The Narrative Subject

Storytelling in the Age of the Internet

Christina Schachtner

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Preface

Network actors and bloggers from various countries in the Arab world and Europe as well as from the USA provided the empirical basis for this book with their narratives in words and images. Thanks to their willingness to participate in the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace," it was possible to propound a typology of narrations which can be read as time stamps, illustrating what is on the minds of adolescents and young adults in different parts of the world today. I would like to thank them for their readiness to talk. My thanks also go to the researchers in my team at the University of Klagenfurt, Nicole Duller, Katja Langeland, Katja Ošljak, and Heidrun Stückler, who conducted the interviews with great commitment.

The translation of the book into English was accompanied by Doris Haslinger (FWF) and Sabina Abdel-Kader (FWF) as they paved the administrative way for support by the Austrian Science Fund. With their professional advice and much empathy, Lucy Batrouney, Mala Sanghera-Warren, and Bryony Burns from Palgrave Macmillan were very helpful in shepherding this book through the various stages of publication in getting the book published.

I would particularly like to thank the translator, Helen Heaney, for our intensive cooperation on the book, during which I learnt a lot about the art of translating and about wrestling with words and their meanings.

Klagenfurt, Austria   Christina Schachtner
2020

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About the Author

Christina Schachtner, DDr. is professor of media studies at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, and is particularly interested in the interrelations between people and digital technology. She has written on subject construction, the network society, gender and media, social movements in the digital age, and virtual spaces for playing and learning. She is currently working on the research project 'Transnational Life: Migration and Mediatization'.

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Introduction

The idea behind this book was inspired by the findings of the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace"[1] in which our research interest focused both on the communicative practices which young network actors and bloggers[2] between the ages of 11 and 32 engaged in online and on the subject constructions which were created as part of these practices. In the study, the process of subjectification, in which the subjects constructed themselves or were constructed as such under specific conditions created by the use of media technology (Reckwitz, 2008, p. 9) lay at the heart of the empirical analysis. One of the main findings was that the process of subjectification evolved between the conflicting priorities of autonomy and heteronomy for the adolescents and young adults participating in the study. While analysing the data, I soon gained the impression that the empirical sources, interviews, and visualizations did not only provide information on the communicative practices and subject constructions

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[1] The study was part of a larger project on *Subject Constructions and Digital Culture* carried out by research teams from the universities of Klagenfurt, Hamburg-Harburg, Bremen, and Münster. The members of Klagenfurt's research team were Nicole Duller, Katja Langeland, Katja Ošljak, Christina Schachtner, and Heidrun Stückler. The project was financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and the VW Foundation. The main findings are presented in Schachtner and Duller (2014).

[2] The term network actors refers to those who participate in various communicative activities in the internet, including blogging. The term bloggers is used when the narrators concerned primarily refer to themselves as bloggers and their narrative-based practices in the internet primarily consist of blogging.

but, on top of that, also told stories which related both to the internet as a life base and the everyday realities beyond the internet. These stories addressed not only the here and now but also the yesterday and tomorrow, putting the practices and subject constructions which we had identified in an overarching narrative context.

The narratives which emerged from our data then became the research interest in my secondary analysis of the interviews and visualizations, confirming my initial impressions and rapidly growing into a new research question: What stories do internet-savvy adolescents and young adults from different parts of the world tell in this day and age? The transnational perspective was possible because network actors and bloggers from six countries in Europe, four Arab countries, and the USA had been included in the initial study, accommodating the intention of analysing sociocultural transformation as one context of the stories which was playing out not only within individual nations but also on the global stage.

The secondary analysis was based on the assumption of the "hermeneutic circle"[3] (Struve, 2013, p. 22), which means that the reading of a text never comes to an end. I do not wish to restrict the assumption of multiple stages of evaluation to empirical data which were collected as part of an understanding-interpretative approach to research. Nevertheless, texts produced in a research context are especially suited to a primary, secondary, and tertiary analysis because of the multiple layers of meaning they represent. Barney Glaser, who, together with Anselm Strauss, developed Grounded Theory, already pointed to the possibility of picking up on the research process time and again: "The research in progress is always there waiting to move forward when the researcher can return to it" (Glaser, 1998, p. 15). What Roland Barthes defined as a characteristic of objects is also true of texts; they have more than one meaning (1988, pp. 182–183). To a certain extent, that dethrones narrator and researcher alike because both have to reckon with the text allowing further meanings and interpretations (Struve, 2013, p. 22) going beyond what the narrator intended and the researcher interpreted.

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[3] All quotations from German publications were translated into English for this book.

1.1 THE SOCIOCULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NARRATING

In line with Kurt Ranke (1955), Albrecht Lehmann proposed that it is a basic human need "when describing the world to understand, interpret, and talk about it in all of its dimensions" (2011, p. 28). This implies that the world is predetermined for us, that we are born into a world which gives rise to narratives. The world is, as Michael von Engelhardt writes, a product of narrating and, at the same time, through narrating, it undergoes a process of further development (2011, p. 39).

In narrating, perceptions and what we have seen or heard take shape as experiences. In other words, experiences of the world do not befall us; we create them, we integrate them in existing stories, or we make new stories out of them (Wolff, 2012, p. 183). The dynamics of society see to it that storytelling does not end but develops as an unfinished process in which causes are identified, links are forged, predictions are risked, and the exceptional is linked with the ordinary (Bruner, 1990, p. 47). Narrative practices relate to existing social orders, interpreting them, modifying them, and refining them. As we encounter them in narrative, subjective processes of experiencing and doing can only be grasped in relation to their specific socio-historical nature according to Heiner Keupp (2015, p. 31). Lehmann maintains that every narrative situation is embedded in universal life circumstances (2011, p. 29). Thus an individual's life is inextricably interlocked with social structures but without being at their mercy.

In times of sociocultural upheaval, such as we are currently experiencing, the challenge is intensified to process and digest observations, events, and messages in narrative form. Subjects are confronted with social contradictions, tensions, and conflicts which are crying out for solutions. As Keupp observed, ideas are formulated relating to the fundamental incompatibility of subjective desires and social imperatives (2015, p. 7). Questions are asked about negotiations between culture, society, and the subject (2015, p. 7). The ambivalences we perceive do not invite us to stand firm; rather they give rise to "a spur to speech, an urge to utterance, a way of working-through what is contradictory and unresolved" (Bhabha, 2012a, pp. 51–52).

As this sociocultural unrest is global in nature, narratives are being triggered all over the world in which people try to interpret the upheavals they are witnessing and attempt to embed themselves in new social structures in the very stories they tell. The narratives spring from different cultural backgrounds and biographies, which means that they do not necessarily

form a harmonious whole. But people cannot keep out of each other's way in an increasingly transnational world. Where intercultural encounters take place and different narratives collide, "cultural translation" (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 132) is essential, but it does not always succeed. Misunderstandings, conflicts, and violence are highly likely when apparently irreconcilable narratives collide. And yet these narratives are almost all we have as a means of understanding each other, and their prospects of success will increase when they are combined with a global understanding of ethics, which, however, still has to be developed on the basis of human rights.

1.2   THE SUBJECT-THEORETICAL APPROACH

A subject-theoretical approach underlies both the theoretical and empirical parts of this book, which means that the subject is the starting and reference point for the empirical analysis and the theoretical reflection. The decision to take this approach was based on the fact that narratives start off with individual people (Lehmann, 2011, p. 31). It is individuals who process their experiences in narrative form, who tell Others[4] about them, who exchange stories with Others, and who continue and change their narratives as part of this exchange.

Individuals construct themselves as subjects because they can make themselves the objects of their narratives by virtue of their reflexive practice. Narrating gives them the opportunity to develop a self-concept, to portray themselves, to make themselves perceptible to Others, to bridge the gap between themselves and their social surroundings, and in doing so they participate in the construction and maintenance of a common sociocultural life-world (von Engelhardt, 2011, p. 39). These comments already imply a certain concept of the subject which differs from depictions of the subject in which the subject is an instance independent of Others in which it finds the basis for its knowing and doing in itself, and in itself alone (Reckwitz, 2008, p. 12). The idea of the autonomous subject is bound to the notion of occidental modernity, which conceptualized the subject as sensible, as identical to itself, as the sovereign of its life (Bilden, 2012, p. 184), and which understood itself as a social formation that pursued the

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[4] In this book the term "the Other" refers to those who are indispensable for subject construction, from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, amongst others. As such the term refers to specific Others, which is why it is capitalized.

emancipation of the subject (Reckwitz, 2008, p. 12). This concept of the subject has been criticized by many from a feminist and post-structuralist perspective along the lines that the classical concept of the subject is a historical product and that subjectivity is constituted in fields of power which are characterized by social inequality (see, for example, Bilden, 2012, p. 185; Reckwitz, 2008, p. 12).

This book follows a subject-theoretical approach, which assumes a dual structure for the subject as described, albeit with different accents and distinctions, by Helga Bilden (2012), Judith Butler (2005), George H. Mead (1934), Käte Meyer-Drawe (1990), and Andreas Reckwitz (2006, 2008).[5] It is an approach that contrasts with both "individualistic doctrines, which are too preoccupied with praising the rights of the *I*" and those "schools of thought to which individualism is opposed" that favour "collective, plural pronouns [as in] traditional communism [or] the feminism of sisterhood" (Cavarero, 2000, p. 90) in which, as Butler underlines, "the *we* is always positive, the *plural you* … is a possibly ally … the *I* is unseemly" (Cavarero, 2000, pp. 90–91 quoted in Butler, 2005, p. 32).

The assumption of a dual structure, with the subject being simultaneously autonomous and heteronomous, is part of the etymology of the word. The term subject goes back to classical Latin *subiectum*, which means a person ruled by a monarch or sovereign state. In the modern era, its meaning changed, now being related to the recognizing self and referring to the self-determining self-consciousness. The Enlightenment, too, focused on the recognitional competence of the subject when calling upon it to free itself from its immaturity and its "inability to use [its] understanding without guidance from another" (Kant, 1784/1983, p. 41). This appeal was addressed to the subject as a whole, considering it primarily, however, as a rational being, even though, following Immanuel Kant, a philosopher central to the Enlightenment, the importance of experience for subject construction cannot be denied (Beer, 2014, p. 224). Reckwitz considers the two factors of autonomy and subjection as two sides of the self, which is prompted to "model itself as a rational, reflexive, socially oriented, moral, expressive, boundary-crossing instance" (2006, p. 10) in the process of its subjectification. His analysis of the subject focuses both on the discourses in which forms of the subject are represented and problematized and on the subjectifying potential of everyday practices (2008,

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[5] At this point I will elaborate on only some of the approaches; later on, the discussion will be taken up again and complemented by the positions of other authors.

p. 9). These practices include the narrative acts which are at the heart of this book.

In the process of subjectification, Reckwitz posits that the subject becomes an "allegedly autonomous" instance by subjecting itself to the criterion of autonomy (2008, p. 14). The formulation itself emphasizes that the autonomy of the subject is only apparent, which understandably leads Reckwitz to ask the following question: "Which codes, bodily routines, and preferred structures do individuals have to incorporate in themselves in their particular historical-cultural context in order to become an attributable 'subject' recognized by themselves and others?" This perception of the subject means that it does everything in order to satisfy the requirements of these codes.

As Butler sees it, a greater autonomy to act is accorded to the subject by Michel Foucault in his later works, particularly in his concept of "Technologies of the Self" (1988). Although both Foucault and Butler start from the premise that there is "no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character" (Butler, 2005, p. 7), they also want to demonstrate that the subject is equipped with the power to shape these norms (Butler, 2003, p. 9). The commonly posed question "What should I do?" presupposes an 'I' and the possibility of 'acting', which indicates the existence of a subject capable of self-reflection (2003, p. 9). In the stories told by the network actors and bloggers, this question turns up time and again, triggered by external threats or also by newly gained insights into the impact of media-technical artefacts. It creates the opportunity to develop a critical perspective on norms; nonetheless the subject is not "fully free to disregard the norm. … If there is an operation of agency or, indeed, freedom in this struggle, it takes place in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint" (Butler, 2005, p. 19).

Helga Bilden, who shares the notion of a dual structure and, like Butler and Foucault, considers the subject to be capable of challenging norms, goes one step further in her formulation of the notion of a subject. She emphasizes the processuality of becoming a subject when she rejects the idea of a "complete subject" in favour of "an ensemble which is repeatedly negotiated and constituted afresh" (2012, p. 188), an idea which had already been taken up by Silvia Pritsch (2008, p. 127). Subjectivity, Bilden continues, is negotiated and constituted in the stories which Others tell about us and which we tell ourselves. Bilden stresses that narrations can contribute to uniting heterogeneous elements (2012, p. 221), a process

which many of the stories presented in this book certainly bear witness to, for example when they are about formulating concepts of democracy within authoritarian societies or redefining the relationship between the public and the private.

Bilden also highlights the subject's diversity of voices (2012, p. 296), developed in response to the plurality that is a core characteristic of contemporary societies. She releases the notion of the subject from the requirement that the subject should generate itself as a harmonious entity, allowing it instead to be contradictory and multifaceted. It should not be forgotten, however, that a diversity of voices can also be problematic, for example when they are part of a multiple personality disorder, often brought about by traumatic experiences which can only be tolerated by the person concerned splitting the mind into multiple, separate, non-communicating identities (2012, pp. 194–195). When acknowledged by the subject, a diversity of voices without such a traumatic backdrop could, in contrast, increase the capacity to deal with messy or ambiguous situations or to react to cultural differences in a more open and tolerant manner, understanding them as being bound to other cultural locations (2012, pp. 222ff.).

Finally, the notion of the subject as developed by Bilden includes not only the sociocultural world as a stimulating-to-constitutive factor of subjectivity but also the world of things, here, primarily, the world of digital media. From the moment they are born, people are faced with a world of things "which they encounter in a friendly or hostile fashion, which are enticing, motivating, terrifying" (Schachtner, 2014, p. 9), and which, as Kurt Lewin already established in the 1920s, have a particular "demand character" for the individual (1926/1982, p. 64). Things prompt infants to interact with them, as the paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott observed (1971, pp. 4ff.); they encourage infants to reach for them, to squeeze them, to throw them away, and to get them back. In this interaction game, they discover the difference between inner and external reality, between the I and the Other; and so the foundations for subjectification are laid. Things retain their demand character for the subject for a lifetime. Time and again they stimulate so-called interaction games anew (Lorenzer, 1981, pp. 155ff.); they become object, instrument, and space for narrative practices. But that is not all: They also influence these practices alongside the narrative forms and contents they produce. How could it be different? After all, things materialize sociocultural codes which trigger a certain way of thinking and acting when

interacting with them. A chair, for example, makes us sit in a certain way, a ball forces us to make specific physical movements in certain directions, and a blog compels bloggers to write and present themselves in a certain way. Nowadays, the digital media play a dominant role across the globe in the world of things. Following in the footsteps of images, they have become powerful engines for changing subjectivity (Bilden, 2012, pp. 206ff.). This book also deals with this proposition.

1.3   EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Because the results of the empirical study which form the core of this book are influenced not only by my theoretical perspectives but also by my methodological approach and research methods, the following section is devoted to a presentation and discussion of issues relating to my methodology and methods.

1.3.1   *Methodology*

Methodologically, this book is rooted in the tradition of an understanding-interpretative approach to social research which makes it possible to grasp subjective experiences and actions in their specific socio-historical nature (Keupp, 2015, p. 31). This is precisely the interest which lies behind my research when I ask what stories internet-savvy adolescents and young adults from various parts of the world recount in this day and age. This question also includes an interest in "the way in which historical and social conditions affect the lives of individuals interacting with each other," to use Rainer Winter's words (2014, p. 125). The possibility of an understanding approach arises from the fact that, in their everyday lives, individuals always face and interpret each other and the world (Soeffner, 2014, p. 35). No matter how preconfigured social situations are, in their everyday lives, individuals must define them anew for themselves and they do so, according to Hitzler, with the help of "knowledge-guided and knowledge-generating processes" (2014, p. 61). If social research aims to understand these processes, it has to be involved in reconstructing meaning (2014, p. 61). With reference to Alfred Schutz, Hitzler proposes that meaning constitutes itself in "conscious acts which take a stand" (2014, p. 64). This definition places meaning on a conscious and rational level, ignoring the fact that it can also have a tacit dimension (Polanyi, 1966) and that, alongside cognition, meaning also includes sensory and

emotional elements which would remain hidden from social research if meaning were only considered to be the result of "conscious acts which take a stand" (Hitzler, 2014, p. 64).

As the interpreting, meaning-creating subject never acts alone but always in a force field of interdependencies, it is the task of an understanding-interpretative approach to social research to analyse these interdependencies, for example between an individual and historical situation, or between an individual and collective world view (Soeffner, 2014, p. 40). This book covers the interdependencies between media artefacts and individual positions, between individual stories and sociocultural transformations, between self-definitions and social expectations. These interdependencies also involve non-verbal forces to a large degree, which need to be translated into language during the research process. Reality only becomes visible once it has been verbalized, but a discrepancy remains between reality which has been lived and reality which has been interpreted; Soeffner warns against confusing "linguistically interpreted and understood reality" with "actual reality" (2014, p. 51). Winter does not appear to share this view of a division between lived and verbalized reality. Instead he believes that "lived experience … is always shaped and structured by texts and discourse" (2014, p. 119). The risk of confusion in his proposition has a somewhat different emphasis, involving as it does the difference between lived textuality and verbalized textuality.

It is in the tradition of an understanding-interpretative methodology that Grounded Theory can be placed. The elicitation and the analysis of the empirical data at the heart of this book were based on its principles and rules, integrating aspects of its methodology and methods. Grounded Theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the early 1960s; on the one hand, it was inspired by American Pragmatism as expounded by John Dewey, George H. Mead, and Charles S. Peirce and, on the other hand, by the use of case studies, which were favoured by the Chicago School of Sociology. Since the turn of the millennium, Grounded Theory has enjoyed increased attention in German-speaking countries, not least, I presume, because of its openness, making it a very vibrant approach which can be regenerated and refined, as was the stated intent of its founders. In the USA it was one of Anselm Strauss' students, Adele Clarke, amongst others, who related Grounded Theory to the "postmodern turn" (Strübing, 2014, p. 100); in the German-speaking world it was Heiner Legewie and Barbara Schervier-Legewie (2004), Bruno Hildenbrand (2000/2004, 2011 with Juliet Corbin), and Jörg Strübing

(2004, 2014) who rendered services to the reception and evolution of the approach.

In contrast to a nomothetic methodology, the goal of Grounded Theory is not to verify a theory but to discover the theory slumbering in the data (Strauss, 1995, p. 71). The main task of researchers consists of finding an interpretative approach to the data and to develop theoretical assumptions in close connection with the empirical evidence; in other words, it is an inductive approach. The crux of the interpretative work is the identification of a core category which not only lies at the heart of developing a theory but is also central to the empirical reality. Glaser writes: "Grounded theory produces a core category that continually resolves a main concern, and through sorting the core category organizes the integration of the theory" (1998, p. 13).

Grounded Theory is an appropriate research approach for analysing the stories told by network actors and bloggers because it focuses on the dialectic relation between action and structure, particularly in Strauss' reformulation (Strübing, 2014, p. 103). Thus it supports the research interest pursued in this book relating to the entanglement of micro- and macrostructures. Clarke took the approach one step further by integrating nonhuman actors in her research, which was not expressly ruled out by Glaser and Strauss but not explicitly formulated either. In the stories analysed here, this is certainly a factor which is not to be ignored.

As meaningful as an understanding-interpretative approach to the empirical field may be in relation to the explicit issue at hand, it also has its limits. As a matter of principle, it must be assumed that the procedures in an understanding-interpretative research method shape the empirical data under investigation. As mentioned, Soeffner identifies the sources of error mainly in the discrepancy between "the immediate horizons of meaning of the practical action and the … later interpretation of this action" (2014, p. 41). With reference to Winter (2014, p. 119), when analysing the narrative acts of the network actors and bloggers, I do not assume that they signal an immediate horizon of meaning but rather that they have already been shaped by a meaning which has been mediated through discourses and experiences with the media. All the same, the difference between the meaning embodied in the narratives and the one that is interpreted when these narratives are analysed has to be taken into account, especially since it is impossible to capture all levels of meaning. In the study presented here, several transfers of meaning took place which presumably resulted in changes in meaning. The first transfer already took place when the

network actors and bloggers recounted their day-to-day reality and the second one when their spoken language was written down as text, with the third and fourth transfers happening when these texts were interpreted and then transferred into book form. On top of that, the influence of the interviewers on the first transfer must not be ignored, caused by their sociocultural origins and the way in which the interviews were carried out. The risk of potentially changing the meaning in the transfer process cannot be eliminated completely, although it can be reduced by following specific rules when collecting and interpreting the empirical data. A high level of reflection is also required on the part of the researchers, on the basis of which a critical distance is established, both to themselves and to the empirical material, which encourages a wealth of perspectives in the research process.

Winter pleads for a socially critical appreciation of the understanding-interpretative research approach (2014, p. 118). I understand his plea to cover not only a critical look at the limitations of the methodology and methods but also an appreciation of the consequences of the findings. Glaser formulated a socially critical interpretation of Grounded Theory in as much as he demanded that it has to be measured up against whether it produces findings which are of value for relevant behaviour in the real-world setting under investigation and are meaningful for the people in that setting (1998, p. 17). Winter's socially critical interpretation goes one step further as he demands not only that researchers uncover cultural myths when they write, along with the emotional substance of the stories under investigation, but also that they search for new perspectives for those who are affected (2014, p. 125).

This book complies with the demand for a socially critical perspective to the extent that

- The social mechanisms are uncovered which have an impact on the subjects, including those which restrict their freedoms.
- The ideas which could transform society are given a voice, particularly those formulated by the Arab network actors and bloggers.
- Observations are made on the future of narrating which reveal the possibility of establishing a social alternative in the face of transnational developments.

1.3.2   Sample

The secondary analysis of empirical data taken from the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace" included 21 network actors and bloggers[6] between the ages of 11 and 32 (11 female and 10 male). The age group was chosen to represent Generation Y, defined by Klaus Hurrelmann and Erik Albrecht as those born between 1985 and 2000 (2014, p. 15). Worldwide, members of this generation use the internet and smartphones most intensively and the organization of their everyday lives is closely connected with the digital world. As an affinity for digital media is a general characteristic of this generation, it can reasonably be expected that the results of the study presented in this book are relevant for this generation as a whole, even when the entire range of stories told by this generation cannot be traced due to the limited number of participants. In spite of that, the narrative typology which was identified provides insights into the experiences of and attitudes towards life of a generation whose future is being organized amidst the increasing digitalization of everyday life and sociocultural upheaval. It reveals the focus, expectations, hopes, and doubts of this generation as they set foot on the stage of the adult world, or, to be more precise, the self-concepts and social practices which accompany them in their free time, as they start studying or working, or when they are entitled to vote or become involved in politics.

The network actors and bloggers were not selected to represent one country alone, coming as they do from six European countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, and Ukraine), four Arab countries (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen) and the USA.[7] The reason behind this broad geographical dispersion is the increasing deterritorialization of phenomena, events, and developments in view of transnationalization and globalization. In connection with digital media in particular, national borders no longer represent the limits of experiences and actions. The narratives of Generation Y often develop in transnational contexts, forging links with narratives from other parts of the world, so that transnational occurrences and questions of interconnectedness and exchange themselves become the subject of narratives.

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[6] The original study involved a total of 33 network actors and bloggers.

[7] The network actors and bloggers from the Arab world and the USA were interviewed in English. The other interviews were carried out in German; any quotations from these interviews have been translated into English.

1.3.3   Research Methods

Stephan Wolff claims that stories are told to those who know the story-teller well, who ought to get to know the storyteller well, or who challenge the storyteller to tell one (2012, p. 187). The last reason applies to the narrators who have their say in this book, although they were invited to do so rather than challenged. Generally, appropriate participants first have to be persuaded to take part in a study. Initially the interest in participation appears to lie exclusively with the researchers, who want to obtain results and publish them. In retrospect, the possibility of talking about themselves is often seen as a good opportunity by the participants as well. Talking about oneself is a fundamental human need and where do you get the chance to talk about yourself at length, to attentive listeners to boot? The Arab narrators must have experienced their interviews as an ambivalent situation, even though nobody picked up on the topic. But they did speak about the conflicting situation they found themselves in. On the one hand, it was important to them to make their critical voices heard worldwide; they may have seen their participation in a Western research project as a good opportunity to do so. On the other hand, they knew about the personal risk of criticizing the political and cultural systems which prevailed in their countries.

The research methods which were chosen were thematically structured interviews and visualizations. The topics which were included in the interview guide focused on the questions that were important for the original study on computer-based practices and subject constructions. In the interviews themselves, the interviewees were deliberately left enough wiggle room to set their own criteria for relevance, enabling them to bring in new thematic aspects. This increased the spectrum of levels of meaning, which was certainly very useful for the research interests pursued in the secondary analysis. Interviews are occasionally objected to on the grounds that what people say is not the same as what they do. Jerome Bruner would find such an objection strange as it implies that "what people *do* is more important … than what they *say*, or that the latter is important only for what it can reveal about the former" (1990, p. 17). It would be like insisting that "'saying' … is *only* about what one thinks, feels, believes, experiences" (1990, p. 17), leaving aside the fact that, as he writes a couple of paragraphs later, "saying and doing represent a functionally inseparable unit in a culturally oriented psychology" (1990, p. 19).

The visualizations produced by the interviewees provided answers to two questions: "Who am I online?" and "I move between different platforms. What does that look like?" They were asked to draw their answers to these questions at the end of the interview. Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp emphasize the value of imagery in research, characterizing it as "the irreducible center for the research and evidentiary context of the sciences" (2003/2013, p. 24). The method of visualization addresses different levels of consciousness, to a certain extent, to methods based on verbal language; it opens up access to the preconscious, the anticipated, even to the unconscious. The latter, however, did not play a role in the analysis. Contradictions and ambivalences can emerge more prominently in images because they do not push the artists to provide logical explanations; they also free them from the pressure to be unambiguous because differences can exist alongside each other. Finally, it could be expected that images, which arise out of sensory perception and appeal to the senses, can also convey emotions to a greater extent than words. And emotions play an important role in telling stories, after all (von Engelhardt, 2011, p. 46; Wolff, 2012, p. 191).

Both methods of eliciting data gave rise to narratives,[8] which arose in a very specific situation. This is quite likely to have had an influence on the narratives. One of the influential factors in that situation was the language used. The interviewees and researchers did not always speak the same mother tongue, for example when the interviewees came from English-speaking countries, but sometimes, too, when they came from German-speaking countries because not all of the researchers spoke German as their first language. It was particularly challenging when neither the researcher nor the interviewee could use their native language, which was the case when interviewing the Arab network actors. Misunderstandings were to be expected due to the language barriers, but when they were identified and talked about during an interview, they could be extremely revealing because they encouraged more precision and differentiation in the content. Above and beyond that, the contacts with the Arab interviewees involved political risks, which meant that the researchers had to find a balance between their research interests and protecting the interviewees. Then there were technical malfunctions with the Skype interviews, which were often interrupted for hours or even days. Finally, the interviews with

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[8] The type of narratives they produced will be explained later on in this introduction and in more detail in Chap. 4.

the Arab network actors in 2010/2011 were affected by the revolutionary events in North Africa and the Middle East. The interviewees gave their opinions on political topics in a context dominated by violent confrontations; some of them were also facing existential threats themselves. One interview, for example, took place while the blogger was on the run.

The analysis of the data followed the guidelines of Grounded Theory, which could be used to interpret both the interviews and the visualizations. The basic procedure in Grounded Theory is coding. First of all open coding is used in order to identify as many aspects as possible which are relevant for the research question; this is followed by axial coding, which looks for linkages in the wealth of data. The goal of coding is to identify a core category; examples of core categories in the analysis of the narratives at hand are "interconnectedness," "managing boundaries," or "setting out and breaking away." A core category must appear frequently in the empirical data and has to play a pivotal role, such as being the starting point for various subpatterns of the phenomenon (Strauss, 1987, p. 36). The core category is central to the coding paradigm, creating a structural context for the data which were sorted out during axial coding (Strübing, 2014, p. 24). The coded segments which occur around the axis of a core category can be used to answer questions about the conditions, context, and consequences of a phenomenon as well as about strategic actions related to the phenomenon (2014, p. 25). The narrators' reflections and emotions relating to the phenomenon were also coded in the analyses of the narratives presented here.

The analysis of the visualizations also followed the guidelines of Grounded Theory, albeit in the knowledge that visualizations contrast with verbal language as a source of data. They were examined as a combination of symbols which stand for something else (Lobinger, 2012, p. 55). The visualizations drawn by network actors and bloggers which are included in this book stand for everyday scenarios, feelings, self-perceptions, relationships, and intentions. When analysing the drawings semantically, I was interested in the relationships between the sign and the signified. In this sense, the focus was on the visualizations as symbols which, according to Lobinger, are characterized by a "high degree of semantic vagueness and ambiguity" (2012, p. 55). At the same time, Susan Sontag suggests that the "photographic exploration … of the world … provid[es] possibilities of control" (1973, p. 156). Furthermore, "at its origins [image-making] was a practical, magical activity, a means of appropriating or gaining power over something" (1973, pp. 154–155).

Both aspects can be found quite frequently in the narrators' visualizations, namely in attempts to provide possibilities of control, for example between human being and machine, between the I and the You, or by assigning the machine a specific spot in one's everyday life. At the same time, the visualizations include signs of ambivalence, ambiguity, and openness, as expressed in one drawn by a 14-year-old blogger to answer the question "Who am I online?" It only consists of a circle, creating the impression of a closed order, which the 14-year-old is possibly trying to establish with his blog; yet the circle is empty, leaving what is happening inside the circle fully open. The open horizon of meaning in the visualizations was counteracted in the research process, firstly by asking the person who had done the drawing to comment on their visualization and secondly by following the guidelines of Grounded Theory when analysing the drawing, as described earlier. In this book, the results of these analyses are not presented systematically; the drawings are only used to illustrate the stories that they accompany.

1.4   Structure of the Book

The second chapter of the book deals with narrating as a cultural practice and life form which is deeply embedded in the history of humanity. Storytelling is introduced as an act which contributes to producing the foundations of our lives as it helps us to comprehend the world in which we must be able to act on the basis of this interpretation. Individuals merge with the world through their narratives. This is followed by an attempt to relate narrating to time and space following Paul Ricœur. Time is described as the contextual framework for narrating, as its content-related and structural relationship, and as the product of narratives. Space is also characterized as a framework for narrating, but one which only constitutes itself through narrating.

Inspired by the subject-theoretical approach at the heart of this book, the next question concerns the functions of narrating for the subject. With reference to Michel Foucault (1988), the discussion focuses on a technology of Self-construction which provides orientation and agency, self-knowledge and self-understanding, as well as self-assurance and transgression. Based on the proposition that narrating as a technology of Self-construction implies not only a movement towards the Self but also a movement towards the Other, the role of the Other is explored as a reference point, topic, co-narrator, and part of the narrative Self, also in

reference to the concept of the "relational self" developed by Kenneth Gergen (1999). This leads to the question concerning the extent to which narrating is limited in its actions, which can be answered by characterizing narrating as a technology of subjection or enablement. This means that, as narrators, we are not alone when directing our narratives, yet we are not totally at the mercy of the expectations of our social and material environment either. It is proposed that we situate our stories within a set of norms, which we cannot ignore completely at the risk of losing out on social recognition, without our stories becoming effects of these norms. On the contrary—the argument continues—they retain something irreducible which arises out of the necessity of adopting norms, in the process of which autobiographical dispositions have to be considered in relation to norms, which creates structural opportunities for critical reflection (Butler, 2003, p. 10).

Following on from the social counterpart, the material counterpart in the form of digital media is addressed as a further reference point for the narrating of present-day adolescents and young adults. Digital media are portrayed as the products of social practice which are endowed with a sociocultural charge in the process of being created. This is fleshed out—as the argument goes—in the form of structural characteristics which are pertinent to narrating, such as interconnectedness, interactivity, globality, multimediality, and virtuality. The claim is not made that digital media differ fundamentally from all types of media which preceded them; however, it is postulated that there are differences in relation to the form and intensity of these characteristics. The multimediality of digital media, for example, demands that the relationship between image and text is re-examined in terms of its consequences for narrating. Finally, virtual space as constituted by digital media is illuminated from the perspective of Foucault's concept of heterotopia. The conclusion is that narratives from the physical world are not barred from virtual space but that the latter, at the same time, stimulates novel narrative acts.

In the fourth chapter, the empirical data are presented in the form of a typology of the stories which were told. The analyses reveal how these stories interweave experiences and actions from virtual space and from the physical world, from the past and the present, and with intentions and hopes for the future. As the analyses also show, they move on different levels of awareness, intuition, and pre-awareness; they run like a subterranean web through the narrators' lives, initiating specific patterns of thinking and doing. The core categories which were already identified in the

primary analysis in relation to the narrators' practices pointed the way to the focus of the individual stories. The following six types could be identified, which sometimes also appeared in different variations: stories about interconnectedness, self-staging, suppliers and sellers, managing boundaries, and transformation, as well as setting out and breaking away.

The next chapter addresses the extent to which the concepts covered in the second and third chapters, namely time and space, the Self, and the You, and the structural characteristics of digital media, are present in the narrative typology and which form they take on in the stories. This is an attempt at a theoretical postscript. Time appears in the stories as biographical and sociocultural time. Space takes on form in the narrative practices of managing boundaries, in the crossing of national and cultural spaces, and in the production and configuration of virtual spaces. The presumption that narratives are technologies of Self-construction is confirmed on many occasions in the stories. These can be seen as attempts by the narrators to find their bearings in the world through Self-construction or as narrative saunters between standardized and experimental representations of the Self, or between those representations which divide and those which create continuity. In addition, the analysis of the narratives confirms that the I does not act in isolation in relation to time, space, or the Self. The You appears on the narrative stage as a reference point, a topic in the narration, or in the imagination. Finally, this chapter turns to the interaction which unfolds between narrators, narratives, and media technology. "No end in sight" is shorthand for the seemingly infinite distribution of narratives through digital networks unleashed by their rhizome-like character. To look at this interaction from another angle, the fact that images are particularly en vogue enhances their function as a narrative medium for the documentation of social events, as a social binding agent, and as a means for self-staging. A typical feature of this kind of interaction is transmedia narrating, which interlinks media experiences from earlier phases of life as well as experiences in different media, creating a cosmos of stories which the narrators share as designers.

In accordance with the research interest formulated at the beginning of the introduction, the analysis focused not only on which stories the network actors and bloggers told but also on whether and, if so, how these stories relate to sociocultural transformation in contemporary society. Consequently, they were matched against phenomena of change like detraditionalization, pluralization, the blurring of borders, individualization, and global flows, revealing that the stories of the network actors and

bloggers are not left untouched by social upheaval. That is not to say that they are determined by upheaval as the narrators are self-willed subjects with the ability to select, differentiate, and reflect. In particular, the search for and establishment of alternative value orientations and life forms can be seen as an answer to social challenges, whereby the narrators from Western countries tend to act as individuals, and narrators from the Arab world strive for collective strategies.

In the last chapter, narrating is placed in the context of cultural developments, tracing an arc back to Chap. 2, in which storytelling was explored as a cultural practice and life form. The question is which guise must narrating assume in a world in which global flows and the global interplay are intensifying and accelerating. The demands placed on narrating are discussed from the perspective of the "translational turn," from which consequences can be deduced for the future of narrating. Storytelling must be in a position to help create narrative spaces which literary theorist Homi K. Bhabha calls the "Third Space" (1994, p. 37), describing it as the springboard for a type of narrating which is detached from dualisms and offers space for cultural differences.

1.5   INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

When I outline the innovative nature of this book, I do not want to imply that the aspects I mention have been overlooked by the academic community so far but rather that they have only been discussed—as far as I can tell—inadequately or on the fringes.

This book is about everyday stories, not literary or cinematic narratives as staged for television or in film. It is about research into a narrative world which, although of constitutive significance for developing one's personality and culture, narrative researchers have tended not to focus on as they are primarily concerned with "self-contained, aesthetically pleasing narratives" (2011, p. 28), as Lehmann points out. The interest pursued here in everyday narrating in the context of digital media is also relatively new, although it is more common in academic discourse in the Anglo-American context, where it goes under the heading of storytelling, than it is in the German-speaking world. Even there, though, media space has received little attention as a co-creator of narratives. This gap is counteracted by drawing on approaches which deal with the sociocultural meaning of things, even if digital media do not play a specific role in them, as in the approaches of Lorenzer (1981), Barthes (1988), and Csikszentmihalyi

and Rochberg-Halton (1981). Awareness should be raised of the fact that people are not confronted with a neutral world of things but rather with a stimulating one in which new accents have been set by the digital media as they leave their traces in the narratives of individuals.

The transformation of the topic of narrating into media studies is also breaking new ground in that the storytelling under consideration is carried out by everyday actors and not by professional narrators, PR agencies, or media companies. The analysis within a media studies framework is not limited to an interpretation of the texts alone but also includes the narrators, as the creators of these texts and as actors in the narratives; it thus focuses on the subject, an approach which cannot be taken for granted in the context of media studies (Gentzel, Krotz, Wimmer, & Winter, 2019). Moreover, the notion of the subject used here has to hold its ground against the classical notion of the subject which, although it has come under criticism, has not yet been set aside. In contrast to the idea of an independent subject, a subject is posited which moves between the poles of self-determination and determination by the Other.

The entanglement of micro- and macrostructures demanded by the nature of the research question required an interdisciplinary approach. Complementing the perspective of media studies, there was input from sociology, psychology, philosophy, literary criticism, and cultural studies, which also contributes to the innovative nature of the book.

Alongside the theoretical innovations, new avenues were explored in connection with aspects of the methodology. While the understanding-interpretative approach is sufficiently acknowledged and almost mainstream these days, I would suggest that the introduction of visualization as a research method is methodologically innovative. In media studies and visual culture as well as in the history of art, the image is the main object of research; in disciplines like psychology or education, it serves as a diagnostic instrument, which comes closer to the function of the image as a research method. On the one hand, the drawings produced in the empirical study represent a form of communication between the narrators and researchers and, on the other hand, they serve as representations of the Self and as interpretative pictures with which the narrators attempt to organize their perceptions, emotions, and relationships. The drawings reveal "inner landscapes" which bear witness to the ambiguous rapport between the I and the world (Sontag, 1973, p. 122).

Finally, I would like to reiterate that I did not examine traditional stories and have thus created a concept of narrative which differs from traditional notions. The stories presented in this book were told within the context of interviews and visualizations in words and images; they do not proceed in a linear fashion spanning the beginning, climax, and end. They do not restrict themselves to memories and descriptions but encompass future perspectives, commentaries, and reflections. They are like pieces of a narrative jigsaw puzzle which reflect different phases of the narrators' personal biographies and different spheres of life which do not dovetail perfectly with each other. The narrative notion represented here draws on an integrated view of the pieces in the jigsaw and on the identification of a focus around which the pieces of the puzzle arrange themselves, although the narrators do not necessarily have to be aware of this. The narrative notion takes account of the "small stories" (von Engelhardt, 2011, p. 46) and favours a spotlight on seemingly unimportant details, passing remarks, metacommunicative comments, incomplete sentences, and pauses, on the assumption that it reflects a complex reality (Ginzburg, 1980, p. 13). I was interested in securing the narrative traces as time stamps for Generation Y.

1.6   Major Themes

The following propositions are my attempt to summarize the theoretical and empirical insights gained while working on this book in connection with the everyday stories, digital media, and sociocultural transformations as currently experienced by adolescents and young adults from various parts of the world:

- Storytelling transcends the immediacy of human existence. It points to the past and future alike; it integrates what has been experienced with what can be imagined, what is close and what is distant, what is solid and what is fluid.
- Media change the forms and locations of narrating. They turn out to be playing grounds for our narrative self-realization. Digital media are driving forward the deterritorialization of narrating, displacing experiences, interpretations, ideas, and values in the process. At the same time, they are the products of narratives.

- The narratives told by the network actors and bloggers are like sub-terranean webs which integrate experiences and actions in virtual and physical reality and give them their meaning.
- The narratives provide some answers to phenomena associated with sociocultural transformation, such as detraditionalization, pluralization, the blurring of borders, individualization, and global flows. They are shaped by this transformation and, at the same time, serve to process social challenges. Some of the narratives are also characterized by a desire for sociocultural change, particularly those told by the network actors and bloggers from the Middle East.
- The pronounced narrative search for coherence is a response to the fragmentation of everyday life experienced or initiated by the narrators as well as to the erosion of cultural coherence. It serves to assemble new perceptions, experiences, and encounters.
- The breakneck dynamics of sociocultural transformation are reflected in the incompleteness of the stories. Denouements, a good ending, the final closing bracket are missing; instead the stories reveal scepticism and insecurity but also optimistic visions of the future.
- In the future, narratives, whether online or offline, will increasingly evolve in spaces which are confronted with cultural differences and which question what were believed to be time-honoured systems of values and norms. More than ever before, it will be necessary to provide a cultural translation of narratives, which cannot be envisioned as a smooth transfer but as a reciprocal presentation and negotiation of differences, as an opportunity to critically examine and overcome hierarchies. This would lay the foundations for the emergence of a "Third Space" (2012b), a subversive philosophical construction imagined by Homi K. Bhabha which undermines closed systems.
- The multimediality of digital media opens up new opportunities for cultural translations which dispense with verbal language. The removal of language barriers bodes well for narratives, expanding their range in the form of images, videos, and music so that they can be appreciated beyond cultural borders and so that they can interact with narratives from other parts of the world.
- Cultural translations can certainly come up against boundaries which appear to be unsurmountable, however. The stories told by Others can contain untranslatable fragments which irritate, resulting in an experience of the uncanny. As Sigmund Freud described it, the

uncanny points to the repression of an emotional affect which balks at a translation or transformation because it inspires anxiety (1919/1955, pp. 226ff.). The irritation or fear which is experienced can leave the individual with a desire to eliminate cultural differences; at the same time, these feelings represent the opportunity to discover the Self in what is perceived as the Other or the Foreign when they are accepted and reflected on.

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Storytelling as a Cultural Practice and Life Form

> Telling always binds one thing to another. We want a coherent world, not one in bits and pieces. (Hustvedt, 2008, p. 276)

According to Roland Barthes, "narrative begins with the very history of humanity" (1988, p. 95). Narrative is a cross-cultural phenomenon (Meuter, 1995, p. 173) that has always been present "in all periods, all places, all societies" (Barthes, 1988, p. 95). In Ludwig Wittgenstein's words, "recounting … [is] as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (1953, p. 12e) and as such it is one of the fundamental activities of life. Narratives and stories already exist before we arrive on the scene; we are born into a world of narrations which make up the "unexamined ground of everything given in [our] experience" (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 4).

Schutz and Luckmann posit that narrations emerge because "the world is already given to [us] for [our] explication" (1974, p. 6), motivated by the necessity of comprehending the world "in order to be able to act in it" (1974, p. 6). As used by Schutz and Luckmann (1974, pp. 3, 15), narrations represent meaning-contexts or life-worlds, which consist of an aggregation of experiences, orientations, principles, values, and norms which have been and always will be related to each other by subjects in such a way that they function as the foundation of meaning for thinking and doing. When telling our stories, we intertwine the various elements of meaning, emphasizing or relativizing them in a never-ending process.

From a historical perspective, meaning-contexts represent a continuum as what we explicate is but an explication of what has been explicated in the past. We trust that the world we are familiar with will continue to be familiar and that the "stock of knowledge obtained from [our] fellow-men and formed from [our] own experiences will continue to preserve its fundamental validity" (1974, p. 7). "And so forth" (1974, p. 7) is an "essential aspect of thinking" according to Schutz and Luckmann (1974, p. 8).

At this point I would like to elaborate my understanding of the notions of narrative (*Erzählung*), narration (*Narration*), and storytelling (*Erzählen*). Just like the concept of narration, a narrative should indicate an active process whereas storytelling relates to the narrative act itself (see also Mahne, 2006, pp. 12–13). In storytelling, the "how" is dominant; in narrative and narration alike, the "how" and the "what" are closely connected. Narratives or narrations combine various episodes, points in time, and places, linking them to each other to create a meaningful relationship. They consist of elements of meaning which, when combined, result in an overall meaning which is not, however, inherently definitive. Narrations or narratives can change, subject to time and space. I do not regard storytelling as either a purely rational action or a purely descriptive activity; it also includes emotions and moods as well as reflections and interpretations.

As already mentioned, we are born into a world of stories which are told to us and which we tell to Others. In and through our narratives, we make the world our own; we situate ourselves in this world and tell Others in it about ourselves. Narrative acts as a means with which to understand the world; storytelling acts as a means of conveying that understanding and—a point I will return to later—as an instrument for configuring the world.

A prerequisite for telling a story is the ability to use a language; language is the vehicle of narrative. But not only oral and written verbal languages take on this function; as Roland Barthes would have it, it can also be performed "by image, fixed or moving, by gesture, and by the organized mixture of all these substances" (1988, p. 95). Accordingly, narratives can be found everywhere and at any time: in everyday gossip, in film, in comics, on billboards, on the bodies and faces of individuals, in architecture, in the internet, in politicians' speeches, in newspapers, and in academic texts. Even Nature can tell stories, as seen in the Brothers Grimm's *German Dictionary*, in which the following quotations from the Old Testament are used in the entry for *erzählen*: "The fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee" and "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Grimm & Grimm, 1862/1984, p. 1077).

Things can become the vehicle of narratives, but the narrative itself always remains immaterial in nature, composed as it is of symbols and meanings. Susanne Langer distinguishes between discursive and presentational symbols. Verbal language is basically discursive in Langer's view (1957, p. 96). The individual elements of verbal language are units with independent meaning which, to use Langer's metaphor, are like "pieces of clothing … strung side by side on the clothesline" (1957, p. 81). The logic of discursivity is such that "only thoughts which can be arranged in this peculiar order can be spoken at all; any idea which does not lend itself to this 'projection' is ineffable, incommunicable by means of words" (1957, pp. 81–82).

Although presentational symbols also consist of units which are components of a narration, these units do not have independent meanings (Langer, 1957, p. 94). Light and dark areas in a photograph, for instance, which can be taken as an example of presentational symbolism, do not convey meaning by themselves (1957, p. 94). But in combination with other elements, they have an effect, resulting in an image which is revealed to the viewer all at once and not gradually (1957, p. 94).

Whether we make use of discursive or presentational symbolism for our narratives, we draw on existing symbols, as already mentioned; otherwise we would be unintelligible. But we do not simply adapt these symbols; we modify and mould them. As Alfred Lorenzer puts it, we join in interaction games making use of an existing system of symbols. With respect to presentational symbols, we develop sensory–symbolic interaction forms; with respect to discursive symbols, we develop linguistic–symbolic interaction forms (1981, pp. 159ff.). In the sensory–symbolic interaction forms, we are closer to emotions and bodily processes while the linguistic–symbolic interaction forms force us to come to grips with the world in a rational and reflexive manner. In the process of storytelling, we combine these interaction forms, storytelling thus becoming the instrument with which to mould our system of symbols.

According to Wolfgang Kraus, narrative psychology starts with the premise that "we configure our lives and our relationship to the world as narrative and that we also engage in our daily interactions and the organization of what we have experienced with the help of an ongoing narrative"[1] (2000, p. 4). Our entire lives take place in narrative or narration, if we ascribe to Barbara Hardy's view that

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[1] All quotations from German publications were translated into English for this book.

we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future. (1968, p. 5)

By telling stories and through our narratives, we reveal the manner in which we live, if Hardy is right; in this sense, storytelling generates life forms.

Narrative life forms are intersubjective life forms; they are connected to existing systems of symbols and continue to develop through the negotiation of meanings in a social context. One result of this negotiation is shared meaning-contexts, which are the foundations of culture. A concept of culture which is guided by life forms integrates everyday culture (Welsch, 2001, p. 256). Here culture should be understood as communally developed and shared systems of meaning and symbols as well as ways of living and working together, in line with Jerome Bruner (1990, p. 11). In fact, the notion of culture did not crystalize until the end of the seventeenth century (Welsch, 2001, p. 255). Even then, Samuel von Pufendorf, a professor of natural law, was interested in the constitutive dimension of culture, defining it in his (1684) tome *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* as "the totality of those activities by which men structure their lives as humans—in contrast to beasts merely eking out their existence" (quoted in Welsch, 2001, p. 255). The constitutive element would be inconceivable without narrative interpretation and the negotiation of meanings in the interaction of various narratives as it implies variation and change. Culture is a narrative which does not only represent norms, as Bruner puts it, but which also allows for interpretative leeway so that deviations from the norm still make sense (1990, p. 47). In other words, narrative "specializes in the forging of links between the exceptional and the ordinary" (1990, p. 47) such that "the viability of a culture inheres in its capacity for resolving conflicts, for explicating differences and renegotiating communal meanings" (1990, p. 47).

Viewing culture as a narrative means characterizing it as being the creation of human subjects. But culture is also prescriptive, providing us as it does with a script, the vocabulary of which "set[s] boundaries and give[s] direction to future creative effort" for our thoughts, perceptions, and interpretations (Hutton, 1988, p. 122). As cultural practices, narrative life forms produce a *habitus* in Pierre Bourdieu's terms. They harbour

dispositions which are "predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations" (1980/1990, p. 53). The *habitus* of narrative life forms points to the effective presence of the past conditions which generated them (1980/1990, p. 56). But their efficacy is relative; the past permits, opens up, prevents, disrupts, and facilitates, but it is not deterministic, at least not when reflexive reference is made to it. Bourdieu describes the dialectic effect of the past on the *habitus* as follows: "The *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (1980/1990, p. 55). In this respect, narratives exist in the realm between freedom and determinism.

The potential for narratives to cross borders suggests that cultures may open up as a result. What happens when narratives intersect which come from different parts of the world and which draw on different cultural traditions? In the light of global communication networks, this question is particularly relevant at present. Will these cultures prove to be a "closed sphere" (Welsch, 2001, p. 258) in tune with the classical model of monolithic cultures associated with Johann Gottfried Herder? Herder wrote that "each nation has its *center* of happiness *in itself*, like every sphere its center of gravity!" (1774/2002, p. 297). As individual nations turn towards their centres, this makes them "more blooming *in their kind*, more passionate and hence also happier in their *inclinations* and *purposes*" (1774/2002, p. 297). These comments could be interpreted as a plea in favour of the homogenization of culture. But Herder is not consistent either: Just a few pages later, he points out how individual cultures feed on other cultures, writing "the Egyptian was not able to exist without the Oriental, the Greek built upon them, the Roman raised himself onto the back of the whole world—truly *progress, progressive development*" (1774/2002, p. 299). Questions relating to the criss-crossing of cultural practices as a consequence of and precondition for storytelling will be picked up on and discussed time and again in the pages of this book.

Narratives take place in the present, feed on the past, and point to the future. They encompass both individual and collective elements. They constitute space and conquer spaces. Time and space create contexts for storytelling in more ways than one. As cultural practices and life forms in time and space, storytelling gains in importance for the I and the You in equal measure. The following sections will discuss the contexts and functions of storytelling in more detail.

2.1   Contexts of Storytelling

The notion of context is used here along two dimensions, firstly in its meaning as a setting or framework for narratives and secondly in its meaning as a content-related and structural relationship for narratives.

2.1.1   Time

Storytelling forges links with the phenomenon of time as Paul Ricœur illustrated in the second volume of *Time and Narrative* (1985). Ricœur made this point in connection with literature and history as well as with everyday stories (Meuter, 1995, p. 123). In this section, time is discussed as a point of reference for and the product of storytelling, which then becomes a product for framing further narratives. Above and beyond that, the time of the narrative itself is examined in which it takes on a cohesive role.

2.1.1.1 Time as a Point of Reference for Storytelling

According to Paul Ricœur, narratives have their own system of tenses, namely "tenses that are included, others that are excluded" (1985, p. 63). Stories always relate to the past and never to the present or the future—an assumption he makes on the grounds that in the moment in which something is recounted, that something has already happened. Stories include three past tenses: "the aorist (or preterite), the imperfect, and the pluperfect" (1985, p. 63).

In as much as storytelling makes recourse to experiences, the reference to the past is a foregone conclusion. A narrative is produced by combining heterogeneous happenings from the past into temporal units, thus making it possible to assign them to a particular point in time. This is a process of configuration as telling stories involves selecting, accentuating, relativizing, and emphasizing. In this respect, Norbert Meuter is right when he sees storytelling as being a process of selection, the purpose of which is to reduce complexity (1995, p. 133). Meuter speaks of a "synthesis of the heterogeneous," a complex interplay of intentional events and intentionally contingent events (1995, p. 128).

Memory is the faculty which enables us to narrate events from the past (Assmann, 1991, p. 185). Narrative recall is the starting point for becoming aware of something which breaches, structures, and records the flow of experience (1991, p. 185). I emerge from the sphere of pure experience

and make use of language to label what I can remember. Thanks to the "shaft of attention" (Schutz, 1932/1967, p. 73) of storytelling, lived experiences which are struck by this beam preserve a fixed past. The fluid nature of the stream of experiences acquires fixed elements (Assmann, 1991, p. 185).

