WORD AND IMAGE RELATIONS IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES OF ROLAND BARTHES AND SOPHIE CALLE

by

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Graduate Department of French
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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is on the use of visual evidence in contemporary French autobiography, with an emphasis on the autobiographies of Roland Barthes (Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes) and Sophie Calle (Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée, and Appointment with Sigmund Freud). The objective is to study how these two media participate in the representation of their identities within their respective narratives. Barthes’s and Calle’s texts are examples of French contemporary literature, written by well-known figures of French culture, they are autobiographical in nature, introduce photographic images within their narratives, and use a performative style of writing. These authors also differ in their approach to writing, since they come from different disciplinary backgrounds – one author (Barthes) is predominantly a theorist (Semiotician and Literary Critic) and the other (Calle) is an artist (performance and conceptual).

In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, the author integrates images into his narrative to demonstrate how the autobiographical subject asserts itself as an object of literary expression that is confined within the bounds of writing. Our study on Calle will represent a more extreme example of literature. In Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée, and Appointment with Sigmund Freud, the artist introduces photographs into her narrative to illustrate how she moves the practice and study of autobiography outside the canon of literature and into the public sphere. Emphasis will
be placed on *Doubles-jeux*, because of the text’s strong literary orientation. *La visite guidée*, and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* will also be studied to emphasize the performative aspects of Calle’s writing. This thesis is organized into four chapters: In the first two chapters on autobiography (Chapter 1) and photography (Chapter 2), the theoretical and methodological premises are established to provide a framework for the analysis of the literary corpus. In the last two chapters on Barthes (Chapter 3) and Calle (Chapter 4), critical thinking is applied to the life narratives of both authors. Although word and image relations represent the main focus in our study, our analysis incorporates other areas of inquiry that contribute to the rich interdisciplinary character of this thesis: photography, life writing, intertextuality, performance studies.
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Introduction
Photography and Autobiography in the Life Narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle

Fellini’s work is often said to be autobiographical. ‘Even if I set out to make a film about a filet of sole, it would turn out to be about me’ is his way of putting it. But he also says, ‘All art is autobiographical; the pearl is the oyster’s autobiography.’¹

Even the oyster has its autobiography. Fellini’s very interesting observation infers that every animate object has a story to share about its existence. How we choose to see and interpret this story is shaped by our own expectations of and experiences in the world. Taking Fellini’s remark into consideration we ask ourselves “What is an autobiography?” and “How should it be interpreted?” Theorists of the genre have been asking themselves these same questions for decades. However, with answers, have come limitations to the practice and interpretation of self-representation – limitations that are now being questioned and re-examined to take into account the different perspectives and approaches that autobiography takes; its initial focus, as a practice situated in a long tradition of writing, is slowly changing to incorporate broader conceptions of self-expression. These changes are being made to reflect the different modes of expression practiced by individuals from diverse backgrounds (cultural, religious, linguistic, ethnic, professional) and levels of society (underprivileged, middle class, wealthy) with a common goal of telling their life stories. Fellini’s description of the oyster, which engages both the visual and the inanimate in the role of storytelling, takes on special meaning within our own interpretation of autobiography and its different forms.

Although autobiography has been “formalized” by critics as a writing practice and a literary genre, our study aims to show that self-representation could also be inclusive of other forms of expression – outside the act of writing. However, keeping in mind that the ideas and concepts explored in our analysis originate from a literary studies background, the objective is to illustrate how autobiography has expanded its boundaries to include other forms of expression, while remaining within the established conventions of literary studies.

The focus of our study is on the use of visual evidence in contemporary French autobiography, with a particular emphasis on the life narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle. Our goal is to study how these two media participate in the representation of their identities within their respective autobiographical narratives. Both Barthes and Calle introduce photographic images into their texts as additional sources of meaning to their writing. Their narratives provide excellent examples of how the visual pervades the literary space to enhance the meaning of the text. As a result, the inclusion of photography as a category of analysis in our study of autobiography is not gratuitous, but becomes an indispensable tool that offers new possibilities for literary analysis.

Although word and image relations represent a common thread in our study of Barthes’s and Calle’s personal narratives, our analysis incorporates many other areas of inquiry that contribute to the rich interdisciplinary character of our research: photography, life writing, intertextuality, performance studies. The introduction of “performance” or “performativity” in our study of Barthes’s and Calle’s texts highlights the originality of our research, since
“performance” is a fairly innovative concept that remains largely unexplored by scholars and critics of French literature.²

This thesis is written in English in order to maximize its interest within the academic contexts in which it is inscribed. Our aim is to contribute and appeal to a broader community of English-language scholars who are already working in the fields of autobiography and photography. It is important to mention that in our theory chapters (Autobiography and Photography), in the cases for which an English translation is available for the French reference we are quoting, we will favour the use of the English translation for the French theorist that we are quoting. For those theorists who have not been translated in English, we will keep our

² Performance (especially in the context of autobiographical writing) is a concept that is mostly studied by scholars in Gender studies and Performance art studies and not generally explored by scholars of French literature, especially specialists of Barthes and Calle. Anthologies on the topics of Autobiographical writing and Performance have mostly been published within the context of Feminist Studies: Miller, Lynn C, Jacqueline Taylor and M. Heather carver (Eds.) Voices made flesh: performing women’s autobiography. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003; Autobiography and Performance. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Gale, Maggie Barbara and Vivien Gardner (eds.) Auto/biography and Identity: women, theatre, and performance. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004; Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson (eds.) Interfaces: women, autobiography, image, performance. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002; Carr, Tessa Willoughby. Recovering Women: Autobiographical performances of illness experience. Austin: University of Texas, 2007; Kadar, Marlene (ed.). Tracing the Autobiographical. Waterloo: Wilfred University Press, 2005. Sophie Calle has been featured in two of these anthologies (Voices Made Flesh and Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance). Scholars in French Literature, such as Johnnie Gratton, Anne Sauvageot, Anna Whiteside, Françoise Gaillard, Philippe Lejeune, Ben Stoltzfus, etc., have focused mostly on the literary aspects of her work. Other scholars such as Martine Delvaux and Michael Sheringham have contextualized their analysis of the word and image relationship in Calle’s work from a literary perspective. With respect to Barthes, two books have been published on the topic of performance in his writing: Timothy Scheie, an Associate Professor of French at the Eastman School of Music (University of Rochester), has published Performance Degree Zero: Roland Barthes and Theatre. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. In this book, Scheie does not look at the performative aspects of Barthes’s works, but merely studies Barthes’s own writing on the theatre. Scheie has also published numerous articles on the topic of Barthes’s ideas on theatre. In another book, The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, Henry M. Sayre, a professor of Art History, dedicates a chapter to the discussion of Barthes’s writing in terms of a critical performance. Although Timothy Scheie is a Professor of French Studies, he does not study the performative aspects of Barthes’s writing per se. He is also part of a faculty at a University whose primary focus is Performing Arts (Music). The unexplored terrain of literature and performance in French Studies is also reflected in University French Studies Departments. Course offerings on performance and literature are only offered in Music, Comparative Studies, English, and Performance Studies Departments. The University of Guelph’s English department now offers a Ph.D. program for Literary Studies/Theatre Studies. Brock University’s Comparative Literature Department offers a graduate course on Performance and Literature. Undergraduate courses are also offered in “Literature and Performance” at the departments of The University of Toronto (English & Drama), The University of Winnipeg (English), The University of Melbourne (English), Northwestern University (Performance Studies).
quotation in its original French language. Although Sophie Calle and Roland Barthes are French writers, they are also authors that are extensively studied by English-language scholars. Second, our hope is to introduce the concept of autobiography and literature within the context of French Studies to punctuate the growing interest in word and image studies with an extended analysis on performance. The literary analysis that we undertake in our chapters on Barthes and Calle is also written in English. If the critical and theoretical references used in these chapters were originally written in French, they have not been translated and therefore will remain in their original language.³

In our analysis of Barthes’s and Calle’s texts, we will draw on a few similarities between the writing practices of both authors: They are both examples of French contemporary literature, written by well-known figures of French culture, are autobiographical in focus, introduce photography into their narratives, and combine all of these elements into a performative style of writing. The concept of performative writing plays an essential role in linking our two authors. Despite the numerous similarities brought on by their common goal of telling their life stories, our study will focus on the unique perspective that each author brings to the practice and interpretation of autobiography. Although Barthes and Calle integrate performative writing into their autobiographical narratives, they take very different approaches. Apart from the fact that there are gender differences between these two writers, that they lived in different historical and social contexts, that they are obviously individuals who had different convictions, beliefs, and life experiences, we believe that the uniqueness of these writers’ texts come from the fact that they come from different disciplinary backgrounds. Barthes is a writer, predominantly a theorist

³ Please note that there are a few exceptions for those critical and theoretical references that have been cross-referenced between our four chapters.
(Semiotician and Literary Critic) and Calle is an artist (performance and conceptual) and a writer. Our analysis on Barthes will be restricted to the study of autobiography as a performative model of literary writing. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the author integrates images into his narrative to demonstrate how the autobiographical subject asserts itself as an object of literary expression that is confined within the conventional bounds of writing. On the other hand, our study on Calle will represent a more extreme model of literary writing. In *Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée*, and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, the artist introduces photographs into her narrative to illustrate how she moves the practice and study of autobiography outside the canon of literature and into the public sphere. Calle has written more than one autobiographical narrative; the artist’s autobiographical art has spanned to include four decades (from the 1980’s to present) and includes over 20 projects that are autobiographical in nature. We have chosen to study three of Calle’s texts to provide a broader analysis of her approach to autobiography. Our emphasis will be placed on an analysis of *Doubles-jeux*, because of the text’s strong literary orientation. However, we will also study in a less detailed fashion *La visite guidée*, and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*. This will allow us to emphasize the performative aspects of Calle’s autobiographical writing. Even though we acknowledge that there are other authors of French literature who incorporate word and image relations into their writing, we have decided to focus on the works of these two prominent authors, since their texts share the traits of performative writing. Both writers are important in our study as they have written photographic autobiographical narratives that, within the historical context of their production (Barthes in 1975; Calle in the 1980s), were perceived by literary critics as innovative and thought-provoking literary works. Although our thesis does emphasize the word and image relations in

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4 Although Calle continues to publish her autobiographical works, her autobiographical projects first appeared in the 1980’s, when her style of autobiographical writing was fairly uncommon.
our author’s texts, we will limit our analysis to the images that we believe are most pertinent to
our literary analysis of these texts. Of the 30 photographs and illustrations that we have
reproduced in our thesis, only 10 of the “Figures” are from *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*,
while the remaining 20 have been taken from Calle’s works. Although we have included twice as
many photographs for Calle as we have for Barthes, it is important to recall that we are studying
several of Calle’s texts (*Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée, and Appointment with Sigmund Freud*),
while our analysis on Barthes will be restricted to the study of *Roland Barthes par Roland
Barthes*.

We have organized our research into four chapters: In our first two chapters on
autobiography (Chapter 1) and photography (Chapter 2), our theoretical and methodological
premises are established in order to provide a framework for the analysis of our literary corpus.
These theoretical presentations are not exhaustive: Our objective is to introduce a large number
of theoretical concepts that are important in defining and grasping the complex nature of
autobiography as a literary genre and photography as a visual medium. These chapters also
provide valuable insights and theoretical concepts for our analysis of Barthes and Calle’s
illustrated autobiographical texts. It is also important to mention that while the presentation of
these first two chapters may at first seem to inscribe a teleological account of autobiography and
photography that moves from a conservative, stable, and naïve past way of thinking to a radical,
dynamic, and sophisticated and reflexive contemporary approach, our sole objective is to identify
the principal arguments underlying the theories of autobiography and photography in a way that
reflects and supports the arguments presented in our chapters of literary analysis. Our objective
is to demonstrate how scholars have continued to shift their perceptions of autobiography to
reflect a more performative and interdisciplinary framework. This change, of course, has
followed the emergence of autobiographical narratives that incorporate a more interdisciplinary
and performative approach to their writing. It is not our intention to suggest that contemporary examples of life writing have more merit than their earlier and more conventional counterparts. However, it is almost impossible to illustrate how contemporary examples of writing use more dynamic and performative strategies of writing without taking into account the evolutionary process of autobiography. It is important to mention that our study does not aim to utter the final word on autobiography or photography; it is part of a very dynamic corpus of literary and theoretical works, which continue to evolve within the ever-changing historical, social and cultural contexts in which they have been produced.

In the last two chapters on Roland Barthes (Chapter 3) and Sophie Calle (Chapter 4), we apply our critical thinking to the life narratives of our authors. In these chapters we interrogate Barthes’s and Calle’s texts by drawing on the theoretical tools presented in our initial theoretical chapters on autobiography and photography.

Chapter 1 is devoted to the study of autobiography, in which we present some important ideas associated with the practice and interpretation of personal writing. With the backing of certain key theoretical debates surrounding life writing, we will attempt to define autobiography and its parameters. The analysis in this chapter will not provide a complete overview of the history of autobiography theory. Instead, its aim will be to work through some key theoretical ideas that will allow us to illustrate the shifting conventions of personal writing from a rigid model of self representation to an open narrative form that is inclusive of alternate modes of expression. Our chapter is organized into several sections to suggest the changing nature of autobiography from an objective mode of self representation to a highly subjective form of expression. Through the various theoretical perspectives engaged in our chapter, we will present a definition of the genre, briefly link the self-referential approach of autobiography to its claims
of objectivity and authenticity, discuss the subjective nature of personal writing and its effects on self-representation, identify the interdisciplinary character of the genre linking autobiographical writing to other forms of representation such as biography, autofiction, and fiction, and finally, by discussing how current debates on autobiography identify the practice as a performative act. In the different sections of our chapter, our discussion on the shifting nature of autobiography will demonstrate that changes in the genre are closely linked to the changing perspectives of theorists of the genre.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the study of photography. Since the autobiographical narratives that we analyze in our study engage in a dialogue with photographic images, it is important to examine the various issues and questions concerning photography and its representation within the context of autobiography. When reading this chapter, one must remember that our presentation of photography is influenced by the literary context of our thesis. In order to study photography alongside autobiography and to begin to draw parallels between the two mediums within our own analysis of these two practices, the presentation of this chapter follows the same evolutionary perspective offered in our chapter on autobiography; our presentation of photography follows a description of the medium from an objective and authentic mode of expression to a highly subjective and symbolic mode of visual communication. Although it may seem that our chapter suggests that we are retracing the evolution of photography – from a scientific to an artistic medium – this is not at all our intention. We have organized our chapter to mirror our study on the shifting conventions of autobiographical writing. By presenting photography in a way that suggests a movement from its documentary roots into an expressive art form, our objective is to emphasize the shared problematics of photography and autobiography. To establish connections between our theoretical chapters, we divide our study of photography into two main parts. In the first part entitled “Photography: both mimetic practice
and artistic interpretation, our main focus is to outline some issues concerning the practice and theory of photography: we discuss the beginnings of photography, the technical aspects of the practice, the objective nature of the medium, its subjective and symbolic rendering of reality, its cultural and social impact, and its recognition as a practice that is closely tied to notions of performance. In the second part of this chapter, entitled “Word and Image relations: the use of photography in autobiographical writing”, we analyze the word and image interface – in particular the relationship between photography and autobiography – in order to combine these theoretical approaches in our interpretation on Sophie Calle and Roland Barthes.

In Chapter 3 of our study, we begin our literary analysis with the autobiographical narrative *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. In this chapter, we will show how Barthes establishes his autobiography as a model of performative writing through the use of word and image relations. Our analysis will attempt to highlight Barthes’s emphasis on the literary aspects of autobiography. Barthes constructs his autobiographical subject as the product of writing – bound by the writing processes that inform it and its complex relationships with the author’s everyday life. We will study how Barthes introduces photographs into his text in order to emphasize the arguments presented in the written text. The introduction of a family album into Barthes’s narrative connects his autobiographical subject to a shared, social identity in the real world through the representation of the family; his autobiographical subject is constructed in the text as the product of multiple social networks through relationships of intertextuality and intratextuality. Our analysis of word and image relations in Barthes’s autobiographical writing will demonstrate how the author writes his narrative to criticize, among other things, the referential claims of autobiography. In order to consider the role that the various relationships play in the presentation of his autobiographical subject, our study of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* will take an interdisciplinary approach. In our examination of this text, we will call upon
the theories studied in our chapters on autobiography and photography. It is important to mention that we summarize a few theoretical concepts (the family album, intertextuality, autotextuality, and the act of writing) necessary to contextualize and validate our claims to the network of social relationships that are created in Barthes’s text both visually and verbally. The interdisciplinary approach adopted in this chapter will highlight Barthes as an innovator of autobiography whose example of life writing has introduced new strategies for the writing and the analysis of contemporary autobiography.

In Chapter 4 of our thesis, we will analyze the autobiographical narratives of Sophie Calle. Our goal in this chapter is to show how performativity is a concept that is highly relevant to Calle’s practice of autobiography. Known primarily as a performance and conceptual artist who introduces autobiographical elements into her artistic practice, Calle channels her practice of autobiography through her role and practice as an artist. In this chapter, our focus will be specifically on the use of photographic images in Calle’s narratives entitled *Doubles-jeux*, *La visite guidée*, and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*. *Doubles-jeux*, *La visite guidée*, and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* were chosen for our study because they offer compelling examples of contemporary autobiographical writing that require an interdisciplinary approach to their analysis and interpretation. We will analyze the ways in which photography is introduced into these texts as a strategy to participate in the construction of the autobiographical subject. We have chosen to study these three texts for two main reasons: Each text plays an important role in engaging the theoretical issues outlined in our previous chapters on autobiography and photography. Moreover, these texts provide excellent examples of how Calle introduces photography into her autobiographical narratives to demonstrate identity as a performative and relational phenomenon. In order to lend direction to our analysis of Calle’s autobiographical writing, the three books that we are studying in this chapter will follow a certain order of
presentation. This analysis will trace Calle’s autobiographical writing from a literary mode of production to a more collaborative, performative and interdisciplinary practice. Our analysis of *Doubles-jeux* will trace the increasingly performative nature of Calle’s writing within the project itself; through her collaboration with Auster, she is able to illustrate how autobiographical writing can be transformed through her performance art projects. This will be followed by an analysis of *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, which will attest to the increasingly performative character of the artist’s more recent work. As we have already mentioned in the previous pages, our focus in this chapter will remain on *Doubles-jeux*, however an extended analysis of *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* will be performed to place further emphasis on the performative aspects of Calle’s autobiographical writing. By combining autobiography and art, Calle explores the ways in which individual identity is framed and constructed through a network of social and cultural relationships. In our analysis of *Doubles-jeux* we will demonstrate how Calle constructs her identity as a product of writing through intertextual relationships created with Paul Auster’s *Léviathan*. In *La visite guidée*, Calle is able to stage identity as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon through a staged museum visit. We will study how Calle moves autobiographical writing outside of the context of literature and into the social realm through the cultural experience of the museum visit. An important aspect in Calle’s approach to autobiographical writing is her use of personal objects as a means to reveal certain details about her life. We will take a closer look at how Calle uses inanimate objects to participate in the storytelling process. In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, we will analyze Calle’s autobiographical writing once more through the filter of the museum visit. Through the symbolically charged setting of the Freud Museum, Calle consciously recollects, re-experiences, and re-lives her past through techniques of self-analysis. By framing her own processes of self-inquiry within the larger context of Freud’s influential life and work –
through the representation of the Freud Museum – Calle stages autobiographical writing as a revisionary return to the canon.

