

Centre for Narrative Research, UEL, Gender Institute, LSE, and The Open University

Postgraduate Seminars in Biography and Narrative, 2002-3

All seminars will be held in the Gender Institute, London School of Economics, Columbia House, Aldwych, London WC1, from 5-6.30pm.

All welcome, especially graduate students.

Tuesday October 8 **Margaret Volante, University of Surrey**

Learning and Professional Practice: Biographies of Nurses.

Margaret Volante is Head of Academic and Practice Development in the European Institute of Health & Medical Sciences at the University of Surrey. She leads the Institute's interface with the local NHS Confederations for Workforce Development regarding strategic contemporary developments for practice. This has involved setting up practice development units both in academic and practice settings, which is reflective of her research interests in the learning and knowledge creating processes of nurses and other health professional undertake whilst participating in practice development initiatives.

Promoting academic development through curriculum development for professional learning, is a feature of her curriculum vita. This ranges from undergraduate preparatory programmes for professional registration in nursing, midwifery, health visiting, chiropractic and osteopathy to postgraduate programmes for continuing professional learning.

Tuesday November 5 **Shachindra Nath, The London Institute**

Story Plot and Character Action: Narrative as an Emotional Braid

The new has created new challenges. Story tellers have always been used to structuring tales in a sequential pattern of information and audience experiences. Intelligent systems and interactivity imply a 'free' structure that is more emergent than pre-structured. Autonomous agents based systems today make it possible for virtual characters to have 'life-like' personality traits and behaviour patterns. This, however, does not ensure the emergence of a narrative. In fact it is more probable that the outcome will be an almost absurdly chaotic set of situations, if there is no narrative control. How do we make sure that every session of interaction with a story system results in an interesting narrative? To create systems that are capable of generating narrative, we need to provide them with a logical hierarchy and the logical interrelationship between the constituent elements of the experience of a story. In my view, the key lies in emotions. A story teller doesn't just narrate a sequence of events (story) as the outcome of actions of the characters, in such a way that the audience understands the reason behind the occurrence of events and a character's choice of a particular action (unity of plot). She excites emotions in her audience, to be able to

play with their expectations. The story teller thus primarily subjects the audience to a pattern of emotions. The choice of a pattern controls her choice of character action, and events, and the 'why' of it all. The emotional state of the audience is the key to structuring memorable stories. Unity of emotions, is therefore an important concept in the structural logic of emergent narratives.

I shall be elaborating on the above points and shall support my argument with examples from well known movies and stories. I will also elaborate on my concept of Unity of emotions and present a broad model of the hierarchy.

Schachindra Nath has a degree in English Literature and a Master's in Communication Design from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design. I began my Doctoral Research in October 2002. Following intense activity in Theatre at college, I started my professional career in film and video editing. I shifted to multimedia and web work, and worked as Creative Director at Mphasis, before taking a study break to pursue the ultimate challenge in the presentation of information in the interactive medium: being able to tell a story owing to (and in spite of) the audience's freedom of choice. I have written and produced 2 interactive films during the course of my research.

Tuesday December 3 **Hermione Thornhill, UCL**

Recovery from psychosis: Stories of escape, enlightenment and endurance

This presentation reports on a qualitative study drawing from the broad field of narrative methodologies for its analysis. I interviewed 15 individuals who described themselves as recovered or recovering from one or more psychotic episodes (psychosis refers to 'hearing voices', holding unusual beliefs - 'delusions' - and an apparently unfounded fear of others which is termed 'paranoia'; it can also refer to other types of hallucinations such as seeing things or feeling things which do not appear to others to be there). I analysed the narratives in different ways, both taking the narratives as a whole and examining themes across narratives. I found that broadly the narratives could be characterised in terms of genre as narratives of 'escape', 'enlightenment' and 'endurance'. This raised important questions about how the individuals described their experiences of the psychosis and of the treatment they received. Parallels emerged not only with narratives of health and illness but also with narratives of recovery from trauma and narratives of survivors of imprisonment, for example. Themes which emerged across the narratives were: the importance of making sense of the experience; seeing the psychosis and the self in new ways; the importance of others - recovery as a dialogic process; issues of openness and honesty (being able to tell your story) versus silence and deceit; and 'working out where you stand' - wider issues within society of human rights and responsibilities. Excerpts from the narratives were analysed to see how individuals drew on the meta-narratives available of psychosis and recovery (e.g. medical/ psychological/ religious). It seemed that it was not the choice of meta-narrative which was important but how that meta-narrative was interpreted and used. Crucial in this was whether the narrative allowed for the development of meaning, identity and agency. An analysis of 'turning points' and 'stuck points' also highlighted these as key factors in recovery.

Hermione Thornhill has been a doctoral student in clinical psychology at UCL for

the past 3 years. From October 2002 she will be working in Newham, East London, as a clinical psychologist based in the community and in an in-patient setting (The Newham Centre for Mental Health)

January 14 **Jane Montague, The Open University**

Constructions of personal relationships: older women in conversation

Traditional social psychology has examined certain aspects of personal relationships in detail over the years – altruism, aggression etc. However it is only with the recent turn to more qualitative methods that a focus on relationships in their entirety has been taken (Duck 1998). Criticisms have also been levelled at the focus on problems encountered in social life, for instance older people have often been represented negatively, either from an illness perspective or by examining activities they can no longer do (Bodily 1994). Taking these issues into consideration, semi-structured interviews have been carried out with a group of older women focussing on their personal relationships. The study uses a qualitative methodology: first by individually interviewing the participants about personal relationships generally and then by asking them in pairs about these relationships using their personal photographs as a topic of discussion. The conversations are audio- or video-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using discursive methods, particularly membership categorisation analysis (Sacks 1992). My main interests are how the women construct the identities of relational partners and how they make relationships relevant within their conversations. Particular focus is given to how closeness is constructed in talk, how the concept of centrality in relationships is made relevant and how changes and continuities that occur over time are constructed.

