

1 Introduction

Fake news, folks. Fake news.

At the heart of this book is a radical re-evaluation of one of the most dynamic and innovative areas of creativity today, namely digital storytelling. Central to this reassessment is the emergence of a new kind of creative modality in which the divide between the digital and non-digital is no longer binary and oppositional. I term this condition *postdigital*. Although digital storytelling is a key focus, the foundation of this book remains, what I identify as, new and evolving forms of postdigital interconnectedness. As such, the book does not artificially separate digital from non-digital storytelling. Rather it seeks to explore and understand the emerging poetics of a postdigital condition that is inherently transmedial and hybridic, and in which the digital and the non-digital domains are increasingly entangled (Berry and Dieter 2015). Yet this entanglement is not without hierarchy; indeed, this book will show that the recourse to print is increasingly a strategic, even transgressive, act. In the postdigital age, it is the printed book that has become a signifier of functional deficit, a physical manifestation of ‘that which is not digital’ rather than any natural or intrinsic form of published work in and of itself.

By exploring both the affordance and affectivity of these poetics within the arts and humanities, the book also offers a significant re-evaluation of practice-based inquiry as a critical form of knowledge production within theoretical and research paradigms.

The book’s critical perspective is therefore wider and deeper than much of the previous work in this area. Crucially I place the discussion of contemporary digital storytelling within a more profound understanding of *creativity* itself. I argue that, with the end of postmodernity, we have entered a new ontological paradigm, an alternative way of seeing and understanding the world that has, at its heart, a different creative modality. While postmodernity is associated with irony and depthlessness, denying any sense of meaningful representation and action, this new age, what some have called metamodernism (van den Akker *et al.* 2017), embraces innovative forms of situated embodiedness. Critically, too, is a new ethical imperative from which comes a belief in, and desire for, affective action and change in response to

2 Introduction

social, cultural and ecological crises. In this new creative paradigm, then, creativity becomes a tactical intervention whose end goal is affective change, what Donna J. Haraway calls ‘troublemaking’ (2016). One of the core arguments of this book is that postdigitality is a fundamental feature of this metamodernist condition and not simply a product of technological advancement. As a consequence, postdigitality emerges from these chapters as a key marker of deep and sustained cultural and social change.

There are two significant consequences of these approaches for my argument: the first is that I necessarily push and extend the definitional boundaries of *digital storytelling*, an umbrella term that, over the years, has come to comprise a wide range of subgenres and tropes, from electronic literature to hypertext fictions. The critical perspectives taken in this book allows these rather tired concepts to be dynamically reconfigured. Here, postdigital storytelling embraces both formal and informal modes and forms, including social media and web-based platforms and apps; it embraces digital biography and non-fiction as much as fiction, prose and poetry. It is code, data, narrative and performance. It is collaborative and participatory as well as individual and personal. Yet it is also transmedial, foregrounding the postdigital mash-up where the divide between the digital and non-digital is porous and creatively fluid. As such, one of the innovations of this book is that it examines the response of traditional printed texts to the postdigital condition.

The second consequence relates to the relationship between postdigital storytelling and academic research. With these new configurations and modalities come innovative ways of thinking about the role and function of creativity as both praxis and research (Barrett and Bolt 2010). Specifically I argue how new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary forms and approaches are needed, rethinking the traditional division between creative artefact and critical exegesis. In fact, I demonstrate how postdigital storytelling and transdisciplinarity are irrevocably intertwined, each the child of our new ontological paradigm. Storytelling has much to offer the research of global imperatives such as resilience and empathy (Bazalgette 2017), yet it is only by reaching across and beyond academic boundaries that such issues will be addressed (see Koehler 2017). And that reaching across comes not just from the arts and humanities disciplines. In the interdisciplinary terrain of science and technology studies, for example, Ulrike Felt reminds us that concepts such as situated knowledge production and performativity, ‘values, aspirations, and imaginaries’ (2017, 253), are equally important to those working within science-based disciplines.

The intended audience for this book is therefore threefold. First are authors, writers and theorists of stories *per se*. Since this book embraces the full panoply of output, from printed text, to completely digital work, with all manner of hybridic work in between, the book offers an opportunity to explore continuities and connections across creative modes that have traditionally been remote from each other. Second, are those interested in the wider role of contemporary creativity within a theorisation of postdigital normativity; and third, are those with a concern for practice-based research,

particularly the degree to which new and innovative forms of storytelling can inform our understanding of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research within the arts and humanities.

Two wider phenomena form the context for this study. The first is the transformation of storytelling since the advent of the new millennium, driven by an ever-growing list of technological innovation. Chief among them are two interrelated global phenomena: the rise of smartphones and the growing ubiquity of social media platforms. These two things alone have radically altered how stories are both constructed and consumed. From being static, PC/CD-ROM dependent artefacts, the traditional digital story has been freed from its gilded cage. The adjective ‘hypertext’ has found itself replaced by an ever increasing list of arriviste upstarts (including, but certainly not limited to, shareable, locative, adaptive, mashable, generative, augmented, virtual and collaborative) as digital stories have been transformed by a new generation of functionality.

Alongside these recent technological developments, there has also been a concomitant rise in the perceived value and utility of storytelling *per se* within the arts and humanities. As I’ve intimated already, this is not specific to this discipline area, of course: as Boyd has made clear, stories play a fundamental role within human cognition more generally. In science and technology studies, for example, an exploration of how knowledge is (co) constructed, shared and challenged remains at the core of the field (Felt 2017) while in health sciences, storytelling has been used with great effect, particularly in the diagnosis, treatment and research of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and trauma, but also in the way clinicians share and understand their own reflective practice (for example, see Gabbay and le May 2011).

Traditionally, the value of practice-based approaches (such as storytelling) across the arts and humanities was itself rather neglected, denigrated to the methodological sidelines of those disciplines perceived to come within the remit of creative art and performance as opposed to the humanities (Barrett and Bolt 2010). Yet a brief overview of humanities disciplines will show that, over the last ten years, things have begun to change quite radically. As the *Digital Research in the Arts and Humanities* series is showing, disciplines as disparate as geography, archaeology, literature, linguistics and history have all, to some extent or other, begun to explore the potential of storytelling as a practice-based research methodology (see Smith and Dean 2009). What have been termed the ‘spatial’ (Cooper *et al.* 2017), ‘creative’ (Harris 2014) and ‘participatory’ (Facer and Enwright 2016) turns are transforming research across the humanities (and beyond), and this book will show how storytelling is an important element of each. As Estelle Barrett notes, ‘practice-led research is a new species of research, generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of research’ (2010, 1). It is hoped that this book goes at least some way in demonstrating the veracity of Barrett’s assertion.