As it was previously mentioned, our thesis will begin with two initial chapters dedicated to theoretical presentations of autobiography and photography. The last two chapters will be dedicated to Roland Barthes’s and Sophie Calle’s texts.
Chapter 1
The Shifting Modes of Self-Representation

Once dismissed by the academic community as the least scholarly of the literary genres, autobiography has matured into one of the most complex and dynamic literary forms of contemporary literature. In recent years, the critical discourse surrounding the personal narrative has increasingly recognized autobiography as an important literary genre that is developed within a continuously evolving framework. The recent inclusion of unconventional modes of personal writing within discussions on autobiography reflects the latest development in autobiography studies from a highly conventional genre to an open, changing and continuously expanding practice that connects writing with other modes of representation. Due to its transition into a rapidly growing field of interdisciplinary inquiry, the formal “definition of autobiography has proved elusive” and is changing to incorporate a much broader range of works. The study of autobiography provides a rich field of investigation for literary critics interested in contradictory and performative models of writing; autobiography takes on many forms, and as a result, appeals to a much wider academic audience:

Enshrined as a separate genre, autobiography has gained considerable territory in a short time by multiplying itself under various avatars. But this ‘ego-literature’ is not limited to autobiography. Present in trace amounts, or as a simple temptation, in a number of various writings, autobiography migrates from one genre to another – correspondence, diary, fictions, testimonials, essays – without ever being confined within clear

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5 Charles Berryman confirms that autobiography was at first considered by scholars not to be a serious field of academic inquiry; “Autobiography suffered from benign neglect for more than half a century because it was treated as a poor stepchild by professors of both history and literary criticism.” (“Critical Mirrors: Theories of Autobiography,” p.71).

6 Charles Berryman writes that it is in the 1960’s, with “the first critical attempts […] to define the nature of autobiography”, that autobiography finally begins to “emerg[e] from its long period of neglect by professors of history and literature.” (“Critical Mirrors: Theories of Autobiography,” p.71). Susanna Egan justifies Berryman’s claim when she writes about autobiography as a field that has emerged into “an intense area of study […] and production.” (Burdens of Proof: Faith, Doubt, Identity in Autobiography, p.12).

boundaries. The study of its random properties could be the basis for a historical poetics of self writing, when, these properties are precisely reluctant to borrow from official or authorized channels. The twists and turns attributed to autobiographical writing, the masks and the postures adopted by the writer to avoid what is sometimes felt like the imposture of autobiography, indicate how self writing is an impure, hybrid, experimental form of writing, which should pave its way into various genres that are constructed to invent its truth. 

Many critics of autobiography are favouring more experimental models of self-representation and are placing more emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of the genre. Once considered the “poor stepchild […] of both history and literary criticism,” autobiography theory is now being integrated into a range of other academic disciplines that were not commonly identified with the autobiographical genre in the past. In a discussion on the theoretical issues relevant to personal writing, Anna Schein takes note of the interdisciplinary approach that characterizes contemporary studies on autobiography:

The field of […] autobiographical theory is becoming increasingly multidisciplinary as we enter the 21st century. Scholars in disciplines as diverse as literary criticism, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and psychiatry are simultaneously and collaboratively reexamining, redefining, and recreating their respective disciplines by applying the broad base of […] autobiographical theory to their projects. The very definition of autobiography is expanding and now includes collaborative, as-told-to autobiographies which present both authors and critics with multiple challenges in writing, understanding, and interpreting these works.

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9 See also Anne Kugler who writes that “in contrast to earlier ideas of autobiographical writing […] more recent literary scholarship characterizes autobiography as an evolving and dynamic process of self-invention that produces multiple, changing, and inconsistent identities.” (*Errant plagiary: the life and writing of Lady Sarah Cowper, 1644-1720*, p.210). Like Kugler, Suzanne Nalbantian writes about the “evolution of autobiography in the Western world” (p.25) and also refers to earlier theorists, such as Elizabeth Bruss, who have discussed the subject at greater length: “[she] viewed autobiography as an evolving genre” (p.29). She also refers to William Spengemann’s presentation of “autobiography as an evolving literary genre which proceeded from the historical to the poetic” (p.30). (*Aesthetic Autobiography*, p.25-30).
10 Although Schein’s comment originally intends to offer a feminist perspective in her study of autobiography, it could also apply to autobiography studies in general. (“Developing a Reader Response to Ruth Behar’s Translated Woman: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Readings,” n.p.)
Autobiography theory is not only integrating other disciplines in its practice, but it has also become a focus of interest for researchers in a broad range of academic disciplines. This recent shift of interest in autobiography theory has broadened the formal definition of the genre to become inclusive of models of writing that span across different genres and academic disciplines.

The discussion presented in this chapter offers a selective review of some of the key concepts that have been relevant to the analysis and the understanding of the autobiographical genre. Although “autobiography” is divided into many subgenres and although the term has been re-imagined and renamed by contemporary scholars of the genre, our present study will focus on autobiography as the literary practice that governs all forms of self-referential writing. The word “autobiography” will be used to refer to canonical models of self-referential writing while the term “life writing” will be used to allude to contemporary examples of self writing. The expression “life narrative” will be used to refer to modes of self expression that lie outside the act of writing, such as performance art and artistic installations. In this chapter, we will explore a select number of critical approaches that will help illustrate the changing nature of the autobiographical genre. The aim of this study is not to provide a complete overview of the history of autobiography theory. Instead, our analysis aims to elucidate some important concepts that will allow us to trace the passage of personal writing from a rigid model of self-representation to an open narrative form that is inclusive of alternative modes of expression. Ultimately, our hope is to present autobiography as a practice that has evolved and converged

11 Although many critics have distinguished the traditional model of self-representation – “autobiography” – from more contemporary examples of personal writing – “life writing”, “memoir”, “life narrative, “self life writing”, etc. - this is not the focus of our study in this chapter. For a detailed description of the different forms and subgenres of autobiography see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. (Reading autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives, p.4-5).
with other modes of representation to illustrate the changing focus of the genre – from a static, univocal representation of identity to a multifaceted and multidimensional mode of analysis. Our emphasis on autobiography as an evolving phenomenon will attest to the emerging body of self-referential narratives in which boundaries are continuously contested and renegotiated. Understanding the recent shift in autobiographical criticism will allow us to contextualize our own insights on the life narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle as innovative models of contemporary autobiographical writing. The literary contributions of Barthes and Calle represent different critical periods in the history of autobiography theory – *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* was published in 1975, at a time when autobiography theory was in its early infancy, whereas Calle’s life narratives continue to be published, at a time when autobiography theory is at its most vibrant. The narratives of Barthes and Calle also represent different approaches to life writing, since Barthes’s contribution to autobiography theory is largely attributed to his role as a visionary literary critic, whereas Calle’s main contribution is largely attributed to her role as a conceptual/performance artist. The strategies used in Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical texts will be further examined in the chapters devoted to these two writers. The analysis of autobiographical texts such as those written by Barthes and Calle, have permitted scholars to trace the evolutionary process of autobiographical writing from a rigid paradigm of self-expression into a flexible model of interdisciplinary collaboration and innovative writing. In order to establish the relevance of contemporary scholarship on autobiography to the life narratives of Barthes and Calle, we will begin this chapter with an introductory survey on the genre. Our brief introduction will allow us to define autobiography and to determine how this literary genre has been challenged in recent years to be inclusive of marginal or atypical examples of life writing, such as the narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle.
1 The Autobiographical Mirror: Self-reflexive writing

In 1981, Albert E. Stone wrote about autobiography as “an important new field for scholars and critics.”\(^\text{12}\) Although Stone described it as a relatively new field in 1981, by the 1980s, autobiography had already been established as a literary genre that followed certain conventions. As Philippe Lejene writes: “Literary genres […] constitute, in each era, a sort of implicit code through which, and thanks to which, works of the past and recent works can be received and classified by readers. It is in relation to the […] ‘horizons of expectation’ […] that literary texts are \textit{produced then received}, that they satisfy this expectation or they transgress it and force it to renew itself.”\(^\text{13}\) In the context of autobiography, the conventions, as explained by Marlene Kadar, are integral to the writing and understanding of the genre and continue to be used by contemporary scholars as the starting point for discussions on autobiography:

The term autobiography derives from the Greek ‘autos’ meaning ‘of’ or “by oneself,’ independently, and the first mention is recorded again in 1809.\(^\text{14}\) Autobiography is a genre that obeys the laws which have governed the writing of one’s self. Although the author is not “distant” or even ‘objective,’ the text exhibits certain formal conventions and adheres to certain protocols that are different from those of biography.\(^\text{15}\)

The formal conventions theorized by critics of the genre have turned autobiography into a literary practice that follows certain norms concerning the representation of identity. When writing about the conventions of the genre, Elizabeth Bruss writes that “there are limited generalizations to be made about […] autobiographies, and which seem to form the core of our


\(^\text{14}\) Although its first mention is recorded in 1797, Albert E. Stone’s reference to autobiography as a new field of inquiry in the 1980s reveals that the emergence of autobiography theory was quite slow. See also Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson who write about the origins of the word “autobiography”: “In English the term \textit{autobiography} first appeared in the review of Isaac D’Israeli’s \textit{Miscellanies} by William Taylor of Norwich in the \textit{Monthly Review} (1797). Its first use, however, is often ascribed to Robert Southey’s anglicizing of the three Greek words in 1809.” (\textit{Reading autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives}, p.1-2).

\(^\text{15}\) Marlene Kadar. \textit{Essays on life writing: from genre to critical practice}, p.4.
notion of the functions an autobiographical text must perform. One may put these generalizations
in the form of rules to be satisfied by the text.”¹⁶ According to Linda Anderson, the pioneering
critics of the genre “like Lejeune and Gusdorf believed that [autobiography had to] provide both
‘conditions and limits’ if it [were] to be containable and identifiable as an authoritative form of
‘truth-telling’ which is clearly distinguishable from fiction.”¹⁷ Similar to the ideas imparted by
Linda Anderson, Jean Starobinski writes that “autobiography […] requires that certain possible
conditions be realized, conditions that are mainly ideological (or cultural): that the personal
experience be important, that it offer an opportunity for a sincere relation with someone else,”
who happens to be the reader of the narrative.¹⁸ These conventions have led to the creation of a
canon of texts that have continuously been identified by scholars as the classics of
autobiography,¹⁹ which typically include the personal narratives of the “great” men of society;
As Linda Anderson writes: “By focusing on a particular historical canon of texts which
celebrated the extraordinary lives of ‘great men’, an important group of modern critics writing in
the 1960s and 1970s deducted abstract critical principles for autobiography based on the ideals of
autonomy, self-realization, [and] authenticity.”²⁰ One of the earlier critics to assign a canon of
texts to the autobiographical genre is Georges Gusdorf. As early as the 1950s and well into the
1970s, he examines “the conditions and the limits” of autobiographical writing and lists a
number of texts belonging to the canon of autobiography:

Autobiography is a solidly established literary genre, its history traceable in a series of
masterpieces from the Confessions of St. Augustine to Gide’s Si le grain ne meurt, with

¹⁹ For a more detailed list of the “classics” of autobiography, see Estelle C. Jelinek. (The Tradition of Women’s
Autobiography: From Antiquity to Present, p.6-8).
²⁰ Linda Anderson. Autobiography, p.3.
Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Chateaubriand’s *Mémoires d’outre tombe*, and Newman’s *Apologia* in between. Many great men, and even not so great – heads of government or generals, ministers of state, explorers, businessmen – have devoted the leisure time of their old age to editing “Memoirs,” which have found an attentive reading public from generation to generation.21

For Gusdorf, like for many of the early scholars of autobiography, the autobiographer was typically “a white male whose primary reason for writing was to announce to the world a story of personal achievement most often measured according to traditional notions of masculine success. By writing autobiographies, successful men […] capitalized on their public identities and fashioned a lasting image of greatness in the American mind.”22 The conventions of classic autobiography typically emphasize the close relationship that exists between the act of writing and self-representation. In her study on autobiography, Estelle Jelinek emphasizes the link between writing and the representation of the autobiographer’s self-image:

I consider an autobiography as that work each autobiographer writes with the intention of its being [his or] her life story – whatever form, content, or style it takes. […] I do consider works entitled “recollections,” “reminiscences,” “memoirs,” and the like as autobiographies if the author’s intent was to write a life study, to look back over [his or] her life or a portion of it. Autobiography is an amalgam of one’s self-image, one’s process of thinking and feeling, and one’s talent as a formal writer.23

Writing becomes the privileged medium for the practice of self-representation. Philippe Lejeune is one of the most prominent scholars of autobiography – he is responsible for its emergence as a literary genre and is the person most associated with the definition of the genre. According to Lejeune, autobiography is defined as a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.”24 When referring to Lejeune’s definition of autobiography as the confrontation

between text and life, Anne Meller explains that in his "efforts to codify the conventions or literary rules of autobiography," Lejeune "implies that the self has a structure and chronological development that can be narrated, that coherence exists between the present and the past (a "retrospective" of "his own existence") and that the ontological presence of this self (this "real" person) is not in doubt." Conventional autobiography is theorized as a literary practice that mirrors the author’s lived experience in the real world through prose: "Autobiographies are seen as providing proof of the validity and importance of a certain conception of authorship: authors who have authority over their own texts and whose writings can be read as forms of direct access to themselves," as self-referential modes of representation. When referring to the referential character of the autobiographical text, Lejeune states that the autobiographer, the narrator, and the protagonist of the text must all share the same identity: "The acquisition of the proper name is no doubt as important a stage in the story of the individual as the mirror stage." According to Lejeune, when writing the autobiographical text, “there is no need to go back to an impossible world-beyond-the-text: the text itself offers this last word at the very end, the proper name of the author, which is both textual and unquestionably referential.” By introducing the concept of the mirror into the practice of autobiographical writing, Lejeune compares the act of self-writing to the artist who sees “on canvas, oneself painted like someone else, a mere portrait; in the mirror, a portrait of the self in the process of painting himself, leaning and turned, the palette in hand: in “reality.” In his description of the author as an artist, Lejeune alludes to the autobiographer’s role as a figure who becomes actively engaged in the creation and exhibition of his own image

through writing. Gusdorf reinforces Lejeune’s remark by comparing the autobiographical text to a painting: “While a painting is a representation of the present, autobiography claims to retrace a period, a development in time, not by juxtaposing instantaneous images but by composing a kind of film according to a preestablished scenario.”\(^3\)\(^0\) In this respect, Gusdorf alludes to autobiography as a mimetic art form that has preceded technology in allowing man to reproduce his own likeness in writing; he writes that “if it is indeed true that autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image, one must nevertheless acknowledge that the genre appeared before the technical achievements of German and Italian artisans.”\(^3\)\(^1\) For Gusdorf, autobiography “appears as the mirror image of a life.”\(^3\)\(^2\) In “such a mirror the ‘self’ and the ‘reflection’ coincide.”\(^3\)\(^3\) Due to the self-referential focus of the autobiographical act, it is often considered by critics and autobiographers to provide a true and accurate reflection of the author’s life story: “Many autobiographies assume that there is an ‘essential self’ that the autobiography as mirror can reflect.”\(^3\)\(^4\) Robert Folkenflik continues this thought by writing that “one can think of autobiography itself as a ‘mirror stage’ in life, an extended moment that enables one to reflect oneself by presenting an image of the self for contemplation.”\(^3\)\(^5\) Nowhere is this assertion of self-representation as clear as in Michel de Montaigne’s _Essais_. In his address to the reader, Montaigne writes about how self-referential writing could be interpreted as a true reflection of the author’s personality:

> READER, thou hast here an honest book; it doth at the outset forewarn thee that, in contriving the same, I have proposed to myself no other than a domestic and private end:

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34 Elizabeth Wanning Harries. _Twice upon a time: women writers and the history of the fairy tale_, p.139.
Had my intention been to seek the world’s favour, I should surely have adorned myself with borrowed beauties: I desire therein to be viewed as I appear in mine own genuine, simple, and ordinary manner, without study and article: for it is myself I paint. If I had lived among those nations, which (they say) yet dwell under the sweet liberty of nature’s primitive laws, I assure thee I would most willingly have painted myself quite fully and quite naked. Thus, reader, myself am the matter of my book: there’s no reason thou shouldst employ thy leisure about so frivolous and vain a subject.\textsuperscript{36}

While addressing his readers, Montaigne certifies that he is writing about himself in the most candid and transparent manner possible. Montaigne’s invitation to the reader to interpret his text as a true and accurate reflection of his personality has been documented by critics as feature of autobiographical writing. To explain this relationship between the autobiographer and his reader, Lejeune introduces “the referential pact” (the autobiographical pact) into autobiography theory. To form a pact with his reader, the writer does not necessarily have to be as explicit as Montaigne regarding the autobiographical nature of his text. However, the autobiographical character of the writing must be communicated to the reader in some way to establish the “pact.”

Lejeune outlines “the referential pact” in some detail\textsuperscript{37}:

\begin{quote}
The formula for it would not be “I, the undersigned” either, but “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” The oath rarely takes such an abrupt and total form; it is a supplementary proof of honesty to restrict it to the possible (the truth such as it appears to me, inasmuch as I can know it, etc., making allowances for lapses of memory, errors, involuntary distortions, etc.), and to indicate explicitly the field to which this oath applies (the truth about such and such an aspect of my life, not committing myself in any way about some other aspect). We see what makes this pact look like the one that any historian, geographer, or journalist draws up with his/her reader.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Just as a mirror offers an objective, accurate representation of an individual’s outward appearance, the autobiographical text becomes a reflection of the author’s subjective experiences. Lejeune compares the rapport established between the autobiographer and his reader to the relationship between the historian, the geographer, or the journalist and his reader.

\textsuperscript{36} Michel de Montaigne. \textit{Essays Of Montaigne, Volume 1}, p.46.
\textsuperscript{37} The “referential pact” is also referred to as the “autobiographical pact.”
Through this relationship, the understanding is that the facts assembled in the written text are true because they are based on some form of empirical evidence. The “referential pact” is understood as a contract between the author and the reader that affirms that the author’s presentation of identity in the text is one of openness, honesty and authenticity: “The reader accepts as ‘true’ both the supposed facts of the narrative, and the autobiographical conflation of the writing subject and the subject of the written text. In this way the autobiographical pact reaffirms the referentiality of autobiographical discourse and the ontological integrity of the self.”39 For this pact to be valid, both the autobiographer and the reader must be aware of the conditions that apply to this contract. In his study on autobiography, Lejeune organizes the conditions implicated in the “autobiographical pact” into four main categories. First, he writes about the role language plays in the autobiographical act, which is traditionally recognized as a narrative in prose.40 Second, he emphasizes that the subject matter of the autobiographical text mainly concerns the recollection of details pertaining to the individual life story of the author.41 Third, Lejeune anchors the autobiographer’s identity in the text by stating that in autobiographical writing, the author (the referent of the subject of the story) and the narrator (the virtual person telling the story) are one and the same person.42 Finally, the last requirement of autobiographical writing involves the narrator’s position, where the narrator and the main

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42 Philippe Lejeune. *On Autobiography*, p.21. See also Elizabeth Bruss, who discusses the importance of the shared identity between the author and the narrator: “Rule 1 […] necessitates that some shared identity bind author, narrator, and character together; no matter how vague, no matter how great the tension or disparity, the relationship itself is inescapable.” (*Autobiographical Acts*, p.12).
character share the same referent and the personal experiences of the author are told from a retrospective point of view.\textsuperscript{43} Texts that have met all of the conditions of autobiography have traditionally been classified as autobiographical. Texts that adhere to some of the above categories, but do not meet all of the requirements, are generally referred to as sub-categories of autobiography.

