

## Performing packets.stories and the revealing role of the reader

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### Beginning: introduction

The aim of this text is to recall the participatory and performative means employed by this author to explore aspects of Umberto Eco's *'Role of the Reader'*, in relation to mobile 'packet' media gathered in weblog / collaborative online platforms.

A presentation of the same title was originally enacted as a co-performance activity with 6 audience members, on 12th May 2005, for assessment by Massimo Berruti, at the Department of Semiotics, University of Helsinki. To be more specific in contextual background, it was inspired by / in response to *'The Role of the Reader in Umberto Eco's Textual Semiotics'* presentation by Massimo Berruti, as part of his *'Approaches to Narratology'* lecture series, Institute of Art Research, University of Helsinki, 31st April 2005. The academic references cited in this text are taken from Berruti's lecture essay: Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, 1979; Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of reading: A theory of Aesthetic Response*, 1979.

Acknowledging the paradox of not having done so, I really should spend time to read more of these texts above cited. Considering the nature of the subject, and the enacted performative response, the following statement may offset the academic alarm bells: it will always be an interpretive process of understanding between the writer and the reader, no matter whether the source is original or second hand. What matters more in my opinion is the imaginative space which is made that allows for understanding to happen, and accepting the different understandings that are revealed for each person are all true.

Anyhow, with this disclaimer aside, let's return to matter of the presentation. There is some preparation work to be done in advance, as will now be elaborated.

The co-performance relied on printed reference material from the *'Mapping and Sewing Together Mythologies'* (a.k.a. *Mapmyths*) Project [2], text in which I was the author, and images in which I was co-producer. The material referred to is a fantastical STORY, based on lived experience: The meeting of a bear in a hotel-bar in Lapland and a journey to a wilderness church, with ambiguous references to (un/desired) seduction, male drinking talk, a wedding, cultural tourism and Northern European mythology.

This content has been selected and contributed to the 'Aware' platform [3], translating the original linear text and image arrangement / representation into a series of discrete 'packets' with contextual keywords ascribed [4][5][6], which are to be printed out [7] and sequentially revealed, with the following preparatory instruction:

FABULA section #1 / [4] - Prepare each by covering image, keywords, sender, time contexts (with 'post-it-notes' to reveal) leaving only packet id & description text.

FABULA section #2 / [5] - Prepare each by covering descriptive text, keywords, sender, time contexts (with 'post-it-notes' to reveal) leaving only packet id & image.

FABULA section #3 / [6] - Prepare by covering image, keywords, sender, time contexts (with 'post-it-notes' to reveal) leaving only packet id & description text.

On the original occasion, these piles of paper were laid out at one end of a long table, and following introductions which positioned myself and my approach, the audience-members for the presentation were invited out of their chairs, to gather in front of the table.

Much of the aim of the presentation is to ask questions, and invite interpretations of the STORY that is revealed gradually in front of the audience-members / readers / listeners.

The text which follows in the next section are the notes for presentation. That which is displayed in CAPITALS are statements or questions to be read with direct emphasis to those present. These capitalised words should not be interpreted as 'shouting' or forceful, but instead, when read aloud: calmly and slowly, but looking directly into the eyes of the listeners.

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[NB/ URL's below should be pasted as one line in browser address window]

[1] <http://mapmyths.rirc.lv>

[2] <http://aware.uiah.fi/packet/index.php?id=mapmyths+Inari+chapter>

[3] FABULA section #1 - <http://aware.uiah.fi/packet/?pkt=10973.10974.10975.10976.10977>

[4] FABULA section #2 - <http://aware.uiah.fi/packet/?pkt=11001.11002.10991.10992.10993.10994.10995.10996.10997.10998.10999.11000>

[5] FABULA section #3 - <http://aware.uiah.fi/packet/?pkt=10978.10979.10980.10981.10982.10983.10984.10985.10986.10987>

