

*Gábor Szécsi*

## **Self, Community, Narrative in the Information Age**

### **Abstract**

Narrative thinking has a significant role in the formation of the self and identity. In fact, to such an extent that the self is seen as the product of narrative thinking, a fictional character emerging at the intersection of autobiographical narratives. In this article I investigate what effect the narrative interpretative schemes used in everyday communication have on our conceptualization of the self, on our self-image, while, I also intend to analyze what effect media narratives displaying intentions, beliefs and desires have on the narratives of self- and community construction of individuals in the information age. The aim of this essay is to demonstrate that analyses like this can, in the long run, contribute to a great extent to the preparation of models and philosophical concepts targeting the description of the functioning and formation of narratives that capitalize on the shared cognitive structures of human motivational factors, goals, emotions and actions.

### **Keywords**

Narrativity, narrative self, digital culture, networked individual, new conceptualization of community

## **Self, Community, Narrative in the Information Age**

### **1. Introduction**

Communication and thinking in narratives are intertwined processes of self-creation. The production and processing of narratives, that is, the application of mental schemes that give meaning to observed events, phenomena is such an elementary cognitive ability, that it is of key importance in identifying communicative intentions. Communicative intentions suggested by the narratives become tangible and meaningful for the receiver through the narrative structure of the conscious mind. Conceptual relations identifying coded and decoded meanings are structured in a narrative manner, and hence they represent situations of action of different complexity in the mind. The conditions of mutual understanding are ensured by conceptual representations of event structures that serve as building blocks of narratives from the most basic actions to the most complex situations. Through the narratives constituting these conceptual relations humans who organize and process information in the framework of narratives in fact experience their own lives as narratives. In the process of understanding, humans themselves become a part of the narrative built in collaboration with the communicative partner. They make use of narratives to serve their communicative goals, and parabolically projecting these narratives onto the events they experienced they look for an explanatory framework, a justification, in order to find the reason for the events experienced, and to find their own role in them.

Narratives that play a key role in everyday meaning formation and communication can be identified as schemes for the analysis of situations, or rather as data-structures feeding from the rich system of relationships of the conceptual representation of actions and events. Therefore, narratives are nothing else but conceptual networks functioning as frameworks of interpretation when identifying situations of action. The schemes of event structures activated by narratives (beginning – mid point – closing) are patterns of interpretation present in all our conceptual representations and in our experiences of actions of problem resolution. We rely on these when identifying the elements of situations of action from the simplest forms of action to the most complex forms of communicative acts. Due to the internal relationship between the conceptual representations of narratives and actions, the key for the structure of simple narratives guiding the understanding of everyday situations can be found in the structure of human action. When understanding narratives, we actually project our knowledge concerning interpersonal action on narratives guiding situation analyses. This observation is in harmony with the basic tenet of disciplines like narrative psychology, cognitive linguistics, and the analytical philosophy of mind that consider our narrative, story-telling function as a general anthropological feature of the psyche, stating that the narrative form of thinking has a key role in the formation of the self and identity (Fillmore 1985; Dennett 1985, 1987, 1991, 1992; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Lakoff 2008a, 2008b; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Lakoff and Narayanan 2010; Langacker 1987, 2008; Talmy 1983, 2000; Ziemke, Zlatev and Frank 2007; McAdams 2013). Dan P. McAdams (2013), for examples, believes that identity is actually our life history, composed of several autobiographic narratives. The self in this approach is not a subject “behind” experience, busy

organizing the experiences into a unified whole, but it is a product of narrative thinking closely connected to psychological phenomena; or as Daniel Dennett puts it, it is a fictional character in the center of autobiographic narratives. In other words, the self is not a substance of some kind, but it is the formation of personal events of the individual “living in the center of their own narratives” into a narrative unit that offers a framework for the understanding of situations of action both in the present and in the future (Dennett 1992).

In this article I would like to emphasize that through the everyday use of information technology (internet, mobile phones, etc.), the logic of the media increasingly dominates our thinking and worldview, it affects every element of society and culture, and it changes sub-systems of society like economy, politics, science and education. This process penetrating all layers and domains of our life is basically a meta-process that transforms socialization and the entire system of conditions of social life through the interiorization of narratives transmitted by the media. It, therefore, creates new social forms, besides shedding new light on our views of the role communication plays in the formation of communities. Today that information technology and its devices serve as tools to transmit different types of content simultaneously at the personal- and at the wider social level, their widespread use amplifies the process that has been observable in postmodern cultures with the appearance and spreading of monologic media (radio, television). The main idea of this is that with the industrialization of narrative production, narratives in mass communication transmitted by electronic media have an increasingly strong impact on the attitudes, world views, values and human connections of receivers. In fact, to such an extent, that since the regular “consumption of media” starts early on in childhood, these narratives actually get strongly intertwined with the personal narratives mediated by new forms of communication technology (e.g. mobile-phones), all the more, they become part of the autobiographical narratives that form the self-image and identity of the mediatized individual.

