The Facebook Profile as a Genre of Life Writing: Constrictions, Transgressions, and Opportunity

Susanne Fuchs

New York University

ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

Since Facebook's introduction of the profile "Timeline" in 2012, the social network advertises itself as a platform of life writing. This article takes Facebook's self-promotion as an outset to analyze the ideological implications of this move and the commercial interests motivating it. Resorting to contemporary research on genre and discursivity, the "Facebook Profile" is read as a life writing-genre characterized by the self-narrating nature of the utterances linked to it, the legally binding contract connecting a specific assembly of self-narrations to a single person, and the profiles' pre-shaped formalistic setup. Inventive user expressions challenge the legal and structural boundaries prescribed by the platform and, thereby, exemplify how contestations or transgressions of genre laws (in both a formalistic and legal sense) may provide an outlet from apparently deterministic generic arrangements. In particular, the article examines "Fake Profiles" establishing and performing "Fictional Characters" and the Facebook-based artwork "My Space For Your Life" by Jack Toolin. In both cases, the contestations of genre demarcations point at potentially new ways of apprehending the subjectivities expressed by means of digital life writing.

ABSTRACT IN GERMAN

Seit der Einführung des Profiles "Timeline" im Jahre 2012 präsentiert Facebook sich als eine life writing-Plattform. Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht die ideologischen Implikationen dieser Darstellung sowie die kommerziellen Interessen die sie bedient. Der gegenwärtige Stand der Genre- und Diskursivität-Forschung erlaubt es, das Facebook-Profile als ein life writing-Genre zu

lesen, das durch die folgenden drei Konstellationen gekennzeichnet ist: 1) die in seinem Rahmen getätigten Aussagen sind überwiegend autobiographischer Natur 2) ein gesetzlich bindender Vertrag knüpft bestimmte Gruppierung von Aussagen an einen in staatlichem Kontext dokumentierten Namen 3) die Struktur des Profiles ist durch die Plattform fixiert und vorgegeben. Innovative Benützungsweisen des Profiles fordern die legalen und strukturellen Vorgaben der Plattform wiederholt heraus und illustrieren auf diese Weise, wie die Infragestellung oder das Überschreiten von Genre-Gesetzen (im formalistischen wie legalen Sinne) Wege aus angeblich deterministischen Arrangements bilden. Im Besonderen untersucht der Artikel die digitale Performanz von fiktionale Charakteren (sogenannter "Fake Profiles") und das Facebook-Projekt "My Space For Your Life" des Künstlers Jack Toolin. In beiden Fällen verweist die Unterminierung von Genre-Markierungen auf das Potential von digitalem life-writing herkömmliche Verständnisse verschriftlicher Subjektivität zu erneuern.

Keywords: Facebook, Fake profile, life writing, genre theory

1. FACEBOOK PROFILES AS A GENRE OF LIFE WRITING

On October 4th 2012, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced that the network reached a total of one billion registered users.[1] Facebook's presence and influence on large communities in certain countries and social strata in the world are indisputable.[2] In contrast to earlier telecommunication devices, such as the telephone or the Internet-based email, social network sites' primary purpose is not to serve as a medium of communication in the narrow sense of information transmission. Facebook's operators put as much emphasis on stimulating data-production and offering data-storage space as on the promotion of the simple information transfers also enabled by the website. That is to say: the application would be of little or no significance without the information participants enter themselves, information about themselves, related to their daily lives, their affections, moods and antipathies – data entries that are often not directed at a specific addressee. The main category offered to Facebook users to express and share their experiences is a user's "Status": "What is on your mind?" the most prominently placed text-box on the page asks insistently each time users log into their accounts.[3] As soon as a status is posted, it appears on the "Newsfeed" located in the central section of befriended users' pages. Ruth Page's socio-linguistic study, *Stories and Social Media. Identities and Interaction,* offers an insight into the contents of these updates. She categorizes 70% as "self-reports," banal stories reporting day-to-day activities.[4] Aptly, David Kirkpatrick declares

Facebook to be "a giant experience in personal disclosure."[5] In other words, what is known as the phenomenon "Facebook" consists to a large extent of self-written lives, or autobiographies, as the etymology of the word suggests: "autos" – self, "bios" – life, "graphein" – to write.[6]

There are three aspects in specific that allow for a reading of the Facebook Profile as a "genre" of auto/biographical writing or (to benefit from the flexibility of a broader term) life writing[7] in its own right: the first aspect is, as implied above, contents – the self-exposing and self-narrating quality of Facebook posts; the second concerns Facebook's emphasis on its one-person-one-profile policy; and the third is related to the set-up of profiles, which establishes a link to formalistic definitions of literary genres. An approach to the phenomenon "Facebook Profile" via the concept "genre" allows for a discussion of the structural constitution of the occurrence that simultaneously provides access to examinations of different contents. Most importantly, it enables the address of transgressions and contestations of the provided form and potential, regenerating consequences of such moves. The last three sections of this article are dedicated to creative Facebook expressions and the challenges they pose to the preset structures of the platform. The first and following section will expound on the three nexuses connecting profile creation and life writing.