[6] Reference material for print - [http://mlab.uiah.fi/~apaterso/texts/apaterson\\_performingpackets\\_reference\\_2005.pdf](http://mlab.uiah.fi/~apaterso/texts/apaterson_performingpackets_reference_2005.pdf) (2.1 MB)

## **So I will start as an introduction #1**

My creative practice as

- \* initiator, participant, author, producer

According to / within different collaborative and interdisciplinary projects

Media / socially-engaged / dialogical arts

- \* specialising in mobile & collaborative interfaces / interactions

'Artwork'

- \* as conversation, devised situation / workshop / event

## **So I will start as an introduction #2**

Artistic research

- \* Communicating practices informed by theory
- \* Knowledge generated from doing: processual and conversational
- \* Dialogical with multiple roles of initiators, participants, audience, tellers and listeners
- \* Mobile participatory systems, media, socially-engaged and STORYtelling

Practices

- \* Mixed media + contextual keywords
- \* Shared (personal) experiences
- \* Contrasting tools of gathering
  - \* Immediacy with mobile network devices
  - \* Immediate or reflective representation depending on the platform (weblog or wiki)

Media form - 'packets'

- \* Elements (media, text, including contextual information) which depending upon the platform, and immediacy of contribution/gathering can be the
  - \* FABULA (chronological order of the events constituting the narrative)
  - \* Plot or STORY (order in which they appear in the narrative)

Aesthetic of this 'packet' medium

- \* Always gaps in contribution
- \* Archival process
- \* Narrative sequence can mean translation of lived experience into keyframes
- \* Representational orders (temporal, thematic)

### **So I will start as an introduction #3**

The title: "Performing packets.stories and the revealing role of the reader"

Refers to the combination of

- \* My approaches
- \* The media form (packets)
- \* Cooperative interpretation – reader-response aesthetics

According to Wolfgang Iser

- \* Understanding the dynamic relations between text and reader
- \* Meaning of text not as object which needs decoding and reconstruction by detached subject,
- \* But that the “meaning of the text is the result of an interaction process between textual signals and comprehension acts on the readers part”

Dynamics of reading..

- \* Successive non/linear figuration of signs, words, media, elements, packets.. bits of information, even if meant to be understood as simultaneous in the STORY.
- \* Consider the
  - \* 'Primacy effect' (early stages can have a crucial effect on how whole is perceived, and such meanings and attitudes are preserved for as long as possible)
  - \* 'Recency effect' (encourages the reader to assimilate all previous information to the item presented last)

Hence reading is “a continuous process of

- \* Forming hypotheses
- \* Re-enforcing hypotheses
- \* Developing them
- \* Modifying them
- \* And sometimes replacing them by others
- \* Or dropping them altogether” (Berruti)

### **And lets talk about your role as model readers**

According to Umberto Eco

- \* The utterer / author devises a strategy of which the prevision of the readers' moves is part

YOU ARE THE MODEL READERS

One who is able to cooperate to the textual actualisation/interpretation as the author has devised it..

According to Simon Lesser

- \* There is a notion of “sovradetermination”

JUST SO THAT YOU KNOW; A NARRATIVE TEXT WILL MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO EACH OF YOU; AND WILL PRODUCE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SIGNIFICATION, BASED ON YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCES AND *ENCYCLOPAEDIA* (Eco)

There are the instruments the author uses:

Linguistic choices

SO FIRSTLY, WHO CAN READ IT?  
(text is only in english)

Encyclopaedia choices

AND WHAT MIGHT YOU INFER; AND DOES THIS CHANGE AS YOU PROGRESS?

WHAT DO THE KEYWORDS AND CONTENTS SUGGEST?

Narrative devices/Discursive structures

HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND THIS STORY?

WHAT GENRE MIGHT YOU RECOGNISE; AND DOES THIS CHANGE AS YOU PROGRESS?

