

Centre for Narrative Research Web Newsletter 2 - October 2002

Welcome to the second issue of the CNR newsletter, which exists to distribute news of members', associates' and interested others' relevant research and writings, and also for short reviews of conferences, papers and books, and announcements of future plans. Please email us if you would like to contribute something about your work, or some other writing, to the next issue.

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Recent and Upcoming Events

- A fourth narrative workshop, on 'Narrative and Health,' will be held on Thursday November 14, 2002, Kings' College, Cambridge. Speakers include David Harper, Trish Greenhalgh, Catherine Riessman, Phil Salmon and Vieda Skultans. Tapes will be available after the workshop to those who cannot attend. Further details are on Workshop web page. A 'Narrative and Politics' workshop follows in March 2003.
- Catherine Riessman's University Lecture, '**Looking Back: Narrative Identity and Social Research,**' will be held on Wednesday November 20, 5.30pm, UEL
- CNR research seminars and the joint series of postgraduate seminars arranged with the Open University and the Gender Institute, LSE, are starting in October. Details are on the Seminar and Postgraduate seminar pages.
- We are planning to run two graduate level short courses on **Life Histories** and **Narrative Analysis** in central London in Spring 2003. These will be evening courses, suitable for people who are using or developing narrative methods either academically, or in applied settings. Please get in touch if you are interested in participating.
- Just out: A special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* on 'Narrative and art education,' coedited by Shelley Day Sclater; and a special issue of *Narrative Inquiry* on 'Counter-narratives,' edited by Molly Andrews.
- Forthcoming visitors at CNR: **Catherine Riessman**, from Boston University, will be at CNR and elsewhere in Britain during the month of November, as British Academy Visiting Professor. She will be working on reflexivity, narrative identity and biographical disruption. **Helena Willen** (Nordic School of Public Health, Sweden) and **Margareta Hyden** (Stockholm University, Sweden) will also be here in the autumn semester.

News of Members and Associates

The Second Tampere Conference on Narrative, "Narrative, Ideology, and Myth", June 26-28, 2003, Tampere.

Guest speakers: Lisa Jane Disch (Minnesota)
Mark Freeman (Holy Cross, Worcester)
Liz Stanley (Manchester)

Program committee: Kathy Davis (Utrecht), Olivia Guaraldo (Verona), Margaret Heller (Kings College, Halifax), Annabel Herzog (Haifa), Kia Lindroos (Jyväskylä), John S. Nelson (Iowa), Shelley Day Sclater (East London), Maureen Whitebrook (Sheffield), Matti Hyvarinen (Jyväskylä, chair).

Over the last three decades, the concept of narrative has successfully traveled from humanities to social, psychological and political studies - and to many other disciplines. Whatever this "narrative turn" has engendered, it has not managed to produce any consensus of the ideological nature of narrativity. In recent critical literature, narratives have often been studied from the perspective of power, persuasion and ideology. In contrast, empirical narrative work in women's studies, health studies and sociology in general, typically understands narratives and storytelling as a form of emancipation, or "giving a voice" to otherwise silenced groups.

Different theories of narrative typically have one sort of narrative - be it historiography, oral life story, myth, novel, or film - as their point of departure. This conference wants to find more diverse and non-normative ways of discussing narrative, narrativity and storytelling. We would like to address the issue of social, cultural and political circulation of narratives, and study the different forms narrativity can take within social action.

We intend as well to address the "murky side" of narrative: the issues of myth and persuasive stories. "Myth" as a core narrative can constitute the seductive yet hidden structure of social or political theories, of news release, and of personal life stories, or appear as an explicitly discussed theme within fictional narrative. At the same time, we would like to question the whole opposition between the clarity of the concept and the 'darkness of the myth'. Is it possible for us to rethink our cultural and political belongings so that they take the form of a constantly re-narrated story, as a founding myth without an origin? Can we - as critical scholars - for instance, investigate the relationship between 'nation' and 'narration' in a way that does not commit us to a sort of cultural inevitability?

We believe that the core of narrative- and its social and political importance - lies in the fact that narrative and storytelling remain bound to a partiality of perspective, and thus must reject any form of abstract universalism. At first, this seems to contrast 'theory', 'concept' and 'narrative', but we also insist on exploring the possibilities of narrative theorizing. How is it possible to denounce the false universalism without falling prey to 'community' -determined identities? Can we feature storytelling as a weak form of universalism?