As the software adjusts itself to the widespread use of smartphone-technology, the latest changes of Facebook's self-representation (effective in 2015) put increased emphasis on the communicative function of the platform.[8] Nonetheless, the platform's announcement of the section "Profile" links Facebook participation to acts of life writing as it asks users to share life events that constitute common places of "traditional" autobiographies:[9] "[…] profile picture, school, interests […]" and "[…] graduations, weddings and other important events […]".[10] The present interface structuring users' profiles and interactions was launched in 2012 and initially introduced as "Timeline".[11] Timeline differs from previous forms of profiles in that it offers space to archive users' past life events and posts.[12] The official introduction site and introductory video provided instructions on how to best utilize and navigate the profile: "Tell your life story with a new kind of profile"[13] was the promoting slogan for this interface, revealing the attempt to frame the participation in the network as an autobiographical undertaking, a "life story". According to the first announcement, Timeline offered nothing less than "a home for all the greatest stories" of the user's lifetime and was advertised as a place to "highlight your most memorable […] photos and life events", a place to "tell your story from beginning to middle to now."[14] It was, however, Timeline's promotion video[15] that most strikingly drew a comparison between life writing and participation in the network. The one-and-a-half minute long

video starts out with the birth date of the white heterosexual male "Andy Sparks," flips through baby pictures, teen pictures, Andy's first change in his relationship-status, a short graduation clip, a map indicating Andy's honeymoon location, and, finally, brings the simple storyline to a conclusion when Andy's first child is born. Though both the advertisement materials and the designation "Timeline" were removed from the Web in 2015, the functions promoted are still in place. Considered collectively, the archiving of posts, the promotion of the respective feature, and the events listed in the Andy Spark video, demonstrate the content-based parallels between the participation on the platform and the forms of life writing that Facebook seeks to stress.[16]

The second aspect that links the "Profile"[17] to forms of life writing is the importance the platform attaches to the connection of one person (defined in legal terms) and one profile, that is, a singular and specific location intended for the self-representation of this specific person. This connection implicates an important limitation as the creation of more than one profile per person is simply prohibited: The "Statement of Rights and Responsibilities" that a Facebook user has to agree to in order to open an account includes the following declaration: "Facebook users provide their real names and information, and we need your help to keep it that way."[18] Participants must therefore accept the following conditions:

1. You will not provide any false personal information on Facebook, or create an account for anyone other than yourself without permission.
2. You will not create more than one personal account.[19]

Mark Zuckerberg's alleged claim that "[h]aving two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity"[20] is a gesture downplaying the fact that Facebook's revenue is dependent on advertisement and relies on the number of hours "real" people – in this context, credit card owners and potential online shoppers – spend on the website. There is, however, more to this remark: the implication that one (stable) identity is a sign of "integrity" is fully in tune with the ideology of Facebook's overall marketing strategy based on a notion of individual authenticity, which excludes the possibility of multiple selves.

These (legal and ideological) regulative efforts tie into a broader discussion of forms of subjectivity and the ways in which their understanding is impacted by digital and networked ways of writing and communicating. Both legal and ideological attempts of identity standardization and authorization are exposed to strong counteracting mechanisms in digital, networked contexts. Facebook's persistence regarding the practice of linking a singular-strand narrative to a legally attested person is certainly remarkable considering that self-expressions taking place on the

platform are clearly marked by its multi-medial and polyphonic character: "Profiles" are formed in an interactive manner, inviting comments from other users, a process governed by the software. Additionally, the users of the website have a range of different medial options (images, videos, hypertext) at their disposal. Thus, Facebook profiles much rather reflect a post-modern understanding of subjectivity stressing the phenomenon's fragmented, multiple, and dissociated nature.

Interpretations of online identity production within literary and media studies account for this. Laurie McNeill's article with the telling title "There is no 'I' in network" is an early example of an analysis leading in this direction.[21] According to McNeill, the digital era upsets the conventional understanding of the relationship between signifier and signified and potentially "trouble[s], if not totally destabilize[s], dominant conceptions of 'autobiography,' and in particular Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact, which insists on the stability of the 'I' and its verifiability, the synonymity of the signifier and the signified."[22] Facebook's one-person-one-profile policy strives to protect the illusion of an "authentic" self and to bolster the belief that the proper name of the "author" coincides with and guarantees the existence of the person enunciating.[23] Instead of exploring the possibilities of the absence of a pact between the "vital statistics"-self and the "enunciator,"[24] which Lejeune does not fail to allude to in his first book on autobiography,[25] Facebook's promotion presumes the existence of an "author, narrator and protagonist"-identity.[26]

Facebook's interest in this kind of identity construction is first and foremost connected to corporate revenue. The differentiation between network "content" and "user data" drawn by Jessica Reyman renders Facebook's financial stakes more transparent. Following Reyman's distinction, "content" is the actual content of users' posts (including their photos and videos), whereas "user data" consists of "objective facts" collected by the network software for the purpose of data mining, that is, the use of data for commercial ends. Reyman points out that content and user data are tied together as the latter only comes into existence through the production of the first.[27] Facebook's suggestive advertisement presents the most palpable connection between the network's corporate interests and the actual contents of profiles established by its users.[28] Since Facebook is interested in motivating as many users as possible to upload and share content, as this enables Facebook to gain access to the valuable user data considered "unowned property,"[29] we must assume that its marketing specialists deem the readily assessable and straightforward concretization of a single-strand life narrative as an effective strategy to motivate people's participation in the social network. The normative standardization of what profiles look like and of how interaction on Facebook is conducted

certainly supports the impression of stability, reliability and simplicity – features that constitute, according to Mary Evans, the overwhelming success of popular auto/biographies in the 20th century.[30]

This aspect is closely related to the third characteristic that establishes a link between profile creation and life writing: Due to the provided templates with labeled fields for profile creation and communication, users' identity expressions are obviously framed and restricted. By providing and regulating a fixed structure, a "genre" (in a formalist meaning of the term[31]) is created that is aptly described as a "multiple-choice" form of life writing featuring some open-ended questions.

