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**Narrative/life of the moment:**

**From telling a story to taking a narrative stance**

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### **1. Introduction: 'I've got a story to tell' as an everyday observable**

The phenomenon under study in this chapter can be subsumed under a wide range of communication practices that involve momentary, fleeting involkings of 'other' (to the here-and-now) worlds: e.g. allusions to tellings, intertextual tellings<sup>1</sup>, promises to tell, deferrals of telling, withholdings of offers to tell. The verbal forms of such practices can range from one-liners to skeletons of stories (e.g. mention of main events and the teller's assessment of them) to conventionalized story-opening devices (e.g. meta-pragmatic, spatiotemporal references; Bauman 2004; Jefferson 1978). In earlier work, I have documented many cases of such practices in a variety of environments of everyday storytelling: from a *storytelling bid* at the family dinner-table by the child who desperately wants to take the floor –monopolized by the grown ups- and tell a story (Georgakopoulou 2002); to the interviewee who is struggling to remember a specific episode from their lives to satisfy the interviewer's narrative-elicitation question and supplies *story framing* –not to be followed by a story- as

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<sup>1</sup> Their understanding is premised on the 'audience' knowing of certain events and/or prior tellings.

the 'right' answer (Georgakopoulou 2009)<sup>2</sup>; to a particularly salient case of such miniaturized story talk in a group of female adolescents which I called *references* (Georgakopoulou 2007). References were recognisable (to the interlocutors) one-liners or condensed tellings that had originally formed part of a shared story. As such, they brought in conventional associations between characters, events & evaluations of them and positioned teller and interlocutors as characters and tellers of previous tellings. All such cases are rich in identity work, marking the interlocutors' roles and relations. As I have shown elsewhere (2007, 2009), the social actions they perform range from reaffirming solidarity with interlocutors to actively resisting the researcher's agenda, to grabbing attention –on false pretenses- with a promised activity that tends to secure floor-holding rights, and so on.

From the wide gamut of miniaturized stories or references to stories, in this study I single out a subset of cases, which, I argue, are new media-related and facilitated. The examples I will offer below come from data-sets that are very different in many respects. In other work (e.g. 2008, 2013a), I have attended to the nuances of their contextualization. However, I also believe that there is merit in bringing these different communication practices together, not least as testaments to the cumulative valency of the new media-related miniaturization of stories, which I focus upon in this study.

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<sup>2</sup> Meta-pragmatic references to storytelling (e.g. 'I remember', 'I'll tell you a story', 'I've got a story'), what I call story framings, are very common in interviews. As we have shown (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008), they may be offered and explicitly retracted.

## 1.1. Data

Below, I will briefly present the different data that I draw on and I will provide initial observations and orientations about them, which I will develop further in the analysis.

A. Data-set of end of school text-messages collected in the period September 2011-January 2012, from a group of Year 7 girls starting senior school in central London. The data are part of a larger project on the uses of adolescents' new media, particularly mobile telephony, for the micro-coordination of their everyday lives.

### Examples

(1) Hey mum had a g day xx c u soon  
xx are u picking me up?? Bio thing went SOOOOOO well  
we were def the best group we really enjoyed it too.

(2) On the coach xx day was  
not bad after all ... All my  
classmates looked after  
me really well, Marina and  
Grace were doing  
performances for me and  
a group of girls made me  
a foam display, it was

really cool I was happier by about 10.30 ... So  
when's my bed coming!!!

One point to note already is how the above messages seem to readily be part of a longer conversation that has been unfolding not just on the medium in which they appear. The story snippets of the messages therefore presuppose some kind of prior knowledge. This is deictically encoded in referents that need to be deciphered by the addressee, creating relationships of contrast or continuity with what was known before: e.g. 'the bio thing', 'day was not bad after all'. The continuation, unpacking and expansion of these story snippets are premised on the certainty of an imminent face-to-face interaction. This raises a question to which I will come back: why do the text senders choose to tell these stories, however elliptically, when they know that they can have a chat with their addressees thirty minutes later?

B. Data-set: Status updates (SUs)/wall postings on Facebook. For the first part of this ongoing collection, from my list of friends, I identified a female friend in her '30s, who posted the most SUs and I followed her wall for a period of 6 months in 2010-2011, having secured consent from her and the friends involved.

(3) Susie has got through the day with chocolate brownies!! When was it a good idea to finish a build at the same time the baby is due??

Like 10 Comment 3

(4) Abby is finally doing her wedding photo album, 2 years later! Just as it was all going so nicely, first dance song came on the radio and the waterworks started!

All a bit emotional.

Like 12 Comment 5

(5) Mary has just had a delic hot curry next to a fire log! Oh and watched X Factor too. A lovely Sunday night!

7 people like this.

The above examples serve to illustrate the combination of mini-tellings with the tellings of the moment (now), which I will elaborate on below. All these instances are about events that have happened 'just now' and 'today'. Below, I will discuss the role of the FB features 'Like' and 'Comment' in the interactional processes that are generated by mini-tellings on FB and how these can affect further telling.

C. Data-set: A collection of selected celebrity and public figures Twitter streams and their retweets in lifestyle/gossip columns of two UK newspapers (The Evening Standard and The Mail Online).

(6) Quote of the day

'Busy day, during which I have finally learnt how to spell 'kaleidoscope''



Sally Bercow tweets after her husband, Speaker John Bercow, used the word kaleidoscope three times in his speech to the Queen.

(Evening Standard, 21/03/12).

The above example is illustrative of the creation of an intertextual chain , where the original tweet by Sally Berkow<sup>3</sup>, can base its brevity (i.e. keeping with the 140 character references) on the assumption or hope that her Twitter readers will have known of the story, which in the Evening Standard reproduction of the tweet is being –albeit elliptically- told for the sake of the readers. At the same time, the brevity of the original tweet comes with the potential for circulation elsewhere, as is indeed the case. I will return to this point below.