The aim of this essay is twofold. I examine, on the one hand, the relationship between the narrative schemes of interpretation we use in the identification of intentions, beliefs and desires in everyday communication and our concepts of the self and self-image; while I analyze, on the other hand, the effects of media narratives displaying intentions, beliefs and desires in our increasingly digital culture on the narratives of self- and community construction by the networked individual. I believe that such an analysis can greatly contribute to the preparation of philosophical views and models targeting the emergence and functioning of narratives that capitalize on the common cognitive structure of human motivational factors, goals, emotions and actions, and can also give a framework for the drafting of a new concept of the self as it has been greatly encouraged by philosophers of the mind and language philosophers. The conditions for this lies in that we should see narratives, the building blocks of cognition and understanding as structures creating self and identity that, as Lakoff claims, “become part of our consciousness and offer models that not only help us in everyday activities, but also define who we are” (Lakoff 2008a: 231).

## **2. Narrative and intentionality**

In communicative actions individuals elucidate elements like role of action, background, conflict, main plot, resolution and corollaries using event-organizing actions offered by

narratives. Obviously, we turn to narratives if we want to understand the motives in the actions of others and in the intentions, beliefs and desires feeding these actions. Thus, narrative-orientedness in thinking constitutes the main pillar of the mundane practice known as naïve- or folk-psychology in the framework of which we understand others' actions and beliefs through attributing beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, and other mental states to them.<sup>1</sup> The application and use of narrative explanatory schemes enable us to attribute desires hopes and fears to others in our communicative acts, which in turn helps us understand the communicative intentions in the background of the messages conveyed. This is how we can see others' actions as being rational – provided, they meet some given set of criteria for this – and predictable. In other words, the predictive force of folk psychology stems from the narrative nature of our mind and thinking, from our ability that when we understand the narrative of others, with our knowledge of the meta-narratives characteristic of our society that determine these personal narratives, we can actually predict which action the individual will most likely choose from among the potential options of actions that can be carried out in the given situation so as to achieve their goals. Such optional and potential acts to resolve problems are represented by community meta-narratives, while the individual represents their own relationship to meta-narratives with the help of autobiographical narratives through which they construct their self and identity. This is the framework in which their actions in a given communicative situation can be labelled as rational or irrational, with the tools of folk-psychology, and this is how we can reconstruct the beliefs, desires, wishes or even the prejudice influencing their intentions. In the background of each

---

<sup>1</sup> In the practice of everyday communication, individuals attribute intentions, desires, beliefs to each other in a given situation in the light of recognized patterns of behavior, and interpret or predict each other's actions based on that. The predictive power of this folk or common sense psychology, our everyday way of rationalizing intentional actions lays the foundations for understanding, empathy and effective interpersonal strategies on the part of individuals in communicative relationships. This "naïve social technology" (Dennett 1987) serves as an everyday frame of interpretation for possible patterns of causation between perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and actions. Folk psychology considers beliefs, intentions, desires, actions etc. as intentional events and states which are causally related to each other. Thus the explanations of actions referring to intentions, beliefs, and desires describe the mental processes leading to the performance of the acts by assuming the reasonableness of the actions, that is these explanations try to determine the real causes of the acts presupposing the rational behavior of actors. As Jerry Fodor points out, "reasonable action" as a concept contains an essential causal element that all individuals in a given culture regard as a criterion of reasonableness (Fodor 1975). This is why the communicatively related individuals can approach each other as intentional systems, that is, as beings whose behavior can be understood and predicted by attributing intentions, beliefs, and desires to them. These mental states, according to Dennett, are usually identified on the basis that individuals must possess them as a function of their life stories. In other words, when we understand the other person's behavior, we assume that the mental states attributed to him are both true and relevant to his life as depicted in the narratives. Although Dennett does not analyze this process in detail, his explanations suggest that this process of interpretation takes place at the crossroads of narratives. The individual facing the other person's behavior creates a narrative about the behavior and its circumstances by attempting to reconstruct a life story that illuminates the relevance of the behavior, thus serving as a kind of framework narrative for interpreting the narrative directly expressed by the behavior. Based on this, he concludes that behavior consists of acts that are relevant and reasonable for the individual endowed with different mental states (beliefs, desires). For a subtle investigation of this question see also Dennett 1985, 1991, 1992; Scalise Sugiyama 1996; Hutto 2007, 2008, 2009.

narrative directly told, there is an immanent narrative, whose task is to shed light on the reasons why in the given situation the narrator would choose the given communicative act from among the potential sphere of acts in order to convey the narrative at hand. The primary motive of the sender, the individual carrying out a communicative act, is that the receiver should comprehend the narrative representing the sender's intended choice in light of this hidden narrative. The primary condition for this is that the story teller should also have information about the relationship of the potential actions acknowledged in society and the spheres of actions seen as possible by the receiver in the given situation; in other words, about the potential actions the receiver would take as a reaction to the problem the sender desires to resolve, in the given situation. All in all, these pieces of information constitute the most important pillars of folk-psychology operating in the given context.

