Dialogue and Dissent in Stories of Community

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the opening of a new phase in our project called *True Stories* is discussed. We are investigating the uses community groups might make of hypermedia technology in telling their own story. We describe where we have got to so far, and some of the theoretical background, and try to locate what we are doing in relation to the participatory design tradition. As we now move towards working with groups whose stories may be contested, contentious, or painful, we need some further development of our theoretical and methodological base. Using ideas and examples from several authors, we open up a discussion about how plurality, dissent and moral space can be preserved. Following Landow in observing that hypertext provides a natural medium for collage, we note that community stories have features which make collage an appropriate representational form for them. We finally suggest a model of dialogue derived from Freire as an appropriate practical vehicle for running projects attempting to articulate stories of community.

Keywords

Story, True Stories, community, dialogue, dissent, plurality, hypermedia, hypertext, collage.

TRUE STORIES

Background and theory

In our project *True Stories* [2,3,4,5], we are investigating what community groups can do and what they do in fact do when using hypermedia technology to tell their own story. We want to see if and how technology can be used for making narratives which mobilize or concentrate a community's understanding and expression of itself. At least on the face of it, current hypermedia technology can support this latter kind of activity powerfully, allowing the construction and sharing of rich 'little narratives' and the maintenance of

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multiple perspectives within a narrative. Such narratives will give a community a resource from which to project future actions. Because the narratives and inventions can be stored on the computer, the community gains a cumulative repository which it can use to develop larger imaginative practices.

In this work, we have used as a theoretical resource Ricoeur's model for imaginative communities. Ricoeur's analysis of the development of imaginative practices shows imagination as the foundation of social action. He suggests a path leading from a theory of the imagination through to practical action in society. Starting from a theory of metaphor, he shows the imagination schematizing and redescribing the world. The redescriptions start as fictions, but fictions which take us beyond earlier descriptions into new understandings and new possibilities [19: 124]. Stories (as well as other kinds of fiction) can move a community towards action in the real world because, as they are told and re-told, they have the capacity to reflect, unite, and mobilize a community.

Ricoeur shows stories to be the basis for possible *projects.* He sketches a progression from schematization of projects to the articulation of possible actions. He uses Schutz's analysis [20] of social relations to show how it is possible to move beyond individuals' plans of action to intersubjective action.

In the sense of story we want to pursue - where story has a mobilizing potential in a community - a story ought to be *true*, or at least true enough to gain sufficient assent in the community to be credible and to provide a basis for realistic action. This fits with Ricoeur's observation that:

> "The domain of action is from an ontological perspective that of changing things and from an epistemological perspective that of verisimilitude, in the sense of what is plausible and probable." [18: 199]

In the *True Stories* project, to inform our research method, we have also drawn on Certeau's analysis of the practice of everyday life [7] for guidance on how spaces or resources are owned and used. Certeau uses the terms *strategy* and *tactics* to distinguish between the respective situations and possibili-

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ties of system owners and users. A group with sufficient will and power to establish and hold a base for its operations can produce a strategy for maintaining its boundary, rationalizing its operations, and reproducing itself. Users, on the other hand, operating in a space which is not their own, can only produce tactics - isolated and opportunistic actions conducted *ad hoc* against the background of a dominant strategy, to take whatever advantage there is to be had. This useful distinction gives us insight both into relations between the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless, and into the logic of users' practice.

In the *True Stories* project, we can see that the use of a new technology (by people who did not invent it) should be studied as a 'production', an emergent process of making and doing. Our users are likely to feel themselves to be in someone else's world when working with the technology, and so approach it 'tactically'. Nevertheless, perhaps in the process of telling of their own story members of a community group could create for themselves a sense of ownership of their work and their situation, and so eventually proceed to 'strategic' engagement with the technology.

So, we suppose that hypermedia technology can be a useful vehicle on which to put together a story, arguing that it will support diverse forms of expression and multiple perspectives. But what can we say about the form the technology should take? We already know that this technology is complex, and that to introduce it into a community may trigger tactical responses and counter-moves. Such counter-moves would include not only resistance to the technology, but falling under its spell to the extent that the story was forgotten or made subordinate to the programs. In general, the approach should be to encourage the emergence of the community's story, so that the community can establish a strategic space for itself, and then bring in the technology as non-invasively as possible, in the hope that the community may be able to absorb it rather than react to it. Such computer-based narratives as may then emerge will be the product of community members, not of a software designer, and they are built alongside and in parallel with the community's action in the world. In this way imagination and reality transform one another.

