

## Chapter 4

# Web 2.0 Storytelling

Since Web 2.0 has led to an explosion of user-generated content, we should expect to see some storytelling emerge out of all of that material, in its huge size and full diversity. If we use our working definition of storytelling, which combines sequence with meaning and engagement, we can find many examples of these.

Two cautions concerning fragility should be borne in mind as we proceed. First, social media evolve at a very rapid speed. It is likely that some of the platforms and styles we explore here will be outmoded or replaced by the time you read this. Consider this chapter, then, to be a historical snapshot of Web 2.0 storytelling in 2010. As with any historical content, some will persist through the reader's time, and some will not.

Second, some of this content may disappear. "Link rot" has been a persistent problem since the dawn of the Web, as URLs change syntax, hosts cease hosting, creators change their mind, or technologies become obsolete. Such evanescence is now essential to Web storytelling's nature: not as temporary as sand painting, but perhaps closer to television content in durability. The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine is one of the best resources to check for backup copies of Web-based content.<sup>1</sup> In fact, astute readers will note that some references in this book point to Internet Archive versions of content now vanished from its original site. Google's habit of caching Web page copies can also be useful.

### Blogs

Bloggng may well be the most visible and accessible form of Web 2.0 storytelling. It is one of the oldest social media authoring platforms, allowing at least a decade of steady creation to provide a wealth of experiment

and examples. From the first days of the form, its similarity to diaries provided a ready comparison to that classic narrative tool, and easy ways to think about both production and consumption. The personal sense associated with diaries also enabled “blogger” to emerge as a category, even a professional identity, letting us think of blogs as character vehicles. This, too, situates blogs well for story thinking.

For example, on a personal note, I first taught with blogs in the spring of 2001, during a British literature class. Assigning students the task of creating their own blogs from the Blogger.com service (since purchased by Google), I (and they) were pleased at the ease of building Web content. As the semester progressed, I found myself thinking of each blog as the student’s self-representation, far more than I had through such other digital teaching tools as discussion boards and Web 1.0–style Web pages. They felt like personae, the face of the student in my class, as opposed to their broader life. Even though this class’s blogging was an experiment, it felt easy, even natural, very quickly.

The personal aspect of blogs has persisted over the past decade, simultaneously complemented by other interpretations: group blogs, community blogs, intranet blogs for corporate knowledge management, newspaper blogs, and so on. This historical diversity makes it imperative that we not consider blogging as a single, simple entity. As Steve Himmer argues, “Focusing exclusively on the material production of a weblog is akin to arguing that what allows individual novels to fit into a class of novels—or, indeed, for a class ‘novels’ to exist at all—is that they all consist of printed pages of prose fiction bound into a volume.”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the category of blogs as storytelling devices is broken down for this chapter into a typology: diary, character exploration, time-based republication, and one-post stories. As noted in chapter 1, these forms include both fiction and nonfiction.<sup>3</sup>

Blogs are diaries: This metaphor has been a powerful one, especially as a heuristic to explain the odd-sounding technology to newcomers. There is an obvious connection, since both forms consist of content chunks arranged in linear chronological order. There is also a strong appeal, since diaries are often associated with personal intimacy, sometimes from childhood. The metaphor breaks down rapidly, though, once one realizes that each form proceeds along opposed chronological directions and that so many blogs are nothing at all like diaries.

Yet the metaphor remains lively, and sometimes describes projects. *She’s a Flight Risk* (2003– ) narrates a woman’s life as she travels around the world, escaping from an unhappy situation. Instead of eating, praying, and

loving, Isabella v. describes encounters with private detectives and reporters. The first post began: “On March 2, 2003 at 4:12 PM, I disappeared. My name is isabella v., but it’s not. I’m twentysomething and I am an international fugitive.” The remaining posts narrate this adventure, alternating biographical details with claims to veracity. The story unfolds in sequence of blog time stamps, date by date, with some digressions back in time to present context.

A public diary, a social media journal—comments appeared on it to offer suggestions, criticisms, protestations of disbelief. John Richardson offers a good account of the skeptical range Isabella’s storytelling induced, from disbelief to credulity. Richardson’s ultimate face-to-face meeting with Isabella, or someone claiming to be her, echoes the shift from digital to physical we also see in alternate reality game storytelling (see chapter 10). The *Flight Risk* blog acts as a public performance, with audience participation included. Its blurring of the boundary between fiction and nonfiction parallels its storytelling stance straddling content authorship and audience co-creation.<sup>4</sup> A similar fiction/nonfiction blur attended the *Belle de Jour* blog from its launch in 2003 until the author revealed her identity in 2009.<sup>5</sup>

The blog-as-diary concept became recognizable enough to appear as a device in fiction. Bruce Sterling used this approach to tell a short story about a hyperlocal, yet very mobile, future. The blogger-narrator describes the rocky course of his engagement, while noting developments in net.art, social media, and general technology along the way. “Dispatches from the Hyperlocal Future” is not a blog, but it mimics one, consisting of serial, dated, and discrete posts. We don’t see blog comments, but the narrator refers to them, as well as to other social media effects fictionalized around his blog.

06.18.2017 | In transit

... Thanks for the many supportive readers who wrote in with wise advice when I was so visibly losing it there.

05.22.2017 | Torino

I just egosurfed myself, and I discovered that a comical picture of me glaring at my misbehaving handheld is by far the most popular pic of me ever placed on the Internet. I was caught between expressions—it was one of those unlucky shots—but it appeared overnight in the commentary of Janis’ blog. An instant worldwide explosion followed, lavishly tagged with “hilarious” captions by Janis’ legions of fans:

I CAN HAZ LIMELIGHT NOW? . . .

and hundreds of others even more puerile.<sup>6</sup>

Nothing restricts a diary-style blog story to a single blog, save authorial decision. Multiple blogs, each hosted on a different site, can combine their individual voices into a polyphonic, hyperlinked whole. The *World without Oil* alternate reality game (2007) consisted of a half dozen bloggers, each describing his or her life as an oil shock rapidly unravels civilization. Each blogger's biography offered the person's perspective on events, grounded in personality, socioeconomic status, and geographical location. Readers/players could post comments on each blog, offering advice, asking questions, and participating in the unfolding story.<sup>7</sup>

*Dionaea House* (2004) follows a similar pattern. This haunted house story is concerned with seduction and psychological dislocation; aptly, its components are character studies. One part consists of a young man's emails and text messages, putatively edited and copied into single Web pages in blog style. Mark Chondry's story, as related to Eric Heisserer, traces the identification and pursuit of a sort of monster, an architectural analogue to the Venus fly trap (and hence the title): "Here are copies of the correspondence I received from Mark over the course of the last month. For the most part, I have merely copied and pasted them from my email application."<sup>8</sup> Each entry consists of a sparse Web page, each one with an addressable URL, and a very basic navigation tool.

Once we finish Mark's story, which climaxes on an effectively spooky note (texting and explaining, by doing so, that "THE DOOR IS OPEN"), we are led back to Eric's editorial voice, and his apparent destruction by the same malign force. This occurs not on serial pages, but in two different sites: first, a single HTML document, titled "Updates and Other Resources," with diary entries arranged in chronological order; second, a personal blog, "A Quiet Place," linked from the first page.<sup>9</sup> The content in both describes Eric's research into the haunting force, and his truncated exploration of a scary house. The Updates page consists of emails to another character, while the blog is written in (presumably) Eric's own voice. Like *Ted's Caving Journal*, Eric's narrative breaks off at the moment of a final-sounding plunge, followed by no further content: "Here we go."