To understand the effects of narratives on our thinking, on our processes of comprehension, on our communicative acts, and our everyday actions to resolve problems, is therefore, not less than investigating the relationship of human nature and culture. Thinking in narratives is a natural ability that immanently defines our cognitive processes. As Roland Barthes says, narratives "like life, are just there" (Barthes 1977: 79). Narratives function as a special meta-code embodying human essence in our everyday communicative processes that ensures that with the deciphering of communicative intentions the messages concerning the common world known for the receiver and the sender can flow freely in the given culture, or between different cultures. As Walter R. Fisher claims: "Narration [...] designates a conceptual frame, one that I think is intrinsic to the nature of human beings [...] would account not only for the kinds of discourse just mentioned but also all other discourse forms, including scientific, historical, philosophical, political, religious, and so on – *insofar as they lay claim to our reason*. [...] life itself – that is, its interpretation and enactment – is to be understood in narrative terms" (Fisher 1995: 170).

Narratives are not simply the condition of understanding, but they also constitute structures that shape meaning and create concepts. Our concepts, embedded in structures as they are, connect to each other, and become the building blocks of our knowledge. Just as our most essential experiences of action, our most complex mental constructions are also organized into narratives. In the process of cognition we create, convey narratives of ourselves and of the world, and with narratives we can make sense of our roles played in various situations of communication. In our communicative acts we process and display our personal experiences linked to communicative situations in the form of narratives. We communicate about our own selves and about our identity's social integration in narratives. Thinking in narratives connects us with other members of our community and enables us to understand the perspective of others in view of the relationship to our self. By acquiring the ability to produce and comprehend narratives we also learn how to connect the beginning and the end of a series of events in a way to express our sense of belonging to a certain social-, ethical- or legal order, our cultural bonds and connections. Narratives structure our future and past; narratives make it possible for our past experiences to turn into the pillars of our plans and expectations for the future. Our concepts of right and wrong, of important and unimportant events are also organized into narratives. That is, we evaluate and organize our experiences with the help of narratives. Some experiences become salient and important as a result of the narratives they reside in, thus constituting the

starting point of the evaluation and understanding of different entities and actions. Narratives also serve as a framework of the moral evaluation of actions. As George Lakoff and Srinivas Narayanan point out in their study, “narratives enable us to function in the world in a sensible way, and to be central for our self-consciousness” (Lakoff and Narayanan 2010: 24).

As a result of the above-mentioned claims, the statement that individuals experience their own life in the form of narratives, has become the basic tenet of both narrative psychology and cognitive linguistics.<sup>2</sup> They use and apply narratives for their own purpose, and projecting these onto the experience they have had, they search for a framework of interpretation, an explanation, so as to identify the reasons for the events they have experienced, and to find their own roles in these. The creation of our private, inner world is facilitated by autobiographical narratives in which the central figure of the narrator and the narrative activity is the same entity. We share different stories of our past, habits, motivation or planned future, in the form of autobiographical narratives. Hence narratives like these are also of a somewhat intersubjective nature. Their source is discourse between individuals, so they are inseparably linked to the intersubjective communicative situation.

As Lakoff and Narayanan claim, the event structures in narratives actually have several dimensions (Lakoff and Narayanan 2010: 24-25). Apparently, they have an important role in the transmission of ethical values and guidelines for the management of everyday life. Stories and fables that inherently comprise community meta-narratives, beyond their help in our understanding of the world around us, also offer solutions for moral and practical problems we might encounter. Narratives also constitute the basis of folk-theories that shed light on the functioning and logic of events, on the characteristics of humans, on cause-and-effect relations, on plans that determine action and goals. Our life is nothing else but a series of consecutive narratives in overlap, that are fulfilled by individuals who play their roles – claims Erving Goffman, sociologist (1974). As Goffman suggests, each social institution and form of practice is like a drama with actors, dialogues, and fairly well-defined actions. Adapting to the needs of certain social situations, is, after all, nothing else but the acceptance of relevant social roles, and the connected forms of action and behavior.

It is reasonable to ask then, how narratives can shed light on intentions, desires, goals, and plans in the background of the connoted message, in the process of communication. How can narratives become the basis of understanding, forming elements of efficient communicative acts? How can individuals portray their attitude concerning their communicative partner, the communicative situation at hand, or the content of the message, with the help of narratives, and thus make their behavior and action understandable for their partner in their communicative act? In answering these questions we should start out from the supposition that the conditions

---

<sup>2</sup> Views in narrative psychology claim that telling narratives significantly determines the nature of human thinking. As Jerome Bruner emphasizes, our thinking and sensible functioning has two forms, and each organizes experience and thus constructs reality in a different way (Bruner 1986, 1990). In this differentiation one is the traditional style of thinking, of a paradigmatic, logic-based, scientific nature, which leads to detailed analysis, logical verification, reliable argumentation, and the raising of rational corollaries. The other form, represented by narrative style thinking, results in historical narratives, reports, and inherently belongs to our psychological reality.