4 Introduction

It is these two conditions then, the growing affordance offered by digital platforms for storytelling, *and* the wider interest from arts and humanities disciplines in the value of practice-based approaches to knowledge creation, that inform the context of this book. By seeking to map this new and emergent terrain, the book is innovative and timely, both for the study of postdigital storytelling as a new creative modality, but also through an understanding of its specific impact on the arts and humanities disciplines.

Exploring the role of storytelling within the wider context of practice-led research will be key here. As Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean note (2009), such research needs to be understood as an essentially bi-directional process. In other words, practice-led research is as much about the production of creative output that leads to research, as it is about research in itself that then leads to creative practice. Smith and Dean call this an ‘iterative cyclic web’ and it forms one of the cornerstones of this work. Crucially, what I’ll be developing here will build on and extend Barrett’s ‘interdisciplinary’ methodology (in other words, research that crosses academic boundaries). Instead, and as I’ve already intimated, I shall be using postdigital storytelling as a critical focus through which to advance a more transformative framework for *transdisciplinary* research across and beyond the arts and humanities. In other words, the book seeks to prioritise research and methodological approaches that bring together both scholarly disciplines and non-academic stakeholders to explore what Jay Bernstein, in his study of transdisciplinarity, calls ‘the inherent complexity of reality’ (2015, 13).

Still life: politicians with smartphones

In September 2016, Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate in that year’s American presidential election, emerged into a room full of supporters. What happened next produced one of the most controversial photographs of the campaign in which, according to Chris Graham of *The Daily Telegraph*, a crowd of ‘narcissistic’ millennials revealed their desperation to take a photograph with their political heroine (2016). In fact, as the person who took the photograph, Barbara Kinney, later made clear, the mass selfie had been Clinton’s idea.

The photograph is striking and somewhere within it is surely a message for our times. That message, however, is not about narcissism, at least not directly. Instead, what the photograph really shows, better than countless pages of statistics and graphs, is something that is all too easy to overlook today, namely both the speed and depth of the change to our everyday behaviour brought about by digital technology. Imagine going back in time, say to 2006, and presenting this same photograph to a group of tech-savvy young adults. They wouldn’t have a clue what was going on; go back even further, to 1996, and the bemusement would be even greater. Such confusion would not simply be created by all those strange silver objects in the crowds’ hands. It would also be engendered by the physical actions of the people themselves, that

strange act of mass cold-shouldering, arms raised, as though not daring to lay eyes on what has emerged before them, and, like Perseus and his shield, gaze only at a reflection caught by whatever they are holding. There's a word for that action of course. We know it but all of those living in our thought experiment wouldn't have done. The term selfie only really took off in 2010 with the arrival of the front-facing camera on smartphones such as the iPhone 4 (Losse 2013). Yet its cultural impact has been precipitous. By 2013 the Oxford English Dictionary had christened selfie as their word of the year, having beaten such shortlisted contenders as bedroom tax, bitcoin and twerk. It is this speed of normalisation and technical acculturation that is captured by the photograph of Hillary Clinton. In this way we can see that the photograph acts as a kind of synecdoche of the wider technical and cultural changes that have transformed society since the advent of the new millennium. The selfie and the ritualised communal behaviour of its taking are the more visible reminders of just how fundamental has been the impact of digital technology on our lives.

One area where this influence continues to be acutely felt is in the area of storytelling. Storytelling of course could be considered to be a rather archaic term in itself, conjuring up images of night-time ghost stories told orally around flickering flames and dancing shadows. From an academic perspective, narrative or (hyper) textual construction might seem a better choice and certainly narrative and text are preferred by some theorists, particularly those approaching digital texts from a linguistic perspective (for example, see Bell 2010; Ensslin 2014; Ryan 2015). Yet storytelling captures something that perhaps is lost with other terms. For a start, the term neatly encapsulates two separate, though intertwined, elements: both the creation of a story and its telling. As a verb, storytelling helps to represent the underlying iterative process between making and telling, between the act of creating a story, and the separate, though interrelated, act of providing access to that story for an audience. Storytelling therefore **priorities** both author and media (paper, oral, digital) as much as it does the reader. And, as we'll see, decisions about, what might be termed, means of access, directly influence both the nature and form of the narrative. In other words, the process by which an audience accesses a story is as important as the story itself. In fact, the shift away from the traditional oral and paper-based forms of transmission, towards digital platforms and forms, only extenuates this phenomenon. The functionality offered by digital technology inevitably leads to a radical reassessment of both form and structure, perhaps best exemplified by the transformation of print-based journalism and the media sector (Gauntlett 2015). As John Naughton noted of the internet more generally, disruption 'is a feature of the system, not a bug' (2012, 4–5). As we'll see, storytelling has certainly not been immune to its own form of disruption. In fact, the inherent transformative capacity of digital technology remains at the heart of this book.

Yet there is another reason why storytelling should be considered an apposite term. Since the dawn of the new millennium, there has been an increasing

6 Introduction

social and cultural imperative to understand what might be, rather grandly, called the twenty-first century human condition. Although incredibly broad, it is possible to identify two key characteristics of this imperative. The first would be the growing recognition of the value of transdisciplinary activity and approaches already highlighted; in other words, research that transcends traditional subject-based boundaries. The second characteristic would be a focus on ‘community’ as a critical site of social and cultural value (Facer and Pahl 2017). This is important as it marks an epistemological shift away from conceptual frameworks that favour unproblematic notions of ‘society’, ‘city’ and ‘nation’. A single place will have multiple, conflicting, communities, defined by a wide, and ever changing, range of factors, that could, although might not, include such things as background, age, race, gender and sexuality (Lambert 2013). This imperative has been given fresh impetus through the election of the 45th President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, in November 2016, and the EU (Brexit) Referendum in the United Kingdom in June 2016. Both events gave outcomes that dumbfounded many critics and academic experts (Welfens 2017). In the aftermath, there has been a scramble to re-engage with the actualité of life as it’s lived on the street, whether it be the rust belt towns and cities of America, or the Brexit citadels of small town Britain (for example, see Raghuram Rajan’s *The Third Pillar: The Revival of Community in a Polarised World* 2019). Crucially, many experts have highlighted the importance of social media in the creation of enclosed ‘ecosystems’ of news, generating hermetically-sealed ‘clusters of like-minded people sharing like-minded things’ (*The Economist* 2017). Suddenly community-based research has become all about saving the liberal democratic dream. Yet, as Keri Facer and Kate Pahl admit, research that is both interdisciplinary and community-based, is liable to be ‘messy, contingent on practice, uncertain, embedded in stories and histories that could be dismissed as “anecdotal”, and located in events and histories that are themselves ephemeral and lacking disciplinary anchorage’ (2017, 11). If we are to understand communities and the complexities of people’s lives then Facer and Pahl are just two of many academics calling for the prioritisation of storifying as a key research method. Or, to put it another way, it is now recognised that stories play a central role in any understanding of how individuals, communities and societies engage with and understand the world. Storifying then is no longer an activity that is seen as the preserve of a literate, articulate elite. Instead, the basic urge to storify, to generate explanatory narratives in the here and now and on the go, individually within our own minds, and mutually, across dynamic networks and relationships, both real and virtual, should be understood as a fundamental aspect of twenty-first century human cognition.