"Updates and Other Resources" includes links to several other story sites. This is where we first find "A Quiet Place," along with a babysitter's Live-Journal.<sup>10</sup> Dani describes caring for a child in one of the haunted houses we now recognize. Her perspective, that of a teenager utterly unaware of the plot, is both sad and clichéd, recalling the past generation of teen slasher movies. After describing ever-increasing terror, the blog ends on a destabilized note. The last entry evidently written by Dani indicates mental

breakdown or possession, consisting of two nursery rhymes without explanation. Next follows a single-line post, reading only “found you” and linked to Eric’s “Quiet Place” blog. The monster has claimed another victim—and perhaps a fourth, as we learn nothing of the fate of Dani’s charge.

The Updates page links to still another blog, maintained by one Loreen Mathers.<sup>11</sup> This stands as a sequel to the others, dated as starting one year later (2005, continued into 2006). Loreen describes an attack by the haunted house in more detail than we’ve read so far, and in a very different voice. She portrays herself as very worldly, cynical, and practical, and also as a murderer.

Blog comments also contain what seems to be some additional authorial content. One “JennyLevin” comments on one of Eric’s posts:

Hey . . . Hang in there, Eric . . . I know what you mean, and I’m having the same feelings and thoughts just like you wrote here . . . Let me tell you how far I have gone, so you won’t feel so alone in this.<sup>12</sup>

Two comments are attached to Eric’s final post, one from ally Jenny, and the next from an apparently possessed (or imitated) Dani:

JennyLevin said . . .  
Please . . . PLEASE answer your phone . . .  
This waiting is killing me . . . . .  
12:28 PM  
ohdanigirl said . . .  
jenny levin where are you  
the boys are all inside now  
come and find us  
the door is open<sup>13</sup>

Also included within the overall Dionaea project, linked from “Updates and Other Resources,” is an instant message conversation, archived and published as a single, plain, text-only page.<sup>14</sup>

Taken together, the several voices of Dionaea House comprise a single, interlinked story. Characters refer to each other by addressing them, describing their actions to a third party, or linking to their Web content. This process is dialogic, as each of our readings connects with and reshapes the others. Dani’s naïveté throws Loreen’s cynicism into relief, and Loreen’s detailed descriptions of the terrible place fill out Mark’s sketches.

Readers can enter into dialogue with the story through blog comments. After Eric posts about the ominous-seeming Sweatsuit Man, comments

appear wishing him well and offering helpful advice.<sup>15</sup> After his final post, with its ominous comments, readers weigh in with assessments about the story's veracity and craft. A first-time reader encounters each blog with that combination of content and commentary.

Dionaea is not as interactive as *World without Oil* and some other blogs, in that commenting is not available for two sections of it, Mark's tale and Eric's single-page account. Readers can create social media content elsewhere and link to Dionaea, but not interact through this classic blog feature. Not all blogs allow comments, but the practice is general enough to shape blog reading.<sup>16</sup> In a sense, this combination of blogs, bloglike pages, and flat HTML constitutes an anthology of Web strategies for the time of its creation. Perhaps we should consider Dionaea as a transitional text, crossing between Web 1.0 and 2.0 storytelling styles. We can hear that historical arc here: "These emails are becoming more of a journal for me, to help me [b]log my progress."<sup>17</sup>

*Project 1968* is a better example of what Angela Thomas calls "blog fiction": "fiction which is produced where an author or authors have used a blog as a *writing* device, using all of the features afforded by the blogging or journaling software, such as hyperlinks, graphics, and the commenting system."<sup>18</sup> Read for the first time, *Project 1968* appears to be a two-person group blog out of time, each author writing as if she were participating in the 1968 Democratic Party national convention in Chicago. Its front page offers several ways to proceed. We can read the entire blog chronologically, either backward or forward, with Amy and Janine together as a dyad or separately, thanks to the author function of the blog platform.<sup>19</sup> We could look for the "About" page, and there find an explanation of the project, along with supporting documents and hyperlinked resources<sup>20</sup>—going behind the scenes, as it were, sidestepping the blog's presentation as historical fiction. Along those lines, we can read an explanation of Amy and Janine's characters.<sup>21</sup> Leading away from the *Project 1968* blog is a link to a MySpace site that provides a kind of parallel story content base, as well as an example of cross-platform, transmedia storytelling (see chapter 8).<sup>22</sup>

Focusing in on the main blog content, we find it presented as a diary or newscast. Read chronologically forward, *Project 1968's* notes about current events yield a serial account of historical unfolding. Unlike a single diary, or a newscast purporting to speak with a single voice, Amy and Janine write (or speak) with similar yet complementary voices, offering parallel perspectives. For example:

August 28, 1968  
by Amy

12:10 A.M.—Lincoln Park

They were beaten. We watched them from afar. They beat the priests who gathered to protect us. Coleman asked Glasses if the priests knew what was about to happen. Glasses assured him that they did. They sent him away, and they stayed.<sup>23</sup>

Such a post immediately launches itself at the reader's emotions, through the combination of violence and mystery. For the latter, this is clearly an entry lacking context, at least, which sends us into the blog archives to search for explanations, or to wait for the next entry. Perhaps we will investigate the MySpace page or search the open Web for other platforms. Some readers will want to respond, either in fictional or objective modes.

But this is a putatively coauthored blog, and we have been trained to expect a complementary view. On the same date (August 28, 1968), Janine posts from a different location, observing another set of events:

Unstoppable . . .

5 P.M.

Craig is gone. He yelled at Ron that he was going to burn his convention pass in the park. It's horrible. She told him that it was important not to give up, but he just kept saying over and over again that it was all a set-up. The entire convention was a big fake, phony exercise and that the whole thing was rigged.

I have to admit, it looks like he's right. It doesn't matter what the people want. We have no say in our own government. "IT'S A SHAM! THE WHOLE GODDAMN THING IS A SHAM! WE'VE WASTED OUR TIME!"<sup>24</sup>

Janine is inside the convention. In other words, her attention is divided between party maneuvers within the building (and, metaphorically, within the party itself) and protestor-police interactions outside (also outside of the party as well).

The post veers back and forth between the two, touching on numerous characters, framing out the historical moment. Later in that same post, we read:

10:30 P.M.

We can't get enough organized quickly enough to get it through. The Humphrey/Daley people are ramming it through.

We can't stop them.

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And yet, again in the same post, Janine perceives the events in which Amy is acting:

7 P.M.

... I'm angry at Becca. And I'm also afraid for her. What if she gets arrested? She hit that policeman in Madison. What if she does it again?

9:30 P.M.

We're standing by a television watching what is happening outside. I can't believe it. No one can. Mrs. Stoutmiller says that some delegates are planning to protest inside the convention. I certainly don't want to be on the floor when that happens.

Ron keeps trying not to stare at the television. He's talking with people, chatting up The Senator's aides. We wonder how The Senator will get to the Amphitheatre. What kind of security precautions are there?

I just saw a cop hit a demonstrator across the legs. It was a blonde girl. He broke his baton.

