



# Narrating, Doing, Experiencing

*Nordic Folkloristic Perspectives*

Edited by

Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, Barbro Klein & Ulf Palmenfelt

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## Introduction

### Telling, Doing, Experiencing

### Folkloristic Perspectives on Narrative Analysis

Narrating and narratives are at the heart of the study of folklore. Whether spoken or sung, whether in the form of myths, *märchen*, ballads, epics, legends, anecdotes, *cante-fables*, jokes or life stories, whether set in times and places close to the experiences of narrators and audiences or set far away in mythical or fictionalized worlds, oral storytelling – or rather written textualizations of oral telling – constitute the core of the field.<sup>1</sup>

However, during the last few decades something has happened to this disciplinary core. Analyses of oral narration and orally told narratives have become important, not only within folkloristics, the study of literature, and related fields, but also within a great array of other contexts. Among the newer and older disciplines that have recently intensified their interest in oral narration are: history, sociology, including ethnomethodology, sociolinguistics including conversation analysis, philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, political science, history, journalism, police science, and many others (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997). Sophisticated bodies of knowledge have been built up to which folklore scholars have made significant contributions (Hymes 1972, Bauman 1984, Briggs 1988). And if “oral” is omitted, we will find the word narrative everywhere, not only within the humanities, law, and the social sciences but also within the natural and legal sciences (Lash 1990). Indeed, academic theorizing has been analyzed in narrative perspectives (Finnegan 1998: 4–9). The so-called *narrative turn* (Bruner 1990, Aronsson 2001) has taken hold of the sciences, as scholars study, more intensively than ever, not only the way it is or was, but how people speak about or represent the way it is or was.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the words narrative and narrating have a central position not only in scholarship but also in a multitude of other realms of life – formal or informal; obvious examples are when we seek jobs or medical help or when we have to go to court. Actually, in our mediated world – on radio, television and the internet – people are continuously in the process of narrating and describing experiences and memories to interviewers, viewers, listeners or readers who are far away in a physical and, perhaps also, an experiential sense (Giddens 1991:27). It is also to a great extent because of the media that people are continuously exposed to a complex and contradictory web of “grand” or

“foundational” narratives concerning global and local politics, human nature, nations, the natural world, and the world beyond. These grand narratives surround us and influence us in innumerable ways just as much as we use them and reshape them in our daily existence, not least when we tell stories about our own experiences. All our lives, we are involved in intertwining these complex grand narratives with the equally complex small ones through which we communicate with one another. It is through such processes that we shape our senses of ourselves: the efforts of modern individuals to create their own “thoroughly reflected identities” are, to a great extent, narrative projects, says Anthony Giddens (1991: 215). Indeed, in the early part of the twenty-first century, the words “narratives” and “narrating” are becoming as frequently and as loosely used as “identity” and “culture”. A question posed in this anthology is, therefore, what folkloristic perspectives might mean in this situation. What might be the role of folkloristic narrative studies during the current “narrative turn” – and after it?

While this question is important to us, addressing it is not the primary aim of the articles in this anthology. Rather, what we offer is a handful of recent, or fairly recent, studies of narratives and narrating written by folklorists from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.<sup>3</sup> Our book is the result of a series of workshops in which not only the authors but also occasional guests participated.<sup>4</sup> During one of the first meetings it was unanimously decided that the planned anthology was to focus not only on “telling” or “narrating” but on narrating in relationship to “doing” and “experiencing”. All participants have made efforts to incorporate all three aspects into their analyses. Not unexpectedly, this has not been easy. We do not have the kinds of backgrounds that would enable us to penetrate the complex philosophical deliberations on the three aspects and the linkages between them. And while a great number of folklore studies in some way or another address the experiences and actions of tellers, audiences and the worlds depicted in oral story-telling, there is nevertheless little in folkloristics in the form of sustained theoretical work on the provocative three-pronged puzzle on which we are trying to focus. As will be seen, in particular the relationship between narrating and experiencing has periodically been ambivalent and even highly charged among folklore scholars.

Naturally, we often debated the concepts of narrative and narrating in our workshops. If we had not understood it earlier, we soon came to realize that the word narrative can be conceived of extremely broadly. It does not have to be limited to a specific verbal form but can be regarded as a “root metaphor” for many different aspects of human life (Mattingly 1998: 186). However, we also came to realize that most folklorists conceive of narratives in terms of stories. With one exception – Anne Leonora Blaakilde –, also the authors represented in this volume define narratives as definite speech acts. In most of the analyses and descriptions in this book, therefore, to narrate means to tell stories, i.e. to present events in a more or less temporal order, in such a way that these events are given some kind of relationship to one another; stories are regarded as entities or units that have beginnings and ends or closures (Arvidsson 1998: 61). This means that the contributors to this anthology also

recognize a number of more or less stable verbal forms that are not stories; together these might be designated as verbal art in a broader sense (Bauman 1975, 1984; see also Klein in this volume).

On the next few pages, attention will be paid separately to folkloristic narrative research in two regions of the globe which have been important to the field of folkloristics as a whole: the United States of America, on the one hand, and Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, i.e. some of the Nordic countries, on the other. The two regions are discussed in separate sections because research has developed in somewhat different directions within them. It could be said that while Nordic scholars were quite dominant in international folk narrative research during the early decades of the twentieth century, North Americans came to play a greater role from the 1960s and onwards. To be sure, North American scholarship has exerted considerable influence on the Nordic researchers represented in this volume. But, as the following survey will show, these researchers are also well entrenched in the scholarly traditions of their respective countries. Naturally, the survey does not aim to be exhaustive in any sense. Rather, the intention is to provide a background, first, to the articles published in this book and, second, to its difficult topic, i.e. the links between narrating, doing, and experiencing.

### *Narratives, narrating, and the study of folklore I: perspectives from the United States of America*

When folklore study was emerging as a field in Europe during the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, a hierarchy of narrative genres was developed. Some genres, such as wondertales (or *Märchen*), myths, fables, ballads, *fablieaux* and saints' legends were at the center of interest while historical or supernatural legends were placed further down on the ladder. But many genres that folklorists recognize today, were not considered "real" folklore and were not recorded and investigated. "True" or "authentic" folk narratives were thought to exist as recognizable, "traditional" types that, albeit with variations, followed given templates as they were handed down "from generation to generation" or were transmitted "from mouth to ear". Even as late as the 1960s, such genres as "local histories", "personal experience narratives", and "life stories" were not generally included within the domains of folklore study. They were regarded as residual forms or helpmates which, at best, could assist in the analysis of real folklore.

Then, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many changes took place in the study of folklore in several parts of the world. These changes were perhaps more radical in the United States than elsewhere, where the spectrum of oral literary genres had arguably long been more inclusive than in folklore study in Europe. One of the reasons for this was that the study of Native American story-telling had been important in the United States from the very incipience of field, not least due to the efforts of Franz Boas. North American Indian stories did not easily fall within the European genre divisions and,

in spite of many attempts to make the Native American material conform to European ideals, North American folklorists were, in fact, more open to generic variations than their European colleagues. Yet, the true breakthrough for an expansion of the generic landscape came during the methodological transformations of the 1960s and 1970s, when a number of genres were recognized – genres that had previously not been “discovered”, let alone accepted into the canon of proper folklore. Among these “new” genres were “urban” or “contemporary” legends as analyzed by Alan Dundes, Jan Brunvand, Linda Dégh, and others (Hand 1971). And among them were also life histories and life stories. The rising field of oral history and a number of anthropological studies of life stories, autobiographies, and life histories contributed to the new folkloristic interest in these forms (Titon 1980).

Other “discoveries” that were to become central to folklore study were the so-called “personal experience stories”, in particular as these were conceived by Sandra Stahl (1977, 1989) who demonstrated that people employ shared or similar narrative devices and techniques, also when they relate the most personal or individual experiences. People tend to express the most personal and intimate details of their individual lives in collective or traditional forms (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989). Actually, the idea of “personal experience stories” emerged in folkloristics along a number of routes, not least via German studies of “*alltägliches Erzählen*” (Bausinger 1977). Most influential of all, however, were the studies of “narratives of personal experience” that were introduced by sociolinguists William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967) and later further elaborated by William Labov alone (1972). Labov and Waletzky found that these narratives “of personal experience” contained a recurring sequential pattern involving abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. Although severely criticized (Norrby 1998: 38–41), not least for methodological reasons (Bamberg 1997) and because it did not fit narratives emerging in natural conversations (Bennett 1986), the “Labovian” schema remains influential also in contemporary folkloristics and other disciplines.

These various contributions to the study of “everyday narration” or “personal experience narratives” – Labov and Waletzky’s in particular – should be further understood in the light of other influential insights and discoveries during the late 1960s and early 1970s, insights and discoveries that eventually contributed to the shaping of the “narrative turn” in the humanities and social sciences. One of the developments was the folkloristic interest in sociolinguistic methods and the efforts to interest sociolinguists in folklore study. Dell Hymes played a crucial role in bringing the two fields closer together (Hymes 1972, Gumperz and Hymes 1972). Also involved in the developments were ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, micro-sociology of Erving Goffman’s variety, the thinking on poetic language developed in the Prague linguistic school (Garvin 1964), as well as several other schools of thought, in particular various forms of structuralism. Many of these interests and developments came together in the anthology, *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, first published in 1974, and co-edited by folklorist and semiotician Richard Bauman and anthropologist and linguist Joel Sherzer.

It was Richard Bauman who, in the mid-1970s, on the basis of Dell Hymes' thinking, was to formulate a theory of verbal art as performance (Bauman 1975, 1984, cf. Bauman 2002), which has long been regarded by many as the most sustained theoretical contribution by American folklorists to the study of narratives and narrating (Berger and Del Negro 2002). A basic idea in this contribution is that narratives and other forms of verbal art "emerge" in social interaction as aesthetically marked forms. Tellers and audiences recognize these forms as special, i.e. as "performances", thanks to cues made through tone of voice, mimicry, gestures, quotations, "disclaimers of performance" and other devices. Indeed, one of the most influential sections of Bauman's work on verbal art as performance is a list of keys by which storytellers establish narrative frames. Arguing further that performance is "*constitutive*" of verbal art, Bauman helped to publicize methods to study oral narrating as "artistic communication". Among these methods are ways to transcribe tape-recorded and video-recorded texts, to "lay them out ethnopoetically" or to "textualize" them in such a way that oral qualities can be understood also by those who read the material on the printed page (Tedlock 1972, Hymes 1981, Fine 1984, Briggs 1988). In this anthology Georg Drakos, Barbro Klein, and Ulf Palmenfelt employ varieties of such methods.

The "performance turn" in folkloristics has had many effects on the study of oral narratives, primarily among North American folklorists, but also among researchers from other disciplines and countries. Scholars have come to understand how stylistically intricate oral narration can be with its pauses, cadences, gestures, mimicry and other features which audiences often do not notice, at least not consciously (Young 2000). Scholars have also pointed out that, in many cultures, oral narrating, with its rich dialogues, is closer to drama than to prose literature (Tedlock 1972). Another insight is that frequent repetitions are not to be dismissed as poor artistry as has often been the case. Rather, repetitions can be seen as ways to control complex materials (Hymes 1981). A repetitive structure simultaneously offers restrictions and creative freedom; it aids memory at the same time as it frees fantasy and improvisation (Klein 2001).

What Bauman and other students of verbal art as performance did, was to create ways to investigate oral narrating and other forms of verbal art as social accomplishments, as *doing*, as something that people engage in actively when they interact with one another. If storytellers in the past were seen as transmitters of handed down traditions, they were now regarded as active artists with power to transform social life. If the folkloristic study of narratives in the past was based on texts collected from oral narrators and then written down, it was now a study of verbal exchanges in on-going communication. It will become evident that the contributors to this volume are indebted to this way of thinking and working. Indeed, it is possible to say that the work of Richard Bauman and others, such as Charles Briggs (1988) and Deborah Kapchan (1996), has become established as "normal science". Many young folklore scholars today cannot fathom that once, not so long ago, there was a kind of folklore study in which both narrators and their agency were made invisible.

This brings us to the present. While such genres as epics (Foley 1991, Honko 1998), *märchen* (Bacchilega 1997, Apo 1995), and contemporary legends and rumors (Fine and Turner 2001) continue to be important research topics in many countries, it is undoubtedly true that in contemporary folkloristics, not least in the Nordic countries, such forms as life stories, oral autobiographies and (personal) experience narratives are now privileged. The folkloristic hierarchies of the past have been turned around, so that “I”- and “me”-centered narrating has become the norm or orthodoxy at least in the western world, both in everyday practices and in scholarly research (Nilsson 2003: 115). In that sense, contemporary western narrating and the study of it fit the idea that, in late modernity more than ever before, people are involved in never-ending projects of creating personal identities through narration (Giddens 1991). In late modernity, people are incessantly narrating themselves and narratives are “battlefields for self-ascription and self-projection” (Aronsson 2000: 10290). However, in this context it is pertinent to note that many older fictional oral forms also concern identities and identity transformations. This is particularly true of wondertales or *märchen* which center on a hero’s or heroine’s long journey toward the discovery of his or her true identity; at the end frogs turn into princes and orphaned young girls are transformed into rich and beautiful queens. Yet, it is not easy to know what tellers and listeners invested of themselves and their personal aspirations into these kinds of tales.

### *Narratives, narrating, and the study of folklore II: the Nordic countries*

In the Nordic countries, where the folkloristic study of orally transmitted narratives has a long and illustrious history, scholarly developments differ somewhat from those that have taken place in the United States. At the same time, many parallels and cross-influences can be noted. While in the following brief survey the scholarship in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden will be discussed separately, it should be emphasized that Nordic folklorists have continuously met and influenced one another across national borders. This was particularly true during 1959–1996, when the Nordic Institute of Folklore (NIF) played a central role in furthering collaboration between Nordic folklorists and between Nordic folklorists and scholars in other parts of the world.<sup>5</sup>

The world’s first academic position in the discipline of Folklore was established in 1888 in *Finland* and, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such scholarly giants as Julius Krohn, Kaarle Krohn and Antti Aarne developed the so-called “Finnish” historic-geographic school which was to have a great influence on the world-wide study of the motifs, types, origins, and dissemination of folktales. Indeed, the “Finnish” school became so entrenched internationally that, to this day, Finnish folk narrative scholars often find it necessary to emphasize that they no longer practice the historic-geographic method. What remains true, however, is a

lively and diverse folkloristic activity in Finland. Long central among the scholars was the late Lauri Honko (1930–2002), whose researches ranged from investigations of Ingrian beliefs and narratives about supernatural beings (1962) to a monumental studies of the epic singing of Gopala Naika of Karnataka in India (Honko 1998). Also, Honko played a critical role in shaping international folkloristic developments, not least during the period (1972–1990), when he served as director of the Nordic Institute of Folklore.

But also a number of other Finnish scholars working during the late twentieth century have made internationally important contributions to the study of oral narratives and narrating. Notable among them is Anna-Leena Siikala whose scholarship ranges from studies of storytelling in Finland (1990) and of shamanism in Siberia to analyses of the epic narration of Cook islanders in the Pacific (Tarkka 2002). Other important contemporary folk narrative scholars in Finland are Satu Apo, Lauri Harvilahti, Seppo Knuutila, and Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj who have all taken the study of oral narratives and oral narration into new directions. Kaivola-Bregenhøj, one of the initiators to this project and volume, has analyzed the stories of Juho Oksanen (1996) in accordance with Walter Kintsch's influential work on the cognitive structures of memory; her investigations have exerted a great deal of influence in Finland and elsewhere (Vasenkari et. al 2000). In the article printed here, "War as a Turning Point in Life", Kaivola-Bregenhøj turns to the world of Finnish speakers in Ingria, just as Lauri Honko once did. But, unlike his work, hers is not based on archived collections but on fieldwork among women in post-Soviet Ingria. Also Anne Heimo, attests to the importance of war among Finnish speakers in her contribution to this book: "Places Lost, Memories Regained: Narrating the Finnish Civil War in Sammatti". Both articles are linked to the broad interest in life stories and life histories among Finnish researchers representing different disciplines (Tigerstedt, et.al. 1992). Another Finnish contributor to this anthology, Lena Marander-Eklund, represents a long tradition of folk narrative research among Swedish speakers in Finland at the same time as her work is a result of a project concerning cultural aspects on childbirth involving young folklorists and ethnologists from different Nordic countries.

In *Denmark* the study of oral narration reached an early zenith, not only through Svend Grundtvig's seminal work on ballads, but also thanks to the leadership of Axel Olrik whose studies of the epic laws of folk narrative (1908, 1921) continues to exert influence on scholarship throughout the world.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, due to his monumental collecting efforts, Olrik's contemporary Evald Tang Kristensen, delivered material for important analyses that were published many decades after his death. Among them are the late Bengt Holbek's celebrated study, *Interpretation of Fairytales: Danish Folklore in a European Perspective* (1987) and Timothy Tangherlini's *Interpreting Legend* (1994). In the 1980s and 1990s, Bengt Holbek's younger colleague, Birgitte Rørbye completed several ambitious studies of narrating in relationship to cultural notions of aging and in relationship to the history of the medical profession in Denmark (Rørbye 2002). Rørbye's untimely death prevented

her from continuing her highly original narrative analyses but, in many ways, Anne Leonora Blaakilde (1999) builds on her work. Blaakilde is represented in this volume with the article “It’s Just a Story I’m telling You”. Due to a series of unfortunate circumstances, folkloristics has now ceased to exist as a separate discipline in Denmark.

In *Norway*, eminent nineteenth century folktale collectors and editors, such as Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, were among the many learned Europeans who carried on lengthy correspondences with the Brothers Grimm (Schmidt 1885), thereby attesting to the lively exchange of scholarly ideas in the mid-nineteenth century. In particular Jørgen Moe contributed to giving folk narrative studies a solid footing in Norwegian academe. Norwegian scholars took an early interest in legendry connected to families and to locally known personalities; in Norway such materials have long been analyzed and debated in relationship to their value as historical sources (Hodne 1973). Also, eminent scholars of folk medicine, such as Ingjald Reichborn-Kjennerud, were important to the development of a Norwegian tradition of studies in folk medicine and narratives concerning healing and folk beliefs. During the last two decades, this research specialization has been further advanced by Bente Gullveig Alver and Torunn Selberg (1992). Thus Selberg’s contribution to this volume, “‘A God’s Wonder’: On Miraculous Healings” is linked to a long and impressive scholarly tradition.

In *Sweden*, Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, set the tone for the study of oral narratives during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Opposed to the “Finnish” school on many grounds, he particularly objected to its lack of attention to the narrators. His distinction between “active” and “passive” storytellers was an important breakthrough toward recognition of the importance of storytellers and storytelling situations. Von Sydow was also deeply engaged in distinguishing between narrative genres; among his coinages is the *memorate*, a term intended to describe “peoples’ stories about their own purely personal experiences” (1948: 73). These stories could concern anything that individuals considered important and memorable. Von Sydow did not think of *memorates* as part of tradition, although he acknowledged that some of them might become accepted as traditional. It is noteworthy that, although von Sydow – at least not in his early definitions – never said that a *memorate* would have to concern experiences with the supernatural, the term has nevertheless often been used in the context of supernatural beliefs. In many respects, the *memorate* can be looked upon as a precursor to the “personal experience story” (see further pp. 19–20 in this volume).

Several Swedish scholars have continued to build on von Sydow’s work, among them Anna-Birgitta Rooth, Jan Öjvind Swahn, Carl-Herman Tillhagen, and Bengt af Klintberg. The latter, in particular, has broken new ground both in his studies of legends of Swedish peasant society (af Klintberg 1972) and in his influential work on contemporary legends and rumor making (af Klintberg 1986). It must be noted, however, that, since 1972, there is no separate discipline of folklore in Sweden and that most folkloristic work on oral narration is academically situated within the broader field of ethnology.

Despite this, the interest in folklore study, in particular in narratives and narrating, remains quite strong and exerts influence on ethnology as a whole. This is true of Alf Arvidssons (1998) analyses of life history interviews, Inger Lövkrona's (1999) studies of eighteenth century court records, and Ulf Palmenfelt's analyses of nineteenth century legend collections in the light of performance methodology (1993a, 1993b). In Palmenfelt's contribution to this volume, "The Impact of the Un-Mentioned Event", there is also clear influence from conversation analysis, a linguistic sub-field that is well developed in Sweden (Adelswärd 1996, Eriksson 1997, Norrby 1998), albeit with relatively few connections to folkloristics as a discipline. As is the case in many other countries, some of the Swedish work in conversation analysis concerns narration as a diagnostic and healing tool in medical discourses (Hydén & Hydén 1997). There are substantive links between this research tradition and Georg Drakos' article in this anthology, "HIV/AIDS, Narrativity and Embodiment".

### *Narrating*

All the contributors to this book agree, first, that in narrating people express experiences, values, concerns and ideas that are important to them as individuals or collectives and, second, that they do so through the employment of stylistic techniques, tropes, tones of voice, and gestures. Furthermore, as already noted, most of the contributors work with the idea that in narrating people give events some kind of temporal order and some sort of marked beginning and ending (cf. Arvidsson 1998: 61).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the authors do not slavishly follow the idea of temporal order: all recognize that much narration may not be sequential at all. For example, some events and experiences can be so difficult to make sense of or so terrifying that people cannot make order of what happened although they strive to do so (Briggs, with Mantini-Briggs 2003: 77–80). Furthermore, all the contributors to this volume recognize that there are great numbers of verbal expressions that are not given narrative form just as there are many kinds of verbal art that are not narratives. In her article Barbro Klein analyzes the emergence in conversation of both non-narrative and narrative expressions that could be characterized as esthetically marked forms of verbal art. Another contributor, Anne Leonora Blaakilde, works with a broader understanding in which the word "narrative" includes a variety of verbal utterances, descriptions or reports. Blaakilde is interested in the ways in which people in their utterances draw upon and develop shared cultural tropes regarding grandmother-hood and ideas of individual boundaries. As emphasized earlier, it became clear in our workshops that while all the participants were open to such broad meanings, most of us nevertheless preferred to focus our analyses on more clearly bounded and recognizable narrative forms.

In this context it should also be pointed out that many Nordic scholars have found it difficult to accept some of the tenets of North American performance scholarship, even though, in some respects, they have been influenced by

this scholarship. This is particularly true of the American emphasis on “art”, “esthetic” and “esthetically marked”. In the Nordic languages these terms are linked to the “high” arts and many Nordic folklorists find it difficult to characterize the stylistic devices employed in everyday narrating, such as forms of quoted speech or various paralinguistic devices, as “esthetic markers”. Some Nordic scholars even claim that the “American performance school” has had as a result that every-day narration and the meanings of it have been ignored (see, for example, Marander-Eklund 2000: 36–37). Most of the practitioners within the “American performance school” themselves would emphasize the opposite, i.e. that their research has led to a discovery of the multi-form narrating that takes place in the quotidian and to a discovery of how deeply meaningful this activity is to narrators and audiences. Performance scholars underline that the performance school has led to a (re-) discovery of narrating as an esthetic accomplishment in everyday life and as an intense kind of doing.

Methodologically, all the articles in this book are similar in so far that the authors analyze narrating that has emerged in interviews rather than in other contexts. However, in some respects these interviews are different from one another and range from so-called life history interviews (Kaivola-Bregenhøj), to an experiment in which short-term employees hired by a folklife archives conducted interviews with fellow-citizens (Palmenfelt), and to a failed attempt to record a “regular conversation” in a family context (Klein). In other ways, the interviews are rather similar. For example, all the articles (with a possible exception for Palmenfelt’s) draw on interviews linked to long-term projects with the same informants. Furthermore, all the interviews are conducted in *intimate* situations in which only the interviewer and one or two other interviewees are present. In these ways, the articles in this volume are representative of the most prevalent method for the study of narratives and narrating among contemporary Nordic folklorists: the analytical base is small, face-to-face situations. It could be said that the favored method matches the contexts of the favored genres, since personal experience stories and life stories tend to emerge in situations of intimacy (Stahl 1989:10). There is undoubtedly room for methodological innovations and variations.

### *Doing*

The separation into narrating, doing and experiencing is, of course, artificial and done for analytical purposes. In “real life”, the three are intertwined in intricate ways so that narrating is at one and the same time doing and experiencing. In the next few paragraphs, different levels of “doing” in conjunction with narrating will be considered: inside the stories, in the story-telling situations, and in larger social and cultural contexts.

Let us first take a look at the “doing” “inside” narratives or “inside” the “tale-world” to use Katharine Young’s terminology (1987). Oral narrators often manage to concentrate an amazing amount of action within the frames of brief narratives. A narrator can move events and messages forward in

numerous ways: by imitating voices of others, by quoting direct speech, through laughter, powerful metaphors, moral summations, repetitions, pauses, speed, tone of voice, silences, gestures, mimicry and other kinds of paralinguistic devices. At the same time, narrators are both constrained and given lee-ways by the demands and creative possibilities of a genre. Sometimes, as in ballads, action moves forward slowly and yet intensely, standard formulas are plentiful, and the stylized action is controlled through numerous repetitions (incremental or otherwise). Not least prevalent are the repetitions that take place through refrains – devices which give singers and audiences an opportunity to reflect and ponder. In other cases, such as in legends, the action tends to develop with dramatic alacrity with the help of verbs in the active form: “people move forward, they work, they travel”, notes Bengt af Klintberg (1972: 12, my translation) in his classical analysis of the legendry of the Swedish peasant world.

Some of the narratives analyzed in this anthology move forward with vivid and forceful dramatic action. A striking example is Lena’s story about the arrival of the Germans in her Ingrian village. In Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj’s words “the entire narrative is full of frenzied simultaneous action”. In this story the repetitions are not used to slow down the action as is the case in ballads. On the contrary, they serve to heighten the drama. This is how Lena begins:

*The war came, we’d no idea where it would all lead. We fled into the forest to escape it. We took the cow and everything with us into the forest and went off into the forest. They were already firing in the forest. They were starting to shoot everyone. We ate mushrooms there and milked the cow. My cow got left behind. I left the cow there. We left because we thought we’d only meet our deaths in the forest, we’d starve to death.*

The tumultuous activity inside the tale-world and the jumble of thoughts and feelings in Lena’s mind come through loud and clear also in translation and this despite the fact that Kaivola-Bregenhøj does not use any special transcribing techniques, ethnopoetic or otherwise.

When we move to a second level of “doing”, i.e. to the story-telling situation, or, in Young’s terminology, to “the realm of conversation”, it becomes clear that this story “did” a great deal. Kaivola-Bregenhøj says that Lena’s story had a great effect on her as an interviewer: “I almost had the feeling that she had been waiting for me in order to tell me about the coming of the Germans in 1941”. Indeed, in her article Kaivola-Bregenhøj furnishes a text-book example of how “everyday” narrators can be artists who have great capacities to affect listeners and transform social life. In this sense narrating is rhetorical action, or an act of doing, a potentially powerful social accomplishment. This has been emphasized most strongly by performance scholars; in a way, performance theory as developed by Richard Bauman, Dell Hymes, Roger Abrahams and others, is a theory of “doing” (cf. Burke 1966). Over and over, performance scholars have demonstrated how narrators can be performers who have the power to move other people into action and have the power to “do” things with them or “to” them. Narrators represented in this volume give advice as Blaakilde notes, confirm the power of a miraculous

healer as Selberg shows us, re-empower the seemingly powerless as Drakos emphasizes, and establish an entertaining and deeply satisfying sense of historical continuity as Klein stresses.

In a sense, this way of speaking about things that narratives “do” comes close to the kinds of analyses of the functions of story-telling that have a long history in folklore study (Bascom 1954). What is remarkable is that such effects and meanings come through so clearly, even though most of the stories analyzed in this book have emerged in interviews. Interviews are of course to be regarded as “natural” social situations, albeit natural in a special sense. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that in interviews narrators commonly speak to unusually willing and sometimes breathlessly listening audiences, audiences that take care not to interrupt “narrative flow”. We have few studies of narrating in situations when narrators *are* interrupted and try to take the word again. In this book, Klein attempts to enter this difficult area of research. In any case, we must be aware that many conclusions regarding what narratives and narrators “do” to their audiences might be different if they were based on material studied in other kinds of conversations than interviews.

A third level of “doing” concern the broader arenas of social and cultural life in which orally transmitted narratives may also assert themselves. In many situations narratives are constitutive of the events and social situations that unfold (Mattingly 1998: 184). Legends and rumor building constitute particularly clear examples of this. Legends are narrative forms in which people relate how the strange, the extraordinary or the supernatural took place right “here”, right in a given human environment. Legends are forms of symbolic action through which people try to deal with critical areas of life, such as tensions in race relations (Fine and Turner 2001) or try to articulate other forms of “cultural pressure points and individual anxieties” (Dundes 1980: x). Indeed, in vicious rumor-mongering, stories can kill just as much as other kinds of practices (Briggs, with Mantini-Briggs 2003: 17). Most of the narrating analyzed in this volume is linked to important or problematic issues and events or, to use another vocabulary, to significant but problematic grand narratives: wars and nation construction (Kaivola-Bregenhøj and Heimo), healing and medicine (Selberg and Drakos), the twentieth century transformations from rural to urban life (Klein), generational differences in the conceptions of personal integrity (Blaakilde) and the broader discourses on childbirth in contemporary western societies (Marander-Eklund). In that sense, all the articles strive to elaborate upon and make sense of historical events and ideas that have exerted profound influences on narrators.

But this book also contains an example of how oral narrating in conjunction with writing can have a positive societal impact. This is the case with Steve whose books, ideas and oral narration Georg Drakos analyzes. Drakos makes us think about Steve’s role both as writer and oral narrator dealing with a critically important topic, HIV/AIDS. What does Steve “do” to audiences and communities as an oral narrator and what does he “do” as a writer? It is undoubtedly true that some gifted oral narrators can produce effects that written literature cannot bring about, not even when it is read aloud.

## Experiencing

Whether concerning times and places close to narrator and audience or referring to mythical or fictionalized worlds, narrating involves experiencing in different ways and on different levels.

In Latin the word *experientia* means an act of trying and *experiri* means to try or to experiment. These ancient meanings communicate something about the contingency, the transformative possibilities, and the constant learning processes involved in experiencing. Our experiences are “try-outs” or “rehearsals” (Abrahams 1986: 62); they are never finished as long as life goes on. Perhaps one could say, to choose a few of the suggestions in *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, that an experience is, first, the “usually conscious perception or apprehension of reality”, i.e. one experiences the world through “direct participation in events”.<sup>9</sup> But, second, experiences are also memories of events that persons or communities have lived through in a past. In this sense experiences constitute that “unending mass of impressions, memories and forms of learning with which living provides us” (Blehr 1999b: 23, my translation). An “experienced” person is a person who has lived through a great deal and accumulated knowledge and insights. Furthermore, as Wilhelm Dilthey observed, English (as well as Germanic languages) distinguishes between *experience* and *an experience* (Turner 1986: 35). The former can denote such larger “developmental patterns” as “the American Experience” (Abrahams 1986: 61), whereas the latter is perceived to have a beginning and an end and a capacity to form a plural.

The Scandinavian languages and Finnish have two sets of words for the English noun “experience” and verb “to experience”. One set comprises the verb *erfara* (Swedish) or *erfare* (Danish and Norwegian) and the noun *erfarenhet* (Swedish) or *erfaring* (Danish and Norwegian). In Finnish the comparable noun is *kokemus* which is related to the verb *kokea*, meaning to “try” or to “endure”. An *erfarenhet*, an *erfaring* or *kokemus* can be translated into English as “an experience” in the broadest sense. But there is also another set of words in the Scandinavian languages and Finnish that is relevant here, namely the verb *uppleva* (Swedish) or *oplevelse* (Danish and Norwegian) and the noun *upplevelse* (Swedish) or *oplevelse* (Danish and Norwegian). The Finnish (near-) equivalent is the noun *elämys* which is derived from *elämä*, meaning “life, living”. The nouns *upplevelse*, *oplevelse* and *elämys* tend to stand for unique, deeply affecting and powerful sensory experiences, sometimes involving the supernatural world. Swedes may speak about the act of giving birth as an *upplevelse*. Possibly one could say that the words *erfarenhet*, *erfaring* and *kokemus*, have stronger cognitive overtones than *upplevelse*, *oplevelse* and *elämys*. Often enough the two words overlap in meanings and usages. At the same time the workshop participants came to realize that the distinction between these two words has bearing on folk narrative studies in the Nordic countries; a great deal of meeting-time was spent on attempts to specify the differences between the two words and on fruitless attempts to find English translations for them. In this book we try to mark the distinction between the two words, whenever we think that it is important to do so.

Our experiences constitute “a powerful force that propels us forward” (Blehr 1999a: 4, my translation). Some experiences make indelible marks on us and on our bodies, not least such overwhelming experiences as childbirth, disease and war. Yet, experiences can have no meaning for us until we reflect upon them to ourselves on some conscious or nearly conscious level (Schutz 1975) or until we communicate them to others. What is more, as scholars we cannot easily grasp the meanings that experiences have for people unless we turn to the ways in which people represent them or express them: in their actions, in discourses, in writing, through bodily reactions, through the media, in material forms, through art, dance, and music – and in oral narration.

Indeed, narrating and storytelling constitute some of the prime ways known to human beings to communicate their experiences. When people tell stories they shape deeply felt experiences into “meaningful, apposite form” (Hymes 1975b: 346). When people tell stories they transform experiences “in narrative syntax” (Labov 1972). When people tell stories they tend to employ stylistic resources and metaphoric play in such a way that they render experiences meaningful on many different – more or less conscious – levels. When people tell stories they tie together many different realms of life and allow themselves and their audiences to hear many different voices. But at the same time as people shape experiences in (to) narrative form, narratives and narrating constitute experiences in themselves. Not only does the act of narrating become an experience for narrator and audience, people also reflect on their experiences and shape their meanings in accordance with narrative patterns that they know (Bauman 1986: 10). Experiences shape narrating and narrating shapes experiences in seemingly endless chains. Often storytellers incorporate previous storytelling situations into new ones as is evident in the case that Klein takes up in this volume. It is crucial that one understands the chain of mutual interdependences between experiencing and narrating. It is often said that “our lives are as a story that is told”; perhaps one can also say that our lives are like experiences that are (re-)lived and (re-)embodied in stories.

Within the study of folklore, experiences and experiencing are ambivalent terms with uncertain positions. First, different genres have different experiential status. On the one end of a scale are such narrative forms as *märchen* or wondertales. By mutual agreement narrators and audiences accept that their contents are fictitious and recognize that these kinds of stories concern fantasy characters who move in far-away, never-never lands. On the other end of the scale are personal experience stories and life stories. Whether speaking in humorous or tragic modes, the narrators of these stories most often strive to tell others about events that “really” took place in their own lives. In other words, to most oral narrators the issue of truth and untruth is a salient one. But this issue has consistently given researchers a great deal of trouble, something which is particularly true when the “truths” at issue are supernatural beliefs and experiences.<sup>10</sup>

The issues of experience and truth are particularly complex in the work of Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, not least in connection with the term *memorate*. As

noted earlier, with this term von Sydow meant, “people’s stories about their own experiences” in the real world (von Sydow 1948: 73). For experiences he used the word *upplevelse*, thereby indicating that he meant experiences that were deeply affecting to the people who had them. And although, in his early definitions, he did not specify that these experiences necessarily concerned supernatural beings, a great deal of his work involving the term came to circle around peoples stories about their experiences with the supernatural. What’s more, von Sydow created a great deal of confusion with regards to the relationship between belief, experience and story. On the one hand, he claimed that because the *memorate* was a representation of a person’s *own* experiences, it was more authentic and a closer reflection of what had “actually” happened than more elaborated or consciously fictionalized narrative forms. To him representations of authentic experiences in the form of *memorates* constituted proofs that people *believed in* the supernatural beings of the forests, waters, and fields. But *memorates* could not constitute proofs that such beings existed. Indeed, influenced by perception psychology, von Sydow was convinced that what people “actually” saw or heard were natural phenomena, such as owls or other animals. In other words, he and some other folklorists, notably Lauri Honko (1964), found themselves in the position that they had to discredit people’s experiences at the same time as they celebrated and analyzed their narratives about such experiences. In this ambivalence we most likely find some of the roots of the uncertain position of people’s experiences in many studies of folklore.<sup>11</sup> This is true not only in the Nordic countries but elsewhere as well, where the issue of experiential truth has been a constant stumbling-block to researchers.

With the advent of interest in life histories and with the discovery of personal experience stories, the realms of experience made available to folkloristic inquiry expanded in a multitude of ways. Any number of experiences, small and large, ordinary and extraordinary (Abrahams 1986) were now open for inquiry. Even so, extraordinary events remained highly valorized among researchers. Also in this book this tendency is evident in so far that some of the topics analyzed are wars, miraculous healing, HIV/AIDS. But also when they study ordinary, everyday interactions and events, scholars have observed that through the skilful use of narrative techniques, narrators can turn seemingly ordinary or trivial occurrences into extraordinary happenings with manifold layers of meanings. In this book Klein addresses such a case. In particular, researchers have begun studying how people intersperse longer accounts of life histories and local histories with brief narratives concerning specific and memorable experiences, the kinds of narratives that William Labov and Sandra Stahl identified. Folklorists have observed how people employ such briefer experience narratives for many reasons. They may do it order to authenticate their life experiences, to make listeners reflect or laugh, to handle painful or embarrassing topics, or for any number of other purposes. In the world of quotidian narration, many smaller forms are embedded in longer verbal presentations in the manner of Russian dolls (Arvidsson 1998). Moreover, people often insert such brief narratives also when they *write* autobiographies or the like.

We have learned a great deal from the many studies during the last few decades of “experience narratives”, both from the pioneering attempts in the performance school to relate narrating to peoples’ experiences and from some outstanding recent studies of the relationship between narrating and experiencing in specific societal and political and situations.<sup>12</sup> But despite this, many, perhaps most, aspects of the linkages between narrating, experiencing, and doing remain elusive. It is possible that, at least in the Nordic countries, there is still a lingering distrust of the experiences that “common people” represent in narration, a distrust left over since von Sydow’s days. Most likely, the major reason is the difficulty in attempts to link together narrative form and lived life, art and social reality. In this respect, folklorists sometimes differ from scholars in such related fields as ethnology and anthropology who tend to focus on the experiences “behind” the words and disregard the formal aspects or the “surface” of narration. The great challenge is to study the links between narrative form and experience, the links between experiences as narratives and narratives as experiences. After all, a primary way to grasp the ways in which people understand their experiences is by paying attention to the ways they represent them in words or other means of expression.

In her contribution to this volume Anne Leonora Blaakilde addresses one of the many difficult issues involved here, namely that people tend to value their experiences highly but not to the stories they tell about them.<sup>13</sup> People often think of their experiences as “true” and of the narratives they tell about them as more or less fictionalized versions or “weak reflections” of this truth. It should also be emphasized that people in our era place an extraordinary emphasis on the seeming immediacy of experiencing and doing, perhaps even more than they do on narrating. The experience industry is taking hold of all of us and many people are in constant search of powerful experiences: there is an “immense hunger for experience”, remarks Roger Abrahams (1986:52). Indeed, students of culture, are now devising new ways to use phenomenology in order to describe and analyze experiences as they happen (Frykman and Gilje 2003). It could be said that we live in the midst of an “experience turn” just as much as in a “narrative turn”. Most likely, the two turns are related in intricate ways.

Seemingly endless numbers of questions can be posed regarding the linkages between doing, experiencing, and narrating. Some of these questions have been taken up by students of literature, esthetics, drama and others, but many questions have received scant attention. How do oral narrators in different cultures *actually* communicate strong emotions and touch their audiences (Sawin 2002: 34)? How do they create tears and laughter? How does Lena do it in the interview analyzed by Kaivola-Bregenhøj and how does Gustav do it in Klein’s article? What role does the red dress play to re-evolve a powerful memory in Anne Heimo’s analysis? When does stylistic elaboration intensify and deepen meanings (Hymes 1981:10) and when does it not? Does a proliferation of tears during narration also move the audience to tears? How do people in the course of narration dramatically re-experience in their bodies previous powerful bodily experiences, such as childbirth (Skog 2002: 179–181)? And, how do we grasp and analyze all those silences, all

those experiences that are not represented verbally at all (Mills 1991: 20–21)? How do we understand all those times when experiences are so powerful that narrators, even the most skillful of narrators, cannot speak, those times when they are overwhelmed by sorrow and get “clumps in their throats”, those times when terror makes “a mockery of sense-making” (Briggs, with Mantini-Briggs 2003: 77)? Mostly, we can understand all that which cannot be said only by a careful study of that which *is* said, as Ulf Palmenfelt observed in one of our workshops. We have to learn to study the subtle communicative interactions in order to understand all those experiences that cannot be given verbal form, Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj pointed out on the same occasion. To do this one needs to work for long periods together with the same narrators and the people surrounding them. But, great ethical problems are involved here. What are scholars allowed to reveal? What experiences are best kept in silence?

*Concluding remarks: folkloristic contributions to narrative analysis during and after the narrative turn*

Because of their complex nature as representations of experiences and as (often profound) experiences in themselves, oral narratives and oral narration are special entry-points to understanding human beings and the ways in which they shape their lives, their history and cultural memory. Folklorists have long realized this. Furthermore, if it is true (as it seems to be) that we are in the midst of a narrative turn and that an entire world of scholarship is engaged in thinking about and studying narrating, narration and narratives (in broader or narrower senses), this ought to be a golden moment for folklorists. A whole world of scholarship is opening up. In other words, this is a time to learn from all the new insights formed in different disciplinary contexts and to develop firmer folkloristic contributions on that basis. The folkloristic expertise in studying oral narrating and oral narratives is a resource to the other human and social sciences – more than folklorists seem to realize. In conclusion, let me comment briefly on two strong aspects of folklore study.

One is the tradition of scholarship rooted in ethnography of speaking and performance studies. In my view, folklore scholars have not yet exhausted the possibilities of these methodologies. On the contrary, the great value of meticulous and long range empirical work with narrating in small-scale human interactions is becoming increasingly evident. Yet, in order to understand better the many dimensions of peoples’ stories, laughter, tears, and silences in small-scale contexts, folklore scholars will have to expand their visions and combine their careful ethnographic work with investigations of more comprehensive social, cultural, and political issues. A couple of the essays in this collection attempt to do so. Yet, they do not do it boldly enough. If the study of narrating in small-scale interactions is to be truly fruitful it must be combined with broad perspectives.<sup>14</sup>

Another important folkloristic strength is historical expertise. In folkloristics the understandings of narrating, doing and experiencing do not

rest only on analyses of contemporary life-stories and experience stories as is the case in sociolinguistics and many other fields. Rather, folklorists have a long history of investigating a multitude of narrative expressions and forms at different periods of time and in different parts of the world: from South American Indian myths and Mongolian epics to European wonder-tales. Because of this long research history and because of periods of strong historical interests within the discipline, folklorists have incomparable opportunities to historicize the concerns of the present, to compare older and newer expressive forms and contexts with older ones, and ultimately to discover new dimensions on the confounding relationships between narrating, doing, and experiencing.

## NOTES

- 1 Attributed to Paul Ricoeur (1971) the term textualization has increasingly been used in folkloristics to describe the complex process of transforming forms of oral communication into written texts. This process constitutes the central analytic problem in Lauri Honko's seminal work, *Textualizing the Siri Epic* (1998).
- 2 Many "turns" have taken place within the last two decades or so. There are, for example, the "literary turn" in anthropology, the "cultural" and "dialogic turns" in sociology, and the "ethical turn" in the humanities in general. There is also a growing literature on various "turns", such as Jameson (1998) and Camic and Joas (2004). It may not be far-fetched to suggest that many of the "turns" are related to each other.
- 3 Regrettably, no Icelandic scholar took part in the project. Also absent were scholars from the Baltic countries, and this despite the fact that Baltic and Nordic folklorists nowadays often cooperate closely with one another.
- 4 Five workshops and two editorial meetings have been supported by the Nordic Network on Folklore (NNF) and NOS-H. This support is hereby gratefully acknowledged. The workshops took place in Stockholm, Turku, Bergen, Copenhagen, and Visby.
- 5 Through its follow-up, the Nordic Network of Folklore (NNF), which co-funded the meetings on which this anthology is based, the spirit of cooperation continued. However, also the NNF has now ceased to exist.
- 6 A translation of an early and brief contribution by Olrik (1908) is in *The Study of Folklore*, edited by Alan Dundes (1965).
- 7 Beginning in 1909, Von Sydow's folkloristic *oeuvre* spans more than four decades. His most important articles were published in English and German in 1948 in *Selected Papers on Folklore*, edited by Laurits Bødker. However, one should be aware of the difficulties involved in using von Sydow's terminology. He continuously re-examined his coinages and definitions (Rooth 1971:13) and individual scholars have stressed different aspects of his definitions and are using his terms in different senses.
- 8 A current usage in the Scandinavian languages is confusing, namely that the word *narrativ* (without an "e" at the end; plural *narrativer*) both within and outside folkloristics has come to stand for all kinds of briefer narratives (jokes, anecdotes, personal experience stories, and others) that are embedded in larger contexts, such as interviews, every-day conversations, or long renditions of life stories (cf. Arvidsson 1998). This usage is unclear in the light of the more inclusive meanings of "narrative" in English.
- 9 The question of "conscious" or "unconscious" is, of course, exceptionally difficult and there will be no attempts to debate it on these pages.
- 10 Since the seventeenth century, the clergy in the Nordic countries studied supernatural beliefs that were not sanctioned by the church so that these beliefs would become

known and could be weeded out. Then, at the height of Romanticism, many scholars and writers also became fascinated with the experiences with supernatural beings that common people expressed in stories. For a long time, attempts to “get rid of superstitions” went hand in hand with a fascination for them. Thus, ambivalence concerning “the supernatural” has a long history, a history that impacts upon our own era.

