CHAPTER 13

The Power of the Eye and the Ear: Experiences from Communicating Research with Digital Storytelling

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Introduction

The media department at the University College of Oslo and Akershus for Applied Sciences (HiOA) offered a workshop in digital storytelling for researchers during 2013–2014. This coincided with a commission from the Norwegian Ministry of Justice to evaluate a new prison for young people aged from 15 to 18 years. In the workshop, I learned how to use narrative and visual skills to convey some impressions from my ethnographic fieldwork in relation to the quality and design of the prison. First, I made a Norwegian version. To my great astonishment, the heads of the prison at three administrative levels understood the audio-visual story and, with my consent, used it as part of their own presentations. They felt that I, through the combination of personal visuals and vocals, had articulated many of the dilemmas related to the imprisonment of young people. They requested an English version and the story has since travelled to China, Kazakhstan, the USA, Germany and the Baltics: “Every time I see

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your little film, I feel like crying", said the vice-director of the regional Norwegian correctional services.

Elements of this evaluation are difficult to convey and disseminate by words alone. The method of digital storytelling in this project proved more effective than I could ever have envisioned. One of my conclusions is the same as the American educator Ernest L. Boyer, who conveys in his report *Scholarship reconsidered* (1990, p. 17) the process of discovery as a commitment to knowledge and freedom of inquiry.

Based on my experiences of digital storytelling, this chapter will discuss the power of the visual and the challenge of the emotional. My ambition is to build bridges between:

1. teaching, learning and dissemination of research results as a visual and dialogical process,
2. the emotional challenges and responses to this dialogical process explained with neurophysiology and psychology, and
3. the experienced impact of a particular digital story from a Norwegian youth prison.

With a cross-disciplinary background as a medical doctor and a social anthropologist, I combine intrapersonal skills and interpretations that might be useful for a deeper look into the benefits and challenges of using digital storytelling for research dissemination.

Previously, I had no experience of the audio-visual tools and programmes of either PC or Mac. Thus, part of this chapter focuses on the complexity of acquiring the practical skills and knowledge necessary to construct a digital story. A second part relays the unexpected outreach of the story. The third part analyses the viewers' reaction to the story—and the impact this had on its continuing dissemination.

Background and Context: The Prison Evaluation Research

The background and arena for my first digital story experience is a research-based evaluation of the Norwegian youth prison conducted for the Norwegian Ministry of Justice. The assignment was to investigate whether the prison and its interdisciplinary team fulfil the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since 2012, there have been a

Fig. 13.1 The finished prison building

number of legislative amendments concerning youth in conflict with the law in Norway. The new youth penalty aims to reduce the number of imprisoned young offenders between the ages of 15 and 18 and to help them to understand the consequences of their acts. A new type of youth prison, *ungdomsenheter* (two special units for 15–18-year-old offenders outside Oslo and Bergen[1]) was planned according to the needs of young people.

Upon the establishment of these youth prisons, the Norwegian Parliament demanded a research-based evaluation of the first unit in Bergen. The purpose of the evaluation project was to enable the Ministries to make decisions about continuing the existing unit while planning a new unit in the Oslo area. In addition, it was to provide a knowledge base for the various legal and administrative changes needed to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child within the various support systems for young people in prison or probation (health and social care, child protection and education).

Through fieldwork, interviews and photos, I studied the new implementations at all levels, together with a legal scholar—Elisabeth Gording

Stang. We reported to a committee of senior advisers from four ministries: Justice and Public Security; Education and Research; Health and Care Services and Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, in addition to the Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Services (Hydle 2014; Hydle and Stang 2016).

During the prison evaluation fieldwork, I observed how many different actors, including some young inmates, had been involved in the careful planning of the prison. They were concerned with a wide variety of practical, ethical and aesthetic details, as well as the desire to achieve a balance between the young people's safety, security and well-being and their need for a normalised life, albeit within prison walls. The need to find good design solutions to all these issues is regulated by legislation. A number of details in the physical environment had both practical and symbolic importance.

