

## Keynote Speakers

### **Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf**

*Who is Afraid of Autofiction? Of Strange Loops and Real Effects*

‘Autofiction’ is a contested concept. The lecture does not intend to present a new or any normative definition of autofiction. It rather highlights shifting aspects of the autofictional and how they correlate: The first emphasis will be on the real-life effect of autofiction. The paradox of two conflicting pacts, the autobiographical and the fictional pact, will be a further issue. Thirdly, the lecture looks at the role of fantasy in autofictional texts. And, last, but not least, it suggests that autofiction be considered as an implied dimension of autobiography. Literary examples will go along with the theoretical reflection. On the whole, the lecture argues for a performative understanding of autofiction.

**Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf** is professor of modern German literature at the University of Münster (Germany). She received her PhD from the University of Tübingen and did post-doctoral work at the University of Konstanz where she completed her habilitation. Before she became professor at the University of Münster she was professor of modern German literature at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. Her research fields are: German literature from the 18th to the 21st century, general theory of literature, autobiography and autofiction, theory and history of authorship, the interrelation of literature, religion and politics, law and literature. She is the author of *Autobiographie* (Stuttgart and Weimar 2000; 2nd edition 2005) and she edited the 3 volume *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction* (Berlin and Boston 2019).

### **Max Saunders**

*Some Versions of the Autobiographical: Autofiction, Autobiografiction, Autofabrication, and Heteronymity*

Descriptions of ‘autofiction’ have been unhelpfully imprecise. This paper uses Stephen Reynolds’ 1906 essay ‘Autobiografiction’ to argue that we need both terms for a fuller picture of the various ways in which writers can combine autobiography and fiction. The logic of the analysis is shown to require the other two concepts to complete the proposed new taxonomy.

**Max Saunders** is Interdisciplinary Professor of Modern Literature and Culture at the University of Birmingham. He was Director of the Arts and Humanities Research Institute at King’s College London, and Professor of English and Co-Director of the Centre for Life-Writing Research. He studied at the universities of Cambridge and Harvard, and was a Fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge. He is the author of *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1996) and *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford

University Press 2010); the editor of five volumes of Ford's writing, including an annotated critical edition of *Some Do Not . . .* (Carcanet, 2010), and has published essays on Life-writing, on Impressionism, and on a number of modern writers. His book *Imagined Futures: Writing, Science, and Modernity in the To-Day and To-Morrow Book Series, 1923-31* was published by Oxford University Press in 2019. He was awarded a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship from 2008-10; and in 2013 an Advanced Grant from the ERC for a 5-year collaborative project on digital life writing called 'Ego-Media'

## PANELS

### **Panel 1: Autofiction: Theory and Practice**

Chair: Melissa Schuh

**Alison James** (University of Chicago)

*What's Fictional in Autofiction?*

This paper attempts to move beyond the assumptions that have made "autofiction" both a privileged term (especially in the French context) and the object of a theoretical impasse. According to Serge Doubrovsky's initial definition of the genre in 1977, the events and facts of autofiction are strictly real, yet the "adventure" of language produces its own fiction: a book is not a life. In a sense, however, Doubrovsky's "autofiction" itself originates as a curious and contradictory theoretical fiction, one that both occupies the empty square in Philippe Lejeune's chart of autodiegetic narratives and undermines the pragmatic basis of Lejeune's distinctions. Subsequent broader (and vaguer) definitions that emphasize the blending of fact and fiction offer a literary alibi for the disclosures of autobiography. But hybrid experiments in this genre also provoke increasing ethical and epistemic anxiety in the era of "post-truth." Drawing on examples and counterexamples from the work of Annie Ernaux, Édouard Louis, Camille Laurens, Karl Ove Knausgaard, and Rachel Kusk, I aim to develop a precise account of the forms and degrees of fictionality or fictionalization at work in autobiographical writing, from descriptive artifice that generates quotidian detail (Knausgaard) to the creation of fictional entities. Fiction takes on very specific and often limited functions in narratives that rely for their power on the referential force of self-exposure—as well as on the contagious sense of shame that exposes social and sexual norms (Ernaux, Louis) and even annuls stylistic aspirations (Knausgaard). I argue that the case of autofiction offers an important resource for theorizing fictionality in general, while the trend towards autofiction also signals a shift in contemporary uses of fiction—where fiction must always confront the test of truth.

**Arnaud Schmitt** (University of Bordeaux)

*Avatars as the Raison d'Être of Autofiction*

As the dust settles in France on the two-decade-long debate on Autofiction, the two opposite sides remain unreconciled: the anti-essentialists (Colonna, Vilain...) and the rationalists (Lejeune, Schmitt...) haven't reached a theoretical agreement and everyone has gone on to work on different topics and projects. This might be the perfect time for someone who took an active part in this debate to take a step back and reconsider the other side's perspective. As far as I'm concerned, the concept of autofiction remains flawed as explained in *The Phenomenology of Autobiography* (Schmitt 2017) and *Je Fictif / Je Réel* (Schmitt 2010), mostly, to make a long (theoretical) story short, because hybridity is cognitively unrealistic, since a fictional segment within a predominantly referential context is contaminated by its immediate ontological environment and becomes "tainted," and vice-versa.

However, among the arguments put forward by the anti-essentialists, one remains convincing and deserves in my opinion further consideration. It can be found in various forms in texts by Doubrovsky, Colonna and Vilain and consists in presenting Autofiction as an opportunity for the author to enter a fictional world while retaining her/his name, or her/his psychological/physical features; in other words, describing or even using oneself as an avatar.

The purpose of this paper will be to define what an avatar really is within an artistic endeavor defined as an autofiction, its purpose beyond its playful intent and above all what distinguishes an autofictional avatar from the narrator of an autobiographical novel.

**Innokentij Kreknin** (TU Dortmund University)

*Autofiction as Subject-Formation: Opting for a Restrictive Approach*

The term 'autofiction' has had a remarkable success in recent years, not only being used in scientific publications, but also becoming increasingly popular in the discourses of literary criticism as well. And while the term was never strictly defined, recent success made it even more vague. In my paper I would like to take a critical look at the discourse in German Studies and suggest a more restrictive approach to the concept. The value of 'autofiction', I would argue, is not confined to a strictly 'literary' view. Instead, a perspective seems more appropriate that is able to show how autofictional practices are used to create public personae and specific autofictional subjects. I would like to discuss three conditions that can serve as a foundation of a more restrictive – and precise – definition of autofiction; reshaping it as a textual and referential subject-practice. The first condition which has to be met is that a particular autofictional figure is not confined to single discourse or a single field of reference, but must be identifiable as autofictional in several spheres of art and life equally. The second condition is a derivation of the first: figures that qualify as autofictional should be 'consistent', at least in a poetological and referential sense. The third and final condition is the absence of a meta-position, i.e. to be in a state that makes it impossible to draw a distinction between person and persona. In such a re-

strictive approach, autofictional poetics would qualify as a certain mode of parrhesia, a ‘free and truthful speech’ – that is produced in compliance with the laws of literature and art. I will use autofictional practices and poetics situated in the realms of the digital sphere as examples to underline my arguments.

## **Panel 2: Autofiction as Literary Strategy**

Chair: Antonia Wimbush

**Alison Gibbons** (Sheffield Hallam University)

*Autofiction as a Reading Strategy: “dissolving margins” of Fictionality in Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan Quartet*

In Elena Ferrante’s *My Brilliant Friend*, the first novel in the Neapolitan Quartet, the narrating-character Elena Greco describes what her friend Lila calls a sensation of “dissolving margins” in which “the outline of people and things suddenly dissolved, disappeared” (2012, p.89). For Lila, such episodes are experienced as psychic disturbances, yet the concept might equally be used to describe the blur or indeterminacy of fictionality that characterizes readers’ reception of, the publicity for, and reporting on Elena Ferrante and her Neapolitan novels. The novels are classified as fiction, yet readers often interpret the books as autofictional, and thus revealing of experiences from Ferrante’s own life. Such a biographical impulse is all the more complex in light of the fact that ‘Elena Ferrante’ is a pseudonym and the biographical details of her life are therefore unknown or ambiguous.

This paper explores the dissolving margins between fictionality and referentiality in reception – that is, how readers identify, navigate, and even confuse or reject the fictionality or referentiality of a text. I adopt a cognitive stylistic perspective, because such an approach offers the greatest insight into how readers form their interpretive judgments of fictionality and experience fictional texts and their authors as autofictional and thus vicariously real. Drawing on Lejeune’s (1989 [1971]) influential comparative linguistic mapping of autobiography and fiction and Genette’s (1993 [1991]) outline of the voice dynamics of autofiction (namely: author=narrator=character), my analysis moves outward from text to context: first, studying potential signposts of fictionality/referentiality and the narrator-character relation; second, considering readers’ interpretations of author-narrator and author-character relations; and thirdly, scrutinizing the effect of Ferrante’s pseudonym. Ultimately, I suggest that ‘autofiction’ may not only designate a literary genre: for the author, the pseudonym ‘Elena Ferrante’ is itself an autofictive construct; for readers, autofiction can be an intensely affecting reading strategy.

