The Nottingham Trent Universi
Library & Information Servic
LOAN

41 0623139 5

ProQuest Number: 10183380

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10183380

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.
This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Reading Trauma: exploring the relationship between narrative and coping

Wendy Patterson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of The Nottingham Trent University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2000

To Ian, for his unfailing love, support and encouragement, and to my children, Joe and Abigail – may their life stories be happy ones.

Reading Trauma: exploring the relationship between narrative and coping in the aftermath of trauma

Contents

	Acknowledgements	
	Abstract	
	Introduction	1
Chapter One	The Nature of Narrative	8
Chapter Two	Telling Lives: personal experience narratives	45
Chapter Three	Making Data : from process to text	89
Chapter Four	The Research Process: imagining the data, blind alleys and real lives	130
Chapter Five	Narrating the Impact of Trauma	181
Chapter Six	Narrating the Traumatic Aftermath	228
Chapter Seven	Narrative Meaning-Making	272
Chapter Eight	Resolutions	320
	Conclusion	338
	References	345
Appendix I	Key to transcription	
Appendix II	The narratives	

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to my director of studies, Val Shepherd, who not only provided the initial idea for the project but also continued to fully support and encourage me when I took the idea off into different directions. Grateful thanks also to my supervisors, Caroline Stainton and Sandra Harris, for all their help and excellent advice. Special thanks to Richard Johnson, who acted as my informal supervisor and advisor. My experience of the research process and the development of the thesis were greatly enriched by our discussions. My greatest debt is to the narrators whose stories lie at the heart of the thesis. I hope that it will read as a testimony to their courage and strength.

Reading Trauma: exploring the relationship between narrative and coping

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of The Nottingham Trent University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Wendy Patterson

Abstract

This thesis argues that narrative is the primary way in which we make meaning of our experiences in the world. The concept of narrative is liberated from the constraints of structuralist, narratological or literary perspectives through a tightly drawn re-definition of the term which is non-eventcentric, and is based on the distinction which can be made between narrative and story and on a conceptualisation of narrative which is based on the relationship between story and life.

The central focus of the work is how, *precisely*, narrative enables us to make meaning of our experiences and, in particular, how the process of narration in the aftermath of trauma is related to the process of coping. The database for the study is made up of personal experience narratives of trauma. These are analysed in the terms of the model of the trauma narrative proposed by the thesis, and a wide range of structural and linguistic features are identified, analysed, and interpreted. These interpretations are made in dialogue with psychological approaches to trauma.

Moving beyond the study of trauma, the thesis argues that we live our lives within a time/narrative framework. The work of Paul Ricoeur is used to develop the notion of a life story cycle whereby experience, memory, narration, reading and interpretation are understood as integrated processes within the relationship between life and story.

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration into the relationship between the process of narration and the process of coping in the aftermath of a traumatic event. Theories and concepts from narratology, literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, discursive psychology and psychotraumatology are employed in order to argue that people make meaning of the world by telling stories and that this human meaning-making activity is especially crucial in the aftermath of traumatic life events. This theoretical claim is supported by and developed through the reading of personal experience narratives which tell unique stories of traumatic experience. These narratives of trauma are read as cognitive instruments, in that the stories we tell about our life experiences can be regarded as strategies for living, and as linguistic constructs, in that the act of narration produces a text which can analysed in order to investigate precisely how those stories are constructed and how the processes of narration and renarration may be related to the process of coping.

My use of the terms 'cognitive instrument' and 'linguistic construct' highlights the complex dual role I propose for narrative in this thesis; it functions simultaneously as a mode of meaning-making and as a mode of representing that meaning-making process. The narration of experience, traumatic or otherwise, is crucial to meaning-making and the psychological processes of cognition and memory are, I will argue, inseparable from the linguistic, social and political process of story-telling. In addition to producing meaning for narrators and listeners, the narration of traumatic experience produces texts which can be read, analysed and interpreted in order to make explicit the process of narrative knowledge in relation to the process of coping in the aftermath of trauma.

This rich source of 'local', contextualised knowledge which emerges through the narration of trauma is excluded from most empirical studies of traumatic stress which aim to construct universal knowledge by scientific methods.

Chapter one is a rigorous interrogation of the term and concept 'narrative'. This addresses one half of the question I have been asked and have attempted to answer many times during the research process which culminated in the production of this thesis: 'What is narrative and what has it got to do with coping with trauma?'. The answer to the other half of the question is worked through as the thesis develops but, as will become clear, its formulation is grounded in my understanding of the nature of narrative and in the broader philosophical issue of whether a distinction can be made between life experiences and the stories by which those experiences are known. This chapter includes an examination of the 'double logic' of narrative, the difference between the 'plot' and the 'point' of a narrative, and the process of meaning-making in relation to time and narrative, in order to explore in detail the nature of narrative and its relationship to story and to life.

Chapter two moves the thesis on from a consideration of narrative generally to the personal experience narrative in particular. In this chapter I theorise personal experience narration as a culturally specific process of self-identity and consider social and political constraints on the autonomy of the individual narrator. The central focus of this chapter is the dialogic nature of the oral personal experience narrative and of the self. Although the personal experience narrative can be regarded as marking the point of interface between the 'inner' world of the individual and the 'outer' world of social interaction, I show that these worlds are not separate at all and offer a critique of the

artificial dichotomies 'individual/society' and 'self/other' upon which many Western assumptions and academic disciplines are based.. I argue that the telling of lives is a complex, interactive activity, not only involving dialectic processes between personal motivation and social and political forces, and between and within the self and diverse others, but also between our personal experiences and the means by which we can tell those experiences. A continuum of narratable and non-narratable spheres of experience is proposed and I discuss the way in which the relationship between the two spheres becomes particularly significant in personal experience narratives of trauma. In addition I identify and discuss a range of ways in which the dialogic self is constructed linguistically in our established ways of talking about ourselves and in the levels of narration in specific personal experience narrative texts. In this way I am able to provide insights into the ways in which the self and its experiences are composed in interaction with diverse others, in negotiation with powerful social and political forces, within the limits of language, and the limits of narrative, through the process of telling lives.

In **chapter three** I consider the way in which oral personal experience narratives are defined and used as data from a range of different theoretical positions. Taking an overview of the field of the study of the oral personal experience narrative enables me to locate this work within an academic context and also reveals the way in which the framework of enquiry constructs the object of analysis. Through a critical reading of a range of theorists' approaches to narrative as an object of analysis, I formulate a definition of the oral personal experience narrative for this thesis and discuss the production process through which oral narratives become texts. In addition, a range of

relevant methodological issues are discussed, including transcription. A key to the transcription conventions used in this thesis is provided in appendix I.

Chapter four provides a summary of the methodological procedures followed and an account of the research process through which the narratives I use as data were produced. A list of these narratives is provided in appendix II. The focus of this research changed considerably from the original ideas about the type of data and analysis that would be undertaken and the reasons for this shift are discussed in detail in this chapter. My analysis and interpretation of the narratives, most fully presented in chapters five, six, seven and eight, must be read in the light of this story of their production. This story is told in dialogue with other theorists' accounts of the personal dilemmas they have had to address in relation to the ethical issues of the production, ownership, interpretative authority and publication of other people's stories. In this chapter the methodological issue of using interview narratives rather than 'natural narratives' as data is also addressed.

Chapters five, six, seven and eight present my analysis and interpretation of the narratives and these four chapters are organised according to the model of the structure of the trauma narrative that I propose:

Chapter 5		Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8
X liminal zone	**Y**	**numbness, madness retraumatisation**	**narrative meaning-making**	**resolutions**
equilibrium=> turbulence=>		disequilibrium=>	action=> intervention =>	restoration of modified version of equilibrium

This model emerged through my reading and analysis of the narratives which can best be described as a process of absorption and discovery. Patterns of similarity and difference and the occurrence of particular linguistic features became evident across the narratives through reading and re-reading them in conjunction with the development of my theoretical and methodological approach to narrative.

In **chapter five** I focus on the narration of the moment of traumatic impact and look at the significance of the 'equilibrium disturbed' structure and the 'liminal zone' in this aspect of the narratives. I argue that these two features are related to the injustice of traumatic experience and suggest that the specific way in which the moment of traumatic impact is narrated is closely related to both the narration of the ongoing experiences in the aftermath of trauma and to coping strategies and meaning-making. In this chapter and the three that follow, the problems associated with event-centric approaches to narrative *and* to trauma become clear as the crucial role of imagination in narrating, and coping with, traumatic experience is highlighted.

Chapter six looks at the narration of the experience of disequilibrium in the immediate traumatic aftermath and is structured around the experiences of numbness, madness and retraumatisation. These experiences are narrated by the extensive use of metaphors as narrators strive to make meaning of the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of their narrated selves during the struggle to survive in a severely disordered world. The experience of disequilbrium is well-documented in the literature on the medical condition known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Numbness, hyperarousal and intrusive thoughts, which persist for an abnormally long time, are considered the core symptoms of this disorder, and its pathological nature is determined in relation to an assumed standard of normal responses to trauma, whereby these highly distressing

symptoms are relatively short-lived. The 'normal' coping process is not explored within these psychiatric and psychotherapeutic approaches to traumatic stress, however. It is taken as a given, and assumed to be a simple and transparent process. My analytic aim in this thesis is to investigate and illuminate the 'normal', rather than 'pathological', process of coping and I am able to reveal its diversity, its complexity and its interrelationship with narrative. It is argued therefore that psychological approaches to traumatic stress could be valuably informed by the insights into the process of coping that this thesis provides.

Chapter seven is concerned with narrative meaning-making and its relationship to longer term coping. Two related comparative meaning-making devices are identified and analysed in terms of their function as strategies for evaluating the self and the traumatic experience. This analysis reveals that the occurrence of a particular type of comparison, or its positive or negative quality, is not necessarily related to a particular type of experience or to a particular context of narration, rather it is related to the details of the particular and unique narrative in which it occurs. In addition, I look at the ways in which causation is decided and blame is assigned in the narratives. These issues are highly subjective and have a profound effect on long term coping experiences. The analysis in this chapter also reveals that narrators construct a history, a story of the origins, of the trauma which may reach far back in time as they link together events and experiences which were inexorably, yet unrecognisably, leading to the traumatic event.

Chapter eight focuses on the resolutions that are offered as endings to the narratives. The resolutions that narrators are able to find/make through the narration of their traumatic experiences emerge from within the coherence that configures, 'grasps

together' (Ricoeur 1984:66), the narration of traumatic impact, the narration of the experience of disequilbrium, and the evaluations of the self and the experience. These combine to produce particular ways of talking, and of thinking, about what has happened and can be understood as the framework within which the memory of the traumatic experience exists and from within which future stories will be told. Traumatic experience changes, in quite fundamental ways, how people think about themselves, their lives, and the world in general. In this final chapter I show that these particular ways of thinking, which emerge through the narration of the experience of trauma, are specific and unique and can be identified and analysed through a linguistic approach to narratives of personal experience.

The conclusion provides a brief summary of the key issues and findings of the thesis and includes a discussion of the issues of truth and reality in relation to both narrative knowledge and narrative analysis. The conclusion reflects back on the approach to narrative and trauma taken in this work and points forward to potential new approaches that could be taken in the light of this thesis.

Chapter One

The Nature of Narrative

This chapter is an exploration into the nature of narrative within which I discuss a range of conceptualisations and definitions of narrative in order to arrive at a precise formulation for the purposes of this study. Firstly, I consider narrative as a particular type of text, a linguistic construct, and secondly I consider narrative as a particular type of meaning-making device, a cognitive instrument. One of the claims that I make in this study is that narrative is the primary way in which people make meaning of their experiences in the world; it is a strategy for living. This is not a new claim, it is one that has been made by a number of theorists, as I shall discuss. The new question which drives this thesis is '*how*, precisely, does narrative make meaning?' and in this chapter I begin to address this question by taking, refining and developing a range of structuralist, literary, linguistic and phenomenological approaches to narrative. I consider, in turn, the narrative/story distinction, the relationship between life and story, the 'double logic' of narrative, meaning-making in relation to time and narrative, and the selectivity of narrative, in order to examine in detail the nature of narrative and its relationship to story and to life. The formulation of narrative I propose and the specific points I make are illustrated and developed through the use of extracts from the personal experience narratives of trauma I am using as data for this study.

Conceptualisations of narrative

Within narratology, structuralist approaches to narrative have dominated with the work of Saussure and the Russian formalists of the early twentieth century generating a large

body of work which is, in the main, concerned with the intrinsic, formal properties of narrative texts, particularly the novel. In recent years, however, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has become particularly influential in challenging the rigid formalism and monologism of narratological theories. He and his colleagues, 'The Bakhtin Circle', developed a politically aware, dialogic approach to narrative texts which emphasises the dynamic relationships within and between texts and emphasises the social, interactive nature of language. This disruptive, dialogic intervention into the orderly formalism of narratology has provided an opportunity for a number of new interdisciplinary approaches to narrative. Dialogic perspectives on narrative often bring together insights from Mead (1934), Wittgenstein (1953) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) in order to explore the cultural, social and political aspects of narrative as action, rather than form (see, for example, Sampson 1993, Shotter 1993, Hermans 1996, Morss 1996, Leiman 1997).[1]

The term 'narrative', formerly only found in the disciplines of narratology, literary theory and the philosophy of language, has now been taken across disciplinary boundaries, utilised for diverse purposes, and has become a key term in a wide range of disciplines, particularly psychology, sociology and cultural studies. De Peuter (1998:30) describes this as 'the narrative identity paradigm' which has gained legitimacy and moved from the margins of interdisciplinary studies to provide an alternative to the reductionism of both structuralism and mainstream psychology.

This 'narrative identity paradigm' can be seen as part of the more general linguistic or interpretative turn in the human sciences over the past two decades, most clearly embodied in the social constructionist movement with its emphasis on the central role of

[1] Dialogic approaches to narrative are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

language in the making, and remaking, of realities, of identities and of meanings in contexts[2]. A definitional muddle has been created by this 'narrative moment' (Maines 1993, Plummer 1995) or 'narrative turn' (Russell 1991, Riessman 1993) in the human sciences which, in my view, is problematic in that it obscures the nature of narrative and deflects attention away from its concrete linguistic properties. I shall attempt to unravel this conceptual and definitional muddle in this section before moving on to offer my own definition. The term 'narrative' is being used within and across a range of disciplines in a variety of different ways, for example:

(i) as a specific type of text (e.g. Chatman 1988, Virtanen 1992)

(ii) as a general type of structure or form (e.g. Ong 1982, Sarbin & Kitsuse 1994)

(iii) as a form of knowing, mode of understanding or type of truth (e.g. Bruner 1986, Polkinghorne 1988, Spence 1982)

(iv) as a universal 'metacode' for human existence (e.g. White 1981)

(v) as a model of identity development (e.g. Widdershoven 1994)

(vi) as synonymous with, and as a 'preferred' term to, story[3], history, theory or 'dominant ideology'.

Examples of this last way of using the term include: 'grand narrative' to refer to a 'big' theory, often Marxism; 'cultural narratives' (Sampson 1993:106) or 'metanarratives' to refer to 'dominant ideologies' or the mainstream, sedimented stories of a cultural community as in "I define postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives"

---

[2] Inspired by the insights of Mead (1934) and Wittgenstein (1953), social constructionist theorists in sociology and social psychology (a representative example would include Berger and Luckman 1967, Blumer 1969, Gergen 1985, Sarbin 1986, Potter and Wetherell 1987, Shotter 1993b, Plummer 1995, Michael 1996 and Potter 1996) have now produced a large body of texts which illuminate, in a great variety of ways, the reality-generating and reality-maintaining role of language in the social world. See Burr (1995) for a detailed history of social constructionism and McLeod (1997:83-106) for an analysis of the social constructionist perspective in narrative therapies.

[3] I shall explain the distinction I make between narrative and story shortly.

(Lyotard quoted in Plummer 1995:140); and 'narrative' when used to refer to a major form of social stratification as in "gender, a major narrative that will not collapse" (Plummer 1995:157).

These different ways of using the term 'narrative' are not mutually exclusive and can co-exist, without definition, in the same theorist's work often merging, almost imperceptibly, with each other. This imprecise, shifting use of the term 'narrative' with little indication of what it is meant to signify, allows for both an overuse of 'narrative', so that it becomes somewhat meaningless (Bell 1990), and also, I suggest, for inappropriate use when what is actually being referred to is 'story', 'history', 'theory' or 'ideology'. To use 'narrative' rather than 'story', as the preferred 'intellectual' or 'academic' lexical choice, reflects a lack of understanding of the nature of narrative and its relationship to story. 'Narrative' is not simply a better, more formal, way of referring to a story, it is a *different* thing and to collapse concepts like story, theory or history into the term 'narrative' is unnecessarily reductionist, leading to an impoverishment of the concept of narrative. This misuse[4] of the term 'narrative' serves then to obscure the nature of narrative and its complex, interdependent relationship with story and allows the context-bound specifics of the processes of narration, reading and interpretation to be ignored. Abstract, generalised uses of the term deflect attention away from the specifically linguistic features of narrative and may be seen, therefore, as inadvertently undermining the very paradigm shift, the 'linguistic turn', that is being promoted.

[4]This is not intended to be a pedantic rejection of Humpty Dumpty's famous declaration "When I use a word, ...it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." (Carroll 1984[1948]:100), but merely to point out that, without adequate definition, using the term 'narrative' arbitrarily in place of other, more appropriate terms, ignores a crucial dimension of language and the of nature of narrative.

Narrative as a type of text

I define narrative as 'a text which realises a story'. There are three aspects of this, apparently quite simple, definition which I shall discuss in turn:

i. a narrative is a text
ii. a narrative is not a story
iii. a narrative brings a story into being; it is a linguistic construct that realises a cognitive construct[5]

The first way in which I shall be using the term 'narrative' is to refer to a particular way of organising language which can be distinguished from other linguistic structural forms. In other words, narrative is a specific type of text[6]. Texts, as distinct from synchronic communicative structures, for example paintings and sculptures, control readers' access to their content by imposing a fixed temporal reading order and therefore a fixed meaning-making temporal order (Chatman 1988:22) . While it is perfectly possible for readers to refuse to cooperate with the diachronic nature of narrative texts and, for example, to read the ending of a book before the beginning or to skip paragraphs, pages or chapters, they are nevertheless forced, to some extent, to fill in the gaps and to make meaning from the ending in the light of what has come before. To read a book from end to beginning, or to watch a play with the scenes and acts randomly organised, or to jumble up the verses in a ballad, is to distort the narrative structure to such an extent that either a quite different meaning has been created or only a meaningless juxtaposition of events can be perceived. The meanings created by a narrative text, or indeed any other type of text, do not, therefore, arise only from the content but also from the form; the structure which organises that content. Synchronic

[5]The term 'cognitive' is usually associated with thought and not with emotion or feeling. As I shall discuss in chapter three, my conception of 'cognition' involves a broad notion of meaning-making which includes feelings and embodied emotions within an all-encompassing notion of *consciousness* as a defining aspect of narrative. My use here of 'cognitive construct' involves the notion of a meaning-making framework which is realised by a linguistic construct, the narrative text.

[6]The texts I use in this study are spoken or written language texts but these are not, of course, the only media which can be narratively structured; for example, silent film and live mime performance are just two of the non-verbal art forms that can be regarded as narrative texts in that they also realise stories.

art forms[7], which cannot regulate the order in which they are 'read' in the same way as texts, may well have narrative potential in the sense that one can interpret them as conveying sequentially ordered meanings but cannot be regarded as narrative texts as they lack the structural and temporal regulation which imposes beginnings, middles and endings and, in doing so, creates particular chronologically ordered causal relationships between events.

In Chatman's terms, it is the *external* time regulation which texts impose on the reader, start at the beginning and proceed to the end, that distinguishes texts from other communicative structures, and the *internal* temporal dimension of the narrative text-type that distinguishes it from other text-types, such as argument, exposition and description (Chatman 1988:22). The persuasive, clarifying or descriptive functions of these other three text-types do not necessarily depend on the internal temporal dimension which characterises narrative texts and, in this sense, they have may have a static, timeless quality.

It is interesting to note that Chatman does not include 'instruction' in his list of text-types and although, from his discussion of the criteria he uses for categorisation, it is possible that he would categorise instructive text-types as description this is not made clear. Instructive text-types may have an internal temporal dimension and a textual structure not unlike that of narrative text-types. In a recipe, for example, there is a clear beginning, middle and end and a very definite time span over which the processes the reader is instructed to perform take place. This places a question mark over Chatman's

---

[7] Of course many postmodern art forms play with the boundary between synchronism and diachronism. See, for example, Bal's reading of Ken Aptekar's 'I'm Six Years Old and Hiding behind My Hands' (Bal 1977:66-75)

claim that it is the internal temporal dimension of narrative text-types which distinguishes the narrative text-type from other types of texts, unless he subsumes 'instruction' under 'narrative' and would therefore categorise recipes, assembly instructions and the like as narrative text-types.

For the purposes of this discussion, however, it is sufficient to agree that narrative text-types make use of time in a qualitatively different way to other text-types and the distinctiveness of narrative texts can be further elaborated through Virtanen's (1992) two-level typology of texts in which she relates 'text-type' to 'discourse type'. Virtanen includes 'instruction' as a separate text-type which gives five text-types as compared to the four used by Chatman. In addition, Chatman's notion of surface forms being at the service of deep-level functions is more rigorously schematised by Virtanen who organises her five text-types, narrative, description, instruction, exposition and argument, on a scale according to their potential to realise different discourse types. The criteria for identifying discourse types relates to the purpose of texts while the text-type relates to the surface textual form. As Virtanen illustrates, by using prototypical text-types, the narrative text-type can realise the whole range of discourse types in that a narrative text can describe, instruct, clarify and persuade. However, the narrative discourse type, the purpose of which is to tell a story, can only be realised by a narrative text-type. In contrast to narrative, at the other end of Virtanen's scale, an argumentative text-type can, typically, only realise an argument discourse type while an argument discourse type may be realised by the whole range of text-types.

Virtanen's diagrams illustrate these points clearly:

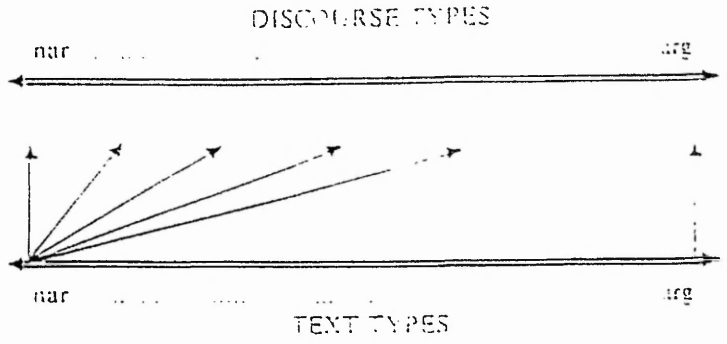


Figure 2. Text types in the service of discourse types:
nar=narration arg=argumentation

(Virtanen 1992 :303)

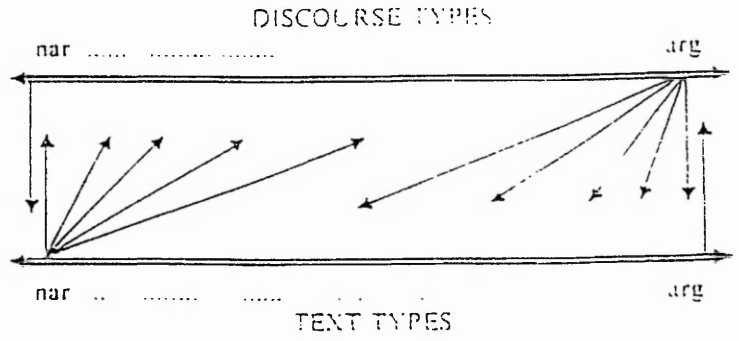


Figure 3. Scales of correspondence between discourse types and text types
nar = narration. arg = argumentation

(Virtanen 1992:304)

Schematising the relationship between form and function, or text-type and discourse type, in this way enables Virtanen to suggest that narrative has a 'basic' or 'primary' status within text-types in that it is capable of realising the whole range of discourse types. Narrative, in Virtanen's terms, is a strong, flexible text-type and a restricted

discourse type, in that it may only be realised by a narrative text-type. The realisation of the function of the narrative discourse type depends, therefore, on surface textual manifestation in a way that does not apply to other discourse types.

The following extract provides an example of a narrative text-type which, within the context of its telling, fulfills the functions of description, exposition and argument discourse types as it realises a story:

1. there was an incident actually a few weeks ago I was with
2. my mother in law and my daughter and the little girl from next
3. door (.) we were walking the dog and there was a man who
4. was sitting (.) erm (.) drinking a bottle of wine or sherry or
5. something looking very er (.) well down (.) dirty and shabby
6. but he had that look (.) and he watched (.) as we passed very
7. intensely (.) now if I hadn't been with my mother in law I would
8. have been absolutely (.) scared out of my mind but because
9. she was there you know I felt OK (.) just about (.) she was
10. worried ...

G1 16:813-823[8]

The narrator of this story, Gail, was physically and sexually assaulted by an intruder in her home, and just before telling this story she had been talking about her fear of being alone and her fear of men. She provides this narrative as an example of how, and in what circumstances, this fear manifests itself. The text contains description, for example, 'a man who was sitting (.) erm (.) drinking a bottle of wine or sherry or something looking very er (.) well down (.) dirty and shabby' (lines 3-5). It also functions to clarify and illustrate what the narrator has previously talked about in a general way, and to persuade the listener of the truth of her earlier statement about her fear of men: 'if I'm not on my own then it doesn't concern me'(G1 15:808-809). This persuasive function is most clearly evident in the phrase which begins 'now if I hadn't

[8] A key to transcription is provided in Appendix I. Details of all the narratives used as data in the thesis are provided in Appendix II.

been with my mother in law'(lines 10-11). The narrator uses a discourse-shift marker (Polanyi and Scha 1983), the forceful 'now', as a means of alerting the listener to the significance of what is coming. It is followed by a comparator (Labov 1972)[9], which tells of something that might have happened but didn't (Gail being on her own) in order to make the point of the story absolutely clear. Since she was attacked, Gail has become afraid of men, especially men who have a 'hungry look' (G1 15:791) but this is only a major problem if she is alone and when she is not alone she is 'OK (.) just about' (lines 13-14). In this way, a very short personal experience narrative functions within the context of its telling as a highly effective and economical way of providing a specific example which serves to validate a general statement and of clarifying, explaining, and arguing the point of the story.

The full range of discourse types which a narrative text-type has the potential to realise will, of necessity, be presented in the form of a story and it is this relationship between story and narrative which, I suggest, promotes the narrative text-type above other text-types in terms of its value as a human strategic resource. We can, and do, describe, explain, clarify, instruct and persuade through the stories we tell, yet every story *must* have a narrative structural frame. Narrative is therefore distinct from story but both only exist in relation to each other.

The narrative/story distinction

The narrative/story distinction holds a central place in the history and development of narratology: the science of narrative. It was pioneered by Russian formalist critics (especially Tomashevski 1968[1925] and Propp 1968[1928]) and has been developed

[9] The use of the comparator as an evaluative device is discussed in detail in chapter three and is one of the main categories of analysis in chapter seven.

extensively by modern structuralist and post-structuralist theorists in narratology and literary theory within a broad multi-disciplinary area of interest in the poetics of narrative. Key texts within this very large body of work include Barthes (1977), Chatman (1978), Segre (1979), Genette (1980), Todorov (1981), Prince (1982), Rimmon-Kenan (1983) and Bal (1985). The Russian formalists worked with the distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet*[10], *fabula* being the events which make up the story, and *sjuzet* being the specific representation of those events.[11]. In Onega's and Landa's (1996) historical overview of narrative and narratology, the formalists' distinction was preceded by Henry James' use of the terms 'subject' and 'wrought material', to make the same distinction (James 1971[1884]) and can be traced all the way back to Aristotle's use of the terms *praxis* and *mythos* in ***The Poetics***, which can be regarded as the first narratological treatise (Onega and Landa 1996:1). While terminological confusion arises when one attempts to compare different theorists work in this area[12], there is consistency in the basic distinction being made between a sequence of events (whether real or imagined) and a specific representation of that sequence. As I shall discuss shortly, there are some problems with this event/representation of event formulation but, for the moment, this what I am referring to as 'story' and 'narrative', respectively.

---

[10] This term is spelt in a variety of ways by different theorists. I have opted for the simplest version which seems closest, phonetically, to the Russian.

[11] The story/narrative distinction I am discussing is sometimes referred to as the story/discourse distinction; 'story' and 'discourse' being conceptualised as two dimensions, or elements, of the overarching concept 'narrative' (see for example, Chatman 1978 and Prince 1988). There are three reasons why I do not use 'story/discourse'. Firstly, this formulation leaves 'narrative' as a somewhat abstract concept whereas I conceptualise it as a general structural form, each manifestation of which is concretely linguistic. Secondly I see no advantage in introducing a third term when two serve my purposes adequately and thirdly, I reserve the term 'discourse' to refer to formations of language which construct knowledge and social practice, in Foucauldian terms, for example 'the discourse of therapy' or 'the discourse of trauma'.

[12] For example, the term *récit* (which translates into English as *narrative*) is used by Genette to denote the presentation of events (*sjuzet*) as distinct from *histoire* (*fabula*) and *narration* (the enunciation of narrative) in a tripartite model. While *récit*, for Bremond, is *fabula* and narrative is *raconté* (Bremond 1964) in a bipartite model. Similarly the term 'story' (or *histoire)* is used in the same way by Chatman (1978) and Barthes (1977) who both distinguish it from *discourse* in their bipartite models. But in Bal's tripartite model (*fabula*, *story* and *text)*, *story* is separated from *fabula* and seen as part of *discourse* (Bal 1985). Rimmon-Kenan's tripartite model uses the terms 'story' in the way that Bal uses *fabula*, 'text' to represent Bal's 'story' and 'narration' in the same way as Genette does which seems to be equivalent to Bal's 'text'!

In a very straightforward 'if p, then q' type of way, narrative and story co-exist in an interdependent relationship but are not synonymous or interchangeable terms.[13] A useful way of conceptualising the distinction between 'narrative' and 'story', as I am using the terms in this paragraph, is to liken 'story' to 'myth' or 'fiction'. The story of Red Riding Hood, for example, is realised through an enormous variety of narratives, in different textual forms and in different languages, all of which can be recognised as tellings of the story of Red Riding Hood. In this way, any particular narrative is a version of a story. 'Story' should not be *equated* with myth or fiction, however. The narration of historical events produces stories of the past, whether that be yesterday or two thousand years ago. 'Fictional' literature and 'factual' historical accounts are often regarded as different, even opposed, phenomena and have been studied in separate disciplines but, as I shall illustrate in this thesis, the dichotomy fact/fiction, when applied to narrative texts, is an artificial one which denies the both the nature of narrative and the role of narrative in the construction of knowledge. As Lamarque and Olsen (1994:225) point out, the narrative form is 'neutral on questions of truth, reference, and correspondence with reality'.

Separating story from narrative in this way is a useful conceptual stage in an exploration into the nature of narrative or in an analysis of a narrative text, but the distinction being made must be viewed with caution, as 'story' and 'narrative' do not exist independently of one another. These phenomena are not separate entities and to regard them as such implies that something as discrete and as tangible as the narrative text existed before it

[13] In an otherwise excellent chapter, Sarbin (1986:3) begins by blurring this distinction stating that, for his purposes, 'narrative is coterminous with story as used by ordinary speakers of English'. His decision to collapse the two terms allows him to slip between 'narrative' and 'story' throughout the chapter which, rather than clarifying the important points he makes in support of a narrative rather than a mechanistic view of human nature, serves to create confusion around the connections he makes between literary, linguistic and psychological concepts.

and is somehow producing the narrative. The story that is told in a text does not have a separate, earlier existence; it is produced by the narrative (in the telling and in the reading). I am suggesting, therefore, that narrative is a linguistic construct and story is a cognitive construct[14]; a narrative is a specific linguistic version of a 'story' but the way that story is understood can vary both between and within versions. The story that is read from the narrative, the knowing that is taken from the telling, depends on who you are, where you are, in time and space, and what assumptions you bring to your reading of that narrative. Story is always, therefore, an interpretation made by the reader, while the narrative, as a linguistic construct, is a much more fixed entity; it is there 'in black and white'[15].

Bal (1985)'s tripartite model of narrative (fabula, story and text) provides a third dimension to the narrative/story distinction. In this model, story and text are equivalent to my story and narrative, while fabula is what the story is about, in a abstract sense. Fabula is the raw data or bare scheme of events prior to any narrativisation; the 'material that is worked into a story' (Bal 1985:6)[16]. From this perspective, story occupies a dual position as both signified and signifier; 'A *story* is the signified of a narrative text. A *story* signifies in its turn a *fabula'* (Bal 1977:4[17]). How does this fit with my explanation of the distinction between narrative and story above, using the fairytale, Red Riding Hood, as an illustrative example? I claimed that we know the story of Red

---

[14]Onega and Landa make a similar point when they refer to story as a 'cognitive scheme of events' and to narrative as a 'linguistic construct' (1996:8)

[15]Oral narratives, such as the ones I am using in this study, have to be recorded and transcribed before they are there 'in black and white', of course. The issue of transcription is discussed in chapter three.

[16]Toolan (1988) seems, to me, to have misinterpreted Bal's model. He describes the distinction between Bal's story and text as a bifurcation of the second half of the standard story/discourse distinction while fabula remains equivalent to story. Of course, this may be because he would not agree that the way I am using story/narrative is equivalent to (the way he understands) story/discourse.

[17]Translated by Onega and Landa (1996:6)

Riding Hood and this enables us to recognise a specific version of the story when we read or hear it. In Bal's terms, we could restate this by saying that we know the fabula Red Riding Hood; the bare scheme of events of a traditional cultural tale which is told and retold in many different versions. These different linguistic versions are specific narrative texts which realise a range of stories of Red Riding Hood, which all have the one abstract fabula in common. Therefore the movement from cognition, from what we remember, in some abstract fabula form, to telling, to others or to ourselves, involves the process of narration which produces a narrative text. The narrative text realises a story that is read and interpreted in diverse ways by different readers. This story is the manifestation of the narrator's knowledge of the fabula, or the manifestation of the way in which the narrator *chooses* to convey their knowledge, in a specific context for a specific purpose. The fabula/narrative/story relationship is not, therefore, a linear, or chronological, one, but a cyclical, dynamic one, as stories feed into the fabula which informs the narratives which realise stories.

Defining narrative as a meaning-making structure

Earlier, I defined the term 'narrative' quite simply but precisely; it is a text which realises a story. In my discussion of the fabula/narrative/story distinction I have spoken of narrative as a linguistic construct and story as a cognitive construct in an interdependent relationship. The 'simple' definition now appears more complex; narrative is more than just a type of text, it is, by definition, a particular type of meaning-making structure. It is this meaning-making function of narrative that has become the focus of attention in a range of disciplines within the human sciences in recent years, although the full complexity of precisely how narrative makes meaning is seldom addressed. An increasing number of social constructionist psychologists have

turned to narrative in order to better understand the way the mind works (for example, Gergen and Gergen 1983, Sarbin 1986, Bruner 1986, Shotter and Gergen 1989, Shotter 1993a, Harré and Gillett 1994). Theodore Sarbin regards narrative as the 'organizing principle for human action' and proposes that 'human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures' (1986:8). As I have discussed, narrative structures function to realise stories; stories which enable us to know the past, make sense of the present and imagine and plan for the future. The 'storied nature of human conduct' (Sarbin 1986) has long been appreciated in certain schools of philosophical thought;

> *A man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything in terms of these stories and he tries to save his life as if he were recounting it.*
>
> Sartre (1964:18)

Sartre presents the image of an individual immersed in, and perceiving the world through, a story-laden context. This implies that life is made up of stories and stories are constructed from life, and we cannot have one without the other; we live in a 'storyworld'. According to Bruner's thesis, we are ideally suited to the storyworld into which we are born because, he suggests, we have a genetic proclivity for narrative understanding (Bruner 1986). Narrative is present, as far as is known, within all languages and cultures, and human beings acquire the ability to understand and to produce stories very early in life[18]. Narrative is 'simply there like life itself ... international, transhistorical, transcultural ', states Barthes (1977:79). If narrative structure is a universal human phenomena, as Barthes claims, then so are stories, although the content of stories and the meanings which are read from them will, of course, be socially and culturally specific. Indeed, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz proposes that culture can be defined as 'an ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves'

[18]By the age of six, most children can produce the classic (adult) pattern of narration (Peterson & McCabe 1983:61).

(1973:448) and that culture is a pre-requisite for life as we know it, in that without culture we would cease to be human. If we agree with him, then we will have no difficulty in accepting that we are truly *homo narrans* - humankind as storyteller (Myeroff 1978).

In order to explore how, precisely, narrative functions as a cognitive instrument which enables us to make meaning of our experiences in the world, it will be helpful to begin by comparing my definition of narrative, 'a text which realises a story', to other definitions. In literary theory, narratology and linguistics, definitions of narrative typically foreground 'events';

> *oral or written narrative statement that undertakes to tell of an event or events* (Genette 1980:25).
>
> *the recounting of one or more real or fictitious events* (Prince 1988:58).
>
> *a narrative is the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way* (Onega and Landa 1996:3).
>
> *a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events* (Toolan 1988:7).

These definitions arise from the narrative/story distinction I have discussed, which is so fundamental to narratology. Story is conceptualised as being comprised of events which are made meaningful through narrativisation, or are being turned into a story through the process of narration. In literary theory and narratology the focus of attention has traditionally been literary fiction, especially the novel. It is not surprising, therefore, that these definitions fall short of encompassing the qualities which typically characterise the oral narratives which are a feature of a large number of everyday social interactions: conversation, therapy sessions and interviews, for example. Toolan (1988:4) describes a central characteristic of narrative as 'a degree of artificial

fabrication or constructedness not usually apparent in spontaneous conversation' thereby quite inappropriately excluding narrative from the context of conversation, where it very often occurs spontaneously, and, at the same time, perpetuating the notion that narrative is fiction.

In oral personal experience narratives it is often not the events themselves which are given central importance but the way in which the narrator experienced those events and the ongoing effects of that experience which means that past and present experiences are inextricably linked. William Labov's seminal work on the oral personal experience narrative (Labov 1972), which has been the starting point for a great many studies of this genre (including this one), makes a distinction between narrative clauses and evaluative clauses, thereby separating what happened from the narrator's evaluation of what happened. Labov still retains, therefore, a rigid 'events/representation of events' conceptualisation of narrative, defining narrative as 'one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred' (Labov 1972:359). Polanyi (1985) concludes that while Labov's model is:

> *successful in part because* ...[it indicates] *the classical development of the plot in conversational stories* ...[it is not*] ultimately very helpful* ...[as] *the clauses that one finds in the transcripts of taped stories hardly ever correspond to this ordering.* (Polanyi 1985:193-4).

An event-centric definition of narrative which conceptualises stories of personal experience as only being concerned with the past is not adequate for this study which aims to explore the complexity of the relationship between narration and coping in the aftermath of trauma. As I shall argue, a crucial element in this relationship is the means by which narrators integrate past, present and future in their stories of coping and events, as such, are not what narrators are necessarily concerned with. In chapter three,

I discuss the ways in which a number of personal experience narrative theorists have extended, refined or rejected the Labovian model in order to more adequately and comprehensively analyse narratives of personal experience, and based on these, I offer my own, inclusive, definition of the oral personal experience narrative. In this chapter, while I shall continue to highlight the distinctive nature of oral personal experience narratives, I want to keep my exploration into the nature of narrative at the level of narrative, generally, rather than focusing solely on the oral personal experience narrative as a specific, distinctive, sub-genre of narrative.

The life/story relationship

In my definition of narrative, 'a text which realises a story', I am using the term 'story' very broadly to refer to what is made known by the act of narration, the knowing that is taken from the telling, and I conceptualise 'events' as 'things which happen in the story'. They need not be something physical or observable but could be a thought or a feeling, in fact 'an event' could be absolutely anything, including a non-event; a decision not made for example. In order to say something about how I want to use the notion of fabula, it becomes necessary to make a clear distinction at this point between fictional literary works and 'life stories'[19] : the former create events in imagined worlds which need not, necessarily, make any claims to represent reality or to retell historical truths while the latter claim to tell stories of actual historical events which have happened in the real world. White (1981:19) describes the telling of history as 'this discourse of the real' which is produced in the context of a desire for authenticity. 'Fabula', in the context of fictional texts, can only be another, albeit different, synthetic abstraction in

[19]Oral personal experience narratives and autobiographical texts and are the two types of 'life story' that I analyse in this study as they are both concerned with the telling of the narrator's own life and experiences but 'life story', as I am using the term, means a story taken from life and includes all narratives that claim to tell a 'true' story. McLeod (1997:35) discusses the way in which the factual or fictional nature of a story may be indicated by the genre within which it can be categorised. In this way an autobiographical text makes implicit truth claims in a way that a novel, for example, does not.

that there is no specific real world experientiality which the story purports to signify. By contrast, in the context of 'life stories', the fabula is life: life which has happened and has experiential validity for real people in the world. The life which is signified by personal stories of trauma is so real to narrators that it has, or has had, the power to overwhelm the present, impinging upon present lives and emotions in a qualitatively different way to the rest of their history. In the stories of trauma presented in this study the evidence of the past (an overwhelming fear of being alone, the disfigurement caused by extensive burns or the absence of a loved one, for example) is vividly present to the narrators; it is what they live with on a daily basis. This traumatic fabula, the raw data which must be worked into a story that is liveable with, is very different from a fictional cultural fabula, the telling of which may have a familiar, even comforting, quality.

While we live with the effects of our history, the causes of those effects and the details of our lives, from birth to yesterday, and, for that matter, the details of history generally, exist in memory and can only be known by their reconstruction in the present. There are of course texts which were created in 'past presents' (archival material, books, newspapers, letters, diaries, photographs, audio and video recordings) which may be regarded as historical evidence but these only provide a fragment from the past which must be interpreted and incorporated into a much larger story in order to make sense of the past. Narration is therefore a revivification of fabula or, in my terms, of life, which entextualises and transforms experience in the production of a narrative thereby realising a story. The story then *becomes* the past life, becomes history as it can be known, and only known, in the present. 'Once a story is told', says Steedman (1986:143), 'it ceases to be a story: it become a piece of history, an interpretative device.' It is more accurate, therefore, to present the relationship between life and story

as a dynamic circular process rather than the static, layered models of narrative which have been so favoured by narratologists in the past.

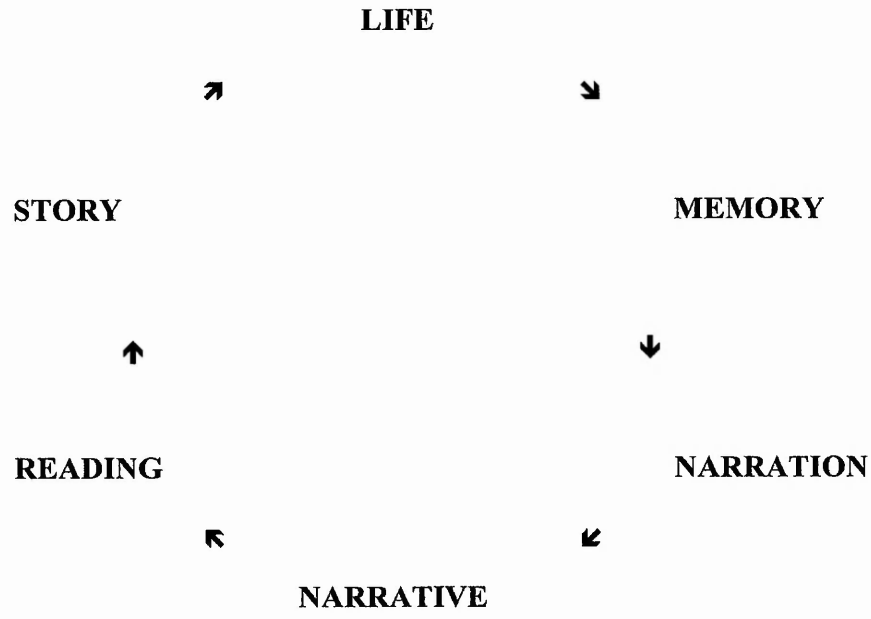


Fig.1 A life story cycle

Fig. 1 is a very simple diagrammatic presentation of a complex process. Precisely how 'life' becomes 'story' and 'story' 'life', if indeed this is what takes place, involves the processes of memory, narration and reading which are fundamental to knowing, telling and interpreting in specific contexts. These are all key issues which I shall come to in due course but, for the purposes of the present discussion, the diagram usefully illustrates both the distinction between, and the interdependence of, narrative and story and the cyclical process by which I understand the dialectical relationship between life and story in this context.

The use of a circle[20] to represent the relationship between life, narrative and story rather than a linear model, which would suggest a simple, chronologically ordered, production line (life => memory => narration => narrative => reading => story), invites the question 'which comes first?': is a story produced by life or life by story? The distinction between living and telling is blurred indeed, if we can only know that living in the telling of it.

Paul de Man addresses the same issue within the context of autobiographical writing:

> *We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces a consequence, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiography project may itself produce and determine life?*
>
> (de Man 1979:920)

Culler (1981) refers to this feature of narrative as its contradictory 'double logic'; a narrative text is a *re*presentation of a sequence of events and therefore we must, as narrators and as readers, assume the prior existence of that sequence. However, as Culler's readings of 'fictional' texts (*Oedipus* and *Daniel Deronda)* and 'factual' texts (Freud's case histories and Labov's 'natural narratives'[21]) illustrate, the meaning which events have in a story is not determined by 'what really happened' but rather by the demands of the logic of the 'plot', which configures the events of the story into a whole, or, in the case of Labov's natural narratives, by the 'point' of the story. Culler discusses the ways in which 'what really happened' in *Oedipus*, *Daniel Deronda* and *The Wolfman and Sigmund Freud* is not decided by recourse to an actual sequence of events (whether real or imagined) which the narrative represents but by what 'fits' with the story. In this

---

[20] Widdershoven (1994:2) describes the process I have represented as a 'hermeneutic circle'; life informs and is informed by stories. Similarly Scholes (1981 :207) describes a 'semiotic circle' which is completed by interpretation as it strives towards a recreation of the events. Ricoeur (1981:72) reconceptualises his 'vicious' circle of *mimesis* as 'an endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes'. I shall return to Ricoeur's important contribution to narrative theory in the context of my discussion of time and narrative later in this chapter.

[21] The 'danger of death' stories which Labov (1972) elicited from young black American males.

way, the present 'writes' the past, as causation is only assigned to an earlier event in the light of a later one; causes are the effects of their effects and only exist in retrospection.

I shall return to this inversion of the cause-effect relationship within narrative shortly but before doing so I shall consider in some detail the way in which Culler discusses the manifestation of narrative's double logic in terms of 'plot' and 'point' in order to tease out some of the subtlety of the nature of narrative which he suggests but does not develop.

The 'plot' and the 'point' of narrative texts

The conflict between the primacy of events and the primacy of story is not only present in fictional or theoretical texts but also in 'natural narratives', as Culler (1981) discusses. Although Labov's treatment of his 'natural narratives' assumes the primacy of events, defining narrative, as previously discussed, as 'one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred' (Labov 1972:359-60), he then goes on to discuss the ways in which the, perhaps overriding, function of evaluation enables the narrator to convey the 'point' of the story. Evaluation is one of the six elements in Labov's model of the personal experience narrative. Narrative, says Labov (1972), can be understood as a series of answers to underlying questions and the elements of his model of the structure of a mature, fully-formed oral personal experience narrative function to respond to those questions:

1. Abstract (optional) - what was this about?
2. Orientation - who, when, what, where?
3. Complicating Action - then what happened?
4. Evaluation - so what?
5. Result - what finally happened?

A sixth element, the Coda, functions to sign off the narrative, to hand the 'floor' over to the hearer(s), and rather than answering a question it '*puts off* a question', signalling that questions 3 and 4 are no longer relevant (Labov 1972:370 emphasis in the original). Labovian analysis breaks down a narrative into these components in order to establish a core narrative, the complicating action, made up of narrative clauses which refer to specific events, and evaluation, made up of non-referential clauses, which convey the narrator's perspective and the way in which this is mediating the point of the story. A simple example would be: 'he hit me (narrative clause) and it was dreadful' (evaluative clause). Labov's attempt to match narrative clauses to events and to maintain a strict distinction between referential clauses, which report the sequence of events, and evaluative clauses, which mediate the 'point' of the story, is problematic in that, as Culler points out, any clause may be present because it fulfils the evaluative rather than the referential function. In other words a clause that appears to be a simple narrative clause referring to an event is not necessarily present in the text just because it is what happened (all narration is selective, it is impossible to tell everything that happened) but may have been selected for inclusion because it supports the point of the narrative, and its primary function is therefore not referential but evaluative.

For the purposes of Culler's discussion about the logic of narrative, the 'point' of an oral personal experience narrative, which must be perceived by the hearer in order to validate the telling of the story, serves the same function as the 'plot' of a literary narrative and he does not therefore have to make clear the difference between 'plot' and 'point'. They are actually quite different concepts which perform similar functions within dissimilar sub-genres of narrative. In literary theory, 'plot' embodies both temporality and causality, as in Forster's famous plot 'The king died and then the queen

died of grief' (Forster 1962: 93). This would not necessarily provide the 'point' which, as Labov (1972) and Polanyi (1979) discuss, is so crucial to the oral personal experience narrative, however. This is because the 'point' of a oral narrative does not reside only within the text, as 'plot' does, but exists within the context of the telling. In addition, as Holmes' (1997) analyses show, an oral personal experience narrative may make multiple points, explicit and implicit, and and the most important point of the telling need not necessarily be apparent in the narrative itself but may be deeply embedded in the context within which it is told.

Holmes (1997) demonstrates this by analysing a fairly mundane oral narrative about taking children swimming and visiting an elderly parent and arguing that it functions to make at least three points at different interactional levels within the conversational context of its telling. At one level, the narrative is 'doing friendship' by bringing the listeners up to date on what the narrator has been doing. At another level it is a response to a specific question about the health of the elderly parent but more important than either of these two, states Holmes (1997:275), is the implicit, indirectly made, point of the narrative which is to construct the narrator's identity as a 'good' mother and daughter. 'Point' is, therefore, both an internal (textual) and an external (contextual) element of an oral personal experience narrative because it is an aspect of social interaction as well as a feature of this particular sub-genre of narrative. 'Plot' is a relatively abstract, static property of a literary text whereas 'point', the significance of an oral personal narrative, may be multiple, complex and subtle and is fundamentally context bound. It validates the telling of a story within its immediate context and therefore the 'point' of a story, its *raison d'étre,* is perceived, or not, within the social

interaction which provided the forum for the telling (conversation, interview, therapy session etc.) and is not necessarily evident in the text alone.

If we return to Gail's narrative about the shabby man in the park, the distinction between plot and point becomes very clear:

11. there was an incident actually a few weeks ago I was with
12. my mother in law and my daughter and the little girl from next
13. door (.) we were walking the dog and there was a man who
14. was sitting (.) erm (.) drinking a bottle of wine or sherry or
15. something looking very er (.) well down (.) dirty and shabby
16. but he had that look (.) and he watched (.) as we passed very
17. intensely (.) now if I hadn't been with my mother in law I would
18. have been absolutely (.) scared out of my mind but because
19. she was there you know I felt OK (.) just about (.) she was
20. worried ...

G1 16:813-823

The plot here is minimal: Gail and her companions are walking the dog, they see a shabby man who watches them very intensely, Gail is 'just about' OK and her mother-in-law is worried[22]. However, the point of the narrative is much more complex and significant, involving explanation, clarification and argumentation, as discussed earlier (this chapter:16-17). This short personal experience narrative functions to clarify, illustrate and argue what the narrator has previously talked about in a general way. It does this by providing a specific example, and by providing evidence, within the plot of the story, that will persuade the listener of the truth of the narrator's earlier statement about her fear of men. In a sense the plot is incidental. It is the point of the story, which is realised through the content and the form of the narrative within the context of the interview, that is significant and this significance is made explicit by the narrator, by the use of the discourse-shift-marker, 'now' (line 10), and the comparator which begins 'if I hadn't been with my mother-in-law'(lines 10-11), as discussed earlier.

[22] This is the complete narrative of this incident and the only reference Gail makes to it in the whole interview.

'Plot' within fictional narratives is a deliberately constructed organisational strategy which may entertain, intrigue, mystify or challenge readers. Oral personal experience narratives may well have a deliberately constructed 'plot' in that funny, intriguing and entertaining stories are told in conversation and the quality of the 'plot' may be closely related to the 'point' in these instances, but 'plot' is not an essential feature of these texts. There is no expectation that oral personal experience narratives which are told in therapy sessions, for example, should have a well-constructed, clearly identifiable 'plot', and the 'point' of these narratives is provided, in part, by the context in which they are produced; therapists are not going to respond with 'the withering rejoinder, "So what?" '(Labov 1972:366)[23]. This will not necessarily free narrators from the desire to provide a 'point', indeed the aim of therapy may well be the creation of a 'point', but clearly the determining influence of the tension between events and story within an oral personal experience narrative is contextualised in social interaction in a qualitatively different way to that of the more stable, textually-bound strategic force of 'plot' within written literary fiction. Langellier makes a similar point when she states that 'whereas story and discourse may be separable and irreconcilable [as Culler claims] in literary theory, they are *lived together* in the very activity of performing personal narratives' (1989: 270 emphasis in the original).

What this means is that while the nature of narrative is, as Culler describes, characterised by a contradictory double logic which demands that the primacy of event and the primacy of story somehow co-exist, different types of narrative (fictional, historical, oral etc.) deal with that contradiction in different ways in order to fulfil

[23] Ferrara (1994:55) makes a similar point when she comments that '...client narrators in psychotherapy do not have to justify holding the listener's attention. They are paying for it.'

different functions. It is necessary, therefore, to guard against making generalisations about the nature of narrative from the analysis of any specific sub-genre of narrative. There is much that can be said about the nature of narrative which is relevant to all narratives but any quality or characteristic common to all narratives may manifest itself quite differently in specific types of narrative, as I have illustrated by the concepts of 'plot' and 'point'.

The temporal nature of narrative

If we now return to the inversion of the cause-effect relationship within narrative, by which the meaning which events have, in life or in fiction, is not present at the time that the events occur but is retrospectively assigned to them in the light of their effects, it becomes clear that the complex dialectic between story and life is played out within and through time. The nature of narrative is temporal, at many levels. This aspect has been explored in great depth by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur who approaches narrative from both a phenomenological and a hermeneutical perspective (Ricoeur 1984, 1985 and 1988). In ***Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*** (1981:112) Ricoeur defines the task of hermeneutics as 'the explication of the being-in-the-world displayed by the text' rather than 'an inquiry into the psychological intentions which are hidden beneath the text'. His project in ***Time and Narrative*** (1984:3) is to relate the activity of narrating a story to the temporal character of human experience and he does this by exploring 'the circle of narrative and temporality', formulated by the hypothesis; 'time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.' (Ricoeur 1984:52).

From his reading of St. Augustine's *Confessions,* Ricoeur takes the concept of 'the dialectic of the three-fold present' which allows time to exist despite the seemingly irrefutable logic of the argument; 'time has no being since the future is not yet, the past is no longer, and the present does not remain.' (Ricoeur 1984:7). The past and the future exist in the present by virtue of the acts of remembering and expecting, and there are, therefore, three times; a present of past things (memory), a present of present things (perception) and a present of future things (expectation) (Ricoeur 1984:7-10).

Ricoeur then brings this concept of time to narrative by means of his interpretation of readings of Aristotle's *Poetics.* He introduces a temporal dimension to Aristotle's concepts of *muthos* and *mimesis* and a narrative dimension to Augustine's concept of time by means of an expanded conception of mimesis which provides a mediating bridge between the two classic texts. *Muthos,* in Ricoeur's interpretation of Augustine's use of the term, is emplotment (the organization of events) and *mimesis* is the active process of imitating or representing something[24]. The former is regarded as the product of the latter: 'Imitating or representing is a mimetic activity inasmuch as it produces something, namely, the organization of events by emplotment.' (1984:34).

Ricoeur's three-fold mimesis (mimesis I, II and III) consists of three moments (temporally) or movements (spatially) which allow him to follow '*the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time*' (1984:54). It is mimesis II, configuration, says Ricoeur, that is the key to understanding the temporal nature of narrative and the narrative nature of time. Mimesis I, prefiguration, is concerned with the conditions which make it possible to imitate or

[24] See White (1991:149) for a discussion of Ricoeur's challenge to Aristotle's distinction between *mimesis* (imitation of an action in discourse) and *diegesis* (description of events) upon which fictional and factual discourse have been conventionally opposed.

represent action, the 'preunderstanding' of what human action is, structurally and symbolically, in time. Mimesis III, refiguration, concerns the relation between the narrative text and the reader thereby completing, through the process of mimesis II, a mimetic circle[25]. What I understand this to mean is that mimesis III is anticipated by, indeed to some extent is already present within, mimesis I in that refiguration is the point of intersection of the world of the text and 'the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality' (1984:71); it is, therefore, a precondition for prefiguration. Mapping Ricoeur's mimetic processes onto my life story cycle makes the point:

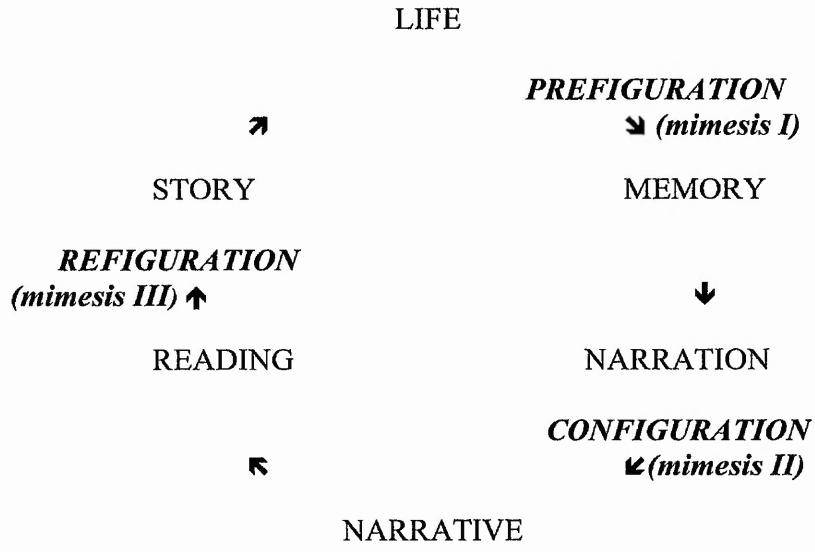


Fig. 2 Life-story cycle as mimetic process[26]

Note that I have chosen to represent Ricoeur's mimesis III as mediating between reading and story and not between story and life in my cycle. I do this in order to avoid

---

[25] Vanhoozer (1991:50) points out that Ricoeur's three-fold *mimesis* bears a striking resemblance to the Heideggerian notion of the 'working out of possibilities projected in understanding' and he finds a correspondence between Riceour's three types of *mimesis* and three Heideggerian concepts: pre-understanding, the projection of possibilities and the appropriation of these possibilities 'understandingly'.

[26] This figure is used again in chapter 5:203 in relation to the XY structure of the narration of traumatic impact.

representing story as an imitation/representation of life experience (I see it as both informing and composing life experience through the dynamic of the circle as a whole) and because I see refiguration as a part of the process of reading, or interpretation, and therefore a precondition for the construction of story. Similarly, prefiguration seems to me to be a precondition for memory as well as narration, hence its position within the cycle.

The particular aspect of Ricoeur's seminal work on time and narrative that I want to focus on here is 'emplotment' and through a discussion of this I shall be able to show how narrative reverses the 'natural' order of time and why this is crucial to meaning-making, thereby supporting the claim that narrative is a strategy for living.

Emplotment belongs within mimesis II and is described by Ricoeur as mediating between individual events or incidents and a story as a whole. Emplotment is, therefore, a transformative act, drawing from the 'manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole' (1984:66). It is this feature of narrative which, Ricoeur suggests, solves the enigma of time which caused Augustine to lament: 'What then, is time? I know well enough what it is provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is, and try to explain, I am baffled'[27]. As Vanhoozer (1991:48) points out, Ricoeur's approach provides a poetic rather than a theoretical solution to the aporia of time: 'time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.' (Ricoeur 1984:52). In this way a hermeneutical approach to time and narrative understands that the meaning of either arises from the relationship between the two.

---

[27] *Confessions* II 14:17 quoted by Ricoeur (1984:7)

Ricoeur's two-dimensional concept 'emplotment' both reflects the paradox of time, one dimension being chronological and the other achronological, *and* provides the solution to the paradox: in coming together the two dimensions make it possible to follow a story.[28] To 'follow a story', as Ricoeur understands it, is to respond to a force within a narrative text, a 'particular "directedness"', with expectation as to how the story will end (1984:150).

The two dimensions of emplotment are the 'episodic' and the 'configurational'[29]. The episodic dimension is chronological, drawing narrative time in the direction of the linear representation of time. It provides the 'then' and the 'and then' structure which gives a linear representation of time and provides an open-ended series of events. These can be added to, indefinitely, in response to 'and then what happened?', as long as the episodes follow one another in accordance with the irreversible order of time. The configurational dimension is achronological and it displays its opposition to the chronology of the episodic dimension in three ways; firstly, it is a 'grasping together' (Ricoeur 1984:66), making the succession of events into a significant whole which provides the 'point' or 'theme' of the story. In this way the entire sequence of events can become 'one thought' (Ricoeur 1984:67). Secondly, the configurational dimension imposes the need for a point of closure on the open-endedness of the episodic dimension. This 'sense of an ending' (Kermode 1968) is, I suggest, integral to both the narrating and the reading experience. Stories do not ramble on endlessly answering the question 'and then what happened?', and if they did, the listener will soon stop asking!

---

[28] In the context of Ricoeur's discussion of emplotment, 'story' approximates to 'plot'.

[29] Ricoeur refers to this dimension as 'configuration proper' which is distinct from the overarching configuration which is mimesis II as a whole.

The 'anticipatory thrust' (Neimeyer 1994:238, quoted by McLeod 1997:34) of narrative counteracts the episodic tendency to continue on indefinitely. Thirdly, the process of configuring a sequence of events or incidents into a meaningful whole, a 'followable' story, involves making meaning in the *reverse* order of chronological time.

It is, I suggest, the three-fold present of the 'now' of the moment of narration, mimesis II, which enables time to, in effect, travel backwards as the end of a story determines its beginning. This is how narrative and time, together, invert the cause-effect relationship between events. Causes become the effect of their effects because until the effects are known, the causes cannot be identified. They remain insignificant events which would not warrant inclusion in the story, and are therefore non-existent, until, or unless, they later become significant and are brought into being in the 'now' of the moment of narration.

An extreme example of this is provided by Sandra's narration of the traumatic experience of being sprayed with acid while working in a shop. Her initial understanding of this event involved a stranger, disguised in full motorbike gear, coming into the shop and attacking her in order to gain access to the money in the till. This initial meaning-making was incomplete in that all that happened could not be fitted into the story. When Sandra fled into the back of the shop, instead of taking the money and leaving, the man followed her and continued to douse her with acid:

1. I did think he was going to set fire to me or something like that 2.
   I wasn't sure what he was going to do [tearful] I couldn't
3. understand why he followed me out the back

S1 5:249-251

When Sandra later discovered that the perpetrator was not a stranger but was in fact her estranged husband, she was, eventually, able to construct a very different meaning-making narrative about why she had been attacked:

1. S: well I mean I keep thinking of er you know the saying that
2. er (.) if I can't have you no one else can (.) but at the same
3. time (.) I don't think his motives were to actually erm (.) hurt
4. me as badly as he did I think he just wanted to (.) hurt me (.)
5. so much as (.) like he was coming into the hospital looking
6. after me and he you know and that when I went out of hospital
7. (.) that er I think he wanted me to let him come and look after
8. me (.) and erm me just need him again

9. P: so you think that in quite a bizarre way it was his way of
10. trying to

11. S: get us back together again yeah

S1 10:506-519

Sandra's initial narrations of her traumatic experience are, in Ricoeur's terms, prefigured by what she knows about life, her pre-understanding, which involves knowing that, for example, robberies involving violence occur. The later experience of discovering that the perpetrator was her estranged husband involves, not only a re-interpretation of the events which occurred, prefigured through, for example, her understanding of her husband, but also radically changes the experience itself, changes life which has happened. Now, Sandra narrates a story of being attacked by her estranged husband and strives, through her narration, to make this meaningful. What Sandra experienced, at the time, involved being attacked by a stranger but the experience she has to come to terms with, to make meaningful, is a quite different one.

It may seem that Sandra's experience is so bizarre and unusual that it is an inappropriate example of the complex dialectic between life and story. However, there are many much more common life experiences that involve a similar process. For example,

someone who discovers that their partner has been having a secret affair may have enormous problems coming to terms with the recognition that their experiences during the time the affair was going on were not what they understood them to be at the time. Happy stories of special occasions, intimate times or indeed *any* shared experiences are transformed into stories of deceit, betrayal and humiliation[30].

Past experience is not fixed and does not have intrinsic meaning, it is always open to re-interpretation and, in certain situations, can turn out to be surprisingly fragile. In this way, we do not possess or have total control over our past experiences or over the meaning of those experiences. Our personal histories, constructed through our stories of personal experience, are inextricably entwined with the histories of others[31].

The selective nature of the narration of life events

The effect of discovering something about an event, which was not apparent at the time, may change what one believes caused that event. The breakdown of the relationship between Sandra and her husband only became the cause of the attack when Sandra discovered that he was the perpetrator (effects create causes, as previously discussed). This new cause has its own effects in the present. Renarration of the traumatic experience, in these circumstances, is likely to involve a different selection from all the possible experience that could be included. For example, the actions of Sandra's estranged husband (visiting her in hospital, declaring his intention to find the perpetrator and generally behaving like a devoted, loving husband) were irrelevant in Sandra's initial story of what had happened but became very significant, indeed essential,

[30] Weiss (1975) discusses the 'obsessive review' that may dominate a person's life in the wake of the termination of a relationship, whereby people constantly renarrate the relationship and are obsessed by the need to make meaning that they can live with.

elements of the later meaning-making narrative. The narration of life is, of course, *always* a highly selective activity. Life is full of irrelevance whereas in stories everything has significance. Historians, biographers and narrators of personal experience narratives *must* radically reduce the vast array of potential experience which could be included in their stories. No-one could possibly tell *everything* that happened in one day and if one could no-one would want to listen to an endless list detailing the mundane, ordinary events which always accompany even the most extraordinary of happenings. This is described beautifully by Ong (1982:13) who refers to the construction of narrative as the isolation of certain elements by a narrator who cuts them out of 'the incessant and dark flow of life' and the 'density of time' and frames them in words. The imposition of a narrative structure makes manageable the vast array of experience available through memory as past life is recomposed and rendered meaningful in the present telling.

Making meaning for the future through narrative

Meaning is not only assigned retrospectively to the past, in the light of what came after, but is also constructed prospectively, for the future, in the light of what came before; the past, reconfigured in the now of narration. When imaginary stories of the future are constructed however, the same *re*trospective action of emplotment operates; a linear succession is 'grasped together' (Ricoeur1984:66) to provide an ending, a point of closure on the future.

In the following extract Sunita narrates a future story for her unborn child as part of her explanation of how she came to the decision to have an abortion:

---

[31] As I shall discuss in detail in the next chapter, our dependence on others extends well beyond the meaning of our past experiences and is integral to our concepts of identity and self.

1. I had to have the termination done because what good was it
2. going to be for the child of rape to come to this world? it was
3. going to be suffering for him or her all the time people pointing
4. to that child and saying you're a child of rape and that abuse
5. was going to kill that child although he was going to live but it
6. was going to kill him every day feeling guilty all the time why
7. did I come to this world? why couldn't my mother get rid of me?
8. so I think due to my circumstances I made the right decision
9. but it was a very hard decision

Sunita 1:24-33

In planning for the future we must be able to answer the question 'what if?' and we can only do so by proposing an ending, a resolution to potential stories of experience. The future need not be unknown, chaotic or random, therefore, because we can make the future known through narration in the three-fold present; through the 'present of future things'. Prospective narration brings the future under control because we can predict outcomes, assign causes to effects and make meaning *ahead* of time. Our imaginary stories may not turn out, in the living of the future, the way we constructed them but they will nonetheless influence both the way we experience life and the way we will evaluate, retrospectively, future pasts in future presents.

The strategic power of narrative

The full strategic power of the temporal nature of narrative can now be appreciated; a narrator perceives (in the present of present things) through memory (the present of past things) life experiences which are configured into meaningful stories about the past. Understanding the past enables a narrator to imagine (in the present of future things) stories for the future which is the very basis upon which life will be experienced and evaluated at a future 'now' time of narration.

I shall return to a much more detailed discussion of these ideas in chapters five and six when I consider, among other things, what can happen during and in the aftermath of a

severe traumatic event. Perception, memory and expectation, organized by the temporal nature of narrative in the three-fold present, can all be radically disrupted when a traumatic event shatters the unity of 'now'. Narrating life may then become both the most necessary and the most difficult thing to do.

In the preceding sections, I have only scratched the surface of Ricoeur's rigorous, in-depth treatment of time and narrative and I have developed some aspects of his ideas in order to take a different, but I do not think contradictory way into understanding the temporal nature of narrative and its power to construct meaning of the past and for the future. This has enabled me to further explore the specific means by which narrative, as a linguistic construct which realises a cognitive construct, renders the world meaningful and becomes a strategy for living.