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<sup>3</sup> Sally Berkow, the wife of the Speaker of the House of Commons of the UK Parliament, has often generated controversy in part of the UK media with regard to how discussion-provoking statements on her part or her own appearance may conflict with her role as the Speaker’s wife.

D. Data-set: Collected for the ESRC Identities & Social Action Project on Urban Classroom Culture & Interaction ([www.identities.org.uk](http://www.identities.org.uk)).<sup>4</sup> The different data consisted of:

- systematic ethnographic observations recorded in a field diary;
- 180 hours of radio-mic recordings of interactions in class and in the playground from 9 focal students (5 female, 4 male, 13-14 years old when the project started) who were from a range of ethnicities and varied greatly in their academic performances;
- 10 hours of research interviews with the focal students;
- playback sessions with the focal students with selected key-excerpts from the radio-mic data;
- supplementary documentation covering Year 9-10 demographics and school performance, staff and parent handbooks, lesson handouts, etc.;
- Teachers' project with focus group interviews, questionnaires and playback sessions.

Following up on previous studies of London schools (Rampton 2006), we were particularly interested in this project in how the students' discursively constructed knowledge in, familiarity and engagement with new media impinged on and shaped their identities at school.

(7) Period 1 Maths: 8.55-9.40am

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<sup>4</sup> The project team comprised: Ben Rampton (Director), Roxy Harris, Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Constant Leung, Caroline Dover & Lauren Small.

The extract begins five minutes after Nadia has entered the classroom. Nadia sits at a small table in the back corner of the classroom with her friends Lisa and Shenice (her best friend Laura is not in the lesson). The girls are supposed to be doing their maths coursework but Nadia has been talking about her looks, stating that she will never be able to be a model because she is not the correct weight and has a bump on her nose. They then share some snacks as Nadia compares Harry Potter's eyebrows with those of a character from the television programme 'The OC'. As Mr O'Cain begins the lesson, Nadia launches the small story about Adam texting her the previous day.

Participants: N: Nadia, L: Lisa, S: Shenice

- 1 N: ((excited)) oh: Adam text me yesterday 12.31  
2 d' you know what he said:?=
- 3 L: = Re:ally?
- 4 N: He was gonna come and see me (.) yesterday
- 5 Mr O: Fo:lks you haven't got time to talk
- 
- 35 N: Anyways yea:h 14.49  
36 he text me yesterday h-  
37 oh yeah (.) I didn't forget my phone by the way  
38 (6) ((taking phone out))  
39 he text me  
40 I don't know  
41 (6) ((going through messages?))  
42 Yeah he said (.)



261. N:	Anyways yeah (.) he's like (.)	21.52
262	he wants to come and see me	
263	but I would say yeah you can come Lisa	
264	but you can't	

As I have argued elsewhere (2008), story snippets such as the above were very common in the classroom data: c. 12 stories per period. As in the above example, the participants tuned in and out of a story's telling for the duration of the lesson (and beyond). So, a further telling, depending on e.g. the teller getting a further text-message, as in the case above, remained a possibility and the line of storytelling communication remained open. Story launches were premised on conventionalized story openers (Jefferson 1978), e.g. character references (*Adam*), disjunct markers (*Oh*), main event (*he text me*), time of the event (*yesterday*), as we see in line 1 above.<sup>5</sup> Despite the conventionalized story openings, a full telling very rarely came immediately after a telling to follow. Normally, a fuller telling was premised on more stuff for storying to come. In this case, Nadia with her second resuming of the telling (lines 35-42 above), retrieves the actual text message and quotes from that. In the third relaunching of the telling (line 261 onwards), she has received a new text, which allows her both to take the telling further and to involve her friends in this. This open line of storying presents the reverse trend of what we saw in the text-messages of Data-

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<sup>5</sup> The temporal marker 'yesterday' in the example above is typical of the recency of the reported events. In the lives of those participants, such narrative activities were meant to be filling in one another on what happened between the end of the previous school day and the beginning of this one.

set A above: here, storying face-to-face becomes shaped and further engendered by mediated interactions, while on text-messages, further tellings tend to happen in face-to-face interactions.

## **1.2. Small stories research for the smallest of small stories**

In previous work, I have argued for the frequency and significance of fragmented and literally small stories and for the need for them to become part of the analysis. To this effect, I have developed, with colleagues, *small stories research* (e.g. 2006, 2007, 2008, Bamberg 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008). Small stories research has been intended as a sensitizing paradigm for narrative and identity analysis that focuses on a range of discourse activities that are traditionally either under-represented or not viewed as stories within narrative analysis. The aim of small stories research has thus been to shift emphasis from stories about the self, typically long, teller-led, of past and single non-shared events to stories about short (fragmented, open-line) tellings about self and other of ongoing, future or shared events, allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, etc. Small stories research acknowledges the significance of stories as prime sites for construction of self (and other) but it also highlights the need for small stories, be they in conversational or interview contexts, to be included in the remit of narrative and identity analysis as equally worthy data as the life stories which have monopolized the attention of narrative studies.

Small stories research was developed on the basis of the proliferation of fragmented storytelling phenomena in everyday interactional environments, as part of everyday social practices and readily observable. But my claim in this chapter is that there is a close association of the smallest of small stories, for moments of narrative orientation, with the explosion of new/social media and their pervasive presence in everyday life, as that is facilitated by the increasing media convergence. Media-rich environments afford opportunities for sharing life in miniaturized form at the same time as constraining the ability of users to plunge into full autobiographical mode (e.g. the 140 characters constraint). In particular, they offer users the ability to share experience as it is happening with various semiotic (multi-modal) resources, to update it as often as necessary and to (re)-embed it in various social platforms. The increasing media convergence and the fusion of social networking sites activities, along with social engineering principles on various platforms, clearly encourage the sharing of life ('life-logging, life-caching') and, as of lately, the drafting together of life (a e.g. Facebook *Timeline*, *Timehop*).