Some of the practical implications of this position, as we saw it, were as follows: that we should take the computer equipment into the territory of the community group; that the equipment be kept relatively cheap and simple so that the chances of its continued use could be maximized; that we should operate as advisors rather than directors in our relations with the user group; and that we should provide suggestions or examples of stories, including stories on the computer, not definitions or rules which would constrain users in their story making.

First Findings
Our main study so far, conducted on the basis of the above analysis, has been with the St Paul's Carnival Association. This is a group which has for several years put on an annual Carnival in the St Paul's area of Bristol. The Carnival reflects and celebrates Afro-Caribbean culture in Bristol, but is of wide general appeal in the city. What we did in *True Stories* was help members of the Association put together their story of the Carnival, on a PC installed at their office, and eventually write it on to a CD which was then shown at the Carnival itself. We used an ordinary PC with a photo drive and Photoshop and Director software. We made no significant use of video material. The story that came out was to some extent historical, tracing the history of the Carnival partly through its successive programmes, but was more importantly thematic, covering music, food, stalls, processions and other typical Carnival subjects. The various parts of the story were by and large created by different individuals working mainly separately (whenever they had time to sit at the computer and make something). The parts of the story were not subjected to editing or stylistic control except by the individual authors, though the whole story was organized within an overriding metaphor of an island, proposed by one of the group and adopted by all. The top-level interface presented to users was a picture of an island, on which were located numerous icons through which access was gained to the material assembled under the different themes. A story with multiple authors and with many ways to navigate through the material was in fact thus made, as had been hoped; it made use of pictures and sound as well as text, was extensible, and exhibited an overall coherence despite (or maybe because of) the plurality of voices in it.

There is space here to mention a few of our observations from involvement in this exercise. Most importantly, a story was made, and made substantially by the group themselves, who were rightly pleased with their efforts. The facilitation role was sometimes problematic: the participants were reluctant to do anything before the equipment arrived; it was hard to get a core group established to carry the work forward; and sometimes an element of direction was expected from the facilitators when we really only wanted to supply assistance. Projects like this take time, we learned. Participants did come forward, and though they never worked very concertedly as a group, they gradually assumed collective control of their story. Nor was the story subjected to much concerted effort to *design* it, or give it a clear overall shape or direction; rather it was *discovered* as it emerged, in a fairly piecemeal fashion, with coherence being found more in the reading of it than in the writing.

PCs are by no means an ideal tool for collective working, either in the set up of the hardware or in the orientation of the software interface. In this project, much of the working together was done first off the machine and then transferred to it. The central metaphor of the island, for instance, was originally drawn on the wall of the office; the drawing was successively annotated and became the basis for subsequent work on the computer. The drawing is still there, and is now used to explain the project to enquiring visitors. It did prove

difficult for people to master the software: partly because we were using two main packages, - which are both complex but not integrated with one another; and partly because the metaphors built into the software conflict with the metaphors users bring with them out of their ordinary lives, including images of computers. People who persevered established a *modus vivendi* with the system - routines and tricks that worked, that they sometimes picked up from one another, and from which, when feeling adventurous, they could extend into new areas. Their use, in short, was tactical in Certeau's sense: they made forays into the system and withdrew, building their skill sporadically and opportunistically. This process is only partly visible to an observer. Given the fluidity and complexity of the technology, we are of the opinion that the general mode of use will remain tactical for most users, without ever becoming truly 'strategic' (this is certainly true of our own mastery of the software, for instance...). This has significant implications for project setup and the conduct of participative work.

One of our aims in this work, to make it sustainable after we had left, has not been fully achieved. The people who worked on the project are now dispersed, and the computer the work was done on has been removed. The CD has been much used, and is still being used, to illustrate the story of the Carnival and to show what was done in the project; but to some extent, it would be true to say that the production of the CD froze the story at that point. Achieving continuity in these stories therefore remains problematic.

True Stories and participatory design
The participatory design movement and tradition [6,11] form an important unspoken background to our work in *True Stories*. Important perspectives opened up by that movement form a taken-for-granted starting point for this work. For instance, the ideas that computer systems should be built to support or enhance, and not degrade, users' skills, that users should participate in design work alongside designers, that design is always political, that systems must be incorporated within and relate to a working practice, and that design itself is a working practice - all these are guiding principles for us, especially if we can substitute 'research' for 'design'.

