

Narrative and the Self

2017-2018 Fall Term

Instructor: Luca Pocci

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This course focuses on the role of narrative in the construction of identity. Is identity dependent upon our capacity to grasp our life in/as a narrative? Is the self a narrative construct, i.e. do we really know who we are only on condition that we are able to put together and tell (both to ourselves and others) a story of our life, a good life-story? What kind of act is the act of writing the self and what are the paradoxes of the genre to which writing the self is conventionally associated, the porous genre of autobiography? We will address these and other questions through the lenses of philosophy and literature. We will explore the narrative theories of identity proposed by Jerome Bruner, Judith Butler, Paul J. Eakin, Christopher Lasch, Philippe Lejeune, Paul Ricoeur, Charles Taylor. At the same time we will examine literature's influence in shaping and developing such theories. The texts that will be discussed include Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, Luigi Pirandello's *The Late Mattia Pascal*, Jean Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*. Special attention will be given to the current debate on narrative and trauma, and, in particular, to the healing or therapeutical function that such theorists as Dominick LaCapra and Roger Luckhurst attribute to the narration of deeply traumatic events.

Course requirements

Oral presentation	30%
Class participation	20%
Final essay	50%

Oral presentation: each student will be allotted approximately 30 minutes for her/his presentation to the class. The topic will be determined in consultation with the instructor.

Class participation: you are expected to do all the readings scheduled for each class and to participate actively in class discussions. You will have to complete one book or article review.

Final essay: 20 pages (MLA style). The topic will be determined in consultation with the instructor.

Required Texts

- Pirandello, Luigi. *The Late Mattia Pascal* (trans. W. Weaver. New York Review of Books: 2004)
- Saint Augustine. *Confessions* (trans. R. S. Pine –Coffin. Penguin: 1961)
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Nausea* (trans. L. Alexander. New Directions: 2007)
- Sebald, W. G. *Austerlitz* (trans. A. Bell. Random House: 2001)
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another* (trans. K. Blamey. U. of Chicago Press: 1992)
- Bruner, Jerome. "Life as Narrative." *Social Research* 71, 3 (Fall 2004): 691-710
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge: 1990, ISBN 978-0-415-38955-6)
- Eakin, Paul J. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Cornell U. Press: 1999
- Hall, Donald E. *Subjectivity*. Rutledge: 2004
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. Cornell U. Press: 1998
- Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. U. of Minnesota Press: 1989
- Lasch, Christopher. *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*. W. W. Norton: 1984
- Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. Routledge: 2008
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard U. Press: 1989.

Course Schedule (Tentative)

Week 1	Course introduction
Week 2	Theories of the Self
	C. Latch. <i>The Minimal Self</i> . "Introduction: Consumption, Narcissism and Mass Culture," 23-59.
	C. Taylor. <i>Sources of the Self</i> . Chapter 1 ("Inescapable Frameworks," 3-24); Chapter 2 ("The Self in Moral Space," 25-52).
Week 3	Theories of the Self

P. Ricoeur. *Oneself as Another*. "The Question of Selfhood," 1-25; "Person and Identifying Reference," 27-39; "Utterance and the Speaking Subject," 40-55; "From Action to the Agent," 88-112.

Week 4 **Theories of the Self**

P. Ricoeur. *Oneself as Another*. "Personal Identity and Narrative Identity," 113-139; "The Self and Narrative Identity," 140-168; "The Self and the Ethical Aim," 169-202.

Week 5 **Theories of the Self**

J. Bruner. "Life as Narrative;" (691-710)

Narrating the Self

St. Augustine. *Confessions*.

Week 6 **Theories of the Self**

P. J. Eakin. *How Our Lives Become Stories*. Chapter 2 ("Relational Selves, Relational Lives: Autobiography and the Myth of Autonomy," 43-98).

Narrating the Self

St. Augustine. *Confessions*; J. P. Sartre. *Nausea*.

Week 7 **Theories of the Self**

P. J. Eakin. *How Our Lives Become Stories*. Chapter 3 ("Storied Selves: Identity through Self-Narration," 99-141).

Narrating the Self

L. Pirandello. *The Late Mattia Pascal*.

Week 8 **Narrating the Self**

J. P. Sartre. *Nausea*

Theories of the Self

Hall, Donald E. *Subjectivity* (selection of chapters)

Week 9 **Theories of the Self**

R. Luckhurst. *The Trauma Question*. Part 2 (“Introduction: Trauma and Narrative Knowledge,” 79-86; “Trauma in Narrative Fiction,” 87-116).

Narrating the Self

W. G. Sebald. *Austerlitz*.

Week 10

Theories of the Self

J. Butler. *Gender Trouble*. Preface 1999 (vii-xxviii); Chapter 1 (Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire,” 1-46).

Week 11

J. Butler. *Gender Trouble*. Chapter 2 (“Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix” 47-106; “Conclusion: From Parody to Politics,” 194-203).

Week 12

Class Presentations

Week 13

Class Presentations

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf .