SEEING NARRATIVE
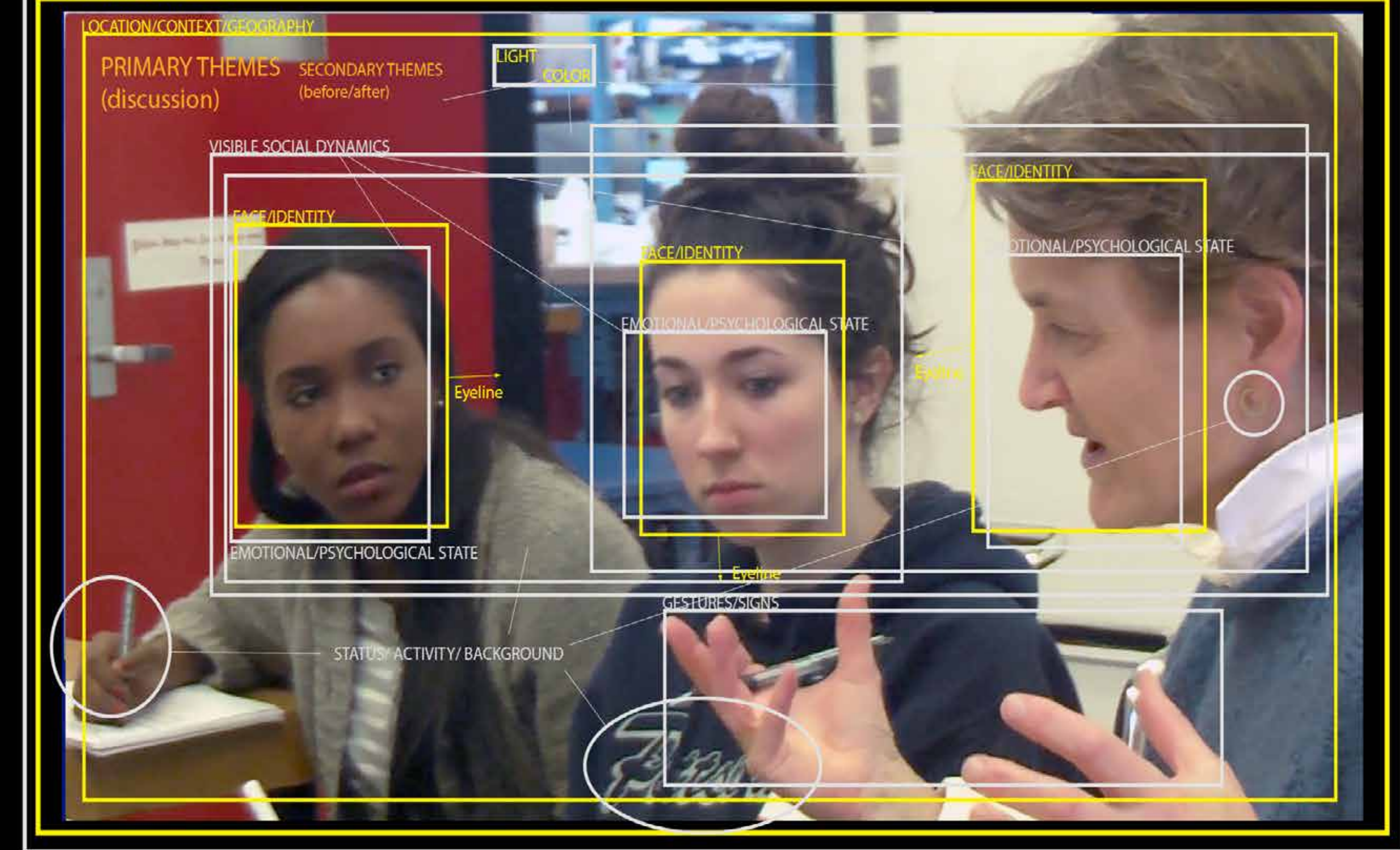
A RESEARCH AND VISUALIZATION INITIATIVE FOR
FILMMAKERS AND ARTISTS TO ENGAGE IN COMPLEX
PROBLEMATIC SYSTEMS

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Seeing Narrative leverages the relatively untapped research capabilities of artists and filmmakers to allow for new insights into large-scale complex systems, based on human motivation and systemic causality, using innovative media production methods and unique digital tools.

