



BSA Auto/Biography Study Group  
Centre for Biography and Education,  
University of Southampton  
with  
Department of Education,  
Brunel University London

## BSA Auto/Biography Study Group Christmas Conference

Friends House, Euston Road  
173-177 Euston Road, London  
8th December 2017

### Public and Private Lives



BRITISH  
SOCIOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

BSA Registered Charity Number: 1080235

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the one day Auto/Biography Christmas Conference Programme. I think you will agree that we have a programme that looks exciting, varied and interesting.

Thanks to all of you for your support and assistance in putting the programme together.

Very best wishes

Anne

#### **Forthcoming Events**

**2018 Summer Conference 'Auto/Biography and the Family' will be held at Wolfson College, Oxford. The dates are 19-21 July, 2018.**

**2018 Christmas Conference is planned for 7th December**

## Delegate information

### Contact Details

Friends House, Religious Society of Friends, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ.  
Telephone: 0207 663 1000

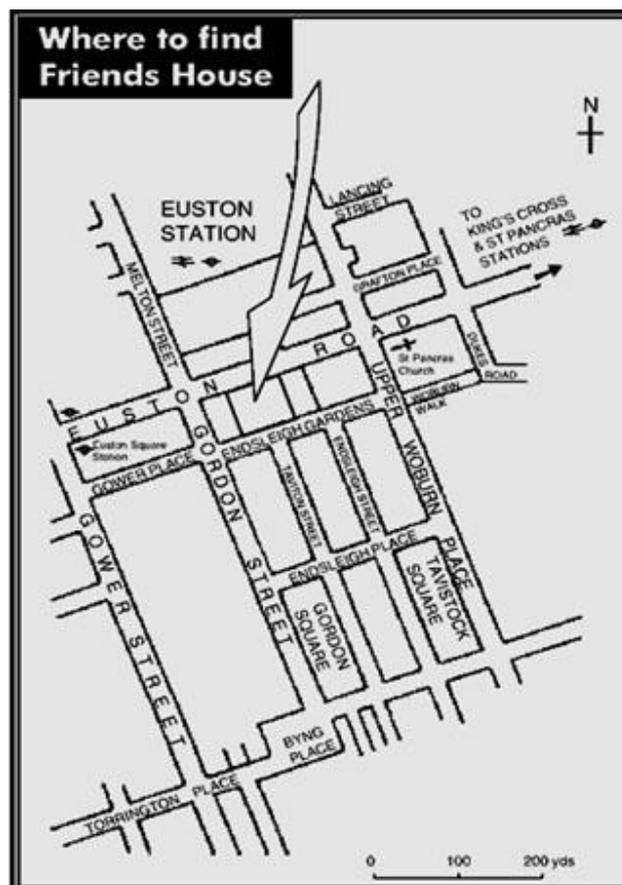
### Travelling to Friends House

Friends House is on the south side of Euston Road directly opposite Euston station (BR main line, Victoria and Northern underground lines).

**Walking:** It is ten minute walk from King's Cross and St. Pancras main line and underground stations, and five minutes from Euston Square underground station.

**By Bus:** Buses 10, 18, 30, 73 and 205 pass the door; 59, 68, 91, 168, and 253 stop nearby.

**By Car:** Friends House is within a meter parking zone. Charges must be paid Monday to Friday 0830 – 1830, Saturday 0900 – 1630. There are alternative parking facilities under Euston Station.



### AV Facilities

Facilities and notes for audio-visual presentations: each presentation room has full facilities for PowerPoint and access to the internet.

## Public and Private Lives: Programme

0900-0930: Registration in the second-floor lobby  
Refreshments and pastries in the Elizabeth Fry Room

0930-0935 Welcome: Elizabeth Fry Room

0935-1035 Keynote: Elizabeth Fry Room

**Feeling the world: romantic socialism and feminist politics**

Maria Tamboukou

Chair: Anne Chappell

1040-1130: Paper Session

Elizabeth Fry Room

**Talking policy: getting everyday wisdom out of the pub and into the public sphere**

Anne Rachel Collis

Chair: Sara Louise Wheeler

Margaret Fell Room

**Unravelling networks, the hidden wiring: from Leicester to Cambridge**

Dennis Smith

Chair: Josie Abbot

1130-1200: Refreshments: Elizabeth Fry Room

1200-1250: Paper Session

Elizabeth Fry Room

**Exploring the collecting self**

Roger Slack

Chair: Dennis Smith

Margaret Fell Room

**Queering kinship: a sibling's coming out**

Samara van Toledo

Chair: Jeni Nicholson

1250-1340: Lunch: Elizabeth Fry Room

1340-1420: Paper Session

Elizabeth Fry Room

**'My bones won't break me': transitioning one's private experience into the public domain**

Joanna Thurston

Chair: Judith Chapman

Margaret Fell Room

**Novels, biopics, auto/pathographies and poems: exploring the value of health humanities within an undergraduate social sciences-based health studies milieu**

