Part I

A Communication Approach to Storytelling

Here, I would like to recount a little story
so beautiful I fear it may well be true.
—Michel Foucault (1976, p. 225)

"Let me tell you about something that happened to me," one friend tells another as they walk through the park. "So, how did your school day go?" asks a family member at the dinner table. "Did you see last night's episode on television? Let me tell you what happened," a worker says to a colleague during their coffee break. "Once upon a time," intones a pre-school teacher to a group of children. "I would like to tell you my version of what is going on," a petitioner states at a town meeting. "You'll never guess what happened today," begins the latest entry in an online Internet journal. "Here is how I experienced it," a patient confides to a doctor. These simple speech acts announce, request, declare, promise, and invoke stories. They perform narrative. Such storytelling matters: it is an integral and consequential part of daily life.

As audiences gather around storytellers, narrative becomes a significant site of communication and study. Embedded in the daily lives of ordinary and extraordinary people, storytelling flourishes. People make sense of their experiences, claim identities, interact with each other, and participate in cultural conversations through storytelling. Narrative is performed everywhere. Writers pen autobiographies and fiction; scholars recount the dramas of history and science. Storytelling permeates newspapers and magazines, radio, television, and film. Advertisers tell stories to sell their stock, and politicians package their lives in stories during campaigns. On stage, in the workplace, and at home, storytelling thrives. In the postmodern idiom, we "get a life" by

telling and consuming stories (Smith & Watson, 1996). The study of narrative surged in the United States after World War II, fueled by at least five contemporaneous phenomena: the narrative turn in the human sciences; the memoir boom in writing; the new identity movements based in race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, age and ability; the therapeutic cultures of self-help and talk shows reciting illness, trauma, and victimization; and the self-performance practices of performance art, popular culture, and electronic media, including the Internet.

Narrative studies have emerged to address the storytelling performances all around us. As part of that effort, this book sifts through the wide spread and far reach of contemporary narrative performance to concentrate on storytelling practices rooted in people's daily lives, families, and communities. As storytelling is embedded in daily life, so, too, our narrative interests are located in our personal and intellectual lives, kindled by our biographies as spouses, parents, colleagues, and researchers. We listen to stories about siblings, for example: "Remember when Larry and Dennis went fishing, and Dennis ate the bait," or "the time we forgot Kevin at home when we went to Grandma's house," or "how Maria broke her arm and no one believed her," or "when Tom nearly burned down the house." We also tell stories when we talk with colleagues, friends, and family. Now that our son Keir is away at college, we narrate in e-mail: a tale of how our cat, Hobbes, got caught in the neighbor's live trap two nights running, or an update on the health of a close family friend who has cancer, or a chronicle of the new metal roof as it weathers its first Maine winter, or an anecdote from one of the classes we teach. If, as Jack Zipes (1997, p. 132) writes, storytelling is "an experiential moment in which one learns something about oneself and the world," this study is our effort to share some of what we have learned about storytelling and about performing narrative in daily life.[1]

We present a critical interpretation of narrative in daily life, an interpretation rooted in our academic disciplines of communication and performance studies. This intervention shifts analytic focus from story text to storytelling performance as embodied, situated, and embedded in fields of discourse. The mundane experience of performing narrative—listening to and telling stories—suggests that storytelling is first and foremost a human communication practice. The simple act of saying "let me tell you a story" establishes a communication relationship that constitutes the speaker as a storyteller and the listeners as audience. The utterance "let me tell you a story" is, in other words, *performative* in that it does what it says it is doing. It performs the storytelling that it announces. "Let me tell you a story" also establishes a story, the "something that happened" that the storyteller reenacts, recites, or represents. The telling of the story is a *performance.* As a human communication practice, performing narrative combines the performative "doing" of storytelling with what is "done" in the performance of a story.

The term *performing narrative* incorporates both performance and performativity. Narrative performance materializes performativity in that "experiential moment" of learning something about oneself and the world: a risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (telling and listening to stories) and a thing done (the story of experience) where participants reiterate norms of storytelling and where discursive conventions frame interpretations of stories. Performing narrative is risky and dangerous because, as Elin Diamond (1996) asserts, "as soon as performativity comes to rest on a performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable" (p. 4). The emphasis on storytelling performance conceptualizes narrative as act, event, and discourse—a site for understanding and intervening in the ways culture produces, maintains, and transforms relations of identity and difference (Strine, 1998). Performing narrative refers to any act of doing storytelling, not just to a heightened act of communication, aesthetically marked, framed in a special way, and put on display for an audience (Bauman, 1986). Performing narrative constitutes the event and conditions of communication, not as a singular or intentional act but as the reiterative practice by which discourse produces the effects it names (Butler, 1990a). Performing narrative focuses on doing things with words and asking what difference(s) it makes to do it.[2]