It is no surprise to find that it is in arts and humanities subjects where there has been the most generosity shown towards these ideas. Such endeavours are very often interdisciplinary in nature, embracing what has come to be called the ‘linguistic turn’ in methodological approach. Building on the work of theorists such as Michel Foucault (1986) and Henri Lefebvre (1991),

more recent work has focussed on the importance of place and space as key concepts, leading to, perhaps rather inevitably, the adoption of the term spatial turn. This kind of approach foregrounds the performative and spatial aspect of knowledge creation, in which storytelling plays a key role. This in turn naturally leads to radical ideas of cultural mapping and topographic representation, what Les Roberts calls the ‘textualities of space, place and mapping’ (2015, 18). Lawrence Cassidy’s ‘cultural memory project’ (2015), for example, is a good example of this approach in which the ‘lost history’ of two working-class communities, one in Salford, UK, the other in Cape Town, South Africa, are brought together through ‘participatory mapping’ into a series of interactive art installations consisting of material remnants and fragments.

Yet this interest in storytelling extends much further than those subjects traditionally associated with the humanities. Human geographers have long argued for the centrality of narrative in the subjective engagement with physical space (for example, see Malpas 1999). Recently a focus on storytelling and creative writing has become much more noticeable, with a concomitant interest in materiality, affect and embodiment. Angharad Saunders, for example, argues that it is time geographers began to seriously consider ‘the role of writing in the creation and validation of geographical knowledge’ (2010, 442). She suggests that it is creative writing’s very ‘ambiguity, evasiveness and subjectivity’ that remains its strength as well as its ability to engage with what, Angharad calls, the ‘ordinariness’ of everyday life (450). This is emphasised by Emilie Cameron who notes that it is creative writing’s ability to ‘affect’ that is one of its most important characteristics: ‘the capacity for stories to be practiced in place and to generate (intersubjective) change’ (2012, 581).

Stories then help us to understand and explore both the situatedness of meaning and its capacity for change. Even in a subject such as archaeology, a discipline steeped in the scientific lore of artefactual discovery and interpretation, there is ongoing debate about the utility of creative storytelling. For Gavin Lucas, ‘archaeology is a materialising activity – it does not simply work with material things, it materialises. It brings new things into the world; it reconfigures the world’ (2004, 117). It is in this process of ‘materialising’ that Lucas sees the role of storytelling, foregrounding the role of human subjectivity in the creation of meaning. Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks are even more emphatic. They argue that archaeology is less about understanding the past and more about how narratives of the past are constructed and experienced. From this perspective, they foreground the experience of place through what they call ‘the performance and construction of the past in memory, narrative, [and] collections (of textual and material sources)’ (2012, 2).

Ruth Tringham’s *Dead Women Do Tell Tales* project created a digital database of Neolithic archaeology recovered from excavations in southeast Europe and Anatolia (2015). The choice of electronic platform for the reader

8 Introduction

allows the creation of, what Tringham calls, ‘recombinant histories’, made up of narratives that are ‘collections of indefinitely retrievable fragments ... by which the past may be conceived as fundamentally mutable and reconfigurable’ (Anderson 2011). In terms of narrative, Tringham notes the similarity between these ‘recombinant histories’, steeped in the intimate and everyday detail of microhistories, and the partiality of flash fiction (28–29). The effect on the reader is the same: stories that deliberately undermine any sense of an objective, readily graspable, truth or understanding. There’s something else going on too: the generation of poems and stories from pre-existing textual fragments has a long history within the avant-garde. Yet Marjorie Perloff (2010) argues that digital media has made such intertextuality ubiquitous across social and cultural life, to the point where it is now the key creative *modus operandi*, a process Lev Manovich (2001) calls ‘cultural transcoding’ where digital technology slowly transfigures the practices and behaviours of the non-digital world. Hayles’ (2012) concept of ‘technogenesis’ takes this even further, seeing both human and technical evolution as intimately interdependent. This suggests that academic work such as Tringham’s *Dead Women Do Tell Tales* project and Cassidy’s cultural memory projects touch on something far-more significant than perhaps might at first appear. From this perspective, concepts such as ‘recombinant history’ and ‘participatory mapping’ embrace a fundamental ontological shift in how we both create and understand stories. And at the heart of this change is the impact of digital technology.

It is these issues, amongst others, that this book seeks to explore. Yet for now it is enough to recognise what has been said so far in this introduction. First, that digital technology has impacted on how stories are both written and experienced; and second, and equally important, that storytelling itself has become mainstreamed as a way of understanding the world and what might be called ‘lived experience’, a epistemological position where meaning is both individualised as well as community (and spatially) based. When the archaeologist Reinhard Bernbeck states that ‘archaeology is ultimately nothing other than a huge machine that churns out reasoned ways to bridge gaps in knowledge’ (2015, 266), he could not only be talking about every academic discipline, including those in the hard sciences, but also the way we all live our lives. This book argues that storytelling helps us to bridge those gaps, to link together those certainties we feel we can trust; yet it does something else too – it can point a finger at that very process, at the way knowledge is created, and in that way it can foreground the very uncertainties that lie at the heart of all experience.

The postdigital condition

There’s a curious anomaly at the heart of digital storytelling. On the one hand the term appears to position itself in the camp of the avant-garde and the dangerously innovative. David Ciccoricco, for example, describes how digital

fiction falls naturally within the traditions of experimental literature, a tradition ‘typified by its subversion of conventional form, technique, and genre’ (2012, 469). Such iconoclasm has helped pigeon-hole digital storytelling as the essence of postmodern fiction, the sort of storytelling that Brian McHale called ‘an illusion-breaking art’, with its insistence on the foregrounding of the underlying ontological structure of texts and their fictional worlds (1999, 221). Marie-Laure Ryan is in accordance here, championing what she sees as the ‘natural and elective affinities of electronic writing for postmodern aesthetics’ (1999, 103). A good example of this would be Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* (1995), developed using the Storyspace software programme and distributed as a standalone CD-ROM. The story is a rewrite of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) while also drawing on the character of Scraps in *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (2013). In Shelley’s original novel, Victor Frankenstein decides to create a female companion for his monster but in the end decides to destroy it before it can be completed. In *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson brings this female monster to life. The story consists of five sections composed of textual fragments and images connected through multiple links. As the patchwork girl explains right at the very beginning of the story, ‘I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only in piecemeal. If you want to see the whole you will have to sew me together yourself’. *Patchwork Girl* draws on ideas of pastiche, appropriation and self-construction. As Alice Bell notes, the experience is ontologically and epistemologically challenging (2010, 148), as the reader tries to put back together the patchwork girl while navigating multiple branching pathways.