“There is a story i would like to share”  
“And so it goes”

HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION IN WHICH THE STORY ENFOLDS? i.e. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ENUNCIATION

HOW DOES THIS STORY RELATE TO WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW OR HAVE EXPERIENCED BEFORE? (referential indices)

However this recognition maybe made ‘in brackets’, belief being suspended

According to Umberto Eco

\* "Non-committing references to the world".

ARE THESE COMMON OR UNCOMMON FRAMES OF REFERENCE FOR YOU?

Maybe at the end you might ask..

IS THIS A NATURAL NARRATIVE? (where the events they relate are presented as actually occurred)

IS THIS AN ARTIFICIAL NARRATIVE? (where the events relate to “possible worlds”)

## **Introducing your presence here and the revealing roles of the reader**

AS YOU ARE CURRENTLY PRESENT, I AM GOING TO NOW ENLIST YOUR COLLECTIVE COOPERATION IN ACTUALISING THE TEXT

WHAT IS PRESENTED TO YOU BY THE AUTHOR IS INCOMPLETE

According to Wolfgang Iser

- \* "No tale can be told in its entirety. It is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism"

GAPS HAVE ALSO BEEN INSERTED ON PURPOSE, BUT SOME OF THESE WILL BE UNDONE, FILLED IN, REVEALED FROM BEHIND A MASK

There are Information / Hermeneutic gaps

- \* The act of reading might reveal / involve enigmas and clues, forming hypotheses as you read and the tale is revealed

There are Temporary gaps

- \* Resulting from a discrepancy between FABULA (what was chronological as it happened / experienced / was documented) and plot / STORY (how it is represented)

These are Temporary gaps

- \* That exist only in the remoulding of the elements of the FABULA into what is called the STORY)

There are Permanent gaps

- \* In both FABULA and STORY where the information is never given

## **Revealing the packets**

[Go through the packets one by one, prompt choice, and the reveal details of packets by removing the 'post-it-notes']

What is on the table..

A STORY WHICH WILL BE GRADUALLY REVEALED WITH THE READERS

Through words and sentences..

AND WHAT DOES THAT REVEAL? reading text, one packet after the other

Through keywords / context words

AND WHAT DOES THAT REVEAL?

Through images

AND WHAT DOES THAT REVEAL?

Through inferal connections that may be made with other packets

AND WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL?

ACTUALISATION IS A PROCESS “in becoming”

**Predictions and probabilities while in the process (keep returning to these questions)**

AS MODEL READERS.. ARE YOU FINDING CONSISTANCY ACCORDING TO YOUR UN/COMMON FRAME OF REFERENCE?

AS MODEL READERS.. DO YOU THINK OF SEVERAL POTENTIALITIES / POSSIBLE WORLDS? that now may happen a, b, or c?

AS MODEL READERS.. ARE YOU VALIDATING POSSIBLE WORLDS OR INVENTING DELIBERATELY IMPOSSIBLE ONES?

AS MODEL READERS.. DO YOU THINK THIS IS EASY OR COMPLICATED TO MAKE PREDICTIONS?

In order for the model reader to make any predictions that have the chance to satisfy expectations and the course of the STORY, s/he continually ‘escapes’ to make reference to their lived experience / encyclopaedia, to elaborate inferences derived and inspired from elsewhere (common or intertextual frames of reference)

**Interpretations after revealing packets**

Discursive Structures

HOW DOES THIS REVEALING GENERATE THE INTERPRETATIONS WHICH THE AUTHOR IMPLIED FOR THE MODEL READERS?

The topic fixes and delimits the boundaries of the text, and the reader is orientated by what is revealed

A mix of

- \* Explicit signals which mostly reduces and stems the interpretive potential, orienting the direction of the actualisations
- \* Implicit signals which have to be detected.. sometimes the text may establish it by reiterations of keywords, or those located in strategic positions.

