



Seminar

MERJA POLVINEN

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*Enacting the Artifice:
A Cognitive Approach to Literary Self-Reflection*

Tuesday, 12 November, 2019, 2:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY

ABOUT MERJA POLVINEN

Merja Polvinen studied English at the University of Helsinki and completed her PhD in 2009. Her post-doc years took her to Scotland, where she collaborated with the AHRC-funded project *Poetry Beyond Text: Vision, Text & Cognition*, and to the USA, where she was a visiting scholar at *Project Narrative* at the Ohio State University. Back in Finland, she was a Core Fellow of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies in 2013–2016, and she currently works as Senior Lecturer at the Department of Languages, University of Helsinki. She also holds the position of docent (adjunct professor) in Comparative Literature.

Polvinen works on interdisciplinary approaches to literature. Her PhD dissertation focused on literature and the natural sciences (*Reading the Texture of Reality: Chaos Theory, Literature and the Humanist Perspective*, 2008), and her current work combines literary studies with the cognitive sciences (particularly the 4E approaches) to study the role of fictional narratives in human lives.

For 2018–2022 Polvinen is a PI in the consortium *Instrumental Narratives: The Limits of Storytelling and New Story-Critical Narrative Theory* (iNARR), funded by the Academy of Finland, where scholars from three universities examine the ways in which stories are – and are not – helpful in understanding complex phenomena in contemporary societies.

At SCAS Polvinen will examine artifice as a central quality in the experience of fiction – one that makes the cognitive environment of fictions fundamentally different from our everyday sensory reality. Recent articles on this topic have appeared in the volumes *Cognitive Literary Science* (OUP, 2017), *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative Theories* (Edinburgh UP, 2018) and *Narrative and Complex Systems* (Springer, 2018).

ABSTRACT

This talk will present an outline of my work on self-reflective narratives as cognitive artefacts. I combine literary theory with the cognitive sciences in order to study the role of fictional narratives in human lives, and I argue that such an interdisciplinary dialogue about literature – ongoing now for two decades – needs a sharper discussion about the role of artifice and self-reflection. I discuss literary experience using a combination of narratology and second-generation cognitive science (4E approaches), and suggest that artifice is a central quality in the experience of fiction, and one that makes the cognitive environment of fictional narratives fundamentally different from our everyday sensory reality. More specifically, I will present this argument in relation to the experience of time in narrative, and discuss the case of John Barth's short story "On With the Story" (1995).