**Lut Missinne** (University of Münster)

*The Functioning of Autofictional Strategies*

Discussions on the heterogeneous nature of autofiction, autobiographical novels or other hybrid life writing genres that rely on the intricate interaction of fact and fic-

tion often focus on the author/narrator or on the reader perspective, but tend to overlook the interaction between these two. In my talk I want to investigate what contribution rhetorical narratology (as explored by James Phelan 2017) and his ideas of ‘textual dynamics’ and ‘narrative progression’ can make for the study of autofiction. Do we mainly have to deal with autofictional writing or autofictional reading or with both? I will pay attention not only to signals and strategies in text and paratext (e.g. the rhetorical and stylistic techniques as well as the narrated events themselves) that direct the reader in his/her reading attitude, but particularly to the functioning of autofictional strategies. I will consider questions concerning the relation between fictional and referential reading - can a reader sit on the fence? (A. Schmitt) - and seek explanations for the use of autofiction. Thereby I will reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of broad and narrow generic interpretations of autofiction. I will do this by means of the work of the Dutch author P.F. Thomése, who has written an autobiographical novel, autobiographical essays and autofictional books (*Schaduwkind* (2003); *Nergensman. Autobiografieën* (2008); *Verzameld Nachtwerk* (2016); the trilogy: *J. Kessels, The Novel* (2009); *Het bamischandaal* (2012), and *Ik, J. Kessels* (2018)).

**Gertrud Maria Rösch** (University of Heidelberg/Dalhousie University at Halifax)  
*Playing Hide and Seek with the Author. Demarcating the Roman à Clef from Autofiction*

The intertwining of fact and fiction does not only have a long literary history in the genre of autobiography. Among its predecessors is the continuously productive genre of Roman à Clef, for which the defining feature is the deliberate mixing of fact and fiction. Roman à Clef constitutes a genre the terms of which are established at the beginning of the 20th century, but whose origins date back to the 17th. The technical term, originally coined by French librarian Fernand Drujon, is less well known than the genre itself, to which academic research has paid varying interest (e.g. Latham, Sean: *The Art of Scandal. Modernism, Libel Law and the Roman / Clef*. Oxford/New York 2009); however, American literary scholars use the term ‘faction’ to define the genre. A text categorized as Roman à Clef – which includes dramatic and lyrical forms – depicts a fictional plot that is heavily laden with references to historical personalities and events. Their real names, however, are not mentioned but rather fictional names are assigned to characters and locations in the text. The most significant example remains Klaus Mann’s novel *Mephisto* (1936), in which members of the author’s family and political figures of the 1920s and 1930s appear. In my paper, I will point out the links and cross-references between the two genres of Roman à Clef and Autofiction. It is not only pivotal to examine the narrative modes by which Roman à Clef and Autofiction are linked, but it is also important to investigate how the author’s intentions manifest themselves in the text and how reception history can alter the meaning of a text. On these two levels it should be possible to differentiate between these two genres.

### Panel 3: Affordances of Autofiction as Term and Strategy

Chair: Meindert Peters

**Sebastian Brass** (Harvard University)

*Fact, Fiction, and (Non-)Transparency: The Question of Self-Referentiality in Autofiction*

*What happened to the truth is not recorded.* (Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*)

The contribution explores the possibility of conceptualizing autofiction as a fictional genre which can be opposed to the factual genre of autobiography qua its lack of a quasi-scientific self-thematization. It sets out from Wagner-Egelhaaf's observation that autofictional writing from the 1980s to the present leaves behind the alternatives 'truth' or 'fiction' – this difference "läuft sozusagen selbstverständlich mit," becoming visible every now and then, but without the pathos of the 1970s. Whereas Wagner-Egelhaaf sees this as the vanishing point of autobiographical writing *generally*, I insist on the continued importance of self-referentiality. I combine Schneider's (1986) and Schabacher's (2007) notions of autobiographical self-referentiality with linguistic and narratological strategies and hold that all of them together fulfil the scientific criterion of transparency (analogous to transparency as it evolved in the meta discourse of historiography, cf. Droysen 1868). The border between knowledge and nonknowledge becoming apparent on the textual surface is a constitutive element of 'autobiography,' which I thus, in a move against Paul de Man (1979), conceive of as a genre – and, in spite of its fictive and fictional (cf. Zipfel 2001) elements, as an altogether *factual* one. Autobiographical texts stage a meta-knowledge regarding autobiographical 'non-knowledge' which *hides* the impossibility of producing verifiable knowledge on *both* sides of the border *knowledge/non-knowledge*. Against this background, I seek to test the possibility to define autofiction negatively qua the *absence* of such explicit self-referentiality, and, positively, qua fictional elements in the sense of Doubrovsky (1993) and, again, Wagner-Egelhaaf, who points out the *overtly* fictional elements in Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei*. Fictional signals (cf. Cohn 1990, Genette 1991) can be argued to function as implicit meta-commentary, questioning worldly reference (and opening up the text for non-referential readings) in a literary rather than quasi-scientific mode. Looking at French (theories of) autofiction (Doubrovsky, Robbe-Grillet) as well as Özdamar, Karl Ove Knausgård, and Philip Roth, it will be shown that this approach can help to define autofictional texts as opposed to factual *Wirklichkeitserzählungen* (Klein/Martínez 2009); some of these texts, however, seem to resist it. If a homodiegetic text does not let go of the self-referential dimension and does not include intratextual signals of fictionality, but is not a 'fictive' ("fingierte") autobiography (cf. Zipfel 2001) either, what kind of text is it? *Paratexts* seem to be an indispensable factor: they do not only make possible the distinction between autobiography and 'fictive' autobiography, but (as in Roth) can also blur it. They do not only allow for autofiction without a staged transparent self-thematization (as in Özdamar), but, under special circumstances, for heavily self-referential autofictional texts as well.

**Hywel Dix** (Bournemouth University)

*From Private Quest to Public Commemoration: Autofiction, Postcolonial Writing and the Politics of Memory*

It has by now been quite well established that a reaction against theories of the death of the author provided one of the important contexts in which the theory and genre of autofiction started to develop in the 1970s. More recently, the autofictional rebuttal of the death of the author has been very noticeable among postcolonial writers, who, because their voices and experiences had been historically marginalised until the very recent past, are unlikely to accept the tacit silencing of those same voices that theories of the death of the author might imply. More specifically, two of the elements of autofictional practice that have been of particular interest to postcolonial writers are its capacity to mediate between individual and collective forms of memory on the one hand; while also radically destabilising notions of absolute truth and authenticity on the other. Drawing on my earlier research into the relationship between writing and forms of public commemoration, this paper will argue that the tools and techniques afforded by the emergence of autofiction have been taken up by postcolonial writers seeking to draw attention towards a number of historical events such as colonial massacres, enslavement of people and naval disasters that took place during the imperial period but which – compared to other more widely recognised historical events such as VE Day or the Somme – have received far less historical or cultural memorialisation. By establishing these events as being culturally and morally important to remember, the paper will argue, autofiction provides a number of tools for engaging with the politics of public memory and commemorative events in the present.

**Alexandra Effe** (University of Oslo)

*Autofiction in Historical Perspective*

The term autofiction is a fairly recent coinage, while the practice of autobiographical writing in at least in part fictional mode has a long history. Throughout the development of the novel and the autobiography, we find texts that creatively work at the intersection of both genres. This paper considers the term autofiction in view of this tradition, asking what is gained and what lost in using the term for a wide range of texts that differ strongly in aesthetical and ethical aims, narrative strategies and stylistic devices, historical and cultural context, and publishing history. There is no lack of critique of the term autofiction and no lack of alternative designations, amongst them autobiographical novel, autonarration, reality-literature, meta-nonfiction, autobiografiction, surfiction, and faction. Nonetheless, the term autofiction remains the most common in use. Is it productive for the analysis of texts also before Doubrovsky and for discussing how the genre has developed since then? Which dimensions of the texts under discussion, of our way of thinking, and of the development of the genre of the autobiography and of the novel, does the term foreground and help us to understand? And are there facets that get lost by applying the term and by grouping a diverse range of texts under it?