- 11 The best known statement of some of the problems involved is Linda Dégh’s and Andrew Vázsonyi’s article, “Legend and Belief” (1971).
- 12 An excellent recent example of the latter is the large book *Stories in the Time of Cholera. Racial Profiling during a Medical Nightmare* by Charles Briggs and Clara Mantini-Briggs (2003).
- 13 We find here find an interesting reversal of von Sydow’s position.
- 14 Some recent studies by folklorists and anthropologists do use such bold strokes. One is *Stories in the Time of Cholera* (2003) by Charles Briggs with Clara Mantini-Briggs, which has been mentioned before on these pages; here the experience stories by a great number of individuals are ingeniously linked to global economy and global inequality. Another example is folklorist Amy Shuman and legal scholar Carol Bohmer’s (2004) study of how asylum seekers in the United States learn to shape the culturally correct kinds of experience narratives that are necessary if they are to convince the immigration bureaucracy of their need for protection. The study presents particularly interesting connections between narrating, experiencing, and doing. A third and entirely different example is Ruth Finnegan’s *Tales of the City* (1998), an intriguing analysis of the powerful intertextual weave formed by all kinds of storytellers (housewives, scholars, retired businessmen, city planners, politicians) about one English city.

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## War as a Turning Point in Life

Some fifty years had passed since the outbreak of war when I interviewed Ingrian Finns, living in the region southwest of St Petersburg in 1992–1993. When asked to tell me about their lives, very many of them began by talking about the war. “The outbreak of war” meant 22 June 1941, when the Germans began advancing on Leningrad and the evacuation of the local population began. I have here chosen to introduce four women and discuss their narratives about the evacuation that heralded a change that was to alter their entire lives.

The Ingrian Finns, as they are called, are people of Finnish descent whose forefathers moved from the eastern regions of Finland to the area around what is now St Petersburg from the 17th century onwards. In the 1920s there were 138,000 Ingrian Finns living in this area, but by the 1990s their number had, as a result of the Second World War and Stalin’s deportations, been reduced to only about 20,000. Meanwhile there were about 61,000 calculated as living in other parts of the then Soviet Union (Nevalainen 1991: 9).<sup>1</sup> The re-migration to Finland from the early 1990s onwards has reduced this minority even further.<sup>2</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 made it possible for researchers once again to carry out fieldwork in the regions of Russia once inhabited by Finns and visited by enthusiastic collectors of folk poetry in the 19th century. I myself was able to take part in two field trips arranged by the Finnish Literature Society to the villages of southwest Ingria where people of Finnish descent now live side by side with Russians.

The minority of Finnish descent and many of the families I interviewed had been affected by the chaos even before the outbreak of the Second World War. The first deportations from Ingria were in 1921, and by 1931 some 18,000 people had been exiled to other parts of the Soviet Union. Like other minorities, the Ingrian Finns were victims of Stalin’s ethnic cleansing, imprisonment and deportation, and some 50,000 are reckoned to have perished by the time war broke out. The religiously active and more well-to-do members of the population were hardest hit by the persecution. As we drove through the villages in our fieldwork area, our local contact would mention farms where the owner had been “made a kulak” and banished to Siberia in the great ethnic cleansings of the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile the Ingrian

Finns, like many of the other minorities, lost their cultural rights<sup>4</sup> as well, and in 1937 the Finnish language was prohibited and newspapers in Finnish banned. (Nevalainen 1991: 258–260.) The following year saw the closing of the Finnish-speaking schools and a prohibition on the practice of religion (Sihvo 1991: 354). Many of the people I interviewed remembered the day they had to start speaking Russian instead of Finnish at school; they were not allowed to speak Finnish even during the breaks between lessons.

### *Fieldwork*

I have conducted many interviews over the years, but not until I started doing them in Ingria<sup>5</sup> did I begin by asking people to tell me about their own lives. There were two reasons for this: first, the traditional folklore topics (such as legends and beliefs) were, in the Ingria of the 1990s, no longer a natural topic with which to begin a conversation. People had spent 10–12 years in harsh conditions away from their roots, in surroundings where there was neither room nor use for, say, the prose tradition related to their native areas. Second, I set out into the field to find out about the Ingrian identity and wanted, through my interviews, to come to grips with this complex subject (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1997).

People find it both natural and difficult to speak about their lives. I was astonished to find that a simple request – “Can you tell me about your life?” – should immediately produce narrative containing some intimate and sometimes very terrible details of the major turning points in their lives. Many began their tale not with childhood or memories of school, but with the moment the war began for them. This was a clear turning point in their lives. It was unusual in that we immediately got launched on topics that are often only touched on after a long time spent together and after the creation of mutual trust. I was also surprised at the ease with which contacts were forged. Our local guide, who helped us to find the villages with inhabitants of Finnish descent, was a trusted member of a minority, familiar to all. With him as our guide, people were prepared to confide in us.

Our interview schedule was to some extent hampered by the fact that our guide, who was also our driver, wanted us to meet as many potential interviewees as possible. Since we had only one car at our disposal and the roads were bad, much of the day was spent getting the six members of the fieldwork team from their lodgings to the villages. Sometimes the interviews had to be cut short because the others were all outside waiting to leave. Being a folklorist, I would have preferred longer, repeated interview sessions.<sup>6</sup> But because I found most of the meetings very intense, I was left with an impression that they had been successful. I am, however, in no doubt that this impression was due not only to the discussions but also to the interview environment, which was quite different from anything I had experienced before, and to the fact that my experiences had a great effect on me emotionally.

Coming from Finland and visiting a country village in Ingria is like

“stepping back into the past”. Most of the buildings are old, and the houses are either grey timber or, more recently, painted. Some villages had a new concrete housing estate, prized because it had such amenities as running water and central heating. The standard of the new buildings is, however, poor, and the staircases and yards are untended and dirty. The detached houses are, by contrast, surrounded by a kitchen garden that is cultivated with care because any food that can be grown is more than welcome. Even the small detached houses had domestic animals – a cow, pigs and chickens. The animals were kept in temporary sheds of which people were ashamed and which were not supposed to be shown to visitors. Our interviewees were incredibly hospitable and pressed all sorts of produce on us: potatoes, tomatoes, apples and eggs. Our fieldwork team came away laden with food because we could not refuse everything we were offered. Sometimes the gifts were in exchange for the coffee, tea and sugar we had brought with us to hand around.

The four women I wish to talk about here – we will call them Anna, Kaarina, Lisa and Lena – lived in two villages here termed The Adjacent Villages, southwest of St Petersburg. I interviewed them in the summer of 1992 and briefly met some of them again the following summer. I chose these four from a possible thirty or more because they all began their narrative with the war and evacuation and since, coming from neighbouring villages, they had all been through similar evacuation experiences. There was something about them that made me unable to forget them. By this I mean my own feelings, which I will be trying to analyse in conjunction with their narratives, because the memories of our meetings cannot avoid influencing my interpretation of their narratives. To quote my colleague Laura Aro: “...a narrative is a product of narration, a process, which the narrator creates and the listener interprets, each on his or her own terms and from his or her own world” (Aro 1996: 48). The women’s narratives were without any doubt influenced by the fact that I was Finnish. To them, I represented Finland, a country where people spoke their own language (or a language very similar to it), and to which they had been evacuated. This early stage of their long journey had, for all of them, been easier than the end. Many wondered why on earth they had not stayed on in Finland. Since the Ingrians were not yet sick of tourists in the early 1990s (the first Bed & Breakfast visits to The Adjacent Villages were made in 1993), and the interest in Finland had long been nothing but positive due to gifts and aid from the Finnish church, etc. (including a temporary church, food and clothing), it was easy for the interviewee to be a Finn. There was something in me that made them openly confide in me.

### *Four women, four narratives*

Anna, Kaarina, Lisa and Lena lived near one another in The Adjacent Villages, which until the Second World War were completely Finnish-speaking. Anna, Kaarina and Lisa had families and knew one another because they all went to church on Sundays. Lena lived alone and was the oldest of the four, but she still went to work in St Petersburg several days a week at the age of 77.

I met Lisa on the road running through the village and immediately took up her invitation to call in at the family's summer home beside the road. While visiting Anna and Kaarina, I could not help noticing the big kitchen garden, the daily tending of which took both time and energy. The old yard had been turned over to growing things, and between the vegetables were flowerbeds in their August glory.

The experiences of Anna, Kaarina, Lisa and Lena may on the surface seem rather similar, but the four women differed greatly as narrators. Even so, I had the impression that they each began their narrative by pouring out one key experience.

### **Anna**

When I arrived to interview Anna, her 39-year-old daughter had just come home from the shop for lunch. She immediately agreed to an interview, and with Anna's help, we managed to overcome our language difficulties. Although the daughter looked upon herself as Finnish, she spoke Russian better, and that was the language she spoke with her husband. Before she went back to work, she fetched a candlestick from her room to give me as a present.

Having noted down Anna's personal particulars (b. 1928), I asked her: "Could you tell me a bit about your life?" At which she asked me, "Well what interests you more? What do you want me to tell you? About my childhood, or what?", to which I replied, "Anything from childhood onwards." At which Anna began her story. (The dashes in brackets (---) signify a slight pause or search for words.) For the purposes of analysis I have put all the place names and indications of locality in the plot in italics.

Anna: "Well, when I was a child, we lived over *there at Virkkilä*, with my mother and father. My sister was sent to *Germany*. The Germans came *here*. They gave us a whole twelve hours in which to empty *the village*. Everyone had to leave. After eight o'clock in the evening no one was allowed to go *anywhere*. And by six o'clock in the morning everything had to be ready to be taken to *Estonia*. We were given one horse and the children ... we had to put all our belongings in bags. All the cattle had to be left *behind*, and everything else we possessed. And so we came to *Hatsina* (---) the Nazis had brought us *there*. And so we waited. Then we were given a wagon and we were brought *here to the Baltic coast*. (---) First we were taken, they were enormous soldiers' *barracks*. Well, *the military mansions, the military mansions where we were billeted*. The Jews were *in one*. We were *in the other one*. We were *in the soldiers' mansions*. Reckon we spent a week *there*, and then we were taken *to the coast, to the Baltic Sea coast*. And then I remember, it was a German boat, the boat was called the *Siilas*, and there were *sixteen villages* on the boat, we were all put *on board*. They're calling out *Virkkilä village*, all the children and all the adults *from Kousunkylä*, we all got on the boat and we were brought *to Rauma, to Rauma we were brought, Rauma harbour*."

Anna continued with a description of how the family lived in Rauma and ended with a brief account of their return to the Soviet Union. In telling about

the return, she suddenly burst into tears. I nevertheless wish to examine only the description of their departure.

The narrative outlines the first of the rapid deportations that befell the Ingrian Finns during and even after the Second World War. By the time of the interview, some fifty years had passed since they had been forced to leave. Anna's tears nevertheless revealed that talking about it was not easy, even though her narrative may on first reading (and especially without my italics) seem rather impassive (as it did on hearing it). I have often thought about this narrative, and the person, Anna, who told it, and each time I have found new keys to its interpretation.

One of the things that struck me first as I began to unwrap the possible interpretations of Anna's story was her language. The telling of this memory is marked in its use of the passive ("we were given a wagon and we were brought here") and the recurring use of the verbs "to give", "to bring" and "to take", which stress that the decisions about them were not made by the narrator and family but came from elsewhere. The narrator, Anna, was an object to whom the things happened, like it or not. Above all Anna here strongly emphasises the "we-experience": the events affected the family, the kin, the whole village or even a whole ethnic group. One interesting feature of this narrative is the frequent use of the words "we", "us" and "all", which in seven cases out of nine indicates that the event was experienced by a whole group.

If the narrator was a mere pawn in the game about to begin, then so was her sister, who is not named in the narrative. The statement "My sister went to Germany" is the briefest possible description of a great upheaval in the life of a very close relative. It is even briefer in the original Finnish ("Sisko Saksaan."), and it is not certain whether the sister herself decided to flee from the war to Germany or whether she was sent there. For some of the Ingrian Finns were sent to labour camps in Germany. There is nothing in Anna's tone of voice to indicate that the fate of her sister made her stop and think. Her fate was just one of many.

That the events all happened a long time ago is reflected by the fact that there are very few precise references to time: no mentions of dates or years, for example. All the expressions of time are at the beginning: "when I was a child", "a whole twelve hours", "after eight o'clock in the evening", "by six o'clock in the morning". Once the journey has begun, Anna marks it off with "first", "a week" and finally "then". These temporal designations are interesting in that they could appear in any narrative. In other words, they are generic rather than personal.

The only approximate definitions of time are offset here by precise definitions of place. The numerous place names and even more frequent expressions of locality give the impression that, as she spoke, Anna was drawing a map in her mind that became increasingly exact as the journey proceeded. A precise location was followed by shifts in time. By repeating phrases Anna seemed to stop and linger on them (she mentions the soldiers' mansions four times and the Baltic Sea coast three times); they are important as transfers from one place to the next and as memory- and mindscapes. The terminal point of the narrative is here the town of Rauma in Finland, which

is again repeated several times. The repetition of locality may also express the length of the journey, both in time and in distance.

Many folklorists have noticed that locality may compensate in a narrative for the lack of a time perspective. Narrators may “remember” people and events of historical importance via the places with which they are associated. Anna-Leena Siikala (1998) reports that on the Polynesian island of Mauke, places have concrete meaning to narrators: people may go to them and there teach the children of the community the history of the family and kin. Although the outsider may not necessarily notice anything special about the place, the locals know precisely what should be remembered there. Henry Glassie (1982: 662–664) stresses that in Ballymenone in Ireland he had to specifically ask the time to which historical narratives were referring, as this was overshadowed by place and events. It was very noticeable that when young men told historical narratives learnt from their elders, they associated them primarily with a place, and the time of the event was immaterial. This seems easy to understand: the place still exists, here and now, whereas the time is gone and over. In Anna’s case, admittedly, the place has become abstract, because the focal points of the narrative, in Estonia and Finland, are no longer visible before her eyes and exist only in her memory.

If I were to show Anna my interpretations of her narrative, she would no doubt be astonished at the numerous details that have attracted my attention. Some of the details are to do with the narrative devices (such as the links with time and place), while others reveal the perspectives emphasised by her as a woman and as a representative of the Ingrian-Finnish minority (the emphasis on the ‘we’ perspective). But how would I phrase my observation that her narrative does not, at the verbal level, appear to bear any trace of emotion? The fact that she burst into tears a moment later took me completely by surprise, because there had been nothing in her story to prepare me for it. Anna, and many of her fellow sufferers, had on the face of it left Finland to return home of their own free will in late 1944 and early 1945, and not until they reached the Finnish-Soviet border did they hear that they were in fact being deported to Yaroslav. During the ten years they were forced to spend away from home they suffered so many trials and tribulations, hunger and the death of near-ones and dear-ones, that the experience had presumably turned Anna into a matter-of-fact narrator.

The fragment of life story narrated to me tended towards the tragic, but the good narrators also found motifs to talk about in the calmer periods of life. Anna had a good command of this side, too, and recalled some of the joyful things – like dancing – when she was young: “...There was always something to be cheerful about when we were young. Life was fun, it was. It was a cheerful time when we were young...” Once again the events began as a “we-narrative”, and the subject did not become I until she met her future husband.

### **Kaarina**

Kaarina (b. 1927) was Anna’s neighbour and good friend. I met them together in church, and Kaarina told me that being neighbours, they had quite a lot

to do with each other. On the Sunday I had met a group of women waiting for the bus to take them to church and had fixed a time to talk to a number of them. I thus made my way to Kaarina's neat, detached house, which was again surrounded by a big vegetable garden and fruit trees.

Kaarina had been baking and had coffee ready for me. She was a quiet soul, and I got the impression that she was a little unsettled by her unmarried 40-year-old son who drank and was in and out of the house. I sometimes had to press her for information, because she was not a natural narrator. Once I had taken down her personal details, our conversation proceeded as follows:

AK-B: "Can you tell me something about your life?"

Kaarina: "Well I was thirteen when the war began. Then in the autumn of forty-three we travelled to Finland."

AK-B: "How did the war begin here? In what ways did you notice it? What happened here?"

Kaarina: "Well I don't know now what happened. It wasn't good in any way. They were difficult years like, and there wasn't any bread and. Then in autumn forty-one and forty-two we had enough potatoes and forty-three there was grain, and. It had been sown. So then we had bread, too. In autumn forty-three our mother died and father had been caught in Leningrad in the war and never came back. Then we travelled. One of my sisters was older than me and I had two younger brothers. We travelled to Finland, and everyone from The Adjacent Villages travelled together. So...we were at Rauma to begin with."

Kaarina was a year older than Anna when war broke out and was forced to leave home with her brothers and sister. The mention of "Rauma" indicates that she had made exactly the same journey as Anna. A moment later she specified more precisely:

AK-B: "How was the journey to Finland?"

Kaarina: "Well we were given twenty-four hours. The same for everyone taken through Estonia. We weren't there in Estonia (place name unclear, refers to Klooga), were we there one week only perhaps, and they took us in a big ship. We spent a year in Rauma..."

The route travelled and the journey itself was in all probability the same as those reported by Anna, but Kaarina's narrative lacked all the precise details of Anna's. From the narrative point of view the text is rather thin even though Kaarina carefully repeats all the dates, since she does not dwell on events, merely giving a brief summary, but the contents contain some tragic details. Her father, who "had got caught in Leningrad in the war and never came back", had presumably met the same fate as the 10,000 or so other Ingrian Finns who got caught up in the siege of Leningrad. Some starved to death there, some were transported over the frozen Lake Ladoga to distant Siberia. (Nevalainen 1991: 267–268.) Kaarina's mother having died just after war broke out, the four orphans, of which 13-year-old Kaarina was the second oldest, had to leave home with the other villagers. Another detail of the narrative I wish to point out is the expression "twenty-four hours", which kept recurring in the narratives of many of the people I interviewed. People

were given 24 hours in which to gather together the things they wished to take with them. Even when people were being deported from their native regions, they were allowed this much time to prepare for their departure. Anyone who had experienced this knew what 24 or 12 hours meant and it served as a sufficient metaphor in narrating.

Kaarina tells about all the stages in her life with the utmost brevity. Some of her sentences end with the word “and”, as if she intended to continue. In speaking of their departure, she uses the neutral word “travel”. I realise from my own frequent questions that I was nervous because the narrative did not seem to be getting under way. I recall that it was by this time evening, and I had been interviewing others all day. I felt bad about not seeming to be able to establish rapport with Kaarina. She was not a “narrator”, but she had agreed to an interview of her own free will. She could have refused, but because her two neighbours had been interviewed, refusal would have meant exclusion. Margaret Mills (1991: 20) talks about “silential relations, the relations of the said to the unsaid and the unsayable”, the “most problematical and most intriguing” issues in narratives. “What are the things that are remaining unsaid?” was one of my primary questions in analysing the repertoire of one narrator, Juho Oksanen (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996: 69–74). In Kaarina’s case the reasons for her silence were never investigated, since I did not possess the long partnership and sizeable interview material this would have required.

The drama of Kaarina’s narrative is not evident in any way from her verbalisation; it springs from her experiences. The narrative is an account of her losses, yet the tragedy was only revealed when I started to analyse the text. I have since debated the therapeutic effect of forgetting and saying nothing: could it have been one reason for Kaarina’s laconism. It has been found that victims of the Holocaust, for example, may be loath to tell of their experiences because they fear the torment their memories cause them (Kirmayer 1996: 174).

### **Lisa**

I walked along the road through The Adjacent Villages, handing out chewing gum to the children who asked for it. Lisa (b. 1929) came up to talk to me and invited me to step into her house. Her family had a little cottage for summer use surrounded only by a vegetable garden and fruit trees. It was August. Lisa was preserving cherries and she gave me a big jar of them to take home with me. Our meeting meant very much to her, and even while we were still out in the road she began telling me about her time in Finland as a young girl. The interview therefore began after I had taken down her details with the question: “When were you in Finland?”

Lisa: “During the war.”

AK-B: “Could you tell me about it, and a bit about your life in general?”

Lisa: “When the war was on, I was twelve at the time. Well then we went hungry. We were taken to a camp in Estonia. And my mother...I can’t go on. It was so terrible. (sobbing) My brother died in the camp. Then there was one other brother, he did not get as far as Karelia, he died.

Then there were Germans. We were really hungry. Grass we ate, and all sorts of things. *Vot*, the men used the sauna, and me, I remember when I was small. My mother was there, and we and the men all sit side by side. They were all hungry, all had long necks and /long/ hair. No one was ashamed of anything, because we were starving. Then the German soldiers went away. My brother was fifteen at the time. Nine boys there were who went. They took rusks from behind the stove. They meant to kill them, to put a rope round their necks. Then the village elder went and asked /whether the punishment could be changed /to a whipping. Then my brother got twelve lashes of the whip. And so he came home on all fours. All the parents were waiting for their children to come home. It was a terrible time. Then the Finns took us. We were brought to Hanko. Then from Hanko we went to a camp in Savonlinna. From Savonlinna we were taken to Kurikka. Then we had an aunt near Hämeenlinna. Then we came here to Parola. We stayed at Parola.”

AK-B: “How would you describe your time there in Finland?”

Lisa: “It was good in Finland. It was very good at Parola. We stayed with a farmer and it was a good farm. A Finnish farm. Very good farmers, they gave us plenty to eat. We ate a lot. It was good in Finland.”

AK-B: “You were quite a young girl then?”

Lisa: “Fifteen....”

I will stop Lisa’s narrative at the point where she begins reporting her return to the Soviet Union. Like many others, she had close relatives – a brother – who had remained in Ingria and she therefore felt a need to return voluntarily, but instead of ending up at home in 1945, she was sent far away.

Lisa’s narrative is slightly disjointed because of both the sobbing and the language, for she mixes both Estonian and Russian with her Ingrian dialect. Many terrible events, ranging from hunger to death and the dire punishment for stealing food come pouring out at a rapid tempo. It is as if the dammed up pain is unleashed as she tells of her family’s experiences. Again, Lisa does not stop at many details: the memories are so painful and she has to fight to control her feelings. The Finnish place names listed at the end of the narrative, from western to eastern Finland and back again, indicate the many moves the evacuees had to make. Although I had already heard many versions of the sad stories by the time I met Lisa, I could not help asking myself whether I was doing the right thing in asking her about her life. But she was more than eager to tell me; she felt a compulsion to speak.

Obviously news of our interview team sped around The Adjacent Villages<sup>7</sup>. I was undoubtedly chosen as a listener, as women from the villages came forth and volunteered to be interviewed. Many have quite rightly emphasised that life histories reflect the informant’s experience of the researcher as a person and the things that will, without being explicitly stated, be of interest to him or her (Danielsen 1995: 111). As the atmosphere became more liberal in the early 1990s, it is possible that people were, for the first time in their lives, able to speak of their ancient traumas to an outsider who was at the same time felt to be almost a friend. Many spoke of themselves as Finns, and the term Ingrian Finn has only entered the Finnish language since the Second World War. Being Finnish was for my interviewees a guarantee, as it were, that the interviewer was a suitable listener and person to talk to. This

should also be borne in mind in the sense that it undoubtedly affected the way the narrators poured out their experiences. Only one of the thirty people I interviewed made any cautious criticism of her time in Finland.

It became apparent in the course of Lisa's narrative that she had a strong emotional desire to be classed as a Finn and to visit Finland once again. Some of the women from *The Adjacent Villages* had visited Finland on a trip arranged by the church, but the strict "pecking order" had, it seems, meant that quiet, timid people like Lisa got left at home. Some of the villagers were known to have been turncoats, calling themselves first Russians and then Finns, depending on which way the wind was blowing (e.g. aid from Finland). Under the Soviet regime a person's nationality was entered as he or she wished on his/her passport.

### **Lena**

Lena (b. 1915) was the oldest of the four women from *The Adjacent Villages* and in other ways different from the others. By the time we met she was already 77, but she had a job in St Petersburg some days a week, washing floors and dishes in a hospital. Lena was a widow and lived alone in her house. She had had the house repaired and therefore needed the extra income she could earn to eke out her meagre pension. There was firewood to be bought, and she had to pay someone to chop it up. Whereas everyone else said, when asked, that childhood had been the best time of their lives, Lena's childhood had been marred by her father's drinking and the resulting want. By the age of 13 Lena had already had to go out driving a sand lorry. She said that once you have learnt to work, you can't stop.

Having noted down her particulars (name, year of birth, home village) I asked Lena my usual question: "Could you tell me something about your life?" She replied immediately by asking, "You mean how we lived during the war and before the war?" I hardly had time to nod before she began to talk. In other words, she herself set the war as the cornerstone on which to anchor her narrative. Never before had I come across an interviewee who jumped straight into an experience that took place decades ago with such intensity that I almost had the feeling she had only been waiting for me in order to tell about the coming of the Germans in 1941. Like all good narrators, she drew me unconditionally into her personal narrative world (cf. Palmenfelt 1993: 176–196). Here, now, is a relatively broad extract from her long narrative to illustrate the tempo with which the memories pour out once Lena embarks on her story. I have marked the narrative with // with a view to subsequent analysis.

Lena: "The war came, we'd no idea where it would all lead. What it would come to. We fled into the forest to escape it. We took the cow and everything with us into the forest and went off into the forest. They were already firing in the forest. They were starting to shoot everyone. We ate mushrooms there and milked the cow. My cow got left behind. I left the cow there. We left because we thought we'd only meet our deaths in the forest, we'd starve to death. I went to Leningrad, I gave the cow to some poor people. There was a woman there, and she had five children.

I gave her the cow.

AK-B: (clarifying question omitted)

Then Germany drew near, Germany drew near and the Russians are coming, the bodies of Germans are being carried away. I took off and came away. My mother remained there, my brother, my sister remained there. They all remained in the forest, my father.

AK-B: (clarifying question omitted)

Where do you think you're going, you'll meet the Germans. Yes where? // I came home in the evening. There's no one in the village. I heated up my aunty's oven, my own oven. I set about cutting bread, to dry it and make rusks in the oven. I dried the bread, and I saw them all coming back from the forest, they were all coming home from the forest. They all came home. We dried the bread. We had some flour. I made a tub of dough, to bake some bread. A day later (unclear at this point) they all came home from the forest. There they sit, I've already got the bread in the oven. // Our own folk I mean our own folk, the Finns urge us to leave immediately. My aunt and I looked for lice. We killed the lice on each others' heads (laughs)."

AK-B: "Yes."

Lena: "I'm telling you all this."

AK-B: "Please just tell me how things were."

Lena: "How they were, yes. We have to go into the forest, to Nearton (name altered). The Germans are coming. We have to go to Nearton. We had bread in the oven. Please let us finish the bread in the oven. They didn't. My aunt, she came and stood up for us. They grabbed her by the hair, they threw her out. I mean our own, our own Finns."

AK-B: "How come that was so?"

Lena: "We have got to leave home. She is not going, the loaves are in the oven. Threw her out by the hair. The children started to cry. The children were still small, they began to cry. So then they stopped. And then they began from down there, driving everybody away from the village. The rain was bucketing down. Everyone was rounded up. Oh and the fresh loaves were put into sacks. As soon as they were baked they were put into the sacks. Mother had a cow. I had a cow, we put the sacks on the cows' backs. // And so many kilometres, it's ten kilometres to Nearton through the forest. Up to here in mud. We just loaded some clothes onto the cows' backs and off we went, to Nearton. The cows grew tired having to carry sacks on their backs like horses. My brother was only little. How old would he have been? He was nine, he was. He wanted something to drink. So there we are holding a mug, to milk the cow, to get him something to drink. We went over to Nearton. We had an aunt there, the whole village went to one place. So what then? The bombs started falling. My aunt got wounded in the leg. She was taken in mud (unclear). Just vanished like that. She's gone, where can she have gone? Then we just went wherever we could. There was a school there. We were all herded into the school. There were people trying to lie down, to get some sleep, everywhere, all on top of one another. So many people and so little room. That night there was bombing again..."

The sustained eye contact between Lena and me was the reason for the few clarifying questions. Lena seemed to halt if my expression changed, and I had to ask another question at once to be sure she knew I wanted to hear everything. Otherwise I listened to her with bated breath, and doing my best

to understand, because she spoke extremely fast and her language was spiced with Russian words which someone later had to explain to me. The fragment I have quoted represents about a third of her whole narrative.

All of a sudden Lena is there in the midst of events; it is as if she is seeing again a film familiar to her and trying to tell me what she can see before the events speed ahead. The experiences were Lena's and the "film" was hers, and the maker-narrator of this story is "I". The sentences are very short and packed with details following one upon the other. She uses a lot of repetition (e.g. "We had the bread in the oven. Please let us finish the bread in the oven." or "The children started to cry. The children were still small, they began to cry." or "We fled into the forest to escape it all. We took the cow and everything with us into the forest and went off into the forest."). By contrast, she does not use any filler words.<sup>8</sup> There is a lot of repetition of whole sentences or phrases. Repetition can give the narrator time to think about how to continue, or else it can be used to highlight the numerous events being mentioned. And once again, the narrative is entirely lacking in expressions of emotion (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2003). It occurs to me that the speed with which the narrative is delivered and the impression of chaos could be a sign of emotional outpouring. But Lena does not make any mention at all of being afraid. Not until much later does she mention fear, when she says the women were afraid of the Germans. Her choice of verbs does, by contrast, underline the action (fire/shoot, grab, throw, cry, drive away, milk, and bomb) and the entire narrative is full of frenzied simultaneous action.

The narrative is on first hearing – or reading – difficult to grasp, but the incorporation of chaos in the narration is really a salient feature of Lena's narrative. As you read the story again and again, the concrete, cinematic quality and speed of the events become even more striking. The narrative can be broken down into contentual elements, thus yielding four separate stages (indicated // in the text): (1) the fear of war and hiding in the forest, (2) the return home and preparations, (3) leaving home, and (4) the evacuation to Nearton and the bombing. The elements hang together logically and structure the narrative. The speed of the events is checked in the narrative by a few hiatuses when Lena describes how the bread was made and the heads deloused on reaching home, and later how the cow was milked in mid flight so that her thirsty little brother could have something to drink. At these points the narrator momentarily abandons the past tense, the imperfect, the tense normally used in narratives, and instead adopts a dramatic present. A change of tense has been found to enhance the drama of a narrative (Schiffrin 1981: 52). But soon the flight continues, because the soldiers are forcing them away from the front. The children's crying, the rain, the mud, the exhausted cows and people concretise the general chaos. The bombs begin to fall. The fragment is an excellent example of the use of language by a dramatising narrator.

When war broke out, Lena was slightly older, 26, than my other narrators and in her narrative, too, she is more of an actor than the others, whose flight began when they were 12 or 13. To begin with Lena and her family found themselves trapped between two fronts, and they remained in their home area, which was occupied by the Germans, right up to 1943, when she said the

Germans evacuated them to Finland. In her narrative Lena gives a fleeting close-up of her aunt and little brother, and her mention of her brother has the tenderness of a big sister. Later in the narrative her brother is wounded in the leg. There are more mentions of cows in the story than there are of people: a domestic animal was a great asset in time of need. The calm command of the crisis and chaos is also demonstrated by the bread: it had to be baked just as the people were about to flee so that they would have something to eat on the journey. And if there was time, the bread would be dried to make rusks that would keep. Some of my interviewees told how, in a similar situation, a ram was slaughtered and roasted as food for the journey.

The interview with Lena continued after this long key narrative with a discussion that lasted for two hours in which she gave only short answers to my questions. When at one point I asked her what had been the most difficult moment in her life, she told me, in the form of a narrative, about being hungry and going begging in Estonia. The most difficult thing was overcoming her timidity and finding the courage to go to farms and ask for bread. No other narratives were forthcoming during our meeting. Could the long, intense narrative at the beginning of the interview have tired her out? Had she relieved the pressure of her memories once she had told the key narrative? I cannot find any answers to these questions in the course of the interview.

### *Experiences and narratives*

I have called the memoirs of these four women “key narratives”, by which I mean a report of an experience that was exceptionally meaningful to its narrator (cf. Jauhiainen 2000: 39) and in which the narrator interprets events in the past for the listener (cf. Ukkonen 2000: 139). In the case of these four women, and many others besides, the key narratives came right at the beginning of the recording and dealt with one of the decisive turning points in their lives. In most cases a narrative such as this is sure to come up again at some later stage in the conversation. One person may have several key narratives, but the experience of losing control over one’s own life is understandably one that can never be forgotten. It was also something they could tell me. The key narratives were not just the narrators’ interpretation of the events, since they also gave me some idea of the narrator as she saw herself. These narratives may provide an explanation for the narrator’s whole life: why things are as they are today.

In approaching the experience stories of Anna, Kaarina, Lisa and Lena I have the advantage, as a researcher, of being able to read and listen to them over and over again. I can check the notes I made in my field diary and I can still see a vivid picture of the narrators in my mind. And since I know approximately what happened during the long evacuation and deportation of the Ingrian Finns living southwest of St Petersburg, even little fragments of mosaic fall into place to produce a meaningful picture. (Examples here are the statement “my sister was sent to Germany” in Anna’s narrative, or the mention by Kaarina of her father going to Leningrad and never coming

back, and the expression “24 hours”; or I know where the Finnish places mentioned by Lisa are, and I understand when Lena says, “we had some flour”, or when there is talk about grain and potatoes in general). But even more important: I am familiar with the interviews made with all of them, and I know how the story they told me at the beginning of our meeting fits in the overall scheme. One of the features characteristic of the personal experience narrative is in fact their place in conversational contexts; they are known to be so closely tied to a given interaction that they could not exist outside it (Allison 1997). It is, of course, possible to understand Anna’s and Lena’s stories as such, but not Kaarina’s and Lisa’s. And in order to interpret them all, the listener needs to know the contextual dimensions of both the event and the interview.

One thing that struck me in the life stories of all the thirty or more people I interviewed was that none of them touched on the ordinary stages in life: childhood, school, courting, marriage, birth of children, or work. The narrative was structured by certain thematic points such as being an evacuee in Finland, return to the Soviet Union, hunger, and returning home. (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1999). Of the “ordinary life” during the interim years of exile before returning to the homelands in the 1950s and 1960s my informants have rather little to say. The forced transfers and difficulties acting as markers in life seem to have made a more indelible impression on the mind than ordinary everyday life. Maybe there was nothing of interest to tell about in their everyday lives, as opposed to the most memorable moments that, however terrible and unpleasant, seemed worth talking about. I am not alone in this observation, for scholars who have examined the Holocaust, for example, have reported a similar finding. The focal points in the stories are about persecution, and the other periods in life are only skimmed over. Survivors of the Holocaust have expressed “their inability to feel joy in their present life on account of their past experiences”. (Rosen 2001) Such concepts as “interesting”, “noteworthy” and thus “narratable” do not, it seems, have universal application or the same meaning and are defined according to cultural, social and personal criteria (Polanyi 1989: 211).

By the time of the interviews, a good fifty years had passed since war broke out and people were forced to leave their homes. Should I therefore question the accuracy of my informants’ memories? This is the wrong question to ask. Rather, I should be asking myself how legends and memories tie in with the life of the community, the social structures, and the cultural tradition in which they are told. (Peltonen 2000: 162) I should in fact go on to ask: how can they possibly be forgotten? And so what if historical research should prove that a place name or date was in fact wrong? This is a secondary question of accuracy and veracity that may be defined as follows: “The guiding principle could be that all autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose.” (Passerini 1989: 261) The memories are those of my narrators, of things they have experienced, and the important thing is not the details but the experience of exile and loss. One person may have several versions of the same narrative to tell, all of them true. (Danielsen 1995: 111) The folklorist does not search for the one

and only truth in a personal narrative but wants to find out what the memory means to the narrator and what the narrator wants to express through the narrative.

What sorts of events do narrators pick out to make up a narrative, and how do they choose? The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 50–51) has pointed to the difference between private and collective memory. He states that the individual recalls but the group defines what is worth reminiscing and what must be remembered. The historian Jorma Kalela (2000: 38) in turn points out that the oral history, which takes in the sorts of experience narratives I have been talking about here, is maintained by the community, and the community also supervises and decides what qualifies for inclusion and how matters must be presented. This set me wondering whether this evaluation and awareness process was in fact only just getting under way in Ingria in the 1990s. What is the process that makes the experiences of a nation and individuals worth remembering and narrating? And what if the events are re-assessed? Memories of evacuation and exile were not acceptable personal history under the Soviet regime. Those who were evacuated to Finland were branded enemies of the people and as a result had a number stamped in their passports that stigmatised them and prevented them from travelling freely in the Soviet Union. Not until after Stalin's death in 1953 were they gradually able to return to their homelands. This the first of my interviewees did from 1956 onwards, when Khrushchev's rise to power and the criticism of Stalin's regime made this possible. Experiences were discussed in family circles and with neighbours, but in the early 1990s the public processing of the deportations, executions and branding as kulaks was only just beginning. Some of my informants reported that the relatives of innocent victims had received an official apology, their honour had been restored and their relatives paid symbolic compensation.

The collapse of the Soviet Union made it possible for people to speak to outsiders about their terrible experiences. In my role of interviewer I was both an "outsider" and "almost one of us". I represented affluent Finland, I was younger and highly educated (though I did not make a point of this in the interviews). I came from the same ethnic and language group as my interviewees. I was part of the "dream Finland" that existed in the minds of many. I was a suitable listener. One could perhaps speak of the "privilege of sharing the past with others". The four women I interviewed, and many others like them, had long existed in a state where "individual lives bear witness against the state". This is an expression used by the medical anthropologist Vieda Skultans, who has studied experience narrative in post-Soviet Latvia. For as long as memories were not considered justified, they "reinforced feelings of loneliness and ultimately made people ill". (Skultans 1998: 28) Skultans stresses the importance of telling, for "the inability to enshrine experience within available narrative structures, to transform private grief into public sorrow, makes people ill". Skultans, whose own roots lie in Latvia, set in motion the idea of the necessity of telling. Summarising the losses mentioned in the narratives of 35 Latvians she interviewed, she says: "Latvian illness narratives are characterised by three cumulatively linked

losses: loss of a sense of belonging, loss of identity and loss of meaning” (Skultans 1998: 128). I, too, can see this on examining the overall content of my own interviews.

The dominant elements of the four women’s narratives are movement, being forced repeatedly to leave home and settle in a new environment that was not of their choice. Being evacuated to Finland was, for many of the interviewees, followed by deportation, an attempt to return home, a 24-hour notice of further deportation and a new period in exile in either Estonia or Karelia. The names of the places and the various moves have stuck in their memories for decades, likewise the events and details of their survival. “Ordinary” everyday life has been forgotten. The grief and pain written into the stories tended to be manifest as sudden shows of emotion rather than being expressed in words. Linguists, too, have observed that only a small proportion of human emotions and attitudes are verbally expressed, and that tone of voice, gestures, and the listener’s visual observations say far more (Pääkkönen and Varis 2000: 13). The most concrete worry for my informants was hunger, something which all had experienced and which they still, in the early 1990s, feared in old age in the race between prices and pensions. Their narratives lacked the elements proper for a ‘moral’ section: evaluation of the situation, assessment, criticism or aggression. The chaos, the avalanche of events and concrete distress are most in evidence in Lena’s story, but even she does not criticise. The reason for this may be that the events were too personal, that they happened so long ago, or that the listener was new to her. Allowance should also be made for the time of the interviews, the social and cultural constraints in the early 1990s: what it was fitting to talk about, to whom and how. I do not have enough background information to be able to assess these constraints, but it is not, in my opinion, the job of those who experienced them first-hand to evaluate the events and aftermath of the Second World War. The time for that is still to come.

*Translated by  
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## NOTES

- 1 For more about this minority see e.g. Teinonen & Virtanen *Ingrians and Neighbours. Focus on the eastern Baltic Sea region*, edited by Teinonen and Virtanen 1999. In the chapter headed “Background and anatomy of the project” Matti Räsänen (1999: 11) writes: “Precise figures for the number of Ingrians are difficult to obtain, but by the late 1980s there were about 20,000 living in East Karelia, about 24,000 in and around St Petersburg and just on 17,000 in Estonia. After the Second World War about 8,000 Ingrians stayed on in Finland; around half of them moved on to Sweden.”
- 2 In 1990 the Finnish President, Mauno Koivisto, granted the Ingrians remigrant status, and since then at least 20,000 Ingrians have settled in various parts of Finland (Räsänen 1999: 11).
- 3 A kulak was a prosperous landed peasant whose property was collectivised.
- 4 Educational, cultural and other such activities in Finnish were made more difficult. The Russian language, ideology and opposition to religion began to dominate, the teachers

- were gradually Russified and cleansed as Communists (Nevalainen 1991: 259).
- 5 Ingria has never been an independent area, and since the Second World War it has not even existed as a geographical entity. I use the term Ingria here for the sake of brevity to refer to the areas southwest of St Petersburg that still had some Ingrian Finns living there in the 1990s. There is, however, an Ingrian minority of Finnish descent living in the regions north of St Petersburg as well.
  - 6 In other parts of Ingria, north of St Petersburg, young researchers from the University of Turku have been carrying out fieldwork for a number of years. In their folkloristic work they have concentrated on the recording and study of life stories (Vasenkari & Pekkala 1999, Rimpiläinen 2001). The research data are stored in The Archives of the Turku University, School of Cultural Studies, TKU Archive.
  - 7 I was the only one actually interviewing; Ulla Lipponen and Arno Survo were filming the villages on video and the other members of the team were elsewhere. The material on this field research project, conducted in 1991–93, is in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society.
  - 8 I wish to thank Mirkku Wekström for analysing Lena’s narrative in connection with one of my courses and for pointing out various aspects of her language.

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ANNE HEIMO

## Places Lost, Memories Regained

### Narrating the 1918 Finnish Civil War in Sammatti

The everyday environment has a significant role in the formation of historical knowledge. In this article<sup>1</sup> I will analyze how the inhabitants of Sammatti use places situated in their everyday environment when they speak about the 1918 Finnish Civil War. Sammatti, home of Elias Lönnrot, the compiler of Kalevala, is a small rural town of approximately 1000 inhabitants in southern Finland. I first became interested in the topic while I was working as an interviewer for the Finnish Literature Society in Sammatti in 1988<sup>2</sup>. Already during my first interviews, I noticed that people were more interested in talking about *the Rebellion* – as the Civil War was commonly called in the region – than about belief legends, Lönnrot or for that matter the more recent wars, the Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944). One reason for this was that the Civil War was fought at home, unlike the other wars, which were fought far away in Karelia. Therefore, the everyday environment of the narrators was filled with reminders of the war: buildings, hiding places, execution sites and monuments. While some of these locations had purposefully been established to act as reminders of the Civil War, most of them had not.

The concept *sites of memory*, is useful, when discussing the way places are used in reminiscences. Initially Pierre Nora referred with the concept *lieux de mémoire* only to statues, buildings and other well known sites relating to historical memory (Nora 1996.). Today, the concept has expanded to refer to “concrete or non-concrete symbols which through human work have become a part of a community’s historical memory” (M. Peltonen 1999: 100). In my own study I apply the concept *sites of memory* to all the places which the narrators connect with the year 1918, irrespective of whether these places still exist or if they are merely dependent on memory.

#### *The 1918 Finnish Civil War and its Aftermath*

As a consequence of the Russian Revolution, Finland gained independence in December 1917. Only a month later the nation was at war. On the one hand this was a class struggle over social conditions and on the other a

struggle of political power between the socialists and the non-socialists. The war divided the people of Finland into two sides: Red and White. The Red side consisted mainly of industrial and agricultural workers and craftsmen, whilst landowners, entrepreneurs and the intelligentsia joined the White side. With the help of German military forces the war was won in May 1918 by the White Civil Guard. As a result of the war about 35,000 people died, of which over 27,000 Red. About 82,000 Reds were accused of crimes against the state, condemned to imprisonment and deprived of their civil rights for years to come. The years following the war were difficult for the families of the Red side. Work was difficult to find for the Reds, as the employers bore grudges against their former workers; unemployment and poverty was rife.<sup>3</sup>

The nation was in mourning and war memorials were built, but the official commemoration applied only to dead Whites, whereas the families of the Reds were prevented from mourning and honouring the memory of their dead. The Whites never admitted the severe consequences of the aftermath and were never prosecuted for the crimes that they committed during the war. When we put all these factors together, it is no wonder that the Reds felt bitter hatred and were forced to foster their own interpretation of the year 1918 in order to survive. Personal interpretations were cherished among families, at work, at Workers' Associations and in the labour movement. (Heimo & U. M. Peltonen 2003, U. M. Peltonen 2002, 2003, 1996.) Narratives relating to the year 1918 were cherished dualistically and differentially until the 1960s, when the second part of Väinö Linna's trilogy *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* (Under the North Star)<sup>4</sup> and Jaakko Paavolainen's *Poliittiset VäkivaltaisuuDET Suomessa 1918 I–III* (Investigations of Terror in 1918 I–III) contributed both to the increase of study of the year 1918 and to the gathering of massive collections of oral history. Today the discussion is still in process and new studies emerge continuously, a register of all the 1918 Civil War victims has just been completed in an extensive project assigned by the Prime Minister's Office of Finland (<http://vesta.narc.fi/cgi-bin/db2www/sotasurmaetusivu/main>) and new names are being added to memorial stones.

### *The Civil War in Sammatti*

When the war broke out at the end of January 1918, Sammatti was, like the entire Southern Finland, controlled by the Reds. The local Red Guard confiscated guns and foodstuff and controlled the village roads. There was no violence, but several land owners felt it would better to hide or even to flee the area. There was no White Civil Guard at the time in Sammatti, but some of the land owners joined the Civil Guard of the neighbouring municipality. At the end of April, the Whites took over Sammatti with the help of Germans. Executions began immediately. According to the most recent calculations, a total of 34 Reds perished in Sammatti: four were killed in action, 25 were executed and five died in prison camps.<sup>5</sup> As a proportion of the population, the number of Reds executed is one of the highest in Finland. The intensity of

the aftermath is highlighted by the fact that the Whites lost only one of their own in Sammatti. (Paavolainen 1967: 166–167, 174, Tukkinen 1999).