I was present at various stages of construction, listening to discussions and questioning the choice of colours, walls, security safeguards, space selections, decoration, outdoor space and playgrounds. I witnessed how this delicate balance between care and control was gradually taking physical form. These were findings and issues that are not easily conveyed by words alone, and therefore I was looking for alternative approaches to research dissemination, building on my knowledge and previous experiences of working with visual media (as I describe below). This led me to explore digital storytelling as a method of research communication.

My Theoretical Background for the Entry to the Field of Digital Storytelling

I have been interested in the visual and auditory approach to communication through video for a long time. Since 2000, I have collaborated with visual anthropologists, in particular at the Department of Visual Culture Studies at the University of Tromsø and at the University of Bergamo. I had thus dug deeply into important theoretical contributions by Christina Grasseni (2007, 2009), Sara Pink (2012), David MacDougall (2005) and Tim Ingold (2002, 2010, 2011).

In the current era of multimodality, a visual cultural approach belongs to newer anthropological knowledge about the senses and their contribution to new perspectives regarding the role of vision. This approach is not

"as an isolated given, but within its interplay with the other senses, and with the role of mutual gestuality", as Grasseni explains, based on her fieldwork among Italian cow farmers in the Alps. Her studies focused on efforts to perfect cow breeding for the production of the famous Taleggio and Strachitunt cheeses. She continues: "Moreover, it explores vision as a ductile, situated, contested and politically fraught means of situating oneself in a community of practice" (Grasseni 2007, p.1)—both for data gathering and for dissemination—or as David Howes conceptualises it, "Cross-talk between the senses" (2010).

Film is used as a strategy for discovering coherences in the world, for improving dialogue and for dissemination of knowledge. Film as a disseminating tool for ethnographic knowledge can reveal best or unique knowledge or expert knowledge (Holtedahl 2006). The cognitive effect of the viewing or filming process may be a tool for education and change. When words are insufficient, vision may replace sound and speech. Film creates a reflective space between man and the world on one level, or between partners in a dialogue on another. Thus, the visual representations from research sites may be rich sources of meta-knowledge that contribute significantly to alternative interpretations of the research process and of the dissemination methodology of a project.

That said, there are further complexities to be unravelled. What does it mean to "cross-talk between the senses"? Pictures and video/film used for research nowadays may be seen as a recapturing of a particular approach to vision, look and gaze in more than one sense. Firstly, the observation, that is, the gaze or the look, is one of the main tools in the collecting, ordering, analysis and presentation of data. Yet, it is often taken for granted or regarded as so obvious that one does not even register it. Bourdieu (1977) called this doxa, that is, the syntax that guarantees a common understanding when people talk with each other. In everyday speech, people do not explain their grammar; it is taken for granted. Latour, by observing and analysing the behaviour of natural scientists in their laboratories, named all the material and social processes that contribute to scientific results as "blackboxing"—taken for granted by researchers themselves (Latour 2012; Grasseni 2009). Within the field of anthropology, in which both Bourdieu and Latour have a central place, vision and gaze are in use as active tools in the expression and development of critical self-understanding. This is especially relevant when informants become co-researchers and co-producers, when they themselves are behind the camera (Holtedahl 2006;

Waage 2007), or when they are involved in directing and editing film. Vision is thus an instrument for information, for the development and dissemination of ideas, for thoughts and practices.

Researchers often describe situations in which they are present themselves, whether they are observing and recording what happens in a laboratory (Latour and Woolgar 2013), or interviewing or observing what other people do or say. They therefore participate in something of which they are partly co-producers. Researchers are never invisible observers as storytellers. “We do not just observe those whose story we will tell, they also observe us and take in their impressions of us. We affect both how people speak when they suffer and how they speak about their suffering. We become part of their suffering. In addition our description turns from what we interpret from them to be our own story” (Sachs 2003). In my project, the informants are well cared for legally by the NSD—Norwegian Centre for Research Data. The rules for protecting personal data are strict. Therefore, I “told” the story of the prison building, which is possible to do without showing individuals up-close, and still conveyed some of the context and content of the study subject.