Disgusting.

*Project 1968* brings into play all of the storytelling principles we discussed in chapter 3. The blog structure breaks up the flow of content into a serial sequence. The two main characters are the ground of the story, each going through personal transformations. The social framework is made available through these blog posts' comment features, along with similar interaction elements over in MySpace. That MySpace site offers another proscenium for action, while *Project 1968* takes advantage of various blog affordances on the main site: an About page, serial and social presentation.

This history-story blog offers a readily accessible version of blog-based storytelling. The events portrayed are recent enough to evoke memories in some readers, while remaining formally comprehensible to many American audiences. The vivid personal presence of the two women demonstrates blogging characters, while the documentary evidence shows a way of integrating multiple documents.

### Temporally Structured Archival Blogging

Some predigital content was published in chronologically marked forms. The epistolary novel, for example, usually includes letters identified by date. Diary- or journal-based stories, of course, must do this, and readers expect as much. These stories can violate that expectation to make a point, such as establishing that the narrator has gone insane. Some rare examples of



fiction rely on a detailed chronological structure, like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1896), which consists entirely of dated content items: letters, diary entries, telegrams, receipts, audio recordings, newspaper clippings.

We've seen this storytelling style in other venues besides print. *Timecode* (dir. Michael Figgis, 2000) features four parallel plot lines, each visible on screen (depending on which version or performance) and occurring at precisely the same moment. More famously, *24* (Fox-TV, 2001–2010) attempts to follow a single day, with each episode pinned to an individual hour.

The point of identifying such examples is to give background for similar digital storytelling cases using blogs, sometimes with the same material. The first well-known example of this is the *Pepys Diary* blog (2003–), which posts from Samuel Pepys's journals on the same date as the original entry. The "10 February 1665/66" entry, for example, appeared on February 10, 2009.<sup>25</sup> The source material is available in the public domain and is republished using the popular WordPress blogging platform.

A series of other projects have followed suit. *WW1: Experiences of an English Soldier* republishes letters, other personal documents, and contextual information related to one Western Front soldier and his biography. Dated content is associated roughly or precisely with the date of each post.<sup>26</sup> *The Orwell Diaries* offers a similar, if more narrowly focused, project, blogging George Orwell's 1937–1942 journal entries "70 years to the day since each entry was originally written. The diaries start as Orwell heads to Morocco (with his wife Eileen) to recuperate from injury and illness, and end in 1942 (or 2012) as the Second World War rages."<sup>27</sup> That war is the subject of another blog-history project, *World War II Today*.<sup>28</sup>

*News from 1930* posts selections from each day's *Wall Street Journal* during the early years of the Great Depression.<sup>29</sup> For example, the May 1, 2010, entry draws on material from the Friday, May 1, 1931, *WSJ* issue ("Dow 151.19. +7.58 [5.3%]"), including editorials, letters, macroeconomic news, miscellaneous news, stories about individual businesses, movies reviews, and jokes.

*Editorial:* Businessmen should be responsible and stop joining "college economists" and "maverick politicians" in their talk of "failure of the capitalist system" and "challenge to the existing order." . . .

"Trained monkeys are now used by Chicago burglars to squeeze through transoms . . . and open locked doors from the inside, thus demonstrating the uplifting power of evolution."<sup>30</sup>

*News from 1930* has several avowed purposes. As with other time-based republication blogs, the format defamiliarizes the document: "I do think

you get a different feel for history seeing it day-by-day like this—less tidy, but more real.” The blog reading revises the blogger’s sense of the time:

In histories of the Depression the leaders of the time are commonly portrayed as oblivious to what was going on, do-nothing, and stupidly optimistic. . . . [Yet] It appears that the people in charge at the time were well aware of what was happening, and did most of the things that we’re doing now to alleviate it (with a couple of notable exceptions). And as for unjustified optimism, we will see that at least in mid-1930 there was a fair amount of good news coming out about the economy.

This leads to a political aim, both in viewing the past as well as the Great Recession present: “And it just might give you a useful skepticism for some of the more Panglossian commentary we’re seeing today when you see that similar things were said back then—and probably with more reason!”<sup>31</sup>

Shifting ground from history to fiction, I can share the story of having blogged *Dracula* for several years.<sup>32</sup> My motivations for launching the project were to reread the novel from a different perspective, to win more readers for the book, and to further explore the blog storytelling platform. The logistics for doing so were quite simple. I was preparing an edition of the book for print, and so had an annotated digital copy on hand. I already had a blog platform that allowed me to spin off secondary blogs. It was an easy matter to simply copy and paste content from Word to Web browser, once I set up a basic schedule. I did nothing for publicity and collaborated with no institution.

Readers began to arrive, based on Typepad’s blog statistics, which put daily hits in the hundreds, then some thousands. Readers also began leaving comments on individual posts. As with the *Pepys Diary*, comments ranged from reader response to scholars sharing their research. For example, following Dr. Seward’s first post (a fascinating technological artifact, purportedly a transcription of a wax cylinder audio recording), the first commentator shared his thoughts about the characters. David40 then asked, “Why is Jack drawn to Renfield during his period of pining for Lucy?” Babyjinx offered an explanation, then David40 responded. Next Elizabeth Miller, one of the world’s leading *Dracula* scholars, commented about Renfield’s name: “The name ‘Renfield’ never appears in Stoker’s Notes. The character is there from the outset, but he is referred to as either the Mad Patient or the Flyman.” More discussion ensued.<sup>33</sup>

After the first year ended with Van Helsing and the other survivors contemplating victory in November, I reran the novel several times, each time beginning in May with Jonathan Harker's first bemused journal entry. I revised the presentation slightly, splitting up some entries into two posts, due to a clearly marked internal timeline breaks, and more precisely timing several posts according to their own description (midnight, etc.). Each year, a new commentary layer appeared, gradually lower in number, but still interesting. One reader, Andrew Connell, created a set of Google maps to illustrate several voyages in the novel (Dracula's trips from Romania to Britain and back, for instance). Repeat readers offered reflections on their experience, now that they'd finished it. In a sense, the Draculablog offered—and still offers—a distributed, collaborative reading of the novel, “an online reading group,” in Angela Thomas's account.<sup>34</sup> As a teacher and scholar of the novel, I learned a great deal about its temporality and the skillful way it creates suspense.

These temporal blog-publishing projects partake of many social media qualities. First, they often trigger active audience contributions. *Pepys Diary* readers post comments (called “annotations”) exploring each entry in detail: inquiring about mental states, London locations, British politics, and so on. They reflect on the day's description:

“He was coldly received by us, and he went away before we rose also, to make himself appear yet a man less necessary.” The tension in this scene must have been enormous and Sir Thomas obviously reacts in a way that further discounts him in the eyes of Pepys and crew. This would be harsh for any man to endure, but for a Gentleman, it would have been a humiliation. Still, I have to give it to Pepys for this superb line “. . . yet a man less necessary.” The concision of the image is brilliant.<sup>35</sup>

We can see these temporally based republication blogs as doing the work of storytelling in two ways. First, they reproduce a text that has already been received as a story. Fiction (*Dracula*) and nonfiction (Pepys) alike, the source material clearly tells a story and has a reception history as such. The blog format heightens the temporal nature of these stories, marking it more clearly than otherwise, blog post structure being more clearly dated than the same content nicely formatted in a paperback book. Blogging also makes the time structure more vivid by mapping it onto the reader's time schedule. There remains a gap between the two timelines, which we will see plays a role in gaming (see chapter 6), as few can afford to read each blog

post on precisely the date it appears. Nonetheless, a blog structure makes such a temporally distributed reading more possible, and even likely.