Sara Louise Wheeler

Chair: Gayle Letherby

1425-1515: Paper Session

Elizabeth Fry Room

**Private lives in a public war: reading postcards, 1939-1945**

Julie Greer

Chair: Jenny Byrne

Margaret Fell Room

**The many lives of Dmitri Shostakovich**

Helga Schwalm

Chair: Michael Erben

1515-1545: Refreshments: Elizabeth Fry Room

1545-1635: Paper Session: Elizabeth Fry Room

**'I tweet therefore I am': social networking, public and private identities, possibilities and perils**

Gayle Letherby

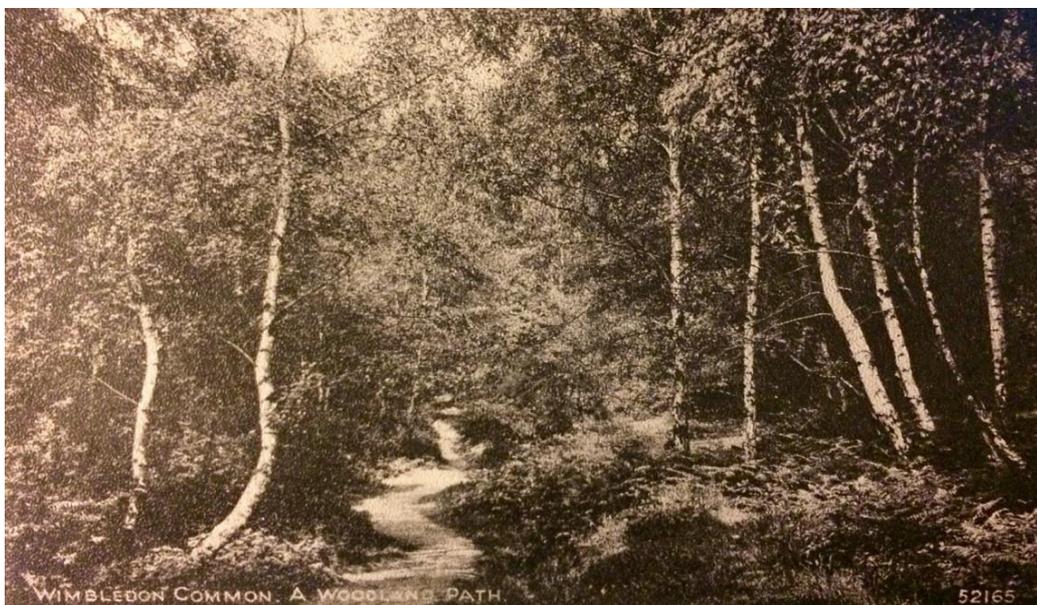
Chair: Andrew Sparkes

## Abstracts

### Talking policy: getting everyday wisdom out of the pub and into the public sphere Anne Rachel Collis

We live in a country where policy makers are promoting public engagement, but with little success beyond those disparagingly termed ‘the usual suspects’. And yet conversations about policy are ubiquitous. They occur in every pub, coffee shop, school gate and home. So very little of that private wisdom, however, makes it into the ears of those responsible for making public policy. Barod, a Welsh cooperative I helped found, wanted to develop a public engagement method that didn’t assume you could read, write, socialise with strangers, think like policy makers or use the language of public engagement. We had some ideas, but did not know how to develop them. Thanks to a Knowledge Economy Skills Studentship, we were able to send me off to Bangor University as a part-time PhD student. Contrary to popular assumptions, the answer has not been found in applied social science, but through creative engagement with my lived experience, facilitated by my developing sociological imagination. This has provided the site for the development of an approach we now call ‘coffee shop conversations’. This paper describes my experiences, and explains how we are using ‘coffee shops conversations’ with considerable success to bridge the gap between private conversation and public policy rhetoric.

### Private lives in a public war: reading postcards, 1939-1945 Julie Greer



9<sup>th</sup> September 1944

*Anne darling, wouldn't you like to come and roam about in this lovely woodland park? We used to do it so often and your dad must know every inch of it – I hope you are enjoying your holidays and being a wonderful 'stand by' to your dear mother. Give her our love and tell her to go quietly now you are all at home. Grandad is in Town at a Board meeting, but he sends his love with mine to you. xxxx*

Given the ubiquity of postcards it is remarkable how little they have been used in auto/biographical research. The brevity of their messages is no hindrance to their value for documentary analysis. These few sentences above capture so much about a private life, within a public war. It is easy to infer hope and worry; life going on as normal and lives disrupted. This paper will consider private lives through people's discarded postcards (1939-1945) and compare and contrast the diverse content with the publicly reported events of WWII. The cards will give an insight into holidays taken; meetings planned or kept; birthdays celebrated and the character of understood but not always explicit communication. A preliminary analysis of the themes and language of postcards will be given alongside a more personal interpretation of the narratives they contain.