However, *True Stories* is not exactly participatory design in the original sense. Participatory design is a broadening of the design process, but still holds to design as the central activity in building a system. Participatory design is about building tools which will be effective for users in the workplace, so assumes an organizational context and a required functionality in the tools. When we make the story of a community on a computer, we are not generally in a workplace or in an organization so much as in society at large, and what we build is not so much a tool as an expression or a mirror. Nor is design necessarily central in this story making; rather, as we have argued above and in our previous paper [4], design is one type of activity and one kind of episode within a more general production better characterized as discovery. We

do say - following Ricoeur - that a story can be the basis for a project; but the story, we would say, is not told *in order* to move on to the project - it merely makes the project possible.

Interestingly, some of the methods and approaches used in participatory design - we are thinking particularly of Future Workshops (especially the Fantasy Phase), and of the uses of metaphor, collage, and play [11, *passim*, but particularly Ch 8] - resonate strongly with the process of story making as we observed it in our case study. These approaches are presented in PD as necessary distancing and contextualizing in design work. We would see them more fundamentally as imaginative engagement at the heart of cooperative endeavour.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL IMAGINATION
New Work
We are on the verge of moving into a new collaboration with an organization in Belfast called *An Crann/ The Tree*, who have collected many stories of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland over the past thirty years. We will be working with expatriates from Northern Ireland currently resident in Great Britain, trying to produce with them hypermedia versions of their stories. We are aware that in this work, stories may emerge which are in conflict with one another, which contest one another's claims to truth.

In our studies so far, we have been working with groups who, by and large, have had common interests and a common view of their history and prospects. The different voices have articulated different aspects or areas of the community's story, but have not generally either questioned the community's boundaries or coherence, nor put forward alternative and incompatible versions of its past or future.

This new work may therefore be a challenge for us. It is likely that conflicting stories of 'the same events' will be told. We are preparing theoretical and methodological approaches which we hope will make it possible to sustain an exercise in which multiple voices are raised which may be in opposition to one another, but which may nevertheless be able to hear and honour one another.

Our first step is to re-examine definitions of community and raise some questions concerning the social imagination.

No way back to community?
Attempts to invoke something like a traditional notion of community based on locality as an antidote to modernity's dislocations are often met with suspicion as romanticizing or retrogressive. Thus Harvey, while recognizing that one response to the travails of time-space compression characteristic of the modern era has been:

> '... to find an intermediate niche for political and intellectual life which spurns grand narrative but which does cultivate the possibility of limited action. This is the progressive angle to postmodernism which emphasizes community and locality, place and regional

resistances, social movements, respect for otherness, and the like.' [12: 351]

- is not sanguine about the prospects:

> 'At its best it produces trenchant images of possible other worlds, and even begins to shape the actual world. But it is hard to stop the slide into parochialism, myopia, and self-referentiality in the face of the universalizing force of capital accumulation. At worst, it brings us back to narrow and sectarian politics in which respect for others gets mutilated in the fires of competition between the fragments.' [12: 351]

Harvey cites as an example the attempt of German and Austrian architects earlier this century to combat the technical functionalism of modern architecture by creating community spaces - plazas and squares - in the city. Nazi supporters subsequently massed in these same squares to express their allegiance to their community and their country and their virulent opposition to Jews and to internationalism [12: 276-277].

In a similar vein, Bauman has reservations about the invocation of community by the communitarian writers. Although the retreat from universal moral values to a 'community first' position appears attractive, it seems unlikely that, in modern times, communities bound by local moral consensus can exist long in reality, or can avoid curtailing individuals' moral discretion. For Bauman, the 'situatedness' of members in such communities, far from being given or natural, is socially produced, controversial, and fragile [1: 44-46].

The general problem blocking a return to community based on locality is that communities can no longer be truly local in a mass culture, and are liable to be destabilized or derailed by currents from the surrounding society. In modern society, communities are bound to be more permeable, more interpenetrative, more voluntaristic and less stable than their predecessors.