Second, blogging a preexisting work adds a social layer to the texts. As Thomas observes, “What is unique is the quick and easy blog commenting mechanism for relatively instant feedback and critique.”<sup>36</sup> In this sense, blog republication is social publication, embedding the source material in the full Web 2.0 world. Thomas is correct to note the ease and speed of commenting and linking; we should also add a long tail effect, insofar as a blog remains on the Web. The source material can be accessed after posting, and the comments around it constitute an already-present discussion. Other blogs and other social media venues can then serve as guides to these republication projects, functioning as “Post-filters” to their stories, in Chris Anderson’s term.<sup>37</sup>

### Character Blogging

Revisiting the theme of blog as diary, we can pause to observe what should now be a truism. Bloggers are characters. Each blogger demonstrates a persona, to whatever degree of fiction. These personalities are shown over time, according to the serial nature of digital storytelling. As Steve Himmer puts it:

As one day’s posts build on points raised or refuted in a previous day’s, readers must actively engage the process of “discovering” the author, and of parsing from fragment after fragment who is speaking to them, and why, and from where whether geographically, mentally, politically, or otherwise.<sup>38</sup>

In this consideration, blogs tell stories through the presentation of characters. *Project 1968* and *WW1: Experiences of an English Soldier* each depend on the exploration of a character engaged in historical events. Their experiences and reactions proceed, and through them we can grasp the larger situation.

But even nonfictional blogs present themselves as characters. The practice of taking pseudonyms is rarely for actual anonymity, cases like *She’s a Flight Risk* notwithstanding. Political bloggers often use names as a kind of character designation, branding exercise, or approach to shaping the reader’s experience of the site’s content: *The Volokh Conspiracy* and *Instapundit* each have resonances of self-deprecation.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, *Informed Comment* suggests competence and seriousness (“Thoughts on the Middle

East, History and Religion”).<sup>40</sup> Consider Hobart and William Smith College professor Michael Tinkler’s blog title: *The Cranky Professor*. Its subtitle completes the misanthropic picture: “You type, and I tell you why 4,500 years of written history shows you’re wrong.”<sup>41</sup> Swarthmore College professor Tim Burke calls his blog *Easily Distracted*, and once more we see a self-parodic subtitle: “Culture, Politics, Academia and Other Shiny Objects.”<sup>42</sup>

The content of blog posts over time obviously grows a character presentation. What isn’t necessarily obvious are the implications of content choices. Blogging about politics triggers expectations of character type based in that milieu: activist, cynic, party loyalist, and so on. Gender implications also appear, as Justine Musk observes, drawing on gender discourse theory: “The attitude seems to be that personal, confessional blogging (‘female’ blogging) is narcissistic, and authority blogging (‘male’ blogging) is not.” Musk also makes an intriguing argument about a blogger’s authority and implied commercialism:

Authority blogging establishes the blogger as an “authority” in some particular niche, and relates information that (theoretically) solves a problem the reader might have or teaches something that the reader wants to know. An authority blogger usually has a product or service to sell you.<sup>43</sup>

Blogs reveal authors’ personae through posts, but also through other content contained on the blog site. Blogrolls, for example, show intended affiliations and interests. “About” pages can contain small (or large) autobiographies. Departments or categories offer a snapshot of blogger interests. Feeds from other content sources broaden the portrait: photos from Flickr, Twitter updates, and so forth. Without necessarily setting out to tell a story, bloggers present themselves as characters.

Some ways of blogging cut across these different modes and apply elsewhere. No matter the content or format, blogs lack a clear boundary for their storytelling activity. They can always extend via posting or comments, while being included in another story is always possible. They differ from other, more concretely delineated story forms in what Himmer refers to as an “absence of a discrete, ‘completed’ product.”<sup>44</sup>

Related to character blogging is what I call “one-post stories.” These are a version of short-short stories, taking place on a single, self-contained blog post. They may include images or other media embedded, or consist solely of text. Over time, a blog publishing many of these develops a kind of character, as in the preceding category.

For example, *Small Town Noir* blogs about historical true crime in western Pennsylvania. Each post offers police photography, accompanied by research into what crime led to that photo. “The mug shots on this site date from the 1930s to the 1950s—from the temporary slump of the great depression to the terminal slump that followed Korea.”<sup>45</sup>

For example, one post—“Martin Fobes, ‘intox driver,’ January 8 1948”—begins with a white man’s face, seen in two different views, head-on and profile. The post’s text describes Fobes’s arrest for drunkenness and then explores a likely second, connected crime of either attempted assault or rape, ending in a woman’s death. Pieces of evidence are presented to establish the second crime, including statements and a mapping exercise about Anna Grace’s death. The whole is presented as a series of mysteries, or mistaken explanations:

The file card that accompanied the mug shot listed the charge as “intox driver”, but Martin Fobes was suspected of something much worse. . . .

It was a mystery to the police, which isn’t unusual, but it also seemed to be a mystery to the man who was arrested in connection with the death. Or so he claimed. . . .

The case appears to have been dropped. The *New Castle News* doesn’t mention it, or Anna Grace, after that day. Fobes wasn’t charged with a serious crime.

No one seems to have been certain what happened in those missing 20 minutes.<sup>46</sup>

Reading post after post, *Small Town Noir* offers a composite character of personal extremity and frequent desperation. This is obviously due to the accumulation of crime stories and criminals, but the overall effect is also colored by the editor-writer’s sense of historical melancholy, combined with historiographical mission:

*Small Town Noir* is dedicated to recovering the life stories behind mug shots from the vanished golden age of one American town.

The men and women in these mug shots are nobody special, but they saw things that none of us will ever see. . . . It was once one of the most industrially productive cities in America, but all that’s gone now.<sup>47</sup>

That sense of gloom is accentuated by the site’s black background. Even its material nature seems grim, as per this note emphasized on every page by a sidebar item:

The mug shots on this site were all taken in New Castle, Pennsylvania, between 1930 and 1959, and were rescued from the trash when the town's police department threw them out. The information that has been used to reconstruct the stories behind the pictures comes mostly from old copies of the local paper, the *New Castle News*.

## Twitter

Twitter might appear to be the least likely storytelling platform of all. Despite the enormous size of its user base and diversity of content, its reputation as a site for trivial pseudo-conversation should preclude meaning and narrative. Twitter's own self-presentation suggests self-abnegation, from its language ("tweeting," even "Twitter" itself) to goofy imagery (the chirping bird, the notorious fail whale). Yet its sheer simplicity and ease of use have enabled tremendous creativity.

As with blogs, Twitter storytelling can be divided into modes. First, Twitter's immediacy lends itself to "live" stories. Each tweet is written to the moment, a quick snapshot of a rapidly unfolding current event. The *War of the Worlds* reenactment referenced in chapter 1, for example, portrayed an alien invasion through multiple Twitter writers describing their local experience. The organizer issued writing prompts, while promulgating a timeline and hashtag ("@wotw2") to coordinate things.