Seeing Narrative is comprised of a methodology and digital media toolset for the conduct and visualization of qualitative research into complex systems, using unique filmmaking, design, systems, and visual literacies. It adopts contemporary media metadata applications and visualization tools and combines them with new thinking on narrative literacy - a form of systems-thinking which uses perceived causality and other film- and visual-analyses to build narrative pathways through otherwise irrational linkages in a system or environment.

YELLOW: Technical/ Visual metadata
ORANGE: Thematic/ Content info
GRAY: Interpretable signs

FILMMAKER-SUBJECT DYNAMIC
SHOT RHYTHM/ PACE (~BPM)
LOCATION/CONTEXT/GEOGRAPHY

PRIMARY THEMES (discussion)   SECONDARY THEMES (before/after)

LIGHT
COLOR

VISIBLE SOCIAL DYNAMICS

FACE/IDENTITY
FACE/IDENTITY
FACE/IDENTITY
FACE/IDENTITY
EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE
EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE
EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE

Eyeline
Eyeline
Eyeline

GESTURES/SIGNS

STATUS/ ACTIVITY/ BACKGROUND

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT   Inflection/Language/Emphasis/Subtext

Preceding shot   Subsequent shot

Governmental and nongovernmental agencies, philanthropic and humanitarian organizations, and academic institutions seeking to penetrate and comprehend complex problems that don't yield to quantitative or Big-Data approaches can use the Seeing Narrative platform to see a large-scale complex system from a human point of view, and visualize these systems for their analysts and collaborators. Conversely, artists seeking to study a complex system in order to gain applicable aesthetic insights can make use of the platform, either for self-directed research or to carve out an essential and functional niche in a context where they otherwise might not be welcomed, because the utility of an artist-researcher is not acknowledged.