For Ricœur, as already mentioned, the present and the future are not points of reference for telling stories. From Alfred Schutz's perspective, they certainly can be. Schutz assumes, namely, that lived experience can be assigned a different meaning "depending on the *temporal distance* from which it is remembered and looked back upon" (1932/1967, p. 74). The actual meaning of lived experience is therefore extrapolated from the particular "Here-Now-and-Thus" (1932/1967, p. 73). That means that the present puts its mark on lived experiences; even more so, as the "Here-Now-and-Thus" is subject to modification, the meaning of a lived experience can also change. Thus the ossification of lived experience in the memory is not permanent: It can be subject to modification or even liquidation in the particular "Here-Now-and-Thus" of the "reflective glance" (1932/1967, p. 74). Admittedly, when we consider the *habitus* of narrative, the changes in meaning which the past undergoes are not arbitrary but subject to the limitations of the forms of *habitus*, which, as already constituted dispositions, become the foundation for later evaluations and judgements (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, pp. 53ff.).

Following Alfred Schutz's line of argument, the future can also be a reference point for telling stories. Schutz takes the view that every "Here-Now-and-Thus" experience has a before and an after "with horizons opening equally into the past and the future" (1932/1967, p. 75). Experiences are not discrete; rather they are embedded in a stream of experiences which takes us to a point somewhere ahead of us. Our reflexive attention to these experiences necessarily anticipates every coming-to-be for it is located in these experiences. It takes shape in the wishes, predictions, and visions which we voice.

Narratives are connected to various time horizons, something which narrators clarify with the help of connectors like *and*, *and then*, and *because* as well as verbs like *begin*, *stop*, *evoke*, and *trigger* (Meuter, 1995, p. 133) or the subjunctive mood in German (*ich käme*, *ich würde kommen*, both translated as "I would come"). Heterogeneous events from the past and potential events in the future are placed in a temporal order from the perspective of the "Here-Now-and-Thus" (Schutz, 1932/1967, p. 73), resulting in a well-rounded story for the narrator, or a meaning-context

on which the narrator can build, thus opening up a wealth of opportunities for action.

2.1.1.2 Time and Narrative

Time is not only a point of reference for telling stories; storytelling itself has a temporal structure as it passes through a "certain passage of time" (Waldenfels, 2001, p. 19). Every narrative has a beginning and an end, even if only imaginary, feared, or desired. The passage of time between the beginning and the end is accompanied by questions as to the whence on the one hand and the whither on the other in an attempt to place the narrative in a meaning-context. The whence and whither permeate every aspect of our lives, affecting them as a whole. In his introduction, Wilmes asks "Where do I come from? Where am I going?" (Mullican, 2011, p. 14), questions which relate to the entire life of American conceptual artist Matt Mullican, as staged in his work "Choosing my Parents." In an interview, Mullican related how he had already posed these questions at the tender age of eight and concocted a story to go with them, which is illustrated in the book by a drawing of the beginning of the story. Mullican's story goes as follows:

> I believed that I had been lying on a conveyer belt with the other pre-babies, or angels or spirits, whatever you want to call them, and that there were these little doors with names above them. I believed that when I passed by the door that said Mullican, I chose to enter that shoot [chute] and that becagime [*sic*] my life. (2011, p. 153)

The beginning of a narration—whether in words, as an image, or a film—often involves an attempt to understand and explain the origins of the happenings beyond the narration. In the interviews we carried out with network actors and bloggers in the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace," which can be regarded as narratives, we repeatedly came across the phenomenon whereby the causes that lay behind particular trajectories in their lives were mentioned in the first few minutes of an interview. Take a 23-year-old blogger as an example whose blog is dedicated exclusively to fashion. On his blog he writes about fashion shows, fashion trends, and individual designers. Fashion has become his purpose in life so much so that he has also configured his own life as a *gesamtkunstwerk*. "Life as aesthetic staging" is the core category we used to identify the blogger's life principle based on our interpretation of the interview. The

foundations for this life principle were laid in early childhood experiences, we believe, which were mentioned right at the beginning of the interview. Two experiences in particular had a formative influence on him: an encounter with a medium and an encounter with a person. He recalled, "when I was nine, I held a copy of *Vogue* in my hands for the first time and I sort of had the feeling 'yes, this is it, this is what I want to do one day'." A few minutes later, he described the second encounter, with a person who turned out to be very important for his outlook on life: "My granny had a great influence on me because she always came across as a kind of *grande dame*, from the way she wore her make-up and used perfume to the way she wore her clothes." The 23-year-old used the interview to tell a story in which he located his chosen life plan on a timeline. The narrative began with what he considered to be the start of his life plan and the story, or rather the interview, ended with his characterizing himself as an expert on fashion issues who is capable of making objective judgements, from which we deduced that he was distancing himself from bloggers who "only blog on their opinion." He continued to pursue the path which he set off on in his childhood: New episodes were added to the beginning of his narration and in his imagination—the interview seems to suggest—there would be a perfect ending in the future, for example when he managed to work as a fashion journalist. The story of conceptual artist Matt Mullican also has an ending, namely one that was still in the future when he was telling it:

> I believed when I was a child … that Fate controlled my life. I believed that Fate had a television set on which he saw me and that he had a big lever, which he pulled down. The lever would have my birth date on it … and my death date, 2014. … However, the date changed later on. 2014 is the earliest I have ever set my death and it is becoming a bit scary because it is so close. But I have also set the year of my death at 2036, 2038 or even 2040. (2011, p. 153)

The end of a narrative does not only give the narrative a goal but also the narrator's life, and the beginning—when seen retrospectively from the end—gains a new meaning.

Between the beginning and a potential end stretches a sequence of events or a chain of reasoning which is grouped around the middle. The middle, Norbert Meuter explains, is a "particularly meaningful sequence of actions and happenings to which looser events can be attached" (1995,

p. 135). In the case of the 23-year-old blogger on fashion, what we called "life as aesthetic staging" could be regarded as the middle of the narrative. In the case of the artist Matt Mullican, the breaking down of the world into parts and the subsequent artistic rearrangement of those parts could be regarded as the middle of the narrative. Here the narrative becomes apparent in its drawn objects. Although the two narratives are completely different in character—the blog here, works of art there—what they have in common is that many works of art, blog posts, and statements made by the artist or the blogger in interviews relate to the middle of their stories.

With a beginning, a middle, and an end, a narrative is provided with structure. What is narrated becomes comprehensible to the person telling the story and Others listening to it as well. It is irritating when the temporal structure of the narrative fails (Kraus, 2000, p. 7). The narrator then appears to be somebody who cannot make sense of their life or does not know what they want (Kraus, 2000, p. 9; 2007, p. 39). If telling stories is one method of structuring one's own life and the world, in contemporary society, in which traditions are under threat on the one hand and the world is becoming increasingly complex and confusing on the other, this method faces a special challenge. In these circumstances, it would be fair to assume that the need to tell stories is very pronounced because doing so promises an increase in the type of security which guarantees a well-structured life and which is absolutely essential as a counterweight for the unavoidable and also important insecurities which exist.

2.1.1.3   Time as a Product of Storytelling

Time is not only a point of reference for telling stories; it is also a product of storytelling. The past, in the form of experiences, only takes shape through telling and retelling stories (Waldenfels, 2001, p. 20). Not only do past events become visible through telling stories; they are also subject to a process of configuration because narrative accentuates, relativizes, omits, and adds things. Wolfgang Kraus calls storytelling the "essence of the social construction of reality" (2000, p. 4). This is as true for past reality as it is for future reality. In line with Michael Neumann, narrative can also be characterized as a stage for the imagination on which possible actions can be envisaged (2000, p. 286). And not only that: The narrative stage makes it possible to rehearse things mentally (2000, p. 286). "What if" questions are popular communication games in all sorts of online networks. Questions like "What if you could rule the country for a day, what if you had to do sport, what if you only found clothes for the opposite sex

in your wardrobe, what if you weren't allowed to drive a car for a year starting tomorrow?" ("Was wäre wenn?" [What if you?] discussions in the group "Nicht P.E.R.F.E.K.T. aber E.I.N.Z.I.G.A.R.T.I.G," 9th April 19 to 7th May, 2010; *Studiverzeichnis*, n.d.) guide network actors towards various potential future scenarios, encouraging them to reconstruct themselves for such a future. As Kraus says, every narrative inherently includes a notion of the future because it moves towards something which does not exist yet (2000, p. 5). Mental rehearsals through narrative point to a possible future but not to one which is inevitable.

Expectations for the future which are formulated in narrative do not pluck ideas out of thin air; they take them from the past. Illuminated by the narrative beam of reflection, the past provides evaluations, priorities, patterns of behaviour, and rationales which serve as templates and blueprints (Meuter, 1995, p. 143). This is a kind of knowledge which has its roots in a narrative examination of the past and which points to the future, a kind of knowledge which expresses a "relationship to being," as Karl Mannheim, sociologist of science, puts it. What it stands for and why it is sought after cannot be "another kind of knowledge but only a kind of becoming in any case—a kind of becoming something different" (1964, p. 204). Thus Mannheim posits that knowledge also serves as a coming-into-being, namely

- A coming-into-being of an individual
- A coming-into-being of the world
- A practical domination and restructuring of the world for our human goals (1964, p. 205)

Mannheim is critical of the fact that modern society only really appreciates and preserves one kind of knowledge, namely knowledge for the sake of control combined with practical knowledge, which aims at changing the world in practical terms (1964, p. 207). Questions which cannot be answered through observation, measurement, and mathematical deductions are excluded from this culture of knowledge (1964, p. 208). More recently, philosopher Paul Liessmann voiced similar criticisms when he spoke of an industrialization of knowledge which is solely beholden to application-oriented and utilitarian principles (2006, pp. 38ff.). This type of knowledge keeps its distance from forms of knowledge which relate to the question "what it was that calls this or that into being" (Mannheim, 1964, p. 208) or which, as Liessmann wrote, represent a kind of

penetration of the world and which are directed at recognizing, understanding, and realizing (2006, p. 29).

Depending on what type of knowledge they convey, narratives engender different pasts and different futures. When application-oriented and utilitarian forms of knowledge dominate, solidity dominates too, for this type of knowledge is dependent on solidification, as represented by analytic logic, unambiguousness, definitions, formulas, measured quantities (Assmann, 1991, pp. 183ff.). We encounter fluidity, in contrast, in narratives which are characterized by 'why' questions, by attempts to understand, by assumptions, reflections, empathy, and fragments of thought. Solidity tends to be found in written narrative texts, fluidity rather in oral narratives and, increasingly, in non-verbal carriers of meaning, for example in a collection of images. Whereas a verbal language consists of discrete units of meaning which do the groundwork for analytic logic as well as the need for abstraction and calculation, the image, as a presentational symbol, includes a wide range of possible interpretations, accompanied by a certain degree of vagueness. This vagueness has an aversion to the solidification of impressions and messages.

In the field of morality and ethics, Martha Nussbaum prefers vague statements. She writes of the "thick vague conception of the good" (1990, p. 217) which draws on Aristotle, justifying the advantage of vagueness in that it allows for many different specifications in concrete cases and is therefore closer to the richness of human life (1990, p. 217). Without that thick, vague conception, we are often given precise answers which are, however, wrong (1990, p. 217). Nussbaum, admittedly, does not refer specifically to narrative, but a theory is also a type of narrative which is equally in need of vagueness; like Nussbaum's theory, narrative is, after all, an integral part of everyday culture. Everyday narratives have to supply systems of meaning which allow enough leeway to provide orientation to people of different ages and with different roots. Vague narratives are best suited for that because vagueness tolerates variation, liquefaction, and open horizons.

Aleida Assmann, who discusses the relationship between solid and liquid as a figure of thought, holds that cultural activity requires three elements: solidification, liquefaction, and oscillation between the two poles (1991, p. 182). When applied to the discussion at hand, this means that we need narrative as an unquestioned, solid foundation for our being on which we install ourselves and act as though everything were fixed and will remain so for ever. That is how we gain trust in the world in which we live.

But there are situations in which we are dependent on the opposite: on the unfinished, the fluid. According to Schutz and Luckmann, such a situation arises when

- "[A] problem is set off against a background of self-evidency" (1974, p. 10).
- The "current experience" can no longer be integrated in a "typical reference schema" (1974, p. 10) for our narrations.
- An "actual experience may contradict a type" (1974, p. 10).

Such situations undermine our confidence because they deprive us of our basis for acting (Zoll, 1993, p. 3). We are more likely to overcome them when our narratives have room for interpretation and manoeuvre, when they include ideas which can be developed further, in short, when they are unfinished. In structural terms, such situations apply to the caesuras in our life trajectories, for example during the transition from childhood to adulthood, or from the workforce to retirement.

Such situations also arise on a social level, even more so nowadays, caused by increasing mobility, whether real or virtual, which brings us into contact with other systems of symbols which put our own into perspective or make us question familiar value systems and norms as a consequence of political and economic crises. Day in, day out, we are confronted with events which we are no longer able to integrate automatically into the interpretative systems we are familiar with. The subject is facing new challenges, requiring changes in thinking, new perspectives, a search for new explanations. The old tales have started to crumble. Which stories do people tell these days? What tales do they hope will help them get back on their feet?

2.1.2   Space

Just like time, space creates a context for narrating. And in this case, too, the notion of context relates, firstly, to the setting or framework of the narrative and, secondly, to its structural relationship. The second dimension implies the constitution of space in the narrative itself whereby space appears as the product of narrating.

Whereas the connections between narrative and time focus on the narrative flow, the progression of a narrative, procedural matters, the before and after, in the connections between narrative and space, it is the

descriptions of the position of narrative elements and their relationship to one another as well as questions of proximity and distance, of expansion and affiliation, of openings and limitations which gain in importance.

Long before the introduction of digital media, space and narrative were linked in the concept of narrative space. Exploring the history of gossip, Birgit Althans (2000) reveals close connections between gossip, as one commonplace narrative form, and space, as the housing, or encasement, and product of narrating. She developed her theory using the example of the history of doing the laundry, which was traditionally a communal activity and was always accompanied by stories which the washerwomen swapped amongst themselves. Part of the process was carried out in the house and part of it outside. The stories varied depending on where they were told. The repeated phases of soaking the washing with endless amounts of water inside the house were associated with the narrating of old stories, legends, and horror stories (Althans, 2000, p. 57). The beating and rinsing of the laundry outside the house was a loud and cheerful affair, Althans established, during which stains on underwear which bore witness to the owner's sexual activities were subjected to professional interpretations (2000, p. 49). While chatting and gossiping, the women's own practical knowledge on how to remove the stains was interwoven with speculation as to their origins (2000, p. 49). Through the combination of manual labour and narrative, the washerwomen constituted a working space which was located in the sphere of reproductive work.

In the same way that women had their washing places, men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had their coffee houses, although it has to be said that coffee house gossip did not just accompany work, as was the case with the washerwomen, but was the primary reason for getting together (2000, p. 80). Men swapping the latest information about financial matters, business, and politics served to help cover their costs of living (2000, p. 80). In contrast to the washing place, where speaking constituted the working space in conjunction with the practical work, in coffee houses, speaking alone was the space-constituting medium. Coffee house gossip is redolent of gainful employment outside the home. It arose at a time when employment outside the home was beginning to liberate itself from its connection to reproductive work and be defined as a working space with masculine connotations.

At one and the same time, the coffee house was the housing for and product of the talking and chatting. It functioned as a housing by channelling the narratives in space thanks to its opening hours, its arrangement of

tables and chairs, the types of meals provided, and having other guests nearby. Having said that, it is clear that coffee houses were open to narrative practices of all kinds; when they became a place of work, this was the result of specific, work-related narrative practices. It is quite likely, even, that coffee houses only dedicated space to work in specific corners while other corners were reserved for enjoyable chats, with absolutely no designs on work at all. Within the large space in a coffee house, different narrative spaces arose.

Examples for the link between space and narrative are not only to be found in historical contexts, however, but in modern life-worlds as well, as illustrated by Stephanie Porschen and Fritz Böhle in their (2005) study on storytelling in technical, industrialized work processes. Storytelling often begins when the technicians have breakfast together and swap their experiences with the machines (Porschen & Böhle, 2005, p. 56); it often continues in situ, that is, when standing in front of a machine, and during work breaks. The contents of the stories include disruptions in production sequences, faulty machines, and difficulties when dealing with computers. The narratives serve to troubleshoot, find solutions, and pass on experiences. Porschen and Böhle recommend that companies maintain, or even create, free space for narrating and listening and that they do not belittle it as tittle-tattle (2005, p. 63) as it is vital for optimizing production processes.

Whereas the work-related coffee house gossip transforms recreational space into working space, partially or totally, the technicians' storytelling extends official working spaces into social space. The actual working space with its machines is complemented by an immaterial narrative space which constitutes itself during the breaks and, from Porschen and Böhle's perspective, represents an essential addition to the material working space (2005, p. 63).

Just how much narrating is intertwined with the generation of different kinds of space is illustrated by the following example from a religious context, that of the confessional box (Hutton, 1988, p. 133). The confessional embodies the narrative of guilt, remorse, and atonement, shaping what is talked about during the confession. The penitent is required to undertake rueful soul-searching whereas the confessor is obliged to forgive. The narrative which materializes in the confessional is not only encoded in the what and how of the penitents' self-examination but also in their bodies as its architecture forces them to kneel in humble spirit. From this perspective, the confessional box is a powerful housing indeed.

At the same time, it is the form and content of the narratives demanded of the confessional which make a confessional what it is. The confessional box would not be a confessional if sinners and priests did not meet there and take on their predefined roles, or if it stood somewhere in open country and was not being used. It relies on specific narrative practices to confirm that it is a confessional box. The confessional is a space created by narratives which initiates and shapes new narratives; as a result of this, it is repeatedly recreated anew.

The examples of narrative spaces from different historical periods and different spheres of life serve to approach the next topic, namely spaces as the product of and housing for narratives, on a more concrete basis, which will then be anchored in a theoretical framework.

2.1.2.1 *Spaces as Products of Narrating*

Rudolf Maresch and Niels Werber have addressed the question as to what can be identified as space in the first place. What qualities stand out as pertaining to spaces (2002, p. 13)? Do spaces necessarily have a material substrate or are they constituted with the help of cultural codes (2002, p. 13)? Do they simply exist or do they have to be created (2002, p. 13)? Maresch and Werber answer their questions by referring to the existence of hard (material) and soft (immaterial) spaces, conceptions of space, and spatial concepts which exist alongside each other, which often complement each other, and which can also displace each other; on top of that they also refer to hybrid spaces, which consist of "physical and cultural mixtures" (2002, p. 13).

The spaces outlined in the introduction to Sect. 2.1.2 cover each of these types of space. The technicians telling each other stories at breakfast create an immaterial working space; the coffee house and the confessional box represent material spaces but have emerged from the immaterial in the form of narratives and as such are endowed with a hybrid character. The washing places mentioned earlier also represent hybrid notions of space; material, spatial reality in the form of containers, tools, and possibly a roof, intermingles with the manual practices and speech acts of the washerwomen to create a complex spatial entity in which material and immaterial elements affect each other and are dependent on each other. Narratives are associated with all of the types of spaces defined by Maresch and Werber. Immaterial narrative spaces can become material and, as such, can give rise to new narratives, which can, in turn, become material, and so on and so forth.

Although I have taken immaterial spaces for granted in the discussion so far, a more precise justification is necessary as this conception of space collides with conventional conceptions which exclusively represent realities which are perceptible and tangible to the senses. My justification harks back to Georg Simmel, who developed an alternative to the conventional, common, everyday notion of space. For Simmel, a kingdom does not come into existence based on a certain number of square miles but thanks to the "psychological powers that hold the inhabitants of such a realm together politically from a governing center" (1922/2009, p. 544). For him, spaces are realized by "an activity of the psyche," which is, however, integrated with the activities of others (1922/2009, p. 544). It follows on from this that Simmel is concerned with social interaction between individuals, in the course of which that space is considered to be "filled and enlivened" (1922/2009, p. 545).

Simmel does not claim that space has no material quality, but he does say that sociocultural aspects precede materialization and are the decisive criteria, which is underlined by his comments on neighbourliness: "It is not the form of spatial proximity or distance that creates the special phenomena of neighbourliness or foreignness. … Rather, these too are facts caused purely by psychological *contents*" (1903/1997, pp. 137–138). It is not discernible whether Simmel assumed that the spiral of creating space proceeds in the same manner, namely that the spatial conditions which arose out of the activities of the psyche, in turn, initiate and influence new activities of the psyche.

A further aspect of Simmel's notion of space is well worth mentioning in view of the subject matter of this book, *Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*. According to Simmel, "there is only one single universal space, of which all individual spaces are portions, so each portion of space has a kind of uniqueness" (1922/2009, p. 545). For Simmel this universal space is possibly the universe itself, within which individual spaces are created as portions. This pattern can be applied to the various hierarchical levels of being. It was already demonstrated with the example of the coffee house, which can be segmented into spaces for working or for pleasure, depending on the focus of the narratives of the guests sitting there.

The internet can also be regarded as a universal space which can be subdivided into many individual spaces in the form of chats, blogs, wikis, and discussion forums, amongst others. It can be assumed that Simmel ascribed a certain degree of homogeneity to the individual spaces when he described their coming-into-being as "the human way of binding

unbounded sensory affections into integrated outlooks" (1922/2009, p. 544). Given our contemporary pluralist society, which Simmel could not have had in mind in the 1920s, the assumption of homogeneity has become questionable, on the one hand, because it does not account for the coexistence and community of people from different cultural groups and, on the other hand, because it can be used to justify exclusion mechanisms affecting anybody who deviates from the norm. However, a social construct that should be perceived of as space requires a certain degree of coherence in order to be able to appear as space in the first place.

Simmel does not talk about narratives but about the "activity of the psyche" (1922/2009, p. 544); however, narratives can also be subsumed under this notion as they create that shared meaning-context by which a space stands out from its setting but is not severed from it.

In the examples mentioned earlier on doing the laundry, politics, and technology as well as guilt and atonement, narrative practices are made use of to construct a "common referential space" (Taylor, 1986/1991, p. 27), which stands apart from its surroundings but also has crossovers. This is catered for by the narrative practices which transport values, orientations, and principles between different spaces.

The question is how autonomous these practices are, or how autonomous we are when constructing narrative spaces. The practices may be rooted in individual biographies, but they cannot be seen independently of the society in which they arose. The erotically tinged gossip of the washerwomen cannot be seen independently of a society in which sexuality is inherently raunchy; the exchange of information in the coffee house takes on its significance against the background of the economic and political nature of being better informed in the emerging capitalist society; the confession is of value in conjunction with the Catholic promise of salvation.

Using the example of the autobiographical narrative of a Japanese man, Shingo Shimada describes how the cultural elements of Japanese society are processed by the narrator "into a coherent, individual life story" (Shimada 2006, p. 78). The male protagonist, who is professionally very successful, portrays his curriculum vitae as one path which is integrated into an interpersonal and institutional network; his decisions are made within this web depending on other people, without the narrator understanding this as being dependent (2006, p. 90). By defining sovereignty as the skill of "independently and judiciously dealing with the opinions of others and being able to determine his life's journey in harmony with his

social environment" (2006, p. 85), his story gains autonomous and heteronomous traits at one and the same time.

An activity, of which narrating is but one example, is, in Alexei Leontev's words, "a system that has structure, its own internal transitions and transformations, its own development" (1978/2009, p. 36) which is "included in the system of relationships of society" (1978/2009, p. 37) and this in two different ways. On the one hand, narrative practices develop when engaging with cultural requirements and, on the other, they are usually embedded in social situations and are, consequently, involved in a process of negotiating meaning. Leontev's approach is similar to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (1980/1990, pp. 52ff.), in which sociocultural practices are constructed and ordered relatively independently of or dependent on their social foundation. Bourdieu appears, however, to allow more latitude to sociocultural practices than Leontev does. The Leontevian formulation that activities are "included in the system of relationships of society" (1978/2009, p. 37) implies a strong, social restriction to narrative practices. Notwithstanding the extent of sociocultural conditioning, narrating generates symbolically charged spaces, which become the housing for further narratives.

2.1.2.2 *Spaces as a Housing for Narrating*

As soon as spaces are created by narratives, the relation between narrative and space is reversed. Space becomes the housing, or rather the condition, for narrating, which influences the form and contents of narrative practices. The generating power of space has an effect on this as the carrier of a specific type of symbolism which narrators draw on, voluntarily or not, when developing their narrative practices (Dickhardt & Hauser-Schäublin, 2003, p. 33). The symbolic vehicle of the confessional box allows little leeway for the verbal and physical narrative practices of those who enter it. It prescribes a certain posture and, in connection with the official list of sins, or the ten commandments, the how and the what of the confession.

Michel Foucault, too, addresses the restrictive cultural code of spaces, taking total institutions like prisons, schools, barracks, hospitals, and monasteries as his examples. The story that these institutions tell is of "coercive observation" (1975/1979, p. 170), which forces the residents, inmates, or clients of these institutions to behave in conformity with what the disciplinary power considers to be normal. In conjunction with architectural features like long, straight corridors where everybody would inevitably meet up when they left the monastic or prison cell, the sickbay, or prison

yards and playgrounds which could be observed from every direction, or inspection requirements, surveillance rituals, and sanctions, Foucault's coercive observation operates with optimum effectiveness (1975/1979, pp. 141ff.). Narratives which go beyond the prescribed norms have very little chance in total institutions. Foucault takes a hybrid notion of space as a basis for his analysis by mapping out the coordination of material and immaterial systems of symbols for a surveillance apparatus which provides for a deterministically influenced relationship between space and the narratives which are potentially found within it.

Another example for the defining power of space in more recent times is the university as an institution, which is in the process of redefining itself as a space for quality management under the mantle of modern educational concepts. Universities are reconstituting themselves in accordance with a set of evaluation tools, which says something about belief in the quality of education. Quality is considered to be a variable which can be measured using these tools, arranging quality in a hierarchy, squeezing it into a yes/no format, and subjecting the educational processes to standardized criteria regardless of the contents and character of the learning events. As evaluation systems can also be used to monitor and appraise teaching staff, and thus to advance or hinder their academic careers, it can be reasonably assumed that the beliefs about education that the evaluation tools embody will become hallmarks for university courses. That would come very close to the technologies of standardization and discipline as described by Foucault.

Even though the spaces which are constituted by narratives always have an influence on the narrative practices which arise in them, this influence does not necessarily have to be restrictive. It can also develop towards the expansive, the diverse, the experimental, as discernible in the interview with conceptual artist Matt Mullican, who said: "In fact, I love cities that are so iconic they almost become a graphic sign" (2011, p. 195). Commenting on the walled city that he had drawn, he wrote: "The city is a box that enables me to put everything there is inside of it" (2011, p. 203). This "everything" is neither restricted nor limited, and yet the box remains a housing.

Let us now turn to the virtual narrative space of the internet. How do the specifics of this space colour the narratives of its users? A core feature of virtual space is that its users do not have a physical presence, at least not in the sense of having real encounters. I would like to illustrate what this means for narratives in the internet by using some exemplary statements

from the interview with a 12-year-old girl who regularly used a digital children's network, *SWR Kindernetz* (2020). The 12-year-old participated in online role-playing games together with Others; at the same time she was a member of her school's theatre group. When comparing the online and offline role-playing games, one observes that corporeality is a key factor which plays a role at school and is absent online. Her explanation went as follows: "In *SWR Kindernetz* you don't see the other people who play a role, well actually, you don't see anything about them … and in the theatre group you have to express your role with facial expressions and gestures." She found that acting at school was much nicer but then pointed out that the digital role-playing games allowed her to carry out experiments: "Usually I play the bimbo, although that's not what I'm like for real, but I find it really exciting to play that role." Shortly afterwards, she revealed that she also experimented with gender roles online, sometimes playing a boy and sometimes a girl. From the point of view of the young network actor, the narrative housing of the internet has an effect on the genesis of her stories due to the inadmissibility of corporeality, being both restrictive and plot-enhancing at the same time. Her response to this contradiction was equally ambivalent.

2.1.2.3 Spatial Connections

Nowadays we move in many different narrative spaces rather than in just one. Under the conditions of a pluralist society, narrative spaces are multiplying. Wolfgang Welsch talks about a "life in the plural" (1991, p. 352), which unfolds at the crossing points of different social and cultural settings. These crossing points occur daily and often in quick succession. Whereas the stories told by family members at the breakfast table are about family matters, the discussions at a meeting later on that morning, in an architectural practice, for example, concern plans for a residential development around which various stories have grown up about why what should be built and how. At lunch, a get-together with a friend is on the programme, including the saga of their ongoing divorce; the afternoon's workshop includes a debate about the (hi)story of architecture. After work, your children recount what happened at school, your spouse talks about what went on in his or her job as a doctor, lawyer, or software developer, and after the evening meal you start planning your next holiday online, hungering for the big wide world and taking part in stories about adventures, foreign traditions, and cultures.

This description presumably covers just a few of the narrative spaces which the modern subject can be confronted with on a daily basis. Some of them are located close by, in geographical terms, whereas others are far away, in other countries and on other continents. Digital media help transport them into our field of perception and experience. In the wake of global migration flows, narratives from other cultures literally arrive on our doorstep as well. Dickhardt and Hauser-Schäublin refer to multi-ethnic cities like London, where migration has caused one place to constitute itself as an ensemble of highly diverse places; in other words, places from all over the world have gathered together in one place (2003, p. 15). What I have just depicted here as a development from the twenty-first century reminds us of Simmel's proposition whereby, within a large space, many small spaces are portions of the large space (1922/2009, p. 545). These "portions of space" reflect the different, culturally configured ensembles of individual life stories.

The juxtaposition of various narrative spaces is not the end of the story, however. According to Daniela Ahrens, spaces are not immobile (2003, p. 187). It is their sociocultural constitution which makes them mobile, with their narratives bridging the gap between these spaces. When people from different narrative spaces communicate with each other, these narratives—regardless of whether the communication is taking place virtually or face to face—come into contact with each other. Of course, it is conceivable that the narratives told by the Other are ignored, misunderstood, vilified, or even fought over (Welsch, 2001, p. 261). On the other hand, in the interests of global political and ecological challenges and the global economy, it is not desirable for the different narrative and cultural spaces to remain clearly distinct; instead they should become closely connected points of reference (Dickhardt & Hauser-Schäublin, 2003, p. 15). Wolfgang Welsch has predicted that life forms will no longer end at the borders of single cultures but will cross them and permeate each other, a development which he has termed transculturality (2001, pp. 275ff.). Transculturality does not happen automatically, however. It requires existing narratives to be scrutinized, transformed, and discarded on a large scale and new narratives to emerge.

The virtual narrative spaces which are at issue in this book and which count as the most recent narrative spaces worldwide pave the way for transnational narratives as almost no other narrative space has done so before, pushing forward possibilities for relativizing, transforming, and restructuring narratives by connecting interpretations and symbols from

various cultural contexts and turning them into novel transcultural systems of meaning. The questions still to be answered in the course of this book are:

1. What kind of spaces are constituted by narratives in the internet?
2. Conversely, what effect do the familiar structures of virtual spaces have on the narrative practices and contents?
3. How is the Foreign dealt with in the narratives of Others?
4. To what extent do transcultural elements crop up in digitally assisted narratives?

2.2   The Functions of Narrating

A 26-year-old Yemeni blogger declared in her interview "I'm passionate about writing," revealing that at the age of 15, she had already started to keep a diary. The blogger of today compares herself to the diary writer at the time: "There is no difference between the online and offline [name of the blogger]." She uses her blog to write about her everyday life and political events. It is not clear from the interview whether she already wrote about politics when she was 15 years old. What has stayed the same over the intervening years is that she writes about everything that is on her mind. She makes use of writing to configure her life and her relationship to the world as a narration (Kraus, 2000, p. 4). Narrative writing implies a mental move in two directions, both towards herself and towards the Other. The two directions are related, of course, but I will analyse them in two separate subsections in order to be able to describe them.

2.2.1   *Narrating as a Technology of Self-construction*

Narrative writing is characterized by Michel Foucault as a "technology of the self" (1988, p. 27), in which writers acquire knowledge about themselves so as to understand themselves better. Foucault contextualizes this technology in the culture of "taking care of oneself," which he describes as originating in the Greco-Roman philosophy of the first two centuries of the early Roman Empire (1988, p. 19). Technologies of the self are characterized by being concerned with oneself, paying attention to oneself, taking care of oneself. This can take on the form of "taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends" (1988, p. 27). As an example of a technology of the self, Foucault quotes part of a letter

from Marcus Aurelius, before he became Roman Emperor, to his teacher, friend, and lover, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, dating from 144 or 145 A.D., which may not remind us of modern-day status messages in digital networks in its choice of words but certainly does so in its import:

> Hail, my sweetest of masters. We are well. I slept somewhat late owing to my slight cold, which seems now to have subsided. So from five a.m. till nine I spent the time partly in reading some of Cato's *Agriculture*, partly in writing. … Then we went to luncheon. What do you think I ate? A wee bit of bread, though I saw others devouring beans, onions, and herrings full of roe. (1988, p. 28)

The young Marcus Aurelius, 24 or thereabouts, describes in minute detail in his letter what he had thought, done, and felt, who he met, and what was talked about. In style it is not dissimilar to the reports written by a 14-year-old blogger from a German-speaking country in 2011. On his blog, he wrote:

> I was on holiday over the weekend. After driving for hours and hours and after lots and lots and lots of mountains, we finally landed up in the Eifel region in Rhineland-Palatinate. When we arrived on Friday evening, first of all we had to clean up the house that we had rented.

Five days later the 14-year-old blogged: "At short notice, I decided to do without animal products like milk and eggs, for example, from now on. … Today I tried to eat only vegan stuff for the first time."

Both communications include numerous elements of care, such as taking care of one's health, or one's physical and mental well-being. The authors of these communications speak about themselves, constituting themselves as individuals in the process who are embedded in social relationships (the blogger describes the excursion as an undertaking with Others, the salutation in Marcus Aurelius' letter also marks a relationship), who are taking proper care of their health, who are mobile, who are pursuing intellectual interests. Paul Ricœur summarizes the connection between narrative and self-construction in his proposition that "in the reflexive form of talking about oneself narratively [*se raconter*] this personal identity is projected as a narrative identity" (2005, p. 99).

The individual's own personality lies at the heart of talking about oneself narratively; at the same time this is no solitary activity as it plays with the existence of the Other, with that special Other who should read what

the individual wants to communicate. Marcus Aurelius expects his friend to do that; the blogger expects his so-called followers to read and comment on his posts. The blogger calls them "visitors" in his interview and it is important to him that they are "real visitors" and not machines; here he is expressing his interest in being understood, albeit implicitly. The Other does not come into play by chance; the significance of the Other as an essential component of Self-construction will be explored in more depth in Sect. 2.2.2. In this section, self-referential narrating is in the foreground. Foucault points out that the technologies of the self, which stand in the tradition of a culture of taking care of oneself, are not exempt from criticism, interfering as they do with the principle of "Know yourself," which has its origins in the tradition of Christian morality according to Foucault (1988, p. 22). From the perspective of Christian morality, Foucault believes that taking care of oneself has something immoral about it as it provides "a means of escape from all possible rules" (1988, p. 22). Foucault observes that the members of contemporary society have inherited "the tradition of Christian morality which makes self-renunciation the condition for salvation. To know oneself was paradoxically the way to self-renunciation" (1988, p. 22).

Despite the suppression of taking care of oneself by Christian morality, we still come across this care in Christian cultural circles. It appears as though care, in the guise of talking about oneself narratively, has been given a new boost, not least because of media stages like talk shows and the internet. Digital networks represent global narrative spaces on account of their users. The worldwide visibility of a passion for telling stories on media stages signals the unavoidable nature of the Self; it reveals the significance of storytelling for constituting the Self, to return to Wittgenstein, which we cannot refrain from doing any more so than walking, eating, or drinking (1953, p. 12e). This proposition will be discussed later to the extent that those aspects of talking about oneself narratively will be covered on which the constitution of the Self depends. As illustrated by the examples cited at the beginning of this section (the letter from Marcus Aurelius and the 14-year-old's blog entry), because the narrative technologies not only relate to the Self but also construct the Self, I would like to modify Foucault's terminology and talk of technologies of Self-construction. This certainly appears to me to be in the spirit of Foucault in as much as his technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect … a certain number of operations on [themselves] … so as to transform themselves" (1988, p. 18).

2.2.1.1   Orientation and Agency

The purpose of narratives is not to reproduce reality, according to Wolfgang Kraus, but to search for meaning (2007, p. 36). In the process of narrating, things are selected, structured, accentuated, or left out, with the goal of gaining a new perspective on what has been experienced (2007, p. 40) or fulfilling the need for orientation (Neumann, 2000, p. 292). We have to imagine the world as consisting of bigger and smaller stories so that we can find our way about in it (2000, p. 292). Narrative performs the function of extracting "a finite whole from the infinite entanglements of reality" (2000, p. 292). In this manner, situations and actions which have been experienced become readily comprehensible and, consequently, communicable. Examples of such extracted stories include the blogger's report on his excursion to the Eifel region or the shared meal as described by Marcus Aurelius in the quotation chosen by Foucault.

Talking about oneself narratively implies an act of remembering with the help of which the flow of narrating is breached and halted. Borrowing from Alfred Schutz, Aleida Assmann conceptualizes remembering as "allowing something to become fixed" (1991, p. 185), which is connected with the creation of consciousness. Remembering implies that experiences are interpreted; it makes it possible to integrate them in a meaning-context, making our experiences available to us in our conscious mind (Schutz, 1932/1967, p. 105). By telling stories, we make sense of the past; we learn to understand it, "for all understanding is directed toward that which has meaning" (1932/1967, p. 108). Understanding makes us capable of acting. The potential of narrating as a strategy for remembering and raising awareness has also been exploited by psychoanalysis. Recalling and narrating conflict-laden experiences from the past, and particularly from early childhood, is considered to be the first step to becoming aware of these experiences in order to position ourselves in relation to them as a prerequisite for "enhancing our capacity to assert power over our own behavior" (Hutton, 1988, p. 132).

There is an essential connection between narrative recall and orientation as an aspect of consciousness on the one hand and agency on the other. The clearer the reflexive reference to the past happens to be, the more obvious the connections prove to be; the more secure an individual is in their view of the past, the more they learn what is of relevance for their actions in the present and the future.

A 24-year-old blogger describes this memory effect when looking back at the blog which she had been writing for five years as follows:

> I find that memories are simply important for my life because you learn from your mistakes, you can remind yourself of the positive things whenever you want, and you can remember the exciting things you did and the things that you somehow messed up, or didn't. … I just find it funny when you take a quick look at what you wrote in older blog posts and more recent ones and then you really can see how much you've changed.

It is in the process of narrating offline, in an interview situation, about narrating online that the past acquires meaning for this blogger. Through the reflexive narrating, she develops a yardstick for evaluation which helps her to differentiate between positive and negative experiences from the past. When she talks about learning from her experiences, implicitly she is referring to the consequences of actions on narrative recall. This gives her the opportunity to perform a mental dry run, including anticipating the possible reactions of Others to this action, as narrating is always aimed at Others. Searching for meaning in the process of narrating and remembering leads to options for acting in the here and now; in addition, it encourages the development of future perspectives as it also generates ideas for constituting future behaviour (Kraus, 2007, p. 34).

2.2.1.2 Self-knowledge and Self-understanding

The comment by the 24-year-old blogger already touched on the point that digital narrating is a document of the personality being moulded, this becoming clear to the blogger when she recalled her narrating in an earlier phase of her life. Michel Foucault puts knowing oneself at the heart of his technologies of the self, as we encounter in Ancient Greek and Roman texts, namely in connection with the principle of taking care of oneself (2001/2005, p. 82). The self becomes accessible according to Foucault by "be[ing] concerned with oneself" (1988, p. 19). The "'Know yourself' has obscured 'Take care of yourself'" (1988, p. 22). The tradition of Christian morality also places a high priority on self-knowledge, although it should be attained in reverse, namely through selflessness. Christian self-knowledge is characterized by a shift away from the demands of the self; the Graeco-Roman "know yourself," in contrast, demands an orientation towards this self. The Graeco-Roman view on self-knowledge implies empathy in relation to the self, which points to the emotional dimension

of self-knowledge and opens up the path to self-understanding, which includes a component of acceptance beyond rational self-knowledge. As a cognitive–emotional–social technology of Self-construction, narrating opens up a multitude of paths to the Self. Recalled experiences provide the opportunity to relive events, to awaken feelings, to visualize encounters and conversations with Others, and, thus, to be able to name them.

As soon as we find ourselves on the terrain of language, we can find templates and formulas which are suitable for communicating our experiences. The world of subjective experience is overarched by the general world of language (Assmann, 1991, p. 185). Language provides a system of shared symbolizations in which intersubjectivity is anchored and consciousness illuminated (1991, p. 185). In a similar manner to memories, language indicates a solidification, something that juts out of the flow of our experiences, something which turns implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge, propelling it into the sphere of our consciousness. An example of how narrating can produce awareness is illustrated in the story about her nickname, Gaia, recalled by a 21-year-old blogger from Italy in her interview. The story of this nickname goes back to the blogger's childhood. When she was around 12 years old, she read the series of novels called *Fearless*. The protagonist in this series is a 17-year-old girl called Gaia, who lives in New York and tracks down criminals. One characteristic of this figure which impressed her the most as a 12-year-old was, as she recounted, that "she has no fear gene and so she doesn't feel fear." Gaia became the "great role model" for the now 21-year-old blogger. Like her role model, she started to learn martial arts and also became more courageous. She has retained that courage over the years, also making use of it in her blog. She herself points out the link between her earlier role model and her behaviour in her blog, as the following quotation shows: "It's no longer important at all what other people [who read my blog] actually think of me." The story she experienced preceded the story she told, but only by telling the story did she take possession of the narrative, recognizing and naming the connection between the media figure and her own personality, only now becoming aware of the lasting effect of an experience from childhood, discovering who she is and who she wants to be.

In the spirit of Foucault, technologies of Self-construction arise at a specific point in life, which is known as *hora* in Greek (2001/2005, p. 86). This is the phase in which the young man grows up. Why Foucault only referred to males in his theory is inexplicable because the task of Self-construction applies equally to females. This task is never concluded,

being, as Foucault admitted, "an obligation that should last for the whole of one's life" (2001/2005, p. 87), although it does come to a head in phases of biographical upheaval. In this book the digital narratives of 11- to 32-year-olds are investigated. In this phase of life, two caesuras have to be mastered, one being the transition from childhood to puberty and the other the transition from adolescence to adulthood, processes which are assumed to last for a relatively long time nowadays.

Narrating as a form of self-referentiality is not only relevant for today's adolescents and adults as a strategy for coping with biographical upheaval but also when faced with the plurality of life forms and interpretations of the world as well as the resulting convolution of options for the self (Helsper, 1997, p. 177). The dilemma of the self-referentiality of the subject in today's society is being able to find the right degree of self-referentiality against a convoluted background. If the required amount of self-referentiality falls short, the Self becomes the plaything of external constraints; if it is ramped up too much, this leads to an inability to make decisions (1997, p. 177). This dilemma underlines the importance of narrating as a technology of Self-construction as it helps detect the right amount of self-referentiality thanks to its share of reflexivity.

2.2.1.3 Coherence and Change

As a reflexively performed technology of Self-construction, narrating does not become superfluous beyond the phase of becoming an adult. It fulfils two conditions which signal that it is a lifelong, indispensable technology. In keeping with Sylvia Pritsch, who thematized writing as a location for self-assurance and transgression alike, narrating, too, whether written, or using body language, or with the help of things, can be ascribed a dual nature (2008, p. 37). Narrating covers both moments of solidification, in the form of memories and linguistic naming, which promote self-assurance, and moments of liquefaction, in the form of interpretation and accentuation, which facilitate transgression. Narrating is a constitutive technology which promises narrators that they will overcome perceived boundaries (2008, p. 37). In Foucault's words, it helps individuals to bring about

> by their own means … a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (1988, p. 18)

For Paul Ricœur, the concept of narrative identity offers insights into the relation between two types of identity[2]: "The immutable identity of the *idem*, the same, and the changing identity of the *ipse*, the self, with its historical condition" (2005, p. 101). Its "immutable identity" arises from the genetic code, according to Ricœur, and expresses itself, for example, in "physiognomy, voice, and gait, moving onto stable, or, as we say, acquired, habits, and finally to those accidental marks … such as [a] scar" (2005, p. 102). Its changing identity, the *ipse*, is the product of talking about oneself narratively. Our stories about ourselves acquire different hues depending on where and when they are told, how others react to them, and how we integrate new experiences (Kraus, 2000, p. 5). They document, as Kraus puts it, "work in progress" (2000, p. 5), or are like "a journey without end" (Hutton, 1988, p. 140) in the quest for meaning, sense, and courses of action.

Whether Ricœur's allegedly immutable elements of identity really are so immutable remains to be seen; after all, both physical characteristics and habits can change. What is essential is that identities are composed of relatively solid and, at the same time, fluidly changing elements which blend in a particular way that is also subject to sociocultural transformation.

At present, the blend seems to have changed in favour of fluidity, particularly in view of descriptions of the subject in current discourse on the topic. Subjects are characterized as reflexive, flexible, mobile, and adaptable, and as such are in a position to react to the social challenges which they are confronted with at work, or in the spheres of politics, leisure time, family, or personal relationships (Bilden, 2009; Ehrenberg, 1998/2010; Kraus, 2000; Roth-Ebner, 2015; Sennett, 1998). Speed, acceleration, and change have become hallmarks of contemporary society, all of which are reflected in the (desired) constitution of the subject. The ability to change harbours opportunities for the subject because it opens up new horizons for thinking and acting, exploits unexpected resources, and bestows recognition on the subject. Change can also become a burden, however, when it is driven by compulsion rather than desire (Helsper, 1997, p. 180; Sennett, 1998). Behind the promise of individuality and autonomy as a reward for flexibility and a willingness to change lurks the risk of being overloaded and fragmented.

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[2] I use the term identity here because Ricœur uses it in his argumentation; otherwise I prefer to use terms like the Self or subject construction in order to avoid the static implications of the concept of identity.

Given the multitude of experiences and the proliferation of tasks, subjects in the twenty-first century are faced with the task of keeping themselves in one piece and not experiencing themselves as fragmented, thus having an image of themselves as a whole. More than a few will fail at this task. According to Richard Sennett, the risk of failure is no longer reserved for the underprivileged but also affects the educated, when they no longer manage to prevent their lives from falling apart: Faced with permanent demands for flexibility and mobility in their professional lives, they lose touch with other areas of their lives, such as the family, and this is seen as a failure (1998, p. 118). Likewise, in *The Weariness of the Self*, Alain Ehrenberg characterizes depression as a disorder of inadequacy afflicting subjects when they can no longer integrate the multitude of changes in their lives (1998/2010, pp. 124ff.).

Paradoxical as it may sound, talking about oneself narratively does not only foster a change in personality; it also has an integrating effect because it makes it easier to find connections between experiences in different spheres of life and to allow the different parts of the personality anchored in each sphere to communicate with each other. Referring to Rivera, Helga Bilden suggests a form of integration which does not count on synthesis but is rather characterized by the fact that different and sometimes contradictory experiences, roles, emotional states, and points of view are held in one central consciousness and that strategies are developed to cope with that (Rivera, 2002, pp. 343–344; Bilden, 2009, p. 23). Differences are not silenced but rather examined to establish whether they can be woven into a coherent narrative of the I (2009, p. 23).

We cannot do without this narrative representation of the Self and the coherence that it establishes, when we go by Wolfgang Kraus; doing without would lead to a dissolution of the subject (2000, p. 15). It is not the struggle for coherence itself that would make us ill, according to Kraus, but the refusal to struggle in the first place (2000, p. 15). A 24-year-old network actor from the USA recounted how she fought her battle for coherence. As an American, having the freedom to do what she wants is a matter of great importance for her. She took this desire for freedom with her from the USA to the various European countries where she lived, studied, or worked for a longer period of time. Her attempt to hold the different parts of her life together consists of taking photos of things she sees and experiences in the various places and producing a digital picture story out of them. These are not photos of famous sights but completely normal things like advertisements, a man with a funny hat, food that she

ate: "I take pictures of my food that I eat in different countries just … to remember 'Oh, that was a really good pizza there'." The picture stories serve to connect the different types of day-to-day life and, thus, to confirm her Self as a percipient, sentient, corporeal being. The 24-year-old is aware of the function of her picture stories as her final comment was "It's an easier way to put things together."

Coherence and change are two conflicting poles which the subject cannot escape from. The subject constructs itself through narrative and changes itself in the process because talking about oneself narratively is about Self-construction. Talking about oneself narratively requires an I that will never solidify into a fixed shape (Meyer-Drawe, 1990, p. 122); conversely, it must never disintegrate either. As a technology of Self-construction, narrating must, at the same time, counter the tendencies which it, itself, produces. It has to develop an integrative effect which creates the feeling of coherence and provides protection from self-destruction. This is a never-ending process in our lives: As Assmann speculates, no connection lasts for ever, nothing that is concluded can never be reopened, and no certainty can never turn out to be uncertain again (1991, p. 183).

2.2.2   Narrating Opening Up to the You

Descartes was wrong. It isn't: I think, therefore I am. It's: I am because you are. (Hustvedt, 2003, p. 91)

In what has been covered so far, it has shone through on several occasions: Talking about oneself narratively does not exclude the Other. Quite the contrary: Even in contexts which are exclusively about taking care of oneself, as in the letter by Marcus Aurelius which Foucault cited, the Other is kept in mind as the one who can and should listen, sympathize, understand, and react. Narrating includes, as mentioned before, movement in two directions, towards the Self and away from the Self, but even as a movement away from the Self, narrating has an effect on the Self. This section discusses the role of the Other in the context of narrating from four perspectives: the Other as a point of reference, as a topic, as a co-narrator, and as part of the narrative subject.

2.2.2.1 The Other as a Reference Point for Narrating
The movement towards the You in narrating is established in the character of narrating as a linguistic act. Language is intersubjective; "all speech calls

for a response," according to Lacan (1953/1996, p. 206). As he explains, "speech, even when almost completely worn out, retains its value as a *tessera*" (1953/1996, p. 209). In a footnote to another translation of Lacan's (1953/1968) text, the translator Anthony Wilden comments on the meaning of a *tessera* as follows: "The *tessera* was employed in the early mystery religions where fitting together again the two halves of a broken piece of pottery was used as a means of recognition" (Lacan, 1953/1968, p. 101). Later it came to signify "a token of recognition or a 'password'" (Lacan, 1953/1968, p. 101). Thus we can assume that the words and sentences that we use resonate with the Other. Lacan posits that there is always a response "even if speech meets only with silence, provided it has an auditor" (1953/1996, p. 206).

We reckon with this response when we tell something. We make the Other—whether physically present or just imagined—the reference point for our narratives. Just how strong this need for a response is can be exemplified nowadays by narratives in virtual space where the Other is not physically present, where narrators cannot even be sure that their words are getting through to Others. Nevertheless, the Others play an unmistakably important role in the imagination of online narrators, as already indicated for the 21-year-old blogger nicknamed Gaia, who makes the Other the imagined reference point for her self-presentation. She uses her description of herself in her blog to create a particular image of herself for her followers or, as she put it,

> [i]t's just that I want to show them that I'm a humorous person and like laughing about life and don't always take everything so seriously, but sometimes I do take things too seriously. I just want to give them some insights into my life.

To use Lacan's metaphor, the shards of pottery which she offers to the Others are principally her emotions and moods; the matching pieces that she desires in return are comments. She explained how she likes comments "where you can tell that they have really read it [the blog] and thought about it." She wants to be seen; she wants to be somebody that the Others will think about.

Whereas this blogger appeals to the Other as an observer and commentator on her own I, a 26-year-old blogger from the Arab world appeals to Others to be interested in his country and in a collective I. In his narratives about his country, he wants to draw the attention of the global public to

its social and intellectual particularities which, in his opinion, are not adequately represented in the state-controlled media: "I'm trying to allow people to look into things especially in Saudi Arabia and especially when they look back to Saudi Arabia through my blog to see the social and intellectual fabric of what makes Saudi Arabia Saudi Arabia." His narratives in the internet are counter-narratives. The Arab blogger implies that his narratives "arrive," that their message is understood. He can only assume this when he has the implicit knowledge, at least, that people in different cultures think and understand in and through narratives. We acquire this knowledge by realizing that "we understand others by thinking in narratives," for example when we explain why somebody acted in one way or the other (Gergen, 1999, p. 126). We learn to see Others by making them present in our stories and offer them stories in return so that they can see and understand us.

It is this gaze of the Others that we rely on, for although we belong to the kingdom of the visible, as Käte Meyer-Drawe argues, we can only see fragments of ourselves (1990, p. 116). When we gaze on ourselves, parts of our physical form remain invisible; on the level of our mental and spiritual existence, we must reckon with blind spots as well. At the same time, these are blind spots in the autonomy of the subject, but, equally, they stand for an opening up to the Other (1990, p. 116). The gaze of the Other touches the parts of myself that I cannot see, apart from through the resonance of his/her gaze (1990, p. 117). Whether it is approving or critical, this gaze signals recognition for Jessica Benjamin, conveying a feeling that I exist, that "I am the doer who does" (1988, p. 21). Recognition, according to J. Benjamin "is the essential response, the constant companion of assertion" (1988, p. 21). With our narratives we target this gaze which comments on and reveals our actions, those matters which often remain hidden for us. And in that sense, we can say that the narrative movements that lead away from us return to us as well.