A more recent example would be Joanna Walsh’s digital novella, *Seed* (2017). Published by Visual Editions and Google’s Creative Lab, *Seed* tells the story of an eighteen-year-old girl over a period of four months in the late 1980s. However, while *Patchwork Girl* is a story locked into the 1990s architecture of the desktop computer, *Seed* has been designed for the smartphone with simple swipe-screen navigation. Again, the story emerges from textual fragments, this time scattered across a network of interlacing ‘vines’. The order in which each piece of text is read depends ultimately on the reader’s own navigational decisions as they move through the story’s rich undergrowth, visually represented by Charlotte Hicks botanical illustrations. As the narrator admits, ‘However many times I tell it I still don’t know what anything means’ (Hawlin 2017). This sense of fracture, of making sense of something which is ultimately beyond us, lies at the centre of a story whose opening line promises ‘a story that grows and decays, that becomes entangled and disentangled’ (Hawlin 2017). It is ‘illusion-breaking art’ in the sense that it is the reader who creates the story. As Walsh explains, she wanted readers to ‘have no sense of reading left to right, of the weight of the book, of how far they were through, or, sometimes, of direction within the narrative’ (Hawlin 2017). This sense of directionlessness harks back to earlier printed works such as B. S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* (1969), a novel made-up of unbound chapters placed in a box, that, apart from the specified first and last, can

be pulled out and read in any order. Yet the effect of digital stories such as *Seed* is even more disconcerting. Excluding those first and last chapters, *The Unfortunates* has twenty-five randomised sections. Yet the reader is always aware of the entirety of the novel, sitting there in its famous box. With a work like *Seed*, however, this is not the case. As Walsh admits, ‘readers have told me they’re unsure about whether they’ve reached “the end” of the book ... And some readers who have explored the text thoroughly have told me they feel there still might be other sections they might have missed’ (McMullan 2017). There’s clearly a challenge here for writers in regard to how, and to what extent, they balance readerly freedom against narrative coherence and structure, something we’ll be exploring in Chapter 5 (see Punday 2018). Yet for now it’s enough to recognise that the traditional notion of a story, of a self-contained explanatory narrative with a clearly defined size and structure, has been left a long way behind within the canon of digital storytelling.

Running alongside this tradition of the avant-garde and the experimental, however, is a more recent condition which, rather than responding to digital technology’s novelty and originality, is instead a recognition of its overwhelming presence in everyday life. This is a world in which over 90% of adults in the United Kingdom own a mobile phone, over 70% have a smartphone and 73% use social media (Ofcom 2017). A report by the Economist Intelligence Unit noted that, in the Asia-Pacific region in particular, the smartphone revolution has had a ‘profound impact on media and content consumption’ (2017, 19). The report goes on to note that it is countries such as South Korea, China, Indonesia and the Philippines who are now at the cutting edge of digital innovation.

Yet the smartphone is just one small part a much wider phenomenon, a phenomenon that has at its roots the increasing ubiquity of digital data flows across the planet. The rise of pervasive connectivity, alongside increasing computer processing power and technological innovation, have overseen a revolution that has overwhelmed almost all aspects of contemporary life. Concepts such as Big Data, the Internet of Things, augmented (AR) and virtual (VR) realities, immersivity and artificial intelligence (AI), are just the latest instalments in this endless sequence of change. And as the photograph of Hillary Clinton shows (Figure 1.1), these changes are not just technological: they reach deep into our very sense of self. Anthropologists Daniel Miller and Heather Horst have gone further, stating that digital technologies are now so pervasive they have actually become ‘a constitutive part of what makes us human’ (2012, 4). The flipside of that, as Deborah Lupton notes, is that digital technology has become invisible, everywhere but also nowhere (2014, 2).

Florian Cramer, Joseph Tabbi and Mel Alexenberg, amongst others, recognise this new era as postdigital.¹ As we’ll see, although definitions of the term vary, at its heart is the sense that we have entered a new kind of relationship with technology. As Tabbi notes, we are now living at a time when not only has most literary work been digitised but also that ‘nearly all new writing is now



Figure 1.1 Hillary Clinton Poses for Selfies, Orlando, Florida, 21 September 2016.
Source: © Barbara Kinney/Hillary for America.

done digitally’ (2018, 5). The postdigital world then is not one that has moved *beyond* the digital; instead it is a place where the digital is now ubiquitous and consequently invisible. As Cramer argues, ‘in a post-digital age, the question of whether or not something is digital is no longer really important—just as the ubiquity of print, soon after Gutenberg, rendered obsolete all debates (besides historical ones) about the “print revolution”’ (2012, 162).

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the rise of hand-held devices (Apple’s first smartphone was released in 2007) and ubiquitous wifi connectivity facilitated an explosion in Web 2.0 based applications. The best example of this is provided by the phenomenal success of social media platforms, such as Facebook (officially launched in 2004), Baidu Tieba (2003) and Twitter (2006), and more recently Snapchat (2011) and WeChat (2011). Alongside this, dedicated blogging sites appeared, such as Wordpress (2003) and Tumblr (2007); and digital story platforms such as StorySpace (1987), Twine (2009) and Genarrator (2009). The fate of Storify is interesting in this context. Set up in 2010 as a means of creating stories by embedding social media posts within a narrative, the service quickly found that other social networks started to offer similar functionality, such as Facebook’s moments and Twitter’s threading. Storify closed in 2018.

The concurrent rise of the e-reader confounded many media specialists who predicted that online reading, especially of longer forms of fiction such

12 Introduction

as novels, would just not take off; at the same time, initiatives such as *Editions At Play*, a collaboration between Visual Editions and Google's Creative Lab, is showing that there is genuine interest in re-thinking what online narratives might actually be. Most of the stories published through *Editions at Play* have been produced for the smartphone. Their rallying cry is for a new type of book, one written specially for the web, that could be 'data-led, locative, generative, algorithmic, sensor-based, fluid, non-linear, expandable, cookie-ish, personalised, proximal, augmented, real-time, time-sensitive, adaptive, collaborative, and share-y' (*Editions at Play*). *Breathe* by Kate Pullinger (2018), for example, is a story about a young woman who talks to ghosts. The opening line of the story is, 'Pick up your phone, I'm ready'. Images of the reader's location, captured through the phone's camera, appear during the story, as do the reader's geographical location and local weather conditions. The reader also has to move the phone in order to make (hidden) text appear. The overall effect is disorientating, as the reader's own world slowly creeps into the fictional story at the same time as they are interacting with the phone.