In this chapter I have proposed a definition of narrative as a text which realises a story, and I have formulated a conceptualisation of narrative as a linguistic construct that realises a cognitive construct. I have explored narrative's meaning-making functions through looking in detail at specific elements of the nature of narrative, and I have highlighted the ways in which the three-fold present of the time of narration is crucial to meaning-making. The temporal nature of narrative, and narrative's relationship to life, are fundamental aspects of the relationship between narration and coping in the aftermath of trauma and I shall draw on the formulations I have made in this first chapter many times in the development of the thesis. In the next chapter I look closely at the narration of personal experience as an autobiographical act shaped by its cultural, social and political context, and consider the ways in which individual storytellers narrate their lives in different contexts, for different purposes.

Chapter Two

Telling Lives: personal experience narratives

> *So in despair I felt sure my bad luck was due to the influence of those heavenly powers who have such dominance over us here below; and in this state set to work to write my whole life, my origin and all the deeds I had done in the world, and I also described the many years in which I had served the illustrious Duke Cosimo. But on thinking the matter over, I was minded how great princes often take it ill if their subjects complain and tell the truth about them. So with much heart burning and not without tears I tore up what I had written...*
>
> from 'The Treatises of Benvenuto Cellini on Goffsmith and Sculpture'[32]

Lives are told in diverse forms and contexts. From the carefully constructed, revised and edited autobiographical text to the spontaneous anecdote in conversation, we narrate our lives in diverse ways, producing stories of a particular time and place. This chapter provides a broad, yet detailed, examination of the phenomenon 'the personal experience narrative' by covering its cultural, historical, social, political, structural and linguistic aspects. In the first section, I consider the personal experience narrative, in all its forms, as autobiography (*autos*-self, *bios*-life, *graphe*-writing) which, as Gusdorf (1980:30) points out, is only possible in a cultural landscape where a particular consciousness of self exists. From this exploration into the cultural specificity of personal narration, I move on to consider a range of theories that link the popularity and commodification of autobiography in the Western world to the emergence of a postmodern Western self. The mutable postmodern self is described and defined in contrast to a former stable, unified, autonomous modern self, the development of which can be traced back through a long tradition of autobiographical reflection. Making these connections between autobiography and Western conceptions of the self, exposes the sovereign, autonomous self, the self-contained authorial 'I', as an illusion, dependent upon the very 'otherness' it denies.

---

[32] quoted by Sturrock (1993:70)

This leads on to a discussion of the dilemma which the philosophical dissolution of the subject presents to the 'others' it denied, and I focus, in particular, on feminist responses to the positive and negative implications of postmodernist theories of the self. I then go on to consider personal narration as social and political practice and examine some of the ways in which self-authoring involves a complex process of negotiation with diverse forces. This leads to a closer examination of the dialogic, rather than monologic, nature of personal narration which, I argue, is a complex, interactive activity, not only involving dialectic processes between personal motivation and social and political forces, and between and within the self and diverse others, but also between our personal experiences and the means by which we can tell those experiences. I propose that there are narratable and non-narratable spheres of experience and that the relationship between the two becomes particularly significant in personal experience narratives of trauma. In the final section of the chapter, I identify and discuss a range of ways in which the dialogic self is constructed linguistically in our established ways of talking about ourselves and in the levels of narration in specific personal experience narrative texts. In this way I am able to provide insights into the ways in which the self and its experiences are composed in interaction with diverse others, in negotiation with powerful social and political forces, within the limits of language, and the limits of narrative through the process of telling lives.

Many of these aspects of the telling of life are illustrated by the quotation above: the narrator's understanding of the cause of his 'bad luck' places the text in a particular historical and cultural context, a context which he assumes is shared by the reader, one of 'us here below'; his decision, 'to write my whole life, my origin and all the deeds I had done in the world', reveals the essence of the autobiographical act, a 'narrating I'

creates a 'narrated I' as the protagonist in a story. In this case the autobiographical project may be seen as an attempt to use narrative autonomously and strategically in order to wrench some control from 'those heavenly powers'. A powerful 'other' in his life story then denies him his autonomy, 'I was minded how great princes often take it ill if their subjects complain and tell the truth about them'. In any case, the task he had set for himself, 'to write my whole life', is, of course, an impossible one. All personal experience narration must be a highly selective process, as discussed in chapter one. In addition, also discussed in chapter one, the telling of life, unlike fictional narrative, is committed to a notion of authenticity; it is a 'discourse of the real' (White 1981:19). Therefore, when this narrator comes to believe that he is unable to 'tell the truth' because a more powerful other will not permit him to do so, the project becomes a futile one and the autobiographical dream is abandoned. Finally, the autobiographical project is not outside the life it tells but part of that very experience. The quotation is a personal experience narrative about the creation and the destruction of a personal experience narrative: a traumatic experience in itself.

The cultural specificity of personal narration

Telling one's own life story from the perspective of a single 'I' is an act of self-possession in that one's personal history is understood as belonging to a single self, distinct from all other selves. The assumption that we can be the sole authors of lives is not a universal assumption, however. For many cultures, the very idea of individuality, of 'self' and 'other', the dichotomy upon which the Western self defines itself, does not exist. In addition, Western concepts of time, chronological order, development and progress (which are all central to the traditional autobiographical project) are not intrinsic properties of the world but cultural and linguistic concepts,

which are used in order to impose meaning on the world and to speak about human experience within it. Other peoples, transhistorically and transculturally, have different concepts and talk about the world and their experiences in the world in different ways; what is taken to be 'natural' and universal in one culture may be completely alien and unnatural in another. Clifford Geertz's sensitive anthropological reading of other cultures finds that, on a global scale, the Western conception of the self is a 'rather peculiar idea' (Geertz 1973:229).

I do not propose to delve too deeply into the issue of cultural and linguistic relativity, which would require much more than a section in a chapter of this thesis. Instead I shall take some examples and some insights from the work of Sampson (1993), Whorf (1956) and Hoskins (1998) as these are particularly relevant to a study of self-narration. These studies demonstrate the cultural specificity of autobiography and reveal that there is no transhistorical, transcultural self but rather a multitude of diverse historical and cultural selves.

Sampson (1993:67-73) surveys a number of studies of cultural diversity which distinguish between egocentric and sociocentric, or individualistic and collectivistic, cultures, citing an international survey by Hofstede (1980) which found that the top three nations, in terms of individualistic attitudes, were the US, Australia and the UK. Sampson provides examples of anthropological studies which illustrate the 'peculiarity' of the Western conception of self. For example, Ochs' (1988) comparative study of American and Samoan lifestyles found that Americans socialise their children to expect the world to fit in with them (by modifying their behaviour to meet the child's needs), thereby fostering individualism, while Samoans expect their children to fit into the

world (the child must modify its behaviour to fit into Samoan adult life), thereby fostering collectivism. Ochs also discovered that Samoans view 'any accomplishment ... as a joint product of both the actors and the supporters': "Well done the trip" would elicit the response "Well done the staying back" (1988:200). This is also demonstrated by the Samoans' conversational convention of responding to an acknowledgement of achievement with a comment like 'Well done the support', thereby including the acknowledgement in the achievement (1988:200). In another comparative study, Lutz (1985) found that the Ifaluk very rarely use the term 'I', which is regarded as expressing an egocentric lack of concern for others, but prefer to use 'we' for the majority of the occasions when 'I' would be used in English. This is not only to be polite to others but also to convey 'the Ifaluk's emphasis on the shared viewpoint of the group [for example 'we don't understand'], rather than the unique viewpoint of the individual separate from the group' (Sampson 1993:70).

There is, of course, a danger in making comparisons between cultures. This danger lies in the homogenising tendency of studies that claim, for example, that 'Americans' think this, and 'Africans' think that. The very concept of 'nationality' is, of course, highly problematic. All nations are made up of diverse social groupings (age and gender being social stratifications common to all) and most 'cultures', the American and the British being perfect examples, are not single homogenous cultures at all. They are made up of diverse sub-cultures, juxtaposed in complex hierarchical structures, with their own social conventions and their own variations on the standard language of any geographical area. What is taken to be the 'British' or the 'American' culture is very likely to be a stereotypical or a media-constructed version. I am not suggesting that any of the particular studies mentioned by Sampson are guilty of falling into this

homogenising trap. Perhaps the greatest danger lies in the way anthropological findings may be taken out of the context in which they are first presented and then summarised in other works in order to make crude comparisons.

The work of Benjamin Whorf, and that of his mentor, Edward Sapir, has certainly suffered from some such crude appropriations. Whorf's anthropological linguistic theory has come to be known as the Sapir-Whorf, or the Whorfian, hypothesis[33]. His work can be understood to have two main strands. The first concerns the notion of linguistic relativity, that is that different languages express different world-views and there is no objective, non-linguistically perceived, world against which these can be evaluated. The second, more controversial, strand concerns linguistic determinism, two versions of which can be identified. The 'strong' version, now less frequently argued, is that language determines thought[34]. That is, we cannot think outside of the framework of our own language and that because different languages employ different grammars and encode different concepts and distinctions, not only are there

---

[33] Although, as O'Halloran (1997:164) points out, with reference to Ellis (1993), the word 'hypothesis' does not appear in Whorf's writings and, O'Halloran argues, the notion of a 'Whorfian hypothesis' seems to be 'the result of exegesis rather than something Whorf actually espoused.'

[34] It is this version of linguistic determinism that has frequently been attributed to Whorf and has therefore become known as the Whorfian hypothesis. See O'Halloran (1997) and Mülhaüser and Harré (1990) for a critique of theorists who assume that Whorf espoused the strong version of the hypothesis. Mülhaüser and Harré (1990:2) find that neither Whorf nor Sapir espoused a thesis of strong determination from an independent language to a dependent human form of experience. A particular paragraph, in 'Science and Linguistics' (Whorf 1956:207-19), referred to by O'Halloran (1997) as the 'famous paragraph', is the piece of text most frequently cited as evidence of Whorf's position. The paragraph includes the following statements, which are taken as evidence that the strong version of linguistic determinism is Whorf's own version: 'We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages.'; '[we are party to]... an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.' O'Halloran (1997) argues that Whorf has been seriously miscronstrued by those who assert that the misleading hypothesis, language determines thought, represents Whorf's position and that this misreading of Whorf has occurred for a number of reasons. I shall briefly mention just two of the problems O'Halloran identifies. Firstly, misreadings of Whorf occur, he says, because of underlying objectivist assumptions that language and thought can be separated. For Whorf, language *is* thought and his anti-objectivist position is clearly delineated in the paper in which the 'famous paragraph' appears. Secondly, the 'famous paragraph' has typically been extracted from its context, treated as though it contained discrete, self-contained, statements and inaccurately paraphrased. This means, argues O'Halloran (1997:170), that its 'intratextual' features are lost. By 'intratextuality', O'Halloran is referring to the way in which a text echoes itself, and in this way the meaning of the statements in the 'famous paragraph' can only be fully understood in relation to the preceding text which is echoed in this section. O'Halloran's reading of 'Science and Linguistics' finds that, for Whorf, language *is* thought, and that 'linguistic-thought is part of a culture rather than autonomous from it' (1997:173). In this way, rather than regarding language as determining, and therefore separate from, thought, Whorf proposes that there is a relationship between language, linguistic-thought, and a wider form of thought, culture, and in this way, Whorf is suggesting that 'when we talk, we are actually affirming encultured thought' (O'Halloran 1997:171). In the light of O'Halloran's detailed and persuasive arguments, it is

insurmountable barriers to one language speaker understanding the world of another, but also what *can* be perceived and what can be thought is linguistically determined.

From this perspective, people who speak different languages do not simply perceive the same world in different ways, but rather they see, experience, and think, *through* language, such fundamentally different worlds, that it is impossible for one to experience the world of an other. The weaker version suggests that language only shapes, not totally determines, the way we think and, because we are encouraged to perceive the world in a particular way, it is difficult, but not at all impossible, for concepts and distinctions which are not encoded by discrete words or phrases in our own language to be perceived and expressed.

Crystal (1987:15) provides an example of this by comparing Pintupi, an Australian aboriginal language, to English. Pintupi has 10 different words for different kinds of holes, for example: *pirti* - a hole in the ground; *pirnki* - a hole formed by a rock shelf; *yulpilpa* - a shallow hole in which ants live; *katarta* - the hole left by a goanna when it has broken the surface after hibernation. The conclusion which may be drawn from this is that a Pintupi speaker and an English speaker can look at exactly the same hole and see something quite different. However, it is possible for the English speaker to come to perceive the world as the Pintupi speaker does because, although it takes many more English words to convey the meanings of the single Pintupi word, translation, however clumsy and time-consuming, is perfectly possible to do. As Pinker (1994:65) discusses, this is not very different from the numerous English technical terms which exist in the discourses of various professions.

---

more accurate to see linguistic determinism as not only not the *Whorfian* hypothesis, but also representative of a simplistic, and, it can be argued, unsustainable, separation of language and thought.

While it is relatively easy, therefore, to refute the strong version of linguistic determinism in terms of the different lexicons of languages[35], things become more complex, and much more interesting, when the relationship between different syntactic systems and diverse world views is considered. Whorf (1956:217) noted that the Hopi language does not have syntactic forms for distinguishing tense but does indicate, through syntax, different kinds of validity[36]. The form varies according to whether a speaker intends her or his utterance to be heard as a current fact, a remembered fact, a statement of expectation or a generalisation. Whorf linked these and other differences between Hopi and English to the 'timelessness of Hopi life' (discussed by Fishman 1960:332). Pinker (1994:63) calls this an 'outlandish' claim, and O'Halloran (1997:177) refers to 'Whorf's dubious account' of timelessness. It may well be that Whorf took a rather crude leap from these fascinating linguistic findings to a statement about Hopi life in its entirety. It is not that time, as we, native English speakers, understand it, is absent in Hopi language (things can be current, remembered or expected) but rather that what is certain moves with the ongoing, endless cyclical process of life. What interests me, is the idea that in Hopi statements about what is, what was, what will be or what is generally, are not significant in terms of time, as in English (indicating *when* something is), but in terms of the certainty or truth value of something being or happening at all. This syntactic embedding of the issue of validity, what counts as 'real' or certain, suggests that the Hopi may not conceptualise facts or truth as absolute. While the world of the native English speaker is largely dominated by 'things', signified by nouns in our

---

[35]For entertaining 'debunkings' of the Whorfian hypothesis, see 'The great Eskimo vocabulary hoax and other irreverent essays on the study of language' (Pullum 1991) and Pinker (1994).

[36] The essence of the Whorfian hypothesis is played out in this paragraph as I attempt to convey my interpretation of Whorf's interpretation of the subtlety of Hopi grammar - in the 'wrong' language!

language, the Hopi 'cosmos', according to Whorf (1956:215), is made up of processes signified by, what we would term, verbs in Hopi language. The Hopi culture is not characterised by possessive individualism built upon self/other, self/world dichotomies. The Hopi participate in the 'eventings' of life and can only prepare for, rather than plan for and control, their experience. In the collectivistic, contextualised world of the Hopi, there are degrees of fact and, therefore, the moment of narration in the threefold present, involving perception, memory and expectation, as discussed in chapter one, includes a dimension of relative truths, because knowledge is not the possession of the individual. It is very difficult to imagine writing an autobiography from a cultural perspective which does not recognise individuality and sees truth as a process, in a language governed by a syntactic system which omits chronology, but requires the narrator to indicate the relative ontological status of the experience being related.

It is, of course, very difficult to know how accurate Whorf's accounts of the Hopi language and culture are. In any case his work is now fifty years old and the Hopi culture and language are undoubtedly very different today. The value of Whorf's work lies, as Shotter (1993a:115) points out, in the way it demands that we look afresh at the way our own language shapes our world and allows us to imagine different ways of perceiving and experiencing the world. As Whorf (1956:138) himself so eloquently put it, at long last we can be 'pushed willy-nilly out of our ruts'.

Another clear example of the cultural specificity of both the nature of Western autobiography and the autonomy of narrators of personal experience is provided by Hoskins' research into the Kodi people of Eastern Indonesia. Hoskins (1998:2) found that 'the notion of telling one's life directly to another person did not exist in Kodi' and

that the only way she could elicit stories of personal experience was by asking about valued or ritually important objects. Her book ***Biographical Objects*** (1998) is a fascinating account of the way in which the Kodi people's individual and collective life histories and their sense of time and memory are structured and informed by stories of the origins, the histories and the circulation of specific valuable objects. Similarly, Rosaldo (1976) found that although the Ilongot had many stories to tell him about hunting or fishing, self-narratives, about personal experience involving thoughts and feelings about themselves, could not be elicited from them as they simply did not exist in Ilongot culture (cited by Linde 1993).

These examples provide detailed evidence that there can never be a universal theory of self-narration or of the self. The personal experience narratives with which I am concerned in this study, are a form of autobiography, 'self-life-writing', produced by particular types of selves in particular contexts. Autobiography is a 'rewriting of the self' (Freeman 1993:27), and as neither autobiography nor 'the self' are common to all peoples, my project, like Freeman's, is a '(somewhat) local one' which makes no claims to insights about 'human nature per se; it is rather about human culture and the forms its expressions assume' (Freeman 1993:27). Narrative may be universal, as Barthes (1977:79) claims, but self-narratives, and the notion that individuals can find self-understanding through this particular linguistic and cognitive activity, whether that entails the construction of a formal autobiographical text, a psychoanalytic exploration into one's past life or the everyday reflection on personal experience, are an expression of a specific culture at a particular historical moment. This is not to suggest, however, that self-narratives are *mere* cultural expressions and are therefore unimportant or false trails in the search for self-understanding. We *are* the beings that we believe ourselves

to be and we live out our lives in ways that are different, to a greater or lesser extent, to other people. We participate in a cultural story about our 'selves' and a shared cultural concept of 'self', and all its derivatives - self-consciousness, self awareness, self esteem, self control etc. - are embedded in contemporary Western perceptions of reality. An awareness of the specificity of our conceptions and our world-view, does not render these ways of understanding false or incomplete (although they may be, of course, for different reasons) but does enable us to move beyond the limitations of ethnocentric assumptions which deny the existence of culturally diverse selves.

Autobiographical consumption and the sovereign self

Stories of lives, or fragments of lives, are ubiquitous in the modern Western world. In newspapers, magazines and books, on television and radio, life stories abound. The autobiographies which are presented in this public space are those which are considered to be 'newsworthy' or to have entertainment (market) value in terms of their narrators or their content; famous people tell their lives, which are regarded as intrinsically interesting, or ordinary people tell of extra-ordinary events in their otherwise unremarkable, or unmarketable, lives. In our media-dominated culture, we buy and consume life stories on a daily basis and support a 'huge confessional industry' which has grown up in the 'Seller/Teller culture' of the 1990's (Lawson 1997:24).

The theorists Lasch (1979), Cushman (1990) and Gergen (1991) regard the popular fascination with the personal details of the lives of others, especially celebrities, as a symptom of the 'narcissistic self', the 'empty self' and the 'saturated self', respectively. The common ground of their theories concerns the idea that in the complex, technological, Western world we are bombarded by a 'range of technologies that shower

us with social relationships both direct and vicarious' (Gergen 1992:60). So bedazzled by this kaleidoscope of possible identities and ways of being do we become that we lose our sense of place in the world. As disconnected, isolated individuals we must strive to be self-contained and self-sufficient and therefore turn inward, becoming more and more individualistic and obsessed with the self. We consume more and more stories in a vain attempt to find meaning and certainty, feeding the insatiable self from the vast array of identities on offer in 'the great market place of realities that the Western world has become' (O'Hara and Anderson 1991:20). Plummer (1995:160) refers to the same ideas as the 'cliché of sociology - whereas once identities were stable, fixed, bounded, ascribed and taken for granted, in the modern world they have become increasingly fragmented, destabilised, trivialised, mutable and problematic.'

The mutable postmodern self may be regarded as the apocalyptic climax of the unified, autonomous, Western self, the development of which can be traced through the long history of autobiographical reflection. Although autobiographies first started being produced in the twelfth century[37], the Western conception of the self, as a 'bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe' (Geertz 1973:229), can be traced back to Augustine's *Confessions*, written in 397. This work is regarded as a watershed, in Gusdorf's terms, 'a brilliantly, successful landmark', in Western conceptions of the self and as marking the beginning of autobiographical reflection as we know it today (Gusdorf 1980:29). A great many dates and historical events have been suggested by different theorists as heralding the appearance of the autonomous Western individual. Porter (1991:12) refers to the 'Renaissance individualism, Puritan introspection, the Cartesian ego, Enlightenment sensibility and Romantic

[37]The actual word 'autobiography' did not appear in the English language until 1809 (OED). Before this, writings which would now be described as autobiographical were usually called confessions or memoirs.

individualism' which have all been proposed as 'giving birth' to the modern self. He claims that it was the rise of literacy which was 'crucial in representing and outlining the objectified self' (Porter 1991:12). Pagels (1981) discusses the 'oneness' which emerged through the rise of monotheism as Christianity, with its hierarchical and patriarchal structure, suppressed the inclusive, egalitarian Gnostic view which recognised multiplicity. Plummer (1995:134) suggests that classical autobiography which has chronicled a 'linear pursuit of an inner self', from St. Augustine onwards, may now be in decline. He cites Jackson (1990) and Stoltenberg (1989) as examples of new male autobiographical writings which shun the traditional heroic monomyth in which a unified, consistent, single voice holds unquestioned authority in the telling of a life.

Tracing the development of the self-possessed individual through the long history of autobiography, within which the heroic monomyth, narrated by a sovereign 'I', has dominated, alerts us to the possibility that not only is this self an expression of our particular time and culture, and does not therefore have universal relevance, but also that it is the dominant cultural version of the self and not shared by all *within* 'our' culture. 'Autobiography flourishes', states Gergen (1994:23), 'in locations where individuals can become prominent within their social group'. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that autobiographical writing by women, who most often narrate their lives as interwoven with the lives of others, has only been granted a public space relatively recently as female writers challenge the traditional monomyth within which women tend to be 'objects or forces that aid or impede the hero in pursuit of his quest or serve as his reward' (Gergen 1994:24). 'I am', says Smith (1987:50, cited by Probyn 1993:94), becomes an impossible statement for women writers as 'autobiography is

itself one of the forms of selfhood constituting the idea of man and in turn promoting that idea'. In addition, the lives of those from many other marginalised groups, for example working class, black, gay, and differently abled people, have only recently been given (some) public space and are being narrated, in different ways, by members of those groups, rather than being retold from the dominant perspective; 'the God's eye view from nowhere' (Sampson 1993:99). The 'unmarked' ideal Western self turns out to be male, white, adult, heterosexual, middle class and of 'sound' mind and body; *he* is the standard against which all others are defined and evaluated. It is not possible for those selves who are defined in terms of what they are *not* to possess themselves: 'the self-contained view has been constructed on the ruins of a hidden otherness' (Sampson 1993:91).

The postmodern intellectual project to decentre this unmarked sovereign self, a process of self-destruction undertaken by elite selves, is treated with suspicion by a growing number of writers. Stanley (1992:16) highlights the danger of allowing the 'death of the author', promoted by 'French intellectuals supreme', which means that 'to protest at exclusion, to demand a voice' is to be regarded as clinging to an outmoded essentialism; ' ..."what you want to claim a self, to speak your oppression" - really how primitive, how naive.'[38] It is perhaps no coincidence that just when the 'others' who support and are suppressed by this elite self begin to find a voice, to tell their stories and to create spaces where different selves can be celebrated, the notion of there being a self at all comes under attack. The drive to decentre the subject, to announce the 'death of the author', led, in very diverse ways, by Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, Lacan,

[38]Other approaches to gender, race, and sexuality which include a critical take on postmodernism include Fuss (1990) and hooks (1991). In addition, Jameson (1984) suggests that the postmodern deconstruction of the individual subject has replaced the alienated subject with a fragmented subject who serves consumer capitalism. And, most famously, Irigaray (1985 and 1991) takes up and reformulates Lacanian ideas in ways which allow for the simultaneous different presences of female and male.

Lyotard and others, may indeed be, as Freeman (1993:17) suggests, 'an intellectual luxury designed by those whose selves are sovereign enough for them to afford to fritter them away philosophically as they wish.'

The question of whether the postmodernist project to decentre the subject offers emancipatory potential or further oppression for marginalised groups remains a crucial one for feminist intellectuals. Lather, who argues that 'postmodernism remains dominated by Eurocentric male discourses' (1991:35), poses the question thus:

> *Is it a theoretical movement which will enable us 'finally to escape the patriarchal paradigms of Western thought?' (Moi 1988:5) Or is it more logocentrism, more class privileged, Eurocentric, white male discourse, 'the last rise of the patriarchal university trying for power to fix the meaning, and contain the damage, of its own decline' (Morris 1988:15)?*
>
> Lather (1991:36)

Lather identifies three types of response to postmodernism: 'unambiguous condemnation, unambiguous celebration and deliberate ambivalence' (1991:163). She advocates the third response and concludes[39] that refusing to take up entrenched, essentialising positions and maintaining an open, pragmatic, ambivalent attitude to postmodernism provides a way for feminists, and other 'ex-centrics'[40], whose projects precede and parallel postmodernism, to move back and forth along a range of critical discourses and, in this way, to continue to interrupt and destabilise totalising postmodernist discourses rather than being silenced by them.

To delve much further into the range, complexity and diversity of arguments for, against, and within postmodernism would take this discussion too far away from the

---

[39] In dialogue with Flax (1987) Hartsock (1987), Johnson (1987), Spivak (1987), Hutcheon (1988) and others.

[40] Hutcheon's (1988) term, appropriated from Lacan, to characterise the uprising of the marginalised (cited by Lather 1991).

issues I am concerned to address about personal experience narratives in this chapter. I will end this section, therefore, by stating that I share, with those cited above, an ambivalent attitude towards postmodern theories of the self and would want to argue that the project to deconstruct, to decentre and to depose the sovereign self, does not have to lead to an *absence* - to the philosophical death of all selves - but rather creates potential space for a multiplicity of *presences*, speaking from a plurality of sites. The authorial voice from nowhere has now been identified, specified, located and challenged but this does not, in my view, mean that authority is up for grabs in an open competition between voices from everywhere. It is the death of authority itself that creates the potential for actual, specific and identifiable, voices of diverse selves to begin to narrate themselves out of the shadow of the sovereign self. This is one of the reasons why, throughout this project, I ground theory, method and analysis in texts generated by the diverse voices of actual, embodied narrators in order to further explore the ways in which coping with life experiences may be understood as process of narrating the self within a particular cultural, social and political framework.

Personal narration as social and political practice

From his symbolic interactionist perspective, Plummer (1995) rejects any notion of an isolated individual and regards personal narration as a basic interactional form constituting a generic social practice. He proposes that there are four levels in the process through which people assemble their stories:

> i. the personal level - the motives people have for telling their tale
>
> ii. the situational level - the processes through which people turn themselves into self indicated social objects

> iii. the organisational level - the elements which shape a story depending on whether it involves writing or speaking, or takes place in the context of, for example, a research interview, therapy group etc.
>
> iv. the cultural/historical level - the moment of reception
>
> Plummer (1995:34)

It is, of course, impossible in practice to separate out these levels, which all interact with and inform each other, but Plummer's model provides a useful way of considering the complex amalgam of cultural, historical, linguistic, psychological, social and political forces that combine to determine how and when, indeed whether, life stories are told.

In this section, I want to focus on the fourth level, the cultural/historical moment of reception, and consider the pressure it exerts on what may be told in personal experience narratives.

Maines (1993:24) argues that self-narratives cannot be separated from collective narratives as narrating the self is always a narration of the society in which that self lives. Polanyi (1979) discusses this issue in terms of cultural 'tellability' and the power of the audience to confirm or disconfirm a personal experience narrative and Gergen, M. (1992:140) refers to 'acculturated story forms' and discusses the ways in which personal stories are pieced together from the social and cultural resources available to a narrator. In this way, we assemble our personal stories from the stories of significant others which reach us through diverse media channels and through our day-to-day social interactions. Not only do these stories provide a pool of possible stories and form the context within which we tell our 'own' stories, but they also determine what *can* be told and what must remain unsaid. The content and the context of self-narratives are

therefore intimately related; personal experience narratives and autobiographies are possessions of the socius, not the individual.

Plummer (1995) discusses potential stories that currently lie dormant, which may or may never be told[41], as they await 'interpretive communities' in 'social worlds' that will admit the story into the 'communities of memory'. He refers to 'the tale and its time' and the 'politics of prohibition' which censor, suppress and deny an audience to new stories (1995:145-161). A good example of what Plummer refers to occurred in 1997 when three new stories emerged, tentatively, into the social world via the media in the same week. One was told by a woman who tearfully described sexually abusing her young son. This story was told in the context of a television programme which portrayed, largely sympathetically, child sexual abuse by women as an 'untold' story *(The Last Taboo* BBC1, 6 Oct 1997). Another was a story told by a journalist who visited an elderly man, described as a self-confessed paedophile, in order to hear and retell his story (*Monsters with human faces*. ***Guardian Weekend*** 27/9/97). The narrator of this story repeatedly juxtaposes contradictory images of 'Gil' : a nice, gentle, old man, living in a tidy seaside flat, surrounded by family photographs; and a sexual predator who lives his life constantly on the lookout for small girls and interprets their every gesture as sexual desire for him. This narrator closes her story with an equally contradictory evaluation: an acceptance of Gil, even sympathy for him, matched by abhorrence and repugnance. This story opened up a space for another new story which appeared on the letters page in the next edition of ***Guardian Weekend*** (4/10/97). The narrator is an anonymous female who tells a story of her struggle to repress and control her sexual desire for little girls. She tells her story with 'great

[41] Ricoeur (1984:74) makes a similar point and referring to a 'prenarrative quality of experience' consisting of '(as yet) untold' or 'potential' stories.

difficulty' but feels she must tell it because she wants people like Gil to understand 'how wrong they are'. This story ends with the revelation that the narrator had been sexually abused by her father, thereby drawing on an overarching story which frames all these accounts: child abuse reproduces itself down the generations.

These examples of how *personal* experience may only be narrated within *socially permitted* stories illustrate the inherently social nature of both autobiography and the personal experience narrative. Of course these examples concern narratives published in the mass media, but the same negotiated processes of permitting or prohibiting stories operates in other settings. For example, in a court of law, a doctor's surgery or a therapy session, narrators are invited to tell their stories to professionals who hear and evaluate those narrations within very particular frameworks of meaning-making. Schafer (1976) discusses the way in which psychoanalytic therapy involves the therapist restructuring the life experiences of the analysand into a 'better', more cohesive, narrative[42]. Personal experience narratives of trauma can become 'data' in legal, medical and therapeutic contexts where they are accepted or rejected as evidence in support of a medical diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which warrants treatment and, sometimes, financial compensation. The individual must frame their experience in the discourse which is valued by the institution, within a narrative which tells a story which makes sense to the powerful other, the professional who will evaluate it. This is most often achieved by the professional and the individual joining together in the co-production of the story. In judicial contexts, where truths are

---

[42] Most therapeutic approaches tend stress the value of order, rationality, coherence and cohesion following Freud's definition of hysteria as 'narrative incoherence' (Showalter 1997:11). For example, Spence (1982:52) says that 'we [psychoanalysts] are searching for coherence and continuity: as a result, we tend to minimize anything which interrupts the "flow" of the narrative.' In Gergen M.'s (1992) view this emphasis reflects the prevailing androcentric assumption about coherent, linear plot lines which inhibits both men's and women's formulations of selves. Other feminist writers, Fetterley (1978) and Miller (1988) for example, also discuss narrative coherence as a gender conditioned category. McLeod (1997:59) discusses narrative therapies that do not use the core life-story model but instead 'expect the client to be able to generate a multiplicity of alternative story-lines'.

contested, the personal experience narrative may be excluded from the site of struggle, as people are constrained to tell their life experiences in fragments within a tight framework of institutionally imposed relevance: 'just answer the question'.

As I shall discuss in chapter four, in research interviews the researcher can, deliberately or otherwise, operate a 'politics of prohibition' (Plummer 1995) or can become, within the immediate context of the interview, a receptive social world which opens up a space for the interviewee to tell stories which would otherwise never become 'data'. Storytelling and storyhearing in formal or informal contexts is always a social and a political activity.

Having considering the personal experience narrative as social and political practice I now want to return to the first level of Plummer's model and consider the motivation to self-narrate.

Authoring the self

The quotation with which I began this chapter can be read, I suggested, as a story about a failed attempt to take control of one's own history and this motivation to self-narrate, to gain control of the past by putting it in order, is perhaps the one most frequently stated by 'self-life-writers'. For example, Morrell, in her autobiography, co-authored with the former Beirut hostage, John McCarthy, says that she saw the writing process as a form of therapy: 'a way of putting the past in perspective and then moving on' (McCarthy and Morrell 1993:466)[43]. Harvey et al. (1990:12) highlight the 'quest for

[43] The motivation to *publish* belongs, of course, to the cultural/historical level of Plummer's model. The hostage experience has come to include the writing of a book as a necessary element. McCarthy's and Morrell's book contributes to a small but growing contemporary sub-genre of autobiography - the hostage narrative - which also includes books by Brian Keenan, Terry Waite, Charles Glass, Roger Cooper, Jean-Paul Kaufmann, David Jacobsen, Jackie Mann and Benjamin Weir. Waite (1993) describes in

control and understanding' in their list of motivations for telling personal stories and Birren, describing autobiography as 'the best of all stories', emphasises the self-serving nature of the activity of telling one's own story;

> *Writing an autobiography puts the contradictions, paradoxes and ambivalence of life into perspective. It restores our sense of self-sufficiency and personal identity that has been shaped by the cross-currents and tides of life .*
>
> (Birren 1987:90)

This is, perhaps, a somewhat romantic, idealist view of autobiography which fails to acknowledge the dynamic, dialogic nature of self-life-writing. As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, the autobiographical project can highlight one's *lack* of self-sufficiency and the narrating of one's own life may throw up contradictions and paradoxes thereby threatening one's sense of 'personal' identity. Rather than a reliable strategy for controlling the past, Freeman (1993:3) conceptualises autobiography as 'rewriting the self - the process by which one's past and indeed oneself is figured anew through interpretation'. He describes 'coming undone', the fragmentation of the self, as one of the prime provocations for autobiographical writing (1993:114), and quotes from Roth (1988), who attempts to 'repossess life' by retracing the steps to the moment of origin. Roth (1988) discovers that there is no unitary foundation on which to base 'the facts' of his life and, therefore, he cannot discover *the* truth or one definitive meaning but only create stories from multiple perspectives. Similarly, Keenan (1993:1) describes the writing of his autobiography as part of a healing process as he seeks to find the self that he 'may have become' through his experiences as a hostage in Beirut. This narrator is not charged with the task of creating a single, smooth, unified whole, however. The writer states that he has discovered that he is 'many people' and the task is to discover 'a communality' between them.

---

his hostage narrative, ***Taken on Trust***, the discussion he had with his fellow hostages about whether they would write books, and recalls that titles were chosen while still in captivity.

The multiplicity and diversity of the self has been denied by essentialist approaches to the person and in the traditional autobiographical project. In this way, the tension between the power of self-narration, which allows us to be the authors of our lives, and the inherently social nature of the self, which means that autonomous narration and self-possession are illusions, remains unacknowledged, allowing an impoverished conception of the self to continue to reproduce itself. Benhabib (1992) sees the tension as existing between being the author or the subject of a narrative. She equates this to a tension between justice and autonomy, on the one hand, and care and solidarity on the other. Her insightful comments on the delicate negotiation which self-narration involves are worth quoting at length;

> *The self is both the teller of tales and that about whom tales are told. The individual with a coherent sense of self identity is the one who succeeds in integrating these tales and perspectives into a meaningful life history. When the story of a life can be told only from the perspective of others, then the self is a victim and sufferer who has lost control over her existence. When the story of a life can only be told from the standpoint of the individual, then such a self is a narcissist and a loner who may have attained autonomy without solidarity. A coherent sense of self is attained with the successful integration of autonomy and solidarity, or with the right mix of justice and care. Justice and autonomy alone cannot sustain and nourish the web of narratives in which human beings' sense of selfhood unfolds but solidarity and care alone cannot raise the self to the level not only of being the subject but also the author of a coherent life story.*
>
> Benhabib (1992:198)

In the context of storytelling in the aftermath of trauma, Wolfenstein (1957) describes the process of narration as a psychologically crucial movement from passivity to activity, a movement which can only be realised through others, as the self is transformed from helpless victim to effective storyteller:

> *Narration is thus like play in that one can assume control over the repetition of an event which in its occurrence ran counter to one's wishes. While, alone at night, one may dread the revival of the experience, when telling it to others one wants to evoke it as vividly as possible ... from being the helpless victim one becomes the effective storyteller, and it is the others, the audience, who are made to undergo the experience.*
>
> Wolfenstein (1957:139)

The potential power of narrative which enables us to feel that we have control of our lives can only be realised in interaction with real or imaginary others, without whom, in Wolfenstein's terms, victim cannot become storyteller.

Self-narration in everyday conversation with colleagues, friends or relations is an integral part of social interaction, a way of maintaining relationships, as conversational partners share their selves with each other. It is also a highly active process of positioning and repositioning (Harré and van Langenhove 1991) as dialogic partners both respond to and *generate* each other (Michael 1996:21). Shotter (1995:68) refers to a 'politics of ethics' within conversational activity whereby speakers 'may close down or open up the range of responses available to their conversational partners.' In this way, the always asymmetrical power relations, between self and other, which constrained Cellini's storytelling in the quotation with which I began this chapter, not only shape the stories which appear in the public domain but also those which are told in private, even intimate, conversations in our everyday lives.

Narrators of personal experience manage the inherent tensions of self-life-writing and self-production in a variety of ways but can never achieve complete control over their topic. There are, says Johnson (1991) safe stories and risky stories and these are unstable categories. What seems like a safe story when narration begins can turn out to be risky, even dangerous, before a conclusion is reached. The task of telling one's own life involves a complex and delicate process of negotiation within and between the self and others in dialogic relationships.

The dialogic nature of self-narration

In this section I will refer to a number of theories and approaches to the dialogic nature of language, of narrative and of the self before moving on, in the final sections, to explore how this dialogism manifests itself in specific texts. The dialogic, rather than monologic, nature of self narration is played on all four levels of Plummer's model of narrative construction (personal, situational, structural and cultural/historical) and through all dimensions of the narrative text; form, content and context.

Firstly, self-narratives are composed of language, of words, which, as Bakhtin reminds us, must first be appropriated by a narrator;

> *...the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his word!), but rather it exists in other people mouths, in other peoples contexts, serving other people' s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own ... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speakers intentions; it is populated - overpopulated - with the intentions of others.*
>
> Bakhtin (1981:294)

For Bakhtin, every utterance (spoken or written) is 'a link in the chain of speech communication' and 'must be regarded as primarily a *response* to preceding utterances' (Bakhtin 1986:91). The works of Bakhtin, Mead (1934), Wittgenstein (1953), Vygotsky (1962) and Volosinov[44](1973) are all foundational to a growing body of contemporary texts which attests to the inherent intertextuality of language and the interactional nature of speaking or writing (see, for example, Fairclough 1992, Sampson 1993, Shotter 1993a, Hermans 1996, Morss 1996, Leiman 1997).

Secondly, in order to tell a story of personal experience, this shared language is organised in a particular way, in a narrative structure. The process of narration is a

[44] There is a question mark over the identities of Volosinov and Bakhtin who may be the same person. In the absence of complete life stories, due to the political oppression of their lives, we are unable to assign clear-cut identities to them.

highly selective activity, as a narrator chooses both what to tell and how to tell it from a vast range of possibilities. As discussed in chapter one, it is never possible to tell *all* that happened, whether one is claiming to be telling one's whole life story, or simply telling a short episode. The decisions a narrator makes about what to tell will, as Sampson reminds us, involve an other:

> *...that selection is never an entirely personal, private act that is mine alone. I make my selections with you, my addressee, in mind, and once I have made my selection, I am then swept up into a story that is also never entirely mine.*
>
> Sampson (1993:135)

It might be thought that even if self-narratives produced in social contexts belong as much to 'the other' as to the self, stories told only to the self, in private, as one mentally reflects on a life experience in order to understand and make meaning of it, *are* narrated autonomously; true versions of the self, uncontaminated by the other. A dialogic approach to the self would, however, reject this. Sampson (1993:125) says that 'even when we pause to reflect and think, we do not do so in one voice only but always in a dialogue containing many different voices'. Caughey (1984) refers to 'imaginary social worlds' rather than the 'inner world' of the individual thereby blurring the usual distinction between the public and the private; both realms being populated by real and imagined people. This is well illustrated by the comments of the therapist interviewed by Shepherd (1990:172);

> *I often know that therapy is taking off when someone tells me what they said to me in their head during the week! Sometimes they even pick up on a story they have obviously been telling me inside their heads - and have forgotten I wasn't actually there to hear it!*

Not only are there asymmetrical dialogical relationships in the positions occupied by different people, states Hermans (1996), but also among positions within the individual self. For Hermans, the self is not only multifaceted but multivoiced, consisting of 'a dynamic interplay' among voiced positions. The narrating 'I' strives to manage this multiplicity; stories are always told to an 'other' self, other 'me's' and 'you's' in actual and

imaginary social worlds. In order to integrate autonomy and solidarity and to find the right mix of justice and care, which Benhabib regards as constituting a coherent sense of self, a narrator negotiates with others, actual or imagined, within and without the self. In doing so, a narrator must manage the conflicting forces of competing narratives which confirm, complicate or threaten self-identities. If, as I am arguing, self-identity is a process of self-narration, and vice versa, then we are continuously remaking ourselves in diverse contexts; we are forever 'stitching ourselves into place', states Hall (1991:11), identities being 'the things you are willing to own up to depending on who asks you'. The narrating 'I' is drawn into the dynamic of narrative construction, however, and self-identity may become vulnerable as the nature of narrative exerts its own pressure on the delicate dialogically negotiated self. In Bakhtin's terms, 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' forces operate simultaneously as self-narration tends towards both the unification *and* the fragmentation of the self:

> *Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)*
>
> Bakhtin (1981:272)

Finally, in this section, the activity of telling lives, and re-writing selves, enters the life being told. In chapter one I illustrated the dialogic relationship between living and telling by means of my life story cycle whereby the stories through which we make meaning of life become that life: we become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about ourselves (Bruner 1987). Eakin (1980:35) argues that 'the picture [of the thing] is an intrinsic part of the thing itself' and describes the relationship between life and the writing of life thus:

> *As the act of composition extends over time, so it enters the life-stream, and the fictive separation between life and life story, which is so convenient - even necessary - to the writing of autobiography disappears.*
>
> Eakin (1980:192)

Eakin describes self-narrators as chasing the 'ultimate autobiographical dream' which 'will yield at the last the pure ore of a final and irreducible selfhood.' (1980:193). This dream, states Eakin, is a fiction based on a suspension of time that assumes that 'the life comes first, and then the writing of the life' (1980:192). Narrators do not stand back from their lives, outside of their 'selves', separate from others, and produce discrete texts of their lives, but are always positioned socially and politically within the framing story of the 'narrat*ing* I' telling the 'narrat*ed* I' to others. We tell our lives, in conflict or in co-operation, with others, always in dialogue with other stories and other selves as we negotiate ways of being in the world.

In the next section I shall examine some of the specific ways in which the nature of narrative, the structure of story and the point of personal experience narratives interact in a dialectical process which involves *what* may be told and *how* it may be told and I shall suggest how and why this dialectic is played out in particularly significant ways in the narration of trauma.

Narratable and non-narratable experience

As described in the preceding section, the content of personal experience narratives, is not determined by narrators freely choosing from a range of real life experiences, but by what may be told, when it may be told, to whom it may be told and for what purpose. This relates to the 'point' of a personal experience narrative which justifies its telling in a specific context, as discussed in chapter one. One obvious justification for telling is that the experience being told is intrinsically interesting. Labov (1972) discusses this in terms of the 'reportability' of events. To be reportable an event must be unusual in some way or run counter to expectations or norms (Labov 1972:390). The normal,

mundane events of life are not 'narratable', they are unremarkable, in the literal sense of the word. For example, while a short anecdote of what happened because the milkman failed to deliver the milk that morning may not be the most fascinating or interesting story to tell, it is nonetheless narratable in a way that a story about how the milkman delivered the milk as usual that morning is not[45]. Given an appropriate context, narrators of the personal experience of trauma need not be concerned about justifying the telling of their stories, as they are about experiences which are, by definition, out of the ordinary and worthy of report.

Traumatic experiences are also very likely to have extended reportability (Linde 1993:22), that is, they endure over time as suitable topics for a personal experience narrative unlike more minor unusual experiences, like the milk not being delivered, which may only have reportability for a limited time. It is possible, however, to argue that *all* self-narration is a response to trauma, however small, relatively speaking. To be narratable, an experience must be out of the ordinary. It must create some degree of disequilibrium in the ordinary, expected routine of day-to-day life and is, *in this sense*, traumatic and, therefore narratable: an appropriate topic for a story. Stories, according to the Propp (1968[1928]), typically adhere to a basic pattern, moving from equilibrium to turbulence which causes disequilibrium which leads in turn to action and intervention, finally ending with a restoration of a modified version of the former equilibrium;

equilibrium=>turbulence=>disequilibrium=>action=>intervention=>
restoration of modified version of equilibrium[46]

[45] See also McLeod's discussion of stories as 'a means of problem-solving, of reconciling the tenesion between the exceptional and the expected' (1997:34).

[46] I use this the model of the structure of a story as the basis for my model of the structure of a trauma narrative (see chapter five).

'Narratable' life experiences are those that are extra-ordinary, unexpected and create turbulence which is noteworthy and may give rise to, for example, humour, shock, confusion, pain or fear: a state of disequilibrium. At the very least, to justify its telling in any context, a personal experience narrative concerns an experience that in some way, however small, disturbs the expected pattern of life. Whether that experience shatters the everyday or only dents its surface, personal experience narratives are trauma narratives in the widest sense of the term.

Thinking about self-narration and trauma in this way enables me to posit a continuum of experiences whereby at one extreme there are the everyday, mundane, experiences of life, which are not in any sense remarkable. This sphere of experience is not intrinsically narratable, it is the normal, ordinary, expected experience against which remarkable, out of the ordinary, experience is measured for the extent to which it is both narratable and traumatic, in the widest sense of the term. Moving along the continuum from the non-narratable everyday to mildly traumatic experiences through more traumatic experiences, at the other end of the continuum there are once again experiences which are non-narratable, or at least very difficult to narrate, not because they do not disturb the equilibrium of the ordinary but because they shatter it completely.

everyday ordinary experience >> **unusual unexpected experience** >> **mildly traumatic experience** >> **very traumatic experience** >> **extremely traumatic experience**

non-narratable ---------- narratable ---------- non-narratable

Fig. 3 A continuum of experience and the narratable range[47]

[47] I want to emphasise that I am not suggesting that there are specific, categorisable, types of experience that can be accurately assigned a place on this continuum of experiences - the traumatic nature of any experience, and the aspects of that experience which

The extremely traumatic experiences at the far end of this continuum are so far outside the range of everyday, expected life, so shocking to the person that encounters them, that it may be impossible for her/him to create a complete, coherent story, or perhaps any story at all, about them. In the terms of Propp's model of basic story structure, the turbulence and the disequilibrium are present but the possibility of action and intervention which could lead to a restoration of a modified version of equilibrium is not and this renders them non-narratable and, therefore, meaningless. As discussed in chapter one, it is in the nature of narrative to *make* meaning, through the three fold 'now' of the moment of narration, which holds past and future in tension in the present. When the the unity of 'now' is shattered by an extremely traumatic experience, that tension is broken and the meaning-making potential offered by narrative is, therefore, unable to be realised.

The nature of narrative, the typical structure of a story, and the context-bound point of a personal experience narrative which, I am suggesting, combine to determine what is narratable and what is not, are, however, only three of many elements which may interact to determine what is and what is not narratable. For example, in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, it was the power of another which prevented the narration of certain experiences and, in this way, rendered them non-narratable. In a similar way, I have referred to experience which may not be told because it is denied, suppressed and censored by social and political forces and this can also be understood to be non-narratable experience. It is not, therefore, simply the nature, traumatic or non-traumatic, of the experience to be told which determines what is narratable and what is

---

are more or less traumatic, cannot be decided from outside that experience but only from within. Although there are undoubtedly some experiences which almost everyone would experience as traumatic, there are many experiences which would be experienced

not. In addition, the sphere of experience which is not narratable because it is too ordinary frequently *becomes* narratable in personal experience narratives of trauma because it against this ordinariness that the traumatic nature of the experience is evaluated. In chapter five I shall explore in detail how personal experience narratives of trauma draw upon the ordinary, the normally non-narratable, in terms of the construction of 'suddenness': a defining moment in the telling of trauma.

The sphere of experience which is not narratable because it is too *extra*-ordinary is also drawn upon in personal experience narratives of trauma and when this happens the incorporation of the non-narratable can function in very significant ways. Later in this chapter I shall discuss this in terms of the narration of the inability to remember specific events and show how this non-narratable experience can be incorporated into a personal experience narrative of trauma in such a way so as to function to validate the traumatic nature of the experience being narrated. In this section I have focused on the interaction between the content (experience) and the form (narrative) of personal experience narratives and I have begun to suggest ways in which dialectical processes, involving *what* may be told and *how* it may be told in relation to narratable and non-narratable experience, are played out in the narration of trauma. I will return to and further develop these ideas in the following section, which begins with an examination of some of the ways in which multiple, interacting selves are constructed in the language of self-narration.

---

as extremely traumatic by some people and and only mildly traumatic by others.

Linguistic self-production and the dialogic 'I'

Self-narration involves an act of faith in a transcendental ego which is linguistically inscribed by the very form that narration must take. If we did not believe, indeed *feel*, ourselves to be autonomous agents, separate from other autonomous agents, we could not begin to narrate our lives from the perspective of 'I'. However, we do not believe ourselves to be separate, self-contained, unitary entities because of our experience of ourselves. On the contrary, as William James discovered by analysing his own experience, the notion of an enduring central 'I', 'a transcendental thinker', is 'a postulate, an assertion that there *must* be *a knower* correlative to all this *known'* (James 1890:401, quoted by Shotter 1989). Shotter points out that it is not our *experience* but our established *ways of talking* about ourselves that support possessive individualism and mean that we must experience ourselves as 'an object-like' thing when we are, actually, 'a mobile *region* of continually self-reproducing activity.' (1989:139). This region is, I would add, populated by stories of the self without which the self 'contracts into the thinness of its personal pronoun' (Crites 1986:172).

Autobiographical stories are realised by first person narrative texts and tell, in the main, of the experience, thoughts and emotions of a central character, 'I'. It is difficult, if not impossible, to envisage the autobiographical project without assuming that there exists a self-contained entity, 'I', yet, as Harré and Mülhaüser (1990:5) argue:

> *... the transcendental ego, "the inner self", is not an empirically presented entity, but a shadow cast on the mind by the grammatical forms used in the practices of self-reporting, avowing etc. deriving from indexical properties of pronouns and their equivalents.*

To misquote Wittgenstein, perhaps the whole story of the autobiographical project is told in an instance of grammar![48] The essence of the autobiographical act, the telling

[48] 'A whole cloud of philosophy is condensed into a drop of grammar' (Wittgenstein 1953:222)

of one's own life, is the simultaneous splitting and multiplication of 'I'; a 'narrating I' creates a 'narrated I' as the protagonist in a story. This textual self[49], the 'narrated I', occupies a contradictory dual position in relation to the narrating self. On the one hand it is the same person as the self who narrates and therefore evaluation of the actions and intentions of the textual self reflects directly on the narrating self. On the other hand, there exists a distance between the two which enables the narrating self to justify, excuse or even condemn the actions and intentions of the textual self. From a position of greater knowledge or wisdom, the narrating self is able to make a comparison between the two selves which serves to emphasise differences between them. For example, when telling the past one can say 'of course what I (textual self) did was wrong and if I (textual self) had known then what I (narrating self) know now, I (textual self) would have behaved differently.' The narrated self can be negatively evaluated in a way which, rather than reflecting badly on the narrator, serves to make a positive evaluation of the present self who is now 'better', more knowledgeable, than the former self.

In this way, self-narration echoes self-consciousness demonstrating 'the capacity to know and simultaneously be that which one knows' (Bruss 1980:301). It is crucial for the autobiographical project, therefore, that the narrating self is *not* the same person as the textual self while, at the same time, what the narrating self *is* is a product of the textual self. The 'I' who narrates is presented as someone who has developed and progressed, through time, from the 'I' who is narrated. This textual self is, however,

---

[49] In this section I am referring to the 'narrated I' as the textual self and the 'narrating I' as the narrating self in order to make a clear distinction between the two 'I''s I am discussing. I am not intending to imply, however that the narrating 'I' cannot also be a textual self. As will become clear in the following sections, the 'narrating I' can be one of many textual selves who feature as characters in personal experience narrative texts.

continuously created and recreated by the narrating self for different purposes in different contexts: self-identity is, therefore, an ongoing process of self-narration[50].

The narration of the experience of trauma and of coping in the aftermath of trauma is a type of self-narration that is likely to present narrators with a particularly difficult, yet crucial, task of maintaining or reconstructing self-identity. Janoff-Bulman's (1996) theory of the psychology of trauma is based on the premise that the experience of trauma shatters our very basic assumptions about ourselves and about the world. We hold, she argues, three fundamental assumptions: 'the world is benevolent', 'the world is meaningful' and 'the self is worthy' (Janoff-Bulman 1996:6).[51] Self-blame, says Janoff-Bulman, is one of three major strategies used by survivors of trauma and can be understood as an adaptive strategy in that it contributes to the re-establishment of the assumption that the world is meaningful. Although this strategy appears to help to rebuild one assumption at the cost of another, the self is worthy, this is not necessarily the case, argues Janoff-Bulman. This is because self-blame can take two different forms, one of which is not, intrinsically, damaging to self-worth. The two forms of self-blame are characterological and behavioural. Characterological self-blame, which *is* damaging to the self-worth assumption, can be identified in present tense statements like 'I am stupid', 'I am selfish' or 'I am naive'. Behavioural self-blame, which need not be damaging to the self-worth assumption, is narrated in past tense statements like 'I did something really stupid', 'I acted in selfish way' or 'I didn't realise that would

---

[50] The 'narrative turn' in psychology has generated a number of interesting new approaches to the notion of the self and self identity. See, for example, Kerby (1991) who claims that the self can be understood as a character in a story, Widdershoven (1994:107-110) who rejects mechanistic and organismic models of development in favour of a narrative model and identifies 'closed', 'open' and 'radically open' narrative identities, and McAdams (1985:18) who claims that identity stability is longitudinal consistency in the life story and identity transformation is story revision.

[51] There are, in my view, some problems with Janoff-Bulman's theory and these arise from the assumptions on which the theory is based. I will discuss her work in more detail in chapter six. In this section I will use an aspect of her theory, uncritically, in order to expand upon my argument about self-narration and self-identity.

happen'. If we relate this to my discussion above about the relationship between the narrating I and the textual self in personal experience narratives it becomes clear that characterological self-blame occurs when the narrating self and the textual self are one and the same, whereas behavioural self-blame depends upon there being a difference and a distance between the two selves. This distance and difference enables a negative evaluation of the textual self to be, potentially, a positive evaluation of the narrating self.

The distance between 'I' and myself, which enables us to blame ourselves without fundamentally damaging our self-identity, is created in the language we use to talk about ourselves. The following examples, taken from my data, illustrate just some of the very many ways in which an 'I' can talk about its self as a separate entity:

I was so proud of myself (A 25:1320-1321)

I was disappointed with myself (G1 5:226)

I hate myself (C1 10:481)

I get so angry with myself (R 7:332)

I was surprised with myself (J 25:1301-1302)

I am amazed at myself sometimes (Annie 1:6-7)

In these extracts the narrating 'I' tells of having a particular feeling towards its self; pride, disappointment, hatred, anger, surprise and amazement. The self is presented as quite separate from, and out of the control of, the narrating 'I'. Indeed the self seems to have such an autonomous existence that the narrating 'I' can be amazed at its actions.

The separate existence of the self is implied even more clearly in the following examples where 'I' does not know itself:

I didn't know what I felt (A 8:389-390)

I didn't know I'd got it in me (A 25:1321)

I don't know why I did that (M 1:22-23)

I never expected to feel the way I did (Denise 1:23-24)

In the next four extracts, the 'I' is presented as attempting to communicate with the self:

I've been (.) sitting on the edge of the chair (.) convincing myself (G1 7:328-329)

I was desperately trying to tell myself (G1 9:461-462)

I can't explain it to myself (C2 6:287-288)

I still ask myself why (C2 9:432)

Here, the possibility of a dialogue between 'I' and self is proposed. The 'I' is presented as attempting to convince, to tell, to explain and to ask its self but there are clearly some problems with this communication. If 'myself' in these extracts was replaced by, for example, a name as in 'I've been trying to convince John 'or 'I still ask John why', the most likely interpretation to be made would be that John is resisting being convinced or not responding satisfactorily to the question 'why?'. In the next three extracts, the 'I' and the self are presented as being in even more open conflict:

I forced myself to go back (A 13:682-683)

I'm fighting with myself (C2 9:435-436)

I wanted to punish myself (Sunita 1:40-41)

In more complex constructions, we can strive to understand ourselves and make meaning through conscious self-reflection:

I suppose it was me trying to convince myself (C2 5:212-213)

Here a present narrating self, 'I', refers to 'me', a past textual self, as trying to convince 'myself', another past textual self, of something. In the following example, taking control of one's self is described in terms of a dialogue between present selves arising from a realisation made by a past self:

I can think hang on you're going too far here and I've realised I can bring myself back [from losing my temper]

(R16 923-925)

Labelling the various selves will make this clearer:

I(narrating self) can think hang on you(present textual self)'re going too far here and I(past textual self) 've realised that I(narrating self) can bring myself(present textual self) back

Future selves can also be proposed in the ways in which we talk about ourselves. In the next example, present, future and past/future selves are presented as interacting with one another:

I think that if I allowed myself to think about it I could very easily get myself into a state

(G1 15:748)

Again, labelling the different selves will make the example clearer:

I(present narrating self) think that if I(future textual self) allowed myself(past textual self in the future) to think about it I(future textual self) could very easily get myself(future textual self) into a state

These examples illustrate just a few of the vast range of ways in which we talk about ourselves. We can talk as though our selves were quite separate people with whom we have exactly the same sort of relationships as we have with actual other people. We can have feelings about them, talk to them and be in conflict with them. We can feel as though we know them well, or hardly at all, and we can sometimes have control over them and at other times have no control at all. Our relationships with our selves are presented as being as changing, as unpredictable and as confusing as our relationships with other people can be. However, when we talk about becoming estranged from our

selves this seems to be much more problematic, more ontologically threatening, than losing a relationship with another person:

I'm losing myself (A 15:776)

I'm not me anymore (A 28:1462)

I find it hard to be myself (S 11:580)

I've got to find me again (A 37:1917)

To talk of an 'I' without its self seems, to me, to suggest an empty, lost 'I' who does not know who it is anymore. Self-identity, knowing who we are, rests, therefore on this relationship between 'I' and its self[52]. This relationship is constructed linguistically when we talk about ourselves and is played out on many levels and in complex ways when we tell stories about ourselves.

Levels of narration in personal experience narrative texts

Let us first consider the levels of narration in a extract from a past tense personal experience narrative text:

1. a chap came into the shop and erm I was stood behind the
2. counter and he appro approached me erm he had a black
3. balaclava with just the eyes cut out and er a black motorcycle
4. helmet on and he mumbled some he said something but it
5. was mumbled and erm I I just said sorry and he said er erm er
6. packet of cigarettes so I give him his cigarettes er he give me
7. the money er I rang it into the till when the till drawer opened I
8. was looking into the till and I felt this cold wet liquid on my
9. face...[53]

S1 3:147-156

[52] There are, of course, a large and diverse range of psychoanalytic interpretations of this 'I' and 'me' split, based on the classic Freudian ego/id relationship of conflict and repression. In addition, 'the self' has been constructed as a sort of holy grail in Rogerian, 'person-centred', counselling theory with its goals of 'self-actualisation' and 'authenticity' being reached when individuals rediscover their 'inner selves'. I do not propose to explore these psychological perspectives, however, as I am interested in the ways in which language, in particular the language of self-narration, composes and recomposes the self and I therefore regard the self as a discursive process and not a psychological entity. From a different, non-narrative, perspective Harré and Mülhaüser (1990) also reject the notion of the self as a psychological entity and, using a comparative approach to pronoun use in different languages, develop Mead (1934)'s views of the self and his understanding of 'I' and 'me' into a linguistic thesis of the 'double indexicality of the first person'.

[53] For the reasons which will be discussed in chapter four, the narrative from which this extract is taken is unusually simple, especially given the traumatic nature of the event being narrated. Because it contains little, or no, evaluation of the events experienced and does not, therefore, exhibit any sense of the consciousness (thoughts, feelings, emotions, imagination) of either the narrating or the narrated self, it has a basic, uncomplicated structure.

This narrative segment tells part of the story of Sandra being sprayed with acid. There are two characters in the story, 'a chap' and 'I' who describes, using the past tense, what happened. In Bal's (1997) terms, the 'I' in this text is a character-bound narrator (CN), as distinct from the external narrator (EN) who is the person actually speaking. Because this is first person narration, the 'I' who is speaking, who in this case is not present in the text, refers to, and creates as a character, a past self as an actor in the story and it is from the perspective of this past self/actor, the CN, that the experience is told. In Bal's terms, the experience is focalized through the CN: 'he approached me' (line 02), 'I was looking into the till' (lines 9-10), 'I felt this cold wet liquid' (lines 10-11). Analysing the relationships between the narrator, the focalizor and the actor, and 'those moments at which they do or do not overlap in the shape of a single "person"' (Bal 1997:20), gives insights into the complexity, flexibility and multiplicity of self-presentations which narrative offers. The next extract provides an example of a past tense personal experience narrative in which the external narrator, the 'narrating I', *is* present in the text and interacts, textually, with the character-bound narrator in a way which produces a rather more blurred focalization of experience than in the previous example:

1. I waited all day I went in into one of the toilets got the pregnancy
2. testing kit (.) did the test and nearly fell over when I saw it was
3. positive I think I stood in the toilet about 10 minutes just looking
4. at it hoping it was going to change and not be that test positive
5. (.) I went back into theatre got changed came home I don't really
6. remember the journey home I know I got home came indoors
7. and it just seemed everything was different it was like my world
8. had fallen apart...

Sandy 1:3-11

Sandy, the external narrator of this story about the day she discovered she was pregnant, is present in the text. She is the 'I' in the present tense phrases 'I think I stood in the

toilet' (line 3) and 'I don't really remember the journey I know I got home' (lines 5-6). The certainty of what happened that day, what can be focalised through the character-bound narrator, in this case the past self/actor, is disrupted twice and affirmed once by the external narrator's interventions in the text:

1. I(CN) waited all day I(CN) went in into one of the toilets got the pregnancy
2. testing kit (.) did the test and nearly fell over when I(CN) saw it was positive

3. I(EN) think [certainty of experience disrupted]

3. I(CN) stood in the toilet about 10 minutes just looking
4. at it hoping it was going to change and not be that test positive
5. (.) I(CN) went back into theatre got changed came home

5. I(EN) don't really remember [certainty of experience disrupted]

6. the journey home

6. I(EN) know [certainty of experience affirmed]

6. I(CN) got home came indoors
7. and it just seemed everything was different it was like my world
8. had fallen apart...

There are a number of interpretations that could be made about why an external narrator chooses to intervene in this way. One, apparently obvious, interpretation is that the speaker is not sure how long she stood in the toilet and cannot remember the journey home and is therefore simply, and honestly, stating this. However, Sandy has not been asked to state precisely how long she stood in the toilet or instructed to relate the details of the journey home. She did not need, therefore, to include these events in the narrative. The interesting question becomes, then, why has she chosen to include these events, and, in doing so, to apparently undermine the reliability of the CN as the focalizer of this experience? The answer, I believe, relates to the point of this narrative which is to convey to the listener the *traumatic nature* of the experience of discovering

that she was pregnant, 'it was like my world had fallen apart' (lines 7-8), rather than to give a full, accurate, definitive account of the day's events. Narrators of the stories of trauma which make up my data frequently use this option, choosing to reveal their uncertainty, even ignorance, about their past experience rather than to assert their knowledge. They do this because, I believe, it enables them to convey the certainty of the devastating *experience* of the trauma, typically involving confusion, panic, terror and an inability to believe, to take in, what is going on. The narration of the experience of not knowing something, of being unable to remember some details, is often, therefore, an important part of a personal experience narrative of trauma[54]. In this way, the non-narratable aspects of experience are incorporated into, and are supportive of, the narratable aspects. Rather than undermining the authenticity of the narrative, the revelation of uncertainty validates the experience; it is evidence in itself of the truly traumatic nature of the experience. The self who fully knows its self, and its experiences, who can understand and make meaning, rationally, coherently and unambiguously, is not a traumatised self.

The extracts discussed so far in this section are from past tense personal experience narrative texts but present and future tense narration also draws upon the construction of complex relationships between multiple selves. The following extract is an example of present tense narration framing a future tense narrative:

1. I need to tell him what he's done I'll need him to hear me (.) say
2. what he's done to Jonathan that's part of the anger (.) erm and
3. for me to walk away from him really knowing that he's locked up
4. (.) I just don't know I just don't know how he'll react I honestly
5. don't think he'll see me I don't think he'll be able to face me..

C1:8/387-392

[54] I am not suggesting that narrators consciously or deliberately use non-narratability in order to persuade or convince others of the traumatic nature of their experience. It is rather that, in the context of this interview, uncertainty or lack of knowledge is permissable, sanctioned and, indeed, acts to validate the story being told. In a different context, for example a court of law, non-narratable sections are unlikely to be included especially if the point of the narrative is not to convey the traumatic nature of experience, but to tell, with complete authority, exactly what happened in the past.

Here the EN, Carol who is speaking, creates a CN, herself in the future, confronting her estranged husband, the murderer of their son, Jonathan. As discussed in chapter one, prospective narration produces imaginary stories of the future through the same *re*trospective action of emplotment that produces stories of the past. The resolution of Carol's future story involves her future self, the CN, walking away from the perpetrator, 'really knowing that he's locked up'(line 3). This extract is taken from the first of three revenge fantasies which Carol constructs. The other two play out similar scenes of power over the perpetrator. In the second revenge fantasy, Carol interrogates her ex-husband and demands answers to the questions that haunt her and in the third she insists that he face her and denies him any rights:

6. I want to tell him that he's never going to see Jonathan again
7. and I want to know how he can shut his eyes at night time
8. because I can't how he gets through each day knowing what he's
9. done erm (.) knowing how (.) saying that he wanted to kill James
10. what stopped him I want to know how close he got to James and
11. was he intending to kill me on the Saturday morning (.) just
12. whatever possessed him what enabled a person to do it a dad

C1:8/404-410

13. I think he should be made to see me I think he should be made
14. to sit in a room and listen to what I've got to say he took the law
15. into his own hands and took Jonathan away from me (.) and
16. James and the rest of the family he took his life he had no right
17. to do that no right at all and I don't think he should be allowed
18. any rights least of all to refuse to see me Jonathan's mum his ex-
19. wife and to face me (.) and let him try and speak to me

C1:8/420-426

Herman (1992:189) sees the desire for revenge arising out of the experience of complete helplessness and describes the revenge fantasy as 'often a mirror image of the traumatic memory, in which the roles of perpetrator and victim are reversed'. In each of Carol's future stories of revenge, she imagines herself in a position of power over the perpetrator who will be forced to listen and to respond to her. The possibility that this

revenge fantasy will not be realised is acknowledged by the EN, in the first extract above, who recognises that her lack of knowledge, 'I just don't know' (line 4), lack of power, 'I honestly don't think he'll see me' (lines 4-5), and lack of control over the future character of the perpetrator, 'I just don't know how he'll react'(line 4), prevent her from constructing a convincing future story which will bring about the resolution she desires. In the same way as our pasts are inextricably entwined with the histories of others, as illustrated in chapter one through Sandra's experiences, so our future stories, and the use they can be to us in the present, depend on being able to control the other characters in the story. Carol recognises, in the third revenge fantasy, that she will need to call upon outside authority, 'he should be made' (line 13), 'I don't think he should be allowed any rights'(lines 17-18), in order to gain control over this character in her future story. The relationship between the narrating 'I' and its selves is crucial but insufficient, in itself, to realise the full potential of narrative to make meaning of the past or the future for the present. The potential that narrative offers, in terms of meaning-making, whether that entails self-blame, constructing revenge fantasies, or any other meaning-making process, can only be realised through complex dialectical processes involving negotiations with diverse others and diverse forces. The narrating 'I' is in dialogue with others, other versions of the self and other actual or imagined people, who are composed and recomposed in stories *by* the self and stories *about* the self. In addition the narrating 'I' must negotiate the pressures exerted by diverse forces, including the self-referential limitations of language, the nature of narrative, the structure of stories, and the powerful social and political constraints which operate in all story-telling contexts.

In this chapter I have taken a narrative approach to the self, conceptualising it as a discursive, dialogic process, continuously composed and recomposed through self-narration. This approach was developed through a phenomenological analysis of the personal experience narrative which attempts to comprehensively and rigorously explore its cultural, historical, social, political and linguistic dimensions. In the next chapter I review the ways in which personal experience narratives are used as data and formalise both the definition and the conceptualisation of the personal experience narrative that I am using for this study.

