

# CHORAL MACHINES On the Art of Storytelling Systems Design

Welcome to the Studia Generalia Lecture,  
5 April 2016, 12.15-14.00, with brown bag!  
F.lli Castiglioni Room (B9)

## program

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on"  
Shakespeare, W. The Tempest (c. 1610)

Storytelling – or the Art of Lying, as Twain and Wilde may have preferred it – is the most powerful tool to shape human mind and thus the world. Well-told stories raise interest by experiential point-of-view, contextualise events and imprint memory firmly for recollection. Told again and again, they become the cultural backbone on which our humanity, society, technology and nature are based on – myths from which our everyday rituals, enactments of the storytelling, stem from – producing yet new stories.

"Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"  
Dick, P. K., (1968)

Hence it's no wonder that storytelling and narrative disciplines have been in the heart of new technology development as well. Machines with the ability to tell stories – experience, contextualise and recollect – have been imagined for millennia, from the Golden Maidens of Iliad and Kalevala to the rise of digital computation in Alan Turing's work: "...if a machine is expected to be infallible, it cannot also be intelligent." (Lecture to the London Mathematical Society on 20 February 1947)

"Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life."  
Wilde, O. The Decay of Lying (1891)

The power of storytelling, fallibility of intelligence and our ways to imitate narratives on reality will be recurring themes, as I present my various artistic research teams' work on attempting to discover the full potential of storytelling in contemporary participatory digital media in 1992-2016. Via screenings of multiple works, I argue that the really new aspects of "new" digital media are the weight-point on participant-actor's choice, generative nature of chance systems and their unique abilities in representing the participating actors' multiple of points of view to formulate choral narratives, extending for the first time in human history potentially to global level. The only destined element remaining is our ability to dream.

"Lying is universal - we all do it. Therefore, the wise thing is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously; to lie with a good object, and not an evil one; to lie for others' advantage, and not our own; to lie healingly, charitably, humanely, not cruelly, hurtfully, maliciously; to lie gracefully and graciously, not awkwardly and clumsily; to lie firmly, frankly, squarely, with head erect, not haltingly, tortuously, with pusillanimous mien, as being ashamed of our high calling."  
Twain, M. [Clewens, S. L.] On the Decay of The Art of Lying (1880)



Mika 'Lumi' Tuomola is associate professor in Design at Politecnico di Milano. He researches and teaches generative/interactive storytelling and participatory drama in new media. As an internationally awarded writer, dramaturge and director, his artistic productions include the web drama "Daisy's Amazing Discoveries" (Coronet Interactive 1996), avatar and game world designs for "WorldsAway" (ICL-Fujitsu 2000), moving image installations "Myths for One" (Media Lab Helsinki 2002) and "Alan01" (Jaakko Pesonen & Crucible Studio 2008), the dark musical comedy series "Accidental Lovers" for television and mobile devices (Yle 2006-7) and tactile poetry app "Antikythera" (Salla Susiluoto & Taiste 2015). He's visiting artist and researcher at University of Cambridge, UK, and in the editorial board of Digital Creativity journal, published by Routledge, Oxford, UK.

"Artists such as Mika Tuomola have created avatars which embody this sense of a mythical being or digital deity. Tuomola has consulted on and developed numerous visually imaginative and dramatic avatar worlds, drawing on ideas from dream, myth, carnival and commedia dell'arte." (Dixon, S. (2007): Digital Performance - A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation. MIT Press. Cambridge, US.)

