of a humanity larger than the war machine and anti humanitarian processes implemented during war and genocide in Bosnia. The text underneath the images describes a) her neighbour giving her the key to her flat so she could hide when soldiers came looking for Muslims (her family needed the key for three years); b) her taking a loaf of bread she had baked with UN produce (denied Serbs under sanction "because they started the war") and being faced with a soldier with a gun asking her who she was - she replied "you know who am I I would not be here if I were Muslim" and her neighbour did not challenge this.

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Narrating the Digital Turn: data deluge, technomethodology, and other likely tales

Abstract

In this paper it is argued that digital technologies will have a transformative effect in the social sciences in general and in the fast developing field of narrative studies in particular. It is argued that the integrative and interdisciplinary nature of narrative approaches are further enhanced by the development of digital technologies and that the collection of digital data will also drive theoretical and methodological developments in narrative studies. Biographical Sociology will also need to take account of lives lived in, and transformed by, the digital domain. How these technologies may influence data collection methods, how they might influence thinking about what constitutes data, and what effects this might have on the remodeling of theoretical approaches are all pressing questions for the development of a Twenty First Century narratology. As Marshall McLuhan once put it "*First we shape our tools and then our tools shape us*".

Keywords

digital technology, data deluge, narrative identity, psychobiography, storytelling

Introduction

This paper deals with theoretical and methodological reflections arising from a number of pilot projects carried out over the last six years within the Narrativeworks project and presents a model that illustrates the development of a digital/narrative approach to teaching, research and service development in a U.K. university faculty largely concerned with professional training in the field of education, health and social care. Examples of these projects can be viewed at: www.Narrativeworks.com

The pilot projects grew out of the experience of developing and teaching two modules that explored issues of culture, community and identity through the use of Biographical Narrative Research (<http://www.talkinglongterm.co.uk/courses.php>).

One recurring theme in discussion of projects generated within these modules was the way in which the narrator's voice, itself a defining part of an individual's

identity, was being systematically stripped away by the contemporary conventions of a transcript based approach to data analysis and presentation. Answering the question of what could be done about this opened up a complex “theory saturated space” (TSS) represented in the diagram below.



Figure 1. The Digital Narrative Interface.

Each element of the diagram defines a major influence on how any life story can be located, interpreted and presented using digital technologies. Each of these elements should be considered as a portal to a wide range of resources that could be applied to any case study. A specific understanding of narrative theory and method, employing particular digital technology, in collaboration with unique interest groups, generating situated data for specified applications will define any case study.. The complex nature of any particular story, its performance, interpretation and presentation, will generate a unique “aesthetic trajectory” through this TSS. The following discussion loosely describes the trajectory of the Narrativeworks project through this space and will consider each of the elements mentioned above in turn. The links embedded throughout the text invite readers to navigate their own way through this space and the article is therefore best read on a broadband connection.

Narrative Theory and Method

The theoretical base for these particular speculations about the future direction of narrative studies was based on the idea of the “narrative construction of identity”. Writers like Bamberg (2004) have described the theoretical tools that narratology has brought to the human and social sciences as passing through several different phases of development. The most recent of these he describes as a narratology primarily concerned with discourse and interaction central to which is a focus on describing how the situatedness and interactional embeddedness of the story teller/makers should be central to the interpretation and understanding of the structure and content of the story. In the context of thinking about the “digital turn” it is worth noting that narrative theory has also been deeply influential in the development of discussion about computational intelligence, particularly in the deployment of concepts like situatedness/embeddedness in the work of writers like

Cantwell-Smith (1998). Describing cognition as fundamentally social, embodied, concrete, located, engaged, and specific, he employs a vocabulary that overlaps strongly with other contemporary debates about complexity and narrative. Mitleton-Kelly (2004), for instance, writes about the overall way that complexity science investigates systems that adapt and evolve as they self organize through time. Danto (1985) in an overlapping discourse describes how story based explanations focus on a more or less extended chain of particular circumstances bound together by unique situations located in specific times. Interestingly writers like Gatrell (2003) claim that missing elements in “complexity theory” include the embodied human voice and the persistent importance of place as a key element of identity.

My approach here is based on an understanding of the narrative construction of identity as an emplaced, embodied, autopoietic process explored through the application of a biographical narrative interview methodology. This process is theoretically located in wider debates about the impact of globalization on “traditional” identities and the contemporary production of subjectivities. Bauman’s (2000) idea of “liquid modernity” is adapted to integrate global with individual explanations through the idea of “flows”. The local flows of power in which individual identities are constructed can be interpreted as locally situated but evolving in relation to the wider processes of globalization. These “flows” create local “centers of narrative gravity” in relation to which individual psychobiographies trace their unique trajectories. The range of “psychobiographical traces” that could be used as a basis for theorizing and potentially transforming these local centers of narrative gravity are transformed by the application of digital technologies. A reflexive postmodern interpretive approach would explore the dynamic relationships between these elements.

At the level of method the generally accepted standard approach to creating and analyzing biographical narrative data is based on the recording of a narrative interview from which a full text based transcript is produced. Even these traditions have strained at the limits of text, by seeking to reproduce elements of performed speech within the text, by the use of font types to highlight volume level, by the representation of non verbal elements of speech, or by the representation of silence, as measured in seconds which are inserted into the text in brackets. A moment’s reflection on the emotional power of silence in live speech immediately highlights the way in which emotional content may be minimized, and the verbal content of speech acts emphasized in text based representations, due in part at least to the recording medium employed. When that medium is digital, and the recording audiovisual, the nature of the “text” and the question of appropriate analytic procedures are radically changed. More sophisticated procedures will have to be developed that can take account of body language, facial expressions, and other elements of narrative performance that can then be linked to the more traditional approaches of transcript based analysis. Software developments that allow the tagging of such performative aspects of narrative interviews, and their linkage to transcript based data, already exist and can be expected to undergo further rapid development. While I claim no particular expertise in such software an example that handles audio, video and text based data can be found at: <http://www.atlasti.com/index.php>

Indeed depending on the theme of the interview, its context and its setting, there may be other elements of “embedded narrative” that researchers could focus on, such as the potential significance of images or artifacts framing the narrative performance. Photographs and other familiar objects in particular settings will often be saturated with narrative significance and offer a potential focus for data collection and analysis (Hirsch, 2002). For instance Elkin (1996) in his book *The Object Stares Back* raised the issue of what is seen and what is not seen, describing “visual

repression” as a form of self censorship that involves the disappearance of images from both the visual field and the imagination. Similarly Van den Haven (2004) describes the development of a cueing device that employs digital technology for therapeutic use to evoke autobiographical memories in a domestic context.

Linking narrative analysis to other developing research traditions like those of visual sociology, performative arts, child observation studies, and narrative therapy could also enrich the potential analytical frames within which such data could be located and interpreted. The combination of such an approach with the creative possibilities of the digital medium opens up some intriguing and interesting possibilities. Kip Jones (2005: 7; see also Jones’ article this issue) describes a kind of “performative methodology” that potentially “[...]creates a clearing in which meaningful dialogue with a wider audience is possible, feedback that is constructive and dialogical in its nature becomes feasible, and dissemination of social science data transforms into something, not only convivial, but also playful”.

A range of resources can be found on Jones’ site (<http://www.angelfire.com/zine/kipworld/cprp.index.html>) one of which describes the challenge that this “[...] *emerging synthesis of the arts and social sciences present... to the methodological-philosophical foundations of knowledge*”.

Presentation of such data will necessarily be driven away from text based representations toward more multimedia formats which will be able to handle audiovisual data in new and creative ways.

The prospect of large scale linked audiovisual digital data bases combined with software of the type mentioned above also raises a number of radical possibilities that further challenge conventional distinctions between qualitative and quantitative approaches to social research. Most narrative research is based on comparatively small samples of respondents or even on singular case studies. Such an approach is often defended from accusations of unrepresentativeness by reference to the alternative criteria of “thick description” and the power of an individual narrative to illustrate complex themes. Digital data offers possibilities for enriching the development of such themes while also offering the potential for new forms of combined analysis that could locate such case study material in wider data sets.

Digital Storytelling

The Digital Storytelling movement was based on the idea that the tools of digital technology could be used to empower people by building democratic movements based on the sharing of people’s stories. This idea of story, transformative reflection, digital technology and social action characterized the original ideas of the movement. The link below for the Digital Storytelling Festival (DSF) site illustrates the wide range of interests that now characterize the movement. The festival acts as an annual gathering where professionals and enthusiasts who use technology to communicate and share stories gather to examine creative works and new concepts (http://www.dstory.com/dsf_05/).

