The Fifth Storytelling: Global Reflections on Narrative Conference

The Fifth Storytelling: Global Reflections on Narrative Conference took place in Lisbon, between 10 and 13 May 2014. I believe this conference succeeded in its organization aim by gathering researchers from different countries and different disciplines on the same topic—story—and forming a real and strong dialogue among them. The conference was arranged by Inter-Disciplinary.net which was founded in 1999 with a motto, “Knowledge for knowledge’s sake, education for education’s sake”. They aim to create a conference experience that is rooted in the values of inclusiveness, egalitarianism, collegiality, and critical inquiry. Additionally, the most important value of the conference is “interactivity” between delegates, different countries, and different disciplines. Inter-, cross-, and multi-disciplinary exchanges are very essential for this foundation.

With this background, Storytelling 5 is a very interactive and therefore very stimulating conference that participants can share in their thoughts, ask queries, and discuss issues. Additionally, the conference was very multi-disciplinary, people from a variety of subject areas such as maths, literature, education studies, psychology, film studies, public relations etc. participated in this group discussion. All participants received 20 minutes to present their paper and 10
minutes to answer audience’s questions. Session chairs were very sensitive about time sharing. They did not allow some of the participants to dominate conversations. In so doing, a real dialogue occurred during the sessions.

In the beginning a warm-up exercise was made. In this workshop, all participants wrote “Story is...” and “Story is not...” on a paper and walked around the room. With such a practice, they had a chance to know each other and furthermore shared their views about the story with each other. After this small workshop, 50 speakers presented their papers, in 17 sessions.

There are lots of different themes presented in the conference related to storytelling. One of the main issues was “visual works”. All of the participants examined different aspects of stories in the visual works like films, serials, and cartoons. Some of the papers were about the narratives in the films. For example, Carlo Comonducci examined 2 visual works, Waiting in The Summer (Japanese anime) and Chronique d’un été (French film), that blur the naturalized frontier separating the spectator and the film maker. By using these examples he argued the impossibility of defining the meaning of a film, and the spectator’s experience of it. Afterwards, Amnon Buchbinder discussed story as a “living thing”. He shared their 4-year program of research and production, which is based on over hundred on-camera interviews with the storytellers and the people who work with the story. Fatima Chinita examined 3 films, Amores Perros, 21 Grams and Babel, which juggle time concept. Moreover, some presentations examined the subject of making and presenting stories in films. For instance, Margaret Mc Veigh and Herman Van Eyken emphasized on having a cinematic story have lots of different components. Afterwards, the presenters shared their short story made in Griffith Film School, Australia. Eleni Varmazi discussed films as a kind of non-credible storytelling. She examined Antonioni’s Blow-Up as a form of non-credible storytelling. Additionally, Beris Artan Özoran discussed serials in advertising and marketing perspective. She indicated that stories cannot be seen all innocent and showed examples of product placement in a serial called MedCezir.
The other main subject of the conference was new media. Under the topic of “Transforming Stories and Storytelling” Richard James Wirth argued that video games have an interactive ability. He talked about why video games serve as a primary example of secondary oral media. Similarly, Micheal Wilson examined how an old story “Johnny I want my liver back” has changed in the hands of a new generation and in the online space. Ariella Van Luyn represented a storytelling project which uses digital tools to produce a series of locative narratives which aims to strengthen reading and writing communities. Additionally, Elizabeth Heck shared her project about a Citizen Journalism Program, which uses new media technologies. She emphasized that the program uses new media technologies as a means of sharing stories from the community and explores both stories of traditional journalistic style as well as those of more personal autobiographical nature.

Another subject was literary narratives and story. Hsu Shou-Nan examined Ian McEwan’s *Sweet Tooth* to emphasize the connection between illusion and violence in order to show McEwan’s ideas about peaceful coexistence. Alves Teixeira Lopes represented her work which is a part of a bigger research project that aims to investigate some of Salman Rushdie’s novels. She focused on one novel, addressed mostly to children, reflects very complex issues such as social status of literary narrative. Adel Sliti claimed that titles of poems and history are related. She examined names of 2 poems in order to emphasize the titles of these poems weave around a multiplicity of stories retracing genealogies of linguistic roots and liquid routes associated with the history and geography of violence in the times of slavery. Katia Mitova discussed the question “Why does the ancient Greek epic, the *Odyssey* feel so modern?”. In order to explain the modernity of the *Odyssey*, she approached the epic as a work of implicit metafiction. Faisal Al-Doori examined Yeats’s two novels to emphasize the struggle between these two novels, which could show Yeat’s own spiritual reality and ambitions. Defne Karaosmanoğlu and Tolga Hepdinçler discussed non-credible storytelling. In order to explain it, Defne Karaosmanoğlu examined a play called *Mindgame* and Tolga Hepdinçler presented
Sebald’s *Austerlitz*. These presentations led to a deep debate about “Can we talk about non-credible stories?” and “What does credible mean in stories?” in the question-answer section.