And yet, the idea of community cannot simply be discarded as outmoded. The life of a human being is a life with others. In my growing up and in my everyday life as an adult, I am formed in my relation to others, as they are formed in their relation to me. If these relations diminish in intensity or reliability, my development and capacity as a person (for myself and others) will falter. We are all in some community or communities, in that we are involved, all the time, in living and working with others against a background of common understandings, expectations, and purposes. A community in this loose sense will be the ongoing accomplishment of people acting, interacting, making joint cause, disagreeing, misunderstanding, compromising, and improvising. When Bauman comments, against the idea of community, that:

> "Whenever one descends from the relatively secure realm of concepts to the description of any concrete objects the concepts are supposed to stand for - one finds merely a fluid collection of men and women

acting at cross-purposes, fraught with inner controversy and conspicuously short of the means to arbitrate between conflicting ethical propositions." [1: 44]

- we can accept his stricture and still recognize a description of a community of people practically and fallibly engaged.

The social imagination

In his examination of the more general imaginative practices that constitute the social imagination, Ricoeur singles out two opposed but interlocking practices for further analysis: *ideology* and *utopia*. The prime function of ideology is to integrate, recollect and reaffirm a society, and to legitimate a social order, though in its pathological form it can bring distortion, dissimulation and social stagnation. Utopia, on the other hand, has a subversive, challenging function, which can bring about social renewal but might raise impossible hopes or create schism. Ideology confirms the past, and utopia opens towards the future; the two are bound together in an irreducible tension and become pathological if separated.

In Ricoeur's account, is there anything to distinguish good from bad imagination or to prevent a community's slide into the parochialism and sectarianism Harvey has warned us of?

In his analysis of the 'poetics of imagining', Kearney concludes that the poetical imagination, properly understood and used, is also an ethical imagination. He acknowledges a danger that the imagination runs the risk of reduction to mere *simulation*, where there is no escape from an endless mirroring of images, no reference to the world beyond the images, and no possibility of distinguishing true from false or real from imaginary. Nevertheless, Kearney asserts that imagination, by virtue of what he calls its *utopian*, *testimonial*, and *empathic* aspects, can be ethical: it can address the world (instead of simulating it), and it can do justice to the other (instead of forging the other). The utopian horizon of the social imagination, by allowing a free variation of possible worlds which is open to everyone, accommodates diversity, and remains provisional. The testimonial function (close to Ricoeur's 'ideology') recalls exemplary figures and narratives from cultural history and can also commemorate neglected victims and repressions. Empathy, as direct receptivity to the other, is predicated on our moral capacity to recognize and respect the otherness of the other person. These ethical functions of the imagination are intimately linked to the poetic activity of *imagining otherwise*. For Kearney, not only is the true poetic imagination inevitably ethical, but ethics is inevitably imaginative. As he puts it finally:

> 'The poetic commitment to *story-telling* may well prove indispensable to the ethical commitment of *history-making*. Ethics without poetics leads to the censuring of the imagination; poetics without ethics leads to dangerous play.' [14: 228]

However, despite Kearney's hopes, might not utopian or ideological imaginative practice become pathological? Might

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not the other still be forged (and empathy thereby be cancelled) or poetics fall into simulation or 'dangerous play'? Could it not be that communities are too unstable, fragmented, or tenuous to produce unifying narratives, or that narratives are too poisonous or fantastic to motivate just action? Can there be any normative criterion or general practice which ensures that communities' imaginations are ethical?

Plurality and dissent in social space

For an answer to these questions, we could perhaps start by extending Vattimo's discussion of 'the beautiful' and make 'plurality lived explicitly' a criterion for distinguishing a good community from a bad one. A community's model of itself must open explicitly upon the multiplicity of models, and must not identify one single community with the whole of humanity:

> "Aesthetic utopia comes about only through its articulation as *heterotopia*. Our experience of the beautiful in the recognition of models that make world and community is restricted to the moment when these worlds and communities present themselves explicitly as plural. ... In arguing that universality as understood by Kant is realized for us only in the form of multiplicity, we can legitimately take plurality lived explicitly as such as a normative criterion ... namely, that a community's experience of recognition in a model must explicitly recall - that is, open upon - the multiplicity of models."