We will ask if narrative can help us to understand subjectivity as a form of social and political agency always in relation with others, as agency that can exist outside the traditional boundaries of Politics. Perhaps we should re-think subjectivity as a 'story', which is as such always told (also) by someone else and is thus intrinsically relational. This would raise the following questions: What is the relationship between narrative and social, political, and cultural identities in times of global, de-territorialized times and spaces. What is the relationship between myth, storytelling and political identity in times of globalization?

We invite all kind of narrative work that embarks on addressing these various faces of narrative. In particular, we look for papers that combine theoretical and empirical work on narrative, papers that have a genuinely interdisciplinary approach to the subject, and papers that try to find narrative forms of theorizing.

The conference will have plenary sessions and panels (three papers each). Our aim is to provide each speaker with proper amount of discussion time, not to maximize the number of paper givers. The conference venue is Tampere Hall, right in the city center of Tampere.

To apply, please send a 300-350 word abstract (as a message, not as an attached file) to: Tarja.Aaltonen@uta.fi and Matti.Hyvarinen@vip.fi.

Deadline for applications (papers and panels): March 1, 2003.
Conference fee: E 120/60 (lower for research students)

Organizers:

- University of Tampere. Research Institute for Social Sciences
- Finnish Network of Narrative Studies
- Politics and the Arts Group (Standing Group of the European Consortium for Political Research)

New 'Narratives' Website from Anglia Polytechnic University

A new website from APU is online at: <http://www.apu.ac.uk/narratives> . The APU research group is starting to develop multidisciplinary support at the university for narrative research and promote this broad form of research in the various schools. They also hope to work collaboratively with others outside the university as far as is practical. For further details, contact Andy Stevens at A.R.A.Stevens@anglia.ac.uk

Phil Cohen, UEL

Born to Flying Glass Nurseries of Terror and Trauma in the 'post war' world

Born to flying glass
bombs strafing shrapnel murder
from me expect no pleasing tones
no obscurities
reared in the light of the fires
gorging themselves on human flesh
my mind was clarified
Keith Barnes

This is an oral history project that treats the Blitz as a ground zero for representations of war, memory, childhood, and the body politic over the last half century. Does Walter Benjamin's
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catastrophe theory of history provide us with a still topical map for wandering through the ruins of childhoods devastated by war? Or does Freud's insistence on a break, or interval, between the bodily experience of terror and its re-tracing in the symptoms of trauma offer us a better model for understanding the living of stories which oscillate between the foreclosing of events and their chronic re-enactment? Does the promotion of children onto the front line and the front page help or hinder the working through of childhood memories of war? And what happens to the image of the body politic as a protective mother or fatherland when everything that was once solid about its territorial defence systems melts down in the face of surprise attacks from the air?

In this project I am concerned to investigate the unconscious history of terror and trauma and the nature of the defences, psychic, social, cultural and institutional that have been mobilised against them in a variety of situations. The initial phase of the research centres on the changing politics of national memory in Britain and Germany since 1945 and the way this has shaped the life stories of those who were 'born to flying glass' in the Blitzes of London and Hamburg. I am starting by revisiting the archive, both the public record and existing collections of memoirs and oral testimony in the two countries. My aim is to trace through the impact which the very different trajectories of national remembrance – and forgetting – in the two countries have had on the way these events are subsequently recounted by those earliest impressions of the world were shaped by bombs exploding, buildings being torn apart, bodies blown to bits.

The study will also consider the recent impact of what has been called testimonial and confessional culture, often linked to new victimologies and trauma discourses; the whole process of individualisation, whereby biographies have floated free from any fixed anchorage in social structures and have consequently to carry more of the burden of psychic and social integration, might also have a powerful retroactive effect on the way war stories are told over time, especially in contexts where narrative identities are increasingly conflicted. In the process some themes hitherto marginalised might become more central, and some, hitherto dominant, myths of the Blitz might yield ground to more complex story lines.

In addition to this re-reading and rewriting of already authorised accounts, the study involves gaining access to primary sources, in the sense of interviewing people whose war stories have remained for various reasons untold. I intend to contact people who were infants at the time of the blanket bombing of East London and Hamburg, who were too young to be evacuated, and not old enough to register their stories in their own name and voice.

The project sets out to trace this so called lost generation of war babies, whose fate was the subject of so much public debate and scientific enquiry at the time, yet whose subsequent lives have been almost totally ignored. For reasons which have to do with the process of post war reconstruction in both countries, longitudinal studies began and ended with the cohort of children born after the war, the so called baby boomers. So one of my revisionary aims is to write the experience of this historical generation, which is also my own, back into the account, as one of its missing links.

