

**“Auto—”**  
**Duke University Department of English Graduate Conference**  
**February 13 & 14, 2025**

**Keynote Speaker:** Tyrone S. Palmer (Wesleyan University)

The self (αὐτός, *autós*), as many have observed, is not a thing like most other things. No one has ever seen it; it has no visible form, no scent, taste, sound, or texture. Rather, the self is—and this *is* is strange—a precarious abstraction, a fiction, with an ancient history that traces contours over its hollow (non)existence like volcanic ash around a petrified corpse. And yet, the idea of the self, energized by this very history, exerts an enormous pressure on our lives. We are constantly commanded not only to take up the Delphic maxim to know thyself, but also to take care of yourself, love yourself, trust yourself—*be yourself*.

Rather than naïvely replicate that oracular injunction and its assumptions—that there “is” “a” “self” that can be “known”—this conference seeks instead to focus on its final term and inquire into/problematicize the present status of the *autós*/self. Attuned to its various registers and valences (ontological, epistemological, ethical, political, aesthetic, historical, etc.), we invite papers that critically examine not only what the *autós*/self is (and is not) for us now, but also how we come to know it, what we may do with knowledge of it, and how its figuration mutates across the various contexts, discourses, and technologies it appears in.

Potential topics to be addressed may include:

- the *autós* as a historical category conditioned by race, ethnicity, sex(uality), gender, class, ability, geographical location, etc.; how to disaggregate, historicize, and periodize the category of *autós*
- what presuppositions shore up contemporary and historical discourses of the *autós*, and how does this figure become altered when those presuppositions are exposed?
- relations between self/*autós* and other/*állos*; *autós* as a political/ethical category; myself vs. their self vs. ourselves; the gaps between “I,” “you,” “them,” and “we”
- the aesthetics of the *autos*; how to give account of oneself; genres of the *autós* (autofiction, autotheory, the lyric “I,” etc.); tropes of the *autós*; what and how do aesthetic objects teach us about the *autós*?
- automation*/mechanization, *automaticity*, immediacy, alienation
- the authority of the *autós*; what authorizes whom to speak about/of/from the self; selfhood and political and/or aesthetic representation
- autonomy*: bodily, mental, psychic, etc.
- auto-* as prefix
- the limits of thinking *autós*; what does a focus on *autós* obfuscate?

**We invite papers from any discipline** and are especially interested in (1) those that deal with aesthetics of the *autós* and (2) those that trouble disciplinary boundaries, resisting the discrete borders of a disciplinary self.

**Please send brief abstracts (300 words) and a short biographical statement to [britton.edelen@duke.edu](mailto:britton.edelen@duke.edu) by December 8.** Acceptances will be sent out by the middle of December.

**We will be able to provide lodging, if needed, and meals for the duration of the conference for all participants.**