Chapter Three

Making Data: from process to text

I begin this chapter with a brief summary of the problematic status of the personal experience narrative as data in the human and social sciences before moving on to consider the ways in which oral personal experience narratives are conceptualised and used as data from diverse theoretical positions. This overview of the field provides an academic context for this study and highlights the way in which the framework of enquiry constructs the object of analysis. Looking at the relationship between the aims of research and the way in which the object of study is defined illuminates the production process through which personal stories become data. After examining this production process, with particular emphasis on the issue of transcription, I go on to consider the question of what counts as narrative, and why? I argue that the restrictive way in which narrative is usually defined within sociolinguistics, often following William Labov's seminal work in this area, has not only led to an impoverished, static notion of narrative as form rather than action but has also served to focus attention on only one aspect of personal narration: the narrativisation of *discrete events* that are *past*. Text which is generated by the narration of ongoing or enduring states of being or of present, future or hypothetical experience is, therefore, designated as non-narrative and discounted. My reading of personal experience narratives of trauma show that these aspects of personal narration are crucial to meaning-making and to the process of coping in the aftermath of trauma. In order for a narrative analysis to explore these features, an inclusive, non-eventcentric redefinition of narrative is required. In the final section of this chapter, I am able to self-reflexively construct such a definition through a discussion of a number of theorists' adaptations of the Labovian approach and, in

particular, through a critical reading of Fludernik's (1996) redefinition of narrative as narrativity.

The status of the personal experience narrative as data

Although personal experience narratives have been used as data since the very beginnings of the human and social sciences, their status as evidence remains controversial. Yans-McLaughlin (1990) discusses two reviews published by the Social Science Research Council on the use of personal documents[55] in psychological science (Allport 1942) and in history, anthropology and sociology (Gottschalk et. al 1945) and comments that controversy still rages fifty years on. On the one hand, Allport's stunningly obvious question 'If we want to know how people feel, what they experience and what they remember, what their emotions and motives are like, "Why not ask them?" ' (Allport 1942:37, quoted by Yans-McLaughlin 1990:255) has yet to impact in any fundamental sense on the core activities of psychological science. On the other, in areas of sociology where the use of 'the informant's own story' has been widespread[56], personal experience narratives have been read as objective descriptions and presented unproblematically as evidence; a window on reality. As Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992:2) note, 'it was the events themselves, not the stories told about them' on which researchers focused.[57]

[55] Yans-McLaughlin prefers the term 'subjective documents' and includes in this category autobiographies, life histories, letters, oral narratives, interviews and court records.

[56] Most notably, the Chicago school of sociologists.

[57] See, also, Bertaux (1981) for a history of the use of life stories in sociology, and a range of approaches to biography as sociological data.

More recently, the 'interpretive turn' in the social sciences (Rabinow and Sullivan 1987) and the impact of critical hermeneutic enquiry in the context of post-positivism right across the humanities has generated a field of study which takes as its focus the personal experience narrative as an object of enquiry in its own right. Within this multidisciplinary field researchers bring together concepts and insights from a range of disciplines in order to find adequate ways of studying the personal experience narrative. Narrative is conceptualised in different ways within this growing body of diverse, interdisciplinary work as the aims of the various studies determine the way in which the object of analysis is defined and the ways in which data is produced, presented and analysed.

The field of oral personal narrative research

Langellier (1989) provides a detailed overview of the field of research into oral personal narratives by identifying five theoretical positions with different methodological implications which determine whether personal narratives are treated as story-text, as storytelling performance, as conversational interaction, as social process or as political praxis[58]. She arrives at these five theoretical positions by asking three questions of the studies which make up her data:

1. What are the object and unit of analysis?
2. What are the significant concepts for understanding personal narrative?
3. How is context defined?

In this way, Langellier is able to identify the assumptions which underpin the different perspectives and she critically discusses key works in terms of their implications for

[58] Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) provide a more recent review of narrative research, but this covers all types of narrative research, rather than focusing, as Langellier does, on linguistic approaches to the personal experience narrative. Ochs'

theory, method and practice in personal narrative research. What follows is a summary of Langellier's overview to which I have added some extra examples and a commentary on the relevance of each position for this study. Perspective one, personal narrative as story text, has particular relevance for this study and for the definitional issues I shall go on to consider, and I have therefore significantly extended Langellier's discussion of this approach.

Personal Narrative as Story-Text

This text-centred approach stems from the enormously influential work of Labov and Waletsky (1967) and Labov (1972) whose model of the personal narrative (briefly discussed in chap 1) has become paradigmatic in the field. The object of analysis from this perspective is to relate form to function, the unit of analysis is the clause, and narrative is defined as 'one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred' (Labov 1972:359). Narrative, says Labov, can be understood as a series of answers to underlying questions and the elements of his model of the structure of a mature, fully-formed oral personal experience narrative function to respond to those questions:

1. Abstract (optional) - what was this about?
2. Orientation - who, when, what, where?
3. Complicating Action - then what happened?
4. Evaluation - so what?
5. Result - what finally happened?

and Capps' (1996) annual review of narrative approaches to the self focuses on personal narratives but at a general theoretical level rather than a methodological one. Therefore, Langellier's overview remains the most useful for this chapter.

A sixth element, the Coda, functions to sign off the narrative, to hand the 'floor' over to the hearer(s), and rather than answering a question it '*puts off* a question', signalling that questions 3 and 4 are no longer relevant (Labov 1972:370 emphasis in the original).

Labov (1972) describes his model as a modification of the scheme proposed by Labov and Waletzky (1967) within which evaluation was as regarded as a discrete element. In this later model evaluation spreads like a wave through the narrative, and its status is elevated from an element to a 'secondary structure which is concentrated in the evaluation section but may be found in various forms throughout the narrative' (Labov 1972:369). Labov's diamond-shaped diagram of a mature, fully-formed personal experience narrative depicts this:

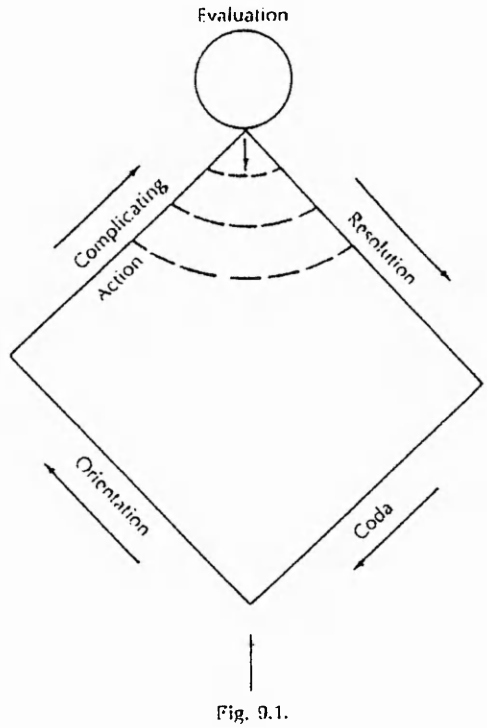


Fig. 9.1.

Labov (1972:369)

Labov describes evaluation as 'perhaps the most important element in addition to the basic narrative clause' (1972:366) and one which has been neglected by other accounts of narrative. It is evaluation which, in Labov's terms, mediates the crucial 'point' of the story, thereby justifying its telling, and reveals the narrator's perspective on the events being told. He identifies three main types of evaluation: external, embedded and evaluative action:

External evaluation is overt as the narrator stops the complicating action, stands outside the story and tells the listener what the point is, for example 'what happened next was the worst moment of all'.
Embedded evaluation preserves the dramatic continuity of the story as the narrator tells how she/he felt at the time, for example 'I thought to myself, I'm going to die', or reports how this feeling was expressed to someone else, for example 'I said to my friend "we're never going to get out of here" '.
Evaluative action stays firmly within the story by reporting actions which reveal emotions without the use of speech, for example 'I heaved a sigh of relief'.

Labov further categorises the evaluative elements in a narrative text into four types of device:
intensifiers which sub-divide into gestures accompanied by 'this' or 'that', expressive phonology, quantifiers, repetition and ritual utterances.
comparators which compare what did occur to what did not, but might have done.
correlatives which bring two separate events together to make a single point.
explicatives which often involve causality and explain why something happened.

In this way Labov offers a very detailed, rigorous method for identifying evaluation in a narrative text and provides a number of very useful analytic tools for examining the perspective of the narrator within any particular personal experience narrative. Evaluation and re-evaluation is clearly a crucial aspect of the process of coping in the

aftermath of trauma. While what happened (the death of a loved one, a rape, a car crash or other traumatic event) cannot be 'narrated out' of the personal experience narrative of that trauma, how one perceives it, what one feels about it and what it means in the present and for the future is open to change, to re-evaluation in subsequent retellings. These issues are most centrally addressed in chapter seven within an extensive analysis of evaluation in narratives of trauma.

Researchers who present their data following Labov's method of transcription and according to his model of structure typically parse the text into clauses, number the lines and, as a preliminary analytic step, divide 'the core narrative' into the discrete structural categories of the six-part model. The core narrative is 'a skeleton plot' abstracted from the full text (Mishler 1986:236) which leaves out evaluation and anything else that does not fit into the remaining categories (for example, interactions between teller and listener, descriptions and asides:

CHART 1
***The Core Narrative*: "Yet we always *did* what we had to do some*how* we did it."**

Orientation	004	They weren't troubles in the sense of real troubles no,
	005	but they were en- en- enforced *lean* times
Abstract	013	Yet we always *did* what we had to do
	014	some*how* we did it.
	015	We got through it.
	016	Ah, Danny got severely burned
	017	and uh, had to have skins- a skin graft
	018	and uh, surgery
	019	and was in the hospital for 45 days
	020	and it was expensive
Complicating Action	043	his clothing caught fire
	044	and he lost all of the skin up here, (I: uhm) from the top of his ankle all up t'here,
	048	And they did a graft from here down t'here.
	051	The whole bill came to fifteen hundred dollars. Everything.
	062	Anyhow he called me up one day,
	069	And he said "Jim, would it help you at all if I considered – If I-" he said "If I reduced my bill."
	070	Well I almost fell on the floor.
	077	And when he said that to me I- I almost- I think I did get a little bit dewy around the eyes,
	081	And I said "No, I wouldn't consider it," his reducing this bill at all.
	082	I said "I was about to call you up and here you are calling me up on the telephone."
	083	And I said "Believe it or not, you're next up at bat."
	086	'n I said "Bill, if you can just hang in there I'll get your- I'll mail a check in about three or four days
	087	and that will start a run on this thing
	088	and we'll *stamp* the *life* out of it."
Resolution	089	And that's what we did.

Note: This core narrative is drawn from the full response included in the Appendix; the numbering of clause/idea units follows that in the complete typescript. The labeling of sections as Orientation, etc. follows Labov's model of narrative analysis.

(Mishler 1986:237)

The evaluation clauses, which mediate the 'point' of the narrative, can then be re-introduced into the analysis in order to examine the narrator's perspective on the 'bare bones' of what actually happened. In this way a clear distinction is maintained between the referential and the evaluative functions of the narrative text.

Clearly there some major problems with this type of approach. Firstly, it is the Labovian model that has determined what the 'core narrative' is, and this is then taken to be a representation of 'what actually happened': an objective reality is being assumed when this 'reality' has been constructed by the method. Secondly, as discussed in chapter one, any clause may be present because it fulfils the evaluative rather than the referential function and it is therefore impossible to maintain a clear distinction between the two. Indeed, as Labov himself notes, 'the narratives themselves may serve only as a framework for the evaluation' (1972:371). Thirdly, the narrative is regarded as a monologue which has an autonomous existence and is simply surrounded by other extraneous or irrelevant talk. Therefore, the interactional context within which the narrative is produced and the textual context from which it is abstracted is either completely disregarded or treated as a secondary, 'add-on' feature. In this way, the personal experience narrative is treated as an autonomous, monologic, self-contained text. It is isolated from its context and internally dissected according to a standard model which was derived from the study of one particular type of oral personal narrative[59] and which embodies very rigid assumptions about what constitutes

[59] Narratives produced in interviews conducted by Labov and his researchers with young, Black American males.

narrative (past events organised in linear time) and about language (representative of reality). In addition, due to the Labovian correlation of *competence* with fully-formed evaluative narrative syntax[60] and due to the success of Labov's model, it 'has functioned normatively to set the standard against which other personal narratives are measured' (Langellier 1989:248-249). In this way, a 'good' narrative is one that fits neatly into Labov's model and, those that do not have, it is implied, been produced by less than competent storytellers.

Let us now consider what a basic Labovian analysis can reveal about Gail's 'shabby man' story:

21. there was an incident actually a few weeks ago I was with
22. my mother in law and my daughter and the little girl from next
23. door (.) we were walking the dog and there was a man who
24. was sitting (.) erm (.) drinking a bottle of wine or sherry or
25. something looking very er (.) well down (.) dirty and shabby
26. but he had that look (.) and he watched (.) as we passed very
27. intensely (.) now if I hadn't been with my mother in law I would
28. have been absolutely (.) scared out of my mind but because
29. she was there you know I felt OK (.) just about (.) she was
30. worried ...

G1 16:813-823

Abstract:	01	there was an incident
Orientation:	1	a few weeks ago I was with
	2	my mother in law and my daughter and the little girl from next
	3	door (.) we were walking the dog and there was a man
Complicating Action:	6	(.) and he watched (.) as we passed

[60]This is quite understandable within the context of Labov's work which compared narrative production in terms of age, ethnicity and class and concluded, among other things, that stories told by working class speakers demonstrated a higher level of competence than those of middle class speakers (Labov: 1972:396). Competence, in this context, refers to the ability to command the attention of an audience. Labov states that middle-class speakers tend to overuse external evaluation and syntactic elaboration which is detrimental to audience interest whereas embedded evaluation successfully dramatises personal narration. In addition, Labov claimed that black speakers 'are certainly not behind or backward' and may be more advanced in narrative syntax than white speakers of the same age and class (Langellier 1989:247). Labov was not simply correlating syntactic complexity with competence, therefore, but perhaps the widespread use of the Labovian model has served to obscure the subtlety of Labov's notion of competence.

Result: 9 I felt OK (.) just about (.) she was
10. worried

The evaluation in this narrative is concentrated in the following section:

Evaluation: 7 now if I hadn't been with my mother in law I would
8. have been absolutely (.) scared out of my mind but because
9. she was there you know I felt OK (.) just about

This is external evaluation, the narrator stands outside the story and tells the listener what the point of the story is, and a number of Labovian evaluative devices are used:

now - intensifer (expressive phonology)

if I hadn't been with my mother in law I would have been absolutely (.) scared out of my mind - comparator (something that could have happened, but didn't)

absolutely - intensifier (quantifier)

but because - explicative (invoking causality)

The narrative also contains embedded evaluation:

8. but he had that look

The use of the adversative conjunction 'but' here functions to indicate that the preceding description of the man:

3. who
4. was sitting (.) erm (.) drinking a bottle of wine or sherry or
5. something looking very er (.) well down (.) dirty and shabby

is not as significant to the point of the story as him having 'that look' is. The phrase 'that look' can only be understood by reference back to the talk which immediately precedes this past tense narration:

1. G: but men I don't know er (.) if they look
2. intimidating (.) men have a I think it's called the hungry look
3. [P smiles] you know some men (.) just just look have a look

4. P: mm

5. G: which yes it's frightening

6. P: right

7. G: it's a very intense look

8. P: right so there's something about certain people

9. G: yes

10. P: you find (.) anxiety provoking

11. G: yes if I'm on my own if I'm not on my own then it doesn't 12. concern me (.)

G1 15:790-809

Taking a strictly Labovian approach, none of this present tense, event-less dialogic sequence would count as narrative, yet is it clear that the point of the narrative that follows is deeply embedded in this. The overriding point of the shabby man story has nothing to do with the specific past events of that day and everything to do with how Gail feels now (at the time of the interview) and how she experiences the ongoing effects of what happened to her in the past.

There are, therefore, severe limitations to the Labovian approach to personal narratives as story-text. Maintaining a clear distinction between referential and evaluative clauses is impossible given that any clause, or even complete narrative segment, may be primarily evaluative rather than referential. Restricting analysis to the past tense narration of discrete events discounts crucial aspects of narration, without which an informed interpretation of the relationship between form and function cannot be possibly be made. In additon, personal narration is intrinsically dialogic (as I argued in detail in chapter two) and treating oral personal experience narratives as decontextualised monologues can only ever produce a narrow, basic description of the

text. Faced with such an analysis, the withering rejoinder 'so what' (Labov 1972), might be an instinctive response!

The problems and limitations of the Labovian approach, when used in isolation, are discussed by a number of theorists who, like me, seek ways of incorporating the very valuable insights of Labov's work into a more holistic approach to data (see, for example, Polyani 1979, Agar and Hobbs 1982, Mishler 1986, Riessman 1993, Ochs 1994, Ferrara 1994 and McLeod 1997).

Personal Narrative as Storytelling Performance

The approach is also concerned with competence but focuses on the dynamics of *how* a story is told, aesthetically, in a social situation, rather than, as in the first approach, on the formal and textual features of narrative. It situates personal narratives within cultural and social oral narrative traditions and aims to study their performance in context. The unit of analysis is the total performance: text, performer(s) and audience in their social and cultural setting. Performance is defined by Bauman (1986:3) as 'a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essense [sic] of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content' (quoted by Langellier 1989:250).

As performed, communicative action, storytelling is regarded as a verbal art form and the personal narrative conceptualised as a self-contained item which is 'stylized, repeatable and polishable by the individual narrator, [and] extractable by the researcher' (Langellier 1989:256).

Carlin (1992:137) describes the process by which she extracts personal narratives from transcribed interviews:

> *Some answers to questions are single narrative speech acts, but I did not count these as personal narratives. "Personal narratives" are those sequences in which at least two related and interdependent incidents are told, and in which some signal of storytelling is indicated by the speaker's framing of the acts, either in nonverbal or verbal cues, usually in the opening and/or closing of the story that indicates boundaries, or in other performance features.*

As Langellier (1989:255) points out, by 'making performance constitutive of narrative' this approach need not concern itself with rigorously distinguishing narrative from non-narrative within the text, as a Labovian approach demands. It thereby extends the conceptualisation of narrative from a relationship between clauses to a relationship between performer and audience. The audience and the wider social and political contexts of the production of the narrative are however typically presented as background to the performance. So, although this approach 'theoretically embraces textual, interactional and social structure' (Langellier 1989:256), in effect the story, as presented in a particular textual form, is all. Through its adherence to a monologic, literary notion of narrative which stresses a narrator's autonomy, this approach tends to decontextualise the narrative text from its social and political context in order to locate it within an oral storytelling tradition and to analyse it within a technical performative framework.

Of the five theoretical perspectives, personal narrative as storytelling performance is the least relevant to this study as although it theoretically takes on the board the dialogic nature of personal narrative, which I see as central, its focus on skilful performance, on storytelling competence, and on the entertainment value of a personal narrative is clearly inappropriate for studying personal experience narrative of trauma.

Personal Narrative as Conversational Interaction

This approach locates personal narratives in conversation and focuses on the joint activity of conversational partners and the mutual construction of narrative within the flow of talk. In this sense it is a dialogic approach to personal narratives as distinct from the monologic approach of the first two perspectives. The work of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) is seminal to this approach whereby 'conversation is conceived as a sequential accomplishment of participants organized by turn-taking, where interactants form a *system of relationships* rather than distinct speaker-listener roles' (Langellier 1989:256 emphasis in the original). The aim of this approach is to explore how personal narratives are constructed and positioned within the structure of a conversational sequence and, characteristically, stories are regarded as semantic objects rather than structural objects in a Labovian sense. The unit of analysis is the interactional sequence within which personal narratives may be clustered, chained or distributed. Micro-analytic techniques are employed to reveal turn-taking, floor-holding and co-narration and it is the interaction between participants which is the primary focus rather than the story which is told. In addition, this approach strives to be minimally interpretative and to simply deal with what is there in the transcription of a conversation. The context of the talk is taken to be the immediate social situation within which the conversation takes place and need not encompass cultural, social or political contextual factors.

Conversation analysis has become one of the primary methodologies for the analysis of spoken language in interactive settings. Its methods of transcription are detailed and rigorous, focusing on the dialogic interdependency of talk in a conversational context. A growing number of studies from a range of disciplines adopt elements of this

approach in order to study personal narratives (for example, Polanyi 1979, Polanyi 1985, Tannen 1985, Wooffitt 1992, Aronsson and Cederborg 1994 and Ochs 1994). Although the narratives I am using are not produced in a natural-occurring conversational contexts, and interruptions and turn-taking are not signficant features of the narratives, I found transcription conventions based on the systems of conversational analysis to be the most appropriate way of representing spoken language as text, as discussed later in this chapter.

Personal Narrative as Social Process

From this perspective, the personal experience narrative is conceptualised as a type of discourse embedded in ongoing social processes. The activity of telling one's own life 'does something' in the social world (Langellier 1989:265). The aim is to examine how personal narratives shape and are shaped by their wider social context and the unit of analysis encompasses the discourse of a specific speech community rather than just the personal narrative itself. This approach does not confine itself to the relationships between clauses, between performer and audience, or between conversational participants, but considers the relationship between the narrative and the wider social context of its production. The focus is on social processes rather than on the individual narrator. Theorists who adopt this position are particularly interested in the conditions in which particular stories are told by particular individuals to a particular audience, and may seek, for example, to interpret personal stories in terms of the influences and constraints of cultural and social storytelling rights, involving 'entitlement', 'tellability and 'storyability' (Schuman 1982 cited by Langellier 1989:263). This approach is also discussed and illustrated in chapter two within my analysis of the

way in which how personal experience may only be narrated within socially permitted stories.

Although, as Langellier notes, some researchers use the methods of conversational analysis in order to combine the analysis of the language of specific texts with the analysis of social processes, more often those who seek to interpret personal narratives as a social process disregard the textual aspects. Plummer (1995:19), who conceptualises personal narratives as generic social processes, is quite explicit about this:

> *a sociology of stories should be less concerned with analysing the formal structures of stories or narratives (as literary theory might) and more interested in inspecting the social role of stories: the ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process. It is time to go beyond the text.*

Plummer's emphasis on the social and political roles of personal narratives encompasses the fifth perspective identified by Langellier.

Personal Narrative as Political Praxis

From this perspective, the personal narrative is political. Defined as a self-making and meaning-making activity which constitutes, rather than reflects, reality, personal narration is regarded as inseparable from issues of identity, subjectivity, knowledge and power. The unit of analysis is specific personal narratives, which are conceptualised as legitimate sources of knowledge in their own right, embedded in the material, social and political context of their production and interpreted as competing in discursive networks of asymmetrical power relations. Locating personal narration in a context of power relationships enables researchers to interpret personal stories in terms of the way in which they conform to, reframe, resist or reject dominant meanings and to analyse them

as personal, political action as well as texts, performances, conversations or social processes.

The Foucauldian concept of 'discursive fields'[61] is relevant to this approach which aims to illuminate the politics of storytelling self-reflexively. The power of the researcher in relation to that of the researched and its operation in the production of data which is presented and interpreted in the discourse of the academy becomes, therefore, part of the unit of analysis. This theoretical position is most clearly manifested in studies which are concerned with 'otherness', most commonly in terms of gender, race, class or sexual difference. From this perspective personal narratives and the study of personal narratives may be endowed with consciousness-raising potential and a political role as a voice is given to marginalised groups. As Riessman (1993:8) points out, however, as researchers we cannot *give* a voice but 'do hear voices that we record and interpret. Representational decisions cannot be avoided .. and qualitative analysts including feminists must confront them'. The voices of women who have been abused, sexually, physically or emotionally, and then silenced by patriarchal power have been heard, collected and interpreted in many studies and these personal narratives have been used as a resource by the women's movement and have helped to effect real change in law and social policy[62]. In a similar way, personal narratives of the experience of being gay, lesbian, or bisexual in an oppressively heterosexual culture have served the progress of the gay liberation movement.

[61] For example the language of the law, the family, the church or the academy.

[62] For example, on sexual violence (London Rape Crisis Centre 1984), on marital rape (Russell 1982), on date rape (Warshaw 1988), on incest (Herman 1981), on sexual harassment (MacKinnon 1979) and on child sexual abuse (Bass and Thornton 1983).

Emphasising the social and political functions of personal narratives rather than their textual, performative or interactional nature tends to draw attention away from the work that language is doing in the construction of the experience being narrated. However, the five theoretical perspectives that Langellier identifies are not mutually exclusive and any one study will typically embrace more than one. My aim is this study is to combine linguistic analysis with critical social and political analysis and, in terms of Langellier's categories, I seek to synthesise perspectives one, four and five, using the transcription methods of perspective three. The results of this approach to personal experience narratives of trauma are most fully presented in chapters six, seven and eight. However, the analyses presented in these chapters must be read in the light of my arguments in relation to the production of data in this chapter and, also in relation to chapter four in which I tell my story of the research process of this study and explore the politics and the ethics of personal narrative research.

The production of data

Langellier's analysis of the field of oral personal narrative research illuminates the role of the researcher in the production of data. What counts as narrative depends on what one intends to do with it and why. The reason for studying personal narratives and the way in which personal narration is conceptualised will radically affect both the type of data produced and the way in which it is presented and analysed.

Plummer (1995:21) describes his role as a sociologist conducting research into the lives of the sexually different as that of a coaxer:

> *...bringing people to the edge of telling a story they might never have told before, and coaching them to tell it in a certain way. My questions, my style, my theory meant that the story they told me did not emerge as it did a century before in the hands of a Krafft-Ebing. Whereas he looked for - and*

> *found - pathological tales, I looked for - and found - tales of normalcy. Coaxers can play a crucial role in shifting the nature of the stories that are told.*

Once a story has been coaxed from an interviewee the researcher then transforms it into a text. The conversion of oral personal narratives into textual data is a further stage in the production process. Feldman (1991:13) discusses Watson's and Watson-Franke's (1985) assertion that 'the text (as editing of the voice) is alienated from the originary subjective intentionality of the informant' and therefore '[i]nterpretation must trace a regressive path back to original presence, past the interference of the transcription, in order to recuperate the situation where intention and discourse "are practically the same thing" at the site of dialogue'. While I agree with the idea that transcripion is interference, I do not accept that interpretation is capable of 'recuperating the situation' in the way that Watson and Watson-Franke describe. The subjective intentionality of the interviewee at the moment of speaking is only accessible if it is voiced by the speaker and, even then, what that intention is understood to be will be an interpretation made by listener or reader. As Olsen (1993:15) describes, the written word can only ever be a poor substitute for the spoken word in its immediate interactional context :

> *While writing provides a reasonable model for what the speaker said, it does not provide much of a model for what the speaker meant by it, or more precisely how the speaker or writer intended the utterance to be taken.*

Unless transcription and analysis is undertaken collaboratively by researcher and researched, the only thing researchers can attempt to capture on the page is *their* experience of the interview. It is possible for transcripts of oral narratives to provide access to social as well as narrative dynamics but the social dynamics, what is really going on in the interview, are filtered through the researcher's subjective experience of that interaction and reconstituted through memory when the tape is transcribed.

Riessman (1993:10) provides a five-level model of the representation of primary experience in the research process; attending, telling, transcribing, analysing and reading. Each level of representation is incomplete, partial and selective and transforms that primary experience into something else. The narrator of personal experience, the researcher and eventual readers are all involved in this production process at different levels. Only some aspects of any particular experience are attended to at the time. This observation is as relevant to the researcher's experience of the interview as it is to the experience that is the topic of the interview. Crites (1986:160-1) discusses this issue in terms of the difference between 'sense' and 'experience'. According to Crites (1986), it is only when we attend to something that our sensory perception of it becomes experience. He makes a distinction between all that happens to us, all of which is sensed at the time, and those things to which we attend and, in doing so, are able to transform into experience by incorporating them into our story of any particular event. In the context of my discussion of fabula in chapter one, it is this 'attended to' experience that constitutes the 'raw data' which must be worked into a story as the totality of the original sense of the experience exists only in the moment.

At Riessman's second level, 'telling', narrators tell particular, selective versions of their experience to a particular 'other', as discussed in detail in chapter two. At the third level, transcribing, the researcher who records personal experience narratives, on audio or video tape, further selects and reduces the already mediated experience in transcription and makes theory-driven choices about how to present oral speech as a text (Ochs 1979). At the fourth level, analysing, certain aspects of particular sections of the full text will then be the focus of analysis and others ignored. Finally, at the fifth level,

reading, readers will make particular interpretations of these transcribed extracts when they encounter them in academic publications in diverse contexts.

Transcription

In her discussion of the problematic issue of transcription, Hollway (1989:20) recalls how she realised that the boundary between what was recorded on tape and what was not was completely arbitrary and therefore there was no reason to 'fetishize' everything that was recorded. In addition, she abandoned the attempt to produce detailed transcriptions which recorded every 'microscopic extra-linguistic' feature as she found that doing so made the text unreadable and contributed little to her analysis. The following example from Hollway (1989:67) illustrates how she chose to present her data:

> *Will*: In a relationship for me, I mean this 'frozenness' of certain feelings is really terrible, and much more of the time than I would like, we're doing this *specialization* job. For just very split seconds, er, like on the phone - a split second in which I felt in touch with the set of feelings that I'm not normally responsible for, and that I don't particularly avow. And I don't even know I feel them. And I think, 'Shit, I actually *felt* that' and I think, I have to hold onto the memory of having felt it for two or three weeks. For two or three weeks I don't feel anything about it again, and I have to say, 'Well, at the moment I don't feel anything, but I *do* remember I mean, at one stage, Beverley said - [sighs] 'Well maybe we should have an abortion' and I suddenly burst into tears ...

Apart from 'er' on the third line and [sighs] on the tenth, the text conforms to written language conventions, using standard punctuation as boundaries for sentences and clauses, italics for emphasis, and inverted commas for a non-standard term and for indicating reported speech.

By contrast, Riessman (1992:233) finds that 'cleaned up' speech is not sufficient for 'an analysis of the relationship between narrative form, meaning, and social context'. Consequently she preserves features which are relevant to her theory by indicating

pauses and including backchannels (for example 'mm' and 'uh-huh') which are provided by the interviewer to encourage the narrator to continue. In addition she divides her texts into numbered lines for referencing purposes during analysis and discussion. For example:

08 N: (laugh/shudder) Well, um (p) when it was time to go to bed it was really rough cause (p)
09 it was like we had to go together (p) (I: uh-huh)
10 and (p) if I wanted to go to bed while he was watching TV
11 he'd say "No, stay up with me" (I: uh-huh), you know
12 and um sometimes I just wanted to stay up
13 but he would insist that I go in with him (I: mm-hmm)
14 so it was like we had to do it together (p) (I: uh-huh)
15 um when, I , you know, when I finally was in bed I'd just roll over and I just wanted to go to sleep
16 I mean scrubbing the floor every is kinda rough, you know, you're pretty tired (laugh) (I: uh-huh) ...

Riessman (1992:234)

Of course there are many aspects of spoken language, in addition to fillers, pauses and backchannels, which could be included in transcription. For example, Gumperz and Berenz (1993) include intonation patterns in relation to phrase boundaries, overlapping and latching speech in dialogues, loudness and syllable lengthening in their discussion of the symbolic representation of speech in the transcription of conversational exchanges. In addition, if a researcher is particularly interested in dialects, accents or other issues of non-standard pronunciation then phonetic transcription may be used in order to convey the subtle phonological variations in speech. O'Connell and Kowal (1995) evaluate a wide range of different approaches to transcription in terms of the relationship between the purposes of the research and the choice of transcription system. They argue for 'purposeful' transcription and against a single, 'field-wide standard', because each system, inevitably, records a particular approach to spoken discourse rather than the discourse itself (O'Connell and Kowal 199:105).

As discussed earlier, systems of transcription based on the conventions provided by the conversational analysis approach arising from the seminal work of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) are the most widely used by researchers who, like me, attend to the linguistic features of spoken language texts rather than just the content. My own method of transcription was arrived at after experimenting with a number of extracts from each recording in terms of the transcription of more or less features. In this way I developed a purposeful system of transcription that is able to convey some sense of the rhythm of the speech, in terms of significant pauses, the emphasis given to particular words or phrases by changes in stress and/or pitch, and paralinguistic features, such as crying and laughing. I also include the repetitions, hesitations and fillers, such as 'er' and 'erm', which are such prominent and meaningful features of spoken language as their inclusion serves as a constant reminder to the reader that this is spoken and not written language. I decided to indicate questions by the use of the question mark (?) rather than by lesser known intonation symbols and to represent reported speech by the use of speech marks ("..."). Because some of the narratives I analyse were produced in videotaped interviews, aspects of non-verbal behaviour could also be transcribed, for example head shaking, nodding, smiling, eye contact, and changes in body posture. However, I did not transcribe these features systematically but only when, in my interpretation, they add something to the meaning of interaction which is not apparent in the words being spoken. As I discuss in chapter four, the benefit of videotaped data, in terms of being able to access and analyse these visual aspects, needs to be weighed against the highly intrusive nature of video recording compared to audio recording.[63]

[63] It is, of course, possible to supplement audio recording with note-taking during the interview in order to record some of this non-verbal behaviour, but, I would argue, that this is likely to be very disconcerting for the interviewee. In my own experience, as discussed in chapter four, note-taking reinforces the asymmetrical power relationship between researcher and researched and works against the possibility of relaxed, shared communication taking place.

What counts as narrative?

A particular methodological issue for personal narrative research concerns the location of narratives within the full text of an interview. Polanyi (1985:183) describes this as 'a seemingly insurmountable problem for analysts'. The problem is centrally one of how narrative is defined. As previously discussed, a Labovian approach extracts narrative sequences from the rest of the talk by means of definitional criteria which determines what constitutes a minimal narrative, 'a sequence of two clauses which are *temporally ordered* ' (Labov 1972:360). These will be past tense clauses because narrative is defined as 'one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred' (Labov 1972:359). Polanyi (1979:208) points out that this is a culturally-specific conceptualisation of narrative, noting that Non-Indo-European stories may be structured so that later actions, states or events precede earlier ones. In addition, some narrative traditions organise stories around place rather than time or around the hierarchy of ranks of the characters or their relationship to the speaker.

Polanyi (1985) offers a methodology for 'finding the story in the embedding talk' which is based on making a clear distinction between text that relates to the 'storyworld' of the narrative, and text that does not. She develops Labov's work in interesting ways and extends Labov's limited 'narrative clause = event' formulation to include *state clauses* in conversational narratives which represent states of affairs that persist over time in contrast to *event clauses* which represent one unique, discrete happening (Polanyi 1985:191). In Polanyi's analysis, a narrative may contain any number of state propositions which tell of states which may have indefinite, gradual or specific beginnings and which may last for the whole time span of the story, for a short interval

of time within the story or recur habitually throughout the story. The examples of state clauses that Polayni (1985) provides include 'We were parked down the hill', 'It was late at night', 'they were black', which are all clauses about states which endure over time rather than event clauses which encode one discrete, unique happening, for example, 'We parked the car at the bottom of the hill', 'it suddenly got dark', 'I realised they were black'. In fact, in Polayni's analysis of 'The Robbery' story, which is comprised of over 300 clauses, she can only identify 8 strictly narrative clauses, in Labov's terms.

Although Polanyi recognises the limitations of an event-centric analysis of narrative, she retains the conceptualisation of stories as only being about the past: '[a] story can best and most simply be thought of as a specific past-time narrative that makes a point' (Polanyi 1985:189). Therefore, although she mentions 'future', 'hypothetical' and 'simultaneous' narratives she excludes these from the category 'conversational story' as 'none of these deal with specific events in the past' (Polanyi 1985:191). Consequently, all the state clauses that Polanyi discusses are past tense clauses. However, in my data, which includes past, present, future and hypothetical narratives, state clauses occur in all tenses. For example:

Past tense state clauses : my mother hated me and loved my twin and always made me feel different
A 1:2-3

Past and present tense state clauses: I've always been able to look back but I can put it in perspective more you know and I feel I feel OK
R 11:566-568

Future tense state clause: I just will never ever get over wanting him back
C1 6:319-320

In addition, some states apply in both the world of the story and the present world of the telling, for example, clauses like 'Sandra never cries' (J 2/3:109), and 'I'm quite strong

as a person really' (A 22:52) offer information to the listener against which the story should be evaluated but are also durative states which persist and are relevant in the moment of telling. Ongoing states may be conveyed in detail in the narration of personal experience which is made up almost entirely of state rather than narrative clauses:

1. I feel since Michael's death no nothing's been normal er I'm not
2. normal everything's a strugggle er I'm expected to be
3. superwoman erm like I say I don't trust I don't know if I love
4. anymore I do love James er but I don't know if I'll love anything
5. any more erm like I say I feel dead I don't know what what I feel
6. anymore

A 33:1756-1762

Clearly such an extract is crucial to an understanding of the experience of coping in the aftermath of trauma and therefore Polanyi's extension of the Labovian definition of narrative is insufficient for this study.

Polanyi's point that the Labovian definition and model is culturally specific is taken further by Langellier and Peterson (1992) who suggest that it is also gender specific. Their research, and that of others they review, shows that there are significant differences between stories told by men and stories told by women. For this reason, Langellier and Peterson claim that the approaches developed by Labov (1972) and Bauman (1986), for example, which were based on the study of men's narration, fail to adequately address the subtle intricacy of the 'spinstorying' strategic techniques (discussed below) which emerge most clearly in women's personal narratives. They cite Robinson (1981) as a particularly clear example of androcentric assumptions in operation. On the topic of stories of victimisation, which are prevalent in studies of women's personal narration, Robinson (1981:63) states that they have 'an ambivalent status as candidates for narration' as they 'do not comfortably fit' and 'cannot be described as interesting or remarkable without risking academic sterility for our

constructs' (quoted by Langellier and Peterson 1992:161-2). Robinson seems to want to discourage the study of such stories on the grounds that these are 'private' stories and therefore difficult to obtain (he clearly doesn't talk to many women!) and because he sees the challenge they present to existing theories and models as sterile. He clearly fails to appreciate that it is the theories and models themselves that are sterile and that these academic constructs are far less important that those 'uncomfortable' stories.

Langellier and Peterson (1992) refer to a number of fascinating differences which have been identified in the personal narration of women and men. For now, I shall simply highlight one which has relevance for a non-eventcentric redefinition of narrative. Langellier and Peterson (1992:173) coin the term 'spinstorying' in order to convey the way in which 'stories are tellable because they are drawn from the fiber of women's experiences', and in order to suggest a spiralling interaction between conversation and story and story and conversation as women collaboratively weave stories of a shared reality. These stories do not centre on a 'point' which exists before or outside of the interaction but neither are they 'pointless'. The 'point' of the telling develops dynamically in interaction as 'when women act as audience, they speak, ... and, when women speak, they act as audience' (Langellier and Peterson 1992:174). Consequently, to define narrative in terms of the recounting of specific past time events would be to miss the point that what matters to some narrators, the 'point' of their narrative, is to share their experiences with others, and not to impart information about some historical event. Langellier & Peterson are particularly interested in women sharing their stories in groups but many of their observations are relevant to the research interview context, and they note that only by entering 'the realm of spinstorying as collaborators' can

researchers adequately understand women's storytelling (Langellier and Peterson 1992:177).

In terms of gender difference in personal narration and the inadequacy of the event-centric model, Langellier and Peterson's findings are supported by Gergen's (1992) discussion of her comparative study of men's and women's published autobiographies. 'Manstories', says Gergen, 'tend to be linear (that is, strongly related to an explicit goal state, the career, or the quest), and progressive (the action moves toward this goal). They therefore follow a single narrative line, whereas in 'womanstories' the story line is much less clearly demarcated, because 'the narrative threads are more complexly woven' as 'career successes and failures mingle with other issues of great personal importance' (Gergen 1992: 139-140). Gergen describes women autobiographers narrating relational lives as their stories tell of living embedded in a variety of relationships and of seeing multiple perspectives. Consequently women have ambiguous feelings about outcomes and the value or significance of any particular event is uncertain and of secondary importance. A standard, linear of model narrative structure which confines itself to the relationship between clauses of sections of text which conform to a restrictive event-centric definition of narrative will therefore not only count as non-narrative much that is fundamental to personal narration, perhaps especially women's personal narration, but will also serve to support and perpetuate an inadequate theory and an inflexible approach.

Riessman (1993:18-19) makes important progress in extending the boundaries of 'what counts as narrative' by identifying 'habitual', and 'hypothetical' narratives as some of the range of narratives genres which make up oral narratives of personal experience.

Habitual narrative is related to Polanyi's conception of state clauses, but Riessman is using 'habitual' at the level of the narrative whereas Polanyi identifies recurring states at the level of the clause. Habitual narrative is produced by the narration of experiences which persist or recur over time as the same events happen over and over again. This type of narration occurs frequently in my data, for example:

1. there have been times when my husband's been out (.) and
2. I've been (.) sitting on the edge of the chair (.) convincing
3. myself that someone's going to break into the house any
4. moment and getting more and more tense and on edge

G1 7:327-331

This is similar to Genette's concept of 'iterative' narrative, 'narrating one time what happened n times' (Genette 1980:116) and is close to, but not the same as, Wooffitt's (1992) notion of the narration of a hypothetical example. Hypothetical examples, says Wooffitt (1992:84), are used in oral personal experience narratives 'to extract recurrent features from actual situations and distil them into an illustrative example of the kind of thing which generally happened'. These examples are hypothetical because they do not refer to specific instances or recount an actual, discrete event and this is indicated by a phrase like 'there could be ...' which prefaces the example as in: 'there could be ten people in the room nobody'd hear it but me' (Wooffitt 1992:84). In Wooffitt's analysis of narratives of paranormal experiences, hypothetical examples function in two ways: they allow a narrator to condense and bring together regularly occurring features of events and also, by presenting a general version of the sort of thing that happened, they protect the narrator from a direct interrogation of the details of a specific occurrence of a paranormal experience. In my data, hypothetical examples also occur but function more simply, allowing a narrator to distil recurrent experiences into one example and to convey the ongoing or recurrent nature of the experience rather than as a device to stave off questions about the truth of what they are saying:

1. but he's got this thing now that nobody loves him even me er
2. nobody likes him everybody picks on him he cries at the the
3. smallest thing he's constantly crying at anything erm if
4. [preface to hypothetical example] you laugh at him he starts
5. crying and screaming at me erm (.) he's very insecure very
6. insecure erm (.)

C1 5:245-250

7. I mean some days I'm OK I can cope with it and then other
8. days when I'm not feeling too good in myself erm I tend to sort
9. of (.) er snap at people you know like if say like if [preface to
10. hypothetical example] the children do something wrong I'll
11. rather than just turning round saying oh don't do that you
12. know WHAT DO YOU DO THAT FOR you know I'll snap at
13. them and really it's very hard (.)

S1 12:617-623

14. erm boats that are in a boatyard and the wind catches them and you 15.
know they rattle that was a real clear noise now if if (preface to
16. hypothetical example) I go to a beach or anything and that rattling of
17. boats you know hhhhh terror you know @@@ it really sort of brings
18. it back and er oh it's that's that's horrible

R 3 145-148

These hypothetical example narratives can be distinguished from the hypothetical narratives that Riessman identifies, in that the latter are concerned with the narration of events that did not happen. Such hypothetical narratives are termed 'comparators' by Labov and are categorised as evaluation, as in my Labovian analysis of 'The Shabby Man' story earlier in this chapter:

7. now if I hadn't been with my mother in law I would
8. have been absolutely (.) scared out of my mind [end of comparator] but
9. because she was there you know I felt OK (.) just about

Whether one counts this as evaluation, as distinct from narrative, as Labov does, or as narrative, as Riessman does, it is clearly crucial to be able to include it in a narrative analysis if one's aim is to illuminate the linguistic construction of the narration of personal experience.

Riessman recalls recognising the limitations of Labov's criteria when encountering a transcript of a personal narrative that 'felt' like a narrative but resisted analysis in terms of his model (Riessman 1993:44). She found, as I did, that Labov's theory and model is inadequate for 'subjective experiences, events that extend over time and even extend into the present ...[as such narratives are] as much about affective "actions", things the narrator feels and says to herself as ... about "what happened" in a more objective sense.' (Riessman 1993:51-2). On this occasion, Riessman found that using Gee's (1991) poetic structural approach to narrative and analysing the text in terms of stanzas and themes was far more appropriate and rewarding[64]. More significantly, for this study, Riessman offers a redefinition of narrative which allows the narration of ongoing or enduring states of being, or of present, future or hypothetical experience to be included by using the term 'narrative' in two ways. Firstly, the entire response of the interviewee is a narrative in that it has sequential, thematic and structural coherence, according to her analysis using Gee's model. Secondly, embedded in this 'overarching narrative' there are two narrative segments which meet Labov's more limited criteria. Riessman does not take the implications of this redefinition any further, asking, for example, what would not count as narrative? I shall come to this shortly but for now I want to explore another aspect of narration which is revealed by her inclusive definition of narrative.

Riessman's approach enabled her to identify a tension in the structure of the particular narrative she was analysing 'between the real and the wished for, the story and the dream' which, Riessman believes, enabled her to 'come close to seeing into [the narrator's] subjective experience - what life "means" to her at the moment of telling' (Riessman 1993:52). This notion of imagined experience and its juxtaposition in a

[64] As mentioned in chapter one, frameworks for narrative analysis must be flexible so that they can be customised to the specific type of narrative under analysis, rather than the narratives being customised to fit a standard model.

narrative with past and present experience, is, I believe, crucial to an understanding of the relationship between narration and coping in the aftermath of trauma. In a very real sense the traumatic event is not contained in the past. It exists in the 'present of past things', affects perception of the 'present of present things' and influences the imagined 'present of future things'[65]. In addition, imaginary narratives of what the traumatic event might have been (which may offer worse, better or just different outcomes) are just as much a part of the process of narration and coping as are narratives of the actual past events, as remembered. Finally the realm of the imaginary is a crucial aspect of the interactive context in which traumatic experience is narrated. At the very moment when a narrator says 'you cannot imagine what it is like' or 'you can never know what it feels like', the listener is *invited to imagine*, to enter into a realm of experience which is not their own but neither is it any longer only the speaker's. Such invitations to imagine often herald a 'narrative proper', in Labovian terms, as the speaker provides a specific example from their past experience in order to help the listener to imagine what it is like to share the narrator's subjective experience.

Just as Shotter (1993a:90), in a different context, argues that 'the imaginary' is incomplete, ongoing, on the way to being other than it is and 'subsist[s] only in people's practices, in the "gaps", "zones", or "boundaries" between people', so I would argue that the junctures *between* narrative segments (past tense, temporally-ordered talk about discrete events) signal rich, meaning-making, narrative action. Studying the moments when the present is narrated in terms of the past or the future, or the future in terms of the present, or any combination of the three, allows the analyst to ask why is this talk structured in this way, what purposes are discrete narrative segments serving in the

---

[65] Here I am referring to Ricoeur's notion of the three-fold present which I discussed in detail in chapter one.

context of the interaction and how, specifically, is meaning being made and narrative knowledge being constructed? It makes no sense, Shotter (1993a:90) argues, to talk of 'the imaginary' as though it has a 'spatially surveyable complete structure' and in the same way, it makes no sense to treat the complexity and subtlety of the narration of experience as though it *should have* an orderly, complete structure by reducing it to the one aspect of narration which (may) conform to the paradigmatic model.

From a different perspective to that of Shotter or the oral narrative theorists I have discussed, Fludernik (1996) seeks to escape the boundaries of established definitions and conceptualisations of narrative for different reasons. Her aim is to redefine narrative for narratology, the science of narrative, and for literary theory. Fludernik's project, to move towards a 'natural narratology', involves a rejection of event-centric definitions of narrative as she argues for the relegation of 'plot' and the promotion of 'experientiality' and offers a radical redefinition of narrative as *narrativity*, the representation of human consciousness.

Fludernik traces the historical development of narrative - from oral storytelling, through Middle English verse narrative, Renaissance prose, realist novels and modernist narrative, to postmodernist, experimental texts - in order to develop her 'natural narratology' which can encompass all these different types of narratives. The link which connects oral storytelling to the postmodern novel, the two extremes which frame Fludernik's historical sweep, is made in terms of 'cognitive parameters' within which readers read texts as narratives which conform to models of the world. Because 'we tolerate a great measure of inconsistency, chaos and ambiguity ...in our everyday experience', Fludernik (1996:305) claims, postmodernist texts are not departures from a familiar model of the world but are part of that model. Fludernik argues that 'narrative

at its fullest manifestation correlates with human experientiality' (1996:312) and that the prototypical narrative is 'experiential conversational storytelling' (1996:57). For Fludernik, oral narrative is 'the basic incarnation of storytelling' (1996:37) and exhibits maximum narrativity, in that it correlates most fully with human experientiality, whereas texts which lack any representation of human consciousness but have a plot, and therefore fully meet eventcentric definitional criteria, exhibit zero-narrativity.

Relegating 'plot' and promoting 'experientiality' in the constitutive framework of all narrative allows Fludernik to include in her new narratology the plotless twentieth century narratives that have been so problematic for traditional narratological analysis. While Fludernik's reframing of the concept of narrative as narrativity is a radical challenge to 'plot-centric' theories of narrative, it remains essentially formalist in that her move towards a 'natural narratology' is motivated by a desire to 'make possible a discussion of narrativity and narrative structure that spans the entire range of available narrative discourses' (1996:51). Fludernik goes on to specify what that range is, from the prototypical oral narrative through to the postmodern novel but excluding historical discourse which exhibits no human consciousness, thereby producing a 'maximally inclusive' typology (1996:323). For Bal (1997:10) any attempt to delineate the range of texts available to narratology is not only futile but undesirable. Bal argues that the concepts of narratology and narrative theory may be useful in the analysis of narrative segments within non-narrative texts and that 'these concepts make possible a description of narrative texts *to the extent that they are narrative.*' (Bal 1997:10). In this way, Bal emphasises the heterogenous nature of texts which are comprised of narrative and non-narrative segments while retaining an eventcentric definition of narrative and Fludernik

reformulates the definition of narrative in order to create a more homogenous corpus of narrative texts.

Although Fludernik proposes that the spontaneous oral personal experience narrative in conversation is the ideal 'natural narrative'[66], the 'organic' form of narrative in her chronology of the development of narrative, she is only really interested in this sub-genre in as much as it supports her *literary* theory of narrativity and correlates to her (limited) model of consciousness (experiencing, telling, reflecting and viewing). Within the boundaries of structuralist narratology and literary theory this works well and Fludernik achieves her all-encompassing aim with detailed, thorough and persuasive readings of a very wide range of literary texts. For a theorist specifically interested in the oral personal experience narrative, however, her treatment of this sub-genre is altogether too simplistic.

On the plus side, her reformulation of narrative is very liberating for the analysis of personal experience narration in that it provides the justification for counting as narrative all that is said as long as it is concerned with the representation of experientiality, instead of fragmenting talk into narrative and non-narrative sections, based on event-centred criteria. I am therefore happy to adopt her redefinition and see it as providing a means of synthesising diverse theoretical perspectives on oral personal narration and as a crucial step in liberating narrative analysis from the restraints of established definitions of narrative.

[66] As will be discussed in chapter four, Fludernik makes, in my view, an unjustifiably rigid distinction between what she terms 'spontaneous' and 'non-spontaneous' personal story-telling, and excludes narratives produced in an interview context from the sphere of interest of natural narratology.

On the negative side, Fludernik makes assumptions about oral personal experience narratives that are potentially restrictive and deny the fascinating diversity within and between these texts. In support of her redefinition of narrative as 'narrativity', which is not centred on a linear sequence of events but on human experientiality, she reports that 'oral narratives of personal experience do not obey a teleological pattern except in so far as the story has an endpoint, an ulterior point of reference from which it is told retrospectively. ' (Fludernik 1996:70). This makes two assumptions, which, for me, work against her liberating reformulation of narrative. Firstly she assumes that oral narratives of personal experience tell complete stories, and secondly that the story is told from a detached perspective, looking *back* on experience. Analysis of my data reveals that oral narrators of personal experience do not necessarily tell complete stories which have a clearly defined endpoint and *do* narrate experience in the present and the future as well as in the past. Personal experience narrators who are structuring their narration around theme rather than chronology may tell fragments of stories, in messy and loosely formed narrations of experience, as they attempt to convey their point to a listener. For example:

1. I can remember meeting somebody in the shop what maybe
2. three months afterwards or something and she said how are
3. you and I was particularly bad at that point cos it's like a wave
4. you know some you can you can feel OK and it's like a wave
5. er really and then something just you know brings it back to
6. you and you know I you see cos Frank who just came then his
7. wife just died in February

J 11:573-579

1. my daughter turns up on the doorstep with baby and all her
2. gear I hadn't even got my stuff unpacked he'd got another
3. woman (.) come to live with me er (.) I've actually gone past a
4. very crucial bit @@ er just (.) I'm trying to remember now

5. W: mm

6. A: can't remember whether she'd had the baby when she told

7. me about the next trauma in my life which was the sex abuse
8. and my brother let me just think

9. W: mm take your time

A 19:975-987

The moment of narration includes the activity of dealing with remembered, perceived, or projected experience thereby producing unfinished stories, which the narrator attempts to fit into the overall theme, or point of the talk, perhaps, but not necessarily, providing some closure on the experience being told. The story of any particular experience does not emerge, fully-formed and complete, at the first telling. Emergent stories, stories in flux, stories which raise more questions than answers, are stories being actively reconstructed in the present moment of narration. These must be included in narrative analysis and can be, according to Fludernik's redefinition, as they are very definitely representations of experientiality. And, more crucially, they enable the very process of meaning-making through narration to be studied. Fludernik's examples of prototypical natural narratives, and those of the other theorists she cites are, in the main, finished stories about the past which are not, to any great extent, difficult or risky to tell nor are they particularly important to the narrators.[67] Fludernik is able, therefore, to describe the point of reference from which a story is told as 'ulterior', i.e. beyond the story, but the telling of experience with which narrators are still cognitively and emotionally involved is not *beyond* the story, or even outside of it, but very much *within* the constructive dynamic of remembering and telling to an other.

Fludernik's work presents me with a dilemma, therefore. On the one hand, I am happy to adopt her redefinition of narrative as narrativity as, in my view, this both conveys the

[67] For example, a story about an amusing holiday experience.

notion of narrative as action, rather than merely form, and allows for the inclusion of all aspects of the narration of experience. On the other hand, I do not agree with some fundamental aspects of her arguments for such a redefinition. Firstly, Fludernik's treatment of oral personal narration is reductionist *and*, paradoxically from my perspective, it appears to provide support for her theory of narrative. Secondly, her reasons for promoting a 'natural narratology' are clearly rooted in her desire to enlarge the 'geometrics of narrative space' (Gibson 1996:14) for narratology's essentially structuralist project, rather than by a desire to expand and enrich narratology by opening it up to diverse, innovative, poststructuralist, multi-disciplinary approaches to narrative. Indeed, as she herself states, her main intention is 'to incorporate the insights of narratology within a more encompassing frame that can accommodate a wider spectrum of texts and which manages to remove some of the problems areas detectable in current models' and her book is 'a last-ditch effort to make linguistics meaningful within a wider narratological and critical arena' (Fludernik 1996:372-3).

The universalising and essentialist tendencies which are clearly detectable in Fludernik's work reflect her failure to engage with dialogic theories of narrative (Gibson 1996:151) and her limited conception of both the central notion of her new narratology, consciousness, and its relationship to narrative. In Bakhtin's dialogic theory, consciousness does not reside, as Fludernik's theory implies, in any individual but is a 'dialogue of voices' (discussed by Gibson 1996:152) and consciousness (or thoughts, or feelings, or understanding) of experience (or of self, of others or of the world) is not *represented* by narrative, like a picture of a separate thing, but is constructed and reconstructed, continuously in diverse contexts, through narrative as lives are narrated and renarrated, always in delicate negotiation with others.

Fludernik's definition of narrativity as the representation of human consciousness needs to be modified for this study within which the dialogic and dynamic nature of personal narration is central. The narration of personal experience involves the *composition* of consciousness of experience (physical/cognitive/emotional) in language. By composition I mean to suggest a constitutive process which is inherently and inevitably transformative and I use this in favour of the term 'construction' in order to convey the notion of 'gathering together' rather than an orderly, rigid construction process of building up from the bottom to create a permanent fixture. Integrating this conceptualisation of personal narration with the definition of narrative I offered in chapter one and the arguments I put forward in chapter two concerning the dialogic nature of self-narration and self-identity, I am able to construct an appropriate definition of the oral personal experience narrative for this study.

An oral personal experience narrative brings a story into being. As a linguistic construct, (a text), which realises a cognitive construct, (narrative knowledge), the oral personal experience narrative is a composition of consciousness of experience, experientiality, in a specific narrative for the time and place of the telling. Because narrative is inherently transformative, through its capacity to re-evaluate with each re-narration of experience, it is, therefore, charged with the potential to be consciousness *raising* in the sense of heightening awareness of the meaning of experience, of the self and of the other. Making experientiality, rather than form, constitutive of narrative brings into the sphere of narrative analysis the full spectrum of texts which tell stories of personal experience, whether past, present, future or imaginary. In this way, the complexity and the diversity of meaning-making through narration can be fully explored. Using such a definition it becomes possible, therefore, to take a theoretical

and methodological approach to data which combines textual analysis with an interpretation of the personal, social and political praxis of meaning-making which narrativity, the dialogic activity of consciousness composition, brings forth.

From this perspective, I define oral personal experience narratives as: 'texts which bring stories of personal experience into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience.' These texts are conceptualised as being produced at a specific moment in a continuous, dialogic process of narrativity through which narrative knowledge, of self, of others and of experience, is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in interaction with others in diverse contexts. This definition is broad enough to include all aspects of personal experience narration without being so broad as to suggest that everything anyone says may be counted as narrative. As a text-type, the oral personal experience narrative is distinct from descriptive, instructive, explanatory and argumentative texts, to use Virtanen's typology (see chapter one). These texts may all be produced orally but the only oral texts which can be defined as personal experience narratives, according to my definition, are those which realise stories of personal experience.

In this chapter I have explored the production process through which researchers make data for diverse academic purposes and I have interpreted this process in terms of the relationship between the way in which the object of study is defined and the purposes of the research. By reviewing a range of different approaches to personal experience narratives I have been able to position this study in the field and I have highlighted aspects of the different theoretical and methodological approaches which are particularly relevant to my data analyses. I have argued that only an innovative, flexible, theory congruent with method approach can do justice to the rich complexity

and diversity of personal experience narratives and for the prioritisation of this diversity over existing models of narrative. Finally, I have constructed a definition of the object of study of this research which is congruent with the development of my thesis and the purpose of the research. More importantly, this definition transgresses the boundaries of the established field of research thereby providing exciting new possibilities for future studies of the personal experience narrative.

The next chapter provides a history of the research process which culminated in the production of this thesis and addresses the issue of ethics in personal narrative research.

Chapter Four

The Research Process: imagining the data, blind alleys and real lives

This chapter begins with a summary of the methodological procedures of this research. The rest of the chapter provides an account of the process by which I produced the data I use to explore the relationship between narration and coping in the aftermath of trauma. As a way of explaining my approach to the empirical research undertaken for this thesis, I begin section two by telling a story about an earlier research experience which undoubtedly influenced my relationship to this work. In the third section, I describe how I imagined data that would enable me to remain safely outside the data production process, thereby protecting myself from having to take personal and ethical responsibility for the participants whose stories I would use. Section four is concerned with arguments for and against the publication of researchers' subjective experiences of the research process and describes how I came to the decision to include the stories I tell in the next two sections, Blind Alleys and Real Lives. In section seven, I discuss the ethical issues of ownership, interpretative authority and publication of other peoples' stories before moving on, in section seven, to describe the nature of the interviews I eventually conducted and to consider the conditions within which care for, and empathy with, interviewees can be optimized. In the final two sections, I discuss the methodological issue of 'natural narratives' versus interview narratives through a critical reading of a range of narrative theorists' approaches to this dichotomy.

Summary of Methodological Procedures

(i) The Database Corpus

As set out in Appendix II, the database corpus consists of 18 personal narratives of trauma. 9 of these are oral narratives produced in interviews conducted by the author or by a psychotherapist, 1 is an oral narrative recorded from a radio programme, 6 are oral narratives recorded from a television documentary and 2 are written narratives.

Narratives C1, C2, G1, G2 and S were produced in video-taped interviews conducted by a psychotherapist. The narrators are former clients of the psychotherapist, having been referred to him for treatment following a traumatic experience. C1, G1 and S interviews took place during the period of time when the clients were regularly attending therapy sessions (although the video-taped sessions were interviews *not* therapy sessions) and C2 and G2 were second interviews and took place more than one year after the therapy sessions ended. The interviews were of 40 minutes duration and took place in a university seminar room. Interviews C1 and G1 and S were semi-structured and designed to elicit information from the interviewees about how they had been affected by their traumatic experience. Interviews C2 and G2 were more tightly structured around a series of questions designed to provide data which could be compared to the first interviews.

Narratives A, R, M and J were produced in audio-taped interviews conducted by the author. The interviewees agreed to be participate in the research after seeing a leaflet distributed by members of a victim support team on my behalf. The leaflet invited anyone who had experienced a traumatic event and was willing to participate in a research project concerned with the effects of traumatic experience to telephone me in

confidence. The interviews were of 90-120 minutes duration. Interview A took place in a university seminar room, interviews M and J took place at the homes of the narrators and interview R took place in my home. These interviews were unstructured. After providing the interviewees with brief details of the research and explaining that confidentiality and their anonymity were guaranteed, I invited them to tell me what had happened to them and how they had been affected by it. I told them that they could tell me as much or as little as they wished. I asked very few questions during these interviews, and those I did ask were requests for clarification rather than requests for specific information.

(ii) Transcription

The oral narratives detailed above, together with the oral narratives recorded from radio and television programmes, were transcribed by the author using the transcription conventions set out in Appendix I. The method of transcription is designed to convey a sense of the rhythm of speech, in terms of significantly long (more than 3 seconds) pauses and changes in stress or pitch. Repetitions, hesitations and fillers, such as 'er' and erm' are included in the transcription as these provide a constant reminder to the reader that they are reading an oral rather than a written narrative. Paralinguistic features, such as crying and laughing, are also transcribed. In the case of the video-taped interviews, non-verbal behaviour, for example nodding, smiling and changes in body posture, are included in the transcription where I considered that they added significantly to the meaning of the spoken language. Extracts from the transcripts are referenced by code, transcript page and line number. For example, C1 4/5:34-41 refers to lines 34-41 on page 4 and 5 of the transcript of the first interview with Carol. Full transcripts are available from the author on request.

(iii) Method of Analysis

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the definition of narrative proposed by this study, which prioritises experientiality over form, enables all aspects of the narration of personal experience to be included in a narrative analysis. In this way, the 'seemingly insurmountable problem for analysts', highlighted by Polanyi (1985:183), of finding, isolating and extracting narratives from the full text of an interview, is not an issue, in that it is possible to use all aspects of the transcribed text that are concerned with the narration of personal experience. However, given such an approach, decisions need to be made about how to manage the volume of text now available for analysis. In this study the final decisions about which extracts to include in the four main analysis chapters (chapters 5-8) were made *after* a process of reading and re-reading the transcripts of the oral narratives and the texts of the written narratives and applying a number of different types of narrative analysis to them.

Clearly, there are very many different ways in which the transcripts could have been analysed, and a number of these were used but not all made it into the final version as priority was given to the analyses that seem to contribute most to the analytic aim of understanding narrative meaning making in relation to the experience of trauma and the experience of coping with trauma in the long-term. For example, the Labovian model enabled different types of evaluation within the texts to be identified, although the model itself could not be used for full analysis as it can only be applied to discrete narrative segments, made up of past tense clauses. Gee's (1991) poetic structural approach to narrative, when applied to the sections of the narrative concerned with the experience of disequilibrium, was revealing in terms of the effect of presenting text as

stanzas and themes, but these analyses are not included in the chapter on disequilibrium as the results were not particularly helpful in furthering an understanding of how narrative makes meaning of experience, which was the primary aim of the analysis. Ferrara's (1994) analytic approach to transcripts of therapy sessions offers valuable insights into the function of narrative in this context but, because her focus is mainly on the development of narratives over several sessions and on the interaction between client and therapist, this approach was not appropriate for the type of data I had. As a final example, Riessman's (1993) approach to narrative analysis, discussed in detail in the preceding chapter in my examination of the data production process and its relationship to issues of definition, was applied to the transcripts. Her redefinition of narrative, which enables her to include the narration of ongoing or enduring states of being, and the narration of present, future or hypothetical experience was extremely helpful in the development of the more inclusive approach I sought to achieve in this study.

During this process of interrogating the texts with different models and types of analysis, a number of common categories and linguistic features were identified and, in conjunction with the development of my theoretical approach to narrative in general, and the personal experience narrative in particular, decisions were made about which common categories and features it would be most fruitful to analyse in order to examine the process of narrative meaning-making in greater detail. In this way, the categories emerged *from* an indepth reading of the transcripts and the applying of various types of analysis to them. Following the lead of Riessman (1993), a method and model for analysis was customised to fit the data rather than the data being made to fit an existing method or model. The model of the trauma narrative, consisting of

the analytic categories I had identified, is based on Propp's structure of the story (Propp 1968[1928]):

X	**liminal zone**	**Y**	**numbness, madness retraumatisation**	**narrative meaning-making**	**resolutions**
equilibrium=>	turbulence=>		disequilibrium=>	action=> intervention =>	restoration of modified version of equilibrium

Within these broad categories, a number of specific features are analysed in detail and discussed in terms of their relevance to an understanding of the relationship between narrative and coping with trauma. For example, all sections of the narratives which involve the narration of the moment of traumatic impact were extracted and systematically analysed in terms of the XY formulation and its function within each specific text. During this stage of the analysis, the prevalence of the subjunct 'just' as a feature of the XY formulation became evident and on further examination proved to a significant aspect of the narration of traumatic impact. In this way, I was able to show how the narration of traumatic impact relates to the construction of suddenness, the destruction of agency, the liminal zone and the injustice of traumatic experience. Within the broad category 'disequilibrium', extracts which involve the narration of the experience of disequilibrium were selected and analysed within three main sections 'numbness', 'madness' and 'retraumatisation'. These three sections relate to the diagnostic criteria for diagnosing post-traumatic stress disorder and I look in particular at metaphor and the dialectic of trauma, the specificity of the meaning of 'mad' behaviour, the narrative as testimony to the self and archive of the life lost, imaginary stories and the reverse face of history, and the two notions of 'rendering' in terms of the telling of experience. Under the category 'narrative meaning-making' extracts which involve comparisons (of any kind), or the assignment of causation and/or blame were

extracted and systematically analysed in order to illuminate the meaning narrators have made of their experience. In this way I am able to show how narrators make meaning through the evaluation and re-evaluation of themselves, of the experience and of others, and how, by assigning causes to effects, they configure, and produce a particular way of thinking about, experience. In the light of these analyses and by drawing together the dominant themes and structural features of the narratives as a whole, I am able, in the final chapter, to offer an interpretation of the resolutions offered by the narratives. This interpretation is grounded in the analytic categories which make up the model of the trauma narrative, and in the two-fold meaning of 'resolution' that I argue is crucial to notion of 'moving on' from trauma.

Research Practise?

My first experience of empirical research was as a mature undergraduate student taking a psychology module which included designing an experiment to 'test' Kohlberg's moral stages theory (Kohlberg 1981) using children as research subjects. I approached a local junior school and asked the Head for permission to use some of his pupils. I told him what the experiment was designed to test and gave him a copy of the material I was going to ask the children to comment on: Kohlberg's 'Heinz and the druggist' story, which is about a man who considers stealing drugs to save his dying wife. I explained that the children would be asked to listen to the story, to decide whether the man should or should not steal in these circumstances and that they would be encouraged to explain how they came to their decision. The head gave his consent saying that he thought the experiment would be relevant to the children's 'personal and social education' (PSE being part of the National Curriculum) and he later told me that he had obtained the necessary parental consent.

When I wrote up this research for assessment I omitted many aspects of the experience of doing the experiment. Some of the children did not respond to the story I told them but instead told me lots of things about themselves and asked me questions about myself and about why I was in their school. One child listened to the moral dilemma story very intently and then, without commenting on the story I had told him, told me about his mother dying the year before. I immediately terminated the experiment. When I wrote up this work I falsified the figures, so that the sample appeared balanced in terms of gender and age, and only included the children's responses that fitted the research questions. I didn't discuss what had happened with anyone and tried not to think about the damage I might have done to this child, or, for all I knew, any of the other children.

Imagining the Data

In view of my earlier experience of empirical research, perhaps it is not surprising that when I began this research I imagined data that would be safe, for me. I set out to obtain early and later stories of the same traumatic event which I could then compare linguistically in order to trace the process of coping through narration and renarration over time, and I was quite sure that I did not want to interview people myself. Instead, I wanted to obtain audio recordings of people narrating their traumatic experiences to a clinician, in sessions that would have happened anyway and were not created for the purposes of my research, which I could then transcribe and analyse at a distance. This method of data collection was very attractive to me as it seemed to shift all ethical responsibility to someone else, someone who was qualified to take it, and placed me in

a very safe position, at a distance from the actual process of coping and the real lives I sought to study.