In Sammatti, the Workers' Association was allowed to operate again in the year immediately following the Civil War, but according to the narrators the association never completely recovered from the consequences of the war, and its activities faded. The Civil Guard and the womens' auxiliary service, the Lotta Organisation, naturally supported the White cause and its interpretation of the Civil War. Similar worldviews were also represented by some sports organisations, youth organisations, the Farmers' Association and the Martha Organisation<sup>6</sup>. In Sammatti, the Civil Guard organised victory parties during the years following the war and held military exercises, though the emphasis was said, particularly by those who took part in the activities, to be on sport and shooting practice.

Information relating to the year 1918 was – except for some occasional statistics and newspaper articles – passed on orally in Sammatti until the 1990's, when a local amateur historian published the ever first article on the subject (Tukkinen 1992). For this reason, the people interviewed in Sammatti in the late 1980's saw the interview as an opportunity to affect the interpretation that would be published about the war, in other words as a chance to make one's own *truth* heard. For those who identified with the Reds, the interview was an opportunity to remind the world of the unjust acts of punishment by the winners, and of the disproportionate harshness in Sammatti. For supporters of the Whites it offered a chance to explain the executions, why they were carried out. For others, mainly for those born after the war, the year 1918 was a significant period, and to remember it was of value in itself.

The interviews I conducted broadened my view of the Civil War in many ways. The image of the war turned out more diverse than the black and white – or should I say in this case red and white – public representations of the Civil War presented in most historical studies. Firstly, the narrated experiences did not concern only suffering and death. In fact, I was quite surprised to notice how much humour the interviews actually contained.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, though I also tend to deal with the Red and White as two distinctive groups, in reality the case was much more complicated. The two sides did not live separated from each other and they did have contact with each other: people belonging to different sides lived as neighbours, worked together and even married the sons and daughters of the enemy. The same applies for the narrators, whom I have classified as belonging to different sides depending on from which point of view, Red or White, they told their stories. The point of view they chose was not in all cases correlative to their social status or the experiences of their family members.

### *Sense of Place*

Local history is comparable with a person's awareness of the uniqueness and divergence of his or her home region in relation to other areas. On the

one hand regional identity consists of elements such as natural conditions, history, culture or dialect, which are a basis for distinguishing the region from other regions, on the other hand, regional identity is comprised of for example belonging in a certain region, feeling togetherness with the other inhabitants, as well as of how the inhabitants perceive their region as a whole and of their awareness of its special nature (Paasi 1996: 35–38; Relph 1976: 37). In spite of their physical existence, regions are socially and culturally constructed creations, places, to which, people are emotionally connected. Most human experiences, memories, impressions and assumptions – both positive and negative – are based particularly on places. Therefore, the concept of *place* refers more to the micro-level world of meanings, whereas *region* points primarily at communal and social analysis of space. When speaking at the micro-level, instead of the term *regional identity*, *local identity* or, alternatively *sense of place* can be used (Paasi 1996: 206–211, Rannikko 1996: 28, Relph 1976: 8, 37–55). However, though a place may have a character of its own, this does not mean that it has a coherent identity, a sense of place, which is shared by all of the community (Massey 1998: 153–154 *passim*).

Our cognitive and emotional socialisation to our physical environment starts in childhood and continues through life. The forming of regional identity is affected by both personal experiences and collective ideas about the special features of a site. Both the identity of the region and the regional identity are the end product of historical development. Regional identity is historically layered, even to the extent that people living in the same region may feel, depending on their generation, that they belong to places with different names. Like in the formation of historical knowledge, public representations and popular memory play key roles also in this process. Helped by the above-mentioned, people unknown to each other can conceive their past, present and future as one. (Paasi 1996: 211–213, Riikonen 1997).

Participating actively in local activities or displaying local symbols are not as important for maintaining local identity as talking about the community's own past. Barbara Johnstone has stated, "A person is at home in a place when the place evokes stories, and, conversely, stories can serve to create places" (1990: 5). Narratives can even be a prerequisite for the survival of places, because without a reminiscer or a narrator the places lose their significance and cease to exist. When there is no narration attached to a place it becomes a part of the landscape and people develop an indifferent attitude towards it. On the other hand, even places that seem at first sight insignificant can through narratives be transformed into noticeable sites and past becomes a part of the present day (Cruikshank 1998: 18, Glassie 1982: 662–664, Ryden 1993: 63–68). Places play a central role in narratives, since they not only remind people of events in the past, but also argue in favour of the truthfulness of the event in question (Johnstone 1990: 126–135, Siikala 1998: 10–1, Raivo 1998: 63–64.)

As we tell stories about events, we draw a type of mental map of our own area. The borders of this map do not necessarily follow the geographical or administrative borders. These borders are normally clear to the inhabitants

but perceiving them might be difficult for outsiders. For example, when Sinikka Vakimo was interviewing the inhabitants of Rasinmäki, a small village in Northern Karelia, she could not delineate, based on the interviews, a common village with clear borders – either regionally or chronologically. The village was referred to both in the past and the present tense, and its inhabitants included deceased people, people who had lived in the village for a short period of time as well as people currently living in the village (Vakimo 2001: 270). Laura Aro has explained this phenomenon by pointing out that the interviewees felt the village was more of “a mental and emotional place, a *state* of mind (emphasis by Aro), than a concrete living environment where one currently lives”. According to Aro, the physical place is not as important as what had happened in it or what was going to happen (Aro 1996: 68). This phenomenon is apparent in my own study as well. Firstly, when people spoke about the events in Sammatti in 1918, they made the relevant area reach into the neighbouring villages and to places that the speaker had never visited, but had only read or heard about. Secondly, the phenomenon can also be seen in who were conceived of inhabitants of Sammatti. There is tendency to define the guilty, both on the Red and on the White side, as not belonging to ‘us’, the people of Sammatti, whilst again the victims of the war tended to be regarded as one of ‘us’. The person’s official birthplace, domicile or place of death was of minor importance in this context (Heimo 2000: 60–66).

### *Gender and Sense of Place*

It has been suggested that in autobiographical texts Finnish women tend to focus on indoor happenings and men on outdoor happenings (Vilkko 1998: 30–31). One evident reason for this is that, in a community, the shared residential area does not have the same significance for all the inhabitants. Instead, it depends on the socio-spatial history of each person, as well as on the person’s age, gender and position in the community. In the Finnish agrarian society boys were allowed to wander around the village in groups, whereas girls were expected to stay in the immediate limits of home (Korkiakangas 1996: 325–327). The traditional division of work between genders (Apo 1995: 199–227, Löfström 1998: 241, Talve 1997: 173–174, Tarkka 1998: 93) which long prevailed in the Finnish countryside, has contributed to the fact that even as grown-ups, men have had more possibilities than women to meet other people and to hear about events in neighbouring villages and in foreign regions.

This difference between sexes is apparent in my study too: The personal memories of male narrators are located in a considerably wider area than those of female narrators. Just like the narrator on page 54, many of the male interviewees told of exciting expeditions to neighbouring villages, where they spied on the Guards and collected cartridge cases after the exchange of fire. As they grew up and participated more in household chores, the difference remained: girls took care of their younger siblings and helped their mothers

at home and in the farmyard. Boys, on the other hand, went with their fathers to work in the fields and were taken along for visits to the mill and town. As adults the situation remained substantially as before.

### *Timing and Placing in Oral History*

A part of the criticism that historians directed earlier at oral history was pointed at people remembering *wrongly*, and not providing exact dates or confusing the order of the events. Unlike when writing when people speak, they do not analyse their past chronologically according to exact years or dates, because the understanding of narratives rarely requires exact timing. However, this does not mean that time is irrelevant or that the narrators do not attempt to time the events at all. The event itself and the place are just more important than when the event took place (Glassie 1982: 662–663, Johnstone 1990: 130–131, Portelli 1997: 99–101). Historical narratives prove that some features of an historical event may remain in oral tradition for a long period of time, centuries even. In some cases, the date of the event may be changed to another more purposeful date (Portelli 1991: 24) or the time span may be altered (Portelli 2003: 33), and as Ulla-Maija Peltonen (1996: 135–202) has shown, a major part of the atrocity tales and belief legends told in 1918 belong to an international tradition of war and persecution stories that is centuries old.

Often just referring to *the good old times*, *back in the old days* and *the past days* is adequate. Another common way is to time the events according to occurrences relating to the narrator's personal life or family affairs. Not many can recall historical times with precision equal to the following 72 year-old narrator as she remembers the arrival of the German troops in Lohja in the spring of 1918, 50 years later in 1969 when she was interviewed for dialectology purposes. The narrator began reminiscing about the year 1918 immediately at the beginning of the interview as she was speaking about her background. Reminiscing is actualised by a mention of a second daughter:

...And then, it was the time of the Red Guard then, the same day when I gave birth to the girl, the second girl, when the Germans came here to Lohja, to occupy it. But they came to our house too, briefly, and questioned us. The older girl's dress was hanging by the door and they pointed it because it was red and asked if we had seen any of those around. My husband just shook his head and said not here but they went that way, he was a little scared and a little (narrator laughs), went that way, towards Hiidensalmi... (TYSKL 1969/1293.)

The narrator continues her story and tells how the family, when the daughter was five days old, fled to the narrator's childhood home and how her husband was saved from imprisonment. At the end of the interview the narrator returned to the year 1918 and described the circumstances of giving birth:

there were battles in Nummela, some twenty kilometres away, and people had fled the village. The narrator's husband had trouble finding a midwife to assist in the birth.

*Interviewer:* Were you all alone in here (*narrator sighs*) or was your husband also here?

*Narrator:* My husband was home, yes he was home then, because I wouldn't have got any help, my other daughter wasn't even three yet, this older girl, she turned three then in July, when the baby was born on the ninth of April. That's why I remember it so well when the Germans came, because they came (*sigh*) on the ninth. (TYSKL 1969/1293.)

Although the narrator herself remembers the arrival of the Germans, it is highly unlikely that she would be able to recall the exact date without the fact that the event took place when her child was born. The birth of a daughter had turned the event into a memorable and significant experience. Each personal event chosen to time a moment reflects what is considered as important in one's own life – and these events are not necessarily the same for everyone.

In addition, communally or nationally significant events or periods of time can be used for timing (Portelli 1991: 69–70), such as crisis periods, natural disasters or presidential terms, for example. In the interviews with the people of Sammatti time was expressed with the help of a few central points: *The time of Lönnrot* meant the 1800's, a time which the interviewees themselves did not remember, but about which they had heard from for example, their family members. Another way to express time was the Civil War, *the Rebellion*. The rebellion was used to define both the events relating to the year 1918 and those which did not relate to that time: the first car came to Sammatti *before the Rebellion*, electricity *after the Rebellion*. When speaking about the Civil War the narrators used, instead of exact dates, expressions such as *the time of the Reds*, *the time of the Whites*, *the arrival of the Germans* and *the time we hid in the forest*. A male narrator born in 1925 answered to the interviewer's question about the year 1918 as follows: "Probably the greatest event occurred here in Peltola, Vannas was the farmer there then. And a bomb was thrown in his living room..." (SKSÄ 100: 5.1988). However, the bombing in question took place months after the war ended at the end of August 1918. The actual time of the war (January 28 – May 16 1918) did not mean to the narrators a particular period of time as such. Rather, it was a phenomenon or a process begun already before the actual war broke out and with consequences reaching to the present in a way. The founding of the Worker's Association in 1907 and the agricultural strikes of summer 1917 are as much connected with the year 1918 as contemplations about how the topic is approached today.

Several studies suggest that places act as mnemonic tools when describing experiences. For example, sometimes it is easier for the narrator to recall the events of the journey with the help of places than with the help of dates. Julie Cruikshank points out in her study on narrators in Yukon the tendency of her

narrators to describe their lives as a travel journal of sorts, which involved moving from one place to another. When describing a year in the life of their family, the narrators were able to mention more than two hundred locations (Cruikshank 1998: 32–34). It is obvious that locations play a significant role when analysing one’s own life when livelihood is based on hunting and life is mobile, but the phenomenon has been noticed also by other researchers. An Ingrian woman interviewed by Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj described in the same manner how she moved from Ingermanland to Finland during World War II (See this volume, pages 32–34). In her extensive study on German war memories Gabriele Rosenthal noticed that it was much more difficult for soldiers to recall World War I memories than it was World War II memories. WW II was a war of mobility, a war full of non-routine situations in different places with various people, whereas WW I was a war fought in trenches. Basing her argument on gestalt-theoretical analysis, Rosenthal argues, that “memory is organized along spatial rather than temporal or sequential lines, and is thus oriented upon changes in the surroundings” (Rosenthal 1991).

This phenomenon comes up in my material also. The following 83 year-old male narrator had lived in the same village all his life. The quote I have chosen is a part of a substantially longer answer to the interviewer’s question about the year 1918. After narrating about hiding in the mill, the narrator proceeded to talk about the sandwiches he saw at the people’s hall, guards walking on the roads and some extra grain given to his father, in other words, about the themes most often recalled when narrating about the year 1918 (Heimo 1996).

I can remember something from the summer of 1918. People were shot here, at the upland over there – it’s no more than two hundred metres away. We used to live in the old home at that time. People were shot there and at the swamp near the Rural Homemaking School, but the bodies were then taken to the churchyard. However, there was a lot going on then. We young boys used to wander about, when the members of the Red Guard left for the direction of Nummi and the Whites followed them from Karjalohja. We went to see the place, to collect some cartridges. Then they got angry and told us to leave or they would start shooting. We hurried away and they left and that was all. We were then, whenever there was shooting, we were (hiding) in the mill at Lallinaho... (SKSÄ 111: 22.1988.)

The reminiscence contains plenty of movement between the locations. The narrator, who knows his surroundings thoroughly, seems to be wandering from place to place in his mind and pointing them out as he moves along. In addition to the references concerning *here* and *there*, the narrator mentions seven different locations: the nearby upland, his home, the swamp by the Rural Homemaking School, the churchyard, the neighbouring villages of Nummi and Karjalohja, as well as the mill at Lallinaho. The narrator mentions the events in reversed time order: first he mentions the executions (in May) and the burials (in the summer of 1918), then the battles between the Reds and the Whites (in April), and finally he returns to the time when the Reds ruled over Sammatti (in February–March). It is a common assumption that narration

follows place-changes chronologically. However this narrator reverses this pattern and begins with the most drastic events and from there moves on to the less drastic ones.

### *Official monuments of the Civil War in Sammatti*

Naming is one way of changing a region to a historically and socially significant site and enables people to individualise and separate the site from others and to talk about it. The function of place-names is not only to help place the site in linguistic and geographic context but also to remind people of its past. For example, in the beginning of the 1990's when the roads and streets of Sammatti were named, the road leading from Sammatti village to Karjalohja was named *Punasentolpantie* (the Red Post Road). On occasion the naming and especially the re-naming the streets can be extremely political. Often, a change of name has to do with a change of power (esim. Nyysönen 1999: 213–217). In Sammatti, naming the road according to the Civil War probably first and foremost expresses the passing of time and the fact that it was possible to name the road after an event which had severely tested the community. Some of the older interviewees mentioned the site; however, it is doubtful that many of the younger inhabitants are able to connect the name with its origin, the Red Guard's meeting place at the end of the road.

Monuments are erected to remind us of their subjects consciously and to maintain their memory. Even though, in terms of time, the monuments are located in the present landscape, they are also located in the remembered or imagined past (Lowenthal 1985, Raivo 1998: 60). Like all places, a monument is given its significance through the rites and narratives of the community. If no narratives or rituals are associated with monuments, they remain as part of the landscape and the attitudes towards them become indifferent. Monuments are perceived as permanent, even if their interpretations are as open to changes as those of other places are (Raivo 1998: 60).<sup>8</sup> According to Nora, the life of a monument maybe divided into two phases. In the first phase, the monument symbolises the purposes, for example ideology and grief, it was erected for. Rituals are a part of the first phase. In the second phase, the monument is transformed into a place of memory, or the historical memory of the concept it represents. (Nora 1996: 6–7.)

After the Civil War, many more monuments were erected in memory of the Whites than of the Reds. Monuments in memory of the Reds became more common only after World War II.<sup>9</sup> The situation was similar in Sammatti, where two monuments commemorating the Red victims of Sammatti were erected in the fall of 1945. One was erected at Sammatti churchyard, the other in the neighbouring village of Tavola to commemorate the twelve members of the Sammatti Worker's Association who were executed and buried there.

There is no official monument for the Whites in Sammatti, but the large grave monument of the only White who died in the war in Sammatti, judge Unto Nevalainen, has commemorated the Whites. Nevalainen was an active theosophist<sup>10</sup> and accommodated a relatively large group of Whites escaping

the war in his villa. The local Red Guard arrested Nevalainen in April but released him after a couple of day's interrogation. However, he was murdered on his way home. Many could still mention the murder site, Siitoinahde, but only a few could tell where the place was. For the people of Sammatti, the death of Unto Nevalainen explained the exceptional harshness of the aftermath of the war; it was a punishment for the death of Nevalainen: "And one Red was killed for each bayonet wound" (Heimo 2003: 49–50).

These monuments commemorate not only the victims of the Civil War, but also remind people of the more fortunate ones who survived and whose names were never engraved on the memorial stone. For example, when speaking about the memorial stone in Tavola one narrator told the story of a man who was offered a choice: he would be saved provided that he blessed the others. Another narrator told the story of a man saved due to his exceptional courage in the face of death: this man refused to be blindfolded so the Germans let him go

For some, the grave monuments are the first or only connection to the events of 1918: "During the Rebellion, people were buried all around the region, but the bodies have now been brought to the churchyard. Additionally, the soil of the grave in Tavola has been blessed. Otherwise I'm not at all familiar with the Rebellion" (SKSÄ 131.1988). Moreover, the narrators sometimes referred to the grave monuments when speaking about the deaths of Sammatti residents: "...At the church, there's a great gravestone for the eighteen members of the Red Guard who died. The members of the White Guard were buried separately, so to clarify it, of course you know them if you look them up, but the gravestone is a concrete monument and the amount of deceased is great compared with the small population..." (TKU/A/91/243: 2) or when speaking about certain events: "Yes, but there is a statue at the churchyard. I have seen it. It was told around here, that it was erected for a judge who was killed by the Reds" (TKU/A/91/242: 4). The monuments of the Civil War have proceeded into phase two: they no longer commemorate primarily the causes for which they were originally erected; instead are a reminder of the fact that there once was a Civil War.

### *Sites of Memory*

The narrators located only certain subjects to general places: guards walked on *the roads*, and in *the villages*, and *the forest* was for hiding and escaping. For the narrators, the forest functioned primarily as physical protection and not as a moral shelter, as it did for the Latvians interviewed by Vieda Skultans (1998: 83–101) who spoke about escaping the war by hiding in the forests, thereby hinting at folk beliefs concerning the forest as cover (Tarkka 1998: 95). Among the Finnish narrators, it was more common to connect the events to existing particular places: the headquarters of the Civil Guard was first located at the *elementary school of Koivikko* and later at the *Ylitalo farm*, Reds were executed in the *Kuusisto shed* and by the *field of the Rural Homemaking School*. Not all of the named locations were unambiguous. For

example, the narrators could infer the location of a place based on their own information and information provided by others, especially the local histories written by Tauno Tukkinen. In April 2000, I visited several of these places with two interviewees. At some of the locations these two men would explore the surroundings and examine them thoroughly, discussing the eyewitness testimonies which Tukkinen refers to in his book: could eyewitnesses to the execution have been where they were? Could a body have been buried in this pit or not?

Many of my interviewees still lived in their birthplaces or childhood homes. In addition to their own memories their homes and living environments could be full of the memories of the narrators' parents and grandparents. Some elements of memorisation were even conveyed through literature<sup>11</sup>. In their narratives, they returned to the places as they remembered them and specified their narrative for the interviewer by explaining: "There was a bench, by the wall there, without that table and fridge and such there, there was a bench and on it, there were three members of the Red Guard..." (SKSÄ 148: 5.1988). The home of one narrator was situated amidst sites related to the Civil War. During the interview we would stand up and look out of the window every now and again to see the actual place the narrator was referring to. The narrator had no need to establish the truth of the narrated events specifically; the places did it on his behalf. At times, the location in question was inside the house, such as the door frame, on top of which the narrator's uncle, a member of the Red Guard, placed his pocket watch before he left voluntarily to be registered at the Civil Guard headquarters together with the narrator's father: "... But he must have anticipated something, he had taken his pocket watch out of his pocket and put it there, on the door frame, when he went out and after that he didn't need a watch anymore..." (TKU/A/99/255). The narrator's father was released, but his uncle was among the first to be executed in Sammatti.

The sense of belonging is usually, but not necessarily, connected to one's native origin. The Ylitalo farm is among the largest original estates in Sammatti. The farm was at the centre of events during the entire Civil War. First it operated as headquarters for the Reds, and later for the Whites and Germans, and a number of executions took place on the estate. After World War II Ylitalo was bought by a Karelian evacuee family. When interviewing the present owner, born in 1929, I was surprised how well he was acquainted with the history of his home:

I have heard people talk, of course. They have told that first here was a headquarters of sorts for the Reds, I think, and when the situation changed, the Whites and the Germans came to this same house, and had their headquarters here. Then began the trials, they read out the sentences here. There are on these lands, you know that field, there are steep cliffs beyond it. Against them, many Reds were shot, and they were buried there for a long time, but now the bodies have been taken to the churchyard. There was a large maple on the yard, right there in front of the doors, there is now another maple tree, its other side was rotten and people said that the

Reds used to practice fighting with bayonets there, poking at the tree. The tree started to dry and rot. It only came down when we had moved here. Many things have happened here (SKSÄ 142: 27. 1988).

He could also show the exact location of the maple tree in the garden. Another memory connected to the Ylitalo estate was the place where farm labourer Juho Koskinen's hat was left hanging from a fence-stake after his execution. On April 27 1918, the same day the Whites took over Sammatti, an execution of at least ten people was carried out. Koskinen managed to escape, but he was caught the next day and executed:

...And a German took him by the arm and led him from the house to Pajanummi, against a pine tree, to shoot him there, and Jussi [Juho] was wearing a hat then and it fell by the fence till someone put it on the fence-stake. There the hat was for a couple of years, on the stake, I can still remember that. It was just fading there (TKU/A/91/232:4).

Although Koskinen had five small children, the Whites would not yield to his pleas for mercy. In reminiscence by a narrator identifying with the Reds, the ruthless executioner is seen only as White, whereas a narrator identifying with the Whites emphasises that the executioner was German and therefore an outsider, not one of "us". By the death of Koskinen, the narrator's aim is to illustrate the nature of the Civil War: Koskinen represented a family man who was caught in the events against his will, like most of the members of the Red Guard. Correspondingly, victims whose deaths cannot be utilised to explain or express anything in particular are more easily forgotten in the long run.

Like the maple tree and hat mentioned above also the following trace also exists only in memory. The following 82 year-old narrator had observed as a ten year-old the burial of two Reds, and he reminisced:

I can remember when the bodies were dug up from the Ylitalo estate, and placed in black coffins. The coffins had been painted black. I don't know what the paint was, but it was so fresh that it was dripping when they were brought. The two coffins were brought here from Kellokasteri, the small gate wasn't there at the time, and men lifted them on top of the wall. The coffins were for Levo and Grönroos. I could see the names on the sides of the coffins, and from the coffin for Levo, the black paint or something, some sort of liquid, was dripping from it to the wall (TKU/A/91/233:10).

For decades, the narrator observed as the paint on the graveyard wall first faded and finally disappeared entirely. No traces – no physical marks – are left of this memory, instead, it exists only so long as the narrator remembers.

### *In the footsteps of Lönnrot*

In Sammatti the historical interpretations of places are produced, reproduced and performed continuously. The significance of the location is not permanent, but continually reproduced and always interpreted from the present point of view. (Massey 1998:153–156 *passim*, Raivo 1997: 202–205). In other words, what is considered as a significant place differs depending on the interpreter. As time passes the interpretations change and in many cases become multi-layered with memories. The following quote is from an interview with a 46 year-old woman and her 73- year-old mother in the summer of 1991.

*Daughter:* And perhaps the upland of Ylitalo is like, it has no monument, it's not a focused location anymore. It is a place of events among all the others that have been cleaned up afterwards.

*Mother:* It changed and calmed down, when they (the bodies of the executed) were taken away.

*Daughter:* Yes, perhaps those places are like that, there haven't been any discussions about it ever, not in school, because these places can be found all around the village in different ways. The ones that remain are remembered, mainly as burial grounds of sorts, instead of actual killing places. It is now presented differently from how it was presented for my parents. Of course, the distance does it, that it is perceived differently; we want to perceive it, and luckily, we perceive it differently, so there is no clear division which was here then, which has naturally been quite necessary at the time (TKU/A/91/242: 38).

This quote demonstrates that the daughter herself had paid attention to the change in attitudes towards places relating to the events in 1918. The emphasis is on the deaths, not on the way in which or the reason why they were killed. The reinterpretation has been necessary for the sake of the community.

One place is the subject of several different interpretations. "Welcome to Sammatti, to the footsteps of Elias Lönnrot," the community of Sammatti states in its travel brochures and Internet site, portraying itself as a region of culture, delicacies, and nature. The year 2002 was the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lönnrot's birth and Sammatti celebrated the anniversary of its great man in many ways, wishing too to increase its recognisability and to attract more tourists to the region in this way. For the locals, the history of their home region includes other important periods and events, of which the Civil War in 1918 with its harsh consequences is among the most significant. A visitor can easily become acquainted with Sammatti by touring the tourist attractions, which relate to the life of Lönnrot in one way or another, without having any contact with the year 1918. On the other hand, the locals are able to connect many locations relating to Lönnrot with the year 1918. For example, the Reds occupied the elementary school founded by Lönnrot, Reds were executed on the lands of the Rural Homemaking School, which was also founded by Lönnrot, and members of the Civil Guard practised in the surroundings of Paikkarintorppa, where Lönnrot was born.

Some of the 1918 sites of memory have been created by themselves, some have been established with the purpose of commemorating the year 1918. Some sites can be perceived by everyone, some continue to exist only in the minds and memories of some people, but all of them depend on people who tell narratives relating to them. Even if many of the places mentioned above are still known in Sammatti, they do not primarily remind the people of the convictions or the reasons behind the war. To follow Nora's conceptualization, they are now places of memory, and have become a part of the community's historical memory, in other words, today they remind people of the Civil War itself, of the fact that this war was once fought and is a part of local history.

*Translated by*

*Saara Suomela and Annaliisa Valtonen*

## NOTES

- 1 This article is based on my doctoral thesis in progress, "Memories of the 1918 Finnish Civil War in Sammatti" which is part of the *Muistitieto ja historian tulkinnat* (Oral history and Interpretations of History) project of the Finnish Academy 1999–2001. In my thesis I examine the memories of the Civil War on a local level, and how these memories have changed since the defeated, the Reds, were given recognition in the 1960's. I also study the different ways these memories have been used to produce a past with which the people of the community can live. The thesis is based on interviews done in the 1980's and 1990's and additional material from several archives: *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Äänitearkisto* (SKSÄ; The Sound Archives of the Finnish Literature Society), *Turun Yliopiston Folkloristiikan ja Uskontotieteen Äänitearkisto* (TKU; The Archives of the Turku University School of Cultural Studies, TKU Archive) and *Turun yliopiston Suomen kielen laitoksen äänitearkisto* (TYSKL; Collections of sound archives of the department of Finnish at the University of Turku).
- 2 At this time the municipality of Sammatti was planning a new local history and the Finnish Literature Society was commissioned to carry out the interviewing.
- 3 For more details see: War victims in Finland 1914–1922 -projects' web page [<http://vesta.narc.fi/cgi-bin/db2www/sotasurmaetusivu/main>] 28.9.2005, Alapuro 1988 and 2002; Upton 1980.
- 4 Translation into English, part I–III by Richard Impola, Aspasia Books 2001–2003.
- 5 The exact number differs from source to source depending on who was regarded as a victim. For example, the interviewees did not distinguish between the victims' official place of birth and home. Nor did they take into consideration whether or not they were killed in Sammatti or in a neighbouring commune. It was said that over 40 were executed.
- 6 The Martha Organization is a home economics extension organization, which was founded in 1899 to promote the quality and standard of life in the home and to carry out civil and cultural education.
- 7 Many of these humorous stories told of small daily incidents in which people behaved unexpectedly or succeeded in outwitting the enemy. One story concerns a Red widow rejoicing after losing her husband of whom she was not so fond of after all, and another is about clever farmer, who prevented the guards from confiscating food supplies. (Heimo 2000.)
- 8 Two contemporary photographic exhibitions, Pekka Elomaa's "Landscape of Evil" (Paha maisema) and Ari Saarto's "The Topography of Murder" (Murhan topografia), show various Civil War execution places. Especially Ari Saarto is

- aware of how the viewer's interpretation changes after looking at the, at first glance, more or less beautiful landscapes and then reading the explanatory texts attached to the photographs. These reveal the different layers of the landscape or, the "Other landscape". In other words they reveal the tragic history of the place.
- 9 The winning side regarded the erecting of monuments as their exclusive right. Especially the graves of the executed Reds were a delicate issue for a long period of time. Although official instructions on burying the Reds were given as early as in 1918, the local officials tried to prevent grave memorials and visits to the graves for several years. The memorials were also subject to vandalism. (Heimo & Peltonen 2003: 45–48, U.M. Peltonen 2003: 187–243, 1996: 220–222.)
  - 10 The narrators siding with the Whites emphasised Nevalainen's innocence in many ways, for example by mentioning that Nevalainen was a theosophist: theosophism is associated with pacifism.
  - 11 For example, one narrator told me the tragic story of Lönnrot's young relative Kustaa Selin, who had lived as a paying guest in the 1850's in the narrator's house of birth and present home. Selin took his own life due to an unhappy love affair with a woman of different social class. The narrator had read about the case in the biography of Lönnrot (Anttila 1935: 234–238).

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## ”Our Lord’s Miracle”

### Talking About Working Wonders

I was one of our Lord’s miracles’ said “Liv” as she told me one of the stories we are about to discuss. She came up to talk to me after attending a lecture I had given on healer Henrik Schei, commonly known as the Pilot<sup>1</sup>. The lecture was held in the autumn of 2000, as part of a series of Saturday talks for interested members of the general public. The venue was the Korskirken church in the centre of Bergen. The audience was exceptionally large; more people had turned out than for earlier lectures. This was not due to the reputation of the lecturer, who was unbeknown to most of the people present, but due to the reputation of the man at the centre of my talk. A number of people in the audience approached me afterwards to speak about, or “bear witness to” their experiences with the Pilot. I have since come to believe that the large audience had gathered because they wanted to hear someone “speak up” about a popular healer of great fame, a man acknowledged, and remembered with gratitude by many, and yet who had never received any “public recognition”, indeed to the contrary, you may say he was surrounded by a “public silence”.<sup>2</sup> The talk I gave verbalized people’s personal experiences with the Pilot, put them into a context with other similar experiences, and made them part of a public discourse about miraculous healing. This spurred Liv into telling her personal story for the very first time. In her book *Traditions of Belief*, English folklorist Gillian Bennett discusses the problem of verbalizing supernatural experiences, or what she terms occult experiences, in modern society. According to her research, part of the problem is that the scholarly study of this type of religious experience is considered not entirely *comme il faut*, which is why such experiences tend to be represented by an older story-telling tradition and relegated to the past. Gillian Bennett believes there is a level of apprehensiveness about publishing new material on this topic. She feels many scholars are anxious not to place their informants in an unfavourable light. This effectively means that nobody talks about supernatural experiences and hence there is little or no documentation. In consequence, nobody talks about experiences that may be considered supernatural or extraordinary. The occult experiences of our current times thus constitute a mute theme (Bennett 1987: 13).

The stories we will be looking at in this paper, provide an insight into a

form of religiousness which has no public spokesperson or recognised literary "cannon". Gillian Bennett calls this kind of narrative "belief stories". They are stories, which express and assess experiences and concepts of faith, which are either non-integral or alternative to official religions.

A "miracle" is an event, which is contrary to the laws of nature and is interpreted as a manifestation or revelation of divine or supernatural forces, forces which at times may be triggered by charismatic people. Miracles are often described as unusual, extraordinary and supernatural events or experiences (Neiman 1995). By defining and describing miracles in terms such as "unusual", "supernatural" and "extraordinary", we imply that these are experiences and events which have no place in a rational, enlightened and modern world. Stories about things miraculous consequently spur another type of tale: the ones that cast doubt. The role of miracle advocate is accompanied by another contrasting role: the role of miracle critic, which exists in most cultures (Dyrendal 1997). However, in their own way sceptics may in fact assist the process of handing down supernatural narratives. American folklorist David Hufford (1982) maintains in his article "Traditions of Disbelief" that two opposing groups confront each other in mutual mistrust: the believers and the sceptics. It is a common notion that stories about supernatural events are passed on by believers, yet Hufford maintains that even the sceptics trust and pass on traditions which form part of a cultural context; even sceptics have their own folklore. The corner stone of their argumentation rests on the lack of evidence of supernatural events and experiences. Their arguments range from reasoning based on psychological references to a conviction that something seen or heard must have been misunderstood. In time, and thanks to the general progress of science, rational causes will eventually be found and the reason why people recover inexplicably from poor health will become clear. According to Hufford, such arguments are consistent and are put forward by people from all walks of life and all age groups.<sup>3</sup> Miracle stories include the voices of miracle critics or sceptics, thus incorporating their own counter stories. The stories become polyphonic and form part of a debate about the place of the supernatural and extraordinary in our present-day world.

Mikael Rothstein, the Danish historian of religion, defines miracles as "non-events": they never take place, but are *postulated* as events. According to this interpretation, miracles have no historical existence, merely a literary or narrative existence (Rothstein 1997: 51). However, stories about miracles have been powerful, and still are. They have given rise to sacred places, sacred people, and even whole religions. The apostles of early Christianity attracted followers by spreading stories of miracles and supernatural powers of healing. This became a criterion of sanctitude, and the display of miraculous powers became an important feature in the fight against heathenism (Thomas 1971: 25). Modern miracle stories are often recognisable echoes of biblical miracles (Mullin 1996: 6). The narrator anchors and contextualizes the miraculous event in ways, which help give the story authority and meaning. On previous occasions I have discussed how parts of a specific healing story I came across two decades ago constitute variations on the stories of Christ's

healing miracles as found in the New Testament (Selberg 1997). I will include this story here, as it was recounted at the time by one of my interviewees, whom I have chosen to call Gunvor in this context. Both Liv's and Gunvor's stories refer to the same healer - the stories have parallel points - but there are differences as well, which help shed light on the two narratives.

### *Liv's story*

Liv told me her story after listening to the lecture I gave on the Pilot, and this was the first time she ever told anyone about the event. Until the summer she turned eight, Liv had been a healthy girl, but was then suddenly taken ill. She was taken to hospital on 6 June 1952, with kidney problems. She was meant to stay only for a couple of days, but as it turned out, she remained hospitalised for six months with kidney failure and a body full of water. She speaks at length about her stay in the hospital, about her experience of being a child in a world of adults, and about being part of the hospital regime. This brings her to a particular episode: One day her mother came to see her, behaving rather conspicuously: she was talking in a whisper, which the eight-year-old did not like. It turned out the mother had brought a prayer cloth<sup>4</sup>.

Then she told me she'd been to see a man, says Liv, I don't think it was the Pilot, I think it must have been somebody else. He could make people get well again, she told me. I was only eight, though ... He had asked her to give him something to put on the place where I was poorly. Now, she didn't have nothing but a hankie, so that's what I would have to lie on, thank you very much. If I was to get well. ...

But at this stage Liv had become part of the hospital regime and didn't want anything to do with this – she explains:

I wasn't motivated, I'd never heard of anything like it, and deep inside I thought, although I didn't tell my mum nothing, mind, but I thought – this is silly, 'cause I was part of – I had gotten into a rhythm at the hospital, they came to wake you up with the thermometer, they brought us food, and water for washing, and then breakfast came – see, everything was to schedule in those days – it was brilliant, what a regime, and I'd become part of that rhythm, and this just didn't fit in, I had no personal life of my own, like.

Even if I wasn't able to say so at the time, I realised this didn't fit in at all.

However, says Liv, she did put the handkerchief in her bed, touching her back, and in the morning when they came to make her bed, they found it, and said: What's this!

I just wasn't receptive says Liv I couldn't get well, there was no communication whatsoever, it was all too sudden, it wasn't possible. For I belonged to the hospital now, I didn't belong to my mum anymore. I had become part of the system. That was my life. It was all right. So, that's how that chance came to nothing. I didn't get any better, but I didn't get worse either.

On 6th December she had been in hospital for six months and her parents came to collect her, perhaps wanting to take her home to die there. It was tough being home, she says, for obviously they didn't have the routines she had become accustomed to, and food was brought to her on a more irregular basis. At home there was the cowshed and the other kids to consider, and in the beginning, she missed the hospital.

Then one night, says Liv, her father sat down by the desk – which in itself was quite an extraordinary event, for he only used to do that if he was going to complain about his taxes. He was a factory worker and crofter and was concerned with practical matters. But now he sat down to write, he was going to write to the Pilot, for somebody had told him he should give him a try. And the letter was sent. Soon afterwards, this happened:

Just after New Year, I was lying there, in the morning, playing solitaire as usual. My mum was in the kitchen, and my granny was there as well, she was in the other sitting room. But then there was this commotion from these two, my mum and my gran: Look who's coming down the road, it's Inga!

Inga was my friend Ellen's granny. She was overly religious; she was a spirit, a walking spirit. She never did anything, for she had eczema, and walked around covered up in a blanket. They used to tell us stories about how religious she was, once when there was a dance on, she got in there and kneeled on the floor among the dancers, praying for them. There were a few stories like that about her, and she would always give you a row.

Nobody liked her calling on them, for that meant she wanted to convert them. My granny certainly didn't want to be converted ... And so these two ladies did a runner, only telling me to hide my pack of cards away. And then they disappeared into the kitchen, and Inga came in to see me fancy sacrificing their own daughter! So, I simply had to lie there as Inga entered ... They never came to help me out, my mum and my granny, no – they just vanished. My younger brothers and sisters were out playing, I was all alone with her, which I'd never been before. She looked like a witch. Her hair was combed straight back, she was hollow-eyed, haggard and thin, stooping a bit. Just like I'd read in the fairytales.

But she started reading; that was all there was to it. She got out a magazine and started reading. It was one of those missionary magazines. She read a piece from it. And she wanted me to listen. ...I'd never been alone

with her before. ... But I do remember that piece. It was about a man. He wasn't so old he was longing to die, but he was a grown man. He had caught an incurable disease, though I can't remember what disease it was. The doctor had given up on him. And he was really desperate and very sad. Then the vicar came to see him. And the vicar said to him: Have you prayed to God? No, he hadn't 'cause he didn't believe in all that. But he had to, 'cause that was the only thing that could save him, praying to God. Then he started wavering a bit, and in the end he got a flicker of hope and started praying to God to make him well again. A day or two passed by, and the vicar had told him he would be given a sign. Then he turned awful' poorly, yet he had come to believe real firm that God would help him. He'd been so sure nothing could help him for such a long time, but now he felt there was hope. And after a day or two he became so poorly everybody thought he was going to die. He couldn't talk or anything. But he himself felt really good inside, and believed this was a critical point. And in the end, he got his health back.

And that's what she read to me. I can't remember talking about anything else, nothing that I took note of anyway, but I do remember that story. I didn't really feel it had anything to do with me, apart from hinting that I ought to be praying more than I did.

I didn't think that much about it. Not in a couple days. Then I had a turn for the worse. And that's when I started thinking about it. What was that she read to me? My Dad sent his letter to the Pilot. What was that she read to me? And I started thinking about what she had read, and I thought, I'll get well again now. I was so ill I couldn't talk, they couldn't touch me; they were wrought with despair. Everybody thought I was going to die.

They sent for the doctor, who turned up with his son, who was a medical student, and he gave me a penicillin jab. That was all he could think of.

She says she can see the despair in everyone around her, and she wants to tell them they need not worry because she will get well again, she knows now, for certain. However, she is so unwell she is unable to speak. Following this crisis she recovers completely. She starts urinating copiously, all the accumulated fluid drains out of her, she loses weight, and then she recovers. And all the villagers come to see her and talk about "what a miracle" it had been. The Home Mission had a meeting about her, and she was allowed to attend. She was our Lord's miracle, they all told her.

I am one of the Lord's miracles,

she confirms. For a year or so she found that the entire village would consider her a miracle. What did that feel like, I ask:

It was great, says Liv, laughing. Everybody was happy and grateful and smiled at me, and I returned their smiles. It was a miracle. It was our Lord's miracle.

It's obviously put its mark on me, this, Liv goes on to say. It's given me a strength inside, as well as a weakness. It's a wonderful thing, being our Lord's miracle, which I still am today. Everybody told me it meant there would have to be a purpose to my life.

She knew all the time that it was the Pilot who had made her well. Her Dad had written to him, and then Inga had enabled her to believe that extraordinary powers did in fact exist. Had she not visited, Liv would never have held that belief.

For I was ill. I doubt I would have recovered without that belief. I don't think so – today. So I sort of insist on that combination of the four: myself and Inga and the Pilot and Our Lord. Nobody is allowed to take that away from me. Lots of people want to. So I don't talk about it very often. – Whoever would believe something like that – it's fairytale stuff.

They never talked about it at home, but I thought everybody was thinking as I did, that it was the Pilot who had made me well. – But then suddenly my Dad says, "He was really clever that old doctor S. They might as well have tried giving her a penicillin jab in hospital. Then she would have recovered earlier." Now, that made me extremely... – they sort of took my life away then, like. I've never said anything about it, but I've heard them say similar things, perhaps five times in all. To other people. That he was so clever that doctor S. He was so clever, 'cause he saved me.

But a couple of months back I told my Dad. 'Don't you think it was a combination of things?' I said. And he went along with that, although he wants to distance himself from these inexplicable things. And I can understand that, for so do I, normally. But this is so deeply rooted in me. For I was lying there, noticing everything that went on at home, my Mum and my Dad and their despair, my Dad is warming to it now, but he probably wanted it to be Dr. S and his penicillin jab.

I ask her if the experience would have been just as magnificent if she had recovered from a dangerous disease in hospital, if she would have felt just as grateful. This is Liv's answer:

That would've been part of a process you could comprehend, like, so the experience wouldn't have been as fantastic. 'Cause what I'm talking about is this experience which has been such a great thing for me to carry with me, – I've learnt to be tolerant – of things you can't see or touch, and to accept that there are things I can't understand and that nobody can understand. I see this as a strength. Accepting that there are things beyond

people's comprehension. It all links in with the fact that I got my health back in an inexplicable way.

Everybody told me it was a miracle – our Lord's miracle.

The next story was told by Gunvor as part of an interview I made round twenty years ago. In her twenties, Gunvor suddenly suffered an aggressive attack of eczema all over her body. She went to see the doctor over a long period of time, but neither his advice nor his drugs offered any release. The drugs the doctor prescribed were extremely expensive, but didn't work, and she had to use most of the money she earned from working behind the counter of a grocery store to pay for them. In the end, the doctor could see no other option but to hospitalise her, which she didn't want. Her fiancé was even less keen on the idea, and suggested they went to see the Pilot. We'll let Gunvor tell her story from here:

My fiancé told me his mum had been to see the Pilot, she had suffered from a stomach ulcer and he had healed her. "Why don't you give it a try", he told me. I had no faith in the Pilot, I really hadn't. But I did say yes, I would give it a try, and so we travelled up to see him.

And there were loads of people waiting, some were limping, and others were ill in all sorts of places. Then it was my turn. He asked what was wrong with me, and I answered that, well, it was eczema. I started unbuttoning my dress so he could take a look. But he said that wouldn't be necessary. I can see where it's worst. He could see through my clothes. Then he said, I'm sure we'll manage this one. He gave me something to drink, something extremely bitter. It reminded me of rowan berries. Then he went into a small room next door, where he prayed. I could hear him, but he never asked me to join in and pray with him. And I didn't want to either, that just wasn't my way. When he returned, he said: you will have to believe in me, for I've prayed for you. Come back and see me in a week, and I'll give you an ointment.

And d'you know, said Gunvor, I did believe him. I don't know, something told me to believe in him, or to put it another way: I wanted to believe him. And then he told me to go to the pharmacist and buy some pure green soap, and then I should run a bath and pour in the soap, and the water should be as hot as possible and I should stay soaked in the tub till it had gone cold.

And I did. My landlady came to see us, and she and my fiancé started giggling and said "You know, he probably enjoyed getting to touch a young girl". And I got so cross, I was livid! I must have believed ever so firmly in him. I threw them both out. 'You're not to joke about this', I told them, 'get out of here!' And then I did as I had been told, and got into the hot water.

The following morning I called for my landlady. 'You'd better come in and have a look', I said. I was standing naked on the floor, wiping the eczema away. She grabbed a towel and rubbed me down, and I couldn't go to work that day because I was aching all over. I was bleeding. I put on an old pair of pyjamas and went to bed. And since then I have never seen any sign of the eczema. And this all happened the morning after I had been to see the Pilot.

As agreed, I went back to see the Pilot the week after. And he said: 'how are you?' 'I'm very well,' I said. And he said, without looking at me, "I can see that". And I said, there's only a few scars left. And then he said, "I've made an ointment for you, but you won't need it. You'll get well without it". And after a year my skin was completely normal again, and I have never had eczema since.

But there was one thing that was rather special. I wanted to pay him, and I gave him 20 kroner, which was a lot of money at the time. He returned half of it to me and said, "you can't afford more than that". And when I think about all that money I had given to that doctor fellow, I must say the Pilot was a reasonable doctor ...

