

Workshop – Tuesday, 11 July 2017, 14:00 – 19:00, in English

Conversion – from the Latin *conversio* – implies a (re)turn and a change of direction. In the Christian tradition, it is normative and teleological, accompanied by repentance and/or longing for rebirth. The convert's soul turns towards goodness and renounces evil in order to enter a new and true life. Conversion can be presented as a return to the self, or rather as the very constitution of self-identity: in these cases, it represents a solution to inner conflict, providing a divided 'I' with a feeling of coherence and integrity. In Western conversion narratives, for which Augustine's *Confessions* are the paradigm, the narrating self must be radically and definitively different from, and yet in continuity with, the unconverted self whose story is told. This complex temporality is one of the core tensions of conversion: is it an event which befalls the inner self, or a lifelong process which will be fully accomplished only after death?

How can one think of the relationship between the definitiveness of conversion, the teleological reconstruction of the past, and the integrity of the self? What are the implications in terms of subjectivity, gender, and desire? Is conversion a process that can be narrated or rather something constituted through the performance of narration itself? Can the paradox that conversion appears as both the condition and the performative product of self-narration be resolved through conversion's teleological temporal structure? To what extent is an irreducibly complex experience reduced by being unfolded in such a linear temporality – and at what cost for the self and for others? And finally, if Western paradigms not only of autobiography but of narration as such have arguably become inextricably bound up with conversion and its temporality, can one think of (narrative and textual) forms that propose other articulations of time and subjectivity?

This workshop will problematize the concept of conversion by looking at the interactions between theological discussions and literary re/presentations. It will also question conversion's temporal structure by considering contemporary critiques of teleology, normativity, and futurity.

The workshop includes a presentation by Daniel C. Barber and will discuss texts by Augustine, Foucault, and Ryan Szpiech.

Please register by 20 June 2017 if you would like to participate. Only a few spaces are available and those who are interested in joining should enclose a brief CV.

Programme

14:00	Daniel Barber: Death of Recognition followed by discussion
15:00	coffee break
15:30 – 17:00	Discussion of pre-circulated texts
17:00	coffee break
17:30 – 19:00	Discussion of pre-circulated texts

On Conversion

Organized by
**Francesco Giusti, Manuele Gragnolati,
and Daniel Reeve**