2.2.2.2   The Other as a Topic and Co-narrator

The Others are not only points of reference for narratives but also the topic of narratives and even co-narrators. They are topics to the extent that the events recounted in narratives cover not only the actions of the narrator but also those of Others (Kraus, 2000, p. 5). It is not at all surprising that the actions of Others are an integral part of narratives as the experiences and events which constitute the subject matter of narratives are always established in social exchange. Life takes place in social

interactions and when we talk about it, social matters become an element in this narrative, for example when we describe, justify, or appraise the actions of Others. In this way we relate ourselves to each other. Michael Neumann asserts that we pay particular attention to fostering interpersonal relationships. He claims that two-thirds of everyday conversations are about interpersonal relationships, including stories about love, marriage, and the family, and an evaluation of them (2000, p. 284).

Whether the social interactions we experience already take shape as a pre-narrative or are merely a sequence of events is a question which is answered in different ways by narrative theorists (Kraus, 2007, p. 33). I proceed from the assumption that—because we think and act in narratives—we already endow the interactions we experience with the form of stories but that when we tell these stories, we revise them by rearranging, emphasizing, relativizing, adding, or missing out elements. And when we revise these experiences and events, the Other also has a role to play. How corrective interventions in the act of narrating turn out, such as whether narrators can uphold their own interpretation of events, is not a decision they can make alone. Frequently there are also co-narrators, who are present in different ways: those who are physically present, like when telling stories together, or those who are not physically present but whose concrete reactions (e.g., in the internet) take effect, or those who are not physically present and who have not yet reacted or will not react at all but who are imagined as potential co-narrators and, solely because of that, have an impact.

In joint narratives, the Other can become a co-narrator for a variety of reasons: because they were asked by the narrator, because they helped out, when the narrator forgot a name, for example, because they added information about their own role in the story, or because they corrected the narrator (Quasthoff, 1980, p. 125). Uta Quasthoff distinguishes between cooperative and antagonistic joint narratives (1980, p. 115). In cooperative narrating, the co-narrator adds orientations in order to ensure the communicative success of the joint narrative; in antagonistic narrating, the co-narrator attempts to impose their own intentions on the narrator (1980, p. 135).

As just mentioned, those who are not physically present can also become co-narrators. What Anselm Strauss illustrates in his comparison of everyday interactions with interactions on the stage can be transferred to narrating as a form of social interaction. Even when there are only two leading actors on the stage in the theatre, Strauss proposes that "there are also

other actors who are visible only to the audience, or to one or the other of the main actors" (1959, p. 56). These actors can be relatives, friends, or teachers; they can still be alive or "long since dead, or arising out of the actor's past" (1959, p. 56); what they have in common is that they "expect appropriate gestures" (1959, p. 56) which the actors are aware of. Thus, "the interactional situation is not an interaction between two persons, merely, but a series of transactions carried on in thickly peopled and complexly imaged contests" (1959, pp. 56–57) where everybody has a say in different, often conflicting, ways, co-creating the stories or thwarting them.

A case of being thwarted was mentioned in the interview with a 27-year-old blogger from Saudi Arabia. She had written about racist incidents in her home town. Some readers of her blog were scandalized by that entry and asked her how she could presume to write about that topic and how she had the guts to do so. As a result, the blogger deleted her entry. The reactions of Others, she felt, had pointed out the limits to her narrative: "It kind of showed me the boundaries." In this example, it is the concrete Others who spoke out on the narrator's story, contributing to her deleting it.

There is yet another possibility for Others to influence a narrative in general, without becoming active as concrete Others. This proposition alludes to the concept of "the generalized other" (1934, p. 154), as George H. Mead phrases it. The "generalized other" represents the "organized community or social group," for example a sports team which the individual belongs to (1934, p. 154). It gains influence over the individual by "[his] taking the attitude of the generalized other toward himself" (1934, p. 156). Mead calls "the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" the "me," as opposed to the "I" (1934, p. 175). In order to flesh out the possible influence of this "me," I would like to return to the 27-year-old blogger from Saudi Arabia mentioned earlier. She might have deleted her post on racism in her home town even if there had not been any critical reactions, for example if she had dwelt on the taboos present in her society and had judged that she was putting herself at too great a risk.

The "I" responds to the social "me," according to Mead, embodying the autonomous power of the individual who is creative and capricious (1934, pp. 174ff.). In the "me," the community comes to the individual; with the response of the "I," the individual sounds out the limits of his (or her) room for manoeuvre. Kenneth Gergen criticizes Mead for assuming

that individuals have little scope for independence, for considering that individuals think and act within purely social roles and, in this sense, for arguing in favour of social determinism (1999, pp. 124–125). Wolfgang Kraus, in turn, introduces the concept of negotiation, proposing that the relationship between the individual and society should be flagged as dialogic when it is a case of drawing attention to the contents and forms of narrating in the context of social processes (2007, p. 5). This process of negotiation can also be anticipatory, according to Kraus, and can be conducted with an imaginary audience (2007, p. 5). This suggestion mediates between the approaches proposed by Mead and Gergen.

A 26-year-old Yemeni blogger described such a process of negotiation in her interview when she talked about what she did or did not blog about. The topic of religion, for example, is taboo in her view: "If I do blog about religion I will be subject for death, that anybody can kill me." Initially she refused categorically to include religion as part of the narrative in her blog. But when she started to talk about the fact that the society in which she was living was in a state of transformation, her stance became patchy. She still refused to express her opinion on religious topics, but this refusal appeared to have a time limit, for she explained that "I don't think my people in my country is [*sic*] ready enough now to hear about my views about religion or rituality, so this I would not write about now, but later." My interpretation of this statement is that it is still too early for such narratives. The "not now" in her last sentence signalizes an inner dialogue with an imaginary audience. The "not now" promises that, in her eyes, one day, something different will be possible, as expressed in the formulation "but later."

The idea of the Other as a co-narrator opposes the claim to autonomy in the modern age according to which autonomy is the result of dissociating oneself from Others. It makes it clear that choices relating to the autonomy of the subject do not happen outside relationships. Instead, the much more important question is whether and how autonomy can develop in and through relationships.

2.2.2.3 *The Other as Part of the Narrative Self*
What is the relationship of the co-narrator to the narrator? When George H. Mead writes that "there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself" (1934, p. 195), it is unclear whether he was thinking of the "I" and the Other as distinct entities or as being interconnected with each other. Mead also expresses this thought elsewhere in his book:

No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also. (1934, p. 164)

Mead's statements provoke thoughts as to the possibilities of the transcendence of the I. Despite the pronouncements quoted earlier, Mead himself, in Kenneth Gergen's eyes (1999, pp. 124–125), still aligned himself to the notion that subjects are born as separate individuals and also encounter each other as such.

Gergen, in contrast, espouses the concept of a "relational being." In this concept, "it is the individual who carries past dialogues into the present … and is born afresh within ongoing dialogue" (1999, p. 131). As the term dialogue designates a communicative occurrence, which would include narratives, this suggests that Gergen's proposition of the relational being should also be taken into consideration in the context of narrative subject constructions. Karen Joisten confirms, at least, that humans are narratively composed from the start because they are "already integrated in the narrative context of a tradition at birth, which gives them support and orientation" (2007, p. 187). The integration proposed by Joisten amounts to an inevitable conjointness within which individuals become what they are. "Whatever we are," writes Gergen, "from the present standpoint, is either directly or indirectly with others. … We are made up of each other" (1999, pp. 137–138).

This conjointness can take effect in biographical narratives as tension, as illustrated in the life story of a Japanese man (see also "Spaces as Products of Narrating" in Sect. 2.1.2.1), which Shingo Shimada presented in his essay "The Cultural Self—Culture in the Self." Born in 1930, Mr M embedded all of his life choices in the context of his social environment, depicting them as the result of his prudent dealings and compliance with the opinion of Others (Shimada, 2006, pp. 85–86). This integration of his own life history in the social context complies with the cultural specifications for a successful narrative presentation of the self in Shimada's eyes (2006, p. 86). From a Western perspective, the tension in this narrative is caused by Mr M being presented as a successful, self-confident businessman on the one hand and as somebody "who, individually, cannot take an autonomous decision" on the other (2006, p. 86). Shimada's explanation is that an individual's life story is not so much conceived of as an individual project but rather as a path which is integrated in an interpersonal network

within which decisions are taken which are dependent on Others without this being perceived of as a lack of independence (2006, p. 90).

The tension between individuals and their social environment may take on a specific configuration in Japanese culture but it can also be observed in other cultures, as the example of a 26-year-old blogger who lives in a Western industrialized country shows. She talked about the way in which she ran her blog, saying that she did not always feel like blogging, if it were not for the Others, the readers of her blog. She felt duty-bound towards them; their expectations gave her a bad conscience; she even felt pressurized. As she put it, "[w]ow, you've not written anything for one and a half weeks yet again. Write something, won't you! It does put the pressure on me." The blogger's narrative shows that the way in which she runs her blog is also the result of the reaction of Others, whether real or presumed. She, too, is what she is in conjunction with others, although the given example only covers a small part of her life. For both narratives, Gergen's statement applies, namely that "we are mutually constituting" (1999, p. 138). There is, however, an important difference between the two narratives. Whereas the narrative about the Japanese businessman does not identify any discrepancies between the expectations of his social environment and the protagonist's decisions, the blogger refers to such discrepancies explicitly in her narrative, experiencing them as pressure, which she defers to, however, because she cannot do without the Others, the ones she reaches with her writing. She even admonished herself: "Now think, won't you, what you could write, otherwise they'll scarper."

There must be countless possibilities in which the Other can become part of the narrative Self, how narrators position themselves in their narratives in relation to this Other which is a part of themselves, how narrators experience the Other, and which actions the remembered or imagined Other incites the narrator to do. The controversial question remains, however, as to whether narrating opens up chances of freedom for the subject and, if so, which.

2.3   Narrating as a Technology of Subjection and Enablement

In their narratives, people become aware of their past and present; they gain orientation and agency. Narrating helps them to anticipate the future and think of new perspectives, or to change; at the same time, narrating

has an integrative effect as it connects things to one another. When we tell stories, we find ourselves; we experience ourselves as an I; we learn how to understand this I and to develop it further. In this sense, narrating serves to construct the Self.

Nevertheless, we are not alone when directing our own narratives. The Others also have a role to play, whether as points of reference, the topics of narratives, or as co-narrators; sometimes they even slip into the narrator's shoes, acting as part of the narrative Self. The Others are present as concrete Others, visible offline and invisible in the internet, but also as potential, imagined Others or as "the generalized other" (Mead, 1934, p. 154), present, in other words, as a collective stance or norm. The concrete or imagined Other which represents a You is not necessarily identical with "the generalized other" (1934, p. 154), which represents a norm.

What all of these different Others have in common is that they write themselves into our narratives. The Others are undeniably there; we cannot turn off their influence. Borrowing from the Italian philosopher, Adriana Cavarero (2000), Judith Butler writes "We cannot exist without addressing the other and without being addressed by the other" (2005, p. 33) and continues that "there is no wishing away our fundamental sociality" (2005, p. 33). But we also have designs on these Others. Our narratives are aimed at the Others' gaze so that they turn towards us. It is recognition that we expect from this gaze. We experience this gaze as recognition because, as already described in Sect. 2.2.2.1. ("The Other as a Reference Point for Narrating"), it touches parts of us which remain hidden from ourselves and are only revealed to us in the resonance of this gaze (Meyer-Drawe, 1990, p. 116). We recognize ourselves in this gaze directed at us; through this gaze we achieve self-confidence and self-assurance (J. Benjamin, 1988, p. 21). Recognition in this sense does not pin down the status quo. On the contrary: Recognition initiates change. According to Butler, "recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was" (2005, p. 27). In this sense, recognition promotes the development of the subject.

In order to achieve recognition, we have to make ourselves recognizable. The narrative is the medium which helps us in our attempt to establish recognizability. Provided that the Other is one of the Yous we want to be recognized by, we refer back to their expectations in our narratives, showing that we are taking these expectations seriously. These expectations can already include social norms which we cannot simply ignore in

the interests of our recognizability. Butler posits that we have to make ourselves "to some degree … substitutable" (2005, p. 37) in the narrative account; in other words, we have to be like Others and follow the same rules as Others. The "singularity of my story" must make way for "the perspective and temporality of a set of norms" (2005, p. 37). The norms are indispensable, if recognition is to be possible, because yardsticks are required against which recognition can measure itself. Before recognition can exist, norms have to exist. To start with, these norms are not mine as their temporality is not the same as the temporality of my life. They precede the I, creating the stage on which the I orchestrates its recognizability through narrative. This I integrates itself with its narrations in the social rule book, proving to be dependent on sociocultural specifications (Reckwitz, 2008, p. 12).

Is it still possible to take this I as the actor in its narratives? Does it not rather have to be seen as an effect of social structures? From Judith Butler's standpoint, the I still has some leeway, despite its dependence (2005, p. 34). She refers to Adriana Cavarero, who "argues for an irreducibility to each of our beings that becomes clear in the distinct stories we have to tell" (2000, p. 89). That is why "any effort to identify fully with a collective 'we' will necessarily fail" (Butler, 2005, p. 34). Just what characterizes this irreducibility and how it can arise are revealed by the following train of thought, which is also derived from Butler's argumentation. It is based on the consideration that the ideas, expectations, and plans of the I are not co-extensive with the social norms which are in store for the I, as expectations, in certain situations. This discrepancy between the subject and norms could be based on the interplay between the genetic code and specific life experiences and events. When the I perceives the discrepancy, this means that it has to contemplate these norms, just like the blogger quoted earlier began to contemplate the discrepancy she had perceived between her rhythm of writing and the presumed expectations of the readers of her blog. This contemplation implies a relation between the I and social rules in which something can emerge which Butler, in line with Adorno, calls a "living appropriation" (2005, p. 7), by which Adorno also understands a "critical examination" (1996, p. 35), or reflexivity. This reflexive relation to the rules poses the question 'What should I do?' which denotes critical dealings with the rules. Butler also sees the critical potential of appropriation in Foucault, whose intention it was to show "that social norms cannot bring forth the subject, without the subject articulating these norms reflexively in the form of ethics" (2003, p. 10). In relation to this

proposition, the discrepancy with social norms is true for every I, so also for the I that the narrator encounters as the You. At the same time, every I that becomes a You confronts the other I with its own expectations.

Neither the expectations of the You nor the social norms have a deterministic effect. They "[set] the stage for the subject's self-crafting" (Butler, 2005, p. 19). Integrating oneself in the social tradition in the medium of narrative does not merely happen as an adaptation of social specifications but as a critical convergence with a You or with social rules, with the goal of achieving recognition without having to give up on our uniqueness. According to literary theorist Homi K. Bhabha in an interview with Lukas Wieselberg, even in the position of the underdog, there are "possibilities to upend imposed authorities, to accept some aspects, and reject others" (Bhabha, 2007). In their narratives, subjects lead a double life: They are simultaneously subservient and sovereign (Meyer-Drawe, 1990, p. 151). Narrating thus proves to be a technology of subjection and enablement alike.

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The Narrative Space of the Internet

Not only does the concrete, imagined, or "generalized other" (Mead, 1934, p. 154) play a part in the stories which we tell in and via the internet, as discussed in Chap. 2, but also the media context in which we locate our stories or which serves as a reference point for our stories. As early as 1998, American media scholar Henry Jenkins argued that the digital media open up "new spaces for storytelling" (1998, para. 7). Ola Erstad and James von Wertsch flesh out this proposition by pointing to the functionality of digital media for narrating and how they have already found their expression in language:

> Information and communication technologies can be used for producing and consuming narratives in a whole new way by people around the world. … By using terms like my(space), you(tube) or face(book) we see combinations of the personal expression and the mediational means used in an integrated way. (2008, p. 32)

This chapter scrutinizes the structural characteristics of digital media to the extent that they are relevant for storytelling, that is for the production of stories in and via the internet. To this end it is necessary to analyse the essence of objects and media in depth, which will also touch upon questions of space and time. In this sense, links are established to the remarks on space and time in Chap. 2, which can now be specified in relation to digital media. In order to do justice to the complexity of digital narrative spaces, the argumentation will sometimes have to sheer off from the topic of narrating.

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3.1   THE SOCIOCULTURAL CHARGE OF MEDIA

The question as to what a medium is is answered using the concept of the object following Roland Barthes (1988) as well as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (1981). Media can be classified as man-made objects, contrasting with objects which have not undergone a manufacturing process, as we often assume is the case for objects found in nature, at least when we speak of "natural things" (1958, p. 150) in Hannah Arendt's terms. Arendt explains that "those things are natural which are not 'made' but grow by themselves into whatever they become" (1958, p. 150), in contrast to cultural things or cultural objects, which are the subject of the discussion at hand.

According to Barthes, objects, that is manufactured objects, are "subject to norms of fabrication and of quality … a certain notion of the object is reproduced … in millions of copies," such as ideas about measuring time and rationalizing life with the help of a watch (1988, p. 181).

The incorporation of ideas in the manufacturing process and in the manufactured object means that both the process and the product are endowed with a sociocultural charge; in other words, they become meaning-full. As meaning, for Barthes, is "always more or less mixed up with language," he regards objects as "structured systems of signs" as well (1988, p. 180). Objects are not only used to do something, for example "to act upon the world" (1988, p. 181), they are also used to communicate something (1988, p. 182). Barthes illustrates his proposition with the help of a fountain pen, which is not only used for writing but also "parades a certain sense of wealth, of simplicity, of seriousness, of whimsicality" (1988, p. 182).

Barthes' theoretical remarks on the object are close to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's approach, which describes objects as "ow[ing] their very physical existence to the attention and intention of their maker" (1981, p. 14). Objects and the human subject are linked to each other in very many ways. Objects owe their existence to "human intentionality" (1981, p. 14), on the one hand, in order to give meaning to the existence of these actors and, on the other hand, through their embodiment of these intentions. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton explain, objects have "an extremely important role to play in human affairs" (1981, p. 14); they provide the following examples to illustrate this point: "It is difficult to imagine a king without a throne, a judge without a bench, or a distinguished professor without a chair" (1981, p. 15). In contrast to Barthes,

in proposing that objects have a social role as well, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton emphasize that they can act as elements of the "generalized other" (1981, p. 51) along the lines of George H. Mead. As already mentioned, Mead understands this term to mean "the attitudes of the organized social group to which he [the individual] belongs" (1934, p. 155). These attitudes become all the more relevant when individuals themselves take them on as their own attitudes and interact with them. Both Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton as well as Mead posit that objects confront the subject with social processes, challenging the subject to come to grips with these processes, as I will flesh out in Chap. 4 with the stories of network actors and bloggers. To underline the point once again, the "generalized other" (Mead, 1934, p. 154) appears not only in the guise of human subjects but also in the form of the objects they have produced.

It is inexplicable to me, however, why Barthes as well as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton limit the notion of objects to material things. Manufactured objects feeding on the intentions, ideas, and imagination of their manufacturers can be conceived of just as easily as immaterial products. Thus, melodies, rituals, and stories can also be dubbed objects on the grounds of their genesis. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton themselves provide examples for this assumption when they assign objects social roles as nowadays the throne, bench, or chair is often only symbolic in nature.

This extended concept of an object as being, potentially, material and immaterial provides the foundations for my attempt to define digital media as specific objects. This extension then allows me to identify digital media, which consist of material and immaterial elements, as objects.

My notion of an object as developed following Barthes as well as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton is also linked to the concept of media proposed by media theorist Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan summarizes his notion of media in the following well-known quotation: "The medium is the message" (1964, pp. 7ff.). The "message" of any medium is "the change of scale or pace or pattern that it [the medium] introduces into human affairs" (1964, p. 8). The invention of the automobile, for example (the McLuhanian concept of media also includes technology as a medium), expedited the idea of mobility, automation, the idea of being freed from physical labour, the documentary, the idea of archiving knowledge, the internet, including the idea of bodiless presence. McLuhan underlines the message of media as being, above all, the extension of our

senses (1964, p. 4): for example, a telescope is an extension of the sense of sight, or hearing aids and loudspeakers are extensions of the sense of hearing. The incorporation of ideas in the construction and configuration of media turns them into objects as defined at the outset. McLuhan points out that every medium "is given another medium as 'content.' The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera" (1964, p. 18). Digital media have narratives, amongst others, as their content; narratives, in turn, have the medium of language as their content.

The McLuhanian concept of media breaks away from the "conventional response" that "it is how they are used that counts" (1964, p. 18). When, more importantly, he intimates that this effect is "quite independent of the freight or content" (1964, p. 8), it seems as though he would ascribe absolute autonomy to media. He negates this impression, however, when he posits that "no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media" (1964, p. 26). Transferred to the subject matter of this book, this means that the meaning of digital media and the meaning of media-based or media-related stories alike are constituted through the interplay between media, here between digital media and stories in and via the net.

Furthermore, the McLuhanian notion of media contrasts with the concept of media presented by Stefan Weber (2001, p. 22) with recourse to Reinhard Margreiter's (1999) article on reality and mediality. According to Weber, "a medium has to include aspects of the middle, the means, the mediation, and the mediated in order to be a medium in the sense used by media studies" (2001, p. 20).[1] Viewing the medium as the middle signifies that it is located between sender and receiver. When media are described as means, they are defined as carriers of information; the aspect of mediation emphasizes the transportation of information or knowledge and the rules regulating that transportation, and the aspect of the mediated indicates the freight which is transported (Weber, 2001, pp. 24ff.).

The aforementioned aspects may represent facets of media but McLuhan would suggest that their essence is not limited to these facets. Media are not simply in the middle, between sender and receiver; they themselves are senders in line with the proposition that "the medium is the message." For this reason, they are not only the means either; they themselves embody content. Moreover, the concepts of mediation and the mediated imply something fixed, giving the impression that a certain content is

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[1] All quotations from German publications were translated into English for this book.

transported from A to B unchanged, thereby not making sufficient allowance for the interaction between media as well as between media and the subject. Weber recognizes the limiting implications of the concepts of mediation and the mediated, acknowledging that the transformation of input/output is ultimately contingent (2001, p. 26) without, however, abandoning the concepts of mediation and the mediated.

For McLuhan, the interplay with other media mentioned earlier, for example between technical artefacts and content, is decisive for the constitution of meaning for both media (1964, p. 26). Communication studies scholar Irene Neverla argues along similar lines when she describes media from a constructivist perspective as being neither "a naïve means for [defining] an expansion of meaning nor a technocratic instrument to configure the world" (Neverla, 1998, p. 28). Her definition reads thus: "The medium is an expression of the synthesis of human being and machine; it is socialized nature" (1998, p. 28).

Using the concept of the object explained earlier with reference to Barthes as well as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton coupled with McLuhan's notion of media is justification enough for characterizing the internet as a narrative space and for showing that, here too, there is a connection between the narrative and space, as I attempted to demonstrate in Chap. 2, both in general terms and by giving the examples of washing places and coffee houses. Digital media constitute themselves in the interaction between material and immaterial technical conditions and cultural codes in the form of ideas, rules, and norms as the product of narrating, only to morph into a housing for narrating which also creates a framework for narrating via the internet. We can capture the essence of narrative space in the internet with a hybrid spatial concept which focuses on spaces as technical and cultural mixtures whose component parts are "mutually dependent, permeate each other, and can be transformed into one another" (Maresch & Werber, 2002, p. 13).

Like every space, the narrative space of the internet co-writes thoughts and narratives, regardless of whether they unfold in this space or in relation to this space. It inspires, spurs on, broadens conceptual horizons, and defines its boundaries, for example by limiting the amount of text like on Twitter, where tweets used to only have 140 characters and now have a maximum of 280 characters. A part of the lives of increasing numbers of people plays out in the context of these possibilities and limitations. In Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's words, "to understand what people are and what they might become, one must understand what goes

on between people and things" (1981, p. 1). This requirement is the central theme of this chapter. The following analysis of the structural characteristics of digital media which the narrating subject is confronted with in the internet should help to illuminate the meaning of a relatively new object for present-day subjects and their stories.

3.2   THE STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DIGITAL MEDIA

The notion of structural characteristics alludes to the intentions or the cultural codes which flow into digital media in the process of being created and which are realized in the interplay with narratives in and via virtual space. I do not claim to cover all structural characteristics but only those with obvious implications relevant to narrating. Neither do I claim that digital media differ fundamentally from other types of media on the basis of these characteristics. On the contrary: Many of them emerged to a greater or lesser extent as characteristics of print or audiovisual media. However, the form and intensity of these characteristics do differ in the context of digital media, which is why digital media can also be referred to as new media.

3.2.1   *Interconnectedness*

Michael Andritzky and Thomas Hauer define interconnectedness as an "elementary property of all higher systems" (2002, p. 13) which has always had an impact on the historical development of human community. The principle of interconnectedness is taken from nature, where networks appear in the form of mycelia (fungal networks), spider's webs, or neuronal networks in the cerebral cortex, and so on. One of the first transfers of the principle of interconnectedness from nature to culture was the technique of plaiting and weaving mats and carpets, which Gottfried Semper defines as the proto-technique of construction work (1860/2004, pp. 247ff.). The woven products were once used to construct the internal and external walls and roofs of buildings, as testified by documents on Chinese architecture going back to 2698 B.C. Semper describes their function as follows:

The interior domestic furnishings are movable, usually actual carpets hung on the walls, or wholly latticework or wooden panels fastened together with hinges which can be set up as desired. Sometimes they are fixed screens that allude to the character of these carpets and Spanish walls. (1860/2004, p. 257)

Networks are multifunctional; they protect and provide structure. They contain and connect; one can also get caught up in them. If nothing else, because of this multifunctionality, interconnectedness has become a "cultural technology of the first magnitude" (Böhme, 2004, p. 26) which one of the most recent networks is also based on, the internet.

Digital interconnectedness is present on four levels in the internet (Schmidt, 2009, p. 177; Weber, 2001, p. 20):

1. In the digitally assisted relationships between network actors (social level)
2. In the linking of digital building blocks of text (textual level)
3. In the linking up of individual digital devices (technical level)
4. In the relationship between network actors and computers (techno-social level)

This division into levels is for analytic purposes as frequently the different levels are interconnected. The interconnectedness between actors or between texts is not conceivable without a computer network, for example. Material things and immaterial phenomena can be interconnected as can be material and immaterial entities (Böhme, 2004, p. 17). Hypertext is one frequently discussed product of the interconnectedness between the different levels. Hypertexts arise by clicking on anchor elements, underlined texts or images which call up a new page (Bolter, 1997, p. 43) that is related content-wise to the previous building block of text. Ted Nelson coined the term hypertext in the mid-1960s with reference to "nonsequential writing/reading" (Yoo, 2007, p. 40). Modern visions of hypertexts as global archives only became possible after computer networks had been developed (2007, p. 42). The World Wide Web, which arrived on the scene in the early 1990s, brought about a hypertext explosion in Hyon-Jao Yoo's words (2007, p. 43). With the help of the World Wide Web's connection protocol, any number of text fragments can be combined to create a new text. If these building blocks of text include narratives, very many different narratives can arise out of one narrative or out

of a narrative fragment, thus representing individual–collective products. Technical, textual, and social levels come into play when hypertexts emerge.

Böhme describes how interconnectedness is a specific way of organizing space (2004, p. 25) which, in general terms, includes the following elements: threads, knots, and the spaces in between. Weber suggests that the threads of digital networks can be "material or immaterial, technical or thematic, visible or invisible in nature" (2001, p. 71), describing them as thick or thin, strong or fragile, major strands or secondary connections. Digital threads can be interpreted as the fibre-optic cables which transport the data, as the strands of discussions, threads, and links (2001, p. 69).

Admittedly threads alone, even in great numbers, do not constitute a net; that requires them to be ordered and organized. In digital space, this happens when the threads intersect and are connected with each other. When at least two threads are connected, a knot is the result; many knots create a network (Weber, 2001, p. 72). Computer-related knots are hosts, servers, or individual computers whereas social knots are formed by the network actors and textual knots by the individual texts (2001, p. 72). Knots are always places of contact, transformation, and exchange (2001, p. 72).

Knots and threads set themselves apart from something, namely from the non-network (Böhme, 2004, pp. 21–22; Krämer, 1997, p. 99). Hartmut Böhme points out that nets are defined as nets because they do not cover entire surfaces but set themselves apart from what is in between, the so-called interstices (2004, p. 21). What is this in-between? Böhme acknowledges that the in-between is linguistically elusive. For him, it has something incommensurable, expressionless, chaotic, and amorphous about it (2004, p. 22). If the network represents order, the in-between represents the disorder surrounding the order which threatens it time and again (2004, p. 22). Communicative aspects of disorder in digital networks could be posts from network actors which are off topic, or also flaming and cyberbullying; technical aspects of disorder could be computer viruses or web attacks. Both kinds of disorder threaten the organization and operation of the net, which tries to protect itself from this disorder with the help of rules and specific programs. For me, the question remains as to whether the in-between should not simply be seen as a hole that individuals falls into either when there is no access to digital networks, or when they do not fit into the structure of the internet. The former is touched on by the concept of the digital divide, which refers to groups of people who are excluded from virtual spaces due to a lack of economic,

linguistic, or technical resources. The latter can happen when the rules of the internet are broken, or when an individual's posts are ignored (Schmidt, 2009, p. 181).

All of the aforementioned groups—individuals who are not represented, those who are not heard, or those who are excluded for not adopting the rules—can cause upheaval, which creates a kind of disorder from Böhme's perspective. In this respect, my interpretation of the in-between as a hole does not, in principle, contradict the interpretation of the in-between as a location of disorder.

Böhme suggests that threads, knots, and the in-between result in a net which can be organized on a hierarchical or heterarchical basis (2004, p. 21). Hierarchical networks are linear in construction, like a TV network, whereas heterarchical networks are generated interactively without a central instance, like biological networks. The internet has both hierarchical links, for example between server and user, and heterarchical links, for example, in principle, between the actors in digital networks, as long as they are not playing a special administrative role.

In the next section, I will attempt to specify the implications of interconnectedness for narrating in and via the internet. These implications are also interconnected such that the one can often only be explained in relation to another. This means that redundancies are not entirely avoidable. The analysis is limited to the heterarchical elements of digital networks.

3.2.1.1 Reciprocity

Heterarchical digital networks are characterized by horizontal relationships, creating the prerequisite for the norm of reciprocity, or for the alternation between give and take (Frerichs & Wiemert, 2002, p. 36). Giving and taking in the context of digitally assisted narrating can mean that one individual tells a story and the Others react to the narrative by adding comments or their own narratives. It can also happen that they become co-narrators, as illustrated in the following case of an online discussion entitled "The Rose," which took place in the *Netlog* network in April 2010. A network actor told the story of a beggarwoman, who, one day, was given a rose, rather than a coin, by a poet walking by; she kissed the poet's hand, stood up, and did not return to her spot for a week (*Netlog*, 2010). The poet's interpretation of the beggarwoman's absence was that the rose had been a gift for her heart which the woman could live off for a week. Other network actors (predominantly male migrants) joined in and turned the story into one about the value of material and immaterial gifts. Initiated by the ensuing deliberations on whether women should be

dependent on gifts in order to be able to survive, or whether they should rather find a man to take care of them, the story turned, once again, into one about the relationship between men and women and, finally, into a story about the self-concept of men. In the process of narrating, everybody participating in the narrative was involved in give and take by turns; they passed the ball from one to another, took up the ideas of Others, and added their own thoughts and experiences. The principle of reciprocity is realized in this narrative by linking the social logic of barter with the logic of social cooperation in the development of multiple narratives (Messner, 1997, p. 46). This link also points to interdependencies. The action of storytelling is geared towards getting something in return: attention, acknowledgement, comments, contradictions, and other stories.

3.2.1.2 *Heterogeneity and multiplicity*
The principle of reciprocity can only work when the digital network features heterogeneity and multiplicity. Nothing could be given if all that was on offer was more of the same. Giving the same as what has been received is taboo, at least in Western cultures. If I am given a vase on my birthday, I cannot give back exactly the same vase on that person's birthday; I would at least have to give them a different vase, if not something completely different (Frerichs & Wiemert, 2002, p. 37). Give and take in the context of digital narrating also builds on diversity. In their Otherness, the Others are in demand as a source of new impulses. This is facilitated in digital networks in which people of different ages and genders from different social and geographical backgrounds come together, more so than in networks restricted by locality, nationality, or milieu.

3.2.1.3 *Openness*
A further requirement for reciprocity in digital networks is that the threads and knots are permeable so that narrators can be inspired by new impulses and so that their narratives encourage connectivity.

According to network expert Dirk Messner, heterarchical networks have loose links (1997, p. 45) or, as Petra Frerichs and Heike Wiemert would have it, "weak ties," which signalize permeability and openness (2002, p. 25). Loose links mean that the narrative space of the internet permits any number of connections between texts, allowing network actors to decide what and how much they want to tell as well as whether and how they will react to the narratives of Others. Hartmut Böhme argues that loose links are open to the unexpected, the contingent, and the novel (2004, p. 32).

3.2.1.4 Dynamics

Böhme suggests that the openness of narrative space in the internet as described earlier gives it the character of a building site (2004, p. 33). This is illustrated when, for example, narratives about the Self, in the form of individual profiles, trigger unexpected reactions, or when the narrative projects initiated by individuals are unpredictable because it is uncertain who will add which building block of text when the story is retold. In Böhme's eyes, narratives unfold in an autopoietic and evolutionary manner (2004, p. 19). The connections between the different levels of technology, individual, and text are instable, that is tentative and dynamic. That puts digital networks, as Böhme would have it, in a position to process errors, disorders, and crises (2004, p. 23). Digital networks evolve in such dynamic contexts which allow engagement with disorders; they take on a dynamic identity which does not feed on fixed points but rather on constantly changing links (2004, p. 23).

The implications of interconnectedness can be encapsulated in a metaphorical concept which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980/1987) formulate in the introduction to their book, namely that of the rhizome. The term comes from biology and describes a subterranean stem that permanently renews itself by sending out roots and shoots from its nodes. Deleuze and Guattari use the term to characterize decentralized, heterarchical social and cultural processes which are entangled with each other and which, through this entanglement, change and renew themselves. They describe how a rhizome can "be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (1980/1987, p. 10), just like online narratives can be abandoned or interrupted in their narrative space only to be taken up again and refined in another narrative space or at another point in time.

As different processes or living entities are caught up with one other, or form a rhizome, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, a shift occurs between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which the authors exemplify with the relationship between an orchid and a wasp:

> The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. (1980/1987, p. 11)

Forming a rhizome in digital networks is about capturing codes in the form of narrative impulses, taking over and changing codes, passing on codes, and receiving them again. The process of forming a rhizome encapsulates all of the implications of interconnectedness, reciprocity, multiplicity, openness, and dynamics. Deleuze and Guattari explain how these implications result in "a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp" (1980/1987, p. 11). In this context, they result in a becoming-narrative, a becoming-narrator, even a becoming-medium. The one and the other becoming are entangled with each other.

Rhizomes differ from arborescent systems as the latter are hierarchical. A tree is like an organization in which "an element only receives information from a higher unit" according to Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987, p. 18). In rhizomes, in contrast, there are no predetermined connections; rather, they form "an acentered, nonhierarchical, non-signifying system without a General" (1980/1987, p. 23).

3.2.2   Interactivity

Interactivity is another structural feature of digital media, and one which I have incorporated in my observations so far, albeit implicitly. Interconnectedness, in a global sense as well, would be inconceivable if people, texts, and systems did not interact with each other. Interactivity is anything but a self-evident characteristic of digital media, however; rather, it indicates "a leap forward in the evolution of media" (Leggewie & Bieber, 2004, p. 14). Although our dealings with print and audiovisual media are characteristically receptive, as long as they are not linked up with digital media, those very digital media enable us to actively engage with media reality (Ahrens, 2003, p. 177; Sandbothe, 2000, p. 88).

But who is interacting with whom or what? That is a question which has more than one answer. Media philosopher Sybille Krämer talks of "artificial communication" in conjunction with computers "because the computer user is not interacting with a person after all but with a machine or, to be more precise, with a computer-mediatized data universe" (1997, p. 92). Here Krämer still includes a human actor in the form of a computer user; elsewhere she even negates the existence of the human actor, writing "they [the computer users] are not acting as people but as chains of symbols" (1997, p. 97). From a theoretical position I could agree with this proposition as human actors are only present online thanks to their

texts in word or image. On the level of the experiences of network actors, however, it is very important as to who precisely is behind a text. A 12-year-old network actor turned the relationship between text and author into one of the main issues in her interview when she pondered in what way an author is present in a text, whether a text includes true or false statements about the author, or whether "true friendship" and "true love" are possible in the internet, the prerequisite for all of this, for her, being interaction with a real person. The 12-year-old's thoughts point to a tension between text and author. Depending on how authors act in relation to their texts and whether they reveal their "true selves" in their texts or not, this network actor considers their texts to be "genuine" or not and interaction with the author to be important or not.

An empirical analysis of media-assisted or media-related narratives in which neither the subject nor the technology can be deactivated as actors requires a broader differentiation of interactivity in digital networks. The first step is to differentiate between levels of interconnectedness. Accordingly, Winfried Marotzki distinguishes between user-to-user interaction, user-to-document interaction, and user-to-system interaction (2004, pp. 119ff.). To this categorization I would like to add document-to-document interaction and system-to-system interaction. This differentiation should not imply that individual forms of interaction can be clearly distinguished from one another in practice. Rather, one form of interaction always includes elements of other forms of interaction. To transfer this idea to the topic of narrating, when online stories interact with each other because they are assembled to create a larger story, the authors of these stories, each of which bears the characteristic signature of its author, also interact with each other, and technical systems also interact with each other to facilitate social and textual interactivity. The conclusion that can be drawn here is that one form of interaction cannot work without another (Leggewie & Bieber, 2004, p. 8).

Claus Leggewie and Christoph Bieber point out that pseudo-interactive media applications are frequently touted as being interactive, for example when a choice can be made between several menu options (2004, p. 9). They believe that "genuine" interactivity involves being able to "influence the content and form, the procedure and duration of a communication— and ultimately that means: active de- and reprogramming of the 'program' as well as open and autonomous co-determination of the architecture of the network" (2004, p. 9). Even if I assume that Leggewie and Bieber do not consider reprogramming computer software to be an indispensable

condition of interactivity, their definition still represents an ideal which cannot be achieved completely in interaction in and through digital networks.

And thus the autonomy of the individual in the internet is limited, partly by the technology and partly by other subjects operating in the net. The speed of a chat, for example, means that messages can hardly be longer than one sentence. Network actors react to this limitation with a wide range of abbreviations and icons, such as smileys and emoticons, which reduce complex feelings and emotions like cheerfulness, sadness, or disbelief to their essence (Tuschling, 2009, p. 168). A network actor experienced a different kind of restricted autonomy when she started a new thread on "childcare and going to work" on the business list of the network *Webgrrls* (1997–2019; Schachtner, 2005, p. 186). The female moderator posted in reply that childcare did not have anything to do with business and should therefore not be discussed on the list. Other list members rejected this feedback with the argument that reliable childcare was a prerequisite for mothers who wanted to work and therefore was certainly very relevant on the business list. This sparked off a heated debate on the question as to what could be considered a matter of "common concern," as Nancy Fraser would put it (1992, p. 129), and to what extent the network actors could have a say in this. The question about the degree of interference in the running of discussion forums also came up in the thread "Warning about tomato sauce" in the *Knuddels* (n.d.) chat community, which took place between 28 February and 3 March 2010. One participant in the forum was first warned and then suspended for seven days by the moderator because he categorized her posts as being off topic, that is as posts which were disrupting the discussion. The ensuing discussion about this sanction also covered the right of network actors to participate, which those involved considered to be extremely important.

Although interactivity is not unlimited in digital networks, when it comes to limitations, they trigger lively discussions. The "autonomous co-determination of the architecture of the network" (2004, p. 9) which Leggewie and Bieber define as being one of the criteria of interactivity is an issue that needs to be renegotiated time and again from the perspective of network actors.

How does the interactive use of digital media affect narrating? Interactivity can have an impact on the product of narrating, the configuration of narrating, the experience of time and space when narrating, and on the status of the narrating subject. Building blocks of text, for example, as Mike Sandbothe points out, can be combined to create a complex

network-like narrative (2000, pp. 89–90), whether it is the narrator who strings together or interweaves different building blocks of text in their blog or the readers who assemble building blocks of text out of various narratives, constructing a new narrative in the process. The result is a dynamic product which is fully accessible despite undergoing many changes. Narrating—whether in the form of writing a text or posting images online—is a public activity as there is hardly any time lag between writing and publishing a text online, and the network is, in principle, accessible to everybody who has signed up for it. When narrators add hyperlinks to their narratives, they can make the relations between their thoughts, memories, and fantasies even more explicit to the public than they could when telling a story orally, in the interests of maintaining a comprehensible narrative flow (2000, p. 102). Under the condition of hypertextuality, narrating also takes place as an interaction with the thoughts and texts of other network actors, in other words as a cooperative activity (Yoo, 2007, p. 40).

Bearing in mind that cooperation can also involve network actors from other countries and continents, it is clear that there are consequences for narrating under the condition of hypertextuality for the dimensions of space and time in narratives. Whereas linear time tends to dominate in offline narratives, online narratives can take place in different time zones more or less simultaneously, for example when one narrator tells their part of a story online in relation to their summer in Europe and a co-narrator from Latin America who is online at the same time takes up the story and shifts scenes to the winter which they are experiencing, maybe in combination with appropriate images. William J. T. Mitchell explains how different time zones interlocking in the stories produced cooperatively by different narrators are associated with overlapping spaces (1999, pp. 234–235).

The reciprocal interactions—whether user-to-user interactions, user-to-document interactions, or user-to-system interactions (Marotzki, 2004, pp. 119ff.)—turn network actors into senders and receivers at one and the same time. "Produsage," a blend of *production* and *usage* (Paus-Hasebrink, Schmidt, & Hasebrink, 2009, p. 19), is the term which was coined by Bruns (2008) in *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* to describe this status mix. As far as user-to-user interaction is concerned, as Mike Sandbothe suggests, interacting with Others is "independent of one's own presence" in the internet: Based on the assumption that my narrative permits self-presentation, others can interact with me via the narrative even in my absence (2000, pp. 88–89).

3.2.3   *Globality*

As a feature of digital narrative spaces, globality is closely aligned to the feature of interconnectedness. As far as digital interconnectedness is concerned, physical distances, also across national borders, have no role to play. Computer networks "connect just about every inhabited place on the face of the earth to every other" (William J. T. Mitchell, 2005, pp. 181–182; see also Ahrens, 2003, p. 176). As a result of this development, Norbert Bolz suggests that territoriality no longer has meaningful boundaries, leading him to anticipate a tendency towards a "placeless society" (2001, pp. 38–39). In connection with global digital interconnectedness, American architect, William J. T. Mitchell, in contrast, talks of displacement; the technical instruments which make this possible are called "instruments of displacement" (2005, p. 182). The notion of displacement retains the place as a context for human activity but does not commit the subject to being in one specific place. Ahrens adds that the isolating effect of a physical location has been breached (2003, p. 176); the implications of the notion of displacement are that the locations of human activity can relocate, shift, be displaced, and overlap.

Digital interconnectedness is an indispensable element of globalization; it "exercises its influence across all *strata*," whether economic, cultural, political, or social, on a global scale (Nederveen, 2010, p. 86). For William J. T. Mitchell, "the unbelievably intricate diagram of Internet interconnectivity has become the most vivid icon of globalization" (2003, p. 10). Sassen proposes that it has a double function as the means of and venue for globalization, providing a space for global actions and communications (1997, p. 231). It is in these functions that the McLuhanian proposition is fulfilled that "the medium is the message," that is "the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 8). The new scale that is introduced with every new medium brings about an increase in subjectivity according to McLuhan (1964, p. 15). Digital media help our communicative action spread to an unprecedented extent and at an unprecedented speed. Norbert Bolz's name for communication which has been intensified and influenced by digital media is "world communication"; this refers, on the one hand, to the operating range of communication and, on the other hand, to its evolved meaning for the constitution of reality. He expresses this very succinctly as "the world is everything which is communicated" (2001, p. 7). Daniela Ahrens proposes that distance intervenes as an "acting distance" (2003, p. 185);

regardless of how far apart actors are in an event or how far apart those are who communicate this event, every event can become a nearby event with the help of digital media (2003, p. 185). The potential of digital networks to interweave communication worldwide makes globality a structural feature of these networks.

"Worldwide communicative connectivity" (Hepp, 2006, p. 66) takes the shift between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which is applied in Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) metaphor of the rhizome, to a new level in qualitative terms. Beyond national borders, new communication patterns and communicative connections arise on a global virtual stage. From this perspective, it is possible to speak of a deterritorialization of communication. At the same time, the communicative contents arrive somewhere; they are read and adapted in various places; they are blended with the thoughts of Others; they are remixed and transformed into action, without geographical borders influencing their reception. They relocate themselves, reformulate themselves, and are reterritorialized. In the interplay between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, a displacement of ideas, values, and orientations takes place.

As we found out in the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace," network actors bank on globality as a feature of digital networks. A 26-year-old network actor from Saudi Arabia related: "There is something [the internet] very big out there. It's not only limited to us." A bit later in the interview, he addressed the internet as a global space for communication "where interaction between Saudi Arabians and international community started to happen." A 26-year-old Yemeni blogger also counted on her tweets overcoming national borders, arriving in another part of the world, and triggering something there:

> We have a lot of stories, a lot of issues, a lot of aspects, a lot of faces that we want the world to know about. And it will be shocking the rest of the world to know that there is another side of Yemen except the terrorism side.

In this quotation, the blogger broaches the possibility of the stories about her country experiencing a displacement, of their being perceived and taken up beyond their original territory, of their being deterritorialized and reterritorialized.

For the Arab network actors, our study revealed, the globality of digital networks was particularly important because they saw it as their chance to overcome their territorial isolation and, consequently, to present a

different image to what was going on in their country on the virtual "world stage." For those network actors who wanted to make friends online and to exchange stories about their everyday lives, in contrast, the globality of the medium was irrelevant. Individual motivations for communication in virtual space appear to determine the extent to which the global perspective is perceived. But even when network actors are not aware of the globality of the medium, their posts on digital platforms can have a global impact because they can be accessed from all over the world.

What does global interconnectedness mean for narrating and narratives? How must we envisage the concepts of displacement, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization in the context of narrating and narratives? What we can take from the words of the Yemeni blogger is that narrating in the net should enable stories about a country to be released from their territorial anchors in the hopes that they will arrive somewhere else, or be reterritorialized. In this process of displacement, the story comes into contact with other stories thanks to which the public image of a country can change. The question is how such changes come about. This can only be discussed on a general level here. In line with Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of stories could ideally and typically take place in such a way that the codes contained within the stories could be picked up by network actors elsewhere and be integrated in their thoughts. At the same time, these codes would undergo a transformation which corresponded to the needs and experiences of the Others so that they could be passed on in their transformed version. Thus the shifts between deterritorialization and reterritorialization and back again can be seen as an endless process.

In more recent discussions in media and cultural studies, the concepts of transculturality and transnationality are used in an attempt to capture the interaction between images, values, and interpretations which come from different cultural contexts. Transculturality focuses on the cultural dimension of global processes and transnationality on the political dimension; the distinction is not entirely clear-cut, however. For Jan Nederveen, "transnational culture is not new" although "since the transportation and communication revolutions, [it] has rapidly grown in scope and density" (2010, p. 86). Benjamin Jörissen (2002, p. 324), who speaks of transculturality, regards cyberspace as virtually paradigmatic for an understanding of transculturality as proposed by Wolfgang Welsch. What Welsch understands by transculturality is that cultures permeate each other, resulting in cultural mixtures (2001, p. 263). Transculturality is a rejection of the idea

of culture as a homogeneous whole (2001, p. 260); rather, from the perspective of transculturality, differences between the Own and the Foreign would be eliminated (2001, p. 266). From Andreas Hepp's perspective, a transcultural notion of culture emphasizes the hybridity of cultures, in other words the mixing of resources from different cultural contexts (2006, p. 76). Whereas Wolfgang Welsch, Jan Nederveen, and Andreas Hepp all focus on the mixing of cultural elements, Ulrich Beck's concept of transnationality highlights the acceptance of differences as a prerequisite for cultural mixture. He sees a transnational perspective as one which is sensitive to differences, one which registers and respects the Otherness of the Other (2006, pp. 5ff.).

As already mentioned, Jörissen considers the internet to be a potential space for the development of transculturality in Welsch's sense of the word. When applied to narrating in the net, it means that narrations from different cultural contexts are interwoven, along with the cultural codes they contain. New codes may arise in the form of new values and standards or life patterns beyond one or the other cultural context, which create new narrations. The concrete narrations in the net are to be regarded against the background of such possibilities.

The hybridization of narrating and the narrated signals a tentative result for transcultural processes; there are preliminary phases which trigger the opportunity for hybridization, as Daniela Ahrens points out. One of these conditions is to understand the encounter with narrations from other cultural contexts as a call to adjust one's own narrations to global communication spaces, for example by depicting one's own positions very precisely (Ahrens, 2003, p. 184). Another condition is that an awareness arises of a "generalized elsewhere" (Meyrowitz, 1989) which allows the perspective of network actors to appear as one out of many and which acts like a mirror in which they take on a reflexive stance with respect to the Own (Ahrens, 2003, p. 184). Practices of reflection document that globality can be experienced on the doorstep without it already becoming part of one's own thinking. They reflect the individual's willingness to open themselves up to the Other. But things can also turn out differently. As Nederveen points out, "it is not a straight-forward path to a global culture" (2010, p. 88). On the contrary, it is a bumpy road which includes isolation, aggression, and conflict. An encounter with the Other may not only be experienced as enriching but also as a threat to the Self.

3.2.4   Multimediality

Multimediality is a structural characteristic of digital narrative spaces which draws on new technical possibilities and cultural specifications alike. Multimedia, Frank Hartmann's term for this characteristic, was a buzz-word in the 1990s and stands for "Multiple Content Media" (2008, p. 8). It refers to the "integration of multiple media formats like text, image, animation, video, and audio" (2008, p. 8) which opens up a new "complex display option" (2008, p. 9).

In principle, media have versatile structures: The various media formats mentioned earlier have always been interrelated. Attempts have always been made to illustrate texts with images, for example, as Sandbothe proposes, without casting doubt on the boundaries between the two formats (2000, p. 83), with digital data networks "set[ting] in motion the semiotic demarcations of image, language, and writing" (2000, p. 83). Hartmann underlines how analogue culture can be converted into multimedia presentation with the help of digital technology (2008, p. 9), which can be seen as the "operational basis for multimedia culture" (2008, p. 8). Digital technology facilitates a new form of media technology, namely the convergence of communication channels by consolidating the technologies of telecommunications and the computer and by integrating media formats such as the image, writing, and spoken language thanks to multimodal coding (2008, p. 8). As an integrated media application, multimediality addresses various senses at one and the same time (2008, p. 19). The different media formats are integrated with the help of computer technology and made available via a single device (2008, p. 19). For example, further media formats are embedded in a computer, which is already a medium in itself; these formats extend and diversify its media potential and, as I will further illustrate, lead to new convergences between media. In relation to the subject matter of this book, *Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, the characteristic of multimediality is that narrations can be told in different ways thanks to digital technology, in the form of text, image, video, and sound (e.g., podcasts or digital music). In view of the empirical data available, I will limit myself to a discussion of the media formats of oral and written language and the image, whose emergence and further development precede the invention of computer technology. These formats take on specific forms under the influence of computer technology, which does not mean, however, that the cultural implications embedded in them as they arose are going to disappear.

3.2.4.1 Language, Writing, and Text

Until the end of the twentieth century, digital media principally made use of spoken and written language, constituting themselves as such thanks to the interplay between digital technology and language which dominated in the fields of information and communication.

If we start from the premise, as McLuhan did, that media influence cognitive and social processes by virtue of their cultural implications (1964, p. 8), as pointed out at the beginning of this section, now is the moment to explore the genesis and implications of language and writing. What is language and what is writing in relation to language?

Language, according to Susanne Langer, is the result of symbolization (1957, pp. 41ff.). The brain constantly translates "the material furnished by the senses … into *symbols*, which are our elementary ideas" (1957, p. 42). As the brain finds itself in a permanent "process of symbolic transformation of the experiential data that comes to it," this gives rise to "a veritable fountain of … ideas" (1957, p. 43). Speech is the fulfilment of those elementary processes in the brain (1957, p. 44). The desire to speak comes from the need for fulfilment urged by the process of transformation. As Langer points out, "symbolization [of experiences] is pre-rationative, but not pre-rational. It is the starting point of all intellection in the human sense" (1957, p. 42). The gradual accumulation of verbal symbols led to the development of language, the use of which "sets man so far above other animals" (1957, p. 26). Merleau-Ponty is of a similar opinion to Langer when he describes thinking and language as not being separable: "Language does not presuppose thought, it accomplishes thought" (1945/2012, p. 182). For him, thinking is not something "'inner,' nor does it exist outside the world and outside of words" (1945/2012, p. 188). He refers to the "orator [who] does not think prior to speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought" (1945/2012, p. 185).

According to Sybille Krämer, writing is not just "language that has been made visible and thereby fixed" (2003, p. 158). She even proposes that spoken and written language are two different media (2003, pp. 158ff.), pointing out that "syntactic units and their relations … can be differentiated with blanks and punctuation" (2003, pp. 160–161). Consequently, in a written text, it is not the "oral phenomena themselves [which are visualized], but rather conceptual contents, such as grammatical categories, as well as relations between thoughts and structures for arguments" (2003, pp. 160ff.). From my perspective, conceptual matters

are not completely alien to spoken language, even when the textualization of language is put under significantly greater pressure to adhere to institutionalized syntactic and grammatical rules. This pressure is not unwavering, however, as will be exemplified by changes in verbal language used in virtual space.