'Narrative Literacy' is the key attribute the filmmaker brings into the sphere of humanistic research. Narrativity is a branch of systems-thinking that addresses the often irrational linkage between diverse elements in a system by its human participants - the study of why a story 'works'; and narrative literacy is the capacity to decode those linkages through methodological inquiry, and also encode new narratives by resequencing, intervening, and/or revisualizing and providing a feedback mechanism for that system. By studying a complex system through the lens of narrative, we can gain valuable new insights into the often-irrational human motivations that drive those systems; and by visualizing those insights, provide a framework for intervening in and altering those systems.
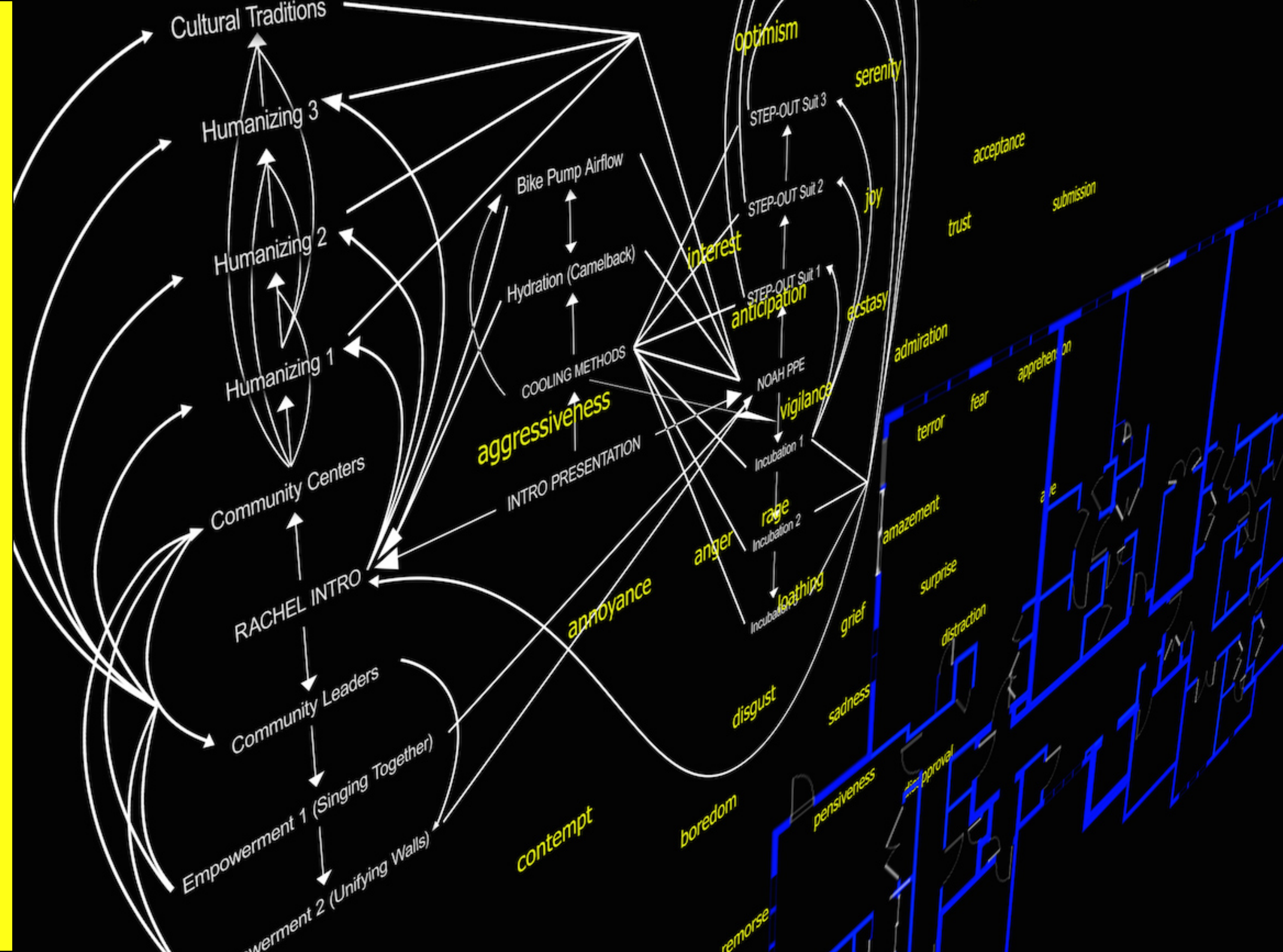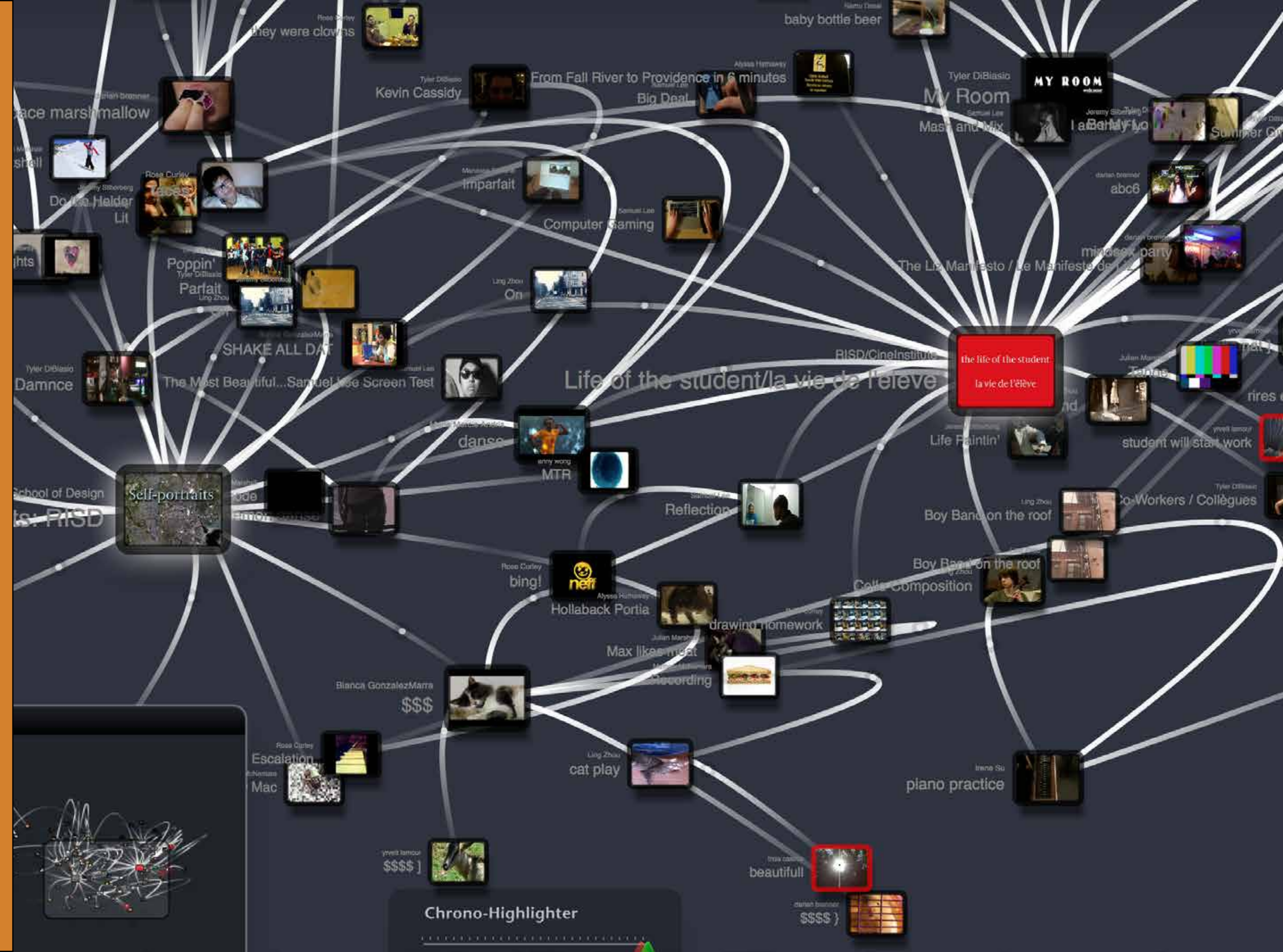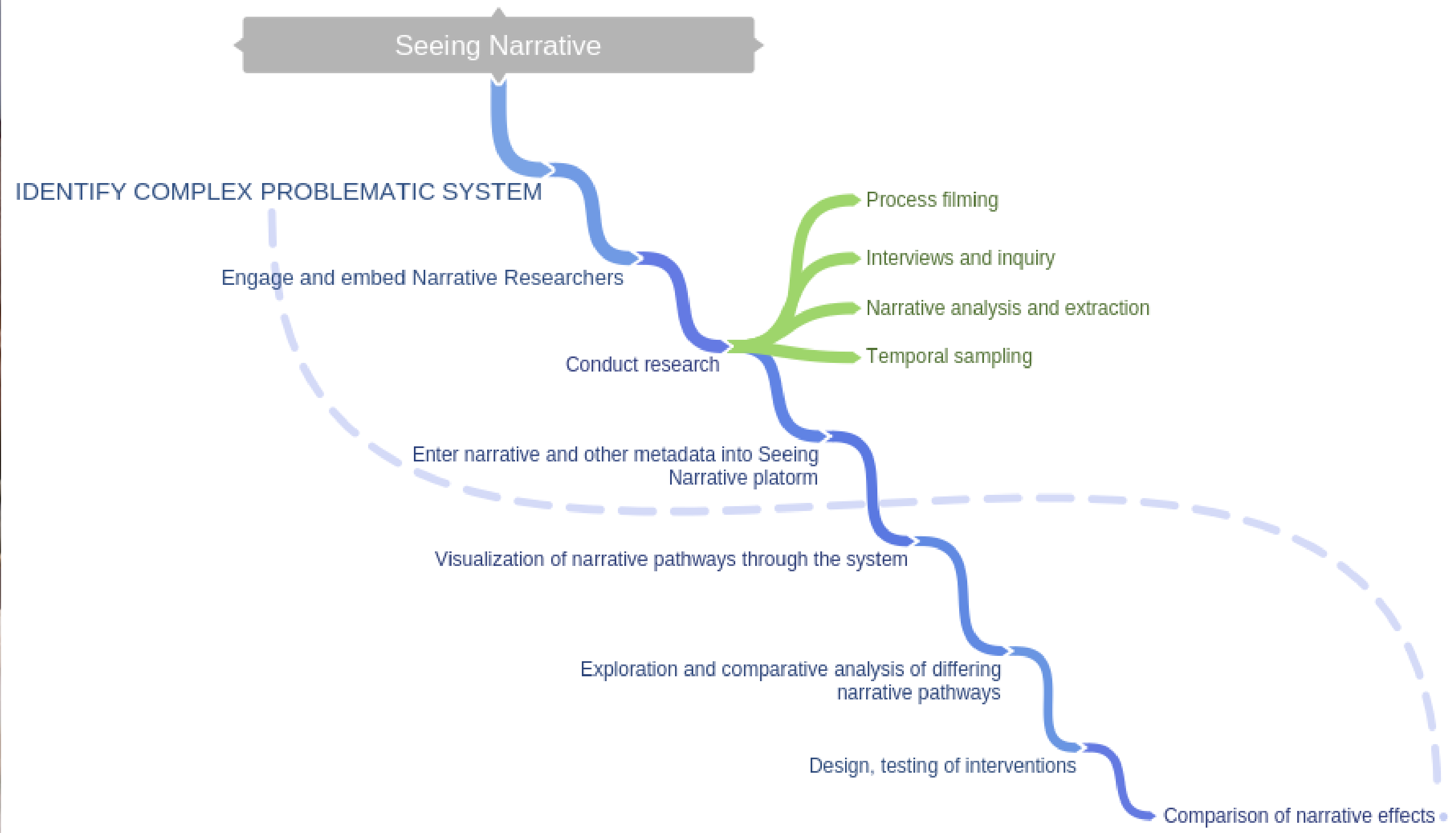
Research into complex problems, particularly humanitarian, social, and developmental systems, is today driven by quantitative data analysis - Big Data - and solutions to human problems are largely derived from STEM-based approaches. To be sure these are powerful approaches to perceiving statistical and patterned systems at vast scales; however human motivation and irrational behavior is often at the heart of such a problem set, and Big Data rarely if ever is able to look at the effects of individual human motivations. STEM-based approaches need to include humanistic points of view, such as that of the artist, turning STEM teams into STEAM teams. The Seeing Narrative platform is a tool for artists to take this essential place in contemporary global problem solving.

