



Claudia Ulbrich, Kaspar von Greyerz and Lorenz Heiligensetzer (Eds.). *Mapping the 'I': Research on Self-Narratives in Germany and Switzerland*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015.

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The volume *Mapping the I: Research on Self-Narratives in Germany and Switzerland* deserves attention in a journal on European Life Writing: it makes results of research projects, book projects, articles originally published in German (and in one case, Italian) as well as MA and PhD theses conducted in Switzerland and Germany accessible to a wider, non-German speaking academic community. The essays, all of them written by historians, cover a wide field of self-narratives written in Germany and Switzerland (though not necessarily in German), with a temporal range from the late Middle Ages to the late nineteenth century. They address such diverse genres as the family book, courtly correspondence or suicide notes.

Gabriele Jancke and Claudia Ulbrich explain that research into self-narratives (*Selbstzeugnisforschung* in German) is not limited to retrospective autobiographies, but also pays attention to “letters, chronicles, family histories, travelogues, biographical dictionary entries or diplomatic reports” (18) and tries to avoid canon formation. In the introduction, the editors sketch the development of research into self-narratives in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands over the past twenty years and identify some of its common aims: the analysis of themes such as personhood and individuality as well as putting genre and writing practices into a wider historical context. The essays in this volume are grouped into three sections: The first section, “Inroads”, focuses on methodological considerations; the second illustrates different angles from which self-narrative can be approached, and the final section, “Cartography”, is meant to “point at the boundaries of the field” (7). These

three emphases, are, however, in fact not limited to the respective parts, but play a role in most of the essays, as a brief discussion of some of the contributions will illustrate.

Two important points, which are echoed in many of the other contributions, are made in the first essay, a translation of Gabriele Jancke's and Claudia Ulbrich's introduction to a volume published in 2005: the authors argue that generalisations concerning recurring themes about individualism in autobiographical writing made on the basis of few case studies will make other themes and practices by writers who are not male, white, or European invisible. And second, they suggest to replace the charged concept of the "individual" as reference point in the analysis of autobiographical writing with a concept of "person" informed by anthropological scholarship. The concept of "person", the authors argue, will enable a stronger focus on relationality and allow for an awareness of historical specificity of self-narratives.

Kaspar von Greyerz, then, grasps self-writing (as he calls it) as a social act and as documentation of social networks. With the help of five texts from the seventeenth century, he demonstrates how documents of self-writing can become sources for historiography. He closes with the valuable observation that early modern self-writing provides fascinating reading for a modern writer and has the potential to make a twentieth-century audience aware of early modern alterity in an entertaining way.

Lorenz Heiligensetzer discusses the archival work involved in a research project conducted in Switzerland to catalogue almost 900 self-narratives from 1500 to 1800. His choice to focus on non-representative examples, and thereby to sketch features that are shared by many of the other works by way of contrast, proves to be a convincing strategy. He comes to the conclusion that one central feature of said corpus is its generic and formal heterogeneity. Gudrun Piller focuses on the private body in self-narratives and dedicates some space to the complex question if such narratives can be used as sources providing insight into personal experience at all. Her theoretical discussion gives a concise and reflected overview of different approaches and wisely abstains from using problematic concepts such as "authenticity" (a concern shared by Fabian Brändle in "Pitfalls in Reading Popular Self-Narratives") or "immediacy" in her own analysis of self-narratives, in which she focuses on unedited texts as expressions of cultural practice. Her close reading of the body in the diary of Johann Rudolf Huber, a seventeen-year old boy, written at the end of the eighteenth century, plausibly illustrates the central role the concern for a healthy body played in the development of the German bourgeoisie. She concludes that self-narratives are always both reacting and contributing to contemporary discourses.

Andreas Bähr's reading of suicide notes of Enlightenment Germany, which is based on the conception of "the act of suicide [...] as a linguistic construction, as a product of texts which narrate conceptions of values within historical societies" (171) provides intriguing insights into the historicity of suicide.

Angela Heimen discusses how references to food and eating are used as a code in Thomas Platter's autobiography. Since she draws on Gabriele Jancke's theoretical concept of autobiographical texts as "anchored in a network of social relations" (119), Jancke's own contribution, a translation from a chapter that first appeared in German in 1996, could have been included before Heimen's essay instead of immediately following it. Jancke provides an approach that takes into consideration the communicative situation of writing as well as the content and the possible functions and intentions of an autobiographical text. She applies her model in a discussion of three autobiographical texts from the sixteenth century and comes to the conclusion that despite their situational, formal and thematic continuity they share an embeddedness in a complex network of social relations, a wish to influence their environment in one way or another, and an articulation of different concepts of social relations. In addition, they share an acute awareness of social power relations. Jancke's model is certainly useful for a reading of autobiographical texts, or 'self-narratives', beyond her corpus of 200 texts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The essays, most of which include case studies of one or more examples selected from larger corpora, share a focus on providing new insights into particular genres (see, for example, Claudia Ulbrich's essay on family and house books), and they ask how research into self-narratives can be made productive for historiography. A particularly successful example of the exploration of the latter is Thomas Max Safley's essay on "Autobiography in Economic History". Economic history, he explains, is "inseparable from technology, history, society and culture" (230) and should therefore no longer ignore the study of autobiographies (as well as of literature in general). His readings of a family book as well as a merchant's diary, both written in the early seventeenth century, reveals the wealth of information these documents include about economic conditions of the respective families as well as the milieu they moved in.

The effort to make contributions originally published in German accessible to a wider academic audience, thereby facilitating inter-lingual and interdisciplinary reception and exchange, which is the invaluable strength of this collection, however, also gives rise to its only weakness: minor flaws in some of the translations, which could have been avoided by another round of proofreading by native speakers. Still, *Mapping the T* is definitely

a valuable addition to European life-writing scholarship, which does not only achieve its aim to provide an overview of research undertaken in Germany and Switzerland, but has, given its wide theoretical and thematic range and its helpful methodological considerations, the potential to inspire future avenues of explorations into self-narratives.