The early, more politicized, “bringing radical technology to the people” stream of the movement evokes echoes of previous radical traditions of community activism but has been somewhat swamped by the later highly individualized web based applications such as blogs and podcasts. That earlier tradition prioritized work with minority and excluded groups to use the process of recording and developing life stories as a tool for personal and community empowerment. The Centre for Digital

Storytelling is an early example of this kind of work offering a range of services to a variety of community groups. <http://www.storycenter.org/>

The potential for a more network based phenomena is perhaps illustrated by a recent report (Prest, 2006) which claimed that Google searches for “podcasting” went from zero to 3 billion in six months. The patterns of virtual relationships and communities that evolve in this context are unpredictable and highly creative as well as being of increasing interest to commercial operations through the development of e-marketing/word of mouth approaches. The recent explosion of interest in Family History Research largely promoted by increased access to the internet provides an interesting example of how such developments can impact on the interpretation of particular family histories and other received narratives of identity.

“What if...” and “If only...” moments feature strongly in most life histories, as well as in many literary, artistic and therapeutic interpretations of them. Working collaboratively with individuals and groups to imaginatively interpret and re-interpret life stories using digital media suggests new ways in which narrative approaches could focus on issues of interest. The externalization of internalized narratives has long been recognized as a critical process in the interpretation and reinterpretation of the self, a key element in most approaches to Narrative Therapy (Freedman and Combs, 1996). Contemporary discussions of identity frequently centre on the shifting, impermanent, risky, and performative aspects of the self. Cultural phenomena like Rap music and DJaying can also be thought of as the externalization of often contradictory and fragmented narratives, a cultural form crucially mediated by technology and widely absorbed as a narrative medium. Digital media allows great creative freedom that fits well with (re)interpreting, manipulating and illustrating life story data based on such postmodern theories of identity.

Collaborative approaches could allow the development of linked databases from dispersed locations and at the same time create new forms of feedback and virtual communities. Working with community based groups in the development, use and interpretation of first hand narrative accounts also provides an arena within which strong collaborative relationships and new forms of practice can be developed. Combining a narrative approach with digital technologies opens up ways of working and thinking that transcend professional, disciplinary, and methodological boundaries. In relation to service users and interest groups in the field of health and social care, such approaches offer new possibilities for the development of a broader kind of evidence based practice, as well as overlapping with, and extending, a range of more traditional narrative and arts based approaches to therapy. The Rosetta Life project for instance employs a digital approach to develop the therapeutic and healing potential of life story and arts based work with terminally ill people, examples of their work can viewed at: <http://www.rosettalife.org/>.

Digital data can be continuously reorganized and re-interpreted depending on what one wishes to make of it, what one might see in it, or what might happen to it by accident. Exposure to new ideas, metaphors, images and technologies can also change the way we think about the world and our place in it. The characteristics of digital technology, its spontaneity, immediacy, interactivity, and its capacity to promote self evaluation provide a new type of data with all sorts of interpretive potential and community based applications.

Digital Technology

In our first explorations of the technology in the Narrativeworks project we quickly discovered that it was possible to convert analogue recordings to digital

format, stream them over a narrative transcript, and store them on a web site. Getting it done with limited technical knowledge and support was then another, very time consuming, story. This initial interest soon broadened into a more general one about the potentially transformative possibilities offered by digital technology in the field of narrative studies. In those days, in the late nineties, lunchtime speculation sometimes centered on the idea of the “dream machine” that such a project would ideally deploy. This would allow audiovisual interview data to be easily stored in a fully searchable multimedia data base, would transform the audio to text, and plug into software which would allow a linked analysis of speech, facial expressions and body language. Not much to ask really!

The speed with which the technology has changed in the last seven years however is impressive, the ability to download audiovisual data directly to a computer cuts out the time consuming data conversion and transfer stages encountered in earlier days. While the “Digital Divide” remains a reality to be carefully considered, the use of digital devices like 3G mobile phones, camcorders, cameras and MP3 recorders have become widely generalized. The development of “off the shelf” editing software opens up the production and creation of narrative materials in a digital format to much wider groups of people. The rapid development of broadband infrastructure means that such material can be easily pooled, shared and accessed. Software programmes are beginning to accommodate the analysis of video as well as text based data. What other developments might the next five years bring?

In 1945 Vannevar Bush, the then US presidential technology advisor, envisaged his own “dream machine” in the development of the “Memex” concept, a device in which all personal data relating to an individual life could be stored, cross referenced and easily accessed. A contemporary version of such a device is reviewed in a webcast of the Digital Memories (Memex) research project which can be viewed at: <http://research.microsoft.com/workshops/fs2005/webcasts/12534/lecture.htm>

A range of related digital projects loosely grouped around the theme of life memories and rich with potential narrative applications can also be found at: <http://www.memoriesforlife.org/jumppoints.php>

Development engineers like Gordon Bell working on the MyLifeBits software project at Microsoft predict that within five years a 1000 gigabyte hard drive will cost less than \$300, enough to store four hours of video everyday for a year. The MyLifeBits Project is designed to allow all personal data, from letters, video/audio clips, photos, phone calls, email traffic, etc. relating to an individuals life to be stored and linked together in a highly flexible database. Related projects like Sensecam promise to vastly expand the type of information that could be incorporated into such a database. The project has developed prototypes of a badge sized wearable camera that can be attached to the human body, which can function for twelve hours, which can store up to 2000 images and which can monitor a wide range of other, including GPS, data. Technologies of this sort represent a step change in the nature and depth of data which could be used to inform a range of academic disciplines. Such data of course could also enhance state-sponsored projects of surveillance to nightmarish proportions. While detailed discussion of such trends is beyond the bounds of this paper it is clear that “tagging technology” based on developments of this sort raise fundamental ethical issues about privacy and civil liberties.

Such developments point to the reality behind talk of the “Data Deluge” defined as the “[...]general perception that the growth in computing power and the dissemination of digital technologies will generate vast amounts of data that will soon dwarf all previously available technical and scientific data” (JISC, 2004:1). While use of the term technomethodology has been largely confined to debates centering on

human-computer interactions it might be useful to consider what that term might also imply for research, teaching, and consultancy at the digital/narrative interface. Crabtree (2004), for instance, in his discussion of the developing relationship between ethnomethodology and the systems development community raises the question of whether the wholesale adoption of digital technologies in the social sciences will inevitably lead to the development of hybrid disciplines. The wider implications of these technical developments are currently being explored in a number of JISC sponsored scoping initiatives that attempt to assess the implications of the digital revolution for a developing e-social science, discussion of which can be found at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=pub_datadeluge

Applications

While the pilot projects undertaken at Narrativeworks.com hardly approach the scale of issues described above they do illustrate some of the ethical and political issues raised by working in this way and will be used to illustrate some of the problems and possibilities of the “Digital turn” in Narrative Studies.

Applications include:

- An archive dealing with the experiences of Jewish refugees who escaped from Nazi Germany and settled on Tyneside.
- An archive dealing with the professional narratives of “cultural managers”.
- A resource dealing with adoption narratives in association with the North East Post Adoption Service (Nepas).
- A proposed strategy for evaluating the experience of participants in a public arts project based on the idea of embodiment in identity construction.

All these sites are under development and as such are in various states of completion.

The Narrativeworks project developed an approach to teaching, research and consultancy based on ideas and applications developed at the digital/narrative interface. One such project mentioned above plans to embed the service user’s voice at the center of health education, research and service provision. The idea is to explore the use of multimedia resources in collaboration with community based interest groups to explore issues of service development from a narrative perspective. The project is being developed within a wider Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning project (CETL4HealthNE) as part of a work stream concerned with the development of “[...] structures and tools that partners can utilize to effectively engage ‘people with experience’ in the planning delivery and assessment of curricula for health care professionals across the North East region”.

The project discussed here is concerned with the creation and development of a network of local groups created by the participating CETL partners dealing with themes relating to long term care. Adopting a narrative methodology each participating group will collect the first hand accounts of service users and carers whose lives are in some way affected by the experience of a long term condition. Incorporated in the first instance as part of an online teaching resource this data will be developed in collaboration with the CETL partners and their local groups for a wide range of purposes including:

- Training and development programmes for service user groups.

- Development of high quality online materials for educators.
- Service development.
- Staff training and development.
- Research.

Figure 2 illustrates how each node of the network will operate.

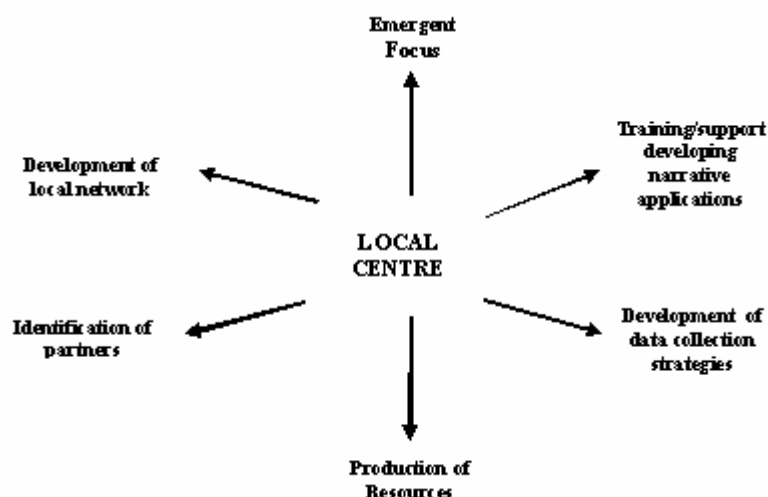


Figure 2. Model for Narrative Nodes.

The developing site, which will also act as a portal to wide range of complementary resources, can be viewed at: www.talkinglongterm.co.uk

The power of reports and presentations that can combine quantitative data with the ability for the subject's or citizen's stories to be clearly seen and heard also has considerable relevance in policy making circles where strong demands are currently being made that the "service users" voice be placed at the center of developments in an "evidence based practice".

Narrative approaches to issues of health and social care however can raise sharp issues of confidentiality and consent, especially in settings where these issues have generally been debated within the professional arenas of medicine and social work. Working from a base within a faculty providing professional training on a contractual basis with Health Trusts meant that narrative accounts were often viewed as either fundamentally violating established protocols of confidentiality or being essentially anecdotal in nature. The rapid development of a wider literature and interest in narrative approaches to medicine, health and social care (Hurwitz, Greenhalgh and Skultans, 2004) however is progressively opening up debate around these potential problems. A valuable resource containing a series of lectures in an audiovisual format on the theme of Narrative Medicine can be found at: <http://narrativemedicine.org/conference.html>

Early in the Narrativeworks project it was decided that a useful strategy in this context was to primarily work with established consumer and interest groups within which the power and legitimacy of individual stories and experiences were widely

validated and sanctioned as a founding principle. In effect some members of these groups had already semi professionalized the telling of their stories in relation to their roles as activists and advocates. As people already committed to the public telling of their stories the ethical and moral consequences of this stance had often been largely resolved through the processes of group membership. Debates therefore often focused on the degree of access to these stories ranging from full protocols of confidentiality to open access on the web. A range of nine levels of access has been described in relation to the TalkBank project which can be viewed below and which provides a useful guide for the ethical context of such negotiations (<http://talkbank.org/share/ethics.html>).

These protocols have their limitations and, as stories that have been published on the web can never be entirely recalled, the implications of this must clearly form part of the negotiation about levels of consent, as should the issue of copyright. If we see individuals' identities as an ongoing accomplishment, their relationship to stories they have told about their life must also be seen as a dynamic one. Consents should therefore reflect this potential dynamic and some strategy needs to be in place that allows the participants to withdraw or re-edit all or part of their story.

For instance, in a project dealing with people's experience of adoption, one participant gave consent for his recorded account to be used online - as one of several such stories that were embedded in an adoption advice agency's website. The audio/text data allowed visitors to the website to access stories of adoptees who had set out to trace their biological parents. This particular story described some very ambivalent feelings that the young man had toward his biological mother. While the narrator was very clear about wanting his story to be used by the agency he did subsequently request that the story be deleted from the site following the death of his mother some time later. In another case a woman who had suffered painfully from Parkinson's disease reflects on drawings she has made to illustrate her condition and discusses her desire to see euthanasia legalized:

http://www.talkinglongterm.co.uk/narrative/narrative1/image_gallery/large_images/image3.php

As an active member of the Parkinson's Disease Society both Ruth and her husband expressed great satisfaction that her experiences might contribute to a better understanding of the human reality of Parkinson's in the training of health and welfare professionals. Figure 3 illustrates the model employed in the overall development of resources within the Narrativeworks project.

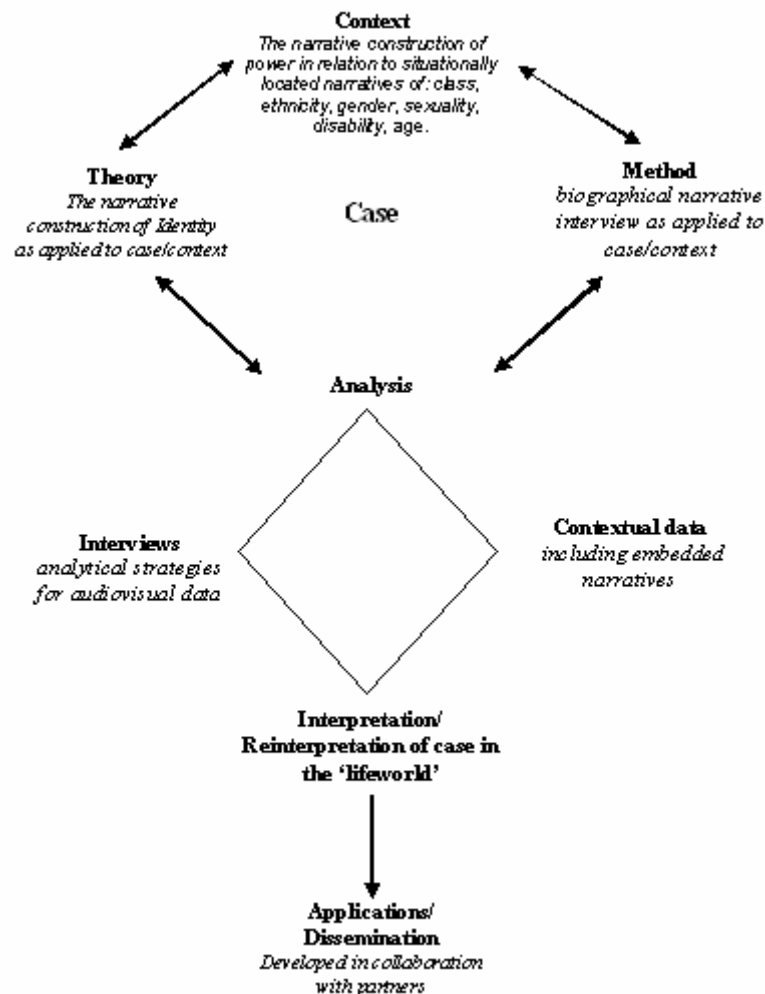


Figure 3. Narrativeworks Project Framework.

The increasing emphasis on the “entrepreneurial mission” of Universities and the development of relationships with commercial interests raises a series of important questions about the commercial exploitation of knowledge and knowledge generating practices within the academy. Protocols of research governance are being increasingly viewed through the lens of corporate liability and within some universities are combining to provide a hostile climate for critical scholarship in general and some forms of qualitative research in particular. The link below illustrates these developments in the field of critical legal studies:

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/slsa/download/Summer%202004-43%20editorial%20only.pdf>

Research committees, often steeped in medical and scientific approaches, may view narrative studies as providing essentially unreliable and anecdotal data. The emergent traditions of the digital storytelling movement and the development of “service survivor” and service user groups however often work from the opposite perspective aspiring to create real or virtual communities based on the public sharing of stories. Such critical communities may well pose challenges to conventional ideas about partnerships in, and ownership of, such social research processes and data within the Academy.

Conclusion

Digital technology opens up radical new possibilities in the field of narrative studies that transcend existing professional and disciplinary boundaries. The rapidly developing field of narrative studies also feeds on the contemporary trend toward the biographical structuring of identity, often claimed to be a developing feature of globalised societies.

These developments open up all kinds of possibilities for new kinds of collaborative relationships between students of the narrative approach and almost any section of the communities of which they are part. Biographical Sociology will also be required to deal with the data deluge generated by the digital revolution as well as coming to terms with the phenomena of lives lived and identities created in cyberspace itself.

Stories of technological utopias should however always be treated with extreme suspicion. The collision of external technologies of surveillance with technologies turned inward is a “scary” prospect of a specifically Orwellian kind. Information is power and digital technologies transform access to information. People’s intimate stories have transformative power, the question is how might this power be used?

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A Biographic Researcher in Pursuit of an Aesthetic: The use of arts-based (re)presentations in “performative” dissemination of life stories

Abstract

The (re)presentation of biographic narrative research benefits greatly from embracing the art of its craft. This requires a renewed interest in an aesthetic of storytelling. Where do we find an aesthetic in which to base our new “performative” social science? The 20th Century was not kind to 18th Century notions of what truth and beauty mean. The terms need to be re-examined from a local, quotidian vantage point, with concepts such as “aesthetic judgment” located within community. Social Constructionism asks us to participate in alterior systems of belief and value. The principles of Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics offer one possible set of convictions for further exploration. Relational Art is located in human interactions and their social contexts. Central to it are inter-subjectivity, being-together, the encounter and the collective elaboration of meaning, based in models of sociability, meetings, events, collaborations, games, festivals and places of conviviality. Bourriaud believes that Art is made of the same material as social exchanges. If social exchanges are the same as Art, how can we portray them? One place to start is in our (re)presentations of narrative stories, through publications, presentations and performances. Arts-based (re)presentation in knowledge diffusion in the post-modern era is explored as one theoretical grounding for thinking across epistemologies and supporting inter-disciplinary efforts. An example from my own published narrative biography work is described, adding credence to the concept of the research report/presentation as a “dynamic vehicle”, pointing to ways in which biographic sociology can benefit from work outside sociology and, in turn, identifying areas of possible collaboration with the narrator in producing “performances” within published texts themselves.