## Panel 4: Self Designs in Autofiction

Chair: Anna Sennefelder

**Zuzana Fonioková** (Masaryk University)

*Autofiction and Autobiographical Comics: A Narratological Perspective*

This paper will draw on narrative theory to look at autobiographical comics and their relation to autofiction and to theories of the self. It will examine the different ways in which the formal elements of comics allow graphic memoirs to draw attention to and comment on issues connected with autobiographical and autofictional writing in general, such as self-invention and creation of self-image. The first part of the paper will explore the relationship between the present and past self. Offering both verbal and visual means of focalisation, comics enable complex techniques of conveying distance and closeness between the narrating-I and the experiencing-I, which can help communicate, among other things, the narrator's (and by extension the autobiographer's) attitude to the past, self-irony, or the perceived continuity between the present and past self. Possible methods of orchestrating the relationship between the narrator and the protagonist include local fictionality within global nonfiction (cf. Nielsen-Phelan-Walsh 2015; Phelan 2016), which will be the focus of the second part of the paper. As with autofiction, fictionality in graphic memoirs may be used to highlight the constructed nature of all autobiographical narrative and to challenge conventional notions of "truth." I will relate instances of fictionality in autobiographical comics to Doubrovsky's view of autofiction as "fiction of strictly real events and facts" and explore the following questions: Could (some) autobiographical comics and Doubrovskyan autofiction be seen as using fictionality on the level of discourse rather than story? Does fictionality in comics help express the sense of self as fragmentary, instable, and difficult to grasp, as is often the case with autofiction? Examples will include Aline Kominsky Crumb's *Need More Love*, Liz Prince's *Tomboy*, Czech author Toy Box's *My Book Winnetou*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and Phoebe Gloeckner's *A Child's Life and Other Stories*

**Karin Westerwelle** (University of Münster)

*Michel de Montaigne, Les Essais: Self-Representation and the 'Power of Imagination'*

Montaigne is the inventor of the genre of the essay as well as of a critical and tolerant world view which does not lay claim to either truth or exhaustiveness. The *Essais* are an epoch-making work of self-representation. They make self and subjectivity the center of attention (Rigolot 1995; Cave 1999; Lagrée 2016) and are one of the documents that have played an important role in the development of a European consciousness, which can be described roughly as the 'discovery of man' (Michelet, Burckhardt) and as the interiorization of identity and care of the self (Taylor, Foucault, Toulmin). The represented self is not prior to the process of writing. As the preface "Au lecteur" highlights, it can be experienced and becomes palpable first and foremost through the medium of language (Starobinski 1993). In a late commentary, Montaigne claims a specular relation between the book and the self via an intertextu-



al reference to Quintilian and Seneca: “J’ay fait ce que j’ay voulu: tout le monde me recognoist en mon livre, et mon livre en moy” (III, v, 918) [“I have done what I wanted. Everyone recognizes me in my book, and my book in me”]. The narrative in the *Essais* does not create a totality of meaning, on the contrary, they emphasize the impossibility of giving coherence to the individual elements, whose analogical or logical argumentative connection is reflected on, in dialogue with Aristotle, in the chapter “Of the power of imagination” (I, xx). Montaigne employs painting of grotesques as a metaphor in the reflective and poetological description of his work. The discovery of the self does not present itself in an integral figure, but in fictional elements and figures. This paper wants to show the essayistic writing process as an attempt of autobiographical construction and as profound reflection of what we may call ‘autofiction’.

**Stefan Neuhaus** (University of Koblenz-Landau)

*The Author as a Fictional Character*

Autofiction poses the question of the relationship of autobiography and fiction. A special form and variety is an author who appears – by name and characteristic features – as a character in a fictional text. In German-language literature an early and key example is E.T.A. Hoffmann, in contemporary literature we can find a comparatively similar concept in the works of Walter Moers, being far more than ‘just’ children’s literature. Hoffmann pretends to be the editor of real stories in *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr* or in *Der Sandmann* and a Hoffmann-like character appears at the end of *Der goldne Topf*, trying to find out the end of the story. Moers invents a whole continent called Zamonien and pretends only to be the translator of the works of a writing dinosaur called Hildegunst von Mythenmetz. According to Patricia Waugh metafictional elements in literature point to the artistic as well as the artificial status of literature, posing the question of how reality itself is constructed. Through formal elements and structures the texts address the question of perception. The paper wants to examine the role, or even different roles of the representative of the author within a text by looking at fictional works mainly by Hoffmann and Moers.

## **Panel 5: Autofictional Modes in Francophone Literature**

Chair: Hannie Lawlor

**Elise Hugueny-Léger** (University of St Andrews)

*Living and Writing against Norms? Women, Autofiction and Self-Transformation*

The notion of autofiction has been a much-debated one in the French-speaking world, with no consensus achieved on how to conceive it, or on the very existence of autofiction as a genre or practice. Yet, despite misconceptions and misunderstandings, autofiction has often become a shortcut, or synonym, for exposure, shamelessness, and self-indulgence – even so, maybe, when relating to female writers. Even today, finding a ‘room of one’s own’, giving oneself the space and time to write, means challenging social norms and expectations for women. In her recent memoirs, Deborah Levy writes:

To live without love is a waste of time. I was living in the Republic of Writing and Children. I was not Simone de Beauvoir, after all. No, I had got off the train at a different stop (marriage) and stepped on to a different platform (children). She was my muse but I was certainly not hers. (*The Cost of living*, 2018)

And yet, in Levy's works, as in the stories of Annie Ernaux, Elena Ferrante, Marie Darrieussecq, or indeed Simone de Beauvoir, female characters – sometimes thinly veiled alter egos of the writer – invent, or reinvent, their lives through writing. By doing so, they also give a public space for women's life experiences. This paper will envisage life-narration and transformation from the comparative perspective of several women writers, from different epochs and cultural backgrounds, whose desire to break away from societal norms, from accepted discourses about femininity, motherhood, ageing, requires breaking away from linguistic norms, from identifiable narrative genres and structures. In that respect, beyond purely theoretical discourses and debates on autofiction, these case studies reveal the collective dimension of autofiction, and its transformative power not just as a mode of writing, but as a mode of living: becoming the author of one's life, one's text, choosing which characters to put in it, which ones to leave out, and which story to tell. For shaping one's life into a text, devising the appropriate form and language to do so, also means transforming perceptions of gender, and genre.

**Mercédès Baillargeon** (University of Maryland)

*The Personal is Political: Autofiction in French And/As Engagement*

In *La règle du je*, French writer Chloé Delaume discusses the “problem” with autofiction as it is often perceived in both an academic context and with the general public. In her words, such would be the many accusations made towards autofiction: “Exhibition. Étalage. Narcissisme. Nombriisme. Individualisme. Égocentrisme. Prétention. Repli sur soi. Sclérose. Indifférence au monde. Indolence face aux choses sociales. Désaffection du politique. Autofiction: syndrome néolibéralisme, sœur aînée processus télé-réalité” (28). Autofiction's popularity and its omnipresence in the French literary field since the nineteen-nineties, with the celebration of an individualistic “je” (to the detriment of the social, or the political) would clearly be a symptom of the decline of the Western civilization - and of French literature as an engaged art form rooted in a tradition of revolt and social critique.

The argument of this paper will take the opposing view on this debate. As Emmanuel Bouju points out, the notion of “commitment” (or “engagement”) today goes far beyond the framework of the explicit politicization of a work, but instead plays out in a writer's personal commitment in his or her own writing. I will argue that, although one may get the impression that autofiction is doing little more than feeding into the narcissism of today's times, the reworking of the “I” that is at the center of autofiction in French actually offers new avenues for the concept of “littérature engagée,” from three major perspectives:

- 1) Engagement is visible in the way that writers put themselves – their bodies, their life, their relationships – directly at play in their autofictional writing.

2) As suggested by literary critic Bruno Blanckeman, the “implication” of writers within their works is also visible through their exploration of form, language, and narrative structure. By resisting formal expectations, autofictional writers bend the relationship to their reader, in yet another way of thinking about engagement in autofiction in terms of forcing the reader’s engagement.

3) I will argue that autofiction’s highly personal narratives offer a new form of social critique by offering an indirect critique of the systemic forces that shape the self, opening back up to a “political” aim as it relates to power, power relations, and self-representation.

Drawing on examples from prominent French language writers including Christine Angot, Nelly Arcan, Chloé Delaume, and Michel Houellebecq, this paper will conclude that the apparent disavowal for all things “political” fails to take into account the way personal narratives become a place to deconstruct the processes and forces at play in the creation of the “I.”

**Sam Ferguson** (University of Oxford)

*The Diary as Radicalisation of French Autofiction*

Autofiction has most commonly been theorised as a hybrid of autobiography and the novel, and this tendency has been reinforced by the continuing critical reference to Serge Doubrovsky’s initial definition and his subsequent promotion of the term. This conception of autofiction is largely a positive assumption of the long-standing trope that an autobiography’s inevitable imposition of narrative form and closure on the representation of a life involves the same sorts of fictionality as the novel. The role of the diary in the history of autofiction as a literary practice has been overlooked, partly because Philippe Lejeune, who is broadly hostile to autofiction, considers the diary itself to be inimical to this sort of hybridisation, and even to offer an antidote, which he terms ‘anti-fiction’. This paper will argue that diaristic writing was central to a radicalisation of autofiction, most notably in the work of Hervé Guibert (although he did not use the term ‘autofiction’ himself), and that subsequent autofictional writing in France follows on from this inaugural moment, rather than following Doubrovsky’s model. Guibert’s own experimentation with the imaginative and hybrid potential of the diary includes his adaptation of material from his ongoing ‘real’ diary (published posthumously as *The Mausoleum of Lovers*, 2001) for fictional works, the combination of two contrasting diaries of the same trip in *Voyage avec deux enfants* (1982), and the use of the diary *Cytomegalovirus: A Hospitalization Diary* (1992) as a part of his ambiguous life-writing project involving his everyday experience of living with AIDS. From the 1990s a new generation of French autofictional writers have produced work heavily influenced by Guibert, and which could be better understood in terms of a diaristic, autofictional aesthetic, involving a manifestation and creation of the self in an open-ended engagement with a writing process embedded in everyday life.