The combination of the performative and performance in storytelling is illustrated by the often-quoted words of Walter Benjamin (1969): "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (p. 87). Benjamin's description emphasizes the sense of storytelling as performance. At a minimum, performance involves a two-step process of "taking" and then "making" experience for someone: first, as an embodied listener at work in the world, the storyteller takes her or his consciousness of experience and "in turn" makes it an experience of consciousness for the audience. Storytelling, Benjamin states, comes from "the realm of living speech" and goes back into it. Benjamin's insistence that experience can include one's "own experience or that reported by others" suggests that this process is not a linear conveying of experience to an audience but a reversible and reflexive process. Storytelling is reversible in that an audience can "take" her or his consciousness of the storyteller's experience and "in turn" become a storyteller and make it an experience for another audience. Audiences can become storytellers and vice versa. Telling one's story invites listeners to respond and often to reciprocate with their own stories (Geissner, 1995). Storytelling is reflexive in that, as Benjamin's description suggests, storytellers begin as audiences to themselves and others before becoming storytellers. It is the reflexivity of the storyteller that makes it possible for her or him to shift from audience to storyteller and storyteller to audience, to shift consciousness to experience and experience to consciousness.

The discovery of reflexivity in performance underscores the sense of storytelling as performative. That is, the constitution of a person as a storyteller or an audience is a contextual feature of a particular material, social, and cultural situation. Storytelling is performative in that possibilities for our participation are marked out in advance, so to speak, by the discourse and by our material conditions. Stories also live after as well as live before performance. When we participate in storytelling, whether as storytellers or audiences, we reenact storytelling as a conventionalized form of communication as well as collaborate in the production of a unique story or performance. This storytelling event recites, recalls, reiterates previous storytelling events in general and in particular. In brief, storytelling is socially and culturally reflexive. Storytelling is not a natural form of communication but a habitual and habituating practice. However, because it is reflexive, any particular storytelling event has the potential to disrupt material constraints and discourse conventions and to give rise to new possibilities for other storytelling events and for how we participate in performing narrative. Our approach to performing narrative theorizes both the transgressivity and the normativity of storytelling (McKenzie, 1998): storytelling's productive potential for creativity and resistance, and storytelling's reproductive capacity to reinscribe conventional meanings and relations.

Our study develops a theory of performing narrative and illustrates it with a variety of examples in order to understand the storytelling that surrounds us in daily life, and, further, to participate critically in conversations about what stories, what meanings, and what bodies matter. We present performances and analyses of family storytelling, storytelling on the Internet, breast cancer storytelling, and personal narrative of gay identity performed on stage. We selected these examples to illuminate the diversity of narrative performances and, in several instances, to examine new sites of storytelling. The book thus integrates a sustained theoretical argument for approaching storytelling as a communication practice with empirical analyses and case studies of performing narrative in daily life.

We organize our study into three parts, with each part introduced by a brief orientation that situates the succeeding chapters within narrative theory and methodology. Part I: A Communication Approach to Storytelling encompasses this introduction and a chapter on storytelling in daily life. In this chapter we examine a story told among a group of women on a weekend trip to Quebec City as an instance of narrative performance in social interaction. We use this story, "We'll See You Next Year," to accomplish two simultaneous tasks: to develop our approach to performing narrative as a communication practice that is embodied, material, discursive, and political; and to illustrate the significance of a communication approach through the description, analysis, and interpretation of a particular narrative performance.

Part II: Family Storytelling: A Strategy of Small Group Culture turns to a somewhat more traditional site for storytelling, the family as experience and institution. We take family storytelling—a communication practice in which families remember, transmit, and innovate stories through generations—as a research model for the study of performing narrative. We devote three chapters to thematically analyze empirical data on family storytelling from fieldwork conducted among Franco-American families in Maine.

Whereas Part II features an in-depth analysis of one way to perform narrative, Part III: Storytelling Practices: Three Case Studies emphasizes the diversity in narrative performance. We offer three case studies to call into question the very familiarity of storytelling and to suggest boundary conditions for performing narrative. We selected these particular cases—storytelling in weblogs, breast cancer storytelling, and a staged performance of autobiographical storytelling—in order to question or problematize the taken-for-granted habits and institutions of performing narrative. In particular, we question the assumption of orality and face-to-face interaction, the assumption of coherence in crafting a recognizable story, and the assumption of representational conventions that privilege visibility in developing narrative identity and agency. Now let us "recount a little story" about performing narrative, about what matters in storytelling, and how and why storytelling matters.

CHAPTER 1

Performing Narrative in Daily Life

A group of eight women, gathered in a hotel room in Quebec City, share stories after a day of sightseeing and touring the city. They listen as Marie (a pseudonym) begins another story:

Marie: when I was in the hospital having Lisa
when he [Paul] was eleven months old
the morning that Richard took me to have Lisa
while I was delivering Lisa he took his first step

These few phrases open Marie's story, which we title "We'll See You Next Year," and illustrate the daily experience of listening to and telling stories. Whatever its significance for the participants, as a communication event it is unremarkable, a common occurrence. How shall we understand what is happening here? In this chapter, we explore *performing narrative* as a communication practice. To do so, we bring together two research traditions: a speech act or semiotic tradition of studying symbolic activity, or what is communication; and a phenomenological tradition of studying conscious experience, or what is human. The combination of these traditions as an approach to the study of human communication has been called semiotic phenomenology by Richard L. Lanigan (1988, 1992).[1] We use semiotic phenomenology as a way to understand and describe what happens in the experience of storytelling. The story that Marie tells serves as an exemplar to illustrate this analysis throughout the chapter.