From a story like *Breathe*, with its layering of fictional graphics and real-world video and data capture, it isn't a big step to the use of either AR or VR in storytelling. Whereas in *Breathe* the reader is still very much *within* a textual story in which the real world plays a walk-on part, with AR or VR the situation is reversed. In AR, computer-generated enhancements are layered on top of the real world through an electronic device, such as a smartphone or iPad. A growing range of AR developer platforms (including Apple's ARKit) are slowly simplifying both the cost and the construction of such experiences. A good example is *Pokémon Go*, an app released in July 2016, which overlays gameplay on top of real world locations. AR books are slowly gaining traction too, particularly within the children's market. Here, an app is used alongside a traditionally printed book. The reader points their device at certain passages or illustrations in the book and their device shows additional content such as a video or an interactive animated sequence. Not surprisingly, AR has also become popular within the heritage and museum sector too, where additional information or stories can be overlaid on real world objects or locations. At the Jinsha Site Museum in Chengdu, China, visitors are invited to use an app to explore the stories behind various artefacts and relics of the lost civilisation known as Shu; while *England's Historic Cities* app uses AR technology to tell the stories of various heritage sites, including York, Oxford and Bath.

Whereas AR layers digital enhancements over the real world, VR immerses the user within a totally simulated world. According to Pimentel and Teixeira, it is this immersivity, alongside interactivity, that defines the VR experience. This is most commonly achieved through special headsets, such as the HTC Vive or Oculus Rift, that could also include eye tracking software and data gloves. The overall effect is to give the user the sense that they are experiencing the simulated reality first hand. Although the equipment can be expensive, it certainly doesn't have to be. Google Cardboard relies on a simple cardboard

viewer into which a smartphone is inserted. The experience itself is delivered by one of the many VR apps downloaded from Google Play. Yet for now, at least, the best experiences are to be had at the most expensive end of the spectrum. *Bloodless* (Kim 2017), a ten-minute VR film by the South Korean documentary filmmaker, Gina Kim, follows the last moments of a sex worker who was murdered by a US soldier at the Dongducheon Camptown in South Korea in 1992. *Sea Prayer* (Hosseini 2017) is a VR animated story by the award-winning novelist Khaled Hosseini, commemorating the death of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned while attempting to reach Greece in 2015. The story takes the form of an imagined letter, written by a Syrian father to his son lying asleep in his lap, on the eve of their sea crossing to Europe.

A similar level of experimentation is taking place in contemporary drama. The Australian Dance Theatre, in cooperation with technology companies *Sandpit* and *Jumpgate*, have created a VR version of their dance and music performance, *The Beginning of Nature*. The VR experience is delivered through an app that works with Google Cardboard, allowing users to view a two-minute 360 degree video of the choreography filmed in a variety of rural locations around Adelaide, Australia. More ambitiously is a project such as *Empire Soldiers VR* by the theatre company Metro Boulot Dodo, UK. The company calls *Empire Soldiers VR* an ‘experience installation’ because it blends both virtual and real-life performance elements. The project seeks to raise awareness of the history of Caribbean soldiers during the First World War. As well as experiencing real-life dancing, the audience undertakes a virtual journey accompanied by a Caribbean soldier returning from the front line in which they hear stories of the battlefield. The journey continues up to the present day, allowing the audience to reflect on contemporary migration stories.

For Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye, this growing interdependence between contemporary performance and what they call ‘new media forms’, brings into question established notions of presence within performance theory. They note how these new technologies facilitate the contest between ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ within a performance: ‘between a property or quality of “a” presence “belonging” or manifest *in* the body, as a “real” act, or as an immanent property of an object or thing, and the “illusion” of presence effected in a staging of forms and modes of representation’ (2017, 241). This tension between absence and presence, between what is understood as real and not real, corporeal and non-corporeal, will reach out across this book. Tellingly, Manovich uses the term ‘software performances’ (2013, 33) to describe the way electronic systems themselves now work: their output, such as web pages and apps, are inherently dynamic, contingent and generated in real time. There’s a sense then that any concept of performance and presence should be seen as something akin to an ecosystem, embracing not only the performers, the audience and the media, but also the underlying (performative) characteristics of the very software itself.

14 Introduction

The use of VR and AR as a means of telling stories is still in its early days. Fundamentally, there still remains a tension between immersion, interactivity and narrativity that we've already met, the balance between the real-life freedom proffered by immersion and interactivity, and the need for narrative structure and design. As Ryan notes, it's a combination 'whose formula still eludes us' (2015, 259).

This pervasive digital presence is all part of our postdigital age. The computer has become, what Manovich calls, a metamedium, where different programmes share common software techniques and design (2013, 123). A key part of this phenomenon is the rise of 'media hybridization' in which existing media technology become 'building blocks for many new media combinations' (2013, 163). A website, for example, may combine photographs, animation, live social media feeds and interactive elements. This is not simply 'multimedia' by another name. Manovich describes how, although multimedia blended different media together, each still opened using their own specific software (2013, 167). The combination of hybridized media is far more fundamental: 'In hybrid media the languages of previously distinct media come together. They exchange properties, create new structures, and interact on the deepest levels' (2013, 169). The postdigital pushes this even further. Here, it is not just digital hybridity that comes into play but rather the new found entanglement between the digital and the non-digital, in other words the transmediatised world in which we live. As this book argues, these developments, from multimedia capability to media hybridisation, from media hybridisation to postdigital transmeditisation, has brought with it profound and significant creativity opportunity. In this sense, the book takes up the challenge thrown down by N. Katherine Hayles in her demand for a new kind of approach to the study of digital media, one 'that can locate digital work within print traditions, and print traditions within digital media, without obscuring or failing to account for the differences between them' (2012, 7).

Yet, if this is indeed a postdigital age, then, as we've seen, it is also the age of the story. In part, this is being driven by the digital technology explored in this chapter and elsewhere in this book. The proliferation of the smartphone, alongside other handheld devices such as iPads and ereaders, have revolutionised how we access and read stories. Yet, at the same time, the interdependency and hybridisation of software, has provided a vast array of new creative potential, from blogs and wikis, proprietary storifying platforms such as [twine](#), through to the timelines and threads of Facebook and Twitter. Never before have there been so many opportunities for writers to create and publish their work electronically (Hammond 2016, Chapter 6). For the first time in history, individuals and communities have been given the technical affordances to create and share their own stories across the globe.