The alien invasion occurs. Follow @wotw2 to keep in sync with the progress of the invasion. This Twitter feed will automatically update, in general terms, the unfolding of the alien invasion like clockwork throughout the world. Coordinate with Tweeters in your area to tell local stories.

1. cylinders fall from the sky. Tweet about where you are. Ask your friends where they are. Form posses. Skip town or take a closer look.
2. tripods emerge. Flee, get stuck in traffic, or take refuge and tell us what you see.
3. Martians begin obliterating every Terran metropolitan area with heat rays. Don't call them heat-rays; that would be a dead giveaway. Describe what they do and come up with your own name! Do you work in a public service like hospitals or fire? What's your job and what do you do? Do you organize your coworkers and flee? Do you head for the hills with your go-bag?<sup>48</sup>

Participants tweeted accordingly: "The freeways are packed! I've heard from a few stuck on 252 and 94, they are sitting ducks."<sup>49</sup>

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A similar, if narrower story was told by the inevitable *Zombie Attack*. This first-person narration is a very fast-paced, almost stream-of-consciousness narration of a “zompocalypse”:

We ran as fast as we could up the stairs Matt slipped and cut his leg, i helped him up and continued to run. Just then we bump into guards.

The guards grab us and ask us if we are okay, we say yes and they continue on by, we walk over to the bench and sit down. What now?

We go to the offices, and are greeted by a guy different from the one we had the first time around, he says he cant help us and grabs my arm

He looks at it for a second, and asks me to come with him, he pulls me into a side office, i turn and Matt is away . . . did he abandon me?<sup>50</sup>

A similar project narrates a thousand years of history, while trying for this kind of immediacy. CryforByzantium narrates the Eastern Roman Empire’s long career. “Usually the ‘person’ speaking will be the Emperor. He (and occasionally she) will explain in brief terms what’s going on. When there’s a change of emperor, the Twitter feed will update with ‘New Emperor’ and the name of the new ruler.”<sup>51</sup>

25 December 820. Going to traditional Christmas hymns at the Chapel of St. Stephen. Still mad about @Michael\_the\_Amorian.

25 December 820. New emperor: Michael II (Michael the Amorian).

First orders: throw Leo’s body into the latrine. Clean up all the blood on the floor. And get somebody to break these manacles off me!

Merry Christmas, Byzantium! You’ve got a new emperor! I warn you, don’t mess with me! \*holds up Leo’s severed arm\*

Spring 821. Whit Sunday. I’m crowning my son Theophilus co-emperor so he will succeed me. We’ve had 7 emperors in the last 25 years!<sup>52</sup>

These are creative and entertaining paraphrases of historical moments, drawing from fuller historical works. A narrower historical focus can be seen in *Kennedy 1960*, which tweets details of that president’s election campaign: excerpts from speeches, travel itinerary notes, and links to larger documents.<sup>53</sup>

A second type of Twitter storytelling uses single tweets to tell very short stories, really micronarratives. One such story republishes selections from Félix Fénéon’s *Novels in Three Lines*. This 1906 experimental novel excerpted or remixed true crime stories from popular newspapers. The Twitter



account then tweets these extremely condensed stories, alternating between pathos, daily life, and black comedy.

On Bécu, 28, who arrived at Beaujon hospital with a gunshot wound, they counted 28 scars. His nickname in the underworld: The Target.

The Anti-Rabies Institute of Lyons had cured Mlle. Lobrichon, but as the dog had been rabid she died all the same.

In Méréville, a hunter from Estampes, thinking he saw game afoot, killed a child and with the same bullet wounded the father.

Amiens will crown its muse on September 16. Forty beauties were vying for the role. It has gone to Marie Mahiou, a velvet weaver.

Misses Cabriet and Rivelle, of Plaine-Saint-Denis and Bagnolet, and M. Goudon of Saint-Denis, all drank: he cyanide, they laudanum.<sup>54</sup>

Tweeji's biographical snippets ("Follow Dead People on Twitter") are closely allied to this approach.<sup>55</sup> Virginia Heffernan suggests that this might be one way for Twitter and Facebook users to consider posting, by carefully reshaping their thoughts about immediate, daily life: "You take a tiny story, which seemingly concerns only you and in which you play the role of hapless, bumbling protagonist, and you turn it into a haiku version of universal truth."<sup>56</sup>

A third Twitter storytelling category is related to this one and draws on the long history of short, pithy observations. Twitter, indeed, seems well suited to aphorisms. Jenny Holzer tweets her own, a mixture of exhortations and warnings:

SIN IS A MEANS OF SOCIAL CONTROL  
 TECHNOLOGY WILL MAKE OR BREAK US  
 YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSTITUTING THE MEANING OF  
 THINGS  
 THERE'S NOTHING EXCEPT WHAT YOU SENSE  
 SOMETIMES THINGS SEEM TO HAPPEN OF THEIR OWN ACCORD  
 PUSH YOURSELF TO THE LIMIT AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE<sup>57</sup>

Another project republishes aphorisms from the most famous English-language creator of them, Oscar Wilde:

Public opinion exists only where there are no ideas.  
 Education is an admirable thing. But it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.  
 To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance.

Occasionally this feed will break the one-tweet limit and yoke two together:

The only thing that the artist cannot see is the obvious. The only thing that the public can see is the obvious. . . .

The result is the Criticism of the Journalist.<sup>58</sup>

The extremely short nature of Twitter seems to lend itself well to the aphorism. These may not be stories, like the Fénéon republication, but they certainly establish a character over time. They may also take advantage of the very short form to attempt other, preexisting short forms, such as the haiku.<sup>59</sup> Excerpts from longer poems can also benefit from Twitter's focusing of readers' attention down to the single line.<sup>60</sup>

A fourth mode heightens the human while abstracting it out. Twitter's success is due partly to the ease by which creators can build programs using the public Twitter feed, pulling out shared tweets and remixing them in new ways. For example, Twittlevision extracts public tweets, then republishes them on a world map, using individual geolocation.<sup>61</sup> A type of storytelling remix comes from Twistori, which searches the public Twitter mass of feeds for key verbs: love, hate, think, believe, feel, wish. It then republishes all current tweets containing those words. The result is a stream of story stuff, emotive shards of daily life.<sup>62</sup> *We Feel Fine* does something similar with "a large number of blogs":

We Feel Fine scans blog posts for occurrences of the phrases "I feel" and "I am feeling". This is an approach that was inspired by techniques used in Listening Post, a wonderful project by Ben Rubin and Mark Hansen.

Once a sentence containing "I feel" or "I am feeling" is found, the system looks backward to the beginning of the sentence, and forward to the end of the sentence, and then saves the full sentence in a database.

Once saved, the sentence is scanned to see if it includes one of about 5,000 pre-identified "feelings".<sup>63</sup>

The result is a kind of posthuman story material abstraction. The experience of reading these flows may inspire one to remix them once more, or to create something new.

## Wikis

One of the most powerful and effective digital collaboration tools is also one of the oldest. Wikis first appeared in the mid-1990s, created by Ward Cunningham to help programmers share code more easily.<sup>64</sup> Wikis are Web

pages that users can edit directly in the browser, without going through Web markup (HTML) or sending files to Web servers. Their ease of use explains their steady growth, seen most notably in the *Wikipedia* project. Many different wiki platforms and approaches have been developed, with variations ranging from editing formats to authentication. Google now supports a wiki-style service, Google Docs, integrated into that company's broad sweep of services.

