

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Department of Sociology
Sociology 715.05 L01 (Quarter Course)
Selected Topics in Advanced Methodological Issues
Narrative Analysis: The Theory and Practice of Stories
Fall 2009

Instructor: Dr. A.W. Frank

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Office hours: Tuesday, Thursday 12:30-1:30, or by appointment

Course dates & hours: October 26, November 9 through December 7, 1:00-3:50

Sociology Department web page: <http://www.soci.ucalgary.ca>

Course Objectives

This doctoral-level seminar will discuss narrative analysis, with emphasis on stories collected as research data. Our particular concern will be how research reports interpret and represent stories. We will consider the two levels of stories: what happens *in* the story—its plot and characters—and what happens as a result of the storytelling *event*: who pays attention to the story and how it affects them. The central theme is what stories *do*, as vital actors that contribute to making life social.

The core reading will be the final draft manuscript of the instructor's next book, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming in 2010). What I mean by socio-narratology is the application to literary concepts (point of view, suspense, etc.) to study the work that stories do for people and also on people. Socio-narratology is concerned with the broadest range of stories, from folktales to literature to everyday, conversational stories.

In addition to *Letting Stories Breathe*, we will read Mikhail Bakhtin's classic work, *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, a book that founds *dialogical* narrative analysis. We will also consider an ethnographic work, Charlotte Linde's *Working the Past* (2009), which provides a test case of the ideas in *Letting Stories Breathe* (Linde's book was published after the manuscript was completed).

Required Texts (see also *Related Reading*, below)

- Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minnesota)
- Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (manuscript copy from university printing; available in seminar)
- Charlotte Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (Oxford)

Course Requirements

Final grades will be based on one research paper, using what we've studied in the seminar to reflect on and develop students' own interests. Papers should demonstrate that

students have been engaged in readings and discussion, but beyond that, topics are open to individual interest, developed in consultation with the instructor. Papers will probably be either original analyses of narrative materials or analyses of methodological issues concerning narrative as qualitative data.

- Because the seminar is small and meetings are few, regular attendance and participation is crucial. Students will be expected to bring notes on the week's assigned reading and be capable of initiating discussion of the reading. Students may also be called upon to prepare specific *seminar presentations* based on the reading.
- Although a specific grade will not be assigned for seminar participation, *final grades can be raised or lowered* up to two grades (e.g., "B" to "A-") as a result of either exemplary participation or systematic failure to participate (the latter will be preceded by warnings).
- Rewrites: papers that receive a grade lower than a "B+" can be rewritten in order to bring that grade up to, but not above, a "B+". Revised papers will be due no later than January 18, 2010.
- Due date for papers: Friday, December 18, 4:00.

Format of final papers

- Papers should be prepared as if they were article submissions to a journal. All citations should follow the format of *any* major sociology journal or the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Papers should be printed, double-spaced, numbered, in at least 12-point font, with pages stapled together (no covers, please). The students name & ID# should appear on the first page, under the title.
- Spelling, syntax, and clarity of expression will count in the grade; see "Advice" at the end of this outline.
- Length: papers should be about 15 pp., including endnotes and references.

Seminar Schedule

October 26 – Bakhtin's *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, introductory material & chapters 1-4

November 9 – finish Bakhtin

November 16 – *Letting Stories Breathe*, chapters 1-4.

November 23 – *LSB*, chapters 5-7.

- Due in class: a 1-2 pp. proposal of your seminar papers.

November 30 – Linde, *Working the Past*, chapters 1-6.

December 7 – *WP*, chapters 7-10.

Related Reading (books I regard as the core works on social scientific narrative analysis)

Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Nebraska and UBC Press, 2000)

Jaber Gubrium & James Holstein, *Analyzing Narrative Reality* (Sage, 2009).

Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (Chicago, 2006).

Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Sage, 2008).

Phillip Smith, *Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, The Gulf War, and Suez* (Chicago, 2005).

On applying Bakhtin to social science, see especially Michael Bell and Michael Gardiner, eds., *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences* (Sage, 1998) and Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (Oxford, 1999). Anything by Michael Holquist and/or Carol Emerson is also recommended for secondary sources on Bakhtin.

