# Narratives Across Media as Ways of Knowing

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**Abstract**: Interest is growing in forms of narrative that go beyond written and spoken verbal signs, in how such varying media expand the range and types of knowledge signified in narratives, and how narrative analysts can work across media. Alongside the more conventional concentration on interview and textual narratives (ROSE, 2012), the articles in the thematic section draw on social media, film and policy narratives as well as still images and the processes involved in creating and documenting them. In the course of this wide address, the authors investigate what is distinctive about these "ways of knowing" and why it is useful to pay attention to the variable media of narratives. The authors suggest that addressing a wider range of narrative media can provide new, cross-media ways of understanding self-narratives that expand the usual verbal, temporal framings of such personal stories, for narrators, their audiences, and researchers. Historical and other contextual differences distinguish narratives, as much as do their specific media. The authors also consider how narratives bring together the global and the local.

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## 1. Introduction

Interest is growing both in forms of narrative that go beyond written and spoken verbal signs, and in how such varying narrative media expand the range and types of knowledge signified in narratives and pursued in narrative analysis (HEAVEY, 2015; HERMAN, 2013; HYDEN, 2013; RYAN, 2004; SQUIRE, ANDREWS & TAMBOUKOU, 2013). Narrative's etymological roots lie in words indicating knowing as well as telling. "Telling" itself signifies something that makes an impact, not just something that is recounted. Such generosity of meaning secreted within the term "narration" accords well with narrative researchers' contemporary efforts to expand the understandings, definitions and practices of narrative across diverse media. [1]

This *FQS* thematic section arises that from earlier panels at the 2014 Narrative Matters conference, given by researchers associated with the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London, and the UK Narratives of Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches (NOVELLA) research program at University College London's Institute of Education. It explores this interest in how narrative media, broadly understood, can expand narrative knowledges. [2]

## 2. Overview of the Thematic Section

Articles in the section address spoken interview narratives, recorded and transcribed, as well as a much broader range of narratives occurring across media, and across the different modalities, or modes of expression, of those media. The range takes in individually produced still image (collage and paint) narratives; records of "activity" or "processual" narratives that is, records of accreting patterns of symbolic actions, held in field notes and images (ESIN, 2017; ESIN & SQUIRE, 2013); moving-image film narratives; policy narratives, produced both verbally and in images, at national and international levels; print, audio and visual broadcast media narratives (DAVIS, 2017); and new-media narratives, including blogs (ELLIOTT, SQUIRE & O'CONNELL, 2017), interactive social media (DAVIS, 2017; ELLIOTT et al., 2017) and online news pages (DAVIS, 2017). [3]

In the course of this wide address, the authors investigate the suggestion that narrative "ways of knowing" are more extensive than the conventional concentration on spoken and written narratives, and that attention therefore needs to be paid to the variable media of narratives. This perspective is well established within cultural and art theory (KRAUSS, 1993; MULVEY, 2006), and is increasingly being taken up by social researchers (RIESSMAN, 2008; RYAN, 2004). The articles in this section suggest that addressing a wider range of narrative media can provide new, cross-media ways of understanding self-narratives, that expand the usual verbal, temporal framings of such personal stories, for narrators, their audiences, and researchers. For instance, in ESIN's account of the processes of young Muslim women in London making art about themselves, at the same time as talking about it, this cross-mediality enabled the participants to consider the broader context of asymmetrical power relations in which they live and tell their stories. The articles point to how audiences too may build up a widened zone of narrative understanding, around public events, such as, in DAVIS's article, contemporary pandemics. Perhaps most pertinently for our arguments throughout the issue, considering narratives across media potentiates wider understandings among researchers. For example, ELLIOTT and colleagues' analysis of the visual and spatial as well as textual stories on the "About Me" pages of mothers' blogs about families, food and recession allowed an understanding of how the blogs were produced as aesthetic and economic as well as social "ways of knowing." [4]