Hartmann describes how, influenced by the invention of printing as a technology of reproduction, written language asserted itself over spoken language as a cultural medium between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (2008, p. 22). He explains how printing opened up unprecedented opportunities for the reproduction and dissemination of texts and knowledge, making it possible to read about experiences, and how, at the same time, it influenced modern patterns of thought, which are characterized, amongst others, by the logic of argumentation, the transfer of experiences into abstract, visual categorizations, and the increasing abstraction of European languages (2008, pp. 22ff.). Krämer adds that "writing is not only a tool for describing but also a tool for cognizing, a technique for thinking that enhances intelligence" (2003, p. 171).

Thanks to the evolution of digital media into media for writing and communicating, written language is no longer bound to print media. The new technical context ensures that the creative possibilities of language and text are changing, depending on the field of application within virtual space in which writing and reading are taking place. Hypertext has already been presented as a new textual form (see Sect. 3.2.1) which evolved out of the interactivity and potential interconnectedness of digital media. Hypertexts can make use of self-created or pre-existing building blocks of text to form a textual structure which, at least partially, disrupts the linear structure of writing. Blogs often take on the form of hypertexts because they allow their authors to connect the different levels of communication and expression with each other.

Anna Tuschling (2009) has analysed chats, another digitally assisted text type. Chats are communications written very rapidly in real time. Often sentences remain incomplete and mistakes are accepted, in a very similar way to oral use of language. Leithäuser and Leicht characterize chats as "writing-cum-speaking" (2001, p. 43). In a chat, voice and speech are decoupled (2009, p. 153). Tuschling posits that digital technology is involved in chats as a third ear, so to speak, influencing the form of writing and language with its potential (2009, p. 163). In the specific circumstances of media-related computer technology, not only is so-called writing-cum-speaking encouraged, but the lack of physical presence also

leads to the body language which would annotate speech in face-to-face encounters being replaced by a wide range of abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons, or, instead of physical signals, a nickname holds the key to making contact (2009, p. 172). Corporeality is generally expressed in writing in online communication, which leads to the creation of new signs and symbols or accords familiar signs and symbols a new status.

As Tuschling discovered, in the medium of the chat, it is not only the form of writing and language which changes but also its contents. Here she provides evidence in the form of flaming (2009, p. 173), namely targeted insults, aggressive outbursts, and deliberate provocation, which is on the increase in virtual space due to the possibility of remaining anonymous.

Despite these new forms of language and writing which have emerged in the context of digital media, there appear to be universal, cultural implications for language, which prompted Alfred Lorenzer (1981, p. 28) to quote Langer's denotation of language as a discursive carrier of meaning (1957, p. 81). As already mentioned at the beginning of Chap. 2, verbal language is discursive because it "string[s] out our ideas even though their objects rest one within the other; as pieces of clothing that are actually worn one over the other have to be strung side by side on the clothesline" (Langer, 1957, p. 81). The process of understanding follows the same logic according to Langer in that "the meanings given through language are successively understood, and gathered into a whole by a process called discourse" (1957, p. 97). Hartmann adds that language is capable of fostering logical-deductive, analytic, and perspective reasoning thanks to its discursive structure (2008, p. 24). Above and beyond that, language connects us with other people, which is why Schade and Wenk see it as a prerequisite for the sociality of the subject (2011, p. 44).

Language also has its limitations, however, as our thoughts have to acquiesce to discursive logic; otherwise "thoughts cannot be uttered or communicated with the help of words" (Lorenzer, 1981, p. 28). It is an interesting question as to whether new forms of language and writing like hypertext might not change discursive reasoning in favour of mental processes running in parallel. It is not possible to pursue this question further in this context.

3.2.4.2 Images
Alongside verbal language, images have always served as carriers of information. Sometimes images passed on information independently, as in

prehistoric cave paintings, while others served as ornamental decoration in liturgical manuscripts or to illustrate books with the aim of complementing or shedding light on the text. Starting in the first half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the discovery of electricity and electromagnetism, new transmission and recording techniques were invented which increased the significance of sounds and images (radio and television) alongside writing (Hartmann, 2008, p. 16). For images transmitted on television, which started to make its way into almost every household in the Western world from the 1960s or so onwards,[2] geographical borders were quite irrelevant. Meyrowitz suggests that when television pictures started to flow through walls, the actual physical location of individuals no longer limited their perceptions (1985, p. viii).

The transnational nature of media images is also a characteristic of digital media, which were established as a medium for writing but which have increasingly emerged as a medium for images as digital networks developed. In contrast to older media (radio and television), everybody who has access to digital networks can post their own images online. The World Wide Web does not only ensure that there is a continuous stream of images from all four corners of the earth but also that these images have global visibility.

In contrast to language, images do not consist of units with independent meanings; the individual elements of an image only make sense in combination with other elements. As already mentioned in the introduction to Chap. 2, according to Langer, the light and dark areas in a photo, for example, have no meaning per se (1957, p. 94): "Their shapes, in quite indescribable combinations, convey a total picture" (1957, p. 95). Like Langer, Lorenzer classifies both images and music as presentational carriers of meaning (1981, p. 24, 32) which speak directly to our senses and to our feelings, which we can see or hear, and which move us emotionally (Langer, 1957, p. 96). Images are capable of recording and making those things visible which defy the discursive code (1957, pp. 42–43). According to Lorenzer, presentational carriers of meaning originate in situations or scenes; they include blueprints for scenic life experience, illuminating the individual's being-in-the-world (Lorenzer, 1981, p. 31). This proposition is demonstrated strikingly by the photo galleries in digital networks which

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[2] Whereas in 1960 only 24% of the population in the Federal Republic of Germany had access to a television, by 1965 it had increased to 64% and by 1971 to 88% (Köcher & Bruttel, 2011, p. 15).

are published by network actors for the purpose of making very many different situations in their everyday lives visible for Others. According to Langer, "the correspondence between a word-picture and a visible object can never be as close as that between the object and its photograph" (1957, p. 95) as a portrait contains "an incredible wealth and detail of information" (1957, p. 95).

Christina von Braun is more sceptical about the potential of images, claiming that, because they have "no layer other than the visible one," they cannot describe what is concealed behind the visible (1989, p. 128). Equally, she believes that they cannot show the horrors of reality in a concentration camp or in the Vietnam War. A true representation of reality rather proves to be a particularly effective way of depriving the conceptual world of this reality (1989, p. 118). It is possible that von Braun assumes this because a pure reproduction does not allow any latitude for the imagination to fill in the gaps in the visible layer. According to her, the invisible can be conveyed by language better than by images (1989, p. 127).

Von Braun's view contrasts greatly with the talk of the power of images which art historian W. J. T. Mitchell seizes on in his book *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005). He tries to clarify his idea of the power of pictures by suggesting that "everyone knows that a photograph of their mother is not alive, but they will still be reluctant to deface or destroy it" (2005, p. 31). He then moves onto advertising and the fact that "every advertising executive knows that some images, to use the trade jargon, 'have legs'" (2005, p. 31), that is, their impact extends beyond their immediate selves, masterminding needs and purchasing decisions. W. J. T. Mitchell points out that pictures are often talked of "as if [they] had feeling, will, consciousness" (2005, p. 31); in other words, he assumes that images have social and psychological agency. This agency also resonates in a project presented in a report broadcast on 6 March 2013 on the Austro-German-Swiss satellite channel 3SAT entitled "Minamisanriku: The Fate of a Town." The Japanese town Minamisanriku was affected most badly by the tsunami in 2011. After the catastrophe, hundreds of volunteers began looking for photos with people on them in the ruins. The ones that were found were cleaned in a very complex process and put on display in a school. Inhabitants of the destroyed town went there to look for photos of family members, very few of who had survived, and in many cases nobody at all. The helpers who had their say in the programme were convinced of the significance of their actions without actually justifying why. This may stem from the fact that these photos represented some of the only links to life

before the catastrophe, that they helped people to remember, and ensured a feeling of continuity for the survivors which was absolutely essential for experiencing their own coherence.

In W. J. T. Mitchell's eyes, the agency of images has become the pervasive idea of a visual culture which is dominated by images and which has become a real technical possibility thanks to modern-day reproduction techniques (W. J. T. Mitchell, 1994, p. 15; Schade & Wenk, 2011, p. 38). In relation to this possibility, W. J. T. Mitchell observes a new/old paradox, which he describes as follows:

> On the one hand, it seems overwhelmingly obvious that the era of video and cybernetic technology, the age of electronic reproduction, has developed new forms of visual simulation and illusionism with unprecedented powers. On the other hand, the fear of the image, the anxiety that the "power of images" may finally destroy even their creators and manipulators, is as old as image-making itself. (1994, p. 15)

W. J. T. Mitchell's position in relation to the impact of images does not necessarily contradict that of Christina von Braun. Whereas von Braun speaks of images which only show the visible, without a hint of the invisible, W. J. T. Mitchell envisages images which conjure up memories which go beyond what is represented, or which pursue invisible intentions with the aid of visible imagery appealing to specific wishes and dreams. Both authors appear to relate to images in different ways, particularly in terms of the room they leave open for imagination. Von Braun makes similar observations to W. J. T. Mitchell when she reports on new forms of photography which can grant or open up spaces to the invisible images which provoke the "inner gaze" (von Braun 1989, p. 125). To sum up the observations made by both authors, the power of images comes above all from what they do not reveal, which then becomes effective thanks to what they do show.

3.2.4.3 The Relationship Between Language and the Image

It is now time to pay more attention to the relationship between verbal language and the image which was suggested in various passages in the previous section, particularly with regard to the status which the two media formats have adopted in Western culture and how the relationship between these formats could be configured in the future. What language and the image have in common, according to Lorenzer, is that they are

products of human practice and, as such, convey meanings (1981, p. 30; see also Langer, 1957, pp. 96–97). Langer adds that different experiences correspond to different kinds of communicative acts (1957, p. 45).

At the same time, it is an academic truism, as Sybille Krämer reminds us, that both formats count as "disjunctive symbolic schemata" (2003, p. 157). This assumption has also left a significant mark on the perception of language and the image beyond academia. Added to this, language and the image are not only considered to be mutually exclusive media forms but are also pitched against each other in hierarchical terms.

Frank Hartmann (2008, pp. 21ff.) gives the following reasons for text being privileged in Western media culture while the image has tended to be denigrated:

- The readability of ideas and experiences is a journalistic ideal and, as such, is rated more highly.
- What can be read is considered to be informative whereas images are only deemed to entertain.
- Images are meant to be easier and quicker to decode and are therefore less complex.
- Images are believed to be superficial whereas verbal texts are perceived as allowing differentiation.

The privileged status of text was dominant until well into the 1980s, defining the world of culture as "a world of discursive signs and referents" (Krämer & Bredekamp, 2003/2013, p. 21). One of Krämer and Bredekamp's strongest criticisms is that "for a long time, perhaps for too long, culture was seen only as text" (2003/2013, p. 20). According to the authors, the "linguistic turn," or "the 'discovery' of language as the pivot for the conception of ourselves and the world" (2003/2013, p. 21), was but a logical endorsement of this privilege. One negative consequence of this privilege resulted in "misjudging the epistemic power of the image" (2003/2013, p. 21).

Frank Hartmann points out, however, that alongside the privileged status of language and text, the pedagogical value of the image has been recognized since the Enlightenment, adding an ambivalent touch to the aforementioned hierarchization. With the emergence of new recording methods and particularly since the development and spread of cybertechnology starting in the 1990s, increased attention has been paid to the image. The new technical conditions have led to a widespread distribution

of images in just about every relevant sector of society, from advertising, politics, and academia to individuals' professional, recreational, and cultural lives, causing Schade and Wenk to ask "Are we seeing a visual turn?" (2011, p. 35).

In the mid-1990s, in reaction to this trend, W. J. T. Mitchell introduced the notion of the "pictorial turn" (1994, pp. 11ff.). According to him, this turn did not suddenly appear as a phenomenon. He explains how it has its roots in Anglo-American philosophy, for example

> in Charles Peirce's semiotics and later in Nelson Goodman's "languages of art", both of which explore the conventions and codes that underlie nonlinguistic symbol systems and (more important) do not begin with the assumption that language is paradigmatic for meaning. (1994, p. 12)

In Europe, he identified the roots of the pictorial turn, amongst others, in the Frankfurt School's scrutiny of mass culture and visual media as well as in Ludwig Wittgenstein's musings in *Philosophische Untersuchungen: Philosophical Investigations* (1953, p. 48e) on the structuring force of images, formulated as follows in this well-known passage: "A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (quoted in W. J. T. Mitchell, 1994, p. 12).

For W. J. T. Mitchell, the pictorial turn is embedded in the interplay which relates the symbolism of the image to social structures on the one hand and to the potential insights and actions of subjects on the other when he defines it as "a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality" (1994, p. 16). In the age of digital reproduction and "a culture totally dominated by images" (1994, p. 15), the author mentions the possibility of the hierarchy between text and image being turned on its head, of the image becoming the dominant factor in our culture (1994, p. 15). Images of all kinds could merge, or as he puts it, "vision, space, world-pictures, and art-pictures all weave together as a grand tapestry of 'symbolic forms'" 1994, p. 19). Yet this assumption of the dominance of the image is still based on a strict division between text and image which does not take the integrative function of cybertechnology or the ensuing multimedia applications into account yet. Against this background, new "intertwined relationships" (Sandbothe, 2000, p. 83) can be imagined between text and image, as have already been revealed in

multimedia hypertextuality (2000, p. 89; Yoo, 2007, p. 44). In such intertwined relationships, Krämer and Bredekamp can already identify a new mode of reproduction for our culture as its "textualization" has shown its limitations (2003/2013, p. 24). They write: "It is … in the reciprocity between the symbolic and the technical, between discourse and the iconic—that cultures emerge and reproduce" (2003/2013, p. 24).

3.2.4.4 Media Carriers of Meaning and Their Addressees

Words and images may be meaningful as objectivations of human activities, but the realization of these meanings is dependent on their meeting with a response from a human counterpart. As already mentioned, Christina von Braun refers to the "inner gaze" (1989, p. 125) which the understanding of discursive and presentational symbols depends on; for W. J. T. Mitchell, the potential insights and actions of subjects are also a prerequisite for the meanings of texts and pictures to be revealed (1994, p. 16). Expectations of a response from a human counterpart are inherent in both texts and images. With respect to the expectation embedded in language, Jacques Lacan explains, "[a]ll speech calls for a response" (1953/1996, p. 206). The metaphorical illustration of this proposition using a broken piece of pottery whose jagged edges match the jagged edges of another piece of pottery,[3] in other words, which prove to be a *tessera*, can also be transferred to the reception of images.

The images which network actors publish in virtual space should attract the attention of Others in the same way as their written blog entries. A 14-year-old who was interviewed in the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace" sees the value of his blog, which he keeps as a public diary, in its very public character, which makes it possible for him to reach more people who might have something to say about his entries or who have the same interests. The 14-year-old counts on his posts proving their value as a *tessera*. It cannot be taken for granted that posts, whether text or image, are encountered by an interested opposite number. What Roland Barthes declared in relation to traditional writing is just as true in virtual space: "The text you write must prove to me *that it desires me*" (1975, p. 6). The so-called like button may, indeed, represent an attempt by providers of digital services to retrieve and document the potential of texts and images to act like a *tessera*.

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[3] For more information on the function of texts as pieces of pottery or *tessera*, see "The Other as a Reference Point for Narrating" in Sect. 2.2.2.1.

In accordance with Alfred Lorenzer, we can assume that the subjects' answers develop in response to texts as linguistic–symbolic interaction forms and to images as sensory–symbolic ones (1981, pp. 159ff.). Linguistic–symbolic interaction forms serve to decipher and understand linguistic signs and textual structures whereas sensory–symbolic interaction forms open up the sensory and emotional substance of presentational symbolism, as presented to us by images.

W. J. T. Mitchell, too, proceeds from the assumption that, firstly, the elaboration of meaning in words and images requires a counterpart and, secondly, that the responses of the counterpart to those texts or images differ. He writes:

> It is the realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or "visual literacy" might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality. (1994, p. 16)

For Lorenzer, linguistic–symbolic and sensory–symbolic interaction forms do not evolve as mere mimesis. Rather, they are part of an interaction game; the meanings of texts and images do not enter the heads of their readers and observers without further ado (1981, p. 156). They are interpreted, accentuated, selected, or relativized in the interaction game. Seeing, for example, is described by Hoffmann-Axthelm as an active sensory function which does not merely register but rather defines (1984, pp. 35–36). Reading and listening are also described as an interactive activity by Roland Barthes: "To read is to name; to hear is not only to perceive a language, it is also to construct it" (1988, p. 115).

When, as described earlier, the boundaries between text and image start to liquify in virtual space, when new intertwined relationships, characterized by their multimediality, arise in the media, the dividing lines between linguistic–symbolic and sensory–symbolic interaction forms are set in motion; these interaction forms then respond to texts and images. On the part of the addressees, new combinations of strategic operations and emotional–sensory forms of expression are required which do not only reveal the experiential significance of presentational and discursive symbolism but are also able to respond to it actively.

3.2.5   *Virtuality*

According to Marc Augé, "it often happens in Africa that a child who is born by chance outside the village receives a particular name derived from some feature of the landscape in which the birth took place" (1992/1995, p. 53). Physical reality is provided with an existential function in the tradition described by Augé; it inscribes itself permanently in human existence, becoming a distinguishing feature of human identity.

As already illustrated in Sect. 2.1.2 on spaces as contexts for narrating, places have always been of great significance for individuals' experiences and actions through the ages and across cultural borders. Alongside physical places, with the increasing mediatization of societies, spaces have crystallized which can be identified as virtual spaces, although this has happened more rapidly and completely in industrialized countries than in agrarian societies. What is the relationship between virtual and physical spaces? How are they experienced by the human subject? What reality status are they accorded? Can they gain a meaning comparable to the physical place described in Augé's example? Virtualization is yet another structural feature of digital narrative spaces, which I will now deal with to round off this chapter.

3.2.5.1   *The Relationship Between Virtuality and Reality*

As early as the 1980s, Jean Baudrillard had already focused his research on questions of virtuality, particularly in the light of the proliferation of media artefacts and scenarios which he had observed (1981/2001, 1994). According to Baudrillard, virtuality arises from a simulation of the real;[4] he also speaks of "hyperreality" in this connection (Baudrillard & Lischka, 1994, pp. 29–30). He was especially interested in the relation between virtuality and reality or, to put it differently, the reality status of virtuality, describing this relation as including both compensation and competition. In its compensatory role, virtuality would be the attempt "[to conceal] the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus [to save] the reality principle" (1981/2001, p. 175). One of the examples he gives is Disneyland, the American toy world, which "is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real" (1981/2001, p. 175). But everything surrounding Disneyland, namely Los Angeles and the whole of the USA, is no longer real according to Baudrillard. He describes "real agony"

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[4] This is my interpretation of Baudrillard's remarks on his concept of simulation.

(1981/2001, p. 180) as a general phenomenon and, simultaneously, notes a resurrection of the real in systems of signs, a simulation of reality which should confirm its existence. Simulation, for Baudrillard, means "to feign to have what one hasn't" (1981/2001, p. 170). One thinks one has a reality but one only has a virtual reality, a model of reality. Baudrillard claims that virtuality has its origins in the need to create a perfect, flawless reality: "So that it becomes perfect, it has to be created anew, as an artifact, because it is impossible for perfection to dwell within the natural world" (1994, p. 14).

Media productions in the audiovisual media, like reality shows, photo galleries, and multimedia self-portraits in digital networks, bear witness to this endeavour many times over. Virtual reality, in Baudrillard's mind, does not stay in its housing as the "concept of virtuality is distilled into real life, in homeopathic doses" (1994, p. 8). Or "television and the media have long since stepped out of their media space in order to conquer 'real' life from within, lodging themselves there just like a virus lodges itself in a normal cell" (1994, p. 8). The truth of television, to follow Baudrillard's line of argumentation, would become the truth for the real; likewise an online profile in a digital network would become the truth for the person who created it. The attempt to save reality by simulating reality turns into a competitive relation between reality and virtuality, resulting in a profound virtualization of being (1994, p. 9; see also Pietraß & Schachtner, 2013, p. 255).

Baudrillard's propositions did not go unchallenged. One of Stefan Münker's criticisms is that in order to ascertain whether a reality is merely virtual, it would have to be assumed that there is a basic reality (1997, p. 117). In line with Münker's argumentation, as soon as virtual reality is mentioned, this implies that "there is only one real and true reality" (1997, p. 117). Münker also finds the thought absurd that we are leading a phony life, which is implied in Baudrillard's assumption of the virtualization of being in which there is nothing beyond the reflections and illusions (1997, p. 117). The reason for such falsities, Münker believes, can be found in the desire for a world with clear, strict boundaries and differentiations as well as clean dichotomies, along the lines of real versus virtual, reality versus illusion (1997, p. 117). Maybe Baudrillard can insist on his dichotomous perspective because he does not define his concept of reality. Münker rejects the idea of understanding the virtual by categorically differentiating it from the real (1997, p. 118), opposing the dualistic method of thinking which characterizes the tradition of Western thought and which is also

reflected in our language. Ludwig Wittgenstein also made this very clear when he wrote: "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (1922, p. 74). This sentence refers to the anchoring of our potential insights in language. The consequences of this anchoring are also manifested in the difficulty of determining the relation between the physical world and virtual reality as generated by audiovisual and digital media as this relation confronts us with mixed structures, after all, which withstand a dualistic classification. As vague as the term virtuality may be, it is impossible to do without it for the time being so as to be able to identify the special features of reality as staged in the media, without having to express an opposition between virtuality and reality.

In his attempt to clarify the concept of the virtual with reference to Schutz's (1970) *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, Michael Paetau claims that the virtual is not something which stands in opposition to the real (1997, p. 119), explaining that every form of reality is mentally and socially constructed and is, therefore, virtual. It is not physical realities but constructs of reality which form the basis for our actions, as explained by Schutz and Luckmann in *The Structures of the Life-World* (1974, pp. 3ff.). These constructs of reality, called life-worlds or meaning-contexts by Schutz and Luckmann, have the character of a virtual reality because they are models. This does not make them any the less real for subjects; rather these constructs structure their experiences and actions.

Yasuo Imai, too, points out that virtual realities are not a peculiarity of the modern world or even the digitalized one; people have always been concerned with virtual realities, at the latest since the invention of writing (2002, p. 26). According to Imai, spoken language would have already fulfilled the function of "describing absent, not immediately accessible issues" (2002, p. 26). Writing, then, provided the denotive function of language with a permanent substance, thus developing a separate world which, with regard to the currently experienced world, could be classified as virtual (2002, p. 26). The image also fulfils this function, I might add; it shows what has been experienced, perceived, or sensed without being identical to what was experienced, perceived, or sensed. Münker adds that we can gain new perspectives with the help of language or images, although this does not simply mean that we see the world in a different light. Rather, we see "a different world" (1997, p. 120), which has an impact just like the physical world.

From a very early age, we practise constructing virtual realities. Towards the end of the first year of their lives, children already begin to transfer

their life-world experiences and feelings into sequences of sounds and, later on, into words; from the age of 12 months onwards, they translate impressions into scribbles, followed by drawings and role play at the age of three to four or so. At the latest when they go to school, they start learning how to write. It appears to be an existential need to produce virtual realities, which Schutz and Luckmann explain by stating that "the world is already given to [us] for [our] explication" (1974, p. 6). Only within the context of an explicated world are we able to act. Writing and drawing are two forms of explication. A 26-year-old Yemeni blogger from the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace" recalled how she felt the urge to write when she was 15 and that later this urge was transferred into the digital world: "I'm really passionate about writing. I used to write since I was 15 years old. I remember that no day passed without me writing one thing in my diary."

Münker proposes that the concept of reality should be relativized and that virtual reality should be seen as one kind of reality alongside other kinds of reality (1997, p. 119). He wants the virtual to be understood as part of the real (1997, p. 122). At first sight, Ahrens appears to use similar arguments to Münker when she defines virtual spaces as "supplementary technosocial spaces" (2003, p. 175) whose relationship with real space involves neither competition nor exclusion (2003, p. 175). The term supplementary spaces implies that realities exist side by side, as also proposed by Münker. However, as she continues to make her case, Ahrens distances herself from this standpoint with an eye to more recent technical developments. Current media trends are not characterized by physical and virtual realities existing side by side but rather in one another and on top of one another. The following scenario should illustrate what I mean: I am sitting in my office or I am outside, on the street, at a bus stop, or in a park, so I am part of the physical world, but that does not stop me from using my PC, laptop, or smartphone at the same time to log into a virtual world, for example to start a blog entry, to post my current activity as a status update online, or to start a conversation with other network actors who are located in other physical spaces. In between, I might make a few moves in a computer game. Doulis, Agotai, and Wyss (2009) underscore how physical and virtual realities intersect in such situations and become indeterminate so that new "spatial interfaces" arise.

According to Ahrens, the intermingling of online and offline realities allows new interfaces to arise between abstractness and contextuality or

between distance and proximity (2003, p. 183). What is meant to be "outside" can suddenly be found on one's own desk (2003, p. 183), making its presence felt in one's everyday immediate world. The boundaries of individual realities shift or dissolve. They become mobile, allowing the creation of mixed realities (Schachtner, 2013, pp. 20ff.).

The new mixed relationships between physical realities and virtual realities in cyberspace prompt reactions from those who move in and between these realities. In the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace," we came across many such reactions; what they had in common was that they were an attempt to clarify the reality status of the virtual. When the 26-year-old Arab blogger cited earlier explained that "there is no difference between the online and offline [name of the blogger]," she was claiming that, for her, the physical and virtual worlds are equally real, backed up by her organizing her online existence like her real-life existence. A 23-year-old blogger from Austria had also expressed his interest in organizing his virtual space like in real space, for example when he posted on his feelings in his blog:

> I think that it is very important that people have this emotional bond with a blogger and that they also know that when I write about such feelings, they [other network actors] can count on the fact that what I write is really true.

For the 23-year-old, true feelings are presumably authentic feelings. We do not know whether his feelings are the same beyond the blogosphere, but while he is writing, that is what he feels, in his mind, and that is crucial for him to experience virtual reality as being real and to let Others experience it as real as well. In contrast, a 12-year-old network actor was not yet so sure about how she should categorize virtual reality in relation to physical reality. In the course of the interview, the 12-year-old returned to the question time and again as to whether activities which develop online are to be rated as right, genuine, and, consequently, important or not. She talked about a boy who had asked her online whether she wanted to be his girlfriend. She reacted to his offer with a counterquestion, asking him "why he can't look for a girlfriend in his real life." When emotional commitment is potentially involved, questions about the degree of reality in the virtual are particularly sensitive as this is associated with a particularly high risk in case the virtual world does just turn out to be an illusory world.

3.2.5.2 *Virtual Spaces as Heterotopias*

The ongoing attempt to determine the quality of the virtual was characterized in the previous section by an exploration of the relation between virtuality and physical reality; now the characteristics of virtuality are brought to the fore as illustrated in digital narrative spaces. By the late 1960s, Michel Foucault had already developed a concept which is highly suited to grasping the idiosyncrasies of digital narrative spaces, namely the concept of heterotopias (1967/1997). Foucault uses this concept to characterize places like psychiatric clinics, prisons, cemeteries, gardens, ships, brothels, and libraries (1967/1997, pp. 333ff.), special places in a society in which physical dimensions intermingle with specific ideologies, visions, and life trajectories. Naturally, Foucault did not have the virtual spaces of cyberspace in mind when he developed his concept; nevertheless it can be used to help characterize them.

For Foucault, heterotopias are "real and effective spaces" which are part of society but which "constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia" (1967/1997, p. 332). On the one hand, they represent a society's culture; on the other hand, they question it (1967/1997, p. 332). Foucault distinguishes between heterotopias and utopias, the latter representing what he calls "spaces that are by their very essence fundamentally unreal" (1967/1997, p. 332) whereas heterotopias, as already mentioned, are real spaces for Foucault. He concedes that mixed forms also exist in the sense that what already exists is mixed in with dreams and ideals (1967/1997, p. 332).

Foucault describes heterotopias with the help of specific principles, which can generally be applied to digital narrative spaces as well. One principle describes how a heterotopia can combine "in a single real place different spaces and locations" (1967/1997, p. 334). The example Foucault gives is of a Persian garden, which consists of four rectangles standing for the four parts of the earth, with a sacred space in the middle symbolizing the centre of the world (1967/1997, p. 334). Gardens were then reproduced in carpets in which, for Foucault, "the world in its entirety achieved symbolic perfection" (1967/1997, p. 334).

The internet is akin to a Persian garden, or even takes its structure one step further, because it works like an enormous "parallel computation device" (William J. T. Mitchell, 2003, p. 13), which not only has four or five spaces but provides an immensely large number of them. We encounter digital workspaces and study spaces as well as spaces for playing, flirting, and discussing, which open up to the narrative activities of subjects.

These spaces do not exist next to each other; they are all available to us simultaneously. Thomas Steinmaurer suggests that we would have to start from the premise of "a liquifying overlapping and co-existence of different representative spaces" (2013, p. 11). Steinmaurer assumes that subjects are "exposed to the intermingling of the simultaneous effects of different spatial references" (2013, p. 11), which he attempts to capture with the term "hybrid multilocality" (2013, p. 11). Given the overlapping of spaces, it would be appropriate to talk of a translocality. In addition to that, the miniaturization and merging of digital technology ensure that the overlapping spaces have become transportable and can be accessed on a smartphone in just about every situation (Schachtner, 2013, p. 20). These technical possibilities are also reflected in the subjects' actions. In the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace," a Yemeni blogger talked about the simultaneity of different spatial references as follows: "When I open my laptop it's my Facebook open, my Twitter, my blog, BBC, Yemen—it's just everything." As she sees it, she is present on all of the various platforms at the same time. Sherry Turkle came across a similar phenomenon with a young network actor in one of her studies, explaining that "she can keep her parallel lives open as windows on her screen" (2011, p. 194). Thus the overlapping spatial references not only apply to interfaces between virtual and physical reality, as described in Sect. 3.2.5.1 ("The Relationship Between Virtuality and Reality"), but also exist within the virtual world of cyberspace.

In another principle, Foucault ascertains that heterotopias are connected to "bits and pieces of time" (1967/1997, p. 334). They function fully "when men find themselves in a sort of total breach of their traditional time" (1967/1997, p. 334). In the light of his examples about breaching time, Foucault appears to associate "traditional time" with a steady flow of time. According to Foucault, the cemetery is a "highly heterotopian place," for it represents the end of human lives. Heterotopias are also places which are dominated by the idea of accumulating everything, all epochs, all thoughts, all tastes, driven by "the desire to enclose all times … within a single place" (1967/1997, p. 334), as is the case in museums or in libraries. In contrast to that, there are also heterotopias "without a bias toward the eternal" which are "linked to time in its more futile, transitory and precarious aspects," such as fairs (1967/1997, pp. 334–335).

The virtuality of cyberspace features different types of breach with traditional time, some of which match Foucault's deliberations and some of

which point to new manifestations. Virtual spaces are incredibly large global archives for information and texts which save the stories of their users, often without their knowledge and not uncommonly against their will. They have storage capacity on a scale hitherto unknown. Conversely, yet also in line with Foucault's concept of heterotopias, virtual spaces are fleeting to a degree hitherto unknown. The stories told in chats, for example, whiz across the screen in a matter of seconds. Narrations which are co-constructed in dialogue, for example in a communication forum or a computer game, can be abandoned from one second to the next, with no chance of their being continued.

Above and beyond that, there are new types of breach with traditional time in virtual narrative spaces caused by the blurring of borders enabled by digital technology. This is revealed in the liquifying of boundaries between day and night; storytelling can happen round the clock and storytellers can even bank on an audience round the clock.

Another way of blurring borders concerns work and leisure time. Under the influence of digital technology, at present gainful employment is moving away from the characteristics of the Fordist–Taylorist model of work, which presupposes invariable borders between gainful employment and other areas of one's life (von Streit, 2011, p. 24), towards a liquification of these borders. As the technology which promotes this liquification has become mobile, the working population find themselves in these heterotopias characterized by numerous time references on a virtually permanent basis (Roth-Ebner, 2015, pp. 256ff.; Schachtner, 2013, pp. 23–24).

A third principle describes heterotopias as always "presuppos[ing] a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time" (Foucault, 1967/1997, p. 335). Either individuals are forced to enter spaces such as a prison or a locked psychiatric ward, thus experiencing the closing of the space, or they are only allowed to enter a space with permission and after carrying out certain rituals, as in an Islamic hammam. The characteristics of this principle are also found in virtual narrative spaces. For the most part they are spaces which are globally accessible, which makes them particularly attractive to narrators as narrative spaces. Computer networks breach the isolating effect of individual spaces, making postings visible on a global scale (Ahrens, 2003, p. 176). The pressure to enter these spaces is implicit rather than explicit and is associated with the increasing importance of such spaces as subcultural partial public spaces. Adolescents, for example, who do not play certain computer games cannot participate in some

aspects of communication in their peer groups as today it is very strongly related to the media. Membership of an online community also demands regular involvement so as not to risk being expelled. For network actors participating in global communication and narrative networks, heterotopic experiences are enhanced, leaving their marks on an individual's representation of the Self, as a network actor from Saudi Arabia explained: "In real life I'm a Saudi guy living in Saudi Arabia and talking within one kilometre radius that is around me. … But online I'm multinational, I'm multigeographical." The opening up of digital narrative spaces worldwide does not rule out participation being tied in with certain access rituals. These include passwords as a condition for access or even ethical codes which have to be agreed to in order to gain access to these spaces.

Heterotopias prevail over dualistic perspectives; they configure, facilitate, and urge individuals to live different or even contradictory lives. They create the "Other Spaces" (Foucault, 1967/1997), the Other in contrast to the dominant culture. Digital narrative spaces are part of the heterotopic spectrum because they match elements of Foucault's principles. For one thing, they reproduce certain facets of the world beyond its digital face but they also contrast with others, for example by challenging accepted spatial and temporal boundaries (Doulis et al., 2009, p. 55). They can turn out to be counterplacements and counterarrangements. Thanks to liquified geographical boundaries, distance can become involved as an "acting distance" (Ahrens 2003, p. 185), triggering a feeling of proximity which is not necessarily limited to virtual space (2003, p. 185), as indicated by the viral nature of social movements which Castells detected. He uses the notion of virality to describe impulses which can originate from political protests in one place and inspire protests in other places (2012, p. 224). Hearing about protests taking place elsewhere "triggers *hope* of the possibility of change" (2012, p. 224). In Castells' eyes, digital media are an important component of virality (2012, p. 221).

Like heterotopias in general, virtual spaces represent special realities, the special features of which are not, however, determined by the question as to whether they are real or not because they are real in the sense that they evoke real thoughts and feelings and are suffused by them. Just like physical spaces, the emergence of digital narrative spaces is dependent on the interaction and communication of network actors. That explains why experiences in the world beyond the screen are not barred as well as why commonplace behaviours are found in digital heterotopias and why new experiences can develop on the basis of novel experiences.

3.2.5.3 *The Narrative Potential of Digital Heterotopias*

The proliferation and overlapping of virtual spaces open up options to add collages and montages to stories (Ahrens, 2003, p. 188). New elements can be transferred to familiar contexts; familiar elements can be transferred to new contexts. In more concrete terms, elements of a story which is told in virtual space, for example in a chat or beyond the screen, can be transferred onto another digital stage and combined there with elements of another story, resulting in a new story, a process which can be carried on infinitely. This could be an example of transmedia storytelling, although Henry Jenkins reserves the term transmedia for a type of storytelling in which "*integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels … each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story*" (2011, para 4.). In the case of narrative collages and montages which are constructed over different spaces, the narrative elements are not tied down to one platform; instead, they are mobile, which means that not one but several stories could emerge in the end. But just like the type of storytelling that Jenkins has in mind, the narrative elements from different digital platforms also interact; the boundaries between different media do not necessarily mark the boundaries of a story. Arising out of the possibilities of narrative collages and montages in digital heterotopias, it follows that the stories can be changed over and over again at all times, that the permanent and the fleeting can form innumerable alliances, and that the narrated life or representations of the Self can be experienced and perceived as constructions.

Furthermore, digital heterotopias put narratives on display in the spirit of Walter Benjamin (1935/1996, p. 21). Like the "actor before the camera" (1935/1996, p. 21) that W. Benjamin refers to, the network actors and bloggers tell their stories while interacting with a technical device.[5] The process of narrating is co-extensive with the product, with the narrative, as reflected in the very term "narrative," which indicates its procedural nature (cf. the beginning of Chap. 2). One difference between actors in the film industry and network actors or bloggers is that the latter can

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[5] The apparatus, or the camera in front of which the actor tells his or her story, is not just a recording device either, although W. Benjamin would have it as such; rather it comments permanently on the actor's performance under the guidance of the cameraman (or woman).

adapt their reactions to their audience because their relationship is interactive. In view of the emergence of interactive films in which the addressees can help shape the story, the difference is reduced between storytelling online and in film (Gaudenzi, 2009). Yasuo Imai's interpretation of W. Benjamin is that he wishes to resolve the tension between the process and the product, giving the process greater recognition by declaring it to be a product (Imai, 2002, pp. 31ff.).

Imai attempts to verify the suitability of W. Benjamin's approach, or rather the concurrence of product and production, for characterizing virtual reality with the example of the concept of life-writing, which also demonstrates parallels with digital storytelling. As mentioned earlier in "The Relationship Between Virtuality and Reality," for Imai, writing is about the production of a virtual reality, regardless of what technology is used. The concept of life-writing was introduced by the progressive educational movement, which was very influential in Japan in the 1930s. It involved children writing essays about their life experiences, expressing their fears and worries, addressing enjoyable and horrible aspects (2002, p. 36). The underlying assumption is that in the process of writing, the different dimensions of reality, namely the I–Self relationship, the I–world relationship, and the social reality of the I–Other relationship, permeate it, merging to create a single reality (2002, p. 39). The product, or reality as a whole, is not an end product of writing but constitutes itself in the very process of writing. In the sense of W. Benjamin, the writing process and product merge.

The forms in which stories are told in digital heterotopias, whether in the form of longer passages in blogs or succinct tweets in digital networks, are similar to the life-writing essays of Japanese children. Here, too, everyday events and the associated emotional states are translated into written language. It is doubtful, however, whether this writing can meld experienced realities into one whole in view of our pluralized society. It is more likely that written products emerge which mirror multifarious realities with non-compatible facets. Nevertheless, writing in digital heterotopias could pursue the intention to produce a coherent reality. Whichever realities emerge from digital narrating, they are realities which people experience as existing alongside other realities. As "actual" realities, however, they cannot be isolated from those in digital heterotopias.

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The Net Generation's Stories: A Typology

Even though the research interests in the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace" focused on the courses of action[1] which developed and were described by the network actors and bloggers in virtual space, the impression soon emerged that, in combination with the themes, feelings, and biographical details they reported on, the depicted actions and practices were being used to tell stories. A secondary analysis of the interviews and visualizations zoomed in on these narrations, which illuminate further facets of the everyday reality of adolescents and young adults in the age of the Internet. Out of the 33 interviews we conducted, 21 were selected with network actors and bloggers from 11 countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine; USA; Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen)[2] in which there was a clear narrative focus which could be characterized as one of several types of narrations. Hints as to which interviews to include in the secondary analysis were provided by the core categories used to identify the actions and practices under investigation.[3] It is not at all surprising that these courses of action

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[1] The actions and practices which were identified and the subject constructions which were embedded in them were analysed by Christina Schachtner and Nicole Duller in "The Internet as a Place of Communication: Digital Practices and Subjectification" (2014).

[2] The network actors and bloggers from the Arab world and the USA were interviewed in English. The other interviews were carried out in German; any quotations from these interviews have been translated into English.

[3] More information about the methodology and research methods can be found in the introduction to this book.

C. Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51189-0_4

provided the hints as they were essential components of the particular narration.

Most of the interviews had one dominant narration; if they included a clear focus on a second type, we also analysed that but did not include those narrations which were only hinted at or fragmentary. The existence of dominant narrations points to the irreducible, mentioned in Sect. 2.3, which is unique to every individual and which arises from subjects grappling with the difference between the stock of ideas, plans, likes, and dislikes which has evolved from their life histories and the current expectations imposed on them by society. This confrontation leaves its mark on the subject's handwriting, metaphorically speaking, which then runs as a common thread through their narrations and which can be identified as a dominant element. A comparison with examples from music and art should make this even clearer. Why can we easily identify works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Philip Glass, Paul Klee, or Claes Oldenburg? Because they bear the idiosyncratic signatures of their creators in a particular sequence of notes or in a particular combination of colours and shapes.

Our interviewees did not deliberately set out to tell a story; they were just describing their experiences, talking about what they do, witness, and feel as network actors and bloggers. They were presenting pieces of a narrative jigsaw puzzle, some of which they put in a logical order and some of which they did not, some of which pointed to the beginning of a narration and some of which did not, some of which had an ending and some of which—considerably more in fact—had an open end. The narration arises out of the sum of the jigsaw pieces and the specific links between them; it is implicitly present and the protagonists are not necessarily aware of it. It spins the "subterranean web," as it were, which the individual remarks stem from and which endows them with meaning. The focus of the analysis is the act of telling stories about what and how things are communicated in virtual space and not telling stories in virtual space, as would be the case when analysing blogs or computer games, for example. It is possible to distinguish between two levels of storytelling: (1) the level of the narrative acts which are developed in the internet and (2) the narrations about these acts, which is what this book is about. The narrations presented here are very often intertwined with virtual space but they also go beyond that, referring to other, current aspects of life and earlier phases of life alike. These are narrations in the age of the internet in the sense that media technology plays a self-evident and indispensable role in them.

First of all, all passages with narrative content in the interviews were extracted as they came. Then the individual passages were placed in thematic clusters, resulting in the following list of questions in accordance with which the statements in an interview could be classified:

- What are the characteristic attributes of the narration? (attributive level)
- What actions stand out? (actional level)
- What motives/goals can be identified? (motivational level)
- What feelings are associated with the motives/goals and actions? (emotional level)
- What reflections are revealed? (reflexive level)
- What role do digital media play in the narration? (media level)
- What external consequences/reactions are revealed in the narration? (consequential level)
- In which sociocultural context is the narration embedded? (contextual level)[4]

After the interviews had been analysed individually, they were compared to each other, firstly to identify overlapping characteristics which would justify assigning individual interviews to particular types and secondly to identify differences between the interviews assigned to a particular type, indicating variations on that type. The following six types could be identified in the empirical data: narrations about interconnectedness, self-staging, supplying and selling, managing boundaries, and transformation as well as setting out and breaking away. The account of the individual types and subtypes of narrations follows the questions given earlier, albeit without referring to them explicitly in the text. In this way, the pieces of the narrative jigsaw puzzle are structured, but not in a temporal order; instead they are structured along the various dimensions of the narration. This structure is governed by our interpretation and not by the structure of the narrator's tale. The narrations are illustrated with the help of quotations from the interviews; when one and the same quotation is required to illustrate individual thoughts under different headings in different sections, it is simply repeated. The verbal presentations are

[4] The list of questions which we used to create the thematic clusters of narrative elements signals a very broad conceptualization of narration which includes justifications, reflections, and explanations alongside descriptions of a storyline.

complemented by selected visualizations which were produced by the narrators, providing a more in-depth insight into the particular type of narration.

4.1   NARRATIONS ABOUT INTERCONNECTEDNESS

A common thread running through the narrations about interconnectedness identified in the interviews is an orientation towards the outside world, a communicative connection to other network actors. The narrations in this category differ according to the extent of that interconnectedness and the type of connection.

4.1.1   *Showing and Exchanging*

The narrations about interconnectedness follow the central theme of "showing and exchanging" in which network actors cross local and regional geographical borders in the internet on a communicative basis; communication with the rest of the world takes centre stage. It is not so much a question of sharing personal matters with anybody who is interested but rather of showing them one's own country, one's own culture. At the same time, there is an interest in exchanging views on events and social developments in other parts of the world. Narrations involving interconnectedness of this type were only identified in interviews with the Arab network actors.

Two 26-year-old male network actors from Saudi Arabia told us that they both run blogs addressed at people living in the Middle East but also in the rest of the world. They blog about social topics, technology, and art through texts and images. One of the two runs a photography blog in which he presents political photo projects which deal with fear, violence, and refugee issues and on which he cooperates with artists worldwide. The second network actor, who mostly talked about his verbal interconnectedness, recounted how he discusses political events all over the world with his friends in America. Both of them spend a lot of time creating their communicative offerings, constantly uploading things from their mobile devices. Their posts trigger many welcome reactions, including comments, questions, and many followers. One of the bloggers also talked about undesirable ones, including the authorities regularly accessing his blog. This particular blogger had also been arrested several times when taking

photos for his blog in public, on the insistence of passers-by, mind you, and not of the police.

Both of the network actors agree that they want to put a different complexion on Saudi Arabia to the one the world is normally presented with by the official media, as the following statements document: "I'm trying to allow people to look into things especially in Saudi Arabia and especially when they look back to Saudi Arabia through my blog to see the social and intellectual fabric of what makes Saudi Arabia Saudi Arabia." The second network actor explained: "I use it [the internet] as a way to show kind of the Middle East and Saudi Arabia specifically from the ground, from a perspective that's not really represented in the news." The picture drawn by one of the two network actors (Fig. 4.1) shows him ready to receive and transmit: What he needs for global exchange is a head, complete with a brain and antennae, surrounded by sound waves which get to him, ears which can hear, and a mouth which can talk.

Transnational interconnectedness is accompanied by feelings which either arise as a reaction to messages which are received or are features of the network actor's own messages. He admitted that he is proud when other network actors ask him questions as an expert but also when he can show his feelings: "Whenever an emotion comes in I actually share it proudly and I say, 'This is what I'm feeling right now.' I'm not ashamed of it."

Reflexive elements in narrations about interconnectedness of this type are revealed in connection with self-representations. Whereas communication with the rest of the world is a part of his self-representation which the network actor who has already lived in various countries takes for granted—he calls himself a "citizen of the world"—for the second network actor it leads to a split into an offline and an online representation of the Self, or into a local and a global representation of the Self. He explains that "in real

Fig. 4.1 Ready to receive and transmit (network actor, m, 26, Saudi Arabia)

life I'm a Saudi guy living in Saudi Arabia … but online I'm multinational, I'm multigeographical."

Both network actors value digital media in their attempts to interconnect. For one of them, they are places "where interaction between Saudi Arabians and international community started to happen." They both appreciate the potential for sharing their posts but also the potential for solidarity from online communities, which one of the network actors experienced when he was having problems with the authorities. As he put it, "[t]here was a community that was supporting me."

The narrations about interconnectedness outlined earlier are embedded in biographies in which encounters with other cultures have an important role to play. One of the network actors has parents who come from different countries; the other has lived in various countries and on various continents so far in his life. These biographical experiences may have awakened their interest in and curiosity towards the Foreign and, at the same time, nurtured their skills in transnational communication. For both of them, their interest in the Foreign corresponds to their appreciation of the Own which the attention of Others should be drawn to.

4.1.2   Seeing and Being Seen

The motto of "seeing and being seen" is best illustrated by a story about interconnectedness told by a 29-year-old network actor who lives in Vienna. In this narration, too, outward-looking orientation and being connected with Others are in the foreground, but the radius of his connections is much smaller than in the interconnectedness narrations with the central theme of "showing and exchanging"; it encompasses, essentially, the places where he has lived so far in real life, all of which are in the same country. His communicative contacts are not political in nature but rather personal. This story about interconnectedness has another special feature, namely that the opportunities for digital interconnectedness do not only connect people but can also be directed against Others.

The starting point for the 29-year-old's narration about interconnectedness was a profile picture which he posted online. He described how "it simply got bigger and bigger and then I actually almost didn't realize that I was becoming so engrossed in it." Thanks to his internet presence, he came into contact with old friends again, whether he contacted them or the other way round. The 29-year-old does not cultivate his online friendships via a blog but via his own profile, with text and images, and by

chatting, sometimes all night long. In the first few weeks, when he started to "become so engrossed" in the internet, he concentrated on looking for contacts, gradually building up a network of friends. But soon he started to rank them, with family members and close friends right at the top, "followed by … second-class, third-class, fourth-class friends, and then my acquaintances come somewhere after that."

The original motivation behind his online activities, he claimed, was so that he could find old friends with the help of the internet, but he was also attracted by the thought that Others would be able to find him, as well as by the possibility of wielding power by controlling information flows. "You really are like a, a, a god in this respect" was the way he put it. The 29-year-old wants to see things, to see how other people live, even when the Other happens to have cut himself or herself off from him. He recounted how he continued to monitor the mailbox of an ex-girlfriend after they had split up because he knew the password. But he also wants to be seen himself, something he called "balm for the soul." Those who stop paying him attention risk being "kicked off" his network of friends but should certainly be aware of it: "They should by all means know that they've been kicked off my list of friends so that they're annoyed about it." This is a clear indication of the feelings on the part of the network actor as well. He, himself, thinks that he is pretty "cool" when he "throws people off" but in fact his aggressive stance cannot be overlooked.

In this story about interconnectedness, reflexive elements take up much space. The network actor critically challenges his own behaviour: "What am I actually getting up to? I perch here permanently, staring at the 'stupid screen' and waiting for somebody to deign to let me be part of their lives." Being connected with Others has turned into a drug for him, fed by the fear that he could be "left out," that is no longer belong, be alone, be lonely. This fear could possibly explain why he illicitly clings onto friends who have cut themselves off from him. Even he is aware of how dubious this is; he called it "stalking," adding "that's really, that is, that's just like the *Stasi*,[5] it's completely crazy."

It is not digital media per se which facilitate interconnectedness for this network actor, in keeping with the motto "seeing and being seen"; his medium of choice is Facebook. "Facebook, it's like a bulletin board" on which a slip of paper can be posted, figuratively speaking, with the message

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[5] The colloquial term for the Ministry of State Security in the former GDR, one of the functions of which was to keep the population under surveillance.

"Hey! I want to see you!" Facebook is like "a big room where everybody is standing around and you can decide, am I going to listen to him, or am I going to listen in there?" Facebook appears to be such an attractive platform for him because there is plenty of room for manoeuvre when looking for new contacts, both for him and the Others. He dismisses the idea of using a mobile phone for such purposes because it is too direct a way of getting into contact with Others, one possible consequence of which, as he pointed out, could be being turned down directly as well.

In contrast to the interconnectedness narrations about "showing and exchanging," particular shared sociopolitical topics are not important for this 29-year-old; instead interconnectedness itself is the reward. For him it is about social connections, about feeling good as part of a greater whole, which is frequently underlined by the words he uses like "becoming engrossed" and "being in the thick of things."

4.1.3   Sharing

The interview with a 21-year-old American student serves as an excellent example for this type of interconnectedness; in no other interview was the word "sharing" used so conspicuously often. In a similar fashion to the previous interconnectedness narration "seeing and being seen," this interconnectedness narration is characterized by a strong outward orientation, by the wish to be connected, and by nodes which are made up of people the network actor knows from his immediate social context. Staying in touch with his family and friends is particularly important for the 21-year-old, and what is most important about staying in touch with Others is the sharing of observations, experiences, impressions while travelling, and, above all, photos. This theme of staying in touch distinguishes this narration from the interconnectedness narration "seeing and being seen," where it is a question of being connected per se, and reveals some similarities with the interconnectedness narrations "showing and exchanging," although there the themes are sociopolitical in nature whereas here the "sharing" concerns private matters.

The 21-year-old's interconnectedness narration began with the platform MySpace, where he swapped music with Others. When most of his friends changed over to Facebook, he, too, changed to that platform. Now, he explained, he is digitally networked on a permanent basis, both via email and the social media:

> For emails I'll stay on all days. I check in multiple times throughout the day. Facebook I'll check it once briefly in the morning. … I'll check it maybe around lunch time and then at the end of my day.

He posted photos for his father on the platform, where he had set up a photo album, to give him an impression of his life at university but kept in touch with his mother by calling her regularly as she was not so internet savvy.

The 21-year-old gave two reasons for his digital sharing habits: On the one hand it was good for the family, and on the other they allowed him to stay in touch with people he grew up with:

> I want to maintain connections to people. I wanna know where people arrive within their lives, so when I go back to New York like I can still, you know, be a part of their life and they can be a part of mine and you kind of keep your friends.

Moving away from New York to study elsewhere in the USA should not cause friendships to come to an end. Face-to-face contacts can be kept up digitally for the time being and then turned back into face-to-face contacts.

Unlike the protagonists in the interconnectedness stories about "showing and exchanging" where friendships are often limited to the internet, this network actor assumes that friendships must arise offline and, at best, can be continued online. Far away from his home town, he regards Facebook as a vital stage on which to share his life with Others. The multimediality of the medium allows him to use images both to document his life and to keep in contact.

This interconnectedness narration is associated with the domestic situation in which members of a family live in completely different places, whether due to divorce or educational mobility. In this case, studying elsewhere meant that the network actor had to leave his home town of New York and all of his friends there. Sharing acts as an integrative mechanism to maintain networks within the family and between friends; digital media are the prerequisites for allowing such a mechanism to evolve.

