

Narratives in the humanities and social sciences

Workshop, Bergen 12-13 June, 2023

Programme and Abstracts



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Monday 12 June

Morning session from 09.30 to 11.45 (Humanities building, room 217)

09.30-09.45: Arrival, Tea and Coffee

09.45-10.15: Welcome and round of presentation of all the participants. Introductory remarks by Hans Geir Aasmundsen & Øyvind Gjerstad

10.15-11.05: Merete Birkelund & Sébastien Doubinsky: Lever quelques voiles sur “AUBE” d’Arthur Rimbaud -- images et clés, surfaces et révélations, la langue et le langage comme faux-semblants

11.05-11.45: Malin Roitman: The storytelling in the campaign before the French presidential elections of 2022: The narratives of the nation in the inaugural speeches of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Éric Zemmour and Valérie Pécresse

11.45-12.30: Lunch at the Sydneshaugen cafeteria

Afternoon session from 12.30 to 16.00 (Humanities building, room 301)

12.30-13.10: Kjersti Fløttum: New linguistic perspectives on narrative characters

13.10-13.50: Milad Shahpary: The verisimilitude of narrative structures in language and cinema: A study of Abbas Kiarostami’s use of cinematic form and dialogue in *Close-up* (1990).

13.50-14.30: Ida Vikøren Andersen: Narratives as examples, arguments, and constitutive rhetoric. A rhetorical approach to narratives

14.30-14.40: Tea and Coffee

14.40-15.20: Hans Geir Aasmundsen: Religion and Narratives or Religion, Narrative, and Communication; From individual stories to grand narration

15.20-16.00: Øyvind Gjerstad: “Polynarrativity”: Combining narrative and polyphonic analysis to reveal intersecting storylines in texts

19.30: Dinner at Villani Trattoria Skostredet



Tuesday 13 June

Morning session: Synthesis and Brainstorming (Humanities building, room 301)

09.30-10.00: Introduction by Hans Geir Aasmundsen & Øyvind Gjerstad: Analyzing socio-religious narratives in an interdisciplinary perspective, and possible research designs going forward

10.00-11.45: Discussion: How can the various perspectives be combined to develop new approaches to narrative?

11.45-12.30: Lunch at Café Christie, University Museum of Bergen

Afternoon session: What to do and how to do it (Humanities building, room 301)

12.30-15.00: Collaboration, research network, projects



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Lever quelques voiles sur "AUBE" d'Arthur Rimbaud -- images et clés, surfaces et révélations, la langue et le langage comme faux-semblants.

Sébastien Doubinsky et Merete Birkelund, Université d'Aarhus

Résumé: La poésie d'Arthur Rimbaud est généralement associée à une grande complexité qui se prête à toutes sortes d'interprétations. La célèbre querelle autour de la Pléiade de ses oeuvres autour des choix d'André Guyaux est assez symptomatique à ce sujet. Poursuivant le travail d'un Charles Baudelaire autour de l'image, Rimbaud va en radicaliser les termes, plaçant le travail idiosyncratique au-dessus de la position ironique de son prédécesseur. Il ne s'agit plus pour Rimbaud de détourner le cliché, mais de le détruire -- et le lecteur avec, si possible. Certains poèmes, pourtant, apparaissent comme plus "accessibles" et pas seulement ceux de jeunesse. "Aube", dont la composition est située entre 1873 et 1875, et qui fait partie du dernier recueil de Rimbaud, *Illuminations*, n'est pas, en effet, à première lecture le plus obscur ou le plus "hostile" au lecteur ou à la lectrice. Cependant, en s'approchant de plus près, nous nous rendons bien compte que c'est un texte à exégèse délicate, voire impossible, car tout semble passé au travers d'un filtre syntaxique qui en limite, obscurcit, voire bloque, la compréhension. Nous nous pencherons donc sur ce texte avec une approche double: celle de Sébastien Doubinsky s'attachera à expliquer le rôle du langage dans son travail de flottement sémantique et sur le rôle possible de ce flottement comme clé du poème; et celle de Merete Birkelund, qui va focaliser sur les aspects implicites et ce qu'il faut en entendre dans un contexte poétique.

