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Living Stories: The Role of the Researcher in the Narration of Life

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Abstract: Narrative inquiry has the advantage of being able to reveal the "inner life" of the analytical text that is usually obscured—a powerful addition to the researcher's toolbox. The interpretive character of narrative takes us beyond reportage and recording of data. This contribution discusses ethical questions emerging from taking a narrative turn in social research, and asks, "Who owns stories once they are told? Can the telling of a 'true' story always be considered ethically sound?"

The shaping and ownership of meaning is a crucial consideration for researchers in cross-disciplinary domains and cannot be isolated from aesthetic considerations—whether a story sounds good or adds weight to an argument. This article deals with ethical considerations as they relate to specific work with specific people, and with how engagement in creative processes in research becomes a contributing element in the ethical life of the narrator.

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Figure 1: Night by a Black Pool, Northern Ireland, photo, Ainslie YARDLEY, 1998 [1]

1. Homage to Lindy: A Narrative

> They lay on the side of the small hill watching the grass against the bright sky shuddering with the wind. "It's trembling," Lindy whispered, "I can feel it trembling. This moment, trembling around the world forever, over the whole surface of the world." She turned towards her friend. "Can you feel it Clare?" Clare looked back at Lindy, startled, but for a split second, she could feel it.

The skin of Lindy's face was blotchy and a little rough, like the sandy river pebbles that lay in a line across her bedside dresser. Her hair hung lank and lifeless. "Cheap shampoo", she'd say, tucking a strand behind her ear in resignation. Getting what she wanted had become too complicated—people asked too many questions, looked for hidden meanings and for motives that she didn't have. Anyway, she didn't want to notice how she looked. Once upon a time, a distant time—in another life—she had adorned herself with care, and a flutter of pleasure in unusual accessories. She had a Lindy "style". Now her body was clothed in dull, muddy coloured sweat shirts and track pants. She shuffled as she walked, shoulders slightly stooped, dragging down the pockets of her cardigan—clenched fists plunged deep. She had become homogeneous, at one with this place and all who lived here. There were fleeting moments when she was again attractive, almost pretty—when a long smothered spark broke through the shadows of her pale unblinking gaze. Then she would become momentarily animated and snatches of stories, sharp and bright, would dart through her rapid chatter, stopping suddenly, smothered almost in the instant of their birth. [2]

She spent most of her time with Ted, her "beau"; short for beautiful she said always slightly mocking of herself, but never of him. He called her Belle. "Given names lose their ring in here." He had a shy and careful smile. When Ted was "out", or they were struggling with the weight of relationship, she wandered the asphalt paths that divided the lawns in which each of the hospital's bungalows rested. These buildings lay anchored together, a lost and lonely convoy, its movement arrested in a sea of undulating green. Sometimes she broke her ritual of repeated circuits detouring down the dead end path that stopped abruptly

before the tiny forest shielding the hospital grounds from the public road. On her most adventurous days she would leave the grounds by this route and cross to the fields on the other side that bordered the river. Here she could forage slowly and unobserved, through a tangled undergrowth of emotions—picking berries and feeling the sun upon her back. Whatever the season she would find an echo there of the ripple of her Self—in the glistening autumn water, the high swirling clouds of summer, the biting frosts of unforgiving and unforgiven winters, and sometimes, best of all, nestled in a gentle blanket of muffling snow that shone on her sleeves and caressed her. On these days she would straighten her spine and walk with arms swinging, feeling the pull of her muscles and an awakening memory of life. Sometimes she would raise her arms to the sky, open her mouth and let her heart fly up to the sun. [3]

She stopped, always, in the same spot before returning, by a dark pool overshadowed by a cliff, its stern face softening behind a fan of delicate fern. When the weather was too wild she stayed indoors making pictures of herself with Clare. They hid them so they couldn't be interpreted. [4]

Over time the light shone more often in her eyes and colour returned slowly to her cheeks. This picture could not be hidden, and was interpreted. She was becoming "well". Well enough after all these years, to return home to her mother —and her father. "This will be good for you," her doctor stressed, "Set things right." Perhaps it would. She worried about her mother—wanted to make peace with her. It was decided. And arranged. She would go in one week's time. She did go, but not home. Not to her father for certain—or her mother. [5]

A young farm labourer found her downstream from the shadowed pool, a billow of her once fluffy dressing gown caught in the drooping branches of a willow. She had been missing for several weeks. They had searched for her everywhere, gone over the same ground a hundred times—some of the staff, Ted and Clare, many of her friends. Someone reported her being sighted upcountry hitchhiking. That news had brought sharp relief and a flush of optimism for a time to all but her closest people. Those who knew she would never hitchhike for any reason. Then they found her, the boy and his dog out rounding up sheep. [6]

What was so hard for Ted, what "left him low", he said, was that they took her away without telling him. Her parents took her, without ceremony, without telling anyone, had her cremated unattended and without warning. As though he and she had never existed. They didn't even go to be with her themselves.