From the outset, then, this research was conducted in the context of my desire to avoid having to deal, personally, with the considerable ethical issues I felt were involved in collecting stories of trauma and using them for the purposes of research. While I firmly believed that there was something very worthwhile to be explored in the relationship between narrative and coping with trauma, I did not feel that this justified intruding into people's lives, especially people who were traumatised in some way. I felt, and still feel, a real abhorrence around the idea of asking someone to talk to me about painful and distressing experiences just so that I can get some 'good data' for my research. Consequently on the many occasions when friends talked to me about traumas they were experiencing (bereavement, breakdown of a relationship, serious illness and many other crises) I did not even consider asking them if I could record our talks and use them for the project as this would have felt like a betrayal of our friendship. It would have seemed, to me, to imply that my work was more important to me than their problems and that I was using them in some way. On a couple of occasions when someone said, in the context of such a conversation, 'this must be very interesting for you in view of your research' I felt embarrassed and anxious to deny that I was 'thinking like a researcher' rather than as a friend. Attempting to maintain this separation between my personal life and my work turned out to be impossible but it clearly influenced what I would consider in terms of data production and contributed to my desire for 'safe' data which would arrive packaged in audio cassettes; a neat and tidy collection of texts for analysis.

For a number of unforeseen reasons, which I shall come to shortly, I did not obtain this imaginary 'safe' data and I have had to address the very ethical issues I sought to avoid. Some of the data I am using still feels safe to me because it is made up of narratives of trauma which have been published, in books or newspapers, or broadcast on television, or were produced by other researchers for different purposes. My other data, produced in interviews I conducted or in interviews conducted on my behalf, is what I think of as 'risky' data. Producing this data brought me hard up against the issue of ethics in research into people's lives, and at some points close to abandoning the research. By telling stories of my personal experience of this data production process I am able to reveal the considerable ethical and methodological issues which arose and provide some insights into my relationship to the data; a relationship which transgresses the boundary I had attempted to maintain between my public role as a researcher and my personal doubts and anxieties about intruding into the lives of traumatised people.

The personal is methodologically and ethically significant, but should it be published?

All research is a process and the texts which a researcher produces at various moments in the process, work in progress reports, conference papers, journal articles, a thesis or a book, reveal only the tip of the iceberg. These texts mask their history in that the details of the complex, non-linear nature of the research process are rarely recorded and 'the failures, regrets, and mistakes of qualitative research are rarely, if ever, published'(Punch 1994:85, quoted by Price 1996:207). Discovering that the original research questions, the methodological procedures or the theoretical assumptions are flawed or inappropriate in some way is a crucial aspect of the development of any research; if a researcher starts off knowing the right question and the way to go about answering it *so that* it supports an existing theory, there probably isn't much point in

doing the research. While certain aspects of the *academic* process may be written up (methods revised or models modified), the researcher's subjective experience of the process, their story of the research, is rarely told.

The histories of academic texts, which are intimately bound up with the subjective experiences of their authors, are relegated in favour of an emphasis on their academic context. This is because the discourse of mainstream academic work demands that researchers position their work in relation to other work in the field, not themselves in relation to their work. The context of an academic text is regarded, therefore, as being made up of other academic texts, which also mask their histories, and need not necessarily include the author. As Walkerdine (1997:59) discusses, even in research which depends, openly, on interpretation, 'a move towards the subjective is a move towards the non-rational, or irrational' as the illusory correlation of rational objectivity with validity still stands as an unquestioned assumption. In recent years an increasing number of researchers, feminists in the main, have questioned this assumption arguing that not only that is it impossible to eliminate subjectivity but also that subjectivity should be regarded as a positive feature of research, a resource, rather than a problem to be dealt with (see, for example, Hollway 1989, Personal Narratives Group 1989, Probyn 1993, Josselson 1996, Walkerdine 1997).

In my experience, researchers talk about their subjective experiences informally to each other, to friends or family, but there exists a general, unquestioned assumption that these personal issues should be kept, formally, separate from the research. They are something to be dealt with or coped with covertly, 'whispered behind the hand' (Josselson 1996:xiii), while the overt practice of research goes on. Researchers tell stories, in safe environments, about their motivation to embark on their research in the

first place (which may be pragmatic or economic, rather than academic), about their frustrations, doubts and anxieties about what they are doing, about pressure from more powerful others to proceed in a particular direction and about events in their personal lives which have affected their relationship to the research. But all these very real and relevant issues, which are a fundamental part of the history of any particular research project are, generally, completely omitted from academic texts.

The subjectivity of the researcher can find a hiding place in the use of the third person as the notion of detached objectivity, continues to reign in traditional methodologies (Walkerdine 1997:59). The notion of detached objectivity is based on a rigid separation between subject and object, between self and other, and between the personal self and the public self of the researcher. Probyn (1993:88) describes 'speaking the self' as blurring the distinction between private and public spheres and argues for 'a practice of the self' that operates both ontologically and epistemologically and against 'a logic which insists that emotions are a private matter and knowledge a public affair, which seeks to divide the self in two.' It might be argued that this division is necessary because otherwise academic texts would become a genre-bending collection of personal experience narratives; 'closet' autobiographies. Bruner (1993:6) warns against the danger of 'putting the personal self so deeply back into the text that it completely dominates, so that the work becomes narcissistic and egotistical'.

If it is true that all academic work is influenced in some way or other by the personal experiences of researchers then it may be argued that this should be taken as a given and it is not necessary, appropriate or desirable for researchers to disclose the details of their particular experience; 'an academic context is not "the place" for revealing the self' (Probyn 1993:88). In any case, any account researchers give of their experiences will

be, like all stories, partial and told to make a particular point; there can be no definitive version of the research experience which reveals the truth about the history of a text. In addition, researchers' self-reflexive practices may well provide insights into themselves and their relationship to their work, but they should not delude themselves into thinking that self-reflexivity automatically provides them with a deeper or better understanding of those they study. As McRobbie suggests, feminist methodological principles must not be taken as creating 'oneness' between researcher and researched.; 'no matter how much our past experience figures and feeds into the research programme, we can't possibly assume that it necessarily corresponds in any way to that of our research "subjects"' (McRobbie 1982:52 quoted by Probyn 1993:84). So, what would be the point of all these stories being told in the context of academic writing?

My own position on this, which has evolved through my own research experiences and my reading of others' experiences, is that while I do not want to argue that all writers of all academic texts should reveal themselves to their readers (although personally I prefer to have some sense of the person who has written whatever I am reading), I do believe that in some spheres of research it is crucial to the integrity of the work. In work such as mine, which argues theoretically for the constructive, dialogic nature of language and the cultural, social and political nature of knowledge construction and against realism, positivism and the illusion of objectivity, it is impossible to be unaware of one's own subjectivity in action in the practice of researching and writing. This becomes particularly significant in research involving the interpretation of personal experience narratives, because, as Probyn (1993:72) states, 'the fact that the materiality of the other is made to disappear ...only to reappear as a textual figure, renders it imperative that we know who is speaking ...it matter[s] that some speak and some are merely spoken' and, I would add, that it is imperative that the reader be given access, albeit mediated and

policed by the speaker, to the way in which the speaker understands the personal and political relationship between her/himself and those who are spoken, without which a reader cannot begin to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis and interpretation.

I know that my experiences, my feelings and my beliefs have affected my approach to, and my reading, analysis and interpretation of, my data, and I believe that this must be the case for everyone involved in similar research activities. A deconstruction of the illusion of objectivity and a recognition of the complexity of the operation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in research (involving both researchers and participants) and in writing (involving both writers and readers) is vital if we are to move beyond the mechanistic, static, passive conception of the human subject which has been the mainstay of empirical work in the human and social sciences. It will not be possible to do this unless researchers refuse to collude with the myth of objectivity and begin to write into their work what they would formerly only say in private.

An increasing number of researchers have taken this brave step. They have 'pushed and gnawed at something which detached objectivity would rather forget and cover over' (Walkerdine 1997:59). Had I not read some of this work then I would not have written this chapter. Stories of personal experience emerge into the public world only when they are socially permitted to do so, as discussed in chapter two, and it was the publication of other researchers' stories of their subjective experiences[68] that gave me the confidence to decide to include some of my own stories in this thesis. However, the question of what stories to include remained. Deciding which aspects of the research experience are relevant and which are not is not a simple matter. Positioning oneself in

[68] In particular, Hollway (1989), Probyn (1993), Walkerdine (1997) and the authors in Josselson (1996)

relation to one's work by telling stories of personal experiences which one feels have had a significant effect on either data production, analysis or interpretation is not a simple matter of being honest, of revealing the truth about what happened or about how one felt about what happened, but involves a complex negotiation between the public self and the personal self of the researcher. Writing one's self into the text involves the construction of a textual identity, the creation of a narrator who takes up a position in relation to the work and in relation to the reader and 'producing a position is a problem of rhetoric' (Probyn 1993:86). In an attempt to avoid 'narcissism and egotistical self-confession' (Bruner 1993:6), I decided to focus on what it might be useful for someone else to read rather than on what might make me feel better to have written. Merely owning up to one's mistakes and thereby 'off-loading' guilt, is insufficient without a serious and rigorous working through of the issues involved. Identifying and writing about personal experiences that, one feels, are particularly relevant to the research can be a painful, difficult process but it is, I believe, the only way in which the depth and complexity of the issue of subjectivity in research can be explored, and open, honest practices of interpretation developed.

Blind Alleys

Two main factors prevented my imagined data being realised. Firstly, I found that I could not persuade a practising clinician, who had access to the sort of material I wanted, to take ethical responsibility for my research. After making a great many approaches to individuals and institutions who provide services for traumatised people it became clear that the clinical material I required was not going to be made available to me. Various reasons were given but these generally involved a reluctance to introduce audio-taping into therapy sessions as this would be too intrusive and damaging for the

therapeutic relationship or, if recording was acceptable, clinicians did not feel that it was appropriate to ask clients to give consent for this material to be used outside of the context of therapy. I accepted these reasons as valid and although this was probably the most frustrating period of the research, it was also very useful in that I had many interesting discussions about my work with clinicians and made many contacts in the field of traumatic stress studies.

Secondly, the data I had imagined did not exist. At this early stage in the research I was thinking about narratives of personal experience in terms of a linguistic structuralist model (temporally ordered narrative clauses matching a sequence of past events[69]) and envisaged two clearly bounded narratives of the same traumatic event produced at different times in the aftermath of the trauma which would provide evidence of the power of narrative to 'heal' through re-evaluation over time. This conception was flawed in a number of ways. Firstly, a simple, linear model of coping in the aftermath of trauma does not adequately represent the complexity of the process. Listening to, and reading about, people's actual experiences of living in the wake of a severe traumatic event has made me aware that the process of coping is better envisaged as a series of cycles of 'coping' and 'not-coping' or of coping 'well' and 'less well'. Narrators describe this non-linear process in a variety of ways, as the following extracts show;

1. you have your good days and your bad days (.)
2. it's like the worst time is not always at the
3. beginning it can come later so then when you
4. think that you've you've got through the worst
5. it gets even worse than that and that's just
6. when people expect you to be getting over it (.)
7. erm sometimes it's like taking two steps forward
8. and er five steps back

A 18:937-943

[69] Labov (1972)

9. I was particularly bad at that point cos it's
10 like a wave you know some you can you can feel
11 OK and it's like a wave er really and then
12 something just you know brings it back to you

J 11:575-578

In the first extract, Ann describes the expectation that the passage of time and 'getting over it' (line 6) will go together as both informing her experience, 'so then when you think that you've you've got through the worst it gets even worse than that' (lines 3-5) and increasing her difficulties as 'people expect you to be getting over it' (line 6). She uses a simile, likening the process of coping to walking and ending up travelling backwards. In the second extract, Janice also uses a simile, likening grief to a wave that can overwhelm her unexpectedly, so that feeling OK is not a stable endpoint to be reached but a temporary, fragile respite from pain and suffering.

The idea of simply freezing (recording and transcribing) and comparing two moments of this complex process and then being able to say something about the process as a whole now seems fundamentally flawed in the light of my greater understanding of what is involved. In addition, I had failed to fully appreciate the way in which the interactional context in which one narrative is produced cannot be recreated in order to produce a second comparable account. An influential part of the context of the second narrative would be the first along with known, unknown and unknowable variables, such as what the participants perceive the purpose of the interaction to be and the changes in their relationship in the period between the two sessions. Attempts to control such variables can only ever be extremely partial and in qualitative research of this kind variability is to be expected and studied for its own sake rather than controlled and set aside. A further issue which became clear to me when I did compare two such narratives concerns the artificial relationship which a comparative method imposes on

the two texts. Inevitably, the focus of analysis and interpretation is on the similarities and differences between the two narratives and therefore the first is read in the light of the second and vice versa, producing a third intertextual narrative which tells a story based on a forced, artificial relationship between the two texts. Finally, if I had succeeded in obtaining a number of pairs of interviews from one clinical context then I would have had to consider the particular therapeutic techniques employed in that practice. Therapy is designed to produce change and different therapeutic techniques attempt to do this in different ways. Using this kind of material as data would have meant studying the process of coping in the context of a particular type of therapy which was not what I set out to do. In this way, the research shifted from a narrow, rigidly framed focus on data which would make the complexity of the relationship between narrative and coping somehow more 'manageable' to one which accepted the challenge of that complexity.

Real Lives

Ironically, just at the time when I had come to above conclusions, I made contact with a psychotherapist, whom I shall refer to as Paul, who *was* prepared to allow me to use video-tapes of interviews with two of his former clients[70], and who was so interested in my research that he was willing to contact these people and ask them to do a second interview which would provide me with two pairs of narratives for comparison. In addition, he offered to help in the production of further data of this kind. In spite of my, by now considerable, doubts about comparing two narratives in this way, his offer seemed too good to turn down. With his help I was also able to make contact with a local victim support team and, in addition to the very useful discussions I had with them

[70]Carol, whose son had been murdered by his father, and Gail, who had been subjected to a violent physical and sexual attack by an intruder in her home.

about their work, they agreed to distribute a leaflet to their clients inviting them to participate in the research (see appendix III). At this stage I was still reluctant to interview anyone myself and was very pleased that my psychotherapist colleague, was willing to do this on my behalf.

No-one who had been recently traumatised came forward so this did not lead to the production of any more pairs of early and later narratives of trauma but one woman, Ann, who described herself as having experienced a series of traumas in her life, telephoned me and said she was willing to participate in the study. We had quite a long conversation on the telephone, during which she told me that her son had been killed in a motorcycle accident five years before and that, in addition to this tragedy, she had had a number of other traumatic experiences which included discovering that her daughter had been sexually abused by her brother.

While I was talking to Ann on the telephone I could feel myself wanting to withdraw from what she was telling me and I felt a strong reluctance to take up her offer of an interview. It all sounded too complicated and too messy. I told her that while I very much appreciated her contacting me and offering to participate in the research, she did not meet the criteria as we were looking to interview people to whom something had happened recently and then to do a follow up interview later. She sounded disappointed and said that her memory of everything that had happened was as clear as though it had happened yesterday. I said that I would check with my colleague and get back to her. Paul did not think that Ann would be suitable at all and that we should definitely only take people from whom we could obtain early and later accounts of a discrete traumatic event. My doubts about the possibility of obtaining such data resurfaced and I thought

long and hard about what to do about my caller. Clearly she wanted to participate in the study but her eagerness disturbed me. I was concerned that perhaps she needed someone to talk to and that this someone should be a professional therapist and not me. But the more I went over our telephone conversation in my mind, the more I felt that I should not turn away from the reality of life which *was* messy and complicated and did not fit into the neat, bounded methodological framework I had constructed.

Eventually I decided to do the interview with Ann and soon after doing so, I made contact with Ruth, through a friend, who agreed to talk to me about her experience of being very badly burned in a car accident. I then received a telephone call from a victim support worker, Maggie, who offered to talk to me about her work, generally, and in particular about the murder of her goddaughter and her experience of supporting the bereaved parents. Following our meeting, Maggie put me in touch with one of her former clients, Janice, who agreed to talk to me about the death of her daughter in a car accident.

These interviews all took place between January and June 1997 and the four sessions provided me with seven hours of women talking about the traumatic experiences they had lived through. In the meantime, Paul conducted second video-taped interviews with his two former clients and also video-taped an interview with a current client[71] with the intention of interviewing her again later[72], thereby producing three pairs of narratives for comparison.

---

[71] Sandra, who was sprayed with acid while working in a shop.

[72]The later interview never took place because Sandra moved away. She sent Paul a letter apologising for not contacting him before she left but she 'could not face doing another video'.

As it turned out, it was not the interviews I conducted that worried me from an ethical point of view but those that Paul did. Because of our focus on comparability we decided that I should provide Paul with a list of themes from the first tapes that he could ask interviewees to talk about again in the second. This method had a number of unforeseen consequences which did not become clear to me until I watched the second interviews. In the first interviews the clients talked freely for long stretches of time about what had happened to them, how they felt about it and what effects it had had on their lives but in the second interviews their talk is more fragmented as Paul appears to be much more directive and concerned to keep the interview focussed on the themes I had provided. This resulted in much shorter narrative sequences and in one case created a very awkward interactive sequence as the interviewee, Gail, could not remember the specific issues Paul raised:

P:... one of the things that came out when we did the first interview was (.) you described a feeling of disappointment erm when you said you began to disintegrate a couple of weeks after the incident cos you thought you would be able to shrug off what had happened and carry on with life do you still have any of those feelings or do you think that you've that things have moved on since then

G: not the disappointment I don't think erm (.) no but it has coloured my judgement of society it's coloured my judgement of men (.) but not the disappointment I felt in myself personally I think that that's faded

S: when you say faded to what extent has it faded

G: I don't actually remember it

S: right

G: I don't remember that feeling of disappointment

S: right

G2 1:6-28

More seriously, our method for producing comparable narrative sequences caused great distress to one of the interviewees, Carol, as she was clearly unprepared for some of the issues to be readdressed[73]. The second video-taped interview with Carol, whose younger son had been murdered by his father two and a half years before, begins with her appearing composed, cheerful and talking optimistically about her new job and about her elder son settling in well at his new school. When Paul asks her to talk about the specific issues I had highlighted she immediately becomes very distressed:

P: one of the things you said before was or you mentioned your inability to remember Jonathan as he was (.) what are your memories now

C: same (.) same (.) to try and sit and remember (.) Jonathan playing running around (.) the pain is just (.) its too much [rising intonation] it upsets me too much (.) so I don't I just don't and I don't like myself for that because he was here erm he was a part of our lives (.) just miss him [in a whisper, very tearful, sobbing]

S: do you want to stop

C: no

C2 5:222-240

Before this, Carol had explained how she manages to cope with life in the aftermath of the murder of her son:

really my way of coping with it is not (.) trying not to think of him that he's just gone away for a while I can't think of him as being dead that's my way I know he is [tearful] that's how I get through I don't I don't think about it or try not to think about it I'm not saying I don't think about Jonathan I do but I don't think about what's happened to him I try not to do until it comes on TV or something or whatever that's my way of getting through each day

C2 4:168-176

In view of this, questions about specific issues which demand that Carol does think and talk about the details of her son's death seem, to me, quite inappropriate, even cruel. In

[73] Before the interview commenced Paul did tell Carol what he was going to be asking her about, and she said that was OK. I still feel, however, that Carol was ill-prepared for what was to come in the interview and that her agreement was based on her desire to respond positively to Paul's requests.

a different type of interview, one that is not structured around a pre-set list of themes and gives control of the topic to the interviewee, this lack of care and respect for coping strategies that have been clearly stated by the interviewee would not take place.

Another problem with asking specific questions is that the interviewee may assume that there is a right or a wrong answer or that the interviewer is trying to elicit something specific. The interviewee may be completely disempowered by this and feel that she/he is failing to provide the 'right' answer. For example, in response to Paul's questions about whether she has rebuilt a sense of security, Gail produces a personal experience narrative which tells of her continuing fear of strange men. The coda[74] to this narrative reveals her concern about what Paul wants from her:

1. but that doesn't really answer the question does it?
G2: 5:259-260

In addition, the directive nature of the second interviews served, I believe, to prohibit the interviewees from talking about what they wanted to talk about, what was important to them at the time of the interview.

These second interviews were problematic for another reason which relates to the impossibility of recreating a specific context. The first interviews had taken place while the two women were seeing Paul for therapy on a weekly basis and therefore, within this therapeutic relationship, they were used to talking about themselves and their emotions at length. When the second interviews took place they had not had contact with Paul for some considerable time and were no longer in any kind of therapy. This

---

[74] The coda is an element of the Labovian model of the personal experience narrative, as discussed in chapter three, and functions to 'sign off' the narrative and hand the floor over to the listener.

partly explains why Paul felt, after both second interviews, that they had not gone well. He described feeling awkward and uncertain about how to respond in the interviews which, he said, felt artificial. The following extract which is taken from the second interview with Gail gives an insight into the difficulties the two participants were experiencing. This talk took place when, as far as the participants were concerned, the interview was over but in fact the video recorder was still running. I am extremely glad this accidental recording took place as without it I would not have known what the participants thought about the session or been able to appreciate how constraining and intrusive the video-taping was:

1. P: yeah (.) that's what I was trying to I (.) I you you picked up 2. on it

3. G: waffle really

4. P: no I was waffling

5. P: I was waffling

6. P: no you see it's very difficult one of the things that is very
7. clear and I think that's what comes (.) it the time lapse it's
8. quite a big one

9. G: it is

10. P: erm but what's interesting is in terms (.) it fits that theory 11. that notion quite well that peoples' assumptions about the
12. world change it's about how you rebuild those

13. G: mm mm

14. S: and maybe I should have asked you about that

15. G: well you did (.)

[Gail's body language changes dramatically. She leans forward, looks directly at Paul and her whole body seems to relax and loosen up. She smiles and uses her arms and hands to emphasise what she is saying. She also talks much more quickly and makes more use of intonation and pitch changes in this last section of talk. All this is in stark contrast to her rather tense stillness and her lack of expressive phonology and physical movement before.]

16. G: did I ever tell you about the time when I was in a [shop
17. name] lift?

18. S: no

19. G: hh dear well that was not long afterwards I I've never since
20. been in that lift I'm never going @@@ in that lift @@@
21. @ again it's the lift attendant for goodness sake

(G2 16:864-894) [75]

Gail then goes on to tell the full story of this incident and of another incident in which she felt threatened by a strange man. These are the only two spontaneous personal experience narratives Gail produces in the whole interview and it is quite clear that the intrusion of the video camera in combination with Paul's imposition of a particular structure on the interview, based on an agenda I had set beforehand, worked against relaxed communication taking place. This second interview would seem to be an example of what Fludernik (1996:76-77) describes as a 'solicited' interview narrative which she disqualifies from the category of 'natural narrative' and therefore from the sphere of interest of narrative analysis. I shall discuss this distinction in detail in the final section of this chapter.

In addition to this accidental recording which gave me some insights into the nature of the video-recorded second interviews, an accidental meeting provided me with further information about the consequences of the one of these second interviews. I happened to meet the victim support worker who had worked with Carol in the months following the murder of her child. She had heard about my involvement with Paul and knew about the second interview with Carol, although she had not had any contact with Carol herself for some time. She told me that she had recently met Carol's mother while shopping who told her that Carol had been very upset and distressed following the

second interview. Carol's mother said that doing the interview had caused Carol to have a 'relapse'. The victim support worker understood her to mean that Carol was experiencing the same anxiety and depression that she had experienced for a long time after the trauma but had been free of for some time prior to the second interview. I said that I would not have asked Paul to do the interview if I had thought there was any risk of harm to Carol. The victim support worker said 'oh it's not your fault' and explained that she had not agreed with Carol doing the first interview and, given the opportunity, would have advised against doing the second but Carol would not have listened to her because 'she would do anything Paul asked of her'.[76]

This was my lowest point in the research process. I was appalled at the thought that I had been the instigator of harm and very angry with myself for letting my desire for data blind me to the (now) obvious potential for harm that these second interviews presented. Like Bar-On (1996:20), I too felt 'afraid of my own urge to try and accomplish something'. I had to acknowledge to myself that this accidental meeting had only confirmed what I had formerly suspected, but repressed. Paul and I had set up the second interview with Carol without any real discussion about the danger it might present for her; I had left that up to him and he had taken her agreement to do the interview as 'informed consent'. During the interview our pre-set agenda had prevented Carol from using the coping strategies she had developed and it seemed that this may have caused her considerable problems. I realised that I could not escape taking ethical responsibilities for the effects of my research by transferring that responsibility to another, nor could I hide behind institutionally imposed regulations which serve to

---

[75] Both participants later gave their permission for this 'off the record' talk to be used.

[76] Of course, without a number of violations of 'professional ethics', this conversation would not have taken place.

protect researchers, and their disciplines, rather than participants. As Josselson (1996:xii-xiii) states:

> *merely waving flags about confidentiality and anonymity is a superficial, unthoughtful response. And the concept of informed consent is a bit oxymoronic, given that participants can, at the outset, have only the vaguest idea of what they might be consenting to.*

My first instinct was to throw the videotapes and transcripts of these second interviews away - as though by not using them I could somehow make amends. I knew, however, that both Carol and Gail had said that they were willing to do the interviews, and to give permission for the material to be used for training purposes or for research and publication, because they wanted to help others who had suffered similar experiences. Like Carlin's interviewees they seemed to see the research project as a channel which could connect their experiences with the experiences of others:

> *If there was some way to help somebody else by talking about it, I think that's where it's at, that's the whole point of allowing the interviews in the first place.*
>
> (Carlin 1992:151)

Towards the end of the second interview with Carol, Paul asks her how she feels:

P: when we talked about doing this again you were naturally anxious about it (.) now that we have talked about it

C: mm

P: and reflected on some the things we spoke about earlier how do you feel now?

C: alright I was nervous I was apprehensive when you asked me to do it erm (.) I mean I remembered doing the video with you but I can't remember what was said or what went off the first time as you've gathered I can't I still find it hard to talk about Jonathan and what happened (.) erm (.) alright (.) it still brings it back and I'll probably go home now and think about it (.) I'll think about what happened again obviously it's brought it all back to the surface (.) so erm I'll probably have a bad day basically (.) but erm I'll be up tomorrow and I'll be fine my favourite saying I'll

16. be fine [smiling] if it helps people it helps people (.) you know

C2/12 598-619

In view of this, not using the material would be going against Carol's expressed wishes and would make the ordeals of doing the interviews completely pointless. I came to the conclusion that the only thing I could do was to decide not to instigate any more of these kind of interviews and to learn from this experience that I could not duck taking ethical responsibility for my research by handing it over to someone else.

Whose stories?

Bar-On (1996:18) states that 'as long as an analysis or a transcription of an interview lies in our drawers, the major ethical dilemmas between us and our interviewees have not yet begun.' Here he is referring to questions of ownership, interpretive authority and publication. For example, should research participants be given an opportunity to participate in the analysis and interpretation of their stories, to read material before publication and to censor or withdraw their material completely? More generally, this is an issue of complex layers of asymmetrical power relationships, between researcher and researched and between researcher and the academy. A number of the contributors to Josselson's (1996) volume on ethics in research discuss the particular dilemmas they have had to face concerning these issues. Josselson describes this as 'a daring volume' because she 'invited those who expose others' lives to expose themselves' (1996:xiii). For example, Price (1996:209) discusses the way in which the confidentiality of her participants was jeopardized by her university's insistence on signed informed consent. She says 'I was caught between being ethical and being compliant; compliance won out.' On the issue of relinquishing (some) power over the interpretation and publication of their stories to participants, Chase (1996) describes her struggle to reconcile

professional pressures with her feminist commitment to non-exploitative research practices. Although she wanted to share her work in progress with those she was writing about, and felt that she *should*, she dare not risk delaying the completion of her work because she 'was racing against the tenure clock' and she knew that if she 'lost an entire chapter at the request of an interviewee, those evaluating [her] ...would treat that as a sign of failure rather than a serious methodological commitment.' (Chase 1996:48). Josselson (1996:62) says that she worries intensely about how people will feel about what she writes about them because she believes that 'every act of writing a person's life is inevitably a violation.' She feels so uncomfortable about this that she has sometimes not sent participants copies of a publication, despite having promised to do so. Josselson's efforts to find out how people felt about what she had written about them did not help to alleviate the 'dread, guilt, and shame that go with writing about others' (1996:69);

> *There is always the dread that I will have harmed someone, that I will be confronted with, "How could you say that about me?"*
>
> *My guilt, I think, comes from my knowing that I have taken myself out of relationship with my participants (with whom, during the interview, I was in intimate relationship) to be in relationship with my readers. I have, in a sense, been talking about them behind their backs and doing so publicly. ...I am guilty of being an intruder and then, to some extent, a betrayer.*
>
> *...shame is about my exhibitionism, shame that I am using these people's lives to exhibit myself, my analytical prowess, my cleverness.*
>
> Josselson (1996:69)

I experienced a 'welcome shock of recognition' (Probyn 1993:37), that others felt as I did, many times while reading Josselson's collection but none more so than when reading the above in Josselson's own chapter. However I also feel that, while it is vital that researchers continue to address and share these feelings, we must guard against the danger of slipping into a patronising attitude towards participants; the danger is of further disempowerment as those who made a decision to participate in the research are

constructed as victims, incapable of understanding the research relationship and the nature of academic activity. In her chapter, Josselson reaches the conclusion that narrative research should go on but it must be done 'in anguish' as no matter how many safeguards are put in place, they will never be good enough to completely protect those involved in an intrinsically intrusive and potentially harmful activity (1996:70-71). I agree, but it is not helpful to project this 'anguish' on to participants. Instead we must act to try to equalise the power relationship by sharing our knowledge, and our concerns, with them.

Identifying the disjunction between the interests of those who tell their stories and the interests of those who analyse and interpret their texts enables Chase (1996) to claim interpretive authority in her work. Her reading of other researchers' experiences of sharing the process of interpretation with participants suggests to Chase that the necessity or appropriateness of such collaboration depends on the aim or purpose of the research. Chase's focus in her analysis and interpretation is not to discover the exact meaning her participants meant to convey, which is what matters to participants, but rather to 'interpret the meanings expressed implicitly in their use of cultural discourses, their narrative strategies, and their linguistic practices' (1996:54). Chase argues that the difference between what the researcher wants to communicate to others and what the researched wants to communicate to the researcher means that validation of interpretation cannot be provided by participants. In this way, interpretive authority rests with the interpreter and not with the interpreted and the interpretation will ultimately be validated, or not, by other academics. Bal (1997:11) discusses the way in which the inevitably subjective nature of the process of interpretation of narrative texts turns narrative analysis into an activity of cultural analysis. She argues that attaching a meaning to a text can only ever be a proposal ('I think that the text means this') and in

this sense it cannot be right or wrong. However, if the interpretation based on a precise textual description, ('the text is so constructed'), and, for Bal, a theory of narrative is an instrument for making such descriptions, then the interpretation becomes discussable within the general framework of academic interest in narrative analysis (Bal 1997:11). Also on the issue of interpretation, Hollway (1989:43) describes how ' [i]t has become a point of political principle not to question women's accounts' and goes on to highlight the danger of the humanist egalitarian approach which insists that participants' accounts must be allowed to 'speak for themselves'. The danger, for Hollway (1989), lies in the impoverishing effect these humanistic premises have on feminist methods which can result in dominant sexist knowledges, which inevitably influence participants' accounts of themselves, being reproduced rather than explored, questioned and challenged. If personal experience narrative research is to be conducted ethically, therefore, it is necessary to give potential participants as much information as possible about the nature of the research and to explain, from the outset, that interpretive authority rests with the researcher.

I told my interviewees that my research was concerned with the effects of traumatic experiences with the aim of developing a greater understanding of how people cope in the aftermath of trauma. I did not mention the words 'narrative' or 'story' as I did not feel that this was necessary. Prior to the interviews I discussed the issues of anonymity, confidentiality and possible future publication with them and could detect no anxiety on their part about any of this. They seemed happy to trust me to protect their identities and when I later sent them full transcripts, with names and other identifying features changed, they approved these. Because the main focus of my thesis is language and meaning-making through narration rather than on the specific content of the stories, I

did not feel that it was necessary to involve my interviewees in the process of analysis and interpretation. I did, however, promise to send them copies of any publications in which I used their stories. At some point in the future I may discover, therefore, that the ethical issues of ownership, interpretive authority and publication are more problematic within this research than I believe them to be at the present time.

Shared stories and conditions for empathy

One of the reasons why I feel that the interviews I conducted are not ethically problematic, unlike my feelings about those that Paul conducted on my behalf, lies in the nature of the interaction that took place in the hours I spent with these women. Although we began the interview as complete strangers[77], by the end of the session we had become something else. Not friends exactly, our meeting was too brief for that, but it felt to me as though a bond had formed between us based on the shared positive experience of the interaction that had taken place. My experiences support Clandinin & Connelly's (1994:422) assertion that 'personal experience methods have the potential to generate new shared stories for participants and researchers in relationships that are akin to friendships'.

Very early on in the sessions I ceased feeling like a researcher or an interviewer as I became more and more involved in the stories I heard. For the vast majority of the time I said very little because there was no need to, my interviewees narrated their experiences in great detail and at length and there were no awkward silences that I needed to fill with prompt questions.

[77]Except Ruth, a friend of a friend whom I had met a few times socially.

When I later listened to the audiotapes I was surprised to discover that I was providing an almost constant stream of backchannels (mm, yeah, right) while my interviewees were talking. These were particularly frequent in the early part of the sessions, when we were still strangers and when the most painful and difficult experiences were being narrated. Backchannels are minimal responses which do not interrupt the speaker, but provide reassurance and support which functions to encourage the speaker to continue. I discovered that I most often provided backchannels in response to the interviewee saying 'you know'. Polanyi (1979:238) argues that although 'you know' is often regarded as an unnecessary repetitive filler, it often has exactly its literal meaning, implying that the speaker assumes the material is known by the listener and is a questions requiring verification of this assumption. In Quirk et al.'s (1985) comprehensive grammar, the functions of this frequently occurring 'stereotyped clause' depend on its intonation and can be interpreted as the speaker requesting assurance that the addressee is following the communication in all its detail and allusion (rising intonation), as the speaker reassuring the addressee that they are not being underestimated, that is the speaker assumes that the addressee gets the point (falling intonation), or as the speaker demonstrating confidence in shared knowledge of some particular facts which need not be mentioned (fall plus rise intonation) (Quirk et al 1985:19.65). Backchannels are therefore co-operative and appropriate responses to 'you know' which reassure the speaker about these issues without interrupting their flow of talk.

Holmes' (1997:270) comparative gendered analysis of storytelling finds that women tend to provide this sort of ongoing, explict, positive support more than men, who are more likely to interrupt and whose feedback tends to be minimal and neutral. Active,

supportive listening is a gendered activity (Epstein and Steinberg 1997:52) and this is now well documented[78]. Holmes (1997:270) also reports that the more personal the topic the more reassuring and supportive women listeners' feedback becomes. This would certainly apply to my behaviour which I think was also influenced by my desire to give control of the session to the narrators and to present myself as a caring, senstive listener who would treat their stories of trauma and suffering with the utmost respect. There are so many of my backchannels peppering the women's talk that I decided not to transcribe them all because, while they were crucial to our interaction at the time, they simply get in the way in the transcripts and are not necessary for my analyses.

These verbal responses were not, of course, the only feedback I provided while the women talked. Our eye contact, my nods, smiles, frowns, expressions of surprise, sadness or amusement and all my other non-verbal behaviour, body posture etc., provided feedback which was being interpreted, consciously or sub-consciously, by the women as they talked. In this way, the interview situation is highly interactive, and the particular stories that are produced are narrated for that specific context.

During the interviews, I found that I could very easily identify with the feelings my interviewees expressed about what had happened to them. Although I had not, of course, shared their experiences, I did feel that I understood and shared the feelings they had about them and, because I believe that my empathy came across through my verbal and non-verbal behaviour during the interview, we were, to some extent, sharing their stories. I heard stories of trauma and tragedy but also stories of happy and amusing

[78] See Treichler and Kramarae's (1983) summary on research on women's talk which finds consistent evidence for the supportive nature of women's conversational interaction and also Wodak (1997)'s edited volume for a range of studies which find significant gender differences in a number of different discourse situations.

experiences. The following extracts illustrate some of the variety of things we talked about and give some sense of the interaction which took place. These extracts are from fairly late on in the interviews with Ann, Janice and Ruth when the stories of trauma have been told and we are no longer strangers.

Ann told me about the time when her lover, Tony, bought her a gold necklace and she tricked her husband, Alf, into buying it for her from a friend, thereby gaining the necklace and forty pounds cash. This narrative begins with the phrase 'it wasn't all painful life's what you make it'(A 31:1659), thereby indicating that the story to follow is different to the stories of trauma Ann has told earlier in the interview. The following extract is the ending of the necklace story:

1. A: and Tony laughed and he come up to me and he says
2. when Alf had gone to the loo he says Fred had told him what
3. we'd done and he says "you're the only person I know that can
4. have a present and make money out of it as well"
5. @@@@@@@@@@

6. W:@@@@@@@@@@

7. A: oh dear @@@@@@ I had to make money on it @@@@
8. I've still got it I've got lots what Tony bought me

A 32: 1686-1696

Our shared laughter, at the rather cruel double deception of Ann's husband, seemed to set the tone for this last part of the interview during which Ann talked about the burden of the numerous supportive roles (wife, mother, grandmother) which she felt, to some extent, trapped within. Towards the very end of this two hour interview during which I felt we had both become very relaxed with each other, the following exchange took place:

1. A: ...I'm quite happy to to be the grandmother and I mean
2. grandmothers don't go bonking in laybys do they

3. W: @@@ well @@@ probably quite a few do @@@
4. actually @@@@@

5. A: @@@@@@@ well yes I think you're right there

A 35:1880-1885

During the interview with Janice, she told me about her ex-husband, Don, who left her and the children to 'go off with' a marriage guidance counsellor, and, as an example of his lack of commitment to their children and her out-of-character outspokenness in the aftermath of her daughter's death, she recalled the time that Don's father rang asking for Don who had come came to visit their son, Dan:

1. I said "oh he left nine years ago" actually when I look back it
2. just took everybody by surprise I was surprised with myself
3. cos you know I've never said these sort of things before you
4. know I was always there trying to keep I I couldn't I just
5. couldn't I hadn't got the energy to have that pretence you
6. know and so I said "oh he's just gone out to look for his son
7. he's six foot two and he's seventeen stone I wonder if he'll
8. recognise him" @@@ and of course he came in and he'd just
9. gone past there's a big picture on the wall I'll have to show
10. you that Dan did it's about eight foot by two foot or something
11. and this woman [a neighbour] who'd gone whizzing round
12. writing all these things in this book [a funeral album] I'll have to
13. show you erm Don had written this poem called listening
14. which she'd written out in this book anyway I showed it him
15. but there was a comma missed out somewhere in this thing
16. which he noticed and I said "did you notice Dan's work"
17. @@@@@ "oh no and he's like walked past I mean you
18. should see the size of it and I thought yeah that just about
19. sums it up on something he's written there's a bloody comma
20. missing

21. W:typical

22. J:absolutely bloody typical

J 25:1300-1323

I believe my comment 'typical' (line 24) was intended to indicate to Janice that not only did I understand 'the bloody comma story' to be a succinct illustration of what she wants to convey to me about Don but that I also *share* her feelings about Don's

behaviour, and perhaps about ex-husbands generally (she knows by this point in the interview that I have one myself). Janice strongly affirms the appropriateness of my reaction to her story with the response 'absolutely bloody typical'. Perhaps our exchange also carries the unspoken exclamation 'men!', which, in my experience, often occurs in women's conversations. As a specifically gendered way of 'doing friendship', 'men!' functions as a handy shorthand term which encodes exasperation, contempt or a sort of despairing resignation and also carries a wealth of meaning, support and understanding. However specific or generalised our shared feelings were, the interaction transcribed above shows that Janice and I had certainly connected in a very positive way over an issue that was important and emotionally charged for her.

When I interviewed Ruth, she spoke at length about how she feels she has changed in the years since she was very badly burned in a car accident and how she has come to terms with being permanently scarred and disfigured. In the following extract, she describes how she has regained confidence and become more assertive in her relationship with her partner, Martin:

because of this lack of confidence in the beginning I couldn't
and so it was probably two years into the relationship before I
could actually say "hang on no I don't want that" but it's only
now and this is five years on that I can actually [bangs hand
down hard on the table] "NO" definitely "I don't want that" you
know "if you want to do that that's up to you" but you know I
can actually be firm about it it's only five years on that I've
learnt to do that and it Martin's had to come to terms with it
but also I've had to come to terms with it that's what me and
Neville [ex-husband] should have been going through (.)

W: yeah?

R: it that is uncanny it really is cos Martin is very similar to how
I was he he'd just go along ***** you know (.)

W: expect everyone to

15. R: he expects everyone to fall in and doesn't really give much
16. consideration to anybody else and he's very very selfish but I
17. won't tolerate it now I've been able to

18. W: whereas you were doing

19. R: yeah yeah yeah but Neville couldn't go through that he
20. couldn't learn he couldn't learn that lesson we couldn't go
21. through that process together I've had to go through this
22. process now reversed which is is it's uncanny it's weird and
23. this is what I say is it are you meant to learn lessons in life you
24. know

25. W: mm

R 18/19:965-997

In lines 1-8, Ruth is talking about how it has taken her five years to be able to be clearly state her wishes to her partner, Martin. She then goes on to compare this relationship to her former relationship with Neville, when she behaved like Martin has with her and Neville behaved the way she had been behaving with Martin. She believes that she and Martin have gone through a process, learnt 'a lesson' that Neville was unable to, and that this is 'uncanny'. My responses in lines 11 and 25 look like backchannels, but they are in fact functioning slightly differently within Ruth's quite complex explanation about how she has changed. My response'yeah?' (line 11) occurs in the pause after Ruth has said that she and Neville should have gone through the process she has just been describing within her current relationship. It is said with rising intonation and is therefore a question, also carrying a (slight) note of surprise and functions, I believe, to request further explanation. Ruth begins to provide this, 'Martin is very similar to how I was' (lines 12-13), and, invited by the 'you know' and the pause (line 13), I try to convey that I *do* know what that similarity is: (Martin and Ruth both used to) 'expect everyone to'. Ruth confirms that I have this right by repetition and expansion, 'he expects everyone to fall in .... he's very very selfish' (lines 15-16). On line 18 I interrupt Ruth with 'whereas you *were* doing' in order to convey again that I am

following what she is saying (she used to tolerate things but no longer) but, unfortunately, this means that I never get to hear what she is 'now able to..' (line 17) because Ruth responds to my interruption to confirm, 'yeah yeah yeah', that I am right in my interpretation. The final 'mm' (line 25) in this extract is not simply a backchannel, either. It seems to be more like a minimally affirmative response to Ruth's (?rhetorical) question 'are you meant to learn lessons in life' (line 23). It is difficult to make a definite interpretation of this from the transcript but I think my 'mm' is deliberately ambiguous as I am attempting to confirm that I understand that this is Ruth's question, 'and this is what I say' (line 22-23), without appearing to answer the question, that is without saying 'yes, you are meant to learn lessons in life', which I'm not at all sure that I believe.

I hope this extract illustrates something of the complexity of the interactive sequences that occur in the transcripts when I do more than simply provide supportive feedback. Fortunately, both for the narrators at the time and for ease of analysis later, for the vast majority of the time I did not feel the need to say anything beyond, 'mm', 'yeah' and 'right' which encouraged the narrators to continue without making them feel that they had to respond to me in a specific way. By the end of each of the sessions we had shared experiences, laughter, coffee and we parted with warm farewells. All four women offered to talk to me again if it would help the research. Both Ann and Ruth told me that they felt better for doing the interview. They said that it had been helpful to them go over things in such detail and they felt easier in their minds as a result. Maggie's experience of meeting me led her to feel confident about putting me in touch with Janice and, after our session, Janice sent me a poem and a story that her daughter had written concerning their family tragedy.

I do not believe that it is possible to provide a fixed set of methodological guidelines or a formula for achieving this kind of rapport within an interview situation. I do believe, however, that it was very significant that I regarded my interviewees as the 'experts' and adopted a 'not knowing' stance towards them (Anderson and Goolishan 1992). As Bar-On (1996:9) comments, 'when we take a closer at interviewing ...it seems less like a formal research set of a priori rules and more like an intervention without the clear boundaries or a contract that a clinical intervention contains as a given.' It is vital, therefore, that researchers share their experiences of conducting interviews, both good and bad, in written, as well as oral, personal experience narratives in order that others can gain insights which will enable them to develop their own ethical research practices.

In the case of the interviews I conducted I think it is significant that I did not attempt to structure the interviews around a set agenda, a series of questions[79] or a time limit. Instead I began each interview by saying how grateful I was for their willingness to talk to me about what I knew were very painful experiences, that we could talk for as long or as short a time as they wished and that it was entirely up to them how much detail they wanted to go into. In this way, I attempted to give control of the interview situation to the interviewee, for example :

1. W: so really I mean if you could tell me what happened I only
2. know (.) what Maggie said that your daughter was killed in a in
3. a road accident

4. J: yeah

[79] I had prepared some questions for the first interview, with Ann, and I did begin the interview with pad and pen as I wanted to have some 'prompt' questions ready and to supplement the audio recording with some notes about the nonverbal aspects of the interview. I very quickly discarded these, however, as I could see than Ann was registering my notetaking and I could not become fully involved in what she was saying while attempting to do this kind of observation. In any case, Ann had her own plan for the interview. She had made some notes of the things she wanted to tell me and although she stopped referring to her notes quite early on in the interview she checked through them at the end saying that she wanted to make sure she had remembered to tell me about all the aspects of coping that she had thought of beforehand. In the other interviews the only equipment I used was an audio-cassette recorder.

5. W: just really er what happened erm (.) and what what it was 6.
like and how it affected your life and that sort of thing and tell 7.
me it's up to you how much you tell me how little you tell me
8. sort of don't (.)

9. J: mm yeah

10. W: it's more having a chat than you know anything very formal

11. J: yeah well erm well it was you know this time of year (.) on 12.
my birthday (.) I was forty five that day and ... [narration
continues with no breaks until line 232]

J 1:43-60

By contrast, Paul began his interviews in a much more formal way and provided his interviewees with considerable details concerning the way the interview would be structured. The following extract, from his interview with Sandra, occurs at the beginning of the interview 'proper' and *after* Paul has already described how he is going to start the interview and what questions he is going to ask her, so this is the second time that Sandra gets this information:

1. P: erm I'm going to ask you about the event what happened
2. and your thoughts and feelings at the time I'll then go on and
3. ask you about the aftermath when you were in hospital and
4. the affects it had on you and the family I'm then going to talk
5. about how things are at the moment and some of your
6. thoughts and feelings and attitudes towards people in general
7. and the world and how that's changed OK so I wonder if you
8. could begin by giving me a description of how what happened

9. S: erm (.)

10. P: or as much as you as what you remember

11. S: yeah yeah erm a chap came into the shop and erm I was 12.
stood behind the counter and he appro approached me erm
13. he had a black balaclava with just the eyes cut out and er a
14. black motorcycle helment on and he mumbled some he said
15. something but it was mumbled and erm I I just said sorry and
16. he said er erm er packet of cigarettes so I give him his
17. cigarettes er he give me the money er I rang it into the till
18. when the till drawer opened I was looking into the till and I felt
19. this cold wet liquid on my face...

S1 3:133-156

Sandra's account of what happened to her, which reads more like a police statement than a personal experience narrative, continues like this for further 62 lines. She is providing what she believes Paul wants, however. He asks for a 'description' (line 8) and this is what he gets. It is not until after Sandra finishes her description that Paul asks her for some evaluation:

1. P: what about thoughts and feelings at the time (.) you were
2. obviously very distressed and frightened

S1 5:227-228

The dichotomy between objective reality (what actually happened) and subjective experience (how one feels about it) which Paul invokes here, is a feature of psychological approaches to trauma *and* a fundamental dichotomy within the vast majority of literary, linguistic and narratological approaches to narrative as discussed in detail in chapter one. The problems of this event-centredness in both fields will become evident from my analyses in next four chapters. It is sufficient to point out for the moment, that, as an interview technique, it fails dismally to generate a story and effectively reduces the potential narrator to the role of reporter of events.

The fact that Paul's interviews were videotaped also contributed significantly, I feel, to the more formal, constrained nature of the interviews and, although video-recordings provide much greater access to what went on in the sessions than audio recording can, it is, in my experience, much more intrusive and stressful for the participants. In my interviews, the intrusion of having a tape recording running seemed to fade within a very few minutes of it being switched on and although I had to change and turn over tapes during the sessions, this did not appear to inhibit the flow of talk in any way.

It was also very significant, I believe, that the women who chose to talk to me were, in many ways, like me. We are all between 40 and 50 years old, white, mothers and come from, I suspect, broadly similar working class backgrounds. As Riessman (1987) discusses, class, race and cultural storytelling traditions can be just as important as gender in terms of both the interaction within the interview and the subsequent interpretation of the material by the researcher. Skultans (1998:12) remembers how surprised she was that the Latvians she interviewed for her research 'were as open and welcoming as they were, taking me on trust and confiding past lives and sorrows to a stranger'. It is clear from her descriptions of these encounters, however, that, although Skultans had left Latvia when she was a baby, her interviewees saw her as one of their own, a returning exile, and that, because she had grown up reading Latvian literature and hearing stories of her family history, she shared a storytelling tradition with her interviewees;

> *In the course of my fieldwork many people expressed interest and curiosity in my family and life history. If asked I always responded as fully as a could. As a result, an exchange of stories took place. ...[the interviews were] an encounter between my memory and the memories, both textual and personal, of my narrators.*

Unlike LaRossa, Bennett and Gelles (1987 cited by Nadeau 1998) who developed an interview technique that included asking structured questions and notetaking in order to avoid the ethical problem of interviewees perceiving the interviewer as a therapist, I did not encounter this problem. The initial discussions I had with the women when we arranged the interviews were about how they could help me, not about how I could help them, and this shared understanding of what we were doing remained in place throughout the time I spent with them. In addition, I believe that Maggie's counselling training as part of her victim support work and Ruth's experiences of counselling in the aftermath of her accident gave them both an awareness that would prevent them

mistaking the interview situation for a therapy session. Both Ann and Janice have no time for counselling, as the following extracts illustrate, and there was, therefore, no danger of them treating the interview as a counselling session. I believe that had they perceived me to be behaving like a therapist, their resistance to engaging with me would have been very clear, and this was not the case.

I went in talking to this counsellor who (.) they might be trained
but what do you call trained? because when I walked out that
door I I'd still got the same feelings and emotions and er (.)
she didn't know how I felt she'd not lost a son I walked out the
door exactly the same what good was she doing me? (.) I got
more out of talking to people that knew Michael people that
knew me understood what I was saying or like Jean who I've
met through the leaflet or my best friend Doreen who used to
make me laugh and still does and she was there for me like if
I was feeling low "get up here" and she'd listen to me and we'd
laugh and we'd talk and that was better than anything you can
get in them counselling rooms it was a waste of space that
was

A 23: 1221-1235

I mean Don and Gilly [narrator's ex-husband and his new wife]
they have this sort of you know bereavement counselling
manula manual "on this day you should be feeling this" and I
couldn't (.) that made me really angry cos I think he rang up
one day saying "oh today I felt angry with Vicki" and I thought
well er you know this they're like feeling they do everything it's
all this you know they never drop being this counsellor and it's
"I hear what you're saying" cos we went we had to go to the
inquest thing Don well he was supposed to go with me
although he went with his wife and er my friend Sandra picked
me up and we went and erm then you know we went for this
drink and "I hear what you're saying" I said if you say "I hear
what you're saying" once more I'll smack you one

J 16:826-839

These counter-discourses, which can be seen to represent what Foucault (1980:82) termed 'popular', or 'low-ranking' knowledges, resist and reject the authority ,'what do you call trained?' (line 2), and the discourse, 'if you say "I hear what you're saying" once more I'll smack you one' (lines 25-26), of the institution of counselling and therapy which has become so powerful in the contemporary Western world. It is

perhaps significant to note, however, that both narrators direct their contempt and anger mainly towards individuals, 'she didn't know how I felt she'd not lost a son ...what good was she doing me?' (lines 4-5), 'they never drop being this counsellor' (line 20), rather than against counselling/psychotherapy per se. I believe this is because their objections are not general, universal or theoretical but personal, specific and experiential, and my later analyses bear this out. It is narrative knowledge[80], not scientific knowledge, on which everyday coping is based and it is this specific, context-bound knowledge that I attempt to access in order to better understand the relationship between narration and coping in the aftermath of trauma.

Many of the stories I heard in the interviews resonated with my own experiences and as my interviewees told me how they had felt and reacted in particular circumstances, I found that I had memories of feeling and reacting in similar ways and that their stories were acting as a trigger for my own. It was the similarity of feelings rather than the similarity of the events which enabled me to feel that I could understand something of what their experiences had been like for them. When I listened to and transcribed the tapes I found myself searching my memory and using my imagination in order to find contexts in my own history in which to place the emotions that the stories aroused. In this way my interviewees' stories generated new stories and new understandings about my life for me. Probyn (1993:148) describes the remembering of personal experience as a 'precondition for the capacity to articulate rhizomatic lines that touch and connect

[80] Narrative knowledge, according to Bruner (1986), is a distinct type of knowledge produced by a particular mode of thinking and is quite different to scientific knowledge which is produced by a paradigmatic, or logico-scientific, mode. Narrative processes of thought search for particular connections between events and are concerned with human intentions in contexts, with the aim of a holistic, yet specific, interpretation of phenomena. Paradigmatic thought processes are, by contrast, concerned with the general and search for universal truths with the aim of achieving a context-free explanation of phenomena Narrative knowledge is, therefore, interwoven with the phenomena it is knowledge 'about' whereas paradigmatic knowledge presents itself as distant from, and uncontaminated by, both the phenomena it explains and the methods its employs in order to arrive at that explanation. See McLeod (1997:28-39) for a developed discussion of Bruner's distinction between paradigmatic and narrative knowing.

with the aspirations of others'. Just as my interviewees were willing to remember and talk about their experiences in order to connect with others, my remembering enables me to find a way of creating an understanding of how they coped with their experiences. If stories, any stories, are beyond the imagination of the reader then they are incomprehensible, meaningless. hooks (1991:57) argues that 'the ability to be empathetic is rooted in our capacity to imagine'. Imagination is, therefore, an essential feature of telling, of listening to and of reading personal experience narratives and practising empathy by thinking imaginatively, as narrators, as readers and as researchers, enables 'a conscious gesture of solidarity' to be forged (hooks 1991:57).

'Natural' narratives vs. interview narratives

Finally, I want to address the issue of the validity of using of interview narratives as data in the light of Fludernik (1996)'s assertion that such material is not suitable for narrative analysis and in relation to my experiences of producing data. As discussed in the previous chapter, Fludernik's project in her book, ***Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*** (1996), is to find a way of enlarging the sphere of narratology so that it can encompass the diverse and uncategorisable range of literary texts that evade the rigid structuralist models of narratology. In order to do this she redefines narrative as 'narrativity' and rejects narratology's prioritisation of plot and event in favour of an emphasis on experientiality and consciousness as the essential constituents of narrative. I have discussed Fludernik's arguments for this redefinition in detail in chapter three in the context of my redefinition of the oral personal experience narrative. In this section I want to take issue with Fludernik's notion of the 'natural narrative' and her assertions about the invalidity of using narratives produced in an interview context as data for narrative analayis.

Fludernik (1996:76-77) disqualifies what she describes as 'solicited' interview narratives from the category of 'natural narrative' as, she says, they 'observe entirely different patterns of structure' to spontaneous narratives produced in conversation. Therefore, she argues, the use of these as data 'skews the patterns observable in spontaneous storytelling and is no reliable guide for their analysis'. If Fludernik is correct, that all interview narratives are radically different to 'natural narratives', then none of the oral narratives I am using are suitable for narrative analysis, in her terms. However I think that she makes an unjustifiably rigid distinction between what she terms 'spontaneous' and 'non-spontaneous' personal story-telling. She does this because, despite her radical reformulation of narrative, Fludernik is staying firmly within a structuralist notion of narrative. This prioritization of form works to exclude from the framework of 'natural narratology' texts produced in, what are for Fludernik, *un*natural contexts. While she concedes that 'mere reports', which exhibit zero-narrativity[81], can occur in 'natural' conversational contexts, and personal experience narratives, which exhibit full narrativity, can occur in interviews, she is nonetheless precious about the 'naturalness' of the context of narrative production. She argues that the vital dimension which is missing from 'long, elicited, stories' produced in an interview context is an interactive listener which means that turn-taking does not feature and this releases the speaker from 'the need to be relevant, or to be brief, or to provide a really good story.' (1996:76).

I suspect that what Fludernik means by 'a really good story' is one that conforms, structurally, to her ideal prototype, but, leaving that aside, she is surely wrong in assuming that just because the interviewer does not compete for the floor and therefore

[81] A 'mere report' is a description of a series of events with little, or no, evaluative comment by the narrator. Sandra's description of the acid-spraying incident discussed above may be regarded as an example of a 'mere report'.

turn-taking does not take place, the narration is monologic, taking place in a non-interactive environment which produces impoverished reports because the narrator need take no account of the listener. A dialogic approach to narrative, and to language in general, is much missed in this otherwise ground-breaking approach to narrative. As Gibson (1996:217) proposes, dynamic approaches to narrative are able to develop theories of reading which challenge the 'static geometry enjoined on us' by narratology and fine-tune narrative models 'with an acute sense of narrative as interaction'. I would add that a similar intervention by dialogic approaches to the activity of narration is needed in order for Fludernik's new narratology to do justice to the oral personal narratives she takes as prototypical of 'natural narratives'.

As discussed in detail in chapter two, personal experience narratives are produced in diverse contexts, all of which are dialogic. I can see no reason to assume, as Fludernik does, that turn-taking is vital to narrativity nor that the interactive dynamic between speaker and listener is at all reduced by the listener listening and not speaking and my own experience of data production backs this up. As described earlier in this chapter, my interviewees talked for hours, I was thoroughly involved in their narration and the evidence for this is not at all in what I said, which for most of the interview was very little indeed, but in my body language, our eye contact, my nods, back-channels, groans of sympathy, gasps of shock or surprise, and laughter. My behaviour was motivated by the polar opposite of the turn-taking scenario, as I continually encouraged them, without words, to keep talking.

Fludernik seems to assume that although 'natural spontaneous conversational storytellers' must be relevant, be brief and provide a really good story (1996:76), they are exempt from any other restraints on their narration, ignoring the power relations which always exists between self and other, as discussed in chapter two, and she is therefore unduly precious about certain kinds of data (spontaneous narratives produced in conversation) and correspondingly disparaging about other kinds (Studs Terkel's for example[82]). In view of this, it is strange that she uses many aspects of Labov's (1972) model of the personal experience narrative, which he developed from the analysis of the very interview narratives she believes 'skew' the structural patterns observable in 'natural' narratives. In support of her position on the inferiority of data produced in interviews, Fludernik refers to 'the interviewee's diffidence about what will interest the interviewer' because this uneasiness results in 'structural unevenness' (1996:76).

Firstly this only matters if structural evenness is what one is looking for, rather than accepting that narrative is not only activity but *inter*activity and as such is a dynamic process that resists static formalist models. Secondly, Fludernik is ignoring the fact that 'spontaneous' conversational partners may be just as uneasy as interviewees about what will interest the other and about what is appropriate to tell in any particular context. The only difference, perhaps, is that they might not say so in such a direct way (Is that what you wanted to know?) and consequently don't 'mess up' the text in the way that 'diffident' interviewees might. Such overt requests for reassurance need not be regarded as evidence of an unnatural situation which distorts narrative production, but rather as a clear expression of the interactive nature of storytelling, in any context. The women who asked Hall (1985) 'Is this what you want to know?', are understood by Langellier

[82] Terkel (1990) collected oral histories of World War II by interview.

and Peterson (1992:171) to be collaborating in 'point-making', which searches for and discovers relevant and interesting material rather than assuming that their stories are self-evidently important. Researchers who are willing to enter 'the realm of spinstorying as collaborators' (Langellier and Peterson 1992:177), need not be concerned that the data they produce in interviews will unsuitable for narrative analysis. It is not the 'naturalness' or 'unnaturalness' of the type of situation (conversation, interview, therapy) which determines the level of narrativity, as Fludernik claims, but rather the nature of the actual interactional context which will be characterised by a particular power relationship between participants, which may be adversarial or co-operative, with one or other of the participants having more or less control of the interaction at different moments. It is the dynamics of the interaction which will encourage or prohibit the telling of stories of personal experience not the presence or absence of turn-taking or a 'natural' conversational context.

In this chapter I have provided a (partial) history of the thesis by telling stories of my personal experience of the research process. These stories provide a context for the data which I am using to explore the relationship between narrative and coping with trauma. In addition I have attempted to make connections between my stories and methodological and ethical issues which are particularly relevant to research into other people's lives. In doing so I have described the operation of subjectivity in the research process in the two senses of self-reflexivity identified by Probyn (1993:62), as 'a metatheoretical reflection upon the activity of writing texts' and 'to name a phenomenological or experiential moment of interacting with others in the field'. Rather than using labels to claim an identity (I am a white, Western, working class, feminist researcher, aged 43) at the beginning and then plodding off 'into the usual

disembodied type of argument' (Probyn 1993:13), I have used my stories, which are open to multiple interpretations, in order to expose my subjectivity in operation and to convey a sense of what I feel about my data and how this must influence my approach to it. Finally, I have stressed the central role of imagination and fantasy at all stages in the research; from the initial imagined data, which eventually led me to a greater understanding of both narrative and coping, to the way in which using my imagination provides me with a way of understanding and connecting with the stories of my participants.

Probyn (1993:4) is surely correct when she says that 'as theorists we don't know what to do with our selves' and this is hardly surprising when there are no obvious, comfortable places from which to speak one's self within mainstream academic discourse. And the problem is, of course, much more complex than that. We cannot possibly tell, or know, all the ways in which our life histories, our beliefs and values, and our fears and fantasies inform our research, but what we *do* know, we can tell.

Chapter 5

Narrating the Impact of Trauma

> *When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else.*
>
> Atwood (1996:298)

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the beginning of a traumatic experience is narrated. The moment when a sudden, shocking event impacts on the normal, expected, experience of day-to-day living marks the point in time, for many narrators, when their lives are changed dramatically, often irrevocably. The detail of this moment holds, therefore, enormous significance both in terms of the sudden, shocking impact of the moment *and* for the experiences that follow it. As I shall show, it is, in many ways, the *defining* moment in the telling of trauma.

The first section is concerned with narrating suddenness in relation to the impact of traumatic experience. The telling of the onset of unexpected experience seems to require the narration of a contrasting equilibrium which means that the, normally non-narratable[83], mundane experiences of life become not only narratable but also highly significant in conveying both the impact of the trauma and a sense of the life that is thrown into turbulence. I explore these ideas through a discussion of Wooffitt's (1992) identification of the formulation 'I was just doing X ...when Y' in the telling of paranormal experience. This formulation sets unexpected experience in a context of normal, mundane, experience and, Wooffitt argues, functions in specific ways.

[83] See chapter 2:72-76 where the idea of narratable and non-narratable experience is introduced and discussed in detail.

I investigate this formulation in narratives of traumatic experience and, as a development of Wooffitt's ideas, I offer suggestions which explain why the 'X when Y' formulation is so prevalent in narratives of personal experience. These suggestions are based on aspects of the nature of narrative discussed earlier in the thesis and are further developed here through the analysis of specific narratives of traumatic impact, in four sub-sections of section one.

In the second section of the chapter I use Turner's (1986) notion of 'liminality' and talk about the narration of a liminal zone of experience in narratives of traumatic impact. This is a place of desperation, the threshold between equilibrium and disequilibrium, where the narrated self strives to make benign meanings out of the events which are unfolding. This, all too transient, zone of liminal experience is comprised of imaginary stories which the narrated self tells itself in order to try to maintain equilibrium in spite of the turbulence which is becoming ever more apparent. The liminal zone is characterised by a confusion of disbelief, imagination and intense desire; feelings which are only partially defeated where the zone ends and the narrated self crosses the threshold into full traumatic impact.

I then go on to argue, in the third section, that the 'X when Y' formulation and the liminal zone in narratives of trauma are related to the injustice of traumatic experience and I discuss these ideas in relation to Janoff-Bulman's 'shattered assumptions' theory of trauma. My analysis of the linguistic construction of helplessness and passivity in the narration of traumatic impact and my reading of the stories of the liminal zone sections finds support for this psychological theory. The 'shattered assumptions' theory suggests that survivors of traumatic experience must rebuild these assumptions in order

to live a 'normal' life again. I argue that this involves a process of narration that can reintegrate past, present and future and provide an example of what may happen when narrative *fails* to incorporate an extremely traumatic experience within the ongoing life story of a survivor.

Finally I suggest that the specific way in which the moment of traumatic impact is narrated is closely related to the narration of the ongoing experiences in the aftermath of trauma and, crucially, to coping strategies and meaning-making. These ideas are then taken up in detail in the following three chapters, according to following model of the narrative of trauma:

Chapter 5		Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8
X liminal zone	**Y**	**numbness, madness retraumatisation**	**narrative meaning-making**	**resolutions**
equilibrium=> turbulence=>		disequilibrium=>	action=> intervention =>	restoration of modified version of equilibrium

'I was just doing X ... when Y'

Wooffitt (1992) analyses oral narratives of paranormal experience, 'tales of the unexpected', and identifies a range of linguistic features and devices which function to organise these accounts in specific ways. The particular feature I want to look at in this section is the two-part formulation 'I was just doing X ... when Y' which occurs, Wooffitt finds, when speakers reach the part of their narrative where they recall their first encounter with the anomaly they are reporting (Wooffitt 1992:117). 'X' in this formulation is the narration of the mundane circumstances in which 'Y', the unexpected, occurs. An example of this formulation in relation to the narration of

paranormal experience would be, 'I was just sitting at my desk, reading a book (X) when a ghostly figure appeared (Y)'.

Wooffitt notes that this formulation is not only used in the telling of paranormal experience but also occurs in the telling of traumatic experience and he critically considers two different explanations for the prevalence of the two part formulation in the telling of unexpected events. The first is a cognitive psychological explanation based on the notion of 'flashbulb' memories (Brown and Kulik 1977 cited by Wooffitt 1992:121) whereby the impact of an unexpected event triggers 'a neural mechanism ... which automatically registers and records, not only the stimulus event, but also any other information being processed at the same time, such as routine, everyday activities' (Wooffitt 1992:121). Hence, the brain (here described as operating like a video camera and an information processing machine with a computer-like memory storage facility) automatically records and stores the extraneous details of the context of the traumatic impact which become part of the traumatic memory and, incidentally, accompany the telling of the traumatic experience. Wooffitt puts forward two arguments against this explanation. Firstly it fails to account for the 'X when Y' formulation when Y was not recognised as an unusual, unexpected, or traumatic happening at the time it occurred but only became so in retrospect, and secondly it fails to account for the contingent relations between the two parts of the formulation. That is, the detail of the X component is not a random snapshot of what happened to be going on at the time of Y but is a selection of detail which is directly related to the detail of Y. The 'flashbulb' memory theory is based on an information-processing model of the mind, a model which is rejected by theorists who take a narrative approach to memory and to the notion of reality[84]. As I

[84] See Ochs and Capps (1996) for an extensive list of such theorists.

argued in chapter one, memories are not frozen snapshots of a past reality but are already narrative versions of past experience. I illustrated this argument by means of my life story cycle, which shows how stories *become* the past experience as it can be known. This explains, in my view, why the apparently extraneous details of the context of unexpected events are recalled so clearly. Wooffitt notes that aspects of the 'I was just doing X... when Y' format were first recorded by psychologists studying recollections of political assassinations and were cited as evidence of cognitive, psychological processes a century ago (Colegrove 1899, cited by Wooffitt 1992:121). Today, we know that many people remember exactly what they were doing when they heard that President Kennedy had been assassinated or when they heard that Princess Diana had died in a car accident. However, this is not, in my view, because this detail was 'burned' onto their brains by the shock of the news, but because, in the immediate aftermath of these events, they talked to other people and exchanged stories of the experience of hearing the news. In this way the context of hearing the news is *part* of the story of their experience of the unexpected event and it is the story, not the isolated event, that is remembered.

The second explanation that Wooffitt considers is provided by Neisser (1982) who also rejects the neurophysiological/cognitive approach, and argues that narrators are simply following a cultural storytelling convention which determines how events should be described. Wooffitt argues, on the grounds of the contingency between the two parts of the formulation, that Neisser's proposal that narrators are *only* engaging in a ritual activity fails to account for the 'meshing' between the two parts of the format (Wooffitt 1992:125). Wooffitt then goes on to show precisely how the 'X when Y' formulation functions in narratives of paranormal experience and concludes that it is used

pragmatically by narrators in order to highlight the contrast between the normal and the paranormal and to emphasise both the veracity of their experience and their reliability as the narrators of that experience. In a similar vein, I shall analyse examples of the 'X when Y' formulation from my data in order to see how it functions in narratives of traumatic experience. In addition, I want to make some suggestions about why this formulation is a convention of narrative.

