ID7002  Questions of Identity in Europe – Part 2

Module type  Compulsory (core module)

Term / hours  Hilary / 22

ECTS  10

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Lecturer(s)  Prof Stephen Wilmer
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Module description

Together with its sister module (Part 1), this module explores the question of identity by providing students with a strong historical and theoretical grounding in key issues of identity in Europe. The module is taught by a team of colleagues, each exploring a different identity-based topic. The standard format for each topic will include one 2-hr introductory lecture/seminar on the theoretical implications of the topic, followed by one 2-hr seminar looking at case studies (this format may vary depending on the topic). Topics in this module (listed below) explore issues of identity as they unfold in drama, post-modernism and visual culture, language use, post-secular theories and religion, post-humanism and intermediality, technology and philosophy.

Syllabus

1. Performing the nation (Prof Stephen Wilmer)

These seminars consider the role of theatre in helping to shape national identities in Europe. They examine the ways in which cultural nationalists have used theatres and dramas to advocate and reinforce notions of national identity. In particular, we review the creation of national theatres in specific regions where a nation-state was yet to be created, such as Ireland, Norway, Bohemia, Finland, Hungary, and Germany, and consider the work of playwrights whose plays complemented or challenged this process. The seminars also look at some of the features of nationalism evident in, for example, the history of the Bayreuth Theatre, raising questions about more extreme forms of nationalism, by contrast with the German theatre community’s welcome to refugees in 2015.

2. Are you postmodern? (Dr Justin Doherty)
These seminars examine cultural expression in a range of media (literary and popular fiction, cinema, visual arts and visual culture) through the theoretical lens of postmodernity. First, we explore concepts of postmodernism, looking at the work of key theoreticians, with particular focus on the emergence of the idea of the postmodern from the modernist movement in mid-late 20th century, as well as the points of intersection between postmodernism and postcolonial theory. Second, we focus on visual arts and visual culture, exploring various trends and media, including photography, street art, installation art and performance art. Discussion focuses on both ‘classic’ postmodern art of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as more recent problematics around technology and the posthuman. Finally, we look at cinema and film media, with a focus on features of recent cinema such as genre-blending, narrative disruption, polystylism and meta-reference.

3. My language is my home (Dr Rachel Hoare)

These seminars explore the connections between variation in language use and the construction, negotiation, maintenance and performance of identities at the level of the individual and the group at the intersection of the region and the nation. Examining a range of issues around the language/identity nexus, this core topic focuses on complex identity contexts and the forming of transnational identities in order to gain clearer insight into the identity-making and marking functions of language. The seminars draw upon a range of perspectives from sociolinguistics, social psychology, the sociology of language and linguistic anthropology.

4. I still believe (Dr Clodagh Brook)

Religion has been instrumental in the creation of contemporary socio-political Europe. It has been held responsible for some of the darkest moments in recent history, from the Holocaust to Jihad. But it has also been described as the creator of a forceful heritage of architectural and artistic works, from monasteries and cathedrals to the Vatican treasures, from paintings, sculptures and frescos to the rich imagery and narratives on which writers and poets have drawn for centuries, and upon which filmmakers to the present day still draw. In these seminars, we concentrate on how post-secular theories of religion try to understand the continuing place of religion in Europe after secularisation. After an introductory class, we look at case studies of Italy, through discussion of sociological texts and of representation of religious identity on screen.

5. Are we still human? (Dr Radek Przedpelski)

The seminars explore the question of identity in its relation to technology, intermediality, and post-humanism. The key question posed here is how in the era of the Anthropocene the human identity, traditionally understood as the domain of the same and the similar, opens itself up to processes of mediation, individuation and change across both human and non-human registers of a larger natural-cultural continuum, thus reconfiguring the very notion of technology and media. At the same time, the seminars aim to draw attention to hidden modes of Anthropocentric and speciesist thought which still continue to pervade both academic and public
discourse. The seminars extend an invitation to think otherwise in Arts and Humanities. They do so by combining innovative insights from new materialism and its precursors, process philosophy as well as object-oriented ontologies with a number of thought-provoking case studies drawn from contemporary art.

6. Conclusion: Where are we going? (Dr Hannes Opelz)

This concluding seminar explores the question of identity in its relation to technology. The seminar is organised around two contrasting but equally influential accounts of the role of technology in Western societies: Jacques Ellul’s *The Technological Society* (1954) and the first volume of Bernard Stiegler’s *Technics and Time* (1994). In particular, the relationship between identity and technology is examined at the intersection of philosophy, anthropology, and sociology.

**Assessment**

The module is assessed through a 4,000-5,000-word essay.

**Indicative bibliography**

Topic 1


Topic 2


Topic 3


Topic 4

Brook, Clodagh, *Screening Religions in Italy: Contemporary Italian Cinema and Television in the Post-secular Public Sphere* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).

Habermas, Jürgen, ‘Notes on a Post-Secular Society’, *Sign and Sight*, 2008 [online, open access].

**Topic 5**


**Topic 6**


**Learning outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

**LO1** Identify and describe identity issues as they emerge in a range of cultural manifestations across Europe and beyond.

**LO2** Compare and contrast different methodological approaches to questions of identity.

**LO3** Accurately and critically deploy key concepts drawn from drama studies, postmodernist theory, social psychology, sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, film studies, post-humanist theory, intermedial theory, theories of technology, philosophy.

**LO4** Critically assess textual and visual form through systematic reflection and close reading of select passages from various works and artefacts.

**LO5** Develop academic written skills through essay writing.