The third important theme was education and storytelling. In her presentation Yongyang Wang explored storytelling and dramatization as a pedagogical tool for intercultural teaching of Chinese as a second language for non-native Chinese speakers. He showed some videos from her lesson when students play roles while learning Chinese. While Rebecca Shar presented about poetic provocations of teacher uncertainty, Nuria Alanso Garcia and Nicholas Longo shared their projects on integrating local and international partnerships by using storytelling. Ilana Shiloh talked about storytelling in academia by giving examples from a reading comprehension course in English for Ethiopian students in the College of Management in Rishon Lezion.

Stories of women’s lives were also discussed in the conference. Claudia Cassidy Bennett represented her research made with nuns by emphasizing that current literature does not adequately address the intersection of religion and feminism in the life of nuns. Dario Serrati shared his case study about females in Sicilian mafia communities and Megan Sijapati represented Hindu women’s adornment practices in Kathmandu’s transforming sociocultural landscape. She focused on story of the *pote*, a kind of bracelet that married women wear, and how it transformed nowadays.

The other theme was about patients and people with handicaps. In this session, Barbara Ciccarelli emphasized on that patients and caregivers have found some solace in the new trend in illness blogging by the example of carepages.com. Afterwards, Barbara Renzi draw attention to the role of metaphors in storytelling and examined the metaphors of depression. Nicola Grove presented a paper about a structured program to teach anecdotal storytelling grounded in social constructionist theories of narrative development which was implemented in adult services for people with intellectual disabilities and in schools for children with special educational needs.
One of the interesting topics was storytelling in different countries and traditions. Shirin Bozork Mehr represented an Iranian storytelling style Naqali which is a verbal expression of events or stories in lyrics or prose. She showed some examples of Naqali. With the presentation about revelation of African initiatory secrets and stories, Peter Oni talked about the narratological desacralisation of initiatory secrets in the works of Fagunwa. And, Shunichi Ueno represented storytelling of violence in Japanese pop culture by using examples from movies.

Memoirs, inner stories and autobiographies formed an interesting session. Katarzyna Macedulská shared her research about Mary Karr’s memoirs and Holly Rigland talked about her own creative writing experience about her life. She shared how she decided to write her inner story instead of writing a fiction. David Farnell and Rute Noiva made a presentation about how different cultures interpret mermaid and what these interpretations have to tell about ourselves. They argued that the mermaid will be used as a mirror that reflects our own nature back us.

The other interesting subject was the link between story and place. Deidre Mathee and Ines de Carvalho emphasized the potential of immersive performance to create space for storytelling and to proffer that space itself can tell stories. And they shared their project, which they made for a museum. While Gerson Werlang, analyzed the travel literature by Brazilian writer Enrico Verissimo, Sona Gulyan talked about virtual tourism. She argued that the virtual tourism discourse is a medium tool of impact and an instrument to shape tourist destination, ideology and identity.

Additionally, there were presentations about oral storytelling. Paulina Johnson emphasized on the importance of oral narratives by giving an example from Canada. On the same subject Tracy Friedel shared her study that would produce sixteen Elder stories, with proper attention paid to safeguards regarding the intellectual property rights of the Indigenous community.
In addition to these main topics, there were many interesting presentations. One of them is Dorota Kuncewicz and Ewa Sokolowska’s presentation explaining how psychologists can utilize literary theory devices in the interpretation of language communication. The other one is Hanne Smith Pedersen’s presentation about rhetorical function and ethics of narratives in political speeches. And Elise Cloete represented a paper about how tigers and lions presented in tales and fables.

In addition to these structured sessions, there were two unstructured sessions called “Sharing Stories”. In this session, participants voluntarily attend to share their stories, traditional tales, professional stories, personal stories, pedagogical stories, humorous stories, children’s stories, and so on.

To sum up, in The Fifth Storytelling: Global Reflections on Narrative Conference, different aspects of storytelling was discussed and participants shared their own approaches on story by presenting their papers. Besides presentations, question-answer parts were very beneficial to talk over papers and share the views of the participants. Similarly, the conference was beneficial to presenters to get feedbacks about their researches. To receive further information about the conference, conference e-book is planned to be published in September 2014 which I believe is worth to wait for the readers and the researchers.