



Digital Words of Wisdom? Digital Storytelling with Older People – Ponderings of a (fairly) new PhD Research Candidate and a (growing) older Digital Storytelling practitioner

Tricia Jenkins¹

Digitales, London and Middlesex University, London

Abstract

Digital Storytelling is over 20 years old, its roots in citizen activism, its techniques evolving from radical theatre and media arts and its primary driver an unwavering commitment to enabling people to find and share their stories, as well as to the valuing of each and every one of those stories. This paper builds upon a presentation given at “Digital Storytelling in a Time of Crisis”, an international Digital Storytelling conference that took place in Athens in May 2014. It sets out to map some of the territory around Digital Storytelling and older people – ageing and the old (specifically the *costs* associated with a growing older population) being the ‘crises’ in question. The paper discusses questions concerning the benefits of Digital Storytelling with older people – both active older people and those who have dependency needs associated with ageing, such as dementia. The questions focus on the measurement of value, both in terms of participation in Digital Storytelling as a process and in the stories themselves. The paper is also self-reflective, as the writer embarks upon the formal route of PhD research, questioning the assumed benefits of the practice that has dominated the last eight years of over thirty years as a teacher and avid promoter of participatory media as a means to

¹Tricia Jenkins is a co Founder-Director of Digitales Ltd. in London (www.digi-tales.org.uk) and a PhD research student at Middlesex University (www.mdx.ac.uk), London. Digitales is a not-for-profit research and Digital Storytelling company hosted by the Department of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London (www.gold.ac.uk). Her research interests are in Digital Storytelling as a specific practice, the benefits of participation for older people and the value of digital stories as qualitative narrative data. DigiTales is a key partner in the EU funded Silver Stories transnational project, <http://silverstories.ipleiria.pt/?lang=en>. She can be contacted at tricia@digi-tales.org.uk or t.jenkins@mdx.ac.uk.

effect positive change. The paper is in 6 parts: (1) The Ageing Agenda; (2) Why Am I Doing This?; (3) What are the Benefits of Digital Storytelling with Older People? (4) The Pros and Cons of Digital Storytelling Projects (5) Extending Creative Practice and Silver Stories – Two Transnational Projects Linking Digital Storytelling and Older people – a sustainable model? (6) Ever Decreasing (Story) Circles.

Funding

PhD Studentship awarded by Middlesex University, London for undertaking the investigation entitled ‘What are the Benefits of Digital Storytelling with Older People? 2013 – 2016.

Extending Creative Practice was funded by the European Education and Culture Lifelong Learning Programme GRUNDTVIG 2010(Agreement GRU-10-P-LP-181-BN-UK).
www.extendingcreativepractice.eu

Silver Stories is funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation and is led by the University of Brighton. <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/silver-stories>

Digital Words of Wisdom? *Digital Storytelling with Older People – Ponderings of a (fairly) new PhD Research Candidate and a (growing) older Digital Storytelling practitioner.*

Tricia Jenkins

Digitales, London and Middlesex University, London

The Ageing Agenda

This article is based upon a paper delivered at the international Digital Storytelling conference ‘Digital Storytelling in a Time of Crisis’ in May 2014, in Athens, Greece (<http://dst.ntlab.gr>). If you enter the words ‘ageing’ and ‘crisis’ in Google, you are bombarded with references in the media to the doomed state in which we find ourselves with this ever-expanding demographic that encompasses ‘older people’, the elderly and the ‘oldest old’. Western industrialised nations are ‘woefully underprepared’ for a ‘demographic time bomb’ that could ignite “a succession of miserable crises’ in the near future. So says the recent *Ready for Ageing?* Report from the UK House of Lords. Statistics confirm that over ten million people in Britain are over sixty-five years old and rapid increase in life expectancy will probably see those figures double within the next twenty years or so: that will mean that a third of the population is ‘older’, with a far higher proportion of people living into old age or very old age.

Looking at it a different way, surely the global ageing of population should be seen as a success story for humanity. Is it not the case that longer life expectancy is generally regarded as a key indicator of an improved health status of a population?

The crisis, though, is nothing to do with ageing – it is about paying for ageing. “In the developed world, population ageing tends to be regarded as a crisis because older people are frequently viewed as a costly burden. The common myth is that they are frail and non-productive.” (World Health Organisation, 2000). Added to the notion of ‘burdensome’ old age are the narratives of blame – what Lynne Segal calls ‘generational warfare’ or ‘boomer bashing’ in her wonderfully insightful book *Out of Time. The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing* (Segal 2013 : 39, 45). She cites a number of poignant media attacks on the sixty-plus generation in the UK from 2006 onwards:

On my birthday in 2010, I logged on to the Internet only to find the BBC homepage adorned with a denunciation of ‘my generation’. Headline space had been given over this time to Neil Boorman, the author of “It’s All Their Fault”,

indicting those of us who have reached our sixties for... well for what, exactly? We have been blamed for every social and moral blight, from housing and fiscal crises to environmental pollution, while also being held responsible for all the insecurities, moral laxities and any other imputed fears, anxieties or vices of the generation we reared (Segal 2013, p. 47)

Segal also points out that dominant narratives associated with ageing focus on 'resilience' stories in which we postpone the ageing process, or they swoop upon the state that is our greatest fear, in which we face cognitive deterioration. Dementia is clearly a growing concern, as greater numbers of people become afflicted because they are living longer, however it is not a foregone conclusion that we will *all* become cognitively impaired! It is not the *only* growing old story.