The impact of this is difficult to overestimate. There are downsides of course – the proliferation of fake news is a consequence of many things, including how corporate platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter ghettoise news streams through homophilous sorting (D'Ancona 2017, 50).

There can be no doubt that the deliberate spreading of false or malicious lies is an attempt to weaponise social media in the battle for social and political power (*The Economist* 2017). Yet the negative publicity surrounding post-truth, Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year for 2016, should not detract from the enormous benefit that individual and community storytelling can bring. One of the underlying causes of the post-truth/fake news syndrome is surely that, within a globalised world, the role of the individual, and the communities in which she or he lives, are easily forgotten, subsumed within the vast, macro world view of economic and social policy. If stories have a role here it's ~~surely~~ to remind ourselves how the world is actually experienced: individually, through the local and the intimate. As I've already shown, from issues such as global warming, through to urbanisation, aging and social resilience, the power of stories is slowly being recognised. A good example of this comes out of the UK-based Connected Communities Programme launched by Research Councils UK and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The £30 million programme has the aim of funding projects, partnerships and networks that explore the historic and contemporary condition of 'community'. As Keri Facer and Bryony Enwright make clear, a major influence on the programme has been, and continues to be, what they call the rise of the 'participatory turn' in knowledge creation, 'in which users/publics/patients/audiences/communities are invited to take on more active roles in shaping the knowledge, policies and practices of the world around them' (2016, 144). As they go on to note, storifying is central to this process: 'how we produce knowledge, scholarship and ideas about reality matters for the stories we are able to tell about ourselves and our society, and for how we frame our response to the changing realities of the contemporary world (2016, 11). Further afield, the Sidney Myer Fund and The Myer Foundation in Australia has a similar focus while, in the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts has grant programmes aimed ~~specifically~~ at the integration of arts, culture and community. The 'Our Town' grant program, for example, specifically supports creative placemaking projects, bringing together artists, arts organisations and community development practitioners to help transform local lives.

Computationalism and storytelling

Yet it would be wrong to deny that there isn't a tension here. If normalisation has brought with it all sorts of technological opportunities for storytelling, there's also a danger that with it comes a blindness to the inherent power structures enacted through digital systems (Tabbi 2018; Heckman and O'Sullivan 2018). For a critic such as David Golumbia, this sort of deep socio-cultural enmeshing, what he calls 'computationalism', brings with it fundamental dangers and risks.

One powerful tradition within digital storytelling was (and remains) the creation of texts that specifically illuminate and reveal the iniquitous effects of 'computationalism' or what John Cayley calls 'Big Software', in other

words the deep and pervasive influence of computational power and the global companies that lie behind it. In *A Hacker Manifesto* (2004) McKensie Wark transposes these concepts of technological resistance onto a Marxist framework, in which the classic nineteenth and twentieth-century class conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is reconfigured into that between the ‘vectoralists’, those who control flows of information, and the hacker class, who enable innovation and open up new information flows.

Golumbia takes a different position, cautioning against using computer systems at all in the wider critique of corporate and institutionalised power structures. Although he notes the raise of ‘new media art, hackers and open source software’ (2009, 4), and recognises that, at the level of the individual they can be empowering, Golumbia states that it is a mistake to see them as offering any real impact on, what he describes as, the inherent authoritarianism of computerisation (2009, 220).

It’s an extreme position. Taken literally it implies that nothing less than a rollback of computerisation across the planet would offer an escape from its more iniquitous effects (a utopian rally cry that Golumbia makes in his book). In other words, computers and computer systems are inherently bad and the only way of escaping their influence, and the power structures they support, is by switching them off. This is clearly an important argument and Golumbia isn’t the only person to have made it (for example, see Srnicek 2017; Mosco 2005; Schiller 2000). No book that seeks to understand the relationship between creativity and digital systems can afford to ignore such fundamental concerns. At least two questions are useful here though: first, is there truth to the claim that computer systems are indeed in thrall to the sort of authoritarian hegemony described by critics such as Golumbia and Srnicek; and second, even if the first question is true, where does that leave the role of creativity, specifically that enacted through those very computer-based systems that are seen to be instrumental in authoritarian systems of control?

As we have seen, many early practitioners of digital storytelling, those working in the 1990s for example, saw their practice as, to use Ciccoricco’s term, a ‘kind of art of resistance’ where electronic works were an explicit ‘mode of political or ideological intervention’ (2018, 151). In his 2004 book Alexander Galloway called hackers ‘freedom fighters’ (2004, 152), a metaphor that extended beyond those writing code, to those producing digital art capable of turning computerised systems against themselves.

Yet, now, as the 1990s and those early years of the millennium recede into the middle distance, critics such as Tabbi are becoming less sanguine about this radical tradition. In a world where computerisation is fundamentally normalised, any understanding of the digital as subversive and radical becomes redundant; for Tabbi, this postdigital world ‘is no place for avant-gardes’ (2018, 7). Instead, he argues that if electronic literature is now mainstream then it is from here (rather than from any avant-garde periphery) that writers should evolve a ‘post-digital poetics’ capable of defamiliarising our digitised condition. And in so doing, making what was invisible visible again.

Although writers such as Golumbia would argue this is impossible *tout court*, this book takes up Tabbi's challenge by seeking to explore both the practical and the philosophical limits of a postdigital poetics. Galloway, in his more recent study, analyses the digital condition through the work of the French philosopher, François Laruelle. Galloway notes that, for Laruelle, an event (defined as a relation between two moments in time) has two vectors: a movement of *reality* and a movement of *freedom*, each working in opposite directions (2014, 80). For Laruelle, the movement of freedom seeks an 'elevated artifice' (what he calls fictions, artifices or performances) using data 'as they are assembled within relational and decisional events' (2014, 80). As Galloway explains, 'digital freedom is thus a question of being "free from" the autonomy of data. Counterintuitively, then, the movement of freedom is driven not by liberation but by increased imbrication with the sociopolitical sphere' (2014, 81). In this way, the sociopolitical sphere (to use Galloway's term) is forced to engage with (to be encoded within) the event, and in that way 'move closer to freedom' (2014, 81). Freedom can only come from this entrenched position.

Yet there's also other, equally important, questions that need addressing here. For example, behind Tabbi's argument lies the unspoken assumption that the overt role of any digital literature should be to critique and engage ideologically with systems of power. I would argue that this sort of argument exhibits a dangerous reductionism. Perhaps at its heart lies an assumption about intent – that a radical text is simply determined by the intention of the writer. Surely the reality is far-more complex. What a reader or an audience draws from a text, whether digital or not, is ultimately beyond the control of the writer. Did an author such as Jane Austen (1775–1817) consciously set out to challenge both the form and language of the novel, not to mention gender-based relations? Did Art Spiegelman in *Maus* (1991) sit down to write a story that would both transform people's opinion of graphic novels, as well as their understanding of history and personal testimony? I would suggest that in each of these cases the answer is no. The primary drive for both Jane Austen and Art Spiegelman was to tell their story in the way that felt right to them. A radical text then, one that challenges established ideological conditions, is one that is chosen to be so by its readership, rather than its author. As writers and artists, we should be careful of falling into the trap of thinking that it is us who ultimately decide the role our texts should and will play.