Facebook's investment in a digital version of generic formalism, its encouragement of the creation of "self-reports" (to borrow Ruth Page's term) and its insistence on linking the sum of such self-reports to one legally attested person, creates an unprecedented large and diverse arena to test and apply the propositions of different strands of genre theory.[32] Thanks to its scope, it provides abundant material to be considered in attempts to answer new questions raised in the field. Genre theories, on the other hand, propose guiding questions for a critical examination of the phenomenon "Profile," which highlight its functions and limitations as well as effects on users' (self-) experiences. In *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre*, Richard Coe stresses that certain "attitudes, values and ways of doing"[33] are inevitably implied in different genres and concludes that in regard to a specific genre it is not enough to ask "Does it work?", but also necessary to further inquire "What does it do?" and "For whom does it work?"[34] John Frow fans out a similar question in the issue "Remapping the Genre": "What kind of world is brought into being here—what thematic topoi, with what modal inflection, from what situation of address, and structured by what formal categories?"[35]

Considering Facebook's official number of users, we can confidently assume that the genre Profile does work and certain "attitudes, values, and ways of doings" are being promoted – as the analysis above revealed, such values are already transported in the site's user manual, legal framework, advertisement, and set-up.[36] The need to provide large quantities of "user data" to companies distributing their advertisement over the network exposes Facebook's motivation to advance certain meanings, ideas, and practices.

However, there are user expressions that either playfully or artistically challenge pre-set norms of self-expression – even in defiance of legal restraints. These utterances are of importance as they bypass the platform's interest in the stimulation of certain kinds of "self-reports" and provide an outlet from the deterministic, formalistic structures they test and transgress.

2. IDENTITY PLAY – "FAKE PROFILES" AND "FICTIONAL CHARACTERS"

The templates provided by Facebook construct a frame, which inevitably implies forms of normativity. Other mechanisms the platform relies on, however, conflict with standardization. The desire that fuels the activity of self-narration is the desire to be acknowledged by other users.[37] To achieve that, a profile has to attract attention by being unique, outstanding, and original. Facebook identities are thus compelled to oscillate between normativity and creative gestures that transgress its set of norms. Two of the earliest studies by humanities scholars on the subject, McNeill's "There is no 'I' in network" and E.J. Westlake's "Friend me if you Facebook", focus primarily on the frameworks governing user expression in social networks, which results in descriptions of normative structures in non-digital worlds that continue in the virtual realm.[38] Such investigations fall short of accounting for the "innovative ways" of internet-storytelling "that have as yet to be explored."[39] In what follows, I will focus on challenges from within the normative set-up that may trigger the set-up's undoing and allow forms and genres to evolve.

The broader phenomenon of "inauthentic" or "Fake" Facebook profiles performs precisely this move as it exemplifies the legal and social restrictions governing profile creation as well as the contestation of these restrictions. In August 2012 the designation "Fake Profile" gained some prominence when Facebook published its first quarterly report to the US financial regulators. In the respective report, Facebook revealed that 8.7 percent of its accounts were run by users, who it deemed "not real."[40] Media reports on the subject immediately coined the term "Fake Profiles" for such accounts.[41] According to Facebook, approximately one third of these accounts were created for pets, to promote businesses, and to send spam. The larger portion of accounts run by "not real" users consist of what the company describes as an "account that a user maintains in addition to his or her principal account."[42] According to this slightly cryptic formulation, 4.8 percent[43] of all existing Facebook accounts are either created to represent lives of users' alter egos or fictional characters, whose stories are not intended to explicitly relate to the user's "real" life" experiences. Despite being listed as a separate group, pets' profiles belong – given their structure – to this latter group, which may, as a subgroup of "Fake Profiles" and in reference to Westlake's article, be dubbed "Fictional Characters."[44] "Fictional Characters" roughly fall into three categories: pages of pets, pages of inanimate objects, and pages of famous (including famous and deceased) figures. The descriptions of the following examples illuminate the – in the eyes of Facebook, undesirable

– phenomenon and demonstrate possible effects of identity plays involved in these types of profiles.

To use a prominent example and representative of the idea of "authorship" in the category of famous and deceased figures: in the summer of 2015, 89 registered Facebook profiles circulated under the name "Johan[n] Wolfgang Goethe".[45] Many of these profiles utilize a portrait of the historic person Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) as a profile picture; the profiles are composed in a variety of languages. One of these "Johann Wolfang Goethe" profiles, established in 2008, is now designated as a community page.[46] The originators of the posts on this "Goethe"-wall are impossible to discern. Some posts are written in first person (e.g. Nov 22nd, 2014: "John Zelazny has written a parody of my beloved 'The Sorrows of Young Werther.'"); others by an anonymous voice, addressing an equally anonymous readership and speaking of "Goethe" in the third person (e.g. Nov 4th, 2014: "Did you know from where Goethe had his inspiration for Faust?"); a third type of posts merely consists of uncommented links and poetry-quotes.[47] The languages used in the posts vary, ranging from Hebrew, Turkish, and Arabic to Italian, German, and English. A different "Johan (sic) Wolfgang von Goethe" lives in "Weimar, Germany."[48]

The choice of this example stresses the link to Michel Foucault's famous essay "What Is An Author?" It demonstrates that the author is not necessarily "dead", as Roland Barthes' essay title "Death of the Author" implies, but rather multiplied, polyglot, and unidentified – in the sense of anonymous as well as bare of a singular and clear identity. "No longer" reads the conclusion of Foucault's text, will the "tiresome repetitions" of the following question be heard:

> "Who is the real author?"
> "Have we proof of his [!] authenticity and originality?"
> "What has he [!] revealed of this most profound self in his [!] language?"[50]

Foucault's essay continues listing alternative questions. Among them "'What are the modes of existence of this discourse?' / 'Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?'"[51] These questions are conspicuously similar to those posed by contemporary genre theorists.[52]