Whilst traditional gerontology focuses largely on the physical states associated with the chronology of ageing, humanist gerontologists have, over the last twenty years or so, shifted the focus to exploring *what it feels like* to grow old. At the Seventh International Symposium on Cultural Gerontology and the Inaugural Conference of the European Network in Ageing Studies (ENAS, <http://www.agingstudies.eu>) Jan Baars speaks of ageing as being rooted in time, "yet time is usually reduced to chronometric time; a mere measurement that has been emptied of the narratives that were traditionally part of it" (Baars 2012 :143). He emphasises the importance of collaboration between the sciences and humanities in relation to Ageing Studies in order to challenge the dominance of chronometric time in the generation of studies and statistics, which conceals the impact of social, political and cultural macro-narratives on the destinies of ageing people. Moreover, "it is argued that micro-narratives remain important for empirical studies of ageing as they articulate human experiences, but that narratives also play an increasingly important role in systemic worlds and life worlds" (Baars 2012: 143).

So, returning to the 'crisis' narratives: are spending, service and policy decisions relating to ageing drawing significantly on the input and insight of those who have first-hand experience of what it is like to be old? In this digital age, in which not only are public services and information increasingly shifting to digital platforms, but so are the fora in which to 'have your say', are the micro-narratives of older people able to penetrate the plethora of personal narratives available through social media platforms and online campaigns? Can Digital Storytelling as a process 'give voice' to older people – and which older people? More importantly, if digital micro-narratives are produced by older people, are they being listened to – by the right people, by enough people? Does Digital Storytelling as a movement provide a prominent enough platform for personal, individual stories to gather the momentum required to become the stories relating to the group 'older people' – the stories that will influence or change policy, practices and perceptions? As Hartley (2013: 71) discusses, how do we address 'the problem of how to "scale up"'

from self-expression to communication... and the question of the role that stories play in constituting “we”-communities (or “demes”).

Why am I Doing This?

As a teacher and a practitioner of participatory media for some thirty years, over the last ten years, Digital Storytelling has re-kindled some of my early personal drivers for working in this field. My politics were strongly influenced by the Marxist theorists shaping the curriculum of my film and theatre studies minor course at university in the late 1970s. Using semiotic analysis to challenge the Leavisite traditionalist approaches favoured by my English Literature major course, my dissertation focused on working class novelists of the 1930s – I wanted to write about the form and content of the stories of those who were not in the great canon – the stories of ‘ordinary people’.

Media Studies as a subject to be taught in schools and colleges as well as in Higher Education, was emerging at the beginning of the 1980s and I was part of the second year’s intake of London University Institute of Education’s Post Graduate Certificate in Education training to teach English and Media Studies in secondary schools and further education². I felt part of a ‘movement’, excited by the potential and energy of this new field to effect positive change. When you set out on a career in which you are constantly defending your field against traditionalists trashing your trade (how often have we heard ‘mickey mouse’ as a prefix to descriptions of media studies over the last thirty years?), you identify with your peers in being part of a ‘struggle’. This, at the beginning of one’s working life journey, is an irresistible narrative ... or at least it was for me.

Digital Storytelling is a means of self-expression brought about through a process of deep reflection, shared with others in the Story Circle. It is an international movement of practitioners from across the globe, using facilitated workshops to ‘enable ordinary people to tell their own stories using digital means of production, editing, archiving and distribution (Hartley 2013; Lambert 2006; Meadows et al 2006; Hartley & McWilliam 2009; Lundby 2009). As the movement has gained the attention of academics, it is growing a body of scholars who are focusing on Digital Storytelling, as pointed out in Hartley’s article in Volume 6 of this journal (Hartley 2013: 72) Hartley cites Thumim 2012; Chouliaraki 2012; Couldry et al. in addition to earlier works referenced above, including his own jointly edited volume *Story Circle* (Hartley and McWilliam, 2009), which was arguably the first publication to collect together accounts of Digital Storytelling from around the world and even in the Acknowledgments thanks the publisher ‘for taking on a topic that is not yet fully embedded in educational courseware’.

² In England, Further Education refers to colleges which teach and train people from the age of sixteen upwards. They differ from Higher Education, as their curriculum includes both academic and vocational subjects, and ranges from basic education to, in some institutions, an alternative place in which to study for a degree or higher-level vocational qualification.