"They wanted to get rid of her quickly", he said, "because they were ashamed." [7]

He couldn't understand it. No memorial service, no family, no friends. No-one to be with her. He had wanted to sit with her awhile, that's all. Be close to her. Say something. They had been together for more than five years and he wanted to say goodbye. Maybe if he could find the place where she had left them it would feel less bewildering.

Clare went with him, so he wouldn't be alone in the shadows. [8]

It took half an hour to find the spot, sliding along the rough farm track, steep in places, muddy by the river. They knew it instantly; there was no doubt, although no one could or would say exactly where she had gone in. This was the place. They sat on the rocks beside the pool warmed by the afternoon sun.

"I wanted to know", Ted said, "I needed to find this place." [9]

There was cobalt in the water in this river. Maybe it was the cobalt, then, or the shadow from the cliff that made the pool this dark blue-black. It looked so deep, as though it went down and down and down to the dark centre of the earth. They sat together watching, feeling the light pressure of each other's shoulders barely touching, lost in thought, breathing shallow memories that flickered just below the surface of that singing blue. They could see her there, wading in with purpose, drifting out with the quiet ripples, arms outstretched—then sinking down and down and down into the blue-black centre of the earth. There was no anguish in it, only a breathless peace. A peace they knew she had wanted for a very long time. [10]

They sat, silent, until the sun dipped behind the cliff top and the sparkle left the water before rising to walk back along the path, one behind the other in the dimming light. Clare reached forward and took his hand. "We will have a memorial service Ted, a beautiful one, with music, and we will read her poetry." Her voice rang out through the insect sounds of the evening, louder than she had intended. He squeezed her hand lightly in return, letting it drop to brush aside a low branch across the pathway that would lead them to the road. Clare's small blue sedan was parked on the roadside by the farm gate as she had left it. They stopped briefly before climbing in, to look across at the looming shadows of the hospital, glad that neither of them needed to go back there. [11]

"We made a home in that place," Ted said finally, "a home of a kind, good enough for us." He'd sat awhile as she drove, his eyes closed, head resting back against the seat, "Many kinds of homes in there. Hidden ones, homes of the heart, below the surface where 'they' couldn't see. That they had no idea were there." [12]

Ted and Clare went back on the chosen day and stood together in the silence of the chapel waiting while it slowly filled, end-to-end, and wall-to-wall. They had gathered everyone, all the people who Lindy loved and who in turn loved her. Together they listened to the gentle song of a solitary flute, they read her poems and spoke quiet words for her. All the unimportant ones, the shuffling ones who had no power to decide, came there to bring her into mind, to fill the space with memories and to sit with her—to feel together the ripple of that moment as it trembled around the world, forever and forever. [13]

AND SO ENDS A TRUE STORY (YARDLEY, 2004, p.216)

1.1 But is my story "true"?

This paper depends on narrative and an exploration of a shared concept of "truth", structurally and methodologically, in its creation of meaning. By "truth", I mean that which we individually or collectively perceive to have authenticity, to be free of guile, manipulation or spin. My sense of "truth" in the context of Lindy's story requires generosity of spirit, a willingness to imagine another's life and to walk for a time in another's shoes. "Homage to Lindy" is a "true story" from my own life experience. By "true" in this context, I mean non-fictional, a story that recounts an event that actually happened rather than a fictional story intentionally constructed wholly from the imagination. Without the construction of a story according to my chosen narrative ethic, I cannot embark on the discussion, or begin to explain my motivations or my theoretical standpoint. I lay the story down and then depend upon the reader to participate in the unfolding of a multi-layered interpretation of the story and of my reasons for its' telling. [14]