In comparison to "Community Pages," Facebook profiles of pets are more closely tied to a single writer as a pet's "real-life" owner is commonly (though not necessarily) known to other Facebook users and potential Facebook friends. In such cases, the multiplication (or, at least, the duplication) of the "author" identity allows for a more intentional identity play. To give an example, the pictures posted on Facebook user "Ollie Foxi's" wall suggest that "Ollie," born in Junction, Texas on March 3rd, 1967, and

currently living in Lake Sarah, Minnesota, is a cat.[53] There are, however, numerous posts on "his" wall, written in the first person. Additionally, "Ollie Fox" is addressed in second person by befriended Facebook users, who post on "his" wall, like, and comment on "his" posts. Some of "Ollie's" posts written in the first person allow for the inference that the addressed user's "real life" life form is the owner of the cat pictured in "Ollie's" images, as in: "Can someone please call […] and remind her to check her Facebook messages? I have a very urgent message (FEED US!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!) that I'm not sure she's checked." (February 24th, 2015). While utterances of this sort can be found on similar walls,[54] "Ollie" stands out in directly addressing the the animal-human-duality of the enunciator: "I'M A FREAKIN CAT – OBVIOUSLY I CAN'T TYPE BY MYSELF SO […] IS MY MASTER!" (March 1st, 2015). This post stands in for and indicates the numerous ways in which Facebook profiles can playfully adopt and challenge traditional notions of subjectivity.[55] Foucault's questions aiming at the source of written discourse can be relocated and moved onto the psychological plain. Here, they illuminate the complexity of the phenomenon "subjectivity": enunciators like "Ollie's" direct the attention to the fact that – even in regard to writings stemming from a certain presumed being – it is legitimate to ask "'What are the modes of existence of this discourse?'" and "'Where does it come from; how is it circulated; who controls it?'"[56] Assuming the voice of an "other" is one means to problematize a self's "own" voice. Kitchen sink psychology and basic discourse theory suffice to realize that there is no certain, single answer to the question "who controls" this voice – it is profiles like "Ollie's" that carry this non-decidability into Facebook users everyday lives.

The projective outsourcing and division of identity roles taking place on pet profiles function similarly in the case of inanimate objects: "Jonny Surabaya"'s profile picture suggests that "Jonny Surabaya" is a face-like feature on a partially green-painted concrete wall.[57] However, the profile indicates that "Jonny" was "born" at a specific time and location, is in a "complicated" relationship and traveled to different destinations with other Facebook friends of "his." Other examples of inanimate objects include items that do not even offer a "face," like a hand-cart or a candle – the options of objects to be utilized for this end are, of course, unlimited.[58]

The ways in which the quoted profiles establish and perform fictional characters are best described as comical and light-hearted. Nonetheless, they belong to the category of "Fake Profiles" that diminishes Facebook's market value and are prohibited. Facebook takes its prohibition seriously, which is demonstrated by the fact that a "Report" button to denounce a profile that violates any part of Facebook's "Statements and Rights"[59] is built into every profile page and can be activated by any user.[60]

Facebook's ideological condemnation of certain forms of creative self-expression and its commercial interests informing its regulations mirror broader attitude-changes affecting Internet-platforms. The "real-name"-requirement ties the usage of the network to the nation state,[61] the authority administering the issuance of legally recognized "names and information" that are required during the sign-up procedure.[62] Such connections are fully in-line with the development of the Internet, which was welcomed as a "cyber utopia" and celebrated as a "potentially post-gender, post-racial, and disembodied world of enthusiasm"[63] in the 1980s and 1990s, to a place where anonymity is suspect and "associated with trolls, scammers, and fringe activist groups."[64] According to Judith Donath, sites like Facebook that became prominent in the 2000s "make identity less fluid than it is even in face-to-face experience."[65]

3. THE LAWS OF GENRE

Facebook's "Statement of Rights and Responsibilities" illustrates how the legal frameworks connected to corporate online platforms create new categories and laws governing online genres. As both a formalistic as well as a much broader idea implying notions of subjectivity and generation, the concept "genre" and the long history of its reception assist in further understanding the potential for creative transgression of such genre-laws. By moving from taxonomy to subject-notions, Derrida's observations in "The Law of Genre"[66] help discern the effects "Fake Profiles" – a genre that is indeed shaped by the "law" in the socially normative as well as purely legal sense – have on the network and its users. According to Derrida, it takes the appearance of a second genre for the first one to emerge. In regard to Facebook, this means that the appearance of the term "Fake Profile" enables the emergence of "Profile" as a genre. Simultaneously, however, Profile is exposed as an impossibility – the difference between the two types of Profiles can neither be successfully linked to a specific formalistic structure, nor to a specific content. "Genre-designations cannot be simply part of the corpus."[67] At the same time they are not "extraneous to the corpus" either.[68] The difficulty arising from these two axioms concerns the "impossibility of stabilizing" such texts "from the outside."[69] The impossibility of stabilizing them from the "inside" is proven by the many contestations (including Lejeune's own) of the Lejeunian pact (see section one). In the case of life writing this destabilization means that the self-referential narration (the reference) of the subject cannot be reliably traced back to its enunciator (the referred to) and the subject referred to escapes our grasp and grasping.

These formalistic deductions can be translated into a social world constructed by "genres." Highlighting the broad meaning of the French

word "genre"[70] and the connection between the German word "Gattung" (genre) and "Gatte/Gattin" (husband/wife), Derrida's argument extends into non-literary fields: "The question of the literary genre is not a formal one: it covers the motif of the law in general, of generation in the natural and the symbolic sense, of birth in the natural and symbolic senses, of the generation difference, sexual difference between the feminine and masculine genre/gender [...]."[71] English and French dictionary definitions of the noun "genre" support such a reading.[72] This link to the "human genre" reveals how much is implied in a discussion of genres – especially in the discussion of one as common and widely circulating as the Facebook Profile.

