

Commemoration as a Technique of the Self: Subject Constitution through Collaborative Biographical Writing

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Commemorative biography as a genre has faced multiple changes in structure and discourse. These changes are usually explained by considering trends in literature and advances in historiographic methods. However, the influence of digital instruments on biographical writing has largely been overlooked. With the introduction of collaborative writing tools, the biographical enterprise has received a new level of sophistication and interactivity. The digital medium's procedural and participatory nature has evolved new ways through which people transform themselves and secure a sense of purposeful existence. In this sense, digitally-mediated biographical writing might be approached as a technique of the self in which commemorators shape their self-understanding by documenting the life and deeds of memorable persons. Commemoration is thus included among the practices through which subjectivity is formed, so that collective remembering becomes a practice through which people develop knowledge of themselves. This paper discusses how collaborative writing tools have made commemorators constitute themselves as subjects by participating in the production of biographical narratives and by engaging with an ever-evolving remembrance discourse. The results of the postphenomenological analysis show that collaborative authorship modulates group awareness in a process that intentionally relates commemorators to the object of memorialization. Collaborative tools of biographical writing mediate social validation as a phenomenon through the mutual constitution of commemorators and commemorated persons. This has significant consequences for the process of historical knowledge production and the institutionalization of social memory through discursive dynamics with political reverberance.

Short bio

Ștefania Matei is Lecturer at the Department of Sociology, University of Bucharest, where she teaches the course on "Digitally Mediated Knowledge and Communities of Practice". She is the cofounder and vice-president of the Association for Social Entrepreneurship "Social Plus One" that aims to promote participatory technological design and creative appropriation as ways to resist the unintended consequences of surveillance capitalism. She authored the paper "Responsibility Beyond the Grave: Technological Mediation of Collective Moral Agency in Online Commemorative Environments", published in *Design Issues* in 2018. Her research interests focus on online commemoration, the technological mediation of collective remembrance and the processes of historical knowledge production.