The events described in both stories happened a long time ago, and both narrators are able to view them from a distance and to consider them all with hindsight. Unlike Liv, Gunvor has told her story a number of times. It is well composed - and the actual healing - and the initial mistrust of her immediate circle - as well as their ensuing conviction, provide the climax of her story. These aspects are described in the greatest detail. Liv tells her story for the first time and keeps moving back and forth between the past and the present, like when she tells us how she and her Dad relate to what happened. She reflects on the impact of this experience on her later life. Liv's story is longer, and the introductory descriptions of life at the hospital are given ample space as she talks about what it was like for a little girl to become part of a hospital regime and having to relate to only adult company. In her own turn of phrase, she belonged to the hospital. Inga's visit is another episode, which is given ample space: - this also marks a clinical turning point, as Inga instigates the great change. Compared to Inga's visit, the doctor is mentioned almost in passing - his most important role being to personify the rational, - even in the present-day interpretation of the events of the past. As in Gunvor's story, the actual healing process is described at some length - as are people's reactions to the event. Unlike fiction, oral literature is normally characterised by a straight chronology; what happened first will be recounted first. Nevertheless, oral accounts will sometimes protract the narrative time in order to dwell on the most important, interesting or spectacular parts of the story (cf. Palmenfelt 2000a: 9). Despite the fact that Inga's visit is a brief episode in Liv's illness, this episode is described at great length and in considerable detail. Inga's person and Inga's visit appear to constitute the most important element of Liv's experience.

Both stories include a coda, a summary which provides an assessment of events. The narrator positions herself outside the story and addresses the audience, commenting on the narrative (Palmenfelt 2000b: 40). Gillian Bennett (1988) has shown that whenever narrators position themselves outside their story, address their audience and provide information and comment, they use a strategy designed to increase the story's credibility (Palmenfelt 2000b: 41). Liv points out that the experience she has recounted is a great thing for her to carry with her, that it has made her more tolerant with respect to the fact that certain matters are beyond rational comprehension, and that being "Our Lord's miracle" is a strength for her in her current life – which gives her life a purpose. "I don't believe. I know", she says. When Gunvor tells us about wanting to pay the Pilot, she compares the Pilot to her doctor, and in doing so she rates rational medicine against popular healing. Also, the payment episode points back to the beginning of her story, where Gunvor tells us she had to spend virtually all the money she earned to pay the doctor – who never provided any help anyway. Gunvor's ending thus points out that the Pilot is a person who *knows* more than others, because he *knows* what Gunvor is able to pay. Through this knowledge he declares his solidarity with her, just as Gunvor has declared her loyalty to the Pilot as part of her story. They belong to the same sphere, whereas the doctor is somewhere else.

### *An echo of biblical stories*

In different ways, Liv and Gunvor both contextualize their stories within a Christian universe. Firstly, the two narratives adhere to the same structure as the biblical stories about Christ's healing: an introductory passage describes the disease and its history, which is then followed by the healing process. In conclusion, the actual cure is demonstrated to outsiders (Neiman 1995). Healing is a central theme in Christian religion and the biblical stories about healing illustrate the triumph of life and spirit over disease and death (Mullin 1996: 144). The stories describe the main character's transition from one state to another which is qualitatively different: from being unwell to being well. To Liv, this new state involves more than regaining her health, it has become decisive to her outlook on life. Her story also shows us how her recovery prompted a new kind of integration in the local community, "everybody was happy and grateful and smiled at me, and I returned their smiles."

The diseases in these stories are serious and incurable; in Liv's case even life threatening. Doctors and hospitals can do nothing and give up. But following their contact with the Pilot, both women experience sudden and total recovery. The disease materialises and disappears in a palpable, visible way: it drains away or is wiped off. Both healing instances work like a cleansing process and are invocative of the story in the New Testament about Jesus healing the leper: "While he was in one of the towns, Jesus came upon a man who was a mass of leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he prostrated himself before him and begged: 'If you want to, Lord, you can make me clean.' Jesus stretched out his hand, and placed it on the leper, saying: 'Certainly I want

to. Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him. (Luk. 5: 12–13)."

Other parts of Gunvor's story also echo some of the stories in the Bible (Selberg 1997). On the one hand, Gunvor and Liv's experiences can be seen as unique, detached episodes, while on the other hand, they refer to conventions of representation which are associated with a common system of meaning (Drakos 1997: 31). As the experiences are retold, the biblical stories reverberate and give the narratives a particular meaning and authority. Present-day miracles are associated with the grand events recorded in the Scriptures and echo the biblical miracles (Mullin 1996: 6). Stories of miraculous intervention have existed at all times – and these stories are used as models for new ones (Klein 2000: 11).

Is the Pilot portrayed as a sacred man in these stories? Gunvor maintains that she is a non-believer. Nevertheless her story reflects a Christian view of the world: the stories of Christ's healing miracles are present as she interprets her experience and lend their structure to her story. However, the power that caused the healing is interpreted as the Pilot's personal attribute, not as the power of God administered through him. Similarly, the Bible interprets Christ's healing power as a personal attribute. People gathered round him just to touch. Furthermore, Gunvor maintains that she believes in the Pilot; in her story the Pilot is described as omniscient and is portrayed as a saint-like person.

This is different in Liv's description of the Pilot. She has really never met him. The only point of contact is her father's letter to him. In other words, this is a form of remote healing. In his autobiography the Pilot calls this a "Forwarding of God's power". He writes: "One of the greatest revelations God has bestowed upon me, is the gift to be able to forward God's healing power to whoever I want, wherever I want and whenever I want. This power can be forwarded to anywhere on earth. Distances don't matter, and neither does time." He writes that he has forwarded such powers to many places, but adds a word of warning: "if you approach me with doubt in your heart, you yourself will bar the power from working. Contact is impossible" (Schei 1947: 79). In Liv's story, there is a mediator, the deeply religious Inga who opens Liv up to the divine powers forwarded by the Pilot. She emphasises the importance of all four factors: Inga, the Pilot, herself and Our Lord. To explain why she recovered, Liv links together events such as her father's letter, Inga's visit, the magazine story, and her ensuing clinical crisis, in a cause-and-effect relationship.

### *Faith, doubt and reason*

Are present-day miracle stories clear-cut echoes of the biblical healing stories? Are there perhaps any other references and reverberations at work? The miracle is a religious and cultural category in which numerous, contradictory viewpoints are maintained (Klein 1997). Stories of extraordinary events, which are contrary to the laws of nature are intertwined with references to doubt, scepticism and reason, all of which work as dramatic contrasts. They

help make Liv and Gunvor's stories a meeting place of ideas derived from a number of great narratives – not only biblical ones. Liv and Gunvor's stories are interlaced with objections voiced by sceptics and doubters. The modern rational and scientific system, represented by the doctor and the hospital, is presented as the miracle's adversary. In this context, miracles are out of fashion. Historically, the Reformation put an end to the era of miracles; the idea of a limited time for miracles has been promoted ever since. Whereas the Catholics maintained their "superstitious" belief in the miracles of saints and martyrs, Protestants recognise only the miracles of the Bible. Within Protestant Christendom there was accord that miracles were essential to the Bible's revelations and the establishment of the Christian church, but once The Scriptures were completed, the era of miracles had passed (Mullin 1996). Today, miracles constitute a religious category, which Protestant theologians tend to keep quiet about.

In the last few decades of the 18th century, Scandinavia saw a formidable flourish of critical public debate on religious issues, writes Arne Bugge Amundsen in his paper "Akkomodasjon og mirakler" (1997: 141). At the centre of this debate was a "miracle problem". The opposing parties agreed on one thing: that the times were changing. These were modern times, and as such, they needed modern answers. Miracle stories did not fall into this category. It was claimed that the extensive belief in miracles among common people represented an obstacle to the modern religious project (Amundsen 1997: 146). Believing in the miracles described in the Bible was one thing, believing in everyday healing miracles was something entirely different. Amundsen quotes one of the debaters, vicar Peder Hansen, who wrote about the popular belief in healing: "People in ill health were to sleep next to a Spring, made famous by a Saint in ancient times, and accompanied by the most laughable stories." Even worse was the faith in so-called "wise men and women" who would defraud people of their money and even cause them to lose their lives through performing miracles. Stories about saints and the belief in healers were at best laughable, at worst dangerous. During this era, miracles became seriously unfashionable in the eyes of contemporary society, and perhaps particularly in the eyes of the theologians. Behind this debate, writes Amundsen, we detect the values of the bourgeoisie: predictability, consequence and morality – a world in which progress and reason are rewarded, "... Progress is reason, reaction is belief in miracles." (Amundsen 1997: 148–150).

However, the irrational and extraordinary constitute criteria of the miraculous. When recounting a miraculous event, narrators introduce a number of different views personified through different characters. In this way, one allows for alternative interpretations of the recounted events (Bauman 1992). In both Gunvor and Liv's stories the doctor is present as a representative of modern science and of a regime. However, he has to give up in the face of the challenges represented by Gunvor and Liv's diseases, and once rationality and science are at a loss, the ground is prepared for the miracle worker. But as he enters the stage, so does the doubter, as is the case in some of the biblical stories. Gunvor tells us how her landlady and also

her fiancé – who was in fact the person who suggested contacting the Pilot in the first place – laugh at her as she returns from the Pilot, full of faith in his capabilities. They reduce him to the level of an old man who enjoys touching up young girls. The boyfriend represents the believer as well as the doubter; the landlady is the real doubter. But she is proved wrong; the miracle is clearly demonstrated as Gunvor wipes away the disease before her very eyes. In Gunvor's story, doubt is a recurring theme throughout: first her own, then her boyfriend's, and finally her landlady's. In the course of the story, doubt is replaced by faith. The miracle has been demonstrated; there is no scope for doubting the facts. The Pilot achieves what no-one else has been able to achieve. The miracle transforms ill health to good health, and changes doubt into faith.

In Liv's story, the relationship between doubt and faith is not quite as clear-cut. Liv herself is convinced that it was the Pilot, Inga and God who made her recover. In her story however, the voice of reason speaks through her father's interpretation of events. The doctor is also given a role to play in Liv's healing, as he administers the penicillin. Towards the end of her story, this episode is revisited, as she refers to her father's comment: "He was clever, that doctor S". His emphasis is on the fact that Dr. S., the physician from the back of beyond, outdid the doctors at the hospital in town, who should have been in a better position to think of the penicillin solution. By doing so, the father suggests there is a rational explanation to Liv's recovery. She protests however, and believes that he is now open for taking aboard other interpretations. Liv offers a meta-narrative comment: she says about her father that he "wants to distance himself from these inexplicable things. And I can understand that, for so do I, normally. But this is so deeply rooted in me. ... and my Dad is warming to it now, but he probably wanted it to be Dr. S and his penicillin jab."

Modern medicine and popular healing represent two different worlds. Liv talks about being taken over by the hospital regime, which leaves her unreceptive to the powers represented by popular healing. When her mother came to see her in hospital with a prayer cloth, the eight-year-old understood – perhaps intuitively – that there was no place for this within the system. Liv now interprets the feelings and reactions she experienced as a child, and says: "I wasn't motivated, I'd never heard of anything like it, ... – I had gotten into a rhythm at the hospital, ... what a regime, and I'd become part of that rhythm. ... There was no communication whatsoever, ... For I belonged to the hospital now." The hospital is part of a modern world in which healing and miracles have no place. Miracles are contrary to the laws of nature, but in some places "nature" is more obstinate than elsewhere. Things were different at home, where there wasn't the same sort of system, says Liv. Things were left to happen more at random. Compared to the hospital regime, this was chaos. This was a place where the deeply religious Inga could call, uninvited, and prepare Liv so as to make her receptive to the healing powers of the Pilot. In terms of Liv's fourfold healing factors, Inga is a mediator between Liv herself on the one hand, and the Pilot and Our Lord on the other. This made her a divine miracle for the whole village, and later even to herself.

The story describes the introduction of order in the chaos represented by life at home.

Liv comments on the relationship between the two different worlds when she is asked whether recovery from a life-threatening illness in hospital would have been as magnificent an experience to her. She says: “That would’ve been part of a process you could comprehend, so the experience wouldn’t have been as fantastic”. Her miraculous healing is an experience which has marked her whole life and which she carries with her; it has taught her to be tolerant and to accept that there are things beyond her comprehension. She considers this to be a strength. Doubt and rationality form part of the stories in a number of ways, thus providing scope for other interpretations and descriptions of the relevant events. A miraculous event may become a discursive field in which a number of different views and values are expressed and discussed (Klein 1997, 2000).

### *When does a miracle occur?*

Mikael Rothstein (1997: 53), historian of religion, refers to the significance of miraculous events in both the Old and the New Testament, and concludes that stories of miracles are concealed within larger semantic systems: they occur when they are supposed to. But is it possible to maintain that the miracles encountered by Gunvor and Liv occurred when they were “supposed to” in relation to a larger system? In Catholicism the recognition of a miracle can play an important part with respect to church policy (Eriksen and Stensvold 2002). Barbro Klein (1997, 2000) describes how a miraculous event taken from a Swedish context was utilised in a religious /political conflict within the Assyrian/Syrian church in Södertälje near Stockholm. She also reflects on how the Swedish media’s interest in this miraculous event triggered renewed interest in miracles among Swedes, while at the same time the event was used to brand immigrants as “superstitious”. Once miracles become part of a public debate, as illustrated by Barbro Klein, or are assigned significance with respect to church policy, they gain importance as part of the modern regime.

Within this picture, the events of Gunvor and Liv’s stories are more like isolated incidents. They form no part of a public debate. Nevertheless, Liv talks about becoming a “Lord’s miracle” to her entire village, and of how the Home Mission wanted her to attend their meetings. The miracle that happened to Liv thus becomes part of a religious strategy; turning her into the embodiment of a congregation’s emphasis on miraculous events. This illustrates one of the conflicts that miracles may highlight, the conflict between religious *experiences* on the one hand, and religious *dogma* on the other. Based on the five religious dimensions postulated by the sociologists of religion Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Starks (1965) – faith, experience, activity, knowledge and consequence – religious researchers have pointed out that experience is the dimension which is considered most important within popular religiousness (Lunestad 2000). In terms of religious involvement,

the dimension of experience is associated with some form of subjective experience of a divine or super-empirical reality. The extent to which the various religions attach importance to subjective experiences varies greatly. Within the Church of Norway, as in most other major religious communities, there is a certain level of tension between those who attach great importance to spiritual experiences, like the charismatic movements, and those who warn against basing a Christian faith specifically on subjective experiences (Repstad 1981: 28–29). There is thus tension between the dimensions of faith and experience as well, in the sense that some consider it more important to experience than to believe in various dogmas. Miracles are religious experiences that tend to be hushed up in some contexts. They incorporate a number of diverse and conflicting values, and represent a cultural and religious area in which our conceptions of faith and doubt, faith and knowledge, and the relationship between religious experience and religious dogma, are both defined and challenged. Gunvor and Liv's stories are "belief stories" which provide an insight into a form of religiousness, which has no authoritative scriptures or doctrines.

These days, the miracle, as a religious experience, plays no central or obvious part in the official religious discourse, although the idea of working wonders is kept alive through stories of events that cannot be designated to any particular religion or religious movement.

When religion was modernised, the miracle was ostracised. It failed to provide a modern answer, in Amundsen's phrase. Miracles are no longer part of the established religious discourse in Scandinavia; in modern times the era of miracles has passed. In the fight against Catholicism, and in the face of enlightenment and reason, the miracle was forced to give way. Yet it never disappeared. The stories about the Pilot, and the extensive public interest in him, indicate that miracles are still present in popular religious conception.

This may be the reason why so many people turned up to listen to a lecture that promised to "speak up" about a popular healer, thus introducing him as part of a public discourse.

*Translated by  
Hege Hernæs*

## NOTES

- 1 He was generally known as the Pilot, due to his "civilian" occupation as a sea pilot.
- 2 There is no information about him in the relatively recently published Bergen Byleksikon (Bergen City Encyclopedia), nor in the local collection at Bergen Public Library. In 1947 he published his autobiography *Overnaturlige helbredende nådegaver*, in which he gives an account of numerous miraculous healings.
- 3 Cf. Dégh/Vazsonyi 1974, who also maintain that sceptics pass on legends of the supernatural.
- 4 A prayer cloth is a piece of material which has been touched or prayed over by a healer, thereby transferring his healing powers. These will start working on the person who is ill once the piece of cloth is put onto the affected part of the body.

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## An Afternoon's Conversation at Elsa's

On the following pages I will describe a conversation that took place at my aunt Elsa's home in the outskirts of Stockholm on May 5, 1983 between her, my father Gustav, and me. The description is, in part, based on diary notes and on my recollections of the "feeling tone and texture" (Hymes 1978) of this and many other conversations. But most of all, it is based on a three-hour long tape-recording. At the outset, I was the only one who knew that the conversation was being taped.<sup>1</sup>

This article is one of several focusing on the stories, recollections, quotations, and descriptions through which my father, in the company of relatives and friends, reconstructed, dramatized and fictionalized past experiences, in particular childhood experiences (see, for example, Klein 1982, 1990, 1996).<sup>2</sup> My father – who passed away in 1986 – sometimes named such oral performances *skitprat* ("shit talk") or, more seldom, *tosaföror* ("playing around with nonsense"). Thus, to him these dramatizations constituted a special category or a special "way of speaking" (Bauman & Sherzer 1983). On these occasions, he took advantage of nuances in conversations and other kinds of interaction in order to stage stories and other forms of verbal art in which he utilized a number of stylistic devices and verbal techniques to make the past come alive: rich metaphors, play with dialects and other paralinguistic resources, traditional migratory motifs and turns of phrase, cultural historical explanations and elaborations. Together the many stories, brief descriptions, and other verbal forms constitute a rich and colorful local and regional history populated by more or less fictionalized characterizations of people who once lived. Central to his verbal art, the most important grist for his mill, were Gustav's own experiences, not least his experiences with listening to other narrators and singers. In that sense, he furthered a powerful local narrative tradition; it was this tradition that structured his sense of verbal art. But both this tradition and his own life-long activities as narrator playing with words and styles also structured his own new experiences and his verbal representations of them. At the same time, all his verbal dramatizations played an integrative role for all the people who were drawn into his performances. It was through verbal art that he and his friends and relatives created important links between their past and their present.

Even if it is Gustav's verbal art that is at the center of this study, I am also interested in how narrating and other forms of verbal artistry are cumulatively shaped in social processes. The conversation described in this article is shaped by three individuals and in my description I emphasize Elsa's and my own roles just as much as Gustav's. Furthermore, this particular conversation rests on a number of implicit experiences, values, assumptions, expectations, and layers in time and space. Among these are countless previous conversations, our familiarity with each other's life histories, and our experiences as Swedes. The conversation at Elsa's in May 1983 is to be understood against the background of many unspoken circumstances and tacit assumptions. All that is said makes sense against the background of our life histories – deeply intertwined, yet highly individual. As young adults in the late 1920s, Gustav and Elsa left the village on the south-east coast of the province of Småland where they grew up. In time, they also rose from their proletarian background. Gustav who had been a sailor and had worked as a janitor in Stockholm eventually became a white-collar employee in a private company. Elsa who worked in various Stockholm restaurants advanced in the hierarchies within that field. I myself left my family background and became an academic working in universities on two continents. Thus all three of us had participated in the massive societal transformations in Sweden and elsewhere during the twentieth century and also contributed to these transformations. As is the case with so many other twentieth century Swedes, the central ingredients of our life histories are migrations, upward social mobility, and the learning of new cultural and linguistic repertoires. Particularly important for the understanding the verbal interaction under consideration in this article is that in daily speech – in particular at work – Gustav had abandoned his childhood dialect and taken to using the more “standard” version of Swedish spoken in the capital. Elsa, on the other hand, never changed her childhood dialect to the same degree that Gustav did; with her it was always noticeable. All this and many other facts and phenomena are implied in my text. Indeed, every time I describe and analyze this material I discover new aspects and perspectives. Every time it feels as if I step inside an ongoing conversation in which I have partaken all my life but still have not really gotten to know.

Other dimensions of this article are connected to the fact that I work in the tradition of “the ethnography of speaking” which I attempt to apply as a theoretical point of departure, a method and a technique. Accordingly, I view folklore as a particularly intensive form of communication, a form of communication that has a “stylized content” and is linked to “stylized behavior”, a form of communication that is often suitably described as a performance (Bauman 1975, Hymes 1975a). Accordingly, I see it as one of the tasks of the folklorist to discover, through careful ethnography, how people, in interaction and conversation, shape such highly marked forms. Therefore, I have selected long conversations and interactions as my units of observation and not discrete narratives and other verbal forms lifted out of their conversational contexts. For example, I ask what effects the structure and changes in the “feeling tone” of a conversation have on the formal shaping of verbal art. What are the connections between the structure of feeling in

a conversation and the verbal forms that are crystallized (Hymes 1978: 137, Glassie 1982: 35–87)? From this it should be clear that I make a distinction between narratives and other forms of verbal art. I regard a narrative as a verbal form that has a beginning and an end and some kind of complication; in a narrative events are presented some kind of (temporal) order and have a relationship to one another (Labov 1972). Other verbal forms or genres, such as quotations, proverbs, wellerisms, metaphoric descriptions may be linked to narratives. Yet, I do not regard them as narratives in themselves. They are, however, forms of verbal art that are important to my relatives. They are part of the ways of speaking that – as noted above – Gustav sometimes characterized as *skitprat* (“shit talk”) and at other times as *tosaföror* (“playing around with nonsense”).

My point of departure as a folklorist utilizing ethnography of speaking as theory, method, and technique guides my description of the conversation on May 5, 1983 and guides the parts of it that I select for presentation. It will soon become clear that I have chosen to highlight the moments of the conversation that are most intense, verbally elaborated, metaphorically rich, and filled with laughter. I treat these moments as a motor – or a structural backbone – in the conversation and I regard other moments as a sort of resonance to the verbally more elaborated segments. With some justification, it could be said that the “un-marked” segments constitute a context for the more highly marked moments that here appear as “folkloristic texts”. Thus this entire description depends on my special folkloristic lens. With another point of departure and with another focus, the conversation could have been described and interpreted in a different way.

Another consequence of my utilization of the ethnography of speaking is that I attempt to reproduce in writing some of the nuances of oral speech as carefully and “audibly” as I can (Tedlock 1983: 7). I transcribe some portions of the conversation in accordance with a crude and simplified “ethnopoetic” technique which is a variation of a system, first presented by Dennis Tedlock in the late 1960s (Tedlock 1983; cf. Seitel 1980, Fine 1984, Klein 1990). I begin a new line when a speaker makes a pause. (If the next line is indented that means that speech continues without an audible or special pause). I also mark a particularly long pause with \*, a loud voice with capitals, emphasis with underlining, and Gustav’s exaggerated and archaizing use of the dialect of Småland with italics. This transcription technique facilitates my analyses of oral style. Yet, I utilize it fairly sparingly and it is primarily some peak moments that are represented in accordance with this system. I summarize most parts of the conversation in my own words, occasionally citing Elsa’s, Gustav’s or my utterances.

In my description I attempt to clarify both my role as researcher and my role as a close relative. It would have been tempting to emphasize that during the conversation at Elsa’s my role was primarily that of a daughter and niece and that, therefore, the processes documented would have been “uncontaminated” by the presence of a scholar doing fieldwork. But that was not the case. Although the tape-recorder was hidden during part of the conversation, and although I did not wish to control that which was said, and

although I wanted this to be like “all other conversations together with my relatives”, it was still colored by my scholarly ambitions. The event assumed the shape that it assumed, because I participated in it as a folklorist and not only as a relative. In writing this article I have seen it as essential to make this clear. But at the same time as this conversation had a unique character, it was utterly common. It was structured like many other conversations in which Gustav and Elsa had the leading roles and it had a “feeling tone and texture” that reminds me of many other occasions.<sup>3</sup>

### *The conversation begins and gets on its way*

In early May, 1983, Sigrid, my mother, was hospitalized and one afternoon during this period Gustav and I were invited to dinner at Elsa’s. Unlike other occasions when I had taped our conversations, I had not told Gustav and Elsa in advance about my intentions to record this one as well, and they did not know that a tape-recorder was hidden in my purse and a small microphone was attached to the hem of my jacket. The mood around the table was strained. Gustav was tired and hungry and left most of the talking to Elsa and me. She and I spoke about food, among other things about the filet of cod that we were eating. We had eaten and talked for about a half hour, when I happened to mention that a friend was sick. At that point the conversation took the following turn:

E: Is she?

B: She’s been sick in bed for several days.

E: What’s she got?

B: She caught some kind of flu.

E: Aha.

Everybody. Watch out for the bones.

G: (mumbling) She’s got some damn virus, Engström said.

B: What? She’s got some what?

G: (raising his voice). DAMN VIRUS, said Engström.

B: Said Engström?

G: (with his mouth full) ENGSTRÖM! A fellow down in Småland.

B: I see.

G: Down at Gammalnäs. You know, he passed away a few years ago.

They found him in the roadside ditch, drunk.

E: What kind of guy was that Engström?/ What Engström was that?

G: Well, he was the postmaster and stationmaster at Brohult in his day.

He owned a house near Hästatorp.

E: I never knew him

G: Nooo. He had a house. It was near Gammalnäs.

E: Aha.

G: Where our cottage was.

E: Uh huh.

B: Uh huh.

G: So he was lying in the roadside ditch, drunk. And Berg and another man came along.

“Are you all right, Engström?” Berg asked.

(Raises his voice). "URGH," said Engström. I dunno. Must have caught some damn virus."

B: (giggles).

E: And so had those people I met in Vällingby, anyway.

At first glance, one might think that there is nothing special about this exchange of words. Nevertheless, this is a highly representative example of the most common technique that Gustav utilizes to stage his verbal art. The technique is particularly common, when he wants to take the word or when there is uncertainty or silence among the speakers. He grabs hold of almost anything in the situation – a turn of phrase, a tone of voice, a gesture, an unusual sound, a movement outside the window – to mobilize something that is worth telling about. Using another vocabulary, one can say that any number of phenomena can constitute the key with which he frames a performance (Bauman 1975). In this case, the word "flu" leads him to an association. Gustav draws attention to himself by lowering his voice and mumbling: "She's got some damn virus, Engström said." He dangles a hook with a worm in front of us: a mysterious quotation of an unknown Engström. I bite, an almost automatic reaction from me in the role of folklorist: as such I had for several years realized that the quotation technique is the most common one that my father and my relatives and their friends from Småland use to introduce verbal art (Klein 1982). Gustav's mumbling is clever. Since I can't hear him, I ask him what he says and give him a chance to raise his voice: "DAMN VIRUS, said Engström." Now there is no chance to miss the fact that something special is on its way. Gustav clearly indicates the conditions for how that which is to follow should be interpreted. Engström is "a fellow down in Småland", one of numerous persons who once lived but who in narrative performance tend to blur with the stereotypical characters in anecdotes and jokes. Gustav is ready for a narrative performance.

But now Elsa breaks in. She is curious and wants to know which Engström Gustav is thinking of. Gustav specifies with place-names and occupations and explains that he is not speaking about his and Elsa's childhood village but about another district of Småland where he and my mother for many years owned a summer home. As was the case so many other times, it is important for Gustav and Elsa to link story-telling and also other kinds of talk about the old days in Småland to actual people and places and their histories.

After all this preparatory "edge-work" (Young 1987: 19–68) Gustav finally gets a chance to tell the brief story. The concluding "edge-work" is not nearly as lengthy as the preparatory one. Nor does the final repartee provoke much of a reaction. I giggle a bit, but Elsa simply continues with the subjects of drunkenness and drunk people using her regular conversational tone of voice. The fit between conversation and narrative is exact, both at the beginning and at the end. A seemingly unimportant exchange of words follows a well rehearsed structure.

Through his quotation technique Gustav establishes a perfect frame for the performance of a little story containing a brief dialogue; this way he clearly distinguishes a fictivized world from the rest of the conversation. But the quotation technique is also noteworthy in so far that the initial quotation also

can begin to lead its own life and function as an independent wellerism, i.e. an often humorous statement attributed to a real or fictive speaker (Neumann 1968). This happened over and over in Gustav's verbal art (although this particular quotation never came to enjoy an independent life). It is, among other things, because of the independent life of such brief forms that I hesitate to use only the word narrator about Gustav. As is the case with so many verbal artists, his art is flexible and subordinated conversational demands: narratives can be shrunk into a few words or be expanded depending upon the contexts. To understand such processes it can be important to describe entire conversations.

For a brief moment, Gustav maneuvers the conversation so that he can introduce a typical (albeit routine and uninspired) example of his verbal art. This way he brings to the present glimpses from another world and other experiences. But the little story is not amusing or interesting enough to change the tone of the conversation. Elsa and I continue talking about food and when that subject feels exhausted, we turn to Elsa's neighbors and other people. Gustav remains almost silent. Occasionally we all laugh a bit. The mood remains rather low-voiced. But it is no longer strained.

After dishwashing we move into Elsa's best room. By this time, we have spent nearly two hours together. I have now hidden the tape-recorder behind a sofa pillow. Elsa and Gustav still do not know that our conversation is being taped. But I keep thinking that this afternoon I am not only a relative but also a folklorist in disguise. I am bothered by this and many questions enter my head. Is this really a good thing? Can I refrain from attempts to direct that which is said into subjects that interest me? I try to forget my dilemmas.

I am helped by the atmosphere. The conversation is no longer sluggish and uninteresting. After food and drink we have all become eager to talk. Elsa and Gustav begin to joke, banter, and remember. Gustav no longer needs to use intricate staging maneuvers to get his verbal art across: Elsa and I are eager to listen regardless. The conversation undulates between points of high energy and slower moments, we burst out in laughter more and more, reminiscence is added to reminiscence, one association leads to the next. The afternoon is becoming increasingly intense emotionally.

For a long time, Elsa dominates. She and Gustav bandy words. They are talking about a general store in the village of Odinsås, not far from the village in which they grew up. Who was the owner? Precisely where was the store located? After a long discussion, Elsa establishes that "it was down there by the movie house". Her mentioning the cinema triggers a reminiscence. And she emphasizes its strength by quoting the old lady in exaggerated dialect (here marked with italics).

E: You and father and I were there,  
went to the movies there.

G: Yeees,

E: Do you remember that?

Can you remember it? When we saw *The Rolling Barrels* I think the film was called.

B: Ha ha ha!

E: And there was this old lady sitting behind me (ha ha):  
 "OH LAWDY LAWD, they're comin' at me!" the old lady cried.  
 (Elsa and Barbro burst out laughing).  
 'Cause they were rolling, you know.  
 "They're comin' at me!"

A quick association, an intensely remembered experience contributes to shaping the atmosphere. But Gustav is not really interested in Elsa's reminiscence. He would rather continue talking about the place where the cinema was located. That place was called "Free Week Square (Frivicketorget) as I have told you before, Barbro" he announces with a lecturing tone of voice, as he attempts to lead the conversation toward one of his favorite subjects: the life that was led on this square during "free week" in October.<sup>4</sup> He is not successful, since Elsa is more keen on speaking about owners of other shops in the vicinity. And soon also Gustav turns to the subject of people they both knew or knew of "down there". To Elsa and Gustav it is important to characterize people geographically and socially, to specify place-names and kinship, and to make clear who had moved to Stockholm and who had not. At times, the conversation seems to consist of nothing but catalogues of place-names and names of persons and I do not really understand that Elsa and Gustav are as engaged as they are in these catalogues. I am waiting for excitement: for the funny stories and songs.

For a long period Elsa dominates that which is said. But she does not forget her role as hostess and tries to persuade us to take more gingersnaps with almond slivers on top. We eat and talk. Suddenly Gustav says with a dead-pan voice and seemingly without moving a facial muscle: "Did you cut your toenails onto these?" We all look at the almond slivers on the cookies. "Yes," says Elsa, using the same tone of voice. And, without moving a facial muscle, she adds: "I went to the pedicurist some time ago and it occurred to me that soon Gustav and Barbro will be here, I had better bring some extras with me home."

### *Building up a crescendo of laughter*

Banter and well rehearsed witticisms: we all know exactly which rejoinders are expected (cf. Gumperz 1982: 71). And we laugh and joke about gingersnaps, in-grown toe-nails, and pieces of almond that resemble cockle-shells. At the same time Gustav and I assure Elsa that the cookies are very good. Then Gustav continues, saying that the cookies are

G: almost like the ones Fia at Källan baked.  
 E: You're right, that's it (laughter).  
 B: (bursts out laughing)  
 G: There's a whole pinch of butter in them.  
 E: How did it go?  
 Jan Olofer's Anna she spit on her nails:  
 "PFUI," she said whenever she was making almond pastries  
 before she pressed the dough into the forms.

G: No, it was Abromers Matilda!  
E: What?  
G: It was Abromer's Matilda.  
E: Right, it was. Abromer's Matilda, that was it!  
B: Who?  
G: Abraham, Abromer's, Abraham's.  
B: (Bursts out laughing)  
E: (laughing) But really! She was so godawful filthy that woman!

Fia at Källan who said she had used an entire pinch (knivsudd) of butter in her gingersnap dough, Jan Olofer's Anna, Abromer's Matilda – these are names that resonate. Now Elsa and Gustav are getting going in earnest. The mood is becoming increasingly intense. For the first time this afternoon, they speak about the people of their childhood – paradigmatic figures who are brought back to life over and over when the two are together. Now Elsa speaks with a louder voice than earlier. Now she and Gustav imitate many different voices: their own when they were children and those of the old women and men. Now they take turns remembering the dirt at Abrom's house. "We were used to cleanliness," Elsa emphasizes, calling out: "One has such memories, don't you think?" And Gustav mentions visits at Peppar-Nisse's grocery-store. Elsa and Gustav are no longer merely big-city people looking back at life a long time ago; rather, they are present as visitors and actors on the stages they describe. And Gustav mentions how he and other boys used to play hartsfiol – which had a horrible screechy sound – first at Jonne Snäll's and then at Abromer's. "Ah," said Abrom, "are you here again, you little glaziers"?

We laugh and enjoy ourselves. But Gustav does not want to let go of Abrom. He is eager to stage performances, but now he uses a technique that is different from the one he used at the beginning of the afternoon. He no longer has to make sure he has attention from his audience: we are all ears as Gustav continues about Abrom.

G: And  
\*  
he built a privy at Olle Ejnarsson's.  
And you know they had to have,  
they had for the children, they had smaller holes.  
E: That's right.  
B: (laughs softly)  
G: They had three different kinds,  
B: (laughs)  
G: The old woman she had one helluva big hole (laughs).  
E: NO THAT ONE WAS FOR THE OLD MAN!  
G: Oh no it wasn't (laughs).  
E: The hell it wasn't!  
B: (Bursts out laughing)  
G: Well, maybe at Olle Ejnarsson's, 'cause Majli she was pretty skinny.  
E: (laughs)  
B: (laughs)  
G: But

\*

So Olle Ejnarsson had to get involved:

“Well, Abraham,” he said, “don’t they usually make the holes thus and so big?”

“*I won’t listen to a word you say,*” said Abrom.

“*I use my own head for making the holes.*”<sup>5</sup>

(peals of laughter, with Elsa laughing especially loudly).

E: So he .... (her words drown in the laughter), used his head for it.

Ha ha ha ha haha!

B: Ha ha ha ha haha! You mean he was the one who said that?

(more loud laughter)

E: He was a funny fellow, wasn’t he?

Banter, cultural historical details, dialogues quoted in an exaggerated and archaic dialect, narration that provokes bursts of laughter – all in one package. Add to this the fact that this is one of numerous examples of how Gustav links a well-known joke to one of the figures who lived in his and Elsa’s childhood village. Indeed, common narrative types and motifs are important resources when Elsa and Gustav make their childhood world come to life. In words and laughter the two of them become children again, children who watch the people who were old then, children who imitate the old ones and joke with them, the way they did once long ago. When the two of them speak together the way they do now, they re-live important childhood experiences. At the same time, they bring me as a listener back to all the performances they once staged for my mother, my brothers and me. As the laughter fades out, Elsa says to me: “But you know, there is so much of this kind of stuff.” “I know,” I answer, “Gustav has told me since I was a child. But I don’t know which one of those people said what.”

Now Gustav and Elsa are truly in the mood for telling stories and for staging performances; nothing can stop them. I laugh repeatedly and I no longer have the feeling that I am listening to catalogues of names. Rather, the places and persons Elsa and Gustav bring up now are charged with meanings that have had an impact on me long before this conversation. They have made an impression because they are a part of Gustav’s and Elsa’s most beloved repertoire. Elsa mentions Berg who practiced “cupping” and pulled out Gustav’s tooth. Gustav adds the coffin maker in Odinsås who pulled a tooth out of the tanner’s mouth; the tanner caught an inflammation and died. Blood-letting, tooth-pulling and leeches constitute an inexhaustible combination of topics. Gustav mentions that “grandmother went to Berg for blood-letting” at which point Elsa adds: “Oh, grandmother was such a kind person. Was there ever such a kind person anywhere in the world?”

But Gustav does not pick up the subject of his and Elsa’s maternal grandmother, Kristina. He prefers to continue talking about blood-letting and leeches. For a while he totally dominates the conversation and leads us into a new crescendo of laughter. This is how it happens:

G: And that old Alma who was married to Per, she laid on leeches.

And I had the damndest inflammation in my jaw

that had given me a terrible toothache.  
E: Who did you say did it?  
G: That old Alma who was married to Per!  
B: That old Alma who was married to Per (laughing)!  
E: That old Alma who was married to Per?  
G: Yeah, she lived down past Bila-Lena's.  
B: (bursts out laughing)  
E: (laughs) Oh right, down there (laughs)! Across the way.  
G: Right, and when I got there (laughs)  
    When I got there.  
E: Ha ha ha ha ha!  
B: Ha ha ha ha ha!  
G: When I got there  
    there was  
    there was Bila-Lena there, too, she had a huge damn abscess on  
    her ass.  
E: Ha ha ha!  
B: Ha ha ha! (wiping away her tears).  
G: She was a big, fat dame.  
    so the leech sucked it clean  
    and when it was full, Alma took it out and wrung it out and  
    then she put it in my mouth.  
B: OOOOHH! Ha ha ha ha ha!  
E: OH NO YUCK! Ha ha ha ha ha! I don't believe my ears!  
B: How he is lying! Ha ha ha ha !  
E: It's sickening! Oh, it was about the most sickening thing!  
G: Hee hee hee.  
B: Ha ha ha.

Here Gustav demonstrates that it is not without reason that he sometimes refers to his verbal art as "skit talk". At this moment, a great deal of coarse and ill-mannered talk was certainly carried out in Elsa's meticulously clean and well-decorated living-room. But the subject at hand is not yet exhausted. As soon as the calls of disgust and the laughter quiet down, Gustav takes it up again. And Elsa catches on and contributes without hesitation. Together they construct a scene out of their childhood, a scene in which they themselves participate both in minor roles and as witnesses.

G: Bila-Lena was going to treat us to cookies.  
B: OH! Ha ha ha ha !  
G: She took the plate that,  
    that was by the stove, from which the cat had eaten  
    and put two cookies on it.  
B: OH! Ha ha ha ha !  
E: Yees.  
    "Helena, don't you ever WASH YOUR DISHES?" they said to her,  
    they shouted, the old woman was deaf.  
    (falsetto:) "Helena, don't you ever WASH YOUR DISHES?"  
    "Why should I?" she asked, "when one dish has contained only  
    porridge and the other only gruel. Food is food," she said.  
B: (laughing). True.

Elsa's and Gustav's maternal grandmother, Kristina, plays an important role as background figure in this part of the conversation. Elsa describes her, as she always did, as a "kind person". "Was there ever such a kind person anywhere in the world?" she asks, thereby creating an effective contrast to Per's Alma and Bila-Lena and the other burlesque characters. This contrast contributes to the laughing reactions to the stories and heightens the effect of the joint memory construction. When Gustav and Elsa speak about their childhood, they do not do it in reverential terms. Rather, they focus on dirt and smells, body parts and bodily secretions. People and ways of life are resuscitated through concentration on concrete bodies. Gustav and Elsa create particularly powerful reactions by bringing together different categories and body parts. In this kind of bringing together lies perhaps something of the essence of comedy and humor (Stewart 1979). As is the case with many other conversations involving Gustav and Elsa, the liveliest and most laughter-filled parts are dominated by the mixtures of categories that are normally kept separated. The tone was set with the banter surrounding the almond slivers and the cut-off nails. After that came the topic of Abrom and his privy-building. Finally, we found ourselves in a crescendo of laughter in the episode involving Alma and Bila-Lena.

The peak-moment of the afternoon had now been reached, at least in terms of excitement and volume of sound. No more equally intense outbursts of laughter were to take place this afternoon. Nor would Elsa or Gustav on this occasions imitate how Orvar's Emma and some of the other characters used to sing with shaky old voices. Nevertheless, it could be said that this afternoon conversation has a kind of structuring of rhythm and sound that resembles the "terraced sequence" Henry Glassie observes in the Ulster village he studies (1982: 37). When people there gather for a ceili, i.e. to talk and drink tea, they begin by sitting together in silence. But after a while, that silence is transformed into quiet talk and this talk often turns into witticisms and metaphorical sayings ("cracks"). Eventually the "cracks" expand into stories ("a heightened kind of speech") and perhaps into song ("speech at its decorated peak") or music. In many respects, the afternoon at Elsa's follows a similar rhythm. It begins with quiet talk which after a while is interspersed with routine witticisms. Eventually the conversation intensifies and centers on concrete people and places in Gustav's and Elsa's past. The jokes and the puns increase in number and strength as do the dizzying combinations of words and categories. The laughter becomes louder and louder.

But the visit with Elsa is far from over. Bila-Lena gives Gustav occasion to continue his associations. Now he enters a new trail and the conversation becomes calmer. "Bila-Lena," he says, "used to walk her sheep just like that old woman in France did. I called her, Bila-Lena also, remember?" He is referring to a summer in the mid-1970s which Sigrid and Gustav spent together with my family and me in a village in central France. "I remember how they used to take care of things in France," he says admiringly. "They swept up spilled grain, when they were driving to the barn," he says giving us glimpses of his experiences in France, experiences which he has elaborated on

in many other contexts more than he does now. His oft repeated comparisons between life in a village in France in the 1970s and life in a village in Småland in the 1910s contains many precise observations and interpretations. But today he does not become engrossed in the trip to France. He confines himself to brief remarks which do not lead to any particularly strong reactions. "Surely," he ends, "I have experienced a lot. I have swept grains on French country roads. And I have milked a French cow too."

The French cow leads to a new chain of associations. The conversation now returns to Gustav's and Elsa's home village. Soon the laughter comes back - although it is a bit quieter than earlier. The people "down there, back then" touch special chords of emotion, and laughter and tears are never far away when a conversation turns to them.

- G: I remember when I used to milk Orvar's Hjalma, she was easy to milk.  
E: Right! Her name was Hjalma!  
G: Wha ha ha ha ha ha ha?  
B: Ha ha ha ha ha!  
E: Yaha ha ha! That was the cow's name.  
B: Orvar's?  
E: That was the cow's name. Her name was Hjalma.  
B: Right, and what about Orvar? Where did they live?

The name of a cow, a quick recollection – only a few hints are necessary to bring the laughter back. At this point Elsa and Gustav eagerly answer my question regarding the owner of the cow, his relatives, and where they lived. The conversation now turns to this family and where its different members lived. Soon Elsa recalls a little episode:

- E: Then, remember? Mia turned up, Mia was her name, the old lady  
She came in then,  
She came in to see us then.  
And then she stood around talking, for ten minutes. At that point she thought of saying: "Hello, I should say," she said

After this the conversation continues as follows:

- G: Orvar's Mia, she was the grandma of Ester from Djurabo.  
E: That's right, she was.  
B: Aha.  
G: Ester and Hjalmar, don't you remember them?  
B: Of course, yes. I do remember them.,  
G: We were at their place, when you were.  
E: But listen here, guess who I was thinking about, I was thinking about Evert and Sven,  
Maja's  
boys.  
G: Uh huh.  
E: Evert, he got kidney trouble, you know, and died.

G: Right.

E: He lifted a bag of seed, or something

When

when he was young. And goodness how they could fiddle, those two, Remember?

### *Running out of tape*

Once again Gustav and Elsa concentrate on kinships and relationships, on named individuals and their characteristics and life histories, and on their connections to specific places. Once again, I find it difficult to pay attention – and this despite the fact that it was a question from me that led Gustav and Elsa into these trains of associations. As a folklorist, I was waiting for the engaging narratives and the quick repartees. It was not until many years later, through careful listening and transcription, that I came to realize that there are important links between the reporting, cataloguing mode of speaking about people and the dramatic narratives and the citing of their drastic repartees and hilarious turns of phrases. But I am not thinking about this as the afternoon conversation turns to new topics: my own immediate plans, the coming repairs in Elsa's apartment, and the necessity to pack away most of the many things she owns. Furthermore, a new dilemma presents itself. It strikes me that the recording-tape is about to run out. This happens just as Gustav alludes to a childhood-figure, about whom I would very much have liked him to continue talking. I try to figure out a way to change tapes without Gustav and Elsa realizing what I am up to.

I fail. There is no chance to hide the goings on. Gustav and Elsa are surprised but not upset. They have participated in tape-recordings before. But on previous occasions they have always been asked in advance for their consent. Now the knowledge of the tape-recorder affects our mood and the tone of the conversation changes. I begin posing questions about facts in a kind of "interview mode", questions that they are not particularly willing to answer. Instead, Elsa self-consciously begins mentioning amusing phenomena in modern life, phenomena which she apparently thinks are suitable in a world of machines and microphones. With an affected tone of voice she relates a joke about the time when "Adam and Eve were out biking". The tone of the joke jars against the previous part of our conversation. Only Elsa laughs and the conversation takes the following turn:

E: But that one was about modern times.

B: Yes, it was.

E: But right when a person is about to remember something, then.

G: But it's odd, now when they are going to, if they are going to tell a story

They don't set any store by

How people lived or what things were like in the old times

E: No, they don't have time to think about that or to listen.