I did lie some years ago on the rim of a grassy hill next to a young woman, and listen to her speak in poetically metaphysical terms as she watched the grass shiver in the breeze. She was a very interesting young woman with whom I had worked for more than two years and whom I held in great affection; and she did eventually take herself out to die alone in a river. The narrative that I have constructed around this event gives it form and shape in my memory and allows me to share it with others. True to this narrative of my own construction, I sat with her partner beside the place where we believed she had entered the water; and we did organise a memorial service so that the people who had loved her and been her friends could gather in farewell. The details have been carefully obscured, names changed and any features that could identify the institution hidden behind a veil of fictional description to preserve privacy. My musings on how she felt and what she did on her final day are, of course, purely fictions. I wasn't there to observe her last hours, but in my minds eye I can see her walking. [15]

1.1.1 Owning the story

So whose story is this now? Is it mine? Is it Lindy's? It is about Lindy, and me and Ted. It is about relationships and people who were integral to Lindy's life—her parents, medical staff—other hospital residents. Lindy's story is a biographical account but it is also autobiographical. I am the narrator and the event is filtered through the prism of my experience and world-view but the story is, nonetheless, about Lindy and the need of many individuals, including myself, to mark her passing. [16]

The experience of writing an auto/biographical narrative like this is curiously similar to writing fictional narrative. In both forms one is constructing a story with a beginning, middle, and an end, that is entirely dependent on one's own point of view—a very different intention from reportage or the recording of "facts". While all the details of the story are deeply felt and true to my memory of the events, I have turned myself into a "character" in this story, with a set of narrative objectives within the constraints of a plot. I inhabit the text with other characters

with points of view quite separate from, and different to, my own. But I could not separate these individual stories, mine and the other protagonists, from one another and place them in different narrative territories without, to some extent robbing them (and me as author and subject) of their inter-connected meanings. In the telling and retelling of personal stories, narratives and meanings intersect and overlap. In each telling meaning is shared and created anew. [17]

1.1.2 Narrative in the research context

There is no infallible way of determining or creating meaning, in any research context, but without narrative the opportunities we have for delving into the artefacts of memory, for placing what we know from experience on a broader canvas, become very poor indeed. JOSSELSON, LIEBLICH and McADAMS support this view, going so far as to say that the narrative researcher shuns "methodolatry in favor of doing what is necessary to capture the lived experience of people in terms of their own meaning-making" (JOSSELSON, LIEBLICH, & McADAMS, 2003, p.260), their own very particular kind of "truth". [18]

At the time Lindy died I was working as an artist/animateur as well as researching the value of access to arts practice in health-care settings. These were challenging times for the cross-disciplinary researcher, "methodolatry" was rarely shunned, and the meaning-making of research participants, in their own terms was not considered a valid addition to the research toolbox. [19]

The climate was yet to emerge when finding interesting and interpretable content would become a priority in certain research domains superseding, within accepted ethical boundaries, any rigid adherence to prescribed procedural rules. Narrative, at this point was in use as a form of reportage—a means simply to describe something, a form of capturing data, or recording a case history. The interpretive character of narrative takes us way beyond reportage. Every element I select is chosen not only to tell the story but to show "why I tell the story" (JOSSELSON et al., 2003, p.62). [20]

1.1.3 Creating a narrative framework

I tell the story of Lindy, in the context of this paper, not to question the events as they unfolded, although in another context the story might contribute to such an objective very well, but to question the ownership, or moral right to the narrative itself and the ways in which the writer establishes the narrative ethic that gives the story its form and weight. What if Lindy hadn't died, if she had been found in time, if the young man and his dog had happened by sooner, if he had managed a dramatic rescue? Whose story would it be then? Has it become less Lindy's story, more mine, because she died? Because I was one of the people left behind to make sense of what had happened, left behind to ask the question, "why?" and to track the circumstances and decisions that lead inexorably to her self-determined end. Because I, like many another was left behind to create coherence in the midst of chaos and existential suffering. If she hadn't died, what

kind of narrative ethic would I, or anyone, establish to tell the story that was Lindy's? [21]

The young man out with his dog found a body. That was his story. He found the body of a young woman he didn't know, and that experience governed the arc of his narrative, a narrative that from that fateful day begins, in his retelling, as he sets out at first light to check his father's boundary fences and move the sheep. Ted's story begins, in my experience of it, with the agony of Lindy's loss and moves back and forth without lineal constraint across the troubled but love filled years of their relationship. My story begins, in these pages, as Lindy and I lie side by side on the grass, resting quietly after a busy, people filled day spent in the workshop. Images of an intricate design she has painted run through my mind as she speaks. This was a transformative moment between Lindy and me, a moment of great clarity in which she shared an idea with me, a conceptual treasure of value to us both. [22]