Now there have been five biennial international conferences in Wales, Australia Norway and Turkey, with the sixth planned in 2015 to take place in the United States. In addition, there was the International Conference on Digital Storytelling in Valencia, Spain in 2012 and the Digital Storytelling in a Time of Crisis Conference, at which an earlier version of this paper was presented in May of this year (2014) in Athens. It was at this conference that Joe Lambert, founder of the Centre for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley California, referred to us (practitioners *and* academics) – informally, over coffee one morning – as an international ‘tribe’ of activists.

It is this feeling of being part of a movement that has re-awakened those original – if naive and romantic at the time – drivers of my early career days. There had been some years in between in which my youthful idealism almost had imperceptibly shifted into cynicism, my energetic engagement with ‘the struggle’ slid into the weariness of just trying to make a living and dealing with the burdensome bureaucracies of the institutions in which I worked. The first time I engaged with Digital Storytelling back in 2005, I remembered why I had started.

Now I see my Digital Storytelling colleagues at conferences; we collaborate across borders on international projects; we connect, share and ask for help on our Facebook DS Working Group³, which is accessible by invitation and describes its membership thus:

We are practitioners, researchers, companies and social workers using Digital Storytelling as a way to reflect on our work, stimulate communication and generate social change.

In the Introduction to the Fourth Edition of *Digital Storytelling, Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, Joe Lambert describes Digital Storytelling as “having evolved to become an international movement of deeply committed folks working with story in virtually every field of human endeavour” (Lambert 2013:1)

As I approached my mid-fifties, being part of this movement enabled me to reignite a passion for work. At this stage in life, it feels good to belong to something that seems to have such a profound impact on those who facilitate and upon those who participate. I gave up a well-paid but deeply unsatisfying job to turn all of my attention to developing and delivering Digital Storytelling projects.

At the same time, in 2013, I was awarded a PhD Studentship at Middlesex University, London. This has provided the opportunity to immerse myself fully in Digital Storytelling

³ The DS Working Group Facebook group is an invitation only group of 460 members at the time of writing.

as the focus of my investigation. It has also led me to having to ask some difficult questions of the very practice that feeds my soul.

What are the Benefits of Digital Storytelling with Older People?

This is the title of my research. Why the focus on older people? Partly it was through involvement with the project 'Extending Creative Practice' (www.extendingcreativepractice.eu) which won an award for good practice and piloted using Digital Storytelling with older people as a means of addressing digital exclusion. It led to a subsequent project, which is currently running at the time of writing, called 'Silver Stories' (<http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/silver-stories>)⁴ which seeks to upscale the uptake of Digital Storytelling as part of the professional toolkit of those who are training to work in health and social care environments with older people.



Extending Creative Practice Participant Liisa Helenius describes her experience of learning how to make digital stories at Silver Stories 'Transfer of Innovation' workshop at Laurea, University of Applied Science, Espoo, Finland.



Watch Liisa's story : Sauna Sisters

Unsurprisingly, the ageing agenda provides funded opportunities for research and projects that address the needs of older people. However, the reason for proposing the research is not simply opportunistic. I have a particular interest in the uses of Digital Storytelling with people who are living with dementia, and their carers. That is a nod to my late father, who lived with dementia for some years, but lost his 'voice' rapidly when he was absorbed into a nursing home environment, where listening – at all, to anyone – was not on top of the priority list. I had a gut feeling that digital stories could be tremendously powerful in terms of influencing care provision, providing opportunities for carers to share their stories with others as they progress through their journeys with loved ones, or with patients or residents in care homes. The groundbreaking work of Pip Hardy and Tony Sumner in Patient Voices' (www.patientvoices.org.uk) "Dangling Conversations" project presents evidence of significant benefit to both the storytellers themselves, all of whom had early stage dementia, as well as in their use as learning materials for nurses. There are many pockets of evidence of the benefits of Digital Storytelling, which the research process is helping me to uncover (thanks to the community of Digital Storytelling practitioners who so generously share their work), such as the Colorado Culture Change Coalition/Center for Digital Storytelling's project 'From The Heart' (2012, http://www.coculturechange.org/#!/stories_of_change/c1kwk) in which ten staff members from six nursing homes each produced stories that showed personal and professional transformations. The staff members then helped one resident from each of their homes tell their own story about a moment of change.

Perhaps the other reason for focusing on ageing is to do with the life-stage at which I find myself. Losing both parents between 2007 and 2009 re-positioned me in the family tree. Perhaps it was when I noticed that, when completing surveys, in the commonly used age groupings I seem to have only one more to go! An observation by a speaker at an event in London to present 'Festival In A Box', one of the Arts and Humanities Research Council

(AHRC) Cultural Value projects,⁵ half jokingly accounted for the increasing prevalence of interest in the arts and older people, and the emergence of Age Studies as a field, as having something to do with the age of community arts activists and practitioners who set up organisations twenty or thirty years ago!



