TELLING STORIES:
MODELS OF THE SELF
Fall 2008

LECTURE NOTES:

PROFESSOR: Chris Latiolais, Chair
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Kalamazoo College
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Telephone # 337-7076

Offices Hours:
- Monday: 8:00 - 9:30
- Wednesday: 3:00 - 4:00
- By Appointment

COURSE GOALS:
In this course we examine the way in which philosophical genealogy, psychoanalysis, and poststructuralism have challenged traditional conceptions of the rational self. Traditional models of identity assume that a person is accountable, both to herself and to others, and that this responsibility requires her to recount, or take responsibility for, her actions and involvements. Identity, then, is a matter of telling stories, to oneself and others, which demands that one reflect upon, take apart, and re-unify the different moments of one's life for the purposes of action and interaction. This Enlightenment conception of a unitary, rational, historical balancing of identity and difference – identity as narrative-like – has been severely challenged by the so-called "dark thinkers of the Western Enlightenment": Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. We examine Freudian and Lacanian models of self, which conceive of subjectivity as a tenuous balance between conscious and unconscious processes, and we examine Nietzschean and poststructuralist models of the self as alienated within, and reified by, anonymous and unaccommodating social demands. For such dark thinkers, our stories are often evasive, defensive, illusory, and symptomatic of an underlying self-estrangement – not truth-telling but, instead, telling fictions about our lives. We begin the course with a few songs from Tracy Chapman’s provocative Album, Telling Stories. In these songs, Chapman raises fundamental questions about the stories we tell about ourselves and, correlatively, the histories that we presumably share with others. In this provocative album, she questions whether the stories we tell ourselves and others might be so permeated by fiction that truth telling becomes impossible. We then turn to various skeptics – Hayden White, Louis Mink, and Paul Ricoeur – who argue that narratives – or more simply, stories – are not designed to represent facts and, consequently, cannot be evaluated as true or false. They deny that narratives have the cognitive function of representing “how things really are,” and they suggest, instead, that narratives serve either moral or ethical goals – to condemn or praise – or aesthetics goals – to please or entertain. We then read David Carr’s spirited defense of the traditional model: Time, Narrative, and History, along with Habermas’s attempt to treat Freud as an Enlightenment figure in his “Self-Reflection: Freud’s Psychoanalytic Critique of Meaning.” According to Carr and Habermas, the Enlightenment ideal of the self as the locus of responsible, rational agency is not unseated by such critical challenges. They argue that the social commerce of giving and asking for narrative self-account is not only possible but, indeed, necessary in human life and, further, that such accounts are indeed evaluated as true or false. We then turn to an alternative, “dark” reading of Freud as the arch anti-Enlightenment thinker: namely, the Lacanian interpretation of Freud, which treats the rational, responsible, “reality-testing” ego as sort of delusional about its real motives. We also consider Sartre’s account of the ego and its relations to others as a fierce, competitive struggle to dominate others, which offers yet another challenge the traditional rational ideal of mutual reconciliation among rational egos. For Sartre, stories function as the contested domain in which competitors jockey for supremacy in assuming the vantage point of narrating the significance of another’s action. The winner so to speak writes the history of the vanquished. Finally, we turn to Axel Honneth’s spirited defense of the Enlightenment ideal of personal identity and mutual responsibility in his article “The Struggle for Recognition: On Sartre’s Theory of Intersubjectivity.” The course ends on this open question of whether the Enlightenment ideal of truthful story telling is over.

This course is part of the First-Year Seminar Program. Professor and students are therefore committed to the following goals: First-Year Seminar Goals:

EVALUATION:
Students will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, vocabulary quizzes, midterm examinations and a final paper.

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<tr>
<th>TYPE OF EVALUATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation: Seminar presentations, classroom discussion and email correspondence</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Writing Assignments</td>
<td>5 @ 18% = 80%</td>
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POLICIES:
Students are expected to follow the reading schedule and to come to class prepared to actively discuss the texts they have read. More specifically, students must bring their texts to class with marginal notes, highlighted or underlined passages of particular importance, and pages marked where they have encountered difficulties in understanding the material. Quizzes offer students the opportunity to identify and to clarify central terms and concepts. The midterm assignments allow student to write essays on key philosophical issues and arguments, and the final paper offers students the opportunity to respond in depth to a single topic. 3 unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction. Late papers will be marked down a half grade for the first day and a full grade for the second day. All work must be turned in at the end of term, unless alternative assignments have been given by the instructor. Students caught plagiarizing will fail the course.