[22: 69-70]

Alternatively, or additionally, we could rely with Lyotard on the very multiplicity of narratives to block the emergence and dominance of bad ones. Lyotard insists that all 'language games' - including those in science - are heteromorphous, and subject to heterogeneous sets of pragmatic rules. He rejects Habermas's claim that humanity will find emancipation through regularization of discourse, and asserts that the true aim of dialogue is not consensus, but rather dissent, or dissensus [17: 65-66]. He welcomes the multiplication of little narratives and the demise of grand narratives under post-modernity and sees justice as being achieved not by any grand system of rules, but by preserving each person's power to deploy their narrative imagination. Left to themselves, the little narratives of different social groups and movements will resist absorption into any grand history, and will refer beyond themselves not to any more inclusive narrative, but to other little narratives:

> "If the networks of uncertain and ephemeral narratives are capable of eroding the massive apparatus of institutionalized narrative, it is in multiplying the somewhat lateral skirmishes or disputes such as one finds in recent decades in the women's movement, prisoners' rights campaign, anti-draft revolt, prostitute rights groups or farmer and student rebellions. Here one

invents little histories/stories, even segments of stories, one listens to them, puts them into play at the right moment. Why *little* stories? Because they are short, and consequently are not extracts from a grand history and resist absorption into it." [16: 34] (Quoted and translated by Kearney [14: 199-200])

Bauman's analysis of social space will give us further help in filling out the possibilities and characteristics of the social imagination. He regards socially produced space as combining *cognitive*, *aesthetic*, and *moral* elements:

> "If the cognitive space is constructed intellectually, by acquisition and distribution of knowledge, aesthetic space is plotted affectively, by the attention guided by curiosity and the search for experiential intensity, while moral space is 'constructed' through an uneven distribution of felt/assumed responsibility." [1: 146]

The construction and maintenance of social space is essentially a cognitive process, involving planning, design, allocation, regulation, and the categorization and typification of others. By contrast, moral space is not calculated nor regulated, but involves us in direct relations with specific others - non-typified others who we live *for* rather than merely *with*. The moral space is populated by those we care for. The aesthetic space is a space of spectacle in which amusement value overrides other considerations. The other here is an object of curiosity or a source of entertainment.

These three kinds of space overlap, but may have different relative saliencies in different communities. So long as people are born and live and die with people who care for them, they continue to inhabit a moral space charged with specific mutual responsibilities, even if this becomes residual or attenuated for them. To the extent that they work, fulfil roles, exchange knowledge and move about within orderly cities and institutions, they are in a cognitive space, rationally laid out and organized. As consumers and spectators, they inhabit an aesthetic space filled with shows and commodities. One may see the shift from small traditional communities to an urban industrial culture in terms of an expansion of cognitive space at the expense of moral space. In the movement to post-industrial society, cognitive space comes to be eclipsed by aesthetic space. (We may discern the clue to halting or reversing this tendency in Vattimo's argument.)

It seems plausible to suggest that these three kinds of social space need to be kept in reasonable balance in an adequately functioning community. Empathy, belonging most clearly in moral space, is threatened by over-expansion of cognitive and especially of aesthetic space. If aesthetic space is kept too cramped, the free play of the imagination will be blocked, and censure and stultification may be the result. Cognitive space provides the order, continuity and stability around which narratives and projects can form; confining it too far will limit the schematizing, projective, and testimonial potentials of the imagination. Unchecked reduction or

expansion of one kind of social space may lead to degeneration from imaginative deficits such as sectarianism (loss of empathy), simulation (loss of reference) or stultification (loss of play).

LIFE STORIES: BELONGING AND CONCEALING

We sketch in this section two examples (from the literature) of story telling in traumatic or conflictual situations. What we draw from these examples is that, in order for stories to open towards one another, and for the tellers to begin to belong to each other (so that 'plurality lived explicitly' becomes a possibility, and dissent may flourish), it may be necessary to sacrifice forms of coherence traditionally expected of stories, and to hide - perhaps only temporarily - some parts of the tellers' own biographies.

Extreme situations of personal or social trauma or conflict highlight more sharply the plurality, complexity and contradiction that exist between and within a community's stories. Skultans' account of Latvian illness narratives demonstrates that tellers make use of the resources or topics from the textual communities and conventions available to them to shape their stories according to need -rather than having these structural and thematic resources imposed upon them, or being shaped by them. She points out that there is no fixed correspondence between the conventions or topics used and the experience of the teller or the resulting narrative. She could detect different narrative trends in the life stories available to her. Some narrators used traditional narrative conventions to support the direction of their narrative, while others deconstructed social or literary conventions in order to recount or demonstrate a lack of purpose or a sense of alienation within their narrative. There was no particular correlation between experience and narrative form and content. Similar experiences could elicit quite different narratives [21: xii-xiii, 17-34].