Keywords

Biographic narrative research; arts-based (re)presentation; relational aesthetics; social constructionism; “performative” social science

Introduction

Exploring the possibilities of a “performative” social science, for me, grew directly out of dissatisfaction with limitations in publication and presentation of my own biographic narrative data. For instance, my reciting papers to audiences or, worse, reading text from PowerPoint presentations directly to them (audiences who were certainly capable of reading slides for themselves) contributed to my self-inflicted discontent. I began, therefore, to look to the arts and humanities for possible tools which might be transposed in order to better disseminate my narrative interview material at conference gatherings. In considering methods from the arts as a possibility, it seemed crucial to explore critical thinking in contemporary aesthetics in an attempt to find resonance with my efforts at crossing disciplinary boundaries in my reports of biographic investigations.

The currently emerging synthesis of the arts and social sciences presents challenges to the methodological-philosophical foundations of knowledge. At the very heart of this matter is an aesthetic of knowledge transfer. The need for innovation in dissemination of detailed descriptive and interpretive information has, until recently, been largely neglected in the social sciences. As collage-makers, narrators of narrations, dream weavers, however, narrative researchers are natural allies of the arts and humanities. In practical terms, promising possibilities include, but are not limited to, performance, film, video, audio, graphic arts, new media (CD ROM, DVD, and web-based production), poetry and so forth.

For some time now, biographic work in social science has sought new ways of attaining greater “sensibility” to humanistic concerns. A central problem with a synthesis of the arts and social sciences within biographic production is epistemological; the status of new forms of production and dissemination as academic knowledge remains contested and ambiguous, and further development is required. I suggest that one way that this can be achieved is through an exploration of the aesthetic/performative principles proposed here. Such an attitude more fully celebrates and represents the humanistic concerns of social science pursuits, creating new spaces in which to expand our means of (re)presentation and offering possibilities for alternative means of evaluation of such academic work.

By rethinking our relationships within communities and across disciplines such as the arts and humanities, we are presented with opportunities to move beyond imitation of “scientific” reports in dissemination of our work and look towards means of (re)presentation that embrace the humanness of social science pursuits. This creates a clearing in which meaningful dialogue with a wider audience is possible, and so feedback that is constructive and dialogical in its nature becomes feasible and dissemination of social science data transforms into something not only convivial, but also even playful. Presentations can then evolve into ways of creating meaningful local encounters and performances, in the best sense of these words. Even publications can become infused with a creative and visual spirit that reflects the nature of human interactions, inventiveness and relationships.

I contextualise my paper through an exploration of the use of tools from the arts and humanities within science, narrative research, and knowledge transfer; I then consider contemporary aesthetics, leading to a discussion about publication as a “performative” outlet. The reflective and dialogic approaches of contemporary biographic social science are “recast” through the concept of relational aesthetics, placing an emphasis on improvisation/spontaneity as a feature of the “new” approach that is being offered.

In order to reach this conclusion, I first turn to science because, for some social scientists, a narrow concept of science itself as unchanging and inflexible remains commonplace. The traditional science of objective principles involving systematised observation and experiment (often mimicked in the social sciences, therefore, “scientistic”) has recently made way for a more enlightened conception of science as opportunities for invention, discovery and creative endeavour, using methods which are counter-intuitive, unexpected and polyvocal. By visiting contemporary and innovative thinking emanating from the new physics and the like, we can return to social science refreshed and invigorated by a new conceptualisation of science, with possibilities translatable to the social sciences themselves.

I next look to narrative endeavours and report the call for interdisciplinary efforts that is beginning to build critical mass. I further explore the emerging synthesis of the arts and social sciences within models of knowledge transfer and the social dissemination of knowledge. I then consider French curator Nicolas Bourriaud’s (2002) theory of Relational Aesthetics in order to find fresh and contemporary thinking in the arts and to begin to explore the possibility of Relational Aesthetics’ fit within the social sciences more generally. I subsequently return to a discussion about publication—the most frequently utilised outlet for social science dissemination. Despite growing interest in arts-related diffusion of social science data, the vast majority of social science research continues to be disseminated textually. Taking up this challenge, I end by reporting on a particular use of web publication as an outlet for a “performative”, art-based textual production of my own biographic interview data. I describe my published biography with well-known feminist, educator and writer, Mary Gergen, and how the process of creating that document itself became collaborative, “performative”, relational and reflective of an arts-based approach to the diffusion of biographic narrative data.

Novelty, creativity, narrative and science

Physicist Gergely Zimanyi believes that “Science and art are complementary expressions of the same collective subconscious of society” (Morton, 1997: 1). In fact, Zimanyi predicts a new convergence of science and art with the latest technological changes made possible by computers: “When a modern scientist’s program spews out a million data, in what sense is the problem solved? Only visualization can possibly help in comprehending such a massive output. This is why many scientists are using computers to better visualize their work” (Morton, 1997: 1). Richard Taylor, associate professor of physics at the University of Oregon finds similarities between producing scientific papers and painting pictures. “Art and science have a common thread—both are fuelled by creativity. Whether writing a paper based on my data or filling a canvas with paint, both processes tell a story” (Taylor, 2001).

According to sociologists, Law and Urry (2004):

Social science has problems in understanding non-linear relationships and flows. Tools for understanding such complex connections have been developed within the ‘new physics’ of chaos and complexity theory, but have been applied only falteringly within social science. ... A breakdown of the boundaries between natural and social science allows us to conceive of nature as active and creative, making the laws of nature compatible with the idea of events, of novelty, and of creativity. ... Complexity theory argues against reductionism, against reducing the whole to the parts; the methods

necessary to capture complexity may well be unexpected and/or counter-intuitive. (p. 400-402)

In fact, since Mishler noted a surge of growth in the variety of narrative inquiries in 1995 (Mishler, 1995: 87), the excitement of possibilities for diversity in (re)presentations of qualitative data have continued to blossom exponentially. Thus, a convergence between the arts and the social sciences begins to build:

- Rorty (in Hiley, Bohman and Shusterman, 1991), posited that the objects of inquiry include recontextualising what is at hand - the desire to know essence - characteristically a human concern. Rorty continues that the desire to dream up as many new contexts as possible "... is manifested in art and literature more than in the natural sciences, and I find it tempting to think of our culture as an increasingly poeticized one, and to say that we are gradually emerging from scientism ...into something else, something better" (Hiley et al, 1991: 80).
- Hollway and Jefferson (2000) have asked researchers to represent the subjects of narrative research with the complexity we associate with literature and works of art more generally.
- Denzin and Lincoln (1994; 2002) find that qualitative theoretical development is – increasingly - taking place at the intersection of science and the humanities.
- Clough (2004) reports that leading researchers are now frequently recommending designs of enquiry and dissemination which rest on processes of art rather than science.

These authors represent just a sample of thinkers who have begun to challenge traditional distinctions between research and (re)presentation, that is, between acts of observing or "gathering data" and subsequent reports on this process (Gergen and Gergen, 2003: 4). Nonetheless, text is often only linear and, therefore, temporal; in text the meaning must be precise or risk disbelief. Conversely, "working visually involves a significant shift away from the often oddly lifeless and mechanical accounts of everyday life in textual representation, towards sociological engagements that are contextual, kinaesthetic and sensual: that live" (Halford and Knowles, 2005: 1). A pluralistic approach to the use of tools from the arts and humanities, in both production of social science data and its dissemination, thus, begins to evolve. The distinction between gathering and reporting data begins to dissolve, progressing to something quite new and refreshing, adding to our capabilities. In this way, a visual "text-performance" begins to materialize - a welcome addition to our possibilities of (re)presentation of social science data, reflecting what Denzin forecast as "the cinematic-interview society" (Denzin, 2001: 23) to our potential audiences.

Narrated biographies and the constructed memories that are their building blocks, like dreams, are simultaneous layers of past and present - the visual *and* the spatial - and these added dimensions, beyond the purely temporal, demand our attention. As a description of a dream in words never quite captures the essence of the dream itself - its feeling/picture/space - so too narratives of lives need to be fleshed out through additional devices. Law and Urry caution that traditional "methods have difficulty dealing with the *sensory* - that which is subject to vision, sound, taste, smell; with the *emotional* - time-space compressed outbursts of anger, pain, rage, pleasure, desire, or the spiritual; and the *kinaesthetic* - the pleasures and pains that follow the movement and displacement of people, objects, information, and ideas" (Law and Urry, 2004: 403-404).