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TEXTS:

- Articles:
  - Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id."
  - Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers," from *Beyond Good and Evil.*
  - Hayden White, "The Narrativization of Real Events"
  - Louis Mink, "Everyman His or Her Own Annalst"
  - Paul Ricourer, "Narrative Time"
  - Axel Honneth, "The Struggle for Recognition: On Sartre's Theory of Intersubjectivity"
  - Habermas, Juergen. "Self-Critique as Science: on Freud's Psychoanalytic Critique of Meaning."

Schedule of Reading, Assignments, and Events

**PART ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY AS NARRATIVE: THE SCEPTICAL CHALLENGE:**

**Week One**

- Monday:
  - Course Mechanics
  - Tracy Chapman's *Telling Stories*
- Wednesday:
  - Introductory Comments
  - Carr: Introduction
- Friday:
  - Louis Mink, "Everyman His or Her Own Annalst"
  - Writing Assignment #1

**Week Two**

- Monday:
  - Hayden White: "The Narrativization of Real Events"
  - Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time"
  - Due: Writing Assignment #1
- Wednesday:
  - Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers," from *Beyond Good and Evil.*
- Friday:
  - Discussion
  - Writing Assignment #2

**PART TWO: CARR'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE COGNITIVE FUNCTION OF NARRATIVE IN EVERYDAY STORIES AND HISTORY WRITING:**

**Week Three**

- Monday:
  - Carr: "The Temporal Structure of Experience and Action"
- Wednesday:
  - Carr: "Temporality and Narrative Structure"
- Friday:
  - Carr: "The Self and the Coherence of Life"
  - Survivor in the Library Assignment

**Week Four**

- Monday:
  - Carr: "Temporality and Historicity"
- Wednesday:
  - Carr: "From I to We"
- Friday:
  - Discussion of Paper Outlines.

**PART THREE: STORY-TELLING AS MOTIVATED COVER UP: THE PSYCHOANALYTIC CHALLENGE:**

**Week Five**

- Monday:
  - Due: Writing Assignment #2
  - "Time, Narrative, and History"
- Wednesday:
  - Freud, "The Ego and the Id"
  - Brenner, Introduction and "The Drives"
Friday:
  - Brenner, “The Psychic Apparatus”
  - Writing Assignment # 3

Week Six

- Monday:
  - Brenner, "The Psychic Apparatus (continued)
  - Brenner, "Dreams"
- Wednesday:
  - Brenner, "Psychopathology"
  - Brenner, "Psychic Conflict and Normal Mental Functioning"
- Friday:
  - Habermas, Juergen. "Self-Critique as Science: on Freud’s Psychoanalytic Critique of Meaning,”
  - Discussion of Assignment #3

PART FOUR: THE INTERSUBJECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF NARRATIVE: CONTENTION AND COOPERATION AS THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF COMMUNICATIVE EXCHANGE:

Week Seven

- Monday:
  - Due: Writing Assignment #3
  - Frie, Introduction
  - Frie, "Situating Sartre and Binswanger: Between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis"
- Wednesday:
  - Frie, "Jean-Paul Sartre: Reconstructing the Subject"
  - Writing Assignment #4
- Friday:
  - Survior in the Library Day

Week Eight

- Monday:
  - Frie, "Ludwig Binswanger: The Primacy of Relation"
  - Axel Honneth, "The Struggle for Recognition: On Sartre’s Theory of Intersubjectivity"
- Wednesday:
  - Frie, "Sartre and Binswanger: Speaking Subject"
- Friday:
  - Lecture: Lacan’s Freudianism
- Sunday:
  - 12:30 PM, Balch Playhouse, lunch
  - 2:00 Death and the King’s Horseman
  - After performance: Discussion with Wole Soyinka

Week Nine

- Monday:
  - Frie, "Jacques Lacan and Juergen Habermas: From Subjectivity to Intersubjective Speech"
- Wednesday:
  - Discussion
- Friday:
  - Due: Writing Assignment # 4
  - Final Writing Assignment

Week Ten

- Monday:
- Wednesday:

Finals Week