> "There is in all narratives an exchange between the purely personal and shared social, literary and linguistic worlds. Social metaphors and literary structures are brought in to support people in extreme situations and to preserve their humanity. Conversely, metaphors and literary paradigms take on new meaning when seen working in such adverse circumstances. ... There is a stock of social and literary commonalities known to all, but not everyone draws upon them or does so in the same way. Although membership of a textual community is important, people's use of paradigms also has a personal dimension which arises from their experience and intentions. Many people with eventful lives have little to say about them. There is no perfect match between lives lived and lives remembered." [21: xii]

Skultans describes many little stories, each with differing relationships to what are seen as shared or larger stories.

While acknowledging that story can be a means of achieving coherence, and of imposing a design on one's life, she suggests that the use of conventions and shared social themes is principally a means of reaching out to other narratives, and that coherence is more about belonging than achieving a convincing chronology or a neat narrative:

> "Although the raw data of past experience may create the need for narrativization, its allegiances are not towards the past but towards other narratives. It seeks for connections and where it succeeds in making these we as listeners and readers recognize coherence. Coherence is thus about belonging." [21: xiii]

Narrators are attempting to achieve coherence through the connections in their narratives to other narratives through shared themes or conventions and textual or interpretive communities. As well as questioning traditional notions about the structure and coherence in narratives, Skultans goes further to suggest that a story's unity may be achieved less through the provision of a clear account than through the effective deployment of *metaphor* (here recalling Ricoeur):

> "By definition narratives contain sequences of contiguous events. However, pure contiguity does not produce meaning. In the case of Latvian narratives it produces sequences of arbitrary events which in fact break down customary structures of meaning. The interweaving of metaphor contributes a meaning beyond chance juxtaposition to what would otherwise not be perceived. Metaphor enables some people to reconcile themselves to the past; its absence prevents others from coming to terms with it. Metaphor attributes an underlying unity to life and in doing so binds together past and present. Narratives without metaphor fail to reconcile past and present and the past is perceived as interfering with the present, as a continued source of grievance. Metaphor endows narratives and lives with a significance which transcends historical time." [21: 31]

For a second example, we refer to Juhasz's experience as a member of a group of women ('WAVE') producing a video about being care providers for people with AIDS. Like Skultans, she emphasizes the importance of belonging and the relation or situation of the individual's story to a group or community story. However, for Juhasz, as much as this is an experience of shared story, it is also one of dissimulation or selectivity with respect to what one can present of oneself both within a narrative and in the process of producing a narrative:

> "The women in WAVE found that our commitment to AIDS and to the production of an educational video

provided a locus around which we decided to form community despite our other differences. We decided that the idea of 'care provider' bound us together, and then it did, for a while, and within a particular context. We did not reveal all of ourselves, the parts that were not those of the care provider; we had other communities where we could be gay, or religious, or sexually explicit.

...

Yet placing oneself into the 'AIDS community', or even a community of care providers, does not necessarily establish that one knows precisely what that 'means', or that there could ever be one meaning to this term or position. Even so, the moment when a maker or viewer agrees to identify himself or herself as the person specified by the title or content of an alternative work, and others who have done the same, is a moment of self- and community identification."

[13: 233]

Juhasz suggests that, for the women involved, it was necessary and worthwhile to shut down some aspects of their lives in order to achieve the project of their temporary community. It was only after their collaboration had ended that she discovered the extent to which some of the participants had concealed themselves. Her experience also suggests that wishing to present an alternative story to the mainstream does not guarantee plurality. An AIDS video may have been at odds with mainstream social conventions but even within this setting certain narratives were closed down in the attempt to produce a single coherent narrative line.

Both Skultans and Juhasz highlight the difficulties of achieving plurality in stories or other representations of community. To tell one's story in a contested or painful domain is troubling. It is not a question of fitting a story to a pre-existing schema, but a search for ways of telling which at the same time reflect the teller's experience and reach across towards possible hearers whose experiences are different.