of mutual understanding lie in the simultaneous transmission and processing of an explicit and an implicit narrative in the communicative situation. Each explicit story “told” gains a meaning in view of the implicit narratives and life-stories in its background, and thus it becomes the basis of predictability and understandability of action. In other words, the meanings conveyed by the sender of the communicative act can be made accessible for the receiver by making the intentions, desires and attitudes in the communicative act in the given situation clear, with the help of an explicit and an implicit narrative. The processing of both of these two forms of narratives can make it clear which motive dominated the actions of the sender in choosing the particular communicative act when conveying the given message from among the potential sphere of communicative acts that are socially accepted and sensible; and also help us see what desire, belief and attitude lie in the background of this motive. The reproduction of this motive, and of the desire, belief and attitude in its background is the condition for the receiver to see the sender and the sender’s action as rational in the given situation, to attribute meaning to the communicative act at hand in the light of this attributed motive, and to see the sender’s behavior and acts as predictable in similar situations. Explicit narratives shed light on the motives behind the action to resolve the problem at hand in the given situation with the help of verbal and nonverbal tools. With this, the sender can reveal why they have chosen the given act to be the most efficient to resolve the problem in the situation from among the sphere of socially accepted possibilities, and to convey the message connected to the resolution of the problem. Explicit narratives, being mental schemes, thus enable the receiver of the communicative act to understand, through the event structure at hand, what intention motivated the sender to choose the given act due the emergence of the problem. With this the sender wants the receiver to understand their reason for choosing the particular communicative act to solve the problem at hand, as observed by the receiver. At the same time, however, the sender, with their behavior and action, convey an implicit narrative as well, which primarily intends to map the general attitudes of the sender in connection with the situation at hand and with the problem observed in the concrete situation. With this narrative displayed with both verbal and nonverbal signs, the sender wants to make it clear for the receiver how they generally connect to the problem in the given situation and to events similar to the concrete situation. These implicit narratives (using different stylistic devices, gestures, metacommunicative signs, paralinguistic elements) show the receiver the actions and behaviors the sender reacts with generally, to problems similar to the one in question, in settings similar to the concrete situation at hand. The sender makes use of these implicit narratives in order to apply autobiographic narratives shaping their identity in revealing their communicative intent. The condition for the understanding of the communicative message is that the sender simultaneously computes the intentions, desires, beliefs and attitudes expressed by the implicit and explicit narratives revealed by the sender. That is, understands why the sender chose the action observed by the receiver to convey the message at hand, in order to discern the general attitudes of the receiver connected to the situation and problem in the given situation. In other words, the explicit narrative that sheds light on the details why the sender chose the particular act to convey the message in the given situation, from among the possible sphere of actions known for both the sender and the receiver, becomes comprehensible only in light of the implicit narrative that suggests and reveals how the sender reacts generally, in situations similar to the one at hand, with problems similar to the

one at hand. Narratives, in this dual framework, ensure the conditions of efficient communication, from the simplest interpretative processes of folk-psychology, to the deciphering of the most complex meanings. These reveal why the sender chose the concrete action in question to resolve the given problem in the given communicative situation, from among the sphere of possible actions socially accepted. The criteria for this is that both the sender and the receiver must possess more-or-less the same knowledge about the potential sphere of actions accepted by society, concerning the problem at hand, and that with the attribution of this shared knowledge they encode and decode the meanings embedded in the narratives. In simpler discourses of folk-psychology this means that an individual attributes intentions, desires and attitudes to their communicative partner in a way that they, on the one hand, understand their explicit narratives, which reveal why they chose the given act from the possible sphere of actions, and on the other hand, that they observe implicit narratives as well, which mirror the general attitudes of the sender connected to the situation at hand. This is how they attribute rationality to their actions and become able to predict behavior in the given situation.<sup>3</sup>

The notion concerning the inner relationship of thinking, action and narratives places the concept of the self in a new light, because, if we accept this premise above, than we have to hypothesize an inner relationship between the self and the narratives that determine its development. It is enough to think of the claim that narratives build on schemes of event-structures incorporated by conceptual representations that represent action situations, where these schemes store intentions and beliefs connected to the communicative situation in a way that these can easily be recalled again and again. As these intentions and beliefs have been “conserved” in the framework of the self–other–shared context triad linked to intersubjectivity in the event-structure schemes, they do not only constitute a source of understanding, but also feed the concept of the self. This is how the self itself can become a network of intentions and beliefs, and the center of narratives storing intentions and beliefs. In a more radical conceptualization, we can claim that the self is actually a result of narrative activity. In order to form a narrative construction, but at the same time to be able to experience mental states, feelings, senses, desires, thoughts, etc., the self needs a cognitive system in a wider context in which the self is not only the narrator of events, but it is, at the same time, the entity that experiences the narrated events as well.