In developing semiotic phenomenology as an approach to human communication, Lanigan draws primarily upon the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault. As we suggest through the following analysis, we find the confluence of these thinkers particularly productive for understanding

storytelling matters—especially their emphasis on communication as embodied in a social world and as a locus of material action and power. As Nick Crossley (1996) argues, Merleau-Ponty's and Foucault's attention to the lived body and the inscribed body, to the existential and the institutional, can "be brought into a mutually informing and enriching dialogue" (p. 99). We develop four aspects of this dialogue in separate chapter sections to argue that performing narrative is (1) embodied, (2) situated and material, (3) discursive, and (4) open to legitimation and critique.

The first section looks at how storytelling is *embodied* by participants in a system of relations among audiences, storytellers, narrators, and characters. Any access to performing narrative is made possible by bodily participation, including the researcher's body. The second section examines how storytelling is *situated* in particular material conditions by looking at the constraints of language, history, and culture among storytellers and audiences. Situational resources and material conditions suggest how the communication context gives rise to particular stories, to particular performances of stories, and to particular performance practices. The third section asks "why is this story performed in this way and not that way?" by exploring the *discursive regularities* that constitute rules of exclusion and inclusion for stories and storytelling, and rules for who listens to and who tells stories. Performing narrative as a communication practice makes conflict over experience and identity concrete, accessible, and therefore discussable and open to change. The fourth section considers how performing narrative is open to *legitimation and critique*. That is, what does particular storytelling "do": how does it normalize experience and identities, and how does it transgress social and cultural norms and institutions? Questions about the consequences of performing narrative cannot be answered by a focus on any one system component—story text, storyteller, audience—but only within a multilevel model of strategies and tactics that examines relations of power. At the end of each section of this progressive argument, we offer a set of questions which guide the analysis of storytelling in daily life as *a communication practice* and which reflect our emphasis on performing narrative as performance and performativity. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of this emphasis on communication in a theory and model of performing narrative.

The Embodied Context of Performing Narrative

We begin with a most mundane and obvious description: some *body* performs narrative. Performing narrative requires bodily participation: hearing and voicing, gesturing, seeing and being seen, feeling and being touched by the storytelling. The challenge comes in describing this bodily participation in ways that do not reduce the body to a collector or information processor of stories

outside of any body. Performing narrative is not a discrete event—somehow external to the body—of processing and recounting prior events. The body of the storyteller does not function as a kind of organic video camera or tape recorder. Rather, the storyteller takes up some part of bodily activity (such as the perception of an event) and moves it to another activity of the body (such as the performance of a story): as Benjamin writes, "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (p. 87). Nor can the body be reduced to thought and consciousness. Performing narrative is not a cognitive or reflective process for which the body is a container. The body of the storyteller is not a film or video screen upon which or through which stories may be projected. Before performing narrative is conceived or represented, it is lived through the body as meaningful. Our task is to explicate the context of relations in which the body is both part and participant.

Benjamin's description of storytelling suggests that the storyteller is embodied before an audience simultaneously as both a narrator and a character, both a speaking subject and a subject of discourse. The speech act "let me tell you about something that happened to me" situates the storyteller as a narrator in a relationship with a listener in a particular setting ("let *me* tell *you*"), with a larger audience which includes the storyteller and listener (the "us" implied by "let me tell you"), and with potential listeners beyond the immediate context (a more general or public "you"). At the same time, it situates or positions the storyteller as a narrator in a relationship with herself as a character ("something that happened to *me*") and in relationship as a character with other characters within the story (Maclean, 1988; Bamberg, 1997b). In phenomenological language, these multiple and ambiguous relations are lived through as bodily conduct, and they constitute a "system of four terms" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 115; Lanigan, 2000). In storytelling, this embodiment constitutes a system of relations among storyteller, narrator, character, audience. That is, these embodied relations are extensions of an incarnate subject capable of moving reciprocally between perception and expression. The storyteller lives as both narrator and character in performing narrative for an audience. Narrator and character are not things the storyteller can withdraw from or hide behind. The storyteller does not change bodies to become a narrator or a character or a listener. Nor is the storyteller a composite of narrator and characters. Both narrator and character are sensible to the extent that they are dimensions of the storyteller's bodily conduct; they are ways of grasping the world, of moving voice and body to tell stories.[2]

Narrator and character are sensible for the storyteller—they are seen and heard and felt—because they are postures of a body that can see itself seeing, hear itself speaking, and touch itself touching. This description of storytelling as a bodily capability follows the phenomenological tradition of emphasizing the lived body, or what Merleau-Ponty calls *le corps propre* ("the body

proper"). Merleau-Ponty (1964a) focuses on the undividedness of the lived body when he writes: "The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself" (p. 162). In performing narrative, the storyteller is an audience for herself or himself. Furthermore, because the bodily comprehension of narrator and character are forms of conduct sketched out in the world, such embodiment is always already accessible to others. The body that can touch itself can also touch and be touched by others, can gesture and feel emotion. Narrator and character form part of an intersubjective system that is lived through by storyteller and audience. Let us turn now to the story "We'll See You Next Year" in order to illustrate these aspects of embodiment in performing narrative.