Shortly after the conventions of autobiography had been established and adopted by literary critics, they were met with some resistance from the academic community. Some critics had expressed unease with the conventions imposed on autobiographical writing. Opposition did not come as a surprise to Lejeune, who writes that literary genres are established with the expectation that they will eventually evolve with time:

Literary genres […] constitute, in each era, a sort of implicit code through which, and thanks to which, works of the past and recent works can be received and classified by readers. It is in relation to the […] ‘horizons of expectation’ […] that literary texts are \textit{produced then received}, that they satisfy this expectation or they transgress it and force it to renew itself.\textsuperscript{44}

Based on Lejeune’s observations, in its function as a literary genre, autobiography is predispositioned to change, since literary texts are written to be received by readers whose own perceptions of reading fluctuate with time. Readers’ “horizons of expectation” are influenced by their personal, social, cultural, and historical contexts.\textsuperscript{45} Susannah Radstone alludes to the cultural influences that inspired a shift in the conventional structure of autobiography when she attributes the changes in autobiography to Lacanian psychoanalysis:

\textsuperscript{43} Philippe Lejeune. \textit{On Autobiography}, p.21-22. See also Elizabeth Bruss, who also establishes a set of conventions intended to identify the autobiographical genre. She organizes her classification of an autobiographical text into three main rules: First, “the autobiographer […] is the source of the subject matter and the source for the structure to be found in his text. Second, “information and events reported in connection with the autobiographer are asserted” to have happened and to be true. Third, “whether or not what is reported can be discredited […] the autobiographer purports to believe in what he asserts.” (\textit{Autobiographical Acts}, p.10-11).

\textsuperscript{44} Philippe Lejeune. \textit{On Autobiography}, p.141.

\textsuperscript{45} We elaborate further on reader reception theory in the next section of this chapter.
Under the influence particularly, but not exclusively, of Lacanian psychoanalysis, autobiographical criticism undertook a deconstruction of the ‘individual’ whose coherence and perspective constituted the essence of the realist mode of representation, positing that individual’s coherence, unity and autonomy as fundamentally illusory. […] Much recent autobiographical criticism has concerned itself with autobiography’s inherent contradictions – […] autobiography constitutes a suicidal genre since it ‘presents the writer with an empty or discursive ‘self’ – an ‘I’ never his own because it makes present what remains past to him.’

The shifting conceptions of identity and its representation in culture are reflected in the reading practices of autobiography. The limitations of conventional autobiography are often attributed to the influence of language as the primary means of expression in the text; meaning is constructed in the text through language, which is shaped by its social and cultural contexts.

2 The Shattered mirror: The language of Autobiography and the Multiple Dimensions of Personal Identity

In our analysis of autobiography as an accurate and objective rendering of the author’s identity, we must also take into consideration the narrative and discursive elements engaged in the act of writing one’s self into existence. Both Philippe Lejeune and Béatrice Didier raise the question of identity and its relation to writing: Lejeune states that “identity is the real starting point of autobiography”47; Didier observes that the personal narrative points to the author’s presence in the text: “La présence de la personne et du sujet impose immanquablement la présence du corps dans le texte.”48 The inclusion of the “body” or “identity” in the autobiographical narrative raises certain questions concerning the author’s advent into writing. As we will see in our analysis of Barthes’s text in Chapter 3, the correlation between identity and writing becomes an important concept in the interpretation of *Roland Barthes par Roland*

Barthes. Within the context of self-referential writing, “not only is identity constructed through language, but language is the only way to reflect upon the representation of self and the world.”49 Without language, there are no words, and without words, there is no life story to recount. To allude to the important role that language plays in autobiography, Lejeune asks himself precisely “how can we think that in autobiography it is the lived life that produces the text, when it is the text that produces the life!”50 Although the body is present in the autobiographical narrative, it is through language that identity is perceived as a pre-existing entity whose authentic story is organized along a linear trajectory from birth to maturity. By examining the role that language plays in personal writing, we are able to understand identity as a culturally-constructed phenomenon that is shaped by social relationships and that evolves over time. Lejeune supports this notion when he states that “we are constituted as subjects only in relation to others.”51 By conceptualizing identity as a changing phenomenon, we are able to revise the traditional boundaries of autobiography “as a singular or solipsistic genre that eclipses the self in relation to community, family, nation, or other sites of relation.”52

The autobiographer positions himself as the subject of the narrative and writes his personal story with a potential reader in mind. It is the reader’s involvement in the storytelling process that not only defines autobiography as a mode of writing, but also as a mode of reading. By placing emphasis on the reader’s role in the reception of the autobiographical text, critics shift the focus from the autobiographer to the reader as the primary source of agency. Lejeune

explains that “autobiography […] is a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing” and implies that the reader plays a central role in the interpretation of the autobiographical text. As Bruss writes: “Although centered largely on the responsibilities of the author, these rules also create the rights of the readers of autobiography and stipulate the legitimate extent of the expectations allowed them. […] Readers understand the act as something they might also perform.” In a sense, “readers turn to autobiography to satisfy a need for verifying a fellow human being’s experience of reality.” The emphasis placed on the role of the reader changes the autonomous and introspective focus of autobiographical writing into a collaborative and collective writing process. In her study of autobiography, Bruss quotes psychiatrist R.D. Lang who writes that identity is composed not only by acts of self-perception, but also by acts of “other-perception”:

Self-identity (‘I’ looking at ‘me’) is constituted not only by our looking at ourselves, but also by our looking at others looking at us and our reconstitution of and alteration of these views of others about us… even if a view of me is rejected it still becomes incorporated in its rejected form as a part of my self-identity. My self-identity becomes my view of me which I recognize as the negation of the other person’s view of me. Thus ‘I’ become a ‘me’ who is being misperceived by another person. This can become a vital aspect of my view of myself.

Since the autobiographical narrative creates a social contract between the writer and reader, autobiography relies heavily on the reader’s interpretative processes. Ultimately, it is through the exchange that occurs between the author of autobiography and his reader that we are able to use the autobiographical text as a tool for understanding identity as a relationship of interdependence.

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56 H. Phillipson Laing and A.R. Lee. *Interpersonal Perception*, p.5-6. This paragraph was quoted by Elizabeth Bruss. (*Autobiographical Acts*, p.13).
and reciprocity between “Self” and “Other.” The emphasis on personal writing as an object for cultural consumption marks an important shift in autobiographical criticism from the autonomous, introverted “self” to a “self” that develops and defines itself in relation to others. Identity is as much a product of external forces as it is a product of internal processes. Although the conception of identity is the direct result of one’s personal experiences in the real world, it could also be considered as each individual’s experience within a wider social, cultural and linguistic context. Autobiography becomes an intersubjective process through the pact that is forged between the autobiographer and his or her reader. The active role attributed to the reader in the construction of meaning in the text helps to situate the autobiographical narrative within social dynamics and to establish personal identity as a social construct. As a social being, the individual’s tendency to situate his or her personal identity within the context of collectivity becomes increasingly evident in the autobiographical text:

57 The concept of alterity is a topic that is often discussed in autobiography studies: “The concept of alterity is very complex and used in different areas of studies. […] it is generally dealing with the way identity is constructed in contrast to the ‘Other.’” (Saskia Lührig. *Alterity and History in Michael Ondaatje’s The English Patient*, p.8). Alterity is considered an important topic in autobiography, since “figures of alterity (understood here as the Other) have also had a structuring role in […] autobiography, playing a crucial role in the practice of writing about oneself; indeed, there is an overall tendency to define oneself in relation to significant others […] As a decentring textual practice – moving away from a narcissistic me (of the type found in the autobiographies of Rousseau and Chateaubriand) – the […] autobiographer offers […] readers an altogether kind of narrative, where relationality rather than an obsession with autonomy (ego, freedom, and textual self-mastery) governs the autobiographical project.” (Victoria Boynton and Jo Malin. *Encyclopedia of Women’s autobiography: K-Z*, p.31).

58 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson allude to the articulation of identity in the autobiographical narrative as a complex relationship between language and its social context: “Ultimately, […] autobiographical acts […] work intersubjectively. That is, they force us as viewers, who are addressed in and by the works, to participate actively, and oftentimes uncomfortably, in negotiating the politics of subjectivity. They invite us to confront our own participation in ‘othering’ the text, the image, and the [author] embodied before us. They invite us to re-vision […] and to remake [autobiographers] as cultural agents of the autobiographical interface.” A few changes have been made to the original wording used by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson who adopt a feminist perspective in their study of autobiography. We have changed the focus of the original quotation from a feminist point of view to a more general analysis of the study of autobiography. It is important to mention that although we will draw extensively from feminist scholars in our study of autobiography, our own analysis on the genre will not privilege a feminist perspective. Although not the focus of our particular study on autobiography, it is important to acknowledge the vital role that women’s studies have played in the emergence and development of contemporary autobiographical writing. (*Interfaces: women, autobiography, image, performance*, p.36-37).
In the process of writing, the autobiographer fashions a persona, mobilizes an identity to navigate and question the public he inhabits. That writing is about self-fashioning [and] suggests the autobiographer’s consciousness of identity as multiple and fluid. Autobiography might then be understood as the process by which the autobiographer situates himself in public view, and thereby discovers and reacts to the cultural narratives which purportedly describe him.\(^{59}\)

Since language is described as a social phenomenon, within the context of autobiographical writing, identity becomes “an intersubjective, retrospective construction from within the existing, discursively mediated practices of writing and telling a life.”\(^ {60}\) As a result of the subjective nature of language, the autonomous, singular subject of traditional autobiographical writing is defined within seemingly contradictory boundaries, since “the genre of auto/biography is a mode of discursive practice – the major function of which is to construct a continuous, unified personal identity at the intersection of the multiple, discontinuous, fragmented and often contradictory socio-cultural positionings available.”\(^ {61}\) In this respect, the self-referential narrative is designed to represent the author’s singular identity as a multiple and fragmented phenomenon. The fragmentation of the personal subject represents a fundamental departure from the stable and autonomous identity of traditional autobiography to a more dynamic model of self-representation. The author, narrator, and the subject of the personal narrative present overlapping voices in the expression of identity in autobiography; identity is an interpersonal and relational phenomenon that emerges at the intersection of multiple and conflicting discourses.\(^ {62}\)

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62 An author’s multiple identities serve to situate him within a broader social context: “Social identity theory argues that people have multiple identities, ranging from the unique individual to the number of groups in which a person can be a member. […] Much as we categorize objects, so too, do we categorize people, including ourselves. The groups in which we are members form the bases for the categorizations that we use to identify others and ourselves.” (Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber. *Understanding genocide: the social psychology of the Holocaust*, p.145).
The author’s intersubjective perspective can be articulated in autobiography through the use of different personal pronouns. Within the context of self-referential writing, the object of the discourse is the author himself, who commonly privileges the first-person pronoun to tell his personal story:

Il semble aller de soi que les ouvrages personnels et/ou intimes sont écrits à la première personne. En effet, celle-ci, marquant l’identité du sujet de l’énoncé et du sujet de l’énonciation, est à même de révéler le sens profond de l’existence de l’auteur axiologiquement considéré comme une source irréductible de valeur (et il est remarquable en ce sens que l’autobiographie prenne son essor au moment même où l’individualisme s’épanouit dans les doctrines éthiques et politiques des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles). Statistiquement, autobiographies, mémoires, journaux et autres récits ou discours personnels sont dominés par le je, expression grammaticale d’un moi démesuré qui envahit les textes. Toutefois […] il est tout à fait possible d’imaginer des écrits intimes à la deuxième ou à la troisième personnes.

The use of the first-person pronoun in autobiography holds certain expectations in the interpretation of personal experience: “Every autobiography – even when it limits itself to pure narrative – is a self-interpretation.” As a result of the self-referential focus of the autobiographical text, the personal narrative most often privileges the use of the first-person pronoun to relate the personal experiences of its author. However, other subject pronouns – such as the second and/or third-person pronouns, which are also used by Barthes and Calle in their autobiographical narratives – can be and often are used in autobiographical writing. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write, “in life writing, subjects write about their own lives predominantly, even if they write about themselves in the second or third person, or as a member of a community.” Although in autobiography the narrator, the subject, and the author are intended to allude to one and the same person, the autobiographical subject could also be interpreted as a collective experience of self.

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2.1 Autobiography as a “Writerly” Text

By exposing the author’s personal life to a public readership, autobiography emphasizes another consciousness (aside from that of the author, the narrator, and the main character) that is present in the construction of meaning in the text. The idea that the reader plays an important role in the construction of meaning is reinforced by the theoretical framework of reception theory, which started gaining popularity in the 1960s and 1970s when autobiography theory was beginning to emerge. Reception theory emphasizes the role of the reader as an essential element in the creation of meaning in the literary text. In reader reception theory, meaning is constructed through the relationship that is forged between the text and its reader. As we mentioned in the previous pages, the reader comes to the text with expectations based on his or her own individual knowledge and previous literary experience (“horizons of expectation”). This important shift in the role of the reader in the creation of meaning in the text has impacted studies in the humanities, in particular the interpretation and understanding of literary works:

One of the principal effects of ‘New Criticism’ in literary studies was to shift the focus of scholarly attention from ‘author’ to ‘text.’ The traditional assumption that ‘authorial intention’ was the source and guarantee of meaning in literature was effectively challenged and superseded by the notion of ‘textual autonomy,’ with its insistence on the close relationship of form and meaning and its almost reverential acknowledgement of the literary work as ‘a well-wrought urn.’ With the explosion of new theoretical interests and procedures from the late 1960s onwards (feminism, psychoanalysis, structural linguistics, cultural materialism), the focus of interest shifted decisively towards the role of the reader or audience in the process of interpretation. The reader came to be seen not as the passive recipient but as the active producer of meaning. The idea of the text underwent a similar transformation: it was no longer to be regarded as a unified object with a single, determinate meaning, but a fractured, unstable entity with plural and perhaps indeterminate meanings.

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66 Reader reception theories are most known for having begun in the United States and in Germany in the late 1960’s and 1970’s. Stephen Regan writes that in the USA, reader reception theory is mostly associated with the work of Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, David Bleich, etc., whose ideas overlap significantly with the concerns of structuralist critics such as Jonathan Culler and Michael Riffaterre. In Germany, reception theory or reception aesthetics is most associated with Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. (“Reader-response criticism and reception theory,” p.137).

The understanding of the autobiographical subject as fragmented and multiple becomes a direct consequence of the changing conceptions on the literary text and its relationship with different cultural and social contexts. Roland Barthes’s “Death of the author” (“La mort de l’auteur”) represents an important essay in which Barthes discusses this important shift in the literary text. In his essay, Barthes writes about the role that authorship plays with respect to the interpretation of a text. The essay is most commonly known for moving the focus from the author as the sole agent of meaning in the text. The use of the metaphor “death” in relation to “life writing” introduces a new interpretative approach to the reading of the personal narrative. The representation of the life story comes at the expense of the author. Within the context of autobiographical writing, the concept of death is brought into play when the autobiographer tries to reproduce an objective and complete portrait of his life story; his attempt to maintain an authoritative final word on his life story is done in vein as, in Barthes’s words, every text contains multiple layers of meaning that are not solely attributable to the author’s intentions:

A text consists of multiple writings, proceeding from several cultures and entering into dialogue, into parody, into contestation; but there is a site where this multiplicity is collected, and this site is not the author, as has hitherto been claimed, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any of them being lost, all the citations out of which a writing is made; the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination, but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted. […] we know that in order to restore writing to its future, we must reverse the myth: the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the author.68

According to Barthes, “the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture.”69 As a result, a text cannot be defined as the intimate and individual experience of the author, but more as a product of its author’s cultural, social and literary contexts. Barthes

68 Roland Barthes. The Rustle of Language, p.54-55.
69 Roland Barthes. The Rustle of Language, p.53.
questions the traditional assumptions that attribute meaning in the text solely to the author by removing the perspective of the author from the text. He writes that “the author is nothing but the one who writes, just as ‘I’ is nothing but the one who says ‘I’: language knows a ‘subject,’ not a ‘person.’” In the first-person narrative, the author’s personal story is appropriated and deconstructed by the reader during the act of reading. The reader’s participation in the construction of meaning in the text places emphasis on the diminished role of the author as the primary agent of meaning in the narrative. This new reversal in the relationship between the author and his reader, in which the reader drives meaning in the text, alludes to the degree to which the reader becomes the agent of production through the act of reading. In contemporary autobiography, the reader projects his own identity into the personal narrative in order to re-create and re-imagine the events surrounding the author’s individual life experiences. By studying the autobiographical text from the reader’s perspective, we could adopt Paul de Man’s attitude on autobiography that it is “not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts.” In this respect, de Man contradicts Lejeune, who treats autobiography as a genre, when he writes that autobiography is not a genre: “Autobiography seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, of representation and of diegesis.” At first, autobiography appears to be a simple frame of reference, since its initial purpose is to mirror the details of the author’s intimate life experiences. Although the author’s personal life may be reflected in the autobiographical narrative, in contemporary discussions of autobiography, the reader holds an equally important, if not a more dominant role, in producing meaning in the text; through the participation of the reader, with each act of reading, meaning is

continually re-created and re-negotiated in the text. Barthes’s essay aims to emphasize the social and cultural dimensions of every text in order to allow language to govern the processes of meaning through the author-reader interaction. Barthes further removes the author from the text through an explicit distinction between what he calls “readerly” (*lisible*) and “writerly” (*scriptible*) texts. As we will see in our chapter on Barthes, these concepts become important in the interpretation of his autobiographical narrative. For Barthes, each type of text implicates the reader differently in the reception of written work.\(^{73}\) According to Barthes, most literary works represent classic models of reading and could be referred to as readerly texts\(^{74}\); these texts are written in a traditional style since they follow a linear structure of thought and comply with certain guidelines on content and style. Meaning in the readerly text is singular, stable, and unchanging, and the reader is depicted as a mere receiver of information: “The readerly texts [...] are products (and not productions), they make up the enormous mass of our literature.”\(^{75}\) As Carl Rhodes writes, the readerly text is a product of the dominant culture and purports to be an unproblematic transcription of reality:

> The readerly text is one that limits the number of oppositions that it incorporates by purporting to be an unproblematic transcription of reality. The focus of the readerly text is not on itself (i.e. a text) but rather on what the text purports to represent; it is a text that conceals its textuality through dominant and taken for granted genres. The readerly text achieves closure and positions the reader as a passive consumer of its meaning.\(^{76}\)

In contrast to the readerly text is what Barthes refers to as the writerly text. According to Barthes, “the goal of the literary work [...] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a

\(^{73}\) Barthes’s discussion on readerly and writerly texts shares common point with Eco’s discussion on “closed” and “open” texts.


\(^{75}\) Roland Barthes. *S/Z*, p.5.

\(^{76}\) Carl Rhodes. *Writing organization: (re)presentation and control in narratives at work*, p.110-111.
The writerly text does not provide the reader with a model of predetermined meaning, but instead relies heavily on the reader’s role as an agent of meaning in the text: “The writerly text […] is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages.” Opposite the readerly text, the writerly text aims to deconstruct the literary norms and conventions exemplified in the classic models of writing. According to Barthes, the deconstructive nature of the writerly text is put into play through an interpretative act of reading:

This new operation is interpretation […] To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it. […] In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers […]; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language.

For Barthes, the writerly text exemplifies the ideal text, which is characterized by an infinite network of signifiers:

In this ideal text, the networks are many and intersect, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds, it has no beginning, it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable.

