

Storying as the meaning, and the evasion, of life: reflections on when stories might be better left untold.

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Storying can be a process by which we make narrative sense of ourselves and our lives, a process by which we develop an identity, and give identities to others as we weave them into our stories. Some have argued that the meaning of our lives is found in our ability to write ourselves into others' stories (Edwards, 2000). All of this gives a rationale, if rather functionalist, for caring about the telling of stories, and I have been fascinated for a long time with the possibilities that are opened up by thinking of ourselves as stories and storytellers (*Homo narrans narrator*). The time had come when I had the opportunity to put together my range of thoughts about this, to tell the story of how stories tell the life. Then I discovered what I think was a big hole in my thinking which I wish to explore in the conference. I now suspect that the continuous telling of stories, including to ourselves, leads us always to the past and the future and away from the present moment. If our storytelling is any good it will feel to our listeners (if any) and to ourselves that we and they are very present in the story. Perhaps we are, but I am not convinced that the presence of the fully involved storyteller and the rapt listener is a presence in the present (Mead, 2002). Could it be that continuous storying is a defence that we use, and that others might encourage us to use, against mindfulness, against being, or against acting? Is it one of the ways in which we maintain the internal buzz which keeps us from knowing ourselves or what we care about it? Is our storying a major part of 'the inner chaos going on in our heads, like some wild cocktail party of which we find ourselves the embarrassed host' (Laird, 2006)? Are we like the host of the cocktail party in seeking to be good story tellers, and encouraging others to tell their stories, so as to keep a cheerful noise going during the consumption of the drinks and canapés? Would we develop more mindful action, peace and presence in the present if we could let a whole lot of stories remain untold, rather than developing the skills and charisma that enable us to keep going in a state of unbridled story incontinence? I have no idea whether I shall have reached a satisfactory conclusion, or even chapter ending, to this story by the time of the conference, but I shall tell the story so far and hope that it will develop into a multi-authored story.

Edwards, L. (2000). "A narrative journey to understanding self." M. Phil. Thesis, School of Business and Management, Brunel, London.

Laird, M. (2006). *Into the silent land: the practice of contemplation*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

Mead, G.H. (2002). *The philosophy of the present*. Amherst: Prometheus.