How can wikis be used in the service of storytelling? We can now identify several levels of wiki-based storytelling, depending on type collaboration.

First, authors can collaborate on stories through wikis as a form of document hosting. Any number can take turns editing a text, adding, deleting, or modifying words. The results can be read on wiki pages directly or exported to other formats. In this level, wikis serve a very basic function. This function could be served by other technologies as well, such as coauthored blogs or spaces supported by groupware (Sharepoint, for example); wikis are simply more focused on this feature.

Collaborative writing through wikis can be attached to other media, in the form of response writing or prompts. A three-dimensional visualization of a new building, for example, could be projected on a screen or viewed in a Web browser; viewers could then write together in wikis about that digital object.

Second, people can take turns advancing a story through a wiki, round robin style. One editor (which can be a single person or a group clustered around one computer) writes something and then hands off the URL to another creator. The second editor adds to the story, but cannot subtract. Instead, he or she takes the story forward, perhaps in a new direction. This editor then passes the amended tale to a third party, and so on.

There are storytelling benefits to this wiki approach. The challenge of adding your vision to another's can elicit creativity. It can also build relationships, as round robins provoke challenges, one-upmanship, parody, and creative competition. I can speak to the buzz of excitement such "wiki-robin" exercises elicit. Participants laugh, protest, and plot against each other, pointing to the playful nature of wikis (and a partial explanation of their popularity). Additionally, wiki-robin storytelling helps participants learn one of the most practical lessons of social media: that other people will use your content, beyond your ability to control.

A different spin on the wiki-robin uses the Exquisite Corpse method. This refers to a French surrealist game, where players write sentences or phrases in round robin style. However, each successive writer cannot see the previous writer's words. A third person receives the two-handed

composition and reads it aloud. The results are, predictably, surreal. The game's name comes from one such paired snippet: "The exquisite corpse drinks the new wine." Wikis can be used to play the game or to ramp up its scale to paragraph levels. A group of American liberal arts colleges have used this approach with multimedia, each creator responding to a hidden creation from another campus's student.<sup>65</sup>

A parallel form of wiki storytelling is available through one subtype of wiki software. MediaWiki, the platform used by *Wikipedia*, and several others position a supplemental discussion page alongside each wiki content page. For example, a *Wikipedia* entry on French bread describes the composition and history of baguettes, while a discussion page is also accessible from that page via a top-menu tab. Clicking on that tab reveals a kind of shadow page, where we read the history of the main page's creation and editing over the years. Furious debates about syntax and French culinary law ricochet down the screen, all built through a wiki format. This opens up a space for two different storytelling functions. First, two parallel stories can be told, each responding to the other, perhaps in dialogue. Second, the discussion tab allows a creator and audience to communicate in a separate but closely linked area, similar to a blog post's comment thread. Such a pairing also resembles the well-known DVD combination of movie with director's commentary. The first, dual wiki use is actually storytelling, while the latter is in support of that purpose.<sup>66</sup>

Can wikis be used for storytelling beyond this level? Penguin Publishers launched an experiment in 2007, opening up a wiki platform to allow the entire Web-reading world to write a novel together. The conceit or ambit of *Million Penguins* ran thusly:

Can a collective create a believable fictional voice? How does a plot find any sort of coherent trajectory when different people have a different idea about how a story should end—or even begin? And, perhaps most importantly, can writers really leave their egos at the door?<sup>67</sup>

A single page was launched, empty of content but for a Brontë line: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day." Contributions and edits rapidly appeared, then grew. An editorial apparatus emerged in order to keep server load manageable, while dealing with spam and other attacks. Several times the wiki "forked," as the project split into two parallel projects, then more. The text grew and won public attention. Eventually the wikis were locked, preventing them from further editing.

Several storytelling themes emerged, which appeal to social media and digital storytelling more generally. First, characters became major figures—not only fictional ones, but editors and contributors whose work won attention both positive and negative, such as Nostrum19, YellowBanana, and Sentinel68. Pabruce, a particularly energetic participant, won an honor of sorts in being rendered within the text as “just another wiki character.”

Second, content forking indicates a latent possibility within social media, based on remix culture. The term *fork* is drawn from open-source coding and refers to a single body of text copied into two different locations, then each developed separately. Within the *Million Penguins* wiki, several forks appeared, including nine choose-your-own-adventure stories and an unusual parallel novel caused by a participant’s ruthless insistence on writing bananas into every wiki page.

Third, at least some observers consider the *Million Penguins* project to have forked our understanding of wikis. Bruce Mason and Sue Thomas see the experiment as challenging the “garden” model.<sup>68</sup> Popularized by such authors as Stuart Mader, and drawing on ecological metaphors from works like Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O’Dea’s, this understanding sees wikis as requiring nurturing in dynamic systems.<sup>69</sup> Wikis require feeding, pruning, fertilizer, time to grow, transplantation, healthy competition, and so on. Good wiki organizers are gardeners, users with a healthily horticultural approach to these organic texts. *Million Penguins* did feature gardeners, and Mason and Thomas were able to divide them into subtypes. For example, they consider light editors to be “garden gnomes,” even “Wiki-Gnomes”: “Unlike gardeners, WikiGnomes rarely make major changes to the structure of the wiki [and] consequently their actions are often not noticed.”<sup>70</sup>

But the garden paradigm was balanced, or even outmatched, by a “carnival” one. Some contributors fought each other for wiki page dominance, rather than collaborating to care for the novel. Some of those battles resulted in the numerous forks mentioned earlier, where a unified text broke into a divergent pair, then each branch divided again. Moreover, a surprisingly large number of pages were created outside of a hyperlink network. “Approximately 75% of all these pages do not link to any other pages in the site. In addition there are 150 content pages [30%] that are not linked to by any other page.” At best, Mason and Thomas deem these “walled gardens,” while at worst calling them “wastelands, undeveloped, unlinked fragments of content.” The characters mentioned earlier seemed to oppose the gardener idea from a different level. They attracted attention as performers,

not as cultivators. “Content may have been generated by many people yet, with occasional exceptions, the users rarely actively collaborated.”<sup>71</sup>

Taken together, Mason and Thomas see these strands combining in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival concept. In this model, social rules are not transplanted to new soil, but are upended in creative riot. Voices do not collaborate, but struggle dialogically. “There was no community built around ‘A Million Penguins’ because it was not a setting in which community could form.”