4.2   Self-Staging Narrations

In the narrations about self-staging, the focus on the I is much more obvious than in all of the other narrations, or, to be more precise, the focus is on the presentation of the I for an audience (Seel, 2001, p. 49). The Others are not interesting as unique individuals but merely as spectators and commentators. The I is quite deliberately set centre stage, the staging being carefully prepared. Issues of revealing and concealing are paramount. Stories about self-staging were recounted exclusively in interviews with European network actors and bloggers.

4.2.1   The Adored Star

The network actor introduced in the interconnectedness narration "seeing and being seen" also told a self-staging story. In the second narration, this showing-oneself-off as opposed to an interest in Others is pushed to the fore in the expectation of being admired by the digital audience.

The 29-year-old talked about his attempts at self-staging in connection with stays in hospital. "Whenever I do something to myself, I post the x-ray online," he reported. When he was in hospital for a knee operation, he represented himself with a knee "where everything was hanging out of it." With this series of self-staging posts he wanted to show "what a tough cookie[6] I am [laughing] and what I've survived so far." If Facebook didn't exist anymore, he replied in response to the researcher's question, it would be "a veritable disaster … because I also enjoy showing myself off." He went on to explain how he presented two versions of himself online: "an ideal version," without the "lumps and bumps," with which he wanted to create the impression that "wow, he's an absolute super cool guy; he's never experienced failure in his life," and a second version, "which includes the stupid photos as well," which was for his family's eyes only. Both of the presentations are carefully thought out in order to create a specific impression: "I'm very choosey about what information I pass on so that I create this or that impression of myself." His drawing here tells the story of the "super cool guy" (Fig. 4.2). He's the show-stopper in the picture, straddling a pile of status symbols like a laptop, car, and basketball, his skis hanging around his neck to demonstrate how athletic he is, looking at himself in a mirror, out of which his own reflection is looking back at him,

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[6] In German, he said "Was für ein harter Knochen," a pun involving "hard bones."

Fig. 4.2 The absolute super cool guy (network actor, m, 29, Austria)

just like Narcissus, who saw his own image in a pool and fell in love with it. His audience is looking up to him through the window behind him in admiration and envy. Being allowed to admire him should be considered an honour in his mind: "Some are allowed to or are able to look in. Others are standing at the back. They can't see anything at all." As a finishing touch, he added a blind to the window, enabling him to escape from view by closing it if he so desires. In this drawing, the game of revealing and concealing is presented as a kind of power game.

Alongside feelings of power, this self-staging narration also includes pride at the network actor's own attempts at staging himself, which he repeatedly describes as "cool." When telling this story, he always includes a touch of irony, as though he wants to distance himself from his narration, as though he knows about the discrepancy between his staged version of himself and reality.

The virtual space which he has set up for himself on Facebook is described as "a small living room," which indicates that he feels at home there and can act out his aspirations. At the same time, it is important for him that he can open up this living room to make himself visible to Others, not just to his friends but to the whole wide world, as he explicitly stresses.

Facilitated by the transnational character of social media, this global visibility attaches unprecedented importance to the self-staging of an individual.

4.2.2   Role Model and Seeker in One

In this self-staging narration told by a 23-year-old male network actor, the focus is also on the I and especially on the desire to be a role model for Others. At the same time, this I is also a seeking I, which needs commentators as well, and not just an audience in the manner of "the adored star." It is an I en route to a better, open future.

The self-staging narration of the 23-year-old blogger (see also "Time and Narrative" in Sect. 2.1.1.2), who was born and still lives in a large European city, began in 2009, when he set up his own blog.[7] He explained that he chose English as the language of his blog because it is an international language which he spoke better than his mother tongue. In his first article, the graduate of fashion design presented his own fashion collection named "the dramatic human perfectionist." He continued to write articles on fashion, often after he had been to fashion shows and press conferences. He also described how he wrote articles about the meaning of life. His second phase of blogging started with an article which he wrote after splitting up with his boyfriend in which he, together with his readers, attempted to figure out

> [w]hether it [love] is something social, whether it's a chemical process, or whether it really is something that Walt Disney impressed on us in our childhood which we actually … through those classics like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, and *Beauty and the Beast* which we actually were taught to believe that it really exists, that you stay with the same person for ever.

He was inspired to write this kind of blog, in which aesthetic issues relating to fashion intermingle with questions about the meaning of life,

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[7] The name of the blog is not given for reasons of anonymity.

by the teen series *Gossip Girl*[8] and the TV serial *Sex and the City*.[9] He related how he spent eight to nine hours writing each article and wrote three to seven articles a week. At the time of the interview (2011), he had 5000 readers who posted both favourable and critical comments.

The motivation behind writing his blog was that he wanted to give expression to his personality, in a way which he was responsible for shaping himself: "I believe that it is important that you try to influence this image [that you present to the world]; that you push this image in the right direction." He wants to be seen as "somebody who has an idea of fashion, where you notice that he has a degree … that he busies himself with life but that he doesn't stop fighting either and also lives his dreams." The 23-year-old comes across as somebody who is very competent but at the same time he admits that he faces problems and setbacks which he has to overcome. This is where he slips into his role as a role model, something which is even more obvious at another point in the interview when he explained that

> [i]t is important for me to give a little of myself, or to kinda show people that life goes on after splitting up … that it's a question of continuing to live your life and to enjoy life anyhow, even when it's a struggle and hard work.

Feelings play an important role for the 23-year-old when blogging; he describes them as being the catalyst for his writing: "My blogs are fundamentally driven by my emotions. So that I really start writing when I am really very sad, or very happy, or in the middle of an identity crisis." He writes about his feelings in order to express his own personality and to engage emotionally with his readers: "I believe that it is very important that people have this emotional bond with a blogger."

The 23-year-old provides a series of reflexive references to his blog. When asked why negative comments are also important for him, he

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[8] *Gossip Girl* is a series targeted at teenagers which ran on the US network *The CW* from 2007 to 2012. The sixth season was broadcast in German-speaking countries in 2013. It is about topics like friendship, love, and drugs in a group of privileged upper-class adolescents growing up in New York City's Upper East Side reported on by the blogger Gossip Girl (*Wikipedia*, 2020).

[9] *Sex and the City* is a US TV series which was filmed between 1998 and 2004 and ran for six seasons. The focus is on four women from New York and their erotic and sexual experiences as well as their thoughts on human relationships in general. The series is based on the novel of the same name by Candace Bushnell.

responded: "Because you can't evolve … when you only ever get positive reviews." This comment reveals him to be a seeker. He talked about blogging having turned into work for him, that it was no longer possible to separate his work from his private life, and that for 24 hours a day. As he said, "[i]n principle, I work on my blog 24/7."

The digital media provide this blogger with a platform for his self-staging in the form of a blog: "It's like … having cameras pointed at you and you're filming an episode in your own, personal series." At the same time, they create the housing for his quest for the Self which he wants to promote in exchange with Others. Whereas the adored star portrays himself as having already reached his goal, the 23-year-old blogger is still on his way.

It is childhood experiences, amongst others, that form the background for this self-staging story. In his family, it had always been important to put across "a good social image as a family." His interest in fashion, which had become one of the two main content areas of his blog, was strongly influenced by his grandmother, whom he characterized as a "*grande dame*" who "always took very meticulous care about the way she presented herself." This was amplified by a magazine, namely *Vogue*, which, when he saw it for the first time at the age of nine, gave him the feeling that "Yes, this is it, this is what I want to do one day." For him, fashion was also attractive because it promised "a better future." This promise could be the motivation behind the recurrent theme in the 23-year-old's blog of being on a quest. A second time, many years later, media provided a guideline for the blogger once again; this time it was the two US TV series mentioned earlier which caused him to write his blog in a "mixture of comedy and drama." Just like in the self-staging narration "the adored star," this reference to "comedy" brings humour into play; in the self-staging of the 23-year-old, it may well be not so much with the intention of distancing himself from his own self-staging but in order to stave off the "drama" which he senses in his own life, to turn the "difficult into the easy" (Bönsch-Kauke, 2005, p. 17).[10]

4.2.3   *The Counter-Model*

The I that is presented in this type of self-staging narration is not an I which already exists which needs to be adored or reviewed by others; it is

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[10] All quotations from German publications were translated into English for this book.

an I which does not (yet) correspond to the real I in the eyes of his or her creator and on which certain desires are focused. The desired I is fixated on certain concepts of beauty or desired patterns of behaviour. The individuals concerned think very carefully about which characteristics the desired I should have and work very carefully on their ideal image. The "counter-model" type of self-staging narration was identified in three interviews with young female bloggers between 21 and 24 years of age.

The self-staging narration of the 21-year-old was already evident in the choice of her blog nickname, namely Gaia, called after the main character in the series of novels *Fearless* (see also "Self-Knowledge and Self-Understanding" in Sect. 2.2.1.2). She recounted how she read the books when she was 12 and even then considered Gaia to be a role model as she was not afraid of anything, having no "fear gene." The 24-year-old was also inspired by a media figure for her choice of nickname. On her blog she calls herself Asu, borrowed from the manga character[11] Asuka, a "cheeky redhead." Asuka appears to embody something desirable for the blogger because after describing her character she said: "So it's not surprising that I called myself after her." However, she not only calls herself after her; in the pictures on her blog, she also models her appearance on Asuka, wearing "girly clothes which are very pink and very sparkly." The third blogger (22 years old) uses photos as part of her self-staging as well, presenting herself in such a way that "people are often surprised that I look completely different in real life." She wants to appear "interesting, maybe a little bit mysterious." What the three bloggers have in common is that they wish to present a favourable image of themselves online. The 22-year-old referred to her ability to "work [well] with perspective, holding my head in such a way that my face looks more or less ok" whereas the 21-year-old recounted how she coerces her boyfriend into "photographing me a thousand times until I'm happy with what I look like on the photos."

All three young women estimated that they dedicate a great deal of time to their online presence: one to two hours for the 21-year-old, two to three hours working on a blog entry for the 24-year-old, and three to four hours online daily and even longer at the weekend for the 22-year-old.

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[11] Manga is a term used in Japanese to refer to comics and cartoons. Manga figures are based on a schema of childlike characteristics; their big eyes and cupid lips stand out in particular.

The three bloggers have set up their self-staging for an audience as one way of "fishing" for comments. Compliments are like "balm for the soul" according to one of them whereas another admitted that she was grateful for compliments. But there were also ambivalent-to-negative reactions from their readers. The blogger who went by the name of fearless Gaia had to deal with the following comment one day: "On your blog you are completely different than in real life … in reality you appear to be a bit shy." Another of them was happy about all comments, even the negative ones, as long as they were "nicely formulated" and included "constructive criticism."

The motivation behind this kind of self-staging is partly indirect and partly direct. The remarks made by the blogger nicknamed Gaia indirectly reveal her desire to take on Gaia's characteristics by adopting her name. She had already started doing so: Gaia's mastery of all forms of martial arts had motivated her to take up one in real life. She found that the fearlessness which she so admired had a general effect on her behaviour: "It's no longer important at all what other people actually think of me, not even in real life."

The other two bloggers formulated their motivation more directly. One of them said that she used her own staging to "persuade" herself that "I look wonderful and everybody else believes that as well" and the other one explained that she wanted to take centre stage, "which I don't do so often in real life." In addition, she found it positive when she could decide for herself "how somebody sees it [her as an individual] or how somebody perceives it [her]." The possibility of influencing the perception of Others gave her a feeling of power, she claimed.

From an emotional perspective, not all of them managed to sustain their intention to exploit this type of self-staging as a counter-model. Only one of the three bloggers focused on the communication of positive feelings corresponding to her ideal image; the other two also talked about what stressed or bothered them in real life, even if that contradicted the "lovely image" of themselves which they had created. One of them used a blog entry to describe how she felt at her little brother's funeral; the other wrote entries when she was "very lovesick or was really cheesed off." She assigned these feelings a positive turn in her narrative, however, explaining that such emotional states gave her "an awful lot of energy" and that she drew her best pictures in that frame of mind. Happiness and/or anger are not only part of these two bloggers' self-staging; they are also felt in response to the reactions which come from outside, depending on whether

they read "you're just a superficial, silly cow" or "I like the colour of your eyes."

As self-staging is a deliberate process, it is not at all surprising when the three narrators relate to this process reflexively, reflection being a prerequisite for an individual being aware of their own behaviour. All three narrators integrate not only their own actions in their reflexive considerations but also those of Others, namely the readers of their blogs. One of them admitted that she only blogged to elicit responses, calling herself "addicted" to this feedback. Another one explained how she enjoyed "creating some kind of illusion," in relation to her appearance and particularly for Others, although maybe for herself too. Using the term illusion certainly points to her knowledge of the discrepancy between staging and reality. The third blogger associates her self-staging with a desire to overcome the feeling that "I'm a nobody and I can't do anything either." Admittedly even she sees a discrepancy between the girl in make-up in her online version of herself and her interest in computer games, programming, and numerical codes, none of which is visible in her self-staging.

Without the technical possibilities of digital media, the types of self-staging portrayed here would be inconceivable. Their multimediality and interactivity provide the prerequisites for the construction of an I that represents the longed-for Other. Above and beyond that, their network structure allows an audience to gather which should comment on the attempts at Self-construction.

The examples of self-staging as a counter-model do not come about by chance: They are related to biographical experiences, some of which the bloggers referred to themselves. The attempts to create an illusion with the help of self-staging which were mentioned earlier are related to different experiences. For one blogger it is the fact that her own body measurements are not ideal, as she admitted: "I weigh—I don't know—twenty kilos too much or twenty kilos too much in the eyes of most people." For the second blogger, it is her height of 1.44 m which prompts others to ask questions which she considers personal attacks and which she tries to fend off through her self-staging by disclosing her height and scoring highly with her sparkly self-image, amongst other things. This representation of the Self also helps her to counteract the feeling that "I'm a nobody and I can't do anything either," which is connected with her situation as a migrant. Due to her different cultural background and poor language skills, she explained how she became an outsider at school in the country she moved to, attempting to turn the situation around by teaching herself

to be more self-confident. Her self-staging online is possibly part of this training where she feels she is in a better position than she is offline because then she is the one who is in charge and who can delete unwelcome reactions. The third blogger, who chose the nickname Gaia, also had to overcome a radical change in her life. When she started studying, she had to move away from the rural community where she had spent a "happy childhood" to a city in another region. Her identification with fearless Gaia could be a strategy to steel herself against the challenges and risks of big-city life.

4.3   STORIES ABOUT SUPPLYING AND SELLING

Staging is also involved in the narrations about supplying and selling; not the individual but rather material or immaterial products are at the centre of attention here. Aided by the resources of digital technology, network actors carefully present, evaluate, endorse, and comment on these products, frequently on behalf of a company. Sometimes they produce or invent the products themselves, especially in participatory projects where they want other people to join in. Promoting and praising a product involves material or immaterial gain, for example being given the product, receiving a fee, or having others admire a home-made product. The addressees of the product endorsement play an important role; it is about anticipating or stimulating their interest in words and images. The digital suppliers and sellers differ depending on whether they are presenting products to buy or projects which others can take part in, although there is no clear-cut distinction.

4.3.1   *Objects and Designer Products on Offer*

One of our interviewees, who was 14 years old at the time, endorsed torches, smart phones, and dental bleaching kits, amongst others, on his blog. Companies contacted him via a particular home page and sent him products to test. He presented them in the form of personal testimonials, which took him a long time to produce: "When I write something about the torches, it can take me a whole day … to do so." He recounted how he reread his articles several times, never losing sight of his potential readers. "It just takes one sentence to put somebody off," he explained, "you have to be really careful what you write." He continued that he wanted to be successful and his definition of success was to persuade many readers or

potential buyers to take note of his testimonials. This was also the goal of a 24-year-old network actor, who sees himself as a candy seller in his endorsement of designer products, as depicted in Fig. 4.3.

This network actor has located himself and his kiosk on the side of a motorway, which symbolizes digital flows of communication for him, and he is trying to advertise his products like sweets. Their sugary taste should tempt people to stop. He has even provided a car park for them, to the right of his kiosk. The 24-year-old is the seller, although he pointed out that several friends were also involved in the production of his blog, either as programmers or photographers. He described the joint preparation of the designer products and their presentation on his blog as a commercial enterprise.

Touting for readers is something both bloggers have in common, as they explicitly stressed. They have to be capable of anticipating needs, developing empathy, and managing their internet presence to suit their readers. When I looked at them, it stood out that both blogs present their
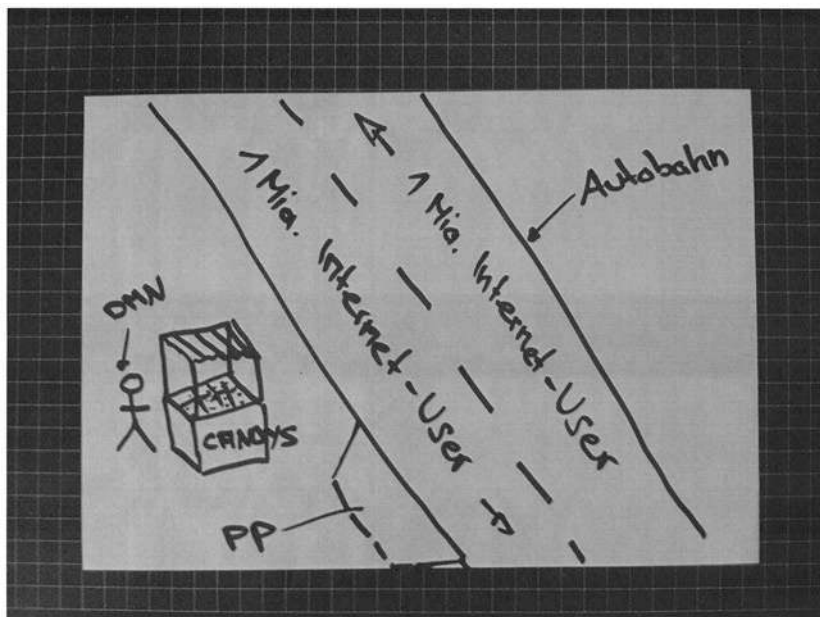

Fig. 4.3 The blogger as a candy seller (blogger, m, 24, Switzerland)

wares embedded in a series of entries which are about completely different topics. These include reports on the bloggers' everyday lives, their relationships with other people and with animals, their illnesses, very personal topics in fact. It could be the combination of business activities and private life which is somewhat irritating at first glance because it is completely different to professional advertising. Nonetheless it increases the blogs' appeal, thus ensuring that the products attract the desired attention.

What motivates both network actors to post their testimonials online? The 24-year-old hopes that he will get commissions in the design sector whereas the 14-year-old reckons that he can keep the products he is sent and might even be paid a fee, depending on how many people read his blog. Both of them are interested in a large number of readers for financial reasons, but that is not the only motivation behind writing their blogs.

The 14-year-old describes how his readers' comments "helped him get on." As the comments relate to both his testimonials and entries about his personal life, which he called diary entries, it can be assumed that this "helping him get on" refers to both aspects. The following passage from the interview would support this assumption. The 14-year-old explained: "The blog is actually my diary. When something happens that I find important, I write it down in my blog too. You hide a diary, more or less, and a blog is public, of course." When asked why he preferred to write about his life in public, he replied: "Because more people can read it, and yes, they can respond to it." In this way, his own life becomes a product to present which attracts public feedback.

Emotion-wise, the digital suppliers and sellers appear to be less involved than the protagonists in the interconnectedness and self-staging narrations; yet they too talk about feelings like pleasure and pride over compliments for their product presentations or the way in which they live their lives.

Thinking about the roles of the readers of their blogs could be interpreted as a reflexive act; otherwise their attempts to exploit private blogs for their own mini businesses are not called into question. This could be taken as proof that the logic of profit, albeit outside official channels, has become a matter of course for the bloggers which leaves its mark on their thinking and acting. Digital spaces are used as salesrooms in which the products on offer can be staged with the help of multimedia tools and which guarantee a high distribution potential thanks to their transnational character.

As far as the autobiographical integration of the narrations about suppliers and sellers is concerned, conjectures are only possible in relation to one of the two network actors. The configuration of his blog as a shop window with a colourful display of products reflects his personal life situation, which is marked by a chronic illness which has excluded him time and again from his habitual everyday contexts. It seems as though setting up his blog as a shop window allows him to build up his own new universe. On a specific date in April 2015 the products he was presenting ranged from vegan recipes, including his own cooking experiences, a Nokia smartphone, and a series of documentaries preceded by a trailer.[12] The virtual parallel universe allows him to practise his skills as well as to develop and show off new competences. It also enables him to compensate for a lack of face-to-face contact with other people. As already mentioned, not even his illness can prevent him from operating in this universe; this is possibly where he can command the respect which he does not gain due to his absence in his so-called real life.

4.3.2   *Participatory Projects on Offer*

Like the 14-year-old blogger introduced in the previous section, a 22-year-old blogger also discusses products for companies if she can keep them afterwards.[13] Like him, she intersperses personal entries with advertising for these products. She does not only make a pitch for goods to be sold, like video games or a particular brand of headset, however; she also touts something different, something which cannot be bought but which involves participation. A quick analysis of her blog in April 2015 gave the impression that these participatory projects even had priority. She encouraged her readers to answer the question "How, when, and where do you prefer to watch series?" by describing their own experiences with TV series in her so-called blog parade. She prompted them to follow her example and put together a "retro toy mirror" which had a frame made out of small toys which she had spray-painted green. She sent round a "recycled flea market nerd box" out of which everybody could take the same number of things as they put back in. At the end of the game it would be returned to her. In addition, she set up competitions in which she passed

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[12] Trailers are assembled from individual scenes in a film and last around two minutes.

[13] This is the second story which the 22-year-old tells alongside her self-staging narration in Sect. 4.2.3.

on the presents which she had been given by companies and she was also in the process of setting up a blogger network.

In contrast to the digital suppliers who provide goods which can be bought, the 22-year-old posts ideas for products on her blog. Producing them requires cooperation or participation. She is not the only one who can win a potential prize in the form of a small present or having fun: Anybody who participates can win something.

She admitted that her motivation for organizing the participatory projects was the pleasure she gains when her ideas meet with a positive response. She was not so enthusiastic about negative comments. If anybody repeatedly left negative comments on her blog, she issued the following warning: "If it continues like that, your comments will simply be ignored or deleted." Otherwise visitors were naturally very welcome as potential participants. In order to attract visitors or readers to her blog, she regularly read and commented on other people's blogs, 355 in all. That would add up to approximately 300 posts daily which she at least skimmed through. Advertising and setting up her participatory projects requires a much more intense kind of interconnectedness than selling goods. The 22-year-old blogger may be the initiator, but the products themselves are collaborative in nature.

In the course of the interview, the blogger evaluated her actions from a moral perspective, saying that she thought that keeping presents from companies for herself was ethically questionable: "Even so, I don't only use my blog for such things but have to admit that I sometimes misuse it to get things for free." So sharing donated products with others appeared to be morally more acceptable: "Now and again I do something for my readers, it's not so that I always keep the products for myself, but now and again I give something away."

In a similar manner to the digital suppliers, at least when they were only offering goods for sale, for her, digital space is a salesroom which she has turned into a sparkling setting for her product placements with the help of multimedia applications. Its network-like nature supports her wish to interconnect with as many people as possible. In contrast to the suppliers in the first group, she exploits the multimedia options to create a game out of supplying and selling products and ideas for which she then looks for fellow players.

The 22-year-old's training as a media designer forms an important backdrop for the structure and presentation of her participatory projects. Her own blog serves not only as a platform for putting what she has learnt

into practice but also as a stage on which she can act independently and try things out which would presumably not be appropriate in a professional context. Another biographical detail could also be potentially significant for explaining the context of her participatory projects. When she was young, she lost her brother. She mentioned her brother's death right at the beginning of the interview when the researcher asked her about formative events in her childhood. Her response: "I may have been only six years old at the time, but I can still remember everything very clearly. … How my family behaved, I can still remember that very clearly. I can also remember the day he died." Her brother's death must have represented a drastic loss for her which still affects her life today as she remembered it so vividly 16 years later. The participatory projects which she initiates on her blog are a kind of antithesis to these experiences, demonstrating her attempts to maintain relationships with others in contrast to her experience of loss. They could serve to compensate for the drastic loss which she experienced at an early age. But this is only conjecture. There are not enough empirical data to provide additional support to this argument.

4.4   Narrations About Managing Boundaries

In the narrations of network actors and bloggers which are about managing boundaries, boundaries act as a focus for thoughts and actions. Boundaries separate territories from one another, often running along embankments, waterways, and mountain ranges, and are visibly marked by border stones, border stations, and border guards. Boundary symbols of this nature are non-existent in the internet. Access to some apps may require registration and/or a password, but these barriers are easily overcome and are hardly even perceived as such.

The technology behind digital media has swept away the familiar geographical and physical borders and has turned virtual space into a boundless space, at least on the surface, as new borders are edging into virtual space, both from the outside and from the inside. In the stories told about managing boundaries, external barriers play a role in the form of sociocultural borders whereas internal ones correspond to individual needs. Whether we are dealing with external or internal borders, it is always a question of the division between the public and the private, which can also be linked to the division between online and offline. These borders collide with the proposition of a border-free digital zone, the collision becoming a challenge to act for network actors and bloggers. In the stories they tell,

they take up this challenge; the narrators act as managers of boundaries. In other words, they want to decide for themselves, taking the detected or suspected risks into account, how to define the border between the public and the private. Characterizing them as such underlines their systematic approach and defines them as actors.

4.4.1   Managing Boundaries as an Answer to Sociocultural Borders

A 27-year-old Arab blogger told a story in which the collision between sociocultural borders and the boundlessness of the internet opened up by digital technology surfaced particularly clearly. She not only senses that disregarding external borders would be dangerous for her; she knows that it would be. She does not know the precise course of the sociocultural borders, even though she mentions topics in the course of her narrative which are socially taboo. The 27-year-old has to establish where the border runs for herself, possibly with support from the blogging scene in her home town, but no such support was mentioned.

The 27-year-old started blogging when she was 17 years old after establishing that most bloggers were based in the USA at the time (2001/2002) and there were no blogs from Saudi Arabia. The shortcoming which she had identified was motivation enough she claimed: "And then I just thought, why not make a blog that is also from Saudi Arabia?" She did not say that she wanted to be present on the international stage of the internet as an individual, in contrast to the narrators of the self-staging stories, but that her home country should be represented there by her blog. This is the first indication that, as a blogger, she has located herself within a cultural framework which she cannot ignore because she has to take it into consideration in her online activities. She admitted that her awareness of this framework had increased over the previous ten years and that her early blogs differed considerably from her later ones: Earlier, she had posted entries under her own name; now she avoided publishing personal information, at least in the blog which addressed the general public directly. The 27-year-old was running three blogs at the time of the interview. She used one of them to keep in touch with family and friends scattered all over the world. She blogged every evening, reporting on the experiences that she wanted to pass on, explaining "[s]o it's something where I can share my life with them." Access to that particular blog was restricted to a group of people she knew whereas a second blog, a podcast, was for public

consumption and particularly aimed at the inhabitants of her home town. She produced the contents during the week and broadcast the podcast every Friday. It was about life in her home town; she often invited people to participate and interviewed them about their lives in the town, one which she considered to have a relatively constructive atmosphere for discussion: "The city of [name][14] has a reputation for being the most open city in Saudi Arabia; we are more open to modern things." But there were still taboos, she admitted: "Well, in the audio blog we talk about everything you can imagine about in [name of city] in Saudi Arabia except, except for religion and politics. These are two things that we never, never talk." It was not the case that she was not interested in these topics at all. Quite the opposite was true: "In fact, I enjoy talking about them." But she emphasized that these topics were reserved for face-to-face contacts offline: "You know, they're very, they are very sensitive topics in my society and I feel it's better discussed in person." The third blog was a photo blog, but she did not go into any detail about it.

The way in which she runs the three blogs reveals her strategy of drawing a line in virtual space between the public and the private by posting about different topics and making them available to different groups of people. The boundaries she draws are not restricted to virtual space either; they are also drawn between the space where discussions take place, namely online and offline. Public topics which would be risky to discuss in public online are consigned to private spaces offline. In addition, she draws a line between the public and the private in her offline life when it is influenced by her online presence. She does not want to be identified as the author of her podcast in public, for instance. She recounted:

> For example, I would be at a supermarket or I'd be at a restaurant and someone would recognize my voice and say, 'Hey, aren't you on that podcast?' … Most of the time I deny it and I say, 'No, no it's not me [laughing]. You probably mistake me for someone else'.

She justifies her behaviour by explaining that those who listened to her podcasts should react to the contents she presents there and not to her as an individual. She also indicates that it is not desirable in her country to become an online celebrity when she told the interviewer: "You would think that it's a nice feeling, because it's like being a celebrity, but in our

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[14] The name of the town has been left out for reasons of anonymity.

society it's not the same." Once again, the sociocultural framework becomes visible to which she has tailored her behaviour. The strategies she practises in separating the public and the private as well as her online and offline presence demonstrate that her actions are deliberate, which makes this a clear case of managing boundaries.

Strategic behaviour requires awareness, which also comes to light in the blogger's reflections scattered throughout her narrative. On the one hand, her reflections relate to her reasons for practising boundary management. In connection with not discussing politics and religion in public, she initially said that the reason for this was that she did not know enough about it:

> I feel, I feel we don't have the right knowledge, we don't have enough information about religion and politics to talk about it. It's not our expertise—do you know what I mean? And it's not fair for us to talk about it.

This justification contrasts with another statement when she said that she enjoys discussing these topics in private. This contradiction can be solved if the blogger proceeds on the assumption that a public discussion requires extensive knowledge which is not necessary in a private conversation. On the other hand, the blogger speaks about regarding political questions as cultural issues because they are closely connected with religion. Religion belongs to culture; the discussion of cultural questions is possibly subject to fewer restrictions, as hinted at in the following passage:

> I think it's more cultural than political, honestly. Saudi Arabia is, we don't really have much politics here that is not involved with the religion. The two topics are, they're very close to each other. … So we try to keep it on a cultural level.

The last sentence speaks in favour of strategic behaviour with the intention of converting political questions into cultural ones so that they can be turned into something which can be discussed in public. This also suggests that attempts have been made to expand the space for public discussions in the internet as well. The self-imposed boundaries are, thus, flexible rather than rigid.

The reflections integrated in her narrative also relate to the blogger's Self. The self-imposed boundaries between the public and the private raise the question as to whether the different areas reveal different Selves within

the blogger; in other words, whether there is a public and a private Self. The blogger has obviously asked herself this question too as she answered it in the interview, although it had not been asked, namely "I'm pretty much the same online, the same person online as I'm in person. … I feel like my life online cannot even be separated from my real life … it's like a continuation." Even when different Selves may be present online and offline, the blogger does not necessarily feel as though she is fragmented, provided that she is aware of the different areas of her life and the Selves which evolve in each of them can communicate with each other. The blogger talked about the interdependency between the different areas of her life in the following passage, which can be interpreted as a communicative relationship: "Everything that I do online has a connection to what I do in real life. My interests, my hobbies, my friends—it's all very much interconnected."

The management of boundaries described earlier is closely connected to the 27-year-old's internet presence. "I'm 100% an internet person" is how she describes herself. She already began using the internet when she was 14 and was given her own laptop at age 16/17. She describes the early days of her using the internet as a transition from keeping a diary to using the computer. That explains the importance of the blogs as a platform for expressing her life in words and images. She said that her daily blog entries were like writing in a diary every day with the crucial difference that these entries were addressed to an audience and thus questions about their public and private nature were pressing. At the same time, she is not uncritical of the medium, lamenting the deficits of digital communication in comparison with face-to-face communication: "Well, I think online there is a lot of things that are lost like maybe a tone of voice, maybe a facial expression and we tend to misunderstand a lot of things." Her awareness of such deficits could make her even more cautious when drawing the line between the public and the private so as to avoid risky misunderstandings in a public discussion online.

Despite her prudence, the 27-year-old could not prevent a collision with sociocultural boundaries. When she was asked about her most meaningful blog entry, she talked about one which she deleted after she had published it. Her story went as follows:

> I wrote, I wrote a blog that is about racism. This is a very long blog post. I talked about racism in my city, which is something that we don't really talk about, nothing you talk about. And when I published that, it suddenly

became a huge thing. People started calling me and asking me about how I felt and why, how did I have the guts to publish something like that, you know. I have deleted it, it kind of showed me the boundaries.

We did not find out whether the people who took offence at the blog entry were government representatives or other internet users; in either case, the reactions drew her attention to a boundary which she felt she had crossed. She considered this boundary to be insurmountable and deleted the entry. In retrospect, she had misgivings as to whether she had made the right decision, saying "I wish I didn't delete it." That speaks in favour of her attempts to sound out the boundaries of the public sphere and to move the boundaries which were defined from the outside, a possibility which she had not considered at first in the face of the fierce external criticism. One possible reason why she chose this blog entry as being particularly meaningful is because it sent her a clear signal in what was otherwise a largely indistinct area of external boundaries which she subsequently took into consideration in her actions. This does not mean, however, that she welcomed such a sign because she also explained: "I think one of the worst things about publishing yourself online openly is that people tend to judge you."

The fact that the 27-year-old turned the internet into an important location for her life is embedded in her specific educational history. She attended an international school where she learnt English so well that at the time of the interview she was writing for an English-language newspaper and was teaching English as well. Thus she is proficient in a language which allows her to communicate worldwide unhampered and she has mastered the technical skills as digital technology was already available to her when she was young. This facilitated her access to a space for communication which plays by different rules to the society in which she lives beyond the realm of digital technology. The blogger's management of boundaries is an attempt to deal with the differences she perceives in such a way that the risks are banished and new spaces are opened up to her for communication.

4.4.2   *Managing Boundaries as an Individual Need*

This type of narration about managing boundaries is also about dealing with boundaries but this time they are not external, stemming as they do from individual needs. These needs also relate to social expectations,

which are, however, much hazier than the sociocultural boundaries described in the previous narration by the Arab blogger. In the following narration by a 19-year-old European network actor, chosen for its prototypical nature, it is not the problematization of externally set boundaries and attempts to shift them which dominate but the boundaries the network actor draws in the interests of improving her own chances. These personally defined boundaries serve to demarcate the private from the public, but in contrast to the first story about managing boundaries, the sole focus is on a depiction of the blogger herself and not on a discussion of political topics. Issues relating to revealing and concealing oneself occupy centre stage, but they give rise to ambivalences as revealing oneself has both its advantages and disadvantages.

When the network actor set up her first home page at the age of 14, she already used it as a platform to present herself and her preferences, she admitted. It included a list entitled "What Margarete[15] likes, what Margarete doesn't like." She also put a photo gallery on her home page, including photos of her room, and a page where she published the computer games she played and the texts of songs she listened to. At the time of the interview the 19-year-old was active in social networks. On Facebook she posted photos of her trips but also her own poems. In her status updates she shared "when I am travelling somewhere or what I'm thinking about." When she went to an event, she "automatically" posted that on Facebook as well.

Digital media, it would appear, document her life but not her entire life. She described how she selected what she related and how, with the intention of creating a positive public image of herself:

> Well, I don't want to post any old thing online which I myself don't like or which presents me in a bad light somehow. You always make yourself a little bit more beautiful somehow, when you have the possibility to present yourself.

For this network actor, it is all about the "beautiful image" of herself which she wishes to create in the public space of social networks. She admitted that if something did not fit in, she kept it to herself, deliberately drawing a line between revealing and concealing herself, as is quite clear from the quotation which, at the same time, represents the boundary

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[15] This is a pseudonym.

between the public and the private. By changing from the first-person singular pronoun (*I*) to the second-person singular (*you*) when talking about the sugar-coated self-portrayal, she characterizes her conduct as general behaviour. This possibly allows her to own up to this behaviour although she is well aware of its problematic aspect, as the following experience shows.

Drawing boundaries in the interests of creating a beautiful image can become problematic when another boundary is crossed in the process, namely the boundary between digital space and the world beyond that space in which face-to-face encounters dominate. The network actor told a story from the time when she had just begun to be active in the internet. She related how she got to know a girl in a chatroom "who I then wanted to meet or she wanted to meet me and then I didn't want to. Well, it was like this, for me, I suddenly didn't dare to meet her." She did not dare to meet her because she was aware of the discrepancy between the image which she had created of herself online and the image which she did not make public. It even appears as though she perceived the beautiful image to be a false image when she said: "I got in the habit of presenting myself as somebody who maybe wasn't me." The fact that she dared to do so online, I would presume, was because the "virtual and the real" were separate in her head. When faced with the up-coming meeting, the boundary between online and offline threatened to liquify. There are also indications that she was uneasy about the meeting from the very start because she was not clear about who wanted to meet whom and whether she really wanted to meet the other girl. Ultimately she prevented herself from crossing the boundary from online to offline by evading the face-to-face contact, which she presented as a drama because she cancelled at the very last minute. Up until that point she had hesitated, only to confirm the boundary present in her head in order to keep the beautiful image intact.

Even as a 14-year-old, she saw how having her own home page gave her the option of determining her own public image. She exploited this option, from her perspective, to "portray myself in a positive light." Against the backdrop of this motivation, it is hardly surprising that she developed a methodological and intentional plan of action when dealing with boundaries in virtual space as well as between so-called virtual life and real life which involves management skills.

This behaviour promises her the responses that she treasures. They trigger a feeling "like Oxytocin,"[16] she explained, "and that is the same feeling you get when having a cuddle [laughing]. And that really triggers a feeling of happiness." The feeling of happiness is not long lasting, however. She recounted how she felt anxious when she became aware of the fact that the audience for her electronic messages was unlimited and that her online profile could be accessed anywhere any time:

> I was at a party recently and I was standing near the TV in the living room where you could look at Flickr albums[17] and suddenly they started to look at my Flickr album and that really was, that was a bit weird.

The interviewer asked her what she felt like in such a situation. "Well, pretty unpleasant at first," she replied, "because there were photos of a photo shoot together with a friend. And then all of a sudden I wasn't sure whether she also was in favour of me posting it online so that others could see it." The 19-year-old had unexpectedly become witness to her own online presence; she was forced to look at herself from the perspective of an audience, taking over their standards and measuring her own image by them. That can be quite unsettling. She also realized that she had publicly posted pictures of her friend online without asking her for permission.

There are no general rules for the constitution of new public spheres in virtual space. Everybody has to decide for themselves where they draw the line between the public and the private. The 19-year-old had relieved her friend of this task, possibly disregarding her friend's idea of where the line should be drawn in the process, she now realized. She identified her mistake; we do not know whether she took appropriate action. The doubts that briefly arose on having posted her own picture soon gave way to a positive assessment, as the following statement shows: "But otherwise I actually find it pretty, well somehow fascinating to see how they react. Because then you also notice what people actually like and what not when they look at it." As a direct witness of the reactions to her own photos the network actor found out what she could do even better, how she could appeal to public taste even more. This situation which started off by

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[16] Oxytocin is a "feel-good" hormone which is associated with love and trust.
[17] Flickr is a web portal where digital images and five-minute videos can be posted and shared.

unsettling her, in the end, accommodated her motivation to create a positive image of herself.

And yet she still has doubts as to whether the boundaries that she draws are drawn appropriately. Looking back on the boundaries she drew between the public and the private as a 14-year-old network actor, she wondered "whether I should have actually disclosed that?", continuing "[y]ou have to ask yourself how much you should post online these days." She mentioned this right at the beginning of the interview, indicating that the question of managing boundaries is uppermost in her mind. Towards the end of the interview, she reformulated her scepticism even more clearly, comparing her generation with a generation which does not have an online presence in her eyes:

> When I think about it, the grown-ups of today don't have their past on record. You can't actually find out anything about them online because the internet hasn't been around long enough; well, nothing about when they were young at least.

This comment sounds as though she is envious of the generation described as not having an online presence. Contrary to this generation, she sees her past as being on record in the internet. A "past on record" is like handcuffs which can bind her to an unloved spot, which she cannot throw off, which can also operate effectively in the present, whether she likes it or not. Thoughts along these lines appear to stick in her mind: "I don't know whether you … can keep track of me for ever. Actually I can never ever reverse it and that's somehow a bit crazy." These words reveal the uncertainty in her mind as to what can happen with her public image, what access it will be exposed to, things that she cannot prevent from happening because she has entrusted her image to a medium which stores all content on a permanent basis, like an archive. That is how she sees it at least. In response to the researcher's question "I am present on various online platforms. What does that look like for me?", she drew a picture which visualized both her uncertainty and her attempt to protect herself from unwanted access (Fig. 4.4).

In this drawing there are many arms and hands to be seen which are all clutching a figure, well wrapped up like a mummy, with only the head sticking out. She described herself as the "little doll with her Mac, typing away to herself, with her eyes closed and looking down, actually." She could feel the arms and hands coming from outside, but she did not want

Fig. 4.4   Retreat into the private amidst an anonymous public (network actor, f, 19, Austria)

to look at them, pointing out that the arms did not have any faces. They represent an anonymous public. By looking down and not being able to see herself, she can cherish the illusion that she cannot be seen; as a mummy-like figure there are few opportunities to attack or access her. The drawing creates the impression that she is retreating into her private world while surrounded by an anonymous public. This conflicts with her need to use the digital stage to be able to present herself to the general public in a positive light. She can live with this contradiction. It makes her think. She searches for reasons to publish personal details, also seeing them in the appeals launched by social networks like Facebook: "They pretty much urge you to reveal everything about yourself." She has followed these appeals so far by showing online what can serve to construct a beautiful image. We do not know what the future will look like: The thoughtfulness which we identified and the doubts expressed about the way she has

managed those boundaries so far lead us to believe that the 19-year-old is undergoing a period of change in her life.

This network actor discovered the internet for herself when she was 14 years old; she did not regard it as a tool but rather as a new place to live: "I spent my whole life there then, the whole day, I was really addicted to it." Looking back to her early days in the internet and to subsequent experiences, she wonders whether she identified the correct boundaries. In a similar fashion to the Arab blogger in the previous story about managing boundaries, she is concerned about identifying strategies which should protect her from the risks of unauthorized access without wiping out the potential for accessing a new public.

4.5   TRANSFORMATION NARRATIONS

Changes from one life phase to another or changes in self-representations are the focal points which the transformation narrations revolve around which were identified in the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace." The protagonists in these narrations are between 11 and 13 years old. They sense that something is about to change, that they should and/or want to become an Other. Intellectually, actively, and emotionally, they are setting off on a voyage of discovery in which digital media take on important functions in several respects. Even mere possession can serve to document the process of change in a visible manner; digital media are also used as an experimental space, training venue, or template when making decisions about questions concerning real life. Woven into their online actions are moral questions and questions about the Self as well as questions about success and respect.

4.5.1   The Goal-Oriented Actors

Both of the narrations embedded in the interviews with a 13-year-old and an 11-year-old network actor, both male and from the same German-speaking country, have a clear common objective, which should be conveyed by the heading "the goal-oriented actors." For one of them it is quite simply the goal of becoming an adult; for the other it is the marks of success and bonuses which are associated with becoming an adult. The 13-year-old wants to leave everything behind which identifies him as a child and surround himself with symbols of the adult world instead whereas the 11-year-old is trying to attain his goal of becoming a famous

football player. For the 13-year-old, the symbols of the adult world include increasing his access rights to the internet and owning (media-related) technical devices whereas the 11-year-old is busy practising his football skills on the pitch, on the street, and in the internet. Both protagonists were included in the study because they were members of *SWR Kindernetz* (2020).[18] But by the time the interviews took place, several months after they had been selected, they were only using the network sporadically or were distancing themselves from it. Their growing detachment from *SWR Kindernetz* corresponded to their efforts to conquer new ground.

Right at the beginning of the interview, the 13-year-old distanced himself from a computer game that *SWR Kindernetz* (2020) had put online, explaining that he used to play the game and called himself "Löwie" in the game but that he had dropped the nickname and hardly played the game anymore either. A little later he referred to a second computer game where he could interact with a frog and a tiger duck[19] which he had also turned his back on. His justification for no longer having fun playing it was: "As I said, I think that it's more for younger kids." The 13-year-old wants to act independently, which also becomes clear in the part of the narrative where he described how he came into conflict with the editorial team of *SWR Kindernetz* (2020). He explained that he had breached rules on the network on several occasions, for example by including a Playboy symbol made up of dollar signs on the home page which he had set up on the portal. He then removed the symbol from his home page but uploaded it again the following day. He had not been reprimanded a second time. The 13-year-old thought that his actions were funny; he attested that the editorial team were "nuts." The incident he described was all about negotiating power. Virtually still a child, he was wrangling with adults about who had the authority to make decisions. For the time being, the 13-year-old could assume that he had won the power game, which he could chalk up as a gain in status.

Whereas the examples described earlier concern the use of digital media, which provides evidence, in the eyes of the 13-year-old, that he is growing up, he emphasizes in other passages that owning (media-related) technical

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[18] *SWR Kindernetz* (2020) is a portal for children aged 8 to 14 which has been run by the Southwest German Broadcasting Company (SWR) since 1997. At the time of the interviews in 2010/2011, its online offer included a media network, an information section, an online meeting point, and a games section. The network was moderated, but the children could also set up their own clubs and home pages.

[19] A character in a children's book created by German artist and author Janosch.

devices should prove his transition to adulthood. He recounted that he had bought a "brand spanking new" mobile phone which was "bloody expensive" but he wanted to have a "fast and good mobile," and his pocket money obviously sufficed for the purchase. In addition, he had "got hold of a new screen" for his PC. At the time he was looking around on eBay for a scooter because he wanted to "get hold" of one the coming year. "Yes, then I'll be able to ride a scooter," he said, adding that "I'll get one with my pocket money as well." It is not only the fact of owning such (media-related) technical devices by which the 13-year-old is catapulting himself into the world of adults; in order to participate in this world, having his own money also appears to be of importance as it allows him to behave like a consumer.

No less goal-oriented, the 11-year-old pursues his path into the world of adults, albeit by different means. He is not interested in owning status symbols and having rights but in improving his skills as a football player. He is not only a member of a football club in the real world; he also takes part in football role-playing games provided by *SWR Kindernetz* (2020). He related how he swapped information online with other internet users about football clubs, players, and trainers; he also watched videos about football games online. And when he himself played football, "then I try to play like them, so I also copy their tricks." He described how he took on the role of admired players, became a star himself, as long as he was online at least, and experienced "what it feels like to be famous." He went even further, wondering "what he [Miroslav Klose, for example, a former member of the German national side] does in his free time, whether he's somewhere online in the internet." He followed his role models on Twitter. He was not only interested in their qualities as football players but also in how they lead their lives. His role models stand for a specific life model which he aspires to, as will become clear.

What motivates the 11-year-old to follow in the footsteps of his role models so passionately? He knew just what it was. He wanted to be famous. "Famous?" inquired the researcher. "Yes, famous, yes, yes!" he replied and continued:

> I think it's just great when you're famous and hear a lot about yourself, that you're in the media, on television, in the internet, in computer games as well, that people know a lot about you … that you're also famous all over the world.

The 11-year-old would like to be at the focus of media attention, admired, and maybe even envied, an important person for many. He expects that fame would also bring about something else, namely the possibility to earn a lot of money. He found that "it would certainly be good if I could buy myself great things with my money." By "great things," he means new gear. "Well, clothes are important to me," he explained. At school it was very "in to wear cool gear." He would like to have brightly coloured clothes, "yellow, light blue, blue, red" and sparkly stuff, like some girls wore in his class. He was crazy about "a lot of small diamonds, maybe, well okay, stones that glitter, that gleam in the sun." He did not have any clothes like that himself because they were too expensive. But he had given himself a nickname that brought him closer to such gear. He called himself "Hardyboy." Hardy was his favourite brand of clothes, although he did not own a single piece. The 13-year-old, in contrast, did not go into his motivation to strive for an increase in his access rights to the internet and to own more (media-related) technical devices in such detail. They were concealed, more implicitly, in the descriptions of what he did. He would like to replace childhood things with adult things but he did not say why adult things were so important for him. He did not mention the ideas he associated with being adult in his narrative either. In a similar way to the 11-year-old, it could be the feeling of being acknowledged that he wishes for. But there is no evidence for that in his interview.

Neither of them speaks explicitly about feelings when they talk about their goals and how they will achieve them. They disclose themselves implicitly, however. The 13-year-old is clearly proud when he lists the (media-related) technical devices he owns, when he emphasizes that he could afford to buy them with his pocket money, and when he compares the merits of his new possessions with the "old crap" which he has abandoned. The enthusiasm of the 11-year-old comes across clearly when he imagines being as famous as some of his favourite football stars or when he describes the glittering stones which he discovered on the expensive clothes which some of the girls wore in his class. Feelings of longing are also likely to be part of him as the things he admires and the things he aspires to are quite a long way away for him. Feelings of fear and frustration cannot be ruled out for either of them as the paths they have chosen to tread are paved with uncertainties, which makes setbacks likely.

In contrast to the 13-year-old, the 11-year-old sprinkles his narrative with reflections on the reasons which should explain his preferences and activities. He particularly tries to work out why he prefers football and

remembers: "I always was very sporty, for as long as I can remember." He started playing football when he was three or four. "Actually I grew up with the ball," he said. He was particularly fascinated by the moves, probably because he was good at them himself. He continued to explain: "You have to move around a lot, you see. You also have to run and be in good shape. And well, I am fit and that's what I like about it." He gave a second reason for his enthusiasm for football, namely the aesthetic qualities of the ball. He thought that the ball was "a very beautiful piece of sports equipment." This eye for beauty provides a link to his enthusiasm for brightly coloured, sparkly clothes and could represent the dreams of a young boy who would like to accomplish a great deal in the future.

Both boys pursue their strategies, which are geared towards change, online and offline, deliberately integrating digital media into their strategies. These media have qualities which turn them into a central location and tool where and with which the shift from childhood into the adult world is decided. The 13-year-old was given access to the internet on his 11th birthday, which he could interpret as a sign of growing up, but, then again, his father "activated the parental control function so that I can't access all homepages." This function appears to matter a lot to him because he mentioned it in the interview time and again, including the fact that he gauged his biographical status by it. Shortly after he had mentioned the parental control function in the interview for the first time, he declared with relief: "Now I've not got the parental control function anymore." His father had removed it because he assumed that the boy would now manage to find his own way around the internet. With pride he recounted: "And then I got everything, all of the programs: Microsoft, Outlook, and everything else were installed by my father." Having said that, he also mentioned that he was still not allowed to use the social network *SchülerVZ*,[20] although he found it "cool" precisely because his father did not let him use it. It could be that his initial perception of having the entire internet at his disposal was somewhat exaggerated, but that would only serve to underline that the removal of restrictions, in connection with the trust his father placed in him that he would deal with this in a responsible manner, was crucial for him when determining where he could place himself on his biographical "ladder of life." A further function, which was already discussed earlier, relates to the possession of (media-related)

[20] *SchülerVZ* was an online community for pupils which was founded in 2007 and which closed down in 2013.

technical devices, where digital media count as a materialized expression of becoming grown up, along with the scooter and television.

For the 11-year-old, the digital media are important for training and looking for information. As already mentioned, football role-playing games give him the chance to practise his skills as a footballer whereas on social networks like Twitter and YouTube he comes closer to his idols by following their digital trails in words and images. Towards the end of the interview he mentioned another opportunity for training provided by digital media, namely communication with girls. In digital networks he dared to do things he would not dare to do face-to-face. Online he could "pretend a bit and say, 'Hey, how are you doing?'." In real life he would "never get it out … properly because I'm a bit shy." For him pretending obviously means that he comes across as being more courageous than he actually is. His courage would fail him if he "was standing in front of them in real life." Possibly he is worried about how to deal with rebuffs which he would need to react to immediately in face-to-face contact. In such a situation the little boy would be visible who can hide himself online behind words and pictures. But maybe the little boy will also become more courageous when he has had enough practice in the internet.

The transformation narrations of the two boys should be seen in the context of a life phase characterized by upheavals and transitions. Childhood is coming to an end and adolescence, which leads to adulthood, is in sight. They are confronted with new, external hopes and expectations or have a presentiment about them; sometimes these expectations become tangible, like in the case of the parental control function being removed, accompanied by the appeal to behave responsibly online. More often than not, these expectations remain vague. The two boys face this unclear situation with clear objectives which they resolutely pursue.

4.5.2   *The Role Player*

Like the 11-year-old boy, a 12-year-old girl also talked about her preference for role-playing games. But in contrast to the boy she does not just slip into one role but takes on many different roles online and offline, including roles which she said would not go with her personality. The 12-year-old is trying things out; she has not yet made a decision. She is struggling with the question as to which one is right for her, and the digital media help her to come closer to her answer.

She explained how she joined *SWR Kindernetz* (2020) because of the role-playing games, which proceed as follows: Everybody taking part in the game gets a role whose character is not represented visually but is described in words by the moderators or players themselves. Between 10 and 50 players participate in one role-playing game. Together they write a story in which the players take on specific roles. When asked by the researcher which role she played, the 12-year-old replied: "Usually I am a normal person and rather a girl, of course, but sometimes a boy, too." This network actor does not want to become too detached from the reality which she thinks of as being normal but she does flirt with the idea of the Other as well, for example when she reported that she sometimes played "the bimbo" although that was not what she was like "for real." As a bimbo she had long blond hair, wore shorts or miniskirts, teased the others, and considered herself "totally gorgeous." Although such behaviour did not correspond to her self-image, she found it "exciting to play that role." It could also be exciting to try out another personality, allowing her to experience new feelings and thoughts as well as other players' reactions, which could also reveal a few surprises. The 12-year-old was taking part in seven role-playing games, slipping into a different role for each of them, which also opened up a broad spectrum of possible experiences and actions.