G: The thing is, the thing is

- that  
it's really a lot of fun, to learn about that.  
And  
exactly what life was like for people
- B: Uh huh.
- G: and things like that. Now if a person wants to tell something, “do you want to hear a joke about it”?
- B: Yes.
- G: Then they go on and tell one of those idiotic
- E: Uh huh.
- G: stories.

Just as he has done on many other occasions, Gustav here emphasizes how important it is to him to bring back to life “exactly how people lived”. And as is often the case, he also demonstrates the carefully thought-out character of his verbal art. It has none of the unconscious naïveté that is sometimes attributed to oral narrators. Rather, it could be said that Gustav orchestrates daily life in accordance with thoroughly planned and sometimes archaizing esthetic ideals which include dramatizations and reconstructions of ways of life. These esthetic ideals are much more important to him than that which he perceives as the standardized joke-telling of modern life. On many occasions, he has characterized contemporary jokes as “idiot bits that waltz all around Sweden”.

But I remain guilty about the hidden tape-recorder and launch into apologetic comments. I speak about how “interesting” it is to record exactly what is being said and I ask Elsa and Gustav if they think that recording is at all “irritating”. Elsa assures me that she does not mind the tape-recorder at all. But Gustav has objections: “If we are ‘talking shit’ about someone, it wouldn’t be a good idea, if you were to play the tape so that they can hear,” he says. We laugh, but I know well what he is saying. He reminds us that his and Elsa’s loving imitations and word-play, given another tone of voice and other gestures, could be perceived as spiteful gossip or other kinds of malevolent talk. People who live in small communities tend to be acutely aware that such shifts of interpretation might occur and to Gustav they were almost a possibility: he often pointed out that relatives of persons he spoke about “are still alive”. Sometimes he would change names, at other times he used to remove a name and refer to a particular person as “an old woman” or “an old man down in Småland”. He often used the latter technique when telling stories to my brothers and me, when we were children. Over and over, Gustav, reminds us of the many possible aspects of the term, “shit talk”. But this afternoon nothing further is said on the subject. I myself laugh and reply to his comment about playing the recording: “Nobody forces you to talk shit about others!” “Yes,” says Gustav, “that’s what Abrom said too: ‘*Fear God,*’ he said, ‘*and walk in honesty, take care of yourself and don’t mind Abrom.*’<sup>6</sup>

*Back on track*

Back to Abrom! This afternoon Gustav cannot let go of him. Once again a well-worn technique is used with finesse. Quoting a proverb-like sentence in exaggerated dialect and placing the utterance in the mouth of Abrom, Gustav again mobilizes this character out of his childhood. We laugh and loose interest in speaking about the tape-recorder and the dangers in talking about other people when they are not present. Conflicts are swept under the carpet. Gustav's voice becomes urgent and the conversation quickly takes the following turn:

- G: And Abrom and Malena, they wore,  
every single Sunday they wore black, when they went to church.  
E: Yes, they did.  
She had a silk lace shawl (blonderschalett), Malena.  
B: She had what?  
E: A silk lace shawl.  
It was  
G: black  
E: Do you want to see one of those silk lace shawls?

Elsa starts looking for her black silk lace shawl. Meanwhile, Gustav takes up another reminiscence:

- G: And then  
when you went out onto the road on Sundays  
B: Yes  
G: First you'd see Church-Adolf come pushing himself along.  
His shoes  
were as long as this room

I burst out laughing. But Gustav does not get to go on about Church-Adolf, because Elsa shouts eagerly from where she is rummaging around after the silk lace shawl. She has found it. She shows it to me, explaining that it belonged to her and Gustav's maternal grandmother. I cannot admire it enough. Gustav stresses that "everybody wore those for churchgoing" and Elsa puts it on, demonstrating how the shawls were tied. "Then you would tighten it up like this," she says, and Gustav adds:

- G: so that  
when you went out onto the road on Sundays  
and the old women were heading for church,  
they looked like a swarm of jackdaws or crows.

We all laugh. Finally Gustav gets a chance to stage the scene of road-life on Sundays which has been on his mind for some time. The visually rich image forms a unit together with the shawl that Elsa now wears. In words and acting the two of them have together built up a portrait of the bustling road life, when they grew up.

The shawl is a treasured possession because it had belonged to Elsa's and Gustav's grandmother. But its value does not lie only in that fact. It is also a part of cloud of associations linked to their childhoods and it takes on a more universal quality. Given the enfolding of the interaction between us that particular afternoon in May 1983, the shawl turns into a concrete testimony of how all the adult women were dressed on Sundays, "down there, at that time". And at the same time as Gustav's recollections are very personal, the image of Church-Adolf pushing forward and all the little ladies tripping after him like a swarm of black birds has a broad cultural historical and esthetic significance. Through the powers of verbal art, the unique and personal is made collective and shared.

"Isn't it lovely?" Elsa asks and removes the shawl. We admire it and speak about it a while longer. But when she is about to put it back into the chest of drawers, she discovers other possessions she wants to show us: old and new gifts and many other objects. She and I look at the things she pulls out and we talk about them. Gustav is not interested. Then Elsa holds up a recent gift from a neighbor: a bottle of cologne with a gleaming top. "Did she give you a gold cap, too?" Gustav asks indifferently, and the conversation goes on:

E: What?

G: Did she give you a gold thing?

B: A gold case (laughing)

G: Right

E: It isn't gold all that glitters, but this one is gold.

G: Oh no, remember Deaf-Pell Gusta's line, he said "wool".

B: What?

E: That's right, he said "wool".

B: Who?

G: Deaf-Pell Gusta

A brief discussion follows about Deaf-Pellgusta's speech impediments which made it impossible for him to say gull ("gold"): what came out was ull ("wool"). Once again Elsa and Gustav have together maneuvered the conversation in such a way that they can resuscitate a figure from the past as well as his characteristic expressions. The quick exchange of words is effectuated without the slightest hesitation. The resuscitation of a childhood figure is well rehearsed and the making of history is a routine part of everyday practices.

Elsa now leaves the room humming "yes this is wool, this is wool" and nothing more is said about Deaf-Pell Gusta this afternoon. Gustav and I sit in silence for a few minutes. Eventually I say that I think it is "important" to listen to his and Elsa's bantering and telling of stories. But Gustav answers in a negative and unresponsive tone of voice: "Sure, it's like a madhouse, when Elsa and I get together." I don't give up but assure him that I find it much more rewarding to listen to them than to read ethnological studies of people's reminiscences. Gustav is not impressed. The mood changes when Elsa enters wearing yet another kind of headgear. This time she has put on an elegant hat from the second decade of the twentieth century. We begin

speaking about Elsa's mother-in-law who had been the owner of the hat. Soon Elsa takes out photographs of her and other people who have long been dead. And once again, the topic of conversation is other people, but this time the people are part of Gustav's and Elsa's experiences in Stockholm. Elsa also takes out photographs from recent funerals, including one from a funeral that had taken place about a year earlier. A close friend of Elsa's had died and she speaks at length about his last few weeks at the hospital. She cries at the memory.

After some time, the conversation shifts to the time, a few months earlier, when Gustav was in the hospital. He had suffered a heart attack and for a whole day he was delirious. "And," I add, "every now and then you would come to." Then I turn to Elsa, and remark: "And wouldn't you know it? He came up with several stories and other kinds of "things"?" Now Gustav becomes interested and the conversation continues as follows:

G: I did?

B: You did. There were many stories.

I wonder if you didn't tell that one about the farmer from Halltorp  
or that

other one, that one ... yes, you did.

You came to and there you were. And we, that's why we didn't  
realize

how bad a condition you really were in.

E: No.

B: That joke, the one you've told lots of times, how does it go?

G: The one about the man who was in the hospital in Kalmar -- no?<sup>1</sup>

B: Yes, oh yes, you did tell that one.

Right in the middle of your heart attack!

Right when you were delirious.

Gustav starts to laugh. In fact, all three of us are laughing, as the conversation continues:

G: Have you heard that one, Elsa?

E: No, which one?

G: There was an  
old farmer from Halltorp

E: Yes.

G: He was in the hospital in Kalmar.

E: Yes.

G: And in the old time, people never addressed one another in the  
familiar form, they were  
very formal.

E: Uh huh.

G: And this fellow had had stomach surgery,  
the farmer  
from Halltorp.

E: Yees.

G: And

\*

and there was another old man in the next bed. And he was so damn curious and eager for the farmer from Halltorp to come to, so he could start asking him questions.

E: Yeees.

G: Aha.

And when he, when he finally came around then

\*

\*

“*So what’s wrong with you then, sir?*” he asked

“Well, they operated me in my stomach”

Yes.

“*I see, so they cut your stomach open, sir?*”

“That’s right.”

“*Do you live here in town then?*”

“Nope

I don’t.”

“*So where are you from sir?*”

”I come from Halltorp.”

“*I see, so you come from Halltorp?*”

E: “So you are not to be buried hereabouts”

G: And when some time, when some time had passed, he said: “*Well, I don’t*

*s’pose you are going to be buried here in town, you’d rather be buried in*

*Halltorp where you come from, isn’t that right, sir?*”

E: That’s it, Ha ha .

B: Yaha ha ha. You didn’t tell the whole joke, just that part.

E: Yeees, ha ha . Yes, that’s that old thingamajig.

G: How the hell can a person think like that when he’s lying on his deathbed himself?<sup>7</sup>

We laugh and continue speaking about the difficult day at the hospital. And Gustav reminds us of remarks he has been told he made. Among these is a comment he made, when the staff invited Gustav’s visitors for coffee: “That’s the least you can do,” I said to them, “after all they have come to attend a wake.”

The afternoon at Elsa’s is not over. There is going to be more laughs. Råva-Helmer and Näska-Greta and a few other figures will be brought out from Elsa’s and Gustav’s enormous supply. But I will conclude my description of the conversation after Gustav’s circumstantial version of the story about the hospital encounter between the farmer from Halltorp and the curious Kalmar-dweller. As Gustav often does, when he has plenty of time, he begins with the historical background; in this case it concerns forms of address during earlier decades of the twentieth century. The pauses are elegantly placed; the long silence before the dialogue is particularly telling. The use of dialect is similarly effective. Only the inquisitive gentleman from Kalmar speaks the dialect of southern Småland – and this despite the fact that by all accounts both interlocutors ought to have spoken some form of dialect. This way

dialect constitutes an effective contrastive stylistic resource. This version is much more elaborate than the brief summary that Gustav had told me a few months earlier at the hospital. This is a well-known joke which Elsa has heard many times and she cannot refrain from revealing the punch-line prematurely. Gustav, however, ignores her in order to get on with his elaborated quotation in dialect. To her this migratory story is tedious in ways that the verbal art linked to the people of their childhood can never be - regardless of how often it is repeated.

“How the hell can a person think like that when he's lying on his deathbed himself?” asks Gustav. To narrate, to imitate, to give life to people and experiences through words, tones of voice, and gestures is perhaps a way to cheat death. Roaring laughter and fear of death go hand in hand while memory traces long-gone ways of life (cf. Schrager 1983: 91). The deeply felt and the intensely experienced can be shaped into “a meaningful, apposite form” (Hymes 1975: 346) – also in an old thingamajig.

### *Conclusions*

In many ways, the afternoon at Elsa's, as described here, stands out as a compilation of fragments. The conversation that she, Gustav, and I construct seems to consist of little else than allusions, brief images, bits out of previous dialogues, plays with known turns of phrases, and reconstructions of earlier performances and conversations. Motifs out of known narratives float by, disconnected from imagined entities. Only two or three “whole” stories – with a beginning, a middle, and an end – are told.

Yet, in spite of the seeming fragmentation, the afternoon's conversation felt as if it were cast in one solid piece; it certainly was satisfying to the participants. Contributing to this was the conversational rhythm and texture that we built up. Laughter, crying, and many other expressions of emotion succeeded or superseded one another as the event changed from a routine exchange of words to intensive communication expressed in highly marked and metaphorically rich verbal forms.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that I have tried to describe the conversation in such a way that it would be possible to point to several sets of recurring components or elements. One is the concentration on named places and persons. In some ways, this concentration is the logic that binds together different segments of this and many other occasions involving my relatives (cf. Glassie 1982: 662–663). The passages in which they deliver catalogues of factual information about people and places are necessary pre-requisites for the drastic and exciting images, metaphors, sayings and narratives. A second set of recurring elements are all the quotations. Dead people come alive through imitation, not only of their words, but also of their tones of voice, dialects, gestures, mimicry, and headgear. The paralinguistic aspects are as important as the verbal ones. A third set of elements are all the metaphors and similes. For example, Gustav and, to some extent, also Elsa often describe people by comparing them to animals – even though,

on this particular occasion, this occurred only once when he says that the old women heading for church “looked like a swarm of jackdaws or crows”. Comparisons to animals are among the oldest and most common devices to dramatize descriptions of people (Fernandez 1972). By using such metaphors, Gustav and Elsa make the people of their past into unforgettable characters who have paradigmatic power. A fourth recurring and important element in the conversation is the laughter. Together Gustav, Elsa and I sometimes create the kind of laughter which makes your tears roll down your cheeks and your stomach hurt. Through this kind of laughter the people from the past become anchored in our own bodies. In this way, one could say that we are joined in “regenerative laughter” (Bakhtin 1968). In resuscitating Abrom, Fia at Källan, Deaf-Pell Gusta and all the others as dramatically as possible, Gustav and Elsa (re-) experience aspects of their joint past in a deep and bodily sense: they are back there together. At the same time, they are passing by in silence many (perhaps most) other aspects of the world they have known during childhood and adulthood (cf. Klein 1996).

Along with countless similar occasions involving my relatives, the conversation at Elsa’s an afternoon in May, 1983 can be said to constitute a special kind of doing. Through their verbal art, through their performances, Gustav and Elsa integrate people from their past into the lives they lead in the big city. In words, gestures, mimicry, and headgear they weave together childhood memories, the present, and their approaching deaths. This way, they create, over and over, in themselves and in their audiences, an intensified consciousness of cultural and personal continuity – despite rapid and sometimes overwhelming historical changes.

*Translated by  
Barbro Klein and Linda Schenk*

## NOTES

- 1 This is a revision and translation of my article “Ett eftermiddagssamtal hos Elsa” which was published in 1989 in the anthology *Etnologiska beskrivningar*, edited by Billy Ehn and Barbro Klein. The emphasis on “description” in this article is attributable to the fact that this anthology was devoted to descriptions and their role in ethnology and folkloristics. Since 1989, a substantial literature of relevance to this text has appeared; this is not reflected in the bibliography below.
- 2 The tape-recordings were conducted during the summers 1977–1983 and resulted in circa 130 hours of taped conversations. The majority of these recordings took place in the evenings at my parents summer-home. Sometimes other people (friends, relatives, passers-by) participated, but often the only interlocutors were my parents and I. Most often I would initiate the conversations by mentioning events – small or large – that had taken place during the day. Often I would ask about something that my father had said earlier in the day. “Why did you use that expression? Why did you quote Hönsa-Hocken at that particular time? Why did you use that saying?” In other words, the evening conversations began as reconstructions of past conversations; after a while the reconstructive element would fade away and the conversations turn into more “regular interactions”. The conversation analyzed in this paper is one of three that were taped in the home of my aunt, Elsa.

- 3 The three interlocutors have their own names, but most other names for persons and places have been changed. Some of the changes are Gustav's own suggestions.
- 4 Until the 1940s, many agricultural workers on the large estates of southern Sweden customarily changed jobs during the first week of October. They had now received their wages from their previous employer and this was in effect the only time of the year when they were off work: hence the names "free week" (*friveckan*) or "in-between week" (*slankveckan*).
- 5 He is actually saying: "I use my own head as measurement for the holes."
- 6 Here he cited Abrom using an extremely exaggerated dialect.
- 7 Kalmar is the largest city in the region where Gustav and Elsa grew up and Halltorp is a nearby village. Kalmar has a renaissance castle and a cathedral; a fairly large bourgeoisie resided there.

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## The Dark Shadow of the Un-mentioned Event Collapsing Taleworlds and Narrative Reparation

The performance of personal experience narratives is affected both by the tellers' wish to communicate their experiences and by the listeners' acquiescence to accept them. The actualization of personal experience narratives involves an aspect of intimacy (Stahl 1989: 37f.) and of mutual creation of new experiences (Braid 1996). In this article<sup>1</sup> I will demonstrate how the narrator's knowledge of his listener's (never mentioned) earlier experience proved to be decisive for the development of a six-hour long tape-recorded life history interview. As a theoretical starting-point I will use Katharine Young's model (1987) of how participants in a verbal interaction move between a conversational realm, a storyrealm, and a taleworld.

### *The Interlocutors*

The material was produced in 1995 in a joint project between the Gotland Folk Life Archives and the local employment agency, in which some 15 unemployed persons were trained to conduct life history interviews with retired citizens. The speaker was Edvin<sup>2</sup>, 71 years old, retired from a public service job, interested in boating and fishing, married to Gerd, with two grown-up children. Another of their daughters had died at the age of 44.

The interviewer was Lars, a 48-year-old high school graduate, who had worked in his father's business, but also within the same public service company as Edvin. The two men owned summerhouses in the same area, they belonged to the same boating club, and they often met in connection with different sports activities.

When considering this particular interview situation a few facts have to be taken into account. One is that the interviewer is not a trained folklorist, in the sense that he does not carry out the interview out of professional interest, but as an assignment for which he is being paid. Another, and perhaps the most important one, is that the two speakers belong to the same community. They know each other's backgrounds as well as local history. These two facts give the interview situation some of the qualities of ordinary everyday speech<sup>3</sup>.

In qualitative interviews, interviewers typically occupy positions of power, being academics who initiate the situation and who take the formal responsibility for the successful completion of the interview. In this case

Lars's position of power in his role as interviewer is supported by his higher education, but, on the other hand, weakened by his being younger than Edvin and his junior in their common sporting and boating activities. Moreover, at the time of the interview he is unemployed, while Edvin is retired after having completed a successful professional career.

### *The Telling*

The tape-recording starts abruptly with Edvin telling, in a calm, controlled voice, audibly amused, a story about his own sudden birth.

Edvin: in June ... in nineteen hundred and twenty-six ... on a hot summer's day ... thunder ... and rain my mother was, eh, raking grass or hay in x-forest<sup>4</sup>

it was called x-pasture in my time or in those days (smacking his lips)

and she started having labor pains, eh, ran inside, and, eh

probably that's why I've had such, eh, been so hot-tempered all my life except for the last few years

and then I've got to admit...I don't recall much before nineteen-thirty ... but it started

that was the best part of my life

I was five years old then ... it was in thirty-one and Johnny and I got a toboggan for Christmas...and there was snow

it had been snowing on Christmas Eve ... and we ran out at once

the other ... the rest of the Chris-Christmas gifts we didn't care about ... we just, eh, played with it all day long

but later on we had a big toboggan with a steering wheel that my father built

my daddy was a bicycle mechanic ... my father he, eh, he worked in Nilsson's bike workshop on X road ... and then he opened his own workshop in Y street and ... then ... after a few years he could move to Z st, Z ...

Lars: n n n

Edvin: hrm (clearing his throat) and as I told Lennart (the project leader who had contacted Edvin for the interview) before

when I started school

the only road there was between my home and school was L road

you know the one that is called M road today  
(65:I, 1)

After the short, but efficiently told, birth episode Edvin picked out one happy childhood memory, the one about the Christmas gift toboggan, that made him and his brother leave the family Christmas party. With this specific memory as a starting-point he went on to generalize and evaluate his childhood as a whole. This is the beginning of a more or less coherent account of Edvin's childhood, consisting of several happy memories. In many of them he emphasizes the positive role of his prosperous and caring father in creating this fortunate situation.

After only two very short episodes and a hint at a possible third one, Edvin temporarily left his own life story to make his father the focus of his tale. Obviously he considered his knowledge of local history important in the interview situation. He had already told the interviewer about the history of two place names. Now, he started to build a narrative of his father's success in geographical terms: step by step the father was able to move his bicycle workshop from peripheral, low status neighborhoods to the commercial center of the village. But where the climax of the success story should have come, Edvin instead interrupted himself, hesitated, stuttered, and all of a sudden changed the subject. Nothing in the tape-recording reveals why the success story was interrupted just before coming to an end.

Lars instantaneously responded by uttering some short sounds, which are probably a series of quick "no"-s.

Almost without pausing, but in an audibly less relaxed voice, Edvin turned to speaking about geographical changes in the village topography. From there he moved on to the world of sports, a topic from which he knew that Lars had positive experiences, since his days as a locally successful soccer and bandy player. After that he dwelled for a while on some local historical episodes, such as a fire in one of the restaurants, and some international ones, among them his memories of the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936. Not until then did Edvin return to his own childhood story, giving himself another chance to restart telling his life history from its chronological beginning.

### *Collapsing Worlds, Connecting Fields*

Why did Edvin suddenly interrupt the story of his father's success? I found a possible answer by discussing the episode with a colleague, familiar with local history. According to this person, the interviewer's father, too, had conducted business in the same prestigious commercial street, but less successfully. He had gone bankrupt and had taken his own life. Obviously, the very second Edvin was about to mention the name of Z Street, he remembered that tragic fact and interrupted himself.

No words were used to comment upon or describe the potentially awkward situation that had occurred. Lars's reaction was to utter (what I believe is) a

rapid series of “no”-s, as if to whisk away any possible sign of discomfort. He appeared eager to show that he had not taken offence and that he did not wish Edvin to feel uncomfortable. However, this might have been the only possible reaction available to Lars without his actively redefining the whole situation. Had he not chosen to overlook the matter, he or his father could very well have taken over as central characters in the tale instead of Edvin and his father.

To understand the roles and attitudes taken by participants in a conversation, Katharine Young introduced the model (1987) of participants in a verbal interaction moving between a conversational realm, a storyrealm, and a taleworld. Her terminology<sup>5</sup> is linguistically somewhat awkward, and when possible I will refer to the conversational realm, the storyrealm and the taleworld as “fields”.

At the opening of the tape-recording, neither the conversational realm nor the storyrealm were audible. When the cassette tape starts to play we are already inside Edvin’s taleworld. From his relaxed, self-confident way of speaking, I conclude that he was at ease with his conversational role as host to the interviewer, as well as in his storyrealm role as raconteur and with (at least many of) the future taleworld roles the “I” of his life history was going to play during the six-hour long conversation in front of him.

What happened when Edvin mentioned that his father succeeded in opening a workshop in the leading business street, was that the safely distanced taleworld instantaneously collapsed. An innocent episode that had taken place almost 60 years ago made it impossible for the two men not to be reminded of the not-at-all-innocent event of Lars’s father’s tragic suicide 30 years later. At that time Lars was working as an assistant in his father’s business, which he had been supposed to take over. As a young man he lost not only his father, but also the future career planned for him and now, when talking with Edvin, he was unemployed. Although Lars tried to hide his reaction, Edvin had been reminded that elements belonging to one of his safely distanced taleworlds, were part of somebody else’s harsh and touching reality.

The episode exemplifies how the boundaries between the conversational realm, the storyrealm and the taleworld in Young’s model can be elusive, uncertain and open to negotiation and redefinition (cf. Young 1987: 11). This kind of overlapping between the three fields is apparent all the time in conversations. Participants in verbal exchanges move not only between one distinctly defined conversational realm, one storyrealm and one taleworld; they wander through a varied landscape consisting of several fields of all three kinds, as well as a multitude of transitional, intermediate forms between them.

Yet, however uncertain, vaguely defined and constantly changing the boundaries between the fields may be, there is no doubt that they exist. In a conversation the participants are probably constantly aware of the different attitudes and role-patterns attributed to the different fields. The storytelling level, however, implies a division into performer and audience, whereas the mode of conversation typically presupposes equality and informality in turn taking. At the next level, taleworlds tend to be constructed in accordance with genre conventions, rendering for them a more or less explicitly

fictional character. While talking, participants in any conversation perform a complicated game of positioning themselves, as well as trying to determine the positions of the others, in relation to these fields. Interlocutors constantly relate to the boundaries between the fields, negotiate them, avoid them, or cross them (cf. Young 1987: 15–18, 158). In this game the instability and evanescent character of the borders become obvious.

Young’s metaphors “realm” and “world” (and perhaps even more the term “fields” I have been using) can be understood as abstract concepts conveying an outspoken spatial connotation. We can imagine the narrator moving between different areas, bringing his audience with him or leaving it in some other field. These figurative spatial movements belong to the scholarly model. Within the taleworlds the acting characters move between different narrated arenas, while the participants in a conversation may also move physically in the conversational realm. In the short excerpt quoted above at least nine geographical areas within the taleworld are referred to:

- (1) x-forest or x-pasture;
- (2) inside Edvin’s childhood home;
- (3) a diffuse non-area or possibly inside Edvin’s mind;
- (4) once again inside Edvin’s childhood home;
- (5) outside Edvin’s childhood home;
- (6) in X Road;
- (7) in Y Street;
- (8) in Z Street (or at least almost there);
- (9) in Edvin’s home at the time of the interview;
- (10) in L Road that is called M Road today.

The utterances I have given the number (3) above do not contain any geographical references. They are Edvin’s reflections concerning his temper and his capacities to remember. Perhaps we could say that they belong to his realm of thoughts.

In the part of the conversation quoted here, the two participants (as far as can be judged from the recording) do not move about physically. Later on in the conversation they move within Edvin’s house. Once Edvin walks away from the tape-recorder to answer the telephone and to get coffee from the kitchen. At another time Lars leaves his place to fetch some empty audiocassettes from his bag. Bringing the tape-recorder along, they walk around Edvin’s garden to admire the flowers and after that they step down into the basement to have a look at Edvin’s carpenter’s workshop.

A common narrative technique in personal experience narratives as well as in folk legends is that the narrator manipulates the distance between himself and the narrated event. Positive, desirable memories or situations can thus be pulled closer to the speaker, while negative, unwanted remembrances may be pushed away from him. For example, when analyzing the folklore collector Per Arvid Säve’s nine-and-a-half-day-long talk with the farmer Per Persson Ronander, I was able to detect a complicated temporal-spatial pattern, where the two men in their interaction moved between fictive and factual times and places, sometimes together and at other times separately.

The spatial starting point was Persson's home or, more specifically, the heart of his home, the kitchen. The temporal starting point was now, in the true present tense of the two speakers. The thematic starting point was Säve's glossary, which they worked through alphabetically, letter by letter. From these starting points the conversation of the two men moved through fictive places and times. Sometimes the two of them made the travel together, at other times it was obvious that they were mentally situated in different imagined times or places. Instead of making a distinction between spatial and temporal planes it seemed natural to me to regard time and space as equivalent points on a two-dimensional plane. In this example, the eighteenth century was as distant, to use a spatial metaphor, as the next parish, the Middle Ages were as far away as Arabia (Palmenfelt 1993: 162f. Also, cf. Young 1987: 77).

In the excerpt quoted above Edvin moved between as many as seven temporal fields:

- (1) 1926: his own birth;
- (2) 1926–circa 1990: “all my life except the last few years”;
- (3) 1930: the alleged beginning of Edvin's life history memories;
- (4) 1931: the happy Christmas Eve;
- (5) circa 1916–circa 1938; span of Edvin's father's success story;
- (6) 1995: the week before the interview;
- (7) 1934: Edvin's starting school.

Where in time a speaker positions his different conversational fields can be signaled by his choice of grammatical tense or by other linguistic temporal markers. In the languages I have some acquaintance with, a life history typically would be narrated in some past tense (including the historical present) with only hypothetical episodes expressed by a future tense. The different past tenses would disclose the quality of the narrated actions or the narrator's attitude to them, while the actual location in time would be expressed by other linguistic means, for instance stating year or date, or by putting it in relation to the narrator's life span (when I finished school, after I had married, when we moved to Västerås, since I retired).

To the spatial and temporal dimensions we have to add at least one more: the modal one (cf. Halliday 1994: 88–92, 354–363; Eggins/Slade 1997, chapter 3). In my example, this dimension can be illustrated by Edvin's sudden change of mood, audibly detectable by the more somber key of this speech. At the very beginning of the conversation he acted as a self-confident guide moving securely through his own well-known system of taleworlds. After the appearance of the un-mentioned event he became more cautious, carefully selecting from among available words and themes, attentively observing possible alarm signals from Lars's side or from inside the narration.

Other examples of such a modal dimension include “fiction within the fiction”, where the teller enters worlds which are fictive also to the characters acting in the taleworld. Such movements can be indicated by the choice of different conditional or subjunctive modalities, but also by the emotional attitude demonstrated by the speaker. Does he express pride, shame, fear, joy, yearning or repudiation? Does he signal that he is daydreaming, bragging,

quoting, joking, lying, or using irony, metaphor or other indirect modes of expression (cf. Young 1987: 55)?

The modal dimension seems to be compatible and interchangeable with the spatial and temporal ones: “here”, “now” and indicative are equally close to the speaker, while “there”, “then” and “if” are equally distant (cf. Palmenfelt 1993: 200ff).

### *Collusive Dialogue*

In the situation discussed here, Edvin suddenly realized that he was about to utter something that could possibly lead to an awkward situation<sup>6</sup>. His mentioning of his father’s success, geographically located to the same street where Lars’s father had been most unsuccessful, could well have made Lars upset.

Edvin’s immediate reaction was instantaneously to interrupt himself and drop the subject. It would have been possible for him to face the situation, explain to Lars that he was aware of the fate of the latter’s father, apologize for reminding him, and continue his own (or rather his father’s) story. For some reason or other, in less than a second, Edvin chose another alternative. He let his own father’s success story lie unfinished and left the potentially precarious arena of the commercial street. Instead he talked for a while about general and non-personal topics, before returning in time and space to his own early childhood, the taleworld where he had been before the threatening collapse of the conversational situation.

Whichever stance Edvin chose to take, Lars would, I believe, have been left with the same two options of acceptance and neglect. He could either have given word to the untold event, saying something about understanding Edvin’s hesitation; but that his father’s death had occurred a long time ago and that he had not taken offense. This reaction, however, could have been taken as a critique of Edvin’s choice and could thus have created a new threat to the smooth proceeding of the conversation<sup>7</sup>. So, in almost the same fraction of a second, Lars chose to accept Edvin’s suggested option. The two men entered a silent agreement that the success story be left unfinished and the fate of Lars’s father be unheard.

But the possible threat did not disappear because the men chose to act as if it did not exist, and for a substantial period of time their silent agreement tuned the mode of the conversation into a more cautious and attentive key.

The double decision-making, literally as quick as a thought, can be described in a simple model that might be applied to many similar situations occurring in human interaction. Whenever a possible disagreement threatens to disturb the smooth proceeding of an interaction, either of the actors has the choice either to address the matter, or to avoid it. The same options lie open to the other actors, but any reaction coming after the first one will automatically achieve the status of a response to it. If the second actor takes the same stance as the first one, the result will be an agreement, an open one if both parties accept the existence of the possible disagreement, and a silent

one if they choose to neglect it. If the second party chooses a stance opposite to the first one, the question will remain open to further negotiation, which in its turn can result in either agreement or disagreement.

Status of Interaction	Actor I	Actor II	Outcome
Possible Disagreement	Accept	Accept	→(1) Open Agreement
		Neglect	→(2) Open Negotiation
	Neglect	Accept	→(3) Open Negotiation
		Neglect	→(4) Silent Agreement

As soon as we start responding to somebody’s acts or words, we have in a sense entered a contract situation, accepting joint responsibility for the successful outcome of the interplay. Response is not only a verbal act, but also a social one confirming that you accept the responsibility to fulfill your part of the social contract of interaction. Linguists and semioticians Raymond P. McDermott and Henry Tylbor use the term “collusion” to describe this agreement between participants in a conversation (McDermott and Tylbor 1995: 220. Cf. also Goffman 1959: 229–237). By the term dialogue I understand the culturally accepted and expected (on the role of expectations, see e.g. Tannen 1993b) patterns of verbal and social exchange in human interaction, many of which are but repeated reenactments of preset, culturally transmitted patterns (cf. Schiffrin 1993: 255f, Tannen 1993b, Shotter 1996: 1f). The collusive practices pointed out here are thus examples of participants’ wishes to adhere to these culturally transmitted patterns of dialogue.

The imbalance in the interchange caused by the never-verbalized presence of Lars’s father was counteracted emotionally by Edvin choosing a more attentive, low-keyed mode of talking and by Lars demonstrating his eagerness not to appear offended or disturbed. Having recommenced his life history from childhood onwards, Edvin’s telling proceeded chronologically. I suspect that he had some memory notes jotted down on a piece of paper in front of him. The strictly chronological organization brings a calm, steady rhythm into the telling. Edvin was in control of the situation, but did not sound engaged by his tale. Perhaps he was so concentrated on avoiding further possible disagreements that there was no room for him to express emotion. But I am not convinced that this control is an effect of the unmentioned event only. The controlled, un-emotional matter-of-fact mode

of expression may very well be the natural way of talking for a Gotlandic man of his generation.

However, some parts of his presentation vibrate with emotions—openly expressed or hidden. The mentioning of the deaths of two of his close relatives are such examples. Chronologically, these accounts arrived at roughly the appropriate points, but they appear to be strangely disconnected from it. The first one was told in a way that might appear casual, almost like a parenthesis thrown into a lengthy sequence of talk reporting on leisure activities and vacation trips:

Edvin: I have many spare time activities ... fishing ... berry picking ... mushroom picking

I read a lot

(tense voice, talking rapidly) then ... in nineteen seventy ... we had another granddaughter

she died ... in nineteen seventy-six ... of leukemia

funny ... she was always so precocious ... attended the children's group at church

she became swollen ... from the cortisone

...

in nineteen seventy-one ... we went to Norway ... for two weeks of fishing  
(65:III, 14)

Was the little girl's short life only worth a few fragments of sentences, stating one of her personality traits, one of her favorite activities and her physical reaction to the medication? I do not interpret Edvin that way. The sentences cut short, his tense voice and rapid way of talking indicate that this memory is still affecting him strongly. For some time in the conversation he has been controlling himself so as not to allow the emergence of further possible disagreements. At this moment he seems almost surprised by the surfacing of the memory of the little girl's death. In a life history we could have expected three elaborated stories explaining and exemplifying each of the three statements Edvin made about the girl. Edvin may be too emotionally affected to be able to (re)produce them. He succeeds only in hinting at some keywords that might comprise the skeleton of a story (or three stories). The memory of the event seems to force itself into the conversation, but Edvin gets it over with as briefly as possible and can thus return to a more restful recounting of less disturbing memories.

Another example of strong emotions' surfacing is the story of Edvin's eldest daughter's death at the age of 44 in 1990, five years before the interview was made. This story emerged when Edvin was in the middle of an

enumeration of the different beaches he and his wife used to go to, camping with their trailer. Once more a story of tragic death is embedded in a context of leisure activities. Edvin's daughter was struck by thrombosis when she and her husband were out camping, while Edvin and his wife were camping at a beach on the opposite coast. Geographically the story belongs to the world of camping sites, while thematically it is an account of unexpected death, tragic loss and deep, lasting grief. In real life this is of course the way accidental death always strikes. In a narrative, however, we would perhaps have expected the sudden death to be dramatically prepared either as a climax following an accelerated building up of tension or as a flash of lightning out of a carefully described cloudless blue sky. In this case the narrator himself seems to be surprised by the sudden turn of the story.

Edvin: we used to go to A Beach before ... but then ... since

we always used to park the trailer at B Beach ... since nineteen seventy-nine ... at Valborg<sup>8</sup> time

where are we now? ... in the nineties

in nineteen ninety ... our eldest daughter died

thrombosis in the carotid

the night before Sunday ... we were camping at C Beach ... I was on back-up duty for the ... for the voluntary fire brigade ... and they

Ulla and her husband ... they were camping at D Beach ... she moaned ... she had a headache ... migraine

sat up in her sleeping-bag ... just like that ... said:

Something snapped!

unconscious ... she was brain-dead ... just like asleep

(sobbing, clearing his throat)

life must go on ... anyway ... take good care of each other ... enjoy every single hour ... enjoy life

(65: IV, 29f)

The daughter's fatal illness struck rapidly and unexpectedly in contrast to the granddaughter's slowly progressing leukemia. Edvin's fragmentary story dwells on the details stressing the normality of the scene preceding her sudden death: the two families camping on different beaches, his status of duty, the daughter's complaining of an innocent headache, the simple utterance "Something snapped" that was to be her last words. Then follow three very short utterances describing her appearance in the hospital bed before dying. As the coda (Labov 1972: 363) of the story Edvin seems to remind himself

to learn from the sad experience, repeating some of the mantra-like phrases many of us usually invoke when facing grief and sorrow.

Possibly the two accounts of his two relatives' premature deaths would come at roughly the same places in the tale and possibly they would have about the same form every time, were Edvin to retell his life history. As the case is now, however, the two episodes clearly acquire the function of dramatically balancing the impact of the un-mentioned event. The suicide of the young man's father is counter-weighted by the untimely deaths of the older man's daughter and granddaughter. Probably Edvin did not plan the effect. His mental image of his own life span and his unconscious knowledge of immanent narrative patterns in combination would be enough to force the stories to surface at these given moments and in these forms. The stories picture the taleworld Edvin, in the middle of pleasant spare time activities, suddenly and unexpectedly struck by grave losses. The narrating storyrealm Edvin seems as surprised by the sudden popping up of these hurtful memories as his taleworld alter ego was.

The strong feelings once felt by the living, experiencing Edvin were relived by the two taleworld Edvins, and they certainly spill over into the conversational realm, putting the narrating Edvin in a similar situation to the one Lars was about to face earlier. A dramatic and emotional balance had been achieved, the tone of the talk became lighter, and Lars started to play a less reserved role. The last hour or so of the tape-recording bears the character of a casual, relaxed chat between two people sharing some interests important to both of them, telling jokes, swapping fishing and boating anecdotes.

### *Negotiating Possession in Experiential Domains*

The two men's handling of the un-mentioned event may also have been affected by their respective experiential relation to it. In all likelihood, anybody who has reached Edvin's age has experienced deep personal sorrow in connection with the death of near friends and relatives. Moreover, Lars's father having been a fairly well known public figure in the village, Edvin had probably some kind of personal experience in connection with his suicide. He must have heard somebody discussing it, or read about it in the newspaper. But these experiences of Edvin's were probably not strong enough to allow Lars's father's suicide to become a narrated event of his own life history. Perhaps only Lars and his close relatives would have strong enough experiences in connection with this tragic event to have the culturally accepted right to transform it into a narrated event of their own (cf. Labov 1970: 80 recounted by Eggins/Slade 1997, Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996: 82, Stahl 1977: 24ff, Young 1987: 109f, 180f, 201f).

Expressed in these terms, Edvin's interrupting himself could be interpreted as a question to Lars, whether he was intruding into Lars's experiential domains or not. Lars's rapid series of abbreviated "no's" would be a negative answer to that question. Edvin's choosing to change the subject would mean that he declined that invitation to proceed along this line. The brief exchange

of words could thus be interpreted as a swift negotiation concerning their respective rights to personal and public experiences.

Probably there is a lower limit of experiential closeness to an event that the teller of it must exceed to remain believable. Your experience has to be strong enough or you have to be close enough to the experienced event to have the right to include it into your own life history. If the audience were to suspect that the teller had not really experienced the event he is narrating, at a certain point his role would be transformed from that of a personal experience narrator to that of a fabulator. His taleworld would rise to a higher level of fictionality. Somewhere the genre expectations would slip over from the personal experience narrative with its supposedly close and clear connection to the narrator's world of experiences to something similar to a fairy-tale with its openly declared lack of such connections.

### *Intertextual Dialogues*

From other parts of the long conversation not quoted here it becomes evident that the two men's interplay takes place not only in the conversational realm and the storyrealm. Both of them also appear as interacting characters in at least three of Edvin's taleworlds: the public service company where they once were work-mates, the boat club and the recreational area, where they both spent a great deal of time.

Several other characters out of Edvin's taleworlds also take part in the dialogue. His own father is the first major character to enter the tale (after the brief mentioning of his mother in the birth scene and his brother Johnny in the Christmas scene), representing security, domesticity, happiness, wealth and love. His dramatic counterpoint is enacted by Lars's unsuccessful father, who appropriately enough is never even mentioned, but whose ghostly appearance for a brief moment casts a dark shadow over a substantial part of the conversation. Edvin's dead daughter and granddaughter make themselves visible in his telling as dramatically and/or socially necessary counter-weights to this spectre. Their appearances are almost enforced by the immanent rules of narrative construction.

I could also have mentioned Edvin's wife, Gerd, who is another recurrent dialogue partner. During the long conversation she is sometimes physically present in the room together with the two men, serving them coffee, showing them family photo albums, throwing asides, comments and pieces of information into their conversation. In Edvin's taleworld she is almost constantly present, very close to, and sometimes inseparable from, the narrated Edvin. During their long marriage the two seem to have grown together in a way that makes the taleworld Gerd at times an almost monologic part of Edvin, supporting his acts and ideas, whilst at other points appearing as a autonomous character, used to create emphatic dialogic counterpoints to the narrated Edvin.

It would be a mistake to regard any conversation as a self-contained, autonomous entity. The dialogic character of all conversations transgresses the

limits of each singular interaction, opening intertextual dialogues with many kinds of discourses and grand narratives in different stages of emergence.

Speakers will almost always have to take into consideration the possibility that what they intended to be a private confidence might be made known to a broader audience. Any conversation may be overheard by or reported to a third party. In the case discussed here, as in other interview situations, the interlocutors were aware of their words being recorded, to be transcribed, stored in an archive and listened to by several people other than themselves. Even if the speakers periodically become absorbed by their ongoing conversation, I am convinced that their understanding of their talk being “overheard” by the tape-recorder adds a “triadic” (Crapanzano 1992: 28, 196, 213–214) dimension to the dialogue. One simple example quoted here is Edwin’s eagerness to contribute older place-names and topographical facts. At other moments he is careful to communicate details from his knowledge of local history. Especially in tape-recorded interviews, we should expect to find a tendency to choose examples and formulations conveying one set of messages to the immediate listener and another one (or several ones) to the imagined future archive researchers.

Even if I (or you, or future scholars) did not take part in the actual conversation, the participants must have been aware that they were addressing us too, in the role of invisible, future dialogue partners. I have listened to this verbal reenactment of a man’s accumulated life experiences several times. Each time new experiences are born inside me. I feel empathy, joy, sorrow, compassion, or indifference. Now and then I am drawn into Edwin’s taleworlds, carried away by the forceful flow of his narration. At other times I distance myself from the narrative, trying to apply scholarly models to what I hear, or lose concentration, suddenly realizing I am thinking about the smoked flounders and fresh potatoes I am having for supper. The tape-recording of Edwin’s life history influences me on several different levels, each giving rise to new experiences, or reminding me of already made ones (cf. Braid 1996). Some of these I have described in this paper, which brings me to you, my reader’s, part in the dialogue.

In my text I have denied you any real possibility of entering the dialogue. To have that you would have needed access to substantial parts (if not all) of the transcribed tape recordings or preferably both the transcripts and the tapes. No narrative analysis should ignore the role of the academic reader as a co-producer of meaning. My reasons for not adhering properly to my own principles in this article are purely practical. The inclusion of large transcripts and sound-recordings would have been impossible.

### *Conclusions*

As a starting point for my discussion I used Katharine Young’s (1987) model including a realm of the ordinary, a conversational realm, a storyrealm and a taleworld. I suggested that we should expand the model to comprise many more fields and I have emphasized that the boundaries between the fields

should be regarded as elusive, uncertain and subject to negotiation. The model invites spatial and temporal interpretations, but should be understood also to include a modal dimension.

At the very beginning of the conversation discussed here the speaker accidentally hinted at an episode, which inside his taleworld was emotionally neutral and thematically peripheral. The same event, however, represented a close and painful experience in the listener's conversational realm. The participants' handling of the situation suggests that there exists a cultural agreement concerning how close to and how involved in an experience you must be to be allowed to make it a natural part of your own life history.

This clash between one person's taleworld and the other one's conversational realm gave rise to an intricate interplay between social and narrative factors. The never mentioned event, supposed to play the role of narrative climax in one part of the older man's life history, at the same time represented social failure and real grief to the younger man. The impact of this un-mentioned event proved to be strong enough to cast its shadow over several hours of conversation to come. Over a calm, controlled, possibly pre-planned account it threw a mist of uncertainty and improvisation. When social collapse threatened to destroy the interaction, balance was restored by the speaker turning to basic narrative techniques. He maneuvered his narrating into socially secure furrows by cleverly positioning it in relation to time, space, and mode. With sensitive timing he produced the dramatic elements necessary to counterweight the menacing social awkwardness. Using narrative means, he invited his speaking partner to enter a process of social collusion to save the situation.

One prerequisite for this discussion was that the two participants in the life history interview were members of the same community. Their knowledge of each other's backgrounds and history, as well as the interviewer's not being a professional folklorist, allowed for qualities of everyday conversation seldom achieved in interviews conducted by professional folklorists.

## NOTES

- 1 Many of the ideas expressed in this article were developed in the discussions of my graduate seminar "Narrative Analysis" at the University of California at Berkeley during the spring semester of 2001. I wish to thank Kimberly Ball, Merrill Kaplan, Katya Rapaport, Victoria Somoff and Michelle Sullivan for inspiring discussions. I am also grateful to Katharine Young, who read an earlier version of this article and suggested several substantial improvements.
- 2 To protect the participants' identities, their names and some of their personal particulars have been changed.
- 3 To indicate this tendency I will use the words "conversation" and "conversational" rather than for instance "interview". This wording does not mean, however, that I automatically wish to link my discussion to the linguistic research tradition of conversational analysis. This field of research with its traditional emphasis on the technical and structural analysis of spoken language has developed several terms and models (see e.g. Eggins & Slade 1997, Halliday 1994, Holmberg 2002, Norrby 1996) which may be used in folkloristic narrative analyses where cultural and

- communicative aspects more often are focused.
- 4 A shorter pause is marked by three full stops and a longer pause is marked by new line. Place names have been substituted by X, Y and Z or the initial letters.
  - 5 The “realm” concept has been borrowed from phenomenological scholarship, while “taleworld” is an invention by Young and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (Young 1987, 8f and note 56 on p. 15).
  - 6 On the impact on conversation of social conventions, see e.g. Polanyi 1989, chapter 3.
  - 7 For a more detailed discussion of semantic patterning, see chapter 5, “The discourse structure of casual conversation: negotiating support and confrontation” in Eggins/Slade 1997, 169–226).
  - 8 Swedish spring festival celebrated on April 30.