Barthes describes the writerly text as a more contemporary model of writing that is open to several interpretations. In support of Barthes’s arguments concerning the text as a plural entity,

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79 “Deconstruction” is a term that is originally associated with Jacques Derrida’s *De la grammatologie*. Derrida argues that “deconstruction” should be used as a strategy for all texts in which binary oppositions generate meaning. As we have mentioned in our chapter on autobiography and in our chapter on Barthes, identity in the autobiographical text is produced through binary oppositions: subjective/objective, individual/collective, public/private, etc. For a definition of “deconstruction,” see Derrida’s *De la grammatologie*.
Catherine Belsey writes that what “is inherent in the text is a range of possibilities of meaning. Texts, in other words, are plural, open to a number of interpretations. Meanings are not fixed or given, but are released in the process of reading, and criticism is concerned with the range of possible readings.”

This view of the text as producing a variety of readings that vary with different readers defines the act of reading as an intertextual phenomenon that calls upon the reader’s participation as an integral part of the construction of textual meaning. As a result, according to Barthes, meaning does not solely reside in the text, but it is produced by the reader through a complex system of intertextual relationships:

I read the text. […] This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost). […] Yet reading does not consist in stopping the chain of systems, in establishing a truth, a legality of the text, and consequently in leading its reader into “errors”; it consists in coupling these systems, not according to their finite quantity, but according to their plurality (which is a being, not a discounting): I pass, I intersect, I articulate, I release, I do not count.

When Barthes describes the reader’s approach to reading as “a plurality of other texts,” he alludes to the degree to which the subjectivity and cultural biases of every reader are involved in the interpretative process of reading literature. Because each reader approaches a text with certain preconceptions that are largely based on earlier readings, each act of reading and writing is a dialogue with other texts. As we will see in our chapters on Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical narratives, intertextuality is an important concept that is introduced in the personal writing of these authors. The intertextual relationship between every text is made especially evident through the participation of the reader. By referring to every reader’s existence as a “plurality of other texts,” Barthes likens lived experience to a textual construction in which “both writer and reader exist and work within an intertextual field of cultural codes and

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Using Paul Ricoeur’s ideas on hermeneutical philosophy, human experience could be compared to the practice of writing because as subjects who interact through verbal, gestural, and written communication in everyday living, humans understand themselves through their cultural and linguistic contexts. Smith and Watson follow this line of reasoning in their analysis of autobiography when they write about human experience as a discursive phenomenon:

Subjects know themselves in language because experience is discursive, embedded in the languages of everyday life and the knowledge produced at everyday sites. […] Of course, this is only one example of how we understand what has happened or is happening to us, and thus how we know ourselves through what Michel Foucault analyzed as discursive regimes. Every day we know ourselves, or experience ourselves, through multiple domains of discourse, domains that serve as cultural registers for what counts as experience and who counts as an experiencing subject. But since discourses are historically specific, what counts as experience changes over time with broader cultural transformations of collective history.

In order to assign the role of “producer of the text” to the reader, the “plurality of texts” used by Barthes to describe every reader’s existence in the real world are intended to create a more open and innovative style of literary interpretation. In this respect, the rigid and fixed model of traditional reading – where meaning is only to be found within the space of the text in question – is expanded to be more inclusive of non-traditional methods of interpretation:

The notions of readerly and writerly texts were part of Barthes’s attempt to free the reader from the constraints and limitations which academic institutions tend to impose on the ‘consumption’ of literary texts, particularly by linking the meaning of a text to the intention of its ‘author and/or to the historical and cultural context of its production.

Within the scope of our present study, the changing role of the reader from a passive observer to an active participant in the construction of meaning is an important element that is explored in Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical narratives. The changing role of the reader in the

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84 Graham Allen. *Intertextuality*, p.89.
85 See Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*.
interpretation of the autobiographical text is closely related to our changing conceptions of identity.

3 Interdisciplinary Approaches: the Shifting Views of Autobiography

As James Goodwin writes, autobiography documents the changing perspectives on identity in society: “Autobiography – as a genre at the confluence of self, life, and writing – is a literary record of human evolution in individuality.”88 The evolving views on language and on identity and its representation in various academic disciplines have also greatly impacted the way contemporary autobiography is written and read. Since topics such as self, identity, and language are subjects that are continuously evolving and that are particularly relevant to the study and interpretation of autobiography, James Goodwin writes about how they directly influence the autobiographical genre as an evolving phenomenon:

The combinative terms of autobiography – self, life, and writing – offer the grounds for a dynamic definition of the genre in terms of the text. A dynamic definition is useful in light of the fact that genre, like other forms of culture, is subject to social, and ultimately, historical, permutation and recombination. Thus, as the terms self, life, and writing shift and develop in meaning, the genre of autobiography enlarges its boundaries and characteristics.89

Susanna Egan also writes about the changing nature of autobiography when she writes that the “the genres of autobiography have refused to stay still because they serve particular social situations and evolve with the cultures that produce them.”90 Because of the changing attitudes on language as a social and cultural construct, the notion of identity has shifted from a singular outlook to a subjective, multiple, and dynamic point of view. Susanne Nalbantian documents this

shift in perspective when she writes that “the evolution of autobiography in the Western world does proceed from the individual to the collective and cultural totality.” 91 The autobiographical text has evolved to present identity as a subjective, contextual, and multidimensional phenomenon. Although our study is limiting itself to the analysis of the autobiographies of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle, these texts are highly rich and complex models of life writing that are relevant to contemporary discussions on the genre. The texts that we have chosen to analyze as part of our literary corpus experiment with autobiographical writing to explore the different possibilities of identity and its representation in language. From this recent shift in focus on identity and its representation have emerged new and interdisciplinary examples of autobiographical writing that are receiving considerable attention in academic scholarship. “Life writing,” the newly adopted term for contemporary autobiography, is a model that incorporates both subjective and objective elements of personal experience within the context of self-referential writing. Contemporary life writing does not limit itself to the conventions of traditional autobiography, but takes on many forms and is used for diverse purposes in various academic disciplines. Smith and Watson write about the diverse perspectives that characterize contemporary life writing:

Our working definition of self life writing assumes that it is not a single unitary genre or form, ‘autobiography.’ Rather, the historically situated practices of self-representation may take many guises as narrators selectively engage their lived experience and situate their social identities through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, narrators are at the same time in dialogue with the processes and archives of memory and the expectations of disparate others. Ever constrained by occasion and convention, and ever contingent, adaptable, fluid, and dynamic, self life writing shares features with the novel, biography, and history. It can employ the dialogue, plot, setting, and density of language of the novel. It may incorporate biographies of others in its representations of family, friends, historical or religious figures. It projects multiple histories – of

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communities, families, nations, movements. Even as it does so, however, it maintains its distinctive relationship to the referential world in its temporality.

The changing conceptions of identity and its representation are reflected in the practice of self-referential writing, which is moving in experimental directions. Contemporary models of life writing use various approaches that combine multiple genres, different media, and disciplines to represent an individual’s experiences of life in writing.

3.1 From Autobiography to Biography: The Refracted Mirror

Through the retrospective lens of autobiography, it is important to keep sight of the fact that the life story recounted in the autobiographical narrative recalls past events and is therefore subject to several inaccuracies. Although autobiographical writing aims to offer an accurate description of self-identity, the personal story depicted in the narrative is already a retelling of the author’s past experiences; the “self” that is written in the autobiographical text “has already been.” From this perspective, the figure of alterity in autobiographical writing exists within the narrative itself between the author’s two selves, where the author is writing his life story, but he is writing about an earlier version of himself. By documenting his life story, the author attempts to recover his past self through the storytelling process. According to Starobinski and Gudorf, the tension that exists in autobiographical writing between the past tense of the narrative and the simulated present of the time of writing, puts into play a variety of perspectives and disassociations that only a retrospective narrative could depict. According to Starobinski, it is this double standard of identity and temporality that characterizes every act of self representation: “[C’est] ce double écart d’identité et de temporalité qui donne matière à tout acte

92 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Reading autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives, p.18.
autobiographique, à toute entreprise de présentation de soi.”93 Without a present or future to speak of, the autobiographical subject cannot be described as a complete representation of the author’s identity. As a consequence, the author is unable to capture his full essence: “Sous l’apparent ludisme auto-réflexif du texte, on décèle cette idée troublante que le ‘moi’ est tellement insaisissable, dans son essence tellement peu substantiel, qu’il exige la pure matérialité du texte [...] pour pouvoir se fixer.”94 If a complete representation of self is unattainable in autobiographical writing, it is because the author must maintain a certain amount of distance with respect to the representation of his former self. In other words, the autobiographical narrative retains a certain level of objectivity to provide a true representation of the author’s identity. Through an objective rendering of the past, the autobiographer becomes a historian of sorts of his own personal history to objectively describe the details pertaining to a specific period of time in his life. In his recollection of the past, the author establishes the autobiographical act as a re-enactment of personal history. Nevertheless, the distancing of the author with respect to his past identity transforms the autobiographical text into a biography of sorts. Marlene Kadar offers the following definition of biography:

First mention of the word biography is recorded in the Oxford English dictionary by John Dryden, 1683, the root is the Greek ‘bios’ meaning quick, vital. The biography then treats a subject that is vital to the subject, but the self of the author does not necessarily intrude into that subject. In this kind of writing, it has often been considered preferable if the author remains objective.95

As in the case of autobiography, the biographical text is a narrative in prose whose main subject is the life story of an individual. However, unlike traditional autobiography, the biographer maintains a certain distance with respect to his subject; the biographer attempts to recount the

95 Marlene Kadar. Essays on life writing: from genre to critical practice, p.3-4.
complete life story of his subject from a collection of personal information (either documentary or testimonial) on the subject in question, but he is usually unable to provide an intimate account of the documented events. By collecting information on the subject of the biography, the biographer takes on the dual role of writer and reader of the narrative. The goal of biography is not to closely imitate the life it depicts, but instead to portray this life objectively, to expose the true life story of an individual in its entirety. The topic of biographical writing within the context of autobiography is raised in our analysis of Barthes’s text in chapter 3 when we discuss the circumstances under which his narrative was produced within the “Écrivains de toujours” collection. At the threshold of reality and fiction, biography represents a departure from reality to an act of creation, since it involves the intervention of the biographer as the person who reconstructs the life story of another individual based on his own impressions and beliefs. As Alain Buisine writes, the practice of biography shares certain elements with the process of writing fiction:

La biographie est elle-même devenue productrice de fictions, bien plus elle commence à comprendre que la fictionnalité fait nécessairement partie du geste biographique. Productrice de fictions à un tout premier niveau parce que la figure du biographe (et son ridicule acharnement à vouloir découvrir la vérité d'une existence donnée), commence à devenir un personnage caractéristique de l’univers romanesque contemporain. 96

The notion of biography is raised once more in our analysis of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* through Barthes’s deliberate use of the third person subject pronoun to tell his life story. The deliberate combination of “I” and of “He” to refer to Barthes’s autobiographical subject puts into play a deliberate attempt to take on the biographical mode as a means to highlight the role of the reader in the creation of meaning in the text:

As for the word ‘biography,’ it designates today, depending upon the person who uses it (1) the story of a person (in general famous) written by someone else (this is the old

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meaning, and the most common); (2) the story of a person (in general unknown) recounted orally by him/herself to someone else who has created this narrative in order to study it (this is the ‘biographical method in the social sciences’); (3) the story of a person recounted by him/herself to one or several others who help him through their listening to get his bearings in his life (this is the ‘biography in training’ [‘biographie dans la formation’].

Through the use of various subject pronouns, the different identities that overlap within Barthes’s narrative validate the concept of a double contract in autobiography. The author, the subject and the narrator no longer allude to one and the same referent. Instead, the different identities that are implicated in the representation of Barthes’s past experiences demonstrate the author’s attempt to distance himself from his personal story. The polysemic value of identity within Barthes’s personal narrative acts to establish a framework in which different meanings come together in the narrative to present identity as multiple and complex. The alternating narrative voices overlap to subvert the representation of traditional autobiography. By confusing the highly subjective representation of the singular autobiographical subject with the more objective third person stance of biography, Barthes’s approach aims to pit traditional notions of autobiographical writing against more unconventional modes of self-referential writing. Moving from a strictly referential form of writing to a more subjective expression of identity, where the author and the narrator do not coincide, creates an aura of “fictionality” regarding the portrayal of the autobiographical subject. The author of the autobiography, as a historian of the self, takes on the role of novelist or agent of self-invention in the act of writing. We will take a better look at the strategies used by Barthes in his autobiographical narrative in our chapter on Barthes.

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3.2 From Autobiography to Fiction

Recent scholarship on autobiography has a tendency to be more inclusive of subjective models of self-referential writing that participate in bridging the gap between autobiography and fiction. As Christy Rishoi writes, “as a consequence of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories that call into question the notions of stable identity and transcendent truth, the boundary between autobiography and fiction has become increasingly blurred.”

As recent studies in autobiography have privileged a more complex and theoretically diverse background from which to analyze different forms of life writing, contemporary autobiography has been developed and interpreted within the scope of an intertextual dialogue with other genres, such as fiction: “The intertextuality of different genres and particularly the intertextuality of fiction and autobiography are as important now as they have ever been.”

If the relationship between autobiography and fiction is an important topic of analysis for critics of autobiography, it is because the tensions that are produced between both genres emphasize the highly subjective character of autobiographical writing. The introduction of intertextuality as a concept to describe the rapport that exists between autobiography and fiction is significant, as it allows us to redefine autobiography in terms of a creative and imaginative mode of writing and reading. As James Goodwin confirms, the autobiographer uses the same techniques of fiction in order to construct the personal narrative:

The powers of imagination and invention can be as important to the autobiographer as they are to the novelist, dramatist, or poet. Indeed the autobiographer commonly uses the same techniques of fiction and drama to shape personal experience into meaningful narrative. In rendering places and people from the past, even when it is possible to revisit them, the autobiographer often applies imaginative and metaphoric coloration in order to

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bring them to life. When, as in many cases, conversation cannot be recalled in detail, the autobiographer creates dialogue to recreate the actuality of the past.100

Through Goodwin’s description, we understand that the conventional view of autobiography as an objective self-referential account of the author’s personal life is an outdated concept that does not completely address the full range of issues concerning identity and its representation in contemporary life writing. In a discussion on autobiography, Susan Friedman writes that “all autobiography is ‘necessarily fictive’; it creates a self whose very coherence is the sign of its falseness and alienation.”101 In referencing the necessary fictionality of autobiography, William Spengemann writes that “self revelation becomes self creation.”102 Based on the theory of autobiographical writing as a process of self-invention, Spengemann “refuses even to distinguish between autobiography and fiction, suggesting that any work which deals with the ‘over-riding concern with the realization of [the writer’s] self’ should be considered autobiography.”103

Although many critics allude to the difficulty in distinguishing between autobiography and fiction, Philippe Lejeune, who wrote extensively on the topic, states that the deciding factor between autobiography and fiction is the pact that is forged between the reader and the writer of the text. To distinguish between autobiographical and fictional narratives, Lejeune creates a “fictional pact.” According to Lejeune, two main aspects distinguish autobiography from fiction:

Parallel to the autobiographical pact, we could place the fictional pact, which would itself have two aspects: obvious practice of nonidentity (the author and protagonist do not have the same name), affirmation of fictitiousness (in general it is the subtitle novel which today performs this function on the cover; it should be noted that novel, in current terminology, implies fictional pact, whereas narrative [récit] is, itself, indeterminate and compatible with the autobiographical pact).104

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The notion of the “fictional pact” is introduced in Barthes’s autobiography in his exergue “Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman.”\textsuperscript{105} We will study Barthes’s strategy of introducing fiction into his autobiography at greater length in our chapter on Barthes. In general, in the case of fiction, the author’s identity is not necessarily implicated in the narrative. The author writes a story based on his own personal experiences in the real world, but is not necessarily writing about his own life story. In other words, in fiction, the author writes about experiences in the world, whether it be real or imaginary, without directly implicating his own identity in the storytelling process. In literature, fiction is defined as a work of the imagination that is not necessarily based on fact, but does depend on reality:

Authentic fictions do not characterize reality, and do not even purport to do so. They are not about the real world but about a virtual alternative reality that does not exist at all but only figures in the thoughts – the imaginations, if you will – of people. Accordingly, fictions of course depend on reality for their realization as such: they must issue from some real ‘work of fiction,’ some linguistically projected artifact that is produced by a real author – or group thereof.\textsuperscript{106}

Any narrative form in which the subject matter is not based on actual events could be classified as fiction. In the fictional narrative, the events depicted may be products of the author’s imagination or may be used fictitiously. In this respect, autobiography is distinguished from fiction in that it depends on verifiable events, whereas fiction does not require the same stringent commitment to telling the truth:

Autobiography seems to depend on actual and potentially verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does. It seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality, of representation and of diegesis […] The distinction between fiction and autobiography is undecidable. But it is possible to remain, as Genette would have it within an undecidable situation.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Roland Barthes. \textit{Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{106} Nicholas Rescher. \textit{Imagining irreality: a study of unreal possibilities}, p.240.
Despite the fact that a definition of fiction seems undecided in relation to autobiography, there are some indisputable characteristics in the relationship that fiction holds with reality:

   Fiction cannot be verified. Autobiography, however, is an inherently discursive act of writing. Like other forms of history, it is a form of testimony and as such it is not autonomous in the way fiction and poetry are. It is a social form of writing (and thus a moral one) and open to all the checks and limitations of testimony. Autobiography is a public act.\(^{108}\)

The autobiographical narrative represents an accurate depiction of a “self”, whereas the fictional narrative is defined as a pure invention of the “truth.” Through an intertextual relationship with the fictional narrative, the autobiographical text assigns a dual role to the autobiographer: as artist and historian of the self-referential text:

   Nietzsche held (in the use and abuse of History) that since we require the same artistic vision and absorption in his object from the historian, as we do from the artist, ‘objectivity’ for the historian is a kind of ‘superstition’ or ‘myth.’ He insists that since it is never possible to render a ‘true picture’ of the past, the historian must strive to create an artistically true one. To think objectively, in this sense of history is the work of the dramatist to...weave the elements (of the past) into a single whole, with the presumption that the unity of plan must be put into the objects if it is not already there. So man veils and subdues the past.\(^{109}\)

According to Nietzsche, the two opposing identities that characterize the author, the historian and the artist, unite in their representation of reality. The dual role assigned to the author as both historian and artist is validated in fiction whose definition is uncertain because it usually involves a combination of reality and imagination. On the other hand, the overlapping of two identities in the same narrative becomes problematic for the autobiographical narrative:

   The historian ‘uses’ the past, of course, but also ‘abuses’ it because the fine historian must have the power of coining the known into a thing never heard before. In this process, ‘objectivity’ is not dismissed by Nietzsche, but it is rethought [...] as the goal of a life-serving form of art. Historical wisdom, then, becomes the function not of


traditional conception of objectivity but of an objectivity having its roots in ‘dramatic insight.’

Through the interplay between history and art, the autobiographer, who is typically characterized as the historian of his own life story, also takes on the role of the artist. The dual role assigned to the autobiographer creates depth, conflict and tension within the framework of the autobiographical narrative. Lejeune states that the “paradox of autobiography is that the autobiographer must carry out this project of impossible sincerity using all the tools of fiction” and that “all the methods that autobiography uses to convince us of the authenticity of its narrative can be imitated by the novel.” By dissociating the autobiographical text from its primary role as an objective model of self-referential writing, the fictional narrative enters into the impossible domain of sincerity without the same pressures of authenticity. As already established in our discussion above, the depiction of factual events is not required or expected in the fictional narrative. In the case of autobiography, for which the use of imagination represents a vital component of expression and individuality, fiction becomes an integral part of the writing process. This becomes especially true when the autobiographer is an artist by vocation. In our particular study on autobiography and fiction, Sophie Calle is an important example of an author who integrates acts of creativity and imagination into the autobiographical narrative through the use of fiction. Autofiction represents an important strategy that is used by the artist in her autobiographical narrative *Doubles-jeux*. In order to effectively examine the concept of autofiction in our analysis of Calle’s autobiographical writing, we will briefly look at some of the defining elements of this complex form of writing.