*Still from 'Half a Bar Ahead, Half a Semitone Sharp', a digital story made on May 16th, 2011
International Day of Story Sharing, a tribute to my late mother. Available at
<http://vimeo.com/111100668>.*

Segal (2013: 62) points to the proliferation of memoir writing and other forms of autobiography in both scholarly and popular domains during recent decades. In delving into writings about old age, I find that there is another question, which challenges the original research proposition with its stated focus on older people:

In the context of memoirs and certain fictions that mirror them, old age no longer appears as simply a type of foreign country separated off from the rest of a life. Rather, in such texts the experiences of the old unfold and collapse back, like concertinas, into narratives that are rarely reducible to age itself, but reveal multiple threads that can remain visible from the struggles, choices, contingencies of the younger life once lived, their psychic traces enduring to the end.

Barbara Frey Waxman, literary critic, in her study of autobiographies of ageing people *To Live in the Center of the Moment* (1997:2), hoped that combining literary criticism with the reading of autobiographies might be able to “transform our fear of ageing and our wariness of elders” (cited in Segal 2013: 62).

⁵ www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project. Festival in a Box event, Senate House, London, May 1st, 2014.

As a practitioner, responding to funding opportunities leads one into a set of languages that enable funders to identify what problem they want addressed – people, or beneficiaries, are often categorized into ‘target groups’, defined by their status as marginalized, or disadvantaged, or ‘at risk’. Many EU-funded programmes have used 65+ as the point in the age timeline from which ‘old age’ begins. We struggled with definitions during the pilot project Extending Creative Practice.⁶

As the ageing population grows there has been some debate amongst those researching and studying the older population. Rather than using the term ‘older people’ it may be more useful to think of old age as having several life phases with different qualities. Proposals have been made, for example, to distinguish between the ‘young old the old, and the oldest old (e.g., Neugarten, 1974; Suzman, Willis, & Manton, 1992) and between the Third Age and Fourth Age (e.g. Baltes, 1997; Laslett, 1991). Third Age refers to the life period of active retirement, which follows the first age of childhood and formal education and the second age of working life, and which precedes the fourth age of dependence. (Rooke and Slater, 2012:8)

None of these definitions is satisfactory. They are too ... linear. The thing about undertaking academic research, which is both positive and challenging, is that the mindset shifts from responding to a pre-determined agenda that is set by, say, funders or commissioners of projects to present a solution, to a state of critique and questioning, to defining one’s terms from a different perspective. You shift from answering questions to posing them. Relentlessly.

The Pros and Cons of Digital Storytelling Projects

Many Digital Storytelling interventions state that their aim is to ‘give voice’ to those whose voices are not normally heard. I have certainly made that argument myself when applying for funding to run Digital Storytelling projects with excluded or marginalized communities. Tracey Dreher’s article “A Partial Promise of Voice” (2012) highlights the limits of Digital Storytelling “and of the social inclusion category of voice” (p.157). She goes on to argue for greater ‘political listening’ in media research policy and practice if the promise of voice is to be even partially fulfilled. This echoes Couldry’s work (2010) on the value of voice, in which he argues that there are many opportunities for voice, but not necessarily for listening. ‘A system that provides formal voice for its citizens but fails so markedly to listen, exhibits a crisis of political voice’. In discussing Digital Storytelling in development contexts, Jo Tacchi (2009:170) also questions the audibility of voice. “Such voicing may be encouraged but nevertheless not be heard. Participatory approaches may themselves turn out to constitute ‘top-down’ participation, where

participation constitutes ‘insiders’ learning about what ‘outsiders’ want to hear, or simply an exercise in administrative task-sharing or the necessary rhetoric to do with funding”.

Matthews and Sunderland (2013) point out that there is little or no written evidence or academic research into the use of digital stories themselves. They also highlight the lack of attention that has been given to ‘the parallel acts of listening – across various and many contexts – that needs to occur if we are to hear, value and respond to people’s self-documented lives and experiences’. They view digital stories as, potentially, ‘large-scale multimedia qualitative datasets’ which could make stories, if they were gathered together, ‘listenable to policy makers’ (p101).

Listening can often be taken for granted. Indeed, ‘Listen Deeply, Tell Stories’ is the mantra of the Center for Digital Storytelling. Yet, as O’Donnell, Lloyd and Dreher (2009) point out, in the analysis of story-based practices within the field of cultural studies, listening is under-discussed in comparison to questions of voice.

There is no shortage of observations, such as Rossiter and Garcia’s (2010:,49) “participant produced digital stories constitute a rich and relatively unexplored source of qualitative data”. There are many pockets of evidence in the form of project evaluations and reports and localized examples of impact, such as the remarkable effect of the work of Patient Voices referenced earlier in relation to Digital Storytelling with people with dementia. In a recent project, Patient Voices used digital stories they had produced with mental health service users to influence the trustees of Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust, who were addressing poor patient and staff satisfaction survey scores in relation to dignity, respect and communication. Two years into the project, digital stories are now shown at the beginning of every Board meeting and in staff recruitment and selection interviews ‘to remind staff and Board *why* they are there’ (Hardy, 2013).⁷.