In chapter two I proposed a continuum of experiences whereby narratable experience is framed by two poles of non-narratable experience:

everyday		**unusual**		**mildly**		**very**		**extremely**
ordinary	>>	**unexpected**	>>	**traumatic**	>>	**traumatic**	>>	**traumatic**
experience		**experience**		**experience**		**experience**		**experience**

non-narratable ---------- **narratable** ---------- **non-narratable**

(Chap 2:30 fig 3)

In this section I want to show how the two, diametrically opposed, types of non-narratable experience are, and indeed must be, brought together in the narration of an extremely traumatic experience. Narrators who have experienced extremely traumatic events tell their different experiences in diverse ways but all are subject to the same pressures exerted by the time/narrative relationship and the story structure which frames their telling of their lives.

As illustrated by the above figure, in order to be 'narratable' experience must be unusual in some way because the mundane, everyday experience of life is, literally, unremarkable. So, we would expect the Y component to occur in most, if not all,

personal experience narratives because 'X' on its own, 'sitting at my desk, reading a book' is not narratable. It only becomes narratable when followed by 'Y', 'a ghostly figure appeared'. Listeners very often provide an encouraging backchannel, 'mm hm', after an X component indicating that they expect a Y component to follow an X component (Wooffitt 1992:137). The question becomes, therefore, can Y be narrated without X? Can unusual, unexpected experience be narrated without being set in a context of usual, mundane experience?

One way of answering this, as Neisser (1982) proposes, is simply to say that it is a narrative convention to provide a setting for stories as a form of orientation for the listener and, of course, models of narrative structure reflect this convention. The orientation element of Labov's (1972) six part model of narrative, discussed in detail in chapter three, functions to respond to the questions 'who, when, what or where?' and the answers to these questions can be regarded as constituting the X component (I was just sitting at my desk). Similarly Stein and Glenn's (1979) structure of narrative begins with 'a setting category' which 'introduces the main characters and describes the social, physical and temporal context in which the remainder of the story occurs' (Stein and Glenn 1979:59). However, to regard the formulation as *merely* a storytelling convention is to offer a description rather than an explanation of the prevalence of 'X when Y', and, as Wooffitt argues, it does not help to account for the contingent relations between the detail of the X component and the detail of the Y component in any specific narrative. Nor does it fully account for the *ordinariness* of the X component, an ordinariness which may be constructed 'in spite of the emotive and traumatic circumstances at the time' (Wooffitt 1992:127).

Three of the aspects of narrative I have discussed in this thesis are particularly relevant to an explanation of why the telling of the extraordinary requires the telling of the ordinary (Y requires X just as X requires Y): Propp's basic story structure of equilibrium disturbed, the dialogic nature of the personal experience narrative and Ricoeur's three-fold mimesis. In the next three sub-sections I will recap on, and further develop, these.

Equilibrium disturbed

In chapter one, I defined narrative as a text which realises a story and discussed the way in which stories typically follow a basic pattern:

equilibrium=>turbulence=>disequilibrium=>action=>intervention=>
restoration of modified version of equilibrium

Propp ([1928] 1968 see Chap 2:26)

Equilibrium is provided by the X component, in the formulation identified by Wooffitt, as this makes turbulence possible. Quite simply, if there is nothing to be disturbed how can turbulence and the ensuing disequilibrium be narrated? And what is to be restored, albeit modified, if equilibrium is not narrated? Stories cannot only be concerned with intrinsically narratable experience (the unexpected - Y) they must, according to the conventional pattern by which we recognise a story, include the narration of, normally, non-narratable, experience (the mundane - X). Thus, the convention of setting unexpected events in the context of mundane life is not simply a device for beginning a story but has a crucial function in relation to the story as a whole.

This convention of story-telling does not mean that any specific narrative must follow the restricted chronological pattern (X then Y) in its actual linguistic construction. However, the story that is realised by the narrative will conform to this cognitive

construction of disturbed equilibrium. The following extracts, taken from my interviews with Janice, Ann, and Maggie, illustrate the way in which X and Y components, whether long or short, single or multiple, chronologically ordered or not, realise a story which conforms to the equilibrium followed by disequilibrium pattern, XY. I have added my interpretation of the way in which X is functioning in each case:

Extract 1

1. a friend in Birmingham whose husband had a heart attack and
2. died (Y) while she was out shopping (X)

J 6:275-276

YX narrative realises XY story achieved through the use of the conjunction 'while'. Also, it may be noted that in this example the X component is split off from the orientation element (a friend in Birmingham). In this way, it can be seen that there are two different kinds of orientation operating. The first (a friend in Birmingham) answers the questions 'who?' and 'where?' as per the Labovian model and orients the listener to who this story is about. The second ('while she was out shopping') conforms to Wooffitt's argument about the ordinariness of the X component and orients the listener to what, precisely, the friend was doing at the time of Y.

Extract 2

1. we actually had lots of happy times and we didn't we weren't
2. sort of fighting or whatever (X) as I say my husband just he
3. got into this psychotherapy thing (X) and he just he just went
4. [off with another woman] (Y) it was just we were married for
5. sixteen years and it was just you know we were married as
6. students (X) and that was quite traumatic it was a very sudden
7. thing it was very sudden

J 20: 1074-1080

XXYX narrative realises XY story. Here the first X component emphasises positive aspects of the relationships (lots of happy times) and a lack of negative aspects (we weren't ... fighting) which, together with the second X component (he *just* got into this psychotherapy thing), increases the impact of Y (he just went). A third X component then re-affirms the impact by emphasising the length of the relationship from which 'he just went'. The story ends with an external evaluation (Labov 1972, see chapter 3:94) which explicitly states the sudden and, therefore traumatic, nature of what happened.

Extract 3

1. and erm what happened we had Michael and again we
2. was the complete happy family everything was
3. wonderful (X) and then he had the whooping cough
4. injection and he came home and he started going into
5. fits and things (Y)

A 3:1342-136

XY narrative realises XY story. The X component is characterised by the use of superlatives (the *complete* happy family ... *everything* was *wonderful*). Pomerantz (1986) refers to exaggerations and the use of superlatives as 'extreme case formulations' which function to legitimate claims. In this extract a 'perfect' normality (X) is constructed by extreme case formulations and these function to increase, and verify, the severity of the disruption caused by Y.

Extract 4

1. and you know we were chatting and sort of passing
2. the time of day (X) and then she (almost Y) (.) and
3. I had no idea she didn't I didn't know from the tone
4. that it was serious news or anything (X) and then
5. all of a sudden she sort of (almost Y) after we'd
6. been laughing and joking (X) she sort of said that
7. you know she'd got some bad news and had I heard
8. that John and Stella's daughter had been killed
9. and that she'd been murdered (Y)

M 4:179-186

X(-Y)X(-Y)XY narrative realises XY story. In this example Maggie seems to begin to move from X to Y twice (lines 2 and 5) but instead of doing so, adds more detail or explanation to the X component in order to further emphasise the incongruity between the two components (laughing and joking/death and murder) thereby increasing the shock of Y. Wooffitt (1992:144) refers to this elaboration of the X component as an extended state formulation, whereby speakers disrupt the device by inserting material between the X and Y components. In this extract, the insertions provide extra information which emphasises the incongruity between the components. This enables Maggie to convey how very unprepared she was for the news of the death of her goddaughter. In addition, the traumatic impact of the Y component in Maggie's narration is incremental; the first shocking news is that Anna has been killed and this is followed by the news that she was murdered.

It can be seen that no matter how the X and Y components are organised in the narratives, in each case an XY story is realised. These examples also illustrate some of the ways in which X components function to construct a state of equilibrium within the

telling of the moment of trauma. In the case of Janice and Maggie, in particular, this is equilibrium of a very specific type. It is characterised by a context-specific type of 'not knowing' which meant that they were in a particular state of unpreparedness for what followed. This unpreparedness relates directly to the type of disequilibrium which follows, and presents, therefore, detailed and specific reasons for their inability to anticipate the occurrence of Y. In this way their experience of the impact of the unexpected is narrated in a way that would not be possible if only a bland, unrelated state of calm was conveyed by the X component.

'Ordinariness' and the function of 'just'

It is interesting to note, as Wooffitt does, that X components can convey a sense of routine activity, of 'ordinariness', in the telling of the circumstances which are anything but ordinary. The 'X when Y' formulation in Ruth's narrative of the car accident in which she was badly burned provides an example of this:

1. I was just in the car and going and that that was
2. basically it (X) erm the car went off the road (Y)

R 1/2:47-49

Immediately before saying this, however, Ruth described the extremely emotional state she was in at the time the car went off the road. This makes it clear that she was anything but *just* in the car, as normal:

1. had an horrendous row with my ex-husband early one
2. morning it was about seven o'clock in the morning and I just
3. took off I just jumped in the car and I was so angry you know
4. it's like I'm going you you've gone I've had enough I'm I'm
5. going and I just went along Leicester Road straight up towards
6. Manley Park at such a speed and the anger you know the real
7. sort of anger and the frustration of it all and I mean I I really
8. just didn't see it it wasn't you know I wasn't clear what was
9. happening

R 1:38-47

The sense of routine 'ordinariness', 'I was just in the car' that can be conveyed by the XY formulation in the narration of circumstances that are *extra*ordinary suggests that the XY, equilibrium disturbed, structure is extremely powerful and is invoked even when it does not fit the story being told. The formulation arises in part, therefore, from the strong influence that story structure has on the telling of experience. However, it also functions in very specific ways within narratives of traumatic experience. In Wooffitt's interpretation, the adverb 'just' in the X component 'I was just doing X' constructs a state of 'conspicuous blandness' which may gloss over the emotive, traumatic nature of the circumstances and he uses examples of this as further evidence against the 'flashbulb' memory explanation. However, the adverb 'just' does more than construct a state of routine ordinariness and, I suggest, its other effects override the function identified by Wooffitt. In the extract above, the adverb 'just' (lines 2,3 and 8) helps to construct the narrated self as out of control and rendered helpless by the 'anger and frustration of it all' (line 7). 'Just' also occurs frequently in Janice's XXYX narrative of the break up of her marriage, discussed above, in which Janice lacks agency and her husband 'just' does things:

1. we actually had lots of happy times and we didn't we weren't
2. sort of fighting or whatever (X) as I say my husband **just** he
3. got into this psychotherapy thing (X) and he **just** he **just** went
4. [off with another woman] (Y) it was **just** we were married for
5. sixteen years and it was **just** you know we were married as
6. students (X) and that was quite traumatic it was a very sudden
7. thing it was very sudden

J 20: 1074-1080

Let us consider the effect of the repeated use of the word 'just' in the following extract from Denise's pregnancy test story:

1. cos the worst thing I didn't want to watch it actually appear I'd
2. rather just know straight away and so I turned it against the
3. wall and just sat there and when I looked at it you know it was

4. just positive it was just a complete shock

Denise 1:3-7

External evaluation, 'cos the worst thing' and 'it was just a complete shock', frames this short narrative of waiting to see the result of a pregnancy test. This narrative realises a subtly different story if the word 'just' is removed:

> I didn't want to watch it actually appear I'd rather know straight away and so I turned it against the wall and sat there and when I looked at it you know it was positive

There is a sense of agency and control in this second version that is, relatively, absent in the first within which 'just' creates a sense of passivity, 'I just sat there', and helplessness, 'it was just positive'. In this way, the repeated use of 'just' seems to enable Denise to narrate the experience of feeling of helpless, disempowered and shocked, feelings that she undoubtedly recalls feeling at the time, even though the narrative of events, minus the evaluative 'just', realises a story of considerably more agency and choice. In Quirk et al.'s (1985:567) comprehensive grammar, 'just' is an intensifying[85] subjunct (an adverbial with a subordinate role) which can either amplify or diminish a verb Capps and Ochs (1995:407) describe the word 'just' as a weakening adverb which grammatically constructs helplessness and they also note that it can function in two ways; as an intensifer, for example 'I'm just DY::ING' or a deintensifier, for example ' just thinking', depending on the type of verb to which it is attached and the way the phrase is said (Capps and Ochs 1995:421). The phrase 'I was just in the car' in Rose's narrative serves to de-intensify the circumstances of the car accident, whereas 'it was just a complete shock' in Denise's narrative, intensifies the shock. In each case, however, passivity and helplessness are constructed and a lack of

[85] 'The term 'intensifier' does not refer only to the means whereby an *increase* in intensification is expressed – rather, an intensifying subjunct indicates a point on an abstractly conceived intensity scale and the point indicated may be relatively low or relatively high' (Quirk et al. 1985:589).

agency is conveyed. The significance of the construction of a lack of agency, by the use of 'just', in narratives of trauma becomes clearer when it is considered in relation to the injustice of traumatic experience and I shall return to the use of this adverb again in my discussion of injustice in the third section of this chapter.

In these two sub-sections, I have explored and developed some aspects of the 'X when Y' formulation, identified by Wooffitt, and argued that it is related to the typical structure of stories and functions in specific ways in the telling of traumatic impact. The XY, equilibrium disturbed, structure of stories also enables narrators to convey a sense of the life which is thrown into turbulence by the trauma and this aspect of the telling of traumatic impact is explored in the next sub-section.

The dialogic nature of the personal experience narrative

In this section I want to develop my analysis beyond the use of the actual words 'I was just doing X, when Y' to look at more extended examples of the general XY structure in narratives of traumatic impact. The X component, which may be short or very long, constructs the necessary equilibrium, the 'ordinary' life before traumatic impact, and therefore provides a sense of the life that was thrown into disequilibrium. To use a theatrical analogy, the story of the trauma is told against this backdrop of equilibrium and it is in relation to this that both the extent of the impact and the possibility, or impossibility, of a restoration of a modified version of equilibrium is narrated. In addition, as discussed in detail in chapter two, the telling of personal experience always involves rewriting the self and the composition of complex relationships: between the narrating I and the narrated self, and between the narrating I and the listener(s). The narration of the impact of trauma realises, therefore, a particular story in which the

central character, the narrated self, is constituted by the narrating I. In this way, the 'XY' structure 'stitches' (Hall 1991:11) the narrated self into the experience of trauma at the same time as it functions to contextualise the experience of trauma within the life story of the narrating I. Narrators are simultaneously generating and positioning themselves in relation to the experience *and* in relation to their audience. In contexts where narrator and listener(s) are strangers, as was the case in the interviews I conducted, the telling of the pre-trauma equilibrium is particularly crucial as it enables narrators to tell something of themselves and their lives before the trauma. As they tell of their 'ordinary', pre-trauma, life, narrators are able to convey 'this is who I am', 'this is the sort of life I live' and, crucially, 'this is why my traumatic experience affects me in the *particular* way it does'. As always, narrators make choices about what to tell and how to tell it in order to convey a particular sense of self within a specific interactive context.

In this section I look closely at the dialogic aspects of some pre-trauma sections of Ann's narrative and at those within a narrative told during a radio interview within which the interviewer, clearly recognising the necessity of the XY structure, explicitly invites the narrator to convey something of his life before the traumatic experience.

As discussed in chapter four, Ann's narrative covered many different life experiences and was structured chronologically, from her childhood to the present day. The first thing she told me concerned the way she was treated by her mother when she was a child:

1. ... I'm a twin and my mother hated me and loved my
2. twin and always made me feel different and what I
3. know now to be physical abuse I didn't know then and
4. my mam used to beat me up with sticks and anything
5. all sorts black and blue only me and not her ...

A 1:1-6

And about this relationship today:

... that sort of emotional abuse which she's still capable of now but I'm not frightened of her any more but she's been a she hasn't been a mother to me she hasn't been anything to me erm very lonely old woman now and wants me to come to her and I can't

A 1 14-9

In the following extracts, which function to provide a background to the death of her son, Ann talks about herself as a mother in a way which contrasts sharply with the way she has described her own mother:

we did start a family planned family and when she came along we was so happy you know there's something and I know we've we both felt so happy about this baby

W: this is your daughter

A: mm and oh I made such a god of her you know like she cried and I had to pick her up and er I never put her down really and it was the first time I felt er I I could love in a in a funny way I don't know and for years and a few years I made a god of nappies apple pies ******** and we was so happy we really were and then erm we decided to have another one cos I didn't want too much of a gap ...

A 3:113-128

...and erm what happened we had Michael and again we was the complete happy family everything was wonderful and then he had the whooping cough injection and he came home and he started going into fits and things...

A 3:132-136

he was er it brain damaged him to a degree and each time not severely but every time he had a fit it put more scar tissue on his brain and then I had years and years and years of speech therapy and co-ordination drugs that made him over active sat him on the washing machine while I'm trying to do me washing and peel the potatoes and it was like a massive twenty four hour day job ...

A 3:146-153

... Alison was a very difficult teenager where Michael wasn't Michael was very so easy you know he used to tap me on the head and say me little mum cos he was bigger than me and

36. he used to say things like I'll look after you when you're old he
37. he was loving and kind and special and he you know he I'd
38. worked so hard to get him normal so hard nobody knows and
39. he was pretty close to normal when he got killed ...

A 4/5:213-220

In telling this history, the background to the death of Michael, Ann tells me many things about herself and her life . The addition of 'planned family' (line 11), seems to be connected to something she said earlier in the interview: 'and then I got married didn't have to' (A 1:19-20). In this way, Ann clearly distinguishes herself from people who 'have to' get married (because the woman is pregnant) and those who have families by accident rather than by choice. In addition, Ann says they 'decided to have another one' because she 'did not want too much of a gap' (lines 20-21). The inclusion of this information suggests to me that Ann feels a sense of pride about these acts of agency and that having choices and making decisions are significant aspects of what she wants to convey to me about herself.

The external evaluation 'it was the first time I felt er I I could love in a in a funny way I don't know' (lines 17-18) within the story of mothering her baby daughter, invites me to consider again the enduring effect her own childhood experiences have had on her and also connects to an earlier comment about her marriage: 'so I met husband now er didn't love him I do now but I didn't love him and I just saw it was just my way out to at seventeen to get married' (A 1 29-30). Again, agency is stressed here as Ann chooses to marry for practical rather than emotional reasons.

Ann's devotion to her children and the unstinting hard work she put into being a mother to Michael, 'it was like a massive twenty four hour day job' (lines 31-32) are balanced, even rewarded, in this story by a reversal of roles 'he used to tap me on the head and say

my little mum cos he was bigger than me' (lines 34-35), and by a future story told by Michael 'and he used to say things like I'll look after you when you're old' (line 36). In addition, Michael's loving care for Ann, his elderly mother in this future story, contrasts sharply to Ann's attitude towards her own mother 'very lonely old woman now and wants me to come to her and I can't' (lines 9-10). I shall return to this extract and to the issue of the destruction of a particular imaginary future in section three when I consider the injustice of trauma. In this section I want to further explore the construction, and destruction, of agency in Ann's self-narrative.

The emphasis on agency and on control over her life in Ann's presentation of her self in the early sections of her narrative is in sharp contrast to the pattern of the rest of the interview. Ann talked about a number of traumatic experiences but the most major trauma was the death of her son. Her narration of this and much of the remainder of her talk is punctuated by a series of 'just X when Y' type formulations and a recurrent use of the phrase 'all of a sudden':

> and then all of a sudden got a phone call from my daughter
> A 7:346-347

> and then all of a sudden there was this great big display in the middle for some reason
> A 8:545-546

> and then all of a sudden this is what hurt me I was I wasn't ready for what Alison put at me next
> A 14 706-707

> but the only thing that really upset me was all of a sudden I'm coping with I don't mean it in a selfish way but I've got to be this brick for everybody and I'm I'm there I've always been the brick and all of a sudden I'm having to hold everybody together I'm having to (.) be this miracle person feeling the way I do
> A 15:765-770

> and then all of a sudden we'd got to leave it
> A 18:965

and all of a sudden I'm I'm sort of like faced with the baby them living with us the baby er that I wasn't ready for

A 19:995-997

In these extracts, the narrated self is consistently placed in 'nonagentive roles' which are, say Capps and Ochs (1995:419), the most obvious grammatical strategy for conveying helplessness. The narrated self is either a passive recipient (got a phone call, was put at, is faced with) or is compelled to do something (have got to be this brick, having to hold everybody together, having to be this miracle person, had got to leave). The phrase 'all of a sudden', note both Wooffitt (1991) and Capps and Ochs (1995), marks the transition from a normal to an abnormal condition. In Ann's narrative, the story of the most major trauma of her life, the death of Michael, is followed by a series of experiences each of which involve a transition from equilibrium to disequilibrium, explicitly marked by the phrase 'all of a sudden' and by grammatical constructions that deprive the narrated self of agency and power. In this way Ann's narrative shifts from a story in which the narrated self (having survived early victimisation and abuse) exercises agency, power and choice, to a story which, through a relentless traumatisation and disempowerment of the self, attests to the endless impact of trauma. Towards the end of the interview, Ann asks, 'will it ever end will it all this ever end or is it going to happen to me forever if I could see light at the end of the tunnel ...' (A 34/35:1832-1834).

Exploring the dialogic functions of the XY, equilibrium disturbed, sections of Ann's narrative has led some considerable way into understanding the complexity of the linguistic construction of traumatic impact. It has also opened up the possibility of a range of interpretations of these sections in which Ann narrates herself to me, the sympathetic stranger, and how she, the narrating I, positions and repositions her

(narrated) self in relation to the impact of traumatic experience. Before moving on to a third dimension of the equilibrium disturbed, XY, structure of narratives of trauma, I want to briefly consider another illustration of the dialogic function of the narration of pre-trauma equilibrium in a narrative which is quite different to Ann's, both in terms of content and form.

In the following example, taken from a radio programme, it is the interviewer, not the narrator, who controls the way the story is told and he clearly recognises the crucial dialogic function of the XY structure within the relationship between interviewee and radio audience. The radio programme, 'The Choice', is comprised of extended interviews with individuals who have had to make difficult choices in their lives. The interviewee, Steven Owens, is taking part in the programme because, following the death of his son in a hit and run road traffic accident, he decided to take revenge on the driver of the lorry that had knocked his son off his bike. This extract is taken from the beginning of the interview:

I: Steven Owens was unable to come to terms with his pain and loss when he'd exhausted all appeal routes through the legal system he put a terrible plan into action it had been in his head for the best part of two years he decided that if he was to get justice for his son he would have to take the law into his own hands (.) Steven what sort of state were you and your family in at that particular moment

S: I think er we'd gone to the bottom of a pit I mean we'd been through all sorts of emotions and er obviously our son was killed and erm this guy had been laughing in the face of the legal system and er aughing at us and there was there was no obvious way ahead for us er to recover or get back to anything like normal erm

I: what was this doing to you

S: well our marriage was virtually dead erm I I was sort of broken as a man I think erm thinking about what the man should do in a family situation to protect his children erm and

my wife was just er er at a complete loss because her her child had gone you know we had we had another son who who was a little bit older at the time but he was off out most of the time but he couldn't really talk about it

I: how depressed did you get

S: well my wife had actually talked about suicide and er I er didn't know what to say to her I felt the same but erm I didn't actually tell her that but er I just felt inside that there was no point in going on er at that time you know I just wanted to burst I wanted something to happen you know something positive to happen er I just felt so low

I: you were right at the bottom

S: mm

I: what what sort of family had you been before the accident

S: well I I I'm from east London and we'd moved out to to Kent to start a business erm a man and a wife and two children er normal sort of people normal everyday things two sons who were involved in helping in running the business basically because it was er er furniture shop and there was always something to do for the lads there you know and we was looking forward to the future expanding the business and perhaps one or two of the boys to come into the business

I: and then one day one moment one fraction of a second it all changed

S: yeah it was er Friday the 13th October 1989 and er we were all working in the shop I I was out delivering some furniture and er I I wanted to take my young son with me he'd just come home from school er my wife wanted him to do an errand for her and er I went off on my own I waited for him for a little while actually before I went and when I came back my eldest son came to meet me he he was in a terrible state he er was crying and er he said that Darren had been killed

Lines 1-30 of this transcript are concerned with the interviewee's experiences in the period of time between the death of his son and his attempt to kill the person he held responsible. This section provides the context, the X component, within which Steven attempts to kill someone (Y) and it is this event that is the major focus of the interview. Steve presents himself as 'sort of broken as a man' (lines 15-16), alienated from his

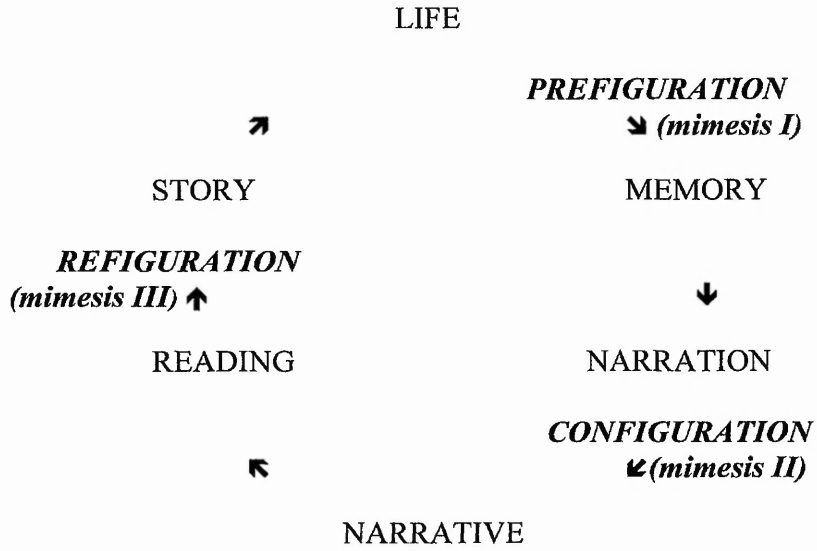
wife and his remaining child, and desperate to act in order to restore some equilibrium: 'there was no obvious way ahead for us er to recover or get back to anything like normal' (lines 11-13), 'I just wanted to burst I wanted something to happen you know something positive to happen' (lines 26-28).

The interviewer then explicitly invites Steven to convey something of himself and his family prior to the accident, that is to narrate the 'normal', the equilibrium, that he is so desperate to restore (line 31). In the context of this interview, within which Steven explains how and why he attempted to murder someone, the interviewer clearly recognises the important dialogic function of this XY structure, in the story of his son's death, as well as in the main story. Without it, listeners may well have difficulty identifying, and sympathising, with Steven. Steven provides the necessary X component, the 'ordinary' life before the traumatic experience, in lines 32-39, and explains that they were 'normal sort of people', 'a man and a wife and two children' doing 'everyday things'. In addition he says that 'we was looking forward to the future' and provides a future story in which his sons grow up and work in the family business. The interviewer retains control of the interview and invites Steven to go on to the story of his son's death. Steven talks about an ordinary day, 'we were all working in the shop' (lines 42-43) (X), which is thrown into turbulence by the news that Darren had been killed (Y). Before completing the X when Y formulation, Steve inserts another possible, imaginary, story. This time it is an alternative version of events, which could have happened but didn't, 'I wanted to take my young son with me' (line 44). As mentioned above, these imaginary stories, of the past and the future, will be referred to again in section three of this chapter. I want to turn now to Ricoeur's hermeneutical

approach to narrative which is connected to the idea of imaginary stories and provides a third dimension to the relevance of the XY structure in narratives of trauma.

Ricoeur's three mimetic moments

In my exploration into the nature of narrative in chapter one I used Ricoeur's work on time and narrative, particularly his notion of the three-fold present and his conception of three mimetic moments through which narrative enables us follow '*the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time*' (1984:54). I mapped Ricoeur's three mimetic moments on to my life story cycle in order to illustrate the way in which prefiguration, configuration and refiguration can be applied to my model of the life story relationship:



Life-story cycle as mimetic process (Chap 1:36 fig. 2)

The dynamic process of configuration, says Ricoeur (1984:65), exercises an integrating and a mediating function which extends beyond its own dimensions (the episodic and the configurational) as it also mediates between the 'preunderstanding' and the

'postunderstanding of the order of action'. In other words, the process of configuration, which 'grasps together' or emplots episodes into a story, also 'grasps together', or integrates, the processes of prefiguration (anticipation/ expectation/ imagination) and refiguration (reading/interpretation/knowing).

Imagination and desire are essential components of each moment in the cyclical dynamic of the life/story relationship. An essential part of the activity of living involves our ability to 'pre-figure', to imagine and anticipate future experience, because it is on the basis of this pre-understanding that experience will be mediated (configured by narrative), and refigured (known and understood) as a story. Indeed, according to Ricoeur we live our lives in search of narrative because human experience has a 'pre-narrative' quality:

> *It is due to this* [pre-narrative quality of human experience] *that we are justified in speaking of life as a story in its nascent state, and so of life as an* ***activity and a passion in search of a narrative'***
>
> Ricoeur (1991:29, emphasis in the original)

Thinking about the life/story relationship in this way, as a hermeneutical, mimetic process, brings experience, time and imagination *together* in a way which enables the subtle complexity of the, apparently straightforward, convention of setting extraordinary experience in the context of ordinary experience to be fully appreciated. Pre-figuration (mimesis I), says Ricoeur, is concerned with the conditions which make it possible to imitate or represent action and, of course, pre-figuration, which belongs within the 'pre-history' of an event, arises from what we know and understand of life, *through the stories* of our past experiences:

> *The pre-history of the story is what connects it up to a vaster whole and gives it a background. This background is made up of the living imbrication of all lived stories.'*
>
> Ricoeur (1991:30).

It follows, therefore, that the narration of traumatic experience, and indeed the telling of all 'tales of the unexpected', will include the 'pre-history' of the story, not only in order to orient the listener, to convey the equilibrium which is disturbed, to provide a sense of the self and life of the narrator, and to generate and position narrated and narrating selves in relation to the trauma, but also, and more fundamentally, because it is the process of pre-figuration, anticipating, which *makes it possible* to narrate experience in the specific way in which it is narrated. That is, the narration of the pre-understanding of the experience, or the 'pre-history' of the story, determines how the story of that experience will be told. I am not suggesting that Ricoeur's notion of prefiguration, which is a subtle expansion of the *sense* of mimesis, can be simplistically equated either with his notion of the 'pre-history' of a story or, even more concretely, with the X component of narrative. Rather I am arguing that unexpected events are set in a context of ordinary, expected life because the narration of the time of a specific prefiguration is *part* of the narration of the unexpected, not an optional extra. Of course, the actual traumatic experience was *not* prefigured, this is what makes it traumatic, but experience of some kind *was* prefigured and the destiny of this prefigured time is followed, configured and refigured *together with* the traumatic experience.

The story of traumatic experience does not begin, therefore, when that experience began but rather with the possibility, or impossibility, of expecting, anticipating, or imagining that experience, within which a range of other experiences may have been imagined or expected. We live with the present of past things and the present of future things in the three-fold present and we are always, therefore, consciously or unconsciously, anticipating, through imagination, what will happen in the future,

whether that concerns the next few moments, days, weeks or years. Of course the confidence we have in our ability to predict what will happen may depend on how far one is looking ahead. The extent to which an experience could not have been anticipated or imagined is the extent to which it is unexpected, unbelievable, shocking or traumatic. Towards the end of this chapter I will discuss an example of extremely traumatic experience which was, and may remain, non-narratable. However, *if* an experience is narrated, no matter how bizarre, shocking, unbelievable or traumatic it is, the process of pre-figuration, during the pre-history of the story, will be narrated even, perhaps especially, when it is narrated as a complete lack of the possibility of anticipating or pre-understanding the experience. The prefiguration of a story of traumatic impact, involves, explicitly or implicitly, what one expected to happen and it is against this expected, anticipated experience that the actual experience is evaluated and experienced. In other words, the narration of the experience of traumatic impact involves a comparison between prefigured experience and actual experience, i.e. between what was, or could have been, *expected* to happen and what *did* happen. And it is from within this comparative relationship between the real and the imaginary that the story of traumatic experience emerges. As we shall see in the next chapter, the detail of the specific and unique comparison within any particular narration of the moment of traumatic impact pervades the narration of the ongoing experience of trauma and, crucially, the narrative meaning-making process. In the next section, before applying these ideas about the prefiguration of the onset of trauma to the analysis of actual narratives of trauma, I want to consider them together with an examination of the way in which the transition from equilibrium to disequilibrium is narrated.

'At first I thought ... but then I realised': The Liminal Zone

> *...liminality can perhaps be described as fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities...*
>
> Turner (1986:42)

Turner develops his concept of liminality from the work of van Gennep who refers to three types of rites: 'preliminal' which are rites of separation from a previous world, 'liminal' (or threshold) which are rites of transition, and 'postliminal' which are rites of incorporation into the new world (van Gennep [1908] 1960:21). From these ideas, Turner (1986:41) uses the concept of liminality to describe a state of being which is 'betwixt and between', a 'no-man's land', in transit between past and future but neither one nor the other. In a similar vein, but in terms of global rather than individual histories, Arendt (1961:9) refers to 'strange in-between' periods of history as:

> *..an interval of time which is entirely determined by things which are* ***no longer*** *and are* ***not yet****. History has often shown that it is such intervals which may contain the moment of truth.*
>
> (quoted by Kearney 1991:64, emphasis in the original).

I am using these ideas to talk about a liminal zone of experience in narratives of trauma. This zone can be identified when narrators are talking, or writing, about being on the threshold of traumatic impact. In the liminal zone, the narrated self is concerned with things which are no longer (equilibrium is disturbed) and things which are not yet (equilibrium is not yet destroyed and may be recoverable); the narrated self knows that something is wrong but does not know the extent of disequilibrium because the full impact of the trauma has yet to be experienced. It is in these liminal zone sections that prefiguration is narrated as narrators typically recall what they thought was happening, or what they thought would happen next, and this is usually much less traumatic than what actually takes place.

In Wooffitt's (1992) study, narrators of paranormal experience also recall their initial (mis)understanding of what is happening. Drawing on the seminal work of Harvey Sacks and following developments of this line by Jefferson (1984), Wooffitt explains that his narrators are doing 'being ordinary' (Sacks [1970]1984) and the formulation 'at first I thought ...but then I realized' (Jefferson 1984) functions to enable them to do this. Wooffitt's narrators explain that when something strange occurred they did not immediately assume that something paranormal was taking place but reacted in the same way as 'anyone' would and made rational interpretations. Presenting themselves as 'ordinary' (rational, sane) is clearly very important for narrators of paranormal experience and, as Sacks' work shows, it is what we all spend a lot of our time doing. Narrators of traumatic experience are also doing 'being ordinary' but in personal experience narratives of trauma, formulations like 'at first I thought ...but then I realised' are highly significant in additional ways.

The liminal zone of experience is located in those three dots between 'at first I thought' and 'but then I realised' and is a zone of transition from the narration of pre-trauma (equilibrium) to the narration of trauma (disequilibrium) as selves are narrated as if pushed or dragged reluctantly over the threshold into the realisation of the trauma and into a future story they want no part of. As we shall see, the detail of the narration of the liminal zone is closely related to, and dependent upon, the detail of the narration of the beginning of the traumatic experience and it *precedes* the narration of the moment of traumatic impact. The referential function of narrative, reporting of events, is not prioritised over its commitment to experientiality in the telling of trauma and, in this way, the narration of the liminal zone permits '*history* to arise where *immediate*

understanding may not.' (Caruth 1996:11, emphasis in the original). Caruth's rereading of Freud's analysis of *Gerusalmme Liberata* shows that:

> *...trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in a individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely* ***not known*** *in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on.*
>
> Caruth (1996:4, emphasis in the original)

The narrator's pre-understanding, and misinterpretation of the unfolding experience, forms part of the pre-history of the trauma, and it is against this background that hope for the future has such an urgent intensity, in the fragile, transient present of the liminal zone of experience.

The following extract is taken from Richard Johnson's (1997) essay 'Grievous Recognitions 2: The Grieving Process and Sexual Boundaries' which he describes as a commentary on the circumstances from which his poems, which make up the previous chapter, arose.

1. *The poems were written as part of the work of grieving for Jill, my wife*
2. *and lover, who died suddenly in the early morning of Saturday, 25*
3. *January 1992 after a relationship of 33 years. Jill awoke with a pain in*
4. *her chest at six in the morning. After some fatal delays, an ambulance*
5. *arrived around 8.00 a.m. I hadn't registered the fact that she was so*
6. *ill. I thought she'd have some tests at the hospital and then we'd come*
7. *home. So I didn't go in the ambulance with her. I was following in our*
8. *car when suddenly the blue lights were switched on and the ambulance*
9. *raced away. When I arrived at the local hospital, I was asked to wait in*
10. *a small room with someone to keep me company. After about half an*
11. *hour, and what I now recognize as some warnings, a doctor and nurse*
12. *came in and said that Jill had died in the ambulance. They had tried to*
13. *resuscitate her but had failed.*

Johnson (1997:235)

In this short narrative of traumatic impact, a number of features can be identified. Firstly the XY (equilibrium disturbed) structure of the story is present in lines 1-3: '*Jill,*

my wife and lover (orientation), *who died suddenly in the early morning of Saturday, 25 January 1992* (Y) *after a relationship of 33 years* (X).' This is less precise in detail than the 'I was just doing X when Y' formulation of the oral personal experience narrative but, nevertheless, the components function in the same way to convey a very long, intimate relationship (equilibrium) which is suddenly ended: Jill died *after* a relationship of 33 years. Secondly, the narration of the moment of traumatic impact is made up of specific, unique components. These are to do with time, with delays, with misunderstanding, and with misrecognition: '*six in the morning', 'fatal delays', '8.00am', 'I hadn't registered', 'what I now recognize as'*. The liminal zone of this narration is the phrase *'I thought she'd have some tests at the hospital and then we'd come home'*. This hope of a 'modified version of equilibrium restored' (the way stories should end) is possible because the delays, now described as 'fatal', were not experienced as this *at the time,* but, rather, *became* fatal later. Time passing turned out to be delays that caused death as narrative reverses the cause/effect relationship; 'causes become the effect of their effects because until the effects are known, the causes cannot be identified' (Chap 1:29). Similarly 'the fact that she was so ill' (line 5) was not a fact experienced at the time but became a fact in the light of what happened later, she *must* have been so ill because she died shortly afterwards. And the 'warnings' (line 10) were not warnings at the time, they did not warn Richard, but are recognised as such later. The narration of the liminal zone is the narration of the possibility of a different story, without fatal delays, or Jill being so ill, or unrecognised warnings. It is a story in which choosing to take the car instead of going in the ambulance was the right choice because after the tests they would need to get home. It is a story that is altogether more acceptable, less traumatic, less irrevocable and much

more congruent with the present of past things and the present of future things. In this way, it is a story that is 'liveable' with.

Within the liminal zone, equilibrium is disturbed but it is still recoverable because the unexpected experience could have been imagined and can be coped with. The fearful selves of the liminal zone demonstrate an almost eager willingness to accommodate the disruption in their everyday lives as they strive to make meanings which are relatively benign. In Richard's narrative, having some tests at the hospital and then coming home again completes the pattern of 'equilibrium to modified version of equilibrium,' through action and intervention, in a 'reasonable' way. It is a worrying story but not one that completely shatters lives. This is what the liminal zone is about - desiring, and imagining a less traumatic outcome in the midst of a story over which one has no control.[86]

The liminal zone involves a rapid, desperate reconfiguring of what was prefigured (a normal day with no unexpected experience to be coped with) on the threshold of traumatic impact and may be understood as an attempt to maintain continuity in the face of the threatened breakdown of the unity of the three-fold present. Richard's narration of the moment of traumatic impact, 'a doctor and nurse came in and said that Jill had died', heralds the end of the narration of the liminal zone *but* the possibilities it offered and the specific, unique features of the narration of the moment of trauma continue to be very significant in the narration of his ongoing experiences in the aftermath of trauma. Very specific imaginary futures have been destroyed by the

[86] In chapter seven, I will return to these ideas again and discuss how the narration of an imaginary story, that could have happened but didn't, does not always involve the projection of a *better* outcome but may have a worst outcome and can function, therefore, to re-evaluate experience in a more positive light.

traumatic experience and this 'present of future things' continues to exert its influence. This issue will be discussed again in more detail in chapters seven and eight. In this section I want to look at some other examples of the narration of the liminal zone and the attempt to maintain or restore some form of equilibrium within narratives of traumatic impact before moving on to consider the injustice of traumatic experiences.

In the following extract, Ann tells her story of the day that Michael died:

and I'd cooked dinner and I'd put their dinners out and I'd told them to be home for three and (****) kept looking at the clock where are they? they are late cos Pete was very reliable and er nothing and then all of a sudden got a phone call from my daughter which was about five o'clock so I I was due to go back out to work and its Alison said er not to me but to Alf there's been an accident and you've got to go to the Lincoln General Hospital well I wondered how she knew and we didn't know so I thought oh dear he's hurt he's broke his leg or he you know I didn't think he'd be dead so we drove Alf drove us to the hospital and meanwhile the policeman had been to the house but apparently they could only trace Pete cos Michael had got no wallet on him cos he was younger and Pete had erm er so they'd traced Pete through his wallet got through to his mum who'd got through to Alison who got through to us and that's how we got to find out then we went to the hospital and I still remember these doctors they was talking about Michael on the phone when we come in and I said I'm Michael's mam you know and they said go in that little room well you don't think nothing of it when they send you to a little room just think oh I've got to wait til they come and er I'd nipped off to the toilet and when I come back there is this man in the room and he never said Michael was dead he just carried on talking on talking and he just said well you know we couldn't save him and that was it and I saw Alf crying and I still didn't know that Michael was dead so and he should have told me when I came in so Alf told me that Michael was dead well you don't believe it you just don't believe it I thought no he's not dead you know so the policeman came in then and start to er then they took Alf through to identify the body cos they said he was tall and it might not be him which was a silly statement to make but anyway er Alf come back crying so I knew it was and then I said I'd got to go because I had to see him to believe it was Michael so I went in and he just looked asleep on the bed so I thought yeah its Michael ...

A 7/8: 342-380

Ann includes a lot of very specific details about the events which occurred between the moment when she 'put their dinners out', as arranged at 3 o'clock, and the moment that she discovered, for herself, that Michael was dead[87]. XY structures occur in lines 1-8, when firstly equilibrium, 'I'd cooked dinner and I'd put their dinners out' (X), is slightly disturbed, 'where are they? they are late' (Y) and then more severely disrupted, 'all of sudden', by a telephone call, at 5 o'clock when Ann should have gone back to work (X): 'there's been an accident and you've got to go to the Lincoln General Hospital' (Y). The narration of the liminal zone occurs in lines 9-10, 'so I thought oh dear he's hurt he's broke his leg or he you know'[88], as Ann tells how she imagined events that fit the unfolding story, they explain why she has to go to the hospital, but do not destroy the equilibrium of their lives. Michael being hurt, having a broken leg or 'you know', some other non-fatal injury, are things that can be coped with. The clause 'I didn't think he'd be dead' (line 10) is not part of the telling of the liminal zone because Ann is not narrating her self as thinking *at the time* 'I don't think Michael's dead', it is external evaluation spoken by the narrating I at the time of the telling. There is a second narration of, or at least reference to, the liminal zone in lines 20-21, 'well you[89] don't think nothing of it when they send you to a little room just think oh I've got to wait til they come'. Like Richard, who only later recognized being 'asked to wait in a small room with someone to keep me company'(Johnson 1997:235) as a

---

[87] This story of traumatic impact should be read in the light of the first telephone conversation I had with Ann, which is described in the previous chapter. During that conversation I suggested that she might not be a suitable participant in the research because we were looking to interview people who had recently had a traumatic experience. Ann responded with the assertion that she could remember everything, as though it was yesterday. I wonder if she would have told this story in the same way if we had not had that conversation or whether she was feeling, to some extent, under pressure to provide evidence of the truth of the assertion. There is, of course, no way of knowing what effect, if any, this particular aspect of the context of the interview had on Ann's narration and, in any case, this extract is rich with features which enable me to further develop my arguments about the significance of the specific detail of the narration of traumatic impact within any particular narrative of trauma.

[88] This is an example of a three-part list within which the third item is elided, 'or you know', the occurrence of which is used to support the theory that we have a cognitive preference for lists of three (Jefferson 1991).

[89] Ann uses the generic second person 'you' to suggest that anyone in these circumstances would react in this way.

warning, Ann thought 'nothing of it' (line 20). Her confidence in the imagined story she has told herself, 'he's broke his leg', remains intact. So much so that she is not desperately anxious while she waits but uses the time to go to the toilet.

In addition to telling the story of her own feelings and experiences as the events unfold, Ann also provides an explanation for a detail that she recalls bothered her at the time, 'well I wondered how she [Alison] knew and we didn't' (lines 8-9) and this story, of the police being unable to contact them directly, is told 'while' Alf and Ann are driving to the hospital in the main story. It is a reasonable explanation, in that there are logical reasons why Alison knew before Ann and Alf. However, the fact that Ann chooses to include this specific detail at the beginning of her narrative of traumatic impact takes on greater significance when one realises that it is an early signalling of a recurrent pattern in the rest of her narrative as a whole. This is a pattern of being denied recognition and is clearly identifiable in her narration of a range of experiences, in this extract and also in later sections, of not being given information, of being ignored and, more fundamentally, of not being recognised for who she is:

17. I still remember these doctors they was
18. talking about Michael on the phone when we come in and I
19. said 'I'm Michael's mam' you know and they said go in that
20. little room

Ann says she 'still remembers' the doctors but, because this seems a strange thing to say given that it is very obvious that she still remembers all the details she is telling me, I think she means that she still *thinks* about them now and is still disturbed, perhaps angry, about the way she was treated. After telling the doctors, who are talking about Michael, who she is, she is told to go in a little room. Within the

narration of this she adds 'you know' after the reported direct speech, 'I'm Michael's mam'. This is directed to me, the listener, as Ann invites me to recognise the significance of this encounter[90]. She *told* them who she was, Michael's mother - a very, perhaps the most, important person in this unfolding drama - and, instead of acknowledging her and her right to know what they knew about her son, she is put aside and told to wait.

In both Richard's and Ann's experience we can see, therefore, that there is an institutional construction, or prolongation, of liminality as the issues of how much, and when, information is given is controlled by hospital personnel. As mentioned above, Ann's external evaluation, 'you don't think nothing of it', suggests that at the time this did not unduly disturb her, in fact she may have interpreted it as meaning that the situation was not very serious. This contributed, therefore, to her being absent when the vital information was given:

21. and er I'd
22. nipped off to the toilet and when I come back there is this man
23. in the room and he never said Michael was dead he just
24. carried on talking on talking and he just said well you know we
25. couldn't save him and that was it and I saw Alf crying and I still
26. didn't know that Michael was dead so and he should have told
27. me when I came in so Alf told me that Michael was dead

Not only has Ann missed the crucial moment, the first news of Michael's death, but she is then ignored as the man carries 'on talking on talking' (line 24) to Alf, not to her, when he 'should have told' her (line 26), should have broken the news to *her* when she came back into the room. Instead, 'that was it' (line 25), the moment was over, Ann had been bypassed and still did not know what had happened until Alf told her. A delay then follows, when Alf, not Ann, goes to identify the body and Ann comments

[90] The function of 'you know' is discussed in detail in Chapter 4:157.

on the 'stupidity' of them saying 'it might not be him' (line 31). This serves to further delay the moment of traumatic impact as it is not until Alf returns in tears that she knows that it is Michael. Throughout this episode, Ann narrates herself as having to look for clues, Alf crying, through which she can find out what is going on because she is neither told directly what the situation is nor is she invited to become involved in it. Eventually, without being asked or invited, and unable to believe what she has been told, she says that she has got to see Michael and she finally founds out the truth for herself, 'yeah, it's Michael' (line 35).

The narration of the liminal zone in narratives of the death of a loved one seem to be very similar in terms of their content and where they are placed in the narrative. The liminal zone in Steven's narrative is very similar to both Richard's and Ann's in that a more benign outcome is constructed within the narration of the time between equilibrium being disturbed and the full impact of the trauma:

1. we were taken to hospital by car by police car which followed
2. the ambulance and erm we were just hoping that he was still
3. alive

O 2:90-92

By contrast, the liminal zone in Ruth's narration of her experience of being badly burned in a car accident is not located within unfolding events of the accident, but occurs afterwards when she is talking about being in hospital, as yet unable to understand the extent of the damage to her body. The liminal zone sections are italicised:

1. once I was able to get around I I looked and to me *I thought*
2. *well it's not so bad* you know it's just like scabs, there was
3. scabs round my mouth and erm (.) you know *I thought oh well*
4. *once they heal I'll be fine it will only be a matter of a few*
5. *weeks and they'll be gone* erm and er I spoke to the physio
6. about it and she said you know I think you probably don't
7. realise that it's going to take a lot longer but it didn't register *in*

8. *my mind it was just going to be a couple of weeks and it would*
9. *just be gone* it just didn't register erm (.) I don't think I realised
10. the extent of what had happened at all when I was in hospital I
11. mean I used to have physio on my hands and er erm *I just*
12. *thought they'd get better . . . just thought well a few weeks*
13. *and I'll be back to normal*

R 5/6:259-277

Getting back to normal, restoring equilibrium, features strongly in Ruth's narration of a range of experiences in the difficult months following her accident and we shall look at how these relate to her narration of the impact of trauma in the next chapter.

Maintaining equilibrium, in the face of an extremely traumatic experience, also characterises Gail's narrative of her experience immediately after being physically and sexually assaulted by an intruder in her home:

1. I was (.) I was quite prepared to just carry on with my life and
2. erm (.) I knew I was aware that within a few minutes the
3. doorbell was going to ring and I had a pupil arriving so I
4. changed my clothes and washed the blood from my arms and
5. (.) erm and got ready for the lesson

G 1:17-22

6. well I think er it's a case of putting up all the barriers to keep
7. things going I was determined and I just felt that I had to keep
8. everything going I had I had to meet my pupils and I just had
9. to keep the life together for the sake of my daughter and you
10. know everything had to be right

G1 3:144-149

During this first interview, Gail reflects back on her early determination to maintain equilibrium, to 'keep things going'. In the following extract, the narrating I recalls how the narrated self felt disappointed with itself[91]. This follows a liminal zone narration (italicised) concerning the effects of the traumatic experience. :

1. G: erm (.) but *I'd thought immediately that I'd recover quickly* I
2. felt strong (.) and *I thought that I'd be able to shrug it off and*
3. *carry on with my life* (.) and erm (.) my my mother said that it
4. would take a few weeks and *I said it would take a few days*
5. and in actual fact it took far longer and still is doing

[91] The complex relationships that exist between the narrating I and the narrated self are discussed in detail in chapter two.

6. S: right

7. G: erm (.) so erm I was disappointed with myself (.) because
8. I'd been strong for (.) a week maybe two weeks (.) and then I
9. began to disintegrate (.) and I felt disappointed in myself I felt
10. I'd let myself down

G1 5:217-229

Gail's initial misunderstanding of the effects of the attack, at first I thought ... but then I realised, compounds her problems in the aftermath of the trauma. In addition to suffering from the effects of the traumatic experience, 'I began to disintegrate' (lines 8-9), she is also distressed by the end of the liminal zone, as she does not recover quickly and cannot carry on with her life. This leaves her feeling both disappointed with her self and believing she has let her self down. Sandra talks of a similar experience:

1. it is well yeah getting worse because I am tending to think now
2. that erm I'm not able to cope as well as I thought I could

S 16:823-826

I shall consider the further significance of the effects of liminal zone narration again in section three in relation to Janoff-Bulman's shattered assumptions theory of trauma.

The liminal zone in Ruth's, Gail's and Sandra's narratives suggests that even very traumatic experiences, violent sexual or physical assault or being trapped in a burning car, are able to be minimised in the liminal zone of their narration which occurs, temporally, *after* the event and is to do with an imaginary story in which equilibrium can be maintained, or quite quickly restored. In a sense then, in these narratives, the trauma occurs *after* the event with the realisation of the true meaning of the event. This is different to the liminal zone in the narratives concerning the death of a loved one which occurs *before* the traumatic impact of being told of the death. In either type of narrative, however, liminal zone narratives are an attempt to maintain or restore equilibrium through the telling of a story that is 'liveable' with, a story in which the

past, the present and the future can remain integrated in the three-fold present of the now of narration. Also, in both types of narrative, it is not the narration of the actual event itself that is most significant to the narrator but, rather, the narration of how the self is positioned in relation to the event, how the experience unfolded and, crucially, how things *should have been* in relation to how they actually were. Narratives of traumatic impact resonate with the injustice of trauma and I shall now explore this further in relation to Janoff-Bulman 'shattered assumptions' theory of trauma.

The injustice of traumatic experience

I have argued that the liminal zone in narratives of traumatic experience involves the narrated self making meaning of the unfolding events by telling a future story that is 'liveable' with. This is particularly poignant in narratives involving the death of a loved one, for example ' 'I thought she'd have some tests at the hospital and then we'd come home', and 'oh dear he's hurt he's broke his leg'. It is also highly significant in the telling of other traumatic events, for example, 'I felt strong (.) and I thought that I'd be able to shrug it off and carry on with my life' when it may compound the difficulties of coping in the aftermath. It is the liminal zone that enables narrative to tell 'the reverse-face of history' (Ricoeur 1991:187). Ricoeur refers to 'impeded possibilities' which are usurped by every event that happens and argues that narrative turns these (non) events, which did not happen but could have done, *back* on history because, in a sense, they *have been* if only in an unrealised, potential way. In this way, the narration of the liminal zone can be understood as a reversal of the irreversible, a 'turning back' from the true impact of trauma to a moment of hope, a moment rich with possibilities of different futures. Implicit in the projection of a different story which

could have happened, in the face of the awful reality of what did happen, is a cry of moral outrage: this is what *should* have happened.

Our beliefs about what *should* happen, or what might reasonably be expected to happen at any given time in our lives, are, according to Janoff-Bulman's psychological theory of trauma, rooted in three fundamental assumptions; 'the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful and the self is worthy' (Janoff-Bulman 1996:6)[92]. She argues that although these assumptions about the world and about ourselves[93] may be positively biased overgeneralisations, or even illusions, they are nonetheless crucial to survival. Maintaining these beliefs enables us to feel, generally, secure and to trust that when we go to bed at night our lives will be fundamentally the same the next morning, the following day, the following week and so on. We may know, rationally, that we, and those we love, are not invulnerable but we do not live our lives *feeling* permanently vulnerable. If we did not hold these three assumptions, and saw the world as malevolent and full of danger which *directly* threatens our survival in an unpredictable, meaningless way and we believed that, as worthless, impotent selves, we have no control over our fate and are deserving of no better, then it is easy to see that it would be well nigh impossible to live.

---

[92] In chapter 2:78 I discussed this theory in relation self-blame and the relationship between the narrating self and the textual self.

[93] Janoff-Bulman's use of the inclusive terms 'our', 'us' and 'we' clearly only refer to people who can take safety and security for granted. There are, of course, a great many people in the world who live in a constant state of threat and insecurity. Although Janoff-Bulman discusses repeated or extended traumatisation, in general she seems to assume that everyone who experiences trauma starts off with intact assumptions about the invulnerability of the self and the benevolence and meaningfulness of the world. Clearly, for a great many people and communities in the world this is not the case. However, I, and my narrators, in the relative safety and stability of Britain today, can identify ourselves within the 'us' of this theory. Van der Kolk and McFarlane (1996:8) argue that Janoff-Bulman's theory, that the experience of trauma shatters fundamental beliefs, may be true in some cases but that in many cases 'trauma does not present a radically new experience, but rather confirms some belief that an individual has tried to evade' and it is this that makes trauma so destructive. I think that this is an interesting idea, but van der Kolk and McFarlane do not provide any examples of this, and I can find no evidence for it in my data. If one were to take a more psychoanalytical approach, we might assume that we all suppress fears of 'the worst' happening, whether that be, for example, our own death, the death or suffering of our children, the loss of a partner, being raped, or being permanently disfigured. In this case traumatic experience could be understood as the realization of something previously dreaded. This does not seem, to me, to be incompatible with Janoff-Bulman's theory, however. She argues that we tenaciously hold on to our beliefs about the invulnerability of the self and about the meaningfulness and benevolence of the world in the face of evidence to the contrary and it is only when trauma impacts directly on our own lives that the illusions collapse. The idea that we have deep-seated fears about the future testifies to the power of the assumptions we hold which enable us to live from day to day, feeling relatively safe and secure.

My text-based, narrative approach to understanding traumatic impact finds support for Janoff-Bulman's theory in the linguistic features of actual narratives of trauma. The single word 'just' in the formulation 'I was *just* doing X ... when Y' seems to me to embody all three of the assumptions she proposes, and, like the narration of the liminal zone, the word resonates with the injustice of traumatic experience. To say 'I was just [going about my normal day-to-day activities]' meaning 'I was only ...' functions to pre-empt and refute any suggestion that 'I' was doing something to invite or to cause what happened next because, as noted in section one, it conveys passivity and helplessness. The word also carries an implicit question 'why did this happen?' which suggests that we don't expect bad things to happen (the world is benevolent), when they do they must have been caused by someone or something (the world is meaningful) and misfortune is deserved or in some way caused by those affected (the self if worthy). Gail's loss of confidence in herself, her recognition of her inability to 'shrug it off and carry on', suggests that her traumatic experience, *together with* her expectations of her self, as narrated within the liminal zone, have indeed shaken her assumption about her self-worth. During the second interview, some nine years after the attack, when Gail is still living with the long-term effects of the trauma. she makes explicit reference to the loss of her assumption that the world is benevolent:

1. I was brought up in a loving and erm warm environment and I
2. sort of thought that the world was like that I suppose and it's a
3. shock when you find it isn't

G2 1:50-53

Within narratives of traumatic experience, the malevolent, chaotic nature of extremely traumatic experience not only wipes out the transient, hopeful stories of the liminal zone, which are based on shaken but still intact assumptions, but also destroys the future

stories by which narrators lived their lives in an integrated three-fold present. For Steven, the future they were looking forward to as a family 'expanding the business and perhaps one or two of the boys to come into the business' (O 2:55-56) is lost by a cruel twist of fate 'I wanted to take my young son with me he'd just come home from school er my wife wanted him to do an errand for her' (O 2:63-65). Again, the possibilities of a different story, which preserves assumptions, are narrated as part of the narration of traumatic impact. What might have been, but wasn't, constitutes the 'if only' stories which may haunt people in the aftermath of trauma. Ann begins such a story:

1. if only if my husband had known there was problems with the
2. bike anyway he wouldn't he wouldn't have let them go back
3. again or if I was at home I wouldn't have done

A 7:337-340

But she immediately stops herself with the words 'but we don't say if only any more cos we've been through that stage' (A 7:340-341) as if to indicate that this form of narrative, the 'reverse-face' of history, is no longer helpful or, possibly, that she and Alf have made an agreement not to go back over the possibilities and to rail against the injustice. Consciously ending the process of narration and renarration of the part of the traumatic experience that relates to the telling of imaginary, 'if only' stories of what might have been, may be seen as a deliberate turning away from the pain and anger that arises from the injustice of traumatic experience. Nonetheless, the injustice of Michael's death is very evident in her narrative, as she talks about the sort of person he was, the sort of person she had made him, and the loss of the imagined future that Michael promised:

1. I'll look after you when you're old he he was loving and kind
2. and special and he you know he I'd worked so hard to get him
3. normal so hard nobody knows and he was pretty close to
4. normal when he got killed ...

A 5:216-220

Janoff-Bulman argues that the task facing survivors of traumatic experience involves the rebuilding of shattered assumptions in order to live something like a 'normal' life again. My approach suggests that this would involve being able to make meaning of the past in a way which makes it possible to live once more in an integrated three-fold present, within which narrative can bridge past, present and future, realise a story that ends in a modified version of equilibrium, and thereby enable a future to be anticipated.

If it remains impossible to tell such a story and, in this way, to incorporate an extremely traumatic experience within the process of the life story cycle, a section of 'life' has, so to speak, spun off out the cycle and out of the reach of the power of narration to make it meaningful in terms of it being connected to both past and future experience. Memory and anticipation, or hope, can, therefore, be annihilated if extremely traumatic events cannot be narrativised. This is one way of understanding Carol's experience in the aftermath of the murder of her son:

1. he was my son and I can't remember him I try to sit and
2. remember him playing and being the cheerful little child he
3. was but I just can't I can't remember him at all and I try to
4. block it out it's as if he never existed to some point because I
5. can't remember him playing erm all I see is the image of him
6. dead it hurts too much to try and remember it just hurts

C1 2:62-69

For Carol, the moment of traumatic impact was when she was told of her son's death:

1. when I found out Jonathan had been killed (.) er I don't know
2. whether you can call it shock or I started firing on all four
3. cylinders I just was numb

C1 1:34-36

and this moment is accompanied by a frozen image:

1. all I have is this vision of Jonathan laid in his bedroom with his
2. eyes open and his tongue hanging out and this thing round his
3. neck

C1 1:50-52

The gulf between 'the cheerful little child he was' and 'Jonathan laid in his bedroom with his eyes open and his tongue hanging out' appears to be too vast for narration to bridge. So, not only has this extremely traumatic event spun off the cycle, out of the reach of narration, but it takes with it the very possibility, for Carol, of remembering Jonathan, and of remembering the part of her life that Jonathan shared: 'two and a half years of my life its part of me gone' (C1 7:324-325). These extracts are taken from the first interview with Carol which was recorded nine months after Jonathan's death. At this time, Carol had been diagnosed as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The diagnostic criteria of PTSD (intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal, numbing and avoidance[94] which persist for a longer period than a 'normal' reaction to trauma), are symptoms that can be understood as arising from the *failure* of narrative to reintegrate past, present and future in a coherent three-fold present. An understanding of PTSD as a failure of narrative is implicit in many psychiatric and psychotherapeutic approaches to PTSD. For example, van der Kolk and McFarlane (1996:9-10) discuss the transformation of memory, which takes place when 'events are remembered as stories that change over time', as 'the norm, whereas in PTSD the full brunt of an experience does not fade with time'. This insight remains implicit, however, because the linguistic detail of specific, unique narratives of trauma has no place within the banks of statistical evidence produced through the use of psychological scales and questionnaires that constitute the methods of psychiatric and psychotherapeutic research (McLeod 1997:142). Therefore, the crucial question of how narrative works, and how it relates to coping, *normally* rather than 'pathologically' is never addressed.

[94] These symptoms of PTSD are referred to again in chapter six which is concerned with the experience of disequilibrium in the traumatic aftermath.

At the time of the second interview, twenty eight months after the trauma, Carol remains unable to recover the two and a half years of her life with Jonathan and explains how she has found a way to live with what is not, in terms of the life story cycle, 'liveable' with:

1. it'll never go away (.) really my way of coping with it is not
2. trying not to think of him that he's just gone away for a while I
3. can't think of him as being dead that's my way I know he is
4. [tearful] that's how I get through I don't I don't think about it or
5. try not to think about it ...

C2 4:167-172

6. ...I dismiss the fact of what's happened to him deny that he's
7. dead which is I I I don't even like going to the cemetery
8. because its having to admit that he's there...

C2 4:193-196

9. ... I just can't accept it I won't accept it and deny it that's why I
10. deny what's happened basically I erm if I think too hard I
11. remember what it what happened to him its (.) well it just hurts
12. too much...

C2 4/5:216-220

13. ... to try and sit and remember Jonathan playing running
14. around (.) the pain is just (.) its too much [rising intonation] it
15. upsets me too much (.) so I don't I just don't and I don't like
16. myself for that because he was here erm he was a part of our
17. lives (.) just miss him ... [in a whisper, very tearful, sobbing]

C2 5:231-236

But, despite this terrible wound of grief and loss which cannot be mediated by narration, Carol *has* managed to rebuild some hope for the future and she does this by *refusing* to remember details of the past which prevent her from coping in the present for the future:

1. ...yeah things have moved on considerably really yeah yeah I
2. mean two years ago when I first came to see you I couldn't
3. even see a tomorrow so (.) but now yeah I plan things (.)
4. ahead (.) and whatever so yeah things have moved on a great
5. deal (.) even though alot of it is just a lot of the things that
6. have happened I just push to the back of my mind and (***)
7. suppose denial of what's happened but that's the way I cope
8. with it everybody deals with it in a different way...

C2 11:541-549

In the terms of Ricoeur's concept of 'the dialectic of the three-fold present' (Ricoeur 1984:7-10, see chap 1), Carol has to find a way of surviving the breakdown of the three-fold present of the moment of narration and she seems to have done this by consciously and resolutely controlling the 'present of past things' (memory), in order to make the 'present of present things' (perception) bearable and in order to have a 'present of future things' (anticipation or hope). Carol says 'everybody deals with it in a different way' and in the chapters that follow I shall look at some 'different ways' in other narratives of coping and compare Carol's narrative with others which, by contrast, tell of the ways in narrated selves re-affirm, appropriate, or celebrate the life of their loved ones. Johnson (1997:239) says that 'the exact circumstances of a person's death decisively shape the forms of grief' and the idea that there are 'standard' or 'normal' patterns of grieving does not match his own experience. I shall show that this specificity within, and diversity between, grieving experiences can also be identified in narratives of other kinds of post traumatic experiences. This is because the narration of these experiences is also contingent upon and grounded within the particular circumstances of the impact of trauma. It is in this way that the narration of the moment of traumatic impact may be understood as the defining moment in the telling of trauma.

In this chapter, I have explored some of the ways in which the moment of traumatic impact is narrated in a range of narratives of traumatic experience and I have supported my analysis and interpretation through the development and application of a number of theoretical insights into narrative at various levels of specificity. Generally, narratives realise stories that follow an equilibrium disturbed/equilibrium restored structure and the pressure this exerts on the telling of unexpected events can be identified in the 'X when Y' formulation which is so prevalent in personal experience narratives. Rather

than functioning merely, and obviously, as a narrative convention which sets the scene, however, I have shown that there are highly specific and contingent relationships within the formulation and between the formulation and the rest of the narrative as a whole. Identifying and specifying the structural, dialogic and prefigurational dimensions of the formulation has provided very valuable insights into the process of narration in relation to the experience of traumatic impact.

My exploration of what I have termed the liminal zone of narratives of trauma makes connections to previous arguments about the non-event centric nature of narrative and enables the significance and the specificity of imaginary stories to be further appreciated. My analysis of the liminal zone in narratives frequently points forward to the next two chapters within which the relationship between the narration of traumatic impact and the narration of the ongoing experiences after the impact will be further explored. Similarly, my linguistic development of the 'shattered assumptions' theory of trauma, mentioned in this chapter in relationship to the injustice of traumatic experience, is more fully realised in the following chapters when I show how the rich detail of the narration of traumatic impact relates specifically to the ways in which narrators tell stories of courageously and creatively rebuilding their lives.

Chapter Six

Narrating the Traumatic Aftermath

I felt a funeral in my brain,
And mourners, to and fro,
Kept treading, treading, till it seemed
That sense was breaking through.

And when they all were seated,
A service like a drum
Kept beating, beating, till I thought
My mind was going numb.

And then I heard them lift a box,
And creak across my soul
With those same boots of lead, again.
Then space began to toll

As all the heavens were a bell,
And being but an ear,
And I and silence some strange race,
Wrecked, solitary, here.

Emily Dickinson (1986)

In the previous chapter, I examined the ways in which the beginning of a traumatic experience is narrated and suggested that the specific detail of stories of traumatic impact significantly influences the narration of the ongoing experiences in the traumatic aftermath. This chapter focuses on sections of narratives of trauma where narrators are talking or writing about their experiences in the immediate traumatic aftermath. These sections involve the narration of the self and the world in severe disequilibrium.

The experience of disequilibrium is well documented in traumatic stress literature (Herman 1992, Janoff-Bulman 1996, van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth 1996). Indeed, numbness, hyperarousal and intrusive thoughts are considered the 'core' symptoms of the medical condition Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and form part of the diagnostic criteria (APA 1994). All the symptoms associated with PTSD may be considered normal reactions to traumatic experience. It is only when they persist for several months afterwards and intensify that they are deemed pathological and people who demonstrate such pathological responses may be diagnosed as suffering from PTSD. Thus, as Van der Kolk et al. (1996:8) argue, 'it is the persistence of

intrusive and distressing recollections, and not the direct experience of the traumatic event itself, that actually drives the biological and psychological dimensions of PTSD.' As mentioned in the previous chapter, psychiatric approaches to PTSD focus on what are regarded as pathological responses to traumatic stress. Such responses, for example, the persistence of intrusive and distressing recollections, are deemed pathological or abnormal in comparison to normal response in that the extent of the abnormality is measured against an implicit standard of how the majority of people, who do not suffer from PTSD, respond to and cope with traumatic experiences. However the 'normal', non-pathological response is rarely examined or even mentioned. It is taken as a transparent, uncomplicated given. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis this study investigates the 'normal' through narratives of trauma and reveals its complexity, diversity and specificity and its interrelationship with narrative. In this way, it is argued that psychiatric and psychotherapeutic approaches to 'pathological' responses could be valuably informed by the knowledge and insight into the 'normal' process of coping and its relationship to narrative that this thesis provides.

The first section of this chapter is concerned with the narration of numbness and disbelief in the immediate traumatic aftermath. This is one of the ways in which the thoughts and feelings which characterise the narration of the liminal zone (confusion, disbelief, imagination, desire) survive the end of the liminal zone and continue to pervade the ongoing narration of experiences in the traumatic aftermath. We shall see that the narration of the experience of numbness, which is not really an experience at all, or is an experience of nothingness, presents a difficult task for narrators. They need to use a range of, sometimes apparently contradictory, ways of describing this immediate effect of the impact of trauma. Numbness and intense feelings can be

narrated together, and may suggest an emotional numbing accompanied by physical sensations or pain. In addition, these feelings can be narrated as being related to a disintegration of, or separation from, the self and/or the world which contributes to the portrayal of helpless, traumatised selves who are, literally, reeling from a blow and do not know what has hit them.