## **Panel 6: Autofictional Modes in Contemporary South African Art and Literature**

Chair: Melissa Schuh

**Karen Ferreira-Meyers** (University of Eswatini)

*Scriptural and Visual Autofiction: A Way of Representing and Understanding the Self*

Autofiction (Ferreira-Meyers, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2018) can be defined as the usage of creative arts that consciously use fictional and poetic techniques to capture self-experience (Hunt, 2010: 231). It is in this sense that we want to analyze the work of Bontle Tau, a young South African artist. A theoretical reminder of the notion of autofiction will be the basis of the presentation of her scriptural and visual work to better understand the processes involved in what Tau has called the "linguistic role play in search of an authentic Self". Approaching her work through the poststructuralist and postcolonialist paradigms (Derrida, Frantz Fanon, MAK Halliday, Stephen Greenblatt and Homi Bhabha), this paper aims to apprehend autofiction as an ideal tool for give shape to the Self's flexible, slippery and difficult to define aspects. Tau sees autofiction as a veil or a sort of smoke screen behind which the artist can move freely between reality and fiction without ever having to distinguish these two extremes for the reader, the spectator, the audience. In this sense, the artist can be vulnerable with a certain sense of protection. This paper seeks to analyze the self-discovery processes targeted by autofiction.

**Laurel Braddock** (Freie Universität Berlin)

*Autofiction and Mental Breakdown in Bessie Head's A Question of Power*

This is a comparative paper between South African exile Bessie Head's and Soweto born K. Sello Duiker's respective works: *A Question of Power* (1974) and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001). Both works are often read as strongly autobiographic. Autofiction opens up perspectives for them: it enables full concentration on the aesthetic and stylistic means of the texts, as well as reading these texts as literary experimentation with writing the self. Indeed, the psychotic breakdowns that are portrayed in both novels are not only autobiographical moments of madness, but experienced moments of madness used in order to fictionally question limits of the self/selves in relation to ubuntu ideology. In the southern African concept of ubuntu, all humans are linked by invisible ties, and our belonging, communality, is what makes us human. As such, my paper uses existing concepts of selfhood in autofiction in order to see how they hold up in a literary environment in which the self is not understood through individual identity, but through personhood as existing *only* through others. The hybrid form of fiction and autobiographical fact relinquishes ownership of one's own trauma. As such, in a second step, I examine these breakdowns as the personal trauma, the "faillite fondatrice" often underlying autofiction (Genon, 2013), in the context of South Africa's own national trauma of apartheid. I perceive autofiction as a useful tool to read the narratives of memory and testimony after the end of apartheid, which are seen as the first steps towards rewriting South

African history (Ndebele, 1998). I will be offering a comparative approach of Head's narrative as an exile during apartheid with Duiker's post-apartheid narrative.

**Daniel Stander** (Stellenbosch University)

*Reza de Wet's Verleiding [Seduction] (2005): South African Autofiction in the Lecture as Drama and Vice Versa*

Reza de Wet (1952-2012) is one of South Africa's most prolific and awarded dramatists. Although she once referred to her plays as her "diaries", none of them, save for one, *Verleiding* [Seduction] (2005), is autobiographical in any obvious way. *Verleiding's* autobiographical status is however complicated by the fact that the author features in it alongside two entirely fictional characters Leatitia and Lizelle, who have no referents outside the framework of the script. This use of what K. Vrankova calls "trans-world characters" i.e. fictitious and non-fictitious persons interacting on the stage of a single text, casts *Verleiding* rather in an autofictional genre framework for its use of "textual markers that signal a deliberate, often ironic, interplay between the two modes" of factual and nonfactual writing, as Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith defines the term. The play assumes the form of a lecture that chronicles and comments on a literary biographical research project conducted by the fictional protagonists on the canonical South African author and scientist Eugène Marais (1871-1936), to whom De Wet was directly related, as well as to his first biographer Leon Rousseau (1931-2016). J.C. Kannemeyer (1939-2011), South Africa's most productive literary biographer, regards Rousseau's life of Marais *Die Groot Verlangte* (1974) as the prototypical work of Afrikaans literary life writing. Through *Verleiding's* specific autofictional narrative devices De Wet stages the inherently theatrical nature of the biographical enterprise as well as of the academic means by which it is often achieved, especially in a literary-historical scholarly ambit. My analysis of this text will focus on how De Wet experiments with autofictional multimodality to comment on a South African life writing industry that often overlooks and fails to poetically exploit its slippery epistemological premises.

## **Panel 7: Autofictional Modes in Contemporary Scandinavian Literature**

Chair: Marie Lindskov Hansen

**Claus E. Andersen** (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

*A Postfiction Turn: Knausgaard, Cusk, and Heti*

With Karl Ove Knausgård's *My Struggle* as a point of departure, my paper will situate his six-volume novel within a postfictional turn in current literature. Using the term postfiction - a term coined by Timothy Bewes - I indirectly distance myself from the term autofiction, which I find problematic, limiting, and ahistorical. Instead, I propose to read this postfictional turn as the latest development in the history of the

novel and its continual attempts to capture what Lukács calls the extensive totality of life (using Guido Mazzoni's recent *Theory of the Novel* as a theoretical backdrop). In addition to Knausgård, my paper will include a discussion of authors such as Maggie Nelson, Ben Lerner, and Sheila Heti. Read together, and in the light of Knausgård, I argue that *My Struggle* is at the vanguard of this postfiction turn not because of its monumentality, but because Knausgård, in terms of form, style, and plot continues a realist tradition where the novel sets out to capture the aforementioned extensive totality of life.

**Helle Egendal** (Albert-Ludwigs University Freiburg)

*On the Subversive Strategy of Blending Voices and Languages. Samples from Danish, Swedish and German Literature*

The concept of 'autofiction' is often discussed in terms of a single author's multi-layered voices where so-called biographic material becomes indistinguishable from fiction. This paper will focus on the dissensus (Jacques Rancière) power of autofiction as presented by contemporary authors with multicultural backgrounds. Three authors with migrant and multilingual background will be presented. They differ in respect to nationality and age, but have in common, that they appear as "angry young men", who in their works 'fight by words': Danish-Palestinian Yayah Hassan with his poetry band *Yayah Hassan* (2013); Swedish-Tunesian Jonas Hassen Khemiri with his novel *Ett öga rött* (2005) and German-Turkish Feridun Zaimoglu with his novel *Kanak Sprak. 25 Misstöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (1995). Autofiction might be a preferred genre for these due to its generic ambiguity offering space for negotiations of multicultural identity. Based on my readings, an important marker of this subgenre of intercultural autofiction should also pay respect to its multilingualism. Multilingualism or 'polyglossia' is here understood in relation to Bakhtin's concept of 'heteroglossia'. In discussing his argument – that the subversive power of literature derives its force from the diversity of voices – I want to discuss polyglossia in autofiction as having the potential to create works with strong social and political appeal. All three works give voice to the ghetto, in which per se a multitude of languages co-exist. While multilingualism in this respect is rarely seen as a lingual resource, but rather as a stigmatizing indicator of social and economic inferiority, the above-mentioned authors actually take advantage of their multilingual capacity, using it as part of a subversive aesthetic strategy, drawing on it as cultural capital. The interrelation between politics and aesthetics in these works will be addressed in the terms of dissensus in Rancière's sense.

**Kjersti Aarstein** (University of Bergen)

*The Veil of Reality in Karl Ove Knausgård's My Struggle*

In his essay *Fiction and Diction* (1991), Gérard Genette criticizes the category of so-called "false autofictions, which are 'fictions' only for legal purposes: in other words, veiled autobiographies." He is concerned that the term autofiction might be employed in order to evade legitimate ethical and juridical critique, by resorting to some notion of artistic freedom. This concern could in and by itself also be raised with regard to any fictional genre and subgenre, which might indeed contain "veiled" autobiographical accounts. The main reason why this issue seems more pressing in the

case of autofiction, however, is the formal resemblance that autofiction shares with the autobiographical genre, which gives most autofictional texts an air of authenticity. In Karl Ove Knausgård's novel in six parts, *Min kamp* (Eng. *My Struggle*), published between 2009 and 2011, Knausgård appears to be relinquishing fiction altogether in an attempt to give a sincere account of his personal experiences. The novel nevertheless calls for a reversal of Genette's critique, as it contains a serious accusation against a recognizable person, mediated by literary and fictional means, albeit "veiled" in the guise of reality. In my paper, I discuss the ethical implications of employing literary devices in order to launch an accusation in a novel that claims to be a work of nonfiction.