Through my shaping of the story I have imposed a framework on my experience of Lindy at the very end of her short life. A framework that has an impact on the audience, as it does on me. The other protagonists in my story have imposed a framework particular to their own experience. Each is different. Each has a narrative ethic that takes the reader on a subtly (or dramatically) different journey. The narrative ethic is governed by the intentions I have towards my audience and towards those whose lives are entangled in the story. The narrative ethic constrains what I may, or may not write if I wish to keep faith with my protagonists, and remain "true" to my audience. It is the means by which I determine the boundaries of my story—what I will reveal and what I will hold back. The young man out with his dog is constrained by a different ethic, one that remains "true" to his characters and his audience. [23]

The narrative framework, then, makes certain demands upon me as a researcher and writer in search of meaning (BRUNER, 1986). It requires that I maintain a formal aesthetic, a languaging style that might not be required of an academic text conceived and constructed according to other "rules" (BECKER, 1998). Sound, shape, imagery, the texture of language—all these matter—alliterative, poetic, humorous and evocative language, colloquial turns of phrase, all have their place. Virginia WOOLF who, like Lindy, filled her pockets up with rocks and waded quietly out of life, writes that the poet by "the bold and running use of metaphor" gives us something "close enough to the original to illustrate it, remote enough to heighten, enlarge, and make splendid" (WOOLF, 1932, p.32). I may fall short of narrative splendour in my illustration of my original inspiration, but my narrative nevertheless must have a plot—even when it is a loosely woven, non-chronological, post-modern plot. [24]

ARISTOTLE viewed mythos (the arrangement of incidents, the "plot') as the "first principle' and, as it were, "the soul" of any work (ARISTOTLE & HEATH, 1996, pp.25-27). The plot provides the structure within which the action of the story unfolds—a dramatically cinematic structure in the boy's evocation of Lindy's story. This structural representation of the "action" of a story exists sequentially in time

and space from the moment of its conception (ONEGA JAÉN & GARCÍA LANDA, 1996), if at times anti-schematically, as was the case in Ted's telling. Narrative requires time, space, and characters to act out its story and a presumption of forward movement. We cannot communicate through story unless there is a tacit agreement between the storyteller and the audience that we are all moving through the time and the space of the story together. The characters in my story are both "real" and "imaginary" characters in that I knew some and did not know others. Whether I knew them or not, I could only imagine what their experience was like for them. They have stepped out of their own narratives to participate in mine, as I, no doubt, have participated in theirs. [25]

2. Narrative: Creativity's Special Tool

If we accept Antonio DAMASIO's premise, narrative has a deeper purpose—to do with the translation of emotion into consciousness and the "feeling" and "relational" state. Understanding how this core function works helps to explain why narrative provides a pathway into another's life experience and a means of making sense of our own. Emotion, DAMASIO explains, is our intelligence gathering mechanism, working away diligently in the background, unbeknownst to our conscious mind, recording all that we experience in the world, including the workings of our own interior, all the while laying down autobiographical memory. DAMASIO describes extended consciousness, the very core of human relationality and communication, as hinging on the ability to create an autobiographical record in which one's sense of Self, the "core you" is "connected to the lived past and the anticipated future" (DAMASIO, 2000, p.196). We make these connections by accessing autobiographical memory and creating a continuously updated narrative. Extended consciousness grows across evolution and the lifetime of individual experience, collecting, adding, re-working our sense of self in relation to the world. Core consciousness (a faculty we share with other creatures), DAMASIO reminds us, provides a rite of passage into knowing, and extended consciousness builds on that capacity, permitting levels of knowing which can sustain human creativity and communication. The capacity which consciousness extends to creativity, and which creativity obligingly puts to good purpose, is image-making. This capacity allows us to transform and combine images drawn from that "wellspring of creativity", the repertoire of patterns of action stored in memory, to invent new ways of doing things and make new plans for future actions (DAMASIO, 2000, p.24). Creativity and consciousness are intimately linked. If we take away consciousness, creativity vanishes. If we take away creativity, and its narrative expression (the process of making a narrative artefact in whatever form or medium to share with others), extended consciousness becomes a chaotic existential curse. [26]