The examples listed in section two elucidate this link: The profiles "Goethe" certainly procure an idea of the phenomenon "Goethe" that is very different from the one announced in Friedrich Gundolf's 800-pages biography *Goethe* that famously bodes a symbolic and comprehensive narrative of *the* "klassischer Mensch"[73] in its introduction. Facebook versions of "Goethe" are certainly better described by attributes like polyphonic, multifaceted, and diverse than "classical." Generations of readers exposed to these kinds of representations (provided in abundance by platforms like Wikipedia, which Facebook now links to) will easily recognize the similarly creative constructedness of Gundolf's " klassischer Mensch."

"Ollie's" profile diffuses any autobiographical limitations of a presently writing Facebook "author" and "authors"[74] as it playfully integrates multiple voices ("Masters"). The originator(s) of the text cannot be identified. Importantly, befriended users interacting with "Ollie" participate in this dissolution of boundaries. As soon as they enter into a dialogue with "Ollie" they accept the elusive nature of the character.

The suspension of generic differences is even more pronounced in the creation of digital lives for inanimate objects (or is it subjects?). The idea of what is traditionally defined as an object being welcomed into a group of friends expresses a readiness to freely experiment with new definitions of what it means to "relate" to another, an other, or an Other.

Testing the boundaries of the genre Profile not only challenges common expressions of subjectivity, but also allows for a more intentional exploration of identity diffusion and relations as the Facebook artwork presented in the next section will show.

4. INNOVATION FROM WITHIN THE GENRE – "MY SPACE FOR YOUR LIFE"

While Fictional Characters are a rather casual way to play with identity formation, artist Jack Toolin's project "My Space For Your Life" alludes

to political implications more expressly. Toolin's digital artwork deconstructs the genre Profile from within the framework set up by Facebook and challenges Facebook users' understanding of identity demarcations and relations among narratives of the self and their referees.

For this project, Toolin, based in New York City, takes pictures of local Facebook users holding a sign with the name of an Iraqi killed during the recent US invasion written on it. These portraits are then uploaded by the users and installed as their current Facebook profile picture. Consequently, befriended users of the participants do not only see their friends' photo but are also confronted with the name of a civilian killed by US forces on Iraqi territory.[75] In contrast to "Fake Profiles," which transgress Facebook's legal framework, Toolin's inter-medial work "My Space For Your Life" confronts the profile from inside Facebook's legal structure. He utilizes what is asked for by Facebook to create an account: living citizens. Those who take part in his project use their place of self-representation to "represent" others. Toolin's project uncovers and highlights the interrelatedness of geographically separated lives as it establishes a connection between people who neither knew each other nor crossed paths during their lifetime. Though the people photographed by Toolin never met in person the Iraqis whose name they carry into their social network, they acknowledge a relation to the dead of the war. Their acts point to the representational power of mainstream media as they allude to the medial neglect of the people who are exposed to the destruction caused by US forces. In her essay "Precarious Life," written in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the New York World Trade Centers, Judith Butler analyzes the relationship between "representation" and "humanization." She repeats and asserts the assumption that "those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all."[76] Butler, however, stresses that common modes of "representation" (e.g. pictures taken in Iraq by American journalists) are not only not enough, but potentially used to misrepresent and deform the represented. The ethical task of the image or other forms of representation is therefore to show how "reality delivers" a "challenge to representation": "The critical image, if we can speak that way, […] must not only fail to capture its referent, but *show* this failing."[77] In Toolin's work, the disruption of the identity of reference and referee may present such a failure. The name written on the signs are not the names of the people in the picture. Despite this rift, two subjectivities are present—not as autonomous, clear-cut entities (although the pictures clearly comment on the different legal and national status of the personhoods involved)

but as related subjectivities. The names circulating on Facebook due to the participation of users in Toolin's project do not "capture" an "original" referent (in the Lejeunian sense). Nonetheless, they reference a linkage between US American and Iraqi citizens. If this link can accomplish the task of "humanizing" the lives referenced by proper names remains open to debate.

The effected superimposing of two identities in one Facebook profile creates a relation, which implies a form of subjectivity that is very different from that suggested in Facebook's Andy Spark video. The ties emphasized in Toolin's profile pictures refer to the possibility of an ethical subjectivity in the Levinasian sense, which knows no clearly delimited "I" but only an always already established form of responsibility for the other, i.e. subordination to the need of the other. According to Levinas' philosophy, such a form of subjectivity "is" and "is" simultaneously "not" – like Derrida's genre. With the assistance of simple means, Toolin's profile pictures potentially challenge both the contents and the boundaries of the genre they participate in new expressive forms of the "human genre."

As genres form our perception, innovative genre expressions have the potential to be of "real life"-consequences. To borrow John Frow's words, "reality" is not "singular and external to the forms through which we apprehend it" but rather "mediated by systems of representations and interest".[78] Cathrine Schryer similarly accounts for the power of genres to form the perception of the world. Shryer describes genres as "enacted by a well-positioned agents [which] reproduce forms of symbolic power that can shape their receivers' view of the world."[79] Jack Toolin's art exposes the power of these "well-positioned agents" and thereby changes modes of perceiving the structures they rely on. This is a possible first step in a process, in which users themselves step into the position of agents who have the "symbolic power" of the genre at their command.

