

ID7002: Questions of Identity in Europe – Part 2

Duration: Hilary Term
ECTS: 10 credits
Coordinator: Dr Balázs Apor (aporb@tcd.ie)

Lecturers: Prof Clodagh Brook, Prof Michael Cronin, Dr Hannes Opelz

Note: This module is offered by the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies and is capped at 5 participants from the MPhil in Race Ethnicity and Conflict.

Module description

Together with its sister module (Part 1), this module explores the question of identity by providing students with a strong 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 (listed below). The standard format for each topic includes 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).

For students enrolled in the Identities & Cultures of Europe degree programmes, this module also includes a workshop, usually held in March or April. While the format of the workshop may vary from year to year, the workshop typically features one or more speaker(s) from academia, civil society, and/or the creative industries and generally involves a range of activities in which students engage with issues of identity in an immersive and supportive environment.

Syllabus

1. Nations and nationalism (Dr Balázs Apor)

These seminars focus on the construction and development of national identities in Europe in modern times with a particular emphasis on the homogenising aspects of modern nationalism. The two cases studies discussed in the framework of this topic address the constructed nature of national identities in the context of the Soviet Union, and the most extreme outcome of nationalism's homogenising ambitions: genocide.

2. I still believe (Prof 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.

3. What did Earth ever do for us? (Prof Michael Cronin)

The advent of human-induced climate change and the entry of humanity into the new geological era of the Anthropocene raises fundamental questions about the nature of what it is to be human in such radically altered circumstances. In these seminars, we explore the emergence of the concept of ‘transversal subjectivity’ (Braidotti) as a way of trying to think about new forms of human subjectivity in the context of the relationship to other animal species and to the world of the organic and inorganic elements in which humans are immersed. Questions of sustainability, resilience and biocultural diversity are also examined in the framework of changing paradigms of the human and post-human.

4. Cognitive estrangements: Science fiction and identity

What becomes of the human when reality itself is estranged? These seminars explore this question by examining how science fiction (SF) challenges and reshapes our understanding of human identity through the lens of Darko Suvin’s concept of *cognitive estrangement*. Drawing on Suvin’s seminal *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, the sessions explore the extent to which SF (de)constructs worlds that estrange its readers from familiar assumptions, while remaining cognitively plausible. We will focus on key elements of Suvin’s theoretical framework, before attempting close readings of one or more case studies – e.g. a short story, a film and/or a TV show episode (tbd) – to test the ways in which Suvin’s model illuminates, or fails to account for, the speculative rethinking of what it means to be human.

5. The Brain Identity (Dr Hannes Opelz)

These seminars explore some of the ways in which recent developments in neurobiology and philosophy are changing our understanding of human identity. The seminars examine a selection of works by contemporary philosopher Catherine Malabou, with a particular focus on her concept of plasticity. Key issues to be discussed are the ways in which brain plasticity relates to capitalism, trauma, and identity. Each session will pair theoretical discussion with a case study, e.g. a podcast episode and/or a film (tbd).

Conclusion: Beyond Identity (Dr Hannes Opelz)

This seminar serves as a conclusion to the module. It will also give students an opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the module, particularly in relation to their course work in the run-up to submission.

Assessment

The module is assessed by completing two assignments:

- (1) A piece of reflective writing (1,500 words) in response to the workshop (**worth 20%**), to be submitted by the Friday of Teaching Week 10 (Calendar Week 31);
- (2) An essay (3,500 words) on one of the core topics studied in the module (**worth 80%**), to be submitted by the Friday of Trinity Week (Calendar Week 35).

For more details on the assessment of this module (reflective writing guidelines and samples, essay titles, marking criteria, etc.), please consult the module on Blackboard.

Please note: students who are *not* enrolled in the Identities & Cultures of Europe degree programmes (and who therefore join this module from other degree programmes) are exempt from completing the first component of the above assessment (i.e. the piece of reflective writing). They are thus required to complete only the second component (i.e. the essay), worth 100% in their case.

Indicative bibliography

Topic 1

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1983).

Kaye, James, and Stråth, Bo, *Enlightenment and Genocide: Contradictions of Modernity* (Peter Lang, 2000).

Martin, Terry, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Cornell UP, 2001).

Topic 2

Braidotti, Rosi, ed., *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere: Postsecular Publics* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

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 3

Braidotti, Rosi, *The Posthuman* (Polity, 2013).

Cronin, Michael, *Eco-Translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene* (Routledge, 2017).

Morton, Timothy, *Being Ecological* (Pelican, 2018).

Topic 4

Suvin, Darko, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction. On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, ed. Gerry Canavan, Peter Lang, 2016 [1979].

Topic 5

Malabou, Catherine, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (Fordham UP, 2008 [2004]).

Malabou, Catherine, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Polity Press, 2012 [2009]).

Malabou, Catherine, *Morphing Intelligence: From IQ Measurements to Artificial Intelligence*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Columbia UP, 2019 [2017]).

Learning outcomes

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

- Identify and describe identity issues as they emerge in a range of cultural manifestations across Europe and beyond.
- Compare and contrast different methodological approaches to questions of identity.
- Accurately and critically deploy key concepts drawn from the various fields and disciplines covered in the core topics.
- Critically assess textual and audio-visual forms through systematic reflection and close reading of select passages from various works and artefacts.
- Develop critical and analytical skills through reflective and academic writing.