The intentionality of the narrative self is not at all a derived concept, since it acts, feels and thinks in the form of mental state networks that build on the narratives that construct the self itself. That is, we can claim, that the formation of the acting self actually precedes the birth of the narrative (autobiographical) self, just as body use precedes language use. The acting self however, does not disappear from the mind, but, as Damasio (1994) and Johnson (2007, 2014)

---

<sup>3</sup> The above assumption is in harmony with the “ostensive-inferential communication” model developed by Dan Sperber and Deirde Wilson (Sperber and Wilson 1990, 1995). Communicative acts, in this model, are processes providing for the recognition both of certain information and of a certain intention to inform, therefore the communicated assumption can be regarded as either an explicature or an implicature. As they claim, communication involves an informative intention “to inform the audience something”, and a communicative intention “to inform the audience of one’s informative intention” (Sperber and Wilson 1995, p. 29).



point out, it helps us in our everyday decision making processes, when we have to choose the most adequate narrative from among a set of competing narratives. In this we heavily build on somatic markers (Damasio 1994), that is, the bodily senses and feelings that accompany narratives. In view of this claim Lakoff (2008a) also argues that the “action field” of narratives can be linked to different bodily networks in the context of embodied cognition. Lakoff sees narratives as conceptual frameworks with distinct scripts, and gives a typology of the structure of narratives in the following way, suggesting two types: a) the dramatic structure of the narrative – this includes scripts of conceptual frameworks and the roles of conceptual frameworks as well; b) the emotional structure of the narrative – in this latter phase the dramatic structure of the narrative engages with emotional, sensorimotor and other bodily networks, therefore, the narratives actually have an embodied dimension as well. Lakoff believes that narratives function in the same way as cognitive metaphors do, but in this case the emotional structure of the narrative is seen as the source domain.

It is no surprise therefore, that the hypothesis stating that the formation of the self as embodied agent can be linked to narrative activity in cognition has become widespread among the thinkers theorizing on the notion of embodied cognition (Gallagher 2006; Lakoff 2008b; Menary 2008; Damasio 2010). Narratives of self-creation in this conceptualization derive straight from the direct experiences of the embodied subject (Menary 2008: 76). In the context of embodied cognition it is not verbal narratives that drive the experiencing of events, but, throughout the development of cognition it is experience that structures the organization of narratives first, which, in turn, gives a framework for the use and realization of verbal narratives. The self is, above all, an embodied mind, that experiences the framework structure and chronology of events in a bodily interaction with the world. The narrative structure of action in the world, in the framework of the embodied cognition hypothesis, necessarily shapes the structure of cognition, which later gives the basis of higher-order cognitive skills like language use and thinking. The narrative self, functioning at the level of reflections later emerges in the verbal interactions of the intersubjective relationship between the triad of the self—other—shared context, as a result of the development of cognitive abilities, and then, turning into an inner speech, it enriches the self with the dialogues between the self and “ourselves”.

In view of all of the above, the notion that individuals in fact experience their life in narratives has become a central claim both in narrative psychology and in cognitive linguistics as well. They make use of narratives that serve their own purposes, and projecting these parabolically onto the events they experienced, they want to find a framework of interpretation, an explanation to understand the reasons for the events experienced, and to find their own roles in these. The understanding of the inner, private world is facilitated by autobiographical narratives in which the central figure of the narrator and the narrative are actually the same entity. We share different stories in the form of autobiographical narratives, in connection with our past, habits, motivations, or planned future. For this reason, autobiographical narratives actually have an intersubjective nature. They stem from interpersonal discourse, hence they are inseparably linked to intersubjective communicative situations. In the following part of the present paper I intend to analyze what effects communicative situations using digital media and the various types of narratives transmitted by the media have on these autobiographical narratives.

### **3. Self- and community constructing narratives in digital culture**

The narratives told by individuals using digital technology increasingly mirror the formal and content-based features of the narratives narrated by mass media. In other words, they tell stories to each other in a way that increasingly displays the characteristics of mass media stories. The topics of their explicit narratives are often similar to the topics conveyed and regularly addressed by mass media. Their implicit narratives connected to concrete topics, mirroring their general attitudes are more and more influenced by framework-narratives representing the values of mass media. In the context of the new media the personal-, community- and social narratives conveyed by electronic communication in fact are completely intertwined by narratives in mass communication. This is how explicit narratives, that is, narratives that target problems of concrete-, personal-, community-, social-, economic- and cultural problems and their resolution, and implicit narratives that display the general attitude of individuals communicating with the help of the media and the values of mass media itself in relation to each other, can therefore, contribute to the mediatization of communities formed by recipient groups.

