

## **Presentation Abstracts**

**SVETLANA MAKEYEVA**

### **“Female Military Bloggers: the Narratives of Military Life”**

With this presentation, I would like to contribute to a discussion about the role of the women military bloggers on the Web. Specifically, I would like to address the problematic of placing the narratives of the female military bloggers within the contemporary feminist theory. In my research, I ask how the personal narratives about military life and combat experiences, written and published by women on the Web, should be 'read' within the contemporary feminist tradition. In Deleuze and Feminist Theory, Clair Colebrook writes that “feminism has never been the pure and innocent other of a guilty and evil patriarchy”; in her view, feminism “has always been obliged to use the master's tools to destroy his house”. (Colebrook 2000: 11) I argue, Colebrook's perspective on the role of the feminist political thought as 'contamination' of patriarchal tradition is useful in the critical reading of the women military blogs. Within the course of the presentation, I will provide critical analysis of a selection of blogposts (1) written by women milbloggers in English, and (2) addressing the traditionally male/masculine canons, such as military life and war.

**FRANK USBECK**

### **“Ceremonial Storytelling: A Cultural Perspective on Civil Reintegration in Milblogging from Afghanistan”**

Scholars and therapists of combat-related stress have increasingly embraced the warrior traditions of indigenous peoples and of ancient civilizations to understand and propose ways how a society can support its soldiers in their transition from civil life to the battlefield and back home. Some Native American honoring, cleansing, and healing ceremonies reintegrate returning warriors through elaborate systems of ritual narration of the war experience and reciprocal ritual acknowledgment by the community. Regarding the unprecedented extent of traumatization among American Vietnam veterans, protagonists in the public discourse have agreed that ceremonialism is a major aspect in healing combat-related stress among soldiers. American efforts during the recent conflicts, both in the military, in social work, and civic engagement, have begun to take ceremonialism and narrative approaches into account.

This presentation will discuss the cultural work of milblogs as modern forms of ceremonial storytelling that might contribute to the well-being of soldiers during deployment and to their social

(re-)integration as veterans. The example presented here will explore the textual features and the choice of topics as the soldier's strategy to cope with the stress of the missions and to retain a sense of "normalcy." Increasingly, the blog becomes a forum on popular culture, developing into its own show. The presentation will argue that meta-narrative features, transmedial reference, and the extensive interaction with the blog audience are examples of playful, ceremonial war narration and, eventually, of a reciprocal cycle of sharing and acknowledging war experience between soldiers and civil society.

**BRIAN SCHNEIDER**

**“Live from the Front: Milblogging and Patterns in the Modern War Narrative”**

Writing about war in the twentieth century, both from a soldier and civilian perspective, has developed a common pattern. First, participants relied on poetry, whether personal or published, to help deal with the immediate trauma of their experiences. Next, generally right after the war ended, nonfiction and memoirs proliferated. Lastly, approximately a decade or more after the conflict, fiction writing finally emerged. Using an American perspective on this progression, the pattern remains fairly consistent through World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and – to a lesser degree – the smaller Korean and Persian Gulf Wars, respectively.

In the twenty-first century, however, digital writing has altered this reliable arrangement. Blogs and other Internet avenues have shortened the time and distance between an individual's traumatic experience and their writing about it. The initial step of poetry writing does remain, with the outpouring of online sentiment after the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist attacks as an key example of this medium's role in a traumatic event. The second step becomes far murkier, as the meme of “war blogging” has, to some extent, usurped the role of journalism and undercut the later considerations of memoir. Who needs recollections when one can blog their war live to the world as it is happening?

This paper will explore the ramifications and evolution of war blogging into this pattern of how a war enters the written record. Though war blogging does definitely speed up the narrative process, the basis of the pattern still remains. Using a few case study examples of war blogs, this paper highlights the role of this online medium as drawing public attention to the previously private letter-writing or diurnal tendencies of soldiers in earlier wars. Finally, this paper ends by probing the question of how this new, and faster, “publishing” of a soldier's story affects the later memoir and

fiction considerations of the broader war narrative pattern.

**SIMONE SCHWÄR**

**“Storyfying War: Writing Lives and Combat in Contemporary America”**

In the preface to his war autobiography *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, soldier author John Crawford, serving over one year in Iraq with the Florida National Guard, writes: “The world hears war stories told by reporters and retired generals who keep extensive notebooks and journals. They carry pens as they walk, whereas I carried a machine gun” (Crawford 2005, xiii). His motivations for writing the book about his wartime experiences are twofold; apart from making people aware of the actualities of contemporary warfare with all its atrocities, shattered illusions, and golden memories, he is voicing his personal account of the war in Iraq, and Crawford and his fellow soldiers have many stories to tell. Aware of a near impossibility to render an authentic battlefield experience through textual means, the soldiers turn to autobiographical modes, finding them to be the most adequate means for their accounts. The dissertation *Storyfying War* investigates into the relation between the fighting subject actively participating in an armed conflict such as the war in Iraq and writing about it, between modern warfare and autobiographical writing. It focuses on selected autobiographical documents of soldiers from the frontlines, male and female alike, examining recent self-narratives in the light of the established traditions of warfare and literature in the U.S.