Forms of narrative knowledge, and the limits of those knowledges, appear within the articles as to a strong degree shaped by, though not entirely determined by, their media. In ESIN's article, for example, what we learn about the young women depends on the researcher's analysis of their self-narrations across their image-making, their activities in and around the research, how they speak, and what they do not say, as much as on what they say about themselves in their images and interviews. [5]

The authors argue, too, that this focus on narratives' operations across media points up the diversity of media operating within narratives generally. An interview

story is performed physically, as well as spoken (ESIN, 2017). Blog narratives are displayed spatially across a page, not just put together from text and image (ELLIOTT et al., 2017). An international policy story, here examined in the UK and Australia, about a current health issue—the H1N1 influenza virus epidemic of 2009-10—deploys a cultural repertoire of film, print media, and policy narratives about "pandemic" (DAVIS, 2017). At the same time, such narrative concatenations operate as good examples of the development of new forms of narrative knowledge. They may look like multiple, cross-genre or "hybridized" narratives at the start, but they develop their own, more specific genres or other high particular elements of content and style. The emergent blog story genre, for example, balances personal idiosyncrasy with readability, visual pleasure and generality of address to potential audiences and markets (ELLIOTT et al., 2017). Contemporary "pandemic narratives" are characterized, DAVIS (2017) deduces, by "risk titration" and the construction of an "alert, not alarmed" subject. [6]

It follows, as the authors argue, that narratives within different media are not fully defined or unified by those media. Narratives' relations to specific media must be understood as heterogeneous and changeable. However, the authors also suggest that common narrative ways of knowing across media can be identified and analyzed to a considerable extent. Narratives exist and are developed within a cross-media "storyworld" (HERMAN, 2013, p.178). DAVIS notes the striking example of the statistically normal bell curve narrative of pandemics in policy documents, and how this narrative "shape" echoes normalizing—in another sense—media and public health narrations of pandemic periodicity. UK blog narratives around parenting, feeding families, and austerity converge with the narrative forms of diaries and recipes, but also with the forms of "austerity" news stories, "mommy blogs" (FRIEDMAN, 2013, p.29), and "poverty porn" reality television (JENSEN, 2014, n.p.; see also DOMINGO et al., 2014; ELLIOTT et al., 2017). ESIN's participants critically inscribe popular media and "current affairs" stories, as well as conventional stories about art, and socially normative narratives about young women's education, families and relationships, into personal stories drawn up at the intersections of these other narratives. In all these cases, the stories that build knowledge, and that constitute the authors' research materials, operate across media, as well as bearing and showing the narrative characteristics of the media themselves. [7]

## 3. Conclusions and Future Directions

Together, these articles highlight the how mobile narratives are—how they travel across media, across time and space. The authors suggest methods for working with these moving targets and doing justice to their complexity. Thus DAVIS (2017) draws out how film and public policy narratives are in conversation with each other and how they are taken up by publics. ELLIOTT et al. (2017) consider what is "new" about new media and trace the continuities with older narrative forms, showing how they add to a long history of narrative technologies of personal and familial memorialization. They argue that blogs recapitulate older, UK wartime and post-war stories of "frugality," as well as developing newer narratives related to intensive motherhood. [8]

Further, the articles in this special section point to how paying attention to cross modal narratives and how they are produced helps us to identify how the global and the local are co-articulated. Thus the young women's narratives in ESIN's research were situated at the culmination of a national monarchic progression—the UK Queen's 2012 Jubilee—and a "global event"—the London Olympics—as well as at the conjuncture of the East London local and the transnational, and of discourses of gender, Islamophobia, and migration. DAVIS's pandemic storyworlds are inflected by histories of pandemic and their biosocial management, as well as by new turns within narratives of "global health" (OOMS et al., 2014, n.p.). The blog narratives described by ELLIOTT and colleagues invoke contemporary and future stories of global inequalities and unsustainability (2017). Importantly, then, historical and other contextual differences also distinguish narratives, as much as do their specific media. [9]

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