The second section is concerned with the narration of the repetitive, 'mad' or obsessive behaviour that some narrators describe themselves as engaging in in the traumatic aftermath. In medical terms, hyperarousal, hyperactivity and sleeplessness are universal, neurophysiological responses to trauma (Herman 1992:35-6), but for the individuals who find themselves behaving in ways which they describe as 'manic' or 'obsessive', the particular detail of their behaviour carries personal significance as they strive to make meaning of themselves within the specific context of their unique traumatic experience. The explanations which narrators provide for their, apparently, mad behaviour are various but, typically, they relate to the specific circumstances of their traumatic experience and/or to their understanding of the type of person they are. In this way, explanations of the behaviour of the self in severe disequilibrium link back to the narration of traumatic impact and contribute to the ongoing self-identification dimension of the narrative as a whole.

The third section focuses on the sections of the narratives where narrated selves are retraumatised in a range of ways. Intrusion, as a symptom of post traumatic stress, refers to flashbacks and nightmares in which the individual re-lives the event 'as though it were continually recurring in the present ... with all the vividness and force of the original event' (Herman 1992:37). This repetitive, uncontrollable intrusion of the past

in the present is regarded as being caused by the distinctive qualities of traumatic memory which, unlike normal memory, is not encoded in language and does not change over time (Janet 1925[1919], Herman 1992, Janoff-Bulman 1996, van der Kolk et al. 1996). It is in this way that an understanding of PTSD as a failure of narrative is implicit in traumatic stress studies. Once experience becomes encoded in language as an individual talks or writes about what has happened to them, the process of narration begins and intrinsic to this process is the possibility of evaluation and re-evaluation through the narration and renarration over time and in different contexts. In addition, traumatic stress studies are event-centred, focusing on what happened during the traumatic experience. We shall see, however, that individuals may also be haunted and repeatedly retraumatised by images and events they have *not* seen or witnessed and by imaginary stories of what *could have* happened in the past and what might happen in the future. Narrators also tell of being retraumatised in many other ways as attempts to pick up the pieces of their lives post-trauma involve continual and painful moments of realisation of the reality of what has happened. These narratives of retraumatisation realise the story of the endless impact of trauma.

Throughout this chapter I shall show how the narration of disequilibrium can be understood in relation to the narration of the moment of traumatic impact and how narrators make specific and unique meanings of their experiences in the immediate traumatic aftermath. The three sections of the chapter, numbness, madness and retraumatisation, take us further through the trauma story, from equilibrium disturbed and the moment of impact, covered in the previous chapter, and towards narrative meaning-making and the resolutions that some narrators are able to find which are covered in the final chapter:

Chapter 5		Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8
X liminal zone	**Y**	**numbness, madness retraumatisation**	**narrative meaning-making**	**resolutions**

equilibrium=> turbulence=> disequilibrium=> action=> intervention => restoration of modified version of equilibrium

Numbness: '*I didn't do anything I didn't cry ... I just did nothing'* (A 8:418-420)

In their stories of the immediate traumatic aftermath, narrators typically tell of being in a frozen or numb state of disbelief:

1. but you see all these films and you think oh they just cry and I
2. didn't do I didn't do anything I didn't cry I didn't I just don't
3. know what I did I just did nothing and Alf cried a bit but he
4. didn't cry enough for me to believe it was true so when we got
5. home and all these people arrived and then I just sat there
6. smoking and smoking and somehow probably told myself
7. Michael would come back it was not true

A 8: 418-425

In this extract, Ann compares the reality of her experience with the imaginary world of films which leads people (the generic 'you') to believe that crying follows the death of a loved one quite effortlessly, 'they just cry' (line 1), and it is against this that she narrates her experience of nothingness. As in her narration of traumatic impact, Ann describes how she used Alf's behaviour as a clue to try to understand what was going on. In this extract, Alf 'didn't cry enough' (line 4) to convince her and 'somehow' (line 6) she is able to deny the reality of Michael's death.

Janoff-Bulman refers to numbing and denial (refusal to recognise the reality of a situation) as automatic coping processes that reduce the psychological impact of traumatic experience which, in the terms of her shattered assumptions theory of trauma, represents a massive onslaught of powerful, incongruous, threatening data (Janoff-Bulman 1992:99). In a similar vein, Herman (1992:43) describes numbing as an altered

state of consciousness whereby people are in a state of detached calm and experience a loss of sensation. This is, she says, 'one of nature's small mercies' as it offers protection against unbearable pain. In the following extracts this type of experience is narrated through the extensive use of metaphors as narrators try to convey their experience of numbness:

1. I I can really still remember it quite vividly before we actually
2. saw Vicki my friend Sandra never cries she's not emotional
3. she was crying and I can remember thinking oh you know they
4. think that she is her mother cos I was too erm (.) shocked to to
5. cry you know I was just er in a state of shock I think that
6. happens to you something seems to cut in to like (.) stop you
7. feeling well it's not that (.) you are feeling the pain you're
8. feeling it just so intensely that you can't cry I mean since then I
9. mean I've you know when somebody else dies I can cry you
10. can cry a lot more easily

J 2/3: 108-118

Here Janice suggests that either numbness is a form of protection, to 'stop you feeling' (lines 6-7), or that the intensity of the feeling of pain is so great that it prevents people (the generic 'you') in this situation from crying, that is from expressing the pain. She recalls, 'quite vividly' (line 1), feeling that she was not behaving appropriately, however, and that the situation was somehow incongruous, as people would think that her crying friend, who 'never cries' (line 2), was the bereaved mother rather than her. Janice adds that she can cry easily following the death of someone she is not so close to and again uses the generic 'you' to assert that people *can* cry in a different, less personally devastating, situation. Similarly, Maggie discovered that, as Anna's godmother, she was able to cry following her death whereas this was not possible for her mother:

1. and it was just awful and er and I put the phone down and I
2. cried and I cried really really hard you know that real hard
3. crying and Neil came down and my mum was sat there and I
4. just cried and cried and after that I was numb and I think you
5. work on auto pilot and I think that's what we did and we we
6. were able to cry and you know and Stella said I'm so glad

7. you're crying because I can't cry you know and I said I feel
8. awful that I'm crying you know in front of you when I feel that I
9. should be you know more together she said no no she said
10. that's fine because you know I can't cry

M 15:756-766

Here, crying is described as something that should be done, 'I'm so glad you're crying because I can't' (line 6-7), so, although Maggie felt guilty about not being 'together' (line 9), Stella is grateful that someone is expressing emotion when she is unable to.

Both Janice and Maggie understand not crying and numbness as a normal reaction to a devastating shock but for Ann, who often mentions not crying as she narrates her experiences in the days, weeks and months following Michael's death, it is her early childhood experiences that have made her into a type of person who cannot cry 'normally'. In the following extract she is talking about a time several months after Michael's death:

1. and I'd still not really cried a lot erm I don't know if I ever did
2. cos I'm not the type of person that finds it easy to cry either er
3. I think my mam knocked that out of me in my early days er so
4. probably that holds me back from the amount that I would
5. have cried normally

A 15: 758-763

The extracts above are all taken from narratives of the sudden death of a loved one but, as Janoff-Bulman (1996:100) documents, the 'sense of feeling emotionally detached, of being unable to feel anything, is reported by victims who have experienced all types of traumatic events'. Usually the frequency and comprehensiveness of the episodes of numbness, denial and detachment from the world decrease over time and it is only when they persist and increase that the individual may be considered to be in a state of dissociation, an extreme form of denial, within a diagnosis of PTSD (Janoff-Bulman 1992:100-103).

The experience of feeling numb, isolated and detached from the world may also be accompanied by a sense of fragmentation of, or separation from, the self. Herman discusses the ways in which 'the person may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is observing from outside her body, or as though the whole experience is a bad dream from which she will shortly awaken' (Herman 1992:42-43). The following extracts provide examples of this type of experience:

1. and you're just you're just outside yourself really just in a state
2. of shock

J 3:119-120

Janice narrates a metaphorical separation from the self, 'outside yourself' (line 1), again using the generic second person 'you'. This unusual phrase seems to echo and intensify the more commonly used metaphor of being 'beside myself' as in 'I was beside myself with grief (or anger)' which is used to convey an extremely powerful emotional response. For Emma, the shock of discovering that she was pregnant left her feeling 'broken' and isolated within herself:

1. basically I kind of felt broken you know I couldn't really relate
2. to anything in the outside world I know that sounds silly but it's
3. a sense of isolation that no-one else knows what's going on
4. inside you and all these emotions are welling up to the
5. forefront erm you know you're feeling kind of scared and angry
6. and upset and nobody knows what's going on inside you
7. you're kind of hiding away and erm so that was a painful time
8. for me

Emma 1:21-28

For Stephen the experience of feeling 'broken' has a gendered dimension:

1. I I was sort of broken as a man I think erm thinking about what
2. the man should do in a family situation to protect his children

O 21:18-20

His identity as a man, and as a husband and a father in particular, is devastated by his son's death and, as discussed in the previous chapter, his desperate need to act, to exact

revenge on the person he sees as responsible, is fuelled by his need to reassert, or reclaim, his identity; to do 'what the man should do' (line 2).

Gail describes herself as beginning to 'disintegrate' following her assault,

1. I'd been strong for (.) a week maybe two weeks (.) and then I
2. began to disintegrate'

G1 5:227-228

and for Sandy, it felt like her world, rather than herself, had fallen apart when she discovered that she was pregnant:

1. I went back into theatre got changed came home don't really
2. remember the journey home I know I got home came indoors
3. and it just seemed everything was different it was like my
4. world had fallen apart

Sandy 1:8-11

Intense feelings can be narrated together with numbness and a lack of emotional expression in the immediate traumatic aftermath. Janice's narration of being 'outside herself' includes an experience of intense sensitivity and exposure:

3. I felt as if my emotions were outside myself I could almost feel
4. what people were going to say I was like hyper charged

J 5 236-237

In the following extract, Carol uses the metaphor 'firing on all four cylinders' which suggests a very powerful, explosive upsurge and discharge of energy accompanied by numbness and disbelief:

1. erm well when I found out Jonathan had been killed (.) er I
2. don't know whether you can call it shock or I started firing on
3. all four cylinders I just was numb I couldn't believe that
4. Jonathan was no longer with me

C1 1:34-37

In her narration of the weeks that followed, this combination of intense feelings and numbness is again invoked:

1. not sleeping headaches not eating very much erm just total
2. numbness ...

3. very angry very betrayed er upset that I wasn't allowed to hold
4. Jonathan which still hurts erm very mixed emotions it one
5. minute anger one minute you cry emptiness you just can't
6. explain all the different emotions

C 2/3 104-113

Herman (1992:47-50) discusses the way in which two contradictory responses to severe traumatic experience, intrusion and constriction (numbing), can establish 'an oscillating rhythm' whereby the individual alternates between states of 'overwhelming feeling and arid states of no feeling at all', and between compulsive action and the 'complete inhibition of action'. She refers to this as 'the dialectic of trauma' which produces a deep sense of instability and 'exacerbates the traumatized person's sense of unpredictability and helplessness' (Herman 1992:47).

Janice also recalls the extremes of emotion that she experienced:

1. I think you're just your emotions are just like so heightened
2. that you laugh a lot and you cry a lot and you and I think that's
3. what some people can't understand you know because I'd just
4. had the most awful tragedy in my life and we'd sort of be you
5. I'd find that everything is hilariously funny

J 5:227-231

Janice's experience in the immediate traumatic aftermath also includes an embodied sensation of the actual impact of the crash which had killed her daughter:

1. I think the thing that struck me as I look back now I was
2. absolutely erm my whole body it was as if I'd been in that
3. impact

J 3: 144-146

4. I just I just felt as if erm I'd been in the impact really
5. my whole of my body just just hurt you know

J 3: 148-150

There is an ambiguity in the tense and meaning of this extract – did Janice intend to say 'the thing that strikes me as I look back now', or does she mean 'the thing that struck me' (line 1) at the time? If it is the latter, then is she referring (metaphorically) to a physical striking, that caused her whole body to feel pain, or to a thought that struck her at the time which enabled her to understand her sensation of physically hurting as though she had been in the impact of the crash herself? The similarity in the language we use to talk about physical and emotional trauma (being 'hurt', 'wounded' and 'in pain' can refer to either body or mind) occurs because this language belongs within a network of figurative connections around the conceptual metaphor 'emotional effect is physical contact' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:50). The occurrence of emotionally traumatic experience is described as an 'impact' and being surprised or shocked is commonly described with phrases like 'it was a real blow' and 'I was floored by it'. In my data 'being hit' is the most commonly used metaphor:

> it's them sort of things that still hit home to me now (A 22:1176-1177)
>
> it hits me more now when I see other children his age (C2 3:135-136)
>
> which you know later on hit me more than it did at that time (R 6: 285-286)
>
> and that is when I think it really hit me (Sandy 1:47-48)

The word 'trauma' is derived from the Greek *traumatizo* meaning 'to wound' (Leydesdorff et al 1999), and was originally used to refer to a physical injury. It is of course still used in this way in medical discourse but since the inception of psychology, and since Freud in particular (Caruth 1996, Hacking 1996), the word 'trauma' has become more commonly used to refer to an event or experience that affects people psychologically and emotionally, whether or not it involves physical injury. However the conceptual metaphor 'emotional effect is physical contact' means that we use the

same kind of language for narrating the experience of both types of trauma. Caruth (1996:4) says that a trauma of the mind involves a 'breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world' and 'is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that ... is experienced too soon, to unexpectedly, to be fully known.' This section on numbness and disbelief points to the inherent latency within traumatic experience whereby, just as the liminal zone invokes a 'putting off' of the reality of the experience, the narration of the immediate traumatic aftermath tells of the 'escape' from reality that the experience of numbness brings. To quote from the poem with which I began this chapter, numbness wards off the possibility of '*sense ... breaking through*'. In the next section, we shall look at extracts that involve sleeplessness, hyperactivity and obsessive behaviour as traumatised selves struggle in the madness of a world in severe disequilibrium.

Madness: '*Many of my activities were fiercely concentrated and wholly preoccupying. I knew they were 'mad.'* (Johnson 1997:237)

The narration of the traumatic aftermath tells the story of the loss of all that is familiar and reassuring and the beginning of a different life; a life neither chosen nor desired but, if the individual is to survive, a life that must be *lived.* The mundane, everyday pattern of activities that structure normal life, such as sleeping, eating and working, are thrown into disarray and narrated selves can hardly recognise themselves within a strange and chaotic pattern of traumatised living.

Sleeplessness or sleep disturbance is frequently mentioned in stories of the traumatic aftermath:

1. all these months I'd been up all night I wasn't sleeping even with
2. sleeping tablets I was awake

A 22:1143-1145

1. well I didn't sleep or eat for about the first three or four weeks and
2. eventually they did give me some sedative but it never knocked me out
3. @@ for more than a @@ couple of hours

J 5:238-241

1. the first night that I got home he gave me sleeping pills so he could go
2. out with his girlfriend that was the first night back and he did go out
3. and the sleeping pills didn't work

R 8:382-384

1. I mean she does tell me you know if I can't sleep to phone her up
2. but I still can't phone her up at one in the morning because I wouldn't

S1 16: 854-856

Van der Kolk et al. (1996:13) note that sleep problems are symptomatic of hyperarousal and occur because traumatised people are 'unable to quiet themselves sufficiently to go to sleep, and because they deliberately wake themselves up in order to avoid having traumatic nightmares'. For individual narrators, however, their sleeplessness takes on specific and unique meanings in the context of the particular circumstances of their traumatic experience:

1. *During the years that followed - and often today – some unconscious*
2. *alarm wakes me regularly at 4.30 a.m. I am still not clear whether it is*
3. *the fear of dying myself that wakes me up at this particular time or the*
4. *hope of saving Jill. I can only assume my unconscious tells me that*
5. *waking up at 4.30 a.m. is soon enough to make a difference.*

Johnson 1997:233-34

Similarly, for Carol the timing of her son's death is the reason why she wakes at a particular time in the night:

1. the police told me that he (.) was killed in the early hours of
2. the morning erm which resulted in me waking up and still do
3. between the hours of of one two o'clock in the morning

C1:1/32-35

Sandra understands her sleeplessness in terms of a logically constructed reason to fear that she is still in danger following the acid attack:

1. I don't sleep at nights I mean you know I sort of lay awake til

2. three in the morning (.) erm cos I'm I I keep thinking er the
3. police have told me that my husband bought a litre of acid (.)
4. and the bottle he used was five hundred millilitres (.) so I keep
5. thinking he's got another half litre (.) somewhere and he's
6. going to come back and (.) finish the job basically

S1 9:478-484

Similarly, Gail understands her 'paranoia' in the traumatic aftermath of her assault as a response to the shattering of her sense of security and she recalls how she tried to reassure herself with a rational argument about the likelihood of it happening again:

1. G: if I hear a noise in the house I take the dog and go round
2. every room (.) check under the beds

3. S: right

4. G: paranoia really

4. S: but at the same time at the same time fairly normal
5. response given what happened

6. G: I suppose so

7. S: yeah (.) can you see it as being that

7. G: yes I guess so yes at the same time I try to get things in
8. perspective by I mean just after it happened I was desperately
9. trying to tell myself that there was no more likelihood of it
10. happening on the Tuesday as there was on the Sunday on the
11. day before it happened

12. S: right

12. G: there was no more likelihood (.) and erm I was trying
13. desperately to get that in perspective but erm I mean basically
14. my security's been affected

G 1 9/10:446-470

Janice offers a more generalised explanation of her 'mania' following Vicky's death:

1. and of course I wasn't sleeping I was just you know in this
2. manic rush I don't know I was writing stuff down and going
3. through pictures I don't know I just I was just trying to make
4. sense of it I just couldn't sleep and erm as I suppose looking

5. back on it probably being like that I was trying to just block it
6. out I was just keeping just so active I was trying to do it I just
7. couldn't I was just like super wound up

J 17:881-889

'Just trying to make sense of it' (line 3) and 'trying to just block it out' (lines 4-5) succinctly embody 'the dialectic of trauma' identified by Herman (1992:47-50), and mentioned in section one. It is not surprising that 'trying to do it' (line 6) drives narrated selves mad, when 'doing it' means living with the unbelievable, the incomprehensible and the unacceptable. Ruth also refers to 'just doing it' and 'just going through it'[95] as she narrates herself as driven by an intense desire to be 'normal' again, to be back where she was before the accident which left her debilitated and disfigured:

1. it was just a matter of taking each day as it came and not
2. thinking about it I mean it was just doing it literally just doing it
3. and I I pushed but I think the whole thing in the back of mind
4. was just I want to be normal I want to be back where I was
5. you know so it was like this drive but not never conscious
6. drive it really wasn't conscious it wasn't a conscious effort it
7. was this unconscious drive to get back to normal I went out
8. erm and looking back I mean if I'd have realised I used to get
9. some real stares I mean six and a half stone I was like a
10. skeleton and burned you know I was in a horrendous state but
11. I I went out I went out shopping for clothes and things like that
12. but I think it was just this you know I wasn't (.) I wasn't in a
13. clear frame of mind whatsoever I wasn't properly conscious I
14. mean I wasn't properly out of it I I was just going through it it
15. was just a matter of going through it erm and I would say that
16. going through it stage lasted for at least at least a year
17. probably eighteen months and looking back now you know I
18. mean I was very very ill mentally you know

R 8 412-420

Similarly, Gail and Sandra refer to their determination to maintain normal life in the immediate traumatic aftermath, in spite of their physical injuries and traumatised emotional state,:

---

[95] As discussed in chapter 5, 'just' is an intensifying subjunct (an adverbial with a subordinate role) which can either amplify or diminish a verb. Here it functions to emphasise the struggle to keep going, to continue living, under conditions that threaten survival.

1. well I think er it's a case of putting up all the barriers to keep
2. things going I was determined and I just felt that I had to keep
3. everything going I had I had to meet my pupils and I just had
4. to keep the life together for the sake of my daughter and you
5. know everything had to be right

G1 3:144-149

The metaphor 'putting up all the barriers' (line 1) suggests a conscious act of self-preservation or self-maintenance whereby the reality of what has happened can be put aside, walled off, so that 'life' can be kept 'together' as though nothing has happened. Sandra presents herself as someone who has 'always been determined not to let things beat' her and suggests that this aspect of her self-identity will enable her to recover her life in 'a short time':

1. I mean I'm determ I've always been determined not to (..) erm
2. let things beat me (.) and er I mean I've been adamant that
3. you know erm if Andrew has done this he may have disrupted
4. my life for a short time but I'm not going to let him keep
5. disrupting my life

S 13:653-657

Referring to the traumatic experience as a disruption suggests that Sandra is able to believe, or is determined to believe, that her life will continue as it was pre-trauma and that the effects of the terrifying acid attack will only be temporary. This projection of a future story within which what Andrew has done to her will be a past event which disrupted her life 'for a short time' (line 5) enables her to prefigure, to anticipate, the present of future things with hope. Being determined not to let things, including Andrew, 'beat' her is fighting talk and, as we shall see in chapter seven, may be seen as a coping strategy within a narration of the self as 'survivor' rather than 'victim'.

In narratives of the traumatic aftermath of the sudden death of a loved one, getting back to normal, even as an illusion, is not an option because normal would include the presence of the loved one. Ann recalls herself engaging in a range of repetitive

behaviours that can be understood as attempts to block out the reality of Michael's death:

1. I just sat there smoking and smoking and somehow probably
2. told myself Michael would come back

A 8:423-425

1. I I just drank and drank and drank and drank water I couldn't
2. stop drinking water

A 9:443-445

1. what I did do which was a silly thing but I know why I did it I'd
2. got er Nessum Dorma er what's that Pavarotti and me and
3. Michael he used to love er Kylie Minogue and he used I used
4. to put this Nessum Dorma record on it had just come out and I
5. used to have it on ever so loud and Michael used to go in the
6. bedroom and he used to put Kylie on drown mine out so you
7. know we used to have a laugh about it and I come back when
8. after a couple of days I still hadn't cried I I plugged myself into
9. this record and it was some headphones and I must have
10. been plugged into that for forty eight hours listening to
11. Nessum Dorma nothing else I wouldn't turn it off but I know
12. why I did it now and it was because I could feel Michael in his
13. bedroom

A 10:496-509

Here Ann tells the story of her retreat from the present into the past through music which enabled her to recreate pre-trauma life and feel Michael alive and close by. Richard also refers to the 'precious time' he spent with Jill after her death. When 'sleeping was too dangerous' in the early hours of the morning he 'madly' pursued activities that he came to understand in psychoanalytic terms as attempts to recreate Jill inside himself, to restore and internalise the lost loved object.:

1. *The feelings associated with trying to embody Jill were very*
2. *physical, often sexual and tender. They involved trying to grasp or*
3. *recreate her looks, gestures, the feel of her skin, the way she*
4. *physically touched you (a quick hand on the arm) when she engaged*
5. *with what you said, the sound of her voice, her vehement*
6. *expostulations and favourite sayings, her Otherness, her persona,*
7. *her very vital presence in the world. ...Many of my activities were*
8. *fiercely concentrated and wholly preoccupying. I knew they were*
9. *'mad'. In psychoanalytic terms, they were 'obsessive'. And worse,*
10. *perhaps, I craved and loved this madness. I wanted to wake up in*
11. *the morning to pursue these activities madly. I am deeply thankful to*

12. all the wise people who told me that the most bizarre of grieving
13. activities were OK.

Johnson 1997:236-237

Janice feels anger towards those people who described her as 'mad' and 'demented' during the immediate traumatic aftermath and wanted her to take sedatives. She recalls one particular incident:

1. and this lad who Vicki had been going out with Tim he's got a
2. motorbike well this day I think it must have been after the funeral I can't
3. remember but he took me a ride on this motorbike and cos I'd got this
4. helmet on and I was actually talking to him because he was the person
5. who was quite close to Vicki and I had a ride on a motorbike and
6. people were going oh Janice she's going demented she's having a ride
7. on a motorbike well why what will people say said Mick this friend I
8. said well what does it matter oh you know people will think you're weird
9. I says well @@@@ why spoil the habit of a lifetime I says it you know
10. I don't know I suppose I didn't fit fit into the pattern of how people did
11. things

J 10: 530-542

In Janice's motorbike story, an explanation for her unconventional behaviour is proposed within the exchange, 'people will think you're weird I says well @@@ why spoil the habit of a lifetime' (lines 8-9). This suggests that people have often thought that she is weird and thus unconventionality is part of her identity. Another explanation is suggested by Richard's psychoanalytic understanding of the process of grieving. Janice's desire to share a part of the life Vicky had spent with another, 'and I was actually talking to him because he was the person who was quite close to Vicki' (lines 4-5), and to experience something that Vicky had experienced, riding pillion with her boyfriend, is an attempt to recreate her daughter within herself, to *be* Vicki and thus re-embody the lost loved one.

Janice ends the motorbike story with the external evaluation 'I suppose I didn't fit fit into the pattern of how people did things' (lines 10-11). The pattern of how people do things following the death of a loved one consists of a range of rituals and conventional

behaviours that, says Kaplan (1995:9, quoted by Johnson 1997:235), 'are designed to give a semblance of order and rationality to the unruly passions of bereavement'. Mourning conventions also provide reassurance and guidance about how to be to *all* those involved in the death. Words of condolence, offers of help ('anything at all, just call'), sympathy cards and attendance at the funeral are the minimum requirements from friends and relatives[96]. Beyond this, those close to the bereaved may be able to give them permission to 'go mad':

1. all the wise people who told me that the most bizarre of grieving
2. activities were OK

(Johnson 1997:237)

And protect them while they do so:

1. I was very lucky that people up close to me er coped with how
2. I was coping with my grief

J 4:203-204

3. J: ...I mean I was lucky that I've got some really really good
4. friends and they sort of was near me and looked after me but
5. didn't you know try and

6. W: take over

7. J: yes but a lot of people did I mean luckily they sort of closed
8. round me a little bit

J 10:510-518

The loss of agency that, by its very nature, traumatic experience brings can be repeated in the aftermath when people 'take over' and decide what should be done. Traumatised selves may be unable to assert themselves and take control of details that become very important and significant in their stories of the aftermath. This type of experience of disempowerment is often narrated by the use of passive grammatical constructions which function to portray narrated selves as lacking, or being denied, agency:

1. things happened when it when it took place things got said
2. and done that I don't now agree with but because I was in the
3. state I was in I just agreed to them telling me things and like

[96] When my father died recently I was surprised to discover that this kind of public recognition of our loss was very important and, to some extent, comforting both to me and to my mother.

4. having Jonathan cremated I wished I hadn't had it done which
5. that's something I've got to live with basically I didn't want him
6. cremated I wanted him buried but at the time (phu) everybody
7. took over everything

C2 2:84-91

Similarly, Ann was disempowered by someone else taking over the arrangements and by her lack of knowledge about 'what you can and can't do', within the boundaries of convention:

1. and then one other regret I've got is that Alf's brother who was
2. the chartered accountant who Alf felt was his stable bigger
3. older brother would make the arrangements for the funeral I
4. don't I can't say I felt anything about that then because I
5. wasn't capable of doing it and he was the first person that ever
6. died in my life I don't know anybody else who died so it was
7. like we'd not experienced a funeral or what you can and can't
8. do or I didn't understand funerals I didn't didn't know if I'd been
9. to one it was a fr it was someone who wasn't related so I let
10. him make all the arrangements and that's another regret
11. because things I know now like he could have had his best his
12. clothes on what he loved his jeans and his I didn't know and
13. he would have had them on

A 12:597-610

Gail feels that she was over-protected by her parents in the immediate aftermath and was not allowed to deal with the situation in her own way:

1. for the few days after that I stayed with my mother because
2. erm (.) my husband was away and my parents insisted that I
3. didn't stay in the house on my own (.) any longer erm and to a
4. certain extent I resented that because I felt I wanted to face up
5. to the situation (.) and erm (.) like you know if you fall off a
6. horse you're told to get back on it

G1 3:158-164

7. some resentment because I was not allowed to be alone at all
8. all week (.) my parents were very very protective and made
9. sure that if I went to the house my father went with me (.) I
10. was not you know allowed to be alone and I really would have
11. (.) appreciated it if they hadn't done that I would have wanted
12. to have faced up to that situation

G1 4:175-181

Other people taking over and making arrangements in the traumatic aftermath can be particularly frightening and dangerous for those who fear that they are actually going mad. Janice's experience of being called 'demented' in the traumatic aftermath means that she can imagine 'people who are perfectly all right being locked up' (J 18:967-968) and Ruth recalls how this nearly happened to her:

I can remember I thought I was going to lose it not long after
I'd been back in at home and not long after Neville had gone
this second time I really thought I was going to lose it and go
you know go mad and er I was having this screaming fit and
you know just so upset and my mum and dad had come round
and they said oh we'll phone for this Trevor Steel who was a
psychiatric nurse we'll phone for Trevor we'll phone for Trevor
Steel and he came round within an hour and wanted to cart
me off to the psychiatric hospital and the battle I had on with
him I says I am not mad you know I am not going to the
psychiatric hospital come come and talk with the psychiatrist I
says I'll talk with the psychiatrist but I am not staying come for
a weekend come and just have rest I am not staying I am not
mad I just need to know how I'm going to survive that's what
was going on in my head how am I gonna how am I gonna
cope with life how am I going to survive financially how can I
cope with these kids and the frustrations of not being able to
open a bottle top you know and Andrew and Tania was doing
all that for me I was on my own with them two kids and I
couldn't even open a bottle top for god's sake and he wanted
to put me on drugs you know @@@@@@ and I couldn't sort
of get it in his head I wasn't mad and it was just the
frustrations of trying to cope I went to the hospital I talked to a
psychiatrist he said I was perfectly sane which I knew full well
I was you know and came back home and and had to really
grit my teeth to get through that that weekend you know and I
the anger with him now I could it was just so such a fine line
that I would have gone into a psychiatric hospital I would have
been on drugs and who knows where I would have been you
know

R10:519-551

Ruth begins this story of her escape from hospitalisation with the acknowledgement that she really did think that she 'was going to lose it and go you know go mad' (lines 3-4) but towards the end says that she 'knew full well' that she was 'perfectly sane' (lines 24-25). This shift is clearly connected to what she says about her behaviour:

'having this screaming fit' (line 4) is part of going mad and gritting her teeth (line 26) is part of staying sane and proving that she can cope when faced with the threat of losing control over her life. Ruth's fears about the practical dimensions of living post-trauma are voiced in the series of questions 'how I'm going to survive?, how am I gonna cope with life?, how am I going to survive financially?, how can I cope with these kids?'. In her narrative these fears are, of course, connected to her physical injuries as well as her psychological traumatisation but they are also the fears of those who have not been physically injured:

I I remember somebody came up this was me and Alf always
comment about this and it and the we we couldn't make them
a drink or nothing but they was hungry cos they'd come from a
long way said look sorry can't make you anything but we'll try
and make you some toast and you know both of us stood
there with the toaster in front of us and the bread and the
butter and we couldn't make toast and we looked at each
other as if to say is this is this real? we can't make toast two of
us can't make toast and we got a bit upset about that because
it was like what's happening? what can we do? how can we?
what's going to happen?

A 11: 560-571

Finding themselves unable to perform a simple domestic task together caused Ann and Alf to ask helplessly 'is this real?', 'what's happening?', 'what can we do?', 'what's going to happen?'. Fearing the future, trying to block out the past and being unable to live in the madness of the present characterises stories of severe disequilibrium in the traumatic aftermath. In Carol's view, the experience of the immediate traumatic aftermath cannot be understood 'until it happens to you'. In the following extract, she refers only obliquely to the 'silly things' and the 'morbid things' that she did, choosing not to disclose any specific details:

you never realise how how people do suffer until actually it
happens to you and until it happens to you nobody'll every
know (.) the pain and the hurt you have inside and the feelings
and the different feelings and things that you carry about and
have and the reasons you get upset silly things nobody every

6. knows until it happens to you and the morbid things people
7. want to do with you know all sorts (.) things that I did and I
8. never that I used to think how could anybody do that and I've
9. done it now and now I understand

C2 12: 620-629

Here Carol compares her former, ignorant, pre-trauma self, 'I used to think' (line 8), with her present, knowledgeable self , 'now I understand' (line 9), a self that has emerged through the experience of the traumatised self who did 'all sorts of things' (line 7). There is a strong sense here, and in the other narratives, of a self forever changed through loss and suffering. In addition, the self that emerges has, unavoidably, become part of a community made up of only those who know through their own personal traumatic experience. This sense of community, of shared specialist knowledge, is also invoked by the frequent use of the generic 'you' in Carol's, Janice's and Ann's narratives which suggests that, however specific and unique their own experience is, they believe that there are aspects and dimensions of the experience and of their responses to it that form a common, generalisable pattern of traumatised living.

It is narrated selves, not narrators, who lose, or fear they are losing, their minds in stories of the traumatic aftermath. And, in this sense, the stories themselves testify to a recomposition of the self, who can now reflect back on a time of madness and loss of self. In this way, the period of madness that is narrated is more than a vortex of chaos, pain and suffering because, within the narrative, it is also a productive process from which emerges a different self; a self that continues to live with the pain of loss but is no longer lost to itself.

The madness of disequilibrium can also be productive in more tangible ways when

activities which may have begun as desperate attempts to survive in disequilibrium, to get through the dangerous night-time hours, become absorbing and reassuring activities through which the life of the lost loved one is recreated and repossessed. Richard's frenetic early morning activities included the creation of a 'photo-life' of Jill which involved searching out, selecting and reproducing images of her and arranging them in an album:

Then, when the whole was composed, I could turn the pages and follow the sequence of her life, especially, but not only, her life with me.

Johnson (1997:236-237).

Similarly, Janice spent many night-time hours recreating Vicki's life through photographs in a state she describes as a 'manic rush' and 'slightly out of my mind':

of course I wasn't sleeping I was just you know in this manic rush I don't know I was writing stuff down and going through pictures

J 17:881-884

I mean I was I suppose slightly out of my mind but on the other hand you know well what do people expect you know you've had the most awful thing happen to you and it's such a shock that you know you do you know everybody is different how they react to it and erm as I say I erm I mean I just er I got all Vicki's photographs out and I needed to look through her life and realise you know what sort of life we had you know remembering lots of things that she did and I still do that

J 6:284-293

The creation of an archive of the life that is lost involves a process of constructing a life story for the deceased; a story that can hold and keep safe the memory of the archivist and serve as a testimony to the dead. Ricoeur's discussion of 'the historian's debt', or 'duty of restitution' to the dead (Ricoeur 1991:186) is useful in understanding the story of the lost life as both archive and testimony. He says that we must 'render what has happened, that is to say, figure it at the same time as returning it to the dead'. In this way, he refers to 'a communion between the living and the dead' because '[i]f we are

unable to "fictionalize" the dead, we would have to return their "having been" to them.' Richard refers to his responsibility 'to remember and to recognize Jill as publicly as possible' (Johnson 1997:247) yet he also knows that his rendering of her life, through private archive or public testimony, produces his own versions of Jill, spoken in his voice, and involves the appropriation and possession of her in ways which, he fears, may perpetuate, 'beyond the grave', the inequalities that he recognises within their life together (Johnson 1997:247). This tension in Richard's narrative, between appropriation and testimony, will be discussed again in chapters seven and eight.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Carol finds it impossible to render the life of Jonathan:

1. as I say I don't (.) tend not to look at pictures of him very often
2. even though they are up in the house erm and I try not to think
3. about the events that took place because when I think about
4. him in the way he was it hurts too much still ...

5. I dismiss the fact of what's happened to him deny that he's
6. dead which is I I I don't even like going to the cemetery
7. because its having to admit that he's there ...

8. to try and sit and remember Jonathan playing running around
9. (.) the pain is just (.) its too much [rising intonation] it upsets me
10. too much (.) so I don't I just don't and I don't like myself for that
11. because he was here erm he was a part of our lives (.) just
12. miss him ... [in a whisper, very tearful, sobbing]

C2 5:231-236

For Carol, there is no possibility of reclaiming or recreating Jonathan's life; no archive to keep safe her memory of Jonathan and no testimony to his life. The terrible way in which Jonathan died meant that his death took his 'having been' with it and Carol feels guilty for being unable to render his life, to pay the 'debt of restitution':

1. and I just want to try and remember him like I used to playing
2. running about being cheeky me shouting at him (.) er and I
3. just can't at the moment (.) and I feel guilty for that so guilty

C1 7:320-323

4. and I just try and blank it out which means I'm trying to say
5. Jonathan didn't really exist

C1 7:331-332

Carol also tells of the ongoing difficulty of having to deny Jonathan's life in order to protect herself and maintain her control over the 'present of past things'[97] which dominated her life in the traumatic aftermath and, as we shall see in the next section, meant that she was continually subjected to intense retraumatisation. Because she has to avoid having to tell people about Jonathan's death she presents herself as the mother of one child only. This erasure of Jonathan's life and death from her self-narrative means that Carol must adopt a new identity which is radically different from the identity of both the post-trauma and the traumatised Carol:

1. C: when people ask me how many children I've got you know
2. that's when I find it hard as well

3. S: what do you say

4. C: .hh one (.) but that's then denial that I've had Jonathan in
5. my view and I don't like that

6. S: do you ever want to say two

7. C: yeah I do yeah every time (.) but erm I don't want to have to
8. go into detail that I've lost a baby (.) you know so and I do find
9. that hard (.) I do find that hard

C2 10:512-525

In the immediate, but not the long-term, traumatic aftermath, Ann couldn't bear to see reminders of Michael's life:

1. I couldn't stand to see anything of Michael's nothing
2. everything had to go out the way and I asked my friend to
3. come down it was my best friend and take all the things out
4. his bedroom because I couldn't bear it and I don't know why I
5. did that and its one of the biggest regrets that I've got er cos
6. everything went and I've got nothing left

A 12: 576-584

[97] See Chap 5:46

and it was too painful to see anything nothing cos when I walked back from the hospital there was two pair of his jeans on the line and I could still see them there erm I just couldn't bear anything of his everything had to go coats anything I couldn't bear it for months

A 12: 592-596

got to move houses because that bedroom in that bungalow although it was shut it just kept destroying me and I stuck it out longer than I wanted to because my husband didn't want to move I wanted to move immediately but he didn't and er eventually I did talk him round because I I think he could see that it had to come

A 19: 947-953

I asked Ann whether she still felt like this about reminders of Michael. My question was prompted in part by the fact that Ann had brought a photograph of Michael to the interview, saying that it didn't feel right to be talking about him to me without him being there in some way. The framed photograph, a visual testimony to accompany Ann's stories of Michael's life and death, stood on the table in front of us as we talked. In view of this, I thought it likely that she had now been able to restore a sense of Michael in the present:

W: what about now have you got do you have times when you are able to think about him

A: oh very much yeah er like Christmas Day I get up and I get I it wasn't that photograph although it's a Christmas one but I get up and I just kiss him after you know birthdays and I like Christmas and I kiss his photo and talk to him and it's like I've said

W: you can do that

A: yeah and er little things spark me off depends what er I was crying this morning funny enough I don't I don't I don't make a habit of doing that but when I was sort of thinking well I ought to bring some photographs and I I sort of I picked that up I'm I'm having what you call a bad day today and I was crying over that erm I think it's because I knew erm don't know it's like it it's like he don't exist

15. W: mm

17. A: you know and it's like you know if I go to parties I got a little
18. photo I always put it in my bag and it's like well he's here you
19. know he's is coming with us

A 35:1764-1788

Finding ways of maintaining, or restoring an intimate, loving relationship with the person who has died and of continuing to re-affirm their 'having been' in the present is clearly related to long-term coping and meaning making processes and we shall return to this in the next chapter.

In this section, we have seen that stories of madness in the immediate traumatic aftermath tell of the desperate attempts of traumatised selves to restore some sense of equilibrium in a radically disordered world. They testify to the narrated self's intense desire to turn away from reality and to return to pre-trauma equilibrium, to recapture and reexperience the past or, as in the liminal zone, to strive to maintain a sense of equilibrium in a disordered world. What may appear to be strange, inappropriate or mad behaviour is, on the contrary, the temporary restoration of the familiar and the reassuring in a mad world.

Feeling out to control, being unable to recognise oneself, going 'mad', involves a terrifying loss of self. In their narratives of this experience, on the other side of madness, narrators make connections between the selves that they were, pre-trauma, and the selves they have become *through* the madness of traumatised living. Narrators do not have to draw on scientific or general knowledge in order to do this. They make sense of themselves and their experiences through narrative knowledge, 'knowing from

within'[98] their stories. Narrative knowledge is context-dependent and constructed through the configuration of particular and specific relationships between their past, present and future experiences. The activity of self-reflection which personal experience narration entails demands that a distance and a difference exists between the narrating 'I' and the narrated self[99] and. in this sense, the process of narration can be seen as a restoration of the self, forever changed but living alongside, rather than submerged within, the traumatic experience.

In the final section of this chapter I shall look at stories of retraumatisation. These stories attest to the inherent latency of the moment of traumatic impact, 'experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known' (Caruth 1996:4), and to the many ways in which the past, the present and the future may be experienced as dangerous and uncontrollable in the traumatic aftermath as narrated selves are subjected to repeated retraumatisations.

Retraumatisation : *'I visualised him shouting for me in his last breath and me not being there to help him (.) and there's nothing I can do'*
(C1 7:329-331)

Narrators tell of a range of ways in which their traumatic experience is not contained in the past but persistently intrudes into the present and the imagined future in the traumatic aftermath. As discussed in chapters 1 and 5, in relation to Ricoeur's notion of the three fold present, the traumatic experience exists in the 'present of past things', affects perception of the 'present of present things' and influences the imagined 'present of future things'. It is for this reason that Young (1996:297) refers to Post Traumatic

[98] Narrative knowledge is regarded as distinct from scientific knowledge in Bruner's (1986) analysis of the difference between paradigmatic and narrative thought processes as mentioned in the previous chapter. 'Knowing-from-within' is a concept used by Shotter 1993a. Both concepts will be discussed again in the conclusion to the thesis.

[99] See chapter two for a detailed discussion of the distance and difference between the 'narrating I' and the narrated self.

Stress Disorder as a 'disease of time', as it involves 'the past invading the present in reexperiences and reenactments, and of the person's efforts to defend himself (sic) from the consequences'. In their stories of the traumatic aftermath narrators recall episodes of retraumatisation that are triggered by events which are directly caused by the traumatic experience and by events that are connected symbolically to the experience. Narrated selves are also retraumatised by their imaginary versions of what happened in the past and by imagined stories of what might happen in the future. I shall look in detail at these different types of stories and the relationships between them within individual narrations of the traumatic aftermath.

Gail describes the 'looming up' of the court case that followed her traumatic experience as 'as bad if not worse than the incident itself' (G1 10:501-503). At the court she saw her attacker for the first time since the day of the assault:

1. at the magistrates court he was taken past me and he should
2. have gone up a lift and he came up a staircase and was taken
3. past me erm (.) I went numb absolutely I just lost all feeling in
4. my fingertips and (.) I was so shocked

G1 11:554-558

Although retraumatised by this at the time, and experiencing similar feelings of shock and numbness as those which accompanied the moment of traumatic impact, Gail thinks that the experience was helpful to her later:

1. in a way (.) it helped afterwards because (.) I don't know just
2. (.) seeing him without the crash helmet I think it was really (.)
3. or perhaps just seeing him in court wearing handcuffs (.) it it
4. helped yes to see him without the crash helmet because he
5. looked more (.) more ordinary I suppose

G1 11 562-567

Because the perpetrator wore a crash helmet during the attack, motorbikes became a symbolic trigger for further episodes of retraumatisation:

1. I was out with some friends one day (.) just talking about

2. general things and (.) erm (.) a man on a motorbike went past
3. (.) and I I was I just had to drop back (.) from them as we were
4. walking and (.) take a few deep breaths in the middle of this
5. conversation erm (.) because I was suddenly smitten with fear

6. S: right

7. little incidences like that (.) that just happen out of the blue and
8. suddenly bring it all back

G1 16:831-837

Gail's reaction to a normally unremarkable event, 'a man on a motorbike went past', makes sense in symbolic relation to the detail of the original traumatic experience because we understand that crash helmets, and therefore motorbikes, carry specific and unique meaning for Gail. This short narrative of retraumatisation, triggered by an incident 'out of the blue' (line 7), is similar in many ways to narratives of traumatic impact. It has the prevalent 'equilibrium disturbed' structure, realised through the 'I was just doing X when Y' device: 'I was out with some friends ... just talking' (X- line 1) , 'a man on a motorbike went past' (Y-line 2). Or one could say that the Y component is 'I was suddenly smitten with fear' (line 5) because it is the effect that a man on a motorbike going past has on Gail that is sudden and remarkable rather than the event itself. The point of this story, within the context of the interview, is to illustrate one of the ways in which Gail has been affected by her traumatic experience, and therefore its significance lies in the way in which normal, everyday occurrences are experienced as traumatic by Gail because of the original traumatic experience. Gail's chooses to use the verb 'to smite' to describe the experience of being suddenly overwhelmed with fear. This draws on the conceptual metaphor 'emotional effect is physical contact' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:50), discussed in section one of this chapter. The passive construction, 'I was suddenly smitten' (line 5), invokes a sense of helplessness as it places the narrated self in a nonagentive role (Capps and Ochs 1995:419), at the mercy of the sudden and unexpected intrusion of the past in the

present. The extent of the intrusion, that is the impact of Y on X, is emphasised by the detail of the X component, '*just* talking about general things' which implies that they were not talking about Gail's past traumatic experience, and therefore the unexpectedness of the fear that smites her is all the greater. In these ways, narratives of retraumatisation may echo, in both content and form, narratives of traumatic impact and the stories of symbolically triggered retraumatisation realised by these narratives are understood within a cause and effect relationship to the story of traumatic impact; a story that repeats itself and reverberates throughout the bigger story of the traumatic experience as a whole.

In addition to the episodes of retraumatisation triggered by motorcycles and crash helmets, Gail describes herself in the immediate traumatic aftermath as having a 'very deep seated fear' (G1 4:203) of men and of returning home alone. These two aspects of her narration of the traumatic aftermath come together in the following episode of retraumatisation, which took place on the first day she had to return home alone following the attack:

I left the dog in the house and went to take my daughter to
playgroup (.) and I remember the the fear of coming back into
the house (.) it took all my courage to get into the house and
when I had (.) I hugged the dog and sobbed for quite a while
erm (.) and I was in the house then for an hour an hour and a
half before I had to fetch her back (.) again and just before I
was due to leave (.) the doorbell rang so I mean before this
incident I would have answered the door (.) but on this
occasion I went to the window to see who it was and there
was a shabbily dressed man (.) who I didn't know and erm I
was I was absolutely terrified absolutely terrified (.)

G1 8:401-412

Living with the danger of finding herself 'absolutely terrified' by an event which before the attack would not have troubled her unduly, becomes a permanent feature of

Gail's life post trauma. The following extract is taken from the second interview with Gail, nine years after the first :

there was a a small incident the other week I was driving
home late through town and a chap got out of a car and
banged the back of my car with his hand now I think that I
reacted more strongly to that because of the other event I was
actually terrified and jumped the lights I drove off because erm
and my heart was pounding I was absolutely terrified when
this man got out of the car next to me and banged on my car
I think things like that are are exaggerated because of that
event

G2 5:250-258

As discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Janoff-Bulman's 'shattered assumptions' theory of trauma, Gail is no longer able to believe that 'it won't happen to me':

I just feel more vulnerable I think I you know until something
happens to you you always have that feeling at the back of
your mind oh well it won't happen to me and once it's
happened you can't rely on that feeling anymore (.) because
then you have to admit yes it might happen to me and so I feel
more vulnerable more insecure

G2 8:423-429

In the next chapter which is concerned with longer term coping and narrative meaning-making we shall see how Gail manages to live with these feelings of vulnerability and insecurity and how she attempts to control and minimise the danger she perceives in her day to day life.

In the aftermath of Jonathan's murder, Carol says that the forthcoming court case enabled her to keep going because she wanted to see 'justice for Jonathan I wanted to see his dad locked away'(C1 4:203-204). But during the trial Carol found out details about Jonathan's death that she had not previously known:

people tell me that he wouldn't have suffered but he did (.) at

2. the court case I found that out (.) you know in your own mind
3. and I visualised him shouting for me in his last breath and me
4. not being there to help him (.) and there's nothing I can do (.)

C1 7:327-331

5. I feel upset because I also found out that he suffocated him
6. and it took Jonathan three minutes to die so now I know that
7. he did suffer for three whole minutes

C1 9:459-461

This new information about Jonathan's death intensifies the terrible grief and suffering that Carol is already experiencing. She is repeatedly retraumatised by imagining those last minutes of Jonathan's life and constructs a narrative which fits the new information. In this story Jonathan calls for her and she is completely helpless both then, 'and me not being there to help him' (lines 4-5), and now, 'and there's nothing I can do' (line 4). The added suffering and retraumatisation caused by the imagination is referred to by Maggie as the 'awful tricks' the mind can play. Because of this, she dare not think about how her goddaughter died:

1. and you daren't think about it too much if you think about the
2. last two hours of her life er you'd just go mad because you
3. know that she suffered you know that she was tortured and
4. you know that she was stabbed and you can imagine the rest
5. you know your mind sort of plays tricks and you can imagine
6. the rest

M 6:315-321

7. and you imagine you know I can imagine her sort of begging
8. er you know not to do it you know and I can hear her voice
9. you know your mind plays awful tricks on you really and that's
10. the sort of thing you have to sort of push away

M 18:941-945

Both Carol's and Maggie's narratives suggest that, given some information, we are driven to fill in the details, to imagine what could have happened or what must have happened and the story that fits is the one that realises our worst fears. Probyn (1993:14) is surely correct when she says that imagination is 'wrought in pain and

cruelty [and] it must be used with care because it can just as easily slice into you, leaving you fragmented within bloody memories'.

Carol's suffering and guilt about being unable to respond to Jonathan calling for her in her story of his death is compounded by an 'if only' story that makes her feel that she could be responsible for Jonathan's death and for Tom's imprisonment:

1. I felt guilty and to a point still do that he is locked up for life I
2. feel as though it is my fault now that if I'd have just said to him
3. on that Friday night I love you he might not have killed him
4. because that's all he wanted me to say to him

C1 9:454-458

Here an alternative version of events is proposed whereby Carol could have said something which would have changed the course of events and averted the tragedy. Carol also has other versions of what could have happened that have worst outcomes. These imaginary stories involve Tom killing James and/or Carol as well as Jonathan. In the same way as liminal zone stories, discussed in the chapter five, are realised by narrative's ability to tell 'the reverse-face of history' (Ricoeur 1991:187), stories of the retraumatising aftermath turn (non) events, which did not happen but could have done, *back* on history and, in this sense, they *have been* if only in an unrealised, potential way. These 'impeded possibilities' (Ricoeur 1991:187) cause further retraumatisation for Carol as she lives in fear for her own life in the traumatic aftermath:

1. I kept visualising his Dad coming round the bedroom door and
2. killing me erm (.) any noise anything I was absolutely terrified I
3. still am terrified at night time as soon as it gets dark I see
4. images of his Dad coming into the bedroom or or even round
5. a corner when I'm walking in town and er wanting to kill me
6. and I'm I'm frightened to death scared to death of him knowing
7. that he was capable of doing that to Jonathan I was told that
8. he was probably going to kill me anyway er knowing that I
9. have lived with somebody for fifteen years that could have
10. killed me at any one time is just you just can't imagine or
11. explain what it feels like you think of all the times that it could
12. have happened all the times he was asking me to go up and

13. speak to him erm on my own I think could he have killed me
14. then was he intending to kill me then and it's the ifs and buts
15. that are hard to handle as well

C1 2:74-90

The 'ifs and buts' (line 14) about what could have happened in the past, 'could he have killed me then was he intending to kill me then' (lines 13-14), throw the whole of Carol's married life into disarray, 'knowing that I have lived with somebody for fifteen years that could have killed me at any one time' (lines 7-10). Despite knowing that Tom is locked up, Carol feels that she is in constant danger from him and is 'scared to death' (line 6) during repeated episodes of retraumatisation. The danger that she now knows existed in the past, when she was unaware of it, is perceived and experienced as an immediate and terrifying threat in the present of the traumatic aftermath. Tom's actions have rewritten Carol's past life in ways which mean that his identity, her identity and their relationship together are all thrown into disarray:

1. when I went to see him at court for the first time when he was
2. on remand I expected to go there and see a murderer and
3. when I got into court and saw Tom I felt sorry for him (.) even
4. though he's killed Jonathan he intended to kill James (.) I
5. actually felt sorry for him thinking of the times that we had had
6. together over the past fifteen years (.) erm and I just couldn't
7. take it in that he had actually (.) murdered him (.) to get back
8. at me er I didn't see a murderer I just saw the children's father
9. my husband

C1 3:117-126

10. if I'd have known him (.) I'd have known that he was a
11. murderer and I never did

C1 9:479-480

By the time of the second interview, Carol is no longer retraumatised by what Tom could have done to her in the past or what he might do in the future:

1. I used to have a lot of nightmares about him (.) visualising him
2. doing what he did going up the stairs and and all the times
3. that he could have killed me that week prior to it happening (.)
4. er I don't have the nightmares so much now (.) in fact I don't
5. think about him an awful lot anymore

C2 7:362-367

She has also managed to resolve her confused and ambiguous feelings towards Tom:

1. I felt I felt sorry for him erm erm (.) especially when after I'd
2. been to see him that time after the trial I really felt sorry for
3. him and I thought he couldn't have done it [scornful laugh]
4. you know and he made me believe [rising intonation] that well
5. he didn't even he didn't say he was sorry at all but I mean he
6. made me believe that (.) that I don't know I can't say but I felt
7. really sorry for him being locked up in there er and it wasn't
8. until a fortnight or so after that event of seeing him that (.) I
9. realised just how nasty and devious he was...

Carol goes on to narrate a number of things that Tom did while in prison that she says finally enabled her to reduce the complexity of her feelings towards him to those of anger and hate. In the next chapter I shall look at the ways in which Carol describes herself as using these feelings as weapons in her fight for survival.

Ruth describes her memories of the car accident in which she was badly burned and of the weeks she spent in intensive care as muddled and fragmented:

1. it was like a dream like sensation everything was in slow
2. motion you know it was just the car went over I can't
3. remember how many times it turned over but it went over I can
4. remember a bang a big loud noise and then like a whooshing
5. sound and then flames erm not really clear I mean it was I was
6. maybe I was in and out of consciousness or maybe it was just
7. the state of mind I don't know but it was very dream like slow
8. motion muddled but I can remember the screams I can
9. remember screaming

R 2:56-65

10. and then nothing there was absolutely nothing erm I was
11. actually in intensive care for about six weeks erm (.) or maybe
12. four say the whole whole of it I mean whether I've blanked this
13. out of my mind a lot of sort of vague of what was happened I
14. I don't know whether it was four or six weeks I was actually in
15. intensive care but I was in intensive care and I was
16. unconscious er er a few weeks

R 2/3:104-111

Her clearest memories of this period are of the nightmares and dreams she had as she drifted in and out of consciousness in weeks following the crash:

1. the nightmares they was just so horrendous nothing like an
2. out of body thing but I can remember one of them was this
3. meeting with the devil I have never been so scared in my life
4. and it was I was in in the in a different body I was actually in a
5. different body so whether this was to do with my subconscious
6. and and getting used to the state of my body I don't know but I
7. was in a different body and I I had to I wanted to get back into
8. my own body and staff at the hospital had taken me to this
9. room to actually have this meeting with the devil to do a
10. bargain I was just left and I was left in this room to actually
11. face the devil and it was just so near you know I thought my
12. heart would give up because of the fear of it you know but it it
13. it was just a a dream

R 3/4: 152-166

14. another one I dreamt that I was like on this wasteland and and
15. had to go to various buildings to be cared for and erm and that
16. was to do with the physio apparently they were doing physio
17. to get all the phlegm and everything off my chest but I had to
18. go to these buildings for this physio and I was sort of
19. wandering the desert

R 4:168-174

20. and part of the dreams were muddled up with the telly there
21. was this Gloria Vanderbilt this bleddy record that was on at
22. that time and I it was part of this nightmare you know and I
23. hate that record so much it was that was to do with wandering
24. these corridors and being burned and meeting other burned
25. people so this was going on even at a subconscious level
26. while I wasn't aware I was seeing this charcoal figures and yet
27. I hadn't come out of the unconscious state so that was going
28. on in my subconscious if you like these dreams

R 4:191-196

Ruth's external evaluations, 'I have never been so scared in my life' (line 3) and 'I thought my heart would give up because of the fear of it you know' (lines 11-12) which frame the narrative of the 'meeting with devil' dream, suggest that even though 'it was just a dream' (line 13) this experience was more *real* and more traumatic, in terms of her experience of it, than the crash itself which she experienced as 'very dream-like slow motion muddled' (R 2:56). It is reminders of the nightmares, rather than memories of actual events, that retraumatise Ruth later. She hates hearing a particular

record because it brings the nightmarish past into the present day and there are other noises that can leave her feeling terrified:

1. boats that are in a boatyard and the wind catches them and
2. you know they rattle that was a real clear noise now if if I go to
3. a beach or anything and that rattling of boats you know hhhhh
4. terror you know @@@ it really sort of brings it back and er oh
5. it's that's that's horrible

R 4: 179-184

The narrating 'I' in the dream stories can make meaning of the dreams in relation to both the physical and the psychological experience of the narrated self at the time of the dreams:

1. whether this was to do with my subconscious and and getting
2. used to the state of my body I don't know

R 3:157-159

3. apparently they were doing physio to get all the phlegm and
4. everything off my chest

R 4:171-172

5. so this was going on even at a subconscious level while I
6. wasn't aware I was seeing this charcoal figures and yet I
7. hadn't come out of the unconscious state so that was going on
8. in my subconscious if you like these dreams

R 4:196-200

We can see, therefore, that the dream narratives involve complex layers of relationships between the present narrating 'I', who tells the story at the moment of narration; the past narrated self who is in a burned body, unaware and unconscious; the dream self, in a different body, who meets the devil, wanders in the wasteland and sees charcoal figures; and the autonomous action of the subconscious which, the narrating 'I' suggests, was dealing with that which both the narrated self and the dream self were unaware. There are many aspects of the dream-like memory of the car crashing and of the dreams in the hospital that feature strongly in Ruth's overall understanding of what happened to her, why it happened and the effect it has had on her life. I shall look at this narrative meaning-making in detail in the next chapter.

Ann's memories of the immediate traumatic aftermath of Michael's death are few and fragmented. The experience of numbness and disbelief persisted for several weeks and she told me that she had great difficulty remembering what happened or how she managed to get through this period. The things she does remember are episodes that she and Alf still talk about, like the time they couldn't make toast for visitors. These shared experiences have been configured, turned into stories, through narration and are therefore installed in their collective memory[100] whereas other aspects of the immediate traumatic aftermath remain unknown and unknowable to Ann. She describes the day of the funeral as a blank:

1. I can't remember at all (.) its just a blank and I still still don't I still try
2. remember it but I can't see it

A 13:673-674

One of the things she did that day *is* remembered by both Ann and Alf, however, perhaps because it has become part of a symbolic trigger for retraumatisation that they co-operatively avoid:

1. I can't remember anything of that day the funeral at all ****** when we
2. arrived no the coffin come outside the house and I sat in the window
3. and I just screamed when it come and my husband won't let me sit in
4. the window now if I ever sit near that window he'll say move he won't
5. let me sit near that window cos he remembers

A 13:651-657

One of Ann's clearest memories of the immediate traumatic aftermath involves an episode of retraumatisation which took place the first time she went shopping:

1.
2. we went shopping I do remember this bit ever so clearly cause
3. I'd not shopped with us not eating we went we decided we
4. wouldn't go locally because what upset me was when I did
5. walk down the village where everybody's knows me it was like

[100] Middleton and Edwards (1990) argue that memory is the product of conversations and the work of conversation is to construct what is remembered rather than to play back the actual trace of the past. In this way, and as I argued in chapters two and five, memories are not frozen snapshots of a past reality but are already narrative versions of past experience constructed in co-operation and in negotiation with diverse others.

6. a path like the parting of the sea and all these people were like
7. crossing the road and they made me feel just say hello don't
8. run away from me and it made me feel worse and that hurts
9. me and I says to Alf when I need a few things ***** cat food
10. and that I says I need some bits but don't go local because I
11. don't want bump into people that I know yet and we went to
12. Lincolnshire @@ for shopping and I remember we went round
13. this supermarket and Michael loved tomato sauce and we
14. walked in and we just went down a few alleys and we couldn't
15. think what to do or what to pick up well you know you only pick
16. things up what the kids like don't you like his biscuits and his
17. tomato sauce and all the things that he wanted so I didn't
18. know how to shop any more and then all of a sudden there
19. was this great big display in the middle for some reason of
20. heinz tomato sauce and I'd got a few bits in my trolley and just
21. run out crying because of the tomato sauce well isn't that silly
22. to cry over tomato sauce

A 10/11:527-549

This story tells of the enormous difficulty of trying to pick up the pieces of a shattered life. The normally mundane activity of shopping is fraught with danger as, despite Ann's attempts to avoid being made to feel worse by shopping locally, she is still retraumatised by seeing products that she would normally buy for Michael. Shopping is connected to cooking and eating and in Ann's story of traumatic impact, discussed in the previous chapter, the X component, equilibrium, included the preparation of a meal for Michael:

1. .. and I'd cooked dinner and I'd put their dinners out and I'd
2. told them to be home for three and (****) kept looking at the
3. clock where are they?

A 7:342-344

Cooking that meal became the last thing that Ann did for Michael while he was alive and it may be that this particular detail of the last moments of pre-trauma life, just before the normality was shattered, made an already difficult and painful activity, 'I didn't know how to shop any more' (lines 16-17), suddenly impossible and unbearable.

In the longer term, it is reminders of the loss of Michael's future that still 'hit home' to Ann:

1. I was seeing all these people and I've forgot the faces and you
2. see I'd go round the village and they'd be pushing prams and
3. it was my Michael's friends and it's like no they're still sixteen
4. like Michael was you see fifteen they're still fifteen and it's
5. them sort of things that still hit home to me now

A 22:1171-1177

In this retraumatisation narrative about seeing Michael's friends growing up Ann suggests that Michael's death 'froze' time for her, 'no they're still sixteen like Michael was' (lines 3-4), and seeing evidence of the passing of time in the lives of others contradicts this and is painful and difficult to believe.

Carol is retraumatised by seeing children of Jonathan's age, particularly if they are distressed:

1. it hits me more now when I see other children his age er his
2. age as he was two and an half erm (.) and basically I just want
3. to scoop 'em up (.) but [tearful] no that'll always be there (.) I
4. can't stand to hear 'em crying [very tearful] that that's still there

C2 3:135-139

Seeing children who resemble Jonathan is also very painful for Carol as this causes her to imagine what Jonathan should be doing:

1. children little blond ones and little boys obviously you know
2. people keep telling me to try and and think of him now as a
3. five year old but I can't I just see him that he should be there in
4. a push chair or walking about or going to nursery and erm its
5. people that resemble that Jonathan that set me off

C2 4:161-166

Janice's younger daughter, Sarah, writes of her sister being 'frozen in time' in this extract from an essay entitled 'The Photograph' which she wrote four years after Vicky's death:

1. *You are my big sister and you always will be. You still exist for me.*
2. *Yet you are frozen in time. You are still the young vibrant eighteen*

year old you were the day you were killed.
But I am older than you now, I cannot believe it but it is true. It does not make sense because you should always be older than me, and in my mind you always will be. When I am an old woman of eighty – If I ever live that long – You will still be eighteen. But you will still be my big sister.

The death of a loved one destroys a very specific imaginary future. Not only the future of the person who has died but the future of those who live on who would have, *should* have, been sharing their lives with the loved one. For Richard the 'incompletion and unfairness' of the sudden death of his wife gave 'a particular desperation to mourning'. They had planned a joint retirement which he saw as one of the 'loving and reparative moves' which he had only just begun to make when she died. The unfairness and inequalities he recognises in their life together are, he says, added to by her death and the greatest unfairness of all is his survival (Johnson 1997:247). Surviving Jill still strikes Richard as strange and incredible:

Even now, four years later, I can still shake my head in disbelief at Jill's dying or find it strange that I have written all of this, in alien languages, about such impossible feelings and events.
Johnson 1995:239-240

Richard notes that 'disbelief is supposed to be a very early 'stage' in the grieving process but this does not fit with his own experience. As we have seen throughout this chapter, narratives of the experiences of numbness, disbelief, madness and retraumatisation reveal that although episodes may be most frequent, acute and overwhelming in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic experience, they continue to occur and recur for many years, possibly forever.

In this chapter I have looked at the many ways in which the experiences of numbness, madness and retraumatisation in the traumatic aftermath are narrated. Through a joint focus on the way in which narrators tell of making meaning of the traumatic experience

and of their feelings and behaviour in the days, weeks, months or years that follow I have been able to show that these two dimensions of narrative meaning-making are closely interrelated. In addition, this narrative meaning-making frequently links back, both in content and form, to the narration of traumatic impact and points forward to the narration of the longer term coping strategies and resolutions that we shall consider in the next chapter.

In my analysis in this chapter I have used the two senses of the verb 'to render', following Ricoeur (1991), in order to show how narratives of the traumatic aftermath render (configure and give back) experience to their narrators; experience which at the time was unable to be grasped or made sense of. Traumatised selves are in no state to make sense of their thoughts, feelings and behaviour at the time but sense emerges in stories of traumatic experience as specific and contingent relationships between the detail of the unique traumatic experience, the type of person they are, and the behaviour that they found themselves engaging in are made through the configuring process of narration. Whether this involves an intellectual theorising of one's behaviour or more everyday, intuitive meaning-making, the rendering of the 'having been' of the experience of the traumatic aftermath configures and gives back a sense of self within a story of a self that was lost but has survived to tell the tale.

Chapter Seven

Narrative Meaning-Making

I thought; Either events are caused or not.
If not, then might as well become
a sot
or junky.
If not, we are flunkies
to chance - which we,
mistakenly,
call "time" -
trying to find meaning where there is none.
Acker (1997)[101]

In the two preceding chapters I examined in detail the ways in which the impact of trauma and the experience of disequilibrium is narrated. I looked in particular at how narrators make meaning of their experiences, and their feelings, thoughts and behaviour, through their stories of traumatic impact and their stories of disequilibrium in the traumatic aftermath. This chapter is concerned with the longer term meanings that narrators are able to make through their stories of what has happened to them.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine how narrators evaluate themselves and their experiences comparatively. This aspect of the narration of trauma is explored by identifying and analysing two related types of meaning-making devices: comparisons and comparators. These devices are related, in that they are both comparative devices, but differ in that the first makes comparisons between the self and others and between the present self the past self, and the second makes comparisons between what happened and what could have happened. In this section I discuss the work of Taylor, Wood and Lichtman (1983) who propose a theory of 'selective evaluation' in their work on responses to victimization. They identify five distinct types of selective evaluation

[101] This quotation is taken from an extract of ***Eurydice in the Underworld*** by Kathy Acker which was published in The Guardian 6/12/97 p.5. Kathy Acker wrote this final piece just before she died from breast cancer.

and I consider these in relationship to my data, by identifying and discussing extracts which can be categorised as comparisons, with other people, with other selves and with other types of experience, and as comparators, the telling of what might have happened but didn't (Labov 1972).

In the second section I revisit the topic of blame, discussed in terms of self-blame in Chap 2:32, and look at a range of different ways in which blame is constructed and assigned in the narratives that make up my data. Blame is associated with causation and therefore the assignment of blame to someone or something is a significant meaning-making process. In addition, one of the powerful ways in which blame can be seen to function is in stories in which the narrated self is transformed from a victim into a survivor, a process which is narrated as being driven by a clear assignment of blame and a determination to transcend the victimization. However, some narrators describe themselves as deriving benefit from *not* assigning blame to, or seeking revenge on, others, and these ways of thinking about the causes or the meanings of events will also be considered.