Visual representations are similar to speech or text in the sense that they are not neutral. Recent anthropological knowledge about the senses contributes to new perspectives on vision, not “as an isolated given”, but within its interplay with the other senses, and with the role of mutual ways of showing gestures. Moreover, visualisation also shows how the researcher’s vision, by leading the camera’s eye, is a ductile means of situating oneself in a community of practice (Grasseni 2007). This relates not only to still pictures but even more to film.

In the critical scholarly discussions of documentary filming, visualisation may be seen as more than a recapturing of an approach to vision, look and gaze. One should also be aware of the interplay with other senses and how it is situated in a practice community.

The deaf anthropologist, Hilde Haualand, claims that anthropology is phonocentric, that is, we take *sound* for granted (Haualand 2002). Do we also take light for granted? What about the living picture(s) and the ability and power of the look and the gaze (film, television, worldwide web, smart telephones, etc.) to attract and create new forms of communication, new spaces, new times and new places? Film creates a space between the man and the world, or between partners in a dialogue. When we watch, see, observe or view, we meet light, with the look or the gaze. Light is the necessary condition for human sight, look or gaze. The gaze or look is

what we cannot see ourselves, but what others can see and meet. The gaze or look is thus a dialogical term and tool in the sense that *I* am dependent upon *your* seeing for the registration of a gaze or a look. Is it accidental that the term vision refers both to a physical and to a metaphysical phenomenon?

The Complexity of Skills and Knowledge in the Constructing of a Digital Story

These theoretical basics created an analytical context for understanding the digital story construction as a complex learning experience. However, my own practice was lacking when it came to creating a digital story with the use of light, sound and translation of complex content into pictures, with voice-over (my own) and music. From that point of departure, I was introduced to the methodology of digital storytelling in a workshop offered by the Media section at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) in 2014. The workshop, based on the model developed by Storycenter (Lambert 2010), was adapted to meet the busy schedules of the researchers.

We were a group of ten scholars from different academic and practical disciplines (e.g. health care, nursing, physiotherapy, education, social work, creative arts) organised in “story circles”. Over two days, we explored various learning methods. Building on theoretical and practical introductions and demonstrations, group discussions, training and practice development, we shared our stories.

We were at different stages in the process of learning about digital storytelling and story making. The facilitators instructed us kindly to share as much as possible of the individual learning and working processes, and show partial results of the digitalisation to each other, creating a community of learning in relation to visual skills (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014). In this community, I felt inspired and challenged; we all asked useful questions and offered advice to one another, as is the aim of such learning communities (Hydle 2015).

We then had access to individual guidance, tailored to our specific needs, in structuring and developing our stories, choosing pictures or video clips, recording the voice-over, selecting music and working with the technicalities related to all of these. After a couple of months, about half the original group joined a second workshop to finish and share the stories, and to reflect on our experience in a focus group discussion.

Here, I finished the prison story and took part in a focus group where we showed and discussed the stories, offering constructive criticism and advice on the various aspects of the story construction process: purpose, audience, dramatic question, voice, music, images and so on. In the focus group, we also discussed opportunities and challenges involved in using a personalised digital story for research dissemination, including issues such as the use of the personal, "subjective", voice as opposed to the academic, "objective" voice. All of us, to varying degrees, found it challenging—yet stimulating—to change our language and use the personal voice—in both senses of the word.

Developing New Visual and Scientific Skills: Producing My Story

In the workshops, I learned how to create a digital story based on still images and a voice-over in iMovie. Together with the other media community members, I was invited to imagine and synthesise the best story, the best images and the best script—read as effectively as possible in my own voice. Inspired by the multivocal nature of realising and then disseminating my research results in this way, I came to feel that I was creating a work of art. This may be because the personal multivocality of the process—the pictures and videos selected or taken through one's own lens, the reflection on one's own written text and choice of music—comes together within the assembled digital story to create an immediacy that is greater than the sum of their parts.