My own work has attested to the new media historicity and remediation of such processes with regard to the increasingly prevalent genre of 'breaking news' stories (Georgakopoulou 2013a). In earlier research (2004), I found that on email, long stories were deemed as unacceptable but so was the idea that a telling would be withheld. As a result, in a corpus of email messages that went back to the '90s, when email style normativity was far from consolidated, breaking news were routinely meta-pragmatically marked as incomplete stories and a full telling was promised in face-to-face interaction (*idem*). At the same

time, in face-to-face interactions, pre-social media explosion, breaking news hinged on the participants' ability to meet very often. This was the case in a group of female adolescents, best-friends and classmates, in a small town in Greece. In their conversations, updates of breaking news hinged on life happening in from of their eyes, as they were chatting over a cup of coffee (Georgakopoulou 2007). From there on, in the UCCI project which I referred to above, breaking news abounded as new media-related & facilitated conversational stories in media-rich environments (Georgakopoulou 2008). As I will argue below, the affordances of social media have decisively shaped the increasingly acceptable miniaturization of breaking news.

### **1.2. Life-tellings of the moment: inane talk or ambient intimacy?**

Life-tellings of the moment have become increasingly common and resonant in the web 2.0 era. The numbers of people using social media are staggering. e.g. An average of 12.9 million British people visit FB daily; it has reached 800 million of active users; 200 million tweets are posted every day, etc.<sup>6</sup> This has frequently attracted fraught discussions in the public domain about the validity and usefulness of what it is that all those people do and how it may be affecting their social lives and relations. Thompson's (2008) description of Twitter has a familiar ring to it: 'for many people, the idea of describing your blow-by-blow activities in such detail is absurd,' "Why would you subject your friends to your daily minutiae? And conversely, how much of their trivia can you absorb? The growth of ambient intimacy can seem like modern narcissism taken to a new,

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<sup>6</sup> These statistics applied in the early quarter of 2012.

supermetabolic extreme—the ultimate expression of a generation of celebrity-addled youths who believe their every utterance is fascinating and ought to be shared with the world’. However, he goes on to argue: “This is the paradox of ambient awareness.<sup>7</sup> Each little update — each individual bit of social information — is insignificant on its own, even supremely mundane. But taken together, over time, the little snippets coalesce into a surprisingly sophisticated portrait of your friends’ and family members’ lives, like thousands of dots making a pointillist painting’.

Academic discourses on the matter seem to be polarized between the celebratory (utopian) and the dystopian (Baym 2010). Some stress the enrichment of social relations through the increased media-afforded ability to connect and to share (cf. ambient intimacy), while others deplore the loss of self-reflection that an addictive engagement with social media can inflict (Case 2011). Nonetheless, there is little in these discourses on what this ‘inane’ or ‘socially ambient talk’ is like and how it is embedded into everyday social practices or indeed how it is connected with storytelling. This research gap, coupled with the fact that the prevalence of miniaturized ‘ego-texts’ is endangering more conventional forms of autobiography<sup>8</sup> are making it imperative, in my view, for

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Ambient intimacy is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn’t usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible’ (Reichelt 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Well-known biographer Michael Holroyd talked about ‘biography’ being ‘in crisis’ and about ‘the dawn of a new age of experimental, shorter biographies (Edinburgh International Book Festival 2011). As he pointed out: ‘The trade winds are not behind biography ... People are writing parts of lives. Look on the bright side: biographies are getting shorter’.

narrative analysts to engage with these phenomena with questions that pertain to both what narrative analysis can offer for their scrutiny and how it can respond to the new challenges that they pose.<sup>9</sup> There are questions to do with how the new technologies affect our sense of ourselves; our sense of what a self is, or might be; our sense of what a narrative of the self is or might be. But there are also questions about the extent to which certain mainstay concepts in narrative research work; what need there may be for the development of a new analytical vocabulary and indeed, what small stories research can offer to this end.

To answer both sets of questions, two caveats should be borne in mind: Any attempt to provide a definitive mapping of the variety of media-enabled and mediated small stories would not be feasible and would soon be outdated, with new 'Mary Poppins technologies' (Case 2011) popping up all the time. Along with the danger of endless typologizing, there is also the danger-common to all research on new/social media-of overstressing novelty, when, as Susan Herring (2012), a leading figure in the study of computer-mediated communication recently suggested, what is needed is analysts charting the 'familiar, the

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'automedia' has been proposed to define formally what differentiates multimedia Web 2.0 self-presentations from conventional written autobiography (Dünne and Moser, 2008; Jongy, 2008). But the broader implications of the new media for autobiographical presentation remain massively under-researched. Within the scarce sociolinguistic work on digital storytelling, the fragmentation and the multi-authorship of the stories has been stressed (e.g. Hoffmann & Eisenslauer 2010) and small stories research has already been employed as a frame of reference for some of the studies (e.g. Heyd 2010, Page 2012). However, as I have argued elsewhere (2013b), there is still no coherent body of work to speak of and the extent to which such forms of narrative constitute new and/or exclusively media-shaped genres is not well understood or agreed upon.

emergent and the reconfigured'. Taking Herring's cue and given my earlier research and the existence of pre-new media antecedents of media-afforded small stories, my main aim is to articulate as fully as possible what is distinctive about such practices but also how they draw on, depart from, or indeed remediate (Bolter & Grusin 2000) other forms and practices of life-storytelling. The questions that I ask then are as follows:

- How does the miniaturization of tellings interrelate with new/social media affordances and constraints?
  