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3.3 Autofiction: Fiction in Autobiography

In her attempt to define autofiction, Dervila Cooke offers the following description of the genre:

In my view, autofiction mixes events from the author’s life with fiction, combines the conventions of autobiography with those of fictional writing, and presents the author as both himself or herself and a fictional character and does this within a single work, thus encouraging confusion between fiction and autobiographical fact independently of the reader’s knowledge of other texts or of paratextual information. It is to be assumed that if a text with an autobiographical basis produces an autofiction effect without any other knowledge on the part of the reader it has a greater claim to the title of autofiction than autobiographically based texts that seem autofictional due to extratextual information known only to some readers, or back-cover declarations that vary from edition to edition.\textsuperscript{113}

The use of fiction has become a common strategy for many contemporary autobiographers. In order to describe the technique of intermingling fact with fiction within the context of self writing, scholars of autobiography such as Dervila Cooke have begun to use the term “autofiction.” These critics inform us that the term was coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 in reference to his novel \textit{Fils}. On the back cover, Doubrovsky attempts to summarize his book. In this brief description, Doubrovsky rejects the classification of autobiography:

\begin{quote}
Autobiography? No, that is a privilege reserved for the important people of this world, at the twilight of their lives, in a refined style. Fiction, of events and of strictly real facts; autofiction, so to speak, to have entrusted the language of an adventure to the adventure of language at large, outside wisdom and the syntax of the novel, traditional or new. Interactions, threads of words, alliterations, assonances, dissonances, writing before or after literature, concrete, as if music.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

Ill at ease with the term autobiography, Doubrovsky offers an alternate approach to the representation of identity in his book. In the description he provides, Doubrovsky undermines the referential dogma of autobiography with the concept of fiction, and consequently, refers to

\textsuperscript{113} Dervila Cooke. \textit{Present pasts: Patrick Modiano’s (auto)biographical fictions}, p.75-76. Italics in quotes are Cooke’s.

\textsuperscript{114} This is an English translation for an excerpt that is found on the back cover of Doubrovsky’s \textit{Fils}. 
autofiction as a hybrid genre of writing, positioned between autobiographical narrative and fiction:

Un curieux tourniquet s’instaure alors: fausse fiction, qui est histoire d’une vraie vie, le texte, de par le mouvement de son écriture, se déloge instantanément du registre patenté du réel. Ni autobiographie ni roman, donc, au sens strict, il fonctionne dans l’entre-deux, en un renvoi incessant, en un lien impossible et insaisissable ailleurs que dans l’opération du texte.\(^{115}\)

While referring to Doubrovsky’s definition of autofiction, critics such as Philippe Gasparini attribute the use of autofiction as a strategy to blur the lines of fiction and factual writing:

Si Doubrovsky fait tomber le roman autobiographique du côté de la fiction, c’est pour déblayer le terrain de l’ambiguïté générique au bénéfice de son autofiction. Symétriquement, il assigne à cette dernière, en dépit du nom qu’il lui donne, deux traits strictement autobiographiques: l’homonymat auteur/héros/narrateur et la garantie de véridicité. À partir de là, son problème n’est plus de distinguer l’autofiction du roman autobiographique mais de l’autobiographie elle-même.\(^{116}\)

As Gasparini informs us, the objective of autofiction is to carry out the same role attributed to autobiography in its promise to represent the author’s personal identity. However, as Gasparini implies, autofiction differs from autobiography in its refusal to be governed by the same conventions:

Loin d’être un genre normé, le roman autobiographique, se jouant des codes, stimule l’invention formelle. Doubrovsky n’est donc pas le premier, ni le dernier, à mettre en place une structure temporelle sophistiquée, et plus ou moins fictionnelle, pour encadrer et motiver un processus d’anamnèse vraisemblablement autobiographique.\(^{117}\)

Similar to autobiography, autofiction is defined in relation to a pact. Elizabeth Jones points out that the pact of autofiction is intentionally contradictory to the pact of autobiography:

Whilst retaining an identitarian relationship between author, narrator and protagonist as is necessary in classic autobiography, autofictional texts are often labeled ‘roman’, or bear some other mark of their partially fictitious content. The autofictional pact varies significantly, then, from its autobiographical counterpart. Rather than professing to tell

\(^{115}\) Serge Doubrovsky. “Autofiction/vérité/psychanalyse,” p.46.


\(^{117}\) Philippe Gasparini. Autofiction: une aventure du langage, p.25.
the truth as sincerely as possible, an *autofiction* acknowledges the fallibility of memory and the impossibility of truthfully recounting a life story. [...] autofictional writing seeks to create a fictional framework through which to narrate biographically verifiable events.  

Resisting confinement within the boundaries of autobiographical writing, autofiction becomes a strategy for writers who are motivated by a revisionist agenda. Juliette Dickstein informs us that autofiction is a literary genre that is used by authors as a method of reconstructing self identity through writing:

Doubrovsky describes autofiction as a staging of the self and a reconstruction of the self through writing. Although he invented the term, he did not create the phenomenon, for he points out, autofiction characterizes the writings of many authors who fictionalize themselves in their work, including Proust, Céline, and Colette.

Although the particular focus of autofiction is the author’s individual identity, this identity is presented as a fictionalized account of the author’s personal experiences. While describing the author’s personal life in terms of a reconstruction of identity, Margareta Jolly writes that, for Doubrovsky, autofiction produces an important strategy of subversion: “Doubrovsky identifies autofiction as a subversion of the referentialist paradigm sustaining conventional auto/biographical discourse.” The description of autofiction as a “genre which can be said to subvert the self-seeking narrative, in particular that of autobiography,” is further emphasized by the definition provided by Autofiction.org, a website dedicated to the study and promotion of the genre:

L’autofiction s’est imposée comme un des chantiers les plus ouverts, les plus vivants de la littérature actuelle. Notion subtile à définir, liée au refus qu’un auteur manifeste à l’égard de l’autobiographie, du roman à clés, des contraintes ou des leurre de la transparence, elle s’enrichit de ses extensions multiples tout en résistant solidement aux

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attaques incessantes dont elle fait l’objet. Elle vient en effet poser des questions troublantes à la littérature, faisant vaciller les notions mêmes de réalité, de vérité, de sincérité, de fiction, creusant de galeries inattendues le champ de la mémoire.122

The designation of autofiction as one of the more vibrant fields of research and innovation in contemporary literature alludes to its capacity to address the construction of identity through multiple and conflicting modes of representation. These opposing poles of representation are carried out through literature: “Pour [Doubrovsky], l’autobiographie doit désormais renoncer aux facilités de cette synthèse, gratifiante mais illusoire, et s’engager dans une analyse autodissociative par des moyens littéraires.”123 Through various intersecting and overlapping literary discourses, which create “a fairly confused notion allowing for enormous slippages between fact and invention,”124 a new form of writing is created. As an inventive model of contemporary writing, autofiction is used as a means to interrogate the construction of identity in autobiographical writing:

Autofiction may thus be described as a postmodern take on autobiography, in which the author practices the art of autobiography while putting into question the centre criterion of the genre, its veracity. It is an autobiography in which the author has willfully and knowingly broken ‘le pacte autobiographique,’ and its theorists willingly acknowledge the bad faith intrinsic to it.125

As a combination of fiction and life writing, autofiction could be viewed as providing a literary model for subverting and redefining traditional notions of self in autobiography. When describing the use of autofiction, Philippe Gasparini writes about it in terms of a renewal of the autobiographical genre: “On voit que l’autofiction n’est plus, dans l’esprit de son inventeur, un nouvel avatar de l’autobiographie […] Elle est destinée à renouveler le genre, et même à le

122 This definition is posted on Autofiction.org’s website. Visit the site at www.autofiction.org
Since autofiction serves to renew and reinvigorate autobiographical writing, autobiography becomes an experimental mode of writing through the practice of autofiction. In other words, the focus of autobiographical writing as a sort of *mise en abyme* of personal identity becomes evident through the practice of autofiction: “Any autobiography, of course, in some measure partakes of autofiction, making as it does promises of sincerity and plenitude neither it nor any text can by definition keep […] autofictions have a special claim to the label […] because they often operate a *mise en abyme* as well as a *mise en scène* of it.” By engaging the issues of sincerity and subjectivity in autobiographical writing, autofiction becomes a way to explore the problematics of identity in autobiography. Although autofiction is described as a fairly new concept, it represents just one example of the recent shift in autobiography toward a more performative model of writing. The representation of identity as fluid and performative has recently become a common practice in autobiographical writing.

4 Autobiography and the Performance of Identity

Autobiographical telling is performative; it enacts the ‘self’ that it claims has given rise to the ‘I.’ Furthermore, an ‘I’ is neither unified nor stable; rather, it is split, fragmented, provisional, a sign with multiple referents. […] the tensions and contradictions in representing an ‘I’ to various audiences, for various occasions, by various means, produce gaps, fissures, and boundary trouble within the narrative.

When Smith and Watson write that “autobiographical telling is performative,” they introduce the concept of performance in the practice and study of life writing and reveal how this

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concept becomes an important aspect in challenging the boundaries of autobiography.

Performance has become a fairly significant concept in the study of literature, more specifically in the interpretation of life writing. Sharing Smith’s and Watson’s perspectives on autobiography as performative, Susanna Egan also describes autobiography as a performance when she writes that “all autobiography surely performs aspects of identity.” It is through this understanding of autobiography as a performative act that a large variety of texts – not previously considered autobiographical – are now being framed within the discourse of autobiography. These contemporary models of life writing are produced to elicit different conceptions of identity. In this respect, through performance, contemporary life writing engages different processes of identity negotiation to illustrate the implicit and explicit links between identity and its representation. Although once exclusively identified with the performing arts, performance has become an important critical term within the context of various academic disciplines, in particular within the study of autobiography:

Typically ‘performance’ suggests the performing arts where audiences view dance, music, theater, or the visual arts. In academic circles, however, the notion of performance has become an important critical term for several disciplines such as theater, anthropology, communication studies, literary studies, rhetoric, feminist and queer theory, and postcolonial […] autobiography studies, among others. Performance studies, reflecting intercultural interests and the postmodern sense of shifting selves, has therefore recently emerged as a new field that crosses disciplinary boundaries and resists stable definitions. ‘Performative’ then, is that aspect of a text that is specifically self-conscious about an interaction with the audience or reader, who then become contributors to its meaning. […] Performative texts assume interaction with an audience and the way the

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text is constructed reveals that assumption. Scholars and artists interested in performativity examine the intertextual dimensions of any text, including autobiography.\textsuperscript{131}

Contemporary autobiography represents a self-reflexive practice that both legitimizes and critiques its own processes of representation through visual and verbal modes of expression. As Boynton and Malin suggest, “performative autobiography critiques its very form, while also engaging that form with readers to construct a life.”\textsuperscript{132} As we will see in our chapters on Barthes and Calle, both authors use word and image relations as a strategy to write self-reflexive narratives that confront and challenge the construction of identity in autobiographical writing. The introduction of elements of performance in life writing has liberated autobiography from its traditional portrayal of a fixed, stable identity to a more flexible conception of identity as a culturally constructed and socially-performed phenomenon:

As a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices, autobiographical narration offers occasions for negotiating the past, reflecting on identity, and critiquing cultural norms and narratives. The life narrator selectively engages aspects of her lived experience through modes of personal “storytelling” – narratively, imagistically, in performance.\textsuperscript{133}

The use of performativity in autobiographical writing serves to highlight the intersubjective nature of the author’s identity. As we have already established earlier in this chapter, the author’s experience of subjectivity is contingent upon his connection and identification with a community of other individuals. In this respect, it is through the concept of alterity that the author is able to examine how identity is shaped by notions of difference and “otherness.” Smith and Watson explain that notions of alterity represent “yet another way of saying that the performance of the self is not self-sustaining or coherent within itself, not a pure, unidirectional show of individual

\textsuperscript{133} Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. \textit{Interfaces: women, autobiography, image, performance}, p.9.
agency, but always contingent on otherness.”¹³⁴ The various relationships that shape an individual’s personal experience are introduced and enacted in autobiography through complex networks of interrelationship and interdependence. In the case of autobiographical writing, the various relationships that define the author’s individual experience as the product of pre-existing social relations are performed through the social construction of intertextuality. Kathy Short suggests that the term “intertextuality” has been described in different contexts by different critics: “Intertextuality has been defined in many different ways by theorists who have located it in the text (O’Donnel & Davis), the reader (Beaugrande; Kristeva) or the social interaction between people (Bloome).”¹³⁵ In our particular study of intertextuality, our focus will concern the ways in which it is used by our authors to transcend traditional modes of life writing. In his discussion of the subversive nature of intertextuality, Graham Allen writes that “however it is used, the term intertextuality promotes a new vision of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy.”¹³⁶ The concept of intertextuality as a performative device will be examined further in our chapters on Barthes and Calle. In more contemporary examples of autobiography, in which the writing process is not the central component in the construction of meaning, the author’s subjectivity is enacted and performed through notions of opposition and conflict. As scholars suggest, the concept of performance is often used as a means to interrogate conventional modes of thinking: “Performance studies scholars emphasize the transgressive nature of performance, that is, how a performance subverts traditional and accepted norms.”¹³⁷ In a

¹³⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds). Interfaces: women, autobiography, image, performance, p.86.
discussion on the topic of autobiography and performance, Tessa Carr Willoughby implies that linking autobiography to a performance produces new strategies of representation that fall outside conventional models of self-expression:

Theories of performance and autobiography share [...] the distrust of traditional frames and mechanisms of representation, and seek to discover new methods of interpreting experiences that lie ‘outside the realm’ of normative discourse. These theories are further linked by their shared focus on agency and identity construction through the formation of autobiography, an understanding of the limitations of language and memory that allows for aporia, contradiction, and dissonance, and an insistence that testimony functions as a politicized performative of truth. Employing these theories, [...] radical reconfigurations of identity [are performed] into a conveyable life narrative – even when that life narrative falls outside of traditional storytelling structures.  

Although the issues related to identity and its expression in autobiography are mainly explored through writing, in contemporary examples of life narrative, the problematics of self-portraiture are also enacted through visual and aesthetic mediums:

In textual and visual regimes autobiographical acts are inescapably material and embodied. They cannot be understood as individualist acts of a sovereign subject, whole and entire unto itself. And the representation produced cannot be taken as a guarantee of a “true self,” authentic, coherent, and fixed. The autobiographical is a performative site of self-referentiality where the psychic formations of subjectivity and culturally coded identities intersect and “interface” one another.

The recent shift in the representation of identity in life writing – from a purely written text to a visual and interpretative projection of culture and ideology – has influenced a change in the interpretation of autobiography into a performative model of writing. Contemporary

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139 The self-portrait is defined as “a picture that an artist makes of herself or himself.” (Thomson, Ruth. What is a Self-Portrait?, p.6). In the context of photography, the self-portrait becomes a picture of an individual that the individual takes of herself or himself. Richard Brilliant connects the self-portrait to a process of self-expression and introspection: “With greater or lesser degrees of success, self-portraiture always makes a concentrated autobiographical statement, the manifesto of an artist’s introspection.” (Brilliant, Richard. Portraiture, p.158). Robert Zwijnenberg writes that “every portrait that resembles its maker is considered as a self-portrait, while it is also presupposed that a self-portrait reflects the inner self of its maker. [...] In this definition of self-portraiture, [...] a self-portrait is successful or effective only if the painter succeeds in uniting the experience of the self with his or her exterior.” (Zwijnenberg, Robert. “Ogni pittore dipinge sé” – On Leonardo da Vinci’s Saint John the Baptist,” p.66).
140 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Interfaces: women, autobiography, image, performance, p.11.
“autobiography […] is critical” in the sense that it represents a “project of reflecting on experience in order to develop an account of self-identity which would serve the double purpose of both adding to […] theory and also providing a challenge to the mainstream.”¹⁴¹ Such a challenge alludes to reconstructive nature of the contemporary autobiographical text. Performance theory represents an important topic in our interpretation of the autobiographical narratives of Barthes and Calle. Although both authors integrate performative writing into their practices of personal writing, they take very different approaches; the unique perspective of each author is largely attributed to the fact that they come from different disciplinary backgrounds – one author (Barthes) is predominantly a theorist (Semiotician and Literary Critic) and the other (Calle) is an artist (performance and conceptual) and a writer. In Barthes’s autobiographical writing, intertextual/intratextual relationships are introduced into the text through word and image relationships to perform the author’s personal ideological convictions as a vital component in the representation of his identity. On the other hand, the performative nature of Calle’s autobiographical narratives is illustrated through her performance art practices. We will take a closer look at the strategies of performative writing used by Calle and Barthes in each of the chapters dedicated to the analysis of their texts. The concept of performative writing in autobiography is an original area of study in our thesis as it has been explored very little in French literature theory.

Before we proceed with our analysis of the autobiographical works of Barthes and Calle, it is important to note that both authors use photography as a strategy of constructing identity in their narratives. In an article she writes on the topic of performance in autobiography, Sherrill

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Grace alludes to the important role that photography plays in reading autobiography as performative:

Despite increasing attention in recent years to the rich multidisciplinarity of auto/biographical practices, prose forms of narrative published as books still receive the bulk of popular attention. Many specialists in auto/biography studies, however, have recognized what artists have long understood – that auto/biography exists in film and in photography, that portraiture (portraits and self-portraits) is closely related to the auto/biographical. To date, however, few auto/biography specialists have […] examined what actually happens to the auto/biographical when it takes the form of a […] performance.142

To fully understand the role that photography plays in the construction of identity, particularly in the construction of a performative identity, we must first discuss photography as a mode of representation, that, when placed within the context of autobiographical writing, interacts with the narrative structure to offer a critical presentation of autobiographical writing. Introduced within the space of the self-referential narrative, photographs interact with the written text to illustrate and catalyze the tensions and complexities involved in the project of constructing self identity through verbal and visual means. The increasing popularity of the study of word and image relations in autobiographical writing attests to the shifting conventions of autobiography. As Linda Anderson writes, autobiography is an important testing ground for a range of ideas concerning the representation of identity:

Autobiography has […] been recognized since the late eighteenth century as a distinct literary genre and, as such, an important testing ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction. The very pervasiveness and slipperiness of autobiography has made the need to contain and control it within disciplinary boundaries all the more urgent, and many literary critics have turned to definitions as a way of stamping their academic authority on an unruly and even slightly disreputable field.143

Linda Anderson’s description of autobiography as “unruly” recalls the observations that we made in the first section of this chapter concerning Lejeune’s remarks about the changing character of literary genres. By understanding autobiography as a genre that is framed within shifting conventions, we are able to situate our study on Barthes’s and Calle’s narratives within its experimental margins.

