

## The Self at Scale (Berlin, 4-5 May 26)

ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, May 4-05, 2026

Deadline: Mar 15, 2026

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Why does it seem so productive today to be simultaneously the subject and object of one's writing? This workshop starts from the premise that certain writing and artistic practices position the theorizing self as a mediator between the subject and larger scales of social organization.

The contemporary fascination with autotheory, autofiction, and related genres, such as auto-sociobiography or mythobiography, is a case in point. These forms show the interplay between theorizations of personal life, subjectivity and historical or collective experience. However, these practices also have their own histories. The workshop is therefore interested in the politics and aesthetics of this interplay, in the genealogies of these forms, and in the moments when these practices have intensified.

The aim of the workshop is to facilitate dialogue between multiple discourses. One such discourse is feminist theory, which has long offered insights into the concept of the theorizing self as mediator. Another discursive resource is the theory and practice of life writing, from the early 20th century onwards. It is precisely within the space between theory and practice, between history and biography, that the 'unexpected subject' can emerge (to borrow the term of Italian critic and theorist Carla Lonzi). Such tension has been framed in works of life writing that deliberately play with the implications of this problem, such as Luisa Passerini's *Autoritratto di gruppo* (Autobiography of a Generation, 2008), Annie Ernaux's *Les années* (The Years, 2008), the collective autobiography *Baby Boomers. Vite parallele dagli anni Cinquanta ai cinquant'anni* (written by Rosi Braidotti, Roberta Mazzanti, Serena Sapegno, and Annamaria Tagliavini, 2003), as well as Carla Lonzi's seminal *Autoritratto* (Self-portrait, 2022), published in 1969. In other contexts, and in relation to the problems posed by racialization and more recent developments in the conceptualization of sexuality, authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Saidiya Hartman, Sara Ahmed, and Paul B. Preciado, have turned to forms of autotheory to reconsider the relationship between embodied subjectivity, selfhood, and the world. Alongside gender, race, and postcolonial critique, what additional insights could autotheoretical writing offer to a renewed reflection on class, its representations, and its lived contradictions?

In what ways do contemporary practices of autotheory preserve, or intentionally erase, a potential space of freedom? Rather than preemptively reading this genre as a symptom of narcissism and self-referentiality, this question aims to explore the reasons behind its attraction for readers and its global success. Traditionally, the 'freedom' of the liberal individual is located in the private spheres of the domestic or inner life. However, in a post-Marxist and post-Foucauldian landscape, such spaces of freedom appear to be possible only through the disavowal of one's social embedd-

edness. Feminist and critical instances of the practice of autotheory generally aim to open up or create spaces in which a focus on the self functions as an antidote and an alternative to a multiplicity of discourses connected to power. These discourses include the logocentrism of canonical theoretical discourse, in which the abstraction of theory is seen to cloud or obscure specific subject positions, their histories, and their epistemologies. This workshop, which is designed to be accessible to students, will bring together scholars, writers, and artists. Some of the questions at the heart of this CfP emerged from conversations with students at Bard College Berlin. The workshop will open with a discussion of selected key texts that will inform the presentations in subsequent sessions.

The organizers welcome proposals for 20-minute talks; presentations may address but are not limited to the following topics:

Autofiction and autotheory in relation to feminism  
Autofiction and autotheory as critical methods for understanding class relations  
Trans and Queer adoptions of autofiction and autotheory  
Self-referential practices in the arts  
Theories of identity in relation to theories of self  
Theories of selfhood in literature and life writing  
Possibilities of collective selfhood in autofiction and autotheory

Please read the full call at this link  
[https://www.ici-berlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CFP\\_The-Self-at-Scale.pdf](https://www.ici-berlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CFP_The-Self-at-Scale.pdf)

Abstracts of 300 words and short bios should be sent by 15 March 2026 to [theselfatscale@ici-berlin.org](mailto:theselfatscale@ici-berlin.org)

The workshop takes place in person May 4-5, 2026 at ICI Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Berlin, Germany

Organizers: James Harker, Clío Nicastro, Laura Scuriatti  
Bard College Berlin in cooperation with ICI Berlin

Reference:

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