Through consideration of such elements within biographic inquiry, we should be able to reconstruct our interviews themselves in Denzin's terms: "not as a method of

gathering information, but as a vehicle for producing performance texts and performance ethnographies about self and society" (Denzin, 2001: 24) where "text and audience come together and inform one another" (Denzin, *ibidem*: 26) in a relational way. This leads us to a consideration of a "performative" social science. In Law and Urry's (2004) thinking, research methods in the social sciences do not simply describe the world as it is, but also enact it (Law and Urry, *ibidem*: 391). They are performative; they have effects; they make differences; they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover (Law and Urry, *ibidem*: 392-93). Indeed, "to the extent social science conceals its performativity from itself it is pretending to an innocence that it cannot have" (Law and Urry, *ibidem*: 404).

These currently evolving principles are put forward in order to indicate means with which biographic sociology can benefit from work outside sociology, and in turn, identify areas of possible collaboration. The hope is that we will dig deeper and further to come up with ways to engage with our data and its dissemination that are contemporary and employ technologies that are becoming easier to master and more user-friendly. We then can return from encounters across disciplines to more traditional outlets for dissemination with renewed possibilities for creative and innovative exploration of knowledge production. My expectation is that these sorts of efforts will do two things:

1. honour the people who shared their biographies with us in the first place, and
2. help establish new audiences for these narratives, thus insuring that they are not just buried in academic journals.

Constructing dissemination socially

Social constructionism, as described by Kenneth Gergen (1985), maintains that knowledge, scientific or otherwise, is not obtained by objective means but is constructed through social discourse. It is founded upon the basic proposition that knowledge is never true *per se*, but true relative to a culture, a situation, a language, an ideology, or some other social condition (Bauerlein, 2001: 1). Social constructionism does not assume information or knowledge to be either subjective or objective. Rather, it understands knowledge formation contextually and dialogically. Knowledge is a negotiated discursive construct that is created between people. Constructionists are interested in the rhetorical methods by which knowledge is created and supported in different conversations and conversational traditions. Symmetrically, constructionist analyses also deal with the discursive means that are used to deconstruct the factuality of versions about the phenomena under discussion. Constructionism overcomes the authoritative worldview of the information transfer model (Tuominen, 2001: 1).

No single point of view is more valid than another in social constructionism, because all points of view are embedded in a social context that gives them meaning. "Such a view does not obliterate empirical science; it simply removes its privilege of claiming truth beyond community" (Gergen, 1997). "Film, books, magazines, radio, television, and the internet all foster communication links outside one's immediate social surrounds. They enable one to participate in alterior systems of belief and value, in dialogues with novel and creative outcomes, and in projects that generate new interdependencies" (Gergen, 2002). One of the reasons that many social scientists turn to biography is the possibility that such investigations present for localised "truths"—one individual speaking her/his "truth" about a specific life to an

audience of one (the interviewer) on a particular localised day. That biography, “performed” on a different day and to a wider audience, offers up that personal “truth” to a community that then decides on its legitimacy and relevance, but only for and within that particular community. This situation leads to the question of whether the initial individual “truth” was transferable (or not). Performing biographies holds great promise for biographers to propose these very questions to audiences in a dialogic way, encouraging realistic, situated feedback and then reporting on it; “The researcher’s goal is not to put forth something that ‘looks like the truth’ but rather to contrast multiple verisimilitudes, multiple truths” (Denzin, 1997: 20).

French educator Pierre Lévy (1991; c. 1997) believes that profound changes are occurring in the way we acquire knowledge that support the potential collective intelligence of human groups through emerging spaces of knowledge that are continuous, evolving and non-linear. Lévy states that, since the end of the 19th Century, the cinema has given us a kinetic medium for representation (Lévy, 2003: 3). In fact, “we think by manipulating mental models which, most of the time, take the form of images. This does not mean the images resemble visible reality, they are more of a dynamic map-making” (Lévy, *ibidem*: 4). Lévy’s book, *L’idéographie dynamique* (c. 1997), contains concepts germane to the discussion here. He moves to relational expressions: *inclusion*, *coincidence*, *separation* and *proximity*. Through kinetic representation, there are three types of mental icons: *images*, *diagrams* and *metaphors*. All of these are expressions and icons which resonate within the concept of the arts-based “performative” social science under discussion.

A danger exists, however, that, in our enthusiasm to embrace the arts as social scientists, we may both narrow our concepts of the possibilities available to us in the arts and humanities and also reach beyond our own grasp and capabilities. Too many of us have sat through somewhat embarrassing dramatisations comprised of well-meaning social scientists’ attempts at becoming actors. I fear that Mickey Rooney’s excited exclamation to Judy Garland: “I know what we’ll do! We’ll put on a show!” is sometimes taken too literally by some enthusiasts of the “performative” possibilities of narrative data. From a wider perspective, “performative” social science is conceptualised to include more possibilities than simply turning narratives into stage productions. A plethora of models and methods of production exist within the arts (facilitated increasingly through user-friendly technologies) which deserve to be explored further in order to enrich the dissemination of our data.

This is where collaboration becomes valuable. Reaching across disciplines and finding co-producers for our presentations can go a long way in insuring that, rather than amateur productions, our presentations have polish and the ability to reach our intended audiences in an engaging way. Pushing the limitations of means of dissemination already available to us (e.g., print, web-based, PowerPoint) to new and creative levels, provides platforms for attention-grabbing, evocative diffusion of social science data. Indeed, taking inspiration for styles of presentation from other disciplines also broadens our canvass. It is a historical fact that the major upheavals and transformations in Western art and science occurred during periods of cross-pollination from discipline to discipline. With this in mind, our collaborations offer us opportunities for meaningful dialogue between disparate communities, opening up unknown possibilities for future dialogues and associations. In addition, revisiting the collaboration between the narrator and researcher within our biographic investigations also deserves to be foregrounded in a “performative” way, to include involving research participants in the production and dissemination of their own stories. Thus, engagement in co-operation itself becomes a creative act, often stretching the

boundaries of our understanding and prodding us to come up with fresh and innovative ways of overcoming practical obstacles in knowledge transfer.

Relational Aesthetics

So, where do we find an aesthetic in which to base our new “performative” social science? “The criteria for evaluating qualitative work ... are moral and ethical. Blending aesthetics (theories of beauty), ethics (theories of ought and right) and epistemologies (theories of knowing), these criteria are fitted to the pragmatic, ethical and political contingencies of concrete situations” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002: 229). The 20th Century was not kind to 18th Century notions of the aesthetic. With Social Constructionism’s principles in mind, 21st Century ideas of what “truth” and “beauty” mean need to be re-examined from a local, quotidian vantage point, with concepts such as “aesthetic judgment” located within community.

The principles of Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) offer one theoretical grounding to the search at hand, basing theories of art in terms of co-operation, relationship, community and a broad definition of public spaces. I am suggesting Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics as a starting point because I think he offers a post-modern, contemporary framework that allows social scientists to think about aesthetics and means of dissemination from the arts in our work in refreshing ways. Relational Aesthetics also forms a structure on which we can begin to think about a “performative” social science—a science that includes more emphasis on collaborations with our research participant co-authors, co-producers or co-performers themselves. It also provides a platform on which to base the production values of our dissemination efforts and gauge the effects that our fabrications have on our audiences as well, allowing for their own participation in a dialogical, creative social exchange.

As a young critic in the 90s, Nicholas Bourriaud used the term “relational art” to describe a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical departure human interactions and their social contexts. Relational art bridges or blurs the differences between life and art and involves the public as co-creators of artworks; i.e., art becomes socially constructed (Ekholm, 2004: 3). Central to its principles are inter-subjectivity, being-together, the encounter and the collective elaboration of meaning, based in models of sociability, meetings, events, collaborations, games, festivals and places of conviviality. By using the word “conviviality”, the emphasis is placed on commonality, equal status and relationship (Hewitt and Jordon, 2004: 1). Relational Aesthetics or “socializing art” often comprises elements of interactivity, but its most noticeable characteristic is its socializing effect. Through such efforts, it aims to bring people together and to increase understanding (Johannson, 2000: 2). In fact, Bourriaud believes that art is made of the same material as social exchanges. If social exchanges are the same as art, how can we portray them?

Relational artistic activity, “strives to achieve modest connections, open up (one or two) obstructed passages, and connect levels of reality kept apart from one another” (Bourriaud, 2002: 8). Key to Relational Aesthetics is the guiding principle that *relational* art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space) points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art. Relational Aesthetics looks towards the possibility of reduction of the inter-personal distance by the development of sensibility for the intuitive and associative aspect of communication (Koljanin, 1999: 2), contributing to

and expanding the reflective and dialogic approaches of contemporary biographic social science through concepts of improvisation and spontaneity within a renewed concept of participant-community.

Art, in Relational Aesthetics, is seen as a state of encounter and the essence of humankind, purely trans-individual and made up of bonds that link individuals together in social forms which are invariably historical (Bourriaud, 2002: 18).