### **'I tweet therefore I am': social networking, public and private identities, possibilities and perils**

Gayle Letherby

An engagement with social media greatly raises the possibility of everyone having their own '15 minutes of fame'. And yet because of the permanency/longevity of Facebook posts and Tweets, Snapchat and Instagram images, not least owing to re-posting/tweeting, screenshots and such like, the consequences of engagement may go way beyond what the author intended. Indeed, there is growing concern about post-death digital legacies. Anonymity, parody, fake and bot accounts (run by computer) complicate matters somewhat and all in all the internet provides scholars of auto/biography with a fascinating, and complex, arena for the study of the display of public and private lives and identities. In this paper, I focus on some recent public and political events (including the Manchester terror attack, the Grenfell Tower fire and the 2017 General Election) to consider some of the possibilities and perils of online social networking. I reflect on my own, relatively recent, activity with and observation of, online communication and networking, which includes a consideration of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour online; the rise of alternative and citizen/activism journalism and the challenge to the mainstream media and (briefly) the significance of social media as both an academic tool and a site of research.

### **The many lives of Dmitri Shostakovich**

Helga Schwalm

It is not only Julian Barnes's recent bestselling novel *The Noise of Time* (2016) that makes the Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich the subject of biofiction. Shostakovich, who has also received much attention by scholarly biographers, features significantly in contemporary anglophone bio-fiction and biopics such as William T Vollmann's *Europe Central* (2005), Sarah Quigley's *The Conductor* (2011) as well as Tony Palmer's ambitious film *Testimony* (1988) and Oliver Becker and Katharina Bruner's *Dem kühlen Morgen entgegen* (2008). In diverse ways, these projects, in dialogue with scholarly biographies, address the complex ambiguity of the life of a famous composer deeply entangled in the politics of twentieth-century history, and a life oscillating between public political loyalty and secret (aesthetic) resistance as expressed in his chamber music. The aim of this interdisciplinary paper is to investigate the strategies of the biofictions and films on Shostakovich in their endeavour to re-imagine, under specific geopolitical auspices, the artist's secret life and private musical self-expression, as opposed to his public role as symphonic composer and supporter of socialist realism.

**RMHR - Exploring the collecting self**

Roger Slack

Building on a long period of fieldwork, this paper aims to explicate what it is to do being a collector – in this case of fountain pens. The paper links the activities of collecting to the notion of the semiotic self and highlights the autobiography of the collector vis-à-vis the artefacts collected. The search for ‘good examples’, ‘grail pens’, and the ‘find’ are characteristic of being seen as a collector and the ways that these and the activities of finding them, e.g. in second-hand stores, antique fairs, pen fairs, or online are narrated is key in constituting the collection as such (as opposed to simply owning some pens). What I will call ‘collectors tales’ also constitute what has been called ‘professional vision’ i.e. the seeing of an often less than pristine or not obviously collectible object as collectible – often what may look like ‘scrap’ is see-able by the collector as a rare example of a particular pen in need of restoration, etc. I show that pens and collections also have narratives that adhere to them in terms of repair and restoration as well as history (re brands, the development of the pen, and particular uses such as the stenographer pen) and completeness (e.g. owning every example of the Waterman red ripple cap bands and knowing what they were intended to do). Thus, the paper will link personal and artefact biographies in and as of the natural history of collecting.

**Unravelling networks, the hidden wiring: from Leicester to Cambridge**

Dennis Smith

I have been unravelling some hidden wiring that ran through the educational institutions I passed through when younger. Why? Curiosity, and an interest in why and how things work the way they do. I begin by recalling that my history teacher at my state grammar school in Nottingham strongly recommended applying for Christ’s College, Cambridge ‘because Plumb is there.’ It turned out that Jack Plumb (as I learnt to call him), a man with a brilliant turn of phrase and a deliberately disruptive manner, had been to my teacher’s old school, Alderman Newton’s Grammar School in Leicester. My old teacher had no magic key or strings to pull but he pointed me in a direction he thought would challenge me. A few decades later I remembered all this and began to research these connections between private networks and public institutions. It turns out that some of this hidden wiring can be brought to light through the works of novelists such as C.P. Snow and William Cooper, as well as the reminiscences of colleagues who remember those involved. The result is, I hope, a fascinating narrative that encompasses not only Christ’s and Alderman Newton but also Haberdasher’s Aske, three resounding names in the educational world.