Certeau's analysis is again brought to mind. It appears that, in this difficult territory, people need to be able to tell their stories 'tactically', proceeding experimentally, tentatively, and by allusion. To put this in a more positive light, following Lyotard, we can suggest that justice will only be served - in all arenas - if the search for the one true story is explicitly abandoned.

COMMUNITY STORY AS COLLAGE
We have argued previously that hypermedia technology, because it can accommodate multiple texts (with different authors), and multiple paths through a collection of texts, offers a possible platform on which members of a community can tell all or many of their stories in an accessible and extensible manner. While we recognize the many difficulties

and uncertainties inherent in such an approach, not least concerning the coherence, organization and ownership or stories produced in this way, the foregoing exploration of the social imagination and of some examples of stories told in contentious or painful domains has reinforced our sense that this technology can be used to support 'plurality lived explicitly' and a web of little stories in a manner unavailable with earlier technologies.

Don sees multimedia computing as a medium well equipped to represent informal stories, such as family stories. She considers the linear notion of a *good* story to be limiting and incongruous to the looser experience of informal oral storytelling which changes according to context and can accommodate interruption and respond to other stories. She created a hypermedia text, *We Make Memories*, based on the oral storytelling in four generations of her family, and found the multilinear structures more appropriate to these rich interwoven stories [9].

"Interactive video also facilitates representing the idiosyncratic contents, structures and rhythms commonly heard in casual, personal storytelling. Often, these personal anecdotes do not follow conventional narrative strategies for "good stories" in which the teller sets the scene, increases the pace of the action, leads to a conflict, and culminates in resolution with a straight forward, easy-to-identify, beginning, middle and end. Limiting ourselves to these criteria as the makings of a good story closes us off to a range of experience not easily represented by conventional linear media." [9]

Don also suggests that the multilinear story opens up possibilities for interpretation, since the same narrative, text or image can be read in different contexts as part of different paths [8]. What Don is describing as presenting new looser frameworks for story are part of the basic structures allowed for by hypermedia. The most fundamental of these is the structure of nodes and links. The fact that hypertext allows the connection of nodes to one another which can lead to the creation of multilinear texts through which many paths can be followed. There is a potential for polyvocality and participatory writing using these forms which is further enhanced by being able to incorporate a variety of media. The storyteller is not restricted to the word but can use many forms and connect different media together. A final aspect of hypermedia enabling looser story forms is the manipulability of digital media. Texts and images can be changed and combined.

Hypermedia frees up the storyteller by enabling new means of making connections and of using shared conventions and themes and removes the necessity of achieving unity of time, space and action. Many stories can be connected to many others and both contradictory and complementary stories can be connected. The same story can be told using different media conventions as well as different textual ones.

What Don says about informal, personal stories can be applied generally, and perhaps still more strongly, to those stories which it is painful or dangerous to tell. Skultans noted the importance of metaphorical accounts as a way of expressing and transcending experiences too difficult to tell straight. It could be argued further from this that looser, more fluid story structures, stories which are incomplete and elusive, but pregnant with possibilities, will be able to carry the experience of a divided or troubled community better than more traditional forms.

Describing hypertext as digital *collage* (or possibly *montage*), Landow notes the following defining characteristics of digital words and images:

> "(1) virtuality, (2) fluidity, (3) adaptability, (4) openness (or existing without borders), (5) processability, (6) infinite duplicability, (7) capacity for being moved about rapidly, and (8) networkability." [15: 166]

Setting aside for our present purposes concern about the insubstantiality and ephemerality of such phenomena, this technology certainly possesses the characteristics needed to produce and connect innumerable little stories and to resist a collapse into grand narratives.

Landow argues that we are able to make connections between texts and between texts and images so easily that we are encouraged to *think* in terms of connections. He points out that hypertext shares certain characteristics with Cubist collage - juxtaposition, appropriation, assemblage, concatenation, blurring of limits, edges and borders, and blurring of the distinction between border and ground. A community story has features in common with a collage. As in collage, items in hypertext are linked together to highlight common qualities, meanings or relationships, but at the same time they remain as different nodes, and so retain a sense of separation. There is thus the possibility of sharing concepts or aspects of a story, while at the same time expressing difference [15: 157-159].