In a project entitled ‘Piloting Digital Storytelling and Action Research as an Approach to Stimulate Pro-environmental Advocacy and Behaviour Change’, funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), undertaken by the University of Bath, the over 50’s age-group was identified as ‘an untapped source of potential pro-environmental advocates who might influence other people towards increased environmental action’ (Collier, Cotterill et al. 2010). The project looked not only to Digital Storytelling as a means to ‘give voice’ to older people in a new and engaging way, but also to draw upon the wisdom of their experience that could be captured in their digital stories, that could ‘build momentum for pro-environmental change within audience groups across communities and age groups’. The sample of older

⁷ Hardy, P and Sumner, T, presentation as part of the Global Mental Health Exhibition, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, October 8th 2013.

advocates was small – eight people – however the key findings demonstrated that digital stories were found by all audiences to be ‘authentic and accessible, and almost universally agreeable’. ‘The stories represented the views and activities of the older generation in a different and palatable way to younger audiences and in a valid, affirming way to those of a similar age’ (Collier, Cotterill et al. 2010: p.3).

This exemplifies the potential for using Digital Storytelling to represent older people and to influence change across generations. It looks to the stories of the participants to influence the now and the future – not simply to reminisce about the past, which seems to be the focus of so much participatory arts activity with older people. It counters what Jan Baars regards as an ”overall loss of respect for ageing, to the point that understanding and ‘dealing with’ ageing people has become a process focused on the decline of potential and the advance of disease, rather than the accumulation of wisdom and the creation of new skills”⁸.

However, it also begs some crucial questions: could a project like this project be up-scaled to capture more ‘digital wisdom’ and create a pool of older online advocates through Digital Storytelling? What could be the long-term impact of such a project, on the participants themselves, on perceptions of older people across generations, on the influence of the stories to promote behaviour change – the original purpose of the project? The evaluation stated that the pilot project ‘showed promising potential, but their effectiveness to build lasting change could not be measured’. The tendency for project evaluations to stop at the same time as the project is an ongoing problem in terms of really capturing evidence of benefit. The requirement to measure results, outcomes and outputs against a project’s original aims and objectives can miss benefits or impact that may not come to light until a significant period of time after the project has completed.

A further issue with projects is that they are often one-off interventions funded by external agencies, whether they are governmental, independent trusts and foundations, private companies (corporate funding) or European, confining any research (whether this is action research, or simply project evaluation) to the specific requirements of the funding stream. If a project is about the digital inclusion of older people, for example, the outputs and outcomes, the key performance indicators may well have been designed within the project application by the applicant and approved as measures of success by the funder.

An oft-used, but true statement ‘the plural of anecdote is not data’, (widely attributed to Frank Kotsonis) underpins the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Cultural

⁸ Baars, J. (2012) *Ageing and the Art of Living*. Quotation from back cover summary of book’s contents. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, USA.

Value Project (see www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project) which has been working towards “establishing a framework that will advance the way in which we talk about the value of cultural engagement and the methods by which we evaluate that value” (ibid). In the arts across the board, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence of the value of engagement with culture. The same can be said for Digital Storytelling. Our problem is that, as with so much of our work, we move from project to project, funder to funder and the associated evidence that is produced through evaluation is linked usually to the purposes for which the intervention has been funded, whether that is digital inclusion, or reflective learning, or the training of healthcare professionals for example. The Cultural Value project has been undertaken to provide a broader approach to generating evidence of value, drawing upon a wide range of academic disciplines including humanities, cognitive sciences, social sciences, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.⁹

My research intends, similarly, to develop a framework specifically to measure the benefits of Digital Storytelling with older people – both the process of participation, the longer-term impact on individual participants and the value of the stories themselves. The intention of the research is to draw upon a range of disciplines across the Humanities and Social Sciences, such as the work of Katherine Riessman, in order not only to analyse the content of an individual’s story, but to consider also *how it is put together*. Why is a story told in a particular way? How much of the ‘voice’ is revealed through the choice of image, of sound, of nuance? Are there recognisable Digital Storytelling generic conventions that influence the kind of story a person tells, the style of voice they use, that are a result of particular styles of facilitation for example? The research will also be drawing on aspects of gerontology, in particular humanistic gerontology and the value it places on story.

Extending Creative Practice and Silver Stories – Two Transnational Projects linking Digital Storytelling and older people – a sustainable model?

Extending Creative Practice was a project funded by the European Education and Culture Lifelong Learning Programme GRUNDTVIG 2010. It was led by DigiTales Ltd., which used Digital Storytelling with older people with the primary aim of increasing their ICT skills to promote digital inclusion. The project partners were Laurea University of Applied Science in Finland, Mitra, an NGO in Slovenia and the Progress Foundation in Romania. In Finland, Digital Storytelling was undertaken with older people who attended day centres; in Romania the project took place in libraries; in Slovenia, the project took place within a community setting and involved some intergenerational work, as did the Finnish project. In the UK, as lead partner, DigiTales provided the ‘train the trainer’ workshops. The evaluation, which was undertaken by the Centre for Urban and

⁹ Interim report now available: Crossick, G. & Kaszynska, P. (2014) ‘Under Construction: Towards a framework for cultural value, *Cultural Trends*, 23:2, 120-131.