'It could (not) have been worse': Comparisons and Comparators as Evaluative Devices

Taylor, Wood and Lichtman (1983[102]) propose a theory of 'selective evaluation' to explain victims' responses to victimization. This theory is based upon their argument that feeling like, and being perceived as, a victim is aversive. They argue that being a victim is aversive over and above the suffering and loss that is caused by the

[102] This is an article in a special issue of the ***Journal of Social Issues*** on victimization, published in 1983. Although there have of course been many developments since this date in approaches to the topic of victimization, see, for example, Janoff-Bulman (1992) and Wood and Rennie (1994), these developments have not negated the theory of selective evaluation proposed by Taylor, Wood and Lichtman. Their theory is developed from the examination of a range of studies which use the personal accounts of individuals who have experienced a variety of serious, negative life events. It is not surprising, therefore, that their ideas provide a useful way of looking at certain aspects of the narratives I am using as data in this study.

victimization, in that it has social and, therefore, personal consequences that further victimize the individual. Within their analysis of the aversive social consequences of being a victim, 'secondary victimization' is distinguished from 'primary victimization'. Secondary victimization is related to how others treat victims, for example, social labelling, rejection, condescension and pity, which can all be seen to lower self-esteem (Taylor Wood and Lichtman 1983:24-5). As an example of aversive personal consequences, these writers discuss ways in which victims may experience a loss of self-esteem through being forced to label or categorise themselves as a victim. This means that individuals may 'react to themselves in part as they would react to another victim: with aversion and, perhaps, some pity' (Taylor, Wood and Lichtman 1983:22). There are a number of examples of these types of experiences in the stories which make up my data. For example, Ann's story of being retraumatised while shopping, discussed in the previous chapter, begins with the telling of the experience of being ignored and rejected by people in the neighbourhood following Michael's death:

1. we decided we wouldn't go locally because what upset me
2. was when I did walk down the village where everybody knows
3. me it was like a path like the parting of the sea and all these
4. people were like crossing the road and they made me feel just
5. say hello don't run away from me and it made me feel worse
6. and that hurts me

A 10:529-534

Janice refers to the same thing, but in the more general terms of what 'people' do:

1. ...but you see if anybody dies people just er and you can walk
2. down the street and people they don't they walk across
3. W: it scares them
4. J: it's it scares them well because it makes them think of their
5. own mortality and it it frightens them and I actually odd times I
6. like stretched out to people they'd be trying to avoid me it's not
7. that they want to avoid me they just don't know what to say

J 11:553-562

Both Ann and Janice also talk about the problem of unwanted attention from others, who appear to be drawn to them as fellow victims:

immediate family I could cope with but it was others and I remember one woman come down who whose daughter had committed suicide on the estate which I knew about this and we weren't friends and she come about the next day after box after we'd took Dad up to the caravan and we'd come back she come running behind us screaming she'll see me she'll see me my sister says no she's not really she just wants to be on her own a bit and she says she will see me she will see me and tell her who I am and she come flying in and she was such an emotional person and I still don't think I'd cried at this time and er she was she sat there for an hour going on about how her daughter died and and all this and it it was so I couldn't handle it because it was like oh its too much this is you know

W: mm mm

A: I still hadn't come to accepting that Michael's dead yet anyway she went and I was so glad she went and er I got as I didn't want anybody to come around but it is the classic usual thing and I did find this through all of Michael's thing that everybody there swarming at you when you're not up to it but when you've had that bit of time and you do need people they are not there they're not there

A 9/10:471-496

Janice has a theory about why she was 'targeted' by a woman in the immediate aftermath of Vicki's death:

I felt what happens when somebody dies everybody's perhaps who've lost people before they are going through what they're going through through through your grief cos there was one lady in the village her daughter she was killed and her she'd been killed in a car accident and she came round and she wrote this she's writing all these poems she was whipping up to Vicki's bedroom writing all this stuff out I know she meant well but she was like she was going through her own grief and I think that happens a lot I I was really aware of that

J 8:412-422

Sandra talks about the way in which becoming 'the woman whose husband threw acid on her' dominates others' perception of, and interaction with, her:

1. S: I do feel that people look at me differently or they they treat
2. me differently erm they don't know me as anymore as erm
3. you know (.) Sandra Porter their friend they see me as the
4. woman whose husband threw acid on her

5. P: mm

6. S: er

7. P: and that's among your friends

8. S: yeah yeah and erm (.) I don't know I mean er I don't
9. necessarily not go out because of it but I don't particularly
10. want to go out and socialise so much be because of this I
11. mean it doesn't stop me going out but at the same time when I
12. do go out I'm thinking all the time that erm it it's not the way it
13. used to be when we did go out because the main topic of
14. conversation is what happened to me that seems to dominate
15. everything

S1 10/11:524-542

Taylor, Wood and Lichtman (1983) claim that individuals react to the aversive state of feeling like, and being perceived as, a victim by selectively evaluating themselves and their situation in ways which minimise their victimization. They propose that there are five mechanisms of selective evaluation: making social comparisons with less fortunate others; selectively focusing on attributes that make one appear advantaged; manufacturing normative standards of adjustment that make one's own adjustment appear exceptional; construing benefit from the victimizing event; and creating hypothetical, worse worlds. Unlike Taylor Wood and Lichtman, I am not regarding these devices as 'cognitive mechanisms' of de-victimization, but as meaning-making devices which are embedded in, and contribute to, the ways in which the narrated self and the traumatic experience are being produced and composed in the dialogic, self-identification process which I have argued that the telling of personal experience is.

Comparisons

Taylor, Wood and Lichtman (1983) note that the idea that we compare ourselves with similar others as a way of evaluating our situation has been a cornerstone of social psychological research since Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. A range of studies since then have looked at upward comparison, evaluating one's own situation in comparison with those who are doing better, and downward comparison, evaluating oneself in comparison with those who are doing worse. Taylor, Wood and Lichtman review a number of studies which suggest, as does their own research with women who have breast cancer, that in victimizing, or potentially victimizing, situations people tend to make downward, rather than upward, comparisons and that the primary motivation for this is the restoration of self-esteem.

Social comparison may be made with actual, identified others or with unidentified 'other people in general'. Taylor, Wood & Lichtman use three categories for such comparisons: social comparisons with less fortunate others; selective focusing on attributes that make one appear advantaged; and the manufacture of normative standards of adjustment that make one's own adjustment appear exceptional. Examples of all three types can be found in my data but looking at them separately is not as revealing of how they function as is a consideration of how they are used in combination. Analysing Janice's narrative in this way reveals that social comparison can be made by the narrator creating and recreating the narrated self in two different roles: self as victim, or sufferer, and self as sympathiser, or comforter. For example, in the following extract Janice compares herself to the woman who 'targeted' her as a fellow victim:

1. this lady I was telling you about whose daughter died I mean
2. she sort of oh how can I (***) her daughter died I know but
3. that's all we'd got in common and I and she used to keep
4. being here but I wouldn't come in I kept running out I thought

5. oh I'm not coming in if she's there cos you know she was oh
6. Janice I catalogued moths that's how I got through well fine
7. but you know I didn't want to catalogue moths @@@@ it
8. wasn't but I wouldn't say but what I found upsetting you see I
9. wouldn't have said to Julie oh that's not the way you should
10. do it

J 10:518-528

Janice's resistance and evasion of Julie's attempts to form a relationship with her, 'she used to keep being here but I wouldn't come in I kept running out' (lines 3-4), clearly convey the experience of secondary victimization as Janice feels that her home and herself are invaded by someone who is not only claiming an identification with her as a victim but also claiming a privileged position of advisor and supporter on the grounds of being a survivor of the experience that Janice is going through. Janice rejects these claims by clearly delineating the limits of any commonality between herself and Julie; the death of their daughters is all they have in common (line 3). The comparison and the judgement here is very explicit. Janice reverses the roles of victim and sympathiser by saying says that she, as sympathiser, would not behave towards Julie, the victim, in the way that Julie behaved towards her. Janice presents herself as tolerant and non-judgemental towards the particular ways in which others find of coping and feels that she has a right to expect the same from others, 'oh Janice I catalogued moths that's how I got through well fine but you know I didn't want to catalogue moths' (lines 11-13). This moral argument arises within many of the different stories of personal experience that Janice narrates in the interview, and in this way she illustrates and emphasises her belief that there us a lack of understanding about, and tolerance of, the unique ways that people find of coping (for Janice this involved 'being manic', riding a motorbike and speaking her mind, as discussed in the previous chapter).

In the next extract, which comes immediately after Janice's discussion about people avoiding contact with someone who is bereaved, she compares herself to people in general, again placing herself in the roles of both sufferer and comforter:

1. now I always do get in touch with people because it doesn't
2. matter what you say really and I found that in a way
3. sometimes if people just gave you a hug that was you know
4. they didn't have to say anything I mean some people can write
5. very lovely letters I had a lot of lovely letters and I admire
6. people who can actually do that I mean I find that I can't really
7. it's you know it's just knowing people think about you I think is
8. important

J 11:563-572

There are complex shifts in this short extract, both between self as comforter and self as sufferer, and between particular selves and people in general. Labelling the role changes, and the movement between the general and the particular, will make this clearer:

1. now I (narrated self as comforter) always do get in touch with people because it doesn't
2. matter what you (I and comforters in general) say really and I (narrated self as sufferer) found that in a way
3. sometimes if people just gave you (me and sufferers in general) a hug that was you know
4. they didn't have to say anything I mean some people can write
5. very lovely letters I (narrated self as sufferer) had a lot of lovely letters and I (narrator) admire
6. people who can actually do that I mean I (narrator) find that I (narrated self as comforter) can't really
7. it's you know it's just knowing people think about you (narrated self as sufferer and sufferers in general) I (narrated self as comforter) think is
8. important

This intricate combination of role changes and shifts between the general and the particular enables Janice to narrate herself on both sides of an experience and she is therefore able to present powerful support and justification for her view and for her behaviour as comforter. Unlike those people who cross the road to avoid contact with someone who is bereaved, Janice always makes contact and, even though she is not like

'some people' who can write lovely letters, she knows that 'a hug' and letting people know that you are thinking about them are what matters. This use of social comparison enables Janice to evaluate herself in very positive ways that are fully supported and justified by being embedded in the narration of her experience as a victim, her experience as a sympathiser and her general moral argument about tolerance towards the uniqueness of the experience of others. In the following extract, Janice uses the same devices of role-switching and shifts between the general and the particular, in order to compare herself favourably to others:

1. I think you need somebody to you know care for you but to
2. accept you I think the worse thing is people say I know what
3. you feel I know just what you feel and I they didn't and you
4. can't and since I've talked to people who've just this weekend
5. I've had a friend in Birmingham whose husband had a heart
6. attack and died while she was out shopping and you know
7. and of course you feel for them and you can understand some
8. of what she's going through but it is not my experience can't
9. be the same as her experience

J 5/6:270-279

Once again, labelling the roles assigned to the narrated self reveals the complexity within this short extract:

1. I (narrated self as comforter) think you (narrated self as sufferer and sufferers in general) need somebody to you know care for you (narrated self as sufferer and sufferers in general) but to
2. accept you (narrated self as sufferer and sufferers in general) I (narrated self as sufferer) think the worse thing is people say I know what
3. you feel I know just what you feel and I they didn't and you (narrated self as comforter and comforters in general)
4. can't and since I've (narrated self as comforter) talked to people who've just this weekend
5. I've had a friend in Birmingham whose husband had a heart
6. attack and died while she was out shopping (incorporation of someone else's story) and you know
7. and of course you (narrated self as comforter and comforters in general) feel for them and you (narrated self as comforter and comforters in general) can understand some
8. of what she's going through but it is not my experience can't
9. be the same as her experience

J 5/6:270-279

Janice produces this type of comparison, with identified or generalised others, a total of twelve times in the interview and this contributes significantly to the positive, self-affirming character of the narration as a whole. I shall return to consider other examples of comparisons from Janice's narrative in the section on 'Blame, anger and fighting talk' and again in the final chapter.

In contrast to Janice's narrative, comparison with others is very hard to find in Ann's narrative. It is surely significant that the only time she does compare herself favourably to people in general she does not take any credit for herself, but says that they (she and her husband) have been lucky:

1. I do know a lot of people split up after bereavement I think
2. we're very lucky that we've survived very well

A 18:931-933

Within the overwhelming theme of the 'unluckiness' of her life, which is told through a narrative structured around a series of traumatic life events, Ann sees the survival of her marriage as 'lucky' compared to a lot of people whose relationships break down following bereavement. The lack of agency and control which is conveyed by the notion of being 'lucky' or 'unlucky', as fate deals out good fortune or cruel blows, is the dominant theme of Ann's narrative, as discussed in Chap 6:29, and I shall consider this again in more detail in the final chapter. However, although Ann does not use social comparison she does make a number of self comparisons, that is she compares her present self to her past self:

1. you don't tend to think about yourself you just keep going
2. keep going and I'm losing myself losing me now because I
3. used to be able to go out happy go lucky I used to go out with
4. my friends I used to have my little affair like I said I things
5. used to run off my back I was a different person to what I am
6. now have now become

A 15:774-780

7. oh I used to go out I used to have all my hair done and make
8. up and my best clothes you know it was like oh I feel good
9. you know and all the other bits I mean I just felt wonderful it
10. was like something I've lost

A 31:1644-1647

11. if I had to conclude what I'm saying now I am mist I don't trust
12. many people I used to do er I'm I don't socially enjoy myself
13. like I used to do I don't erm (.) I'm not me anymore

A 28:1459-1462

Ann makes these comparisons between her present self and her past self through the repeated use of the verb 'used to be' (lines 3,4,5,7,12,13). She provides a detailed impression of her past self as an active, vibrant person: 'happy go lucky' (line 3), going out with friends (line 3), having a 'little affair' (line 4), carefree, 'things used to run off my back' (lines 4-5), and feeling 'good' and 'wonderful' when dressed up to go out (lines 8-9). But no real impression is conveyed for her present self who is only referred to obliquely as 'what I am now have now become' (lines 5-6). It is clear that Ann feels that her 'true' self is the past self who is now lost, 'I'm losing myself losing me now' (line 2), 'something I've lost' (line 10), 'I'm not me anymore' (line 13). In the narrative as a whole, Ann compares her present self and her present life unfavourably to how she and how life 'used to be' a total of 21 times and this clearly contributes significantly to the dominant themes of negativity and helplessness in her narration. Ann ends the interview with some rather more positive and hopeful ideas about her future self and these will be discussed in the final chapter on resolutions.

Self comparisons, rather than social comparisons, also occur in Carol's narratives but these comparisons vary between the two interviews and they are more ambiguous in terms of their positive or negative character. In the first interview, Carol compares her present, traumatised self to the self she was before Jonathan's murder:

1. you try and be the same mum you were but you just can't be
2. you can't I'll never be the same never (.) never

C1 6:286-287

3. it'll never be the same I've got a different outlook on life I think
4. I might not be here tomorrow I tend to have a bit of a
5. complacent attitude I suppose er at the moment erm and
6. instead of doing things for other people which is something
7. I've always done been there for other people I intend to be
8. here for myself and for James and put me and him first now

C1 11:573-580

Using the generic 'you', which conveys the idea that anyone in this situation would be the same, Carol says that she cannot be the 'same mum' (line 1) to James that she used to be, and the impossibility of ever being the person she was before Jonathan's death is stressed by the repetition of 'never' (line 2). In the second extract Carol is explicit about one of the differences between her past self and her present self, explaining that she 'has a different outlook on life' because she is now aware of her own mortality and this means that she intends to change her behaviour towards other people in order to give priority to herself and James. Although 'not being the same mum' is negative rather than positive, in that Carol produces this comparison within the context of the difficulties of her relationship with her surviving son, Carol does not explicitly compare her present self unfavourably with her past self. In the second extract, it is possible to interpret the self comparison positively, as the 'different outlook' is not described as better or worse than her former outlook and although 'complacent' (line 5) may have negative connotations, this is balanced by the change from always being 'there for other people' (line 7) to being 'here for myself and James' (line 8), *if* one regards this as a better way of living.

Before examining the self comparisons in the second interview with Carol it is important to note that, because of the context and the nature of this interview which, as

discussed in detail in chapter four, was set up as a comparative exercise and structured around a list of questions that were deliberately designed to elicit comparisons, the self comparisons that are produced cannot be regarded as occurring naturally in the narration. In fact Carol was forced to make self comparisons by the questions I provided and Paul asked so it is impossible to know whether this is a meaning-making device that Carol would use normally when narrating her traumatic experiences[103]. However, it is nonetheless interesting to examine how Carol makes these comparisons within this particular context and how she manages the discernible pressure to produce positive self comparisons within this interview.

The following extract contains the only unambiguously positive comparison that Carol produces between her past and present selves:

1. P: what are your feelings about Tom 'cos I think when we
2. spoke before and in the times that we would meet you would
3. often describe=

4. C: =I used to have a lot of nightmares
5. about him (.) visualising him doing what he did going up the
6. stairs and and all the times that he could have killed me that
7. week prior to it happening (.) er I don't have the nightmares so
8. much now (.) in fact I don't think about him an awful lot
9. anymore erm

C2 7:358-367

Given the attention that is given to Tom in the first narrative, in terms of what he did, the ways in which Carol was continually retraumatised through reliving imaginary versions of what he could have done, the revenge fantasies that dominated Carol's immediate future, and the questions that haunted her and could only be answered by him, to 'not think about him an awful lot anymore' (lines 8-9) is an enormous difference

[103] In fact, as also discussed in chapter four, Carol's way of coping is not to talk about her traumatic experience and, in this sense, the entire second narrative is 'artificial' and cannot be taken as indicative of the way in which Carol copes 'normally' in her everyday life. Her way of coping is clearly articulated by Carol within the extracts I examine in this section.

and would certainly seem to indicate a positive change. In the next extract, Carol carefully selects very specific ways in which she feels that 'things are better' but also emphasises the ways in which she is still the same as her earlier traumatised self :

P: do you think things are better than they were six nine months ago

C: yeah (.) yeah I'm more con I'm more confident I haven't got a lot of confidence workwise and that yet I'm still lacking that I still get frightened when I'm on my own or in close vicinity of strangers and whatever I do erm but things are better I don't cry every day like I used to and you know just (.) I can laugh a little now

C2 9:458-466

Carol makes a positive self comparison, 'I'm more confident', but immediately qualifies this by saying that she still lacks confidence 'workwise' and that she is still retraumatised in certain situations. Her inclusion of the stressed 'I do' (line 6) suggests to me that she feels that she should respond to Paul's question in a positive way but is determined to be honest. She then offers a different comparison, between crying and laughing, which is positive, but is again qualified; she doesn't 'cry every day' like she used to do, suggesting that she does cry sometimes, and she can laugh now, but only 'a little' (lines 7-8). The tension which exists in Carol's second narrative between positive and negative comparisons is most clearly apparent in the following extracts:

P:in comparison to how you were when I first saw you how do you think things have moved on considerably or are there bits that haven't changed

C: there's still bits that haven't changed but I cover them up quite well (.)

C2 9:471-476

P: but overall things have moved on

C: yeah things have moved on considerably really yeah yeah I mean two years ago when I first came to see you I couldn't even see a tomorrow so (.) but now yeah I plan things (.) ahead (.) and whatever so yeah things have moved on a great deal even though a lot of it is just a lot of the things that have

12. happened I just push to the back of my mind and (***)
13. suppose denial of what's happened but that's the way I cope
14. with it everybody deals with it in a different way

15. P: from what you were saying though there is time from time 16.
to time that you get some of that stuff out

17. C: mm

18. P: do you think that you're dealing with it gradually (***) every
19. so often (***)

20. C: phew I don't know 'cos I don't know what way you should
21. deal with it like I said to you when I first met you how do you
22. deal with a bereavement I don't know like I said to you I hadn't
23. cried well I had cried but I hadn't (.) I hadn't accepted that he's
24. dead (.) which I still can't (.) and I don't like saying it (.) er even
25. though I know he is inside I won't don't want to accept it so to
26. me he's just gone away that's that's how I deal with it (.)
27. probably wrong dunno but that's how that's how I have to do it

C2 10/11:539-569

These extracts occur towards the end of the interview and Paul is clearly encouraging Carol to sum up on a positive note, 'but overall things have moved on' (line 6). Carol co-operates, 'yeah things have moved on considerably really yeah yeah' (line 7), and provides an explicit positive self comparison to illustrate this:

8. when I first came to see you I couldn't
9. even see a tomorrow so (.) but now yeah I plan things (.)
10. ahead (.) and whatever so yeah things have moved on a great
11. deal

But, and this is true throughout the narrative, Carol resists making any wholly positive comparisons and refuses to overstate the differences between her former traumatised self and her present self. She says that 'things have moved on a great deal even though a lot of it is just a lot of the things that have happened I just push to the back of my mind' (lines 10-12). Paul invites her to modify this by saying that *she* has suggested that she gets 'some of that stuff [that is pushed to the back of her mind] out' (lines 15-16) and, in response to Carol's minimal (?doubtful) response, 'mm' (line 17), offers her another, positive, possibility, 'do you think that you're dealing with it gradually' (line

18). Carol rejects this saying she does not know how to 'deal with it' and insists that this is an aspect of herself that has not changed at all.

21. like I said to you when I first met you how do you deal with a
22. bereavement I don't know like I said to you I hadn't
23. cried well I had cried but I hadn't (.) I hadn't accepted that he's
24. dead (.) which I still can't (.)

It is clear that the psychotherapeutic concepts of dealing with trauma, accepting what has happened, coming to terms with it and moving on are not ones that fit with Carol's experience of finding a way to cope with what has happened to her. With, in my view, a considerable degree of strength and integrity, Carol refuses to co-operate with Paul in the joint production of a narrative of coping based on these concepts. However, she does not claim that the psychotherapeutic approach is wrong, in fact she says that her way is 'probably wrong' (line 27) but, nevertheless, that is the way she must do it. This examination of comparisons within Carol's second narrative provides a deeper understanding of its dialogic nature and also, through the identification of the *absence* of social comparison and unambiguous self comparison between the self of the first interview and the self of the second, suggests that making comparisons is not a significant factor in Carol's way of talking, and thinking, about what has happened to her. Carol does, however, evaluate one aspect of herself comparatively with her pre-trauma self and this comparison can be regarded as an example of 'construing benefit from the victimizing event' (Taylor, Wood and Lichtman 1983):

1. I can now relate and feel for people that have lost children
2. and whatever you know you never realise how how people do
3. suffer until actually it happens to you ... now I understand and
4. I think in one respect that's made me a better person not a
5. better person but (.) I can relate to people now with their
6. feelings you know (.)

C2 12: 618-632

In Ruth's narrative, both types of social comparison, with an identified individual and with people in general, are used. She also makes many positive self comparisons

throughout the narrative. The social and the self comparisons in Ruth's narrative occur in clusters within the narration of particular aspects of her experience. In the following extract, Ruth makes a downward social comparison through, in Taylor, Wood and Lichtman's (1983) terms, 'the manufacture of normative standards of adjustment which make one's own adjustment appear exceptional':

1. I actually came out of hospital very very very early erm I think
2. the total stay was only about eight weeks in hospital you know
3. and this was sort of coming from intensive care and then you
4. know the realization it was very very quick you know some
5. other erm burns patients they've been in hospital for a year or
6. more but this this fear it was just I wanted to go home I just
7. needed to get home and and I did really really push for that

R 7:335-343

The repetition of 'very', three times in line 1 and twice in line 4, stresses Ruth's evaluation of the shortness of the time she was in hospital. This evaluation is validated by the comparison between herself and other burns patients who stay in 'for a year or more' (line 6). The 'fear', (line 6), refers to the thoughts and dreams Ruth had while in hospital concerning the possibility that her husband might take their children away from her. Ruth goes on to say that she 'did really really push' (342-343) to be allowed to go home suggesting that this was against medical advice. This is just one example of the sense of agency, determination and strength, particularly in opposition to authority, that dominates Ruth's narrative.

In the next extract, Ruth makes a number of self and social comparisons. These are italicised:

1. they tried to link me up with this person about two years after
2. the accident erm in like a friendship sort of counselling type
3. thing you know this other person was going through a hell of a
4. lot and erm they wanted me to just be friends with her I
5. suppose and I *I thought I was ready to do it and I met her and*

6. *two years down the road there was no way it was like looking*
7. *at me in a mirror* and I couldn't cope with it I just and I said
8. you know I didn't I just I just couldn't cope with it *now when I*
9. *went back to the burns unit this time* to do this aromatherapy
10. they linked me up with her *she had not moved on as much as*
11. *I had* you know she's still at the stage where she needs the
12. counselling and support so it it's five years on for her and
13. she's still not moved on …

14. … she was sort of you know sort of unsure of how I'd react to
15. her how I'd react to her body how I'd react to what it looked
16. like you know so inside she *she's not come to terms but I've*
17. *not been like that* it's been really and whether it's this drive I've
18. never give a damn I mean I don't know wear *I don't wear*
19. *make up you know and I don't hide it* er but again that's not
20. that wasn't a conscious choice it's just that's just how my way
21. of coping

A 14/15:714-759

Extracting these comparisons will make it easier to discuss them:

5. I thought I was ready to do it and I met her and
6. two years down the road there was no way

Here Ruth narrates her self two years after the accident, when she felt she 'ready', that is that she felt that she had recovered from her trauma enough to be able to befriend someone who was going through a similar experience, but found that she wasn't, 'there was no way'. This self is compared to her present self:

8. now when I
9. went back to the burns unit this time

Although Ruth does not actually complete this self comparison, a positive self comparison is nevertheless clearly present as Ruth then provides two downward social comparisons that emphasise the difference between herself and the other woman:

10. she had not moved on as much as
11. I had

16. she's not come to terms but I've
17. not been like that

These make it clear that, unlike two years before, seeing this woman is no longer 'like looking at me in a mirror' (lines 6-7). This comparison, which Ruth uses to describe how she felt when she met this woman for the first time, blurs the distinction between social and self comparison. The similarity Ruth perceives between her former self and this stranger is described as Ruth seeing the woman *as* her former self, and vice versa., and she could not cope with being confronted by a self that she no longer wanted to be. The comparisons that Ruth makes between herself and the woman at their second meeting, which emphasise the differences between them, make it very clear that Ruth no longer sees herself in the woman, 'I've not been like that' (line 17). The final comparison in this extract, 'I don't wear make up you know and I don't hide it' (lines 18-19) is connected to what Ruth has said about the other woman's problematic relationship with her burned body, but is also a comparison between Ruth and those others in general, who do wear make up and try to hide their disfigurement.

Many of the other comparisons that occur in Ruth's narrative are related to the differences between the self she was before the accident and her present self. These are closely connected to the dominant themes of the narrative, which involve 'learning lessons' and 'life having a purpose'. This way of thinking about her experience enables Ruth to construe considerable benefits from her traumatic experience and this is discussed in more detail in the next section and in the final chapter.

The identification and analysis of different types of comparisons in this section makes explicit some of the diverse and complex of ways in which social and self comparisons are used in order to produce positive or negative evaluations of present and past selves. Through the use of favourable comparisons, as in Janice's and Ruth's narrations,

narratives of coping in the aftermath of trauma can realise hopeful, positive, self-affirming stories. By contrast, examining comparisons, or the absence of favourable comparisons, in Ann's and Carol's narratives, reveals their contribution to the more negative themes of loss and helplessness which characterise their stories. The next section is concerned with comparators which are a different kind of comparative meaning-making device in that they relate to experiences, rather than selves, and involve comparisons between what did happen and what could have happened.

Comparators

The term 'comparator' is offered by Labov (1972) to describe the narration of what might have happened, but didn't. In Labov's terms a comparator is an evaluative device which both mediates the point of the story and reveals the narrator's perspective on the experience (see Chapter 3:94). Taylor, Wood and Lichtman (1983:30) refer to this feature of narrative as 'the creation of hypothetical worse worlds' and discuss the possibility that the primary reason for its occurrence is not because it enables individuals to minimise their victimization, although it does this as well, but rather because it is a way of narrating what was experienced during the course of the victimizing event. The fears about what might happen next that go through individuals' minds at the time of a traumatic experience are referred to as 'anticipatory focusing' by Taylor, Wood and Lichtman and they discuss the way in which, for example, women who have been raped or survivors of natural disasters frequently report that they feared that they would be killed. In this way, 'much of the terror associated with a victimizing event stems not from what is currently happening but from the anticipation of how things may get worse' and, therefore, the recollection of these anticipatory fears, through the creation of hypothetical worse worlds, make one feel better about what

actually did happen (Taylor, Wood and Lichtman 1983:31). This idea of 'anticipatory focusing' is clearly closely related to what I have termed the liminal zone in narratives of traumatic experience (see chapter 5), although Taylor, Wood and Lichtman are approaching this phenomenon in a rather different way. Firstly, they are hypothesising a reality, 'anticipatory focusing', behind the 'creation of hypothetical worse worlds' which explains the existence of the phenomenon rather than examining its significance within, and contribution to, the story of trauma. Secondly, whereas I focussed on examples of the liminal zone which proposed a better outcome than the actual outcome, Taylor, Wood and Lichtman focus on examples which propose a worse outcome. It is clear that both types occur in the telling of traumatic experience, depending on how the story is being told on any particular occasion and perhaps some types of experience, and some types of outcomes, are more likely to be told using one or the other. The examples that Taylor, Wood and Lichtman use to illustrate the creation of hypothetical worse worlds are taken from narratives of the personal experience of surviving the trauma of cancer, rape or a natural disaster. Clearly in these cases one would expect fears of death to form a very significant part of the experience of the trauma and it is also very likely, though by no means universal, that survival will be viewed as a better outcome than death. Some of examples of the liminal zone that I analyse in chapter five are taken from narratives of the death of the loved one[104] within which the narration of the liminal zone is part of the telling of traumatic impact, and involves the narrated self's experience of the transition from equilibrium to disequilibrium, before narrated selves know that the worst that could happen *has* happened. In contrast to these narratives,

[104] In chapter five I also examined the liminal zone in Ruth's narrative of nearly dying from her injuries following the car accident and find that this occurs, not during the telling of the accident, but during the telling of her realisation of the extent of her injuries. Similarly in Gail's narrative of being physically and sexually assaulted, the liminal zone is concerned with her realisation of how badly she had been affected by the experience, rather than with what she thought might happen to her during the actual attack. It seems very probably that Gail feared for her life during the attack and it may well be that this forms part of her narration of the experience. We have no way of knowing this, however, because Gail does not actually narrate her experience of the attack during the interview with Paul, only her experiences of living in the aftermath.

one can imagine that the liminal zone in the telling of the *near*-death of a loved one who survives would be very likely to involve imaginary stories in which the loved one dies. In this way, we can see that the type of liminal zone narration, proposing better or worse outcomes, is related to the actual outcome and, in this way, is accorded a place in the narrative retrospectively, rather than being, as Taylor Wood and Lichtman imply, a representation of precisely what happened, and *only* what happened, during the actual course of events. This should not be taken to imply that I am suggesting that narrators invent this experience; rather I am arguing that it is selected for inclusion, from the multiple facets of the experience of trauma, which may well involve the projection of better *and* worse outcomes, because it fits with the actual outcome *and* with the particular story being told on any specific occasion.

In chapter five I interpreted the liminal zone as the narration of the experience of desperately attempting to maintain equilibrium in the face of trauma and as related to the injustice of traumatic experience, in that reasonable, 'liveable with' outcomes are proposed. Recognising that liminal zone narrations may project better or worse outcomes does not invalidate this interpretation, rather it enables the diversity and the flexibility of this particular feature of narrative to be appreciated. It also demonstrates the importance of analysing any particular feature of narrative within the context of the specific, unique narrative in which it is embedded.

In this section on comparators I am not concerned with liminal zone narrations, which occur during the narration of traumatic impact, but rather with extracts which involve the narration of what could have happened, but didn't, which occur within the narration of coping in the aftermath and I am regarding them as part of the longer term narrative

meaning-making process. For example, Gail describes herself as 'so grateful' about an aspect of the circumstances of her traumatic experience:

1. and erm she's only five and you know I've just been so grateful
2. that she hadn't been there at the time

G1 7:325-326

If her daughter had been at home, which could have happened but didn't, Gail believes that the experience would have been much worse and in comparison to this imaginary, more horrific, version of what happened, the trauma of the actual experience appears less and this suggests that, to this extent, it is easier to cope with in the long term. This example highlights the distinction that can be made between comparators and 'anticipatory focusing' as discussed by Taylor, Wood and Lichtman. Although Gail's comparator fits their category of 'the creation of hypothetical worse worlds', which they suggest occurs because of 'anticipatory focusing', it is clear that, at the time of the attack, Gail was not fearing that her daughter was going to be there. This illustrates why the idea that 'the creation of hypothetical worse worlds' is a response to what actually happened at the time of the traumatic event is inadequate as an interpretation of the phenomenon.

In the following extract Sandra refers to her 'great relief' about the way in which she is scarred following the acid attack:

1. I'm very self conscious of my scars on my you know my chest
2. and my back and my shoulders but it it's a great relief that my
3. face isn't disfigured because I don't know how I would have
4. coped

S2 2:70-73

Sandra suggests that she has found it easier to cope with what happened to her than she would have done if her face had been disfigured. She provides an alternative version of the outcome of the attack and, in this way, it could have been worse and Sandra is

relieved that it isn't. It is worth noting that this particular comparator, which, in Taylor, Wood and Lichtman's terms, is an example of 'selectively focusing on attributes that make one appear advantaged', is not an option for Ruth, whose face *is* disfigured. However she is still able to make a favourable social comparison in relation to this dimension of her experience by comparing herself with those who want to hide their scarring, as discussed in the previous section:

1. I've never give a damn I mean I don't know wear I don't wear
2. make up you know and I don't hide it er but again that's not that
3. wasn't a conscious choice it's just that's just how my way of
4. coping

R 15:755-759

Ruth's narration of how she coped with her severe physical injuries in the immediate traumatic aftermath and how she continues to cope with permanent disfigurement is peppered by the words 'conscious', 'unconscious' and 'subconscious' which, as in the extract above, enable her to portray herself as coping extremely well without being aware of having to make a huge effort to do so. She says that it is 'just the way it's been', and makes an implicit comparison with less fortunate others for whom it is different:

1. I mean it it's funny because as I say why I don't feel bitter and
2. resentful I don't feel none of this why me you know I I really
3. don't that's not been conscious it's just that I I don't know that
4. just been the way it's been and that's the end of it

R 18:897-902

'The way it has been' in Ruth's narrative is very closely connected to the way in which Ruth makes overall meaning of the difficulties she has had to contend with in her life and this will be discussed in detail in final chapter on resolutions.

Comparators, like comparisons, can produce negative as well as positive evaluations of what has happened. As mentioned in chapters five and six, 'if only' comparators which

tell of something that might have happened which would have changed the whole course of events, thereby averting the traumatic outcome, are particularly poignant and painful imaginary stories which may haunt and retraumatise individuals in the aftermath. In addition to 'if only' stories, comparators which negatively evaluate aspects of the experience, rather than transform the whole event, can show how 'it could have been better' or how 'it could not have been worse'. Carol talks about the way in which a positive comparator offered to her by others, 'Jonathan could have suffered but didn't', has to be rejected when she finds out that he did suffer before dying:

1. people tell me that he wouldn't have suffered but he did (.) at
2. the court case I found that out

C1 7:327-328

3. it took Jonathan three minutes to die so now I know that
4. he did suffer for three whole minutes

C1 9:459-461

As discussed in the previous chapter, Carol then constructs an imaginary story that fills in the detail of those three minutes and tells the story of Jonathan's death in a way that could not have been worse.

Similarly Maggie describes how she had imagined a particular detail of Anna's death:

1. I had in my mind that Anna had been stabbed with a penknife
2. I don't know why I did that I just had this sort of cosy image of
3. er a little knife

M 1:21-24

She was later forced to acknowledge that this 'cosy image' was completely false and that any positive story about how 'it could have been worse' is no longer realisable. Anna had been stabbed twenty times with a large 'bowie knife' and had suffered a prolonged, agonising death. Given these details, Maggie, like Carol, imagines a scenario that could not have been worse:

1. and you imagine you know I can imagine her sort of begging
2. er you know not to do it you know and I can hear her voice
3. you know your mind plays awful tricks on you really and that's
4. the sort of thing you have to sort of push away

M 18:941-945

Finding out new information about the traumatic event is not the only reason why the positive or negative nature of comparators change over time, however. In the first interview, Carol she produces an 'it could have been better' comparator which negatively evaluates her situation:

1. at first and to some point even now I resented him for still being
2. alive (.) erm because if his Dad had of killed him [James] as well
3. I could have killed myself and I wouldn't have been going
4. through the pain and the hurt and the trauma I'm going through
5. now so at first I wished his Dad had of killed him as well so that
6. I could have taken the easy way out

C1 2/3:160-166

Although one might expect that the survival of James would be interpreted positively, that is with an 'it could have been worse' comparator in which James is also murdered, for Carol, at this time, it could not have been worse and in fact the survival of James prevents her from escaping 'the pain and the hurt and the trauma'. In stark contrast to this, in the second interview, Carol attributes the improvement in her life to James, but does so without contradicting her assertion in the first interview that she would have taken her own life if James had also been murdered:

1. C: we're getting better James keeps me going basically
2. P: he's been a real help to you hasn't he?
3. C: yep
4. P: despite everything (soft laugh)
5. C: yeah [soft laugh] yeah if it wasn't for him I wouldn't be
6. here basically (.) there's no other way of looking at it he keeps
7. me going

C2 5:249-260

In the first interview, James is an obstacle preventing Carol escaping the pain she is in but in the second interview she agrees that he has been 'a great help' and produces a comparator which, in one sense, is the same as the former negative comparator 'if it wasn't for him I wouldn't be here' but, in this context of 'getting better', it produces a favourable comparison between the way things are and the way they could have been worse.

Comparators are also produced when narrators tell of the future stories their past selves imagined and, in this way, can produce positive comparisons between what could have happened and what did happen. Both Carol and Gail produce these kind of comparators when narrating their experience of attending the trials of their perpetrators:

1. so I was terrified absolutely terrified terrified that he'd be
2. walking out of that court room you know a free man that he was
3. only going to get if he didn't he was only going to get a few
4. years

C1 8:419-422

Because this did not happen (Tom was convicted and given a life sentence), this imaginary version of what Carol feared would happen produces a positive comparator. In the same way Gail's fears about what would happen in court, arising from a negative future story told to her by experienced others, were, fortunately, not realised:

1. the rape crisis people had said to me that erm the erm (.) the
2. defence counsel would go all out to try to make it look as if it
3. were my fault (.) and in that respect yes I was very very
4. concerned that (.) I was going to be made to look very black
5. indeed (.) and erm (.) yes you know that I would be condemned
6. and not him

G1 13:637-642

Narrators also produce comparators on the basis of different circumstances in which the trauma could have occurred which would have meant it would have been more

difficult to cope with than it actually was. For example, Richard recognises that his grieving experiences could have been worse if he had not had the public recognition and affirmation that comes with being a member of the dominant, heterosexual majority in society:

I know that painful and perilous though it seemed, my grieving would have been different, and more difficult, if my lover had been a man. There are terms and forms enough for the public recognition of a grieving husband or wife, and even, though already more borderline, for a heterosexual lover. Writing 'widower' on a form or ticking a box marked 'widowed' or applying for a single parent's allowance was strange enough, but what if there are no publicly acceptable categories at all against which to gauge your feelings, no public markers or only very derogatory ones?

Johnson (1997:241)

In a similar, though less politically framed, way, Janice feels that coping would have been more difficult for her if she lived elsewhere:

if I'd have been living in a town I would be you know isolated and I a lot of people I I mean people were just so good to me people I've never people bought food and I mean I wasn't capable of cooking basically I was in such a state people people looked after me and and I found that the incredible warmth I mean there was that side where in a way it was overwhelming but it was you know there was a real sense of warmth and there was a lot of people looking after me

J 20:1051-1059

Finally, in this section, the following extracts illustrate the way in which a traumatic event may be negatively evaluated by isolating a particular dimension as the point of comparison between this particular event and other similar events. In this way. Maggie compares the death of her goddaughter negatively with the death of a friend named Jill and with the death of her father:

it's not that you justify death but like with Jill we said well at least she died with the sun in her face and the wind blowing her hair and she was laughing and it was instant and with my dad we said well you know he was wounded badly in the war and he wasn't expected to live so really from the age of seventeen onwards it's been a bonus er but with Anna there

7. was nothing like that there was no reasoning no justification
8. there was nothing at all there was no comfort in her death

M 6:294-302

Maggie compares Anna's death with Jill's in terms of the way in which each died and with her father in terms of his life being a 'bonus', and states explicitly that this kind of reasoning, or justification, cannot be applied to the death of Anna, who died in fear and suffering at a very young age. In a similar way, but in more general terms, Janice describes the death of a child as much more difficult than the death of a parent:

1. but it's a very different thing you know I know you feel sad and
2. you're upset and you are you do miss your parents but it's part
3. of the pattern of life isn't it it's just so much more difficult
4. losing a child

J 10:500-504

In this section on comparisons and comparators as meaning-making devices I have identified, analysed and discussed a wide range of comparative devices which occur in the narration of trauma and which can positively or negatively evaluate the self and/or the experience. This analysis reveals that the occurrence of a particular type of comparison, or its positive or negative quality, is not necessarily related to a particular type of experience or to a particular type of context of narration, rather it is related to, the details of the particular and unique narrative in which it occurs. In this way, comparisons and comparators are deeply embedded in, and support, the dominant theme of the narration as a whole and, as complex and powerful evaluative devices, provide a valuable way into understanding how meanings of the experience are being produced within the narrative. In the next section the issue of blame is examined as another type of narrative meaning-making device.

Blame, anger and fighting talk

Questions such has 'why has this happened?' and 'why me' are generated by the desire to understand, to make sense and to make meaning of traumatic events. If causation can be established and blame assigned to someone or something then the bewilderment, confusion, helplessness and hopelessness that constitute the experience of severe disequilibrium may begin to lessen. However, establishing causation and assigning blame can also involve becoming overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, anger or the desire for revenge. In this section I shall consider a range of ways in which causation and blame are narrated in my data and consider how these diverse ways relate to coping strategies and to the overarching themes of the narratives.

Traumatic experiences such as murder, rape, assault and other kinds of criminal victimizations, involve a perpetrator and in these cases it may seem that the issue of causation and the assignment of blame is quite clear-cut[105]. Within the narratives of Carol, Gail and Sandra, who all experienced a trauma which involved a known perpetrator who was later convicted and imprisoned, the issue of causation and blame is dealt with in different ways but, in all three cases, it is highly significant in the way in which they think about, and cope with, what has happened to them.

In the first interview, Carol's main aim is to find answers to the questions she has about Jonathan's death and, as discussed in chapter two, she produces three revenge fantasies about confronting the perpetrator and forcing him to speak to her about what he has done. Carol says that she knows *why* Tom killed Jonathan:

[105] However, as many studies have shown, see Janoff-Bulman (1992:125-129), it is not uncommon in such circumstances for victims to blame themselves for what has happened. The idea of self-blame as an adaptive strategy was discussed in some detail in chapter two in relation to Janoff-Bulman's 'shattered assumptions' theory and in terms of the distance and the difference between the narrated I and the narrated self.

1. we knew from the on set that he killed Jonathan to get back at
2. me he even said that in his statement to punish me

C1 8:391-393

but she cannot understand *how* he could have done it:

1. basically I want answers from him I wanted answers from from
2. you from people I wanted people to tell me what was going
3. through his mind what enabled him to be able to go into the
4. room and kill his own child

C1 3:136-140

These questions and Carol's bewilderment about how Tom could have killed his own child form part of the severe disequilibrium and confusion that Carol experiences around Tom's identity, her identity, and their former life together, as discussed in Chapter 6:263 -264. During the second interview Paul asks Carol about the need to get answers that was so important to her at the time of the first interview:

1. P: what about the need to get answers

2 C: I still need that I'd still I still need to know how and why well
3. why we know but how how he could have done that to his own
4. son to his own baby er [sigh] its just beyond my imagination
5. that anybody can do what he did er I'll never understand in a
6. million years that anybody could harm a child in such a way let
7. alone their own (.) erm (.) yes I still ask myself why why me
8. why has it happened to me what did I do to deserve it losing
9. Jonathan (.) why did I never see it in him I just but I know I'll
10. never have (them)

Although Carol says that this need has not changed, 'I still need to know' (line 2), there *is* a sense of change and resolution here in that Carol has accepted that she will 'never understand in a million years' (lines 5-6). The questions that Carol still asks herself point to the issues of causation and injustice, 'what did I do to deserve it' (line 8). and to blame, 'why did I never see it in him' (line 9), in that they suggest that Carol thinks that she must have done something wrong and perhaps this was not realising that Tom was capable of murder. If she had 'seen it in him' she could have done something to

prevent Jonathan's death. However, rather than continuing to be haunted by these questions, she says that she now knows that she will never have the answers.

The confusion and ambiguity that Carol describes in the first interview around the issues of Tom's identity and her feelings towards him also seem to be resolved at the time of the second interview:

1. I could walk in there I could walk in there and slit his throat
2. basically and not think twice about it but then again I want him
3. to suffer for twelve years as well (.) I don't want him to get off
4. that easy I want him to sit and think about what he's done (.)
5. you know oh there's a lot of anger a lot of hate

C2 8:415-420

In the following three extracts Carol talks about her main coping strategy, in addition to *not* thinking about what happened, in terms of harnessing the anger and the hate that she feels towards Tom as weapons in her fight for survival:

1. its like I'm fighting to prove to him in prison that erm we've
2. survived we've struggled but we're surviving

C2 6:305/307

3. but its like now I'm fighting with myself to prove to him that yes
4. I'm a survivor and James's a survivor and we are going to get 5. on despite the fact of what he's done and tried to do we miss
6. Jonathan more than anybody could ever imagine you can't put
7. into words but we will get on and one day we will see him both
8. of us (.) both of us but we'll be a lot stronger and erm able to
9. stand up to him

C2 9:435-442

10. [louder] 'cos I'm trying I'm fighting to prove to him that its like a
11. battle this is my way of probably he's doing me in one respect
12. doing me good thinking that one day I'm going to show him 13. we've moved on we've made a better life you know that we 14. haven't sunk and whatever that we've picked us selves up and
15. we've got on so the anger and the hate that I've got inside
16. probably still for him is making me do that you know (.) proof
17. to him that he hasn't destroyed me which is what he set
18. intended to do

C2 10:502-511

Carol suggests that her determination to survive and to transcend the victimization is fuelled by her desire to prove to 'him in prison' that he has failed to destroy her and she says that one day she will show him the evidence of his defeat and her triumph in the 'battle' between them. This is a different kind of revenge fantasy to the three she produced in the first interview, which involved visiting Tom in prison and forcing him to confront what he had done and justify it to her. This revenge fantasy involves the longer term future when Carol and James will be stronger and able to stand up to the him (lines 8-9). In this way the focus of her anger and hate is *enabling* her to struggle, to survive, and to cope. For Carol, the metaphors of a fight to survive within an ongoing battle between herself and Tom, which he started and she will finish, are clearly very powerful ways of talking, and thinking, about her situation and enable her to narrate the transformation of herself from victim to survivor.

In similar way, Gail says that her anger has made her 'harder and stronger':

1. the anger within me sort of made me very strong and made
2. me fight I think and I still do fight I lash out sometimes at
3. people who don't really deserve it and erm I think that you
4. know it's just made me harder and stronger

G2 14:704-708

It is interesting to note that Gail uses the same sort of language here, in terms of anger inside causing indiscriminate lashing out, as she did earlier in the interview when talking about her understanding of why she was attacked:

1. I have felt that (.) he probably did what he did because he'd
2. been hurt somewhere else I don't feel that what he did to me
3. was a personal thing it was an attack on me because I
4. happened to be in the way it was a it was a lashing out
5. because of some way he'd been (.) hurt he must have been I
6. don't know (.) but it was a lashing out of anger and I just
7. happened to be standing in the way I don't think he I mean he
8. didn't know me so it couldn't have been a personal thing (.)

G2 8:383-392

Although Gail prefaces the above with the statement 'I've never felt any sympathy for him' (G2 8:383), the impression she conveys of the perpetrator, as someone who has been hurt and lashes out in anger indiscriminately, is later echoed when she talks about her understanding of her own anger and behaviour being caused what he did to her. I am not suggesting that Gail identifies with the perpetrator (my reading of her narrative suggests that she would almost certainly refute this idea) but it is possible to interpret how she talks about what motivated his actions and how she has been affected by them, as an indication of a belief that violence, hurt and anger generate more of the same in a cyclical process. Perhaps it is because she feels that she 'just happened to be standing in the way' (lines 6-7) of a man 'lashing out', rather than it being 'a personal thing' (lines 3 & 8), that her anger is directed towards men in general, rather than towards the perpetrator:

1. G: I'm prejudiced against men (.) I find erm well I just find
2. myself hardened against men generally (.)

3. P: and that's a general feeling

4. G: oh no there are some exceptions once I know someone
5. then I might admit into the human race but generally speaking I don't admit men into the human race

G2 2:72-79

Given that Paul is a man, I interpret Gail's response 'oh no there are some exceptions' (line 4) as an attempt to reassure Paul that Gail is not prejudiced and hardened against him, as an individual, but she does go on to say that as far as she is concerned,

generally speaking, 'men' are not human[106]. Towards the end of the interview, and in response to Paul asking her if there is anything she would like to add to what she has already said, Gail asks Paul about her continuing feelings of anger and her worry that this may be harmful to her:

P: right OK (.) thanks for that I think I've covered all the the points I wanted to erm (.) in relation to the first interview is there anything you wanted to add *** we've been talking about things that have been triggered by

G: erm (.) I wonder whether I should (.) be angry at this stage (.) should I still be angry?

P: (...) hh it depends I don't know (.) if I'm honest I don't know erm only to the extent

G: *** I mean talking of strategies I did actually try to forgive because I felt that harbouring resentment and anger was doing nobody any harm but myself and I did actually try to forgive but I don't think I really succeeded

P: is there any reason why you should forgive?

G: for my own sake so that I don't harbour anger for the rest of my days

P: do you think that anger affects (.) other areas of your life?

G: I think I'm a little bit more quick to hit out then I might otherwise be erm (.) and if I mean these kind of feelings if they're very intense if harboured can actually I think trigger

---

[106] The gender dimension of this interview is clearly very significant and may account for a considerable amount of the 'uncomfortableness' that Paul said he experienced, as discussed in chapter four. In the first interview, Paul asked Gail directly about the issue of gender within their therapy relationship and she said that not only was it not a problem for her, but that it had possibly been helpful:

> P: (.) there is (.) there is one thing that I suppose I wanted to ask you from my point of view is (.) I have heard it said that people who have been through this or women who have been through an experience like yourself might feel better talking to a woman rather than a man (.) do you think that that makes any difference?
>
> G: no I don't really I I don't know erm (.) I I don't think I think that's very difficult to answer (.) I think some women might feel that way
>
> P: right
>
> G: erm for me er it was important to me to get men and women in perspective as people
>
> P: right
>
> G: rather than as men and women and erm (.) in a way perhaps it helped

Gail's feelings about men, in general, will be discussed again in the final chapter.

20. erm physical illnesses too

21. P: right

22. G: clearly my being angry at him is not doing him any harm at
23. all it's only going to hurt me

24. P: is there anyway you think you could reduce that anger or

25. G: I dunno therapy I suppose meditation maybe

26. P: do you think that kind of thing would help you in that
27. respect do you think that well the other I suppose the question
28. to follow it up would be do you think you need it?

29. G: it's not a huge element in my life

30. P: right

31. G: probably not but it is there erm and erm (.) yes it is still
32. within me whether I'd ever be able to overcome it I don't know
33. because it's erm it's so ingrained into my system

34. P: mm

35. G: now in my whole thinking

36. P: I suppose the question would be to what extent this is a
37. problem for you

38. G: right

39. P: affects other areas of your life

40. G: (.) minimal

41. P: right

42. G: I mean in fact in some ways (.) sometimes it's a good thing
43. to be able to er be a bit more assertive (.)

44. P: and I suppose that would be my benchmark of whether
45. you needed therapy or not to the extent to which you felt it
46. was difficult

47. G: no because I would have sorted it out if I felt ***

48. P: right OK well thank you Gail thanks for that

G2 14-16: 730-809

Within this exchange at the end of the second interview, Gail refers to one particular coping strategy, 'I did actually try to forgive because I felt that harbouring resentment and anger was doing nobody any harm but myself' (lines 9-11), and says that she doubts that she succeeded. She also says that her ongoing feelings of resentment and anger have a 'minimal' (line 40) affect on her life even though they are 'ingrained' in her system and in her whole way of thinking (lines 33 & 35). In a more positive evaluation of the long term effect that her traumatic experience has had on her she uses the term 'assertive' to describe how her anger manifests itself and says that this can be 'a good thing' (lines 42-43), and this can be seen as example of 'construing benefit from the victimizing event' (Taylor, Wood and Lichtman 1983). Taken together with the issue of personal security, which is also a very dominant theme in Gail's narratives, and will be discussed in the final chapter, it is clear that Gail's life and the way she thinks about the world, and in particular about men, has been fundamentally and, probably permanently, changed by her experience. Nine years after the trauma, she is living a different life in a different world to the one in which she believed she lived prior to the attack:

1. I was brought up in a loving and erm warm environment and I
2. sort of thought that the world was like that I suppose and it's a
3. shock when you find it isn't

G2 1:50-53

Sandra, who is determined that her traumatic experience is only going to be a temporary disruption in her life, as discussed in the previous chapter, also describes herself as having been made strong by her traumatic experience:

1. in one respect it's made me quite strong I mean I'm determ
2. I've always been determined not to (..) erm let things beat me
3. (.) and er I mean I've been adamant that you know erm if
4. Andrew has done this he may have disrupted my life for a
5. short time but I'm not going to let him keep disrupting my life

S1 13:652-647

Like Carol, Sandra suggests that she may have benefited from the experience, 'it's made me quite strong' (line 1) and she uses the same 'fight' metaphor, in terms being determined not to be 'beaten'. However, Sandra talks about her anger towards the perpetrator in relation to the devastating effect his actions have had on their children, and on relationships with families and friends, rather than in relation to what he actually did to her:

1. I'm really angry with him (.) not so much because of what he
2. did to me but because of the (.) sort of after affects of what it
3. did to me the effects that it's had on everybody around us
4. immediate family especially the children I mean Andrew's
5. family my family and all our friends it's completely shattered
6. the relationships we had with these people

S1 9:434-440

It is the 'after effects' that Sandra is concerned with, rather than the actual incident, and, although she is angry with Andrew, she feels that this must take second place to the needs of her children:

1. P: in all of this that's happened to you Sandra what do you
2. feel has been the most or some of the most difficult things to
3. deal with

4. S: erm (.) well really the the children trying to explain to the

5. children the situation erm I mean it's very difficult erm
6. because they don't want to believe that their dad could have
7. done such a thing because they love their dad but I mean I
8. don't I try not to talk about it much in front of the children when
9. it comes to their dad because I don't want to I mean obviously
10. I do feel angry towards him for doing this to me but I try not to
11. let the children see that because I don't want them to erm see
12. that I'm saying that their dad did do this

S1 11:553-566

It is the rebuilding of her life with her children that Sandra is concerned about for the future rather than seeking justice or taking revenge for what has happened:

1. P: (.) how do you see the future?

2. S: (..) well to be honest I mean until this the trial is over I
3. can't see that anything is going to be different at all I don't
4. think that I can (.) as such (.) erm (.) plan for the future until
5. the trial's over and it's sort of done and dusted and then I can
6. you know look forward to erm sort of rebuilding my life as such

This examination of the issues of blame, anger and fighting talk in Sandra's narrative reveals that they are fully coherent with her approach of regarding the traumatic experience as a temporary disruption in her life, something which can be 'done and dusted' (line 5).

In contrast to Carol's, Gail's and Sandra's experiences, the issues of causation and blame are not so clear-cut within the traumatic experiences of Ann, Janice, Richard and Rose, in that they involve accidents and fatal illness rather than malicious intent. Janoff-Bulman (1992:76) suggests that one of the most fundamental distinctions that can be drawn between victimizations is between those events that involve a perpetrator with malicious intent and those that don't, such as natural disasters, serious illnesses and accidents. In terms of her theory, that trauma shatters our fundamental assumptions about self-worth and about the benevolence and meaningfulness of the world, she claims that the assumptive world of survivors is affected in different ways depending on which type of trauma they have experienced. She argues that survivors of human-induced victimization tend to view the world as more malevolent and the self more negatively, whereas survivors of 'Acts of God' tend to perceive the world as less meaningful, more random and chaotic:

> *A whimsical universe is extremely threatening; bad things can happen to good people, horrors can be the lot of careful people. The world can no longer be trusted to operate along our human constructions of justice and control.*
> Janoff-Bulman (1992:82)

This is certainly a perception that comes through in Ann's narrative which is structured around a seemingly endless series of traumatic experiences. Perhaps this is the reason why the issues of causation and blame hardly feature in the way in which Ann talks about her experiences. Although most of the traumatic experiences that she narrates, (abuse by her mother, the sexual abuse of her daughter by her brother, her husband being sacked by her long term lover), do involve a perpetrator, they are told within a narrative of 'just one thing happening after another', within which Ann does not focus on the issue of causation or blame within any particular episode. Instead she portrays herself as buffeted helplessly from one traumatic event to another because of extreme misfortune:

1. I keep thinking well if I'd broke a mirror I'd have seven years
2. bad luck I'm when I get up to my seven years will it ever end
3. will it all this ever end or is it going to happen to me forever if I
4. could see light at the end of the tunnel

A 34:1830-1834

This dominant theme, of just one thing happening after another, is considered in detail in the final chapter.

Looking at the issues of anger and blame in Janice's narrative reveals that she feels sympathy for the lorry driver whose vehicle crushed her daughter:

1. a lot of people get feeling very angry with the person who
2. caused it er I didn't I didn't feel that I just felt to be honest it
3. must be awful for that man to live with that I don't think I could
4. ever drive again if I if I killed somebody but he wasn't you
5. know he wasn't setting out to do it deliberately it was just they
6. were talking and you know he just didn't see her

J 5:245-252

Here Janice compares herself to 'a lot of people' who feel angry with the person who caused the accident. In addition to this social comparative device, Janice also places herself in the role of 'perpetrator' and imagines how she would feel if she had

accidentally killed someone. This enables her to feel sorry for the man whose carelessness, 'it was just they were talking and you know he didn't see her' (lines 5-6), rather than malicious intent, was responsible for Vicki's death. Janice's attitude, of empathy, tolerance and acceptance, even when it would seem perfectly reasonable for her to blame and to feel anger, is utterly different to that of Steven Owen, whose son was killed in a similar way. In Janff-Bulman (1992)'s terms, both accidents are 'fuzzy' instances which fall between the two types of trauma, neither perpetrated by malicious intent nor an 'Act of God', in that an act of human negligence may be seen as the cause. Given such an event, how one evaluates the issue of causation will crucially affect the process of meaning-making and coping in the aftermath. In stark contrast to the way in which Janice makes meaning of her daughter's death, in Steven's story the lorry driver is the sole focus of blame and anger which turns to blind rage and an extreme form of retaliation.:

1. I went to court and they weren't even allowed to tell the jury
2. that he didn't have a licence er it was all wrapped up in er the
3. sort of picture as if he was a lorry drive er who'd just made a
4. slight error of judgement

O 2/3:107-111

5. after he came out of prison I I started feeling the anger
6. building up inside

O 3:153-154

7. I I was on the edge of insanity virtually and I mean the guy
8. showed absolutely no remorse I think that made it much
9. worse and er with the past record of the guy it just ground
10. right into my very soul you know that I wanted I wanted to him
11. to say sorry to apologise for what he'd done and recognise it
12. what he'd done you know what he'd done to our family

O 4:169-175

13. it was like a black cloud from the moment I woke up . . . I just
14. had the feeling that I had to get out get out of the house and I
15. took the gun with me er went to where he I knew he might be

O7:347-354

16. I screamed I think at the time shouted at him and erm he's

17. edging away from me to the right and I thought he's going he's
18. getting away he's just going just going to get away with it
19. again get away with it

O 7:370-374

20. I was looking down on this gun you know as if I was out of my
21. body at the time and er he was he was escaping down the
22. road so I took the safety catch off and fired but it sort of just
23. caught him in the arm and he was still running he was still still
24. getting away with it and I I run after him and fired again and
25. caught him in the back and he he fell down and er a lot of
26. people started coming out and then I sort of come out of this
27. fuzzy world and I I@@ realised what had happened I'd hurt
28. him now and he wasn't getting away with it

O 8:379-388

Steven's tells the story of his anger and intense desire to prevent the man from 'getting away' with killing his son through the use of a number of metaphors: anger 'building up inside'; lack of remorse which 'ground into my very soul'; ' a black cloud'; 'out of my body'; and finally coming out of a 'fuzzy world' to find that he has achieved his aim.

On the surface it would seem that the sudden death of Richard's wife is a clear case of an 'Act of God', not caused by malicious intent or negligence, but this is not the way Richard understands it:

1. *Many stories were told about the reasons for her dying including the*
2. *medical story of 'myocardial infarct' (heart attack), in itself unusual*
3. *in a woman of Jill's age with no predisposing factors. The nastiest*
4. *and the most persistent story I tell myself is that I killed Jill. I did*
5. *not kill her deliberately, but I am none the less responsible for her*
6. *death.*

Johnson 1997:243

Richards says that this 'nasty' story that he tells himself is very convincing because:

1. *Throughout our marriage, at least until the last few years, I reaped*
2. *the dividends of gender inequalities, especially those that prioritized*
3. *my 'career' and subordinated her energies to the needs of family and*
4. *husband. Often, in addition, my behaviour, based in much*
5. *unacknowledged distress of my own, made her life more difficult*
6. *than it should have been. I was difficult to live with, partly because*
7. *of a persistent melancholy undertow in my life. And I didn't look*
8. *after her properly.*

In addition, I asked Jill to accept another close and sexual relationship ... The emotional pain must have taken a physical toll of Jill's health. It seems likely that it was the stress of this period that damaged her health permanently, literally 'broke her heart' ... if Jill had not stayed with me to renegotiate our relationship, perhaps she would now be alive. Even my continuing to love her may have contributed to her staying and therefore the prolongation of stress. In particular, it feels today that I did not reckon fully with the possible physical consequences for her of what I had done.

Johnson 1997:243

Part of the story that Richard tells himself (and the world now that he has published the story) was formulated before Jill died, in that he had already begun to recognise the ways in which he had benefited and Jill had suffered from the inequalities in their relationship and was making 'loving or reparative moves' in the years immediately before her death (Johnson 1997:247). In this way, Jill's death not only confirmed, in the most final and tragic way, what Richard had come to believe about his negligence, but was also so cruel and unfair in that the recognition and reparation he had only just begun to make was abruptly cut short. Jill's death meant the loss of a specific future, 'we planned a kind of joint retirement, which would also coincide with our children leaving home' (Johnson 1997:247), in which Richard would have time and opportunity to make amends. Richard says that this incompletion and unfairness 'gives a particular desperation to mourning', and 'extends beyond the grave' in that he is empowered to speak and she is 'comprehensively silenced in ways that are utterly irremediable' (Johnson 1997:247). The almost complete absence of agency accorded to Jill in the above narrative realises a story in which Jill is silent and passive and total responsibility is placed on Richard's narrated self for the way they lived and the way Jill died. Even though Richard is telling a story about a relationship between two people, agency is only given to one, his narrated self, who 'reaped', 'subordinated', 'was difficult to live with', 'didn't look after her', 'asked', 'continued to love' and 'did not reckon fully'.

The only time that agency is given to Jill is within a comparator about what might have happened, but didn't, 'if Jill had not stayed with me to renegotiate our relationship, perhaps she would now be alive' (lines 12-14). But the possibility of Jill having agency and choosing to stay is immediately undermined by it being Richard's action in continuing to love her that 'contributed to her staying' (line 15)[107]. The particular way in which causation is decided and blame assigned within the narration of their life together, through the presence and absence of agency, does indeed realise a 'nasty' and 'convincing' story, told by Richard to himself, about his negligence and responsibility.

There is of course an enormous difference between taking the blame for damaging someone else and taking the blame for damaging oneself. Blaming oneself for hurting others is very likely to generate feelings of guilt and/or shame but this is not the case when one takes responsibility for damage to oneself. For Ruth, blaming herself is a positive way to make meaning of her accident and disfigurement in that she feels that taking full responsibility for her traumatic experience enabled her to survive and to cope:

1. it was just a matter of going on with it no self pity I think that's
2. another thing that pushed me through because I'd got nobody
3. to blame but myself you know it was no it wasn't an accident
4. where there was anybody else involved I knew it was my
5. temper that's what had caused it that's really what had been
6. you know the the cause of it and I knew that I couldn't blame
7. anybody else but myself I think accepted that right from the
8. beginning you know well I'm here now I've just got to get on
9. with it you know nobody else to blame but yourself and just
10. get on with it

R 7:345-355

Ruth narrates herself as determined not to feel sorry for herself, 'no self pity' (line 1), and in this way refuses to be identified as a victim. This 'pushed' her through the

[107] Richard acknowledges this dimension of his narrative: 'There are other counter-narratives too which are important but which I have not explored here ... the representation of Jill, for example, not as a victim but as a woman who made her own choices' (Johnson 1997:248).

traumatic aftermath and although she says 'I'd got nobody to blame but myself' (lines 2-3), careful reading of this extract reveals that it was actually her temper that was 'the cause of it' (line 6). This self-blame is therefore more behavioural, than characterological (see Chapter 2:79) and thus makes a positive evaluation of her present self. Her temper is the focus of a self-comparison that Ruth makes between her former, pre-accident, self and her present self:

1. I've learned some lessons you know my temper @@@@@@
2. you know has cooled down a hell of a lot I couldn't I couldn't
3. control my temper I mean that that was what that was why it
4. was like almost as though that was the explosion

R 17:911-915

Ruth's hot temper, which has now 'cooled down' (line 2), not only caused the accident. because Ruth could not control it, but also exploded and burned itself out 'as though that was the explosion' of the car that burst into flames with Ruth trapped inside. This extremely powerful and evocative metaphor features in many ways in Ruth's narrative. She describes herself before the accident as:

1. like a a pressure cooker you know almost I couldn't let off
2. steam except for these so you know I just couldn't deal with it I
3. just literally couldn't deal with it I couldn't cope with it so its
4. erm that's why I say it it was almost like a death wish it was
5. almost like there just was so much had gone on it was like
6. whoosh it had gone

R 21:1088-1094

Ruth's intense anger and frustration about so much that had 'gone on' in life, which she could not safely vent, finally erupted and discharged itself, literally went up in flames 'whoosh' (line 6), in an act of self-destruction that very nearly succeeded. Her temper is not only the cause of the accident but also the cause of the breakdown of her relationship with Neville which was the reason why she was so distraught and out of control and therefore crashed the car:

1. in a way I understand why Neville left and why he did cos
2. there was all these problems with the kids my temper my

3. attitude I can understand why he went you know I can't I can't
4. blame him

R 22:1159-1162

Within further self comparisons, Ruth explains that not only was the accident and its cause prophesised, but also that it 'had to happen':

1. it was like and my mum used to say to me when I was
2. younger your temper will do you damage and it did you know
3. and I could not control my temper you know and I could not
4. control my temper and I used to have a really really evil
5. temper and haven't anymore I mean I don't say I don't get
6. angry I still have explosions but I can I can think hang on
7. you're going too far her and I've realised I can bring myself
8. back and I don't I don't lose control cos I did I really did lose
9. control

R 18:919-927

10. and the the anger and the the tempers it was more you know
11. sort of a response to it [all that had happened in her life] was
12. more a resentment and the frustration it was a response to it
13. and that was all suppressed cos life had to go on you know
14. there was absolutely no no way out of it and that's why I say I
15. really do believe I mean I probably had it in my mind you
16. know I didn't I wasn't conscious but it was almost as though
17. that was what it was all about it just it was just this absolute
18. hhhew you know and everything just just went then it it was
19. almost as though it had to happen

R 25:1330-1340

The meaning Ruth makes of her experience, 'what it was all about' (line 17), involves an explosion of suppressed anger and frustration that 'had to happen' (line 19) because 'there was no way out of it' and that Ruth knew this and therefore deliberately, but not consciously, drove her car while out of control and 'hhhew' everything, her anger, resentment and frustration, 'just went' (line 18). This way of thinking about the accident enables Ruth to construe considerable benefits from her experience:

1. I've had more opportunities if you like because this has
2. happened than if than if not I mean I was really going through
3. a frustrating sort of time anyway in my marriage you know it it
4. was deadlock

R 17:902-905

The accident broke this 'deadlock' and freed Ruth from her anger, resentment and frustration and enabled her to 'let go' of the things that had caused these emotions within her:

1. but there's been a peace come out of it you know there there's
2. almost a tranquillity come out of it because of being able to let
3. things go

R 24:1283-1285

This examination of the way in which causation is decided and blame assigned in the narratives reveals that these issues are highly significant in how meanings are made of traumatic experiences and also how these meanings have profound effects on how people cope with what has happened to them. Identifying the different types of evaluations that narrators make in terms of why something happened and who is, or is not, to blame reveals the utterly subjective nature of deciding causation and assigning blame in the narratives. In the specific circumstances of each traumatic experience, causation and blame could feature in quite different ways and still realise a convincing and meaningful story. For example, Janice could have blamed the lorry driver whose carelessness caused her daughter's death, Steven Owens could have regarded his son's death as an accident, and not a criminal act, Richard could have understood the cause of his wife's death as a heart attack caused by a physical flaw in her body, and Ruth could have blamed her husband for her accident because his infidelity and desire to end their marriage was the reason why she was driving in an extremely distressed state that morning. Very different meanings would be made by these, perfectly plausible, alternative stories of causation and blame and, thus, very different experiences of surviving and coping with the trauma would be narrated. Finally, the analysis in this section reveals that narrators construct a history, a story of the origins, of the trauma

which may reach far back in time as they link together events and experiences which were inexorably, yet unrecognisably, leading to the traumatic event.

In the following, final, chapter I consider the resolutions that are produced by the narratives by examining the way in which their overall structure combines with their dominant themes to configure, 'grasp together', the very many experiences that are narrated.

Chapter 8

Resolutions

In the preceding chapter I examined the meaning-making devices that narrators use in order to evaluate themselves and their experiences and to determine causation and assign blame in their stories of trauma. As I have argued throughout this thesis, narrative is, intrinsically, a meaning-making form. When we begin to tell a story about what has happened to us we are inevitably drawn into a process of narration within which the narrated 'I' becomes a character in the world of the story and where causes and effects are proposed through the time/narrative relationship. The configurational dimension of narrative grasps together (Ricoeur 1984:66, see chap1:29) the succession of experiences and events into a significant whole, and its 'anticipatory thrust' (Neimeyer 1994:238) imposes the 'sense of an ending' (Kermode 1968). In this way, narrators are involved in a process which strongly encourages them to strive, through various linguistic means, to evaluate their experiences, to make meaning of them, to draw conclusions and to offer some kind of resolution as the ending of their story.