3. Narrative Ethics

What about the ethics of telling stories then, either fictional or "true"? After all it is the experience itself as it is lived that is real, rather than the narrative constructed to describe it. Readers generally expect when they pick up a story represented as biographical or autobiographical, however, that it will have at least some elements of "truth" within it, that it will have a basis in factual events and in the lived experience of the people it represents. If they discover that such a story is entirely fictional they might reasonably feel cheated and deceived; and that the writer has been unethical. The apprehension of truth is a complex philosophical discussion that can be addressed here in only the broadest terms. My purpose in this context is to explore the place narrative occupies in the specific domain of social science research, how ideas of "truth" and "true stories" contribute to the structure of text and to the authenticity of the stories we tell as researchers about our collaborative partners in the pursuit of knowledge. [27]

We want these real life stories to be authentic. Can the telling of a "true" story, though, always be considered ethically sound? Michael CHEKHOV (Anton's nephew and STANISLAVSKI's star pupil) in an exercise with STANISLAVSKI (who was interested in exploring emotional memory as a source of embodied knowledge through the acting out of a tragic personal memory) acted out, in the most powerfully evocative way, his graveside experience following the death of his father. STANISLAVSKI was deeply moved. The problem, however (in terms of the exercise), was that Michael's father was in excellent health and far from his deathbed. STANISLAVSKI would no doubt have agreed that anticipating the experience of grief is a different thing to reliving it. He failed to recognise the difference between the two in CHEKHOV's performance, however, and felt betrayed by the subterfuge, dropping him from the class owing to CHEKHOV's "overheated imagination" (CHEKHOV & GORDON, 1991 p.xiii). Whose ethical standpoint needs greatest scrutiny? CHEKHOV's or STANISLAVKI's? On the face of it, CHEKHOV deceived STANISLAVSKI, who responded by dropping him from the class. CHEKHOV might reasonably have argued that the feelings engendered by his imagined loss were indeed real, and that the power contained in emotional memory and embodied knowledge can be as effectively brought forth and shared by imagining an anticipated tragedy, as by recounting a real one in the context of "acting out" the fiction of theatre. Michael's performance might well have been impressive for that very reason—he wasn't tapping in to the intense embodied reality of grief, an emotion that separates us from others, and often renders us silent. He was imagining it—a rehearsal of reality if you like. The fiction enhanced his communication of the "truth" of the emotion of grief. The ethical issue that perhaps needs the greater scrutiny is STANISLAVSKI's willingness to put his students in such an unpredictable position—which included the powerful rider that, "should you fail to show me the depth of your real grief, I will drop you from my class." [28]

This paper deals not only with ethical considerations as they relate to specific work with specific people (though these considerations are of great importance given that many participants involved in performative research projects may be

very vulnerable) but with creative processes as a contributing element in an ethical life (DISSANAYAKE, 1988). PESHKIN expresses a complimentary view, stating quite forcefully that "there is a pressing need to show how the practices of qualitative research can help change the world in positive ways … a generative form of enquiry … a form of radical democratic process" (EISNER & PESHKIN, 1990, p.xi). PESHKIN suggests that creativity is a generative form of enquiry, in that it has the capacity to bring about positive change. I suggest that, as well as having the capacity to bring about positive change, it is the foundation for ethical and moral conduct in that it gives us the capacity to imagine, to conjure what we have not known or experienced, the capacity to engage in the "as if"(VAIHINGER, 1924), crucial to empathy, compassion and to conceptualising an image of ethical behaviour, and a means of achieving it. It is crucial to the decisions we make about what should, or should not be brought into existence, and how we might act towards one another in the world. What "might happen" or what "might be" is the foundational question of all scientific endeavour. [29]

3.1 The dark side of "truth"

This means, of course, that the converse is also true—that the capacity to engage in the "as if' also gives us the power to imagine the worst possible ways to hurt each other. Human beings know only too well how to employ strategies to ensure that creativity's absence serves their own self interest—torture being the most sophisticated, deliberate and radical severing of another being from access to creative space (CSORDAS, 1994). This is, perhaps, why survivors of torture and trauma are initially so focussed on the minute detail of how the "truth" is told, how their lives are represented by others—journalists, politicians, dramatists. So much has been lost, so much threatened, that the reality of Self (as one truly is in one's entirety), becomes the most precious of truths to be protected. It is these kinds of stories that are the hardest to safely negotiate repeating to the world. To give an example, I was working with a group of asylum seekers during the period leading up to and following the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The ethical constraints of this relationship precluded any disclosure of personal stories or identifying details. I willingly agreed not to repeat any of the stories told to me throughout this time as the participants in the projects were acutely concerned, terrified in some instances, that disclosure would draw unwarranted attention to them which might affect the approval of their protection visas. Not because they had anything to hide, but because they were afraid that they would sound ungrateful to their host government. [30]