Community Research, Goldsmiths, University of London, revealed that not only had key objectives been met, but that a further emerging theme that was revealed was a reassessment of the place of older people in society through their Digital Storytelling. Rooke and Slater (2012, p.21) state “while it is important to acknowledge older people’s pasts and personal histories, the risk of a focus on reminiscence is that it can symbolically locate older people in the past, as ‘living history’”. They go on to observe that the Digital Storytelling methodology enables us to challenge attitudes:

the power of combining approaches to storytelling which draw on resources from the past (such as memories, photographs, stories, films) together with digital technology has provided opportunities for older people (in this project) to re-think how they may wish to structure and communicate their narratives now and into the future (p21).

The project – and these findings – raises some crucial questions. How ‘digitally included’, then’ are the participants in this project after one experience of making a digital story? If, as Couldry points out, “having an online narrative presence itself becomes expected of well-functioning citizens” (2010: p382), does participating in a Digital Storytelling workshop do the trick? Moreover, is that enough to enable an older person to develop an individual ‘digital voice’, a ‘digital identity’? What constitutes digital identity? How does Digital Storytelling empower older people to engage with the ‘now’, comment on current events, lend their wisdom to today’s debates by participating in a digital arena through the medium of story?

One answer to this lies in whether it is possible to sustain access to Digital Storytelling *more than once* within the confines of a funded project. Impressively, in Romania, most libraries now have a Digital Storytelling facilitator. Within *Extending Creative Practice* 12 initial trainers were trained. Having adapted the model to use within library settings, there are now some 400 Digital Storytelling facilitators across the country. Providing professionals in settings with resources, such as libraries, with Digital Storytelling facilitation skills potentially provides regular opportunities to participate in Digital Storytelling workshops and develop their creative practices. It would be insightful to undertake a longitudinal study in Romania to track whether people do indeed return to become regular story makers and whether they extend their story sharing networks. Following a Silver Stories partner meeting and workshop in Constanta, Romania in May 2014, we do know that a number of participants from the Extending Creative Practice project have continued to meet; one person has since published two novels online; another has published a book of haikus. In Espoo, Finland, we also know that one participant allegedly became ‘addicted’ to Digital Storytelling! But these accounts are, of course, anecdotal.

As well as leading me personally to want to undertake deeper research into working with Digital Storytelling and older people, the success of the project also prompted the original partnership to regroup and develop a follow-up project that would ripple beyond the immediate participating partners.

Silver Stories (<http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/silver-stories>) added to the partnership the University of Brighton in the UK (leading the project) which has not only a strong arts and media school, but also provides qualifications in nursing and health care; Digital Storylab, a small Digital Storytelling organisation in Denmark; Trapezio, a small Portuguese organization with expertise in Digital Storytelling and social media based in Lisbon; and the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL), a public institution of higher education in central Portugal which offers a wide range of programmes in training health and social care professionals and a Health Research Unit that is committed to interdisciplinary scientific research studies and activities.



Still from Digital Story “And Now I’m Going to the Nursing Home” by Patricia Brasil, created at Silver Stories workshop in June 2014 facilitated by Trapezio, Portugal at Instituto Politécnico de Leiria.

The aims of Silver Stories are to extend Digital Storytelling with older people to two new countries (Denmark and Portugal) and to work with those who are undergoing training (students), or who are professionals, or volunteers specialising in the care of older people, whether they are active and in community settings, or in residential care homes. The project includes research into existing examples of the use of Digital Storytelling in higher education or vocational education, the design of quality assured creditable modules in Digital Storytelling and the piloting of those modules through 40 workshops across the partnership. The ambition is to integrate Digital Storytelling into the training

of professionals working with older people, either to add to their professional toolkit for use when working in the field, or as a reflective learning tool during their training period.

The project started in October 2013 and concludes in September 2015, by which time we will have tested the potential for inclusion of Digital Storytelling into the training of existing staff and those who are about to enter the health and caring professions. The project will conclude with an international conference hosted by IPL in Portugal to disseminate the results and showcase the digital stories produced at the end of May 2015, as well as an exhibition at the University of Brighton in August 2015.

The planned legacy for the project addresses some of the issues of sustainability mentioned earlier, especially one-off interventions and lack of longitudinal research potential, by integrating Digital Storytelling within Higher Education institutions who are training professionals to work with older people. All three Higher Education institutions in the partnership in the UK, in Finland and in Portugal have greater capacity to develop longer-term research using Digital Storytelling than smaller organisations which do not have the infrastructure to deliver beyond contract-based projects (however the partnership between Digital Storytelling specialist organisations and larger Higher Education institutions do seem to be mutually beneficial, judging by the progress of Silver Stories to date).

