

Call for Papers

EXPERIMENTAL LIFE-WRITING

22-23 April 2022, Wrocław
University of Wrocław and École Normale Supérieure de Lyon

Conference website: <http://vanessaguignery.fr/>

The capacious category of life-writing accommodates conventional biography and autobiography – with their insistence on linearity, coherence and a stable sense of the self – as well as auto/biographical works that embrace digital media, mix genres and break down neat life narratives into fragments. In order to give a name to the disruptive strand of the auto/biographical tradition, Irene Kacandes has proposed the term “experimental life-writing,” which encompasses texts employing an unconventional formal device “for the purposes of fact or of enhancing, reinforcing or drawing attention to the referential level.” They are driven by the desire “to convey some aspect of the ‘realness’ of certain life experiences that could not be conveyed as well without pushing at the form itself.” Kacandes distinguishes between experiments regarding time, medium, the relation between the author, subject and reader, and the work's focus. Julia Novak goes on to define “experiments in life-writing” as works that “push at the boundaries of existing forms to mould them into something that better suits the writer's efforts of representation.” In her co-edited volume (with Lucia Boldrini) *Experiments in Life-Writing* (2017), she suggests an alternative classification, based on experimentation with the auto/biographical subject, generic composites, style, structure, intertextuality and metalepsis, names and pronouns, and media. 1975 – the year of the publication of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* and Joe Brainard's *I Remember* – can be viewed as the onset of that overtly experimental streak in auto/biographical writing, which has recently yielded such diverse works as David Clark's *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* (2008), Joan Wickersham's *The Suicide Index* (2008), Anne Carson's *NOX* (2010), Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015), Una's *Becoming Unbecoming* (2015) and Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* (2019). However, as Max Saunders has argued, that tradition can be traced back to the Modernist practice of autobiografiction and claim such literary classics as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933).

Our conference aims to theorize, historicize, and exemplify the still very fresh critical notion of experimental life-writing. We have a particular interest in contemporary Anglophone writing and welcome comparative papers about works in English and other languages. Possible issues and forms to explore in conference papers include (but are not limited to):

- fragmentary life-writing,
- genre-defying graphic memoirs,
- multimodal, multimedia and collage-like life-writing,
- digital/online biography,
- conceptual (life-)writing,
- postmodern life-writing and avant-garde autobiography,
- anti-biography,
- fake auto/biography,
- the self as archive/database,
- digital identities and the quantified self,
- auto/biography and social media,
- formal experimentation in the context of trauma, grief and/or radical vulnerability,
- queer life-writing,
- autobiography in the second or third person,

- generic hybridity in life-writing,
- unconventional relations between the author, narrator, subject and reader,
- playing with frames/framing,
- pedagogical implications of experimental life-writing.

Proposals (ca. 300 words), together with a biographical note, should be sent to Vanessa Guignery (vanessa.guignery@ens-lyon.fr) and Wojciech Drąg (moontauk@gmail.com) by 15 November 2021.

Keynote speakers:

Irene Kacandes – professor of German and comparative literature at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Author of *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion* (2001) and *Daddy's War: A Paramemoir* (2009).

Teresa Bruś – associate professor at the University of Wrocław. Author of *Life Writing as Self-Collecting in the 1930s: Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice* (2012) and *Face Forms in Photography and Life Writing of the 1920s and 1930s* (forthcoming).

Guest author:

David Clark – media artist, filmmaker, visual artist and professor at NSCAD University in Halifax. Author of *A Is for Apple* (2002), *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* (2008) and *The End (Death in Seven Colors)* (2015).

Scientific Committee:

Vanessa Guignery, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon
 Wojciech Drąg, University of Wrocław
 Gerd Bayer, University of Erlangen
 Alison Gibbons, Sheffield Hallam University
 Robert Kusek, Jagiellonian University
 Grzegorz Maziarczyk, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
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Organising Committee:

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 Eleonora Wojciechowska, University of Wrocław
 Lech Zdunkiewicz, University of Wrocław

This conference is planned as an on-site event to be held at the Institute of English Studies of the University of Wrocław in Poland. The conference fee is EUR 80 (or PLN 360).