Writing advice.

- Almost any idea is a potentially good paper; it all depends on how you write it. Many of sociology's greatest works have been on topics that most people would have regarded as marginal or uninteresting. The imagination in "sociological imagination" is the ability to demonstrate the importance of aspects of social life that had seemed uninteresting in their marginality.
- The opening paragraph should do two tasks: engage the reader (make him/her want to continue reading) and tell the reader what the essay will accomplish or contribute.
 - A friend told me that academic papers should be structured like detective stories. A murder mystery begins with the discovery of a corpse; the reader knows that what follows will progressively solve who did it.
 - Any essay should open by "discovering the body"; that is, discovering whatever is consequentially troublesome and requires some kind of solution.
 - Bruno Latour wants articles to be like experiments: something should be "on trial" (the derivation of *essay*, to try) and the argument should be able to fail. Take that as an ideal.
- The most difficult part of writing may be learning to read what you have written as if you were someone else, remembering that this someone else does not know what you mean to express—and that you have to make this person care about what you're trying to say. Writing requires G.H. Mead's idea of taking the role of the other.
- Writing begins in revision. The first draft is an opening offer; then you get to work.
- As you edit, concentrate on continuity: does each sentence and each paragraph lead into the next, or does the reader have to ask why you are suddenly talking about *this*? Writing requires meeting a reader's expectations, but without

- becoming predictable and thus boring. Each paragraph should do what the reader expects, but do it in a way that is unexpected.
- The old rule of “one idea, one paragraph” remains a reliable guide. In general, the *first* sentence states the idea of the paragraph. The *next* one or two (or three if necessary) sentences expand and refine this idea. The *final* sentence is a transition to the next paragraph. It puts the idea back in the context of the whole argument by suggesting what needs to be said next (maybe not explicitly, but enough for the reader to think “Of course!” at the start of the next paragraph).
 - Never write, “in my opinion.” If what you are saying needs this qualification (i.e., disclaimer), you should do more research until you can present it as more than your own opinion. The point of sociology is to present arguments that are compelling because they are more than the “opinion” of the writer—that’s science.
 - A conclusion should be more than a summary. The conclusion should notch up the importance of the argument, giving the reader perhaps the best reason why the essay matters. In a truly fine conclusion, the reader will realize that s/he could not have understood this final reason without having read the essay. The reader will feel surprised, yet the conclusion will make perfect sense.
 - A film critic once wrote that audiences will forgive anything during the movie’s first 30 minutes, but nothing in the last 30 seconds.

Exam Policies: You must provide advance notice to the instructor if you are unable to take an exam. All requests for deferral of an examination due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the physical or emotional problem rather than after recovery. Deferred exams may be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or religious conviction. If you have missed an exam for a legitimate reason, you will be able to write a “make up” exam as close to the original exam as possible. The date and location will be at the convenience of the Sociology Department. Travel arrangements and misreading of the syllabus are not valid reasons for requesting a deferred exam. Deferred exams will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

Ethics Research: Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

Academic Misconduct: cheating is regarded as a serious academic offense. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar, which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct.

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor's office or the Department main office. Term assignments must be returned to students individually, during class, or during the instructor's office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.

Safewalk: The University of Calgary provides a "safe walk" service to any location on Campus, including the LRT, parking lots, bus zones, and campus housing. For Campus Security/Safewalk call 220-5333. Campus Security can also be contacted from any of the "Help" phones located around Campus.

Academic Accommodation

Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, telephone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. **It is a student's responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.**

Handing in Papers Outside of Class, Return of Final Papers, and Release of Final Grades

1. When students are unable to submit papers at class, they should make arrangements to hand in their papers directly to the instructor or teaching assistant rather than at the Sociology Department main office.
2. Final papers will not be returned through the Sociology Department main office. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, (i.e., outside an instructor's office, the department office, etc.). Students who want their final papers returned by mail must attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the paper. Otherwise final papers will only be available for pick-up during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or the beginning of the next term.
3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology department. They are only available online.