



Interpretation, Narrative and Identity

Towards a framework for interpretation and reflection on cultural heritage in the digital age

Whether it is in relation to an activity, an event, or an item of knowledge regarding a particular subject matter, interpretation refers to our capacity to understand and reflect about something. As more and more of our every day life and activities shift to the virtual dimension, there is a need for critical dialogue and reflection about our material and cultural environments in order to understand how the ‘digital turn’ is altering our sense-making capabilities. In this two-day seminar organized by the Department of Media (Media Lab) at Aalto University we present a range of methods and tools that can be used to analyze narratives resulting from the research process, including first-person accounts. We also explore how narrative analysis can be used to support activities such as the reading and authoring of new narratives as well as the uncovering of meaning not explicit in the text. Additionally we present the notion of semiosphere as a framework to envision how the cultural heritage narratives resulting from such interpretative processes intermingle in particular digital ecosystems in order to reveal important aspects about collective identities and cultural dynamics.

Place: Miestentie 3, Room 414, Otaniemi

Dates: 26-27 May, 2016

Credits: For doctoral candidates it is possible to receive 3 credits.

For information and registration: helina.kuusela@aalto.fi

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Bringing both the personal and the meta-level narratives into research



Prof. Lily Díaz-Kommonen

26 May, 2016

9:00 – 10:00 Presentation and discussion

10:00 – 10:30 Coffee break

10:30 – 12:00 Hands on session. Participants work in groups.

Our current human modes of action are related to identities, social roles, and context (in space and time) that, as modes of action, become externalized and made present in the tangible and intangible artefacts of our making. These cultural forms however, not only exist diachronically but also emerge dynamically and synchronically as simultaneities from within the relationships of all the system's elements. One of the challenges that a researcher faces is that of unfolding all the concurrent processes with their respective articulations and interpretations (viewpoints or perspectives) while maintaining such forms beyond the data-gathering process.

The session will present an experimental method that combines first person viewpoint ethnography (auto-ethnography and duo-ethnography) with artefact analysis to support interpretation and narrative creation. The objective is to go beyond traditional approaches where narratives with pre-configured roles are presented to passive audiences for consumption. Instead we seek to enable opportunities for active, dynamic, remediation of user-generated content.

Narrative analysis

Dr. Paul Mulholland, PhD.

13:00 – 14:00 Presentation and discussion

14:00 – 14:30 Coffee break

14:30 – 16:00 Hands on group session. Participants work in groups.

Narratives, such as those produced when interpreting a cultural artefact, can be analysed in a number of ways. Narrative analysis can help to reveal additional meaning that may not be explicit in the narrative itself. This could help a reader to understand the narrative in greater depth or assist an author in extending the narrative in new ways. Narrative analysis can also identify common structures that can be found across a number of narratives. These can help to reveal what makes a good story as well as similarities and differences in how we share and understand stories.

This session will introduce a number of ways in which narratives can be analysed. This will include consideration of the following: (i) the events of the story, who is involved and when and where the events take place; (ii) the coherence of the narrative and the extent to which the events contribute to an overall story; (iii) the plot or overall structure of the narrative; (iv) the emotional content of the narrative and the emotional response it elicits in the reader; (v) the themes or intended meaning of the narrative, (vi) the timing of events and their position in the overall narrative.

The session will also introduce some of the technologies that can be used to support narrative analysis, for example, tools for identifying entities (such as

people, places, objects) from the text and the conceptual relationships between them, and tools for identifying the emotion or sentiment associated with the whole narrative or its parts.

Summary session

Discussion and planning of work for next day.

26 May 2016

16:00 – 17:00

Narrative in the digital semiosphere

Professor Luis Emilio Bruni

27 May 2016

9:00 – 10:00 Presentation and discussion

10:00 – 10:30 Coffee break

10:30 – 12:00 Hands on session. Participants work in groups.

Ubiquitous, immersive and interactive multimodal media can be seen as a central element in the evolving character and construction of new Identities – or more precisely narratives of identities. Accelerated by technology, this process has become a multidimensional and multilayer phenomenon which spans through a web of emerging intertwined spheres and domains, encompassing inseparably the individual, the social and the cultural; in domains that go from private to public, from family to work, from local to national to regional to global, touching the many nuances of interest groups and stakeholders co-existing heterarchically in a globalized civil society. In this context, how can the interpretations of cultural heritage objects and processes – represented and mediated in digital culture – contribute to the establishment of new identities and novel narratives of the past? How can these processes influence the ways we interpret our time and imagine the future?

Inspired in Juri Lotman's Semiotic Theory of Culture, in this session we suggest a framework to investigate what the emerging narratives could be revealing about identity, creativity, innovation, knowledge, and imagination (of the future). Therefore, we cross the discussion of individual and collective narratives of identity with Lotman's complex diachronic dynamics of meaning making and negotiation in the semiotic cultural space of the semiosphere, with its central notions of boundary and frontier, center and periphery, "us" and "them", ins and outs, otherness and marginality. Concomitantly, we present the notion of technosphere as the interface between cognition and culture, and suggest empirical avenues to investigate narrative cognition and multimodal narratives in digital culture.

Synthesis

27 May 2016

13:00 – 15:00 Participants work together on their projects.

15:30 – 15:30 Coffee break

15:30 – 17:00 Summary presentations.



Tutors

Luis Emilio Bruni is Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, Design and Media Technology, Aalborg University, an a recognized expert in bio-cognitive semiotics with expertise in interactive narratives, communication science, cognitive modeling and psychophysiological methods. He received a multidisciplinary international training (B. Sc in Environmental Engineering at the Pennsylvania State University; M. Sc in International and Global relations at Universidad Central de Venezuela; PhD in Molecular Biology and Biosemiotics at the University of Copenhagen), and has an extensive interdisciplinary scientific production and didactic experience. Currently, he directs the Augmented Cognition Lab at AD:MT-AAU, which is dedicated to the study of perception, cognition, affective states and aesthetic experience when interacting with complex stimuli and narrative content provided through immersive and representational interactive displays. He is the elected President of the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies and is board member in the International Society of Biosemiotic Studies and in the International Society for Information Studies.

Lily Díaz-Kommonen is Professor of New Media at Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture. Her research interests include the combined use of anthropology and new media to promote human-centered design. Her experience as principal investigator is in research and development projects in digital media and cultural heritage. She works primarily with qualitative methods, including design research and has written over 70 publications in areas related to art, design, heritage and new media. *Ubiquitous Computing, Complexity and Culture* an anthology published by Routledge in 2015 and co-edited with Ulrik Ekman, Jay David Bolter, Martin Søndegaard and Maria Engberg, is her latest result as an author.

Paul Mulholland is a Research Fellow in the Knowledge Media Institute, The Open University, UK. He has been an investigator on a number of UK and international research projects related to technology enhanced learning, cultural heritage and digital archives. Previous work has included the research and development of: innovative applications for use by museum staff and visitors; mobile applications for formal and informal learning; automated narrative generation tools for education and entertainment; and semantic and knowledge technologies for learning in organisations. He has a first degree in psychology, a Masters degree in computing and PhD in cognitive science. He has published over 100 journal papers, conference articles and book chapters. He is Deputy Editor of the International Journal of Human Computer Studies.