## **Panel 8: Autofiction, Authorship, and Identity**

Chair: Hywel Dix

**Naziha Hamidouche** (Bath University)

*Autofiction and Authorial Identity: A Comparative Analysis*

Autobiography is defined as the fact of narrating the self, whereas fiction is the creation of an imaginary world, so auto fiction is the mingling of autobiography and fiction, of the authors' own background and their fancied conception of things. In a number of novels, auto fiction appears to be prevalent as more established authors tend to use their lives as a source of inspiration and narrate their stories from the socio-historical context of their up-bringing. Moreover, auto fiction has become a vehicle of the national and cultural identity allowing the reader to have a glimpse on the authors' belonging and origin. In this paper, I will explore the representation of cultural identity through auto fiction in a comparative approach between two francophone postcolonial female African writers namely: Mariama Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre* (1979) and Assia Djebar's *Vaste est La Prison* (1995), Senegalese and Algerian authors who belong to the first generation writers of the post-independence period. In this paper, I will investigate the different strategies and techniques adopted by the two authors to display their authorial identities through auto fiction. In fact, an emphasis will be put on language of writing as both authors write in French instead of their mother tongues, thereby their literary identity protrudes through multiple means such as translanguaging and auto fiction. Furthermore, by writing the self, Djebar and Bâ write about the socio-historical and political contexts of their countries of origin thus allowing the reader to note their commitments and vantage points regarding their cultural background. While Djebar lived under multiple territories and migrated to France, Bâ was sedentary, this difference will inform the paper about the different stances and criticism displayed in their novels as well as the ways in which they use auto fiction to support, denounce and/or defend their cultural and traditional practices and beliefs.

**Antonia Wimbush** (University of Birmingham)

*Autofiction: A Francophone Female Aesthetic of Exile?*

As Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré observe in their introduction to an edited collection from 2016 which addresses mobility in Francophone women's writing, 'it is astonishing to note that just as human mobility has become increasingly conventional in life as in literature, women's mobility has remained decidedly marginal in the latter'. In the Francophone context, women have migrated continuously between the metropole and 'peripheral' locations which are closely tied to France's colonial past; indeed, the long-lasting legacy of France's colonial history renders these movements as forms of exile. Despite the historical and political connections between France and the former colonies, those who arrive in France, particularly women, often find themselves shunned to the margins of society. Their experiences have not been sufficiently analysed in theoretical or artistic works.

It is evident, then, that a gap exists in the current scholarship on exile. It is my contention that successful female Francophone writers respond to this gap by writing gendered experiences of exile into their autobiographical narratives. I argue that they appropriate the genre of autofiction in order to find their own voice and claim ownership of their life story of exile. Autofiction, a genre which emerged in France following the publication of Serge Doubrovsky's novel *Fils* (1977), enables these writers to be creative with narrative form and to fictionalise particularly traumatic experiences of exile. Exploring the autofictional work of Lebanese-born writer Abla Farhoud who has since settled in Quebec, I demonstrate the potential of the autofictional genre to provide a feminist space for the discussion of exile in the Francophone postcolonial context.

**Melissa Schuh** (Christian-Albrechts University Kiel)

*Autofiction and Literary Autobiography*

As a term, autofiction has been characterised by a significant degree of flexibility and fluidity in critical discourse. As Hywel Dix notes in the introduction to *Autofiction in English* (2018): 'There is no single definition of autofiction either in English or in French'.<sup>1</sup> While it clearly occupies the intersection of factual and fictional writing, autofiction retains an expansive purview: from novels that contain only some autobiographical allusions to distinctly self-reflexive works that explicitly evoke an autobiographical context. In the attempt to critically address autofiction's lack of an agreed definition, this paper will contrast autofiction with literary autobiography. Here, literary autobiography denotes a concept which describes the use of narrative strategies otherwise employed in fiction for the purpose of complicating the autobiographical act. Drawing on case studies from works by J.M. Coetzee, Philip Roth and Günter Grass, literary autobiography will be shown to create instances of performative contradiction that invite the reader to question the boundaries of factuality and fictionality. One way in which Coetzee's, Roth's and Grass's autobiographical works generate an overarching aesthetic of performative contradiction is by portraying autobiographical memory, truth and sincerity through stylistic choices that acknowledge the fraught and instable nature of these notions. By showcasing how literary autobiography as a concept allows the very specific analysis of a particular strand of works



within the field of autofiction, this paper will reflect on the usefulness of the term. Rather than generating competition between two conceptual frameworks, this paper aims to consider autofiction's deliberate 'openness' for its strengths and weaknesses, thus affirming the need to critically interrogate the generic boundaries of autofiction.

**Antonella Lipscomb** (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

*Images of the self in Barthes, Duras, Guibert and Ernaux*

The aim of this paper is to analyse the relationship between autobiography, photography and autofiction in a selection of 20th century French autobiographies, such as *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes, *L'Amant* by Marguerite Duras, *L'Image Fantôme* by Hervé Guibert. I will examine the complex relationship these autobiographers maintain with the photographic portraits or self-portraits they choose to integrate or simply allude to in their autobiographies and show how the conflict between textual and visual images of the self reinforce the fine line between autobiography and autofiction.

In his attempt to avoid revealing too much of himself in his "photobiography" *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Barthes confronts textual image versus visual image. In this struggle, text and images suggest the impossibility of framing a multiple and fragmented self, emphasizing its closeness to a more fictional self. Barthes adopts a very different approach in his autobiographical writing *La Chambre Claire*, *Note sur la photographie*, disclosing more of his self through this very personal reflection on photography. Photographic images are also a fundamental device in Duras's autobiographical writing, helping her shape and delve into her past. *L'Amant* and later *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras* and *Les Yeux Verts* combine virtual and real photographs in an attempt to capture and at the same time elude her identity. Photographic portraits are at the source of Guibert's autobiographical writing in *L'Image Fantôme* in his efforts to reconstruct a reassuring unity of the self. What all these autobiographical writings suggest through their reflections on photography is their endeavour to avoid defining their identity, and by doing so emphasizing and blurring the boundaries between autobiography and fiction.

## **Panel 9: Autofictional Modes in Contemporary Anglo-American Literature**

Chair: Stephanie Bishop

**Elisabeth Reichel** (University of Basel)

*Autographic Inscriptions: Assertions of Authorship in the Contemporary Anglo-American Novel.*

This paper presents an overview of my book project *Autographic Inscriptions: Assertions of Authorship in the Contemporary Anglo-American Novel*. *Autographic Inscriptions* presents the first sustained study of a narrative device that has become a staple of the Anglo-American novel in recent decades but for which existing terminology, including the Genettian terms metalepsis and autofiction, remains sorely insufficient. Specifically, the project sets out to read contemporary novels that feature a

namesake of the author among their narrative agents as not merely engaging in meta-fictional play with the author function but as performing inscriptive gestures that assert the author as the text's principal meaning-maker. Previous research has significantly misread this rapidly growing body of literature by imposing classical fiction/non-fiction, intra/extratextual distinctions, thus falling short of addressing the pressing issues of authorship and gender that connect these "unnatural narratives" (Alber/Iversen/Nielsen/Richardson).

*Autographic Inscriptions* takes as its point of departure a narratological conceptualization of a communicative act that involves a plural, both intra- and extratextual reference of the proper name of the author but forfeits the conventionalized "autobiographical pact" (Lejeune), sealed by identity of name between author, narrator and protagonist. While spanning a range of thematic emphases and stylistic particularities, such narratives, the project argues on its most general level, feature autographic gestures that salvage the author from the peripheral position suggested by 20th-c. critical theory. What emerges is a pivotal platform on which two prevalent contemporary discourses of crisis intersect, one of which revolves around authorship, the other around conceptions of masculinity. Ultimately, the results of the literary-analytical work address the question of how current critical debates around "the death and return of the author" (Burke) tie in with the discursive nexus of authorial anxieties and troubled masculinities that becomes manifest in the novels at the center of the project.

**Sonja Pyykkö** (Freie Universität Berlin)

*Theorizing (Auto)Fictionality and Confessionality in I Love Dick by Chris Kraus*

Since no critical consensus exists yet about the definition of autofiction, one way of theorizing the concept is by breaking it down into its constituent parts of referentiality and fictionality, and critically analysing works that exhibit a degree of both. Recent advances in narratology (Levine, 2015; Copland and Olson, 2017) and in theories of fictionality (e.g. Cohn, 1999; Walsh, 2007) have laid the basis for undertaking a textual analysis of autofiction that is both pragmatic – i.e. considers the usefulness of concepts based on the results of applying them – and ideologically critical. This paper takes the current state of research as a starting point to the theorization of autofiction by combining theories of fictionality with a model of narrative referentiality that is extrapolated from models of essayistic and authorial speech (Fludernik, 1993; Lanser, 1992) on one hand and from critical theory on confessional speech on the other (Foucault, 1978; Brooks, 2000). To demonstrate the analytical potential of this approach, I place examples of contemporary autofictions on a continuum of referentiality–fictionality that stretches from Chris Kraus's feminist autofiction *I Love Dick* (1997) and its roman-à-clef sequel *Torpor* (2006) to Rachel Cusk's more ambiguously referential *Outline*-trilogy (2014– 2018). Reflecting the paradigm shift affecting literary formalisms everywhere, narratological analysis is here balanced with critiques of ideology, producing questions regarding not only the 'how' but also the 'why' of autofiction, as in: What are the specific 'affordances' (Levine, 2015) of a partly fictional, partly referential narrative form that make it especially attractive to contemporary feminist life writers? Moreover, if we think of the combination of fictionality and referentiality as 'a communicative strategy' (see Nielsen et al. 2015) – as a means to an end, as it were – then what is the end these autofictions have in mind, and how do they succeed in reaching it?