Even if a digital story has, necessarily, a formal structure of time, sequence and narrative, and iMovie layers on top of this its own programmatic rules and conventions, there is still, for the storyteller, creative freedom in the selection of time, sequence, narrative, images, sound qualities, voice and music.

My focus on communication across the senses is based upon *dialogism* as a theory of knowledge which is embodied in the works of the Russian theorist of culture, Michael Bakhtin (1981) and the Swedish linguist Per Linell (2009).[2] Gradually, during this selection process, I discovered how their theoretical approaches work in practice: Bakhtin's terms "dialogism" and "polyglossia"[3] are tools for understanding the layers upon layers of events and actions in a research project.

My second approach for understanding the digital storytelling process is actor-network theory as described by Latour, which explains how man and

machine *together* construct a result (2005, 2012), in this case a digital story. Picturing or filming is thus understood as a collaborative process between man and matter, between the person(s), that is, the researchers and the informants, and the technical and material tool(s) —that is, the cameras, smartphones, computers and so on. I realised how the construction of the digital story "skills the vision", to use the expression from Grasseni's book, *Skilled Visions* (2007)—in a dialogical perspective. This particular dialogical perspective led me to the argument of the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2002, p. 245) that "we see things before light, and hear sound before things". Ingold hardly knew then how his anticipation of how we see and hear would later be documented by neuroresearch. The discovery of mirror neurons, which may enable the brain to react and "mirror" outer visual stimuli even before the reaction reaches the cognitive parts of the brain (i.e. before we even acknowledge that we react), explains how we learn through mimicry and why we are able to feel empathy with others before we become consciously aware that we should do so.[4] One may describe and interpret mirror neurons as dialogical tools without which humans would not be able to develop the necessary communication skills from infancy onwards. However, vision is also embedded in environmental circumstance. Ingold's description widens the understanding of the use of vision, thus also disseminating the effectiveness of digital storytelling.

In practice, we were asked to write the story in 200–300 words, a catastrophic demand for a researcher whose expertise is to dig deep into complexities and explanatory models. How could I possibly convey a message in 200–300 words from the complex project of the evaluation of the activities in a youth prison in the context of children's rights? I did not know then why I had selected the building of the prison to represent the professional and emotional content of the whole issue, the task (mine as well as the task of the correctional authorities) and my results. However, I did know that physical environments cannot be taken for granted.

Then, we were asked to imagine illustrating images—again a foreign feeling for someone used to working in the social-scientific arena. We worked as a mutually supportive and advisory group and helped each other in this new practice of research dissemination.

We were then asked to find images or short video clips to illustrate, deepen, translate or explain the messages of our story. We could have used our own pictures or videos, others' pictures or videos if they were legally free to use, drawings or figures—a wide range of possible imaginative illustrations.

The whole experience was so inspiring, fun and creative that I—even before I finished the digital prison story—made two other stories. They were linked to another issue and focus on conflicts in the Northern Sami areas of Norway, and research into restorative justice in conflicts in reindeer herding (Henriksen and Hydle 2016) as well as Sami child protection and family welfare areas. My Sami colleagues at the Arctic University of Tromsø and I have used both digital stories for education and dissemination purposes on several occasions. I regard this as a discovery regarding the effectiveness of the digital story learning experience. The digital story experience has taught me a new way of translating a cognitive "text" into a multivocal message. Firstly, I experienced how the idea of using digital stories spread rapidly from one field of my research into another. Secondly, I experienced the usability for colleagues, in being able to display and share a research area by means of a three-minute digital story to support their presentations. In one instance, a colleague brought my Sami story to the international conference of indigenous social work in Darwin, Australia.

Thanks to the skills and vision of our teachers, we were led through the complex process of digital story construction. My pictures were partly taken by me (the building details of the prison), and partly taken from the Internet, free to use (displaying a Norwegian courthouse and prison). I was struck for the first time by the artistic aspect of the work—in the sense of expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. The invitation for a researcher literally to use imagination to express a scientifically based message was striking and compelling.