- How does the miniaturization of tellings interweave, mediate and become consequential for online and offline experience?

## **2. Life-stories/tellings of the moment: In search of an analytic vocabulary**

As I suggested above, small stories research has been developed with the aim of providing an epistemological framework but also various analytical heuristics for fragmented stories. To do so, it is based on an eclectic synthesis between principles of linguistic ethnography (for details see Georgakopoulou 2007 and Rampton 2007, among others), various modes of interactional sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological analysis<sup>10</sup>, and narrative-biographical research. The latter is drawn upon for the ways in which it analyses subjectivity processes

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<sup>10</sup> These are mostly employed for the identification of social typifications of semiotic features in specific contexts.

and is attuned to the individual 'voice', the experiential and affective process of discursively drafting and making sense of self over time.

However, these traditions present certain kinds of bias that make small stories not just under-researched but also hard to research with some of the existing conceptual apparatus. For instance, within socioculturally minded approaches to storytelling, there has been an emphasis on sustained, full-fledged storytelling (e.g. Labov 1972, among many others) and on teller-led performances that serve as arenas for the display of the teller's communicative skill and accord strong floor-holding rights (Bauman 1986). Similarly, there is a close link between any orientations to a story (e.g. with story-opening devices) and the granting of floor-holding rights to the teller, so as to tell the rest (e.g. Jefferson 1978; Sacks 1992). Overall, there has been an emphasis on a linear, single event unfolding of a story as an activity with a beginning, middle and end. At the same time, in narrative-biographical research as well as in classical autobiography, the emphasis has been on the narrative form as a sustained, totalizing project, structured by concerns with time, moral development and retrospective reflection. It is fair to say that there is a range of more or less moderate so called narrativity theses (Strawson 2004) which I cannot do justice to here, but there is also an undeniable bias in telling/writing the self as a process that necessitates a measure of time distance from the events and self-reflection that is argued to be unavailable in the immediacy of the moment (e.g. Freeman 2010).

### **2.1. Life-stories/tellings of the moment within mobility processes**



It is instructive to place the above discussion in the frame of reference of a broadly comparable quest for re-conceptualization within sociolinguistic work on globalization and mobility. If we accept that varying forms of engagement with social and mobile media are rendering users spatially, temporally and subjectively mobile, even when they are sitting on a sofa in their homes, what Blommaert & Rampton suggest vis-à-vis the study of superdiversity is pertinent:

‘With this extension beyond use-value to the exchange-value of language practices, entextualisation, transposition and recontextualisation become key terms, addressing (a) the (potentially multiple) people and processes involved in the design or (b) to the alteration and revaluation mobility affects texts and interpretive work, and (c) to their embedding in new contexts (Hall 1980; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Agha & Wortham 2005)’  
(2011: 10-11).

Extended to small stories on social media, the above suggests the need to explore them as textual projectiles, transposed beyond single (speech) events. Going further, if we associate them with the social practices of individuals with a ‘mobile social presence’ (Arminen & Weilemann 2009), who are in ‘perpetual contact’ with others, ‘present absent’ in their immediate surroundings (Katz & Aakus 2005), and with ‘continuous partial attention (Stone 2006),<sup>11</sup> as media

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<sup>11</sup> ‘We pay continuous partial attention in an effort not to miss on anything. It is an always-on, anywhere, anytime, any place behavior that involves an artificial sense of constant crisis. We are always in high alert when we pay continuous partial attention. This artificial sense of constant crisis is more typical of continuous partial attention than it is of multi-tasking’ (Stone, [www.lindastone.net](http://www.lindastone.net)).

studies analysts have shown, what we need is analytical vocabulary that can tap into:

*Storytelling for announcing and performing the minute-by-minute experience, whether ordinary or extraordinary, that may develop in different media and be embedded into a variety of online and offline environments, connecting or disconnecting them, with different semiotic modes and that may be sanctioned and re-contextualized in unforeseeable ways and by unforeseeable –networked audiences (Marwyck & boyd 2011), with processes of like, share and follow.*

### **3. Life-stories of the moment as narrative stancetaking practices**

My contention here is that a key-concept that can capture the ongoingness, transposition and fragmentation of small stories on social media is what I will call *narrative stancetaking* (henceforth NS). I define NS as follows:

*A moment of position taking where a teller more or less reflexively mobilizes more or less conventionalized communicative means to signal that the activity to follow, the activity underway or the activity that is indexed, alluded to, deferred, silenced is a story.*

Defined by Du Bois as ‘taking up a position with respect to the content or form of an utterance’ (2007), the concept of stance and stancetaking have been at the

heart of the sociolinguistic study of processes by means of which speakers signal varying levels of commitment and engagement with what they are saying and how (e.g. see chapters in Jaffe 2009). In studies of storytelling, the concept of stance has been under-represented in favour of other –affiliated- concepts, e.g. evaluation (Labov 1972 & post-Labov work), involvement (e.g. Tannen 1989), self-presentation (e.g. Hill 1996, Schiffrin 1996), positioning/positionality (e.g. Bamberg 1997). What brings together work that has drawn on such concepts and existing work on stance in storytelling (e.g. Baynham 2011) is the emphasis on what is going on, once an activity has been established as storytelling and is unfolding as such. But what about stancetaking for signaling and establishing an activity as storytelling? With the concept of NS, I wish to draw attention to the moment of the teller agency, when the teller *chooses* to signal a narrative tale or telling, even if one does not, indeed, follow. As I will argue, the significance of this moment partly lies in that in it, the speaker/writer takes the position of a *storyteller*.