To summarize and conclude: Facebook's marketing implies a need for coherent narratives to create and address users and consumers, a need influenced by a corporate, capitalist setting. Aesthetic play as articulated in the online performance of "Fictional Characters" undermines this coherence notwithstanding the legal restrictions in place to assure it. The extension of possible narratives proves a means to establish new forms of self-expression and new notions of relations among expressive acts and their enunciators. Jack Toolin's artwork points at the political potentialities of creative boundary crossing expressed in word and image. The examples considered in this article expose the broad meaning and numerous implications of "genre" and show how negotiations and re-negotiations of genre contents take place along and in transgression to only apparently well-established boundaries and definitions. Thereby they

illustrate an exit from deterministic limitations created by the defaults of corporate platforms and apps that structure contemporary forms of communication.[80]

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susanne Fuchs joined New York University's German Department in 2010. Her current research considers the intertwining of warfare practices, metaphoricity and the theatrical enactment of disarming gestures. Her research interests include German literature around 1800, theories of subjectivity, theater and film studies, political theory.

NOTES

1 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook Newsroom News. Jul 15, 2015. (newsroom.fb.com/News/457/One-Billion-People-on-Facebook).

2 Facebook did not succeed uniformly, not even in industrial countries. On Facebook's failure to establish itself in Japan and other countries, see: Marichal, José, *Facebook Democracy. The Architecture of Disclosure and the Threat to Public Life.* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012. p. 151–2.

3 For an analysis of this tool's development over the years see: Marrison, Aimée, 'Facebook and Coaxed Affordances' In: Poletti, Rak (ed.), *Identity Technologies. Constructing the Self Online.* University of Wisconsin Press 2014. pp. 112–32. Here: p. 121–5.

4 Page, Ruth, *Stories and Social Media. Identities and Interaction.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. p. 69.

5 Kirkpatrick, David, *The Facebook Effect. The Inside Story of the Company that Is Connecting the World.* New York et al.: Simon & Schuster, 2010. p. 331.

6 For a detailed summary of the different layers and aspects available to Facebook users see: Eisenlauer, Volker, *A Critical Hypertext Analysis of Social Media. The True colours of Facebook.* London: Bloomsbury. 2013. p. 32–9. For another definitional attempt see: Marrison 2014. p. 114.

7 For a differentiation of the terms see: Smith, Sidonie, Watson Julia (ed.), *Reading Autobiography. A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives.* Minneapolos, London: University of Minnesota Press. 2010. p. 4–9.

8 Facebook's present "About"-page's headline reads "You're with Friends", the subtitle: "Ways to Connect." The layout of the users' site was not modified. Retrieved from the Web, Facebook-About-Page. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.com/about/).

9 That is, autobiography in the historical sense of the term. For the history of the desig-
   nation "autobiography" see the introduction to the 2nd edition of Smith and Watson's
   Reading Autobiography (Smith, Watson 2010. p. 2.) The depictions of subjectivities related
   in such writing are conditioned by the historical emergence of the genre and are, cor-
   respondingly, informed by definitions of the human being as an autonomous and self-
   conscious individual (able to obtain and relay self-knowledge) that was most prominent
   in and since the Enlightenment period. Such autobiographical narratives or memoirs
   are often structured along the lines laid out in the metaphoric field that equates "life"
   and "journey" and therefore necessarily move from, to and past several common places
   constitutive of an bourgeois life as conceptualized in the 18th and 19th century.

10 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook Profile-Page. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.com/
   about/#profile).

11 The name was dropped during the recent changes on the introductory page.

12 The announcement read: "[Your stories] don't just vanish as you add new stuff."
   (Retrieved from the Facebook Newsroom Products. Jul 15th, 2015.
   (facebook.com/blog/blog.php?post=10150289612087131).

13 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook About-Page. Oct 28th, 2014. (www.facebook.com/
   about/timeline) No longer available online.

14 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook About-Page. Oct 28th, 2014. (www.facebook.com/
   about/timeline) No longer available online.

15 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook About-Page. Oct 28th, 2014. (www.facebook.com/
   about/timeline) No longer available online.

16 The Andy Spark video was evidently modeled on "autobiography" in its literary, pre-
   dominantly European and North American form dating back to the 18th and 19th cen-
   tury (see footnote 9). Many important markers of this form of autobiography are found
   in the Andy Spark video: birth to white, heterosexual parents, schooling, a marriage
   resembling the parents', birth of one's own child. The historical and ideological indebt-
   edness and inherent normativity of the popular version of the genre led to fundamental
   criticism undertaken by feminist, queer, postmodern and postcolonial theorists (See:
   Smith, Watson 2010. p. 3.).

17 Spelled with a capital letter when used as a genre designation.

18 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. Jul 15th,
   2015. (facebook.com/legal/terms).

19 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. Jul 15th,
   2015. (facebook.com/legal/terms).

20 Krikpatrick 2010. p. 199.

21 McNeill, Laurie, 'There is no 'I' in Network: Social Networking Sites and Posthuman
   Auto/Biography.' *Biography* [35.1], 2012. pp. 65–82. Marrison similarly stresses the "mul-
   tivocal, multimediated" nature of self-narrative texts emerging on Facebook, "that seem
   as much algorithmically produced as they do authored." Marrison 2014. p. 127.

22 McNeill 2012. p.65.

23 That this coincidence is still expected today was illustrated by Oprah Winfrey's show on
   James Frey's book "A Million Little Pieces". See: Rak, Julie, *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir
   for the Popular Market.* Waterloo, OT: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006. p. 43.

24 Lejeune, Philippe, *On Autobiography.* Transl. by Leary, Katherine. Minneapolis, MN:
   University of Minnesota Press, 1989. p.12.