5 CONCLUSION

The introduction of several genres and disciplines in discussions on autobiography would have seemed absurd in previous years. However, in today’s contemporary climate of highly complex models of life writing, a multidisciplinary approach is the most effective means to read and interpret autobiographical writing. Recognizing the evolving canon of life writing, even the most established critics of the genre have had to revisit their theoretical framework to adapt to the changing nature of the genre. As we mentioned in the previous pages, one of these critics is Philippe Lejeune, who has reviewed and revised his theory on autobiography to reflect on changes in the genre:

I choose to single out Lejeune from the tradition of autobiographical studies not because he is typical but, on the contrary, because, although he began by being deeply entrenched in the world of literary criticism, unusually his studies took him towards a wider and wider view of what constituted autobiography. This gives a reader the pleasure of the rare sight of an academic repeatedly revising, adjusting, changing until he emerges as the only writer in the field with an embrace which is hospitable to every kind of autobiographical act. Lejeune cured himself of that dominant disposition to regard autobiography as an intensely restricted literary practice. Step by step he radically revised his position until he eventually saw it as a universal creative human activity, taking many different forms.144

Our analysis of the life narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle will consider the changing nature of the genre and will adapt itself to the multidisciplinary approach required to study contemporary autobiography. This brief presentation of autobiography, biography, fiction,

autofiction and performance in autobiography, has provided us with a framework within which
to address our analysis of Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical writing. The ideas presented in
this chapter will also allow us to reflect on the issues of classification that readers of
contemporary autobiography face when confronting experimental models of life writing like
Barthes’s and Calle’s narratives. The use of photography within autobiography is not what is
experimental in the narratives of Barthes and Calle. Instead, it is through the narrative and
discursive strategies used by these authors that their texts become innovative. It is important to
note that photography is used intentionally in the narratives of Barthes and Calle to stage the
interplay of genres and disciplines within each author’s text. Similar to autobiography,
photography plays a role in debates on realism and addresses the same referential dilemma that is
used to describe autobiographical writing:

Insérée ou évoquée dans un texte autobiographique, la photographie semble être là pour
affirmer la représentation, pour confirmer les racines du genre dans le référentiel. [...] Elle
paraît jouer le rôle de pièce à conviction dans ‘le pacte autobiographique,’ confirmer qu’il y a
identité entre auteur, narrateur et personnage.¹⁴⁵

Despite the close relationship that it shares with the representation of reality, photography has
experienced a major shift in perspective from an objective representation of reality to an artistic
depiction of this same reality: “La photographie a acquis le statut d’œuvre d’art, et comme
d’autres arts visuels, ne peut désormais plus être séparée de la littérature.”¹⁴⁶ For this reason,
“l’écriture est profondément attachée à la vue, et plus particulièrement à la photo.”¹⁴⁷ The
progression of the self-referential writing of Barthes and Calle from autobiography (accurate and

Marguerite,” p.193.
Marguerite,” p.194.
objective depictions of their life experiences) to performative life narratives is further highlighted in the photographs used by each author. In this respect, the practice and theory of photography merits further analysis in our study of Barthes’s and Calle’s life narratives. Because photography collaborates with the written text in the representation of identity, it represents an important aspect in our study on the changing perspective of autobiography in the texts of our two authors. In order to better understand the role that photography plays in the narratives of Barthes and Calle, we will now move to our discussion on photography.
Chapter 2
Photographic Representations

‘The illiterate of the future,’ it has been said, ‘will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph.’

Photography represents an important element in our discussion on the autobiographical texts of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle; the photographic images introduced in these writers’ texts add an important and complex source of meaning to their illustrated autobiographical narratives. As we will attempt to show in our chapters dedicated to the autobiographical narratives of Barthes and Calle, the photographic images collaborate with the written material and actively participate in the construction of the autobiographical subjects. To understand the significant role that photography plays in Barthes’s and Calle’s narratives, we must first focus our attention on the photographic practice as a medium of visual communication and expression. The present chapter offers a quick glance of the theoretical perspectives on photography, in which the primary focus is to discuss the representational modalities of photography. While the presentation of this chapter may at first seem somewhat teleological, it is important to note that our objective is to identify the principal arguments underlying the theory of photography in order to fulfill two important tasks in our study of Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical texts: to situate and interpret the medium within the context of autobiographical writing and to understand the specific role that photographs play in their autobiographies. Although our presentation on photography may appear to suggest an evolution of photography from a scientific to an artistic medium, it is important to note that we have only organized our chapter in this way as a strategy to mirror our study on the shifting conventions of autobiographical writing. By “tracing the

evolution of photography from its documentary and pictorialist roots into an expressive and inventive art form,” our aim is to place emphasis on the shared problematics between autobiography and photography. As a result, before we begin our overview on the subject, we would like to acknowledge that photography has not progressed from a scientific to an artistic medium, but that it is in fact a medium that has catered to both conventions from its beginnings. Admittedly, the framework of this chapter is not exceptionally dialectical. Nevertheless, since the focus of our thesis is primarily literary, this chapter does not seek to critique or to shed new light on the study of photography. Instead, its purpose is to contextualize photography theory within the issues related to the study of autobiography. With this in mind, we would also like to specify that the goal in this chapter is not to reconcile a complete cause-and-effect relationship between autobiography and photography, but to highlight certain similarities between each mode in order to supplement our analysis of autobiography with the necessary theoretical background. In other words, the arguments presented in this chapter are mostly intended to inform our analysis of the illustrated autobiographical narratives of Barthes and Calle. Using theoretical concepts introduced in this chapter, our ultimate goal in our chapters dedicated to Barthes and to Calle is to show how the practices of autobiography and photography collaborate to construct identity in the text. In the life narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle, photography is used to supplement the personal memories narrated by each author. However, the photographic image not only serves as a visual support to the narrative; in our study of Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographies, photographs are co-producers of meaning in the text and accompany the narrative to participate in the construction of an autobiographical subject. Since they are quite

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149 This description of photography is given by the Art Gallery of Hamilton in their 2009 Exhibition Archives for an exhibit held from October 10, 2009 to January 3, 2010 entitled “Modernist Photographs from the National Gallery of Canada.” Visit the Gallery’s website at [http://www.artgalleryofhamilton.com/ex_archive09.php](http://www.artgalleryofhamilton.com/ex_archive09.php)
experienced with the practice and theory of photography, both Barthes and Calle use the photographic medium to construct identity in their personal writing; Barthes has written numerous theoretical articles on the theory of photography, whereas Calle is a photographer who has studied and taught photography at the university level. In their extensive theory (Barthes) and practice (Calle) of the medium, both recognize that photography constitutes a complex mode of expression that can be used in an exploratory way to support and challenge the boundaries of autobiographical writing.

As we have already mentioned, what is especially relevant about our study on photography is that it shares the problematics of autobiographical writing. Since its beginnings, photography has continued to be interpreted both as a scientific device and as an artistic medium. Similar to autobiography, photography is described by some critics as representing a mimetic representation of reality. However much photography is like autobiography, contemporary discussions reject the medium as a purely objective or technical practice; it is also acknowledged as a subjective or artistic mode of expression. Because of the corresponding connections that exist between autobiography and photography, the use of photography within the personal narrative raises important questions about a series of dichotomies that theorists often call upon in their study of autobiography: fact/fiction, reality/imagination, present/past, individual/collective, traditional/contemporary modes of representation. Our study on photography in this chapter will allow us to contextualize the practice of photography within the broader context of autobiographical writing, in particular within the autobiographical narratives of Barthes and Calle. To understand photography as an independent mode of expression within the space of a written text and in order to contextualize our analysis on photography within our study on autobiography, we will divide this chapter into two main parts, each with its own methodology. In the first part of this chapter, which is concerned with the theoretical aspects of photography,
we will explore photography as a mode of expression that offers both a candid, objective view of the world and its artistic interpretation. In the second part of this chapter, we will initiate a discussion on word and image relations in order to situate the theoretical framework of photography within our discussion on autobiography.

In the first part of this chapter, entitled “Photography: Both Mimetic Practice and Artistic Interpretation,” our objective is to outline the main features of the theory and practice of photography. In order to trace the shifting theoretical focus in the study of photography, we will divide this first part of our chapter into five sections: In the first section, entitled “The beginnings of photography,” we will open our discussion on photography with a brief introduction about the early impressions of scholars regarding the medium. In the second section, entitled “Photography as a Technical Process,” we will examine the photographic act “as a technical medium ‘[that is capable of] reproducing objects and subjects with unprecedented accuracy and sharpness.’” 150 In the third section, entitled “Photography as a Mimetic Reproduction of Reality,” 151 we will aim to explore in greater detail the role of photography as a reproduction of reality, or more specifically as a “mirror” or as a copy of the world. 152 In the fourth section, entitled “Photography as a Transformation of Reality,” by comparing it to an artistic mode of expression, we will analyze the role that photography plays, not as a mirror of reality, but as an inventive and interpretative response to the reality that it portrays. Finally, in the fifth and final section entitled “The Social Aspects of Photography: A Complex and Multidisciplinary Mode of

151 The titles for the third, fourth and fifth sections of the first part of this chapter that allude to photography as a ‘mirror of reality,’ ‘a transformation of reality,’ and as a ‘symbolic representation of reality,’ have been inspired by the ideas advanced by Philippe Dubois in L’acte photographique.
152 The expression “mirror of reality” is used by Philippe Dubois in L’acte photographique as a way to refer to the indexical qualities of the photographic image.
Expression,” we will examine photography as a culturally coded system of communication whose expressive character is synonymous with language. It is important to mention that by dividing this first part of our chapter into sections, our main objective is to explore the conflicting and often contradictory perspectives that define photography theory. The aim of the first part of this chapter is to offer a brief retrospective of photography that engages the different theoretical approaches that have contributed to the development of photography theory.

In the second part of this chapter, entitled “Word and image relations: the use of photography in autobiographical writing,” we will analyze word and image relations, namely the relationship between photography and autobiography. In this part of our study, our particular focus will be to analyze the introduction of photography in personal writing as a narrative strategy used by an author to challenge conventional models of autobiographical writing. Our study on the introduction of photographic images within the space of the autobiographical narrative will allow us to illustrate how photographs interact with personal writing to construct identity in the text. From this perspective, we will be able to analyze the strategies used by Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle to construct identity in their personal narratives. Before turning to our discussion on word and image relations in autobiographical writing, we will begin our chapter with an analysis of photography as a technical process.

1 Photography: Both Mimetic Practice and Artistic Interpretation

1.1 The Beginnings of Photography

When photography was first introduced to the world on August 19, 1839, at a joint meeting organized by the Academy of Science and the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris, it received a mixed reception. It was praised by some as a great invention that would create new possibilities
for the sciences and the fine arts, while it was also met with suspicion and distrust by many other supporters of these disciplines. At the 1839 session, the French astronomer and physicist François Arago expressed with great enthusiasm the new possibilities that this new medium offered for both the arts and the sciences:

Though scientists might want photography to provide them with a hands-off epistemology, and artists might be after photography’s soft light, chiaroscuro, and richness of tone, there were those on both sides of the divide who admired the photograph’s ability to render each and every tiny detail effortlessly. […] The capacity to freeze detail with negligible labor remained a lauded feature of nineteenth-century photography for scientific illustration – and of photography as a new, better way to reproduce artwork. ¹⁵³

Although there has been much speculation on its true origins, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, a French artist and physicist, has been identified as the official inventor of the photographic process. The new invention combined science and art in an extraordinary way that had not previously existed. When discussing the early developments of photography, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison also take note of the British scholar William Henry Fox Talbot and his experiments with early photography:

Talbot experimented with paper treated with salt and silver nitrate, against which he pressed various flat objects, such as leaves and lace (and, later, camera obscura projections) to obtain a negative reminiscent of a watercolor or silhouette. Talbot initially called his invention ‘photogenic drawing’; he hoped it would replace the camera lucida for maladroit draftsmen like himself and perhaps also provide a way of reproducing paintings more cheaply and faithfully than engraving. ¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, despite crediting the invention of photography to Daguerre and to other scientists of his time, Mary Warner Marien writes that the basic process of photography was already known to man when Daguerre had invented it:

The basic ingredients of photography – a light-tight box, lenses, and light-sensitive substances – had been known for hundreds of years before they were combined. If the

¹⁵³ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*, p.130.
invention of photography had depended solely on the availability of materials, it could have taken place during the late Renaissance […] However, […] no record of that experiment has survived. Before the end of the eighteenth century, imagining the photographic process seems to have been difficult. Unlike other transformational technologies, such as air travel and automobiles, photography was not foreseen in the centuries before it was invented.

To acknowledge and compensate Mr. Daguerre for his astounding contribution to science, the French government awarded him a lifetime pension in exchange for his promise to reveal his method. Following the meeting, Daguerre published a booklet entitled Historique et description du procédé du Daguerréotype et du Diorama, which was translated and circulated in various countries across the globe. A new mode of representation had been invented that had forever changed the way people perceived and understood the world around them. The invention of photography impacted both the arts and the sciences. The particular influence photography was said to have in the field of art was in painting. With the invention of photography, painting was liberated from the restrictions of realism and was permitted to explore alternative approaches to the visual representation of reality: “The common view of the impact of photography on art is that it freed ‘painting,’ left it to explore other avenues and ideas. The ambition to achieve ‘likenesses’ was no longer required.”

The introduction of photography had presented new challenges on painting, since photographic processes were considered capable of accomplishing “better, faster, and with a circulation a hundred thousand times larger than narrative or pictorial realism [in painting], the task which academicism has assigned to realism.”

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156 In Michel Frizot’s analysis of *Autoportrait en noyé*, we are introduced to the invention of photography through the story of Hippolyte Bayard. Frizot credits Bayard with the invention of photography: “The man who had invented the direct positive process in 1839 complains, a year later, that people had preferred Daguerre to him and that his only recourse is suicide.” (*A New History of Photography,* n.p.).
157 This anecdote was taken from Mary Warner Marien’s description of the origins of photography in the first chapter of her book. For a more detailed account of Daguerre’s involvement in the invention of photography see Mary Warner Marien (*Photography: A Cultural History*, p.1).
158 David Bate. *Photography: the key concepts*, p.133.
As a result, photography was considered superior to painting and the novel in many ways, especially when the objective was to “stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning” of accuracy and objectivity. However, not everyone looked favourably to photography. As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison explain when discussing the reactions to photography at the Salon of 1859, “the first official Parisian art exhibition to include photographs,” photography was received with divided reactions. The most popular response against the successes of photography is the one that was provided by Baudelaire:

Charles Baudelaire railed against slavishly naturalistic landscapes and the still more slavish artistic photography, deploring an art so lacking in its self-respect as to ‘prostrate itself before external reality.’ To ‘copy nature’ was to forsake not only the imagination but also the individuality Baudelaire and other Romantic critics believed essential to great art: ‘The artist, the true artist, must never paint except according to what he sees or feels. He must be really faithful to his own nature.’ Photography might be admirable in the hands of the naturalist or the astronomer, but the ‘absolute material exactitude’ sought by science was inimical to art.

In attendance at the same Salon of 1859, and in contrast to Baudelaire’s reactions to photography, Louis Figuier, a professor of Science at the École de Pharmacie in Montpellier, looked favourably to the role of photography as art: “Louis Figuier […] defended photography as art, citing the photographer’s individual style and “sentiment.” No one, Figuier was certain, could mistake the full-blooded work of a French photographer for the wan images of the English. How could such originality be reduced to a “simple mechanism”? Regardless of whether photography was supported as an art or a science, early reactions to the medium pointed to the two main functions of photography: “It was a sign of the new opposition of science and art that

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161 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*, p.131-133.
the mixing of genres of objective (scientific) and subjective (artistic) photography could provoke scandal.” And since its beginnings, photography theory has been framed within the conflicting claims of art and science.

1.2 Photography as a Technical Process

The powerful relationship that photography has with realism is strongly influenced by the technical aspects that are involved in the processing of photographic images as copies of the world:

Photography is a mechanical, electronic, and chemical means of reproduction [It is] considered automatic, machinic, and natural (chemical reactions), opposed to the subjective and personal. With care, the photographer can be reduced to an operative, minimizing interference in a natural and objective technique. With the camera as automaton, as machinic eye, technology is divorced from social and personal determination.

As Philippe Dubois writes, the photographic camera allows an individual to capture a lasting image of an object or a scene through “the agency of light on a sensitized surface”: In Philippe Dubois’s words, “[La photographie est un procédé technique] permettant d’obtenir l’image durable des objets par l’action de la lumière sur une surface sensible. Similar to Dubois, Barthes describes photography as a technical process, but he describes this process as the operation of two distinct procedures: “Photography is at the intersection of two quite distinct procedures; one of a chemical order: the action of light on certain substances; the other of a

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163 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison write that the term “mechanical” must be understood in a certain context: “In one sense, the phrase refers to the automatic production of an image without the interventions of an artist. In another sense, it refers to the ‘automatic’ multiplication of images (which could be lithographs or engravings as well as photographs) so that they could be accurately, widely, and inexpensively disseminated.” (Objectivity, p.135-137).
164 Brian Molyneaux. The cultural life of images: visual representation in archaeology. p.74.
physical order: the formation of the image through an optical device.” Normally, the production of a photographic image involves three main components: film, camera, and light. Photographic film consists of a thin sheet of plastic that is coated with light-sensitive crystals: “Photographic film is a material that is sensitive to light. When a pattern of light falls on film, an image is produced. Chemical processing makes this image visible and useful for producing photographs.” The photographic camera is a device for which the main purpose is to produce images on a film. When a picture is taken, the light that is reflected on the object photographed penetrates the camera through the lens and transfers the image to film through a chemical reaction. Once this process is complete and the film is exposed to light, the negative is developed and a positive is printed; the result is a photograph, which, according to Barthes, is the product of three practices:

A photograph can be the object of three practices (or of three intentions): to do, to undergo, to look. The Operator is the Photographer. The Spectator is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs – in magazines and newspapers, in books, albums, archives… And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon emitted by the object, which I should like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to ‘spectacle’ and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.

Barthes attempts to implicate human involvement in his description of the photographic process. The three individuals identified by Barthes as the primary agents of the photographic process – The Operator, The Spectator, and The Spectrum of the Photograph – are described as sharing a relationship of reciprocity in the creation of photographic images. In this context, the implication of the word “spectacle” alludes to the photographic act as a predominantly visual and representational phenomenon. Since photography is a visual medium, its mechanisms could be

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compared to the human eye, through which light passes and hits the retina to produce an image.\textsuperscript{169} The camera was made to imitate the functioning of the human eye; both the photographic camera and the human eye contain an enclosed space that allows light to penetrate through a lens to produce an image. Behind the lens is an area that is sensitive to light. For the human eye, this area is referred to as the retina, whereas for the camera, the area behind the lens is reserved for the photographic film. The camera lens operates in the same way as the human retina, in that both the lens and the retina absorb rays of light that are projected onto a privileged scene (\textit{Studium}), and then transmit these rays into an expanding cone, where the scene is reproduced in an area that is sensitive to light (retina/film). The light that is transmitted into the camera lens and into the human retina is controlled by a particular mechanism. In the case of the human eye, this mechanism is the muscle that we refer to as the iris. However, for the camera, this mechanism is called the iris diaphragm. When a camera takes a photograph, the best conditions are produced when the lens filters a limited amount of light. If too little light passes through the lens, the image produced will be dark or black. However, if too much light passes through the lens, the image produced will be far too bright. A blurred photograph is produced when the camera lens is not focused. For the camera, it is the lens that determines the quality of the image.\textsuperscript{170} On the other hand, in the case of the human eye, the brain translates the image onto the retina; it is the brain, or the cortex, that controls visual acuity. Rays of light are focused onto the retina through the cornea, pupil, and lens. Although the mechanisms of the photographic camera are similar to those of the human eye, there still remains one main distinction between

\textsuperscript{169} By comparing the mechanisms of the camera to the human eye, we are attempting to illustrate the limitations of the mechanical device in its comparison with man and his ability to reflect on or to contemplate a visual scene. As we will see in this chapter, our discussion on photography will move from its capacity as a technical procedure to a culturally motivated phenomenon.