Previous studies have indicated the significance of the moment of storytelling launch for introducing ‘a break or a frame of partial suspension of ongoing activities by invoking another world’ (cf. Goffman 1974, narrative as make-believe) and for putting the ‘act of speaking on display’ ...lifting it out to a degree from its contextual surrounding” (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 73). But as I have suggested, they have also closely associated this moment with a full storytelling to follow. Employing the concept of NS allows us to disassociate this moment of narrative signaling from its continuation. It allows us to keep an open mind about what will follow, without however throwing the baby out with the

bathwater; in other words, without missing out on the fact that the tellers signal (with conventionalized means) that what they have got or are in the process of having is a story; the impulse to single out from the flow of experience moments, however ordinary, that are hastily put into some kind of configuration, a sort of incipient emplotment. The NS was by no means the only option that the speakers in my data had. However, 92% of the text-messages in Data-Set A contained, however miniaturized, stories; on the Facebook wall, two thirds of postings either took a narrative stance or were followed up by one; in the survey of the students' new media engagements (UCCI project)<sup>12</sup>, 55% of the activities of the most prolific users took the form of stories about very recent experiences in new media environments (Georgakopoulou 2011). This is in accordance with findings about what users report as doing on social networking sites and on blogs, citing 'to document their personal experiences or share them with others' and to 'update others on their activities and whereabouts' as key motivations for blogging and to 'share news' as the first ranking for FB amongst female students in the USA (Baron 2010).

The narrative impulse that the frequent use of NS is attesting to is indicative of a need to (begin to) tell a story, even in situations that constrain full tellings. It evokes narrative-biographical claims about how narrative meaning making offers a privileged entry into subjectivity.<sup>13</sup> Such claims have not been free from

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<sup>12</sup> New media engagements included a wide range of activities (e.g. from singing to enacting music videos, to just reading text messages together).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Brockmeier argues (2010) that the intricacies of human meaning making are not just represented or expressed by narrative; they only come into being through and in narrative.

critique<sup>14</sup>, but the more neutral idea that narrative, like any other discourse activity, becomes associated with specific subject positions is well-supported by a large sociolinguistic tradition (e.g. Agha 2005, 2007; Eckert 2005, Jaffe 2009). This has shown how particular ways of talking and interacting are associated with certain stances or clusters of stances, which in turn become associated with specific social identities. This process of naturalization of stances primarily involves the connotational rather than the referential significance of activities. In other words, what a way of talking *indexes* (Silverstein 1985), i.e. points to indirectly, conventionally implies or alludes to. By recognizing moments of narrative orientation as moments of NS that mobilize social indexicality, we can begin to look into the kinds of conventional associations that there are, not just with what a story is but also what a story does, what the expectations are about what stories to tell, who tells them, where and how.

### **3.1. Not a storyteller but a story stancetaker?**

A volume of studies of conversational storytelling have shown how in any act of storytelling, the teller's capacity as a here-and-now communicator with specific participation roles holds the key to self-presentation.<sup>15</sup> To put it in Zimmerman's (1998) terms, the here-and-now teller assumes a specific 'discourse identity': a set of involves local participation roles that propose the teller's understanding of

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<sup>14</sup> By this author (Georgakopoulou 2010), amongst others.

<sup>15</sup> The main claim has been that self-presentation is based on the self-lamination of the teller which is unique to storytelling. This involves the strategic play with former and current selves, and the equally strategic manipulation of the deictic inter-relationships between the there-and-then and the here-and-now (e.g. Hill 1995, Schiffrin 1996, among many others).

what is going on while at the same time raising specific participation roles and tasks for the audience. In the NS moments of my data, there is a preponderance of temporal adverbials that suggest immediacy: e.g. 'just,' 'now', 'yesterday' (which seems to be the furthest back that tellers go), as we can see in all of the examples (1-6) above. Temporal adverbials have been found to be typical story-opening devices (Jefferson 1978). The difference in this case is that the past is so close to the present. The abundance of temporal adverbials that stress immediacy has also been attested to in Page's study of stories on Facebook walls and Tweeter (2012).

The co-existence of 'I, here and now' foregrounds the present moment and the teller's current deictic field (Hanks 1996). Combined with the inherent reflexivity of any stancetaking moment (Jaffe 2009), in this case NS, we can argue that what the immediacy, incipience and ongoing-ness of the events actually foreground is the act of telling itself, the teller being in a position to tell. This goes against the assumptions of any act of telling as an act that puts the tellers in a position in which they can assume responsibility for display of communicative skill and efficiency in front of a scrutinizing audience (Bauman 1986). Such a view presupposes an intimate link between the teller and the ownership of their experience as well as with the story as a finished and past affair that can be retrieved and made relevant to the current moment. In conversation analysis, the launch of a story tends to require a first step in which the teller seeks permission from the audience to tell the story, as telling the story implicates suspension of the turn-taking system (Jefferson 1978, Sacks 1992). But in this case, the very ongoing-ness of the events shifts ownership away from the teller

and complicates authorship and telling rights. Below, I will show what kinds of participation tasks, roles and relations this shift proposes.

### **3.2. Taking the narrative stance: the distribution of authorship**

I have argued elsewhere (2011, 2013a) that any practice-based analysis of storytelling requires us to be alert to the inter-animations of three layers, the *ways of telling*, the *sites* and the *tellers*.<sup>16</sup> Following multi-scalar conceptualizations of context (Blommaert & Rampton 2011), I accept that there is durability, contingency and indexicality involved in all these three layers. Meaning making is not just a matter of the here-and-now, the inter-subjectivity of the moment, but also of 'resources, expectations and experiences that originate in, circulate through and are destined for networks and processes that can be very different in their reach and duration (idem: 9). The provenance of such resources can be signaled in more or less indexical ways. Furthermore, the layers of ways of telling-sites-tellers are reconfigured differently in the different recontextualizations of a discourse activity.