- The small spaces of daily gestures determine the superstructure of “big” exchanges and are defined by it (Bourriaud, *ibidem*: 17).
- Art in post-modern times is concerned with occupying time, rather than occupying space (Bourriaud, *ibidem*: 32).
- Social exchanges consist of interactivity with the viewer, and as a tool serving to link individuals and human groups through a preference for contact and tactility (Bourriaud, *ibidem*: 43).

“Bourriaud emphasizes that we have the right to query every aesthetic production whether an art work allows us to take part in the dialogue, whether we can conceive our existence and in which way, within the semantic space which that work defines” (Koljanin, 1999: 1). Strategically for social scientists, relational aesthetics are present when inter-human exchanges become aesthetic objects in and of themselves (Yorke, 2004: 2). Co-operation, co-production and collaboration become things of aesthetic beauty. There is not necessarily an “object” in the traditional sense of art, but rather a time, a space and a gathering, creating a transitory, participant-community. Bourriaud concludes: “It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows” (Bourriaud, 2002: 45).

- Relational aesthetics see the everyday, or the quotidian, as a much more fertile terrain (Bourriaud, *ibidem*: 47).
- “We find in pride of place a project to rehabilitate the idea of Beauty” (Bourriaud, *ibidem*: 62).
- Our intentions need to consist of conveying the human sciences and the social sciences from “scientistic paradigms to ethical - aesthetic paradigms” (Guattari cited in Bourriaud, *ibidem*: 96).

Because relational art takes as its starting point human relations and their social context, as social scientists engaged in the (re)presentation of the storied nature of everyday events, we share a starting point with our artistic contemporaries. Relational aesthetics judges artworks in terms of the inter-human relations which they show, produce, or give rise to (Dezeuze, 2005: 18); this principle, therefore, locates our common ground. One place to begin, then, is in our (re)presentations of inter-human relations through our presentations and publications of biographic material.

And what of the published page?

The traditional and most widely available outlet for biographic narrative data is publication, particularly in academic journals. Ken Gergen argues that the words and stylistic conventions used in typical journals “derive their meaning from the attempt of people to coordinate their actions within various communities” (Gergen, 1997: 6).

These linguistic conventions evolve over time into codified symbols with the ability to compress large amounts of assumed knowledge and background information and deliver it for their intended audiences (and, by intention or coincidence, to withhold such information from others). The members of different groups of scientists, policymakers, campaigning communities and so on go through a lengthy socialisation process to enable them to produce and understand papers comprised of a kind of 'shop talk' that heightens participation in the language game, enabling them to ring-fence their areas of expertise. This professional 'codification' produces icons with the accumulated power to persuade, convince, establish authority and represent authenticity, but which through this very process carries the inevitability of skewing and/or stifling wider community discourse and input.

Left out of the mix in the standard scientific report is a consideration by authors and publishers of their own participation in, and communication with, the larger community to which we all claim membership. The extreme restraints on exposing the personal that are self-imposed by and superimposed ... (upon academic book and journal writers) are presumably intended to illuminate a particular scientific discovery. At the same time, their absence leaves the reader oddly dissatisfied. (Wu, Rapport, Jones & Greenhalgh, 2004: 40)

Such dissatisfaction often leads to explorations elsewhere. By extending our gaze beyond the usual journals and books when seeking venues for dispersion of findings, to new technologies and modes of presentation, we open the doors to new understandings and resources. This experience, in turn, leads us back to more traditional outlets such as journals and books with a renewed vision for extending the possibilities of traditional publication.

It is valuable, therefore, to reconsider publication as an outlet for the creative presentation of biographic data at this juncture. Sandelowski and Barosso (2002), in fact, argue for a "reconceptualization of the research report as a dynamic vehicle that mediates between researcher/writer and reviewer/reader, rather than as a factual account of events after the fact" (Sandelowski and Barosso, *ibidem*: 3). Such an approach resists the dominance of the researcher, recognizing that work is incomplete without readers' responses. This acknowledges an environment of "performer/audience" assembled through the mechanism of the printed page. Paraphrasing Bagley and Cancienne's (2002) imaginative title, *Dancing the Data*, publication becomes "Performing the Page". It is through such an expansive and inclusive attitude, in contrast to narrower approaches to diffusion of narrative data, that possibilities open up 'to cross' (or at least ignore) the traditional boundaries between academic disciplines and liberate the means of dissemination available to us through more formal mechanisms.

An example of relational “performative” biographic production

"Thoroughly Post-Modern Mary"

[A Biographic Narrative Interview with Mary Gergen]
by Kip Jones (Jones 2004a) and Mary Gergen

I now move to an example of production of biographic data which crosses the traditional boundary between art and social science. I have particularly chosen this example of my work in order to demonstrate the use of the arts in dissemination of biographic data, whilst remaining within the confines of the published report. (Examples of my work representative of collaborations with artists themselves in the production of performances for *in situ* audiences are reported elsewhere [Jones, 2005]). I present this particular example of biography to illustrate the production of data for publication within the relational aesthetic of a collaborative effort with the subject of the biography herself. This partnership is demonstrated through the establishment and reporting of the on-going dialogue with the subject during and after the production of the biographic report itself. In this way, a relational aesthetic that embraces the socializing effect of biographic interviewing - the very realm of human interaction - and represents social exchange through the art of production generation, is described. Through relationship, “inter-human exchanges become aesthetic objects in and of themselves” (Yorke, 2004: 2); the resulting graphic (re)presentation of the biographic narrative under discussion is a direct result of participating in such a relational aesthetic. The creation produced resists the assertion of the private symbolic space, reducing inter-personal distance between the interviewer and interviewee and links this partnership with its audience, reflective of discussions within Relational Art itself.

In 2004, the editors of the online qualitative journal, *FQS* (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-eng.htm>), were creating a special issue devoted to interviews with prominent researchers in the field of qualitative research and asked me to interview the feminist, scholar and writer, Mary Gergen. I had met Mary and her husband, the social psychologist, Kenneth Gergen, on several occasions at conferences in the past and had been invited to brunch with them at their home in Wallingford, Pennsylvania on one occasion. Because of this “familiarity” with the subject of the interview, I felt that an opportunity presented itself to make use of the open-ended, unstructured interview technique that I use in my primary research, the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000; Wengraf, 2001; Rosenthal, 2004; Jones, 2004b), but test its capacity to generate story under very different conditions. By using its minimalist-passive interview method, the personal journey to “who the interviewee is today” is encouraged, rather than merely a list of accomplishments, typical of more journalistic interviews.

The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method uses an interview technique in the form of a single, initial narrative-inducing question, for example, “*Tell me the story of your life*”, to illicit an extensive, uninterrupted narration. This shift encompasses willingness on the part of the researcher to cede “control” of the interview scene to the interviewee and assume the posture of active listener/audience participant. A follow-up sub-session can then be used to ask additional questions, but based only on what the interviewee has said in the first interview and using her/his words and phrases in the same order, thus maintaining the narrator’s gestalt.

In typical usage of the method, microanalysis of the narrative of the reconstructed life follows the interview stage, using a reflective team approach to the data, facilitating the introduction of multiple voices, unsettling and creating a mix of meaning and encouraging communication and collective means of deliberation

(Gergen, 2000: 4). In brief, The “Lived Life”, or chronological chain of events as narrated, is constructed then analysed sequentially and separately. The “Told Story”, or thematic ordering of the narration, is then analysed using thematic field analysis, involving reconstructing the participants’ system of knowledge, their interpretations of their lives and their classification of experiences into thematic fields (Rosenthal, 1993: 61). Rosenthal defines the thematic field as “the sum of events or situations presented in connection with the themes that form the background or horizon against which the theme stands out as the central focus” (Rosenthal, ibidem: 64).

I mailed Mary Gergen a cassette tape, blank except for the opening life story question. Mary took up the challenge and recorded her life story on the tape (the transcript is available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-04/04-3-18b-e.htm>; the interview production is available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-04/04-3-18-e.pdf>) and returned it to me through the post. This was followed up by several email question and answer messages back and forth (also included in the transcript). One of the first things that I noticed while listening to the tape recorded response to the life story question was Mary’s use of films as metaphors for transitional moments in her life. It has been my experience with the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method that, frequently, narrators establish an overarching metaphor for their story early on in their narration. Early In Mary’s narration she states: *“I guess that I want you to remember the movie, “The Last Picture Show”. I hope that you have seen that movie ...”* (Figure 1). Two things appeared to be happening here: Mary was creating a device that she would employ throughout her story to represent specific periods in her life - the use of films as metaphors. Secondly, she is emphatic (*“I want you to remember ...”*), indicating the potentiality that this particular film forms the underlying gestalt of her life story. Following her lead, I found a short description of the film, “The Last Picture Show”, and juxtaposed it in the published text with her initial statement: In part, the description reads, *“The center of the film and the major theme (is) –should you listen to your heart or your libido ...”* (Habegger, 1999). In fact, this leitmotif continued as a question in many guises throughout the rest of Mary’s story.