\textsuperscript{170} Our study on photography as a technical process has been inspired by Mark Jacobs and Ken Kokrda’s \textit{Photography in Focus}. 
the two visual agents: The camera is limited to its mechanical function, whereas the human eye is guided by a subjective and intelligent analysis of the visual scene. Although instant cameras perform the function of automatic focusing and auto exposure, these mechanical devices cannot compare to the unique physiology of the discerning and analytical human eye. It is in this respect that the camera is regarded as a purely objective representation of the reality that it records directly onto film; the camera’s objectivity is viewed as one of its benefits in its recording of reality. Nevertheless, despite its capacity to objectively record a visual scene, the mechanical eye is much more limited than the human eye in its capacity for visual representation. Despite the efforts of man to reproduce the spectral response of the human eye through the mechanics of the photographic camera, the lens of the camera sees and records reality, but is unable to perceive it. Instead, it is the subjectivity of the audience that plays a fundamental role in the reception and interpretation of a photographic image. Barthes emphasizes the spectator’s subjectivity in the perception of an image when he suggests that “what society makes of [a] photograph, what it reads there, [one cannot] know (in any case, there are so many readings of the same [image]).”

It is for this reason that Barthes attributes what he calls the **Studium** to the description of the photograph, which is the communication of cultural codes that inspire the interpretation of a photographic image:

"Thousands of photographs consist of this field, and in these photographs I can, of course, take a kind of general interest, one that is even stirred sometimes, but in regard to them my emotion requires the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture. What I feel about these photographs derives from an average affect, almost from a certain training. I did not know a French word which might account for this kind of human interest, but I believe this word exists in Latin: it is studium, which doesn’t mean, at least not immediately, “study,” but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by studium that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy"

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them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions.  

Linda Haverty Rugg echoes Barthes’s views on the cultural dimension of the photographic image when she writes that “we know that photographs are not simply the things they represent, but must be read through the culture that creates and consumes them.”  

Unlike the human eye, the photographic camera is only capable of capturing the *Spectrum*, which represents a reduced form of reality. In this way, the mechanical eye significantly restricts the representation of reality. First, the photograph is limited because it “immobilizes a rapid scene in its decisive instant.” In other words, the photograph only captures a visual scene for a fixed period of time and reduces the three-dimensional world to a bi-dimensional frame of reference. By becoming what Barthes refers to as the *Spectrum*, the real-life scene that is captured in the photographic image becomes a still-life object. The very concept of “still life” undermines the photograph’s commitment to reality:

> I must therefore submit to this law: I cannot penetrate, cannot reach into the Photograph. I can only sweep it with my glance, like a smooth surface. The photograph is *flat*, platitudinous in the true sense of the word, that is what I must acknowledge. It is a mistake to associate Photography, by reason of its technical origins, with the notion of a dark passage (*camera obscura*). It is *camera lucida* that we should say (such was the name of that apparatus, anterior to Photography, which permitted drawing an object through a prism, one eye on the model, the other on the paper); for, from the eye’s viewpoint, “the essence of the image is to be altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being; without signification, yet summoning up the depth of any possible meaning; unrevealed yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and the fascination of the sirens.” (Blanchot).

Although photography was initially theorized as an automatic and direct reproduction of the world because of its technical attributes, it was also recognized for its subjective characteristics.

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The informed viewer of photography understands that his own subjective role in the analysis and interpretation of a photograph can challenge the photograph’s ability to provide us with an impartial image of reality. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes reveals that his own subjectivity is rooted in the interpretation of a photographic image:

Ultimately – or at the limit – in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. ‘The necessary condition for an image is sight,’ Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: ‘We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.’ The photograph must be silent (there are blustering photographs, and I don’t like them): this is not a question of discretion, but of music. Absolute subjectivity is achieved only in a state, an effort, of silence (shutting your eyes is to make the image speak in silence). The photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah: ‘Technique,’ ‘Reality,’ ‘Reportage,’ ‘Art,’ etc.: to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness.176

Barthes replaces the description of photography as a visual phenomenon with a new perspective, that of the subjective conscience, which is an exclusive attribute of human beings. Barthes suggests that the true essence of a photograph appears when an individual attempts to interpret it:

As soon as it is a matter of being – and no longer of a thing – the Photograph’s evidence has an entirely different stake. Seeing a bottle, an iris stalk, a chicken, a palace photographed involves only reality. But a body, a face, and what is more, frequently, the body and face of a beloved person? Since photography (this is its *noeme*) authenticates the existence of a certain being, I want to discover that being in the photograph completely, i.e., in its essence, ‘as into itself…’ beyond simple resemblance, whether legal or hereditary. Here the Photograph’s platitude becomes more painful, for it can correspond to my fond desire only by something inexpressible: evident (this is the law of the Photograph) yet improbable (I cannot prove it).177

Despite the mechanistic character of photography, Barthes describes it as an interpretative process that is initially visualized in the mind of the photographer. Barthes implicates the photographer in the subjective representation of a photographed object when he writes that “the photographer’s organ is not his eye […] but his finger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens, to

the metallic shifting of the plates (when the camera still has such things).”178 Through the photographer’s role in the act of image-making, the mechanical function of the camera assigns a new role to the visual qualities of the photograph: “An ‘image’ is more than a product of perception. It is created as the result of personal or collective knowledge and intention. We live with images; we comprehend the world in images. And this living repertory of our internal images connects with the physical production of external pictures that we stage in the social realm.”179 Photography then lends itself to an aspect of subjectivity through the ever-present human element in the act of creating pictures: “The photographic look has something paradoxical about it […] the look, eliding the vision, seems held back by something interior.”180 Hans Belting writes about this paradox as a result of a continuous internal evolution that has progressed since the invention of photography:

The internal development that photography has undergone since its invention has in no way been inevitable, but is, rather, symptomatic of the free play that takes place as image and medium interact. The two have different origins: the medium as a technology and the image as the symbolic meaning of the medium. Modernity’s conception of the world has changed fundamentally since the early years of photography. In the course of those years, photography passed through a series of fashions: realism, naturalism, and symbolism. Industrial society in the classic sense came and went. The photograph marched in step with this evolution, furnishing the mirrors in which contemporary beholders wished to look.181

In the next three sections of our analysis on photography, we will briefly outline the history of the medium. Our discussion will begin with a description of the photographic act as an objective mode of representation. Our analysis will then shift its focus to an explanation of photography as a highly subjective form of expression. The approach taken in the remaining

sections of this part of our chapter aims to summarize photography as an interdisciplinary framework.

1.3 Photography as a Mimetic Reproduction of Reality

As a mechanical process, photography is recognized as being inextricably linked to an exact and automatic reproduction of reality. As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison explain, the mechanical character of photography assigns the medium its value of objectivity:

‘Mechanical’ had long referred to an inferior brand of human labor executed with the hands, not the head (Shakespeare’s ‘rude mechanicals’). As the Industrial Revolution transformed work in the nineteenth century, ‘mechanical’ retained its pejorative, manual associations, but now referred dismissively to actual machines and the workers who tended them, suggesting they were repetitive, mindless, automatic. […] Haunted by anxieties about their own subjective representations, scientists discovered the ethical epistemic consolations of the mechanical image, in which by a supreme act of self-effacing will – or by deploying procedures and machines that bypassed the will – they could ensure that no intelligence would disturb the image.

By discussing the role that the Industrial Revolution played in the production of images, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison explain how “machine-regulated image making was a powerful and polyvalent symbol, fundamental to the new scientific goal of objectivity.”

In the midst of the Industrial Revolution, machines – such as photographic cameras – promoted the goal of objectivity in three very significant ways:

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182 André Rouillé. *La photographie*, p.78.
First, the machine provided a new model for the perfection toward which working objects of science might strive. […] Second, one great advantage which we may derive from machinery is from the check which it affords against the inattention, the idleness, or the dishonesty of human agents. Just as manufacturers admonished their workers with the example of the more productive, more careful, more skilled machine, scientists admonished themselves with the more attentive, more hard-working, more honest instrument. Third, […] the machine seemed to offer images uncontaminated by interpretation. In this context, the machine stood for authenticity: it was at once observer and artist, free from the inner temptation to theorize, anthropomorphize, beautify, of interpret nature. What the human observer could achieve only by iron self-discipline, the machine effortlessly accomplished – such, at least, was the hope. Here the machine’s constitutive and symbolic functions blur, for the machine seemed at once a means to and a symbol of mechanical objectivity.\footnote{Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.139.}

Through the medium’s technical force, “in the age of science, mechanization trumped art. […] We have no Leonardo de Vinci [sic] […] We can boast no engravings as effective as those of the broadsheets of Vesal […] but we are able to employ new processes that reproduce the drawings of the original object without error of interpretation.”\footnote{Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.146.} In addressing the mechanical features of the photographic medium, Hans Belting describes the privileged relationship that exists between the photographic image and the reality that it depicts:

The photographic image is usually understood as either an objet trouvé, a thing that the camera finds in the world, or else as the product of a camera. In other words, a photograph is seen as either a kind of replica of the world or else as an expression of the medium that created it, its boundaries defined by what technology accomplishes between the moment when the picture is snapped and the print produced.\footnote{Hans Belting. \textit{An Anthropology of Images: Picture, medium, body}, p.144.}

As a replica of the world, photography can be described in terms of a “mirror of reality” since it visually reproduces an object or scene with impressive accuracy: “The machine seemed to offer images uncontaminated by interpretation.”\footnote{Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.139.} In this respect, the photograph is regarded as an
“acheiropoieton”\textsuperscript{189} of sorts, because of its capacity to automatically reproduce reality with the simple click of the camera’s shutter button. In Philippe Dubois’s words, photography is a mimetic recording of reality: “[La photographie] tient (une capacité mimétique qui permet de faire apparaître une image de manière ‘automatique’, ‘objective’, presque ‘naturelle’).”\textsuperscript{190} As an automatic “copy” of reality, the photographic image is not the reality that it depicts but only a representation of it. As Roland Barthes writes, “certainly the image is not the reality but at least its perfect analagon and it is exactly this analogical perfection to which, in common sense, defines the photograph.”\textsuperscript{191} Dubois expands on Barthes’s explanation of the photographic analogue when he writes about photography as a sort of natural, accurate and impartial record that, for the masses, does not lie: “Aux yeux de la doxa et du sens commun, [la photographie] ne peut mentir. Le besoin de ‘voir pour croire’ s’y trouve satisfait. La photo est perçue comme une sorte de preuve, à la fois nécessaire et suffisante, qui atteste indubitablement de l’existence de ce qu’elle donne à voir.”\textsuperscript{192} As a mechanical recording of reality, Nancy Pedri confirms that photography is often referred to as an indexical sign because of its ability to mirror its object\textsuperscript{193}:

\textsuperscript{189} Achéiropoietai, also referred to as icons made without hands, are a kind of icon that are understood as having come into existence miraculously, without the direct intervention of human beings.

\textsuperscript{190} Dubois, Philippe. \textit{L’acte photographique et autres essais}, p.21.

\textsuperscript{191} Roland Barthes. “The Photographic Message,” p.196. André Rouillé shares the views of Philippe Dubois and Roland Barthes on the photographic image as a mirror or “analogon” of reality: “Inaugurale est cette fable que propose dès 1839 le journaliste Jules Janin: le daguerréotype est comme un ‘miroir [qui] a gardé l’emprunte de tous les objets qui s’y sont reflétés’. La métaphore est d’autant plus pertinente qu’elle ne se rapporte pas à la photographie (sur papier), mais au daguerréotype, dont la surface en métal argenté est totalement miroitante. Le miroir va devenir la métaphore la plus éclatante de la photographie-document: une image parfaitement analogique, totalement fiable, absolument infalsifiable, parce que automatique, sans homme, sans forme, sans qualité.” (\textit{La photographie}, p.78).

\textsuperscript{192} Philippe Dubois. \textit{L’acte photographique et autres essais}, p.19.

\textsuperscript{193} André Rouillé ascribes the mimetic nature of photography to the mechanical function of the camera: “La photographie associe cette mécanisation de la mimésis avec un autre embrayeur d’exactitude et de vérité: L’enregistrement chimique des apparaîences. Le vrai-semblable logique de l’empreinte (réputée plus “vraie” que “semblable”) vient ainsi se combiner au vrai-semblable esthétique de l’icône (plus “semblable” et “probable” que “vraie”); les propriétés chimiques de l’empreinte s’ajouter aux propriétés physiques de la machine pour renouveler la croyance dans l’imitation.” (\textit{La photographie}, p.75).
Photographs are first and foremost indexical signs, images that are chemically and optically caused by the thing in the world to which they refer. [...] their documentary force depends not on visual resemblance or similarity, but on a real, actual contact with the object that the photographic image represents and points back to. 194

Anne Marsh defines the term index in the following manner:

The term ‘index’ is used in photographic criticism to indicate the analogue nature of the photographic process. The image in front of the lens is transferred, through light and chemical processing, onto a light-sensitive plate or emulsion. The image thus adheres to the plate or negative film and becomes an index of the object or subject photographed, much like a footprint in the sand or a life-cast of the face. 195

As an “indexical sign,” photography is seen as a trace or an imprint of reality: In Belting’s words, “a new argument against photography alleges that it is merely a token of what is real. [...] a copy or a kind of footprint of everything with which we ever have come into contact, the proof that such-and-such things and events must have existed when they were photographed.” 196

In its role as index, photography represents “an emanation of [...] reality: a magic, not an art.” 197

To clarify what Barthes meant by the term “emanation,” J.J Long, Andrea Noble and Edward Welch offer the following description: “According to Barthes, the photographic sign, unlike the linguistic sign, first exists as both a temporal and a tactile fact – the photograph records light rays reflected off an object, impressing themselves onto photographic film in a fraction of a

194 Nancy Pedri. “Documenting the Fictions of Reality,” p.158. In a chapter that she dedicates to Barthes’s ideas on photography, Laura Mulvey writes that “an emphasis on the index, on the ‘physical connection,’ and on the trace and its inscription, lies at the heart of Roland Barthes’s Camera Lucida.” (p.55). Mulvey describes the photographic index in the following way: “The index, an incontrovertible fact, a material trace that can be left without human intervention, is a property of the camera machine and the chemical impact of light on film.” (p.55). (Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image). The photograph is also referred to as an icon, which differs greatly from the notion of index: “A sign that resembles the referent (or the object) is called an icon. Thus, an icon looks like the referent it represents, sounds like the referent, or retains an image similar to the referent.” (Kyong Liong Kim. Caged in Our Own Signs: A Book About Semiotics, p.19). The notion of the photographic image as an “index” of reality was first described by Charles Saunders Peirce and later developed by theorists of photography such as Philippe Dubois. For other excellent studies on the photographic image as “index” of reality see: (Geoffrey Batchen. Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History, p.61); (Hans Belting. An Anthropology of Images: Picture, medium, body, p.146); (Harris, Clare. Seeing Lhasa: British depictions of the Tibetan capital 1936-1947, p.114); (Wells, Liz. Photography: a critical introduction, p.331-333).


196 Hans Belting. An Anthropology of Images: Picture, medium, body, p.146.

second.” To this effect, Barthes writes that “the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here.” Daston and Galison write about the opposition of photography to art because of its mechanical properties: “Self-consciously ‘mechanical’ photography eschewed all such aesthetic interventions. The mechanical, objective photograph had allegedly been traced by ‘nature’s pencil’ alone, and nature was entirely artless.” Photography is distinguished from art because of its recognition as “a simple and direct reflection of reality,” while “a work of art is a purely imaginary object, existing only and truly in the artist’s mind.” The distinction between magic (the photographic act) and art (a work of imagination) in the description of photography places emphasis on the technical aspects of the medium over its artistic pretensions; the photographer’s collaboration in the creation of a photographic image varies greatly from the techniques and the materials used by the artist. In the case of artistic expression, as Philippe Dubois confirms, it is the canvas (the painting) that represents an expression of the artist’s subjectivity: “La peinture serait le produit subjectif de la sensibilité d’un artiste et de son savoir faire.” However, in the case of photography, the image is created with one click of the camera’s manual shutter button. Although the photographer is responsible for positioning the camera in a certain way to capture a specific scene or object, realists claim that the photograph is still the unbiased result of the camera: In Dubois’s words, “[la photographie reste toujours] le résultat objectif de la neutralité

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203 Philippe Dubois. *(L’acte photographique et autres essais*, p.26.)
As explained by Dubois, the optical and mechanical properties of the camera
aid in capturing a scene in reality with precision and accuracy: “[En tant que] machine régie par
les seules lois de l’optique et de la chimie, l’appareil photographique ne peut que retransmettre
avec précision et exactitude le spectacle de la nature. Voilà du moins ce qui fonde le point de vue
commun, le savoir trivial sur la photo.” It is because of the strong relationship that it
establishes with reality that, as Hans Belting suggests, the photographic image may be privileged
as a type of documentary evidence:

We are afraid that the photographic picture, as a proof of the world, might give us a
bigger dose of reality […] than we are willing to swallow. Photography was and still is a
marketplace where images are displayed and traded: both our own images and those that
we receive from the world.

By placing emphasis on objectivity as an essential element in the photographic medium, the
main goal is to focus on its mechanical attributes in order to remove human intervention from the
process of photography:

Objectivity was a desire, a passionate commitment to suppress the will, a drive to let the
visible world emerge on the page without intervention. […] Objectivity was an ideal,
true, but it was a regulative one: an ideal never perfectly attained but consequential all the
way down to the finest moves of the scientist’s pencil and the lithographer’s
limestone.

André Bazin also discusses the photograph in terms of an absence of human intervention: “For
the first time, an image of the outside world takes shape without creative human intervention.”

