

Dear Colleague,

The January 2011 convention in Los Angeles promises to be a groundbreaking event as we transition to new meeting dates and new formats to showcase presentations and encourage dialogue. For it, I invited you to consider how you might collaborate in the Presidential Forum theme. I am pleased that so many of you have already proposed sessions on the 2011 theme, "Narrating Lives," and I hope that many others will attend these sessions.

The narration of lives surrounds us, from the banal forms of contemporary confessional television to the afterlives of forms inherited from the ancient Greeks and Romans. It extends across the globe, to traditions of life writing in China, North Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. It emerges digitally in modes of online life storytelling. "Narrating Lives" captures this diversity of genres and media, encompassing medieval hagiography, letters, diaries, narratives of exploration and colonization, autobiographical and biographical texts, lyric cycles, and autobiographical fiction as well as the pictographs of native peoples, the oral traditions of indigenous peoples, testimonial witnessing, performance art, graphic memoirs, blogs, and autoethnography.

Exploring the narration of lives engages broad theoretical issues of trauma and memory, authenticity and truth telling, ethical accountability, modes of intersubjectivity, remediation, and the cultural uses of narration. It foregrounds temporal and geographic dimensions of the traffic in lives and narratives through reception studies and studies of transnational and translational routes of

circulation. And it tests methodological approaches to narration, reading practices, and reading communities.

The points of entry to narrating lives open connections to colleagues in other disciplines, from neuroscience and cognition studies to art, architecture, history, and law. "Narrating Lives" also relates directly to the work of the MLA. In narrative forms such as task force reports, the MLA assembles membership stories of the professional lives of language and literature scholars in changing times. Far from directing us inward, focusing on life narration—and building archives of life stories for future generations—exposes the work of the humanities in the world.

The 2011 convention will usher in a new calendar and introduce exciting new formats. Although many of us face diminished support for conference travel, I hope that you will be able to make coming to Los Angeles a priority. I look forward to seeing you there.

Cordially,

Sidonie Smith

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