ENGLISH VERSION:

Lifting a few veils in Arthur Rimbaud's "AUBE" -- images and keys, surfaces and revelations, language and languages as semantic decoys.

Summary:

Arthur Rimbaud's poetry is generally associated with a complexity that lends itself to all kinds of interpretations. The famous quarrel over André Guyaux's choice of works for the Pléiade (2009) is symptomatic of this. Continuing Charles Baudelaire's work on the image, Rimbaud radicalized the terms, placing a systematic idiosyncratic commitment above the ironic position of his predecessor. For Rimbaud, it was no longer a question of hijacking the cliché, but of destroying it -- and the reader with it, if possible. Certain poems, however, appear to be more "accessible", and not just the early ones. "Aube", composed between 1873 and 1875, and part of Rimbaud's last collection, *Illuminations*, is not, on first reading, the most obscure or "hostile" to the reader. However, on closer inspection, we realize that this is a text of delicate, if not impossible, exegesis, as everything seems to pass through a syntactic filter that limits, obscures and even blocks comprehension. We will be taking a two-pronged approach to this text: Sébastien Doubinsky's, to explain the role of language in its semantic floating, and the possible role of this floating as a key to the poem; and Merete Birkelund's, to focus on the implicit aspects and what they can mean in a poetic context.



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Le *storytelling* dans la campagne des élections présidentielles de 2022 : Les narratifs de la nation dans les discours inauguraux de Jean-Luc Mélenchon d'Éric Zemmour et de Valérie Pécresse.

Malin Roitman, Université de Stockholm

Le *storytelling* des dirigeants politiques a toujours marqué la vie politique, depuis l'Antiquité en passant par Cicéron et Charles de Gaulle jusqu'à personnalités politiques de nos jours. Ils montent des récits: de leur vie, de leur époque, de leur pays afin de d'encadrer leur perspective du monde. Pour cette conférence, Roitman s'intéresse plus particulièrement aux 'narratifs de la nation' des trois nouveaux candidats des élections présidentielles de 2022 : Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Éric Zemmour et Valérie Pécresse. La question qu'elle se pose est la suivante : Comment « la France », « les Français » et « les dirigeants français » sont-ils conçus dans les discours des trois candidats respectifs et sous quelles formes ces thèmes sont-ils narrés ?

ENGLISH VERSION:

The storytelling in the campaign before the French presidential elections of 2022: The narratives of the nation in the inaugural speeches of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Éric Zemmour and Valérie Pécresse.

The storytelling of political leaders has always marked political life, from Antiquity through Cicero and Charles de Gaulle to today's political figures. They create stories: of their life, of their time, of their country in order to frame their perspective of the world. For this conference, Roitman is particularly interested in the "narratives of the nation" of the three new candidates for the presidential elections of 2022: Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Éric Zemmour and Valérie Pécresse. The question she asks is the following: How are "France", "French citizen" and "French leaders" conceived and depicted – narrated – in their respective discourses?



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Narrative roles of citizens in the climate “battle”:

French survey of people’s opinions on possibilities for and obstacles to climate action

Kjersti Fløttum, University of Bergen

Abstract: Climate change challenges appear more and more clearly, and citizens in different parts of the world are hit in various ways. The main efforts aiming to mitigate the consequences of climate change should be undertaken at national and regional levels, but support by the citizens is also necessary. The present contribution will focus on a survey carried out in France, asking the participants what are, according to them, the obstacles to manage and the solutions to favour mitigation of climate change. A short overview through a content analysis of 1000 collected answers (mini-narratives) will be presented first, and second, a linguistic analysis exploring what narrative roles the citizens attribute to themselves and how and to what extent they express their own points of view.



The verisimilitude of narrative structures in language and cinema: A study of Abbas Kiarostami's use of cinematic form and dialogue in *Close-up* (1990).