**Ben Grant** (University of Oxford)

*Self-Portraiture and Narcissism in Jenny Diski's The Dream Mistress*

Jenny Diski has said of herself, 'I write fiction and non-fiction, but it's almost always personal. I start with me and often enough end with me'. This tells us that she sees all of her work – novels, memoirs, travel narratives, essays, etc. – as self-writing. But the term 'autofiction' seems to me too restrictive to include the full breadth of Diski's writings, privileging as it does the fictional. I prefer 'self-portraiture', both because this term can embrace, or sidestep, fiction and non-fiction, and because it suggests a genre of self-writing which differs from autobiography. In my use of the term, I am indebted to Michel Beaujour's book *Poetics of The Literary Self-Portrait* (1991). Diski's novel, *The Dream Mistress* (1996), is a remarkable, and multiple, self-portrait. It is also very much concerned with narcissism, as the name of its central protagonist – Mimi, pronounced 'me me' – makes clear. Indeed, I would argue that in its attempt to portray the self, the novel provides important insights into the psychology of narcissism, and I will demonstrate this by reading the novel alongside Julia Kristeva's theory of narcissism as she develops it in *Tales of Love* (1983) and *Black Sun* (1987). *The Dream Mistress* is also about writing, exploring, specifically, what Diski has called 'pre-fiction'. Perhaps, then, in this novel we can find a narcissistic space of writing which precedes any distinction between the autobiographical self and fiction – and this space might appropriately, after all, be called 'autofiction'. There is, in other words, a relationship between self-portraiture and autofiction, rather than, as first seemed, the two terms being in competition. Reading *The Dream Mistress* as a self-portrait will therefore enable me to elucidate the nature of autofiction.

**Ricarda Menn** (Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen)

*Reading Serial Autofictions – Knausgård and Cusk*

The success of Karl Ove Knausgaard's epic *Min Kamp* series, which saw the publication of its final instalment in English translation just last year, is often compared to Rachel Cusk and her prolific *Outline* trilogy. The two can be seen as symptomatic for a distinct subform of autofiction: both set their respective lives experimentally and partly fictionalizing into writing, and do so with a serializing impetus. Written in very different lengths, Knausgaard's series amounting to over 3,600 pages, Cusk's trilogy to less than 700, these projects draw attention not only to the peculiarities of multi-volume autobiography and autofiction as such, but also serial interconnections on macro- and micro levels of single texts and overarching series. With regard to autofictional form and scale, but also to author performance, Knausgaard and Cusk can be situated on two poles of serial autofiction in contemporary literature. One pole relates to maximalism, elaborate and partly repetitive description, the other entails minimalism, reduction and elusiveness. An obvious but also problematic implication of these two cases is the gendered dimension of formal decisions. Whereas Knausgaard's maximalist self-presentation is often described as carrying a heroic quality, celebrating male self-centredness and author performance through his maximalist narrative, Cusk's minimalist strategies seem to be suggesting a more subtle, female staging of authorship. In this talk, I want to address several aspects of this gendered dimension of serial autofiction, including narrative set-up, paratextual performance and reception. Do the categories of minimalism and maximalism really cater to gendered stereotypes of authorship, self-presentation and narrative world-making? How

far can such distinctions be analysed and complicated in considering text-intrinsic negotiations of larger and smaller scales, as well as on the reception side of gendered reading expectations? In posing these questions, I want to treat Knausgaard and Cusk as symptomatic for serial autofiction as a variant of autofiction, which foregrounds questions of experimental scale and as such stretches the boundaries of autobiographical writing even further.

## **Panel 10: Rethinking the Real: Autofiction and Critical Discourse in Spain and Argentina**

Chair: Daniela Omlor

This panel proposes to discuss some of the theoretical insights on autofiction gained in the context of the international research project "Rethinking the Real: Autofiction and Critical Discourse in Spain and Argentina," currently being conducted by an interdisciplinary group of scholars coordinated by Ana Casas (University of Alcalá) with support of a research grant of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. Departing from a certain tendency to associate autofiction with the narcissism and political apathy of the "culture of the spectacle" of the 1990s, our aim is to study works produced since 2000 in which the author interrogates realities that concern him or her not just as an individual but also as historical and political subject and as a member of a specific society. Our investigation focuses on three main aspects of autofiction in its turn to the real: collective memory (reflection on recent and not so recent traumatic historical events, such as the civil war and the dictatorship in Spain, the "dirty war" and state violence in Argentina); the denunciation of social ills (racism and xenophobia, aporophobia, the economic exclusion and pauperization of the working classes, the discrimination of women and sexual minorities in patriarchal and heteronormative societies); and, finally, the conditions of cultural production in the era of global capitalism and the digital revolution. Within these general parameters, the communications included in this panel study different aspects of autofiction in its relations with key notions of cultural studies such as materiality and the archive, exploring the critical ramifications of the concept in memory studies, affect theory, intermediality and film theory. Our investigation focuses on two countries – Spain and Argentina– where the theory and practice of autofiction are widely extended and enjoy critical recognition, to the point that one could speak of a certain saturation of the concept in cultural discourse in recent years. Given the comparative approach of our project, we are interested in reflecting on the critical uses of the concept on a global perspective, and particularly in determining to what extent our assessments regarding the evolution of autofiction in the last two decades in Spain and Argentina –and in general in the Spanish-speaking world– would apply in other literary traditions. By participating in this conference we hope to contribute to a far-reaching dialogue that sharpens our views of autofiction and its relevance in today's world literature.

**Anna Forné** (University of Gothenberg)

*Archival Autofiction in Post-Dictatorship Argentina*

This presentation explores the incorporation and representation of archival material in autofictional narratives in Argentinian literature and film produced during the last fifteen years by children of the disappeared during the last dictatorship (1976-1983). The purpose is to examine the forms and functions of materiality in the artistic mediation of memories in what I conceptualise as *archival autofiction*. This notion comprehends an artistic expression in which the authorial subject –identical to the protagonist– exhibits the creative processes of archival recycling and reflects on notions of authorship as a way of engaging the reader. I specifically put the focus on autofictional narratives because the tensions created in this kind of texts between the materiality of the past and the present textual configuration of the authorial subjectivity raises key questions on the relationship between subjects and objects in relation to the work of subjective memory. The guiding hypothesis is that archival autofiction operates in two complementary directions. On one hand, this kind of artistic practice plays with the documentary authority of the archive and the authenticity of tangible objects, *a modus operandi* which raises interpretative questions on how to approach narratives in which the subject interacts and even changes places with the exposed material traces and objects. On the other hand, archival autofiction's transparent self-reflexive mode as well as its recycling practices, which privilege fragmentation and repetition, engages the reader as participant, inviting him or her to reconstruct what has been dismantled and to collaborate in the production of meaning.

**Patricia López-Gay** (Bard College, New York)

*Archive Fever and the Return of the Real in Autofiction. Rethinking Recent Life Narration Produced in Spain*

This presentation is concerned with the contemporary author's impulse to organize and reorganize biographical records in the autofictional mode. I am intrigued by printed books, blogs and personal websites, wherein contemporary writers creatively archive photographs, documents, historical and literary records, memories, and personal reflections, according to an aesthetics of autofiction that intermittently destabilizes the evidential paradigm of the modern archive. I understand autofiction as a postmodern form of life narration that claims to be fictional. Autofiction comes after, and results from, the advent of the death of the author in French literary theory. In this study, I refer to a group of Spanish contemporary writers, including Enrique Vila-Matas and Marta Sanz, whose autofictional works share a distinctive archival will that is not a will to totalize so much as a will to relate to and explore a misplaced *present*. I suggest that by arranging traces of a world that will never be archived as a whole they construct memory, and make new senses of our changing place in the world. Then, I propose that Sanz's autobiographical account about the recent economic crisis in Spain, *Clavícula* (2017), is symptomatic of a broader political turn in Spanish autofiction. The author who seeks to reestablish a commitment with with her historical context through autofiction does not only denounce social injustice. When the intratextual figure of the author compulsively archives traces of life in a non-totalizing manner, she points at new possible orders of the autobiographical

and, by analogy, she also points at new possible orders of the real. Certain autofiction recently produced in Spain, I argue, reminds us that archiving means proposing an order, in a very specific political sense.

**Julio Prieto** (University of Potsdam)

*Autofiction and Postmemory in Argentina: Notes on First-Person Documentary Film*

In this presentation I explore the relation between the narratological category of autofiction and the question of collective memory in Argentina in the 2000s, particularly in the so-called generation of the "children" –authors, artists and film-makers whose parents were assassinated during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), or whose childhood and adolescence were at any rate marked by the experience of State terrorism. I am interested in tracing an epochal sensitivity specific to this generation regarding the trauma of genocide and the labor of collective memory. This generation brings into play new strategies to cope with loss and trauma such as humor and autofiction as modes of aesthetic and political intervention. These strategies move away from the logic of testimony prevailing in the first phase of post-dictatorship cultural production and rather fall into the orbit of what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory" (Hirsch 1997, 2012). My analysis will focus on the emergence of a range of autobiographical documentaries produced in the 2000s –what Nichols (1991) calls "performative documentaries": films such as *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2003), M. (Nicolás Prividera, 2007), *La televisión y yo* (Andrés di Tella, 2002)–, which I will bring into dialogue with autofictional narratives of the same period –Laura Alcoba's novel *La guerra de los conejos* (2008), Félix Bruzzone's short-story collection *76* (2007), and Mariana Eva Pérez's *Diario de una princesa montonera, 110% verdad* (2016), all of them authored by children of leftist activists "disappeared" during the dictatorship– as well as with emblematic works of second-generation Holocaust literature such as Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1991).