**Feeling the world: romantic socialism and feminist politics**

Maria Tamboukou

In this paper I look at entanglements between love, gender and agonistic politics within the European romantic socialist movements. In doing so I draw on my research with women workers’ narratives, particularly focusing on Jeanne Désirée, the seamstress who founded the first autonomous feminist newspaper in nineteenth century France. Her political writings in the form of letters, petitions and journal articles have become a significant body in the archives of feminist history. But although she lived a fully active political life she did not reveal much about her inner thoughts and passions, with the

exception of a few letters that I will discuss in this paper entering into the dialogue of her epistolary discourse.

### **'My bones won't break me': transitioning one's private experience into the public domain**

Joanna Thurston

The decision to make one's private experiences public, can evolve from a number of motivations. Previously criticised as being a self-absorbed activity, one's rationale for choosing 'auto-methodological' work has the potential to deflect this negativity. Publically I am a young active woman, an academic of 9 years and keen sportswoman. Privately I am 6 years into my diagnosis of osteoporosis, an experience compounded by the fact that I received my diagnosis aged just 32 years old - 30 years younger than the traditional demographic for the condition. As a 'stranger' within my diagnostic group, I am in a unique position to explore the experience of an atypical patient, where no standard care pathway or documented understanding of the implications of such a diagnosis are evident. Reflective Topical Autobiography has transitioned my private self, complete with fears, frustrations and searches for meaning during my diagnosis, to the public domain. The decision process to go 'public' and experience of using the methodology, with its impact on the self, loved ones, reputation and identity are all explored as the private story becomes public and open to both support and criticism. Personal stories are powerful research tools helping others find resonance and validation with their own experiences. If the effective answering of a research question can only be achieved through the exposure of one's most personal and private experiences, the criticism of self-absorbency can be challenged, since the author sets aside their vulnerabilities for what they see as a greater good.

### **Queering kinship: a sibling's coming out**

Samara van Toledo

The controversial plebiscite on same sex marriage and the implementation and disbandment of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia, (a nationally funded program aimed at providing inclusive curriculum for LGBTI youth, their families, teachers and peers) has divided Australia. The vehement public debate can be read as a political and cultural framing of how LGBTI lives are made material in everyday antipodean life. There is a paucity of research surrounding the lived experiences of gay men and teens in Australian schools and even less that looks at the family as the scene and setting for normative identity work. This paper examines the impact of heteronormativity and its effects on queering kinship in regional Victoria, Australia during the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing on a first-hand narrative autoethnographic account, I revisit and reconsider how sibling relationships get queered, and explore the notion of being a 'straight ally' when encountering heteronorming discursive practices in childhood and beyond.

### **Novels, biopics, auto/pathographies and poems: exploring the value of health humanities within an undergraduate social sciences-based health studies milieu**

Sara Louise Wheeler

In my professional capacity, I am a lecturer for a social sciences-based, undergraduate health studies course in the UK. In my private, personal time, I enjoy contributing and

consuming creative writing outputs; I write the column '*synfyfyrion llenyddol*' (literary musings) for *Y Clawdd*, a Welsh-medium community newspaper. In recent years, I have become increasingly interested in outputs which convey people's private health experiences - from the fictionalised accounts in novels, poems, soap opera storylines and films, through to the non-fictionalised biopics and auto/pathographies. I have also recently begun contributing to this genre myself, based on my own health experiences.

It is now well established that the medical humanities can make a positive contribution to medical education. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the health humanities have emerged, providing a broader disciplinary scope and paradigmatic approach to the various outputs and artefacts. This presents us, in the field of social science-based health studies, with an opportunity to explore the value which these outputs can bring to the study of health within our field of enquiry. In this paper, I bring together my public interests in pursuing pedagogic excellence in the field of social science-based health studies, with my private, personal interests in the more literary genres. I explore the ways in which my knowledge of each can complement each other, and help to build engaging pedagogic practice, enriching the experiences of my students.

**Delegate List**

Josie	Abbot
Yvonne	Anderson
Karin	Bacon
Jenny	Byrne
Anne Rachel	Collis
Judith	Chapman
Anne	Chappell
Hilary	Dickinson
Michael	Erben
Julie	Greer
Robin	Hadley
Gayle	Letherby
Terry	Martin
Jeni	Nicholson
Consuelo	Rivera
Helga	Schwalm
Aidan	Seery
Roger	Slack
Dennis	Smith
Andrew	Sparkes
Maria	Tamboukou
Joanna	Thurston
Samara	van Toledo
Sara Louise	Wheeler