Milad Shahpary

The late internationally revered filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami stumbled across an article in Iran entitled "Bogus Makhmalbaf Arrested" in 1989. The article recounts how a cinephile by the name of Hossein Sabzian impersonated the famous Iranian film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf in order to convince the middle-class family Ahankhah to facilitate the production of a film in their house. The family had gradually understood the falsehood at play and alerted the authorities. In court two conflicting narratives emerged for the intention of Sabzian's deceit; one being Ahankhahs' suspicion of the intent to commit burglary; whilst Sabzian's testimony that despite the breach of law, he had no ill will as he is merely a disciple of cinema to such an extent that he simply yearned for the momentary fame of being a revered filmmaker.

Kiarostami enthralled by the story's implications for ardent cinephilia, convinces all parties involved, compromising Sabzian aswell as the Ahankhahs, to play themselves in reenactments of the events that occurred leading up to the arrest, forming the docufictional basis of *Close-up*. Oscillating between documentary footage from the trial and fictional reenactments, the cinematic narrative of *Close-up* provides insight into the personal narratives of the various characters. Thus the following presentation examines the narrative structure of the film, in addition to the narrativity of the dialogue from a linguistic perspective, while concluding on the necessity of discussing the verisimilitude as crucial for the various forms of narrative – whether it is the genre conventions of film, or the polyphonic markers at hand in speech that relates the content of utterances to the perspective of the interlocutor; the discussion of verisimilitude's relevance to narratives allows for a larger discussion on whether to make sense of reality, one needs to relate to the world through personal narratives that escape the rigorous dichotomy of truth and lies.

Kiarostami, A. *Close-up* (1990). Iran: Kanoon.

The film is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ep3595lzTJY>



Narratives as examples, arguments, and constitutive rhetoric. A rhetorical approach to narratives

Ida Vikøren Andersen, University of Bergen

From a rhetorical point of view, narratives serve particular communicative *functions* in discourse.

Rhetoric can be defined as purposive, consequential and situated communication (e.g., Bitzer, 1968; Hauser, 2002; Kjeldsen, 2017), thus making rhetorical discourse texts aimed at specific audiences for specific reasons in specific situations. The study of rhetoric is the study of how people argue and use other means of influence to gain the adherence of an audience. Moreover, rhetorical studies aim to understand the effects and consequences of rhetorical messages as they act upon hearers' and readers' minds. Thus, rhetorical analysis pursues the question of the function of the text, i.e., how particular texts and textual features may act upon hearers' and readers' minds. Moreover, usually dealing with civic communication about collective decisions, rhetorical scholars often apply a normative view of the texts they study, typically ascribing potential social functions to them (Kjeldsen, 2021, p. 5).

The study of narratives in rhetorical discourse examines narratives or narrativity in situated discourse aimed at persuading, convincing, uniting, or otherwise moving people towards specific ends. While rarely complete narratives or completely narrative, such rhetorical discourse often use narrative elements as means to its persuasive and/or constitutive ends. The analytical interest is with the communicative functions of narratives or narrativity; more precisely, how narratives – or narrative elements – in rhetorical discourse function to move or influence audiences.

In my presentation, I will discuss how narratives, according to a rhetorical perspective, may function as examples and statements of facts in argumentation (Lucaites & Condit, 1985) and constitute a collective identity and shared reality (Charland, 1987).

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Religion and Narratives or Religion, Narrative, and Communication;

From individual stories to grand narration

Hans Geir Aasmundsen, University of Stavanger

We live in times of confusion, uncertainties, and sensations of futures that seem to disappear in the fog. The Covid-pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, cultural divides, fake news, alternative facts, and an ongoing and increasing climate crisis, are just some of the factors that contribute to dystopian sentiments. Add to this the recent “threat” of artificial intelligence (AI) and geopolitical unrest. The postmodern condition with the fall of the metanarratives is real and still unfolding.