## **Panel 11: Autofictional Modes in Contemporary Egyptian Literature**

Chair: Dalia Mostafa

This panel explores notions of autofiction across the works of three Egyptian writers of three generations, from the late 1950s to the present moment. The three panelists explore different variations and interpretations of the term 'autofiction' in relation to the works of the selected authors. Concepts of authorship, fictionality, and referentiality are at the core of the multiple meanings of the term 'autofiction' in relation to the 'autobiographical novel' and 'life narratives'. In the light of Phillippe Lejeune's concept of the "autobiographical pact" and Jacques Lecarme's "autofictional pact", the three panelists attempt to situate the selected texts at the intersection of autobiography, fiction and narration. Informed by Serge Doubrovsky's development of the concept of autofiction, in connection to literary, sociological and historical tropes, and building on the Anglophone school of autofiction, presented in *Autofiction in English* (ed. Hywel Dix 2018), the three papers explore the modes of autofictional writing as represented in the works of Waguih Ghali (192?–1969), Radwa Ashour

(1946-2014) and Miral El Tahawy (1968–). The panel will focus on the textual, intertextual and paratextual aspects in the selected works by the three authors, paying particular attention to narrative notions of voice and focalisation, as well as Pierre Nora's "sites of memory" and Birgit Neumann's "fictions of memory." Although the Egyptian literary canon includes autofictional texts, since the rise of the modern novel in the twentieth century, they have received critical attention mostly as works of fiction that are read socially and historically. This panel introduces new conceptualisations of Egyptian autofiction generically, culturally, and textually. In reading the selected texts against theorisations of autofiction, this panel offers a reading of works by bicultural Egyptian writers to explore notions of identity, memory, and 'self-narration.'

**Zainab Magdy** (Cairo University)

*"Personalities ... of a fictitious type": Reading Waguih Ghali's Beer in the Snooker Club as Autofiction*

This paper will examine the only novel written by Egyptian Anglophone writer Waguih Ghali, *Beer in the Snooker Club*, as an example of 'autofiction'. Appearing in 1958, *Beer in the Snooker Club* was published as a novel marking it generically as a fictive work. From the time of its publication till the present moment, Ghali's book is increasingly read as a novel based heavily on the life of its author. With the rise in curiosity around Ghali's life and suicide, the publication of other genres of life narratives after the novel was republished in the 1980s, (Diana Athill's memoir *After a Funeral* (1986), and May Hawas's edited volumes of his *Diaries* (2016, 2017)), has forced a generic shift in how the novel is being read today. In reading Ghali's novel as autofiction, this paper will look at fictional and autobiographical elements, namely the fictional persona and the autobiographical persona, by studying the paratexts surrounding it (the articles he wrote, and the draft of his second novel). The question of how the study of paratexts around an autofictive text change or enhance generic markers is seminal to this reading of fiction as autofiction, in discovering the process of fictionalizing one's life. In the larger theoretical context, this paper aims to contextualize contemporary autofictive Anglophone works, such as Ghali's novel, within the framework of what autofiction means in two different cultural contexts, especially after the reception of the Arabic translation among Arabic readers in Egypt in a pivotal moment of 2013. Finally, the paper poses the question of how the process of reading fiction can take a different trajectory with sociological and political changes, autofictionalizing a work despite of the generic marker it is published under.

**Fatma Massoud** (British University in Egypt)

*Life-writing, History and Memory in Auto/Fiction: A Reading of Radwa Ashour's Specters and Reports of Mrs. R.*

This paper attempts to re-read Egyptian writer and scholar Radwa Ashour's *Atyaf* (published in Arabic in 1999, and translated into English as *Specters* in 2010) and *Taqarir al-Sayyida Ra* (Reports of Mrs. R), published in 2001, in light of the emerging theorization of Autobiography and Autofiction. I try to investigate intersections,

not just of genres, but of elements and threads that deal with authorship, fictionality and referentiality in the chosen texts, as Ashour stresses her need to 'record' and 'historicize' her life. I will be navigating both texts to explore how the identification of the 'stylistic' methods of narration, voice, autobiographical and fictional elements disrupt the specificity of generic labelling of texts as autobiography or auto/fiction. How does Ashour's use of Memory, self-narration, and historicization help her in exercising her agency/authorship in creating a parallel narrative to the dominating discourse? Ashour's 'need to record' will be contextualized to examine how she tried to establish a newly found place for women's life-writing/autofiction as part of the contemporary weave of Egyptian Literature. How does the genre of autofiction reshape the problematic of women's writing being always misunderstood as self-referential, and thus denying their capability of fictive creation? In what ways can Campus as a recurrent motif, or a "site of memory" in Pierre Nora's terms be utilized as an element that contributes to validate the authenticity of a literary text categorized as 'autofictional'? And how does reading Ashour's works in the textual, inter- and paratextual modes substantiate referentiality as 'evidence' to 'real' events in autofictional texts? It will also be compelling to explore the boundaries of my contribution to this process, not only as a critic of her work, but also as an involved reader/recipient who had known her personally as a teacher and scholar. What are the clues that will dictate new boundaries of generic forms, where I decide whether "the fictional is used to encompass the autobiographical, or the opposite" as Ashour had remarked? Finally, I will think about how the paratextual reading of the two texts against Ashour's essays in which she talks about her work, her writing process and objective helps in interpolating history and essay writing as two possible methods of auto/fictional creation.

**Hala Kamal** (Cairo University)

*'A Murmur in the Heart of the Novel': Fictionalising Memory in Miral Tahawy's Brooklyn Heights*

This paper attempts to offer a reading of Miral Tahawy's novel *Brooklyn Heights*, published in Arabic in 2010 (and translated into English by Samah Selim in 2011), in the light of the recent theoretical contributions at the intersection of autobiography and fiction. Miral Tahawy is a contemporary Egyptian woman writer, who has emerged as a novelist, since the 1990s, as a distinct voice among contemporary Egyptian women writers. This study is informed by Serge Doubrovsky's developing understanding of 'autofiction', as well as by notions of cultural memory and literary production. This study discusses 'autofiction' as a critical concept in relation to Miral Tahawy's literary practice and focuses on the use of memory as a thematic element, as an organizing feature of narrative structure, as well as its generic dimension of fictionalising personal memory. The study presents a reading of *Brooklyn Heights* alongside Tahawy's other novels, such as *The Tent* (1996, trans. 1998) and *Blue Aubergine* (1998, trans. 2002), together with her latest publication in Arabic, *Imra'atu al-araq* (Insomniac Woman), subtitled *Sira thaqafiyya* (Cultural Autobiography), which appeared in 2012. This study, therefore, seeks to answer the main question: How does the 'autofictional' emerge in *Brooklyn Heights* textually, intertextually and paratextually? This in turn raises several additional questions, which include the following: How do textual literary elements used in *Brooklyn Heights* suggest a fiction-



al narrative with autobiographical ‘murmurs’? How does the author/protagonist interweave memories of her past in Egypt with her present life in New York, USA? How do the echoes of memory in *Brooklyn Heights* suggest a referential world that is traceable across Tahawy’s fictional texts? To what extent does a paratextual reading of *Brooklyn Heights* validate and yet challenge the ‘auto’ in the ‘fictional’? In more general terms, the study also reflects on *Brooklyn Heights* as a representation of ‘fictions of memory’, and the ways in which ‘autofiction’ as genre can destabilise the frequent reception of Egyptian women’s fiction as life-writing.

## **Panel 12: Autofictional Modes in Japanese, Hindi and Iranian Literature**

Chair: Shilpa Daithota Bhat

**Justyna Kasza** (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun)

*The Mode of Self-Reading: Japanese Female Writers and the (Re)invention of Autofiction*

This paper examines the profiles of three contemporary Japanese female writers: Sagisawa Megumu, Tawada Yōko and Higashimura Akiko. The objective is to demonstrate how the writers in question explore the interdependence between fiction and autobiography by crossing the boundaries of language, gender expression and literary genre. Sagisawa Megumu creates cross-gender narratives by writing from the perspective of a male protagonist and produces a powerful account on her experiences as a Korean living in post-war Japan. Tawada Yōko represents the milieu of translingual writers as she writes both in Japanese and German. In her seminal work *Exophony: A Journey Beyond One’s Mother Tongue*, she explores the notion of cultural identity and suggests how various forms (mis)communications become a hallmark for postmodern self-narratives. The works of manga artist, Higashimura Akiko exemplify “visualized autobiography”. The fusion of text and image constitutes a sharp break with the conventional representations of the “self” and allows Higashimura to address her works to global community of readers.

