

**Writing her/self in Text and Image in Anglophone Women's Life Writing - international conference on women's life writing** organized by Paris Nanterre's FAAAM group to be held at Paris Nanterre on 28-29 September 2018

Co-organized by Amiens University (Corpus), Evry University (SLAM), Paris Nanterre University (Crea), Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès University (Cas), Paris 8 University (TransCrit), and Paris Sud University

Until recently, representations of women by women in art and history books have been few and far between compared with male representations of “woman.” The pioneering role of female photographers—in the early days of photography—can be seen as evidence on the woman's part to represent herself on her own terms, rather than as an object. Images have often been included in life writing, itself a form of self-representation, (with the purpose of) supplementing, complexifying or disturbing the written narrative. Yet images may also accentuate women's narcissistic readings of their works and may suggest they cannot rise above the personal.

At a time when images have come to play an increasingly crucial role in our lives, as women's bodies have become truly objectified, women who write (about) themselves may play with images as a mode of resistance and a means to portray and faithfully record their ageing bodies. As shown by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2002), self-referential displays by 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century women artists who have engaged the politics of self-representation at the interface of visibility and textuality have materialized self-inquiry and self-knowledge, not through a mirror for seeing and reproducing the artist's body, but as the female artists' engagement with the history of seeing women's bodies. They have repeatedly challenged representation of female bodies.

Visual elements in life narratives insist on female agency, yet they may also paradoxically reflect attachment to ideological images such as family albums. A (woman's) radical strategy may thus very well be to delete images in order to increase their evocative power without revealing the self or making the self too personal.

The dialogue between text and image in life writing is never a simple matter for women who write (about) themselves. The conference will focus on the tension, misrepresentation, distortion or correspondence that may exist between text and images in women's life writing while addressing the gendered dimension of the visual textual interface. The seductive power (soft power) of images as well as their emotional pull, their evocative power, both of which introduce a complex relationship with the text will be studied.

Marianne Hirsch argues that visual autobiographies (and most particularly graphic memoirs) force readers to read back and forth between images and words. They reveal “the visibility and thus the

materiality of words and the discursivity and narrativity of images" (Hirsch, 2004). Hirsch used the term "binocularly," adapting Peggy Phelan's concept of "biocularly" to grasp the distinctive verbal-visual conjunctions that occur in comics and highlight the specific way.

Contemporary writers' use of family photographs in family memoirs frequently plays on the spectator/reader's voyeuristic instincts and desires for the supposedly true story (Ljungberg, 2006). Some of these writers have highlighted the spectacular and the performative aspects of life writing and photography and in so doing have denied photography a more "authentic" representational status than writing (Ljungberg, 2006).

Visual verbal conjunctions have their own creative force and help create new forms of life writing, all the more so as they often defy established boundaries between genres.

Various forms of life writing will be examined, from the most recent forms, such as transmedial self-writing (Ruth Ozeki) or ego media projects, writers' daybooks (Maxine Hong Kingston's *To Be the Poet*), graphic memoirs (*Fun Home*, *Marbles*), illustrated travel diaries (Lucy Knisley), travelogues (Hirsch and Spitzer's *Ghosts of Home*), culinary memoirs (Linda Furiya's *Bento Box*), gardeners' memoirs (Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden Book*) or autobiographical nature writing (Silko's *Secret Water*) that include collages, photographs, drawings, or sketches to nineteenth and twentieth century instances of life writing where images, from engravings to photographs to clippings and watercolors play a crucial role—slave narratives, family memoirs including photographs (Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces*), scrapbooks, painters' autobiographies (Elizabeth Butler), visual autobiographies, and so on.

Suggested themes include (but are not limited to):

- Visual/verbal dialogues and political and aesthetic questions raised by representations of women's bodies,
- The role played by images and the influence of new media in self-representation and self-construction in women's life writing,
- The role played by photographs in identity quests (filiation, rejection) and postmemory in women's family memoirs,
- The interconnection (including tensions and conflicts) between herstory and History; between personal memory and collective memory through images, considering women's invisibility in official representations of History,
- Women's ambivalent relationships to the materials of production and their exploration of alternative

materials, the appropriation of canonical works and models, and their remappings of identity (as fragmented, unstable, hybrid or collective) through textual and visual interfaces.

**Keynote speakers (confirmed):**

**Laura MARCUS**, Goldsmiths' Professor of English Literature, University of Oxford

Her research and teaching interests are mainly in nineteenth & twentieth century literature & visual culture, life-writing, early film & literature, Virginia Woolf & Bloomsbury culture, modernism.

Publications: *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (1994), *Virginia Woolf: Writers and their Work* (1997/2004), *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period*, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (2014) and, as co-editor, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (2004).

**Lyn THOMAS**, Professor Emerita of Cultural Studies in the School of Media, Film and Music at the University of Sussex, author of *Annie Ernaux: An Introduction to the Writer and her Audience* (Berg, 1999), *Annie Ernaux, à la première personne* (Stock 2005), and the author of a memoir, *Clothes Pegs-A Woman's Life in 30 Outfits* (at <http://www.clothespegs.net>).

Abstracts (250-300 words) and short bios to be sent to the organizers by 16 February 2018:

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