In digital culture the narratives conveyed by the media have become an integral part of autobiographical narratives that shape the self-image and identity of media-consumers and determine the individual's relationship to traditional values. This, in fact, radically changes the image individuals have about communities and society. For the individual shaping their self-image, building connections, orienting in the world of narratives conveyed by new communication technologies, the boundaries of social context merge and become symbolic. They can become part of not only one, but of many more communities at the same time by using different technologies of communication, and as nomads of the new media-space they can leave many communities, where the internal relationships norms, conventions have become unacceptable for them. Individuals who feel equally at home in communities of physical nature based on direct face-to-face interactions, and in those of virtual nature building on mostly electronically transmitted relations in communication, have a style of common talk where the borders and distinctions of these communities gradually fade and disappear. Their roles in the different communities mutually influence each other and thus their self-image, identity and their attachment to the different forms of communities. For the electronically communicating individual who integrates and transmits explicit and implicit media narratives often as elements of their personal narratives, the notion of communities rooted in several physical and virtual community experiences, forms at the meeting point of the conceptual representation of different community forms. Physical and virtual communities interact with each other at the level of personal conceptual representations and thus become the source of dual identities of individuals who may be simultaneously present in different communities.

Fast and continuous flow of information due to electronic communication does not only bring along the simultaneity of the interpretation of community roles, but often the simultaneity of the roles itself. The individual building networks and communities in the name of narratives transmitted by new forms of communication finds it increasingly hard to distinguish their real-life and virtual community roles from each other, as a result of the frequent and sudden shifts in the technologies. When they communicate as a member of a local community based on direct and physical relationships, they do so, aligning to their virtual community roles in harmony

with the context of the electronic communication, that is, in the framework of media-narratives shaping their self-image and identity. This is how the era of electronic communication can actually become the era of mediatized communities. With the spreading of mediatized communication our relationships in communities also become mediatized. Electronic communication makes the community criteria virtual through the interaction of the transmitted narratives, and at the same time makes these criteria part of the communicative process, thus contributing to the convergence of our virtual and real, true roles. As a result of this, humans of the information age re-interpret their physical and virtual community bonds, relationships and roles, in view of community relations and community criteria mediatized in the spirit of media narratives.

Interiorizing narratives conveyed by electronic media that create self- and community, makes our concept of community very versatile and personal, and changes our perception of the stable identity connected to traditional forms of communities. The use of new forms of communication technology can thus lead to the “saturation” of the self, which means that the members of social networks can embrace and integrate all of their identities, and in this they are not constrained by the issues of locality and identity, that is, the effects of their local communities on their identity formation as in traditional forms of communities. All this, in turn, brings along a novel, relation-centered approach in the conceptualization of the self, that is described in Kenneth J. Gergen’s study entitled *Self and Community in the New Floating Worlds*, in which he targets the psychological effects of mobile phone use (Gergen 2003).

Gergen believes that the use of the new forms of communication technology, with the emergence of absolutely novel forms of “relational existence” drastically undermines the concept of the “bounded self” (Gergen 2003: 110.). In social networks individuals are free to roam among many forms of communities, and besides their direct social connections characteristic of physical communities, they can form new emotional bonds. Thus, the identity of individuals using the different techniques of mediatized communication becomes plastic, and changes like a “chameleon” in the different social contexts. It becomes increasingly difficult to determine what the solid “core-self”, i.e., somebody’s true self is. The individual, becoming part of the global social network, commit themselves to more and more relationships, values, desires and beliefs, while they float from community to community when watching television, using their mobile phone or the internet. We can agree with Gergen therefore, that in the information age, the bounded core-self dissolves and gives the floor to the concept of the relational self. He also rightly claims that this process accelerates as a result of the increased use of dialogic technologies transmitting the metanarratives of novel communities and the personal and mass media narratives simultaneously, like the use of the internet, and especially of mobile phones. As Gergen notes, with mobile phones the network of relations “is always at hand”, and the phone, as an object becomes an “icon of relationships” (Gergen 2003: 111). Mobile phones constitute a “herding-plate” for its users through which they can choose from the competing groups and communities (those of family, friends, colleagues) without any constraints. Mobile communication creates multiple loyalty among the communities among which individuals roam.

Increased mobility gives anyone the chance to communicate with any of the chosen groups with solidarity, without committing oneself to any of the communities. In other words,

the pursuit of the modern individual to define their community bonds, to close down the networks of immediate, social relationships by focusing on the core of their community, is less and less efficient a phenomenon in the age of new communication technologies. The identity of individuals in social networks is determined by their roles fulfilled in the communities of hybrid (virtual and physical) communication. By means of these interactions, stabile, flexible and plastic, ever changing community forms are born in social networks that are creatively referred to as “new tribes” by Michel Maffesoli (1996). These “tribes” ensure that the self can become “versatile” and quickly adapt to the continually renewing community roles in a way that the individual in this process also becomes part of a wide social network as well.