Beyond these role-playing games, the 12-year-old slipped into another role as the organizer of an online drawing club. In this club, which has 20 members, they swap their experiences of drawing, advise each other where they can buy the best coloured pens and pencils, and discuss how they can learn specific techniques. The 12-year-old is in charge of this club, as she describes thus:

> So, when somebody new wants to join, they have to confirm that they are allowed to become a member of my club and I can set up a poll where you have to answer with yes/no or in/out. I can delete posts in case the rules are not—well, in case they break the rules. Yes, it's like that!

Alongside her drawing, in this role she can practise her organizational skills, leadership abilities, and powers of assertion (Fig. 4.5). When asked about the motivation behind founding the club, she explained: "I would like to get better, the way in which I draw and paint, that's actually the most important thing for me, and also that others get better as well." The second motivation, which relates to Others, is part of the role of being

Fig. 4.5 On the lookout for the right thing (network actor, f, 12, Germany)

club leader, responsible for choosing suitable members, asking about their interests, and ensuring that everybody sticks to the rules. An overarching motivation for the 12-year-old's online activities is implicit in her visualization, which answers the question "Who am I in *SWR Kindernetz*?"

The drawing shows a female figure whose body is drawn in detail whereas the head just consists of a rectangle with a question mark in it. There are also two question marks on the figure's torso. In one hand, the girl is holding a pen, in the other a piece of paper; both reveal what the 12-year-old likes doing, namely drawing. She commented on her visualization as follows:

> The question mark should symbolize that not much, well, that people don't know that much about me. And the one and only thing that they know about is what I like doing, and I've got that in my hands: drawing. And

actually I should put a whole lot more question marks all around because they have no idea what I look like, just what I like doing.

Indeed, for the participants in the role-playing games and the members of the drawing club, she is primarily present as a participant; the Others only find out things about her through what she does. They do not know what she looks like for there is no picture of her in *SWR Kindernetz* (2020) and the brief description of her appearance there does not match her actual appearance. She herself appears to have a nuanced image of herself, however, as revealed by the detailed drawing of her body. It is not a childlike body but a body transitioning from a child to a young woman. This body symbolizes a possible goal which has not yet been articulated. The head is concealed, though, even for the illustrator herself. The question mark instead of a head could point to a personality which is still concealed, especially in connection with the two question marks at breast height, a personality the 12-year-old is still seeking in her role-playing games. If this is the correct interpretation, then she herself is the one who does not yet know how her personality is going to develop but also the one who would like to find out about it, which could explain her experiment with many different roles.

Feelings are addressed just as indirectly by the 12-year-old girl as by the two boys in the stories about the "goal-oriented actors." But here, too, there are implicit references to feelings. The motto on her home page reads "A day without smiles is a wasted day," which points to her need to enjoy life and to experience funny things. The way her motto is formulated is a constant reminder to pay attention to such things. Even her nickname "Sahnekeks" [cream cookie], which she made up herself, has an amusing ring to it.

More clearly than feelings, constant questioning is a feature of the interview with this network actor, in other words, a constant need for reflection. Running like a golden thread throughout the interview, this need concentrates on the question of identifying the right thing; a comparison between life online and offline should help her to find the correct answer. Right at the beginning of the interview, she mentioned that there was a theatre group at her school which she acted in. Immediately after that comment, she started to compare acting in the theatre group with online role-playing games, ascertaining that "you can get into the spirit of it better in the theatre group but participation in *SWR Kindernetz*, that's also nice." A few minutes later, she explained that acting in the theatre

group was "much nicer … but in *SWR Kindernetz* it's simply easier because you only have to switch on the computer; there [at school] you actually have to go there and you don't always have enough time, of course, it's completely different." She grappled with the question as to what was different on multiple occasions. In her view, the longer she thought about it, the difference between acting in the school's theatre group and participating in online role-playing games or the difference between communication in the two spheres of reality in general could be attributed to physical presence in the one and not in the other. She began her musings on the presence or absence of corporeality with the following statement:

> In *SWR Kindernetz* you don't see the other people who play a role, well actually, you don't see anything about them but only the description of the role; in the internet … you have to write and in the theatre group you have to express your role with facial expressions and gestures and writing is just something completely different.

Communication by phone at least offered the possibility of hearing somebody's voice, with the consequence that

> you know more about the others when on the phone, you know their voices … you know their moods. When you chat online, you can't add intonation to the voice and that's what tells you about somebody's mood when they're talking.

The voice provides information about the mood; chatting, in contrast, makes it possible to cheat. She pointed out another difference which also has to do with physical presence, namely that she could not do things with her online friends, like having an ice cream or going to the swimming pool. So finally she came to the conclusion that it was not possible for her "to have proper friends" in the internet; that was why she "didn't set great store by friends in the internet." She even went one step further: Whereas there were many important things in "real life," in her view "in the internet … actually nothing is truly important." In the 12-year-old's reflections, the body becomes a guarantee for what is true and important because "it can't lie." Physical invisibility in the internet, in contrast, opens up opportunities for pretence and lies, which the 12-year-old finds irritating. Then again, she makes use of these possibilities herself in her

role-playing games and appreciates them because they lead her into new experiential worlds. It is not surprising that she is sometimes torn between both spheres when trying to evaluate them or that she contradicts herself at times. She justified setting up her online drawing club, for example, by saying that she wanted to improve herself; at another point, she explained that it was not possible to learn anything online "that you needed." Her answer to the question as to what the reactions of other internet users to her online profile mean to her was also ambivalent. "Well, it's not unimportant," she said, "but not truly important either." The reactions are only important when they are negative. And she deleted those, she said. Most of the time they included praise, or even offers of support when she was sad. But that was of no real help to her because the Others did not know the context which had caused that particular mood. They could not try to understand a conflict with her mother, for example, because they did not know her. She does not expect very much from a counterpart who does not share her social context. It is therefore hardly surprising when she responded to a boy who asked her online whether she wanted to be his girlfriend with a resounding "no": "I asked him whether he can't look for a girlfriend in his real life and that I found it quite rude of him to just ask and that we don't even know each other," she reported. Relationships which go beyond mere role-playing games need a common social context, or at least that is how I interpreted the 12-year-old's reaction, in which they have more in common with each other than posts in the internet.

Like the two boys in the previous section, the 12-year-old girl is in a phase of biographical upheaval and transition. She, too, knows, what is important to her: the right thing or the "real" thing, as she put it. She is still trying to identify what the right thing is, though. The only thing she knows is that she does not want to be confronted with lies and pretence. In her eyes, the virtual world provides more opportunities for lies than face-to-face encounters, but at the same time, it is those very opportunities which allow the game to take place with different patterns of behaviour and facets of personality out of which the contours of a new I can emerge. It is this quandary which has become a challenge for her.

4.6   Stories About Setting Out and Breaking Away

In the stories identified for setting out and breaking away,[21] an existing life course or social model is contrasted with something new, involving either confrontation or a deliberate quest. The morphology of the German word *Aufbruch* emphasizes that it signals the beginning of a process. A flower, a bud, or even a wound can burst open (Grimm & Grimm, 1854/1984, p. 630). An *Aufbruch* can be joyful or painful. The word *Ausbruch* indicates a sudden, powerful occurrence, as suggested by a fire breaking out, or a thunderstorm, volcano, the plague, a rumour, a disaster, or a war (1854/1984, pp. 53–54). Setting out and breaking away are often combined with each other in the stories told by the network actors and bloggers. They can appear as a biographical project, which can be embedded in an educational context, or in relation to a political project. In the biographically motivated contexts of setting out and breaking away, it is a question of combining the old and the new with each other; in the politically motivated contexts, those involved want to break away from something old that is experienced as shackles or associated with painful experiences, as illustrated in the Brothers Grimm's *German Dictionary*, which challenges the reader to "not let pain wear out your noble heart without saying a word, let it break out" (1854/1984, p. 54).

In these stories, regardless of whether they are dealing with biographical or political projects, the actors' thoughts and actions are future-oriented. Feelings of insecurity and uncertainty accompany this orientation as the consequences of taking action are unforeseeable, after all. The actors in the politically motivated contexts are infinitely more vulnerable because they are exposing themselves to risks affecting their health and their lives, as will become clear from their narratives.

4.6.1   Setting Out and Breaking Away as a Biographical Project

The authors of the biographically motivated stories about setting out and breaking away were 20, 21, and 24 years old when the interviews took place. Two of them were students—from Turkey and the USA—whose

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[21] The original heading for this section is *Auf- und Ausbruchsgeschichten*. The play on words in the German verbs/nouns *aufbrechen/Aufbruch* (bursting open) and *ausbrechen/ Ausbruch* (breaking out) is difficult to reproduce in English so *setting out* and *breaking away* are used respectively, even though they do not cover as wide a range of meanings as the German words.

stories are part of an educational project, and the third one, a 24-year-old American, was a globetrotter. Whereas the 20-year-old Turkish student was participating in a student exchange programme which took him from Istanbul to Vienna, the 21-year-old American student was a participant in a computer-based university project entitled "Global Modules" (Scudder, 2008, pp. 109ff.) in which students from the USA had online discussions on current political topics like peace politics, consumerism, or totalitarianism with students from other countries within a specified time frame. The Turkish student's setting out can be seen as geographical whereas that of the 21-year-old American was mental in nature. The 24-year-old American globetrotter also crossed geographical borders after setting out for Europe some three or four years previously where she had travelled through several countries, spending longer periods of time in some of them.

In the stories which were told, the old and familiar is found in the form of the narrators' home countries, their families and friends, and the new is found in the form of another country or another continent, including the people who live there and their cultures. Their attachment to their previous lives is important for the protagonists in these contexts of setting out and breaking away: The familiar social connections are maintained, and, at the same time, they want to get to know people from other social and cultural backgrounds, exchange views with them, and make new friends. The notion of setting out is more pronounced than that of breaking away, especially as there appears to be very little preventing them from tapping into new spheres of life, with the exception of their own pangs of guilt. The narrators of these stories are driven by curiosity, interest in Others, and expectations of improving their chances in life. The main experience that is associated with their intention to set out is that of a diversity of experiences.

Part of the setting-out story for the 20-year-old Turkish student involved his setting up an account in the social network *Netlog* (2010), which had been recommended to him by a friend for rapidly establishing contacts in the host country. He recalled that whenever he offered his friendship to Others in this network, he wrote: "Hello, I'm still new to Austria. I come from Turkey. I want to get to know people. How are you doing?" He could communicate in German, English, and Turkish, which shows that he wanted to get in contact with as many people as possible. He was not only interested in online contacts; he also wanted to meet people who were on social networks face to face. In order to counteract the potential transience of such contacts, he was quite resourceful. He

offered: "If somebody wants to learn Turkish and as I want to learn German, we can do a tandem." He recounted that he had regularly met up with a German friend in a café; they spoke in Turkish and German with the aim of learning the language spoken by the Other. As a counterpart to his attempts to learn a new language, get to know new people, and explore a new country, he read Turkish newspapers every day in the internet and Skyped with his family in Istanbul every second day. His comment on that was: "I can see my family and that makes me happy. I really look forward to it."

The setting-out story of the 21-year-old American student took place as part of the university project mentioned earlier in which American students discuss current social issues with students from other countries. The 21-year-old had already taken part in the project three times. Contrary to the Turkish student, for him it was not the personal contacts which were in focus but rather the international exchange on various topics. In this exchange he was not acting as an individual but as the representative of his university and country. "You feel an obligation to make a good impression for your school or for your country," he reported.

The 24-year-old American opened herself up to the way of life in the new countries she was travelling through in pictures. She took photos of everything which caught her attention, for example posters, "a man with a funny hat," or what she ate. She recalled: "I take pictures of my food that I eat in different countries … It's an easier way to put things together." Her statement points to an attempt to find connections between new and different things in visual form which she discovered after setting out for another continent; in other words her aim is to generate coherence. This intention is also reflected in her habit of attempting to stay in touch with people whom she met en route via Facebook. In this way she creates a circle of friends who, virtually at least, accompany her on her journey and give her a feeling of coherence. The photos that the 24-year-old posted online not only symbolize her setting off into a new world; she also used them to build a bridge to what she had left behind. She emphasized that the pictures which she had posted online could be viewed by her family. In her imagination, her family was participating in her story, becoming part of her project.

The strongest motivation in the Turkish student's story about setting out is the desire to find new friends and to build up a network that could maybe provide him with a new home; he does not see this as competing with his existing home but rather as complementing it. Initially, for the

American student, it is a case of providing a good presentation of his country to people from other countries. But it does not stop there. In this attempt, he opens himself up to the Other, as represented by the people he is talking to, and gains, from their perspectives, new insights into the Own, a point which will be discussed later in more detail. In the 24-year-old American's story, the motivation for setting out is represented by the strong desire for freedom which she had already developed as a child, as illustrated by one of the stories she told. Back then she would have liked to play football with the boys but was not allowed to. So she took appropriate steps, as she put it:

> I wanted to play football with the boys but I wasn't allowed to. If I can't play football, I'm gonna read a book. They think I had social problems but it was really because I wanted to play football instead of hopscotch.

Her determination not to be forced to do anything but rather to pursue the Own became her maxim: "If I had to do something, I never wanted to [do it], but I would do just about anything [I wanted to] willingly." This determination must have played a role when setting out for Europe, which does not mean, however, that there were no open questions for her.

"I feel guilty all the time," the 24-year-old admitted. Her guilty feelings related to the younger siblings she had left behind in America and to whom she was like a mother: "I loved to play mother. I was always very involved in their lives." As much as she took pleasure in this role, she gave it up by setting out for Europe; emotionally, it appears, she had not yet freed herself from this role. As already mentioned, the Turkish student looked forward to speaking with and seeing his family in his Skype video calls. He was more worried about the here and now in his host country, Austria, tormented by the uncertainty as to whether he would make friends there, as the following passage illustrates: "I thought … when they [the people in Austria] are not friendly, what will I do then? When I've not got any friends, what will I do then?" For the 20-year-old, friendships appear to form the basis with which to minimize the risks of his setting out, but it is those very friendships which are unsettled by the new situation. Old friends have receded into the distance; new friendships have not yet been cemented. In this respect, setting out in a new country is not only like a bud bursting into flower; it can also lead to injuries, as indicated in the Brother Grimm's dictionary with the example of "a wound bursting open" (Grimm & Grimm, 1854/1984, p. 630).

The Turkish student's emotional insecurity gives him pause for thought: "Austria is in Europa and maybe its inhabitants are a bit cold." He makes a clear distinction between his home country and his host country; his words seem to imply that the different national identities could have consequences for the emotional behaviour of the inhabitants of both countries. These thoughts contradict his experiences in the social network *Netlog* (2010), however: "I use *Netlog* and I look at these people and the Austrians are not so cold." The concrete encounters which his setting out has prompted him to make confront him with the gap between expectations and experienced reality. The American student is also obliged to reflect on the concrete, albeit virtual, encounters as part of his university's online project, in which perceived differences are central. Initially only interested in the online encounters with people from other national and cultural backgrounds in order to present himself in the best possible light, he suddenly felt curious about the Other. He explained that "it was interesting just that kind of cultural curiosity that probably anybody would feel anytime they get to communicate with somebody who would have some sort of different experience from themselves." The curiosity aroused in him made him realize that "the communication style is so different for people in different countries." He found it difficult to describe the differences in communication because they were not only due to his communication partners not having English as their mother tongue. Thinking about it further, he formulated some more concrete reasons. He attempted to characterize the communicative behaviour of people in his country based on a comparison with other countries. Two points stood out: Firstly, "in the United States we tend to be really assertive, but at the same time usually really friendly," and secondly, "Americans, in general, tend to respond like they're right without question, which is maybe not the best quality to have." For the 21-year-old, the Own gains sharper contours thanks to the encounter with the Other, a point which he himself made as well: "You start to notice your own when you're communicating with somebody who has different ones." The gaze of the Own initiated by the communicative setting out for the Other is a critical gaze. And we do not know where that leads.

Whereas the 21-year-old's reflections are aimed at the Own which had become visible in his confrontation with the Other, for the 24-year-old American globetrotter it is the setting out itself which she examines carefully and critically. She reflects both on the social costs her setting out has caused in terms of reduced contact with her siblings and on the risk of

fragmented experiences. The latter emerges implicitly from her narrative when she describes how she uses her photos to attempt to link up different experiences in different countries. This also indicates that she had found a strategy to deal with the risks she had acknowledged in a constructive manner. For her, digital media are an important tool with which to maintain links across national borders. She never switches off her computer so that she can always be contacted, even in the middle of the night, especially by her best friend in America, who could never work out the time difference. She recalled: "So I leave it [the computer] open and she'd call me like four in the morning. But then I can hear it and I would answer." She also wants to be available for her parents. In addition, being permanently online, she could read the online edition of the local newspaper in the place she came from. She admitted that being online gave her the feeling of being close: "I feel connected," she said. Alongside the relationships with people from her home country, she described how she used Facebook to maintain friendships which had arisen on the move.

The Turkish student also uses digital media, as mentioned earlier, as the place and instrument for maintaining relationships. For different types of relationships he makes use of different digital services. He uses Skype to stay in regular contact with his family whereas the social network *Netlog* (2010) is for initiating new relationships and Facebook for communicating with friends. On top of that, like the 24-year-old American, he stays in touch with what is going on in his home country by regularly reading the online edition of a Turkish newspaper.

The 21-year-old American student addresses his university's online project "Global Modules" as one possibility for global communication. He commented on his visualization in answer to the question "Who am I on Global Modules?" as follows:

> I'm putting in the centre of it a picture of the world. … There are a bunch of small wavery lines from my face down onto the globe up in the centre. These will be my little ideas that I'm sending off into the world wide web. Then I'll do the same for these other little faces.

The 21-year-old uses his drawing to emphasize the swapping of ideas, which have not only brought him closer to the Foreign but also to the Own (Fig. 4.6). He also appreciates the limitations of digitally assisted communication in comparison with communication face to face, such as the loss of facial expressions and vocal inflections.
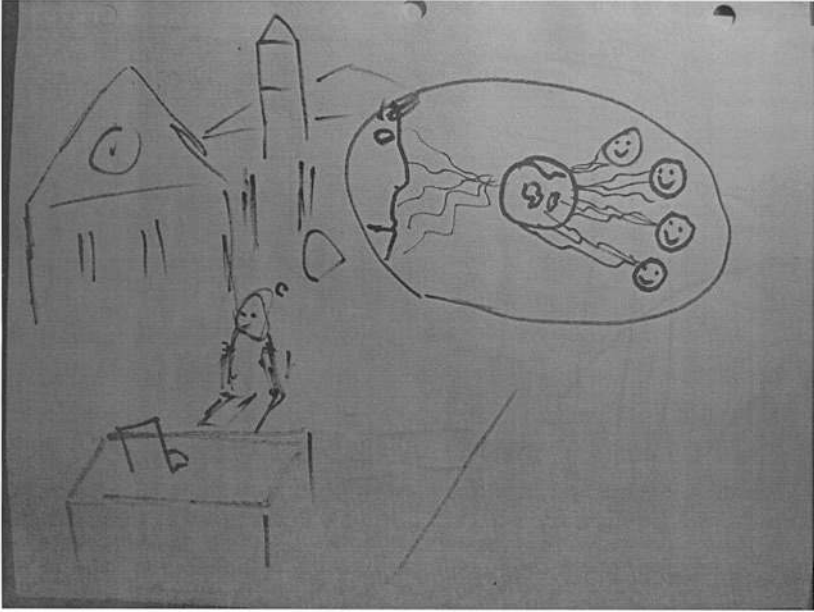
Fig. 4.6   Digitally assisted global communication (network actor, m, 21, USA)

The stories described here represent notions of setting out into other sociocultural territories. The contacts with other cultures and societies are partially based on the physical crossing of borders and partly on virtual border crossings. The double-faced nature of the experience as joyful expectation on the one hand and worries about possible disappointments and losses on the other comes across most clearly when the journey is geographical in nature. In these circumstances, the focus on maintaining and entering into social relationships is even stronger. Whereas his current circle of friends is still a haven of safety for the 21-year-old, the communication patterns of the people he is communicating with from other countries have become a challenge to take critical stock of his own style of communication.

4.6.2   Setting Out and Breaking Away as a Political Project

The narrations about setting out and breaking away are political in nature to the extent that they criticize the ruling sociocultural system and convey visions of an alternative future as well. The stories were told by four female network actors and bloggers aged 21 to 26 from the Arab world. None of the Western network actors or bloggers told stories of this type. These narrations criticize a lack of freedom of speech and opinion, the discrimination of minorities, and the way in which nature and the environment are treated in the region. At the same time the narrations include alternative visions and wishes like freedom of speech, giving minorities a voice, dealing responsibly with the environment and resources, and contacts with Western countries, also to show that the narrators' countries have other sides to them than the official ones relayed by the media, which are controlled by the ruling powers. In contrast to the biographically motivated stories, here the motivation to break away prevails. The narrations date back to the time before, during, or shortly after the Arab Revolution[22] in 2010 and 2011.

It was in 2006 that she began to take a critical look at the political conditions in her country and founded the digital platform *Mideast Youth* (n.d.),[23] recalled a 24-year-old network actor. Taboo topics and anxiety-provoking topics were given a forum on this platform, as the 24-year-old explained: "We talk a lot about taboos, you know, homosexuality, like I said, atheism … sex traffic, things that people don't talk about because they are scared." This platform was also the launching pad for campaigns like the "March 18 Movement," which championed the freedom of speech for bloggers. Before the Arab Revolution, a 23-year-old network actor got involved in an environmental initiative which addresses issues concerning energy consumption and waste disposal.[24] This initiative was addressed to

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[22] The Arab narrators always called the political protests in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010/2011 a revolution whereas in the Western world the name "Arab Spring" dominates.

[23] *Mideast Youth* (n.d.) is a platform for network actors which was founded in Bahrain in 2006. Its aim is to initiate critical exchange on the political situation in the Middle East between network actors who live in the region and those from other parts of the world. As the platform has since started to include political issues and problems from other parts of the world, it has been renamed *Majal: Amplifying Underrepresented Voices* (n.d.).

[24] The involvement of the 23-year-old network actor from Saudi Arabia can be ascribed to "Islamic Environmentalism," which was proposed in the 1960s by the Iranian-American philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Eco-Muslims advocate the economical use of resources,

the population as a whole and not only to the government. Two network actors saw the Arab Revolution as a challenge to turn their blogs into political blogs. One of them subsequently joined the "March 18 Movement"; she said that she also blogged about women's rights, and her involvement developed in parallel with the political events. When a man was killed by the police in Egypt because he had filmed the police in action, her tweets had rocketed. When faced with similar events, she tried to make the topic trend on Twitter. A 26-year-old Yemeni journalist had been using all internet services since the beginning of the Revolution; she reported being online for six hours a day. As she put it, "I tweet, I blog, I skype, I sms." Her full attention was focused on politics in Yemen and the Middle East. She had become an important source of information for the international media. The 26-year-old described herself as follows: "I talk freely about my political views, which are like one of the taboos in the Arab countries."

The motivations and goals behind the notion of setting out and breaking away are very clearly formulated in the narrations of the Arab network actors. Sometimes they are specific and sometimes general; sometimes they are addressed to inhabitants of their own country or region and sometimes to a wider public beyond the Middle East and North Africa. The 23-year-old environmental activist from Saudi Arabia justified her involvement with her love for nature and her observations that nobody in her country was doing anything about environmental issues. Together with Others, she wanted to create an awareness of "the importance of litter and recycling." The 24-year-old network actor from Bahrain who was actively engaged in increasing respect for human rights in the region could also give very precise reasons for her activities: "There was a lack of freedom of speech in the Middle East." Above and beyond that she wanted *Mideast Youth* (n.d.), the online platform she had founded, to give discriminated minorities in the region a voice. She reported:

animal welfare, healthy nutrition, and sustainable pilgrimages, citing the Quran to justify their involvement. According to this interpretation of the Quran, the world consists of signs of God, which should be protected. Most organizations associated with Eco-Islam are based in the Western world; according to the 23-year-old network actor, as a result of the Arab Revolution, many ecological groups and organizations were founded in the Middle East and in North Africa. Social networks, blogs, and websites play an important role in disseminating Eco-Islam.

The information about Eco-Islam presented here comes from an interview with Monika Zbidi (2014). In her dissertation, Zbidi analysed Eco-Islam as a modern Islamic movement.

> I like to discuss about ethnic and religious minorities. … We started talking about Bahá'ís and then atheism and then gay rights; so we started inviting gay people to come in, gay or bisexual or transgender people to give interviews with *Mideast Youth.*

The 24-year-old is convinced that "without their human rights no one else can have human rights." A 21-year-old network actor from the United Arab Emirates wants to help her own generation to find their own voice: "We wanted people to know 'look, we're the youth in the Middle East and we are active online, we are active socially and we believe in causes'. We have the voice and we wanted to be heard."

Feelings are rarely addressed directly in the narrations of the Arab network actors; only one of them reckoned that she would reveal online that she was happy, but not that she was sad or annoyed. Implicitly, however, the narrations indicate a broad spectrum of feelings which accompany the setting out and breaking away, such as anger, rage, fear, worry, hope, longings, and disappointment.

Alongside their motivations, reflections also take up much space in the narrations of the Arab network actors. It is difficult to differentiate clearly between motivations and reflections, but reflections have a greater thematic range. They relate to the social status quo, the attempts being made at the time of the narrative to bring about change, the narrators' own role and own actions in this process, and the perceived boundaries.

When characterizing the social status quo, some of the Arab network actors emphasized the taboos which they should not mention from the viewpoint of the ruling powers while some of them focused on the lack of human rights. "Usually in the Arab countries they have three taboos that they don't talk about: It's politics and religion and sex," reported a 25-year-old Yemeni network actor. Another network actor, this time from Bahrain, challenged the existence of social taboos and the lack of human rights:

> How can we learn about other religions if we are not meant to talk about them? How can you believe about other human beings and about the value of life and the value of human rights if you have no rights?

The political protests which took place in several Arab countries in 2011 are interpreted by a 21-year-old network actor as follows: "It's like a political awakening what's happening in the country. Already the

revolution had made the people realize their own identity, their own nationality, their own political rights, and people now are fighting for their democracy." The word "awakening" refers to the somnolent state which citizens were in before it was overcome because something was recognized as being important enough to fight for, which is one interpretation of the quote. One of the network actors wanted to support this awakening by breaking the taboos on her blog: "When I'm blogging I'm trying to break that wall and talk about one of those taboos. And even when I talk about gender issues I'm also trying to talk about sex … to shock the people with my opinion." She wants to "shock" not only her own country but also the global public, by providing insights into a different side of Yemen which had previously been invisible:

> We have a lot of stories, a lot of issues, a lot of aspects, a lot of faces, that we want the world to know about. And it will be shocking for the rest of the world to know that there is another side of Yemen except the terrorism side. And so I would like to be part of that shock.

Whether making what she considers concealed aspects of her country visible really is a shock for the global public remains to be seen. What is crucial, however, is her intention to debunk the myths, to make things public, and to break the silence, in short to risk a communicative rebellion. But such subversive acts also have their limits for the blogger. She would never write about religion because that would be life threatening. Recognizing the limits and factoring them into the calculation are concerns which affect all of the network actors quoted in this section in order to protect themselves and their families. One of them muses that this is so "because you don't know … who is monitoring you." That means that she never lets slip online where she lives, who her parents are, or when she leaves the house.

The stories about breaking away told by the Arab network actors not only unfold in digital space, although they believe it plays a central role. They tend to use several digital communication and information channels, as one of the network actors revealed: "When I open my laptop it's my Facebook open, my Twitter, my blog, BBC Yemen—it's just everything. I don't know how I'm able to do that but I do it." "Social media is a helping tool," explained the same network actor, adding shortly afterwards that "[s]ocial media is the future." What makes the online networks so attractive to these users? They appreciate the potential of digital media for

staying connected, in the words of one network actor: "I love Facebook because I can keep in touch with everybody." Another one added: "I think the online world makes the whole world smaller." They also welcome the speed of communication and the medium's potential for distributing news, as this network actor noted: "It's usually something about spreading my passion around." Finally, digital space is portrayed as a safe space: "I think some of the things we do, we cannot do outside of *Mideast Youth*; things that are homosexual, human rights, discussions about atheism. This for sure you cannot talk about in public without being arrested or in danger." One network actor called the platform a place where they could learn how to discuss such topics and to challenge everything they had been taught. That is why the platform was also a place of learning, or as the network actor put it, "*Mideast Youth* is education." It is a place which encourages an open discussion and the dissemination of ideas. Being connected with like-minded people is, not surprisingly, also a suitable instrument of combat, as referred to in the following statement: "We use new media in order to fight against oppression—oppression against ourselves, oppression against minorities." Equally unsurprisingly, given the qualities outlined earlier which support the setting out and breaking away of the network actors, some of them describe themselves as being addicted to digital media. Islam and the internet are no contradiction, in the words of a 23-year-old: "I'm Moslem, I mentioned that I'm in [name of town], that I'm an environmentalist, but I love the internet and I used to be an internet junkie." This love for the internet does not appear to be due to the political merits of the medium alone but to its virtues for communication in general, as was much more clearly expressed at a different point in the interview, when the network actor described how easy it was to find people on Facebook whom she had met somewhere. The internet opens up different contents, intentions, and activities. It is also conceivable that the political use of the internet, which currently dominates for the network actors, will give way to a more private use again at a later stage and in a different political situation.

The network actors' political criticism and comments are, obviously, addressed to an audience. Reactions—desirable and undesirable—are never long in coming. The undesirable reactions include threatening emails, like the message quoted by one network actor: "Wake up young lady, you gotta stop criticizing the president otherwise your mother and sister will be deprived of you[r] recklessness." The same network actor recalled an armed attack on a political activist and journalist in her own

home and talked about other journalists who had been beaten up on the street. Those threats were more than compensated for by the words of approval she received from readers of her blog "and from people who believe in me more than I believe in myself." Another network actor explained that she had become more courageous thanks to the support of her readers and dared to say more: "So when you have more supporters on your side it becomes easier to be more outspoken because you have more people who can back you up." Although this support was important, she did not expect only words of approval. Different opinions, with the exception of threatening emails, were welcome on the platform in the same way as the coexistence of diversity was an important component of the concept behind the platform.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the narrations about breaking away were recounted by the Arab network actors when the political protests in the individual countries in the Middle East and North Africa were well under way or had just come to an end. Not only the current events but also the happenings leading up to them were very much in the narrators' minds and were described by one narrator as follows: "We're talking about many years of suffering, of people suffering in their own nation by their own regime." The narrations are also to be seen in the context of specific life stories, which have fostered specific outlooks on life, a critical gaze, or a cosmopolitan attitude. The network actor who is actively engaged in human rights sees the roots for this commitment in her childhood. Even then it was clear to her that "I never wanted an office job, I never wanted to work from 9 to 5, I always wanted to work for myself and I wanted to do something that will change everyone's life." Another one did a degree in International Relations, which must have promoted her interest in the transregional exchange of opinion which is so important to her, as the following statement reveals: "I love the fact that you can share ideas with the community both at a regional local level and also at a very international level as well." A third network actor described her training as a journalist as an "eye-opening career," justifying it by saying "I got to know to be in contact with real issues or serious issues that Yemen has to face." Not one of four network actors became the author of her story about setting out and breaking away by chance; their own ambitions interacted with the historical situation which appealed to those very ambitions.

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A Theoretical Postscript: Time, Space, the Self and the You, and Digital Media as Narrative Constructions

While elaborating the typology of narrations presented in the previous chapter, my research interest was focused on the narrative webs at the heart of the episodes, reflections, contextualizations, and aspirations reported on in the interviews, on the narrations behind the narrations, as it were. Elements of these "contextualized" narrations may be recounted explicitly or implicitly, and sometimes they are nothing more than a hunch. Meaning is only accorded to these narrations, however, when explicit and implicit elements are collated. In the process, the interdependencies between the pieces of the narrative jigsaw puzzle become visible, affording a vision of a meaning which extends beyond that of the individual pieces. As Jürgen Straub emphasizes, the implicit elements of a narration are just as present from a mental perspective as the explicit ones (2013, p. 78). They are part of the "experiential story of a subject talking about the self" (2013, p. 78)[1] in a similar fashion to the unconscious, which is not, however, the subject of this analysis.

The identified narrations which integrate the explicit and implicit elements as well as different phases and spheres of life remind us of what Vera Nünning has called "master narratives" (2013, p. 163), by which she understands the large-scale meaningful narrations which can be sorted into individual episodes (2013, p. 163). Thus, the overarching narration must not be seen as something static. Rather, it is much more likely that it is open to change, that it will be told in different manners at different

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[1] All quotations from German publications were translated into English for this book.

points in time, that new episodes will be added and others omitted. It can also be the case that a second major narration emerges; this could exist side by side with the first or could even supplant it. Whatever the overarching narrations turn out to be, they are also always products of the circumstances in which they are recounted. These circumstances include both the historical point in time, along with its sociocultural implications, and, in the case of the study at hand, the context of the research, the specific research interests, and the cultural roots of the female researchers, which must have had an effect on what was said and how when talking to the Arab and American network actors. Such constraints are a general issue in research as every utterance is constituted depending on space and time. Nonetheless, subjectivity includes certain consistent facets which make up the irreducibility of the human subject discussed in Sect. 2.3. When Arif Dirlik claims, in connection with social transformation, that what is to come always bears the mark of what was before (2010, p. 36), this applies equally to the level of the subject. In this respect, the assumption is that the narrations concerned and the images, strategies, experiences, and attitudes towards life expressed in them are not due to chance but boast elements of continuity.

The narrators are divided up over two instances, being both the narrators of and protagonists in their narrations (Ries, 2013, p. 41), and as such, they often live through what they tell for a second time on an emotional level. Constantly changing between these two roles when narrating also implies a shift between distance from and proximity to what is being narrated. This has consequences for the narrative processing of what has been experienced as well as for the construction of the Self. I will return to this point in Sect. 5.3.2.

This chapter pursues the question as to how the concepts presented in the second and third chapters, namely time and space, the Self and the You, and the structural characteristics of digital media, appear in the narrations under investigation and in what way these concepts and structural characteristics are manifested in these stories. This has already been touched on descriptively in connection with individual narrations; now a cross-comparison should help reveal overlapping tendencies across the individual narrations. The theoretical concepts of time, space, the Self, the You, and digital media can be identified in the different types of narrations but take on different forms in each type. This chapter builds on the previous one, addressing the theoretical interfaces. Familiarity with the previous chapter facilitates comprehension of the theoretical elaborations in the current one.

5.1   Time Stamps

Time appears in various types of narrations as biographical and sociocultural time.

5.1.1   "I wanted to play football with the boys but …": Biographical Time

The most impressive time stamps in the narrations are the autobiographical traces which reference past or current life circumstances, which were formulated as a reason for something happening or not, or which were told to the researcher all the same, or at least could not remain hidden from her. Life stories are not static and invariable. They constitute themselves and change through narrating (Straub, 2013, p. 86). Subjects are involved in the genesis of their life stories in as much as they articulate what they have experienced as in a story (Straub, 2013, p. 96). When Norbert Meuter characterizes the doings in our life-world as a process of which narrating is a constitutive part (1995, p. 164), on the one hand he characterizes narrating as doing and on the other hand he emphasizes the processual nature of life stories, as narrating is the doing through which life stories arise. They appear as a narrative framework encompassing the existence of an individual which integrates the various episodes brought forth by narrating (Straub, 2013, p. 111).

5.1.1.1 The Present as a Consequence of the Autobiographical Past

"The past as such does not exist," suggests Aleida Assmann. "It can only be made present by selecting, shaping and interpreting" (2012, p. 122). In the narrations related for the study at hand, the past was invoked both consciously and unconsciously. It was described as a cause for something happening, or was recognizable as such, or as a supporting factor.

A conscious invocation of an autobiographical past can be found in the stories about setting out and breaking away told by the 24-year-old American network actor who set out for Europe, the 24-year-old network actor from Bahrain who founded the network *Mideast Youth* (n.d.), and the 26-year-old Yemini blogger and journalist, as well as in the self-staging narration by the 23-year-old fashion blogger from Austria. The American recognizes that there is an important link between the stubbornness she developed as a child (one manifestation of which was refusing to play outside because she was not allowed to play football with the boys) and her

setting out for another continent as a young woman. The 24-year-old Arab network actor identifies the determination to change her own life and that of others which she already felt as a "very young girl" as being the reason for her political commitment later on which was interpreted as an act of breaking away. The 23-year-old Austrian blogger tells a self-staging narration, but he, too, is aware of what motivated his self-staging activities. He mentions three causes which stem from the past: the importance of putting across "a good social image as a family" to the outside world; the fashion magazine *Vogue*, which awakened his passion for fashion as a means of self-representation when he was nine years old; and his grandmother, who "always took very meticulous care about the way she presented herself, but also to create a good impression in society."

The reasons that the 26-year-old Yemeni blogger gives as being responsible for her current actions and which are also part of a story about breaking away do not go so far back into the past. She considers her training as a journalist to be pivotal for being able to see through political relationships. This assumption illustrates Tilmann Habermas' proposition that life stories are not engraved in stone in childhood but that they can set a new course in adolescence and beyond as well (2011, p. 649).

How much truth is there in the stories from the past called up by the narrators? The cause–effect relations they present which appear to result in a logical picture are regarded as constructions in literature on the topic. Assmann observes that the past is "mould[ed] … in order to lend support to an argument or an attitude" in the present (2012, p. 122). Jürgen Straub argues along similar lines when he assumes that the past can be changed retrospectively "in the light of a changed present and in anticipation of a new future" (2013, p. 111). This is indicative that a narrated past fulfils a specific function for narrators, allowing them to see their own actions in the present as being logical and meaningful. In this respect, it is not important for the subject whether something really happened in the way it is described as happening (Ries, 2013, p. 36). What is important is that the narrated past gives the subject security on the basis of which perspectives for the future can develop. This is precisely what is interesting in this book, focusing as it does on an investigation of subjects' perspectives.

The past can also play a role in the genesis of life stories when subjects are not aware of it or, at best, only sense it. Examples of this can be identified in the self-staging narration of the 21-year-old blogger from Italy who chose the nickname Gaia and in the seller narration related by the

22-year-old blogger from Germany who promoted participatory projects. Both of them talk about events or experiences which they considered to have left a mark on their lives without establishing a connection between these and the focus of their narrations. Although the 21-year-old explained that Gaia, the heroine in the series of novels *Fearless* which she read when she was 12, had inspired her to be more courageous, she did not say that Gaia—and this is my interpretation—had become a counter-model which helped her to cope with current turning points in her life, caused by starting university in a new town, even if she suspected that that was the case. The 22-year-old German blogger talked about the death of her brother, which happened when she was six, as a traumatic and defining event. She does not talk about how this early experience of loss could have left a mark on her life. I believe that there could be a connection with the participatory projects she launched in virtual space, which I see as attempts to create new social bonds and connectivity which could form the antithesis to her experience of loss through death. Possibly it is one attempt in a series of further attempts to bind other people to her.

A 24-year-old blogger who had emigrated from Ukraine to Germany when she was 10 or 11 repeatedly talked about her experiences of being ostracized in her new home which gave her the feeling of being nothing and not being able to do anything. Then again, she talked about her sparkly online presence, oriented towards the manga character Asuka, to which she dedicated a great deal of time and care. She also mentioned that she had become something of a celebrity in the manga scene. Here, too, I presume that her past experiences of discrimination have some bearing on her internet presence in the sense of the one being compensated for by the other.

The autobiographical past can take effect—whether consciously or unconsciously—as an incentive or an encouragement, as a dark spot or as a bad memory, thus helping to define the focus around which the orientations, feelings, and actions are grouped which result in a specific narration. It can also only take effect as a contributing factor, for example when present-day network actors already had access to digital technology in puberty and could thus acquire technical competences in the use of such media at an early age, when their parents have different cultural backgrounds, or when they were confronted with different cultures as a result of spending time in various countries as adolescents or could attend schools where English was taught. Such life circumstances and associated experiences can encourage interest in the Foreign, coming to terms with

one's own culture, and exchange with network actors from other cultural spaces, supporting narrations in which interconnectedness, the management of boundaries, or setting out and breaking away occupy centre stage.

5.1.1.2 *Current Life Circumstances as Justifying or Supporting Factors*

As already suggested, it is not only a narrator's autobiographical past which can evoke certain narratives; the causative or supporting factors can also be found in current life circumstances. In the narratives under investigation, there are also current autobiographical upsets and upheavals, triggered by individuals or their families, or brought about by their belonging to a specific age group. In both cases, there are links to the stories which are told. The life of the 21-year-old American student who related an interconnectedness narration in which the sharing of experiences dominated must have been thrown into a disorderly state when his parents divorced and family members were strewn in all directions over the North American continent, and he, in addition, had to leave his home town and circle of friends behind when he started studying at a university in another state. His narration concentrates on activities which support interconnectedness in the form of sharing images and communications between the members of his family und making sure that he keeps in contact with his network of friends. The internet is an ideal medium for sharing, so he stays online all day. Another type of autobiographical upset was experienced by the 14-year-old German blogger who told a story about suppliers and sellers, presenting himself in his narration as a tester of purchasable products. At the time of the interview he had been recently diagnosed with a chronic illness which, time and again, made it impossible for him to have a social life. When he reviews technical appliances on his blog, presents recipes and his cooking experiences as well as photos to go with that, critiques documentaries, and uploads trailers, he creates an autonomous world for himself in which he can show off his competences and to which he always has access, unconstrained by his illness. The digitally assisted world of products which the 14-year-old creates with his blog is not a closed world reserved for him alone; rather it is one which is aimed at Others. In order to arouse Others' interests, he endeavours to meet their needs, to flesh out his articles carefully, and, to complement his product reviews, to tell others about his life, including his illness.

It is not events which go back a long way but current experiences which create the time stamps in the narrations of the two network actors. They appear as active participants in their own narrations (Müller-Funk, 2002,

p. 172) whose actions are intended to mitigate or compensate for autobiographical upsets, or, as in the case of the 14-year-old, to draw new outlooks on life from these upsets by developing expertise.

In the transformation narrations of the 11- and 13-year-olds who live in different parts of Germany (cf. Sect. 4.5.1), there is another type of time stamp which has to do with belonging to a specific age group. These network actors are either at the onset of puberty or right in the middle of it. In puberty, which leads to adolescence, everything gets mixed up (Erdheim, 1988, p. 193). The transition has to be managed from childhood to the adult world. A horizon opens up with a wealth of options in the context of which decisions have to be made (Helsper, 1997, p. 177). In Claude Lévi-Strauss' "'hot' societies" (1962/1966, pp. 233ff.), such as in Western cultures, young people are expected to question traditions, to develop innovative creativity, and to restructure their personality, which is no longer attached to a family framework (Assmann, 2012, pp. 118–119; Erdheim, 1984, p. 296). Nonetheless, even in hot cultures, there are social rituals which demand a commitment to prevalent values, or should at least restrict deviations from those values, such as grades at school, parental prohibitions, and selection procedures at university and on the labour market. It is a phase of life marked by contradictions, which unleashes insecurity and, at the same time, challenges individuals to build on agency and future perspectives.

Such challenges are definitely present in the transformation narrations. The two 11- and 13-year-old male network actors describe clear goals which will determine their individual journeys into adulthood. The 13-year-old is attempting to surround himself by things from the reservoir of transport and media technology, which he presents as proof of becoming an adult in his transformation narration; on top of that, he mentions his increased access to home pages which had previously been forbidden, which once again should provide proof of his responsible dealings with media technology. The 11-year-old is reaching for the stars; he wants to become a famous football player, training both offline and online to achieve this goal, and he dreams of expensive fashion brands, getting closer to them at least with his nickname "Hardyboy." Both narratives tell of fantasies of omnipotence, which are typical of adolescents. According to Mario Erdheim, they draw their strengths from these fantasies, but they can also prove to be their weak spots (1988, p. 200).

The narration of the 12-year-old network actor which I entitled "the role player" (Sect. 4.5.2) is also indicative of struggles with the demand

for agency. In the first place, this is illustrated by her participation in role-playing games online and offline. She makes extensive use of the possibility to swap roles in the online role-playing games in particular, playing seven different roles in seven role-playing games, which indicates very intensive experimentation with different ways of acting and self-representations. A second indication for her involvement with demands to develop courses of action is a question which runs through her narrative like a golden thread, namely the question as to what is right and important, or unimportant, in life. She makes use of the virtual world of the internet to help her process this question.

Just like with the autobiographical past, upsets and upheavals in the present can influence the focus around which an individual narration develops. This serves to process experiences through narrative and to develop solutions (Augustin, 2015, p. 180), a function which the narrators do not have to be aware of in order to fulfil a function.

5.1.2   *"It's like a political awakening …": Sociocultural Time*

Whereas in the transformation narrations, biographical life phases should be overcome, other narrations herald the overcoming of sociocultural epochs, namely those narrations about setting out and breaking away, interconnectedness, and managing boundaries which convey a message about a sociocultural epoch, at least when the narrations stem from Arab network actors and bloggers. They were telling their stories in 2010/11 when political protests against prevailing systems were becoming more frequent in North Africa and the Middle East, not only giving rise to the aforementioned narrations but presumably also expanding the scope for narrative practices. Wanting to leave "old times" behind as representative of a specific politico-cultural epoch draws on three narrative facets:

(1) Criticism of the epoch which is to be overcome in relation to existing taboos, a lack of freedom of speech and opinion, the discrimination of minorities, and the destruction of natural resources
(2) Emphasis on the wealth of emerging cultural facets alongside or as part of "old times" in the country concerned which should be made visible for the world public as points of reference for social alternatives
(3) Direct or indirect description of an alternative future

In the narrations, a "better future" is juxtaposed with the criticized "old times," creating the vision which points the way for current actions.

Time and again, the narrators make it clear in their narrations that they are concerned with a collectively experienced past and present as well as a collective future. In order to mark this in their stories, they emphasize a "we" who suffered in the past ("We're talking about many years of suffering, of people suffering") and who should have better chances in the future, as touched on in the statement "the youth of today is the future of tomorrow." The fact that they focus on the past, present, and future in their collective concern is also expressed in the descriptions of their communicative contributions in digital networks as attempts to create a collective consciousness ("We just spread awareness about the importance of litter and recycling") and in their desire to shock society to create awareness of certain points ("The first shock was about my political views and the second is about talking about gender issues and maybe I will also talk about religion").

Another marked element in their narratives in relation to "old times" concerns their designation of the protests in 2010/11 as a revolution,[2] a wording which was chosen by all of the Arab network actors and bloggers. The term revolution signalizes that the phasing out of "old times" has already begun, not in a harmonious sense but—as the term implies—as a rupture, as a more militant, more violent process. The risks associated with overcoming "old times" are discussed explicitly by those who have made it their goal to do so. The risks to life and limb are described. The experiences of risks invoked in the narratives outline a narrative grappling with the boundaries between "old times" and the alternative future. In all narrators there is a conflict between the recognized need to respect boundaries in order to reduce the risks and their desire to break through boundaries in order to help "new times" to achieve a breakthrough. Contradictory estimates of the boundary line by one and the same narrator indicate that the potential manoeuvrability is being weighed up in their narratives.

The narratives by Arab network actors and bloggers about overcoming a sociocultural epoch help them to refine their analysis of the status quo, to relate their own actions to the perceived status quo, and to plan future steps for action. Their confrontations with the past, present, and future of the societies they live in does not rule out that the stories are also about

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[2] In the Western media, the "Arab Spring" is the more common term, which implies breaking away but no upheaval.

their own Selves as every life is an existence which is determined by Others and the Other (Straub, 2013, pp. 79–80).

Time is an integral dimension and point of reference in the narrations presented here as told by adolescents and young adults from various countries on various continents. What comes across most clearly in the narrations is biographical and sociocultural time, which is relevant for the narrators as past, present, and future. The past is involved consciously, unconsciously, or potentially as the cause or as a supporting factor while the future is seen as a vision, a dream, or a goal. The present is not named explicitly by the narrators as it is the current context for action from which to view the past and the future and which influences this view. The narrators are too closely associated with the present in order to turn it into an object of reflection.

The narrations have a clearly identifiable middle as expressed in the focus which gives the narrations their name. The narrators often give their narrations a beginning: Sometimes it is defined very precisely, like a particular novel or a particular insight; sometimes it is only described roughly as a time of discrimination or suffering. Often the end of the narration is missing or it is, at best, an imaginary one, such as a successful career as a football player or a society without taboos. The more incomplete the narrations are, the more they allow new elements to be integrated and the more reasons there are for actions involving change. All of the narrations have a progressive character; this means that things are getting better from the narrators' perspective (Kraus, 2000, p. 12). It does not mean that elements of "stability narratives" (2000, p. 12), in which what has happened so far is pinned down, cannot sneak into the narrations or even dominate them. Such elements surface when the narrator's current context of life has become fragile, as was the case with the American student who, far from his family and home town, told about his constant efforts to hold together his family and network of friends by sharing things on different levels.

5.2   Spatial Relationships

Questions about space play just as important a role as questions of time in the narrations of the network actors and bloggers. They concentrate on experiencing and managing boundaries, on spatial crossings, and on creating and configuring virtual spaces.

5.2.1   *Experiencing and Managing Boundaries*

Experiencing and managing boundaries are topics which are mentioned most frequently in the narrations about managing boundaries and in the stories on setting out and breaking away. They are frequently connected with questions on the relation between the public and the private as well as with questions on the relation between virtual and physical reality. The notion of the public is interpreted more broadly here than in the public sphere conceived by Jürgen Habermas, which denotes the space in which free citizens discussed matters of common concern, resulting in a public opinion (1962/1992, p. 3). The Habermasian concept of the public sphere focuses on the political existence of subjects; in the following, the life-world and autobiographical existence of subjects are also of interest to the extent that they are negotiated in spaces to which there is open access. All narrative practices should belong to the public sphere as long as they are not concealed or secret (Hahn & Koppetsch, 2011, p. 11).

The Arab network actors and bloggers talk about experiencing boundaries in virtual space as they attempt to set up a critical public sphere online in relation to the sociocultural situation in their region. They are not surprised by the demands they receive to stop their criticism or by threats of violence. Given their attempts to put discursive manoeuvres to the test, they have to reckon with such messages. And yet they are insecure. They then attempt to process this insecurity through narrative. They observe: "It kind of showed me the boundaries!" They still ask: "What are the things that I can do and what are the things that I have the courage to continue with?" They remember: "There is one female activist who was attacked in her house." It is a question of grasping the significance of the indicated boundaries. Which actions can be continued risk-free? Which require courage? Could the same thing happen to me as to the activist who was attacked? Which boundaries do I have to accept? Narrating brings about a reflexive distance which promises to clarify the question as to how virtual space, as part of the public sphere, can be occupied content-wise or how it has to be occupied, despite the risks, in the interests of political goals.

Over and above that, experiencing boundaries is described as experiences taking place on the threshold between virtual and physical space. The narratives of several network actors reveal that limits exist for them on this threshold which should be maintained. A 19-year-old described the situation at a party as "unpleasant" when people suddenly started looking

at her Flickr album. She was just as irritated when an online friend suggested that they meet up offline. She admitted that she was not sure whether she really was like what she professed to be in the internet. In the first episode, her irritation could have been triggered by the fact that the public sphere online had been extended into a space that she considered to be private. In other words, she had defined a photo shoot as private which she had posted on Flickr as it also included photos of a friend who she had not asked for permission to publish, and it had now been exposed to appraisal from a public sphere which she was part of in this particular situation. In her story she weighs up the advantages and disadvantages of this experience, finally calming herself down, grateful for the opportunity of getting more feedback from other guests at the party, something which she judged to be advantageous. She characterizes the second episode as being a drama. When grappling with the incident in her narrative, it becomes clear to her what the cause of the drama was, namely that in her mind she had always separated "the virtual and the real" and that this separation had been called into question by the proposal to meet up offline.

The Arab blogger who has her own podcast and whose voice is sometimes recognized in real life, for example when she is shopping at the supermarket, would also like to be sure that the dividing line between physical reality and virtuality can be preserved, albeit for different reasons than those of the 19-year-old, who was worried that she had created an online image of herself which did not reflect reality. The Arab blogger wants to attract an audience for the content she posts online but not for herself; whether online or offline, she wishes to remain a private individual.

The narratives about experiencing boundaries indicate that dividing lines between the public and the private, or between online and offline, have started to shift, initiated to a certain extent by the narrators themselves as protagonists. The strict division between the public and the private, which Habermas (1962/1992, p. 28) promoted as a guarantee for the autonomous development of the bourgeois individual, is beginning to liquify. The narratives reveal an interest in clearly defined boundaries, however. At the same time, the narrators struggle with the definition of boundaries which, in view of an absence of regulatory social roles or such roles not being desired, is targeted at extending boundaries, retaining demarcations, or drawing new borders as an independent accomplishment within the framework of given power structures (Jurczyk & Oechsle, 2008, p. 27).

The acts which are intended to regulate boundaries are described as strategies for managing boundaries, as discussed earlier for the narrations about managing boundaries. Now they should be categorized systematically. The strategies which were mentioned most frequently include selection and differentiation.