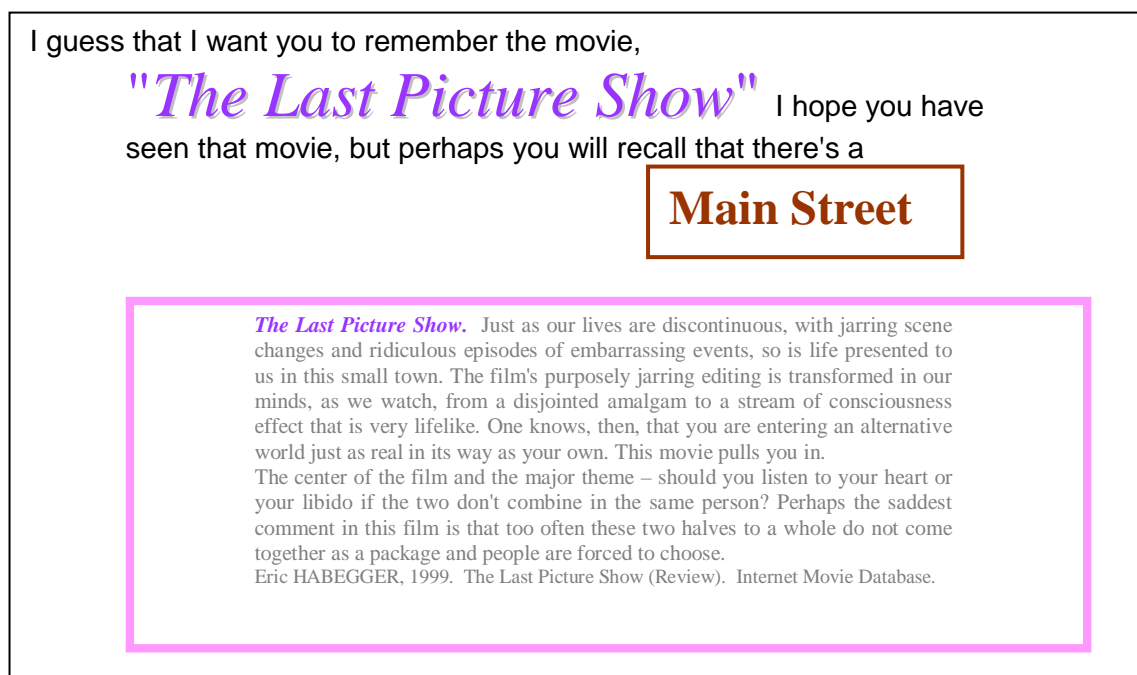


Figure 1¹

Mary referred to films frequently throughout the initial interview. Responding to my query of this in my follow-up questions by email, she states:

Movies – they were my life. I think I may have mentioned that. Ken and I agree that one of the links between us is our ways of living out movies in our life –creating sets, striking sets, acting into a scene – our theoretical ideas about emotional scenarios – seeing ourselves as our favorite actors, funny stuff like that.

Mary then ends her message with:

Its probably all related to the movies – love, affairs, sex, betrayal – and finally, because we grew up in the 50's – happy endings. (personal communicationⁱⁱ)

My second initial response to her life story was that Mary's portrayal of her life story was quite "playful" and I wanted the presentation in *FQS* to reflect that. I decided to use illustrative photographs (often from film) and graphics to enhance the storytelling and to represent one possible interpretation of the story. By using fonts and colours not usually available to us in hidebound journals, I was able to portray the journey through time and its period effects so that Mary's narration was set against a visual background of the influences and cultural sea changes (cohort and historical effects) that abound in any life story's passage through time. In fact, it appears that much of Mary's journey reflects her decision-making style: to swim with the tide or against it?

Through initial immersion in the data and follow-up discussion, and in a collaborative spirit and intuitive way, an aesthetic for the presentation began to build. For example, I chose a colour palette for each historical period that she describes, reflective of the period itself (e.g., life as a small child on the Midwestern prairie: earth tones; the war years: red and black; the sixties: hot psychedelic colours). I also took a clue from Mary's narration where she described a particular writing style that she had developed (Figure 2).

I decided that, by graphically paraphrasing this kind of playful and interpretive production of text, I would be able to produce a visual metaphor for use throughout the interpretation of her life story. This visual/textual device pays tribute to Denzin's post-modern narrative collage, the shattering of the traditional narrative line, a montage or *pentimento* - like jazz, which is improvisation - creating the sense that images, sounds and understandings blend together, overlapping, forming a composite, a new creation. The images seem to shape and define one another and an emotional gestalt effect is produced. The images are seen as combined and running in swift sequence, producing a dizzily revolving collection of images around a central, or focused sequence, thus signifying the passage of time (c.f. Denzin, 2001: 29). It is documentary in style, creating an illusion that the viewer/reader has direct access to reality. Words become a means or method for evoking the character of the person and the time.

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Figure 2ⁱⁱⁱ

In most cases, the other interviews that appeared in the special issue of *FQS* could be labelled as "journalistic interviews". In fact, the editors, in introducing the special issue of *FQS* responded to the Mary Gergen interview presentation by stating:

This particular interview presentation has been referred to as another option, presenting the interview translated into a composition (interpretation) by using citations and visualizing these with photographs and an experimental layout. At first this composition could be seen as the most edited kind of text, however, one must remember that most other published interviews are new texts that have little to do with the original conversation. Probably, this is the 'duography' Kenneth Gergen was talking about in his e-mail interview, which appears in the same issue of *FQS*. (Cisneros-Puebla, Faux and Mey, 2004)

A decision was made to present the "lived life" (the chronological chain of events) and the graphic interpretation of the "told story" as well as the transcript and follow-up correspondence online in the journal in a "raw" form with the further involvement/interpretation of the reader/viewer in mind. The story was not "academically analysed" by the interviewer or reflective teams, but left open to multiple and emergent interpretations, in order that the reader/viewer becomes part of the interpretive process. Still, the production of the story became the creative output and social construction of both the storyteller and the interviewer (the performer and the first audience) and, in this case particularly, one story of many stories that could have been told by the person interviewed. Routine facts were often back-grounded by the narrator through the use of this method in favour of improvisation/spontaneity in the storytelling and the creation of meaningful life metaphors.

After the initial interview, follow-up email collaboration continued between the two of us, the results of this being incorporated into the final presentation. In this correspondence, Mary discussed her story and participation with her husband, Ken Gergen, and his input, although tertiary, makes its presence felt.

Hi Kip. I think what you have done is create a work of art, with the humble beginnings of a story. Very lovely, colorful, fun - playful, as you said. I saw myself there, felt you had interpreted the outcomes in interesting ways - and what there was seemed justified. I showed it to Ken, who also found all of these things in it - we did talk about the politics of it - who I become in the world through this. Could you somehow indicate that this is a creative outcome of what we have done together, and it is selective, or just one possible story, something that emphasizes both the relational aspect and the spontaneity of it?? It's your baby, too, Kip and I don't want to spoil the lovely artistic creation you have made. I would say, my life became the opportunity for you to work your magic of color and space and style - Cheers!!, Mary. (personal communication^{iv})

Permission^v for use of all of the photographs and artwork in the final document was obtained through email correspondence. This process resulted at times in some interesting electronic conversations as well. I was, of course, in dialogue with the editors^{vi} of *FQS*, and their input was extremely helpful. The transcript of the interview was compiled by the administrator^{vii} at our research centre who also acted as a "captured audience" for early versions of the presentation and provided helpful feedback.

Asking a person to tell us about her/his life is just a beginning. By doing this, in a less than perfect way, we are at least starting by participating in the storytelling of the person in her/his world, her/his expectations, successes, failures and dreams. By

presenting a visual interpretation of Mary Gergen's story, I was able to emphasise the "performative" nature of her storytelling and her biography in general. I believe that the Biographic Narrative Interpretive interview with Mary Gergen is a success because it foregrounds the participant and her life as she recalls it today, thus providing insight into the social construction of her "identity", but leaving enough space for the interpretation of the final audience, the reader.

Finally, responding to an early draft of this paper for *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Mary Gergen commented: "Elegant and sophisticated, a thoughtful and provocative rendition of how narrative studies can enhance social science work and provide a bridge with humanities and the arts. Impressive. I'm glad I am part of your assemblage" (personal communication)^{viii}. In the end, the final product of the Mary Gergen interview (but, as importantly, the process of creating it), certainly reflects Bourriaud's call for relational art (and, therefore, "performative" diffusion of biographic production) that is about inter-subjectivity, the encounter and the collective elaboration of meaning, reflecting the material of social exchanges within a spirit of conviviality and play.

Conclusions

Refusing to be limited by more traditional means of diffusion of biographic data also means that a modicum of humility and a state of "not knowing" is necessary in any potential collaborations with others from far a field. Looking beyond the safety of our own discipline, with its protocols, procedures and ring-fenced areas of expertise to what Frances Rapport calls "the edgelands" (Rapport, Wainwright and Elwyn, 2004), can be both daunting and liberating. The trick is, I believe, to remember that art and science are both "fuelled by creativity" (Taylor, 2001) and that the potential for inventiveness resides within all of us. After all is said, creativity is that uncanny ability to work within rule boundaries while, at the same time, changing them.