Like a carnival, the wiki was bounded in space and time and provided an opportunity for “ordinary folk” to hold a barely controllable party. . . . A carnival is a moment of excess featuring multiple competing voices and performances. . . . The wiki novel was in no way a neat, orderly wiki . . . [and] many of the norms of wiki behavior and aesthetics were turned on their head.<sup>72</sup>

If the full wiki collaboration approach doesn’t seize our imagination, perhaps a more structured Web writing approach using the wiki philosophy will. A browser-based social media version of Choose Your Own Adventure launched in 2010. Unknown Tales presents readers with the usual format of short prose sections, followed by limited choices (leave the building, or wait for the timer to go off?). What’s different about its approach is letting users add more content. Registered users can add new choices to a chapter, add new chapters, or launch entirely new stories. In wiki fashion, we can anneal already existing content—expanding what’s already present, filling in gaps, or helping finish stories published in incomplete states.<sup>73</sup>

## Social Images

The field of visual literacy is based on the power of images to influence viewers. Images communicate information, share moods, persuade audiences—in short, partake of storytelling capabilities. This is not controversial; it is, in fact, the stuff of clichés: “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Images provoke stories:

Our easiest direction to anyone thinking about making a digital story is to look around his or her house and find images that provoke memories and stories that are meaningful. Then, see if there are other images around the house that are part of that story. And in the end, you will try to connect the memories that link all of these images together.<sup>74</sup>

Images have played a key role in multimedia since the cave paintings at Lascaux, and probably earlier, if we think of early humans scratching images in sand. More recently, digital multimedia has relied heavily on image content, adding static visuals to other media. The Center for Digital Storytelling curriculum, for example, works closely with images, turning them into video content alongside audio tracks. For this section, we will focus on image-centric storytelling; the next chapters will deal with images as integrated more evenly into other stories.

The leading social media site for images, Flickr, offers many examples of the different ways social images can tell stories.<sup>75</sup> For example, a Flickr group called “Tell a story in 5 frames (Visual story telling)” aggregates narratives built along strict guidelines.<sup>76</sup> Each story consists solely of five images in a linear sequence. A title is the only bit of text allowed and hence serves as the only explanation of what the images reveal, although creators sometimes sneak in several words within the description field.<sup>77</sup> This framework determines a good range of projects, from the humorous to the historical.

Depicted events tend to follow a progressive sequence. “Gender Miscommunication” (nightingale, 2006) traces a man and woman’s experience on a date, where she tries and fails to get him to cuddle. We see the noncouple seated, then her looking at a snuggling couple, her wordless request to her seatmate, his response, then their respective reactions.<sup>78</sup> “The Chase” (Benjamin!, 2009) shows a some birds (chaser or chased?), a hunter (ah, the birds are prey), two shots of the chase, then the hunter having returned to his mother.<sup>79</sup>

A very different type of five-image story is “Farm to Food,” which remixes a series of Library of Congress archival photographs from the Great Depression.<sup>80</sup> Again we see only five images, representing a linear sequence, accompanied by that explanatory title. Each photo may be unconnected to the others in its source, but the combination is quite coherent. Each image offers various historical markers to help us guess at time period (roughly the 1930s). We begin with a potato field, then proceed to two boys unloading potatoes into a barrel. Next we see barrels awaiting transport, presumably filled with produce, followed by a grocery storefront, where fruits and vegetables are visibly for sale. The fifth, concluding photo shows a family eating a meal; clothing suggests the adults and children may be farmers.

Fiction or nonfiction is blurred by the act of arranging this quintet, and further still by our act of viewing and reading it. We imagine and infer connections between the items, but the set is silent on details. Our social

and historical faculties are roused by the content, shaped by the title, and honed by the archival background. At a different level, we recognize the skills required to assemble such a coherent series: visual literacy, to comprehend each image; remixing, to arrange these images; archival competence, at least at the level of knowledgeable user. The result is an accessible, emotionally affective, and thought-provoking story.

What is Web 2.0 about these five-photo tales? Surely we could experience each story as a static Web page. We could even view these outside of a browser, if they were forwarded to us in an email or even printed out on paper. But on Flickr, as with the rest of the social Web, we see two major differences: microcontent and social media. As microcontent, it is simply easier to publish photos through Flickr than by making a Web page (or site): fewer skills to learn, fewer resources to marshal. This doesn't change our experience as consumers, save to remind us that there is more content being published.

The social aspect of social image sites is more transformative. Each five-image story can be commented upon, and usually is. A casual survey of comment threads reveals something like a Web-based writers' workshop, with feedback about craft and interpretation. The three examples we have examined elicited praise, mostly, along with different emphases (some taking the woman's side in "Gender" and others the man's). A fourth example, the sinister and comic "If You Go Out to the Barn Tonight . . ." caused one viewer to brood: "I feel like the rabbit so often, the observer, appalled at the downward spiral and the rush of speed as we fling ourselves toward disaster, the driven, not the driver."<sup>81</sup>

Another piece, "A War Story" (Zafiris S., 2010), received this criticism:

Beautiful pictures, buuut:

they look like a mosaic of a battle, not a tale of a battle.

It doesn't mean that your piece is not good (it's, indeed, superb), but I would like to see an alternative sequence.<sup>82</sup>

Compare with these more concrete critiques of another story:

Now, consider the same photos, in this order: 1, 5, 2, 3, 4.

A completely different story. (GustavoG)

Or even, 2, 3, 5, 4, 1. (Violet Danger)<sup>83</sup>



As a social media platform, Flickr opens up stories for feedback to the entire world, especially the millions of registered users. It's like a classic workshop, but a global one. The creator therefore benefits from greater exposure and feedback; viewers see not only the stories but also others' responses. Unlike email, unlike Web 1.0, social image storytelling exists in a social framework, which alters both creation and consumption. As with blogging, an individual work may not win comments or annotations, nor links from other sites, but that social assumption as a default reshapes our expectations and experience of the work.

An alternate form of social image sharing shifts the hosting ground to Web 2.0 presentation services. The best known of these (so far) is Slideshare, which lets users upload, present, and view PowerPoint files in a very YouTube-like fashion: large media file on the left side of the screen, embeds and comments allowed, connections to other social media services, and so on. It is not that removed from social image hosting sites, conceptually, which helps explain how Barbara Ganley was able to use Slideshare to host "Into the Storm."<sup>84</sup> This series of images is actually presentation slides, combinations of visual and textual content. "Into the Storm" describes a physically and emotionally challenging trip, where images and captions oscillate between the two realms. Like the Flickr five-image stories, we read/view the work in sequence, then have the possibility of commenting. Like YouTube, we can also embed the code for "Into the Storm" in a blog post or wherever else on the Web one's host allows.

## Facebook

"Facebook is the novel we are all writing."<sup>85</sup> Given the history of storytelling, where each new medium becomes a vehicle for narrative, we should expect to see narratives on the world's largest social media platform. With more than 500 million registered users as of this writing,<sup>86</sup> the combination of platform size with sheer diversity is certainly appealing. So far, Facebook stories draw on other social media and digital storytelling practices, while beginning to surface new forms.

Facebook as character study draws on the personal nature of some blogging practice (see above). At its simplest level, a single Facebook account houses a process of personal presentation. As with blogging, the boundary between fiction and nonfiction is blurry and often contextual. Blogging provides another comparative aspect, in that each Facebook account or site

offers many different ways in for reading and writing. While blogs present a current or promoted post, an archive, a search box, comments, and an About page, a Facebook profile offers a wall, a status update, a friends listing, events, discussion, “Information,” and even a microlevel option to “like” the whole person or small bits of their content.<sup>87</sup> Multiple media folders or channels are also present, including images, audio, and video. A character emerges from the intersection and accumulation of these, extended over time.