To read the texts by Sagisawa, Tawada and Higashimura through the lens of autofictional writing is to reconsider the question of authorship and, what remains relevant in discussing any form of life-writing narrative, the mode of self-reading. The point of departure is the analysis of Japanese literary form, known as I-novel (in original: *shishōsetsu*) in order to highlight how the genre corresponds with principles of autofictional writing (as defined by Doubrovsky, Lejeune, Colonna, Gasparini) and whether this comparative and cross-cultural perspective is methodologically relevant. I treat Sagisawa, Tawada and Higashimura as case study to investigate self-referentiality in contemporary Japanese fiction. I propose to identify their writing as (re)invention of autofiction and stress the ambiguities inscribed within first person narratives in Japan. As concluding remarks, I intend to reconsider the applicability of the idea of *une double lecture simultanée* that enables me to focus on Japanese reader’s expectation towards life-writing narratives.

**Naghmeh Esmaeilpour** (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

*(Auto)Fiction and Authorial Narrative: A Comparative Study of Mandanipour and DeLillo*

Searching for his national identity as an Iranian as well as his cultural identity as a writer, Shahriar Mandanipour informs us that he is “an Iranian writer tired of writing dark and bitter stories, [...] I am a writer who at the threshold of fifty [...] with all my being, want to write a love story” in Iran and “I think because I am an experienced writer, I may be able to write my story in such a way that it survives the blade of censorship”. While Mandanipour attempts to enlighten us how difficult is to be an author of a love story in a place where Islamic rules make lots of restrictions for writing, Don DeLillo pens how he begins as “a freelance writer, something of a Renaissance hack. Booklets, pamphlets, leaflets, all kinds of institutional litter for government and industry. Newsletters for a computer firm. Scripts for industrial films” to become the “writers of the Earth” whose challenge is “the integrity of the writer [...] with the language”. Both DeLillo and Mandanipour employ the I-narrator or authorial narrative in a metanarrative level to convey socio-cultural purposes ekphrastically in their stories. What stands as the mutual points are how these authors—with dissimilar nationalities and experiences—make the use of fiction in connection with their real-life experiences endeavoring to postulate an identity for themselves. Grounding the hypothesis on comparative as well as postclassical narrative approaches, this essay seeks to address how literature is employed as a medium in (re)presenting the national/cultural (or the individual/authorship) identity, on the one hand. And, in sum, to investigate how the authorial narrative of DeLillo and Mandanipour in their works address socio-historic-cultural events resulting in the negotiation stemming from nations in making a bridge between two countries, the USA and Iran, on the other hand.

**Shilpa Daithota Bhat** (Ahmedabad University, Gujarat, India)

*The ‘Almost’ Truth?: Going Beyond the Ironic in Saguna*

It is paradoxical to view a genre with contending descriptions. It is even more paradoxical and mystifying to find the overlapping of the real and the illusory, making a genuine conundrum of a narrative genre that encapsulates the experiences of a woman, located in a spatio-temporal zone marked by colonialism, gender, religious experiences and amalgamation of cultures. What segregates autofiction from autobiography and how do readers negotiate and configure the structural and thematic elements of such a textual practice? My paper deliberates on the seemingly perennial argument of the constituent of truth that is associated (or dissociated?) with the writing of autofiction, taking Krupabai Sathianadhan’s *Saguna* (1895) as a case study. This work is claimed to be the first autobiographical novel in English by an Indian woman, making the work an indispensable study from theoretical and practical points of view. Interestingly, it has been suggested that this book was presented to Queen Victoria who was so impressed by the work that she wanted to read other books by the author.

Published in the nineteenth century, this classic is pioneering as a site of immanence on several fronts—it is a book by a woman and therefore as subject position, written at a time in India, when education as an institutionalized pattern, was a privilege—a precious prerogative of a really small percentage of lucky women in the country. The language in which the work is written, is English—again ground-breaking for the fact, that the knowledge of the colonizer’s language for a woman was considered no mean feat. In addition, the theme of this work is the conversion of a Hindu Brahmin family to Christianity—one more radical representation of colonial happenstance. While the protagonist is called Saguna, the author’s life and the plot mirror each other—miserably failing to camouflage the actual lived experiences of the author. These factors make Saguna an ideal conceptual terrain, warranting emphasis on the complexities characterizing the genre of autofiction and my paper will be an exploration of the internal contradictoriness of the terminology

### **Panel 13: Autofictional Modes in Contemporary German Literature**

Chair: Meindert Peters

**Yvonne Delhey** (Radboud University Nijmegen)

*Autofiction as Self-Emancipation: Uwe Timm’s Literary Autopoiesis*

This paper attempts to analyse the work of Uwe Timm, one of the most prolific, best-known writers in Germany today, by the concepts of autofiction and diasporic conception of cultural difference. At first sight, an author like Uwe Timm cannot be easily identified as diasporic. He is said to be a representative of post-war Germany, in particular the generation of 68. The challenge is to show, how fictional and autobiographical writing interfere and create a network of references around the author’s self and how, by doing so, ruptures become visible in the cultural and national tradition, his work is inscribed to. These ruptures, I would like to argue, can be seen as the emergence of a 'diasporic awareness' as maintained by Stuart Hall.

According to Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, autofiction is a kind of autobiographical writing, which uses language in a way, that it gets a performative quality: the writer drafts an image of him- or herself and uses this image to develop his or her identity. It means, that the main focus is not on the question, how closely lived experience and work correspond but on an approach to conceptualize one’s self – aesthetically by finding one’s own voice but also in a broader sense by dealing with social norms and cultural identities. From that perspective, autofiction could be described as a poetic way of exploring self-awareness – at both sides of the literary communication, as author as well as reader. By this, autofiction provides a powerful potential to address questions about self-identity in the globalized world of today.

Academic reception of Timm's work has hardly read autobiographical references under the heading 'autofiction', although Timm himself has repeatedly stressed, that he does not claim truth even in his autobiographical texts. He once said: "I had to learn by fiction, how to write about me and to think of myself." How does the fictional and

autobiographical writing create a self-concept, where, in the consequence, even in a work like that of Uwe Timm a kind of diasporic awareness can be found?

**Ruth Signer** (University of Geneva)

*Writing the Self In the Face of Its Disappearance. Autofictions in the 1970s*

Since the 1970s, theoretical debates concerning the concept of autobiography and autofiction are closely linked to debates on the topic of the subject. It might seem paradoxical at first sight that for example in German literature of the 70s a revival of the autobiographical writing can be observed (the term *New Subjectivity* is essentially connected to an idea of authentic writing of one's private life), while at the same time the concepts of authenticity, unity, self-determination and autonomous privacy are questioned not only in theory. The aim of my talk is to identify the seemingly contradictory tendencies as parts of a common thinking and telling of the subject during this period. A specific concept of autofiction that I will reconstruct in reference to Lejeune, Doubrovsky, Darrieussecq and Zipfel will help me on the one hand to identify a specific way of authentic writing in the 1970s as autofictional writing. On the other hand it will display the connections between theories of the subject (e.g. Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault), theories of autobiography (Lejeune, Neumann) and a specific way of authentic literary writing in these years. In the contested position of the self as it is experienced and described in the 70s, the simultaneity of both a fictional and an autobiographical pact (Zipfel) builds a form through which one can react to contradictory conditions and needs of the subject and its thinking. In my talk, I want to elaborate this paradox attitude that is – as I will show – typical for autofictional writings of the 1970s: referring to the authentic in the face of its contested role. I will thereby offer an explanation to the question as to why autofictional writing and its theory appear in these years and to which situation of the subject they react.

**Anna Sennfelder** (Albert-Ludwigs University Freiburg)

*Overstraining the (self)-referential qualities of autofiction? Felicitas Hoppes' Prawda*

Postmodern autofiction, as Wagner-Egelhaaf put it nicely, no longer has to state: "Watch out, dear reader, the autobiographical speech is problematic and I, as a text, am only constructing", because this "difference runs, so to speak, naturally with the text all the time". Autofictional texts are not obliterating the boundary between the "referential pact and the fiction pact", but they are deliberately playing with the possibilities resulting from a double-pact-offer. Reading autofiction means therefore constantly choosing either a referential or a fictional reading position. I would like to argue though that Felicitas Hoppe's travelogue *Prawda* is playing on this pact-switching so intensively that the boundary between the two pacts becomes unidentifiable even for the most conscious recipients. But the vertiginous speed with which the narrating subject mixes up the referential and the fictional is not only proof of a perfectly played 'pact-switching-game' but serves – in my opinion – mainly as a structural reflection of a very precise political message. *Prawda* is trying to integrate

the two big opposed identities of postmodernity, West and East, by revealing them as constructed, just like the autofiction is itself. Hoppe's 'travelling in traces' is reinforcing the genre's programme: how to tell most truthfully that you never can tell the truth anyway. However, the politically important message of the text – boundaries are nothing but constructs and we need to permanently reflect on the constructed character of territorial and ideological boundaries – seems only accessible to the 'happy few' who can decode this message, hidden behind a super-polyvalent text. I would like to discuss therefore if an autofictional text is reducing itself to an elitist game when overperforming its indissolubility like it is done in *Prawda*, or if this overperformance could be a unique resource of ethical consciousness-building.