I had told the story with my own voice recorded in the studio. Now, I wanted a particular piece of music to play the background "mood". Music has an important contribution to the impact of a digital story. The brain processes music or musical sounds differently from other sounds. Music constructs another layer of meaning and thus conveys other emotional messages than text or pictures (Clynes 2013). I wanted to use a particular piece, *60 Seconds*, of mixed electronic and instrumental music made by the Tunisian-born French musician and DJ Claude Challe. Since the piece is available on YouTube[5] and iTunes, I tried it out without his written permission In spite of several efforts I have not yet been able to obtain permission from Challe, and therefore may only share my story with audiences in closed spaces.

The story ends with some questions on a scrolling text: Care? Punishment? Reconciliation? Restoration? Reparation? While the music fades out. The spectators are left to reflect.

Advocacy Through Digital Storytelling?

As I mentioned earlier, neither images nor sounds are neutral. Individuals will always add a personal touch via all the decisions and selections that are made in the process of constructing the digital story. It is not possible to believe in objectivity or neutrality. Even if the images are taken by camera, there is an eye behind it, and a new eye to interpret the result. The famous press photographer Cartier-Bresson wrote in his book *The mind's eye, writings on photography, and photographers* (1998):

> For me the camera is a sketch book, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity, the master of the instant which in visual terms, questions and decides simultaneously. In order to 'give a meaning' to the world one has to feel oneself involved in what one frames through the viewfinder. This attitude requires concentration, a discipline of mind, sensitivity, and a sense of geometry—it is by great economy of means that one arrives at simplicity of expression. One must always take photographs with the greatest respect for the subject and for oneself. (p. 13)

To involve oneself is to become visible as a personal process. This may, in a somewhat old-fashioned epistemology, be regarded as "un-academic" or "too emotional" to be a good research or dissemination approach. But many leading science theorists have argued against the so-called objective scientific approach. Latour is one of them, dissolving the artificial distinction between objective and subjective. We are all subjects in relationships. Objectifying "the other" is an act of power. As soon as you have "othered" another person, you have distinguished yourself as something other and above. In anthropology and philosophy, this othering is often linked to "orientalism", that is, colonialism (Said 1978) or sexism (de Beauvoir 1949).

However, there is a clear distinction between personal and private. Thus, the construction of a digital story is not a private matter. I used my biological senses, as well as my voice, in the construction of the film. A wide variety of spectators commented that it was in fact my voice that made the biggest impact and contributed most to their understanding of

the underlying story. Other spectators have commented that the introductory images of the Millennium Boy sculpture by the Australian artist Ron Mueck[6] together with my wording made a great impression on them, introducing the main intention of the story. Again an example of my personal interest in the relationships between art and science. I share this interest with many others, thus I do not regard this as private, but indeed personal. This interest influences my personal life and I can use it for professional purposes—without revealing my private life at all.

The photograph, as an example of Cartier-Bresson's "simplicity of expression", will always be in a context, open for interpretation. Gullestad shows, through careful analysis of photographs, how the images of "African natives" taken by Norwegian missionaries in the 1900s convey a colonial perspective and view upon the "other" (2007). The missionaries acted in good faith in taking and distributing the photos.

With this adapted critical view, what did I advocate through the digital story? The spectators, that is, the receivers of my messages through the digital story, have so far been in closed spaces (within the context of teaching and learning about the youth prison in Norway in general, and especially through my research). First, my cross-disciplinary community of digital storytelling colleagues gave the impression of having received new knowledge about youth committing crimes, about the Norwegian prison

Fig. 13.2 This photo shows inmates and employees in front of the new prison building under construction, discussing details and outlines of the building

system and about this particular youth prison. Through my selection of words and pictures, I was able to convey the suffering and trauma of being an adolescent in this precarious situation and the cross-disciplinary challenges of their helpers, caretakers and guards.