"We'll See You Next Year"—Introduction

The story "We'll See You Next Year" is told during an evening of conversation and storytelling among eight women in a hotel room in Quebec City. The women, who range in age from forties to sixties, have joined together for an "immersion weekend" organized in connection with the Franco-American Center at the University of Maine. The women live in the local communities that surround the university and share a connection, direct or indirect, with the university or someone at the university. Five of the women are or were part of university administrative staff (two are now retired), one is a friend of one of the other women, one is a teacher in a local high school who heard about the trip, and one—Kristin—is university faculty. Prior to making the trip, Kristin contacted the participants to obtain permission to audio tape-record storytelling that might happen during the trip. The primary storyteller in what we call the "We'll See You Next Year" story, Marie (a pseudonym, as are all the participants named in this book), is one of the trip co-organizers for this first-time event. She takes up the role of tour guide during the five-hour van ride to Quebec City, occasionally talking to the group as a whole about landmarks, architecture, and other points of interest. For most of the drive the women talk in pairs with their seat-mates. All the women are white, but not all are Franco-American. Some are interested in practicing French language skills; others are more interested in the trip to Quebec City. Some are old friends; others are new acquaintances.

During the weekend, Marie drives the group to Laval University, L'Ile d'Orleans, St. Anne de Beaupre cathedral, and to shopping centers, museums and markets, the cinema, and restaurants. At the end of the first day, the group gathers in Marie and Louise's room to talk about the day, about things they did, French language interaction, Canadian currency and culture, and shopping. Over evening dinner on the second day of the trip, the women begin to tell some personal experience stories. At this moment, Kristin asks if the group would "save" the stories until they return to their hotel after dinner so they could be audio taped. So, after returning to the hotel, the women change into pajamas and robes, open some wine, and gather again in Marie and Louise's room. Marie and Louise sit on the inside edges of their adjacent beds with a woman on the outside edge of each bed. Three women sit on chairs around the beds; one woman sits on the floor. They talk and tell stories: sometimes overlapping each other and talking simultaneously while moving between

conversation and storytelling, sometimes withholding interruptions to encourage one person to become the sole storyteller.

After the tape recorder is turned on, Marie begins by telling about coming home from the hospital after the birth of Paul, her first child, to much laughter and audience participation. She concludes by saying, "Okay, that's my story. Somebody else." One of the group encourages Blanche, sitting next to Marie on the other side of the bed, to tell her story about directions and getting lost on the way to a lake. After Blanche finishes, Marie asks if Rebecca, sitting on a chair next to Blanche, has a story. Rebecca links to one of the stories that Marie told before this session and tells about how her young son and nephew turned into "little devils" in a store. After she concludes, Marie begins what will turn into a series of related stories in which she interweaves descriptions of her experiences with some childhood tales about her son, Paul. In the first of these, a description of how she "cried for five months" upon finding out she was pregnant with her second child, is woven around another often-repeated tale of her threat to put a sign up on the lawn listing Paul, her firstborn, as "for sale" if he kept misbehaving. Louise comments that "Oh, Paul used to do some awful things." Then Marie begins the "We'll See You Next Year" story. She tells the story with much animation, moving around and bouncing on the bed, waving her arms to suggest action, gesturing and taking in all of her listeners. The entire story lasts about three minutes and begins nine minutes after the tape recorder is turned on.

A description of embodiment does not merely specify who speaks and who listens, or even what is said and not said. To describe storytelling we focus on what is said and what is not said within a horizon of speaking, listening, and feeling—a lived unity of bodily participation. Storytelling occurs within a field of bodily practices. The story Marie tells is not outside her body or the bodies of the women in the hotel room with her. They do not hear, feel, or look at the story as they would a disembodied thing; rather, they participate and join in storytelling as bodily practices that are of the world in which they are embedded. Storytelling, we might say, is the focus of their activity. At the same time, this focus is possible because the field has been cleared of other activities. They have put aside other possibilities, such as reading, watching television, sleeping, and individual conversation, in order to give a hearing to, *to audience*, storytelling. If we were to locate a beginning point to this or any storytelling episode, then, it would be found not in the action of an individual storyteller but in the joint project of storyteller and audience. Certainly it is appropriate to say that Marie *tells* the story, but she does so only because the women (including Marie) participate to create a space and time within which the story can be heard, seen, and felt.