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<sup>16</sup> I have defined ways of telling as the socioculturally shaped and more or less conventionalized semiotic and in particular verbal choices of a particular discourse activity. Sites refer to the social spaces of both tales and tellings and capture the conglomerate of situational context factors ranging from physical (e.g. seating) arrangements to mediational tools that the participants may employ. Tellers include the animators of a story who are characters in the taleworld and here-and-now communicators with particular in situ roles of participation in the telling; but also, the tellers as individuals with specific biographies and self-projects and with a repertoire of embodied and semiotic resources.

What the above suggests for the analysis of NS is that in different (new media) sites, NS is intimately linked both with what discourse identities the tellers wish to assume and with what situated identities (Zimmerman 1998) are brought about by assuming them: what normative expectations emerge about who says what in specific precincts and contexts. In turn, the tellers' discourse and situated identities as signaled by NS practices project the relevance of specific types of responses and engagement from the audience.<sup>17</sup>

In this respect, the analysis of the data showed that by choosing to take a narrative stance in social networking sites, the tellers submit authorial control to the audience in any of the following ways: They may be bidding for the audience's show of interest which can generate a further emplotment, including updates for ongoing stories; or they may be bidding for the audience's show of appreciation and 'stance uptake' (cf. stance follow, Du Bois 1998) which may generate the distribution and circulation of a story. In this way, every NS more or less knowingly for the teller carries the potential for the circulatability and even spectacularization<sup>18</sup> of their story.

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<sup>17</sup> This is part and parcel of a story' sequential implicativeness (Jefferson 1978, Schegloff & Sacks 1973): an interactional view of stories accepts that once launched, referred to, etc. in a specific environment, a story will have sequentially organized implications for what is to follow.

<sup>18</sup> The term media spectacles refers to 'events which disrupt ordinary and habitual flows of information, and which become popular stories which capture the attention of the media and the public, and circulate through broadcasting networks, the Internet, social networking, cell phones, and other new media and communication technologies. In a global networked society, media spectacles proliferate instantaneously, become virtual and viral, and in some cases becomes tools of socio-political transformation, while other media spectacles become mere moments of media hype and tabloidized sensationalism' (Kellner 2012).



I will illustrate the above, beginning with the FB SUs. There was a clear correlation in them between how a narrative stance was taken and what further telling, if any, ensued. Overall, the more routine and mundane the event reported was in the teller's life, the less sustained and verbal feedback it received. A simple 'Like' seemed to suffice for the announcements of ordinary happenings that simply foregrounded the teller's current deictic field, as we can see in the example below:

(8) Mary has just had a delic hot curry next to a fire log! Oh and watched X Factor too. A lovely Sunday night!

7 people like this.

On the other hand, the more extra-ordinary the event reported was and the more complications it posed on the teller's life, the more audience feedback about how to deal with it and what to do it received, as we shall see in example 9 below. The sequential implicativeness in both such cases was intimately linked with what the teller's discourse identities projected in the first place. The teller's main discourse identity in the case of a (non-disruptive, mundane) event that was presented as (just) completed was that of somebody who is in a position to tell now. In contrast, in cases of ongoing and unresolved events, the teller positioned themselves as being able and/or willing to tell more.

(9) Gertie Brown is feeling much better with a hole in her leg!

August 27 at 12.19pm

David Martin Got to ask ... What! How big??!

August 27 at 3.15pm

Gertie Brown it was about 3 inches! looks like a bullet wound, now about 1 inch.

August 27 at 3:18pm

David Martin how? Why? Is JB shooting at you now?·

August 27 at 3.22pm

Gertie Brown Got in the way of a pigeon ...

August 27 at 3.26pm

Gertie Brown is recovering from an unexpected operation as a result of a trip to

A&E19 on monday night ☹-(

August 25 at 7.45pm

Charlotte Harris Oh my God! Are you ok? Not the ideal end to what I hope was

otherwise a fabulous weekend and a lovely christening ... Thank you again, xxx

August 25 at 8.01pm

((Another 14 comments))

August 26 at 9.03am

((Another 12 comments))

SUs are presented in reverse chronological order in Facebook, and as can be seen in the example above, this too has implications for how audience engagement with NS may evolve. As is typical in the data, the NS in the first posting from Gertie (*Gertie Brown is recovering from an unexpected operation as a result of a trip to A&E on monday night ☹*, August 25 at 7.24 pm) about an 'unexpected' event sequentially implicates more or less direct requests for Gertie to elaborate and 'tell more': e.g. Charlotte Harris: *Oh my God! Are you ok?* In turn,

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Gertie provides the small story of a series of sequenced events and their evaluation, in her response to such comments (15 in total), that is posted the following day:

Gertie Brown Thanks everyone. Not much to worry about. It was a painful abscess which I thought would go away with some basic home treatment but by Monday it was unbearable and huge so had to go to A&E to have it removed – cross & painful but on the mend! Apparently they are quite normal?!

It was a painful abscess which I thought would go away with some basic home treatment but by Monday it was unbearable and huge so had to go to A&E to have it removed – cross & painful but on the mend! Apparently they are quite normal?!

August 26 at 9.03am

((Another 12 comments))

As we can see, the preface to the small story acknowledges the friends' interest in her posting. What is interesting in the comment exchanges that follow between Gertie and David is that a different storyline is opened than the one established thus far, a storyline that reconstructs the events, even if jokingly, in a different way, i.e., as the result of Gertie's husband (JB), whose hobby is hunting, having accidentally shot her. We can hypothesize that when David read Gertie's SU, he missed the previous storytelling 'thread' about what had happened to her. Even if this were the case, though, it does not cancel out the fact that Gertie as the original teller made a choice to co-construct with David a new scenario of events. As different audiences tune in to a developing story at different times and

points of development, their modes of engagement ultimately shape what and how much is told and how long the story can be kept alive for.