There are maybe a hierarchy of topics

- \* Macro (overall topic of whole)
- \* Narrative (topic of general grouping)

- \* Discursive (topic of elemental groupings)
- \* Phrasal (topic of any sentence)

DO YOU FEEL THAT THE COHERENCE OF THE TEXT IS A COOPERATIVE SHIFT WITH THE AUTHOR LEADING YOU TO INDIVIDUAL SIMILARITIES (isotopies) IN THE MEANING-MAKING PROCESS?

### Narrative Structures

After the discursive level of interpretation has been actualised, the reader can synthesize portions of the text in 'micro-propositions', i.e. the FABULA, the sequence of narration, logic of actions, events ordered in temporal succession

HERE THE FABULA / PLOT IS LAYED OUT ON THE TABLE

(And is understood because of the 'micro-propositions' expressed on the level of the Discursive structures.)

THE PLOT IS DEFINED AS THE WAY THE FABULA IS

For examples

- \* Comprehending temporal shifts back and forwards (the inserted Karhunpesäki section.. is it going backwards or forwards?)
- \* Digressions (sign notice of languages, girl & boy kissing)
- \* Descriptions (in the conversation)
- \* Extra-narrative insertions (the image of same place in October, reflections)

At this level different FABULA's take place, and on their evolving development, the reader decides what events, actions, characters are more relevant than others

### **Towards the end of the process**

LETS SAY IT IS NOT SURE IF THIS IS A OPEN OR CLOSED FABULA.. WHAT IS MORE INTERESTING IS: ACTUALLY HOW INTENSE WAS YOUR COOPERATION?

### Actantial / Ideological Structures

AND SO THE STORY GOES, WHO HAS ACTUALLY BEEN DOING THE TELLING?

I NOW BELIEVE WE HAVE WORKED THROUGH THE POSSIBILITIES TOGETHER.

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR TAKING PART AND CO-OPERATING.



## End: reflection

The co-performed presentation / event, between myself and the 'model readers' / audience lasted in total for 1 hour. Speaking for myself, it was an experimental occasion at making a performative and dialogical essay / presentation. This text is an attempt to wrap it up, so-to-speak, with some sort of 'beginning' and 'end', as context and reflection, offering the resources for others to perform. However, remember this is just a STORY.

Sadly there was no space for conversation among ourselves following the presentation, due to lack of time, and the need to go elsewhere. This aspect of the experience was / is sorely missed. It is the discrepancy between what is essentially the FABULA - chronological as it happened during that presentation on the 12th May 2005 - and the plot or STORY about it that I have written in this text. It is currently a temporary gap (but hopefully not a permanent gap) in how a STORY is represented to the reader. You.

It was my aim to present something critically different from all the other lectures / presentations in the *Approaches to Narratology* series - which were mostly 2 hour sessions, read and listened with reference to a pre-written text on paper. I was keen to hear some feedback from those who were present as audience-members, listeners, and as I suggested in the beginning, as co-performers: those who were co-operators in actualising the text about the meeting of a bear in a hotel bar in Lapland.

To summarise, the activity and questions (that are capitalised the above sections) *did* prompt a response *during* the performative presentation, interpreting individually and together the text that was revealed, as I slid 'packet' along next to 'packet'.

It was my aim that the meaning-making, and the understanding of the themes and concepts I was presenting, could be done in dialogue. And I believe the presentation and activity was, on the whole, successful in creating dialogue. I can say this because there were different responses within the group, voiced and heard. However, as noted above, the potential and possible interpretations of a STORY changes accordingly, as more and more is revealed.

And in the end, it may be said that the only understandings are those which are held onto 'in the mind' afterwards. In other words, individual and / or shared meanings, according to the primary or recency effect. On this last point, and considering it was not possible to discuss afterwards, to listen to what was meaningful for the others who took part. What I remember, are the things that were meaningful to me:

- \* That it was a social experience
- \* That it was actually good fun, and involved laughs
- \* That at the end of the day, the STORY was still a bit of a mystery
- \* That who knows what is true and what is not?