"This will be uncomfortable. Novelty is always uncomfortable. We shall need to alter academic habits and develop sensibilities appropriate to a methodological decentring" (Law and Urry, 2004: 404). I am, nonetheless, encouraged by my initial attempts to respond to Hollway and Jefferson's call for the representation of "human subjects of research" with "the complexity we currently associate with literature and works of art more generally" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 156). I have attempted here to revisit the arts and humanities in search of lenses through which the intricacies of social science data might be disseminated. What needs to be recognized and acknowledged, then, is that, beyond the text of biographic material and its promise of personal revelation, the territory of a physical intimacy that is shared by the interviewee and the interviewer remains situated. Recoiling from this shared intimacy negates the potential for the cathartic, audience-like experience and the possibilities of a truly reflective knowing of another being. Embracing—a good word for it, too—the physicality of the interview relationship unlocks possibilities for deeper understanding and further opening up of possibilities for "performative" presentations of biographic data, whether through publication, on stage, in film or by some other means that we haven't even dreamt of yet.

Finally, within the reader/audience's interaction with our "performance", a third opportunity arises for meaningful communication through images conjured up in a kind of theatrical, magical dialogue. Emphasis is on shared cultural and societal resources or the "habitus—our second nature, the mass of conventions, beliefs and

attitudes which each member of a society shares with every other member” (Scheff, 1997: 219). It is in these moments of shared, extended reality that we connect to what it means to be human and, therefore, reached a higher plane of understanding and a blurring of individual differences. It may be, in fact, as geographer, Susan J. Smith says: “Aesthetics as much as economics guides the interpretation of social life” (Smith, 1997: 502).

Endnotes

- i Permission to reproduce *Figure 1* obtained from the editors of *Forum: Qualitative Social Research (FQS)*.
- ii The complete interview transcript and follow-up email messages were published in *FQS* and are available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-04/04-3-18b-e.htm>
- iii Permission to reproduce *Figure 2* obtained from the editors of *FQS*.
- iv Email correspondence with Mary Gergen quoted with her permission.
- v Photographic reproductions in the *FQS* article, courtesy of the following: *Rolfe Alumni Group*; *True Catholic Organization*; *Tom Tierney*; *The Roy Rogers-Dale Evans Museum, Branson, MO*; *The Missouri Heritage Project, 1999 for educational use*; *Chuck Adams*; *Marilyn Monroe, LLC (CMG Worldwide)*; *B. Krist for Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation*; *Swarthmore College*; *Matson Navigation Company, Inc.*; *University of Pennsylvania*; *Vidisco Ltd.*; *Peter Kurth*; *Stephen Mifud (Malta)* – <http://www.marz-kreations.com/home.html>; *Diva Las Vegas*; *Tickety-boo Ltd*; *Paul Ivester*.
- vi Katja Mruck, Günter Mey, editors and founders of *FQS*
- vii Sirron Norris-Hall
- viii Email correspondence with Mary Gergen quoted with her permission.

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Author-Supplied Abstracts & Keywords

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Representation across languages: biographical sociology meets translation and interpretation studies

Biographical approaches are increasingly being used with people who speak and write a range of languages. Even when an account is originally spoken, the final version usually ends up written in the language used by the majority of the population. Researchers have shown that adopting a language that is not the one an account was given in may change how someone is perceived. Yet little has been written by sociologists using biographical approaches about the implications of moving accounts across languages. Researchers within translation and interpretation studies are increasingly tackling issues of representation across languages and developing concepts that can usefully be applied in biographical research. They question the assumption that accounts can be unproblematically transferred across languages and argue for strategies and concepts that 'foreignise' texts and challenge the baseline of the target, usually for these writers, English language. However, these concepts bring issues of their own. In this article I examine these developments and give an example from my own cross language research that show that these concepts can begin to open up debates about meaning and representation.

Keywords:

cross language research; biography; narrative; translation; interpretation

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Biographies in talk: A narrative-discursive research approach

This paper demonstrates the contribution a synthetic narrative-discursive approach can make to understanding biographical work within a research interview. Our focus is on biographical work as part of the ongoing, interactive process through which identities are taken up. This is of particular interest for people who, for example, are entering a new career and can be seen as 'novices' in the sense that they are constructing and claiming a new identity. Following a discussion of the theoretical and methodological background in narrative, discourse analytic and discursive work in social psychology (e.g. Bruner, 1990; Edley, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998), the paper presents an analysis of biographical talk from an interview study with postgraduate Art and Design students. Our interest is in their identity work, including biographical work, as novices in their fields. The analysis illustrates the approach and the key analytic concepts of, first, shared discursive resources, such as interpretative repertoires (e.g. Edley, 2001) and canonical narratives (e.g. Bruner, 1991), and, secondly, troubled identities (e.g. Wetherell and

Edley, 1998; Taylor, 2005a) . It shows how speakers' biographical accounts are shaped and constrained by the meanings which prevail within the larger society. For our participants, these include established understandings of the nature and origins of an artistic or creative identity, and the biographical trajectory associated with it. The particular focus of our approach is on how, in a speaker's reflexive work to construct a biographical narrative, the versions produced in previous tellings become a constraint and a source of continuity.

Keywords:

narrative-discursive, discursive resources, identity trouble, creative identities, novice identities

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Theorising narratives of exile and belonging : the importance of Biography and Ethno-mimesis in 'understanding' asylum

The article explores the use and importance of taking a biographical approach to conducting participatory action research (PAR) with asylum seekers and refugees in order to: better understand lived experiences of exile and belonging; contribute to the important field of Biographical Sociology; provide a safe space for stories to be told; and in turn for these stories to feed in to policy and praxis.

The authors' combined work on the asylum-migration nexus, the politics of representation and participatory action research methodology (PAR) as ethno-mimesis argues for the use of biography to contribute to cultural politics at the level of theory, experience and praxis, and is constitutive of critical theory in praxis. PAR research undertaken with Bosnian refugees in the East Midlands and Afghan refugees in London will be the focus around which our analysis develops.

We develop a case for theory building based upon lived experience using biographical materials, both narrative and visual, as critical theory in practice towards a vision of social justice that challenges the dominant knowledge/power axis embedded in current governance and media policy relating to forced migration.

Keywords:

biography, ethno-mimesis, PAR, asylum, social justice, cultural politics, politics of representation, media

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Narrating the Digital Turn: data deluge, technomethodology, and other likely tales

In this paper it is argued that digital technologies will have a transformative effect in the social sciences in general and in the fast developing field of narrative studies in particular. It is argued that the integrative and interdisciplinary nature of narrative

approaches are further enhanced by the development of digital technologies and that the collection of digital data will also drive theoretical and methodological developments in narrative studies. Biographical Sociology will also need to take account of lives lived in, and transformed by, the digital domain. How these technologies may influence data collection methods, how they might influence thinking about what constitutes data, and what effects this might have on the remodeling of theoretical approaches are all pressing questions for the development of a Twenty First Century narratology. As Marshall McLuhan once put it '*First we shape our tools and then our tools shape us*'.

Keywords:

digital turn, data deluge, technomethodology, narrative, storytelling

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A Biographic Researcher in Pursuit of an Aesthetic:

The use of arts-based (re)presentations in "performative" dissemination of life stories

The (re)presentation of biographic narrative research benefits greatly from embracing the art of its craft. This requires a renewed interest in an aesthetic of storytelling. Where do we find an aesthetic in which to base our new "performative" social science? The 20th Century was not kind to 18th Century notions of what truth and beauty mean. The terms need to be re-examined from a local, quotidian vantage point, with concepts such as 'aesthetic judgment' located within community. Social Constructionism asks us to participate in alterior systems of belief and value. The principles of Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics offer one possible set of convictions for further exploration. Relational Art is located in human interactions and their social contexts. Central to it are inter-subjectivity, being-together, the encounter and the collective elaboration of meaning, based in models of sociability, meetings, events, collaborations, games, festivals and places of conviviality. Bourriaud believes that Art is made of the same material as social exchanges. If social exchanges are the same as Art, how can we portray them? One place to start is in our (re)presentations of narrative stories, through publications, presentations and performances. Arts-based (re)presentation in knowledge diffusion in the post-modern era is explored as one theoretical grounding for thinking across epistemologies and supporting inter-disciplinary efforts. An example from my own published narrative biography work is described, adding credence to the concept of the research report/presentation as a 'dynamic vehicle', pointing to ways in which biographic sociology can benefit from work outside sociology and, in turn, identifying areas of possible collaboration with the narrator in producing 'performances' within published texts themselves.

Keywords:

biographic narrative research; arts-based (re)presentation; relational aesthetics; social constructionism; "performative" social science

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