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## HIV/AIDS, Narrativity, and Embodiment

Friends, acquaintances, and colleagues have sometimes asked me whether it is not trying to do research on HIV/AIDS and – my previous topic – leprosy.<sup>1</sup> The fact is that I have rarely felt depressed after conversations with people who live with leprosy or HIV/AIDS. Instead, I have often felt elevated. This article is about how narrative and bodily dispositions make this possible. The article is based on meetings and conversations with two people with HIV. The two differ in many respects. One is a Swedish homosexual man, the other is a Greek heterosexual woman.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, by discussing the relations between bodily experiences, narration and the creation of meanings I want to try to shed light on how narratives about difficult life experiences can just as well be uplifting as depressing. Second, I wish to comment on a classical epistemological question: To what extent can we obtain knowledge about people's experiences by analysing their speech and narratives? I shall approach these questions by analysing two life-story narratives. One emerged during a conversation with Steve, as the Swedish man is called. The other narrative was related by Alkisti, as I call the Greek woman.<sup>2</sup> I had met Steve in various contexts since 1998, but I had met Alkisti only once, in connection with the interview in June 2001 to which I shall be referring. About six months later I met her again for a follow-up interview.<sup>3</sup>

This article consists of three parts. In the first I analyse Steve's and Alkisti's narrative styles in order to locate the meanings in their narratives about HIV/AIDS. The second part concerns the portrayal of bodily experiences in the narratives. The third and final part highlights the fact that narration both proceeds from and gives rise to bodily experiences.

### *I. The meaning of illness: Steve's and Alkisti's narratives*

All narration is shaped by the narrator's more or less conscious intentions to relate situationally to contexts of meaning and experience worlds. My opening interview questions triggered both Steve's and Alkisti's narratives. But with the aid of their narratives both soon took control of the conversations. By

narrative I mean here a temporally and causally organized epic account which stands out from other form of talk. Steve's and Alkisti's narratives differed in several respects, but their narrative styles had several shared features, and at least one theme was central to both life stories, namely, their experiences of HIV/AIDS. In their form the two informants' narratives followed several of the elements in William Labov's schema for the transformation of experiences in narrative syntax. He notes the following elements in narrating development: 1) abstract, 2) orientation, 3) complicating action, 4) evaluation, 5) result or resolution, and 6) coda (Labov 1972: 363ff; see also the Introduction of this anthology). Let me begin with an account of Steve's narrative and then continue with Alkisti's.

### Steve

Steve gave me permission, both in advance and after reading a Swedish version of this article, to use his real name and disclose his identity. This might not have been possible if he himself had not published a number of autobiographical narratives about what it is like to live with HIV in his book *Livsfrågor* (Sjöquist 1999). Steve was 43 years old when I met him for the first time at The Noah's Ark Red Cross Foundation in Stockholm. On this occasion, he told a number of people from seven different European countries about his experiences of being a carrier of HIV. The meeting was arranged in connection with an EU project with the purpose of initiating support activities for the family and friends of people with HIV/AIDS in the seven countries.<sup>4</sup>

It was against this background that I went with Steve to Athens for a week in the summer of 1999, to assist him in the evaluation of the implementation of the project there. I had the opportunity to carry out six recorded interviews with him and also to record a conversation that he had with Greek colleagues working with HIV prevention and support work. Several of these conversations were dominated by Steve's narratives about his life and about his own experiences of living with HIV. In the course of the journey we met in several different roles: as colleagues with a common mission, as researcher and informant, as HIV-negative and HIV-positive, as a heterosexual and a homosexual, and – not least of all – as good friends.

Briefly, Steve said that he received his HIV diagnosis in 1987 and that six years later he contracted tumours of a kind called *Karposi's sarcoma*, which is an opportunistic sequela of HIV. The tumours could be treated and removed, but in formal terms, contracting an opportunistic sequela means that patients are given the diagnosis of "AIDS", which is an administrative categorization of the disease. The AIDS diagnosis does not cease to apply even if the sequela that gave rise to the diagnosis is cured. Three years later, in 1996, Steve suffered an intestinal disease that caused him severe pains. He was given large quantities of morphine for a long period to help him to withstand the pain. For a year he spent as much time or more in the hospital as he did at home. He was in a coma for four weeks and was very close to death. The intestinal disease could be medically cured, however. At roughly the same time the new combination therapy for HIV was introduced, and

he started to take this as soon as possible after coming out of his coma. The medicines have radically improved his immune system and reduced the concentration of the virus in his blood. When we went to Athens together I could not see that he was sick in any way other than that he took his anti-HIV medicines every morning when we had breakfast together.

The first recorded interview took place on the very first evening in Athens, at a restaurant in Athens' old town. In reality, however, the conversation had been going on the whole day at airports and during the flight. In the course of the evening conversation I reminded Steve of what he had told me during the trip and explained that I was interested in his life story and in his experiences of living with HIV. We agreed to begin with his life story and then continue with the disease. My open question – “Who are you?” – led Steve to begin to tell me about his childhood, his education, and his working life. The life story functioned as a context for an embedded narrative about how he was told that he had HIV and how he handled this information. The description of his occupational identity as a “care-giving person” and of his role as a resource for other people in need of help seemed to me a central theme for understanding how he described his way of handling the news that he was HIV-positive. Steve had just told me that he had been abroad for two years and about the job he got in Sweden after returning home, when he started his narrative about HIV as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) *Steve*: And during that time, well/  
*Georg*: So you were away two years  
*Steve*: Yeah, that's right. I was in eh– in America part of those two years too. And, eh– During.. It was then that this thing about HIV had come into the picture. But, but it's like this that, I mean, I don't function very differently from others, that.. What's unpleasant and what makes you uncomfortable, you put it out of mind. And since I was living in a new culture, and every day was really a new adventure, there wasn't really any place for it, so that I..  
*Georg*: How do you mean, when you say that HIV came into the picture? You weren't affected yet?  
*Steve*: No, didn't think. I didn't think but I read about it and I knew that it affected homosexual men in America.  
*Georg*: And in that you way you felt concerned, you mean?  
*Steve*: Yes, I did, I did. But it was. But in some way I don't know how defence mechanisms work. I can.. That's probably rationalization after the event. But I didn't take it in at least, or I let it pass me so that it didn't affect [yes]. But still I was living in a very international environment with people from all over the world [yes]. And eh–  
 When I got home from America I felt this tremendous desire to come home after two years. And someone has said that there's a time limit when you're (away) from your own country that, either you stay after it or you go home [yes, maybe that's true]. Well, I don't know. I don't know if it's true. But I also felt full of strength then. I had done a lot of thinking. And at the same time I didn't really know what I wanted to do. But I took the opportunity to resign from my job as head of the ward at the children's rehabilitation center before I came home, because I knew: “No, I don't want to back there!” But I still went in and did substitute work when I got

home, [mm] but I had resigned to make an end in some way.  
And then in some way all this HIV thing got terribly intensified.

In this sequence of our conversation, the opening words, “And during that time, well”, mark that Steve is about to begin a narrative. Having been interrupted by my question he returned to his narrative with a similar opening phrase: “It was then that this thing about HIV had come into the picture”, which also concludes the quoted extract, this time in a reinforced form. In between he digressed several times and also commented on his professional work. These digressions and comments functioned as *orientations* in Labov’s sense. They pointed forwards towards the context that gave meaning to the complicating action and its resolution. Steve thereby oriented me about his important life choices and about the focus on disease and health in his working life.

What triggered the narrative about HIV was Steve’s account of his earlier work with child rehabilitation abroad and his return to Sweden after two years. Being informed that he had HIV, with its prelude and postlude, constitutes the complication and resolution of the narrative quoted above. The prelude was about how HIV/AIDS was gaining in significance in his own environment and about his escalating anxiety about being infected. In Steve’s description of how he was told that he had HIV, his uncertainty as to whether he was infected or not stands out as the most painful experience. Getting the actual news was less painful, it confirmed of something he had already understood.

- (2) Yes, I can never reach any kind of explanation as to why I was so firmly convinced. But after that I know that intuition and strong feelings are important [mm] when you make decisions and when you take crucial steps and so on. You should rely on it [yes], and this time I was right. So when I come back the next Friday they told me that I had HIV. And I didn’t collapse in any way, I just sat.. The only thing I remember really strongly was: “But, my God, I’m sitting on the wrong chair!”, roughly. It’s usually me sitting with people who are sad or having to tell them unpleasant things [yes, yes]  
I didn’t manage that, so I think that.. I have probably very.. I, I have laughed a bit at myself because I behaved in a really exemplary way and took, collected, I was very composed, I think. And thought, “Right, yes, thanks very much for taking care of me!” and so on. At the same time as I know that I stayed on in Stockholm for the weekend. And then, of course my head was spinning terribly. But I, I didn’t get dejected or upset or anything [¿ You didn’t get upset] No I didn’t get upset. I just got (exhales heavily)  
A, a strong a confirmation something I had experienced so powerfully, that that was how it is. Since I had struggled so long out of worry.

In Steve’s narrative about being told he was HIV-positive, there was already a resolution to the complication. Being told naturally did not mitigate the fact that he had HIV. But his description of his reaction has bearing on his later account of how he handled the information that he was a carrier of HIV and

on how people close to him reacted to the results. In his continued narrative he emphasized that he was satisfied with the way he had been informed about his HIV infection and with the response from colleagues, friends and relatives. He describes his boss's reaction to the news as follows:

- (3) And so I phoned my boss and told him. I had told him that I was getting tested. And then he said: "You'll come back here. You're not to take sick leave. We need you here. This doesn't change anything. You're not sick. So come back!"

Steve worked with counselling tasks for patients who were about to have or had just had heart transplants. The boss's words emphatically underline that the HIV infection would not affect his employment. Steve returned to this theme several times and compared himself with others who risked losing their jobs because they had been found to be HIV-positive. Instead Steve described his problem of staying on in his job with reference to what it involved. He explained that he was afraid of losing his ability to empathize with other people's problems after receiving his diagnosis of HIV. He was probably alluding to the paradox that, although he was a carrier of a deadly disease, he would be helping others who had had their lives prolonged.

The final episode in his narrative was about how his parents received the news. Steve described the decision to inform his parents as particularly fraught with tension, and he quoted his own earlier reflections that Christmas, when he had gone home to his parents with the intention of letting them know that he was HIV-positive:

- (4) How would I be able to convey this sad (omitted word) about being the bearer of such bad news? It wasn't fun [no]. At the same time.. In our family we have always been very open and it's hard to hide anything, you know, so that eh—  
The evening before Christmas Eve I thought: "No, now it's do or die!"  
So I felt: "No, I can't keep this to myself, they have a right to know too", I thought.

The fraught situation of revealing his HIV infection to his own parents is something that many people with HIV would recognize. But what is felt to be most threatening varies. Steve told of a young man with HIV whom he had got to know in a support group. This man, who was adopted, said that his adoptive parents had thrown him out of the house when they found out that he had HIV. Steve emphasized that there was never any threat of anything like that for himself. On the contrary, he said that he was fortunate compared with many others. With his rhetorical question, which opens the last quotation from his narrative, about "being the bearer of such bad news", he expressed a different kind of worry. With this question and the closing comment that "they have a right to know too", he voiced concern for his parents rather than fear that they would let him down. By emphasizing how the test results framed his Christmas visit to his parents, he underlined the feelings of guilt that shadowed his deliberations with himself about revealing the bad news.

Yet the outcome of the events parallels his previous description of how he himself received the news:

- (5) And then I let it fall at the dinner table at my parents' house. I'll never forget it. And then my mother said, quite spontaneously: "How nice of you to tell us! I've been wondering so much!" So she had already been wondering about it. She had read and assimilated what was written and what was said on TV and so on, and on the news, and it had made her wonder a lot. So I confirmed a worry that she had had [mm].

Just as he himself had received the news, his mother's reaction was that she had had her worries confirmed and thus no longer needed to be uncertain. He does not mention his father's reactions in the same part of his account. Steve later pointed out that his mother had been more sensitive than his father, and that he and his father had often agreed to spare her from unnecessary worry. Informing his mother about his HIV infection thus seemed to be riskier than telling his father. The narrative did not have a distinct ending. The description of the reactions of both his boss and his mother may nevertheless be seen as the outcome of the narrative, or the "resolution" in Labov's schema, that is, the denouement of the complication. The means used to achieve the resolution indicate the point of the narrative, which Labov describes in terms of "evaluation". The types of evaluation used by Steve were hints at continuities regarding family, working life, and professional identity. His narrative underlines how important it was to him that the news of his infection would not damage his relations to family and close friends, and that his roles and relations in the family and at work could remain intact. In addition, Steve spoke of his first involvement in voluntary support work for HIV/AIDS patients and returned several times to the importance of his experiences with care-giving and ethical questions. In other words, the HIV diagnosis had not prevented him from continuing to be a "care-giving person" and a resource for other people in need of help.

### **Alkisti**

In the narrative also Alkisti focused on how she found out that she was HIV-positive. But, more than Steve she emphasized her situation as a relative. She briefly revealed that she had given birth to a son who was sickly. At the age of six months her son contracted pneumonia, and his condition deteriorated steadily despite extensive attempts to cure him. It took three months before the doctors managed to establish that the son's illness was caused by HIV. Alkisti was highly critical of the fact that pregnant women were not tested for HIV as a matter of routine. She also criticized the doctors for being prejudiced and unable to imagine that people of higher social status could be affected by HIV. She stated this as an explanation for their difficulties in diagnosing her son and subjecting him to painful examinations over a long period.<sup>6</sup>

The discovery that her son had AIDS led Alkisti and her husband to get tested; both were found to be HIV-positive. It has not been possible to establish whether one of them infected the other or each of them had been infected before they met the other. Alkisti maintained that this was not a

crucial question in the context. The totally dominant problem was that their son had been born with HIV and died of AIDS in his third year.<sup>7</sup> When I met Alkisti, four years had passed since the death of her son. She had divorced her husband and now shared a household with her father and her brother. We met in my temporary accommodation. I could not see any signs that she was a carrier of HIV.

Alkisti began her life story immediately after I had presented my research project and said that I was interested in learning something about her life and her experiences of HIV. In our introductory conversation she informed me about her own attitude to HIV/AIDS, to which she would return in her later narratives. She explained that AIDS did not exist in her own life and thought that I would learn more by interviewing her mother and brother. She added with a laugh, “AIDS exists in their life!” After that, she began her narrative by mentioning her parents’ divorce and how they put her in an expensive private school. She said that she had done well in school, but she went on:

- (6) But I also felt a shortage of money. It was the most expensive school in Greece, attended by a lot of snobbish types. And that annoyed me. I felt *deprived*<sup>8</sup> [mm] of things that many girls had. And although I got a really good education and although I liked sports a lot, which we were able to do there [mm], I felt a bit annoyed by that. [...]<sup>9</sup>  
I was part of very nice group of friends, not so eh.. I had a very nice life. Because of chance, or the context I found myself in, I still didn’t understand why, but I always mixed with friends who were very liberated (*íchan pára polí megháli ánesi*) and lived a very good life.

In this introduction there is already a complication and a resolution that pave the way for Alkisti’s continued narrative about living with HIV. She describes her feeling of being out of place among the well-to-do classmates. But one could not miss the meanings of her narrative, that despite the complication she was successful and had a rich social life. In that sense the account of her schooling sums up her continued narrative about her life with HIV, and in Labov’s terms it functions as an “abstract” of her continued life story.

She then described how HIV came into her life. First, however, she told me about her marriage, which likewise had not been free of complications. She had left her husband after three years of marriage. Then they started living together again and she got pregnant. She gave the impression of not having planned to have children, but she welcomed the pregnancy with the conviction that she and her husband could give their child a good life. The man, who was very well off, had a luxury house built for the family during her pregnancy. She explained to me that she had everything she could wish for when her son was born, and that her greatest happiness was to have a boy. Immediately afterwards she presented the central complication in the narrative:

- (7.1) And then at *the peak of my life*  
my six-month-old son got the diagnosis  
AIDS [and was it] it was.. [that your son] Yes eh– and that destroyed

me (*ke aftó me dhiélise*). For I really had all I wanted [mm] then. And the best thing I had was my son. And (inaudible) and two days later of course we were told that we had AIDS<sup>10</sup> both of us. Which means that one of us, even before we got married, before we got to know each other, had been infected by AIDS. And we didn't find out about it until [mm] after we'd been together three or four years. My son had got AIDS, HIV in the womb. I breast-fed him as well [mm] and that's how he got AIDS when he was six months old.

In her narrative Alkisti underlined the tragedy of her son's HIV infection by describing how the disease struck in her own life. She showed with her account that the deadly disease was discovered at a time when she herself was at the peak of her life. The choice of words in the brief summary of this crucial event in her life further reinforces the image of the loneliness that every human being feels in moments of crisis. With the words *ke aftó me dhiélise* (and that destroyed me) she summed up the extent of her personal tragedy. In the immediate continuation of her story she described what the remainder of her son's life was like.

(7.2) And two very difficult years passed at the hospital. I thought that Nikos would live, I wanted to believe that he would live. But after a year I realized that the doctors had deceived me. And that they took advantage of my willingness to believe. I wanted Nikos to live, and they cultivated a utopia [utopia, mm]. That made me furious and I decided that my son Nikos would not go into hospital again, and that he would not be tormented any more. Ah, I interrupt the hospitalization and the treatment. I bring Nikos home and during his second year he had a really good life. It was peaceful at home with his loved ones around him, with his garden, with his pool, with his TV, with his little toys [mm] with his little balls. He lived in his very human environment, and not in the three square hospital rooms where they stuck needles in him and examined him over and over. And he was blind.

This extract from her narrative can be read as a personal account of what happens in the encounter with medical care, when a person with HIV is transformed into an object of the medical discourse. According to her description, her son was forced to undergo painful examinations in a shabby hospital environment for no purpose. But as she continued to describe how she liberated her son from this torment and made the rest of his life good, she made herself into an active subject in the encounter with the health service. Having been deprived of control over her child's health, she recreated herself as a subject of motherhood and parenthood, and regained control over the care of her son. Directly after the passage from her narrative just quoted above, she described her son's illness and death as a source for the renewal of her own self-understanding:

(7.3) I changed when I realized that I'm not the superwoman I always thought I was, very strong, immensely strong. Eh, I knew that I could do whatever I wanted in life. Up to now I have really done what I wanted [mm]. But

I now realized that he was..

Nikos came to overturn all that, came to change that for me so that I would understand that you don't control your life. That was the best lesson I got to be reborn as something better, I would say.

The existential conflict that is the overarching complication of the narrative had its resolution in the last two extracts from Alkisti's narrative. In addition to the description of how she regained control over the care of her son, the last extract from her narrative describes a way out of the conflict. One of her key sentences is: "That was the best lesson I got to be reborn as something better." This evaluation of the outcome of the narrative functions as a hub for the continued conversation. The narrative lacked an explicit ending. Instead it was phased out with a series of descriptions and comments about her ability to live a good life despite, or perhaps thanks to, the existential crisis which she had undergone.

## *II. The body as narrative*

There are many ways to approach an understanding of diseases; among them are not only laboratory investigations and clinical observations of bodily processes but also listening to how people tell of their experiences of disease.<sup>11</sup> One reason for the latter is that diseases do not arise in the body as delimited ontological entities; they appear in life. Narratives about diseases link them to other events and experiences in life (see for example, Good 1997: 133). One consequence of this is that diseases can be described in different ways in different places, at different times, and they can be experienced in different ways in people's varying life worlds. Using narrative as an analytical approach to the understanding of disease is a way to obtain insight into the life worlds where the disease becomes significant. The term *life world* was coined by Edmund Husserl to encapsulate man's being in the world. In the rest of this article I shall try to apply this and some other central concepts and perspectives in phenomenological thought. I have above all been inspired by Merleau-Ponty and the work of his successors (e.g. Good 1997, Kleinman 1988, Leder 1990).

The concept of lived experience is central in phenomenology. Our lived experiences are situated in our lived bodies. We perceive the world through our eyes, ears, and hands. Experiences arise in our lived relation to the world. Our experiences are incarnated, but this does not mean that we are passive recipients of impressions from outside. Rather, the lived body changes character, alternating between being subject and object for one's own gaze and the gaze of others'. The lived body is the seat of the Self and of the Other's gaze. We cannot step out of our bodily dispositions when we tell stories about ourselves or others. That is why we project our self-understanding in narratives about others.

"The body as narrative", as I call this section, is therefore connected to "narration in the body", which is what the last part of this article is about. I use the latter expression to stress that we do not just have a body that we can

regard as an object, but that we are our bodies as subjects. In articulating this dual perspective philosophers have often utilized the distinction within the German language between *Körper*, which refers to the physical body and *Leib* referring to the living body or the lived body (Ots 1994: 116–117). The Körper-Leib phenomenon has been further developed by Merleau-Ponty (1998) and others after him into an understanding of the subject's embodied character. To put it another way, this means that our consciousness is embodied, that our speech, our thoughts, and other actions have a bodily point of departure. In that sense the lived body is the basis for our experiences and for our existence. The body is never merely an object in the world; it is the chief medium through which our world comes into existence.

### **The dis-appearing and the dys-appearing body**

One way to make the bodily basis of our consciousness visible is, as Drew Leder (1990) has shown, to seize on the tendency of the lived body to disappear from itself when it works as it is supposed to, but to stand out and become present when obstacles and complications of both a physical and a social kind arise. Leder uses the expression “the dys-appearing body” to describe the latter state, referring to the body's dysfunction and problematic appearance. One point of the play on the words dys-appearing and dis-appearing is that the body is never absent in an absolute sense. “The disappearing body” simply means that it is not apparent (Leder 1990: 27).

My meeting with Steve at Arlanda Airport the day before our departure for Athens may illustrate this. We arrived in good time and were able to have a coffee while waiting for the boarding call. Already then, while waiting for the plane to leave, I sprang the question, asking Steve if he was willing to take part in my study. Almost immediately he began to talk about his life with HIV, and I hardly needed to ask any direct questions. I listened in full concentration in order to remember it all, and I was soon drawn into his narratives. Steve is a good storyteller, and his narration over coffee was not interrupted until our names were called over the loudspeaker in the departure hall. We had to hurry to our gate, and the same scene was repeated on the return from Athens. On both occasions we had engrossing conversations, forgetting about the time and place where we were.

What happened was that our bodies temporarily disappeared, or rather they were not entirely present since our attention was focused on Steve's narrating and our conversation. Steve continued his stories all through the flight, and I was not silent either. We seemed to have the same delight in talking non-stop. One thing led to another, as the conversation flowed. When we arrived in Athens the heat hit us, and I enjoyed the chance to stretch my legs. Steve said that his legs had gone numb, and that this often happened now when he sat motionless too long. This was an effect of the anti-HIV medicines, he said, and explained that this side effect reminded him that he was a carrier of HIV. He sounded irritated over his legs which prevented him from feeling healthy. I had a feeling that the obstacle in his legs became a force directed against the sense of self he had just felt during our deep conversation, when his body was probably as little present as mine. The trouble with his legs persisted for a few days.

### **The body in Steve's narrative**

This did not prevent Steve from talking about his life later that evening, his life both with and without HIV. I have subsequently asked myself what significance the interview situation had for the narratives that emerged during our conversations. Having read his book, which appeared six months later, and then after also listening to a lecture he gave to the staff at Huddinge Hospital, I can say that the different presentations correspond well in content. However, the forms of his narratives differ partly in the different contexts: the interview, the printed book, and the lecture. Compared with the book and the lecture, the interview was looser in its structure. At the lecture I heard Steve talk to the health care staff in his role as a “care-giving person”. He did not give himself that role in our conversation.

When listening to the recorded interview and reading the transcription I focused my interest on how the narration both proceeded from and gave rise to bodily experiences. Let me begin with the question of how Steve described bodily experiences in his narration. These experiences can be made visible with the aid of Leder's terms, the dys-appearing and the dis-appearing body. The former term corresponds to how the lived body appears as an object, while the latter means that the body does not. Steve's opening narrative about his childhood was free of complications and his body, with one exception, did not figure in this part of the narrative. The exception was a comment about the family having to move several times because of his father's job. Steve hinted that having to leave his home behind several times had been rather painful for him, and he cited his father's words of comfort: “Remember that where you live is something you have inside you!”

Steve explained that he had found his father's words incredibly “corny”, since they did not change the fact that he was forced to leave his friends behind. The argument about finding your home inside you can be perceived as an expression of an unequal power relation whereby he as a child had to submit to the rules of the adult world. Perhaps his father's recommendation was a reflection of the way he himself had learnt how to handle many moves in life. Localizing one's home inside oneself was certainly an adult perspective. Steve seems to remember the discrepancy between the pain, that is to say, his lived experiences, and his father's comforting words, which he could not accept. This break in communication illustrates that which Leder calls “social dys-appearance” and is an expression of the unequal power relations between father and son.

My interest in investigating how Steve described bodily states in the narratives that emerged in our conversation is ultimately an attempt to explore various forms of intersubjectivity, or in other words, relations between lived bodies as subjects (Bengtsson 1993: 80). To express this differently, intersubjectivity refers to how people coexist in a shared (life) world. People's subjectivity cannot be isolated from other people's subjectivity, which means that the individual's self-perception is in large measure social. Leder (1990: 92) points out that my “self-understanding always involves the seeing of what others see in me.” From this point of view, the dys-appearing body must address different types of intersubjectivity.

In his life story, which I listened to at the restaurant that first evening in Athens, Steve described his consciousness of his own body most clearly when he came to the point where he talked about the threat of being infected with HIV (see quotation 1). Here we also glimpse the significance of dominant discourses for how he associated HIV/AIDS with himself. Above all, the early discourse about homosexual men as a risk group was a provocation to his lived body, as Steve pointed out spontaneously just before he passed the following comments about his first recollections of the information campaigns in Sweden.

- (8.1) And at the same time this issue of HIV began eh– The AIDS Delegation as it was then had put up a lot of posters and that. And when I took the local train to my job those posters were there. And they said: Remember that HIV is spreading (both)<sup>12</sup> here in Sweden and abroad. I suddenly had an unpleasant feeling inside me, which started gnawing at me, you know. And it got more and more, stronger and stronger.

This short quotation shows Steve's image of how the threat pressed itself on him from the walls of the local train. At the same time, the possibilities for his lived body to disappear from itself seemed to be shrinking. In his book Steve reproduces an even more obtrusive poster. It bears the words: "This is what an HIV-positive person can look like!" Steve tells us that the poster was like a mirror so that one could see one's own reflection in it, and he writes: "It really makes you shudder!" He then adds that he became even more afraid after the confrontation with the poster and bottled up the nasty feeling as long as he could (Sjöquist 1999: 29).

The mirror reflection was the most refined provocation against his lived body. The threat of HIV/AIDS was incarnated and personified in his own mirror image. The reflection on the poster was simultaneously constructed as the surrounding world's gaze on his lived body, whereby the gaze of the Other invaded his self-understanding. In the reflection he could see himself as both subject and object. The threat came partly from inside his own body and from the risks that he ran, as a homosexual man, of being made an object in the dominant discourse about HIV/AIDS. Just after the last quotation from the interview, he went on to describe the last phase in the process that led to his decision to get tested for HIV.

- (8.2) And so I started talking with my friends and telling them I was worried. And they all said, of course, "No, there's nothing to worry about!" As the same time, people that I knew, on the periphery, like, started getting sick and one or two died. /

(The sound of accordions played by street musicians interrupts the conversation, which continues after a brief pause)

And suddenly it struck me then that "Why shouldn't I be infected with HIV?" Not because I had lived in any extreme way or that. But, since it

was homosexual men that were affected and so much was written about it. And there was an awful lot in the tabloids and that, with big posters about this mysterious thing that research and science didn't have any answer to. A big scare and that [mm] which made me feel very ill at ease so that autumn, '87, was really trying. And at the same time, I had a very demanding job too. And finally I felt that I didn't have any choice. Then I had involved the people that I trusted on these matters, that I was worried. And finally the people around me said: "Well, you'd better go and get tested" because [yes] I had problems sleeping, lying there thinking and I mean, other things stop working then, when you have obsessive thoughts like that.

The description of the worry leading to sleeplessness is perhaps the clearest example of the problematic appearance (dys-appearance) of the body in the cited extracts. The narrative is given special meaning by the revelation that the difficulties occurred long before the HIV-diagnosis. The existential threat was already there in Steve's identification of himself as a member of a risk group. His worry was evidently not alleviated by conversations with close friends. Perhaps the anxiety about being infected was also spreading among them? Steve's narrative is a good illustration of how a disease arises in life and affects the people around the sick person, even when it is not possible to point to any visible physical symptoms. The continued conversation shows how the disease nevertheless changed his lived body and his self-understanding.

(8.3) *Georg*: Did you have any symptoms in any way?

*Steve*: Not a symptom. I was as fit as a fiddle and [L]But the fact that you were] in good trim [so worried, why was that]. No, I don't know where that came from, what it was, if it was anything. I have thought a lot myself about whether there was something that I had held back so long that it wasn't possible, that it just crept out in the end, that it seeped out in some way, that if you keep unpleasant things away too long they come out anyway in some form [yes]. I don't know [no, right], for there was no one in my immediate surroundings who was affected or that. And– So I didn't see any unpleasantnesses, I can say [no]. And so.. But in the end I felt: "No, I must do something about this." By chance on a train journey to Stockholm, privately, I met a guy that I started talking to on the train who was involved with Noah's Ark in Stockholm. And we started talking a lot. And, and then I held on to that, kept that contact and thought that.. And so I felt fairly instinctively – I had read all that was written about HIV, about the fear of being very vulnerable – that I ought to go and get tested, so that.. Since I worked with health care in Gothenburg it was fairly obvious for me without thinking so much that: "No but I can't go and get tested here in Gothenburg. For the risk that I know someone in some clinic where you go and get tested is very great."

This quotation from the interview with Steve conjures up a recurrent picture of the dys-appearance of one's own body. Its problematic appearance is caused here by the liminal process that the body undergoes in serious diseases and in the face of other existential threats. This process, which involves an ambivalent status-less state, is situated in the lived body and is constituted

in interaction with others. Steve portrayed his liminal body by hinting at the uncertainty about its invisible internal state, and by describing his social vulnerability and the risk of being recognized in connection with the HIV test. What is tormenting thing for people with HIV is that, both before and after diagnosis, the disease can put the lived body in a liminal state and make the individual's life world into a border land. In that sense the liminality dissolves the intersubjective reality of everyday life.

This liminal process can be compared with Elaine Scarry's (1985) observations of how life-threatening diseases and other critical events in life make everyday reality collapse, which she has described in terms of "the unmaking of the world". For many people, being informed that they are infected with HIV can be expected to have that effect. It therefore made an impression on me that Steve retold the situation where he received the test result differently. He did not describe the news as a provocation against his self-esteem (see quotation 2). If anything, the news confirmed his self-understanding. When he described the feeling of sitting on the wrong chair and behaving in an exemplary way, he portrayed the spatial ambivalence of the lived body in which the test situation had placed him. But the outcome of the narrative is not that he lost his foothold, but rather that his professional identity was confirmed

In Steve's narrative other people's reception of the news that he had HIV stands out as the end to the liminal state in which the disease had put him. Particular evidence of this is his boss's desire to have him back with reference to the fact that he was healthy and needed at work (see quotation 3). Also, his mother's positive response to his having put an end to her uncertainty about his health can be interpreted as an expression of the end of the liminality (see quotation 5). The description of his professional life both before and after the test result serves to establish continuity here. One can say that it serves to restore the reality of everyday life.

The narrative underlines that the parents' accepting attitude of Steve's parents was not a matter of chance. Steve maintained that the family had always been open. He articulates this in his claims that he has been and remains a "care-giving person". In the narrative his lived body is transformed from its status as a resource for others in health care into an object of HIV infection and once again to its status as a resource for other people in need. These transformations can also be described as a retention of a certain type of intersubjective coexistence with the exception of one temporary interruption.

### **The body in Alkisti's narrative**

In a similar way, Alkisti's narrative was oriented to different types of intersubjective relations and bodily experiences. At the very start of her life story, when she described her school days (see quotation 6), she described the problematic appearance of the body and its disappearance from itself. This was most evident in her account of displeasure about not being able to compete with the material standards of her classmates. Not having such nice clothes as her classmates can certainly be perceived as a bodily defect.

Her image of herself in other people's eyes can therefore be classified as the "social dys-appearance" of the body, to use Leder's term. In the latter part of the quotation she described the reverse situation, namely, that she herself was always among people who moved with great ease and had a very good life. The word *ánesi*, which she used in the last sentence of the quotation, also means having relaxation and comfort, which makes the whole statement seem like an image of a life in which she lacked nothing, when the lived body was not hindered but could disappear from itself.

Alkisti then went on to describe, in a similar way, her life situation when she became pregnant and gave birth to a son (see quotation 7.1). Her words *Ke aftó me dhiélise* (And that destroyed me) describe how the news of her son's disease transformed her lived body as a subject. The disease tore the lived body away from its mooring in time, place, and social life. The peak of the life cycle was transformed into its opposite. Her home and family life lost the meanings they had only just acquired. Her social life lost its greatest asset. The disease that had afflicted the whole family could only be typified as a composite pattern of dysfunctions. In Alkisti's narrative it was the actual news that she had HIV that immediately caused her life world to collapse, not – as in Steve's case – a long period of worry about the possibility of being infected.

But Alkisti's immediate continuation of the story of her son's pseudo-treatment during his hospitalization and her decision to stop the treatment shows how she recreates her life world in words and actions (see quotation 7.2–7.3). Her description of how well her son was when he came home, and the fact that she showed no bitterness about his subsequent death, made a profound impression on me. She did not speak about her grief, instead emphasizing that, thanks to her son, she had been given the most important lesson of her life. She described the event as a turning point, the start of a new and a more substantial life. One point I want to make is that Alkisti's handling of her disease must be seen in the light of this watershed. With her narrative about the turning point in life she articulated her strategies for handling on existential ambivalences of several different kinds.

These strategies have several similarities to Zygmunt Bauman's description of how people handle the conflict between the transient and the durable in modern and post-modern society. In his book *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992) Bauman discusses the tendency in post-modern society to come to terms with the ambivalence about our mortality. As death is an inescapable fact for every one of us, immortality must be created. "Transcendence", writes Bauman (1992: 5), "is what, everything having been said and done, culture is about. Culture is about expanding temporal and spatial boundaries of being, with a view to dismantling them altogether." He (1992: 30) also notes that "the time dimension of transcendence is turning here into a spatial issue: stretching the *span of life* is turned into the effort to stretch the *capacity to live*."

The portrayal of this capacity was at the centre of Alkisti's narrative about her life after learning that all three family members had HIV. She explained that she had chosen to live alone for a year after the divorce and that she

enjoyed this time. She listed a series of pleasant activities that her single life contained: travel, water-skiing, alpine skiing, dancing, cinema, theatre, and concerts. She also stressed her busy social life both with friends who knew that she had HIV and with others whom she had not told. She laughed and underlined her capacity to live with the words: “I have a much better life than many healthy people” (“*Zo polí kalítera apó poloús iyís!*”).

Alkisti also told how she had later had love affairs with men. She mentioned that it was not until she had started the first new relationship after the divorce that she began to worry at all that she herself was a carrier of HIV. However, the first man, who was a little younger than herself, had accepted this fact. In the most recent relationship, which she had started just a month or so before our interview, she still had not told her partner about her infection. She explained that she might never do so, although naturally she protected the man against infection. A recurrent pattern in her narratives about her love affairs was that thoughts of the future had no meaning for her in the present.

Alkisti’s account of how her mother had reacted to the news makes visible the collisions between different ways of handling existential conflicts, concerning both sex and disease or death. She had involuntarily told her mother of the real reason for her son’s death and of her own infection. Alkisti had undergone an operation during which she had been under anaesthesia, and she was not completely awake when the whole story passed her lips. This is how she describes her mother’s reactions:

- (9) Oh *hysterical*. Then she was affected.. [mm] She was no help at all to me. Eh– and since then  
I keep her at a great distance, since she made me feel like a criminal eh– and responsible for Nikos’s death [aha] for in my situation eh– She made me feel responsible for hurting her and for crushing her dreams. And she hasn’t been able to do anything to help me, for she can’t get over.. [mm] And then I felt like a criminal, and I had no support [mm].  
And I saw that she was, that she reacted in a very selfish way. She thought very egotistically [mm]

The account of the episode reflects the different bodily dispositions of Alkisti and her mother, and their different strategic attitudes to death. The clause “and for crushing her dreams” is crucial. The fact that Alkisti had not given her mother a grandchild can be interpreted as an expression of the mother’s immortality strategy, the use of reproduction to secure the immortality of the family. For Alkisti, who had a deadly disease, such a strategic attitude would be incompatible with her life situation and needs, which may explain the critical tone of the quotation.

In the interview the commentary functioned primarily as a criticism directed against her mother and as a restoration of Alkisti’s confidence in her sense of self. The narrative pointed backwards to Alkisti’s opening clarification that HIV is not *her* problem but her mother’s and her brother’s problem. Later in the conversation she reinforced her attitude to the disease by further underlining her ability to live in the present and disregard everything

beyond the current moment, even her own physical health. After pointing out that she probably contracted the infection about ten years previously and that she did not know how long it would be before she was diagnosed as having AIDS, she continued emphatically:

- (10) I'm not afraid. [No, that's good] I'm not afraid of death [mm, yes] I don't care [mm] I mean, I don't go around hoping to be able to live for many years, nor that I can live for a few years. The question doesn't concern me [¿Eh] at all.  
 (lowers her voice) It doesn't concern me [mm] (raises her voice) It doesn't concern me if eh— I become very ugly or if I get very thin or if I don't have any strength.  
 It's very natural. I tell myself that what will be will be [¿because of]. What will be will be [mm] What's the point of sitting thinking about the future? What will happen then and about the side effects [mm] of the medicines [mm] or if there will be new medicines? Or if there aren't any new ones?  
 [mm] If they come, they come [mm] [mm, mm] [Yes, that's good] (I sound admiring and Alkisti laughs contentedly)

We could scarcely have a clearer illustration than this of the transformation of surviving with HIV into a capacity to live in the present. In every utterance Alkisti carefully refrained from looking forwards. This is also a way to separate herself from the infection that has invaded her body. The separation was made possible by placing the self in the present and in her lived experience of being free from physical symptoms of the disease. As I mentioned before, Alkisti's narrative lacked a distinct ending, but it faded out as we both returned to some central themes in her account. One of these was her portrayal of having put AIDS behind her in life and now feeling free of the disease. Towards the end of the conversation she tried to explain to me how this was possible:

- (11) I have shaped my life in such a way (inaudible) that I have AIDS and am satisfied [mm] so that AIDS does not make me feel that I am missing anything [mm] Eh—  
 I don't have it in my brain. I have it in my blood [mm]  
 And I have it only there [mm]. I have no need for (inaudible). So I had no need for (inaudible). But just because it's in my blood I don't let it rule me so that I get it on the brain [mm, mm, I understand]. That's how it is [yes yes].

Her statement can be interpreted as a circumlocution for her reluctance to let HIV occupy her consciousness. Her comment can also be seen as an illustration of the dominant discourse about the division of humans into a physical and a spiritual part, that is, the division that, according to Leder, is facilitated by the tendency of the body to disappear from itself when it works as it is supposed to and is not subject to any kind of impediment. Alkisti's explanation for her ability to keep the infection at a distance from her consciousness is a way to emphasize her dis-appearing body.

Alkisti's and Steve's descriptions of their bodies' dys-appearance or dis-appearance follow Labov's narrative syntax. What stands out as the central complication in both their narratives corresponds to a description of the dys-appearance of the lived body. The resolution of these complications has its counterpart in the reverse tendency, that is, that the body is described as problem-free in the narration or is simply not focused on. The narrative presentation thus corresponds to a description of the transformations of the lived body, from a state in which bodily impediments are not stressed, via its dys-appearance, to its dis-appearance.

### *III. The narrative as body*

While the previous section, "*The body as narrative*" took up a narrator's portrayal of the body in narrated events, this section on "*The narrative as body*" focuses on the presence of the narrator's body in narrative performance. Since I am interested in analyzing the relationship between bodily experiences, narration, and the creation of meaning I will, in this final section, concentrate on the question of how these analytic fields can be linked to one another.

I shall try to make these linkages visible by referring to Thomas Csordas' who regards embodiment and the production of texts as two dialectical partners. He (1994: 12) argues that we should "place the body in a paradigmatic position complementary to the text rather than allowing it to be itself subsumed under the text metaphor". Furthermore he hints at the possibility of investigating "the relation between the semiotic notion of intertextuality and the phenomenological notion of intersubjectivity". In the following I shall discuss this relation as two properties of the narrator, namely, creating meaning and handling experiences. From this starting point I want to approach the epistemological question that I asked at the beginning: To what extent can we obtain knowledge about people's experiences by analysing their speech and narrative?

#### **Intertextuality and subjectivation**

In my earlier studies of the self-understanding of people with leprosy in today's Greece, I have analysed their intertextual strategies as an expression of subjectivation processes (Drakos 1997). With the intertextual perspective I was referring, then as now, to how people make themselves into talking subjects both in relation to discursive orders and to conventions for how they talk about themselves as sick people. My reasoning proceeds from Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman's (1992) actor-oriented problematization of genre and intertextuality. An important point in Briggs and Bauman's argument is that intertextuality is not just a matter of describing intertextual links and relations, but also of focusing the analysis on how such links and relations are established. A fundamental idea is that people consciously either maximize the intertextual gap to other accounts or minimize it. This conscious narrative strategy is expressed, when a person who is HIV-positive describes his or her disease in relationship to other narratives about HIV.

In Steve's life story this way of reasoning could be applied to how he portrayed his ability to be a resource for others. He articulated his self-understanding in this respect by creating continuities between his capacity to be a resource for others in both family and working life. Even the news that he had HIV was presented in the narration as something his mother had received with gratitude, because her worry was replaced by certainty. Above all in the description of his professional role, Steve emphasized his continued capacity to be a resource for others. From an intertextual perspective the life story thus maximizes the intertextual gap to all the insinuations that HIV-positive people themselves are guilty of spreading the infection as well as the gap to all attempts to make homosexuals into scapegoats.

A similar intertextual perspective could be applied in order to understand Alkisti's life story. Her partly contented presentation of her ability to live a better life after her son's death differs from many types of success stories in the world around her but resembles others. An illuminating moment in the conversation with her is the section where she speaks about her mother's reaction, when told about the cause of her grandson's death and her daughter's HIV infection (see quotation 9). Apart from the fact that the her mother's reaction could be linked to the stereotype of HIV-positive people as guilty of spreading infection, the mother's accusation that her dreams had been crushed by Alkisti is telling.

The mother's reaction seems even more violent in that it was directed against Alkisti, who had not only lost her own child but also had the child's deadly infection. Through her life story Alkisti maximizes the intertextual gap to success stories about reproduction as a means to attain immortality. Earlier in the interview, she distanced herself from the medical discourse and from narratives which stress the value of prolonging life at all costs. But with the same narrative she minimizes an intertextual gap to discourses in post-modern society which are characterized by people's tendency to disregard time and emphasize the ability to live in the present.

Although Steve's and Alkisti's life stories and narratives about HIV differ, their intertextual strategies have a common focus. Both make themselves into active subjects of their own self-understanding in relation to dominant narratives which insult them or reduce them to objects for a life on other people's premises. Another common feature is that their intertextual constructions do not just address relations between texts but also ultimately relations between subjects. From an intertextual perspective these subjects are constructed in relation to meaning domains and power relations. An effect of the narration can therefore be that it transforms experiences into a social force.

### **Intersubjectivity and bodily experiences**

Making oneself into a speaking subject proceeds from the lived body as a subject. In other words, this statement means that, for example, the stories that Steve and Alkisti told me proceeded from the way they perceived our meeting in the interview situation and from other, if you will, incarnated experiences. It would be impossible to describe the whole of the reflexive

situation that shapes Steve's and Alkisti's narratives. However, one way to approach the relationship between narrative and experience is to study the types of intersubjective relations portrayed and evoked by narration.

This intersubjectivity was constituted in relation to different levels. Even before they began their life stories and narratives about HIV, relations arose between us in the interview situation. In the conversation with Steve on the first evening in Athens we left the topic of HIV several times and directed our attention towards street musicians or our own meal, which created a kind of co-subjectivity in the conversation context. By using Swedish we were able to talk freely and cut ourselves off from people around us. When Steve was able to return to his narrative after various interruptions we left our co-subjectivity, whereby different experiences and understandings of ourselves and our different bodily dispositions probably made themselves felt more.

My interview with Alkisti can be described in a similar way. However, we devoted more time at the start of the conversation to establishing an intersubjective relation between ourselves, because we had not met before and because Alkisti was not as well informed about my study as Steve was. The conversation context was different because we met in my temporary accommodation and were interrupted only once, by a telephone call. Just after that call, however, Alkisti returned immediately to her narrative as if nothing had happened. In both her and Steve's narrative I was brought into the centre of events and affected by their accounts. They both involved me in the stories they told and gave me the feeling of sharing their experiences.

That feeling grew particularly strong when Alkisti told me about the discovery that her son had AIDS. What happened was that I myself, as a father of small children, felt an intense grief, which of course was my own and not hers. I nevertheless felt relief and admiration for her ability to handle difficult existential conflicts in her narration. I was reminded of this reaction in myself, which I also recalled from the conversation with Steve, when I listened to the recorded interviews. In the conversation with Alkisti, for example, I heard how we joined in delighted laughter over her description of her ability to live a rich life despite being constantly accompanied by HIV. When I later listened to the interview with Steve, I received confirmation for my recollection of how I perceived the conversation as both easy-going and thought-provoking. Both conversations left me with a feeling of optimism rather than depression.