As Digital Storytelling in Romania in libraries has become a well-spread service that is offered as part of the libraries' main provision, Silver Stories provides the potential through embedding Digital Storytelling within the training provision offered by Higher Education institutions for similar extended activity with older people to take place beyond the lifespan of the project across the partnership and beyond.

Ever Decreasing (Story) Circles?

When I first began on my PhD journey, it was a difficult switch. As I started out, re-visiting literary and narrative theories that I had not really touched for thirty years or so and finding some academic writings near impenetrable, I had the distinct feeling of going in ever decreasing circles. I have had to learn to 'read' again. Switching from fundraising or consultant mode continues to challenge. At the beginning, I felt that it was so much more purposeful to identify a funding opportunity, read the guidelines, find the partners, make a case for support identifying a need and proving that my proposal would provide the outcomes required in the language of the funder's agenda. Post submission, a period of a few or many months would pass before either a red light rejection or a green flag to go ahead and deliver the Digital Storytelling workshops I love to do. Why change that? The Extending Creative Practice project demonstrated that certainly in Romania, facilitated Digital Storytelling workshops that are now on offer as part of mainstream library provision across the whole country, can be a sustainable model. However, we

need to ask some questions about provision and purpose. If Digital Storytelling is always available, is there enough focus, enough drive to result in meaningful experiences and powerful stories that can be used to effect change – at whatever level, small-scale or for the greater good?

As my research progresses, the act of questioning, challenging and constructing new ways of assessing the benefits of participating in Digital Storytelling for individuals, in trying to find a way in which to gather stories and identify their value more broadly and in contributing to the development of the Digital Storytelling movement is something that feels timely and worthwhile. How do we get beyond the paradox of the movement and the method's capacity to 'give voice', whilst being so often dependent upon one-off funded interventions *because* the practice recognises the centrality of facilitation, rather than the DIY approach of current mainstream social media practices? Notions such as 'giving voice' in the absence of any systematised ways of amplifying those voices is clearly problematic. Hartley calls the movement to action:

Given that digital media and social networks have already made what constitutes 'our' deme more risky, complex, open, uncertain and multivalent than ever before, it is urgent for progressive innovations like the Digital Storytelling movement to catch up (2013:103).

Hartley is right – digital stories, as we define them, do not tend to go viral and sometimes they remain offline, depending on the wishes of the storytellers. However, we need to assess the impact on individuals, both storytellers and the audiences with whom they share their stories in individual and community settings in a way that reaches beyond the anecdotal.

As a practitioner, I remain firmly convinced that Digital Storytelling is an important social movement and that, perhaps, large-scale change is not where its ambitions should lie. As a researcher, I am looking for avenues of inquiry and theoretical approaches that will enable me to reach beyond conviction and anecdote.

And slowly, and hesitantly, I am finding my academic voice.

References

- Authority of the House of Lords, Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change, Report of Session 2012-13. *Ready for Ageing?* Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldselect/ldpublic/140/140.pdf>. (Accessed April 5, 2014).
- Ayres, S (2013) *Can Online Innovations Enhance Social Care?* Available at <http://www.nominettrust.org.uk/knowledge-centre/articles/can-online->

- innovations-enhance-social-care (Accessed 30 October 2014)
- Baars, J. (2012) *Ageing and the Art of Living*.
- Baars, J. (2012) 'Critical Turns of Ageing, Narrative and Time', *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 7(2): pp.143-165
- Baars, J. (1991) 'The Challenge of Critical Gerontology: The Problem of Social Constitution'. *Journal of Ageing Studies*, (5), pp.219-243
- Barrie, K, 2008. *Digital Storytelling in health and Social Care*, Interim Report, Joint Improvement Team, www.jitscotland.org.uk (Accessed 4 March 2013, no longer available).
- Brushwood Rose, C. and Low, B., (2014) 'Exploring the 'craftedness' of multimedia narratives: from creation to interpretation'. *Visual Studies* (29) pp.30-39
- Charon, R. (2005) 'Narrative medicine: attention, representation, affiliation', *Narrative*, 13(3) pp261-70
- Cobley, P. (2014) *Narrative*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge
- Cobley, P. and Haeffner, N. (2011) 'Narrative supplements' in R. Page and B. Thomas (eds) *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Crossick, G. & Kaszynska, P. (2014) 'Under Construction: Towards a framework for cultural value, *Cultural Trends*, 23:2, 120-131
- Couldry, N. (2008). 'Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of Digital Storytelling'. *New Media & Society* 2008 10:373
- Couldry, N. (2010). *Why Voice Matters*. London: Sage.
- Damodoran L., W. Olphert, S. Phipps. (2013). 'Keeping Silver Surfers on the Crest of a Wave – Older People's CT learning and support needs'. *Working with Older People: Community Care Policy and Practice*; 17 (1), pp. 32-6.
- Davenport, B. (2012). Holding the Moment of Holding. Digital Storytelling and Dementia Report.
- David A. and Weinshenker D. (2012). 'Digital Storytelling and Authoring Identity', *Constructing the Self in the Digital World*, (Ching, C. and Foley, B, eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp 47-75
- Dreyer, T. (2012)"A Partial Promise of Voice", *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy Quarterly Journal of Media Research and Resources*, vol.142, pp157-166
- Dowmunt, T. Dunford, M. & van Hemert, N. (2007) *Inclusion Through Media*. Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Gearty, M. and Williams, M. (2013). Piloting Digital Storytelling and Action Research as an Approach to Stimulate Pro-Environmental Advocacy and Behaviour Change. Available at:
http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Frandd.defra.gov.uk%2FDocument.aspx%3FDocument%3D11187_DefraEVO522DigitalStorytellers_FinalReport_ForClearance_February2013.pdf&ei=5QISVI_OIq6M7Aa1j4CIBQ&usg=AFQjCNG5p3ZVTIjc2ozTAKp5IL