25 Idem p. 16–7.

26 Idem p. 14.

27 This argument is important as it undermines the basis of current internet-legislation
   that treats content and user data as two distinct entities, which allows for the separa-
   tion of user data from the privacy protection applying to contents. (Reyman, Jessica,

User Data on the Social Web: Authorship, Agency, and Appropriation. *College English* [75.5], 2013, pp. 513–3. p. 524–5) Data protection, data mining and capitalist interests shaping social networks and the participation in them are issues of such a grand scope that Reyman, quoting Heidi McKee's work, resumes that "corporate data mining and government surveillance online are two of the most important issues shaping the future of writing on the Internet." (Reyman 2013. p.515.) The quantity of recent publications on online surveillance supports this claim. See: Marichal 2012. Andrews, Lori, *I Know Who You Are and I Saw What You Did. Social Networks and the Death of Privacy.* New York, NY: Free Press, 2011. Trottier, Daniel, *Social Media as Surveillance. Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World.* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012.

28 It thus presents a link between context and contents, two categories that have to be investigated in combination to do a "genre" justice, as Cathrine Schryer suggests. Schryer, Cathrine, 'Genre and Power: A Chronotopic Analysis.' In: Coe, Lingard, Teslenko (ed.), *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre. Strategies for Stability and Change.* Cresskill, NJ 2002. pp. 73–103. Here: p. 74.

29 Reyman 2013. p. 525.

30 In her book on popular auto/biography in the 20th century, *Missing persons,* Mary Evans refers to people's fear of "inner chaos" (Evans, Mary, *Missing Persons. The Impossibility of Auto/Biography.* New York, NY: Routledge, 1999. p. 1). Evan asserts that auto/biography in its popular form indeed glosses over the "chaos within" that is a characteristic of human life (idem p. 135). Thus, popular auto/biographies are based on the assumption of a coherent subject since this fiction "offers us a chance to stabilize the uncertainties of existence." (Idem p. 131)

31 My intention here is to underline the inescapable (and legally binding) formal restrictions imposed on online-genres by the respective software. Though these restrictions shape and impact a genre, the phenomenon cannot be reduce to a taxonomic regulation of form (For a critique of taxonomic definitions of genre see: Rak 2014 p. 19. John Frow, "Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything You Need …": Genre Theory Today. *PMLA* [122.5], 2007. pp. 1626–34. Here: p. 1627–9.)

32 On online genres' contestation of genre theories, see: Marrison 2014. p. 126.

33 Coe, Lingard, Teslenko, 'Genre as Action, Strategy and *Differance*: An Introduction.' In: Coe, Lingard, Teslenko (ed.), *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre. Strategies for Stability and Change.* Cresskill, NJ 2002. pp. 1–13. Here: p. 2.

34 Coe, Lingard, Teslenko 2002. p. 3.

35 Frow 2007. p. 1633.

36 This reading relies on an understanding of genre as a tool or discourse of social control effected by the habituation a frequent exposure to a specific genre creates. See: Schryer 2002. p. 81.

37 Facebook heavily relies on self-narration's ability to meet the fundamental human need to be seen, to be heard, to enter into others' awareness and to receive their acknowledgment. Understanding selfhood as "active self-disclosure" and identity as the result of a conscious "revealing oneself to others" allows further insights into Facebook's mechanisms: connective and operating in present tense, it invites users to constitute themselves every instant. For a narrative approach to identity, see: Cavarero, Adriana, *Relating Narratives, Storytelling and Selfhood.* Transl. by Paul Kottmann. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000.

38 McNeill focuses on the categorization of identity predicates as an inevitable consequence of online profiles built by means of templates and the capitalistic interests informing these templates. *(*McNeill 2012. p. 67–70.) The drama theorist E.J. Westlake speaks of "performances of self." Westlake, E.J., 'Friend Me if You Facebook: Generation Y and Performative Surveillance.' *The Drama Review* [52.4], 2008, pp. 21–40.

39 "[…] the features of social media stories enable and constrain the narrative dimensions of linearity, tellability, tellership, and embeddedness in innovative ways that have as yet to be explored." Page 2012. p. 11–2.

40 Retrieved from the Web, The Guardian. Jul 15th, 2015. (www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/aug/02/facebook-83m-profiles-bogus-fake).

41 Retrieved from the Web, CNN. Jul 15th, 2015. (edition.cnn.com/2012/08/02/tech/social-media/facebook-fake-accounts/). Retrieved from the Web, Forbes. Jul 15th, 2015. (forbes.com/sites/davidthier/2012/08/02/83-million-estimated-facebook-profiles-are-fake/).

42 Retrieved from the Web, The Guardian. Jul 15th, 2015. (www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/aug/02/facebook-83m-profiles-bogus-fake).

43 Retrieved from the Web, The Guardian. Jul 15th, 2015. (www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/aug/02/facebook-83m-profiles-bogus-fake).

44 Westlake describes attempts to defend the right to maintain fictional identities by referring to the group "Fictional Characters are real to Us" specifically and listing other rescue-groups, like "Save the Fictional Characters! Global," "Fictional Characters United", "Facebook is killing my friends!" and "the Militant Fictional Characters." (Westlake 2008. p. 35.)

45 Number retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015.

46 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.com/pages/Goethe/11977044378).

47 Not only are the initiators of these citations unknown, but the quotes' original authors are similarly obscure: the poem "Urlicht" (posted on September 24th, 2014) was not written by the historic figure Johann Wolfgang Goethe as its location on the site may indicate, but is part of Achim von Arnim's and Clemens Brentano's collection of folk songs and poems *Des Knaben Wunderhorn.*

48 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.com/johanwolfgang.vongoethe.5).

49 May 9th, 2011: "Kiss my arse." And "Who knew that this phrase would be so popular when I wrote the variant, "lick my arse" into Goetz?"