In the era of mediatized communities the factor that forms networks and communities most efficiently is the unanimous acceptance of the possibility to choose a community on the basis of mutual trust and openness, on shared interests and quick, efficient flow of information. Mediatized hybrid communities are social networks experienced as a process of trust among people using new and old forms of communication (Wellman and Gulia 1999; Castells 2000; Etzioni 2001; Poster 2001; Haythornthwaite and Kendall 2010). People using the internet and mobile phone transcend the boundaries of virtual and physical communicative situations, and with that, also the boundaries of the communities that stem from these, thus making their own community relations become transmitted by communicative processes as well. These community relations are not organized into sharply distinct virtual and physical spheres, but they form the identity of the members of the community by being part of a social network encompassing both virtual and physical connections. For the individual who wants to understand their own self through their own various community roles in interaction, this social network functioning as a community gives the framework of self-interpretation and understanding. They process the reactions displayed in the form of narratives connected to them and to their communicative roles in this virtual-physical, hybrid framework of interpretation, making these reactions an element of their own self-image. The evaluation and justification of their community roles and the narratives connected to them takes place in this very complex matrix of relations, their sense of belonging to a group becomes a source of power and energy of action in this network of relations.

It is, however, important to note that among the identity-shaping narratives of people using the new forms of communication technologies in order to integrate and convey narratives, the narratives of mass media considered as the institutional “story-teller” of society since the availability and spreading of television play an increasingly significant role. The appearance of new channels of mass communication, the ever-growing popularity of the internet, the new levels of communication offered by different social networks however result in an offensive of media narratives transmitted by pictures, audio materials and written texts in an unprecedented way in the everyday life and world view of users. The way of thinking and language use of the people using such new tools absolutely tune into and adapt to the requirements of the efficient integration and transmission of information and large amount of data. Changes in their mental life, conceptual apparatus and in the structure of their language can actually enable them to select pieces of information from the increased daily amount of information around them that they find most important, so as to communicate and integrate those forms of knowledge that are important to them. For this reason, the selection of the types of media in everyday cognitive

processes that transmit information in the form of narratives most adapted to their values and thinking, becomes more important than ever. That is, they will look for the types of media whose framework narratives can be harmonized with their own autobiographical narratives stemming from their early experience, and with the social meta-narratives, opinions, values determining their behavior. In the era of the new media characterized by the sudden surge in the amount of information to be processed and in the increased speed of information flow, this selective integration becomes more and more predominant in the practice of media communication. The attention of receivers in this enormous flow of information and stimuli connected to the new forms of media applied, gets very much fragmented, which lowers the time and proportion of active attention. People in this new era generally receive facts and data very quickly, in small doses, in an unconcentrated form, and without significant interest; and they are, at the same time, also very critical of these received pieces of information.

A new virtual social space has been created, strengthening cohesion of competing local communities, and in which, therefore, the influence of traditional social and political institutes declines. The new communication situations created by the use of electronic technologies foster greater emotional attachments, to the local community which we choose from among the competing communities deliberately without social and political restriction.

Thus in this new social space there is a fundamentally new possibilities to change the rules of social perception and the conceptualization of the relation between the local communities and traditional political institutes of state. Thanks to these changes, the networked individual is attached to the place and position appointed by his own social class less and less. Through his multi-channel communicative acts he can become acquainted with more and more communal forms, ways of life, traditions and moral values, in the light of which he can choose more deliberately from among the competing local communities. And this more deliberate choice becomes a part of the more and more complex and multi-layered identity of individuals.

By using electronic communication technologies, a networked individual becomes a part of a network of interactions between humans who uniformly accept and apply some rules for the communicative acts aiming at the effective exchange of information. In other words, the media-networked individuals become members of a virtual community that is determined both by the global and the local conditions for an effective method of information exchange. The way of thinking and the language use of the networked individual in digital culture totally adapts to the demands of efficient processing and transmission of large amounts of data and information. In their mental world, in their conceptual apparatus and language use the changes that take place can enable them to select, integrate and communicate the most important pieces of information from the enormous amount of data at a daily basis. The consequence of this process is the increased awareness in selecting the sources of information and types of media that convey information in a manner most in harmony with the senders' set of values, worldview and thinking. That is, they will look for the types of media whose framework narratives can be harmonized with their personal and community narratives, with their opinions and values.

#### **4. Conclusions**

With the argumentation and analysis above I intended to shed light on the mechanisms of the dual network of narrativity I hypothesize, how it penetrates the mediatized, everyday worldview

of the person building their communicative relationships and how narrative production and reception can become a pillar of human communication and cognition in the digital age. With that, I primarily aimed to prove that such investigations can fruitfully contribute to the preparation of philosophical models targeting the functioning and formation of narratives capitalizing on the shared cognitive structures of actions, emotions, goals and human motivational factors. They, furthermore, offer a framework of interpretation for the creation of a new self-concept, very much supported by philosophers of language and -the mind. Thus, the theory of narratives regarded as mental structures of self- and identity constructions, complemented with the above details, can greatly contribute to the resolution of a number of problems in the philosophy of language and -the mind. This is how philosophical models on narrativity can help us shed new light on the results of investigations in semantics, pragmatics and the philosophy of language targeting the relationship of consciousness, action and language. We can, therefore, attempt to give a synthesis of theories describing the processes of meaning construction, of conceptualization, of the functioning and the structure of the mind encapsuled in narratives, from an interdisciplinary approach. A synthesis that yields an unprecedentedly clear picture of the forces how narrativity-based communication shapes humans, communities, societies, and cultures.

## REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland (1977), *Image, Music, Text*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bruner, Jerome (1986), *Actual minds, possible worlds*, Cambridge. Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, Jerome (1990), *Acts of meaning*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Castells, Manuel (2000), *The Information Age Vol. I: Rise of the Network Society*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Damasio, Antonio (1994), *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, New York: Penguin Books.
- Damasio, Antonio (2010), *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing The Conscious Brain*, London: William Heinemann.
- Dennett, Daniel C. (1985), *Brainstorms*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Dennett, Daniel C. (1987), *The Intentional Stance*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Dennett, Daniel C. (1991), 'Real Patterns', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1, pp. 27–51.

- Dennett, Daniel C. (1992), 'The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity', in F. Kessel, P. Cole and D. Johnson (eds.), *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, Hillsdale: Erlbaum, pp. 103-115.
- Etzioni, Amitai (2001), *The Monochrome Society*, Princeton, NJ: University Press.
- Fillmore, Charles (1985), 'Frames and the Semantics of Understanding', *Quaderni di Semantica*. 6, pp. 222-253.
- Fisher, Walter R. (1995), 'Narration, knowledge, and the possibility of wisdom', in R. F. Goodman and W. R. Fisher (eds.), *Rethinking knowledge: Reflections across the disciplines*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 169-192.
- Fodor, Jerry (1975), *The Language of Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gallagher, Shaun (2006), 'The narrative alternative to theory of mind', in R. Menary (ed.), *Radical Enactivism: Intentionality, Phenomenology and Narrative*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 223-229.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. (2003), 'Self and Community in the New Floating Worlds', in K. Nyíri (ed.): *Mobile Democracy: Essays on Society, Self and Politics*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, pp. 103-114.
- Goffman, Erving (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Goldberg, Adele E. (1995), *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, Adele E. (2006), *Constructions at Work: The Nature of Generalizations in Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haythornthwaite, Caroline and Kendall, Lori (2010), 'Internet and Community', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 8, pp. 1083-1094.
- Hutto, Daniel (2007), 'The Narrative Practice Hypothesis: Origins and applications of folk psychology', *Narrative and Understanding Persons: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 82, pp. 43-68.
- Hutto, Daniel (2008), *Folk Psychological Narratives: The Sociocultural Basis of Understanding Reasons*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Hutto, Daniel (2009), 'Folk Psychology as Narrative Practice'. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. 6-8, pp. 9-39.
- Johnson, Mark (2007), *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson Mark (2014), *Morality for Humans: Ethical Understanding from the Perspective of Cognitive Science*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, George (2008a), *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics*, New York: Penguin Books.
- Lakoff, George (2008b), 'The neural theory of metaphor', in R. Gibbs (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17-38.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson (1999), *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York: Basic Books.
- Lakoff, George and Srini Narayanan (2010), 'Toward a Computational Model of Narrative', in *Computational Models of Narrative: Papers from the AAAI Fall Symposium*, pp. 21-28,  
<https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/FSS/FSS10/paper/view/2323>
- Langacker, Ronald (1987), *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, Ronald (2008), *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maffesoli, Michel (1996), *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Societies*, London: Sage.
- McAdams, Dan P. (2013), 'The psychological self as actor, agent, and author', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8, pp. 272–295.
- Menary, Richard (2008), 'Embodied Narratives', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. 15, pp. 63-84.
- Meyrowitz, Joshua (2005), 'The Rise of Glocality: New Senses of Place and Identity in the Global Village', in K. Nyíri (ed.), *Sense of Place: The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*. Vienna: Passagen Verlag, pp. 21-30.



- Poster, Mark (2001), *What's the Matter with the Internet?* Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Scalise Sugiyama, Michelle (1996), 'On the Origins of Narrative: Storyteller Bias as a Fitness-Enhancing Strategy', *Human Nature*, 7, pp. 403–25.
- Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson (1990), 'Rhetoric and Relevance', in D. Wellbery and J. Bender (eds.) *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 140–55.
- Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson (1995), *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Talmy, Leonard (1983), 'How Languages Structure Space', in H. Pick and L. Acredolo (eds.) *Spatial Orientation: Theory, Research and Application*, New York: Plenum Press, pp. 225-282.
- Talmy, Leonard (2000), *Toward a Cognitive Semantics*, London: MIT Press.
- Wellman, Barry and Gulia, Milena (1999), 'Net Surfers don't Ride Alone: Virtual Community as Community', in B. Wellman (ed.), *Networks in the Global Village*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 331-367.
- Ziemke, Tom, Jordan Zlatev and Roslyn M. Frank (eds.) (2007), *Body, Language and Mind, Embodiment*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.