The notion of selection relates to those strategies in the narrations about managing boundaries which are geared towards choosing contents that are to be communicated, or not, or towards people who are to be addressed, or not (Schachtner & Duller, 2014, pp. 67–68). The Arab network actors and bloggers continuously mention social taboos which they want to, or have to, avoid in their posts, albeit interspersed with comments that they actually would like to talk about such matters and whether they should not talk about them anyway. Both the Arab and Western network actors and bloggers describe how they withhold personal details like what they are called and where they live; they would like to carry on an unidentifiable existence beyond the internet. They explained that it was in the interests of their safety to do so, but the opposite conclusion can also be drawn, namely that they want to safeguard their freedoms online. Above and beyond that, the narrators wonder about the group of people they are addressing, like this 12-year-old, who explained: "I'm also careful about who I write to. … I only write to real friends anyway who I know for real." This "for real" refers to face-to-face contacts which should guide her choice of digital communication partners. On the narrative level, physical reality appears to be the more trustworthy kind of reality in the sense that it provides reliable information about the Other.

Alongside strategies of selection, strategies of differentiation are also mentioned which are used to compartmentalize virtual space as characterized by different degrees of public sphere-ness (Schachtner & Duller, 2014, pp. 68–69). One act of differentiation consists of assigning a particular status of public-ness to existing online networks, for example when Facebook is reserved for contacts with family and close friends while other networks are used to contact acquaintances or to come into contact with an anonymous public. Another differentiation strategy which was talked about consists of creating virtual spaces which are assigned different degrees of public-ness, as in the case of the Arab blogger who talked about her three blogs, aimed at her family, the regional public sphere, and an international public sphere.

All of the strategies about managing boundaries identified in the narratives are geared towards defining clear boundaries between the public and

the private, or between virtual and physical reality. The boundaries drawn in the narratives vary as they rely on individual acts. It also comes about that the private and the public are assigned to different locations and even that they are freed from being tied to a specific location, becoming a perspective of the subject that establishes the private in the very heart of the public (Jurczyk & Oechsle, 2008, p. 17), as with the blogger who reclaimed her private sphere right in the middle of a supermarket.

The narrators' strategic deliberations on managing boundaries are accompanied by feelings of doubt, anger, and insecurity, as well as by self-recrimination and fear. While one blogger asked whether she had drawn the line between the public and the private to the detriment of the latter ("Whether I should have actually disclosed that?"), particularly in view of her network activities at the age of 14, another one wondered whether she had reduced the scope of the public sphere too much when she deleted a post on her blog after being criticized by members of the public online ("I wish I didn't delete it.").

For Geert Lovink, the collective "confusion over … how much we should reveal about our private lives and opinions is on the rise" (2011, p. 39). Should this trend be confirmed, it is not only because individuals are left to their own devices when restructuring the relationship between the public and the private, but also because "sophisticated tracing technologies … have effectively destroyed online anonymity" (Lovink, 2011, p. 47). What is more, the internet never forgets. Mistakes which have been made, as many know to their cost, are not easy to fix, or as a male network actor from Saudi Arabia put it, "[i]f you post them [pieces of information], they are gone [posted] for ever, even if you delete them, they're gonna be there."

5.2.2   *Spatial Crossings*

Spatial crossings are another facet of spatial relationships addressed in the stories of the network actors and bloggers. Tales are told of both communicative and physical crossings.

The communicative crossings are hardly surprising, recounted as they are by network actors and bloggers who are using a medium which counts interconnectedness and globality amongst its structural characteristics. Spaces are crossed with every post and every tweet, but this is only thematized in the narratives when digitally assisted communication goes beyond national borders and across continents. "I'm talking to the world" is what

they want to get across. The experiences associated with communicative spatial crossings are described as representing diversity and differences. Diversity is illustrated by the different communication styles and opinions, which also have something to do with alternative ways of thinking, as an American student established. Diversity then brings differences to the fore as comparisons are virtually unavoidable, especially when misunderstandings arise. In the narratives, attempts are made to characterize diversity and differences as well as to relate them to the Own. The fact that this does not stay on the surface for the narrators is clarified by a network actor from Saudi Arabia: "I cannot determine what is the difference of impact that I'm taking from everywhere else coming back into me." Diversity becomes part of his personality, as long as he remains on the stage which is the internet at least, where he experiences himself as being "multinational" and "multigeographical." The prefix "multi" implies that the many exist alongside each other. Another network actor, who does not only communicate and cooperate digitally with partners from all over the world but who has also lived in several different countries, has coalesced into a hybrid whole, as he explained: "I'm a citizen of the world, like I could be at home just everywhere." Salmon Rushdie characterizes the crossing of boundaries, which, for him, implies the crossing of space and the Self, as new life forms: "The migrant, the man without frontiers, is the archetypal figure of our age" (2002, p. 415).

Experience of differences is also described as a key experience in the narratives about physical spatial crossings, but here it is not intrinsically characterized as being enriching and stimulating. In his story about setting out, the Turkish student who had moved to Vienna on a student exchange approaches day-to-day life, which differs so much from that in his home country, with scepticism, asking whether he can find the familiar in it or whether he will remain excluded from this day-to-day life. In her story about setting out, the American globetrotter who had been travelling through Europe for three to four years at the time of her narrative refers to the many different day-to-day lives which she has been confronted with on the European leg of her journey and which appear to promote a fragmentation of experiences, at least when identifying potential reasons from her attempts to link up her everyday experiences through images.

Whereas the internet is characterized as a corrosive medium, wearing holes in closed systems in the case of the communicative spatial crossings, it is seen as a constructive medium in connection with the physical spatial crossings, for example in attempts to establish contacts or in the digital

photo galleries. In any case, Assmann is surely correct when she writes: "Those who have crossed the frontiers from one state, society and culture to another have a great deal in common with those who have crossed the frontiers of familiarity, tradition and perception" (2012, p. 215). The social consequences of the type of spatial crossings named by Assmann are described by the narrators involved in this study as being not only enriching but also unsettling and threatening.

5.2.3   Creating and Configuring Spaces

Starting from a hybrid notion of space (Maresch & Werber, 2002, p. 13) according to which spaces are composed of material and immaterial parts, the narrations of the network actors and bloggers reveal numerous attempts to create and configure a space in the internet through their narrative practices. These narrative acts are portrayed implicitly or explicitly in the narrations. On the broad spectrum of spaces produced through narrative, the ones which stand out most clearly in the narrations include spaces for political discourse, selling, training, and flirting.

The *spaces for political discourse* appear in the stories about interconnectedness as well as about setting out and breaking away in so far as they are told by Arab network actors and bloggers. They generate this type of space by describing social platforms as locations for exchanging political analyses and opinions, for breaking social taboos, for supporting discriminated minorities, and for organizing political activities. In addition, the narrations include references to the risks which beleaguer these spaces and to attempts to reduce these risks, whether by leaving out certain topics or by redefining political discourses as cultural or social discourses.

In the narrations about suppliers and sellers, virtual *salesrooms* are created when talking about internet practices which focus on the provision of services, products, recommendations, and projects. As protagonists of these practices, the narrators promise themselves financial and ideational gains like acknowledgement, belonging, and solidarity.

In all of the narrations, virtual space is characterized as a *location for training*, either implicitly or explicitly. The 24-year-old Arab network actor who declares that "*Mideast Youth* is education" expresses it directly. For her, education means scrutinizing everything. The 12-year-old network actor who regards the social *SWR Kindernetz* portal (2020) as a space in which she can improve her drawing skills speaks out just as explicitly. Other narrations provide insights into the training of a whole set of

other skills like coming to terms with social conditions through images, creating self-representations as blueprints for the future, reconfiguring boundaries, overcoming patterns of childhood behaviour, and anticipating the needs of Others, as well as developing leadership ability, organizational capability, communication skills, and a capacity for interconnectedness.

Virtual space also appears as a *space for flirting* in the narrations, although not as frequently or as clearly as might be assumed from other studies (Illouz, 2007, pp. 75ff.). Only the narrations about self-staging and transformation related by adolescents have some references to this type of space. It acquires clearer contours when the 11-year-old says that he is more likely to dare to contact girls in virtual space or when the 12-year-old describes a boy's attempts to "chat her up," to which, naturally, she turns a deaf ear. In the descriptions of self-staging there is more potential for flirting when these enactments are identifiable as being oriented towards ideals of beauty which are geared to the opposite sex. The weak manifestation of virtual spaces for flirting in the narrations does not mean that they do not exist; this can also be due to the context in which the narrations were related, namely as part of a research environment in which the narrators drew lines between the public and the private and in which the researchers did not explicitly take up the topic of erotic relationships in the internet.

Thanks to digital media, experiencing boundaries, spatial crossings, and configuration of space have gained new facets of meaning. Spaces in the physical world are enlarged or complemented by new virtual spaces which are open to contents of all kinds but which also pose questions as to their relationship with spaces beyond the digital world. New public spheres arise which are used with great enthusiasm but which also meet with resistance, from the forces of law and order, for instance. Boundaries liquify or are redrawn by the network actors themselves or by other actors. The narratives address changes to space assisted by the media as well as options for new spatial structures which condense into individual projects; for the time being, however, that is what they remain: the projects of single individuals.

5.3   Representations of the Self

The thesis formulated in the second and third chapters of the book with reference to Foucault that narratives constitute themselves as technologies of Self-construction has been confirmed as a general trend in the analysis

of the empirical data. One result of this constitutive act is that self-representations are revealed in which the following dimensions have a key role to play: standardization and experimentation, orientation, and division and continuity.

5.3.1   Standardization and Experimentation

"Hot cultures," which include Western industrialized countries, "embrace invention and alteration" and even non-conformity (2012, pp. 118–119), as Assmann observes with reference to Lévi-Strauss (1962/1966, p. 233). The eagerness to experiment online in relation to one's own I which the adolescent network actors and bloggers from Western countries relate in their stories appears to be an expression of culturally promoted non-conformity. Here is the 21-year-old who wants to catapult herself into a fearless existence with the help of her nickname, Gaia, with the promise of independence and an ability to master the turning points in her life. Here are the adolescents who are engrossed in digital role-playing games, whether it is a small boy wanting to become a famous footballer or a 12-year-old girl slipping into a Self which appears to be contrary to their own Self or which involves taking on a different gender. Through their narrative acts in the internet which they refer to in their stories, everything speaks in favour of these network actors and bloggers setting their sights on a Self of the sort that Assmann calls an "exclusive identity" (2012, p. 200), which should distinguish the I from prescribed roles, emphasizing that the I is completely different from all Others. As strong as this wish may be, this begs the question as to whether the self-experiments they undertake really are major experiments in defiance of what is prescribed. Do fearlessness, superiority, and independence not also represent what society expects of them? Do fame and the flexibility of the individual not count amongst the honoured values of contemporary society (Roth-Ebner, 2015, pp. 310ff.; Sennett, 1998)?

In the stories told by Arab network actors and bloggers, who live in so-called cold cultures in which there is resistance to change, in which the signals point to cyclical repetition, and in which an "inclusive identity" is prescribed in conformity with traditional roles, there is a clear "no" to performing such "preformulated social roles" (Assmann, 2012, p. 200). In their stories a rebellious subject is conceptualized which declines to defer to society's expectations, which is in conflict with traditional expectations, which formulates alternatives, which is willing to take chances,

and which, time and again, has to concede that there are unsurmountable boundaries which cannot be ignored in order to protect themselves.

For Lovink, the trend towards standardization dominates Web 2.0, engendered by a global monitoring and surveillance industry which does not exactly encourage experiments with the I and one answer to which is the "Religion of the Positive" (2011, pp. 43–44). Indeed, this religion crops up in many narrations, for example when individuals explain how carefully a self-portrait is edited before being posted online in order to create a beautiful image for oneself and the Others or when they admit that sad and negative elements are excluded from posts in favour of communicated cheerfulness. Of course, not all narrators want to restrict their existence in the net to positive matters alone; some of them also want to reveal their dark sides. And even with those whose digital self-staging is guided by prevailing standards of beauty, flaws can be revealed, as this visualization illustrates in which a blogger draws attention to her online existence (Fig. 5.1).

Long hair, cupid lips, big eyes, round female forms, and shopping bags indicate conformity to current ideals of femininity and female beauty which are presented to a gaze for its perusal. But then there are also accessories in the drawing which symbolize divergence from this stereotype. A camera, paint brush, and pen represent her professional ambitions, standing for her desire for self-determination, individuality, and independence.

Seldom are such narrative self-representations unambiguous, whether in the form of images or texts. Mostly, they move between the opposing principles of standardization and experimentation, striking out for this pole rather than that, although that can change too, for one thing is clear: The self-representations are porous, open constructs. Narrating proves to be a technology of enablement and subjection, bringing about a double life as subject and sovereign in which variations are possible but offer no escape from social dependency.

5.3.2 Orientation

Orientation is about defining one's own position within a specific social context and, on the basis of this definition, being able to develop perspectives for the future with implications for acting. That presupposes knowledge of the Self and of the world. Both arise from the interpretation of experiences which individuals make and have made with themselves in their interactions with the social and cultural world which surrounds them.

Fig. 5.1 Standardization and experimentation (blogger, f, 24, Germany)

The past, too, both autobiographical and sociocultural, needs to be interpreted if it is to expand the horizons of their understanding. It is the stories, the big and the small ones, in which people search, interpretatively, for themselves and the world. This quest grows all the more volatile when existing orientations become obsolete, when confusion arises, and when there is a dearth of possible courses of action. In times of upheaval, insecurity is intensified. And so it is hardly surprising when questions of orientation are particularly obvious as a dimension of narrative self-representations in those narrations in which biographical and sociocultural upheaval form the context for subject construction, namely in the narrations about transformation as well as about setting out and breaking away.

Indications of a quest for the Self are found in the narratives by adolescent network actors and bloggers which are about searching for role models or searching for the right thing, which are about things to do with media technology and fashion labels with which they want to demonstrate

or secure their status, or which are about access to different online applications and websites which establish their position en route to adult life.

Quests for orientation in the sociocultural situations of upheaval find expression in a critical analysis of the social status quo, in experiments which involve breaking social taboos, in the development of social alternatives, and also in the to and fro between rebellion and remaining silent in the narrations of the Arab network actors and bloggers.

The options for defining one's Self and the world depend on narratives being laboratories in which their narrators can analyse, compare, categorize, and look for solutions. In narrating, Straub believes, subjects gain the necessary reflexive distance to what they have experienced which is constitutive for the establishment of orientation (2013, pp. 104–105) but which does not necessarily protect them from errors of judgement. That does not speak against their narrative quest for orientation. Even when this quest is risky, it is one of the most important possibilities for individuals to affirm themselves and the world.

5.3.3   Division Versus Continuity

When virtual spaces are used as locations for activity or as showrooms, the practices associated with these intentions are decisive in relation to who we want to be in these locations, bearing in mind that what we do is an essential part of who we are. "Who am I online?" is a question which the narrators pick up on spontaneously, more or less intensively, during their interviews. At the end of every interview, this question was then posed explicitly by the researchers, along with a request to give an answer to it in the form of a drawing. One of the answers to this question gave rise to the picture portrayed in Fig. 5.2.

Here we can see what the 22-year-old calls a "two-part portrait." She characterizes one side of her face as "pompous," that being the online side, whereas the other side is "simpler" and "more human," that being the offline side. Apart from being able to take the portrait as proof of the "Religion of the Positive" (Lovink, 2011, pp. 43–44) which is prevalent online, it also illustrates the phenomenon of division, which has its counterpoint in the phenomenon of continuity, which finds its voice in other stories. Division and continuity play a key role in the narrative Self-construction of network actors and bloggers, which was already hinted at in the strategy of selection as a form of managing boundaries. In what follows, not only should individual practices of division or continuity be

Fig. 5.2 The two-part portrait (blogger, f, 22, Germany)

considered but also how the subjects position themselves as a whole between the opposing principles of division and continuity.

Just like the 22-year-old German blogger, a 24-year-old Arab network actor also divides up her personality into an online and an offline version. In contrast with the former, according to her narrative, she does not post any touched-up photos of herself online; in fact, she does not post any images of herself in the net. Her visual presence is reserved for the offline world while online she is present through her argumentation, which does not happen offline. "On *Mideast Youth* I am much more outspoken I would say than I am in real life," she explained, continuing that the cause she championed in the internet, namely the rights of minorities, was not a topic that she would pursue in the world beyond the internet. In her own words, "I'm not going to go out in public and hold the microphone and say, 'I support gay rights for everyone'." This division did not only relate to the topics but also to the way in which she expressed herself. She reckoned that her language online was more powerful and aggressive. In response to the question "Who am I online?" she drew a woman wearing a niqab where only her eyes are seen. Her comment: "It's just to show that

who I am online is different than who I am offline." Her observant, critical gaze is visible in the public sphere online while her body is not. In the public sphere beyond the internet, in contrast, the body of the network actor is visible, albeit veiled, but not the political stance arising from her critical analysis. Accordingly, the link between body and politics frames what the network actor attempts to avoid.

Both examples of division are due to assumed dangers, in the first case, fears about dangers relating to the blogger's private life, and in the second, danger for life and limb, which might not be directed at the network actor alone, as she related, but also at her family ("There will be consequences suffering by my family").

Narrations which are about division contrast with narrations which are about continuity. An example of the latter is the self-staging narration of the 23-year-old blogger from Austria who blogs about fashion and his feelings. In his interview, he declared: "My blog mirrors my personality." For him, it was important, he recounted, to let his personality live on in the internet and to show everything it amounted to beyond the internet, including tragic moments in the form of emotional states after splitting up with a partner. His narrative does not reflect the "Religion of the Positive" but maybe a different religion, the religion of being oneself, proof of which can be found in the fact that the cracks in the beautiful image are blogged about quite candidly.

The 27-year-old blogger from the Arab world who presents a narration about managing boundaries spoke even more directly about continuity being a dimension of her self-representation when she commented: "I feel like my life online cannot even be separated from my, like, real life. It's mostly like a continuation." Whereas it is feelings which bring about continuity for the 23-year-old blogger, it is interests, hobbies, and friends which guarantee continuity for the 27-year-old Arab blogger, as she said: "Everything that I do online has a connection to what I do in real life. My interests, my hobbies, my friends—it's all very much interconnected."

In order to describe division and continuity as dimensions of self-representations, I have selected narrations which clearly illustrate the two extremes. Many other narrations fluctuate between the two. But the case studies discussed earlier also include fractures. The 27-year-old Arab blogger is the one who denied her online existence in the supermarket, as described in Sect. 4.4.1, at which point she was not counting on continuity but rather on division. Conversely, the 24-year-old Arab network actor who was strongly in favour of division described how she had started to

give her full name online, making it possible to associate her offline existence with her online presence. This could have to do with the fact that she has become so well known, also in Western media, that her name offers her more protection than her anonymity.

Division and continuity are opposing trends which have a flexible relationship with each other and where decisions have to be made constantly about maxims for future action in the light of new experiences.

5.4   Connections with the You

Whether the narrations of network actors and bloggers are about time stamps, spatial relationships, or self-representations, the I does not act in isolation in relation to time, space, or the Self; there is always a You involved. This You appears on the narrative stage as a concrete reference point, a topic in the narration, or in the imagination. It is not possible to explore all of the subtle ramifications of I–You relationships which run like a golden thread through the narrations. Instead I will limit my discussion to two phenomena in the I–You relationship which can be seen as typical of the net generation, intertwined as these phenomena are with the opportunities offered by digital media: wrestling for the Other's attention and the You in world communication.

5.4.1   Wrestling for the Other's Attention

"My entire blog is simply a challenge for me to get as many comments as possible and as many readers as possible," explained a 14-year-old blogger from Germany. The interest in comments and readers comes up time and again in the narrations, regardless of the age, gender, and cultural background of the narrators. An entire arsenal of strategies and efforts is deployed in order to ensure the Others' attention:

- Taking the greatest of care when writing articles, which are reread and corrected the next day before they are posted online
- Ensuring accuracy and reliability when reviewing products
- Reading other blogs to win their authors over as readers of one's own blog
- Regularly writing posts, even when it is a challenge to do so

The publication of one's own posts, articles, or "micro-narratives," as Ries calls them, takes place in full knowledge of the fact that "the addressees do not only read, observe, and hear but also write themselves, make films, and distribute music" (2013, p. 34). The narrators in the internet produce for other narrators, expect to get their narrative fragments in return, and produce new ones themselves (2013, p. 34). Being part of the lives of Others and having Others being part of one's own life are described as being important objectives. "I perch here permanently … waiting for somebody to deign to let me be part of their lives" was how a 29-year-old network actor from Austria put it (cf. Sect. 4.1.2), his comment expressing the ambivalent feelings that he appears to have in view of his dependence on the Other. This cycle of publishing and waiting has turned into a "drug" for him, he continued.

Lovink talks about a "comment culture" (2011, pp. 50ff.) in digital networks whose credo is "please say something about me, transport me further, link to me, like me" (2011, p. 59). According to him, "comments circulate around the … source text," they appear "informal, fast, and fluid," they "bring the silent original to life" (2011, p. 55), and in so doing invigorate the author as well, as a sign of affection.

"I never turn my computer off. Even in the middle of the night it's always on in case something, somebody calls me like so I can get it," recounted the 24-year-old American who was touring through Europe. As reported by other network actors and bloggers as well, the desire for attention results in the boundary between online and offline being overridden, or in virtual and physical spaces being permanently interlaced with each other, either because the laptop or smartphone is never switched off or because the devices are even taken to bed so that first thing in the morning, it is possible to dip into the world of virtual contacts, as a 21-year-old network actor from the United Arab Emirates described: "As soon as I wake up, I roll over [laughing] and even though I can't see properly, I type in all my passwords to my e-mails, check my e-mails." Should the expected messages, comments, and feedback not turn up, it is possible to force them to happen, as a 29-year-old depicted it metaphorically:

> You have a fishing rod with 200 fishhooks and one of your friends is hanging on every one of those hooks, and whenever you need one of them, you fish him out of the pond with the other 100,000 fish in it.

The interactive character of the medium makes it possible for individuals to become active themselves; above and beyond this, it creates the illusion of a practically unlimited number of Others who can be accessed.

What is the rationale behind the consistently keen interest in telling things to each other and narrating? There is the matter of undeniable dependence on the Other, as set out earlier with recourse to Meyer-Drawe (1990) and J. Benjamin (1988), who can see parts of us which we cannot see ourselves as we only ever see fragments of our whole. Then, as Mead taught us, there is the necessity of the Other as the "generalized other" (1934, p. 154), who confronts us with social norms against which we can read off the degree of our compliance or non-compliance. Safeguarding the Other in this sense is embedded in the modus operandi of giving and taking; I have to turn towards the Other so that the Other turns towards me.

Ries believes that the exchange of everyday micro-narratives online has also got something to do with the silence of the world and its systems (2013, p. 39). What he understands by this silence is the invincibility of nature and individuals' failure to get to grips with this social world by dint of which they are no longer in control of their lives (2013, p. 39). With their digitally assisted speech acts, reflecting everyday life, they assert their territorial links and the fact that they are not alone "versus the silence of the systems and the institutions" (2013, p. 40).

The comment of a 29-year-old that he was afraid of being "left out" if contact was severed with the Others provides a third reason: fear of no longer belonging, of being sidelined, of no longer being seen. In her novel *The Sorrows of an American*, Siri Hustvedt formulates this fear as the general fear of humans today: "'So few people look at you,' Burton said. 'Blind and deaf public hordes with shopping bags and briefcases and backpacks pass you by—that is the lot, my friend, of the unseen, the unknown, the unsignified, and the forgotten'" (2008, p. 291).

The fact that wrestling for the Others' attention in the digital media has become so intense is not due to the need for the Other having become stronger but rather because these media, as networked media, symbolize not only the promise of the Other but also the fulfilment of this promise.

5.4.2   World Communication

For him, it was clear from the very beginning, recounted a 26-year-old network actor from Saudi Arabia, who first got to know the internet when he was 13 years old, that "[t]here is something very big out there. It's not

limited to us." He recognized the potential of the internet in the opportunities to spread ideas beyond national borders. For him it was the prelude for interaction between Saudi Arabia and the international community.

The internet is a technology, according to Ries, which opens up the opportunity for tweets, posts, and images "to be produced, heard, and seen by many via the medium" (2013, p. 32). World communication becomes possible for everybody as long as they have access to these media and have the necessary communicative competences at their command. It is no longer reserved for the privileged few in politics, business, academia, and art.

World communication is visible in the narrations in different forms and has different meanings for individual narrators. The 26-year-old network actor from Saudi Arabia described how he made use of what he perceived as the communication potential of the medium in order to build up a worldwide network of friends in which events from different parts of the world could be discussed. This enables a global commentary to develop, as it were, which feeds on input from all four corners of the earth. As a second form of world communication, he depicts his attempts to introduce a version of Saudi Arabia to the world (cf. Sect. 4.1.1) which would otherwise remain concealed from the global public. Almost all of the Arab network actors and bloggers talk about this kind of world communication which should change the image of their countries and its culture as conveyed by the state-run media.

Thanks to digital media, worldwide communication has experienced an upswing the likes of which has never been seen before, which has led media theorist Norbert Bolz to propose that our perception of the world is identical to our perception of communication (2001, p. 7). Neither in his proposal nor in the examples of world communication mentioned earlier has communication merely played an instrumental role; it also leaves its mark on the contents of our perceptions and changes images.

Alongside the political ambitions which stimulate world communication, there are personal reasons too, as illustrated in the self-staging stories, for example. When the 23-year-old Austrian blogger said that he wrote his blog in English, it is surely not only due to his being more comfortable writing in English, as he claimed, but must also be connected with his aspiration, as a fashion expert, to be appreciated beyond national borders, which he describes as his goal at a different point in the interview. Knowing that they enjoy global visibility in the internet is seized upon by

all of the network actors and bloggers who told a self-staging story. As self-staging does not make sense without an audience, it can be assumed that the self-staging network actors, in the spirit of Lacan, are "call[ing] for a response" (1953/1996, p. 206), that they want to trigger off reverberations which would surely not be unwelcome as a global reverberation.

As the types of information and communication technologies continue to expand, these ties via the media "extend around the world" (William J. T. Mitchell, 2003, p. 17), as do our social relationships; the formats of perception and communication extend and change too. The miniaturization and merging of the digital devices which have made their way into our pockets and handbags ensures that we can stay more or less in permanent contact with the world. This changes subjectivity, "tak[ing] us another step further away from the Edenic condition of living entirely in the here and now, and allow[ing] homo electronicus endless shifts of attention and engagement throughout the reaches of space and time" (William J. T. Mitchell, 2005, p. 185).

5.5   Narrators, Narratives, Media: Cornerstones of Interplay

The references to space, time, the Self, and the You identified in the narrations of the network actors and bloggers always include references to digital technology as well because the narrators' lives are enmeshed with this technology. The interplay between narrators, narratives, and media technology is multifaceted. The distinctive cornerstones of this interplay, around which individual media references cluster, are the centre of attention in this section.

5.5.1   No End in Sight

Even though only one network actor explicitly describes the notion of sharing as the goal behind his narrative activities in the internet, all narrations point to the sharing of messages, images, and videos. Ries suggests that the act of sharing results in narrative migrations online which "turn up, are imparted, and are shared simultaneously in different places" (2013, p. 36). It is the structure of digital networks, in connection with the subjects' intentions, which gets the narratives up and running.

According to Hartmut Böhme, networks are organization forms for producing, distributing, and communicating objects of a material or symbolic nature (2004, p. 19). As computer-assisted networks are heterarchical (2004, p. 32), there is no one central body to steer such migrations. Their anarchic character is at least peculiar to the technical structure of digital media, but we also know from the narratives that there are attempts to conscript hierarchical elements into the technology. Despite such attempts, the internet is still spoken of by many as a place which "evokes, without restraint, textual, photographic, and film productions as raw materials for its exchange scenarios" (Ries, 2013, p. 41). The raw materials which the scenarios provide make it possible for discourses, acts of self-staging, and photo galleries to change constantly, taking up or omitting elements, redeploying one's own I and its speech acts in an apparently endless state of dynamism.

This dynamism is reflected in the narrations which report on the distribution of communication via digital services ("I tweet, I blog, I skype, I sms, I …") or which describe sauntering discursive movements across continents. It is expressed in the attempts which are described to reshape one's digital presentation of the Self time and again, motivated by the interactive exchange with Others, or to split up this I into different roles which represent and refine different facets of this I in different media settings. It can be read in the narratives on the never-ending canvassing for readers and followers, connected with hopes of an unimaginable number of comments. No end in sight is one way of summarizing the imagined character of the developmental potential of digital networks. The network as a building site (Böhme, 2004, p. 33) manages wishes and hopes but can also generate disquiet, as in the narration related by the Turkish student who, on arrival in a new cultural setting, doubts whether he can make new friends there. In this case, it illustrates the emotional processing of the possibility that the anticipated dynamics in the internet which bestow new friends on the narrator could come to an end. Other narrations bear witness to the emotional processing of the endlessness ascribed to the internet. The feelings which are described oscillate between delight at unprecedented opportunities for freedom or a wealth of options and annoyance at the self-imposed pressure of never being able to stop the hunt for new options.

As mentioned earlier, there are attempts to conscript hierarchies into the heterarchy of digital networks which work against the infinite number

of options. They are embodied by administrators, network providers, and, above all, by increasing instances of control and monitoring worldwide, which often work in tandem with political systems. At the same time, counterforces can be observed which emerge from the ranks of network actors and which defeat the modern controllers with their own means with the help of intelligent technical constructions and creative strategies. Further counterforces arise from the rhizome-like character of digital networks. Should it be true that these networks have a rhizome-like character, as postulated in Sect. 3.2.1.4 ("Dynamics"), it will also become difficult for that reason to inhibit the proliferation of narratives because such networks overcome interruptions, for example due to censorship, to re-emerge at another point in time and maybe at a more sheltered spot.

5.5.2   *The Upswing of the Image*

Images, like words, are objectivations of human practice and, as such, embody meanings. Images count as presentational carriers of meaning which, in contrast to verbal language, do not arrange units of meaning one after the other but are "understood only through the meaning of the whole, through their relations within the total structure" (Langer, 1957, p. 103). Until the 1980s the image was considered to be a qualitatively less valuable carrier of meaning in comparison to verbal language, amongst other reasons because images address the feelings and senses immediately. Going back to Greek philosophy, emotions and senses represent, as John Dewey sets forth, the unstable, arrested desire, or permanent change, which, unlike thinking, discourage us from apprehending the essence of things (1916/2009, pp. 449ff.). Krämer and Bredekamp, too, point out that "for a long time, perhaps for too long, culture was seen only as text" (2003/2013, p. 20). Grasping the world of culture as a "world of discursive signs" (2003/2013, p. 21) is deep-seated indeed in Western tradition. Digital media, too, were exclusively text-based media to start with; even the first computer games like MUDs[3] were based on text. The dominance of verbal language in virtual spaces has been crumbling, however, since digital media started developing into multimedia which integrate text, image, and sound. The narrations of the network actors and bloggers corroborate that, alongside text, sound in the form of podcasts and music but

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[3] An MUD (Multi User Dungeon) is a text-based role-playing game running on a central server which several players can log into.

above all the image has gained in significance. What functions of the image emerge out of the narrations, whether implicitly or explicitly?

The function of an image as a document is illustrated in the interconnectedness narration of the 26-year-old blogger who was born and grew up in Switzerland and later lived in various countries in Europe as well as in North and South America. At the time of the interview he was living in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned in Sect. 4.1.1, he produces photos series for his blog which visualize social questions like refugee issues and violence but also the types of clothing worn by Arab women. His narrative on these photo series includes the information that he had already been attacked verbally on several occasions for taking photos. His reaction to these attacks is one of bewilderment because he sees himself as an external observer with a neutral gaze. But presumably, under the impression of the various cultures he has lived in, he has developed a distinct eye for a shot, content-wise, which has an influence on his perspective as a photographer and which is in conflict with the norms of the country he is currently living in. One consequence of this gaze could be that the meaning of the photos he takes transcends the superficial purpose of documentation, which pictures tend to do anyway according to art historian W. J. T. Mitchell (2005, p. 31). The 26-year-old is wise to the excess of meaning, commenting that his photos of full-body veils worn by women show that the traditional attire of women in Saudi Arabia has turned into a "sexy thing." Accordingly, his photos point to a sexualization of clothing, invoking a taboo which surely did not go unnoticed by those readers or observers of his blog who criticized him for the photos he had posted.

In connection with the production of his photo series, the 26-year-old called himself a "community photographer," which implies that these series do not arise from the activities of one person alone. He described how he follows the photo blogs of other bloggers from which he gathers inspiration for his own photo blog and, at the same time, relates his images to the images of Others. As already described in connection with written posts, the production of images appears to take place with an awareness of the productions of Others. Mutual inspiration is not reserved to virtual space, of course, but it makes the process easier and quicker whereby images and texts become a kind of joint effort. It is not coincidental that there are tendencies to waive individual authorship for media products.

Moreover, images can prove valuable as binding agents, so to speak, as recounted by the 21-year-old American in his interconnectedness narration and the 24-year-old American in her setting-out narration. In the first case, the images of everyday activities serve to set up links between people who live some distance from each other ("Look at my Facebook profile at these photos today, you might enjoy them"). In the second case it is a question of linking experiences related to different places ("I take pictures of my food that I eat in different countries"). The narratives which bring the image into play as a binding agent say something about the narrators' attempts to establish coherence. People, situations, and experiences all want to be linked to each other so as to strengthen the feeling of living a coherent life, something that is imperilled by mobility and shorter-term commitments these days. Selecting and arranging images from particular subject areas—whether journeys, birthday parties, visits to the zoo, or family excursions—can create a coherent image of a person according to Nünning (2013, p. 163). This feeling of coherence is not limited to the individual posting the images online; it can also be presented to the outside world, giving the impression of a coherent life to those viewing the photos.

A third function of the image is revealed in the self-staging narrations. Here the narrators mention not only images but also texts as means of portraying themselves, but the image—in the form of profile photos, photo galleries, videos, and drawings—is accorded a much greater significance for the narrative. Part of these self-staging narrations includes giving detailed descriptions of the production of such images as a project in which appearance, facial expressions, gestures, and pose are very carefully staged and later edited, very much in the sense of technologies of Self-construction. The narrators make it clear that the body which is translated by these images "into media forms, the acting, self-portraying, masquerading, morphing body, the performing body becomes more attractive when used as an image" (Ries, 2013, p. 41). The body as an image wants to be admired, envied, and discovered; it should safeguard social contacts and future prospects. As the protagonists of these body images, the narrators find them important on two counts, as their stories reveal: the consistency of the image and signalling the flexibility and changeability of this image (Nünning, 2013, p. 159). Thus a body comes into view which sets continuity and discontinuity in a dynamic relation to each other.

Lorenzer's theory that words can never be as closely associated with visible objects as images can (1981, p. 28) could be extended to propose that wishes and dreams may be much more closely associated with images than words could ever be. Is that why the competition between text and image operates to the benefit of the image? If nothing else, under the influence of the multimediality and globality of digital media, a woven carpet of images could arise in connection with the image-producing subjects which pushes the word into the second row. In "The Relationship Between Language and the Image" (Sect. 3.2.4.3), I already mentioned the "pictorial turn" (W. J. T. Mitchell, 1994, pp. 11ff.); to this can be added a "visual culture," which is in the process of superseding textual culture. This trend does contrast with another development, however, in digital networks and on websites, at least, where the boundaries between text and image are liquefying and where novel text–image constructions arise from which the hierarchy has been removed in favour of a subtle word–image–sound combo, which is often comical to boot (Reichert, 2013, p. 529).

5.5.3   Transmedia

As already mentioned in "The Narrative Potential of Digital Heterotopias" in Sect. 3.2.5.3, transmedia is a concept introduced by media scholar Henry Jenkins which he defines, very briefly, as follows: "*Transmedia*, used by itself, simply means 'across media'" (2011, para. 8). Jenkins already recognized the narrative potential of transmedia trends; he also coined the term "transmedia storytelling," which describes "one logic for thinking[4] about the flow of content across media" (2011, para. 8).

Transmedia narrating is embedded in the flows of communication, information, images, and sounds which extend across different media. Transmedia is a growing topic in narrative research: It deals with transmedia productions in which stories told by media companies are staged as transmedia happenings which can partially be co-constructed interactively by the addressees. The first transmedia project of this type in Germany was Alpha 0.7, a science fiction thriller series on TV and the radio as well as in the internet (Söller-Eckert, 2013, p. 350).

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[4] "We might also think about transmedia *branding*, transmedia *performance*, transmedia *ritual*, transmedia *play*, transmedia *activism*, and transmedia *spectacle* as other logics" (Jenkins, 2011, para. 8).

In this section I am not using the term transmedia for media productions organized by media companies. My research interest focuses rather on the transmedia narrative projects initiated by the network actors and bloggers themselves, and more precisely on how these projects are reflected in the stories they tell in their interviews. Because it is mentioned in the narrations, a type of transmedia narrating is addressed which also has recourse to an autobiographical past. Contents which were absorbed in childhood from various media are invoked from the perspective of the narrators' current life situations and are not only carried over into a new medium with different intentions but are also developed further. Remember the 23-year-old blogger whose interest in fashion was aroused by the magazine *Vogue* when he was nine years old and which is now one of the topics covered in his blog. He recounted how he engaged with the ambitions which the print medium pursues in relation to its readers, offering that to his readers as a topic of conversation. Another media product, namely the American TV series *Gossip Girl*, which he had watched many years previously, was the inspiration for his style of writing as a blogger, which he characterized as a "mixture of comedy and drama." As mentioned at several points, a 21-year-old adopted Gaia, the name of a figure in a novel which she encountered as a child, as her nickname, which reminds her permanently of where she would like to see herself develop.

The transmedia acts directed to the past not only lead to the adoption of media contents; these are also changed under the influence of the new medium and current life questions.[5] The transfer takes place, if the narratives are anything to go by, as an interaction with the transferred contents, which can also lead to the narrator questioning these contents. The 23-year-old quoted earlier, who declared himself to be a fan of Walt Disney films, described how in his blog he had begun to question the influence of the Walt Disney versions of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* which he watched as a child; he was particularly interested in the understanding of love which these films conveyed ("Whether it really is something that Walt Disney impressed on us in our childhood").

Alongside transmedia narrating rooted in the past, the network actors and bloggers also depict a kind of transmediality stimulated by the current reception of media. Current films and video games are presented, evaluated, and discussed with Others in the narrators' blogs. A 22-year-old is

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[5] According to Jenkins, every shift from one medium to another represents an interpretation which adapts and extends the original (2011, para. 12).

proud to talk about the "blog parade" about TV series which she launched. Readers are challenged to report on the setting in which they watch the series by answering the question "How, when, and where do you prefer to watch series?" Comic characters are described as being models for digital self-staging. With the help of make-up and body styling, explained the 24-year-old migrant, she turned herself into the manga character Asuka and that was the image she presented of herself on her homepage. Various network actors and bloggers describe how they take photos of everyday scenarios in their lives and then post them online. One of them includes a literary medium in the form of her own poems in between the photos in her digital galleries. Print media are read online by those who live far away from their home country in order to find topics of conversation when communicating with their families at home, either online or by phone.

For the narrators, it appears to be self-evident that they not only transport their media memories into the here and now but also enliven them in the context of digital media in a novel fashion, incorporating elements of these experiences into new media acts, questioning them critically, or taking them as inspiration for new narrations. The nickname Gaia adopted by one network actor relates a new Gaia story. The style of writing inspired by *Gossip Girl* is used to tell stories which build on the TV series, yet the stories are different. The way in which the narrators deal with current media experiences is not much different, if their stories are anything to go by. They, too, appear to be perceived as an offer which is not simply consumed but which is also turned this way and that discursively in various media locations, processed in a specific way under the influence of the particular community and the specifics of the medium, provided with new facets of meaning, and used as the raw material for new narrative constructs. In the "blog parade" initiated by one of the bloggers, when "How, when, and where do you prefer to watch TV series" is answered in words, and maybe also in images, many new stories can appear in principle—in line with the options offered by the format of a blog—which can possibly be retold in other media and changed yet again.

The narrations reveal that the narrative threads are laid in a criss-cross fashion, that static images are turned into moving ones in the form of videos, that words become images, images bodies, and bodies images. Claudia Söller-Eckert points out how the transformation of one mode of display into another is possible due to the convergence of media (2013, p. 342) as the use of different media is based on similar competences, be

they communicative, artistic, or literary. The transmedia continuation of stories described by the narrators creates a "flexible cosmos of stories which, although they always have an artistic centre, always have open margins in terms of the dimension of their ongoing development," in Martin Gessmann's words (2013, p. 260). Accessories, things, properties, and designations turn into free-moving utensils in the continuation. Media figures can be equipped with new artefacts which are owed to current life trajectories, as in the case of the imaginary comic figure Asuka, where the blogger places paintbrush, pen, and camera in her hands so as to express the blogger's perspectives of the future.

The narrators generate themselves in their relation to the media not as spectators or mere users; rather they act as designers who co-produce the media contents and, therefore, the media themselves as well (Jenkins, 2011). To go one step further: They contribute not only to the development of individual media but also to the blending of media (Krotz, 2010, p. 108). They appear as subjects, driving forward the mediatization of society by introducing media formats and contents into different spheres of life but above all in the way in which they relate these formats and contents to each other as transmedia narrators.

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Narrating as an Answer to Sociocultural Challenges

The narratives told by the network actors and bloggers from different parts of the world who participated in the study revolve around questions about their own lives and social relations but also frequently around issues concerning developments in society and the media as well as the relationships between all of these areas. Klaus Hurrelmann and Erik Albrecht attest that adolescents and young adults, the age group the network actors and bloggers belong to, have an awakened sensitivity when interacting with each other and their environment (2014, p. 15). According to the authors, they are more actively engaged with what is happening to and around them than any other age group because for them, it is a question of finding their own spot in society (2014, p. 15).

Born for the most part between 1985 and 2000, the network actors and bloggers in this study mostly belong to Generation Y, as the millennials are also known. A generation is made up of a demographic cohort confronted with the same social events and challenges. The pivotal experiences common to Generation Y are associated with the sociocultural upheavals which are taking place globally at present on both a macro and a micro level. The synchronization of social structures and individual needs is being put to the test by these upheavals and the first cracks are starting to show (Keupp, 2015, p. 7). When people are no longer confident about spatio-temporal references in relation to which they live their everyday lives and map out their identities, or when they experience them as being restrictive, it is necessary to start mulling them over (2015, p. 7).

That is yet another reason for adolescents and young adults to grapple with social changes by telling stories. The network actors and bloggers do this both implicitly and explicitly in their narratives, which are about the search for new life trajectories and networks of relationships, about shifting boundaries and defining new ones as well as about setting out and breaking away.

The relationship between subjects, their narrative practices, and social transformation lies at the heart of this chapter. The main question relates to the extent to which the narrations presented here reflect this transformation, or the extent to which they provide answers to sociocultural challenges. This concern is based on the assumption that individual and social goings-on are connected with each other (Keupp, 2015, p. 31). "What it means to be a person is social and cultural 'all the way down'" (2003, p. 220) is how Chris Barker formulates the social and cultural construction of the subject. This should not be thought of as deterministic, however; interdependencies are much more likely. Subjects, society, and culture develop in interaction with each other (Honneth, 1990/1995, p. 58), with subjects entering into these interactions with their current questions and influenced by their autobiographical experiences. In phases of social upheaval, narratives gain special significance as mediators between the macro and micro levels.

There is a long list of phenomena of transformation specified in literature on the topic in social and cultural studies. Without presuming to cover the entire spectrum of phenomena of upheaval, I have selected five of them for my discussion of potential links between the narrations of network actors and bloggers and sociocultural upheaval, namely detraditionalization, pluralization, the blurring of borders, individualization, and global flows. In a first step, I will describe these phenomena of social transformation, before relating them to the stories with the intention of identifying possible overlaps.

6.1   DETRADITIONALIZATION

In the Western world, the process of detraditionalization started in the modern period. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the most powerful motivation was to dismantle the old order to "liberat[e] business enterprise from the shackles of the family-household duties" (2000, p. 4). He suggests that "'releasing the brakes': of deregulation, liberalization, 'flexibilization', increased fluidity, unbridling the financial, real estate and labour

markets" (2000, p. 5). Social and cultural life was also affected by the breaking up of traditional structures; traditional values, norms, and life trajectories lost their validity or proved to be ineffectual. Normative commitments and social bonds were "thrown into the melting pot" (2000, p. 6); Bauman speaks of an "unstructured, fluid state of the immediate setting of life-politics" (2000, p. 8) which has radically changed the human condition, proposing that modern subjects have to do without the traditional patterns of orientation which would have framed their life plans (2000, p. 7). Against the background of this historical development, detraditionalization is associated with loss, disassembly, and decay. From this perspective, detraditionalization appears to be something which befalls the subject.

Detraditionalization can also be deliberately pursued by subjects, however, as tradition clashes with the visions of the future held by the next generation. This is most clearly illustrated in the narrations about setting out and breaking away told by the Arab network actors and bloggers. The links between politics and religion, which are traditionally extremely tight, the lack of freedom of opinion and speech, and the ban on debate, which is culturally determined: All of these are seen as shackles which need to be cast off. Here, detraditionalization is not a side effect of macrostructural developments but a process triggered off by everyday actors. In both cases, it is true to say, however, that life forms lose out on the "structural fabric, traditions, and predictable measures against which subjects could orient their life plans, biographies, and identities" (Keupp, 2015, p. 7).[1]

In relation to an order which has been lost or abandoned, for Generation Y, whether in Western or Arab countries, the Other is expressed in terms of vagueness, unpredictability, and precarity. This can lead to fear, which Heinz Bude describes as a typical feeling in Western societies in his book *Society of Fear* (2014/2018). Detraditionalization becomes a source of fear, especially when it is experienced as a loss of security. As Bude points out, "anxiety springs from the knowledge that everything is open but nothing is meaningless" (2014/2018, p. 8). Everything that we do counts, everything that we do could trip us up; with everything that we do, our entire lives seem to be up for renegotiation (2014/2018, p. 8). In contexts where there is a desire to dismiss traditional structures, it is the risks arising out of resistance to die-hard opponents of change which tend to give rise to anxiety. What is left in any case is a feeling of insecurity in

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[1] All quotations from German publications were translated into English for this book.

view of a different future which may be desired but which is also totally open.

According to Hurrelmann and Albrecht, the unpredictable nature of their life trajectories is the most important hallmark of Generation Y and, at the same time, their greatest challenge (2014, p. 35). Generation Y has to learn how to deal with various forms of unpredictability, for example, by

- Adapting to the requirements of a changed reality
- Reinventing themselves time and again
- Negotiating consensus on a non-stop, never ending basis

The network actors and bloggers react to the erosion of traditional structures and patterns with a high degree of reflection, which runs through all of the narrations, regardless of the nationality of the narrator. Values are at issue, love or loyalty, for example, and how they have to be interpreted nowadays, or the appropriacy of one's own behaviour in encounters with Others or when interacting with technology, but also the behaviour of Others, or traditional structural orders and political rights, a problem which was discussed by the Arab narrators above all.

Life trajectories which have become unpredictable and the requirement to reinvent the self are matched by the seeking I, which appears on the scene in the self-staging narrations, which is presented in a blog in the hopes of getting feedback on the blogger's strengths and weaknesses, or which impresses readers with a carefully designed virtual I which also embodies an ideal image as the goal and incentive for the narrator's own development. The seeking I craves approval, as confirmation for being on the right track. Time and again, we heard that approval and praise are like "balm for the soul."

As is to be expected, the theme of searching is also found in the transformation narrations of the pubescent network actors and bloggers, who are confronted not only with sociocultural transformation but also with a phase of biographical upheaval. The theme comes up quite strikingly in the transformation narration of the 12-year-old who asked the question about identifying the right thing, which is actually a question about the "right life," putting it at the heart of her story (see Sect. 4.5.2). She exploits the possibilities of the virtual world to process this question. In the end, she felt, it is the physical presence of a body which is the sole guarantee for what is "right" because in her eyes, it cannot lie. For her, social encounters have to take place face to face for them to be right and

proper. The popularity of role-playing games, both online and offline, which the children and adolescents talked about, also points to the search for patterns of behaviour and meaningful relationships. They offer them the opportunity to find out what comes across best or finds acceptance, without having to commit to one thing or the other. The seeking I associated with the narrating children and adolescents is forced to reconstruct its values when faced with the erosion of society. This does not preclude a critical scrutiny of old and new values but we are not dealing with a rebellious I here.

The setting-out and breaking-away narrations of the Arab network actors and bloggers are very different as they rebel against constrictive traditional structures. Their narrations reveal their use of digital networks to break taboos, constitute alternative public spheres, and create elbow-room for expressing their opinions. The transnational opportunities for communication afforded by digital media are also used to show the world other sides of their cultures which the narrators believe are suppressed by the official media. This is indicative that traditions should not be shelved wholesale but that a distinction should be made between constrictive traditions and those which are held in high regard.

Whether it is a question of replacing traditional cultural systems because they have disappeared or have become ineffectual or because they are no longer acceptable, in all narrations about detraditionalization of one kind or another, the need to shape them anew is very pronounced. This need, in turn, expresses the hope that it will be possible to influence the future according to the individuals' wishes.

6.2   Pluralization

Plurality, Wolfgang Welsch is convinced, lies at the heart of modernity, all the while pointing to a sociocultural hereafter which he calls the post-modern (1988, p. 13). Because I would like to emphasize the processual nature of this phenomenon, I will not speak of plurality but of pluralization. The concept of pluralization describes the multiplication of life spaces which are accompanied by a proliferation of demands and offers alike. This process, too, is rooted in the logic of the modern and of its own economic forces which prompted the diversification of the economic sector, the division between gainful and reproductive employment, and increased mobility in connection with education, work, and relationships. Individuals who wanted to raise their level of education had to move to towns or cities to

pursue educational programmes; those who wanted to improve their chances on the job market had to move to places where many jobs were available. This trend still has mileage today. The superiority of "nomadism" over "sedentarism" is looming (Bauman, 2000, p. 13), shaping more and more ways of life in the era of *Liquid Modernity*, the title of Bauman's (2000) book, while the sedentary way of life is losing its significance.

Pluralization is not a completely new trend, but it is increasingly capturing our attention as it has become more intensive as it speeds up. The media have not an insignificant role to play in this development. Books and newspapers are early examples of media taking us beyond our immediate physical vicinity into other experiential worlds. Meyrowitz describes how telephones, radios, and televisions amplified this because they were easier to consume or to use, because increasing numbers of everyday activities were connected with these media, and because they expanded the spectrum of experiential worlds significantly (1985, p. viii). Now digital media are carrying the multiplication of spaces to extremes (Schachtner, 2013, pp. 20–21). Digital spaces are opening up to all sorts of contents and can thus serve as spaces for working, learning, selling things, and flirting, as well as distributing information and enabling communication. What is more, none of these different spaces stop at national borders (2013, pp. 20–21). In contrast with print and audiovisual media, not only do digital media provide a wealth of experiences; we ourselves can also become active in digital spaces. According to William J. T. Mitchell, the internet is organized like a multitude of "parallel computation device[s]" which provide us with a world of interconnected spaces in which we can communicate, work, learn, and play in overlapping relationships (2003, pp. 13–14). The network actors and bloggers take it for granted that they can use several digital networks, information networks, and computer games, often almost simultaneously. They can do this anywhere and at any time, for digital media have become mobile thanks to the miniaturization of many devices; the plethora of spaces they offer fits in every handbag and jacket pocket. This encourages network actors to saunter not only between virtual spaces but also between virtual and physical spaces, as the visualization provided by a 22-year-old network actor from Austria illustrates (Fig. 6.1).

To start with, the 22-year-old only wanted his drawing to show that he uses different apps like Twitter, Google, and Soup.io (2017–2019)[2] on his

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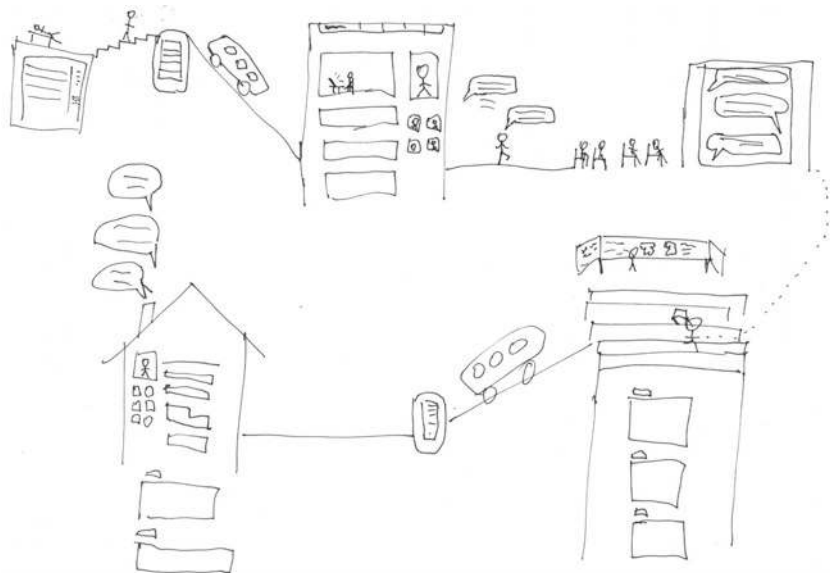[2] Soup.io (2017–2019) is an Austrian social networking und microblogging site.

Fig. 6.1 Communicating, working, and learning in overlapping spaces (network actor, m, 22, Austria)

mobile phone, but then it turned into a representation of his daily routine, starting with getting up, taking a bus to work, going to a class at university, and then taking the bus back home again. Speech bubbles show how he is connected with virtual spaces all day long and is also aware of being so. He moves and acts in shifting virtual spaces as well as in shifting physical spaces, as visualized in his drawing. From his perspective, his actions in virtual space happen "in passing" or "in parallel," as he put it.