Thus, the description of "We'll See You Next Year" begins with the question of what relationships exist so that this story, told in this way, by this person, for this audience, can come into being. A description of these relationships explicates the lived meanings that come to constitute the group and their practice of storytelling. We emphasize these relationships as human communication practices in order to focus on bodily conduct and embodied

discourse rather than to create an inventory of information about individuals and their behavior. Marie's conduct as the first person to tell a story once the tape recorder is turned on and her subsequent emergence as the primary storyteller for the evening's session is not arbitrary but distinctive. There is a continuity or "carryover" of group relations and interaction patterns established throughout the weekend trip. Marie continues to act for and with the encouragement of the group by working to help manage their mutual contact—in other words, Marie continues to act as a kind of tour guide in this storytelling session. She initiates the storytelling round, invites others to tell stories, manages turn-taking by directing dialogue, and then "takes on" or accepts an opportunity to be the primary storyteller. All of the women participate in this contact; they collaborate in laughter and exclamations, they contribute stories, they coax others to tell stories, they coach and coerce speakers by asking questions and filling in details. And while all of the women participate, this participation varies; that is, some speak more than others, some laugh and respond more than others, some listen better or are more engaged than others, and so on.

The relationships that make it possible to perform narrative go beyond the intersubjective relations of the immediate group. The audience for Marie's story includes past listeners in the sense that aspects of her past tellings of this story—such as selection of details, dialogue, intonation patterns—persist and shape her bodily conduct on this particular evening. A few of the present audience members have heard one or more of her stories before. Louise, a lifelong friend, has heard these stories on many occasions. And Marie has written versions of some of these stories to share with her adult children, some of whom have children of their own. Beyond those present in the hotel room, the audience includes persons who have the potential to listen to the tape or read a transcribed version of her story. The presence of the tape recorder, too, contributes to and shapes the conduct of the audience and storyteller in performing narrative. Beyond this potential audience, Marie uses her story to "talk back" to the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, as discussed in the analysis below. It is unlikely that such institutions will ever actually "hear" this story. Instead, they function as a virtual addressee for Marie's story. Thus, performing narrative binds relationships across time and space in that it brings together actual, potential, and virtual audiences in a shared world.

Performing narrative is the site of interpersonal contact; storytelling brings together audiences in such a way that a story emerges. At the same time, performing narrative is a site of *intra*personal contact. The storyteller, Marie, tells about something that happened to her when her daughter, Lisa, was born; she brings to consciousness a past experience. That is, she embodies her experience—she is the narrator of herself as a character. As Merleau-Ponty (1964b) writes, "this subject which experiences itself as constituted at the moment it functions as constituting is my body" (p. 94). It is important to

emphasize that it is the conduct of embodiment—the body that touches itself touching—that makes possible the representation of experience in narrative. Bodily conduct in performing narrative gives rise to representation and not vice versa. As Katherine Young (2000), in an essay on emotion in narrative, clarifies: "narratives do not excavate emotions out of the past or the unconscious but rather construct them in the present in the body" (p. 81). Marie is not merely representing or displaying what happened to her on some past occasion but living her experience by occasioning it for this particular audience in the present situation.[3]

The embodied context of performing narrative forms a system of relations among storytellers, audiences, narrators, and characters. Participation in this system depends upon bodily capabilities to see and be seen, to touch and be touched, to speak and to hear. The mundane observation with which we began, some *body* performs narrative, contains an important ambiguity: that is, this body may be a person (my body, or intrapersonal communication), a few persons (a body of women, or interpersonal and small group communication), many people (the body politic, or public communication), and many groups of peoples (cultural bodies, or intercultural communication). To look at the embodied context of performing narrative is to ask questions about the conduct of bodies in storytelling: What body/bodies participate in performing narrative? To what extent do bodies participate that are not present in the immediate storytelling situation? How do these bodies participate as audiences and storytellers, narrators and characters? Whose body or bodies speak, see, narrate, watch, feel, listen? How is the body the performative boundary—a horizon of speaking, listening, and feeling—for storytelling? How do bodies perform narrative in gestures of voice and hand? How do these performative boundaries accumulate around and accrete sexuality, gender, race, and age? What patterns of behavior (bodily conducts) are shared, coaxed, coached, coerced, and collaborated on among participants? What bodily conducts does storytelling occasion? What systems of social relations—intrapersonal, interpersonal, public, and cultural—emerge in storytelling?

Situational and Material Constraints in Performing Narrative

The embodied context gives Marie and her audiences the possibility to perform narrative; however, only *some* of these possibilities are materialized in the performance situation. Some body performs narrative; and this body, capable of touching others and of touching itself touching, recaptures its corporeal existence and uses it to perform narrative. Merleau-Ponty (1964a) writes that "as an active body capable of gestures, of expression, and finally of language, it turns back on the world to signify it" (p. 7). Performing narrative, like

the other examples Merleau-Ponty gives for symbolic uses of the body, "is not yet a conception, since it does not cut us off from our corporeal situation; on the contrary, it assumes all its meaning" (p. 7). What is this corporeal situation?

As the previous discussion of audience suggests, the human context includes all the actual, real, and virtual relations of daily life. Despite traditions of individualism which would suggest otherwise, we argue that the person is embedded in and "assumes all the meaning" of its environment. The body is dependent upon its corporeal situation and is not independent of or in opposition to it (as suggested by such formulations as nature vs. culture or text vs. context). A simple test of this argument can be performed under what phenomenologists call "imaginative variation": vary—in imagination—an aspect of the situation and examine the result. For example, would a person survive the removal of oxygen from the environment? Or, to use the case suggested by our previous discussion, would a storyteller begin to tell a story without an audience? Through such variations of what is possible, we come to discover the meanings of our corporeal situation.