There are two other points that are also relevant here. The first is not to forget the skills and knowledge needed to actually create and distribute texts in our postdigital age. Even in the traditional world of publishing, almost the entire process, apart from the actual reading of the hardcopy book, is done electronically. Unlike twenty years ago, a would-be author today needs at the very least a good understanding of word processing. And this skills bar is raised even higher once we start to discuss digital texts, in other words stories made explicitly for a digital interface. As we'll see further on in this book, digital stories invite authors to experiment with coding (simple or complex

html for example, or platform-specific commands such as those used by Twine or an app development interface), to explore the complexities of human-computer interaction and the limits and possibilities of digitised narrative. These are not inconsequential skills and knowledge; if there is a radical intent in the creation of a digital text then surely it, at least in part, lies here, in giving ordinary women and men the ability to move from the passive use of computerisation (such as word processing), to the active state of playful experimentation.

The second point I'd like to raise relates to what I've already said in terms of the wider role and function of creativity, particularly storytelling. As we've seen with the rise of the 'participatory turn' (Facer and Enwright 2016), storytelling, or storifying, is now recognised as a fundamental, and transformative, human activity. In other words, stories are a big part of how we make sense of the world (Barrett and Bolt 2010). This knowledge production happens at many levels, from the individual and community, through to the city, nation and the global (Hawkins 2017). In fact, this community-focussed approach forms a completely separate tradition within the history of digital storytelling (see Lambert 2013; Dunford and Jenkins 2017). The *Center for Digital Storytelling*, based at the University of California, Berkeley, was established in 1993, and their goal, then and now, is very much about exploring the way digital storytelling can be used to enhance the power of the personal, community-situated, voice as an instrument of change. As I've already begun to argue, software that enables ordinary people to construct and share their stories can be transformative. The fact that such systems are part of Golumbia's 'computationalism' should not distract from the benefit that such storytelling accords us, especially in view of the many challenges ahead. Democracy is on the decrease around the world with more than two dozen countries having reverted to some form of authoritarianism this century (Mair 2013; *Freedom in the World* 2018). In many of these authoritarian states, in countries such as Russia, China, Turkey and Hungary, it is the control and limitation of digital platforms which forms a cornerstone of their autocracy (*Freedom on the Net 2017: Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy* 2017). It is these platforms' ability to circumvent official power structures, to empower and liberate in multiple ways, that makes them such a threat to authoritarian rule. So, yes, critics such as Golumbia are certainly right in highlighting the dangers of globalised computationalism; yet, that is only half the story. It is that very computationalism, embracing countless individuals across a borderless global network that makes it so dangerous (and ultimately anathema) to authoritarian rule. Our 'post-truth/fake news' condition is a product of repeated and ongoing state-sponsored attempts to turn digital platforms against this liberal, democratic tradition (D'Ancona 2017; Mair 2013).

The challenges ahead are not just political ones, of course. We live in a time of unprecedented social, ecological and climatic disruption. Although not formally recognised, 'Anthropocene' is increasingly accepted as describing

a new era in human history, in which landscape degradation, urbanisation, species extinction and resource extraction are endemic (Davies 2016). Quite naturally, scientists have played starring roles in understanding such a complex phenomenon. Yet it would be wrong to think that the arts and humanities do not also have a crucial role to play here as well. After all, the effects of the Anthropocene are not limited to the landscape and climate but ripple across all aspects of human life. As Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne state, ‘reinventing a life of dignity for all humans in a finite and disrupted Earth has become the master issue of our time’ (2015, 5). This book argues that it is here, in this reformulation of a ‘life of dignity’ in the face of mounting social, cultural, economic and political pressure, that a postdigital poetics can play an important role. In his book, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (2015), McKensie Wark outlines how this might be done. Critical here is what he labels ‘low theory’, in other words how things such as concepts and stories are actually embedded in practice: ‘low theory is interstitial, its labour communicative rather than controlling’ (2015, 218). I would argue that constructing and maintaining such low theory solutions to twenty-first century living will in part be achieved through emancipatory and revelatory acts of (postdigital) creativity. As Lambert notes, ‘through digital storytelling, we can all become storytellers again’ (2013, 5).

Themes and structure

Having summarised some of the major issues that are pertinent to what I’m going to say, I’d now like to briefly set out how the text is arranged. It is worth repeating here that the focus for the book is storytelling within the arts and humanities. As such, it also takes an international perspective on both the application of practice-based research and storytelling as a nexus of new and emerging practice. By storytelling I refer to prose-based work, both fiction and non-fiction. Although poetry has a strong tradition within digital storytelling, it is not an explicit focus of my study, although much that I have to say remains independent of any literary form and genre.

The heart of the book remains a critical analysis of current trends and features in the use of, what I have termed, postdigital storytelling. But before I do that, it’s important to provide some necessary context that will then inform any analytical framework to be used across the rest of the chapters. This is the intention behind the opening section, ‘Pasts and Presents’. It consists of four chapters, the first two of which (Chapters 2 and 3) place discussions of contemporary storytelling within a wider, and deeper, debate about creativity itself. In Chapter 2, rather than understanding creativity as a monolithic given, I show how the ontology that underpins artistic representation has gone through at least three paradigmatic shifts, what Richard Kearney identifies as mirror, lamp and labyrinth (1988). I argue that with the ending of postmodernity, we have now entered a new, fourth era of creative modality, building on Martin Heidegger’s (1889–1976) concept of ‘worlding

the world'. Key here are creative interventions that are embodied, ethically-charged and affective in their engagement with the world. Chapter 2 uses this theoretical framework to advance a reconfigured understanding of creativity within the arts and humanities; it also outlines how an affective and embodied understanding of creativity leads us towards interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to practice-based research. Chapter 3 explores how the concept of the postdigital offers new and exciting ways of rethinking our post-postmodern (~~metamodernist~~) condition. It sets out a new and modified understanding of postdigitality, before exploring its impact on established conceptual terms such as digital storytelling and electronic literature. As well as positing a revised four-layer model of postdigital storytelling, building on Katherine N. Hayles' print/code dichotomy (2004), the chapter examines the role and function of storytelling as a form of research, establishing an enabling relationship between practice, praxis and research.