It was also notable in the FB SUs that when the teller's current emotive state was proclaimed without a narrative stance being taken, the responses that followed tended to generate elaboration in the form of a small story. We can see this below. The initial proclamation of Gertie that she is 'not happy with her mac' is further elaborated upon after Dan's indirect request that she explains why this is the case (*sacrilege, how could someone say such thing!*). Gertie responds to this with a small story of breaking news, which she further updates within five minutes. The update renders Gertie's initial unhappiness as 'resolved' (*problem now resolved so I won't be going to the world of pc just yet!!*) at the same time as proposing that the storytelling should be understood in those terms: a complication that was happily resolved. This proposal, a typical story closing (Jefferson 1978), is taken up by Dan who provides the appropriate story closing response (*That's lucky don't think I could have been friends with a mac deserter!*). This enables Gertie to move on to another topic, which is to make arrangements to see Dan.

(10) Gertie is not happy with her mac :-{

[6](#)Like ·

Dan: sacrilege, how could someone say such thing!

[February 10 at 12:19pm](#) · Like

Gertie: Grrrrrrrrrr i have been on the phone to mac support, technical help you name it and they still can't work it out!! I'm tempted to cross the fence to pc!!

Sorry but i'm at my wits end :-{

[February 10 at 12:24pm](#) · Like

Gertie panic over, just sorted it out! Having been in a phone queue for 50 minutes - problem now resolved so I won't be going to the world of pc just yet!!

[February 10 at 12:29pm](#) · Like

[Dan](#) That's lucky don't think I could have been friends with a mac deserter!

[February 10 at 12:31pm](#) · Like

Gertie well that's lucky then, still friends! Speaking of which when are we going to see you? How about a night on the tiles soon. We get our flat back in march so can bed down there!

[February 10 at 12:33pm](#) · Like

Dan we would of course love to, I have recently joined The Club at the Ivy, which is fun and Paramount which is interesting both worth a cocktail!

dx

[February 10 at 12:37pm](#) · Like

As in examples 9 and 10 above, it is commonly the case that the telling of a story as a follow up to a SU unfolds within a dyadic participation framework between the teller and a 'friend'. In many cases, further storying applies to sub-sets of the audience that have not had the opportunity to partake in the teller's offline experience and are thus unaware of what was going on. The modes of audience

engagement to NS and/or small stories that follow on FB are intimately linked with the well described and attested to phenomenon of *context collapse* in social networking sites: context collapse refers to ‘the infinite audience possible online as opposed to the limited groups a person normally interacts with face to face. In a limited group, a person is constantly adjusting their tone and presentation of self to fit into the social context. In a situation of context collapse, this becomes impossible. In addition, behaviors and materials intended for a limited audience can suddenly clash with parts of the wider audience they actually receive’ (Wesch 2008; Marwyck & boyd 2011).

To sum up, FB SUs show how NS projects certain kinds of audience engagement but it is the actual audience engagement that shapes both further telling and terms of telling. Given that this co-construction is at the heart of the storytelling process on social media, as studies of SNSs have shown<sup>20</sup>, NS in these cases can be seen as a bid and invitation for co-telling rather than as a request for permission for the teller to tell (the full story), as is frequently the case in face-to-face conversational contexts (e.g. Sacks 1992).

### **3.3. Narrative stancetaking and circulation**

So far, we have looked at the indexicalities of NS that are closely linked with the teller’s ability to update, to tell more, if needed. Another new media-afforded

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, in Polletta’s study of the functions of stories in online public deliberative forums discussing plans for the site of the former World Trade in New York, it was found that ‘people often told stories less to persuade people to adopt their opinions than to figure out what their opinions were. Storytellers invited collaboration in drawing lessons from their experience’ (2012: 238).

signalling of NS has to do with the distribution of the story across time and space (e.g. from one mediated environment to another, from online to offline and vice versa) and across audiences/co-tellers with different voices and subjectivities. In this respect, the brevity of NS compared to a full-fledged telling, can be viewed as necessary, if not sufficient, element of circulatability due to the ease with which it can be quoted in new contexts and be recognized as quotable in them.<sup>21</sup> Put differently, the choice of NS facilitates the process of recontextualization of storytelling fragments. As Jaffe aptly points out, ‘even the mundane use of stance has features of ‘high performance’ incl. decontextualizability and accessibility for future reentextualizations’ (2009: 17). At the same time, the brevity of NS may generate the need for more detailed storying in either the original environment of occurrence (as we saw in 3.2 above) or indeed in environments where it may be transposed. This is clearly the case in the data of the re-tweets of celebrity tweets.

#### (10) Lily-livered at ‘virus attack’

You wouldn’t like to sit next to Lily Allen and her over-active imagination during an emergency. The mother-to-be became afraid that a killer virus was about to be unleashed when she saw a ‘weird man’ holding a bottle at a taxi rank in Paris. ‘I hope I’m just being a mad paranoid pregnant lady and that he wasn’t a terrorist about to unleash a deadly virus’ she tweeted. Unnerved by the stranger, the 25-year-old wrote on Monday: ‘Oh god, foreign office have put people travelling to

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<sup>21</sup> There is evidence of the quotability of brief storytelling form from face-to-face conversational contexts too. In previous work (2007), I argued that re-tellings of shared events in the interactional history of friends resulted in condensation of story form, which was conducive to a story’s quick recycling in conversations and to ease of referencing.

France on high terror alert!!!! I'm in Paris already. Scared being here but scared to get on the Eurostar home'. Thankfully, The Fear singer was put at ease by the couture on show during Paris Fashion Week. 'The Givenchy show was amazing, really amazing' she gushed.

