

The Narrative Turn

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The Faculty Seminar in the Humanities for 1997-98 will probe the 'narrative turn' that has spurred much speculative and hermeneutical work in humanistic and related disciplines over the past few decades. Working with an increasingly sophisticated vision of narratological process, scholars in a diverse array of disciplines--e.g., history, anthropology, religion, philosophy, law, medicine, the visual arts, musicology, and literature--have helped reconceive not only their own fields but the general terrain of humanistic inquiry by casting cultural production in narrative terms. At the same time, 'narrative' has proven a flexible, not to say unstable, rubric, encompassing approving and censorious accounts of modernity, discourses of power and resistance, norms and bugbears of scholarly activity. Beginning with intense scrutiny of various formal models of narrativity (taking into account such concerns as structure, emplotment, point-of-view, figuration, and character), the seminar will proceed to probe recent developments in narrative theory and practice in a variety of disciplinary and cultural domains, with a view toward confronting such questions as:

- Is narrative intrinsically 'marked' by particular ideological perspectives or ends, serving some subjects better than others?
- As a vehicle for constructing subjects, how does narrative represent desire, sensation, perception, and memory ?
- How do the demands of such problematic markers of identity as sexuality, race, and nation affect narrative expression?
- Do discrete constituencies within a community necessarily use narratives in distinct ways, or might narrative provide common ground for negotiation of their differences?
- In what senses can we speak of narrativity in non-linguistic media?
- In what senses is humanistic knowledge narrative?
- How do disciplines tell stories about their own (dis)continuities, and how do such stories affect the paradigm shifts they describe?
- How can narrative strategies in scholarship be sustained in a purportedly antirepresentational era--and should they be?