My informants within the Norwegian correctional service took the digital story as if it were *their* story, signifying the impact on feelings and thoughts that this kind of visualisation can have on an evaluation project. Some of them asked to show the story to other closed audiences, both in and outside the country. A variety of students including Chinese law students and Norwegian child protection and social work students have seen it. So have civil servants in Estonia as well as the Kazakhstani ministry of justice and university teachers of social work and child protection. I did not have to use many words and explanations to convey my experiences from the project: this three-minute digital story made up for a long description, analysis and conclusion—an amazing experience.

My reflections upon the messages in the digital story continue with new disseminating experiences. The inner dialogue that Bakhtin describes as part of the human dialogism is enriched by this outer medium (and result of the inner), the digital story. The translation from a personal—but not private—experience to a personal (and still not private) account through a finished digital story of research results has a basis in knowledge theory, as outlined by, for example, Bakhtin, Linell and Latour,[7] as described above.

Another aspect of my reflection is how people perceive a digital story in general. Referring back to the spontaneous comment of the vice-director of the regional correctional services, quoted first in this chapter, it is interesting that he—as most other people—refers to the story as "film". There is not one single moving image in the digital story. Again, I am thrilled by the power of the visual, for example, that impressions from one part of the brain transfer over to another in terms of widening the static visual representation to an impression of something that is dynamic and moving.

Conclusions

Having made the digital story and shown it several times to different audiences as part of my research-based evaluation of the prison, I realise how the planning and construction of the environment surrounding the inmates and their caretakers expresses ideologies, knowledge and feelings. Both my audience and I found that the digital story condensed a complex message in an honest and accurate way. The story also contributed to parts

of the conclusion of the research-based evaluation: the prison and its professionals find themselves within the framework and requirements of the UN child convention.

Digital storytelling is an important new field for researchers who want to or need to disseminate complex interrelationships between realities. In addition, it is effective as a visual and auditory methodology in showing research projects and results within a wide range of disciplinary fields and practices. There are many more mysteries to discover and analyse in this complex field. Thus, as such, digital storytelling may be part of a basic theory of knowledge of science in new eras of digitalisation and visualisation.

Notes

1. The two largest cities in Norway.
2. I have developed this theoretical viewpoint in two ALTERNATIVE publications, Delivery. 2.1. and Delivery. 2.4, see http://www.alternativeproject.eu/assets/upload/Deliverable_2.1_Report_on_conlicts_in_intercultural_settings.pdf [Accessed 5 October 2016] and http://www.alternativeproject.eu/assets/upload/Deliverable%202.4%20Final%20research%20report%20on%20conflict%20and%20RJ%20(1).pdf [Accessed 5 October 2016].
3. The literary and culture theorist Michail Bakhtin develops in his work "The Dialogic Imagination" (1981) a theory of how the meaning of a text always is generated in a context, in Bakhtins term heteroglossia. Language is of a hybrid nature, in terms of polyglossia and there is always a relation between different utterances, that is, an intertextual relation. Texts are always build upon other texts, whether oral (auditory), written (visual) or visualised (e.g. pictures, films).
4. http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct05/mirror.aspx [Accessed 5 October, 2015].
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wnywh99mvwk [Accessed 5 October, 2015].
6. http://en.aros.dk/visit-aros/the-collection/boy/ [Accessed 5 October, 2015].
7. Another support for this knowledge theory approach emerged years ago from the famous story of the anthropologists Michelle and Renato Rosaldo. She died by an accident during their fieldwork among headhunters. Her husband, Renato, wrote an article "Grief

and a Headhunter's Rage" (2004). In an interview he focused on personal experiences leading to how "the visceral, the disruptive, and the violent should be at the centre of cultural analysis. Culture should not be limited to what is normal, routine and expected. It may be that we should seek out the unexpected and the atypical as a way of apprehending other human lives". See http://www.uc.pt/en/cia/publica/AP_artigos/AP24.25.12_Entrevista.pdf [Accessed 5 October, 2015].

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