It is exactly in such a time and under such conditions that I find it pertinent to ask the question of what is happening – and why? While this question cannot be easily answered, in this presentation I seek to get to terms with an important part of the global issues: namely how *narratives and communication* work and affect people, cultures, and societies. Moreover, I want to contribute to the understanding of what a narrative is and/or how it is being employed, particularly, by narrowing down the scope to mainly examine the various aspects of religion, religiosity, and contemporary spiritualities - in this context.

There are as many theories and understandings of what a narrative is, as there are disciplines – we could almost say, academicians. As we cannot sort everything in one go, I am starting with my own fields of interest and expertise – with a goal of exploring this topic together with good people from other disciplines. I think it is the best way to get to terms what narratives are, how and why they are constructed as they are, and how and why they are being practiced and eventually may disappear.

At our seminar I will present a definition/conceptualization of narrative that I am working on, together with Øyvind, and give an example from my empirical and theoretical study of a global Evangelical network and its recent focus on Holistic Mission and Creation Care.

Here’s a draft of my definition as it is for now – to be further explored and discussed at the seminar:

Narratives operate at three different levels: Individual-, social-, and metanarratives. These are then three of a kind so to speak, all with a plot and dramaturgical construction (that they share) – which operate as a common fold or umbrella:

- (1) Initial (creation) state of the narrative where heroes and villains are introduced (coming from chaos in typical religious mythologies),
- (2) followed by consolidation and the establishment of an order where tensions are held at bay (often the present here and now - Pax Romana)



(3) A final stage threatens where all will be settled or not (like for instance Armageddon or “Det er den draumen med ber på, at noke vidunderlig skal skje. Norwegian poem – my translation: It is that dream that we carry, that something wonderful will happen, must happen....)

One can be situated at different places within this narrative framework.

I am thinking that to give such a definition/understanding (or similar) of narrative is much better for a common project like ours. It ties the different projects together and opens up the space for various disciplinary and individual approaches to narratives.



“Polynarrativity”: Combining narrative and polyphonic analysis to reveal intersecting storylines in texts

Øyvind Gjerstad, University of Bergen

Thirteen years ago, Kjersti Fløttum (2010) first proposed that discourse on climate change has a fundamental narrative structure, in which the destabilization of the climate system constitutes the complication, followed by complex sets of proposed actions to solve the problem. Such climate change narratives transpire not only in classical narrative form, or so-called narrative text sequences (Adam 1992), but also in argumentative or deliberative sequences. The implication of this observation is that narrativity can be found and studied in texts such as policy documents and scientific reports, that typically do not represent the kind of storytelling that is associated with genres such as fairytales, fables, or personal anecdotes. Furthermore, this broad narrativity can also be found in texts on a range of topics beyond climate change, and even beyond political and societal issues.

Later studies (e.g. Gjerstad 2019) have combined narrative analysis with the analysis of polyphonic markers, such as reported speech, negation, and concession. These linguistic phenomena signal the presence of other voices than that of the speaker or author, who can use them to reject, concede to or affirm the points of view (pov) of these voices (Nølke et al. 2004, Nølke 2017). The combined analysis of narrative and polyphony, or “polynarrativity”, shows how texts can give the floor to pov that represent elements of other narratives, to endorse or reject them. The most overtly polyphonic phenomenon is reported speech. Through this mechanism, the voices that are introduced are often attributed a double role, as both characters and ‘substitute narrators’ that enter into a virtual dialogue with the main narrative of the text. More subtle markers of polyphony, such as negation (*not*) and concession (*but, however, notwithstanding, etc.*) can serve to refute or concede to elements of other narratives. However, until now, few other such markers have been studied in a narrative perspective. The question is what other polyphonic phenomena may be relevant for such analyses, and how they function. To take a step further in this development, the presentation will tentatively propose the inclusion of two new sets of polyphonic phenomena in polynarrative analysis, namely focalization (Nølke 2006) and irony (Birkelund & Nølke 2013).

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