Another interesting aspect of a looser collage-like story is that it allows for more associative connections to be made. Connections are made by inserting links, but they do not have to be explained and are to a large extent open to interpretation, perhaps eliciting different interpretations among readers and writers. Furthermore, a teller does not need have an articulated reason adding a link. While a linear narrative can be accommodated within a node, the storyteller is not confined to producing a story which is coherent in those terms and can make use of metaphoric or metonymic representations. There is no obligation to have a satisfactory ending to a story, since it is only one node within many in a multilinear structure.

While on one level the hypertext is a loose structure of images and texts linked together in different ways, when it is read or viewed a linear path is charted. The readers, in jumping from node to node, will form their experience of the hypertext as story through the connections they make as they move from fragment to fragment. Unless links are specifically programmed or annotated, a reader can move between the contributions of different authors without even knowing that there are different authors. There is a blurring of authorship which further emphasises the looseness of the form but also may enable an acceptance or at least an acknowledgement of conflicting or contradictory versions when the reader accidentally discovers differences.

A reader with some knowledge of the community may experience a rich account of that community's story and perhaps be confronted by some of the complexity and contradiction within the story and within the ways in which community members make sense of it. (On the other hand if the reader does not have the shared conventions available to her to make some of the associative leaps her experience may be of a fragmented incoherent mass.)

The looser collage-like story thus suggests itself as a more appropriate form for relating the little stories to each other and to their shared conventions without sanction in terms of content or form. It also suggests a more associative means of connection which relies on common experiences and shared imagery to make sense of the connections. However this does not mean that a community will accept the conflicting versions of the story as they are told. Participants may have to conceal themselves just to be a part of the process (as in the example from Juhasz), and even if all stories are tolerated there is no guarantee that they will be connected together or acknowledge one another.

PARTNERS IN NAMING THE WORLD

To try to find a solution for this last problem, we will in this final section deepen our analysis of participation somewhat in the direction of a notion of *dialogue*.

We have argued from early on in the *True Stories* project that the researcher's role should not be to direct the project but to facilitate it and provide some assistance and continuity. It would be detrimental to a project of this kind for the researcher/helper to be stridently expert, either at the technical or the aesthetic level, since such a stance would most likely provoke a tactical withdrawal by the group members.

We took some pointers from Freire's dialogical model of adult literacy education in Brazil. Freire's approach to education requires that the "teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches but one who himself is taught in dialogue with the students."[10: 61].

Freire's model of the self-effacing teacher-student seemed reasonably appropriate to us as we tried to find a good way

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to help people get to grips with the technology in order to tell their story. It seems to us now, on the basis of our experience and of the above analysis, that we should apply Freire's dialogical model more thoroughly (one might almost say, more intransigently), and try to extend it beyond the researcher-participant relationship so that it also applies to the relationships among the participants themselves. Freire's ideas seem to us to suggest a way in which the productive dissensus of Lyotard and the plurality lived explicitly of Vattimo might practically be realized. Freire's approach also reinforces and underlines the importance of reaching towards truth in telling our stories.

> "Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality. Conversely, sectarianism, because it is mythicizing and irrational, turns reality into false (and therefore unchangeable) 'reality'." [10: 19]

> "Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world." [10: 68]

Words without action are empty, mere idle chatter; while action for action's sake - mere activism - negates true praxis and makes dialogue impossible.

Ricoeur's progression from story to project, from imagination to action, is achieved by a dialogue which becomes a praxis. In an echo of Certeau, there are no 'consumers' here, who may read a story and pass on, but only a community of co-producers:

> "It is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it; dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. ... ... this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by discussants. ... Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility.... Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue. Men and women who lack humility (or who have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world." [10: 69-71]

CONCLUSION

Our experience in the *True Stories* project to date has confirmed our belief that hypermedia technology is a promising vehicle for the production of community stories. We have not addressed in this paper the technical inadequacies of PC setups and software interfaces, which we acknowledge to be both confusing and isolating. We know there is more work to do in that direction.

What we hope we have accomplished here is an extension of our theoretical and methodological positions which will stand us in good stead as we attempt to engage with groups whose stories are hard to tell or which conflict with one another. From our original base, which relied principally on Ricoeur and Certeau (and which we retain), we have extended our analysis of the social imagination in the direction of practices which will support plurality. Our view of the nature of community stories has shifted in the direction of looser, fluid, and allusive structures which share some of the properties of collage. As a means of producing stories from and for multiple voices in a community, it seems to us that we need to fortify our original commitment to participation by embracing Freire's dialogical model in a more thoroughgoing manner.

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