#### EVENING STANDARD

(11) ... Appearing at the Cheltenham Literature Festival over the weekend, Blair's former spin doctor blogged of how well he was getting on. 'There I was, darling, chatting to Salman Rushdie in the green room, when who should walk but Alistair Darling and Andrew Marr, then Jilly Cooper rushed over to tell me (and later the world) how sexy I was'. He then took to Twitter to tell the world 'Being asked by journos for my reaction to Jilly Cooper saying I'm sexier than her heroes ... gratified but spoken for, said a spokesman'. But not everyone was as ecstatic as Jilly to see him it seems. 'Ran into Peter Mandelson on his way in as I was heading to car. Didn't seem pleased to see me. Must be a book sales thing'.

#### EVENING STANDARD

No act of recontextualization and/or further storying is stance-free. The reproducer always takes a stance regarding the original teller and inflects the reproduction, as having a particular kind of link with prior texts and discourses. Bauman and Briggs (1990) have long argued that any act of recontextualization inevitably produces new meanings. This has also been shown to be the case for any reported speech (Tannen 1989). As we can see in the above excerpts, the original voice of the tweet is re-semiotized in different ways: from the choice of a picture, which tends to accompany such retweets, to the quotative markers (she



gushed, he took to Twitter to tell the world), the evaluative characterizations of the original teller's state of mind (e.g. *over-active imagination*) to finally the choice of modes of reference foregrounding certain features and not others (*mother-to-be, Fear Singer, former spin doctor*) and making more or less indirect points about the content of the original tweet. For all its circulatability, when NS gets recontextualized, the original teller has very little, if any, control of the authoring process and there are no 'guarantees of intersubjective understandings' (Blommaert & Rampton 2012). The reproducers take a stance regarding the original teller creating indexical chains and addressing different audiences.

The examples above constitute only one possible trajectory of NS: One can assume with relative certainty that the original tweets were transposed and distributed elsewhere, too (the facility "add to my stories" in the online versions of the articles facilitates this) and in different ways. In all such cases, the media serve as vehicles for distribution and recontextualization by regulating and enhancing the ongoing-ness of a story and by shaping the terms of telling and the possibilities for interactivity. The more circulatable a NS is outside of local social networks (e.g. outside of the peer-group, outside of the original site of embeddedness) the more interpretative angles are added and arguably the more the indexicality of the original stance gets 'lost'.

#### **4. Concluding discussion: NS as a new media literacy**

Seen within the framework of NS, the miniaturized story instances, for which I

have claimed that they are new media-afforded, emerge as communicative practices more or less strategically adapted to the affordances and constraints of social media environments. In the light of the 'bad' press that such practices have on occasion received, the above analysis allows us to suggest that there are redeeming features and merits for the tellers in this type of fragmented -but legitimated- storytelling. First, we can argue that their proliferation reflects a process of a democratization of a difficult genre, the full mastery of which is not easy to attain, contributing further to the collapse between the high and the low that Web 2.0 environments have encouraged (e.g. Welsh 2008). But more than this, NS exhibits all the hallmarks of new media literacies, as described by e.g. Jenkins (2006): in particular, the participatory culture which is attested to in the multi-authorship properties of NS and the appropriative elements that accompany the potential recontextualizations. More specifically, the analysis in this chapter showed how the ways of telling of NS are mutually constitutive with new media affordances and constraints, echoing Danet's description of earlier computer-mediated communication as being doubly-attenuated and doubly-enhanced (Danet 2002). This double bind applies to the main features of NS too: NS foregrounds the teller's ability to tell now about any incipient experience but it also submits control of further telling. It is spatiotemporally anchored, foregrounding the here-and-now, but at the same time it is immensely transportable. It capitalizes on indexicality but it is also subject to context collapse, which weakens its potential for drawing on shared assumptions. Our analysis in this respect suggested that in the indexical chains of the -relatively easy-distribution and circulation of NS, new stances are added. On the basis of this, we can assume that the process of circulation itself can become a 'major

source of stratification ... as people differ in their normative sense of what should carry where' (Blommaert & Rampton 2012).

As has been argued about new media literacy (Jenkins 2006), there is communicative competence involved in the portable and 'distributed' (Walker 2004) semiosis of NS, even though on the face of it, the 'verbal art' of full-fledged performances may have receded in its case. There is indeed ample evidence in the interactional data from the UCCI project that communicative competence in new media engagements carries symbolic capital in adolescent peer-groups, serving as structuring forces in peer-group relations. Similarly, successfully interweaving news media experience with everyday experience, with however brief and elliptical stories, is a valued attribute, a sign of a 'smart' individual (Georgakopoulou 2011). More specifically, new media literacies in storytelling practices emerged in the project as the participants' ability to discursively construct stories, however small, on the basis of their new media engagements. There was also a premium placed on the participants' ability to: a) provide evidence for, support and update their NS and small stories with the help of new and mobile media (e.g. by showing their interlocutors a picture, a text-message, etc.); b) jointly draft with their interlocutors narrative scenarios as responses to mediated experiences and post them online (e.g. by sending a text-message).

There is much scope for establishing the interconnections of NS ways of telling with sites and tellers both in online and offline communication. Further work should also look into the kinds of NS that lead to further storying and circulation in different environments at the same time as shedding light on how the

distribution of NS itself makes certain stories more circulatable (tellable) and available and how certain stories and, by extension certain aspects of selves, become more circulatable (tellable), available, acceptable, and legitimate. As Shuman rightly points out (2005), in the travels of a story beyond the private confines of personal experience, 'the failure to transcend the local can involve a failure of empathy' for the experience that it reports; similarly, 'the lack of recognition of the category of its experience may make a story untellable and uncirculatable' (19). In similar vein, Poletta claims 'An important question for further research has to do with the interactional work done by story kernels, story fragments and allusions to stories. ... Do they draw lines between those who are in the loop of understanding and those who are outside of it? Does the ambiguity open up the possibility for new perspectives or does it reproduce preexisting perspectives (2012: 246).

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