Blundering in with questions and demands for personal detail, however well intentioned can, in itself, cause pain and contribute to suffering. Ethical errors of judgement are made, quite innocently (though sometimes thoughtlessly), by playwrights, actors, storytellers and researchers keen to understand the lives of others—and quite deliberately by journalists and government agencies, in the "national interest" or because the public has a "right to know". The system of assessment used by the Australian Department of Immigration over the past ten years, similar to processes used in many other countries during this period, demanded that refugee claimants provide a seemingly endless repetition of the

stories about their origins and the traumas they had been subjected to. Proving and reproving, stating and restating—accounts constantly challenged in a manner which called into question the person's veracity; their sense of their own identity; the truth of the experiences they have had inside their own skin. In these circumstances the recounting of life stories, rather than being a means of sharing a common humanity, a cathartic affirmation of identity, or a memorialising of lost homeland and family, became a debilitating, re-traumatizing event. A pitfall encountered at times, in the telling and re-telling of any "victim story" not integrated or transformed into a reconstructed life. A "true" story for an asylum seeker, or anyone else for that matter—if we strip away any demands for philosophical argument about what "truth" is—must contain a genuine "likeness" to their lived experience, a sense of an authentic embodiment of the life they have actually lived. An analysis, or judgment of it, by others, the use of "poetic licence" or any form of cruel or romanticised dismembering simply will not satisfy the need for stark unembellished authenticity. What might be ethical in terms of one participant will not necessarily be ethical in terms of another, seemingly similar "case". Stories are embodied and go well beyond the constraints of the "case history". The narrative drawn form autobiographical memory becomes reality. [31]

4. Shaping the Ownership of Meaning

The shaping and ownership of meaning is crucial here and cannot be isolated from aesthetic considerations or the desire to serve the common good. What people individually and collectively decide may affect their wellbeing, either positively or negatively, needs to be the determining factor in all our ethical deliberations concerning representations of life experience in collaborative work. Often, the "essence of truth" is what is asked for and needed in determining one's narrative ethic and in the shaping the narrative arc, rather than the scrupulous attention to detail that the group of asylum seekers needed in the midst of their time of crisis in the wake of September 11. When quiet reflection has been possible and time taken to heal, the structural imperative and narrative framing of a story may be quite different. Telling life stories in a more universal, symbolic way, one which breaks down barriers, promotes new understanding and is inclusive of the collective experience of the participating community and its members, is what may be called for and of most value. [32]

The way questions are framed and the processes used in inquiry, are crucial to any research undertaking. Equally important, as BARTHES asserts, are the choices made concerning the structure and form in which a text is developed, fleshed out and communicated (BARTHES, 1986, p.318). The structure of the text and the form and style of the writing contribute considerably to textual richness. For example, the structure MERLEAU-PONTY (1962; MERLEAU-PONTY & LEFORT, 1968) gave his texts mimics his phenomenological argument —ideas growing and developing, coiling back upon themselves as meaning is created. The experience of reading his works, the phenomenon of the reading, becomes structurally part of the discourse. Martha NUSSBAUM asks us to consider literary form as inseparable from philosophical content, in itself part of

content and an integral part of the search for and the statement of truth (NUSSBAUM, 1990, p.3). The stories we tell, and the images we create and include in our research texts are much more than illustrations of a point. [33]

When we share a narrative we are entering, together, a creative, imaginative space that has great power in the "real" world. Stories can keep a political party out of office, bring down a government, justify a war, determine guilt or innocence, blight a life or raise the undeserving to great heights. We make judgments according to the plausibility of the narrative arc and act on those judgements. Deciding when stories should be told and when they shouldn't is one of the great challenges for theatre (and other arts) practitioners working in communities, and increasingly a dilemma for researchers in the social sciences. Sometimes silence, however frustrating silence might be, proves to be the most ethical choice. The challenge for the researcher (and arts practitioner) when using creative processes, including narrative, as a descriptive and interpretive tool, lies in responding directly to each and every situation, to each and every person participating as one defines the ethical boundaries of any collaborative work. Not an easy approach to take when the research participant is not universally accepted as a true collaborator. If we are using a person's narrative, we have no choice but to see that person as a collaborator, and as deserving of all the power and agency that such a role affords. [34]

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