The body that performs narrative is constrained by the material conditions of its corporeal situation. The body is constrained: it depends upon but is not caused or determined by its environment. We use the term *constraint* here in the semiotic and phenomenological sense of a boundary that defines the conditions of what is possible.[4] A constraint is not merely a restriction or obstruction. Constraints define what is possible in the sense that an organism which breathes oxygen is both "restricted" in that it cannot live in an oxygen-depleted environment, and "facilitated" in that the ability to take in and make use of oxygen from its environment makes possible a range of activities. An audience constrains the storyteller in a similar way: storytelling is restricted in that it takes an audience to make it happen, and storytelling is facilitated in that the storyteller can draw upon the shared language, history, and culture of the audience in order to tell a story. The audience constrains the constitution of what can be a story, of how a story can be told, and of the meanings that emerge from storytelling. Thus, constraints both facilitate and restrict possibilities for expression and perception.

The body that performs narrative is oriented toward its project in a particular corporeal situation. Performing narrative depends upon, but is not determined by, the material conditions of its particular corporeal situation. There are no transparent situations or neutral material conditions for storytelling. Instead, we ask what situational resources exist and how are they mobilized and ordered? How do material conditions constrain storytelling? These situational resources are most often taken for granted in both descriptions of and the actual doing of storytelling. For example, in "We'll See You Next Year," Marie tells her story in English, although she also speaks French. She does not explain what she is doing when she begins storytelling. Nor do audience mem-

bers negotiate with each other as to how they will listen or how much they will contribute. There is an economy to the project of storytelling that facilitates participation in habitual forms of interaction—Marie and her audience can focus on storytelling and do not have to invest a lot of effort in making explicit what they are doing or how they do it so long as they continue to employ habitual forms. Consider the first part of her story:[5]

"We'll See You Next Year"—Part I

Marie: when I was in the hospital having Lisa
when he [Paul] was eleven months old
the morning that Richard took me to have Lisa
while I was delivering Lisa he took his first step

Louise: aww

Marie: and he walked

Louise: [laughter]

Marie: I will tell you that

Louise: right on his tip toes

Marie: right on his tip toes
like a little I-don't-know-what

Louise: about ninety miles an hour

Marie: I know it oh geez
he—and he never stopped
he'd get up at six o'clock in the morning
and he wouldn't stop
'til he went for his nap
of course Lisa woke up about the time for his nap
  she was ready to eat
by the time I got her done
  he'd be up
and then she screamed all night
she screamed all night from . . eleven o'clock
she'd have her ten o'clock feeding she'd scream 'til four o'clock in the morning

[?]: yeah that's just like [unintelligible]

Marie: of course you know Richard god love him
  he slept upstairs in his bed
  he had to work

Louise: oh yeah [laughter]

Marie: so Marie was downstairs running walking the floor
crying
Lisa's screaming
  I'm crying

wa::lking the floor
fi::ve hours
finally she'd go to sleep

Louise: ohhh::

Marie: Paul would get up at six o'clock

Louise: yep yep

Marie: so here we go
I got an hour's sleep
Paul would get up and away he'd go

Louise: [laughter]

Marie: there's Paul

Louise serves as an instigator and interlocutor for the first part of the story. She draws upon her shared history with Marie—life-long friends—to interject observations about how Paul walked. In so doing, she extends her comment that "Oh Paul used to do some awful things" made moments before during the end of Marie's previous story (which interwove her threat of putting Paul up for sale with her tale of crying for five months when she found out she was pregnant again). Louise's efforts here work to amplify one aspect of Marie's previous story, thereby encouraging her to tell similar stories. Louise invokes "stories about the awful things Paul would do" as a series of stories that could be told at this time. Even for women in the group who are not as familiar with Marie, this story falls easily within the more widespread "infant tales of childhood antics" genre of family storytelling (discussed in the next chapter as the ordering of content). In both cases, the familiarity of the story as *a kind of story to tell*, whether as an instance of "Paul stories" or "tales of childhood antics," constrains participation.

Marie incorporates Louise's comments; in fact, her easy collaboration with Louise on how Paul walks ("up on his tip toes") and how fast ("about ninety miles an hour") suggests their shared history as conversational partners. Marie confirms Louise's comments but, as will become evident as the story progresses, she uses Paul's behavior to help develop a different kind of story than another "Paul story." Instead, the continuity of Marie's crying in the previous story (when she finds out she is pregnant) and her crying in "We'll See You Next Year" is used to elaborate the daily routine she lives after Lisa's birth. Rather than provide a focal point for the story, Marie situates Paul's behavior as part of a larger pattern: Paul running, newborn Lisa screaming, husband Richard sleeping, and Marie crying. This pattern occurs on a regular schedule each day ("so here we go"). She uses temporal details to make her routine concrete: clock time (six o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, four o'clock in the morning, six o'clock in the morning), duration (an hour, five hours, all night),

speed (ninety miles an hour), calendar dates (eleven months), and life markers ("while I was delivering Lisa he took his first step").