One explanation for this has to do with how intersubjectivity was established in the narrative situations. The feeling of sharing the narrator's experiences is dependent on the intersubjective relation that is established in the narrative situation with the aid of the narrative and the ability to speak to the listener's bodily dispositions and lived experiences. Conversely, not being affected by a narrative can be due to the failure of the narrator to forge links between himself as a subject and the listener as a subject. The listener's subjective involvement is an expression of what the narrative has achieved, but also what the listener himself has done with the narrative. In that sense the narrative established its own world of experience where the narrator and the listener meet as subjects and where new experiences arise.

With the intertextual perspective on narration I have made visible how Steve and Alkisti went about convincing me about the message in their narratives. This was a matter of adapting the stories to formal criteria for narrating. As Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman (1992) have shown, genres are by nature intertextually constructed for strategic purposes. Narratives are always delivered based on some model for narration, whether the narrator distances himself from or comes close to other texts intertextually. From that point of view, it is no chance that both Steve's and Alkisti's narratives took on the form and content that they did. I have previously mentioned how I noted similarities between Steve's narratives in the interviews with me and in his narratives as a lecturer and author. Alkisti's narratives were probably also shaped intertextually in relation to her own repeated narratives and in relation to other accounts. Therein lies the strategic construction of the narratives. Whereas the establishment of intersubjective relations in connection with narration is a kind of condition for making it possible in the first place, intertextual strategies are a rhetorical means to achieve the desired result of the narration.

To sum up, I wish to underline that I view narration as an activity that is at once intertextual and intersubjective. This dual perspective on the analysis of narrative indicates possibilities of revealing links between meaning creation and experiences. Narration and meaning creation are a way to handle experiences. By taking my point of departure in narration as an embodied activity, I have tried to show that analyses of narration can point to the lived experiences in which the narration is rooted and show how experiences are processed with the aid of the storytelling and how storytelling can give rise to new experiences. This way the research interest is focused on the constantly alternating interplay between narration and experiences.

*Translated by  
Alan Crozier*

## NOTES

- 1 In the year of 2000 I started a comparative study in Sweden and Greece about the ways in which family members handle their own life situation and the life situation they share with HIV/AIDS. My doctoral dissertation was about the self-understanding of people with leprosy in today's Greece (Drakos 1997).
- 2 To protect Alkisti's identity, her name and some of her personal particulars have been changed.
- 3 The interviews are part of the research project "Illness, Family, and Friends: Close Relationships and Medical Advances to Prevent HIV and AIDS", which is being carried out with support from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Drakos 2005).
- 4 The EU project initiated by The Noah's Ark Red Cross Foundation in 1997 is entitled "Targeting family members, friends and partners of people with HIV in order to offer informative, emotional and practical support".
- 5 In the transcribed extracts from the interview I have used the following conventions:

Pausing: Left line indented indicates pause.

Interrupted utterance: a slash after the utterance/

An incomplete utterance ends with two dots..

Drawn-out words: a dash after the word–

Emphasis: underlined

Interjected acknowledgement, objections: [in brackets]

Interjected questions, or start of questions: [¿question]

Words spoken in English: *italics*

My comments: (in parentheses)

Words or phrases in later quotations which are quoted in Greek are transcribed according to phonetic principles and rendered in Latin letters. Some of the ability of the transcription to convey the oral style gets lost in translation, especially in the later quotations of Alkisti's speech and narrative, which were first translated by me into Swedish and later rendered in English by a professional translator. The analysis, however, is based on my listening to the recorded interviews and reading the transcriptions in Swedish and Greek.

- 6 Alkisti made these critical remarks after having read an earlier version of this article.
- 7 In an earlier version of this article I changed the sex of Alkisti's child from a son to a daughter, in order to protect her identity. Despite my good intentions, Alkisti asked me to correct this after reading the article. She explained that it is particularly important for women, or at least for women in Greece, to give birth to a son, which meant that the loss of her child was even greater than if it had been a daughter.
- 8 Alkisti wove some English words and expressions into our conversation in Greek. These words and expressions are italicized here.
- 9 A section has been left out to protect Alkisti's identity.
- 10 In Greek speech AIDS is sometimes used synonymously with HIV, as is the case in the quotation. The confusion is often seen in the expression *foréas tu AIDS*, literally "carrier of AIDS", used to denote a carrier of HIV. In official usage the word *orothetikós* (positive) is now preferred to denote HIV-positive.
- 11 The interest of medical science in narration about disease has varied over time. At the start of the twentieth century Swedish doctors generally showed very little interest in listening to the patient's narratives (Hydén 1997). In the last few years, however, it is noticeable that narration has been emphasized as a central topic in medicine in Sweden and elsewhere (Charon 1994, cf Svenaeus 2000).
- 12 In his book Steve cites the wording of the poster, but with the word "both", which was presumably forgotten in his oral account (Sjöquist 1999: 28).

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## The Actors in Young Women's Childbirth Narratives

Then I struggled and exactly 10 minutes later he was born. But the midwife said (laughter) that she couldn't have done any more either, that all her strength was gone, too. So you could say we worked really hard, all three of us /.../ And the midwife was also good, very matter-of-fact. It took some time for us to find a mutual wavelength and start co-operating, but when we did I gave her my full support (IF mgt 1995/130).

In a conversation with me, first-time mother Konstance chooses this way to tell me about her experience of the birth of her child, of the actual moment of birth. She describes how long she had to push before her child was born and she describes who was present at the scene. She emphasizes the co-operation that took place between herself, the midwife and the father-to-be. She evaluates both her own contribution and that of the two others. The fact that the birth took place at the delivery ward of a hospital is not directly stated, but it is implied. Thus, this story contains a description and evaluation of events, time, place, and actors, which is to say, what are the narrative elements of a story (Bal 1985). In this article, I will focus on one of these narrative elements: the actors.

### *Background and aim of the study*

Konstance is one of the women whom I interviewed for my research<sup>1</sup> into how first-time mothers verbalise the physical experience of giving birth and how this textualisation process varies over time. The material of the study consists of thematic, in-depth interviews with 14 Swedish-speaking first-time mothers<sup>2</sup> in south-west Finland during the years 1994–97, on their experiences of giving birth. I interviewed the first-time mothers<sup>3</sup> on three different occasions: once before the birth, once soon after it, and once when the child was about one year old. In the interviews, the women were asked to give a coherent account of their experience, first one month after the birth (narrative I), and then a year later (narrative II). Thus, there were two narratives to compare over time. The repeated interviews have given me

a chance to study how the experience is described and re-interpreted after the passing of a year. The two versions were, naturally, influenced by the interview situation, not only in terms of our interaction, but also in terms of the women's motivation to narrate and their ability to verbalise their experiences in a narrative form.

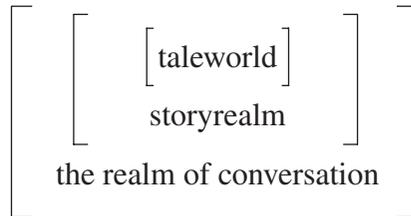
The women were very willing to tell me about their experience; this was probably partly due to our shared experience of childbirth. The narratives demonstrate a common pattern according to which the following events are described: most of the narratives begin with the woman sensing that she is going into labour and deciding that it is time to go to the hospital. Both the departure from home and the arrival at the hospital are recounted. She describes how she was received at the maternity ward and the dilatation stage of the labour. The narrative culminates in the bearing down and the actual delivery. The narrative is concluded with an account of the first encounter with the child and the final stages of labour after the delivery, and simultaneously the experience of childbirth is evaluated. The narrative's pattern or structure following the corporeal, physiological course of events is based partly on narrative models such as expert literature and other mothers' stories of their childbirth, partly on the narrator's knowledge of the construction or pattern of narratives (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996). However, this pattern is only a point of departure for the narration. The narratives turn into vivid accounts through the women's individual ways of narrating and through the choices they make to describe the memory of their experience. The stories become meaningful through the explanations, evaluations and significances that they present. I define the verbalisation of the experience, the childbirth narratives, as personal experience narratives (Stahl 1977).

In this article, I want to analyze how the women in their accounts of their experiences describe and characterize the participating actors. The women present narratives in which each one of the actors is assigned a specific role. A narrative about a childbirth experience can be analysed as a "childbirth drama", where the events are recounted as if they took place on a stage and the actors take on certain roles (Goffman 1959). Even if the description of the experience of giving birth to a child can be interpreted as a self-presentation, the woman narrating her experience is not alone on the stage. What other actors do we encounter in the narrative, who is the woman giving birth said to co-operate with and how is the interaction between these actors recounted? How is a new entry onto the stage described? To what roles are the actors assigned - and when do these roles change in the narrative? What part does corporeality play in this context? What insight into the discursive context of the narrative - in this case the discursive field of childbirth - does such an analysis render?

In this article I am particularly concerned with how the narrators themselves choose to present the actors and the interaction between them. My theoretical points of departure are Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach focusing on drama, stage and roles (1959) and Katharine Galloway Young's model of the relationship between narrative, narration and conversation (1987).

## *Narrative and narration: actors and events*

When talking about the events that are described in a narrative and about the actors inhabiting it, we have to distinguish between the narrator's reflections on the events, the narrative and the narration. The events in a narrative and the narration as an event are not the same thing. In *Taleworlds and Storyrealms* (1987), Katharine Galloway Young provides an analytical framework for the relation between narrative, narration and conversation. Her basic idea is that the events recounted in a narrative, and the actual retelling of these, have a different ontological status – they exist in different realms.<sup>4</sup>



*Figure 1.*

*The relation between the different realms of narrative according to Young (1987).*

Young distinguishes between the different realms in conversation, namely, the events in the narrative (the Taleworld), the recounting and presentation of the Taleworld in the form of a narrative (the Storyrealm), and the realm of the conversation itself. The conversation may be seen as the discourse situation in which narratives are told and is in this case identical with the interview situation. Young says:

Stories, themselves events in conversation, direct attention to another realm of events not in the conversation, the Taleworld. While opening onto the Taleworld, the story retains in its own status as an enclave in conversation, a Storyrealm (Young 1987: 15).

The Taleworld has its own time, its own space, and its own characters, figures or actors, while the Storyrealm exists while the narrative is being performed, here and now. In a narrative the narrator switches between these realms, leading the listener into the Taleworld by means of the Storyrealm (ibid 1987: 14ff.). The Taleworld, that is, the world that the first-time mothers in my material recount in the conversation, is inhabited by people who carry out actions in a certain time and in a certain space. They lead me to this world, where the childbirth takes place, through the Storyrealm<sup>5</sup>, the narrative strategy or composition technique with conventions typical of its genre, and the events the mother chooses to present, and which she uses to get the listener to imagine the world she is describing. Of course, there are also alternative accounts.

The stage or the world which, in this case, the birth-giver has chosen to take me into when narrating her experience is inhabited by characters, or actors. The actors in the Taleworld are on one level and the narrating self in the Storyrealm at another. Young describes the relation between these as follows: "self as storyteller (realm of conversation) presents a character as self (Taleworld)" (Young 1987: 106). However, in narratives of one's own experiences, the narrating self and the central actor overlap to a certain extent – these are recounts of events where the narrating self is also the main character in the events described. In addition, other actors or characters are presented in the narrative. Young's model is interesting as it reveals some of the different levels of narration. Her concepts open up opportunities to analyse narratives recounted in an interview situation and help to understand their internal relations (Marander-Eklund 2000b, see also Nylund Skog 2002).

Young's framework for analysing the relation between narratives and narration is influenced by the dramaturgical approach of her teacher, Erving Goffman. Goffman sees the actor as having a part in a performance. It is a question of how individuals act in various situations and present themselves in relation to other people. He divides the individual into two parts: the individual as actor and as having a certain role. This is a combination of a personal front and a collective representation (Goffman 1959: 21ff). Goffman's symbolic, interactionist theory pertains to the actions and roles of individuals in everyday life. In my analysis, I use a simplified version of his dramaturgical approach. Primarily, I analyze how the actors in the Taleworld are given more or less fixed roles, how they are allowed to perform on "the stage" and how they are said to interact in a narrative world which is controlled by the narrator.

The concept of the actor implies a duality. On the one hand, there are the actors or "inhabitants" whom the narrator describes in the Taleworld – the characters that take the events forward. On the other hand, the actors are also related to a more social, discursive level. In a narrative of personal experiences these two concepts of the actor more or less coincide. In this article, I will mainly focus on the actors in the Taleworld. This does not mean that I assume that there is an unambiguous, one-to-one ratio between experience and narrative. The narrative is a construction where the personal experiences of the narrator are put in relation to, among others, the narrator's personality, narrative conventions and the performance situation. In addition, I will show that the analysis of the way in which the actors are described in a narrative also reflects the view of actors on a more societal, discursive level. In this context, it is interesting to see how the women position themselves within their narratives as birth-givers (and as women and mothers) in relation to the broader discourse on childbirth in the contemporary western world. This discourse mainly focuses on either so-called natural birth without medical interventions or on a medical birth defined by the hospital's terms. These two discursive, partly competing views emerge in the media, medical literature, among the antenatal care staff, and in the narratives of other birth-givers (Fjell et al 1998, Marander-Eklund 1998a).

### *The birth-giver – director or patient?*

The central actor of the narrative is the narrating self, that is, the first-time mother herself. Her body is the seat of the experience she recounts. Her position as a strong subject, as a strong “I”, varies in different parts of the narrative. The women in my material emphasize their “I” in varying degrees, depending on, for example, their narrative styles, but also on how active they are in the actual labour process in relation to the midwife and other staff, and on how much they underline their corporeality in their narrative. The activity takes place on several levels; on the one hand, as a narrating self and, on the other, as birth-giver. As narrator the birth-giver can present herself as having no wish to direct the course of events, or as an active performer directing the delivery process and challenging conventional maternity care. The birth-giver’s presentation of self in the narrative is often strongly influenced by the way in which she positions herself in on-going debates concerning childbirth (Marander-Eklund 1998b).

Initially, the women usually focus their narratives strongly on themselves. They use their own bodies as points of departure. Dagmar recounts and evaluates the changes in her body as emanating from her own “self”:

On Tuesday I walked about quite a bit, I took quite a long walk in the afternoon and sometime around four I started feeling a little something. I hadn’t felt such contractions that were painful before (IF mgt 1994/63).

The self is clearly at the centre when the woman describes her physical reactions. The pregnant woman aims at being admitted to the delivery ward, to change the spatial setting for the events from her home to the hospital. The women in my material want to come to the delivery ward in order to get a confirmation that their labour has begun. They wish to change their role from being a pregnant woman to being a birth-giver. In their narratives, they recount their negotiations with the midwives about this in order to, at least partially, transfer the responsibility into the hands of professionals. Being accepted into the community of birth-giving women constitutes a change of roles marked by a change of clothes from one’s private garments and into patient attire. The woman is allowed to enter the delivery room where she will eventually be given a new identity – that of a mother. Being accepted as birth-giver is often recounted with relief: now they no longer have to wait and think about when the labour will start.

In the maternity ward the women encounter authoritative expert knowledge (Jordan 1994) represented by the hospital staff, an expertise that the women rely on to varying degrees – and that can be interpreted as an expression of positional power, that is, a form of power conferred on a person because of hers or his professional position (Meurling 1996). This is noticeable in the position that the women take on in their narratives in relation to the midwives and the rest of the staff, and in relation to who makes the decisions and who directs the childbirth. In the continued account of their experience the

birth-givers appear as varying strong selves depending on their description of their own share in the delivery situation. Do they regard themselves as directors of the delivery process, in some sense controlling the situation and their bodies? Do they gratefully receive the services offered by the health-care professionals? Or do they take on a position in between these two? As noted, the degree to which the women want to direct the childbirth process reflects their attitude towards the surrounding discursive field of childbirth, primarily towards so called natural versus medical childbirth. However, it must be kept in mind that birth-givers cannot always select their roles. A woman giving birth might wish for greater control over the process, but cannot attain this because of the nature of the particular childbirth process. Yet another aspect is that *in the narratives* the women may want to appear as birth-givers who had the situation well in hand, although this may not actually have been the case during delivery. The narration reveals to whom the narrator wants to give the role of expert – the birth-giver or the midwife. This role can also be subject to negotiation both in the narrative and at the maternity ward. Charlotte Hagström (1999) points to the ambivalent attitude towards expertise typical for today's parents-to-be. Their attitude is a mixture of trust and distrust. On the one hand, the women want to trust the hospital staff, on the other; they want to be their own experts.

About one third of the women in this study describe their role in the childbirth situation as that of being in charge. They place themselves right in the middle of the stage directing the events from the standpoint of their selves and their bodies. A kind of concentration takes place, so that the stage no longer consists of the birth-giver in a delivery room. Rather, the birth-giver's *body* becomes the focal point of the stage. These women underline their expert role and also appear as strong selves in their narratives. Hagar describes a knowingly active role, a role that she had strenuously worked to attain since she held a positive attitude towards the ideal of a natural childbirth. Gudrun's labour did not start by itself as she had hoped for, but was induced following an examination. At this stage, Gudrun does not describe herself as the one controlling the process, as director of the course of events. But once her labour had proceeded to a point where she could take command, she did so. She recounts how she did not want to lie still while her CTG was to be taken, she did not want epidural anaesthesia even if she was offered that option. She emphasized how she wanted to be able to climb onto the delivery table when it was time to bear down the child and how this is what happened.

In her narrative also Flora emphasizes her need to appear active and in control of events. She presents herself as strong and talks about the inner gaze, a need to turn her gaze into her body, to enter into herself and being able to meet the pain (Fjell 1998). When talking about the other persons surrounding her, Flora says:

But I didn't really notice them; perhaps I was too much into my own circles there. /.../ Of course I was a bit worried about my own pain (laughter)

/.../ In a way I was afraid that I wouldn't have the situation under control (IF mgt 1995/32).

The quotation shows that Flora in her narrative reflects on her own role and activity – she relates how she experiences a threat of losing control, which in her case means allowing pain to take over. She explicitly expresses her fear that this would happen. The body is the central stage in her case and in the case of other women who describe themselves as having a leading, directing role during labour.

The other birth-givers do not describe themselves as directors, or as having an active role in the childbirth situation. Ingegård describes herself as quite dependent on the midwife, who was the expert, and she did not take on a particularly leading role. Nevertheless, Ingegård's "self" is strongly present in her narrative. She herself took the initiative to ask for an epidural, but could not control the actual delivery, since her child was born with the aid of a vacuum extractor. In Dagmar's narrative, the staff decides to introduce a drip and an epidural and they tell her when to bear down. Although Judit appears as a relatively energetic actor in her account, firmly stating, for example, that "I suppose I myself do know (laughter) how much my stomach hurts" (IF mgt 1995/102), her own self is not strongly present. She often talks about "one" when she actually means herself.

The narratives of Marta and Lea are examples of the fact that an expressed wish to direct the process of childbirth does not necessarily represent a positive attitude toward natural childbirth. Both Marta and Lea insisted on having a Caesarean section, which the staff tried to avoid as far as possible. In their narratives they negotiate with the experts – the opinions of the staff and the birth-givers regarding the best solution did not coincide. Carita's narrative is one of those in which the narrator begins with a relatively strong self: she herself asks for an epidural. But the focus shifts onto the staff as a joint decision on a vacuum suction delivery is taken. The result is that Carita is relegated to a peripheral role, which she does not like.

And when we had decided to use it [suction], a lot of doctors suddenly appeared. It was almost unpleasant since they, like, swarmed in, all those people, and there one lay and thought, oh, what's going on. Then another midwife arrived who, like, jumped on my stomach and a doctor, a gynaecologist, a paediatrician and a child nurse. They wanted to check right away that everything had gone all right, what with the suction (IF mgt 1994/55).

Even if all narrators in their narrated roles as birth-givers are not equally active, none lacks willpower entirely. While they may not express clear opinions on the actions taken by the medical staff, none of them gives herself an explicitly passive patient role. Instead, they speak about co-operation, or about a (hierarchical) dependence on the midwives and doctors. Dagmar recounts a feeling of helplessness in the childbirth situation which shows that she wanted to pass over the responsibility and expertise to the staff:

I thought that I would never have pulled this through on my own. I've no idea (laughter) how people who give birth at home [manage]. /.../ I would have died (laughter), that's how I felt, that if somebody else hadn't taken the responsibility for it I don't know what would've happened (IF mgt 1994/63).

In the stories the women told one year after giving birth (narrative II), the birth-givers are still the central actors. Here, too, the self is particularly visible at the beginning of the narrative and when the birth-giver recounts what is happening in her body; but this is true also when she thinks back on the events and comments on them with "I remember". The self is central to the narrative. There is also, however, a certain distance to the events and the birth-giver does not now feel such a need to display a strong self. In some cases, the women communicate a state of greater loneliness in narrative II than in narrative I. Even though both the partners and staff play a role as actors in narrative II, the second narrative is, nevertheless, the birth-givers "own" to an even greater extent than narrative I. This is probably due to the fact that in narrative I the birth-givers want to recount their experience as realistically and truthfully as possible, and therefore present all actors in greater detail than later. In her second narrative, Konstance evaluates her view of herself and her own body in the birth-giving situation as follows: "Somehow I was /.../ so self-centred in that situation /.../ that I hadn't the strength to think very much about anything else than myself" (IF mgt 1996/71).

Thus, the birth-giver is the central actor in both the first and the second narrative, and she is particularly dominant in the beginning of it. Her body is the point of departure, crucial for the staging of the events. The woman undergoes two role changes in the narrative: from pregnant woman to birth-giver and from birth-giving woman to mother. The strength of the self described in the women's narratives varies depending on their notion of who has an expert role and is in control of events. None of the birth-givers give themselves a truly passive patient role, even if some of them express dependence on the midwife.

### *Midwife – expert or helper?*

The midwife is the actor we meet in the narratives at the moment either when the birth-giver negotiates whether she can be admitted to the hospital or not or when she arrives at the maternity ward. The midwife functions as a border guard (Fjell 1998) to the delivery ward and is the one who decides who is invited to stay and who is recommended to return later. Ingegård recounts how she was requested to stay at the hospital:

We decided to drive there at around eight in the morning. At half past eight we were there, and /.../ then the midwife examined me and said that I had opened three cm. And that it meant that I could stay. /.../ I lay for quite a while and followed the heartbeats and the contractions. Then I

could go and have a shower, change into hospital clothes, and then I was allowed to go into the delivery room (IF mgt 1995/80).

The expression “I could stay” indicates that she was allowed to stay at the maternity ward, but that this was in no way to be taken for granted. The midwife noted that Ingegård’s labour had started, which was confirmed by a physical measure: the mouth of the uterus was 3 cm open, and she was allowed to dress in hospital clothes. The midwife’s role as a border guard is particularly obvious in Hagar’s narrative, since Hagar is sent back home from the hospital, even twice, with the reason that her labour has not yet started.

In her research, Tove Fjell presents the midwife’s role as that of guest rather than host. This is, according to her, strongly connected with notions of who is the expert in the childbirth situation. The co-operation between birth-giver and midwife is also emphasized in Fjell’s Norwegian material (Fjell 1998: 109ff). My narrative material does not show the midwife’s role as that of guest; rather, this is a role that the woman negotiates in her narration. The birth-givers’ narratives reveal that the midwife plays an important role for the women and that they were keen to maintain a good relation to her. Narrators often spontaneously comment on and evaluate her, often in positive terms. In these cases, the birth-giver and midwife have got on well, and the midwife is regarded as supportive in every sense.

Dagmar describes her midwives in a neutral tone; she does not give any evaluative statements about them, yet it is clear in her narrative that she was highly dependent on them. In their narratives, few of the birth-givers spontaneously say anything negative about the midwives. Hagar is an exception; she was dissatisfied since she was sent home twice. Judit is another exception: she thought she was treated rudely by the person at the hospital reception. The interaction between the midwife and themselves is an essential part of the birth-givers narratives. This interaction entails both co-operation and a will to co-operate, and in certain cases also dependence based on a hierarchical power relation.

The midwife moves between the delivery room and the control room. Some of the narratives reveal that the birth-givers wished that the midwife would have spent more time with them, they felt abandoned when the midwife was out of sight. Sociological studies show that birth-givers experience midwives’ passivity and absence as something negative (Ruusuvaori 1992: 47). The midwife is given particular visibility in the narratives when decisions on measures are taken and when the woman bears down the child.

The midwife is accorded a highly visible role in Hagar’s narrative, as she repeatedly points out that she was grateful for being able to give birth in a natural way with a midwife who supported her wish. After the baby is born, the midwife often takes on a more invisible role in the narrative. Frequently, narrators mention her using an impersonal “she” or “they”. In the narratives recounting a Caesarean section, the midwife has a lesser role than in the narratives where the woman gives birth in co-operation with a midwife.

In narrative II, the women give their midwives an even more peripheral role than in narrative I. In the second narrative she is seldom given the role of

a border guard and more frequently mentioned as part of the staff, as “they”, “she”, “the person” or “the lady”. Neither is the midwife evaluated in the second narrative, although some birth-givers express critical comments. The co-operation between birth-giver and midwife is also described in narrative II, but at this stage the narrators seldom have as great a need as before to underline the midwife's role in the course of events.

Thus, the midwife is given the role of border guard, expert, or guest to varying degrees by various narrators, depending on the extent to which they want, or expect, to get expert direction. The midwife is accorded the role of helper, but this role is described differently depending on the way in which the birth-giver emphasizes her own activity in her narrative. The women's expectations concerning the actions of the midwife, as expert or as helper, are also formed by their positions in the debates on childbirth.

### *The father – helper or absent man?*

Many of the women narrate their experiences partly from their personal perspective, partly from the perspective of “we”. Some narrators relate the changes in their bodies (such as the onset of regular contractions) to the reaction of their partners, saying that “we started timing them” or “we didn't really know how soon one should go [to the hospital]” (IF mgt 1994/66). Nanny uses both “I” and “we”. She says “we were overdue”, which shows that the childbirth was a joint project for the couple; however, the “we” can also be interpreted as consisting of herself and the baby. Flora often refers to conversations with her husband: “I said to Fredrik” and “then he said that you'd better phone in and check” (IF mgt 1995/32). Here, they discuss the decision about when to leave for the hospital. This decision is usually taken jointly. Carita describes her situation as follows:

We walked here back and forth and thought about it and then sat down to watch TV. They [the contractions] became more and more regular and more frequent. Then they actually came with an interval of only seven and five minutes and then we thought about whether we should go to bed or drive to the hospital. We decided to go to the hospital (IF mgt 1994/55).

The father-to-be, is given a relatively prominent role in the beginning of the narrative, when the couple decides to leave their home and drive to the hospital. Once at the delivery ward, he is given a more peripheral role in the narrative, even if he is present in it. Two of the narratives are exceptions in that no man is present at all; Dagmar recounts her experience of giving birth alone and Ingegård had a female friend as her support person. The father-to-be is described as the one who gives the birth-giver drink, massages her back during the dilatation stage, supports her on the delivery stool, encourages her while bearing down, and as company against feelings of loneliness. He gets the role of assistant. In Konstance's narrative her partner is strongly present, and she comments on this as follows:

I'm very, very pleased that Kristian was there and that he gave such good support through it all. I'd never dreamt of anything like the support that I got (IF mgt 1995/130).

In some narratives the male partner is present only in so far that he is mentioned. He does not act, however. In these narratives the woman also typically does not say what he did and did not do during the actual moment of birth. At this point she, the birth-giver, is the main character and the midwife supporting actor. However, after the actual birth, he is given greater presence than during the birth itself. The woman describes how the man cut the umbilical cord and participated in bathing the newborn baby. Some describe touching family scenes. Carita, who was too tired to hold her child after the birth, relates the following about her experience of the father's contribution:

And then they put him [the baby] in Daddy's arms, and I felt it was so very safe that Daddy was there. Since then the baby wasn't immediately given to strange people, but either Mummy or Daddy was there to take care of him at once (IF mgt 1994/55).

This quotation shows that her husband has acquired a new role as father, which Carita clearly indicates by here using the word "Daddy" rather than her husband's first name, as she did before.

Even if the father was present at the childbirth in 12 cases out of 14, he is described as an actor in the narratives in varying degrees. On the whole, the man can be said to be given a surprisingly small part in the narratives, particularly during the phase when the woman is bearing down and mainly focusing on herself. Within Norwegian maternity care, which is directed towards a private, home-like atmosphere, the father-to-be is encouraged to actually participate and not just be present at the birth as a step in the direction of society's attempt to make the creation of families a more intimate event (Fjell 1998, see also Hagström 1999). In my material childbirth is indeed portrayed as an intimate family event. However, the women's narratives do not highlight the participation of the men. The absence of men in the narratives might possibly be explained by the fact that the women present themselves as the main characters; that childbirth, after all, is a woman's "job" as well as her bodily experience, an experience which she finds hard to share – despite the emphasis in the contemporary western world on childbirth as a family event. Another possible explanation is that the presence of the man is seen as so self-evident that his actions do not need to be commented on in the narrative.

The man is given an even more peripheral role in the narratives the women told one year after the birth. He is present in references of the type "my husband was asleep" (IF mgt 1995/50),"then I went with my husband to the cafeteria" (IF mgt 1996/73) or "Fredrik was somewhere in the corridor" (IF mgt 1996/21). In other words, he may be mentioned, but he does not act

independently and only infrequently does he have a helping role. In many second narratives he is included in the form of a "we", but less frequently than in the first one. In a few second narratives the male character is less than peripheral. Marta, for example, gives her partner an active role in the decision to perform a Caesarean section; she says that it was following his pressure that the doctor decided to use it. Also Hagar gives her husband an active role, emphasizing how he massaged her back and translated her messages to the midwife from Swedish into Finnish<sup>6</sup>. Exceptionally, in Carita's narratives the male partner is even more strongly present in narrative II than in narrative I. He is present throughout the narrative and Carita also evaluates this as follows:

Curre sat on the toilet seat [while Carita had a massaging shower] and read out Trivial Pursuit questions (laughter), to make me think of something else. Afterwards I've thought that this was quite good, since then I had something to think about and he had something to do. He didn't just have to stand there and think oh, oh /.../. And then afterwards it was so wonderful that Curre was there, since then there was immediately somebody from the family to take care of Carl [the baby] (IF mgt 1995/45).

The male figure is described in the narratives in the form of a "we", a partner in the joint project that childbirth is said to be in contemporary discourse. However, as an independent actor he is surprisingly peripheral, both at the beginning of narration when he comes forth as a helper and at the end, when he is transformed into a father.

### *The anonymous staff*

The birth-givers do not only speak about their encounters with the midwife, but also about their relationship to the rest of the hospital staff. Staff members are described in fairly impersonal terms in the narratives as "they", "them" or "she". "They" carried out examinations and "they" checked the heartbeat; "they" made decisions on actions to be taken and "they" noted that the amniotic fluid was green. This does not mean that the birth-giver did not have any opinions on who she wanted to be present in the delivery room (cf. Fjell 1998). Rather, the staff is collectivized; in the narratives it does not matter who is carrying out the actions. It is more important that the staff, "they", provide expert knowledge and co-operate with the woman giving birth. The fact that the women describe the staff in impersonal terms, makes the birth-giver stand out even more clearly as an independently acting and narrating self. Referring to the staff as "they" is, of course, also a narrative technique – specifying who they are is unnecessary, since it is obvious from the context.

The doctors are most probably included in the collective "they", but the women still often underline the entry of the doctor onto the stage. This is probably due to the fact that the doctors only visit the delivery room in order to examine the woman, make decisions on measures to be taken, be present at vacuum suction deliveries and, of course, to perform Caesarean sections.

The mention of doctors in the narratives is also an expression of positional power and sometimes also of gendered power. Anita, who had a Caesarean, clearly recounts what staff enters the stage – the surgery nurse, the midwife, the anaesthetist, the surgeon and finally the paediatrician. Ingegård describes the staff in connection with the bearing down phase:

And then people started coming in, whoever they were, paediatricians and then some others when I needed help. One of them squeezed my stomach, one pushed up my knees, and one said breathe like this, and now you can bear down (IF mgt 1996/80).

The doctors assume a prominent role in narratives recounting experiences of Caesarean sections. Lea and Marta describe negotiations between the doctor/staff and the mother-to-be/couple on whether an operation should be carried out or not. In both cases the staff/doctor tried to postpone the decision to operate. Lea describes the vulnerability a birth-giver can feel when her will is ignored:

And the doctor wanted to postpone it [the Caesarean] all the time; he talked about it perhaps taking till the morning. Then I myself started thinking no-o ... do they really want me to give birth (laughter) the normal way /.../. I almost got really angry (laughter) when they didn't care (IF mgt 1995/13).

The women describe the staff in various ways. Most of them are relatively neutral in their statements. Dagmar, however, mentions a student she thought was obtrusive, and Nanny speaks about her worries about not being able to maintain her control of the situation and her dignity in front of unfamiliar staff. Carita is the only one expressing a directly negative opinion about the staff and primarily about the doctor. In narrative II she recounts how she was stitched after the birth by a doctor who only talked to her husband:

I thought, bloody bastard (laughter) I want to kick you in the face and send you flying into the corner. For somehow he didn't care at all about me, but he only talked to the boys (IF mgt 1995/45).

This quotation illustrates the doctor's gendered and positional power. The women described the doctors and the other staff even more collectively and impersonally in their narrative one year later. However, the differences were not significant.

### *Focus on the child*

In their narratives, the women describe yet another actor, that is, the baby who is the result of the childbirth and who gives the woman and the man new roles. Naturally, the child is not given an independent role at this stage. But

it is nevertheless central in the narratives. In this way the narrators appear to be in accordance with the importance given to contact and affinity with the unborn child in contemporary thought, an idea that is central in attempts to introduce a more individual-oriented and intimate maternity care (Fjell 1998, 127ff). In many narratives the child is not called by its name, particularly so in narrative I. Here the child is usually referred to as "she/he", but also as "the child" or "the baby".

The child is referred to as she or he from the very beginning of the narrative, even before the birth, when the first-time-mother in fact does not know the sex of the child. Judit points this out and talks about "it" in the beginning of her narrative. Sometimes the child is mentioned already before the birth at the beginning of the narrative, but it is more common that it enters the narrative in connection with the events surrounding the birth and taking place directly after it. Carita provides an example of a distanced way of recounting the events of the birth and thus also the child: "But then at last he came" (IF mgt 1994/55). After the child is born, and has entered onto the stage, its features are sometimes described. Konstance, for example, laughingly talks about her child's slack, "spaghetti-like arms and legs" (IF mgt 1995/130). But all the women do not describe their child in such a distanced way. Benita mentions hers by name and with great tenderness. Ingegärd recounts her first encounter with her baby as follows:

She [the midwife] held her up and showed her to me, and wanted me to see for myself which kind it was. Then I got her here on my chest. She felt so warm and wonderful (IF mgt 1995/80).

The confirmation of the child's sex is also recounted in some of the narratives. In Marta's case this confirmation is central, and she reports it in the form of an anecdotal, finished narrative in which she emphasizes that she was quite certain that the child would be a boy and it still turned out to be a girl. Some of the narratives depict a warm, familiar feeling after the baby is born; in these narratives the child, together with the recent parents, is in focus and thus becomes one of the main characters. Benita recounts:

And then I just kept looking at Bo... my son, who lay on my stomach. And then I thought yes, now you're here, and all this is for you (with tenderness) /.../ Then she [the midwife] left me or all three of us /.../ He was now lying under the blanket, Bo, and we lay there and looked at him and chatted (laughter) like you do (IF mgt 1994/60).

In the narratives told one year after the birth, i.e. narrative II, the child is given a much more central role than in narrative I. This is so obvious that it could be claimed that the first-time mother is the main character in narrative I, while the child holds the central role in narrative II. The child is often mentioned by name, as in the quotation above, and is present in the narrative from the outset. The child is frequently described with great tenderness, as a "tiny bundle" (IF mgt 1994/58) and as "the little one" (IF mgt 1996/21).

The experience of childbirth, of getting a child, is now evaluated in positive terms, as Hagar does in her second narrative: "It's the best thing that's ever happened to me" (IF mgt 1996/49). Ingegård talks about the incredible fact that the child is born: "I couldn't believe that it was my daughter" (IF mgt 1996/47). Nanny speaks a great deal about the child and ponders her role as mother. In narrative II, it is clear that the women recount their experience of childbirth after a year's experience of being a mother.

In addition, it is obvious that in the cases where the child was present during the interview, the narrator gives the child a more visible and active role in her narrative. However, the harmonious family situation is not described so clearly in narrative II, partly because the husband or partner is now given a more obscure role than he held a year before. With a few exceptions, the attitude toward the child is distanced in narrative I. It can be said that that narrative is not about giving birth to a *child*, but rather about the achievement of *giving birth*. In narrative II the women focus on the child to a greater extent than before. Now, motherhood, which the woman has internalized a year after the birth, functions as a filter through which the narrative is formed.

### *Conclusion*

The Taleworld in a narrative on childbirth experience is populated by several "inhabitants" or actors. These have various roles in the narrative and are ascribed various roles in the drama enacted on the stage. The birth-giver is the main character of the narrative. She recounts the events using her bodily experience as point of departure, thus giving the narrative "I" a strong presence. Sometimes, her role is that of director of the drama, less frequently she portrays herself as patient. The woman recounts how she changes roles from pregnant woman to birth-giver and finally to mother. In the narratives, the midwife is given the role as primary co-operation partner of the birth-giver, as border guard, expert and helper whereas the other members of the staff are presented anonymously and collectively. The narratives describe how the birth-giver interacts with the midwife and the rest of the staff and negotiates the expert role. In the narratives the male character changes from helper to father. He is given a peripheral role and is included in a joint "we". The child is occasionally presented in a distanced manner, but is given the role as main actor together with the birth-giver in the narrative recounted a year later.

One way, one among many possible ways, to analyse a narrative of personal experiences is to explore the narrative elements of the story. In this article, I have analysed the description of the actors in the Taleworld of the narrative. This was done according to Goffman's dramaturgic perspective, using the characters and actors who inhabit the narrative's Taleworld as the point of departure. This way of analysing a narrative makes it possible to show how the narrator recounts her experience of the actors' actions, interaction and role-taking in the Taleworld. The stories can be seen as personal experience narratives and identity narratives, where the women recount their experience

of their own situation and why their childbirth took the specific course it did, by giving the actors presented various roles and facing them with various choices. Here, the individual interacts with the collective. The women's narratives are based on the narrative patterns with which they are familiar, on the knowledge they possess of the course of events and on the approaches that they regard as correct, approaches which to a certain extent is formed by the discursive opinions in their society. Focusing on themselves, the women in my material give a self-presentation as women, birth-givers and mothers.

In fact, analysing the ways in which the narrators ascribe various roles to the actors in their narratives may be a way of approaching the discursive, more societal side of the actor concept. The analysis of the way in which the women narrate may lead to an understanding of the ambivalent meanings they express. The analysis of the actors presented in the narratives reveals not only the happiness and joy of giving birth to a child, but also the fear and anxiety involved. In their narratives, the women describe their view of the experience of the childbirth process and, by extension, express a position on the childbirth discourse in their society, in this case particularly pertaining to natural versus medical childbirth. The analysis of the actors in the narratives shows that the women recount their childbirth experience in such a way that they present themselves partly as vulnerable and exposed, partly as active subjects making active choices in the childbirth situation.

*Translated by  
Heidi Granqvist*

## NOTES

- 1 This research resulted in my doctoral dissertation, *Berättelser om barnafödande* (2000).
- 2 The women were contacted via the Swedish-speaking maternity counselling offices in Turku and Parainen. The women themselves were allowed to decide whether they wished to take part in my study and were not chosen according to any specific criteria. I interviewed all those who were willing to take part in the study. Thus, the women chose to co-operate with me rather than the other way round, which, of course, influenced their willingness to talk about their experiences.
- 3 The women are anonymous and have been given fictitious names in alphabetical order according to the order in which I conducted the interviews. The mother I interviewed first has a name starting with A, Anita, the second a name starting with B, etc.
- 4 This idea of distinguishing the world of events from the narrator's world as propounded by Young is not unique in research. Lars Lönnroth presents a double exposure of narrative technique which he calls "the double stage" (Lönnroth 1978). Likewise, Elliot Mishler, inspired by the philosopher Nelson Goodman, is thinking along the same lines when he presents the concepts of "the order of the narrated" and "the order of the narrating" (Mishler 1997, 69).
- 5 Storyrealm can also be said to include the textualisation process where the narrator makes certain choices in her account of the events. The textualisation process is, according to Lauri Honko, characterised by the way in which a text is created using a certain composition technique in a specific performance, in a specific context. Honko talks about a narrative competence based on a traditional reserve that is tied

to rules specific for the genre, but not to specific plot structures (Honko 1998: 36). This organisation of the poetic material around a plot structure allows a narrative to be long or short, complex or simple. It also implies an intertextuality, partly a dialogue with other texts, partly a way of marking the conventions, rules and patterns significant for the genre in question (cf. Arvidsson 1999). Here, the narrator creates order in her experiences, relates them to other events and other texts and renders the narration significance.

- 6 The midwives often speak only Finnish. Even if many Finland-Swedes do speak good Finnish, childbirth is such a strain that the woman sometimes does not want to or is not able to speak anything else than her mother-tongue.

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## “It’s Just a Story I’m Telling You, I Haven’t Experienced it Myself”:

### A Grandmother’s Narratives and Experiences

“It’s just a story, I’m telling you, I haven’t experienced this myself,” said Barbara, a woman of forty-two years, while she recounted an experience from her grandmother’s life. The little word “just” sums up Barbara’s reservation about relating her grandmother’s experience, which is not Barbara’s own. The word “just” turns the telling into a story – an unverifiable account of what happened.<sup>1</sup>

In Barbara’s speech culture, the term story stands for information that is fictive and less valid than that which is conveyed by the term experience. Experience on the other hand, is based on a subject’s own understanding and is linked to individuality and personhood. Authority claims are inherent in the telling of experiences in the first person. But when related in the third person, the telling is transformed into “just a story.”

In our conversation, Barbara utilized this distinction, and the incident made me wonder: Why does an experience told in the first person lose its authenticity when told in the third person? The telling may be the same in terms of content, but there are differences concerning narrator and narrative situation, and regarding the term used to categorize the telling. In other words, there are genre differences. Thus the telling of stories and the telling of experiences appear to represent two different speech genres. I will return to this presently.

At the time of the telling of the story in question, also Barbara is a grandmother, and in the following I intend to interpret some of the narratives and narrative strategies regarding her own grandmother-hood that she employed during our conversation. The topics, then, are love, feelings, motherhood, the raising of children, and grandmother-hood. While speaking about these issues Barbara revealed how, as a pedagogical device, she uses different narrative strategies and mixes different speech genres in conversation with her adult daughter. In order to contextualize Barbara’s narratives, I will add a few statements by other grandmothers I have interviewed.<sup>2</sup>

I will begin with a presentation of the following perspectives and concepts: *narrative*, *narrative construction*, *narrative route*, and *cultural trope*. Thereupon, the concept of *speech genre* is discussed and I will identify the two main speech genres employed in this article: *experience-telling* and

*storytelling*. Finally, the cognitive metaphor of *container* is discussed as a tool aiding the understanding of a subject as a demarcated personhood in the narratives of grandmothers.

### *Narrative perspectives*

My approach to the study of narrative is inspired by narrative and metaphor studies combined with a constructionist perspective. The constructionist perspective deals with the ways in which people construct reality by means of interpreting meaningful phenomena in social worlds (Gubrium, Holstein and Buckholdt 1994).<sup>3</sup> In accordance with this approach, I assume that social life itself is storied, and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life (Somers and Gibson 1994, cf. Horsdal 1999: 73).<sup>4</sup> The implication of this is that narrative structures and poetic ability are fundamental tools for human intelligibility (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Turner 1996).

As a noun, narrative has been defined in different, but related, ways. The sociolinguists William Labov and Joshua Waletzky proposed the following definition: “A small unit, comprising of minimally two clauses that carry a temporal juncture” (Labov and Waletzky 1967). Elinor Ochs has stated that “...all narratives depict a temporal transition from one state of affairs to another” (Ochs 1997: 189), and the folklorist Alf Arvidsson indicates that narratives consist of minimally two events connected in a causal relationship (Arvidsson 1999: 46). According to the classic Aristotelian definition, a narrative is a story containing a beginning, a middle, and an end, and including a plot, which is understood as a highlight in the storyline.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, however, thinks that Aristotle’s writings on narrative focus upon *mimesis praxeos*, i.e. the imitation of an action. This leads Ricoeur to suggest that narrative understanding implies semantics of action and symbolically mediated action such as signs, rules, and cultural norms (Ricoeur 1991). This means that certain components (of texts or actions) are recognized and perceived in some form of coherence, a “configuration” in Ricoeur’s word (Kemp 1995). Thus narrative understanding is a way to convey unity, as in a storyline, or to create meaning or what I would call a narrative construction of reality.<sup>5</sup>

Many scholars of narrativity are inspired by Ricoeur, including Margaret Somers, who defines narrative and narrativity as concepts which focus “... attention on the new *ontological* dimension of narrative studies rather than on the traditional rendering of narrative as limited to a method or form of representation” (Somers 1994: 607, orig. emphasis). This perspective can of course seem troubling in an attempt to define what a “narrative” is, but according to Ricoeur, there is no need to worry.

The definition of beginnings, ends, plots, a causal-temporal presentation and, especially, some form of coherence does not imply a static structure. It rather depends upon an integrating process by the members involved in the narrative situation (Ricoeur 1991). Hence the interpretations of a narrative definition depend upon the contextualization process as established by each

interpreter (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Subsequently, any definition of a narrative is situated and subjective, but all narratives carry possibilities of interpretations of meaningful phenomena. This narrative approach is based on a non-static definition of the noun narrative; it focuses on the *mimesis praexos* element in narrative configurations, on the creation of coherence. According to the Danish folklorist Birgitte Rørbye, such a narrative approach includes an epistemological skepticism towards essentialistic perceptions of reality (Rørbye 2002).

