

Life Writing, Creativity, and the Social (Bielefeld, 24-25 Jun 22)

Universität Bielefeld

Deadline: Sep 1, 2021

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Much has been written in academia about narrating one's own life and the lives of others that scholars have subsumed amongst others under life writing which includes a multiplicity of different (sub-)genres such as autobiography, biography or diary (see, e.g., Smith and Watson 2010). In the last decades, research has continuously added new perspectives, objects of study, and probed, expanded and challenged what life writing means. Building upon American Studies, Transnational and Hemispheric American Studies and Inter-American Studies (Fisher Fishkin 2005; Horning 2007; Raab & Thies 2009; Fluck, Pease & Rowe 2011; Lenz 2011; Hebel 2012; Davis 2013; Raussert 2014), our workshop explores the role of life writing for reflections on, and inventions of, the social in the Americas from a variety of perspectives.

The social is one important aspect that has been a subject of numerous discussions revolving around life narratives. Following scholars that have highlighted the complex interrelations between life writing and the social, we, for example, aim at exploring how social developments and transformations, which include crises such as COVID-19 or the global environmental crisis, challenge and redefine how we (re-)present ourselves. We are also interested in how life stories of or about people who have historically been forced into subordinate positions, exploited and oppressed contributed to new social developments or how social developments contributed to new forms of (re-)presenting the self and others and other related issues (see, e.g., Jensen and Jolly 2014 for life narratives and human rights; Smith and Schaffer 2004) as it can be seen in social movements such as Black Lives Matter or MeToo.

The role of different forms of media for narrating the self is another aspect that has been increasingly discussed in academia. Some scholars suggest concepts such as automediality instead of autobiography since the former takes different media and forms of self-representation into consideration as well as the interplay between them (see, e.g., Dünne and Moser 2008 or Renov 2004). Following these discussions, our workshop also intends to explore the interrelations between life narratives, the social and different forms of media. This may include discussions about how reality TV shows or the internet and in particular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or professional platforms such as LinkedIn have offered new means of (self-) representation (see, e.g., Poletti and Rak 2014).

Lastly, life writing has creative potential. This includes for example, the creative interplay between fact and fiction in life writing, creativity that emerges from different forms of media, new connections between self and society, self and environment, and regarding reflections and constructions

of the social. We are interested in the variety of forms of creativity that encompass but also go beyond the conventional notions associated with cultural production in the context of life writing. This workshop aims at taking previous discussions about life writing in the Americas (see, e.g., Chansky 2017) and the aforementioned issues as a starting point to systematically explore the myriad connections between life writing, creativity and the social in the Americas.

The international workshop differs from the conventional conference mode in that it intends to discuss and orient all contributions specifically for a book project (Life Writing, Creativity, and the Social in the Americas, ed. Raussert & Rocha Teixeira). For this reason, all participants should be prepared to align their contributions specifically to the keywords/issues of the workshop. Each contribution should address life writing and at least one of the following keywords/issues: mediali-ty, narrating/ (re-)making the self and the social, creativity, social change, and social positioning.

Our workshop will take place June 24.-25., 2022 at Bielefeld University and the Center for Inter-American Studies. We will reimburse our workshop participants for accommodation for two nights and train travel (2nd class) within Germany. We expect participants to submit their presentations as articles for the book project latest by August 15, 2022.

We welcome proposals from emerging and established academics, creative writers, graduate students, independent scholars, and activists who address the connection of life writing and the social in the Americas.

Please submit your abstracts for individual 30-minute presentations (300-350 words) and short bios (150 words) to the workshop organizers by September 1, 2021. Participants will be notified of our decision by November 1, 2021.

For inquiries, please contact the organizers Wilfried Raussert (wilfried.raussert@uni-bielefeld.de) and Susana Rocha Teixeira (susana.rocha_teixeira@uni-bielefeld.de).

Reference:

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