Marie employs temporal details to construct her daily life for this audience. But the meaning of these details depends upon a shared understanding for the larger context of what might be called a political economy of mothering. Marie situates herself as being at the mercy of a schedule she does not control—a common feature of the social relations of production and reproduction in the middle and latter parts of the twentieth century in the United States. Some elements of her story suggest this larger context of social relations: the medicalization of childbirth ("when I was in the hospital having Lisa"), the mother as sole childcare provider in a private home isolated from other support ("I got an hour's sleep"), a wage-earning husband employed outside the home ("he had to work"), the replacement of breast feeding with bottle feeding according to a schedule rather than demand ("her ten o'clock feeding"), and, as we will see in the next part of the story, compulsory heterosexuality and the control—both secular and religious—of sexual relations (the "timing" of children). This larger context of social relations is not uniform or continuous, however. It varies—it is punctuated differently—by race, class, ethnicity, and, as we will see in the next section, religious practices. In fact, Marie's efforts to incorporate a variety of details suggest that the political economy of her life-world is a juxtaposition of discontinuous but regular elements that have been, could be, or might become something different.

The temporal details and markers of "We'll See You Next Year" point to the material conditions of mothering which constrain what can be told in the story, how the story is told, and the meanings that emerge. The story supposes that the participants are already installed in a political economy of mothering. They participate both in what Young (1985) calls the immediate "surround" as eight women who are all mothers and in the larger social and cultural context of production and reproduction. Thus the particular case of mothering that Marie constitutes in performing this narrative comes to symbolize other possible situations. The meaning of mothering in "We'll See You Next Year" is not to be found in the series of clauses and temporal details that compose the narrative but in following them where they go, where they project or point. As Merleau-Ponty (1964b) concludes, "it is at the heart of my present that I find the meaning of those presents which preceded it, and that I find the means of understanding others' presence at the same world; and it is in the actual practice of speaking that I learn to understand" (p. 97). The women in the immediate surround, as well as the potential audience represented by the tape recorder, depend upon—are constrained by—the material conditions of a particular corporeal situation. It is in performing narrative that they are able to realize a common project and understand the meanings of that particular corporeal situation.

Performing narrative occurs under particular *situational and material constraints*. Storytelling mobilizes the resources of language, history, culture, and material conditions to perform narrative. To ask about situational and material constraints is to ask how these resources give rise to particular stories, to particular performances of stories, and to particular performance practices. We ask: What resources in the situation make storytelling possible? What material conditions, what economic and cultural resources, does storytelling draw upon and mobilize? In what places and spaces is narrative performed? How is it embedded in surrounding discourse? What kind and how much time is given to perform? How do the situation and material conditions constrain—both restrict and enable—participation? How much and what kind of effort does it take to perform? How does storytelling point to or assume social conditions of its production? Are there economies of performance made possible by habitual forms of bodily conduct? How do particular historical and cultural formations—such as race, sexuality, gender, age, and class—serve as resources? How does the distribution of resources constrain what stories and meanings can emerge, who can tell them, how they are told, and to what audiences?

Discursive Regularities in Performing Narrative

Through their bodily capabilities and within their situated context, a group of women performs the story "We'll See You Next Year." What are they doing in telling this particular story and in telling it this way? Performing narrative, embodied and constrained by material conditions, is known through the discursive practices in which it participates. To our earlier observation that some body performs narrative, we add an equally mundane and obvious corollary: to perform narrative is to do something in and with discourse. The focus on "doing something in and with discourse" emphasizes performing narrative as an event. Discourse as event, Foucault (1976) reminds us, "must not be confused with the expressive operation by which an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image; nor with the rational activity that may operate in a system of inference; nor with the 'competence' of a speaking subject when he constructs grammatical sentences" (p. 117). Foucault questions these traditional themes—the creativity of a founding subject, the originality of experience, the operation of a universal mediation—by exploring the "ordering" of discourse. As suggested by the title of his lecture, *L'Ordre du Discours,* Foucault asks how discourse is ordered. In particular, he asks how is it that this discourse event appears rather than others, how is it distributed in this series, according to what specific regularities, and in what possible conditions of existence? Let us explore each of these regulatory principles that order discourse: event, series, regularity, and the possible conditions of existence.

As a first step in analyzing the ordering of discourse, Foucault explores the formation of discourse as *event* through systems of exclusion, what he calls external rules governing power and knowledge. These external rules work to delimit discourse, to specify the boundaries that locate "just what discourse is," through a web of prohibitions, divisions and rejections, and the opposition between true and false. As mentioned earlier, a storyteller is not free to narrate just anything, in just any way at any place or time, to any audience. A storyteller utilizes and enacts prohibitions, in other words, when she or he performs narrative. A different system of exclusion operates in the ways that discourse divides and rejects what is meaningful from what is meaningless, what belongs to the narrative and what does not, what contributes to understanding and what does not. These divisions and rejections make possible the opposition of true and false as a third system of exclusion. The division between discourse as an act of enunciation and discourse as what is enunciated makes possible a judgment as to which is true and which is false. In storytelling, this system of exclusion is an effort to fix or locate the "truth" of storytelling either in what the narrative says or in what the performance does. Indeed, this opposition makes possible the common dismissal of storytelling as mere entertainment or fiction, and its reverse valorization as an aesthetic or artistic performance—in both cases, storytelling is excluded from an exercise of power; it says and does nothing in the social world.

