

## Social Media Platforms as Arenas for the Construction and Negotiation of the Past

Abstract:

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Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media platforms are increasingly becoming spaces where we create and negotiate our perceptions of heritage and the past, particularly those aspects considered difficult: contested, traumatic, or silenced. A review of the growing scholarly literature on difficult heritage in social network sites—spanning fields such as communication and social media studies, memory studies, museum and heritage studies, and tourism—raises key questions: How can social media interactions with heritage and the past provide a key to understanding the construction of contemporary identities and attitudes? What communicative mechanisms allow banal nationalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, pseudo-history, and misinformation to thrive on these platforms? How do capital “I” identities (national, political) manifested in social media interactions intersect with small “i” identities, preferences, and attitudes toward social and cultural issues? Finally, what might be an effective theoretical and methodological approach for representing and analyzing social media conversations, connecting how the past is remembered with contemporary attitudes and identities?

This talk engages with these questions, drawing on insights from the Connective Digital Memory in the Borderlands project. This project combines cultural-historical activity theory, Lotman’s cultural semiotics, and Gell’s theory of the art nexus with digital humanities methods to investigate several case studies of social media interactions related to Lithuanian history and heritage. The talk will focus on two such cases: The first is the social media controversy surrounding the removal of Petras Cvirka’s Soviet monument in Vilnius, which illustrates how semiotic agency circulates between human and non-human actors online to negotiate contested material memories of the difficult past. The second case examines the social media post-memory of everyday life, music subcultures, and consumer goods in 1990s Lithuania, highlighting how nostalgia and the affiliative power of mundane objects shape online representations and contemporary identities.

By examining these cases, the talk aims to underscore the complex and varied role social media platforms play in mediating contemporary identities and attitudes through heritage, while also addressing the challenges of researching their emergence as arenas that shape our understandings of the past.

**Costis Dallas** is Professor and Chair of the Department of Digital Cultures and Communication at the Faculty of Communication, Vilnius University. His research focuses on the digital curation of thing cultures "in the wild", on the role of pervasive digital infrastructures in archaeological and humanities research, and on heritage, memory and identity practices on social media. He published over 50 peer-reviewed articles in refereed journals and conference proceedings and was a co-editor of *Cultural Heritage Infrastructures in Digital Humanities* (Routledge: 2017). His latest, co-authored peer-reviewed publications include "The Message Is the Agent: Nexus and Semiosphere in Social Media Communication", "Difficult Heritage on Social Network Sites: An Integrative Review", "An Ontology of Semiotic Activity and Epistemic Figuration of Heritage, Memory and Identity Practices on Social Network Sites", and "Battle or Ballet? Metaphors Archaeological Facebook Administrators Live By". He holds a BA in History from the University of Ioannina, Greece, as well as MPhil and DPhil degrees in Classical Archaeology from the University of Oxford. He served as the principal investigator of the Connective Digital Memory in the Borderlands project.