

Call for Panel Participants:

The Return of Myths in the 21st Century: How Cultural Narratives Shape Reality

*Narrative Matters 2025: Disparate Narrative Worlds: Crisis, Conflict, and the Possibility of Hope (Paris, May 13-16, 2025)*

The contemporary world is marred by division. Everywhere, antagonistic factions are locked in apparently irreconcilable opposition, incapable of finding common ground. Beneath all ideological differences lies an *epistemic fragmentation of society*: an increasing number of people do not just argue their opinion or dispute specific facts and their interpretation. Combining a preference for emotional appeal over rational argument with a profound mistrust towards the institutions traditionally tasked to generate knowledge, this *post-truth* attitude calls into question the principle of a universal epistemic foundation of discourse: the implicit assumption that knowledge is different from belief, and truthfulness is a viable standard.

In such a post-truth environment, knowledge is often legitimized not by verifiable fact and rational argument, but rather by *cultural narratives*: nontextual narrative structures that establish meaningful correlations between events, constitute collective identities, and provide criteria for assessing information. In this context, truth depends on a group's foundational narrative. To outsiders, this approach seems not merely wrong or misinformed, but fundamentally irrational.

Like cultural narratives, traditional *myths* can be conceptualized as nontextual narrative structures. For millennia, they have constituted collective identities, shaped reality, and legitimized knowledge without confirming to the rules of rational discourse.

In the 21st century, mythical thinking permeates all aspects of life in the form of cultural narratives. The proposed panel aims to conceptualize cultural narratives as contemporary manifestations of traditional myths, exploring the consequences of this equation, and its implications for contemporary political and social discourses. Possible topics of inquiry may include, but are not limited to:

- Do cultural narratives function like/as myths? What are structural similarities and differences?
- How can the vast scholarship on myths be applied to the analysis of cultural narratives?
- Can existing theories of myth be applied to contemporary social and political phenomena? (Ernst Cassirer, Claude Levi-Strauss, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Hans Blumenberg ...)
- How do myths/cultural narratives establish individual and collective identities? (Paul Ricœur)
- How are myths/cultural narratives used to legitimate knowledge? (Jean-François Lyotard)

- What are the consequences of concepts like “truth” and “meaning” being based on mythical rather than on rational thinking?
- How are myths/cultural narratives used to establish political power? What is the relation between myths/cultural narratives and populism?
- Can categories like “race” or “gender” be (re-)conceptualized as mythical/narrative constructs?
- Can the notion and analysis of mythical thinking help to understand forms of behavior otherwise dismissed as “irrational”?
- Does the category of myth offer a possibility to reconcile opposing worldviews considered incompatible by rational standards?

Contributions for a **20-minute** presentation at the conference *Narrative Matters 2025* (Paris, May 13-16, 2025; see <https://bit.ly/3XA3tJN>) are invited from narratology, literary studies, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and any related discipline. Please send your abstract of about **250-300 words** together with a short biographical note (max. 100 words) as well as any questions to Christian Baier ([cbaier@snu.ac.kr](mailto:cbaier@snu.ac.kr)). Submission deadline is **September 30th, 2024**.