Seeing Narrative sees several branches of systems-thinking, academic research into narrative, media software development, and experiments in real-world applied narrative research and production come together into a singular initiative to transform how artists and filmmakers can engage in the study of and intervention into complex problematic systems.

RISD.tv • Korsakow Institute • USAID / U.S. Global Development Lab • RISD Dept of Film, Animation, and Video Narrative literacy study • RISD Global / STEM to STEAM • RISD Research MASSDesign Group • CDC

Seeing Narrative

IDENTIFY COMPLEX PROBLEMATIC SYSTEM

Engage and embed Narrative Researchers

Conduct research

- Process filming
- Interviews and inquiry
- Narrative analysis and extraction
- Temporal sampling

Enter narrative and other metadata into Seeing Narrative platorm

Visualization of narrative pathways through the system

Exploration and comparative analysis of differing narrative pathways

Design, testing of interventions

Comparison of narrative effects

With a fully developed digital platform and a tested and articulated set of methodologies, Seeing Narrative can become a standard part of any organizations' research and analysis apparatus. Because it melds the activities of commissioned artists and/or hired media producers with study of context and content, agencies and organizations can doubly leverage their media resources and get essential, rigorous, and informative new knowledge while also generating usable communications material.

    With an open-source toolset, Seeing Narrative can be accessible to any organization and its resident artists to study the systems needing it; as well as holding a place in academic institutions for further study and development.

    RISD itself is exploring the creation of a dedicated center and fellowship program for the study and implementation of narrative-based research and the engagement of artists in real-world, large-scale, and complex problem-solving.

To get here the project is seeking

• supporting institutional partnerships

•timeframe for software development

•funding partnerships

•prototype projects