Let me sum up what I mean by narrative constructionism as a narrative approach. Narratives are understood as performances or actions by anyone who recognizes some form of coherence in them, no matter the size or length of the narrative form. Narratives constitute identity (Somers 1994) and create cultural coherence when interlocutors engage in dialogues. Therefore, narrative performances depict ways in which members of speech communities participate in meaningful, cultural constructions of their world and being. Such narrative constructions invite folkloristic interpretations of meaningful, cultural phenomena; these folkloristic interpretations may of course be viewed as narrative constructions as well.

### *Narrative route and cultural trope*

The Russian formalists pointed to the importance of studying narrative structures, and as a part of this group, Vladimir Propp created a morphology of the folktale, which in its essence was an attempt to create a parallel to the classificatory terminologies of objective, natural sciences, such as physics and mathematics (Propp 1968). Propp's morphology has been an important step in the development of narratology and new narrative studies (Ricoeur 1991, Holmgaard 1994), and it has been a source of inspiration for many folklorists in the study of narrative structures. Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, in particular, has elaborated on culturally determined, well-known narrative structures, called "narrative schemes" (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996), which are recognized by means of temporal-causal sequences in the narrative and by means of textual strategies which activate expectations about content, stylistic and poetic devices, textual markers, formulaic patterns, and parallelistic features (Harvilahti 2001). Such narrative strategies provide both narrator and listener with expectations in accordance with their cultural comprehension of narrative structures. According to Ricoeur, the narrative structures are able to guide interlocutors towards specific experiences, knowledge, understanding, and acting (Ricoeur 1979) and performers belonging to speech cultures with characteristic narratological traditions can create complicated equilibria between innovation, on the one hand, and sedimentation of narratological competence, on the other. As Ricoeur states: "...the narrative schema itself has its own history and (...) this history has all the features of a tradition" (Ricoeur 1991: 24).<sup>6</sup>

In his theory of the literary mind Mark Turner (1996) proposes the term "motion along a path" as a name for a narrative structure which dominates

and inspires interpreters to pick one point of departure in a narrative and thereupon to follow a certain route toward an expected endpoint (Turner 1996).<sup>7</sup> Since many points can be chosen, both for beginnings and endings, it is important to sketch out a line and a direction between two chosen points. This thinking is also related to Paul Ricoeur’s term, *emplotment*, which indicates that a storyline is directed by the message and construction of a narrative, leading to choices of points of beginnings and endings within the narrative structure. And when the choice has been made, the result is a specific direction which guides both narrator and listener: “... we are less captivated by the unexpected aspects of the story and more attentive to the way in which it leads to its conclusion” (Ricoeur 1991: 22).

As a term for this expected guidance of a narrative structure, I use the term *narrative route*, referring to the semantic construction of a storyline with specific points of beginnings and endings.<sup>8</sup>

Narratives often include figurative language emphasizing the significance of meaning in the plot (Siikala 1984). This makes figurative language an important part of narrative interpretation. The term figurative language is itself a broad notion fostering definitional discussions, but according to one influential rhetorical perspective, “there is no structure incapable of becoming a figure by the way it is used...” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 169). The American anthropologist William Bascom called any form of aesthetic expression “verbal art” or “folklore” (Bascom 1955). This point of view, integrated into a contemporary definition of aesthetics (Horsdal 1999:18, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), allows for a folkloristic interpretation of all kinds of speech in order to understand narratives and their cultural significance. Actually, any figurative language is a part of all narratives, but in order to establish methodological distinctions, it is convenient to employ a notion such as *cultural trope*, which is an analytical term for any form of figurative language (Blaakilde 1998).<sup>9</sup>

### *Speech genres*

By elaborating on Barbara’s distinction between experience and story, I intend to use the term *speech genres*, i.e. forms of speech which provide interlocutors with an orienting frame for the production and interpretation of utterances. It is impossible to present a strict definition and categorization of a speech genre; different definitions depend upon culturally accepted canons of differentiation (Finnegan 1992), or, in Richard Bauman’s words, speech genres are “open-ended, (...) flexible and negotiable orienting frameworks” (Bauman 1992). Within a positivist paradigm, speech genres have for many years been defined *a priori* as either analytical genres conceived by scholars or as empirically verifiable genres defined locally by members of a speech community (Bauman 1992). However, a speech genre does not refer to reality, but to cultural conceptualization about forms of speech. Speech genres channel understanding in specific directions through different kinds of wrapping. Speech genres give different persuasive powers to different forms

of discourse. Norman Denzin puts the matter as follows: “Truth is socially established by the norms that operate for each form or genre” (Denzin 1997: 127).

In this article, I will try to understand Barbara’s own differentiation between the two speech genres experience-telling and storytelling. In my view, the two provide the listener with two different modes of listening. When Barbara uses the term experience, she seems to be referring to utterances that are authentic and persuasive expressions of truth, because they are close to their origin, i.e. close to the narrator, and because they represent personhood, (a concept to which I shall return presently). By contrast, in Barbara’s usage the word story seems to stand for a genre which she considers fictive. As a term, story relates to *another* person’s experience. It can also be thought of as a lie and as such it is distanced from the narrator and lacks the ethos of immediate, personal experience. This lack creates a low degree of authenticity which is also influencing the listener in a negative direction.

These two speech genres, as mentioned by Barbara, establish a dichotomy of utterances mediated through authenticity and non-authenticity, respectively. This will be a guiding distinction in this article. Other categories of speech genres will be added, as I interpret my way through the interview with Barbara and interviews with other grandmothers. These speech genres will be further subdivided as either authentic or non-authentic messages. Hence, the study of the impact of different genres vacillates, not only between general discourse and grandmothers’ speech and genre distinctions, but also between my own interpretations and genre distinctions. On top of this, I will have to elaborate on the mixed speech genres which Barbara uses on some occasions when she seems to intertwine the two-dimensional divisions.

According to Bakhtin, speech genres are highly changeable and plastic. Yet, they have a normative significance for the individual speaking, indicating that the better the command of a genre, the more freely it can be employed (Bakhtin 1986). Also Bauman’s characterization of speech genres as open-ended follows similar lines; it will be a point of departure in my interpretations of Barbara’s narratives as well. I will demonstrate how, for pedagogical reasons, she employs some speech genres highly normatively and, at the same time, in an open-ended and fluid way.

### *Experience in a container and demarcated personhood*

In the Danish speech-culture, - as well as in the English - the term experience is often considered closely connected to strictly, personal phenomena. Edward M. Bruner, for instance, states that “...we can only experience our own life, what is received by our own consciousness” (Bruner 1986: 5).

This common conception of a separate personal body containing private abilities to experience relates to a specific cognitive metaphor with a deep cultural significance, according to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). They note that among the many objects and subjects that are metaphorically spoken of as containers are the human being and the human mind. “Each of us

is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces,” they observe (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 29). A container has three parts: the exterior, the interior and the boundary that separates them. In my view, the metaphor of the container constitutes an associative and fertile way to understand narratives of personal experience or experience-tellings. For instance, the boundary of the human container is referred to as a limitation to Bruner who asks: “How, then, do we overcome the limitations of individual experience?” (Bruner 1986 :5). His question underscores the suggestiveness of imagining persons as containers and of thinking of experiences as being developed inside a personal container.

The container metaphor can be seen as a foundational conceptualization of a subject and of individuality as protected and enhanced by integrity<sup>10</sup> and it is also seminal to understanding the formation of a human being; it enhances the idea of personhood as an individual, independent, and isolated sphere. However, instead of directly applying the notion of a container to the conceptualization of a human being, I will use the term demarcated (or bounded) personhood, when I want to emphasize the container metaphor as linked to the discursive understanding of an isolated, personal sphere, a sphere that is unwilling to allow interference from the outside. As an example of this, the grandmother Louise stated about her own position in relationship to her adult daughter:

Louise: One is not supposed to interfere.

Anne Leonora: No.

Louise: I mean, you cannot learn from other people’s mistakes.

This general presumption about individuality as a demarcated personhood preventing interference from the outside is especially emphasized in the case of relationships between parents and their adult children. The grandmother Marion touches upon this topic too, when she speaks about her role as a mother and about her relationship with her daughters:

Marion: I think it has been difficult to avoid giving all the good advice, you know. I think it is *incredibly* difficult to let them make their own mistakes, you know.

(...)

Marion: It is exactly the issue about your children growing up and becoming adults, it is that you are supposed to keep your nose to yourself, you know.

Embedded in the demarcated personhood is an image of a human border that thickens and tightens with age. A child is not considered a fully independent individual, but the human borders are enhanced in the process of “...your children growing up and becoming adults.” The difficult part for a mother is to discover and respect the growing borders of her child, borders that conceal an isolated sphere of individuality, a demarcated personhood. This is of significance to the interpretation of the relationship between a grandmother

and her adult daughter. In accordance with cultural expectations, she has now become an independent individual who is not open to any interference into her life. This is a time when her mother is supposed to “keep her nose to herself.”

Although the term experience is never mentioned in these two quotes, they both belong to the genre of experience-telling. This is so, firstly, because the repeated word “mistake” is presented as a kind of personal experience with a certain quality, and secondly, because the sphere where mistakes belong is said to be lodged inside the demarcated personhood where also experiences belong.

The idea of the demarcated personhood is powerful. It encloses a separate inner sphere of individuality, a sphere that is embedded in isolation of a sacral kind, a sphere that is regarded truly authentic. Indeed, experiences seem to be highly valued in general, exactly because they are believed to rest inside the innermost parts of the demarcated personhood.

Marion introduces another term that has negative implications, namely “giving good advice,” as if it were a contrast to “making one’s own mistakes” or having one’s own experiences. I will now establish good advice-giving as another speech genre, related to story-telling. Both represent a discourse that is distanced from the demarcated personhood. Good advice-giving includes narratives that are considered non-authentic and different from experience-telling which Barbara presented as authentic.

	messages conveying authenticity	messages conveying non-authenticity
Phenomenon genre	experience-telling	”story”/”good advice” storytelling/ good advicegiving

Figure 1.  
This figure shows the division between messages comprehended and communicated as authentic or non-authentic.



Figure 2.  
Illustrates the image of demarcated personhood inside which the messages conveying authenticity belongs

I will return to this in my interpretation of the narratives of the grandmother Barbara, where I intend to elaborate on the two kinds of genres (non-authentic and authentic), which she uses as separate and dichotomous entities. However,

as I will show, Barbara manages to shuttle between them simultaneously in a process which creates new genres that permeate each other.

### *Grandmother Narratives*

Narratives of grandmother-hood are closely connected to narratives of motherhood. As mentioned above, motherhood implies a difficult movement, since it represents a balancing journey from an active contribution to someone’s (her child’s) establishing of personhood until the point where the child is considered grown up and has marked the boundaries of his or her personhood. At this point, the mother and everybody else have to accept and respect the individuality of the now adult child. This becomes even more accentuated, when the daughter becomes a mother herself turning the older mother into a grandmother. The grandmother Barbara fully accepts her adult children as independent individuals and supports her daughter’s sovereignty in managing her new experience of motherhood:

Barbara: Ehh, but I mean, I always insist upon the mother’s sovereign right, I mean I always give the last word to Janis [daughter], because I think that is the right thing.

Anne Leonora: Yes. You learnt that yourself.

Barbara: Yes, that is because I am convinced that no matter what, the mother knows best. If she follows her feelings, she knows best...

Anne Leonora: Yes,

Barbara: So, therefore, I have to bow to Janis, you know.

“Mother knows best” is a statement common to many grandmothers in my study. As an utterance it is embedded in the speech genre of experience-telling emphasizing that people have to learn by their own mistakes and other experiences.

Like the other grandmothers, Barbara advocates the image of the demarcated personhood, which is clearly of deep cultural significance in the speech communities of all of them. The grandmothers affirm and respect the idea that, within the sacred sphere of individuality, there is no space for negotiation. A person – in this case the mother – always “knows best” herself. Her demarcated personhood is ruled by experience, and by another closely connected factor, namely her “feelings.”

The speech genre of experience-telling seems to consist of individual, non-transferable knowledge, since every new generation of mothers has to invent its own mothering practices from scratch, the mothers themselves being responsible for learning from their own experiences. Does this mean that a mother’s collected stock of maternal experiences turn useless, when her daughter becomes a mother? Rather than contributing to her daughter’s supply of experience, the grandmother is precluded from interfering, according to the grandmothers Louise, Marion and Barbara. But is this not a waste of experience and human capacity? In searching for an answer to this question, I will turn to Barbara’s narratives about her own experiences of motherhood and grandmother-hood.

### *The great, eternal love*

Barbara was only seventeen years herself, when she became pregnant for the first time. She says:

Barbara: I mean, what happened was that I got pregnant, you know... you know ehh.... it is quite banal... teenage defiance - and I was at the age of puberty but met the great love. That is fine, you know. And then as you do that. Then... the only way this can be materialized is [laughing] to have a child together, you know, so it was quite by the book, so that's what we did! I mean, Janis is a child of love, you know. Certainly. The Grrrreat Eternal Love, you know.

The “Grrrreat Eternal Love” is pronounced with irony but, as she says “oddly enough”, Barbara is still satisfied in her marriage to the father of her children. After the birth of a second daughter when she was nineteen, Barbara started studying and received an academic education and a job within the educational field. She is the first and only academic person in her family. When talking about “teenage defiance” and when applying the cultural trope “quite by the book,” she presents a paradox. It might be by the book to be rebellious as a seventeen-year old, but to have children at this age is not a rule. And if it was, she was not in defiance. What she refers to as “quite by the book,” is that love awakens an urge to reproduce; thus the narrative route in this experience-telling begins with love, with feelings.

The word “feelings” is often repeated in Barbara’s narratives. It is an important word linked to the image of the demarcated personhood and its implications of non-negotiable experience. When speaking about motherhood, Barbara often creates a distinction between feelings and reason. For instance, she says about herself as a very young and inexperienced mother, forced to postpone her own needs:

Barbara: No, I could not understand it with my head, but I could understand it with my feelings. I mean, I could definitely see that I had this child, you know [laughing].

Anne Leonora: [laughing] So there was nothing else to do?

Barbara: There wasn't really much to do! I just had to ask myself and my feelings, what is right and wrong here? And it was more on a, eh... on the emotional level, I understood at that time, but then afterwards I have thought about... reconsidering, you know.

When Barbara says she is “reconsidering,” she creates a narrative link between various poles. This is what Paul Ricoeur calls a configuration. Barbara links together the past and the present, she links together narrative time and narrated time, and she links together feelings and head, i.e. instinct and reason. The plot in this narrative is a tribute to spontaneous maternal emotions inside the demarcated personhood and is framed by the speech genre of *experience-telling*. When Barbara utilizes the term “reconsidering,” she creates a new image by means of a retrospective glance in which her “head” – as a

metonymy of reason – makes it possible for her in the present to reflect upon and understand her own motherly feelings as they were in the past.

Barbara’s reflections on motherly feelings lead her to discuss her conviction that there is a special bond between mother and child, a bond that is not supposed to be cut within the first eighteen months.

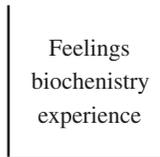
Barbara: [pause] I mean, the bond between mother and child is too strong. I mean, eh... it feels wrong to leave... or to cut the bond. I mean... of course I speak with many other women about this, you know. I mean, most of them looked a little forward to start.. eh.. work again, right. But then they get these terrible frustrations, I mean, when you look at them, you notice that they are not present at their work. [laughing.] Well, OK, some of them are naturally fast..., that is individual, you know, but their consciousness is always in another place. And that split I can’t take. I mean, I can’t concentrate. (...) I don’t know, whether that is the children’s needs or ... the women’s needs, but I believe it is like that. I believe it is biochemistry! [laughing].

Until now, the speech genre experience-telling has been employed alone in Barbara’s speech, but in this utterance, Barbara manages to enforce the narrative of motherly emotions by a rational, quantitative argument. The proof of her argument is that “many other women” feel the same as she does herself. Barbara’s statement indicates that she has discussed this topic many times before our conversation. Subsequently, this kind of experience does not only belong to the authentic speech genre of experience-telling; it is negotiated by means of shared experience-tellings. This means that, as a genre, experience-telling has to go beyond the boundary of the demarcated personhood; it demands participation in dialogical situations of narration.

Many of Barbara’s narratives about motherhood and children include an end-point, (either at the beginning or at the end) which involves biological explanations and focuses on the biologically determined feelings that guide a common understanding of maternal emotions. Most narrative routes with specific end-points tend to ignore events or incidents that do not fit within the outlined path. This is what happens in Barbara’s story, when she admits that the “many other women” do not constitute a homogeneous group and says: “...some of them are naturally fast..., that is individual, you know ...” This way, Barbara acknowledges individuality and heterogeneity. But before completing the statement, she returns to the story-line, stating that “their consciousness is always in another place.” She reconstructs the story-line concerning motherly emotions by using a group categorization (through the word *their*) and a categorical characterization (through the word *always*).

Barbara often repeats a word which could be called a keyword in her vocabulary: *biochemistry*. It is a word that unifies all incidents in the quote above whilst at the same time supplying the speech genre of experience-telling with the authority claims of biological discourse and natural science. *Biochemistry* is a cultural trope in this context. But it is not defined and it is presented as rather mystical and unexplainable. By linking the experience of motherly feelings to biological discourse, Barbara establishes a mutually

fertilizing process involving the authority claims of both feelings/experience and biology. When placed in the sacred sphere of the demarcated personhood, this mixture turns into a powerful and non-negotiable argument.



*Figure 3.*

*Figure 3 illustrates some of the terms and genres placed within the demarcated personhood:*

### *Concentrated study and generational learning*

In Barbara's narratives, biochemistry is a central idea, implicated in various ways in different incidents in the storyline. But before returning to her statements, I would like to add the information that she became a grandmother while she was forty, as her eldest daughter Janis became pregnant at the age of twenty-two.

In the following, Barbara does not use the word biochemistry explicitly. But she speaks about "mechanisms of survival," which I understand as related to biochemistry, since both terms are embedded in biological discourse. Furthermore, in the following utterance she repeats and elaborates on a word she mentioned in the quote before: concentrate.

Barbara: But I do think a woman becomes eh.... I mean becomes so concentrated on her task, or she is so watch-ful all day and night that she is.... It must be a mechanism of survival, which somehow is built-in, right. You cannot prevent a woman from doing that, you know.

Anne Leonora: No.

Barbara: She studies her child intensely, at least during the first three months. During that period it is almost impossible to establish contact with her, right. I saw it in Janis. I mean, she was in total attention in order to study his reaction, you know. How he cries, how he sleeps, what he likes, what he doesn't like... women expose themselves to such an enormously... intense training, you know. And then they obtain abilities, you know. Then they do not let go, until ... [sigh] it is the time for it, you know. That is up to the individual, you know.

Barbara touches upon important aspects of the biology of motherhood (biochemistry and mechanism of survival), when she states that women direct their built-in maternal mechanisms towards an intense study of their newborn children. As an educated woman, she emphasizes those biological aspects of motherhood that prepare the young mother for concentration, watchfulness, intensity, total attention, study, and intensive training.

According to Barbara, a biochemically endowed instinct enables women to be good mothers. But this does not mean that biology predestines mothers to act according to prescribed rules. On the contrary, good motherhood means that every individual mother shows deep respect for human differences and pays attention to every individual child. The dominant plot of her narrative is characterized by biological diversity, not by universality. As a consequence of this causal logic, motherly experiences are regarded individual; they are a part of the demarcated personhood of different mothers. Barbara’s narratives, especially her usage of the cultural trope biochemistry, can be interpreted to mean that motherly experiences always differ from each other and from child to child. Therefore, they cannot be transferred via narratives, they cannot be repeated or traditionalized.

However, the biological instinct can be supplemented with family tradition:

Barbara: You know, I also believe in breastfeeding [laughing a little]. Yes, but then I know also, I mean... I know it from myself, and now my daughter has done the same, you know. (...)

Anne Leonora: Yes. Is it something she learned from you, you think?

Barbara: Well, she believes in it as well... of course it is because I have influenced her, but she couldn’t bear to stop... [laughing a little]. If anything, she is even worse than me! [laughing].

A few minutes later, Barbara says that her mother also breastfed for a long time; then she continues:

Barbara: Yes, it’s probably a generational thing. To breastfeed, this close contact. We actually don’t *believe* that men are good at that! [laughing].

Breastfeeding can be seen as a tradition transferred from mother to child without the use of words.<sup>11</sup> But Barbara also discloses that breast-feeding experiences can be narrated and shared. At first, she reveals this through her certainty about her own influence upon her daughter. Thereupon, she makes it clear in her evaluative narrative concerning men and women the subject of which is a personal pronoun in plural, a “we,” which indicates that Barbara’s mother, Barbara herself and her daughter Janis hold the same conviction about men and women. This conviction - shared across generations - can be confirmed only by means of narrating. This suggests that the positive experience of breastfeeding cannot be isolated within the demarcated personhood as a purely private experience: it must also be communicated and shared.

### *Good advice is bad – personal experience is good*

Barbara: I really don’t believe in good advice.

Anne Leonora: No.

Barbara: Nnyes, of course I believe in health visitors and the like who come and tell, but you know they tell you a lot about something which is based on experience, right.

Anne Leonora: Yes. Do you believe more in that? You said before that you believed in the instinct as such, right? The health visitor is something else?

Barbara: Mmmm, yes. I don't think we ought to quit the health visitor, of course I think they ought to visit, you know. But I think Janis knows best.

As was the case earlier in the conversation, the mother is here given primordial status as an authority figure, inherent in the speech genre of experience-telling. But, at the same time, Barbara is opposed to the speech genre of good advice-giving which seems to be part of a negative discourse and as such a practice that should be avoided. Good advice-giving has little to do with the positive attributes of the individual, private sphere of the demarcated personhood, attributes that are inherent in the speech genre of experience-telling.

But by the same token, Barbara tends to dissolve the limits between the two speech genres in the quote above. After having rejected "good advice," she turns to speaking about the health visitors who visit young mothers in their homes as professional advisers. Barbara expresses approval of them by means of some linguistic equilibristics. Firstly, she shows how in her own mind she connects health visitors with good advice, when she associates to the topic with the little, hesitating word, "Nnyes." Secondly, she utilizes the verb tell for what health visitors do instead of the phrase give advice. This is a redirection from the noun advice to the more acceptable noun telling. Thirdly, the health visitors are provided with the positive value of the speech genre of experience-telling. Their knowledge is said to be based on experience, which, in this context, probably means experience shared by many and not only personal experience.

In her ability to switch to and fro between two speech genres relating to authenticity and non-authenticity respectively, Barbara establishes a genre that connects good advice-giving (which she rejects) with experience-telling (which she accepts). The new genre seems to depend upon a number of factors: the narrative situation on a broader scale; the narrator, the listener, the context, and the interaction between the persons involved. This mixed genre could be called experienced advice-telling.

### *The Great Mother*

In an utterance cited above Marion connects good advice in a negative sense to a mother's obligation to "keep her nose to herself." When Barbara employs the term good advice, she sums up a longish narrative about her own mother's child-raising practices as follows:

Barbara: She, she thinks that... Mother knows best in three generations, you know [laughing]. Or, it is difficult for her to respect... boundaries, you know.

Anne Leonora: Yes.

Barbara: I mean, she sees herself as. The Great Mother, you know. She finds it difficult... just like she did with me [when Barbara was a young mother herself], to respect that it is the mother of the child, who knows best, you know.

The Great Mother is a cultural trope for which Barbara elsewhere in the interview uses the synonym *Mamma Grande*. Both expressions – with which she refers to her own mother – are cultural tropes, because they are hyperbolic references to culturally accepted characteristics of mothers; as cultural tropes their connotations are expected to be understood by listeners. The grandmother Marion employs a similar cultural trope for similar qualities of motherhood, saying: “such a good mother.” The difference is that she uses irony instead of hyperbole; she refers ironically to her own maternal practices, demonstrating her temptation not to “keep her nose to herself” on the issue of giving advice to her daughter. In the following statement, Marion first mentions an insignificant conflict she had with her nearly grown-up daughter, because Marion tried to help too much. Afterwards, when asked by the interviewer, she recalls that her own mother acted in a similar way.

Marion: ...then I thought: “Now you shut up, you know.” [To herself, ALB.] Really. Yes. You know?

Anne Leonora: [giggling] | Do you remember, did you experience things like that with your own mother?

Marion: Yes! I did” [giggling]. She was also such a good mother, you know! [laughing].

As cultural tropes “such a good mother” and the “Great Mother” refer to a woman who is too motherly a mother and does not respect the boundaries of another person, i.e. her daughter. And these boundaries are metaphors relating to the daughter’s demarcated personhood. A mother is supposed to train herself to fulfill the needs of her child and to support the growth of the personhood of her little child. But as the child grows, it is a balancing act to be a mother and, at the same time, to let go of motherly helpfulness. As the border of the child’s demarcated personhood gradually grows and thickens, the mother is expected to “keep her nose to herself.” Therefore, as grandmother a woman can easily become too good, or too great, if she ignores the common cultural convention that says, first, that a grown-up daughter is supposed to learn from her own experiences (lodged in the inside of her demarcated personhood) and, second, that the older mother is expected to respect the boundary of her daughter’s demarcated personhood.

The negative qualities in a cultural trope such as the “Great Mother” seem to refer to a risk endowed in motherhood, the risk that women cannot let go of their adult children and that they do not respect the demarcated personhood of these children. The cultural trope “Great Mother” can also be understood to stand for advanced age; the “Great Mother” probably refers to an older person; often a grandmother. At the same time “grand” can also be pointing to great size.

Thus, the cultural trope the “Great Mother” refers to older mothers and grandmothers who are suspected of having difficulties with the cultural norm against interfering into the lives of other adults. Barbara illustrates how she sees her own mother as a personification of this, when she says “...it is difficult for her to respect... boundaries...”

After this discussion of such cultural tropes as the “Great Mother,” I will return to the topic of speech genres and attempt to delineate the delicate distinction between *good advice-giving* and *experienced advice-telling* as seen in Barbara’s narrative about health visitors. These two speech genres tend to be discernible only through the difference between the main characters in the narrative. These main characters can be ranked on different scales, according to their status in the telling.

In the speech genre, *good advice-giving*, the main character tends to be too motherly a mother of grandmother age, and in the speech genre, *experienced advice-telling*, the main character can be a professional person like a health visitor. However, according to Barbara, the young mother is highest on the scale; she knows best because of her own experiences. This ranking order places the older mother, i.e. the grandmother, on the lowest rank in terms of ability to provide knowledge concerning child-raising practices. She is deprived of the potential power of having a voice, whereas the health visitor is allowed to support the young mother with good advice or experienced advice-tellings.

It is obvious that Barbara is opposed to what she sees in her own mother. She takes herself through a narrative route which is in opposition to her mother’s example. She needs to find for herself other strategies of being a grandmother, and in this desire, her narrative is in line with grandmother-narratives told by other grandmothers of her own generation, Marion for example. For instance, by accepting the idea that the mother knows best, Barbara adheres to the speech of genre of experience-telling which *her* mother did not.

The negative attitude towards the speech-genre, good advice-giving, is not only a critique of Barbara’s own mother: it can also be understood as a critique of the previous generation of mothers, the great-grandmothers of today. While this critique will often emerge in contexts of personal relations, in a cultural-historical perspective it probably derives from greater generational differences (Mannheim 1952). Contemporary grandmothers seem to represent new cultural models of motherhood and personhood, a topic to which I will return soon.

### *Grandmotherly strategies*

What strategies can Barbara and other grandmothers employ, if they want to approach their new role in ways that differ from those of their own mothers, and if they wish to maintain a voice and a position within their families?

As mentioned, Barbara is convinced that her daughter Janis is the ultimate

authority when it comes to knowing her own child. In Barbara’s view, a mother is responsible for obtaining the necessary experience by paying attention to her child and studying it, at the same time as she enjoys it. In Barbara’s case, the maternal eagerness to study her child has continued into her grandmother-hood. In the following she speaks about her fascination with watching not only the development of her grandchild and the development of her daughter as a young woman learning to become a mother, but also the mutual relationship between the two:

Barbara: And it is still a fascinating experience to watch... it, eh... was a repetition for me to watch that, replay. And now I have the opportunity to *study* it, you know.

Being at a distance, as opposed to being the main character in the narrative, the grandmother is able to study and be an observer. Indeed, Barbara is engaged in the object of study as a participant observer. In her respect for the demarcated personhood of her daughter, and in her interest in studying her daughter’s gaining experience as a mother, it seems as if her own experience-tellings take on a new quality that makes it possible to communicate them to Janis:

Barbara: [giggling a little] But I mean... they... there is ... but I mean, Janis has to rely on the health visitor, right. I am not supposed to say anything different from the health visitor.

Anne Leonora: No.

Barbara: She has to find out for herself, whether or not the health visitor is stupid, right.

Anne Leonora: Yes. So that you can control yourself, if you think about things in ways that differ from what she was told...?

Barbara: Oh yes! Yes, yes. Then I can just do it, and tell her what I did myself. That does not seem... so controlling. I can just tell her, and then she can choose.

Anne Leonora: Yes.

Barbara: I mean, that is a form I use a lot. Then I have eh... then I do not force her. Then she can just listen, right.

Anne Leonora: Yes. Does she listen to you, then?

Barbara: Yes. It is .. I mean, it is surprising. I mean, she likes to listen to me telling her about how I felt myself. That is a lot more interesting than if I tell her what she... what I... what she ought to do. I keep from doing that [giggling].

Telling people what they ought to do is a negative aspect of the speech genre, good advice-giving. The positive thing to do is to narrate one’s own personal experiences using the genre of experience-telling. This narrating, however, constitutes a crossing of the boundary between the demarcated personhoods of individuals and is a kind of mediation in narrative form between one person and another. At the same time, this crossing constitutes a crossing between two speech genres: the communication of experiences in a narrative form seems acceptable, as long as these experiences are not labeled good advice.

Again, the difference between the speech genre, good advice-giving, and the speech genre, experience-telling, is not necessarily a matter of the content. Rather, it is a matter of the form through which the message is conveyed. Through this intertwining, another, mixed, speech genre is conceived: the narration of experience-telling. This genre differs from experience-telling, which is considered authentic but also private and belonging to the demarcated personhood. The narration of experience-telling, on the other hand, is a mediator outside and between different personhoods.

A prerequisite for the mutual employment and acceptance of the speech genre, narration of experience-telling, however, is the grandmother's desire to respect the younger mother's demarcated personhood and to study her as she develops her maternal experiences. This is possibly a feature of modern, urban grandmother-hood, founded on modern pedagogical and communicative skills, which I have not found among grandmothers and great-grandmothers who are older and live in rural settings. As touched upon previously, this new cultural model of motherhood and grandmother-hood can be viewed as an example of an increasing emphasis upon individualism as seen in the subject as a demarcated personhood.

### *Permeating the boundaries of personhood*

Narrative form is crucial in the interaction between grandmother and mother, and the admonishing of a grandmother to "keep her nose out" does not necessarily mean a request that she keep an isolated role at a distance. It could also be an invitation to her to listen respectfully as the young mother establishes her own experiences within her own demarcated personhood. However, experience can be obtained from many sources:

Barbara: Well, Janis is a pedagogue herself, you know. I mean, then she is so much more ... need-... I mean focused on his needs, you know. And on his boundary marks, and what have you about all this. [Sigh]. But I mean, she is eh... surprisingly willing to listen to me now. Because... especially about herself. Because I was so young. I hadn't read any books then, you know. So I raised by instinct, I mean, her, you know. So she naturally got some smacks and things like that. [laughing]. You know at that time I hadn't ... Aigh... actually she did not. But OK, it was somehow a more instinctive child-raising than... than the raising of child number two, you know.

In this passage a new and different attitude to child-raising is revealed. Previously, it was emphasized that the narrative route in Barbara's narratives about experiences involves a biological endpoint. This is shown in the way she uses the cultural trope, biochemistry, and in how she connects the mysticism of biochemistry to the speech genre of experience-telling that resides in its sacred sphere within the demarcated personhood. Now this narrative route is turned backwards and mixed up with other narrative directions. Barbara introduces books and education as a pedagogue as factors influencing a woman's

competence as a mother. What she takes up here could be referred to as the speech genre of professional narratives. Now instinct is placed in opposition to narratives focusing on education and learning by reading. Barbara indicates that she thinks that study and reading are the better alternatives, when she discloses that as a young mother she instinctively employed some smacks and the like, i.e. child-raising practices which today are less than acceptable. It seems to me that Barbara regrets her disclosure.

As a genre, the professional narratives are closely related to the genre of experienced advice-telling, since both are associated with professional health visitors.

Messages conveying authenticity	Messages conveying non-authenticity
experience experience-telling	”story”/”good advice” storytelling/good advicegiving
experienced advice-telling professional narratives narrations of experience-telling	

Figure 4.

Figure 4 illustrates the original division of genres related to the dichotomy of authenticity/non-authenticity, plus the new, mixed genres in between.

The narrative routes of different speech genres (which stand in different hierarchical relationships to each other) are mixed in Barbara’s speech. Moreover, their ranking order is switched. Professional narratives, be they from books, education or health advisors, are not personal, and this impersonal quality lead these narratives to be classified as part of the speech genre of good advice-giving. That is a paradox, since professional narratives in general are highly valued in Barbara’s narratives, whereas good advice-giving is not. As is the case with the health visitors, it is difficult to distinguish between these kinds of narratives on the basis of contents; it is the form of the narratives and the characterization of the narrators that are different.

This mixing and switching of narrative routes (that all deliver input into a young mother’s demarcated personhood) demonstrates that Barbara, while adhering to the cultural convention that mothers know best, also accepts the opposite convention that motherly experience can emanate from outside sources, such as books and professional knowledge.

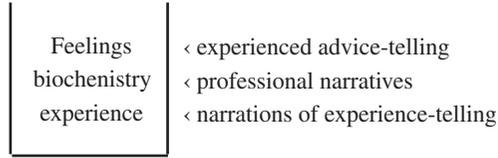


Figure 5.

Figure 5 shows the sources of input in the constituting of a mother’s demarcated personhood.

The biologically determined narrative route goes hand in hand with the professional narrative route. Both are determined by contemporary scientific conventions in terms of ideals of health and education. Barbara seems to reconcile these two narrative routes through her interest in studying and learning, in general, and in observing and learning about her daughter’s development as a mother, in particular. Barbara likes to watch the demarcated personhood (and motherhood) of her daughter grow, and from Barbara’s point of view, this growth is fertilized both by Janis’ personal experiences with her baby, and by additional input from the outer world, such as experienced advice-telling, narrations of experience-telling, and professional narratives.

A significant aspect evolving from this interest is that Barbara is able to transgress the culturally determined limits of the grandmother role. As she respects her daughter and her demarcated personhood, the daughter is in turn willing to listen to Barbara’s narrations of experience-telling. Barbara is given a voice, despite of - or perhaps because of - her role as a grandmother, and she is allowed to participate in the development of her daughter’s motherhood/personhood. The more Barbara respects the boundaries of her daughter’s demarcated personhood (at the same time as she shows an interest in its content), the more she is permitted inside it. Or, put in another way, the stronger the belief in the boundaries of personhood, the more permeable they become. Barbara and her daughter exchange and join experiences in a reciprocal respect. This makes the permeating of personhood mutual.

### *Narrative identity, poly-subjectivity and the great love story*

Paul Ricoeur has suggested that the term subjectivism should be replaced by the term narrative identity, because what we all consider to be an “I” is “...neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution” (Ricoeur 1991: 32). On the contrary, identities are constructed by means of narratives told, heard and shared. Roman Jakobson proposed that, as a sociolinguistic term, “I” should be considered a “shifter,” because “I” moves the center of discourse from one speaking subject to another. Its emptiness is “the no man’s land in which subjects can exchange the lease they hold on all of language by virtue of saying ‘I’” (Holquist 1991: 22).

Hence, the pronoun “I” is an empty word devoid of meaning or characteristics. But every time human beings utter “I,” this word is filled

with a significance that is central within Western subjectivist thinking. This pronoun tends to be grasped as a static foundation for the demarcated personhood. It is seldom realized that the word “I” is actually changed every time it is employed. Nor is it realized that it is dependent on the context of the narration and on the interlocutors involved in the dialogue, just as the demarcated personhood actually is permeated when participating in dialogues and negotiations about life and the world. Hence, the concept of subjectivity ought to be replaced with the concept of poly-subjectivity which discloses that narrative identity is constructed by means of words shared in polyphonies (Bakhtin 1986).

The word poly indicates that many voices participate in narrative construction, i.e. in the dialogues in which cultural coherence and personal identities are negotiated. Polyphony does not point to situations of temporal and spatial gatherings of many people. Rather, polyphony is a term for an ongoing dialogue between people in all situations. A dialogue including only two persons is the smallest unit of polyphony in which the two interlocutors participate in negotiating their respective narrative identities. As a conclusion to this article, I will demonstrate how Barbara, in dialogue with her adult daughter, manages to construct a storyline in concordance with a narrative route which submits not only to her own narrative identity but also to that of Janis, her daughter. The plot in the story concerns the right time to have a baby, and the narrative route shifts back and forth between different opinions in the choice between having children and having an education. Should one follow one’s feelings or should one follow common conventions about temporal priorities with regards to education, job and security before bearing one’s first child?

Barbara: Oh, you know, there are lots of these areas where I have given up... I also keep from talking about, when one is supposed to have children [laughing].

Anne Leonora: Yes. Did you do that? Did you think it was too early, when she came and told you, she was pregnant?

Barbara: [Sigh] Yes. Then I felt I had to express some objections because it was right in the middle of her... her education, you see.

Anne Leonora: Yes.

Barbara: I thought... for... for a month I think, that it was really stupid, you know. But then I found it even more stupid that this opposition should come... eh... from me, you know. She was *so much* in love with Jasper, they were in love, you know. No... I know perfectly well what the end is, when people are so much in love, then they will by all means have a baby, you know.

Anne Leonora: Yes.

Barbara: I mean it *is* like that! [laughing] And then eh... maybe that is biochemistry also... you know. Ermmm... I mean, people have this incredible urge to reproduce themselves.... [laughing] when they are in love so... that is... that is probably as it should be, you know. So it... eh... I stopped from interfering with that. [laughing].

Except for the final sentence referring to her personal decisions regarding her behavior, Barbara employs a normative present tense in the last part of

the passage cited and speaks about a universalistic subject, people. This then could be considered a coda which, according to Labov and Waletzky (1967), is a part of a narrative that communicates a meaningful evaluation in a configuration between narrative time and narrated time. The coda reveals the cultural significance of the narrative plot and is an important message conveying narrative construction of reality. The reality constructed in this narrative by Barbara is a configuration of the narrative identities and life histories of both her daughter and herself. It is also a configuration that connects the past and the present. The cultural trope, biochemistry, is employed again, this time pointing to a normative result of feelings and love. The word love leads back to the cultural trope mentioned at the beginning of the analyses of Barbara's narratives, namely to the "Greeat Eternal Love." It was used as a little ironic comment on Barbara's own love relationship (which is still going strong). Although cultural conventions are against early pregnancy in women, Barbara has been successful in this experience. What is she supposed to tell her daughter, when she wants to repeat Barbara's experience?

Ricoeur states that we adjust ourselves to the plots we have received from our culture, while trying out the different roles assumed by the favorite characters of the stories most dear to us. "It is therefore by means of the imaginative variations of our own ego that we attempt to obtain a narrative understanding of ourselves, the only kind that escapes the apparent choice between sheer change and absolute identity. Between the two lies narrative identity," he says (Ricoeur 1991: 33). Mark Turner suggests that we arrange our experiences and actions by means of narrative routes, directing the movement from one destination to another. In Barbara and her daughter's case, the narrative route was already spelled out by Barbara, and her daughter chose to follow the same course, despite hesitations from Barbara and from common cultural conventions. In this case, feelings of love constitute the point of departure of the narrative route and indicate an explicit end. Literally, Barbara says: "...the end is, (...) they will by all means have a baby." With such an explicit beginning and end, the narrative route could go like this: Babies follow love, no matter the era. For both the mother and her adult daughter this narrative route is a prerequisite for learning, planning, expecting, acting, experiencing and evaluating. By means of the other cultural trope, which Barbara speaks about earlier in the conversation, namely "by the book," she emphasizes the universality of her own experience – exactly because her daughter went along the same narrative route, supplying a manifestation of its validity. This is what convinces Barbara of the true, biochemical connection between love and having babies.

The two women have negotiated with each other, in a mutual permeability of their poly-subjective personhoods, both with respect and with a willingness to listen to each other's voices and to professional narratives. This negotiation has been a source of the narrative route, but at the same time, Barbara has applied the trope biochemistry. In her argumentation she has also drawn on universals and on the emotionality in biological thinking. This reveals, first, that it is possible to use narratives with different routes simultaneously and,

second, that the borders between the genres story/narrative and experience/biochemistry can be quite interchangeable.

### *Summary*

In this article, I have taken as a point of departure the idea that the notion of subjectivism in English (and in the Scandinavian languages) tends to include an understanding of individuals as demarcated personhoods, and that this implies a narrative construction of non-interference into other peoples’ lives as a demonstration of respect. As I see it, the demarcated personhood is an image of individualism and as such a powerful cultural ideal today.

I have shown how grandmothers are immersed in the cultural trope of the “Great Mother,” i.e. that their role in the family involves too much motherliness. Women in this role are suspected of showing a lack of respect of younger family members, such as their daughters, because the “Great Mother” is conceived of as a person threatening the borders of her daughter’s personhood. This threat is brought forward, for instance, by means of good advice-giving, a speech genre which implies a non-authentic and non-personal approach and ignores another person’s experience. This personal experience, on the other hand, is considered authentic and real and contrary to good advice-giving which is regarded a distant and unreal speech genre. Hence, some speech genres are closely connected to cultural notions of correct behavior and, furthermore, they point to a specific narrative construction of reality, namely to an idea of human individualism lodged in separated bodies that have sacred and private interiors. I have suggested that the negative cultural connotations of the Great Mother derives from a generational shift in historical-cultural terms and, moreover, that a motherly identity might have changed towards more emphasis upon individualism, reflected in a deep respect for demarcated personhoods as symbols of personal integrity and subjectivism. Grandmothers, who are represented by the cultural trope “Great Mother”, probably belong to a cultural time with less individualism, and hence they might not be aware of the borders of this demarcated personhood. And the more they try to enter, transgress and interfere with the invisible demarcated personhoods of their adult children, (especially by giving good advice), the stronger and harder the borders will grow, preventing any access.

However, modern grandmothers who accept and respect the consideration of subjects as personhoods with clearly marked boundaries are, paradoxically, able to transgress both the borders and the distinction between some speech genres. A successful and pedagogically skilled grandmother is a woman who is able to utilize the correct speech genres embedded in the world. These are genres fertilized with cultural values thought of as authentic and also fertilized with linguistic terms from the field of natural sciences. This ability is the prerequisite for sharing a meaningful dialogue with the adult daughter.

In the process of participating in this narrative construction of cultural reality, the grandmother narratives reveal another paradox. The stronger an individualistic understanding based upon subjectivism is accepted, the more

it evaporates. The more a grandmother accepts the borders of the demarcated personhood of her daughter, the more this border is permeated, not only by the daughter's interest in listening to her mother, but also by a mutual permeability between the two, a mutual respect and willingness to listen and learn. This means that the more the borders of subjectivism are accepted and respected, the less they exist, and the narrative construction of subjectivism reveals itself to be a prerequisite for a poly-subjectivism in action.

## NOTES

- 1 For helpful comments I thank Caroline Beck, Lone Ree Milkaer, Morten Hoff, Kurt Lüders, and Christine E. Swane.
- 2 The data analyzed in this article is part of a larger body of interviews I conducted in Denmark during the 1990s with twenty-two grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Some of these women lived on a small island, whereas others lived in Copenhagen.
- 3 Among constructionists, there is a growing consensus about the term "constructionism" pointing to the social sciences, whereas "constructivism" relates to the psychological body of knowledge (Schwandt, 2000).
- 4 "Narratives not only construct reality, they *insist* upon certain realities." (Shuman 1994)
- 5 This usage of "narrative reality" does not presuppose a distinction between a reality which is real, and a reality which is narrative. The dualism inherent in such languages as English and Danish tends to force dualistic presuppositions onto the text.
- 6 In his distinction between the terms "narrativity" and "narratology" Ricoeur suggests that narrativity stands for the creative and semantic aspect of narrative, whereas narratology represents the study of traditional rules of narration. He emphasizes that "narratology constitutes the rational reconstruction of the rules underlying poetical activity" (Ricoeur 1991: 24).
- 7 According to Mark Turner, the Anglo-Saxon languages invite such directory narratives, which dominate narratives. A typical example is the life history as a "journey" (see also Cole 1992). Also the Danish speech culture is of a narrative structure in each individual life history (see for instance Jensen 1993).
- 8 The term "narrative route" is inspired by the Danish translation of Mark Turner's notion "motion along a path".
- 9 This distinction can be analytical only, since a factual distinction is impossible. Certain cultural tropes, for instance a proverb, can contain references to a lengthy narrative in traditional terms, with a beginning, middle, end and plot. This example demonstrates the close connections between "cultural tropes" and "narratives".
- 10 Further indication can be found in *Webster's Dictionary*, where "integrity" is synonymous with "complete, unbroken condition."
- 11 Even in the case of a non-verbal transferring of experiences, a transcending of the boundaries of the idea of the demarcated personhood has to take place.
- 12 Actually Barbara herself enjoys learning from her daughter's experiences and from the fruits of her education. This could be seen as a parallel to sharing the experiences her daughter regards as part of her demarcated personhood.

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