Chapters 4 and 5, 'Hypertextual Adventures' and 'Hypertextual Storytelling Today', analyse the rise and subsequent evolution of hypertext fiction, from classic works such as Michael Joyce's *afternoon: a story* (1987) through to the development of Twine and the hypertextual storytelling of research agencies such as Forensic Architecture. In this way they provide the second axis to my analytical framework, namely, longitudinal and historical, charting the development of hypertext fiction from post-modern disorientation to the affective earnestness of metamodernism. As I've already indicated, the late twentieth century was a period of profound technological change, witnessing both the rise of the personal computer and the smartphone; hypertext fiction was just one means by which artists were able to respond to these transformative innovations. This was nothing new, of course. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had already shown that the impact of any technological upheaval could be profound, prefiguring deep and sustained cultural and social transformation. The 'crisis of the senses' (Darius 2002, 3) that underpinned modernist literary experimentation in the first half of the twentieth century, for example, was in part a response to the disruptive effects of the telephone, radio and cinema. By the late 1980s, digital innovation such as hypertext had vastly increased the creative options for any artist. Yet the exploration of hypertextuality as a creative affordance was not limited to the web. Chapter 4 argues that Mark. Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) was one of the first printed novels to explore a new kind of transmedial hybridity, positioning the physical book within a network of paratextual digital material. At the same time, hypertext works such as William Gillespie, Scott Rettberg and Dirk Stratton's *The Unknown* (1998) and *The Doll Games* (2001) by Shelley and Pamela Jackson, embraced new fusions of participatory and performative storytelling. Chapter 5 shows how, by the second decade of the new millennium, hypertextuality itself had become a metaphor for new, hybridic forms of transmedial interconnectivity. From J. K. Rowling's *Pottermore* website to Richard House's use of web-based video in his novel, *The Kills*

(2013), digital storytelling had become increasingly postdigital in form and structure. In this condition of normalised hybridity, any artistic work that remains disengaged from the digital domain does so consciously and tactically. Matthew McIntosh's *theMystery.doc* (2017), an analogue 'hypertextual' novel, is a case in point. Yet behind all these works is evidence of a new ontological imperative, a turning away from postmodern scepticism towards an ethically-informed 'worlding' (Trend 2016).

The second section of the book, 'Into Infinity – Towards a Postdigital Poetics', focuses on the tactics, strategies and conventions of contemporary storytelling. Chapter 6, 'Spatiality and Text: Locative Mobile Storytelling', examines the very recent phenomenon of mobile storytelling, in other words storytelling in which the reader's physical journey becomes a key aspect of a (performative) story. The chapter argues that this represents a stepwise change in how writers think about narrative. Key to this transformation is the creation of what I call *embodied space*. Embodied space is a hybridic form of narrative space that foregrounds the situated embodiedness, the essential postdigital entanglement, connecting all our lives. The chapter argues that it is through embodied space that locative mobile storytelling engages with metamodernist sensibility, particularly in regard to autofiction.

Chapter 7, 'Collaborative Tales', explores two ways that authors are engaging with participatory and collaborative approaches. The first is an examination of the Centre for Digital Storytelling, with its emphasis on co-creation and empathy through such techniques as the story circle within a seven-step creative process (Lambert 2013). Critical here is the notion of digital storytelling as a 'learning modality' (Lambert 2013, 14). The chapter then moves on to look at the ways in which social media can be used within digital arts and humanities' research. Although recognising challenges and complexities in the way social media has impacted on society, the chapter argues that there still remains significant opportunity for researchers and authors alike to harness the enormous collaborative potential of such platforms.

The final chapter of the book, 'How Soon Is Now', looks both backwards in terms of what has been said about postdigital storytelling in the previous chapters, but also forwards in terms of cutting-edge developments such as AI and the sort of machine-to-machine interactions captured by Trevor Paglen's *How to See Like a Machine* project (2017). Indeed, artists such as Paglen remind us that we are fast approaching a time when the majority of machine activity will not involve any direct human input at all. If digital storytelling increasingly consists of these kinds of cybernetic stories that machines tell each other, postdigital storytelling has become the imperative by which we can champion the 'being-in-the-world' of the human condition. The chapter argues that transdisciplinarity is critical here, providing an approach by which the essentiality of this human experience is foregrounded. As the chapter notes, postdigital storytelling and transdisciplinarity are irrevocably intertwined, each the child of a new ontological paradigm, a paradigm I've termed metamodernism.

22 Introduction

Storytelling has much to offer the research of global imperatives such as resilience and empathy (Bazalgette 2017), yet without the means to reach across traditional academic boundaries, we risk being overwhelmed by the sheer scale of what faces us.

Summary

This chapter has introduced, what I consider to be, key areas for debate and analysis in regards to postdigital storytelling. Perhaps the most important aspect of this has been the introduction of postdigital to describe the critical context through which this analysis will be framed. Most fundamentally, I have outlined how I will expand and deepen the concept of postdigitality, elevating it from a straightforward description of technological hybridity to a more complex socio-technological phenomenon that is itself a primary mode of a new and emergent cultural paradigm.

I've highlighted the degree to which the speed and depth of technological change since the turn of the century provides the central pillar on which this phenomenon rests. Yet equally importantly, I've also stressed the concomitant rise in the perceived value and utility of storytelling *per se* within the arts and humanities. Any understanding of a postdigital poetics as an emergent, transformative praxis, needs to at least recognise these two interrelated phenomena.

The chapter has indicated how I'm going to be using my critical engagement with postdigital storytelling to discuss the broader issues surrounding practice-based research, a methodological approach that is still significantly under investigated. This emergent nexus between creativity (poetics) and practice-based research (praxis) forms the methodological focus of this book in which both poetics and praxis play interdependent explanatory roles.

Finally I began to unpick the close relationship that is often presumed to exist between digital storytelling and the avant-garde. I argued that this was an outmoded view of storytelling *per se*. If an imperative exists for postdigital storytelling it is better to look at how such narrative approaches help address wider issues within our society. I introduced the concept that postdigital storytelling can be seen as a critical focus through which to advance a more transformative framework for transdisciplinary research across the arts and humanities and beyond.

Whether or not the Anthropocene is formally recognised as a geological epoch, we live in a world of increasing political, social, economic and environmental distress. Exploring the complex ways in which knowledge is created is of vital importance, and at the heart of this lies the stories we tell ourselves. As John Hartley says, '[f]ictions not only bond groups; they "imagine" the most compelling realities we live by' (2017, 218). Understanding how postdigital storytelling may help conjure up and instantiate such 'compelling realities' is, at least in part, a focus of the following chapters.

Note

- 1 Some authors use the hyphenated *post-digital*. I prefer, and use, the unhyphenated *postdigital* throughout this book.

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26 Introduction

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