Facebookisms

Colleen Toutant

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Alex Equality Snell
Life is a show...
Facebook is just the
venue through which
we perform.
Feb. 8th 2011 at 2:33 pm
Like Comment:

4 people like this.

Facebookisms, Alex, 2011, hand cross stitched embroidery and aida cloth, 9"x14", Toutant.
Blakely Jelley
My name is not fag and my name is Blake David Jelley and I will never internalize your fears.

Facebooksims, Blake, 2011, hand cross stitched embroidery and aida cloth, 9"x14", Toutant

Mahmoud Yousif
Freedom, pride and dignity to Egypt
Hey guys our main goal is safety and security everyone knows the power of our voice and the strength of our resolve...

Facebooksims, Egyptian Protests, 2011, hand cross stitched embroidery and aida cloth, 9"x14", Toutant
Sidonie Smith is Martha Guernsey Colby Collegiate Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan. Her research interests include autobiography studies, feminist theories, and women's literature.

Interviewers: Eir-Anne Edgar and Tim Vatovec

DC: What do you think is the value of social theory? What role does it play in your work?

SS: I am really interested in questions of how it is that autobiographical narratives produce their authenticity effects. What aspects of a narrative convince a reader or an audience that this is an authentic, and "true" story? We can observe how scandals erupt when charges are made that a narrative presenting itself as "true" may not be true in part or at all. And this leads to another question: what are the factors internal to a narrative and external to a narrative that lead to charges of hoaxing? Julia Watson and I have been trying to tease out answers to these questions in two kinds of autobiographical narratives: instances of witness narratives and charges of false-witnessing and instances of ethnic autobiography and charges of the impersonation of an indigenous subject. In the latter case, we are thinking about how certain metrics of authenticity shore up the performative production of what it means to be indigenous. Social theory is central to getting at the anxieties that produce the scandal of the hoax as well as the ways in which narratives project, or not, convincing authenticity.

DC: We were talking a little bit — well we were talking a lot about the issue of authenticity. Do you think accuracy is, then, connected to authenticity? To be authentic does a narrative have to be 100% accurate?

SS: Well, that's the complicated thing: when you invoke the word 'accuracy' or 'truth,' what is the kind of truth you are invoking? Truth to what? Truth to facticity? Truth to a social reality? Truth to a shared history? A psychological truth? We tend to think of the opposite of truth as lies, but that is not always productive for exploring the ways people tell life stories and the social work those stories do and the ways in which particular life stories gain saliency at particular historical moments. Stanley Fish quipped, that even if an autobiographical narrative is full of lies, it nonetheless speaks a truth — in this case a truth to character. Or consider the multiple kinds of truth that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings acknowledged. The Commission's Final Report emphasizes the importance to the reconciliatory process of acknowledging and pursuing multiple kinds of "truth." Factual or forensic truth provides evidence for establishing the "what" of what happened in the past. Personal truth comes from witnessing to the subjective experience of suffering and victimization. The process of coming to a fuller understanding of, or knowledge about, the context of everyday life under apartheid produces social truth. Healing and restorative truth emerges through the production of a collective, consensual narrative of nation through which the new South Africa can remember its past, found its future, a narrative of nation that listens for the voices of the formerly voiceless and disenfranchised. In its process, then, the TRC negotiated the complicated relays among positivist truth, subjective truth, social truth, and narrative truth. Or approach the question of truth through theories of and research on memory. Neuroscientists talk about the neuroplasticity of the brain, and about...