



# New Forms and Practices of Self-Writing: Autotheory and Transbiography

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The last decades have witnessed the emergence of new forms of autobiographical writing, accompanied by a critical reflection whose goals are to examine and theorize them, striving to respond to the questions they raise concerning the relationship between oeuvre and biography. Thus, in a theoretical field dominated until recently by the notions of autobiography (Lejeune 1975) and autofiction (Colonna 1989, cf. Doubrovsky 1977), revisited repeatedly since they were theorized in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the appearance of new practices of self-writing has imposed a rethinking of the vocabulary of literary theory, exploring concepts capable of accounting for these changes. Two of these concepts are of particular interest to us, namely autotheory (Fournier 2022) and transbiography (Mistreanu 2021 and 2022; Freyermuth 2023). This issue's goal is to interrogate their theoretical scope and relevance in the French-language literary production of the early twenty-first century (2000 - present).

Coined in the Anglo-Saxon academic world, the notion of autotheory refers to a genre that lies halfway between autobiographical creation, visual arts, philosophical reflection and social criticism. As writer, researcher and artist Lauren Fournier shows in her monograph (2022), autotheory is an approach (but it is also "impulse", "practice" and "generative force") rooted in feminist activism that echoes social justice movements; it uses individual memory and experience as vehicles for engaging with the political, social and cultural aspects of our world. Indeed, autotheory is a quintessentially transgressive practice, highlighting the porosity of the often elusive boundaries between art and life, as well as between theory and practice. Moreover, proposing a revalorization and a reconceptualization of the biographical, in the wake of the Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1978), autotheory also constitutes the manifestation of an epistemic turn according to which individual experience leaves the framework of the anecdotal and the negligible to become a tool of reflection on the world and an instrument of social criticism. Among autotheoretical works, we can place the essay of the Spanish philosopher Paul B. Preciado, *Testo yonqui. Sexo, drogas y biopolítica* (2020), in which the author stages an experience made with his own body (the application of testosterone preceding his gender transition), insisting on the latter's pharmacological and

political dimensions. The same type of engagement with the relations between writing, body, sexuality and capitalism in the contemporary world is also to be found, to different degrees and in different configurations, in the works of Hélène Cixous, Annie Ernaux, Sophie Calle, Chantal Akerman, Édouard Louis, etc.

The notion of transbiography raises similar questions. The term designates a literary creation that is both a work of fiction and a form of self-writing. Doing without Lejeune's pact of the triple nominal identity – a *sine qua non* condition of both autobiography and autofiction –, transbiographical writing consists in embedding the biographical in the fictional. The notion of transbiography relies on the understanding of identity developed by Lisa Feldman Barrett (Feldman Barrett 2017; Hoemann and Feldman Barrett 2018). Barrett takes a neurophenomenological perspective according to which identity does not primarily consist of what German sociologist Gabriele Rosenthal calls "biographical data" (2018: 168) such as the name, the date of birth and the factual dimension of an existence; it consists instead in what Barrett calls the "self-relevant" and which encompass the concepts (people, narratives, beliefs, ideas, etc.) that one associates with one's own person. Transbiographical texts – for instance, the novels of Andreï Makine or Jean Rouaud (Freyermuth 2023), the first part of Juliana Léveillé-Trudel's novel *Nirliit* (2015), or certain passages in the work of Shumona Sinha or Raymond Queneau – encode the biographical in the fictional by passing it through the latter, thus demanding from the critic to decipher the relationship between the two. As in the case of autobiography, practice precedes its theorization, Jean-Pierre Martin having for instance included in this category the work of Proust, whose confession to Gide he quotes: "You can tell everything; but on condition that you never say: I." (Martin 2006, 173, our translation).

In light of these observations, this issue aims to explore these two new forms of self-writing through a double lens. On the one hand, its goal is to test the applicability of these notions to the contemporary French-language literary production, by identifying autotheoretical and transbiographical works in order to analyze their discursive, aesthetic and narrative strategies, the staging of the self, the relationship between the oeuvre and the biography, as well as between the oeuvre and the political, cultural and social dimensions of the world. On the other hand, we aim to examine, criticize and further develop the theoretical dimension of these two new notions. We therefore invite researchers to question their relevance and their specificities, to examine the criteria used to define them, the directions in which they can be explored or reconsidered and the way in which they encompass, reject or take up anew formulas such as literary posture (Meizoz 2007), automediality (Dünne & Moser 2008), transmedial narratology (Baroni 2017) or intermedial autobiography (Lazar 2021).

The contributions will be written in English or French and will be accompanied by an abstract in English of 250 words maximum, 5 keywords and a brief biobibliographical presentation of the authors. The stylesheet is available at the following link:

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### Submission calendar:

- 15 May 2024 – deadline for sending article proposals (200-word abstract, 7 keywords, minimum 5 theoretical references, 150-word author biography);
- 30 June 2024 – notification of acceptance of the proposal;
- 1 October 2024 – submission of the articles (the stylesheet can be found on the journal's website: [http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/serii/philologia/pdf/Instructions\\_En.pdf](http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/serii/philologia/pdf/Instructions_En.pdf));
- 31 March 2025 – publication of the thematic issue.

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