

Jour fixe Kulturwissenschaften

Donnerstag, 31. Mai 2012 / 16:30 Uhr

Ort: ÖAW, Postgasse 7, „Im Stöckl“, 1. Stock, 1010 Wien

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The Researcher as a Story-Teller: A quest for understanding narratives of professional survival and compromise under censorship

The presentation draws on the writing experience of the research project on academic censorship, self-censorship and publishing in the Czech Republic and Hungary between 1969 and 1989. The sensitive nature of the research, whose main focus were interviews with living and active academics who were also active within the official academic structures during state socialism, together with the numerous tensions and ambiguities contained within all the interviews, necessitated the development of a method of research presentation that would allow for coexistence of the multiple voices and contradictions. The resulting method combines the approaches of grounded theory and narratology in the production of dramatised „imagined conversations“ structured loosely as a quest narrative that tells the story of a research „quest“ to understand the intricacies and dilemmas of individual academic lives under state socialism through the haze of memory, pain and vested interests. Although this method of written presentation of the research material was fuelled by an effort to allow the interviewees to represent themselves to the greatest possible extent, the issues of ethics and power in a research setting are two aspects which I would like to discuss further with the audience of this presentation: Did the manipulation of the narratives achieve the levelling of hierarchies of a research situation, or did it merely introduce different manifestations of authorial power? Is it inevitable that the narrator—that is, the researcher—takes sides in the telling of the stories of others, in order to interpret them within her own set of preconceptions? If so, what are the ethical difficulties of such representation?