50 Foucault, Michel, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews,* ed. by Bouchard, Donald. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977. p. 138. [Comments in brackets added by SF]

51 Idem p. 138.

52 Whereas Foucault ends on a note of "indifference" in regard to the enunciator (" 'What matter who's speaking?' " idem p. 138), the first part of this article clarifies that advertisers financing the platform certainly care about "who's speaking" and that "money" is one answer to the question "who controls [the discourse]?"

53 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.com/ollie.foxi.9/about).

54 Further examples: Eliska Pipsimaus (Retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015. facebook.com/eliska.pipsimaus), Tsilke Dropkitten (Retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015. facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009380289037&sk=about).

55 One example in the present context is the subversion of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's dialectic of master and bondsman-consciousness that is constitutive in the process of subjectivation within the *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Hegel's dialectic oscillates between the poles of mind and matter – drawing an analogy to "Ollie's" post the "mind's" distinctive feature is the ability to type, whereas mere "matter" is described as "a freakin cat."

56 Foucault 1977. p. 138.

57 Retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.com/jonny.surabaya.1/about). The Facebook wall of the profile of this specific concrete wall functions as an

imaginary additional persona included in the digital records of a group of friends' undertakings – as such it is a "personified" (or rather, a "Facebook-profiled") witness to a
commonality that is, as the posts of its participants indicated, experienced as indifferent to possible boundaries between concrete and abstract, "animate" and "inanimate,"
"fact" and "fiction."

58 The referred to candle is registered on Facebook under the name Shittie Dough, the
hand-cart as Horst Hosenseidl. Retrieved from the Web, Facebook. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.com/sandra.doga.75/about; facebook.com/horst.hosenseidl/about).

59 On the Help-Page "How do I report a fake account?" the following advise is listed: "1. Go
to the profile 2. Click [button] on the cover photo and select **Report** 3. Follow the on-
screen instructions to file a report." The page also lists activities not allowed on the site:
"Pretend to be you or someone else; Use your photos; List a fake name; Don't represent
a real person." Retrieved from the Web, Facebook Help-Page. Jul 15th, 2015. (facebook.
com/help/167722253287296)

60 Intriguing is the persistence displayed by users against these regulations. Westlake describes attempts to defend the right to maintain fictional identities by referring to the
group "Fictional Characters are real to Us" specifically and listing other rescue-groups,
like "Save the Fictional Characters! Global", "Fictional Characters United," "Facebook
is killing my friends!" and "the Militant Fictional Characters." (Westlake 2008. p. 35.)

61 This requirement theoretically excludes millions of people with uncertain citizen status
who cannot prove or claim to "have" a legal name or whose name does not meet Facebook's formal specifications. See: Elliot, Deni, 'The Real Name Requirement and the
Ethics of Online Identity' In: Beasley, Berrin, Haney, Mitchell, *Social Media and the Value
of Truth*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013. pp. 17–27. Here p. 19.

62 The fact that the US Drug Enforcement Administration uses "Fake profiles" in its investigations, a circumstance that attracted some media attention in 2014, is particularly ironic in this context and poses its own set of vexing problems. On the legal battle
between Facebook and the DEA caused by this practice, see: Retrieved from the Web,
CNN. Jul 15th, 2015. (money.cnn.com/2014/12/24/technology/social/fake-facebook-
accounts/; money.cnn.com/2014/10/20/technology/security/facebook-dea/?iid=EL)

63 Donath, Judith, *The Social Machine. Designs for Living Online*. Cambridge MA, London:
MIT Press, 2014. p. 224.

64 Idem p. 227.

65 Idem p. 227.

66 Initially written to counter structuralist accounts of genre, the text is by now part of the
auto/biography studies' theoretical text corpus. See: Linda Anderson's introduction to
the field (Anderson, Linda, *Autobiography*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000. p. 7–12). It is,
however, still deemed a "seminal but neglected provocation" in the field of media studies
(Bennett, Peter, Kendall, Alex, McDougall, Julian, *After the Media. Culture and Identity in
the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2011. p. 39, 41).

67 Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre,' transl. by Ronell, Avital. In: Weber, Samuel (ed.),
Glyph. Vol 7. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. pp. 202–32.
Here p. 212.

68 Idem p. 212.

69 Anderson 2000. p. 10.

70 Derrida 1980. p.221.

71 Idem p. 221.

72 In both languages, the respective entries refer first to a specific kind of person and
groups of people and only secondly to the meaning of the word as a means to categorize
literature. A French definition of "genre" lists: "origine, race, peuple, nation, famille,
espèce, genre, sorte." An English example lists: "kind; sort; style; [as in:] 'Two very

remarkable men … but of entirely different genres.'" Guilbert, Louis, Lagane, René, Niobey, Georges (ed.), *Grand Larousse de la langue francaise en six volumes*. Vol 3. Paris: Larousse, 1972. p. 2200. Simpson, J.A., Weiner, E.S.C. (ed.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol 6. Oxford: Clarendon Press, ²1989. p. 446.

73 Gundolf, Friedrich, *Goethe*. Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1916. p. 4.

74 Who and how many are involved in the creation and maintenance of the profile is unknown.

75 Retrieved from the Web, Jack Toolin. My Space for Your Life. Jul 15th, 2015. (www. jacktoolin.net/msyl.html) The artist's presentation of the involved profiles on his own website facilitates the close-reading of the profiles created.

76 Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London, New York: Verso 2006. p. 141.

77 Idem p. 146.

78 Frow 2007. p. 1633.

79 Schryer 2002. p. 84.

80 They also call attention to exits from impasses created by discursive practices linked to Foucauldian analysis. See: Coe, Lingard, Teslenko 2002. p. 5.