One such single-character Facebook project is the archival biography of a Holocaust victim, Henio Zytomirski, created by the Brama Grodzka Cultural Center.<sup>88</sup> Like the Flickr “Farm to Food” remixed story, this one is based on preexisting archival materials, repurposed and represented. His (or the Center’s) site presents us most forcefully with two items: a black-and-white photograph of a young boy, and a string of multilingual comments on Henio’s Facebook wall. The image suggests an older origin than the Web, both with its color scheme and clothing style; any historical context or research immediately brings this to bear. The gap between that historicized image and the up-to-date visitor comments presents itself as a space of historical difference, an attempt at memory, or the reach of archives.

Exploring the site yields more components for this character. His Information tab reads simply: “Location: Lublin, Poland/Birthday: March 25, 1933,” quietly informing us of the historical nature of this characterization. Under images, we find three categories—two with few photos, but one offering a broader mix, “Henio Zytomirski Family & Others.” Here we see a variety of people, along with photos of documents, letters, and tables. One photo of German soldiers marching through a town points quietly, terribly, to Henio’s fate, and the end of the story.

Status updates mark positions along the story’s arc. Like Twitter tweets, each microcontent item can sketch out thoughts or impressions of surroundings:

Winter has arrived. Every Jew must wear the Star of David with his last name. A lot has changed. German troops walk the streets. Mama says that I shouldn’t be frightened, and always that everything is just fine. Always?

Grandpa says that the war will soon be over. He says that soldiers also have families. How is that possible? They have a family, but they kill families.

These updates initially appear as ventriloquism, content authored by someone writing from an imaginary Henio’s position. It is through the direct

documentary context, and a reader's reflection, that the historical situation emerges. This offers another example of the power of social media storytelling to elicit readerly engagement.

While Facebook maintains a strict policy against fictional identities, more projects like Henio's can be found, and more may appear. For example, a marketing project for the film *9* (2009) presented one of that story's characters as a Facebook page. "9 Scientist" portrays itself with and without the fourth wall.<sup>89</sup> An upper level of social engagement reads like marketing language, with contest winners celebrated and timelines announced. Another level is that of fiction, where a character known only as "Scientist" broods on his life, treating Facebook status updates as a kind of public journal.

I am alone, consumed by the ringing in my ears. It's so quiet out there. My body is cold and fatigued, vision blurry.

I haven't heard from anyone in days. Maybe they had to reroute after the strike? But as a pragmatist, I can only assume the more likely outcome and continue on my path.

I am sorry everyone. This world was a place of tarnished beauty, but a place worth fixing nonetheless. And all I ever wanted to do was give my part in fixing it.

He hints at a new project, which a viewer of the film will recognize as the titular nine cloth robots:

For whatever it's worth, these are my new gifts to the world . . .

It is time.

Our world is ending, but life must go on.

— The Scientist<sup>90</sup>

His brooding, terrified face greets us from the classic upper left corner on the Facebook page. Elsewhere on the page are other signs of this two-level approach. An embedded game, "A.I. Challenge," is clickable from the main navigation menu. The Discussion tab leads to open talk of merchandising. But the Photos tab brings up content from the movie without qualification—diagrams of robots, as if we were clicking on an inventor's actual site.

Also linked from this page is another "proscenium," one allied to the Scientist's Facebook page. It is a more traditional movie site, <http://www.9experiment.com>. This site contains a clickable, navigable image,

which appears to be a study. Numerous objects cover a desk and table, behind which loom bookshelves and walls. Fans of the film will recognize items associated with the Scientist, while others will be confused or unexcited by the textless, caption-free presentation of objects. A 1930s-style radio plays music and speeches from the film, a music box contains a journal, a puzzle game opens in a new window, and so on.

The site presents itself as a mystery, in contrast to the far more accessible Facebook component. In a sense, the Facebook page is a supplemental, explanatory, even documentary resource for 9experiment.com. Taken together, viewers can shift between the two, seeking an appropriate level of story consumption. Put another way, the social media piece extends the reach of a more traditional, 1990s-style, Flash-driven Hollywood marketing site.

A Facebook profile can serve as one component of a complex, multi-platform story, as Dionaea House used several blogs, bloglike Web pages, and other Web content as described earlier in this chapter. For example, *My Darklyng* (2010) posts a novel's worth of content into thirty-three Web pages, allied to one character's Facebook profile.<sup>91</sup>

Natalie Pollock's Facebook site gives no immediate indication of belonging to someone who doesn't exist, but it soon points to fiction. Its leading photo is unremarkable, resembling any current teenager. The status page is rich in content from both Natalie and visitors. Digging into it, one meta-fictional update points to a New York Times article about the project (the meta-fictional level is unclear from the update text itself).

The information tab first yields basic information about Natalie's birthday, supporting the front page photo's teen age ("Founded: April 15, 1994 . . . Mission: To survive 10th grade in one piece!;"). The next lines give the game away, by pointing to story content: "Website: <http://www.slate.com/mydarklyng/> / <http://www.twitter.com/eternalnat>." The latter is a Twitter feed that seems to generally echo Natalie's Facebook status, but the first is Slate's directory of *My Darklyng* chapters.

Pollock's Facebook story, the story within *My Darklyng*, advances partly by content contributed by other parties. As Slate's promotional introduction page describes the process, "Over time, mysterious pictures begin to appear on her Facebook page—'70s album covers, sheet music, photos of old Hollywood starlets—all clues to the shattering truth."<sup>92</sup> Natalie responds to each addition to her wall with increasing anxiety:

Anyone have any idea what this weird image means? Somebody put it on my wall. Not that it isn't pretty:)

Okay whats up with THIS weird photo popping up on my wall? Last time I checked I was not religious.

Eeeeeeeeeeeew! Way to scare me to death, creep.

*My Darklyng* adds Twitter content to the Facebook material. Jenna Stecklow is one of Natalie's friends, according to the Slate introduction page. Her tweets focus on shopping (as does her avatar image), eating, friends, homework, and other staples of urban teen life.<sup>93</sup> "Fictional best-selling vampire writer Fiona St. Claire" posts about writing vampire fiction, appropriately, and her Twitter profile (photo, bio blurb) reflects this.

Was just approached about launching a fragrance in Sweden. They'd rather smell like blood than meatballs?

Just reread my chapbook of Poe's ghost stories. Edgar Allen Poe: sexiest writer alive. Even if hes dead.

RT @lilithsaintcrow From WIP: "It was the first good sleep I'd had since I'd come up out of the grave, and it wasn't nearly long enough."

That last tweet retweets content from another Twitter account, and in so doing displays the fuzzy boundary around social media fiction—for lilith-saintcrow is Lilith Saintcrow, an actual author, with two series of books in print. Saintcrow does not appear in the Slate introductory material. We have no evidence linking her to the *My Darklyng* production process. It's reasonable to assume that this is a case of the story using social media to bolster itself, yielding material (retweet) and perhaps a greater sense of realism.

This strategy is paralleled by a nominal connection to the story's nature as fiction. St. Claire's Twitter profile displays a home page URL, which returns us to the fictional layer, pointing directly—and right back to—Slate's *My Darklyng* introduction. St. Claire naturally enough has a Facebook account, which links to Pollock's. The small set of personae interlink neatly.<sup>94</sup>

This discussion of social media storytelling has focused on those platforms driven by text and images. Because these are more accessible to most creators than other, more complex media, we should expect to see more in the near future in the way of this creative ferment. For the more daunting media in Web 2.0, we proceed to the next chapter.

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