The specific way in which this is done may vary with each telling as it is dependent on the specific context of the telling and on the way in which dialogic partners, narrator and listener(s), jointly produce the narrative on any particular occasion. In this way, the meanings and the resolutions that emerge through the telling of personal experience are not fixed but can change, or be elaborated upon, because the experience is open to reinterpretation and re-evaluation with each telling. However, over a period of time, through many retellings, to others and to the self, as illustrated by the 'life story cycle'

in chapter one, more permanent, stable meanings may be made as a way of talking, and a way of thinking, about the experience emerges. This way of thinking may be regarded as the framework within which the memory of the experience exists, in narrative form, and from within which future stories of the experience are realised. I identified and examined some aspects of these 'ways of thinking' in the previous chapter and in this final chapter I complete my analysis of the narratives by considering their dominant themes. These can be identified in the overall structure of the narratives and the coherence within them which links, and 'grasps together' (Ricoeur 1984:66), the narration of the moment of impact, the liminal zone, the experience of disequilibrium, and the struggle to find ways of coping, to produce an overall 'way of thinking' about the traumatic experience and a conclusion or ending to the story being told. In this way we can see that the episodic and configurational dimensions of narrative operate at the level of the narration as a whole as well as within the individual narrative segments which realise the many stories that make up the telling of the experience of trauma.

A number of the dominant themes of the narratives emerged through my analyses in the preceding chapter and in this chapter I will revisit some of these within an overview of the narratives identifying the elements which, in my interpretation, combine to produce resolutions, or endings to the stories[108]. I want to explore the two related meanings of resolution: an ending, as in the outcome or result or a story, and a beginning, as in the making of a decision about change, a plan for the future beyond the time scale of the story. It may be argued that the only way in which a narrative of trauma *can* have a resolution is through the idea of 'moving on' from the trauma to the beginning of a new

[108] Sandra's narrative is not analysed in this chapter, as, in a very real sense, she was still in the middle of her story at the time of the interview, waiting for the case to come to court. The dominant theme of her narrative is one of coping with the everyday difficulties of the traumatic aftermath, particularly in terms of its affects on her children, and waiting for the time when she can start to get back to normal life.

story. In this way, the beginning of a life beyond the trauma is contained in the ending of the trauma story, and the ending of the trauma story is contained within a new beginning, or the promise of a new beginning.

My analysis of the resolutions in the narratives also reveals the ways in which extremely traumatic experience changes, in quite fundamental ways, how people think about themselves, their lives, and the world in general. I shall show that these particular ways of thinking, that emerge through the narration of the experience of trauma, are specific and unique and can be identified and analysed through a detailed examination of the structure and the linguistic features of narratives of personal experience.

Carol's story

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the dominant themes of Carol's first narrative, involving a quest to find answers by confronting and taking revenge on the perpetrator, may be contrasted with the dominant themes of the second. These themes, which are provided in part by the comparative context of this second interview, involve a resigned acceptance about not having the answers, a recognition of the irreversibility of what has happened and a determination to survive *without* coming to terms with Jonathan's death:

1. I would still (.) give my life to have Jonathan back and have it
2. back the way it was (.) if I could have Jonathan (.) but (.) that'll
3. never happen so (.) we'll see but we're getting on that's the
4. main thing I've got this job I'm moving on James's moving on
5. and that's it

C2 10:487-492

6. we'll never be able to put it in the in the past or behind us
7. because its something that we'll never ever come to terms
8. with and we'll never get over (.) erm but basically we've just
9. got we haven't got no choice in the matter we've just got to
10. you know (.)

C2 10:532-536

It is interesting to note Carol's use of 'we' here, (lines 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), to refer to herself and James as united in their struggle to survive. In her first narrative this use of 'we' occurs only four times, 'we've both changed' (C1 3:159), 'we're both still terrified' (C1 4:187), 'we both feel guilty' (C1 4:183-184), 'we'll never be the same' (C1 4:193-194), whereas it occurs 25 times in the second narrative when Carol also says 'we're best friends' (C2 6:277-278). As discussed in chapter seven, the construction of James has changed radically in the second narrative. In the first narrative he takes on the role of opponent; having to stay alive for his sake is preventing Carol from escaping the unbearable pain she is suffering. In the later narrative James has become her helper who has enabled her to survive and they are united in their grief and in their opposition to the perpetrator whom they will one day confront in the realisation of a long term revenge fantasy. In this way, Carol is able to narrate their transformation from victims to survivors:

1. I'm a survivor and James's a survivor and we are going to get
2. on despite the fact of what he's done and tried to do we miss
3. Jonathan more than anybody could ever imagine you can't put
4. into words but we will get on and one day we will see him both
5. of us (.) both of us but we'll be a lot stronger and erm able to
6. stand up to him

C2 9:436-442

Gail's story:

A determination to survive and to transcend the victimization is also a dominant theme in Gail's second narrative, produced nine years after the assault. She is also aware of how she has been changed by the experience:

1. I'm a little bit more cynical as though I've built I suppose a
2. protective shell I've you know I'm a bit more detached and
3. less trusting and harder because I I just have to be
4. determined to survive (.)

G2 10:494-497

The protective shell that Gail has built around herself is physical as well as emotional:

I have a burglar alarm and I wouldn't be without one and I always check the box before I go into the house to make sure it's not been triggered whilst I'm out ... erm I think I've built into my life style a method of being cautious all of the time so it doesn't it doesn't bother me it doesn't interfere with my pattern but I am a a lot more aware and cautious than I was

G2 5:230-240

er I just wouldn't feel safe without the alarm now er I never ever leave the garage door unlocked never not even if I'm out for two minutes because that was his access erm I never leave the back door open not even in the summer it's always locked in case somebody comes into the back garden into the house in the back of the house erm and if I let the dog out I always lock the door while she's out and unlock it for her to come in again so that the door is never open for more than just a couple of seconds erm and all of that all of those precautions are because of that incident but they are all built into my regular routine now and it doesn't doesn't bother me but it's just the way I now am

G2 12:606-619

These security measures, and Gail's attitude towards men in general, constitute the two dominant themes of her second narrative and relate directly to the specific details of the traumatic experience, to her feelings of vulnerability and to her fear and mistrust of men in general. These issues are also significant in her daughter's life, although Gail has not told her the reason for them:

P: which has become second nature now things that you just do automatically

G: yeah and I've taught my daughter to do the same (.)

P: she was quite young then

G: she was four

P: four erm (.) have you discussed this with her at all

G: no she doesn't know it happened

8. P: right (.) in an indirect way do you think she's been affected
9. other than

10. G: she's aware of my prejudice against men

11. P: right (.) does she ever ask you about it

12. G: she agrees with me [smiling]

G2 12/13:629-649

Gail also construes benefit from her experience in that having survived and transcended the victimization, she has greater confidence in her ability to cope with other life events:

1. well I had to overcome that and I've had to overcome other
2. things since and you just know that well perhaps it gets easier
3. actually cos you know that you've come through that well you
4. can get through the next thing too

G2 10:502-505

Overall, these elements of Gail's narratives of her traumatic experience combine to produce a story of a self who is now impermeable both emotionally and physically, and who is resolved to remain so.

Ann's story

Ann also feels that nothing can hurt her as much as the loss of Michael:

1. A: well I suppose I'd if I'm really honest about it I felt so much
2. pain from Michael that that you know that pain

3. W: mm

4. A: that intense that pain of of what all this erm is on top
5. couldn't hurt me anymore you know I hurt you can't hurt me
6. anymore

A 24 1257-1265

As discussed in Chapter 4:148, when Ann offered to participate in this research she described herself as having experienced a series of traumas in her life, and the structure of her narrative accords with this way of thinking about her life. Ann told me about childhood abuse, her daughter's teenage pregnancy and abortion, the revelation of her

brother's sexual abuse of her daughter, her husband losing his job, the breakdown of her long term extra marital affair, and, most traumatically, Michael's death. Ann provides a number of organisational markers which very clearly reveal the chronological and episodic structure of the overall story she shared with me:

1. which is another trauma which I'll come to later on
A 4:188-189

2. A: ...I didn't understand til later on after Michael's death which
3. I will come on to again

4. W: Ok

5. A: so the other one ******** I've had one [trauma] since
6. Michael erm
A 4: 207-213

7. er just before things happened to Michael the the trauma we
8. had with Alison was she got pregnant

A 5:239-241

9. I mean it don't sound a trauma to what I've gone through but it
10. was a build up to this

A 6:301-303

11. can't remember whether she'd had the baby when she told me
12. about the next trauma in my life which was the sex abuse and
13. my brother let me just think
A 19:983-985

Considering these structural markers together with the recurrent use of 'X when Y' formulations, the phrase 'and all of a sudden' and the dominance of nonagentive roles for the narrated self, (these are all discussed in detail in Chapter 5:198-199), reveals that the dominant theme of Ann's narrative is one of repeated misfortune, pain and suffering over which Ann not only has no control, but is controlled by and rendered helpless:

1. it's like everything that is happy or important to me or makes
2. me happy goes away

A 30:1595-1597

3. through the cycle it it's like everything just goes away

A 30:1605-1606

Ann's narration of herself, in negative comparisons between what she 'used to be' and what she has now become culminates in statements about losing herself and feeling 'dead':

1. I've lost me and I feel quite dead emotionally physically

A 28:1471-1472

Ann also narrates the feeling of being lost and dead in terms of not being recognised as herself by others in that she only exists in the roles of wife, mother and grandmother:

1. I I I'm dead I'm lost and I'm fed up of being so like I'm a
2. mother grandma

A 28:1483-1484

3. if I had to put myself in the order of er I'm expected to be the 4.
   brick and and do everything and go to work and that's the
5. normal woman's story but and be the mother grandma and do 6.
   everything and er like that's why I feel I've lost me

A 29:1513-1517

7. I want to run away I want to (.) just go go away and never
14. come back cos sometimes it's hard to stay as the wife and
9. mother

A 34:1810-1812

The narrating I in these extracts is clearly the voice of the self Ann feels she has lost, or has died, not only through the series of traumatic experiences but also within the overwhelming expectations on her as wife, mother and grandma. Ann recognises her experience as 'the normal woman's story' (line 5) as she takes an overview of the other people she is expected to be, all of which take priority over the needs of 'me' who is lost. The lack of integration she narrates between herself and the roles in which she lives her life is so great that sometimes the self who is not the wife, mother or grandma,

finds it hard to stay and considers running away. It is highly significant that Ann's hopes for the future do not involve her family but instead echo how life 'used to be', as described in the social comparisons discussed in the preceding chapter, and are based on a quest to find her self again:

1. I've got to get back to finding me my friend Diane oh god I
2. love her she's fun and if I'm ever with her I feel alive and this
3. is why I'm looking forward to this holiday I'm alive you know
4. and that's what I'm saying I've got to got to live again

5. W: yeah

6. A: and I've got I keep saying well I have moved on and by god
7. I have from what I've gone through I've moved on but (.) I'm
8. dead and I've got to get I'm only forty four and I've got to find 9. me again

A 36: 1907-1918

This resolution for the future, 'to find me again', projects a future in which Ann rediscovers herself by taking control and having agency again and it is this pledge for the future that provides a resolution, a hopeful ending, to her narrative.

Janice's story

The most dominant theme of Janice's narrative, perhaps surprisingly for a narrative of trauma, is one of celebration. This theme can be discerned in the way in which she anchors her experiences to particular festivities: birthdays are mentioned sixteen times, Christmas nine times and parties six times in her narrative. For example,

1. we were just looking yesterday at this video that I had taken
2. on my fortieth and she arranged this surprise party which I
3. had on a boat

J 6:311-314

4. we've always had a lot of fun and on her eighteenth birthday
5. we had a really good party

J 6:319-321

6. Sarah lost her friend her best friend was twelve she had cystic
7. fibrosis she died and was buried on Sarah's 12th birthday

J 3:136-138

15. I've always kept things the same you know like we've still
16. celebrated Christmas

J 9:434-435

11. I've lived here it will be twenty one years at Christmas

J 20:1067-1078

Vicki died on Janice's 45th birthday:

1. I was forty five that day and er).) I just had lots of people
2. calling and bringing me presents and things and while we
3. were here and chatting and having drink and everything Vicki
4. had been she'd been bouncing about all day it was just she
5. was in the middle of her A levels and er she just er I think
6. somebody rang and they were singing happy birthday and she
7. just like beckoned to me oh I'm just nipping out and er she just
8. nipped out (.) and a quarter of an hour later she was (.) dead

J 2:60-69

Our interview took place on the day after her 50th birthday, the fifth anniversary of Vicki's death:

1. this year five years on I thought well you know I really ought to
2. have a party cos Vicki was always organising my parties and
3. she was that sort of person she was always having when it
4. was anybody's birthday at school she made them a cake she
5. was always partying and that sort of thing so erm for Vicki's
6. sake I ought to be getting on

J 5:257-263

In this way, Janice suggests that parties are a testimony to Vicki, who 'was one for a bit of a party' (J 7:356). Janice describes Vicki as 'so bright', and 'so full of life' that she was 'larger than life' (J 4:167-172). Her capacity for having fun, her 'larger than life-ness', even transcended her death:

1. the thing is she wasn't when we went to when we saw her she
2. just looked absolutely perfect you know with a big grin @@ on
3. her face she didn't have any (.) damage to her not I think she
4. had damaged her knees but her face and everything you
5. know she was just she just had a big grin on her face as if you
6. know it was a big joke

J 3:121-127

Janice believes that Vicki is happy, 'the thing that's helped me I feel that she's happy', (J 12:642-643), and this aspect of her way of thinking about Vicki's life and death emerged in the immediate traumatic aftermath when Janice decided that her funeral should be a celebration of her life:

she had the most beautiful beautiful funeral service which I wanted it to be a (.) to be a thanksgiving for her life and and all her friends were there and they sang cos they've got lovely (****) at school and people spoke poems and things and then they all came back and it's like that's why I did this thing yesterday and it's like I said the whole garden absolutely full must have been five hundred people and and the food and I don't know where all the food came from people just people were just wonderful they came and I just you know I had so many letters from people I didn't know at all who knew Vicki and she'd met at various stages and she'd made a big impact on all of them and that was I mean it's sad but it's you know it was nice to think that you know so many people thought about her and we had a big and I knew she would have wanted us to have a you know she was one for a bit of party

J 7:339-356

In the following two extracts Janice compares herself to 'some people' in a further development of the theme of testimony to the life of Vicki. She explains that Vicki has a continuing presence in her everyday life, through conversations, and in her home, which still contains 'Vicki's room' and is decorated with her artwork together with the artwork of other family members:

Vicki was just so you know full of life and (.) and in a way I mean I get alot of comfort out of that some people don't like to talk about anybody that's (.) dead but I we talk about Vicki a lot and you know and we always call it Vicki's room and we're always talking about her because you know she was here and part of us

J 4:174-179

some people they're like at the grave every day but that's how they cope and that and I don't feel to myself that Vicki's in that grave I just remember her more about us and we've got all her artwork up well and I've got Sarah's artwork and Dan's and my Dad's my Dad did those pictures over there everything what I've got on the wall is by one or other of us

J 12:615-621

This way of thinking about Vicki, 'she was so full of life' (line 1), is part of a very powerful metaphor than informs the way in which Janice has made meaning of the death of her daughter:

1. I try actually I think that Vicki was a bright light and maybe she
2. wasn't I've come to that sort of acceptance that you know that
3. she was a bright spark and wasn't going to be with us that
4. long but she's I get a lot of comfort out of that she lived her life
5. you know to the full even now I still find it quite hard to believe
6. that she was only eighteen

J 6:293-299

Given this understanding of Vicki's life and death, 'that she was a bright spark and wasn't going to be with us that long' (lines 2-4), which suggests that early death was intrinsic to the intensity of her life, it makes sense that Janice would have no difficulty in exonerating, indeed having sympathy for, the careless lorry driver who, within this understanding, was only an instrument of Vicki's destiny. In this way the issues of causation and blame are resolved and, within a further social comparison, Janice explains that she has accepted Vicki's death and is resolved to get on with her own life:

1. I think that happens with people really that they don't actually
2. have time to deal with it and I think if you don't deal with it I
3. think you have it there for years it does affect you and you
4. know because I feel that you know I mean I have grieved and
5. it's still painful at times and I do miss Vicki but I feel I have
6. accepted it and you know I always miss her I always feel I've
7. had three children but I don't feel it's you know I feel you know
8. I've got I've got to get on with my life

J 8:424-432

Janice's story of coping is one in which she cherishes the life that Vicki was so full of, and in this way keeps the 'bright spark' alight in her own life. This enables Janice to accept Vicki's death and to be determined to live her own life to the full, as though, in a reversal of the parent child relationship, Vicki has become a role model for her. In this way the resolution of Janice's story provides a reason why she must do more than

survive in spite of her grief and loss, she must also resolve to embrace the meaning of Vicki's life in the way she lives her own life.

Richard's story

For Richard, Jill's death and his survival is the 'greatest unfairness' in his story of the layers of inequalities that made up their life together and, perhaps, caused her death (Johnson 1997:249). Richard's narrative of his grieving experiences is closely interwoven with the main themes of the book in which it is published, 'Border Patrols'. This title refers to the policing of sexual categories and divisions and the various essays which make up the book offer critiques of the hegemonic character of heterosexuality using the ideas of 'border patrols' as a metaphor and a framework for analysis. Richard describes the ongoing process of researching, thinking, talking and writing about Jill's death and his grieving experiences as fundamental to the development of his understanding of what happened and why it happened. More than this, the way in which he understands his own responsibility for what happened, which may be located within, but never exonerated by, oppressive social, sexual and political structures, means that the story that emerges cannot remain private. So, while Richard recognises the intensification of unfairness and inequality that comes with his power to speak about Jill and about their life together while she is 'silenced in ways that are utterly irremediable' (Johnson 1997:247), he also feels that he must bear witness:

1. *The counter-narrative I tell myself is about my own responsibilities.*
2. *Chief among these is to remember and to recognize Jill as publicly*
3. *as possible ... I have done this, most riskily in this volume, but also*
4. *in speeches, and lectures on other matters.*

Johnson (1997:247)

In this way the process, the product and the publication of the narration of his experiences, within which the personal and the political are inextricably interrelated,

may be seen as absolutely central to the way in which Richard copes with Jill's death and his survival. As testimony to Jill, and testimony to the self-aware self that Richard feels he has become, not solely but most radically through his suffering, the narrative also bears witness to the oppression and abuses inherent to the hegemonic sexual, social and political structures within which personal tragedies are played out.

Ruth's story

Ruth would also like to publish her story of a self radically changed through the experience of surviving severe physical and emotional trauma. At the very end of the interview she says: 'I'd love to write a book, Wendy' (R 26:1388) and, as she explains at the very beginning, she is aware that she has gone through a process of narrative meaning-making which means that her perspective now is very different to how she saw things when she was actually going through the experiences she narrates:

1. it's a different viewpoint from then and now I mean you know
2. telling it now which is what six years on I suppose I'm telling it
3. from a different point of view to me even it sounds like a story
4. because in that six years I had to make sense of it all you
5. know so in a way it sounds as though well this is a story you
6. know

R 1:8-14

In this story, Ruth narrates herself as emerging transformed from a near-death experience

1. apparently it was touch and go it was you know whether I lived
2. or died erm I can remember coming out of of (.)
3. unconsciousness if you like I can actually remember the point
4. of of that erm I was sat in the hospital room and I was almost
5. in a foetal position I was you know my head was bowed and I
6. was curled all curled up

R 3:115-120

Ruth's experiences in the unconscious world from which she was reborn included wandering in a wasteland, meeting charcoal figures and making a bargain with the

devil, as described in the narration of her dreams discussed in Chapter 6:260-261, and her return to the conscious world involved both a realisation of the transformation of her body, now severely burned and disfigured, and a transformation of her self and her life. Within the story that emerged as Ruth tried to make sense of what had happened to her, the car accident becomes a dramatic resolution to all the other things that have happened in Ruth's life, in that the anger, resentment and frustrations that she felt about these things were burned away in the flames that engulfed her body:

1. it was almost like there just was so much had gone on it was
2. like whoosh it had gone you know looking back now I just
3. wonder if that was a process that I was here to learn a lesson
4. that's how I feel

R 21:1092-1096

Learning a lesson is a dominant theme of Ruth's narrative within which the idea that life is 'uncanny' is central:

1. I mean the whole process has been such a an experience
2. such a learning experience

R 16:856-857

3. it's uncanny because I think well is there a lesson to be learnt
4. I mean that that's what a lot of the spiritual beliefs are that
5. you're on earth to learn a lesson my god I've learned some
6. lessons

R 17:908-912

7. but Neville couldn't go through that he couldn't learn he
8. couldn't learn that lesson we couldn't go through that process
9. together I've had to go through this process now reversed
10. which is is it's uncanny it's weird and this is what I say is it are
11. you meant to learn lessons in life you know . . . I didn't
12. choose these things to happen and they have done it's
13. absolutely uncanny it really is

R 19:990-1000

In these terms, Ruth makes meaning of experiences, over which she had no control but which, uncannily, fit together within a process that she was destined to go through and to survive:

and now looking back I'm I'm more inclined to say that that I wasn't meant to die and there is a purpose and whatever it was my time wasn't up and for some reason or other there is a purpose there's a purpose in it and the drive and choices I've made which I haven't been conscious of they've all been part of that process I really believe now I really believe because it's been such a coincidence of how things have happened and what's gone on

R 12:630-638

Throughout her narrative, Ruth makes a distinction between conscious and unconscious, or subconscious, choices that she has made (the words conscious, unconscious and subconscious occur 35 times) and in this way conveys her past self as unknowingly making choices and decisions that can now, in retrospect and in the light of the ending of her story, be understood as serving the overall purpose of a benevolent force. Her story ends with the narration of her present self as feeling at peace, willing to 'go with the flow' of life, accepting what has gone before and what it yet to come:

I've never ever ever resented what had happened it it's been more there's a purpose in life and I really really believe that

R 13:650-652

I don't feel as I need to search for answers anymore I don't feel that I feel just at peace and I feel just just think OK I'm here now and and this is how it will be just let it flow you know just that peaceful let it flow that's how I feel

R 26-1373-1377

In this way Ruth depicts her present self, unlike her past angry and frustrated self, as living life without resistance, confident in her belief in the greater, mysterious purpose of life. She recognises that it is the passing of time, together with her recent interest in the spiritual aspects of complementary therapies, that has enabled to see life from this perspective:

whether that's a reality because me you know the last year around these complementary therapies has been a lot of the spiritual belief belief in the universe as a whole and wider things and perhaps that's what I needed to finally make sense of it

6. W: mm

7. R: I don't know perhaps it's not true @@@

8. W: feels true

9. R: @@@ yeah @@ but I feel more more sort of able to go
10. along with it and just just at peace

R 26:1355-1369

Ruth does not know if the resolution to her story, which enables her to 'finally make sense of it', is a 'reality' or 'true' but in a very real sense it does not matter because she is 'able to go along with it', at peace with herself and her life.

In this final chapter we have seen that the reality or the truth of the meanings and the resolutions that stories provide for their narrators, and their readers, does not emerge from an objective analysis of the facts of what happened but from *within* the relationship between narration and coping. Narrating and coping with life is not about establishing true meanings or seeing the true nature of everyday reality but about 'how to be', how to create ways of living with the past in the present for the future. I shall revisit this issue in the conclusion that follows.

The narratives I have considered are diverse and unique but the resolutions they offer all fulfil the same twofold function as, Janus-like, their endings are formulated in the beginning, or the promise of a beginning, of new stories, yet these beginnings only represent a moving on *from* the traumatic past because they are embedded *in* the meaning of that past. In this way, the possibility of a future is wrought in the resolution that the narrative of trauma produces, both as outcome and as a prediction for the future. Time does not stop with the end of the story because endings are not final points in a process, rather they are points of connection between past, present and

future. Endings are vital links in 'the circle of narrative and temporality' (Ricoeur 1984:3). The concepts of coping with and moving on from trauma could not exist without the flow of time and narrative which enables us to narrate our lives and the survival of our selves. Without the flow of time and narrative, there could be no story of survival, of moving on from the trauma, indeed no stories at all:

> *Suppose time can slow down. Suppose it's not an ever rolling stream, but something altogether more viscous and unpredictable, like blood. Suppose it coagulates around terrible events, clots over them, stops the flow. ...Recovery, rehabilitation, regeneration, redemption, resurrection, remembrance itself, all meaningless, because they all depend on that constantly flowing stream.*
>
> Barker (1998:270-271)

Conclusion

In my introduction to this thesis I referred to the question I was asked many times during the research process which culminated in the writing of this work: 'What is narrative and what has it got to do with coping with trauma?'. In this conclusion I briefly summarise the ways in which the thesis answers this question. In addition, I make explicit the significance of my approach to theory, method and practice by drawing an analogy between the ways in which I have made meaning of the relationship between narrative and coping, and the ways in which narrators make meaning of experience. Finally I propose that the insights offered by this thesis suggest fruitful directions for future research into narrative and trauma.

'What is narrative and what has it got to do with coping with trauma?'

I define narrative as 'a text which realises a story'. This definition is non-eventcentric, and is based on the distinction which can be made between 'narrative' and 'story' and on a conceptualisation of narrative which is based on the relationship between 'story' and 'life'. The central focus of the work is how, *precisely*, narrative enables us to make meaning of our experiences and, to these ends, narrative is conceptualised as both a linguistic construct (a type of text) and a cognitive instrument (a way of making meaning). The object of analysis is a specific type of narrative, the personal experience narrative, which is conceptualised and defined in terms of experientiality, rather than form, as a: 'text which brings a story of personal experience into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience.'

The database for the study is made up of narratives of trauma and the thesis provides, therefore, important insights into how stories of trauma are realised through unique narrative texts. It is argued, however, that narrative is the primary way in which people make meaning of *all* experience, not only traumatic experience, and, therefore, the integrated processes of narrating and coping are seen as fundamental to the way in which we live out our lives.

The detailed analyses of the personal experience narratives of trauma that are used as data follow the model of the narrative of trauma proposed by the thesis. The main structural and linguistic features that are identified and analysed, and the interpretations I make about what these can tell us about the relationship between narrative and coping, may be summarised as follows:

Equilibrium disturbed/ XY structure: the construction of suddenness, the destruction of agency, the liminal zone and the injustice of traumatic experience.

Disequilibrium: numbness, metaphor and the dialectic of trauma; madness, the specificity of the meaning of 'mad' behaviour, the narrative as testimony to the self who has survived and as archive of the life lost; retraumatisation, XY structure, imaginary stories and the reverse face of history, rendering the experience.

Narrative meaning-making: social and self comparisons, comparators, causation and blame.

Resolutions: dominant themes and their relation to overall structure, resolution as both outcome and prediction, moving on from trauma.

Narrative knowledge and narrative analysis

Implicit throughout the thesis is an argument for the promotion of narrative knowledge and against reductionist, event-centric notions of both narrative and trauma. I have shown that the reality or the truth of the meanings and the resolutions that stories provide for their narrators, and their readers, does not emerge from an objective

analysis of the facts of what happened but from within the relationship between narration and coping. Spence (1982:31) defines 'narrative truth' as 'the criterion we use to decide when a certain experience has been captured to our satisfaction'. What makes the past known to us, therefore, is not the uncovering of concrete factual evidence but a composition of certain events, through narrative, which makes the past meaningful, and 'liveable with', in the present. Narrative truth is always open to modification, to re-interpretation, and is therefore unverifiable in a scientific sense. In this way narrative knowing is a process of evaluation and re-evaluation through many tellings and retellings, to the self and others. In the narration of the experience of trauma it is also a process of suffering and surviving.

Life is not narratively structured, but life informs and is informed by stories through the activity of narrating experience, as illustrated by my life story cycle. Narrating and coping with life is not about establishing true meanings or seeing the true nature of everyday reality but about 'how to be', how to create ways of living with the past in the present for the future. 'Knowing from within' the living of life is described by Shotter (1993b:7) as a basic type of knowledge, constituted in the chaos and disorder of everyday life; the 'sphere of diffuse, sensuous or feelingful activity'. Shotter argues that its nature 'cannot be described theoretically, in ways amenable to evidential support' (1993b:113). Therefore knowledge about the ways in which narration and coping in the aftermath of trauma are related cannot be constructed by controlling the diversity within, and reducing the complexity of, the process in order to squeeze it into a rigid framework or system of analysis; the very object of analysis would be destroyed (de-story-ed) by this type of methodology.

I have tried to show precisely how narrative knowledge emerges *from within* the stories that are told and thus 'narrative is both phenomenon and method' (Clandinin and Connelly 1994:416), in that the process of narrative knowledge can only be studied from within that process. An analogy can be drawn therefore between the ways (methods) that narrators use to make meaning of their traumatic experiences and the methods (ways) I have used in order to analyse and make interpretations about the narratives in this study. The same parallel can be drawn between the resolutions (outcomes) of the narratives and the findings (outcome) of this research.

The researcher presents and interprets data in specific ways and although the results of this process are often referred to as 'findings', explanations and answers are not found at all but are constructed through a dynamic interaction between theory, method and data in much the same way as stories are constructed from life. I am suggesting, therefore, that although theories and stories are constructed by different types of texts serving different kinds of functions in different kinds of contexts, they are both products of intersubjective meaning-making processes and are both attempts to provide explanation, understanding, knowledge and truth.

In line with the work of theorists from many disciplines, who have been at the forefront of a shift towards self-reflexive methodologies[109], this thesis stresses:

> *'... the importance of the personal, the uncertainty of objective material, the vanishing distinction between subject and object ... the many layers of truth, the hazy line between data and interpretation'*
>
> Josselson & Leiblich (1993:xi)

[109] Theorists who have informed my own thinking on methodology in this study include Hollway (1989), Personal Narratives Group (1989), Code (1991), Gatens (1991), Josselson and Leiblich (1993, 1994, 1995), Riessman (1993), Hite (1993) and Josselson (1996).

From this perspective, personal narratives *and* writing about personal narratives can become a 'counter discourse' (Foucault 1971), denigrating disengaged reasoning and rejecting scientific facts in favour of narrative knowledge generated by personal stories of living in the social, emotional, flesh and blood world of the everyday.

As Shotter (1993a) describes, it is rhetorical, or poetic (and I would include narrative) uses of language that *move* us emotionally, changing the way we feel about things. The stories that are brought into being through the narration of personal experience enable meaning to be made of that experience *and* provide the analyst with a way of accessing that narrative knowledge. In this way, narrative, as a linguistic construct which brings into being a cognitive construct, not only harnesses the power of 'knowing from within' to make meaning *in* communicative contexts, but also, as a textual entity, makes it possible for an account *of* that process to be formulated. This is what this thesis attempts to provide.

Bruner (1986:28) describes narratives as 'trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties' and the same can be said of narrative analysis that offers particular interpretations and ways of reading narratives and is always open to reinterpretation and re-evaluation by other readers. Just as the stories I have analysed produce endings that promise new beginnings, this thesis contains within it the means of moving on from its limits to new approaches to the study of both narrative and trauma.

Moving on

Through a rigorous and detailed reconceptualisation of narrative, this thesis suggests that the sphere of narrative analysis can be enlarged to encompass texts, or aspects of

texts, that have formerly being discounted as non-narrative and in doing so prepares the ground for future narrative research on a wider range of texts than could formerly be considered.

The model of the trauma narrative proposed by the thesis, and the analytic categories around which it is structured, are particularly relevant to research which seeks to better understand the effects of trauma from a narrative perspective. However, the baseline of the model, Propp's structure of the story, is potentially useful as the foundation for the analysis of any kind of narrative. I have argued that all models and frameworks for analysis should be specifically tailored to the type of text they are intended to illuminate and therefore the model and the analytic techniques used in this thesis chould be regarded as useful templates upon which other analysts can build.

Through the inclusion of a personal experience narrative about the ethical and methodological issues which arose during this research process, the work argues for transparency in narrative research and for the foregrounding of the issue of subjectivity in theory, method and practice. In this way the thesis supports, and makes a contribution to, a growing body of work that refuses to collude with the myth of objectivity and trangresses the traditional institutional boundary between the personal and the public lives of researchers.

This thesis tries to understand the experience of trauma *through* stories of trauma. This approach to understanding trauma is quite different, therefore, to psychological approaches to traumatic stress (and indeed to the human condition in general) which propose a psychological reality *behind* what people say. For example, the narrative

analyses presented in this study reveal the crucial role that imagination plays in the experience of the impact of trauma and in the ongoing experiences of coping in the aftermath. As both research and practice in the field of traumatic stress tends to dominated by an event-centred notion of trauma, these could be valuably informed by the insights this thesis provides. Further research, which develops my approach to the time/narrative relationship within which we narrate our selves and our experiences, is needed in order to more fully understand the process of surviving and moving on from traumatic life experiences.

Finally, the life story cycle that this thesis proposes and the issues of time and narrative that I offer as developments of the work of Paul Ricoeur have theoretical implications that go far beyond this study of narratives of trauma. Proponents of a narrative approach to understanding the human condition may find many threads which demand to be taken up and woven into new stories.

References

Acker, K. (1997) ***Eurydice in the Underworld*** London:Arcadia Books

Agar, M. and Hobbs, J.R. (1982) *Interpreting Discourse: Coherence and the Analysis of Ethnographic Interviews* ***Discourse Processes*** 5:1-32

Allport, G.W. (1942) ***The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science.*** New York: Social Science Research Council

Anderson H. & Goolishan, H. (1992) *The Client is the Expert: as Not-Knowing Approach to Therapy* in K.J. Gergen and S. McNamee (eds) ***The Social Construction of the Psychotherapeutic Process*** London:Sage

Antze, P. and Lambek, M. (1996) ***Tense Past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*** New York : Routledge

APA – American Psychiatric Association (1994) ***Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*** (4th ed) Washington, DC: APA

Arendt, H. (1961) ***Between Past and Future*** London: Faber

Aristotle (1927[335]) *The Poetics* (trans.W. Hamilton Fyfe) **in** ***Aristotle: The Poetics. 'Longinus': On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*** Camb. Mass.: Harvard University Press

Aronsson, K. and Cederborg, A. (1994) *Conarration and voice in family therapy: Voicing, devoicing and orchestration* ***Text*** 14(3) : 345-370

Atwood, M. (1996) ***Alias Grace*** London: Bloomsbury

Augustine, St. (1961[397]) ***Confessions*** (trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin) New York: Dorset Press

Bakhtin, M.M. (1981) ***The Dialogic Imagination*** Austin: University of Texas Press

Bakhtin, M.M. (1986) ***Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*** trans. by Vern W. McGee Austin: University of Texas Press

Bal, M. (1977) ***Narratologie:Essais sur la signification narrative dans quartre romans modernes*** Paris: Klincksieck

Bal, M. (1985) ***Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*** Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Bal, M. (1997) ***Narratology. Introduction to the theory of narrative*** 2nd edition
Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Barker, P. (1998) ***Another World***
London: Penguin

Bar-On, D. (1996) *Ethical Issues in Biographical Interviews And Analysis* **in** R. Josselson (ed.)
Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives Vol.4 London: Sage

Barthes, R. (1977) *Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives* ***Image-Music-Text***
London: Fontana

Bass, E. and Thornton, L. (eds) (1983) ***I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse***
New York: Harper & Row

Bauman, R. (1986) ***Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative***
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Bell, M. (1990) *How Primordial is Narrative* in C. Nash (ed)
Narrative in Culture London:Routledge

Benhabib, S. (1992) ***Situating the Self***
Oxford: Polity Press

Berger, P. and Luckman, T. (1967) ***The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*** London:Harmondsworth

Bertaux, D. (1981) ***Biography and Society. The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences***
Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Birren, J.E. (1987) *The best of all stories.* ***Psychology Today***
May:91-2

Blumer, H (1969) ***Symbolic Interactionism***
Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall

Bremond, C. (1964) *Le Message narratif*
Communications, 4:4-32

Brown, R. and Kulik, J. (1977) *Flashbulb memories* ***Cognition*** 5:73-99

Bruner, E. M. (1986) *Ethnography as Narrative* in V.W. Turner and
E.M. Bruner (eds) ***The Anthropology of Experience***
Urbana: Unversity of Illinois Press

Bruner, E.M. (1993) *The ethnographic self and the personal self*
in P. Benson (ed) ***Anthropology and Literature***
Urbana: University of Illinois Press

Bruner, J. (1987) *Life as Narrative*
Social Research 54. 11-32

Bruner, J (1986) ***Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*** Camb. Mass: Harvard University Press

Bruss, E. (1980) *Eye for I. Making and UnMaking Autobiography in Film* **in** J. Olney (ed) ***Autobiography Essays Theoretical and Critical*** Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Burr, V. (1995) ***An Introduction to Social Constructionism*** London: Routledge

Capps, L. and Ochs, E.(1995) *Out of Place: Narrative Insights Into Agoraphobia* ***Discourses Processes*** 19:407-439

Carlin, P.S. (1992) *"That Black Fall": Farm Crisis Narratives* **in** E.C. Fine and J.H. Speer (eds) ***Performance, Culture and Identity*** Westport CT: Praeger

Carroll, L. (1984[1948]) ***Through the Looking Glass and what Alice found there*** Harmondsworth: Puffin

Caruth, C. (1996) ***Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, History*** Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press

Caughey J.L. (1984) ***Imaginary Social Worlds: A cultural approach*** Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press

Chase, S.E. (1996) *Personal Vulnerability and Interpretive Authority in Narrative Research* **in** R. Josselson (ed.) ***Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives*** Vol.4 London: Sage

Chatman, S. (1978) ***Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure*** in Fiction and Film Ithaca, N.Y.:Cornell

Chatman, S. (1988) *The representation of text-types* ***Textual Practice*** 2, 1 Spring : 22-29

Clandinin, D.J. and Connelly, F.M. (1994) *Personal Experience Methods* in N. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds.) ***The Handbook of Qualitative Research*** Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Colegrove, F.W. ([1899]1982) *The day they heard about Lincoln* **in** U. Neisser (ed) ***Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Contexts*** San Francisco: Freeman

Crites, S. (1986) *Storytime: Recollecting the Past and Projecting the Future* **in** T.R Sarbin (ed) ***Narrative Psychology. The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*** New York: Praeger

Crystal, D (1987) ***The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Cushman, P. (1990) *Why the Self Is Empty. Towards a Historically Situated Psychology.* ***American Psychologist*** Vol.45(5) May

Culler, J. (1981) ***The Pursuit of Signs*** London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

de Man, P. (1979) *Autobiography as de-facement* ***Modern Language Notes*** 94

de Peuter, J. (1998) *The Dialogics of Narrative Identity* **in** M.M. Bell and M. Gardiner (eds) ***Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*** London: Sage

Dickinson, E. (1986) *I felt a funeral in my brain* ***Great American Poets. Emily Dickinson*** New York: Clarkson N. Potter Inc.

Eakin, P.J. (1980) *Malcolm X and Autobiography* **in** J. Olney (ed.) ***Autobiography. Essays Theoretical and Critical*** Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press

Epstein, D. and Steinberg, D.L. (1997) *Love's Labours: Playing it Straight on the 'Oprah Winfrey Show'* **in** Steinberg, D.L., Epstein, D. and Johnson, R. (eds) ***Border Patrols. Policing the Boundaries of Heterosexuality*** London: Cassell

Fairclough, N. (1989) ***Language and Power*** London: Longman

Fairclough, N. (1992) ***Discourse and Social Change*** Oxford: Polity Press

Feldman, A. (1991) ***Formations of Violence. The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*** Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Ferrara. K.W. (1994) ***Therapeutic Ways With Words*** Oxford: Oxford University Press

Festinger, L. (1954) *A theory of social comparison processes.* ***Human Relations,*** 7:117-140

Fetterley, J. (1978) ***The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*** Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Fishman, J. A. (1960) *A Systematization of the Whorfian Hypothesis* ***Behavioral Science***, 5 :323:339

Flax, J. (1987) *Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory.* ***Signs*** 12(4):621-643

Fludernik, M. (1996) ***Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*** London: Routledge

Forster, E.M. (1962) ***Aspects of the Novel*** Harmondworth: Penguin

Foucault, M. (1980) ***Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*** Hassocks, Sussex:Harvester Press

Freeman, M. (1993) ***Rewriting the self. History, memory, narrative*** London: Routledge

Fuss, D. (1990) ***Essentially Speaking: feminism, nature and difference.*** London: Routledge

Gee, J.P. (1991) *A linguistic approach to narrative* ***Journal of Narrative and Life History*** 1(1):15-39

Geertz, C. (1973) ***The Interpretation of Cultures*** New York: Basic Books

Genette, G (1980) ***Narrative Discourse*** Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Gergen, K.J. (1985) *The social constructionist movement in modern psychology* ***American Psychologist,*** 40(3): 266-275

Gergen, K.J. (1991) The Saturated Self New York: Basic Books

Gergen, K.J (1992) *The Decline and Fall of Personality* ***Psychology Today*** Nov/Dec:59-63

Gergen, K.J. (1988) *If persons are texts* **in** S.B. Messer, L.A. Sass and R.L. Woolfolk (eds) ***Hermeneutics and psychological theory: interpretive perspectives on personality, psychotherapy and psychopathology*** New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ Press

Gergen, K.J. and Gergen, M.M. (1983) *Narratives of the self* **in** T.R. Sarbin and K.E. Scheibe (eds) ***Studies in Social Identity*** New York: Praeger

Gergen, M. M. (1992) *Life Stories: Pieces of a Dream* in G.C. Rosenwald and R.L. Ochberg (eds) ***Storied Lives. The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*** New Haven: Yale University Press

Gergen, M. M (1994) *The Social Construction of Personal Histories: Gendered Lives in Popular Autobiographies* **in** T.R. Sarbin and J.I. Kitsuse (eds) ***Constructing the Social*** London: Sage

Gibson, A. (1996) ***Towards a postmodern theory of narrative*** Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Gottschalk, L. et al. (1945) ***The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology*** New York: Social Science Research Council

Gumperz, J.L. and Berenz, N. (1992) *Transcribing Conversational Exchanges* **in** J.A. Edwards and M.D. Lampert ***Talking Data. Transcription and Coding in Discourse Research*** Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Gusdorf, G. (1980) *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* **in** J. Olney (ed) ***Autobiography Essays Theoretical and Critical*** Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Hacking, I. (1996) *Memory Sciences, Memory Politics* **in** P. Antze and M. Lambek (eds) ***Tense Past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*** London: Routledge

Hall, D.L. (1985) *Mothers' and Daughters' Lived Experience of Food: An Analysis of Women's Storytelling* unpublished Master's thesis, University of Maine

Hall, S. (1991) *Stitching Yourself in Place* ***Annual Magazine of the European Network for Cultural and Media Studies*** Vol.1

Harré, R. and Gillett, G. (1994) ***The Discursive Mind*** London: Sage

Harré, R. and van Langenhove, L. (1991) *Varieties of positioning* ***Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*** , 21: 393-407

Hartsock, N (1987) *Rethinking modernism: minority vs. majority theories* ***Cultural Critique*** 7:187-206

Harvey, J.H., Weber, A.L. and Orbuch, T.L. (1990) ***Interpersonal Accounts: a social psychological perspective.*** Camb.Mass.: Basil Blackwell

Herman, J. L. (1992) ***Trauma and Recovery*** London:Basic Books

Herman, J. L. (1996) *Crime and Memory* **in** C.B. Strozier and M. Flynn ***Trauma and Self*** Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield

Hermans, H.J.M. (1996) *Voicing the Self* ***Psychological Bulletin***, Vol. 119, No.1:31-50

Hollway, W. (1984) *Gender difference and the production of subjectivity* in J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn and V. Walkerdine ***Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*** London: Methuen

Hollway, W. (1989) ***Subjectivity and Method in Psychology: Gender Meaning and Science*** London:Sage

Hofstede, G. (1980) ***Culture's Consequences: International differences in work-related values*** Beverley Hills, CA: Sage

Holmes, J (1997) *Story-Telling in New Zealand Women's and Men's Talk* in R.Wodak (ed) ***Gender and Discourse*** London: Sage

hooks, b (1991) *Narratives of Struggle* **in** P. Mariani (ed) ***Critical Fictions. The Politics of Imaginative Writing*** Bay Press: Seattle

Hoskins, J. (1998) ***Biographical Objects. How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*** New York: Routledge

Hutcheon, L (1988) ***A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction***. New York: Routledge

Irigaray, L. (1985) ***The Sex Which is Not One*** Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Irigaray, L. (1991) *The Poverty of Psychoanalysis* in M.Whitford (ed) ***The Irigaray Reader*** Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Jackson, D. (1990) ***Unmasking Masculinity : A Critical Autobiography*** London:Unwin Hyman

Jameson, F. (1984) *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capital* ***New Left Review***, 146, July/August

James, H. 1971[1884] *The Art of Fiction* **in** H. Adams (ed.) ***Critical Theory since Plato*** San Diego: Harcourt: 19-46

Janet, P. (1925[1919]) ***Psychological Healing*** trans. by E. Paul and C. Paul New York: Macmillan

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1996) ***Shattered Assumptions. Towards a New Psychology of Trauma.*** New York: The Free Press

Jefferson, G.(1984) *"At first I thought": a normalizing device for extraordinary events*. Unpublished manuscript Katholieke Hogeschool Tilburg

Jefferson, G (1991) *List construction* **in** G. Psathus and Frankel, R. ***Interactional Competence*** Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Johnson, B. (1987) ***A world of difference*** Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press

Johnson, R. (1991) *Two Ways to Remember. Exploring Memory as Identity.* ***Annual Magazine of the European Network for Cultural and Media*** Studies, Vol 1

Johnson, R (1997) Grievous Recognitions 2: *The Grieving Process and Sexual Boundaries* **in** Steinberg, D.L., Epstein, D. and Johnson, R. (eds) ***Border Patrols. Policing the Boundaries of Heterosexuality*** London: Cassell

Josselson, R. (1996) ***Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives*** Vol.4 London: Sage

Josselson, R. and Leiblich, A. (eds) (1993, 1994, 1995) ***The Narrative Study of Lives*** Volumes 1-3 London: Sage (check for vol 5/6)

Kaplan, L.J. (1995) ***Lost Children: Separation and Loss Between Parents and Children*** London:Pandora

Keenan, B. (1993) ***An Evil Cradling*** London: Random House

Kearney, R. (1991) *Between Tradition and Utopia: the hermeneutical problem of myth* **in** D. Wood (ed.) ***On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*** London: Routledge

Kerby, A. P. (1991) ***Narrative and the Self*** Bloomington: Indiana UP

Kermode, F. (1968) ***The sense of an ending: studies in the theory of fiction*** Oxford: Oxford Univ.Press

Kohlberg, L. (1981) ***The Philosophy of Moral Development*** San Franscisco: Harper and Row

Labov, W. (1972) ***Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*** Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Labov, W. and Waletsky, J. (1967) *Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience* **in** J. Helms (ed) ***Essays in the Verbal and Visual Arts*** Seattle: University of Washington

Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980) ***Metaphors We Live By*** Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Lamarque, P. and Olsen, S.H. (1994) ***Truth, Fiction, and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective*** Oxford: Clarendon Press

Langellier, K.M. (1989) *Personal Narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research* ***Text and Performance Quarterly*** 9(4):243-276

Langellier, K. and Peterson, E.E. (1992) *Spinstorying: An Analysis of Women Storytelling* **in** E.C. Fine and J.H. Speer (eds) ***Performance, Culture and Identity*** Westport CT: Praeger

LaRossa, R., Benett, L. & Gelles, R. (1987) *Ethical dilemmas in qualitative family research* **in** D. Olson ***Family research methodology I and II*** (Vol.2) St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press

Lasch, C. (1979) ***The Culture of Narcissism American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*** New York: W.W. Norton

Lather, P. (1991) ***Getting Smart. Feminist Reserch and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern*** New York: Routledge

Lawson, M. (1997) *Invasion of privacy becomes an inside job* ***The Guardian*** 11 October :24

Leiman, M (1997) *Procedures as dialogical sequences A revised version of the fundamental concept in cognitive analytic therapy* ***British Journal of Medical Psychology*** 70:193-207

Leydesdorff, S., Dawson, G., Burchardt, N and Ashplant, T.G. (1999) *Introduction: Trauma and life stories* **in** K.L. Rogers, S. Leydesdorff and G. Dawson (eds.) ***Trauma and Life Stories. International Perspectives.*** London: Routledge

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R and Zilber, T. (1998) ***Narrative Research. Reading, Analysis and Interpretation***. California: Sage

Linde, C. (1993) ***Life Stories. The Creation of Coherence*** New York: Oxford University Press

London Rape Crisis Centre (1984) ***Sexual Violence: The Reality for Women*** London: Women's Press

Lutz, C. (1985) *Ethnopsychology comapred to what? Explaining behavior and consciousness amond the Ifaluk* **in** G.M.White and J. Kirkpatrick (eds) ***Person, Self and Experience*** Berkeley: University of California Press

Maines, D.R. (1993) *Narrative's Moment and Sociology's Phenomena: Toward a Narrative Sociology* ***The Sociological Quarterly*** 34 (1):17-38

MacKinnon, C.A.(1979) ***Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination*** London: Yale University Press

McAdams, D. (1985) ***Power, Intimacy and the Life Story*** New York: Guildford Press

McCarthy, J. and Morrell, J. (1993) ***Some Other Rainbow*** London: Bantam

McLeod, J (1997) ***Narrative and Psychotherapy*** London: Sage

McRobbie, A. (1982) *The Politics of Feminist Research: Between Talk, Text and Action* ***Feminist Review,*** Vol.12:46-57

Mead, G.H. (1934) ***Mind. Self and Society*** Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Michael, M. 1996 ***Constructing Identities*** London:Sage

Middleton, D. and Edwards, D. (eds.) (1990) ***Collective Remembering*** London: Sage

Miller, J.G. (1984) *Culture and the development of everyday social explanation* ***Journal of Personality and Social Psychology***, 46, 961-78

Miller, N.K. (1988) ***Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*** New York: Columbia University Press

Mishler, E.G. (1986) *The Analysis of Interview-Narratives* **in** T.R. Sarbin (ed) ***Narrative Psychology. The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*** New York: Praeger

Morss, J.R. (1996) ***Growing Critical. Alternatives to developmental psychology*** London: Routledge

Mülhaüser, P. and Harré, R. (1990) ***Pronouns and People. The Linguistic construction of social and personal identity*** Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Myeroff, B. (1978) ***Number our Days*** New York: E.P. Dutton

Nadeau, J.W. (1998) ***Families Making Sense of Death*** Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

Neimeyer, R.A. (1994) *The role of client-generated narratives in psychotherapy.* ***Journal of Constructivist Psychology,*** 7:229-242

Neisser, U. (1982) *Snapshots or benchmarks?* **in** U. Neisser (ed) ***Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Contexts*** San Francisco: Freeman

Ochs, E. (1979) *Transcription as theory* in E. Ochs and B.B. Schieffelin (eds) ***Developmental Pragmatics*** New York: Academic Press

Ochs, E. (1988) ***Culture and Language Development: Language Acquisition and language socialisation in a Samoan village*** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Ochs, E. (1994) *Stories That Step into the Future* **in** D.Biber and E. Finegan (eds) ***Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*** New York: Oxford University Press

Ochs, E. and Caps. L. (1996) *Narrating the Self* **Annual Review of Anthroplogy Vol 25:19-43**

O'Connell, D.C. and Kowal, S. (1995) (eds) *Basic Principles of Transcription* **in** J.A .Smith, R. Harré and L.Van Langenhove ***Rethinking Psychology Methods in Psychology*** London: Sage

O'Hara, M. and Anderson, W.T. (1991) *Welcome to the Postmodern World* ***Family Therapy Networker*** Sept/Oct:19-25

O'Halloran, K. (1997) *Why Whorf has been misconstrud in stylistics and critical linguistics* ***Language and Literature*** **Vol?** 1997: 163-180

Olney, J. (ed) (1980) ***Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*** Princeton: Princeton University Press

Olsen, D.R. (1993) *How writing represents speech* ***Language and Communication,*** 13 1-17

Onega, S. and Landa, J.A.G. (1996) ***Narratology : An Introduction*** New York: Longman

Ong, W.L (1982) *Oral remembering and narrative structures* **in** D. Tannen (ed) ***Analyzing Discourse, Text and Talk*** Washington DC.:Georgetown Univ.Press

Pagels, E. (1981) ***The Gnostic Gospels*** New York: Vintage

Personal Narratives Group (1989) ***Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*** Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press

Peterson, C. and McCabe, A. (1983) ***Developmental Psycholinguistics Three Ways of Looking at a Child's Narrative*** New York: Plenum Press

Pinker, S. (1994) ***The Language Instinct*** London: Penguin

Plummer, K. (1995) ***Telling Sexual Stories: power, change and social worlds*** London: Routledge

Polanyi, L (1979) *So What's the Point?* ***Semiotica,*** 25 3/4

Polanyi, L. (1985) *Conversational Storytelling* ***Discourse and Dialogue*** Vol.3 of ***Handbook of Discourse Analysis*** 4 Ed. by Teun. A. van Dijk. London: Academic

Polanyi,L. and Scha, R.J.H. (1983) *The syntax of discourse. Special Issue: Formal methods of discourse analysis.* ***Text,*** 3: 261-270

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1988) ***Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*** Albany: Univ. of New York Press

Pomerantz, A. (1986) *Extreme Case Forumulations: a new way of legitimating claims* **in** G. Button, P. Drew and J. Heritage (eds) ***Human Studies. Interaction and Language Use Special Issue***

Porter, R.(1991) *Introduction* in P. Burke, and R. Porter (eds) ***Language, Self and Society*** Cambridge: Polity Press

Potter, J. (1996) ***Representing Reality. Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*** London:Sage

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) ***Discourse and Social Psychology*** London:Sage

Price, J. (1996) *Snakes in the Swamp. Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research* **in** R. Josselson (ed.) ***Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives*** Vol.4 London: Sage

Prince, G. (1982) ***Narratology: The Form and function of Narrative*** The Hague: Mouton

Prince, G. (1988) ***A dictionary of Narratology*** Aldershot: Scolar Press

Probyn, E. (1993) ***Sexing the Self. Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*** London: Routledge

Propp, V. ([1928]1968) ***Morphology of the Folktale*** (trans. L. Scott) Austin: University of Texas Press

Pullum, G.K. (1991) ***The great Eskimo vocabulary hoax and other irreverent essays on the study of language*** Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Punch, M. (1994) *Politics and ethics in qualitiative research* **in** N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (eds) ***Handbook of Qualitative Research*** Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G. and Svartvik, J. (1985) ***A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*** Harlow: Longman

Rabinow, P and Sullivan, W.M. (1987) ***Interpretive social science: A second look*** Berkeley: University of Caliifornia Press

Ricoeur, P. (1981) ***Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*** (edited by J.B.Thompson) Camb: Cambridge University Press

Ricoeur, P. (1984 , 1985 & 1988) ***Time and Narrative*** volumes 1-3 trans K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Ricoeur, P. (1991) *Life in Quest of Narrative* **in** D. Wood (ed.) ***On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*** London: Routledge

Riessman, C.K. (1987) *When Gender is Not Enough. Women Interviewing Women.* ***Gender & Society***, Vol.1, No.2 June:172-207

Riessman, C.K. (1992) *Making Sense of Marital Violence* **in** G.C. Rosenwald, and R.L. Ochberg (eds) ***Storied Lives. The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*** New Haven: Yale University Press

Riessman, C. K. (1993) ***Narrative Analysis Qualitative Research Methods*** Vol 30 Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1983) ***Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*** London: Methuen

Robinson, J.A. (1981) — *Personal Narratives Reconsidered* ***Journal of American Folklore*** 94:58-85

Roth, P. (1988) — ***The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*** New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Rosaldo, R. (1976) — *The Story of Tukbaw: "They Listen as He Orates."* **in** F. Reynolds and D. Capps (eds) ***The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*** The Hague: Mouton

Rosenwald, G.C. and Ochberg, R.L. (eds) (1992) — ***Storied Lives. The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*** New Haven: Yale University Press

Russell, D. (1982) — ***Rape in Marriage*** New York: Macmillan

Russell, R.L. (1991) — *Narrrative in Views of Humanity, Science, and Action: Lessons for Cognitive Therapy* ***Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy***, 5 (4):241-256

Sacks, H. ([1970]1984) — *On Doing "Being Ordinary"* **in** J.M. Atkinson and J.Heritage (eds.) ***Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis.*** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Sacks, H. , Schegloff, E. and Jefferson, G (1974) — *A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking in conversation* ***Language,*** 50, 696-735

Sampson, E.E. (1993) — ***Celebrating the Other. A dialogic account of human nature*** Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf

Sarbin, T.R. (1986) — ***Narrative Psychology. The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*** New York: Praeger

Sarbin. T.R. and Kitsuse, J.I. (eds) 1994 — ***Constructing the Social*** London:Sage

Sartre, J.P. (1964) — ***The Words*** New York: Braziller

Schafer, R. (1976) — ***A New Language for Psychoanalysis*** New Haven, CN: Yale University Press

Scholes, R. (1981) — *Language, Narrative and Anti-Narrative* in W.J.T.Mitchell(ed.) ***On Narrative*** Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press

Scholes, R. and Kellogg, R. (1966) — ***The Nature of Narrative*** New York: Oxford University Press

Segre, C. (1979) — ***Structures and Time: Narration, Poetry, Models*** (trans. J. Meddemmen) Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Shepherd, V. (1990) ***Language, Variety and the Art of the Everyday*** London: Pinter

Shotter, J. (1984) ***Social Accountability and Selfhood*** Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Shotter, J. (1989) *Social Accountability and the Social Construction of 'You'* in J. Shotter and K.J. Gergen (eds) ***Texts of Identity*** London: Sage

Shotter, J. (1993a) ***Conversational Realities. Constructing Life through Language*** London: Sage

Shotter, J (1993b) ***Cultural Politics of Everyday Life: Social Constructionism, Rhetoric, and Knowing of the Third Kind*** Milton Keynes: Open University Press

Shotter, J. (1995) *In Conversation. Joint Action, Shared Intentionality and Ethics* ***Theory & Psychology*** Vol 5 (1): 49-73

Shotter, J. and Gergen, K.J.(eds) (1989) ***Texts of Identity*** London: Sage

Showalter, E. (1997) ***Hystories. Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*** London:Picador

Skultans, V. (1998) ***The Testimony of Lives. Narrative and memory in post-Soviet Latvia*** London: Routledge

Smith, S. (1987) ***A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*** Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Spence, D.P. (1982) *Narrative truth and theoretical truth* ***Psychoanalysis Quarterly*** 51:43-69

Spence, D. P. (1982) ***Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*** New York : W.W. Norton

Spivak, G. (1987) ***In other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*** New York: Methuen

Stanley, L. (1992) ***The auto/biographical I: the theory and practice of feminist auto/biography*** Manchester: Manchester University Press

Steedman, C. (1986) ***Landscape for a Good Woman. A Story of Two Lives*** London: Virago

Stein, N. and Glenn, C. (1979) *An analysis of story comprehension in elementary school children* **in** R. Freedle (ed.) ***New Directions in Discourse Processing*** Hillsdale, NJ: Ablex

Steiner, G. 1989 — ***Real Presences*** Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press

Stoltenberg, J. (1989) — ***Refusing to be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*** New York Penguin/Meridian.

Sturrock, J. (1993) — ***The Language of Autobiography*** Cambridge: Cambridge UP

Tannen, D. (1985) — ***Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends*** Norwood: Ablex

Taylor, S.E., Wood, J.V. and Lichtman, R.R. (1983) — *It Could Be Worse: Selective Evaluation as a Response to Victimization* ***Journal of Social Issues*** Vol.39, No.2:19-40

Terkel, S. (1990) — ***'The Good War'. An Oral History of World War Two*** New York: Ballantine

Todorov, T. (1981) — ***Introduction to Poetics*** (trans. R.Howard) Brighton: Harvester

Tomashevski, B. (1965[1925]) — *Thematics* **in** Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (eds & trans.) ***Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*** Lexington: University of Nebraska Press:61-98

Toolan, M.J. (1988) — ***Narrative A Critical Linguistic Introduction*** London:Routledge

Turner, V (1986) — *Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience* **in** Turner, V.W. and Bruner, E.M. (1986) ***The Anthropology of Experience*** Urbana and Chicage: University of Illinois Press

Treichler, P. and Kramarae, C. (1983) — *Women's Talk in the Ivory Tower* **Communication Quarterly** 31:118-32

Valentine, K.B. and Valentine, E. (1992) — *Performing Culture Through Narrative: A Galician Woman Storyteller* **in** E.C. Fine and J.H. Speer (eds) ***Performance, Culture and Identity*** Westport CT: Praeger

van der Kolk, B. A.and McFarlane, A,C. (1996) — *The Black Hole of Trauma* **in** B.A. van der Kolk, A.C. McFarlane and L. Weisaeth (eds) ***Traumatic Stress. The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*** New York: The Guilford Press

van Gennep, A ([1908]1960) — ***The Rites of Passage*** trans. by M.B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffee London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Vanhoozer, K.J. (1991) — *Philosophical Antecedents to Ricoeur's 'Time and Narrative'* **in** D. Wood (ed.) ***On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*** London: Routledge

Virtanen, T. (1992) *Issues of text typology : Narrative - a 'basic' type of text?* ***Text*** 12 (2): 293-310

Volosinov, V.N. (1973) ***Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*** trans. L. Matejka andI.R. Titunik Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Ptess

Vygotsky, L.S. (1962) ***Thought and Language*** trans. E. Hanfmann and G. Vakar Cambridge, MA : MIT Press

Waite, T. (1993) ***Taken on Trust*** London: Hodder and Stoughton

Walkerdine, V. (1997) ***Daddy's Girl. Young Girls and Popular Culture*** Basingstoke: Macmillan

Warshaw, R. (1988) ***I Never Called it Rape : The Ms Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape*** New York: Harper and Row

Watson, L. and Watson-Franke, M. (1985) ***Interpreting life histories: An anthropological inquiry.*** New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press

Weiss, R.S. (1975) ***Marital Separation*** London: Basic Books

Widdershoven, G.A.M. (1994) *Identity and Development: A Narrative Perspective* in H.A. Bosman, T.L.G. Graffsma, H.D. Grotevant and D.J. de Levita (eds) ***Identity and Development: An Interdisciplinary Approach*** London:Sage

White, H (1981) *The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality* **in** ***On Narrative*** ed. by W.J.T. Mitchell Chicago: University of Chicago Press

White, H. (1991) *The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History* **in** D. Wood (ed.) ***On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*** London: Routledge

Whorf, B.L. (1956) ***Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*** (ed) J. B. Carroll Cambridge, MA:MIT Press

Wittgenstein, L (1953) ***Philosophical Investigations*** Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Wodak, R. (ed) (1997) ***Gender and Discourse*** London: Sage

Wolfenstein, M. (1957) ***Disaster: A psychological essay*** Glencoe, Ill.:Free Press

Wood, D. (1991) **On Paul Ricoeur.** ***Narrative and Interpretation***
London: Routledge

Wood, L.A. and Rennie, H. (1994) *Formulating rape: the discursive construction of victims and villains* ***Discourse & Society***
London: Sage

Wooffitt, R. (1992) ***Telling Tales of the Unexpected***
Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf

Yans- McLaughlin, V. (1990) *Metaphors of Self in History: Subjectivity, Oral Narrative, and Immigration Studies* **in**
V. Yans-McLaughlin (ed) ***Immigration Reconsidered. History, Sociology, and Politics***
New York: Oxford University Press

Young, A. (1996) ***The Harmony of Illusions: inventing post-traumatic stress disorder.*** Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press

Appendix I

Key to Transcription

Symbol	Example	Explanation
(.)	something seems to cut in to like (.) stop you feeling well it's not that (.)	Full stop in parantheses indicates a significant pause (more than 3 seconds)
_	you <u>are</u> feeling the pain you're feeling it just <u>so</u> intensely	Underlining indicates changes in speaker's pitch or volume which places stress on particular words or syllables
"..."	I could actually say "hang on no I don't want that"	Words in speech marks are reported direct speech
CAPITALS	"NO" definitely "I don't want that"	Capital letters indicate shouted words
[ ]	(a) it's only now and this is five years on that I can actually [bangs hand down hard on the table] "NO" (b) he was a part of our lives (.) just miss him [in a whisper, very tearful, sobbing]	Square brackets enclose paralinguistic information including body language and phonological variation.
@	I've never since been in that lift I'm never going @@@ in that lift @@@@ again	Indicates laughter – the number of symbols indicate duration
=	P: ... you would often describe = C: = I used to have a lot of nightmares	Equal signs indicate an interruption with no ovelapping speech
(***)	and I'd told them to be home for three and (****) kept looking at the clock	Asterisks in brackets indicate that something was spoken but that I was unable to determine the actual words. The number of asterisks indicate the estimated number of syllables of the missing words.
?	yeah?	A question mark indicates rising intonation that produces a question

Appendix II

The Narratives

This section provides a list of all the narratives of trauma used as data in this study. Each narrative is identified by the narrator's name, or pseudonym, and its reference code. This is followed by a brief description of the traumatic experience that is narrated and details of the date, the length, and the context in which the narrative was produced. The full story of the process of data production is presented in chapter four.[1] Extracts from the transcripts are referenced by code, transcript page and line number. For example, C1 4/5:34-41 refers to lines 34-41 on page 4 and 5 of the transcript of the first interview with Carol. Full transcripts are available from the author on request.

1.Carol

Carol's estranged husband murdered their younger son.
He is now serving a life sentence and Carol lives with her surviving son.

1st videotaped interview conducted by Paul[2], March 1995 — Reference : **C1**
approx. 9 months after incident
duration : 40 minutes
venue: university seminar room

2nd videotaped interview conducted by Paul, October 1996 — Reference: **C2**
approx. 30 months after incident
duration: 40 minutes
venue: university seminar rooom

2. Gail

Gail was violently physically and sexually assaulted by an intruder in her home. The perpetrator is now serving a prison sentence.

1st videotaped interview conducted by Paul, February 1989 — Reference: **G1**
approx. 10 months after incident
duration: 40mins
venue: university seminar room

2nd videotaped interview conducted by Paul, May 1997 — Reference: **G2**
approx. 9 years after incident
duration: 40mins
venue: university seminar room

3. Sandra

[1] It should be noted that these narratives are not used evenly throughout the thesis. Narratives 1 – 5, 7 & 9 are used extensively. No. 6, Maggie's narrative, is used less extensively because the majority of the text is concerned with how other people coped with the death of her goddaughter, rather than with Maggie's own experience. Steven Owens story (no.10) is used where appropriate - it is mainly focussed on his actions against the perpetrator rather than on his broader experience of coping Extracts from the'abortion stories' (no.11) are used as illustrative examples but do not feature in the main analyses presented in chapters five, six, seven and eight.

[2] Paul is a psychotheraptist with a special interest in traumatic stress. See chapter four for full details of the data production process.

Appendix II

Sandra was sprayed with hydrochloric acid by a man, disguised in motorcycle gear, while she was working in a shop. The perpetrator, whom she had assumed was a stranger, was later identified as her estranged husband and is now serving a prison sentence.

Videotaped interview, conducted by Paul, June 1997 — Reference: **S**
approx. 4 months after incident
duration: 40 minutes
venue: university seminar room

4. Ann

Ann's son, Michael aged 15 years, was killed in a road traffic accident.

Audio-taped interview conducted by author, January 1997 — Reference: **A**
Approx. 5 years after incident
duration: 120 minutes
venue: university seminar room

5. Ruth

Ruth was trapped in her car when it crashed and burst into flames and is permanently scarred and disfigured.

Audio-taped interview, conducted by author, February 1997 — Reference: **R**
Approx. 6 years after incident
duration: 90mins
venue: author's home

6. Maggie

Maggie's goddaughter, Anna aged 19, was murdered by her boyfriend.

Audio-taped interview, conducted by author, April 1997 — Reference: **M**
Approx. 3 years after incident
duration: 120 mins
venue: narrator's home

7. Janice

Janice's daughter, Vicki aged 18, was killed in a road traffic accident.

Audio-taped interview, conducted by author, June 1997 — Reference: **J**
5 years after incident
duration: 90mins
venue: narrator's home

Appendix II

8. Sarah

Janice's daughter, Sarah, wrote an essay entitled
'The Photograph' about her experience of her sister's death

.

Written narrative, April 1996 Reference: **'The Photograph'**
4 years after incident

9. Richard

Richard's wife died suddenly. They had been together for 33 years. Richard's narrative of Jill's death and his grieving experiences are told within his essay 'Grievous Recognitions 2: The Grieving Process and Sexual Boundaries' which is published in the edited volume 'Border Patrols. Policing the Boundaries of Heterosexuality'. He describes the essay as a commentary on the circumstances from which his poems, also published in the book, arose.

Written narrative, published in 1997 Reference: **Johnson 1997**
approx 4 years after incident.

10.Steven Owens

Steven's younger son, Darren, was killed in a road traffic accident. His narrative is produced during a radio programme, 'The Choice' (Radio 4) which, is comprised of extended interviews with individuals who have had to make difficult choices in their lives. Steven's 'choice' was to take revenge on the lorry driver who caused the accident in which his son was killed.

Oral narrative, produced in radio interview, May 1998 Reference: **0**
Approx 9 years after incident
duration: 45 mins

11. Denise, Annie, Sarah, Emma, Sandy and Sunita

These six women narrate their experiences of having an abortion within a television documentary (Witness. 'The Clinic' Channel 4, 5th November 1997). Their narratives were produced in televised interviews and extracts from them are shown in the programme interspersed with scenes recorded in three private abortion clinics in the UK. The transcripts are referenced by the names of the narrators.



Libraries &
Learning
Resources

The Boots Library: 0115 848 6343
Clifton Campus Library: 0115 848 6612
Brackenhurst Library: 01636 817049