[flwpNjrQ&sig2=c0E5pnBDDnDsAoJzsxdGFA&bvm=bv.78597519.d.ZGU](http://www.cultural-science.org/journal/flwpNjrQ&sig2=c0E5pnBDDnDsAoJzsxdGFA&bvm=bv.78597519.d.ZGU).

(Accessed 30 October 2014).

- Gubrium, A. (2009). Digital Storytelling: An Emergent Method for Health Promotion Research and Practice, in *Health Promotion Practice*, 10 (2): pp 186-191.
- Hartley, J and McWilliam, K. (2009) *Story Circle*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009
- Hartley, J. (2013) 'A Trojan Horse in the Citadel of Stories?' *Journal of Cultural Science*, Vol.6, No 1
- Herman, D. (ed), *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*, Stanford: CSLI
- Herman, D. Jahn, M. and Ryan, M. (2008). *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*.
- Klaebe, H., M. Foth, J. Burgess, and M. Bilandzic. (2007). Digital Storytelling and History Lines: Community Engagement in a Master Planned Development, in *Proceedings 13th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia*, Brisbane. Available at <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/8985/1/8985.pdf> (Accessed 20 July 2014).
- Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. 4th Edition: Routledge.
- Lambert, J. (2013). *Seven Stages: Story and the Human Experience*. Digital Diner Press.
- Lambert, Joe (2000). 'Has Digital Storytelling Succeeded as a Movement? Some Thoughts' *dStoryNews* Issue 2
- Lundby, K. 2008. Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories – Self Representations in new media. Lang, New York.
- Matthews, N. and Sunderland, N. (2013). 'Digital Life Story Narratives as Data for Policy Makers and Practitioners: Thinking Through Methodologies for Large-scale Multimedia Qualitative Datasets', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 57:1, pp97-114
- Meadows, D. (2003) 'Digital Storytelling: Research based practice in New Media'. *Visual Studies*, 2,p189-193.
- Milligan, C. and Passey, D. (2011). *Ageing and the Use of the Internet – Current Engagement and Future Need*. Available at <http://www.nominettrust.org.uk/knowledge-centre/articles/ageing-and-use-internet> (Accessed March 4 2014).
- O'Donnell, P. Lloyd, J. and Dreher T.(2009). 'Listening, pathbuilding and continuations: A research agenda for the analysis of listening'. *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 23(4), pp423-439
- Poletti, A. (2011). Coaxing an intimate public: Life narrative in Digital Storytelling. *Continuum*, 25 (1), 73-83
- Riessman, C.(1993) *Narrative Analysis*. SAGE Publications.
- Rooke A and Slater I, (2012). *Extending Creative Practice*. Centre for Urban and Community Research. Goldsmiths University of London. Available at http://www.extendingcreativepractice.eu/?page_id=110. (Accessed January 2014).
- Rossiter, M. and Garcia, P. (2010), 'Digital Storytelling: A new player on the narrative field'. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 126, 37-48.

- Schegloff, E. (1997) 'Narrative analysis' thirty years later, *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7 (1–4): 97–106.
- Segal, L. (2013) *Out of Time. The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing*. Verso.
- Smith, B. and Sparkes, A. C. (2005) 'Men, sport, spinal cord injury and narratives of hope', *Social Science & Medicine*, 61: 1095–1105.
- Stenhouse, R., Tait J., Hardy, P. and Sumner, T (2013). 'Dangling Conversations: reflections on the process of creating digital stories during a workshop with people with early stage dementia'. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 20: 134-141, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2850.2012.01900.x
- Tacchi, J (2009): Finding a Voice: Digital Storytelling as Participatory Development in Southeast Asia, in *Story Circle*, Hartley, J. and McWilliam, K. (eds), pp.167-175.
- Zunshine, L. (2008) *Strange Concepts and the Stories They Make Possible: Cognition, Culture, Narrative*, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.