In a later phase the project will go on to consider the experience of young children in Beirut and Sarajevo in the 1980s and 90's.

For further details, please contact Phil Cohen ([link](#))

Jayne Ifekwunigwe, UEL

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I am returning from what has been an extremely productive Semester B sabbatical, which enabled me to develop two research projects. The first is theoretical work rethinking the gendered relationship between 'Africa' and the African Diaspora using the transnational circulation of people and goods as paradigms. On this topic, I produced two articles: 'Rethinking "Black Venus" in the African Diaspora of the Global Age,' and 'An Inhospitable Port in the Storm: Recent Clandestine African Migrants and the Quest for Diasporic Recognition.' I was also able to hone these ideas during seminar presentations, at Tufts University (March, 2002), the University of Liverpool (April, 2002), and U.C.L.A. (April, 2002). Moreover, in November, 2002, at Dartmouth College, I will be giving a seminar paper at the [Im]migration and Gender Faculty Workshop as well as presenting an invited paper at the Gendering the Diaspora conference. In March, 2003, I have been invited to deliver the keynote address at a conference on 'Migrant Women Transforming Ireland,' at Trinity College. My visual and ethnographic research on cultural and heritage tourism has also moved along. I have written an article, 'Viewing the Remains: Township Tours in Cape Town, South Africa as Spectres of Apartheid and Spectacles of Domesticity.' At the beginning of September, I gave a paper on 'Healing Place: Robben Island and the Local Politics of World Heritage Tourism,' as part of a three day international conference on the Politics of World Heritage. My critical 'mixed race' studies research continues. '(An)Other English City: Multiethnicities, (Post)modern Moment and Strategic Identifications,' will be published as part of a special issue of *Ethnicities* 3(2) on Multicultures and the Right to the City. The 'Mixed Race' Studies Reader, which I am editing for Routledge, is nearing completion. Finally, I have become a member of the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council)'s Virtual Research College.

Catherine Riessman, Boston University

I am very honored to have received a British Academy Visiting Professorship to spend the month of November at CNR. I will be working on what I imagine will become a book, *Looking Back: Reflections on Narrative Identity and Biographical Disruption*. In the chapters already completed, I re-examine personal narratives I collected and analyzed many years ago (on divorce, infertility, chronic illness) in light of developments in narrative research, social context, and changes in my own biography (and associated perspective on the narratives). I look forward to having lots of time to read in the library, to write, and to meet and learn from with colleagues working in narrative studies.

Andy Stevens, Anglia Polytechnic University

My research interests have been in the area of institutional care and the stories of nurses and other staff in managing disruptive patients and their relationships with doctors in mental deficiency institutions before and after the start of the NHS. I am currently reanalyzing my 1991-2 recordings about the use of a refractory or punishment villa. I am planning to use NR methods with disabled people and their supporters in more recent historical contexts in the future.

Hermione Thornhill

I have recently finished my clinical doctorate thesis, entitled 'Losing the plot and picking up the threads: a narrative analysis of 15 accounts of recovery from psychosis'. I would be very happy to hear from others interested or working in this area: hermionethornhill@yahoo.co.uk. From October I will be based in the psychology service in Newham, East London, with the community mental health team and inpatient services (contact number: Community Mental Health Team West - 0208 250 7270). Some of this work will be presented in the second postgraduate CNR/OU/LSE biography and narrative seminar, in November.

Helena Willen, Nordic School of Public Health

Helena Willén has a Ph.D. in Psychology and is Senior Lecturer in Public Health at the Nordic School of Public Health, Göteborg, Sweden. Her research interests are in personal relationships, particularly divorce, and the psycho-social effects of legislation and decision making. Her current research focuses on post-divorce parental interaction and decision making. In a 3-year project funded by the Swedish council for work life and social sciences, she is studying, with colleagues, post-divorce interactions between ex-spouses in matters relating to their children. The study involves a series of interviews over 6 months' time with couples and individuals, as well as questionnaires. A narrative approach is taken to data analysis, aiming at examining how the individual constructs identity, power and conflict in decision making situations post-divorce. The team is also looking at how children are represented and constructed in the parents' narratives. In this project Willen is collaborating with Martin Richards, Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge and Ulla Bjornberg, Sociology Department, University of Göteborg. Willen is also supervising several student projects in public health using narrative methods, such as inuit at-risk pregnant women's narratives of being referred to hospitals far from home for surveillance during pregnancy and child birth.

Helena Willen was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Sussex, 1995 and at the University of Cambridge, winter 1998/99. She will be at CNR in autumn 2002.