Jane Montague is a research student in the School of Health and Social Welfare at the Open University. Her PhD is about older women and their constructions of their personal relationships. The analytic approach adopted examines the data using discursive methods including membership categorisation analysis.

February 4 **Sandra Kielty, UEA**

What does it mean to be a non resident mother? A psychosocial study of non resident motherhood.

Over the last few years researchers have paid increasing attention to the experiences of parents and children of post-divorce family transitions. However, this body of work has largely focused on the 'traditional' arrangement of resident mothers and non resident fathers. Yet although women represent a minority of all non resident parents, estimates suggest that some 80,000 non resident mothers in Britain alone.

This paper presents preliminary finding from a narrative research study investigating non resident motherhood in the U.K. Although data analysis is not yet complete, findings have already begun to shed light on the complex processes that lie behind child residence decisions. It is clear that gendered societal and internalised expectations about mothering impact differently on the experience and practice of non residential parenting. Because it is a non-normative arrangement, these women

experience societal disapproval and stigma. Unlike non resident fathers, mothers are required to explain and justify why and how they came to be living apart from their children. These hurdles can make it more difficult for women, and indeed the family as a whole to accept and adjust to their altered positions.

A narrative approach has been particularly useful in this study highlighting the variety of actors who influence and help shape mothering, and demonstrating how motherhood is as much about ideas as it is about actions.

Sandra Kiely is a doctoral student at the department of Social Work and Psychosocial Studies at University of East Anglia, Norwich. After working as a counsellor she undertook a degree in Psychosocial Studies and has gone on to pursue her interest in child and family studies with the above research project. Sandra hopes to complete her thesis in 2003.

March 4 **Tanya Campbell, UEA**

Using career biographies to gain perspectives of occupational therapists meaning of motivation in mental health: Is it enough?

In mental health services, the need to motivate clients to become functionally independent to live in the community, is of prime importance. This is particularly important to occupational therapists who aim to engage clients with mental health difficulties, in activities of daily living. These involve personal, work, social and leisure skills of daily life. What therapists mean by 'motivation', is key to understanding how motivation is assessed and treated within the clinical setting. The seminar aims to discuss some of the findings from three occupational therapists who took part in a biographic narrative study, investigating therapists and clients meaning of motivation. It is intended also to use the seminar to critically discuss the use of career biographies, in data collection and analysis.

Tanya Campbell qualified as an occupational therapist from the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa in 1993. Since then she has worked for a number of years in various health care settings, and countries, as well as in diverse cultural and health communities. She gained her M.Sc in Disability Management in Work and Rehabilitation at City University, London in 1997. In January 2001 she began full-time PhD studies at the University of East Anglia, Norwich.

April 1 **Monica Moreno, Goldsmiths' College**

Mestizaje, discrimination and visibility: a research proposal to study women's racial experience in Mexico.

This paper will present the project of my MPhil/PhD research on 'Mestizaje, National Identity, Discrimination, and Domestic Photography in Mexico'. It will look at the complexity of the racial ideology in Mexico and its links with National Identity and the potentialities of working with photographic images to explore experiences of discrimination with Mexican women. I will discuss the ways my research wants to explore how visual representations are strongly linked to the lived experience of racial and gender identities.

May 6 **Janette Bennett, Birkbeck College**

Understanding subjectivity and identity constructions of motherhood in relation to the childhood diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a prevalent disorder of childhood. Underpinned by Foucauldian theory, the thesis will examine the history of the construction of ADHD. The research question is concerned with exploring the effects of the construction of ADHD and constructions of identity and subjectivity. This is a qualitative study using semi-structured open and inviting interviews with mothers of ADHD sufferers. The interviews will be analysed using, in the first instance Grounded Theory to extract emerging themes. Thereafter the themes will be discussed from a Foucauldian perspective as an analysis of the way in which power operates in the lives of women whose children have been diagnosed with ADHD

Janette Bennett graduated from the University of East London in 2000 with a BA (Hons) in Psychosocial Studies. Her research interests are concerned with the way in which mothers experience the onset diagnosis and treatment of childhood Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. She is currently completing her PhD in the School of Psychology, Birkbeck College, University of London.

June 3 **Vicky Skyftou, Goldsmiths' College**

Social memory, oral history and visual culture: the contemporary construction of Greekness

In this paper I will present my PhD research project. The project is concerned with how contemporary Greeks construct a sense of themselves as individual and collective subjects through social memory, oral history, and visual culture. It will focus on the ways oral history is mediated by photographs and is able to produce knowledge of the self and cultural understandings of a nation. I will present how my project is dealing with how personal lived experiences are revealed and how identities are constructed through the uses of domestic photography and what are the links between the personal and national construction of identities within family albums.

July 1 **Power Structures in Narratives of Prostitutes' Clients**

Sabine Grenz, Gender Institute, LSE

Prostitution is a highly contested social field that apart from its moral dilemmas is interesting for social research because it is something ordinary that happens on a daily basis, yet is kept out of sight and is performed with discretion. This paper is based on a discourse analysis of 26 narratives of prostitutes' clients in Germany. The focus of the analysis is on ritualised forms of speech acts that reproduce masculinity and related gendered power expressions. I will concentrate on the perspectives of clients on the prostitute encounter and analyse expressions of powerlessness in the interview material.

Sabine Grenz is an Mphil/Ph.D student at the Gender Institute at LSE