

Workshop THE SELF AT SCALE

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.

Image credit: Claudia Peppel, *The Illusory Nature of Form*, paper collage, 32.0 × 47.3 cm, 2023

Organized by James Harker, Clio Nicastro, and Laura Scuriatti for Bard College Berlin in cooperation with ICI Berlin

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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 embeddedness. 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. Some of the questions at the heart of this workshop emerged from conversations with students at Bard College Berlin. It is designed to be accessible to students and will bring together scholars, writers, and artists.

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4 May 2026

10:00 – 12:00

Panel I

New Ways of Seeing and Scaling Autofiction and Autotheory

- Introduction by James Harker, Clio Nicastro, and Laura Scuriatti
- Visions of Community:
Negotiating Recognition in Kaoutar Harchi's *Comme nous existons*
Elisa Russian
- An Attempt to Decolonize Autotheory
Camille Kingué
- Embodied Autotheory in Motion:
Queer and Diasporic Selfhood in the Moving-Image
Practices of River Yuhao Cao and Tuyet Van Huynh
Nam Huh

12:00 – 13:30

Lunch Break

13:30 – 15:00

Panel II

Autotheory Within and Against the Institution

- The Self at the Scale of Disappearance:
Collective Autotheory in Rosa Yassin Hassan's *Negative*
Anne-Marie McManus
- Mandated Autotheory:
Writing the Self at Scale in Brazilian Teacher Education
Mariana Farias Egues
- Autotheory as Disorder
Jochen Schuff

15:00 – 15:30

Coffee Break

15:30 – 17:30

Panel III

Demands and Refusals of Autotheory and Autofiction

- Auto-phenomenology:
A Lazy Science
Angelica Stathopoulos
- The Business of Dreams:
The Demand for Change and the Presumptions of the Self
SJ Cowan
- Genres of Refusal:
Autofiction and the Trans Body
Amelia Ada
- The Scale of (Self-)Recognition in Jorge Luis Borges' *Los espejos velados*
Monika Raič

17:30

End of Day Discussion

5 May 2026

10:00 – 12:00

Panel IV

Autoforms at the Environmental and Planetary Scale

- The Dissolution of the Autotheoretical 'I'
Sladja Blazan
- Writing the Self at Planetary Scale:
Autofiction and the Mediation of Climate Change
Francesca Balestro
- Becoming Prey:
Transforming the Self Through Writing About Animal Encounters
Matthäus Leidenfrost
- Spheres of Influence
Asia Bazdyrieva

12:00 – 14:00

Lunch Break

14:00 – 16:00

Panel V

Scale, Presence, and Dimensions of Self in Autofiction

- The Self at a Loss:
Epitaph and/as Autotheory in Anne Carson's *Nox*
Sonja Pyykkö
- 'There is too much self in my writing':
Anne Carson, Autoforms, and the Self
Hannah Gardiner
- Autofictional Commonality:
Orality and Challenged Individuality in Rachel Cusk's *Outline* Trilogy
Kai Wiegandt

16:00 – 16:30

Farewell Coffee