A second regulatory principle governs the internal formation of discourse through classification, ordering, and distribution. Discourse exercises control over itself through internal rules that locate regularities in a *series*. This regulatory principle makes it possible to classify types of discourse by locating gradations of repetition and sameness—that is, to locate a series. These repetitions allow us to identify what Foucault (1976) calls a society's "major narratives, told, retold and varied; formulae, texts, ritualised texts to be spoken in well-defined circumstances; things said once, and conserved because people suspect some hidden secret or wealth lies buried within" (p. 220). Another type of series is the ordering of discourse according to an individuality or "I." In storytelling, we identify utterances as belonging to speakers; we identify point of view, narrators, and characters as types of coherence of action in discourse. But a series may also be distributed in discourse which takes neither the form of repetition nor the action of an individual. Foucault names this type of series "disciplines" to indicate that it is an anonymous system of rules for generating new discourse. An example of a distributed discipline in storytelling can be seen in the operation of "the voice of medicine" which can be spoken by anyone—not just doctors or medical personnel—to anyone in stories of health and illness (see Mishler, 1984).

The third regulatory principle controls discourse by governing the conditions under which it is employed by speaking subjects. As Lanigan (1992) summarizes, the conjunction of knowledge and power produces subjects, that

is, "persons who are 'subject to' knowledge and yet the 'subject of' power" (p. 23). These *regularities* in discourse, in the conjunction of knowledge and power, reveal rules for who is qualified to speak on a specific subject, rules for how speaking and listening roles are appropriated and the extent of their interchangeability, rules for the diffusion of discourse through the doctrinal adherence of subjects, and rules for differences in the ability to appropriate discourse. In storytelling, we ask what qualifies someone to tell a story, for example, to speak for herself or himself from the "authority of experience," or to speak for others as an expert. Discourse rules also govern who can or who has to listen and to what extent audiences can contribute, interrupt, or challenge what is told. Storytelling has rituals to determine which subjects are eligible to speak and listen and which subjects are enforced speakers or audiences. When Marie speaks to her experience as a mother in "We'll See You Next Year," she enacts a prior adherence to the subject of mothering and childcare that links all of the women as mothers. Their reciprocal, though variable, allegiance to a discourse on mothering regulates the storytelling.

The final regulatory principle is a critical effort to discuss the conditions of discourse that frame what can be said, what can be understood, and what can be done in storytelling. This effort does not look to find a hidden core of truth or universal meaning in discourse but reverses this tendency to find and fix meaning and, instead, looks to its *possible conditions of existence* for that which gives rise to and limits discourse. The analysis of discourse as event, series, and regularity is a critical effort in that it explicates the rules and regularities that frame discourse: it "brings to light the action of imposed rarity" (p. 234). The focus of analysis is to explicate the struggles over meaning rather than to explain their causes or motivations in the storyteller, audience, or text. That is, analysis elucidates regularities by exploring variations in relations of knowledge and power as the possible conditions of storytelling: this story could be told differently. Analysis does not explain storytelling as the exercise of creativity, as an originary experience, or as a movement of universal signifying system. Let us look at the second part of "We'll See You Next Year" in order to illustrate the four regulatory principles in discourse.

"We'll See You Next Year"—Part II

Marie: so
Lisa I think was two and half months old when we had her baptized
so we . had her baptized
[to Blanche] and you know [names parish member]
I think she was having her fifth

Blanche: yes

Marie: something like that
she was having that one baptized at the same time

okay
so after he baptizes
no:w this priest has baptized two kids in eleven months honey

[general]: [laughter]

Marie: and the priest says to me
we'll see you next year

[?]: ohhhh

[?]: oooo

Marie: and I says you won't if I can help it

[general]: [laughter]

Marie: and wa::s he:: mad
oh:: mother
he went up one side of me and down the other

Cora: oh Marie

Marie: I had to do my: duty darlin'
and well I said
I said Father
that I didn't say I wouldn't have any more children
I want more children
but you're not going to see me next year if I can help it
and I picked up my little Lisa and I walked out the door
so Richard [husband] says
You shouldn't have said that
I said
YOU:: SHUT UP

[general]: [laughter]

Marie: I said let me tell you one thing
if I hear one more word out of you
and one more word out of that priest
I'm taking these two kids
they're going on his doorstep for three days
and I'll tell you he'll change his tune

[?]: [unclear] my god

Marie: and I never heard anything from either one of them you can imagine

[general]: [laughter]

Marie: ay:: *maudit*

What external rules of power and knowledge regulate this storytelling? The question of what is prohibited, the operation of a system of exclusion, is an explicit point of contention in this segment of the story. Marie "talks back" to the priest in multiple ways. Her response to his prescriptive comment