Caused by the pluralization of life spaces and reinforced by the media, life becomes a "life in the plural," a developmental trend which Wolfgang Welsch (1988) already identified in the 1980s. Especially Generation Y is likely to adapt to these life trajectories as, worldwide, if the situation in Germany is anything to go by, their age group uses digital media most frequently.[3] A "life in the plural" poses challenges and makes demands.

[3] According to Birgit von Eimeren and Beate Frees' (2011) study, at the time of the narratives in this book, 100% of 14- to 19-year-olds and 98% of 20- to 29-year-olds in Germany were using the internet (i.e., the age groups representing Generation Y).

Faced with the juxtaposition and interlocking of digital and physical spaces, subjects come across a wide range of images, temptations, and offers, and do not necessarily know how they fit together (Schachtner, 2013, p. 23). "You don't know how the two worlds are going to cross" is how Sherry Turkle describes it (2011, pp. 196–197). Turkle is understating her case when she speaks of only two worlds because, even when taken alone, the digital world and the physical world are intrinsically heterogeneous, without taking the overlapping spheres of virtual and real life into account, which is like a third space, or an intermediate space. The frequent and often rapid switch from one life space to another runs the risk of fragmented experiences and losing the feeling of leading a cohesive life. Pluralization is a contradictory process as it can represent a broadening of options as well as an increase in tensions and conflicts at one and the same time. Those who would like to participate successfully in a "life in the plural" need to be tolerant of ambiguity, competent in plurality, and proficient at mastering transitions (Welsch, 1991, p. 357).

The network actors and bloggers counter the risk of a "life in the plural" disintegrating into individual, isolated pieces with the help of narrative practices that target the establishment of coherence, as in the stories which illustrate interconnectedness but also in those which talk about setting out and breaking away. Digital media have a high priority for Generation Y when attempting to live a life which is coherent as they use such technology to help connect events or people from different contexts. Remember the American globetrotter who took photos of the everyday and the mundane on her travels through various countries and then posted them in an online photo gallery. That was her way of piecing all of her everyday experiences into a colourful mosaic which formed a coherent whole despite the many differences. She explained that another advantage of the online presentation was that she could use the images to bridge the gap to her family, making it possible to integrate her home space into her current environment. Making connections between distant family members and networks of friends with the help of online images, texts, and sound in the here and now is a common strategy for millennials. Kraus describes the struggle for coherence as being absolutely essential; foregoing this struggle would result in the dissolution of the subject (2000, p. 15).

However, the different spaces and experiences associated with them do not always come together harmoniously. This is particularly noticeable in some of the narratives of the Arab network actors and bloggers which explicitly point out that the narrators' online presence can differ massively

from their offline mode. The reason they give for this is the discrepancy between their own opinions and sociocultural limits. Some of them feel that they are fragmented, as they put it; others say that they remain the same in the various contexts. This could be explained by their viewing their different behaviours as just another facet of their identities or by their maintaining a particular self-concept, regardless of the way they behave in the different contexts, which is invisible to the outside world.

Seen in the light of their narratives, the network actors and bloggers shape their strategies for dealing with plurality in different ways, depending on their personal lives; what they have in common with each other is that they have to figure out these strategies for themselves because there is no generic solution.

6.3   The Blurring of Borders

The pluralization of life spaces results not only in extended spaces but also in overlapping spaces, which, in turn, lead to a blurring of borders which is only amplified by the influence of the media. In contemporary society, the contexts in which the blurring of borders is becoming increasingly apparent and in which it is promoted or even initiated by online media include the blurring of geographical or national borders, between work and leisure time,[4] and between the public and the private. This section explores the latter; the geographical blurring of borders is addressed in Sect. 6.5 on "Global Flows, Crossovers, and Hybridity."

Jürgen Habermas has suggested that there are dividing lines between the public and the private which he considers to be constitutive for modern democratic societies (1962/1990, pp. 27ff.). The emergence of a private sphere in which the individual could develop, safe from state interference, was celebrated as a gain in freedom and autonomy in political philosophy (Jurczyk & Oechsle, 2008, p. 9). It is a normative concept, however, which has presumably never existed in such a pure state in reality. Even in the 1960s, when Habermas' book was first published, he observed that the "intimate sphere" had become public and, as a result of that, "the public sphere … assumed forms of private closeness" (1962/1992, p. 158).

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[4] The blurring of borders between work and free time was investigated in the part of the project carried out by the TU Hamburg-Harburg (see Carstensen, Ballentien, & Winker, 2014, pp. 29ff.; see also Roth-Ebner, 2015).

It is largely developments in the media which have contributed to the erosion of existing or imaginary borders. Issues from individuals' private lives are popular subjects for media productions nowadays (Jurczyk & Oechsle, 2008, p. 8). Bringing up children, choosing a partner, everyday family life, and sexuality have become ubiquitous topics in talk shows and on reality TV.[5] The digital media have massively increased the options for disseminating private details because they offer spaces which can be filled by the users themselves but to which, potentially, the entire world has access. In the narrations of the network actors and bloggers, this state of affairs is sometimes welcomed, but sometimes it is described as being frightening or threatening. Those who present themselves as stars on a virtual stage, as is the case with "the adored star" in the self-staging narration (see Sect. 4.2.1), for example, enjoy the attention paid to them by the global public; those who know that their online presence is at variance with traditional cultural order experience the public character of virtual space in a more ambivalent fashion. On the one hand, as the network actors and bloggers from the Middle East would have it, they see their online public as a welcome chance to develop an alternative political discourse which goes beyond regional borders, very much in the spirit of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere; on the other hand, they fear retaliatory measures from the political and administrative authorities. Most of the narrators were not aware of the visibility of virtual spaces right from the start; some of them spoke about their carefree use of digital media when they were children and adolescents. As already mentioned, one of the network actors talked about how she was not really aware of her public personality until she mingled with people, quite by chance, who were just looking at and commenting on her Flickr album, and was really shocked (see Sect. 4.4.2).

Most people who are active in the internet do not see themselves as being part of a public sphere. It is not even necessary for them to physically leave their private sphere: One swipe on their smartphone screen or one click on the keyboard of their laptop suffices to bring public life into the privacy of their own four walls. Programmes on television about public spheres elsewhere are complemented by videos which, since the appearance of so-called smartphone videos, are available on digital networks and blogs in incredibly large numbers. Just one tap on the screen or keyboard

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[5] Reality TV claims to present everyday life-worlds in which exceptional circumstances—birth, marriage, or death, for example—are represented authentically or are reconstructed.

and what is meant to be out there is hauled onto one's own desk. In this way, a public sphere is created in the midst of a private sphere, or something new is created, the term for which has not yet been coined.

When existing or imagined classifications become obsolete, as in the case of the blurring of borders between the public and the private, an established order starts to unravel. The relationships change between certain actions and the consequences of these actions. We can no longer rely on "past successes as guides for future ones" (Bauman, 1991, p. 2). Subjects are challenged to find new classifications, or to develop "acts of inclusion and exclusion" (1991, p. 2). Including virtual spaces in a new classification of the public and the private poses particular problems for subjects because in these spaces they are confronted with a reality which is different from the world beyond digital media. Indeed, it is this otherness which they still have to explore.

The structural blurring of borders between the public and the private is most clearly reflected in the stories about managing boundaries. In these narratives, not only is the blurring of borders addressed; strategies are also described which should establish new classifications. These include selection and differentiation. Selection refers to content matter which is presented in public online, or not presented, as well as to individuals to whom specific content matter is addressed, or not addressed, depending on where they find themselves on the bridge they have spanned between the public and the private. Differentiation, in contrast, refers to the division of virtual space into public and private forums. The most impressive example of this can be found in the story about managing boundaries which was told by the 27-year-old Arab blogger who kept three different blogs in which she drew her boundaries between the public and the private in quite different ways (see Sect. 4.4.1).

The stories of the network actors and bloggers reveal not only awareness of the blurring of borders between the public and the private but also the need to set clear boundaries and not to let themselves drift into unclear situations. Müller-Funk gives reasons which could explain the need for boundaries when he defines their character as representing detachment or connectivity (2012, p. 81). When boundaries disappear, Müller-Funk believes, contact cannot arise (2012, p. 80), but human subjects cannot forego that. In that sense, boundaries are a constitutive feature of human existence.

In connection with the personally defined boundaries described by network actors and bloggers in their narrations, there are two interesting

effects. Firstly, boundaries are not described as being definitive. Secondly, the defining of boundaries appears to be an individual achievement. In the narrations there is talk of border zones which can be varied. The lack of a social model for configuring the relationship between the public and the private is seen by the narrators as a chance to take this configuration into their own hands, every man/woman for himself/herself. If it is true that boundaries determine the possibilities of social togetherness, as deduced from Müller-Funk's musings, the situation cannot stay as it is. Consensual negotiation of border zones will have to replace individually defined boundaries.

6.4   INDIVIDUALIZATION

The individualization thesis signals the disembedding of the individual from social structures, as manifested in the dwindling importance of the "inner social structure of industrial society" (Beck, 1986/1992, p. 87; see also Beck & Sopp, 1997, p. 10), like classes or social milieu. Once again, those collectively shared life trajectories and blueprints for identity are vanishing which appear to be inadequate or are becoming insignificant (Beck, 1986/1992, pp. 87ff). The individualization thesis is also a Western issue in this respect; seen through a sociological lens, losses and the withdrawal of certainties are accentuated in connection with tendencies towards individualization. In the stories of the Arab network actors and bloggers, individualization is also addressed but rather as a rebellious process springing from those individuals who wish to escape from the constraints of handed-down social relations and their traditions. In the Western world, individualization can also mean freeing ourselves from the confining structures of class, stratification, and family roles, which is not to say that traditional social forms always offered integration to individuals in the form that they desired (1986/1992, pp. 87ff.).

Either way, whenever social ties disappear or are cast off, subjects are left to their own devices. According to Zygmunt Bauman, for whom the dismantling of social "patterns, codes and rules" (2000, p. 7) comes close to "Orwellian and Huxleyan-style nightmares" (2000, p. 15), the goals of "individual self-constructing labours [are] endemically and incurably underdetermined" (2000, p. 7). In a society in which connecting links have been assigned to the waste bin, in Beck and Sopp's eyes, neither the political system nor the cultural-normative system can be expected to

accomplish social integration; that is up to each and every one of us (1997, p. 12).

Against the background of the empirical data collected in the study "Communicative Publics in Cyberspace," I go along with the individualization thesis in as much as individualization implies structural disembedding on the one hand and a reconstitution of the individual on the other. The latter is not necessarily just an individual accomplishment, however, as illustrated by the stories of the network actors and bloggers; it can also be conceived of as a collective accomplishment, particularly with an eye towards the Arab narrators. In relation to the narrations investigated here, it is the attempts at Self-construction, whether individual or collective, which are of particular interest in the process of individualization.

According to Kraus, narrating is a fundamental mode for constructing reality, which includes Self-constructions (2000, p. 4). That is why it is hardly surprising when we come across practices of individualization in almost all narrations, particularly in the narrations about self-staging, suppliers and sellers, transformation, and setting out and breaking away.

In the self-staging narrations, there are two kinds of attempts at individualization: an egocentric form and a You-oriented one. The narration of "the adored star" represents the egocentric form, with the 29-year-old narrator characterizing himself as a super cool guy who masters his life by his own means. It is his intention to present himself online, as he related it, "without the lumps and bumps," as "a tough cookie" who can ward off any disaster and whose status symbols lie at his feet, just like the Others who admire him so much, as shown in his visualization (see Fig. 4.2 in Sect. 4.2.1). It seems as though he acquires his strength and superiority from within; the Others are in demand as spectators. But he cannot actually do without them, which contradicts his staged independence.

In the You-oriented kind of individualization, the protagonists living in Europe also put themselves at the heart of their life planning but they do not see themselves as independent actors. They recalled goals which they had chosen themselves and self-representations which they deliberately posted online for an audience with the aim of eliciting their comments. It clearly emerges from their narrations that the comments serve as points of orientation; the narrators hope for praise and affirmation but do not close their minds to criticism either, if they believe it can help them advance.

Another answer to the current surge of individualization which calls for every single person to shape their own lives is the use of virtual space as a location for practising skills which promise the individual a successful life.

Answers of this kind can be found in the narrations about suppliers and sellers as well as in the transformation narrations. Examples include the stories told by the 14-, 22-, and 24-year-old bloggers from Europe in which they described how they framed themselves as an online expert for endorsing technical and media products, a project manager, or a designer. In his transformation narration, the 11-year-old described how he uses the internet as a place not only for learning about famous footballers' tricks but also for practising them himself. His goal is to become a world-famous footballer whose accomplishments are highly remunerated.

Hurrelmann and Albrecht describe Generation Y as a generation in which everything revolves around their jobs and careers so as to ensure that their futures are as promising as possible (2014, p. 30). In the attempts at individualization detected in this study, it is also about the desire for a successful future. In the self-staging narrations, this wish remains rather vague; in the stories which are about practising skills and improving expertise, it becomes more concrete. Career goals do not stand in isolation, however, but are connected with the desire to have a fully developed personality. The stories reveal a generation which has goals to pursue, in contrast to Bauman's (2000) assumption that millennials rather lack an aim in life. It is just that the goals are not determined from the outside but are set by the individuals themselves. The narrative answers which relate to the process of individualization underline that the actors may act as though they are entrepreneurs in charge of themselves and their lives but their actions always relate to Others as well, even when they imagine themselves to be completely independent.

Social orientation comes across strongly in the narrations of the Western network actors but it appears even more strongly in those of the Arab narrators. Their stories also announce a desire for new, forward-looking self-representations, for self-determination, and for self-realization. But the desire for personal development is closely linked with the desire for sociocultural transformation. According to the narrations, the desire leads to actions which aspire to reconstruct individuals and society alike as a collective undertaking. The digital networks, which the narrators perceive as being protected spaces, should help them in the endeavour to find allies and comrades-in-arms. As mentioned in Sect. 4.6.2, in contrast to the Western narrators, they do not find themselves in a situation in which sociocultural traditions have become meaningless; on the contrary, they find themselves surrounded by guardians of tradition who react to deviations from the norm with threatening gestures. Unlike the Western

narrators, the Arab narrators clearly state that individualization, in the sense of a self-determined way of life, is only conceivable once the socio-cultural context has changed. Their knowledge of the power of the die-hard opponents of change initially triggers acts of individualization as collective acts, the results of which then have to be translated into individual acts. Opportunities for individuality arise from the fact that "each human being is different from all those who have lived, who live, and who will live" (2000, p. 89), as Adriana Cavarero puts it.

In order to take it up again: Whether the acts which aim at a self-determined repositioning of the individual in society are planned as individual or collective acts, they always arise in conjunction with Others. The social nature of our actions has to do with the fact that we are born into a social world; in other words "we are constituted as individuals in a social process using socially shared materials" (Barker, 2003, p. 222). Barker continues, saying that "[n]obody is free in the sense of undetermined" (2003, p. 237). This does not speak against self-determination, for different individuals will reach for different materials in order to create their life models out of them (Welsch, 2001, p. 280).

Current sociocultural upheaval increasingly calls on network actors and bloggers to be designers of their own futures. As such, they generate themselves when working on their self-representations online, when they experiment as role players, when they set themselves "sparkly" goals, when they are willing to take risks in pursuit of their dreams, and when they overcome linguistic and political barriers in order to engage in conversation with Others from all over the world.

6.5   Global Flows, Crossovers, and Hybridity

Global flows in the form of movements of capital, commodities, migrants, communication, and information rank amongst the most distinctive characteristics of the social and cultural upheavals which we are experiencing at present all over the world, yet such flows are not a completely new phenomenon by far. The Silk Road which emerged in the pre-Christian era and along which merchants, goods, and culture travelled from east to west and back is one such example, as are the migrations in central and southern Europe in the fourth and sixth centuries. Economic crises have repeatedly led to waves of emigration; for example, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, there have been several periods in which Germans left their home country for the USA. What is new is that modern-day

transterritorial flows now exist concurrently, are picking up speed, have intensified, are much more interdependent, and are visible all over the world (Schachtner, 2009, p. 5). Just about everything which can move these days is moving, in John Urry's eyes, and doing so at stunning speeds in all possible directions: "People, machines, images, information, power, money, ideas and dangers are all, we might say, 'on the move', travelling at bewildering speed in unexpected directions from place to place, from time to time" (2003, p. 2). The multidirectionality of global flows triggers a reciprocal crossover of these flows.

In the context of the questions being dealt with here relating to phenomena of sociocultural change, the cultural dimension of global flows is particularly interesting. Not only things but also ideas are borrowed from other countries and combined in completely new ways. One example for this is the Italian fashion label Etro, which adapts themes, patterns, and colours from another part of the world every season, combing them with Italian flair. Another example is the integration of Far Eastern traditions in treatment plans based on Western medicine. The communication flows making use of digital media increasingly feed on more than one language at a time. Nederveen proposes the concept of "global multiculture" (2010, p. 81) to give this multifaceted crossover a name, using this term to capture the global interdependence and nomadic nature of this process. Wolfgang Welsch rejects the concept of multiculturality because, for him, it is tied too strongly to the idea of single, homogeneous cultures (2001, p. 260). He pleads instead for the notion of transculturality, which makes it quite clear to him that no culture is an island; instead cultures permeate each other (Welsch, 2012, p. 26). The new model for society should not be that of a closed sphere but of a network (2012, p. 28). Transculturality describes a normative concept, although Welsch claims that it increasingly reflects reality and is not just wishful thinking (2012, p. 36). What is common to both Nederveen's and Welsch's concepts is that the postcolonial perspective is missing which was formulated by postcolonial studies in the 1990s and says that we live in a world which was basically built on the relations between the colonizers and the colonized which still have an effect on our lives today (Dirlik, 2010, p. 33).[6] Arif Dirlik points out that this

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[6] In the completely new and revised second edition of his book *Transcultural Communication*, media expert Andreas Hepp attempts to integrate the postcolonial perspective with reference to Homi K. Bhabha (1994) in the concept of transculturation or transculturalization which he adapted for media studies (2015, pp. 18ff.).

influence is visible in the inequalities between industrialized economies and the countries of the so-called Third World in the areas of economic and infrastructure development as well as in education and social stability. One global effect of this inequality which is all too visible at present is the migration flows from countries which had no opportunities for economic and political development under colonial rule and which are, therefore, still unable to safeguard the livelihoods of their inhabitants and/or do not have adequate political and administrative structures in place which would be in a position to respect human rights. Migration is only one way in which those on the margins of society can speak out. The one-way road between the mainstream society and its margins has been broken up in principle.

Developments in the media are a key factor when it comes to global crossover. At this point I would like to return to the discussion started under the heading of "Structural Characteristics of Digital Media" in Sect. 3.2. Conveying information, ideas, values, and lifestyles, the worldwide flows of images and texts are infiltrating what were once thought of as nationally defined cultural maps (Hess & Lenz, 2001, p. 19). Global trade, the coordination of international politics, and the organization of global social movements but also projects in the music and film industries as well as in the art world would be inconceivable without transnational digital media which connect places and regions with each other like a giant underground web.

Global interplay as a result of criss-crossing global flows accelerates hybridization, which Welsch construes as influences from all other cultures taking root domestically in any one culture on the level of its population, goods, and information (Welsch, 2012, p. 28). Bhabha links hybridization with the concept of the Third Space, which allows him to sound out the qualitative potentials of hybridization (Babka & Posselt, 2012, p. 9). For Bhabha, hybridization is a movement (2012, p. 66) which constitutes the Third Space but which does not represent a limited geographical area (2012, p. 68). The Third Space is a "connective tissue" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4) which resembles a stairwell in which the binary order disappears, or as Bhabha phrases it, "the hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities" (1994, p. 4). He continues: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1994, p. 4).

In contrast to Welsch, Bhabha does not want hybridization to be interpreted as a simple blend "but as a strategic and selective adoption of meanings, creating space for people to act whose freedom and equality are at risk" (Babka & Posselt, 2012, p. 13). Bhabha constitutes the Third Space as a space for criticism and subversion, without wanting to maintain that it operates in a power vacuum. Even in the position of an underdog, it is possible to upend imposed cultural authorities, taking on some aspects and rejecting others (Babka & Posselt, 2012, p. 13). Bhabha's Third Space reminds us of Foucault's heterotopias (1967/1997). The two concepts resemble one another with regard to the critical impulses ascribed to both of them as well as their characterization as an in-between space. Admittedly, Bhabha emphasizes the encounter of cultural differences within the Third Space much more strongly while Foucault insists on the Other of heterotopias, or on the difference in spaces in relation to what is taken to be normal, for example by psychiatry. In addition, Bhabha sounds out the Third Space for its postcolonial influences, which Foucault did not keep in mind.

In a world permeated by cultural flows and hybridization, the challenge we face is to take note of and acknowledge the existence of cultural differences. Bude suggests that we need to be able to "adopt the perspectives of others [and] respond resiliently and flexibly to changing situations" (2014/2018, p. 11). It should not be our aim "to resist these processes but to reorganize them and redirect them towards new ends" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. xv).

In the context of this book, the question is whether the phenomena described here resonate in the stories. How present are global flows for the network actors and bloggers? Are they aware of the cultural differences and do they make them the subject of their stories? Do they embrace the opportunities proffered by the Third Space when communicating with people from other cultures?

To the extent that the narratives refer to online communication, all narrators are somehow aware of the worldwide transparency of digital stages, which is one of the conditions for criss-crossing flows of communication and information. But this knowledge remains undetermined. The global public sphere has no clear profile in the narratives. It is a different case with the narrators who crossed geographical borders thanks to educational mobility, who travelled across other continents, who took part in international projects, or who intentionally initiated transnational communication processes with the help of digital technologies. In these cases there is

an intensive appraisal of expected or perceived cultural differences as well as attempts by the network actors and bloggers to adjust their own behaviour to take account of these differences. Remember the Turkish student who was worried when he came to Austria that he would encounter little warm-heartedness and was now in the process of establishing whether that was really the case or not, or whether there were other differences which he had not anticipated, and how he would manage to make friends in his new surroundings. Whether he recognizes and deals appropriately with cultural differences affects whether he can "arrive" in his new surroundings. The American student was confronted with criss-crossing communication flows as a participant in an international online project (see Sect. 4.6.1). By participating in the project, he became aware of differences in communication, which he used as an opportunity to scrutinize established forms of communication in his own culture. The Arab narrators, in turn, saw the communicative interconnectedness of the world thanks to digital media as a welcome phenomenon rather than a provocation, as discussed in several passages of this book. This surely has something to do with the fact that they view their countries as being on the periphery of world affairs, with their cultural distinctiveness wrongly conveyed by the dominant media or ignored by the global community, but they can present them to a public worldwide thanks to digital media.[7] Digital online networks like *Mideast Youth* (n.d.) or *CrowdVoice* (n.d.) are described by the Arab narrators in the narrations about setting out and breaking away as spaces which come very close to the Third Space. They see their function as both forcing transnational exchange in the region and supporting international communication. This goal opens up the possibility of global and local communication flows criss-crossing. Differences of opinion are expressly desired; such differences are described by the founder of the network *Mideast Youth* (n.d.) as an information gain. She explained: "If I lose that [the network *Mideast Youth*], it means I lose a lot of important points of view and perspectives that are not represented in the media."

Cultural flows and hybridization do not appear to have had much impact on the stories included in this study. However, it is a question of developmental trends which will certainly become more intensive in an increasingly entangled world and, thus, will surely become indisputable challenges for upcoming generations.

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[7] This does not rule out their criticizing certain elements of their cultures, which is, after all, one of the manifestations of the narrations about setting out and breaking away told by the Arab network actors and bloggers.

6.6   ROUND-UP

The characteristics of sociocultural upheaval described in this book do not leave the narrations of the network actors and bloggers unaffected. There are plenty of indications that these characteristics do not go unnoticed, even when the participants in the study were not necessarily aware of their being phenomena of upheaval. In those narrations in which criticism of traditional institutions and systems is in the foreground, there is a definite focus on social change in the narrative practices. Regardless of whether change happens or is consciously aimed at, the narrations have similarities on the actional level. They document searches for alternative value orientations, for strategies for organizing a life in the plural, or for managing boundaries, and experiments with self-representation. The Western narrators feel challenged to act as individuals; the Arab narrators, in contrast, describe how their actions are linked more strongly to a collective strategy. Whether their inspirations are individual or collective, it is all about the search for and the establishment of new life forms. Whether it is their intention or not, the search for new life forms lays the foundation of new cultural practices.

As becomes clear from the narrations, digital media make an appearance in the subjects' confrontation with phenomena of sociocultural upheaval in more ways than one. Firstly, they represent and support change, increasing the pluralization of fields of life; accelerating the blurring of borders between the public and the private; facilitating, as transnational media, global flows and the crossover of flows of information and communication. At the same time, they present themselves to network actors and bloggers as instruments and stages for coming to terms with phenomena of upheaval. Faced with the impending fragmentation of experiences, they use the potential of the media to create coherence, making use of the virtual stages for their attempts at individualization or for practising skills which will be useful in the future. Whether we are looking at the role of digital media as representatives of sociocultural upheaval or their role as instruments which help us come to terms with this upheaval, both roles are inextricably linked with the fact that media are culture-specific (Müller-Funk, 2002, p. 177). Every society gives rise to its own media which develop in accordance with certain principles and, therefore, media represent trends in that society. When using them as instruments, subjects adopt the meaning attached to the media by the society they are in. Adoption does not mean mere reproduction of meaning, however; it

opens new latitudes for individual interpretations. The potential in the media comes up against autonomous subjects who have been moulded by their past and who are endowed with different individual abilities to select, differentiate, and reflect. That explains differences in the practices of grappling with the phenomena of transformation described here as well as varying positions in reaction to this transformation.

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Narrative Production of Culture

As I already argued at the beginning of this book, cultural life forms are based on meaning-contexts (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 15) consisting of values, orientations, life plans, and representations of the Self, which enable the subject to act. In the light of current sociocultural upheavals, traditional meaning-contexts are being put to the test; a plethora of questions, reflectiveness, a willingness to experiment, and criticism or rejection of traditional systems of meaning in the narrations of the network actors and bloggers bear witness to this. This chapter starts off with an exploration of the connection between culture and narrating, as mentioned in Chap. 2, against the background of the empirical evidence presented so far, before discussing the future face of narrating from the perspective of translation.

7.1   Culture and Its Designers

Experiences of sociocultural upheaval are both oppressive and empowering. It is the contradictions, tensions, and inconsistencies above all which unleash insecurities and irritations, urging the affected to find solutions. According to Bhabha, experiencing ambivalence includes "a spur to speech, an urge to utterance, a way of working-through what is contradictory and unresolved in order to seek the right to narrate" (2012, p. 51). The interviews with the network actors and bloggers must have provided them with an appropriate forum as a spur for narrative debate. In their

narratives, they presented themselves as active individuals in the world with "significant capacities to plan and design their own futures" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 267). This capacity comes from their ability to reflect, to imagine alternatives, and to communicate their ideas, insights, projects, and solutions. As becomes clear from their narrations, they send posts to each other or position their narratives in digital networks or in blogs knowing full well that Others, too, write, film, and post. They anticipate the narratives of Others in order to gain inspiration to continue their own narratives. They know that they have to pay attention to Others so that Others pay attention to them or they know that they have to comment on the narratives of Others so that Others comment on theirs. They explain that they view such comments as the raw materials with which to create ideas and suggestions for their own narratives.

In their narratives, the network actors and bloggers create themselves as acting and configuring subjects. Configuration, in Appadurai's mind, is a "social fact" when it occurs as the interaction between imagination, anticipation, and aspiration (2013, pp. 286ff.). What this interaction addresses is forward-looking cognitive and emotional capabilities like imagination, visions, hunches, anticipations, expectations, endeavours, aspirations, longing, and, above all, hope. Appadurai credits hope, or "the capacity to aspire," with a "navigational capacity," without which notions like "empowerment" and "participation" would be meaningless (2013, p. 289).

We come across such forward-looking potential in the narrations of network actors and bloggers when they report on

- Virtual self-staging being used as a counter-model which they strive to attain
- Virtual spaces being exploited for experiments with identity in order to find the best possible life trajectory for themselves
- Geographical borders being crossed in order to take on the new and the unknown
- Transnational dialogue being initiated via the internet while holding out hope for exchange and mutual understanding
- Traditional political systems being confronted with alternatives.

When telling their stories the network actors and bloggers create new life forms with the help of imagined or implemented, forward-looking configurative acts, which lay the foundation for new cultural practices.

Culture presupposes shared meaning-contexts, as described at the beginning of Chap. 2. Shared meaning-contexts are particularly apparent in those narrations in which the narrators have set their sights on cultural transformation. They emphasize the We; they describe themselves as being members of a generation whose voice should be heard. Narrators who are primarily focused on configuring their own personal lives, in contrast, understand their configurative acts to be individual actions, although they sense that they cannot act in isolation as otherwise there would be no wrestling for the Other's attention, no need for exchange, and no insights into the lives of Others. Being dependent on Others means that it is not possible to live one's life on the far side of social consensus.

The development of shared life forms which appear as new cultural practices does not necessarily proceed harmoniously as different or even contrary interests and needs intersect in this process. Instead it is far more likely, as mentioned in Sect. 3.2.3, that the path is not straightforward (Nederveen, 2010, p. 88), and that it may also be paved with conflicts and violence.

7.2   The Future of Narrating in Translation

It is becoming increasingly difficult to relate new cultural practices to a specific territory or a specific ethnic group as they are becoming progressively more transnational in character. This trend is not happening independently of the narrative flows which are in a process of developing into global flows with the assistance of transnational media. At the points where these global flows intersect, they can spark off a state of global interplay which, in turn, influences the emergence of new cultural practices. Bhabha posits that global interplay is an essential act of mediation, albeit one which I have omitted in my argumentation so far but which I would now like to bring to the fore, namely an act of cultural translation (1994, p. 228). It is not a new phenomenon by far: Narratives have always had to be translated into the context of other life-worlds which the addressees of the narratives belonged to. As cultural borders are gradually broken down, translating is being paid increasing attention by cultural studies, literary criticism, and, recently, media studies as well (Hepp, 2015, p. 21). In view of this newly formulated interest in translation, literary theorist and cultural studies expert Doris Bachmann-Medick has identified a "translational turn" (2016, pp. 132ff.). I will first discuss the relationship between narrating and translating before exploring the implications of the "translational turn" and addressing its entanglements with culture and media.

7.2.1   *Narrating and Translating*

In Sect. 2.2.2, under the heading of "Narrating Opening up to the You," narrating was ascribed the value of a *tessera* in reference to Jacques Lacan's comments on the substance and function of language (1953/1996, p. 209). This metaphor is a reference to "early mystery religions where fitting together again the two halves of a broken piece of pottery was used as a means of recognition by the initiates" (1953/1968, p. 101). Just like those pieces of pottery, narratives have to fit in the life contexts of their addressees, assuming that they should be understood and responded to by them. Narratives generally do not fit perfectly, however; they have to be made to fit. In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Adriana Cavarero repeatedly emphasizes the uniqueness of narratives, which, once again, underlines the necessity of connecting narratives to other contexts of experience. She writes: "No matter how much you are similar and consonant … your story is never my story" (2000, p. 92).

The 20-year-old Turkish network actor who came to Austria as an exchange student and decided to look for new friends online with the help of the social network *Netlog* (2010) turned the special nature of his story into the starting point of his search. He described his approach as follows: "The first time I write, 'Hello, I'm still new to Austria.' Then I tell people something about myself: 'I come from Turkey. I want to get to know people, and how are you doing?'" His actions can be seen as an attempt to make his narration compatible with the narrations of potential friends in a foreign country by emphasizing the special nature of his story, thus increasing the plausibility of his request. After the justification, he expresses his wish, one which, he assumes, will connect him with people in his new surroundings. He emphasizes the potential connection by asking "How are you doing?" which also signalizes empathy. His attempt to make new contacts proceeds from emphasizing the difference to emphasizing presumed similarities; he describes a cultural translation, the most striking characteristic of which is currently the desire for social contacts, where he hopes that Others will feel that they are being addressed.

The concept of translation reminds us once again of the importance of the Other to whom the narrative is addressed. This never happens by chance, as Cavarero maintains: "In the autobiographical exercise, the real existence of the other, even just as an addressee, is always taken into account, whether he or she is a listener of an oral narration, or an ideal reader to which the text appeals" (2000, p. 85). Narrations transform

language boundaries, as illustrated by the narration of the Turkish exchange student, and are changed in the process, as Birgit Wagner suspects, because this transformation necessitates an examination of other cultural codes of values (2009, p. 2).[1] The extent to which the narration in the example described earlier was changed through translation cannot be ascertained on the basis of the empirical data at hand. It is, however, possible to state that narrating in the virtual space of transnational networks frequently does not take place in the language in which what was narrated was experienced but is translated into a shared language. The network actors and bloggers produce "translating texts" (Wagner, 2012, p. 40), in the form of internet slang, for example, which can be expressed in a mixture of specific idioms, abbreviations, icons, and smileys, or by using the language of the addressees, as in the example described earlier. Whereas the Turkish exchange student decided to use German, a 23-year-old blogger from Austria decided to use English (see Sect. 4.2.2), one of the justifications being that he wanted to use an international language; in other words, he was addressing his narration about fashion and feelings to an international audience. The bloggers from the Arab region, in contrast, were obliged to write their blogs exclusively in English if they wanted to initiate an international dialogue, which was one of their avowed aims. The emergence of English as a lingua franca entails risks, as Bachmann-Medick points out, through its hegemonic tendencies, for example, and "its attendant standardization pressures" (2016, p. 133), which can lead not only to narrations being changed when translated but also to their cultural specifics disappearing.

In order to reduce this risk and to retain the foreignness of the original text, writers often resort to sprinkling their translated texts with words from their own languages according to Wagner; then, it is the readers who are in charge of the translating (2009, p. 7). A similar practice in digital narrating occurs when different languages are used in social networks. In its early days, multilingualism (Arabic, English, Farsi) left its mark on the Arab network *Mideast Youth* (n.d.), arising from its intention to give people from different linguistic contexts a voice. The texts then had to be translated by whoever felt like reading them, which circumvented the dominance of Western languages and even overturned it when posts were written in Arabic or Farsi. The Arab network actors were more likely to

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[1] All quotations from German publications were translated into English for this book.

take ownership of the English texts than English-speaking network actors were for texts in Arabic or Farsi.

Network actors and bloggers are challenged to produce more than one translation. Not only do they have to translate episodes which they have experienced themselves into written language, whether it is their own, another language, or a common jargon used in the internet; they also have to translate the narratives of Others into their own everyday reality. If the specific singularities of the original context are to be maintained, the translation process has to take place by "*crossing boundaries with an awareness of differences*" (2008, para. 2) according to Doris Bachmann-Medick in an interview with Boris Buden. That involves "connect[ing] translations to practices, interactions and cultural representations" (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 134). Cultural differences cannot be inferred from individual textual elements; they can be "unlocked only by examining the more comprehensive context of … their cultural self-interpretations" (2016, p. 134). Consequently, such narratives also have to be seen in the light of culturally specific rituals, rules, and practices.

Due to the complex structural context which they bear on, translations can only ever be approximations: Mistranslations, breakdowns, and misunderstandings are to be expected. The greatest obstructions are caused by power differentials. The way in which power can operate in the translations of network actors and bloggers has already been illustrated in the case of the 27-year-old blogger from Saudi Arabia (see Sect. 4.4.1). In the interview, she explained that in her country, she was not allowed to write about religion and politics, two very closely related fields, in a publicly accessible blog although she would certainly be very interested in doing so. She even described how she had blogged on racism in her home town, which provoked sharp criticism, revealing her limits as a blogger. Against this background she characterized her blog entries primarily as cultural commentaries ("It's more cultural than political"), adding "so we try to keep it on a cultural level." The vagueness of these remarks allows me to interpret them in two ways. On the one hand, it really could be the case that she avoided political and religious topics; on the other hand, she might not avoid them, declaring them to be cultural topics instead. If the latter is the case, it would be safe to assume that she translated politics into culture so as to avoid the clutches of power.

Bachmann-Medick reiterates how translation reveals itself as a "cultural technique" that does not develop in a neutral space but which is "embedded in power and dependency relations" (2016, p. 135); this could

manifest itself in censorship but also in the uneven distribution of the means and ability to translate (Hepp, 2015, p. 22), such as linguistic competence or knowledge of foreign languages. As narrating and translating go hand in hand, it is fair to assume that narrating and translating alike may be exposed to the potential influences of power which could steal, undetected, into narrative patterns or—when exposed—could become objects of conscious enquiry.

7.2.2 The Translational Turn

Although translating is not a new phenomenon and although it cannot happen in defiance of its cultural starting point in the interests of conveying the intended meaning, it was not until the 1980s that translation emerged as cultural translation with the cultural turn in translation studies, becoming the subject matter and research instrument of translation research (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 132). Bachmann-Medick names this shift the "translational turn" (2016, pp. 132ff.). Using the word 'turn' implies that attention has shifted but not that something completely new has emerged. In the same interview with Buden, Bachmann-Medick postulates that

> the category of translation unfolds its potential to stimulate cultural studies only if it reaches beyond the qualities traditionally ascribed to translation, such as equivalence, "faithfulness" to the original, appropriation, or representation—that is, provided that the realm of translating language and text opens up to include a wider horizon of cultural translation practices. (2008, para. 2)

The distinction between traditional and cultural translation mentioned in the quotation may jar against the background of my remarks so far, according to which the cultural starting point can never be disregarded when translating. It is more likely that the distinction is due to academic dictates concerning classification rather than it reflecting the reality of translating, a question which does not have to be clarified in this context. At the very least, it is very much thanks to the translational turn that the cultural implications of translating, including critical questions on the practice of translation, have become the focus of scholarly analysis.

Essentially the translational turn came about in the light of criticism formulated in postcolonial studies that translations were unidimensional,

moving from the colonizers to the colonized; in their place came two-way translations on an equal footing which can celebrate the hybridization of life forms. The meaning of life forms, which is a constitutive element of a culture, gains a hybrid profile in so far as facets of meaning from other cultures are not only taken on board but also enter into novel alliances with existing facets of meaning, without hierarchies playing a role. Following Homi K. Bhabha, a prominent representative of postcolonial studies, Wagner proposes calling this process "transforming processuality" (2012, p. 36), which contrasts with a multicultural parallel existence. The quicksand of transforming processuality is the cultural translation, which Wagner describes as the "transfer of imaginative contents, values, ways of thinking, behavioural patterns, and practices from one cultural context to another" (2012, p. 30). This should not be envisaged as a "smooth transfer" (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 141), but rather as a reciprocal depiction, scrutiny, and negotiation of differences, as a problematization, relativization, and overcoming of hierarchies. This then leads to the constitution of what Bhabha calls the Third Space (Babka & Posselt, 2012, pp. 10ff.), a subversive philosophical construction which undermines closed systems, whether on an individual or a social level.

In a complex world in which global flows and the global interplay are intensifying and accelerating, the demands placed on translation are increasing because it is a question of interconnecting cultural contexts which can seem quite alien to each other. At the same time, the need to translate is omnipresent. It cannot be left to the translation experts; instead it will be a requirement for everyday citizens wherever global flows arise or encounter each other, for example at borders when the police come across refugees from other countries, or at international conferences, on state visits, in diasporic situations, and, naturally, in the internet, where we are only one click away from an intercultural encounter.

A Yemeni blogger addressed the cultural translation of the political situation in her home country, which is part of her life story, in her blog as follows:

> I'm not trying to say that Yemen is … a land of terrorism … we have a lot of stories, a lot of issues, a lot of aspects, a lot of faces that we want the world to know about. And it will be shocking for the rest of the world to know that there is another side of Yemen except the terrorism side. And so I would like to be part of that shock.

The blogger wants to translate her country for the benefit of the internet community and world public in a different way to how it has been translated before. She wants to replace an image which she assumes to be false. Her attempt to create a new translation starts with her rejection of the initial translation. At the same time she presents a revised translation which shows her country in all its diversity. She not only assumes that the new image will shock the world; no, she specifically aims to provoke that shock. The shock appears to be a strategic tool for a translation which is meant to correct an existing translation. Bronfen points out that Bhabha also believes that a shock is the means by which "cultural evaluations and interpretations are prised open" (Bhabha, 1994/2000, preface, p. xiv).

The Yemeni blogger addresses her translation to Western readers who, she believes, all have the same particular image of her homeland which she has rejected. More frequently, though, the network actors and bloggers have no idea who they are translating for when they post in social networks which everybody has access to. That could explain the popularity, or indeed the necessity, of the new globally shared jargons that network actors create in the internet which are detached from national languages. In doing so, they have common text elements at their disposal, which have the secondary advantage of being able to express feelings in a succinct way (YMMD = you made my day) or of giving information about actions which accompany the exchange (LOFL = lying on the floor laughing, amongst others) and which generally convey humour or tell jokes. The shared jargon of the internet promises to be understood across linguistic borders, even if it cannot be ruled out that the use of the symbols, acronyms, and emoticons differs by cultural context.

Alongside the establishment of connections, for Wagner, cultural translating is about making differences visible; indeed, I believe that she even considers this visibility to be a precondition for the translatability of a text (2012, p. 37). The two network actors quoted earlier confirm the relevance of differences for the translation process: The Turkish student expressly stated "I am new" or, in other words, "I am different from you," whereas the Yemeni blogger presented her "counterargument" online with which she wanted to say that "this country is different from what you think." In contrast to Wagner, I classify the presentation of differences not as a precondition but rather as a part of the translation because the depiction of differences already takes place with regard to other cultural contexts.

Yet much speaks in favour of Wagner's proposition, even though I cannot verify it empirically, that a translation does something to a text (2009, p. 5) as in the course of being translated, it needs to become compatible with different cultural codes and interpretations. What is more, translations can be responded to at any time, in every place, and by anyone in the transnational space of the internet. New hybrid value systems can arise as a result, going beyond existing cultural contexts. Hybridity does not preserve tradition; it creates something new (Wagner, 2012, p. 37). Bachmann-Medick identifies cultural translation as a "counter-movement to binary thought and to ideas about identity that are rooted in essentializing determinations" (2016, p. 142). Thinking can profit from translational trends, she explains to Buden, because they urge us to "[cast off] binary constraints on perception and thought" and to appreciate alternative ways of thinking, for example by "stress[ing] the value of liminal and interstitial thought" (2008, para. 5).

The fact that the consequences of cultural translation and hybridity do not necessarily meet with a positive response is underlined by the reactions to Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), for example. Aleida Assmann characterizes it as "a love-song to hybrid mixtures" (2012, p. 214). The condemnation and hatred that Rushdie aroused—on this a clutch of literary theorists agree (Assmann, 2012, pp. 212ff.; Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 149; Bhabha, 1994, p. 225; Wagner, 2012, p. 40)—can be ascribed to the hybrid identities which Rushdie created in this novel. It is not the "misinterpretation of the Koran" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 225) which so incensed the "guardians of 'the Pure'" (Assmann, 2012, p. 214) but Rushdie's plea for hybridity, which stands for nothing less than a rejection of tradition. In Bhabha's words, "hybridity is heresy" (1994, p. 225) and as such an assault on cultural contexts which wish to be seen as homogeneous and closed.

The condemnation of narrations which transcend tradition is not restricted to the famous author, although the attention *The Satanic Verses* attracted was very much in the public eye. The network actors and bloggers who participated in the study, especially those from the Arab world, also talked about how their narrative practices online encountered opposition when they overstepped the limits of traditional value systems, how they censored their own narrations in the light of imagined risks, or how they attempted to circumvent censorship. My reference to the Arab world should not suggest that it is only there that censorship exists. From a translational perspective, it is necessary to keep tabs on possible sanctions

applied to Western narrators when they challenge the Western code of values when translating their stories and when they open up their narrations to other cultural interpretations.

7.3   Media, Culture, and Narrative Translationality

The entanglement of cultural translation and hybridity with culture and the media is elaborated on further in this section with a view to the future of narrating. In order to do so, I would like to return to my reflections on culture at the beginning of this book and take up two of the assumptions about culture formulated there which have proved to be useful for a discussion on the future of narrating and its culturally relevant implications: The first assumption is that culture derives from social consensus and the second one is that culture is a construct (cf. introduction to Chap. 2). Culture integrates shared meanings which arise in processes of negotiation and (also controversial) discussions and which, at least for one group of individuals, can provide a basis—at least temporarily—for orientation and action. Culture is a shared phenomenon but it is not necessarily shared by society as a whole or limited to national territories. It is merely a shared phenomenon in the sense that the systems of meaning which it provides are understood although not necessarily heeded. Culture is a construct which is not free of differences and conflicts which have to be negotiated on a continual basis. This process is never ending, which means that culture is a porous entity. Consequently, it cannot be cast as a rigid form, even when attempts are made to do so. Narrations are involved in both the establishment of social consensus and in the change and ongoing development of cultural systems of meaning, both as the stages and instruments of discursive debate.

In a world in which transcultural encounters have become the norm (Hepp, 2015, p. 21), increasing translational demands are placed on narrating. Cultural translation can only be successful when it draws on systems of meaning which can be understood cross-culturally. Starting off the cultural translation of his narration by pointing out that he was new and a stranger in the city, the Turkish student addressed an experience, either intentionally or intuitively, that he could embrace as a cross-cultural experience. If the aim is to create hybrid networks of meaning out of the cultural differences which have been revealed, further levels of cross-cultural

communication are required beyond linguistic differences. The narrative production of hybrid cultural practices is linked in with culturally specific and cross-cultural systems of meaning alike and is co-constructed intersubjectively.

In order to characterize the structure of hybrid constellations of meaning which create new cultural practices when connected to each other, it is fruitful to use a concept introduced by Norbert Elias to explain the emergence of smaller and larger groups up to entire societies, namely that of figuration (1970/1978, pp. 130ff.). He identifies networks of individuals constituting a larger social group through interdependent action as figurations, illustrating the concept with reference to games. The figuration is the "changing pattern created by the players as a whole" (1970/1978, p. 130), or what binds people together. Alongside games, this bond can be communication in general, or narration in particular. Andreas Hepp has transferred Elias' terminology into media and communication studies as "communicative figuration," exploring it in the second edition of *Transcultural Communication* (2015, pp. 28ff.) as a label for transcultural media-assisted processes of hybridization (2014/2015, p. 28). I would also like to align myself with Elias' model with the concept of narrative figurations in order to describe the intersubjectively produced narrative entanglements of systems of meaning which feed on different cultural sources and accelerate the emergence of hybrid cultural practices. The term narrative figurations emphasizes the narrative production of culture but is not at odds with the term communicative figuration because hybrid cultural practices are always negotiated in a communicative fashion.

Both Hepp and Bachmann-Medick suggest that the power interests which potentially have an effect on cultural translation could also creep into hybrid forms of culture (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 137; Hepp, 2015, p. 19). Hybrid narrative figurations emerge under the influence of the "unequal power relations of world society" (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 137). Narratives written in dominant languages have a much greater chance of being noticed than narratives written in a language which has a more limited geographical scope. In contrast to narrators from dominant cultures, narrators from minor cultures have to deal with multiple layers of translation, which increases the risk of their cultural idiosyncrasies being lost. They have to translate from the minor language into the dominant language and, at the same time, they have to translate their narratives into another cultural context using a language which is foreign to them.

Media play no small part in the genesis of hybrid cultural practices. Long-established media like radio and television broadcast narrative flows or audio/visual products in which cultural codes of different origins intermingle which could become effective models for hybrid life styles and representations of the Self. The advent of digital media like the internet has vastly increased the potential for creating hybrid cultural practices. The structural characteristics of globality and interconnectedness facilitate "narrative figurations" (Elias, 1970/1978, pp. 130ff.) worldwide which are capable of incorporating cultural elements from different parts of the world. Multimediality unites a broad range of options for narrating and translating in one medium. After all, digital media are not only available for experts but also for everyday actors, both as spaces and instruments for narrative and translational acts. This increases the chance of getting involved in and co-creating processes of translation and hybridization, and yet it cannot only be celebrated as a paragon of participatory progress. Currently, attempts can be observed to stop global interplay in the virtual space of digital networks or to prevent tendencies which favour hybridization through so-called hate messages or threats in the interests of a homogeneous model of culture.

It is not by chance that alongside the "translational turn" (2016, pp. 132ff.), Bachmann-Medick has documented the "iconic turn" (2016, pp. 181ff.) as being another important turn in contemporary society. The "iconic turn" was announced in 1994 by art historian Gottfried Boehm; at around the same time, literary theorist and art historian W. J. T. Mitchell published his theory of the "pictorial turn" (1994; see Sect. 3.2.4.3 and "The Relationship Between Language and the Image" for more details). Both the iconic turn and the pictorial turn focus on an understanding of the world through images, in other words an understanding of images as a medium of perception. Remember the online photo gallery of the American globetrotter which she used to make the world's diversity available to herself or the visualized self-staging which the network actors used to present themselves to a global audience. In the first example, the individual desires to understand the world through images; in the second, the world should see and understand the individual through images.

Liberated from language barriers, images promise narrators a greater outreach for their narrations in a world of cultural blends. Bachmann-Medick stresses that images "are leading to many unexplored spaces of perception and knowledge … and to vistas that were once blocked by the dominance of language" (2016, p. 191). As presentative symbols, they

address the senses and feelings more intensively, bringing enhanced translational qualities into play and compensating for linguistic difficulties. But just like language, images are no portrayal of experienced episodes and events; like language, they are constructed, produced, and configured. Digital media provide a broad spectrum of editing options which are used intensively by network actors and bloggers to configure their narrations.

Even when images are added, the resources of narrating have not been exhausted according to Boehm as, beyond language, there is "tremendous scope for meaning, unforeseen space for visuality, sound, gesture, facial expression, and movement" (1994, p. 43). Even though these narrative media have not yet been studied or reflected upon as translational media, they have already made their way into narrative practice. For example, certain movements and gestures have spread worldwide, like raising both arms and shaking one's palms as a physical translation of political protest, as could be observed during the occupation of Kasbah Square in Tunis, on Syntagma Square in Athens, or during the protests of the *indignés* in France (Tsomou, 2014, p. 120). Here it is the demonstrators' bodies which tell their joint stories. Another example for forms of cultural translation beyond language or image alone is the music platform *Mideast Tunes* (n.d.), an offshoot of the platform *Mideast Youth* (n.d.). It includes tracks from many different countries and from all genres of music, from classical to hip hop, which tell of discrimination, inequality, violence, and political resistance. Experiences of this type are translated into word–sound–rhythm combinations.

One hurdle confronted by translational endeavours which, at the same time, is inherently productive in its vigour is referred to time and again by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), namely the untranslatable fragments which constitute the uncanny. This figure of thought provides important impulses for a discussion of the narrative production of hybrid cultural practices. Bhabha draws on Sigmund Freud's (1919/1955) figure of thought of the uncanny; although the latter did not concern himself with cultural hybridity, his thoughts on the uncanny provide insights into the disquiet which is caused by the Other or the Foreign. Freud discloses the quality of the uncanny (literally the "un-home-ly," *das Unheimliche*, in German) by pointing out that it is more than just the opposite of the "homely" (*das Heimliche*) and the "native" (*das Heimische*) (1919/1955, pp. 220ff.; 241). In the uncanny, as Elisabeth Bronfen's interpretation reads, "what used to be native or familiar returns, after it has become foreign via the act of repression so that the foreign *doppelgänger* turns out to

be the distorting transcription of the known, the native" (Bhabha, 1994/2000, preface, p. x).

Untranslatable fragments can be found in an individual's own narratives and in the narratives told by Others; they can be a constant theme running through individual and collective narratives. What is supposedly untranslatable is in league with the power which often holds sway, undetected, over the individual and/or society and which has a vested interest in suppressing certain things from the narratives. But this interest is boycotted by the uncanny, which emanates from the untranslated fragments and which confronts us with the "secretly familiar" (*das Heimlich-Heimische*), which has undergone repression, thereby giving cause for alarm (Freud, 1919/1955, p. 245). In her preface, Bronfen posits that Bhabha wishes to sharpen our awareness of "how unrendered aspects of the past which do not wish to fit into the traditional master narratives of our culture haunt the present" (Bhabha, 1994/2000, preface, p. xi). This is not about the deliberately suppressed but about the unconscious, which persistently evades being made visible, also because it is laden with fear. In a world criss-crossed with narrations and translations, there is an increased risk—and also chance—of encountering the repressed in the narratives of Others which then appear to us to be uncanny. The risk lies in the fact that this experience can trigger the wish to eliminate cultural differences and to replace them with unmistakeably pure models of identity, "for which some are prepared to go to the bitter end," as Bronfen puts it (Bhabha, 1994/2000, preface, p. viii). The chance lies in such encounters when the irritating inconsistencies and angst-ridden contradictions arouse our interest, for it is those very inconsistencies and contradictions which flag the commonalities of the Foreign and, in the process, encourage the reorientation of the translational towards hybridity.

The media can contribute to an increase in such chances or can also prevent them from happening. In the future, their sociopolitical significance will be measured up against whether they provide the spaces and the means to identify the uncanny in its character as the secretly familiar, and whether stories arise in these spaces and are circulated, "the goal of which is to develop ways of dealing with radical otherness which cannot be subsumed in unanimous life plans" (Bhabha, 2000, preface, p. xiv). These are tasks which, in the age of the internet, do not only concern media companies but also the network actors and bloggers who have turned media space into one where they live and work.

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