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206 Hans Belting. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, medium, body*, p.150.
208 André Bazin. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” p.7. Bazin develops a few arguments based on the
photograph’s objective character: “The automatic way in which photographs are produced has radically transformed
the psychology of the image. Photography’s objectivity confers upon it a degree of credibility absent from any
painting. Whatever the objection of our critical faculties, we are obliged to believe in the existence of the object
represented: it truly is re-presented, made present in time and space. Photography transfers reality from the object
depicted to its reproduction.” (p.7).
Because of its ability to represent the world without man’s subjective intervention, photography becomes emblematic for “all aspects of noninterventionist objectivity”\textsuperscript{209}: “The photograph has acquired a symbolic value, and its fine grain and evenness of detail have come to imply objectivity; photographic vision has become a primary metaphor for objective truth.”\textsuperscript{210}

According to scientists such as Camillo Golgi, the mechanical objectivity of photography meant that the spectator would have to make an effort to look at the image without entering into its contemplation:

Objectivity meant cultivating one’s will to bind and discipline the self by inhibiting desire, blocking temptation, and defending a determined effort to see without the distortions induced by authority, aesthetic pleasure, or self-love. […] the regulation of interior states and external procedures defined objective vision. Although mechanical objectivity was in the service of gaining a right depiction of nature, its primary allegiance was to a morality of self-restraint.\textsuperscript{211}

In contrast to the automatic functionality of photography is the recognition that the photographic image is also an artistic mode of expression. As a result, an important source of tension is created as a result of the two conflicting tendencies that define photography (scientific and historical document vs. artistic representation) and alludes to other limitations in the photograph’s ability to fully depict reality:

The rise of the objective image polarized the visual space of art and science, just as the role of the two domains split over the role of the will. From the sixteenth century […] art and science had largely been one of collaboration, not opposition. Only in the early nineteenth century did Romantic artists begin to defend the willful imposition of self as the \textit{sine qua non} of art. For their part, scientists increasingly insisted on the opposite: their images must be purged of any trace of the self.\textsuperscript{212}

As photography became a more popular medium, it became evident that it wavered between science and art. Daston and Galison write that by the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, “faith in

\textsuperscript{210} Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.187.
\textsuperscript{211} Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.185.
\textsuperscript{212} Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.187.
mechanical objectivity was unravelling. The simple promise of automaticity began to appear more ambiguous"\textsuperscript{213} even though critics of the medium “still upheld the ideal of objectivity.”\textsuperscript{214}

1.3.1 Reflecting on the Past: The Limitations of Reality in the Photographic Image

Despite its referential character, photography is questioned as a “mirror of reality” because of its temporal structure. Susan Sontag refers to the photograph’s relationship to time as one of its determining characteristics when she writes about the direct link that photography shares with the past. When describing the act of photography, Sontag writes that “the photographer is not simply the person who records the past but the one who invents it. […] The photographer is the contemporary being par excellence, through his eyes the now becomes the past.”\textsuperscript{215} Tessa Morris-Suzuki extends Sontag’s description of the relationship that photography holds with the past when she writes that “from the early days of mass photography, enthusiasts recognized the potential of the […] camera to strengthen the individual’s sense of connectedness to the past.”\textsuperscript{216} The object or scene portrayed in a photograph is revealed as an aspect of reality that may have existed at one point in time, but no longer exists in the present. In \textit{Camera Lucida}, Barthes writes about photography as “an emanation of \textit{past reality}.”\textsuperscript{217} “There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. And since this constraint exists only for Photography, we must consider it, by reduction, as the very essence, the \textit{noeme} of photography. […] The name of Photography’s \textit{noeme} will therefore be: ‘That-has-been’.”\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{213} Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.189.
\textsuperscript{214} Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. \textit{Objectivity}, p.189.
\textsuperscript{216} Tessa-Morris Suzuki. \textit{The past within us: media, memory, history}, p.87.
Barthes is suggesting when he introduces the “noeme” of photography is the photograph’s ability to attest to the fact that the object or person that has been captured in the photographic image has been there. Barthes argues that photography is able to “print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object” and for this reason, it “is literally an emanation of the referent.”

However, the photograph is only capable of depicting the presence of a “missing being.” By describing the photographic act as an expression of the past, both Barthes and Sontag shift the perspective on photography from an objective representation to a subjective point of view, implying that all photographs are a subjective reaction to a specific moment in time. Like Barthes and Sontag, Walter Benjamin acknowledges the subjective reaction involved in the viewing of a photograph:

> However skilful the photographer, however carefully he poses his model, the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of change, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character in the picture: to find that imperceptible point at which, in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts itself that, looking back, we may rediscover it.

The introduction of the concept of the photographic pose in our present discussion will allow us to shift our focus towards the emotional properties of photography; Barthes discusses the subjective nature of the photographic image through his description of “the pose”:

> What founds the nature of photography is the pose. The physical duration of this pose is of little consequence; even in the interval of a millionth of a second (Edgerton’s drop of milk) there has still been a pose, for the pose is not, here, the attitude of the target or even a technique of the Operator, but the term of an ‘intention’ of reading: looking at a photograph, I inevitably include in my scrutiny the thought of that instant, however brief, in which a real thing happened to be motionless in front of the eye. I project the present photograph’s immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest which constitutes the pose.

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From Barthes’s description, we realize that “to strike a pose is to present oneself to the gaze of the other as if one were already frozen, immobilized – that is, already a picture.” Danny Trom confirms that by selecting an individual or an object as the subject of the photographic image, the individual or the object captured by the camera is immobilized in a precise moment in time by the click of the shutter button:

La photographie possède […] le pouvoir de ‘congeler le temps’, pour reprendre la métaphore suggestive de Susan Sontag. En même temps que l’acte photographique rejette les objets photographiés dans le passé, il les congèle, les fige, les conserve en l’état (celui du moment de l’acte photographique), suscitant l’expérience de la fugacité des choses car un ‘moment présent’ émerge comme un arrêt contingent dans le flux continu du temps.

As Marc Tamisier suggests, the photographic pose marks an important reversal in photography, since through the pose, the subject is frozen in time and inspires a sense of meaning beyond its simple and direct approach to reality:

La pose de la photographie n’est donc, en fait, que le résultat de la pose, de son renversement sur le sujet photographié. Pour en saisir le noème, la temporalité revulsive, il faut donc d’abord prendre la pose, mourir aux instants du présent pour faire une pause. C’est alors dans cette immobilité de la pause que le sujet “je” construit sa légende. La photographie impose d’avancer en arrière, elle produit une temporalité du présent passé. Ce “ça a été” est la condition essentielle du regard photographique. L’en priver revient à la fois à faire de la vérité photographique un traumatisme absurde et à refuser son identité au sujet lui-même […] Le temps du “ça a été” n’a pas le temps de se construire; chaque nouvelle photographie est alors effectivement fascinante, alors même qu’elle semble aller de soi: l’instant présent, contemporain, est, en quelque sorte, devenu le signifié naturel, mythique de la photographie.

In its visual reproduction of the world, the photograph’s ability to immobilize the reality that it purports to represent holds important consequences for the objective characteristics of photography. By freezing an object in time, the photographic image lends itself to acts of contemplation and interpretation:

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222 Craig Owens and Scott Stewart Bryson. *Beyond recognition: representation, power, and culture*, p.198.
[The pose] affirm[s] *imposture* as the condition of portraiture. […] There has always been a sense of the staged in portraiture, a sense that what we see is a *tableau vivant* its characters have chosen to perform. The postmodern portrait, then, presents us with nothing resembling a self-contained work of art. It affirms, in fact, what Baudelaire despised about photography – the work of art’s transitory nature, the contingency of our ability to interpret it, and the fragmentary status of its presentation. […] Above all, our awareness of such posturing undermines the seeming objectivity of photography as a medium.  

The pose presents the subject of photography as an object of reflection. As a result, contemporary interpretations of photography turn to a description of the medium as a subjective, emotional and expressive practice:

The photomechanically produced image is indeed unique among forms of visual representation; however, its uniqueness is as much cultural as it is material. The introduction of photomechanical reproduction in the nineteenth century did not suddenly bring order and objectivity to representational practices that were otherwise disorderly and subjective. Similarly, photographs were not (and are not) universally accepted as objective, unmediated copies of the natural world. […] All photographs employ subjective conventions such as framing and focus and therefore can never be direct, unmediated copies of their subjects. […] photography’s unique claim to objectivity is as much cultural as it is natural.

Although “the mechanical nature of the camera and the chemical nature of photographic development [are commonly] taken to guarantee the accuracy and immutability of information within the image’s frame,”  the photographic medium also functions as a cultural phenomenon when it is viewed within a wider cultural and historical framework.

### 1.3.2 Photography as a Cultural Critique of Reality

It is clear that in several ways photography has been an essential form of social cement in holding together the modern world. […] a photograph works as a representation that is dependent upon cultural and ideological conventions.

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226 Jonathan Finn. *Capturing the criminal image: From mug shot to surveillance story*, p.xi-xii.
228 David C Chaney. *The cultural turn: scene-setting essays on contemporary cultural history*, p.65.
The understanding of photography as a cultural phenomenon becomes especially pertinent when people are implicated in the photographic process and the emotional and expressive qualities of photography become the defining characteristics of the medium. Barthes links the cultural and social aspects of photography to the photographic pose:

Posing in front of the lens […] I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing, but (to square the circle) this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality: what I am, apart from any effigy. What I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffered among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) “self”; but it is the contrary that must be said: “Myself” never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and “myself” which is light, divided, dispersed […] if only photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing! Alas, I am doomed by (well meaning).

In his description of the photographic pose, Barthes compares the individual seized by the camera to a photographed criminal. Barthes’s reference to the convict is an important observation that is instrumental in linking the photographed individual to a wider social group, and consequently, in alluding to the power of the photograph to elicit social facts. The photograph of the criminal, initially investigated by scientists to attribute individual features to a specific class of criminals, is just one example of how the photographic image was used to identify the process “by which one passed from individual to group.” Daston and Galison explain that photographs of criminals were previously analyzed by scientists such as Francis Galton to determine whether certain individuals exhibiting the same criminal tendencies shared the same physical features:

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229 Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p.11-12. This excerpt of *Camera Lucida* is especially pertinent when considering Barthes’s denial of two portrait photographs of himself in our following chapter on Barthes.

Galton had been investigating maps and meteorological charts to extract, by optical superposition, combined data. In the course of his work, he decided the same technique could ‘elicit the principal criminal types’ (such as murderers and violent robbers). For each photographic shot, the camera was moved so that the eyes of each particular malefactor would be aligned. If a normal exposure was eighty seconds, then, for a group of eight images, each would receive a ten-second exposure.\textsuperscript{231}

The tendency to depict individuals in such a way as to have them represent a group is a customary practice among some scientists; in order to illustrate a certain object or phenomenon in a scientific textbook or reference manual, scientists commonly select a photograph of an individual object in order to stand in for a larger whole. What this means is that a photograph of a single snowflake could be used to represent snowflakes in general; an image of an individual bird could be used to illustrate the entire species, etc. The convict, who is captured and treated as an object, can be compared to the photographic subject, who is confined and immobilized as a visual object within the frame of the photographic image. Like the convict, the photographic subject is captured and scrutinized within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts by a discriminating public. The convict becomes a social pariah who is imprisoned and isolated from society. Devoid of a social conscience, the convict has no particular identity or cultural privileges to speak of. Similar to the condemned criminal, the figure captured within the photographic image is objectified and becomes vulnerable to the views and biases of the observer. To assign a subjective value to the photographic image, Barthes introduces the concept of the portrait-photograph\textsuperscript{232} in his discussion on photography. The subjective character of the photographic


\textsuperscript{232} With respect to the portrait, J.J. Allen describes it as a subjective form of representation: “A portrait is a drawing, painting or photograph of a person, especially of his face. […] A more complex definition is that a portrait is a description of a person.” (\textit{Posing and Lighting Techniques for Studio Portrait Photography}, p.4). The portrait-photograph is a photograph of a person that someone else takes. In a discussion on the portrait-photograph, Bill Hurter explains that “portraiture is a visual art form that describes a person’s likeness. By that definition, every snapshot would seem to be a portrait – and that is technically correct. A portrait is, at its most basic roots, a description of the likeness of a person.” He also suggests that a “fine portrait conveys lots of information about the person pictured.” However, he explains that “a truly great portrait will go far beyond this minimum” requirement of
image contradicts the photograph’s primary function as an objective mirror. As a consequence of this contradiction in photography, the photographic image is marked by a paradox:

The portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. [...] the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am only becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears (if only for commercial reasons) this death in which his gesture will embalm me.234

What is important in Barthes’s discussion on the portrait-photograph is the sentiment of death that is attached to its description. Barthes discusses this contradiction in the photographic image when he uses the metaphor of death to depict the portrait-photograph in its expression of reality. As Laura Mulvey suggests, “it is the photograph as index, located as it is in an ‘embalmed’ moment, which enables these exchanges across the boundaries between the material and the spiritual, reality and magic, and between life and death.”235 Mulvey adds that death is a recurrent theme for Barthes in Camera Lucida:

In Camera Lucida, the presence of death in the photograph is a constantly recurring and pervasive theme throughout the book, approached from various different angles. [...] Barthes uses his mourning for his recently deceased mother as the context for his reflections on photography. The themes of time, of the photograph and then of death come more clearly to the surface and are more closely woven together. Not only is the essence of photography, the ‘this was now’, subject to the passing of time within the likeness to a person: “When I view a portrait, I want it to communicate something of the nature of the person, not just look like someone.” As we will see in our chapter on Barthes, when viewing the portrait-photograph, especially a portrait of himself, Barthes tries to look beyond the photograph’s simple promise of likeness to achieve a deeper sense of meaning. (The Best of Portrait Photography: Techniques and Images from the Pros, p.11).

233 William Touponce defines Barthes’s ‘image-repertoire’ as follows: “‘Image-repertoire’ is a term coined by Barthes with which he designates the Lacanian imaginary – a set of images functioning as a misunderstanding of the subject by itself. As such, it is critical of narcissistic reading.” (The Idea of Difficulty in Literature, p.67).


course of a life, but it then becomes, in Barthes’s words: ‘That rather terrible thing that is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.’

Like Barthes, several critics introduce the subject of death into the discussion of photography. André Bazin is one of the most recognized of these critics, with his well-known argument in which he compares the visual arts to a form of embalming. When discussing the similarities between Bazin’s and Barthes’s ideas on photography, Mulvey explains that “Barthes’s reflections on photography in Camera Lucida are strikingly close to, but fail to acknowledge, the ‘Ontology’ article.” In his article entitled “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” Bazin writes about the visual arts as a “practice of embalming the dead”:

If we were to psychoanalyze the visual arts, the practice of embalming might be seen as fundamental to their birth. The origins of painting and sculpture would be found to lie in a ‘mummy complex.’ Egyptian religion, which was entirely devoted to surmounting death, saw survival as tied to the material preservation of the body. This belief satisfied one of human psychology’s most fundamental needs: to defend against time. Death is nothing more than the victory of time. To make fast bodily appearance is to snatch it from the course of time, to stow it in the hold of life. It was natural to preserve this appearance in the very reality of death, in its flesh and bone.

Bazin attempts to link the notion of death in the visual arts to a certain desire to defy mortality: “Bazin’s article analyzes the history of representation in relation to the psychological desire to defy time and death. It is this desire that underlies our efforts to produce imperishable copies of bodies destined for decay and dissolution.” Despite the fact that both Barthes and Bazin share similar ideas on photography, Mulvey acknowledges one major difference in their treatment of death in photography:

In the first instance, for Bazin and Barthes, photography touches the complex human relation to death, but their shared perspective then diverges. For Bazin, it is to transcend death, part of the process of mourning; for Barthes, it is ‘the dive into death’, an

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239 Jean-Michel Rabaté. Writing the Image After Roland Barthes, p.74.
acceptance of mortality. Barthes’s intensely personal engagement with the photograph is a response to his mother’s recent death but also extends to his own future death.²⁴⁰

In order to re-think the character of photography as an objective and unmediated portrait of nature, Barthes presents the photographic image as the site of embodied subjectivity; through the portrait-photograph, Barthes promotes a view of photography as a deeply subjective medium by focusing on the individual as its subject matter. While looking at a photographic image of himself, Barthes reveals that he “would have to descend deeper into [him]self to find the evidence of Photography, that thing which is seen by anyone looking at a photograph and which distinguishes it in his eyes from any other image. [He] would have to make [his] recantation, [his] palinode.”²⁴¹ Barthes’s palinode (the realist as an artistic figure) aims to incite resistance to photography’s claim to truth. Through the example of the portrait, Barthes suggests that the experiences and personal impressions of the viewer can serve to bias the interpretation of the photographic image. As a result, he is prompted to question the ability of photography to provide a certificate of presence:

I am the reference of every photograph, and this is what generates my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is it that I am alive here and now? Of course, more than other arts, Photography offers an immediate presence to the world -

²⁴¹ Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p.60. A palinode is defined as a recantation or a poem in which the poet retracts something said in an earlier poem. In an introduction to Barthes’s writing on photography, especially in *Camera Lucida*, Geoffrey Batchen contextualizes the palinode within Barthes’s own arguments on photography: “Despite having constructed this complex analytical armature, Part One of *La Chambre claire* concludes with a confession: ‘I had perhaps learned how my desire worked, but I had not discovered the nature (the eidos) of Photography’ (*La Chambre claire*, p.60). To do so, he says, he will have to both ‘descend deeper into myself’ and ‘make my recantation, my palinode.’ (*La Chambre claire*, p.60). A palinode is an ode or a song in which the author retracts something said in a previous poem. And indeed, in Part Two of his book, Barthes shifts his search for the essence of photography from an investigation of many photographs to an intense analysis of just one. This is the famous Winter Garden Photograph of his mother, which he found in November 1977 after her death.” (*Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes’s Camera Lucida*, p.13). In the notes to his introduction, Batchen invites us to see Jay Prosser “for a discussion of the history and implications of the palinode.” (*Light in the Dark Room*, p.12-14, p.163-164). Barthes’s recantation in *La Chambre claire* (*Camera Lucida*) is representative of Barthes’s own theoretical approach on the subject of photography; Barthes’s ideas and his approach to photography have evolved over the course of his career.
a co-presence; but this presence is not only of a political order (‘to participate by the image in contemporary events’), it is also of a metaphysical order.242

When the photographic image is disputed as a certificate of presence, it loses its function as a likeness or as a “mirror of reality”:

Resemblance refers to the subject’s identity, an absurd, purely legal, even penal affair; likeness gives out identity ‘as itself,’ whereas I want a subject – in Mallarmés terms – ‘as into itself eternity transforms it.’ Likeness leaves me unsatisfied and somehow skeptical (certainly this is the sad disappointment I experience looking at the ordinary photographs of my mother – whereas the only one which has given me the splendor of her truth is precisely a lost, remote photograph, one which does not look “like” her, the photograph of a child I never knew).243

A new reality – the subject’s inner truth – takes precedence over the interpretation of photography as an exact science: “Both scientific objectivity and artistic subjectivity turned on the valuation of the active, interpreting will.”244 By introducing the notion of subjectivity, critics mark an important contradiction in the practice and the analysis of the photographic medium as an objective mode of representation. When considering Barthes’s comments concerning death in relation to the portrait, Hippolyte Bayard’s Autoportrait en noyé245 (Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man) becomes an excellent example to draw from within the context of our study on autobiography (Fig.1). In our study of photography, Bayard’s photograph becomes relevant as it serves as a critique on the representation of identity in the photographic portrait. In his explanation of Bayard’s Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man, Michel Frizot provides the following description:

On October 18, 1840, Hippolyte Bayard put his signature to a strange piece of text, written on the back of an equally strange photograph. It showed a man who was stripped

244 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. Objectivity, p.147.
245 The English translation for the title of Bayard’s image that Frizot gives is “Noyé.” However, Amelia Jones informs us that “the image is often reproduced with the title Autoportrait en noyé (Self-portrait as a drowned man)” (“The Body,” p.256-257).
to the waist, wrapped in a sheet, and sitting on a sort of bench, apparently asleep. Two objects appear next to him: a vase and a straw hat.\textsuperscript{246}

The writing that appears on the back of the image, written by Bayard himself in the third person, informs us that what we are looking at in the photograph is not a sleeping man, but in fact “the corpse of a drowned man at the morgue”\textsuperscript{247}:

The corpse of the gentleman which you see on the other side is that of M. Bayard, the inventor of the process whose marvelous results you have just seen or which you are going to see. As far as I know, this ingenious and indefatigable researcher has been busy perfecting his invention for about three years.

The Academy, the king, and all those who have seen his drawings, which he himself considered imperfect, have admired them as you are admiring them at this moment. This has honored him greatly and has earned him not a penny. The government, which had given far too much to M. Daguerre, said it could not do anything for M. Bayard, and the poor man drowned himself.

O, the fleeting nature of human things! Artists, scientists, and newspapers have been concerned with him for a long time, and now that he has been exposed at the morgue for several days, nobody has yet recognized him or asked for him. Ladies and gentlemen, let us pass on to other things, for fear your sense of smell may be affected, for the head and the hands of the gentleman are beginning to rot, as you can see.\textsuperscript{248}

Frizot’s reading of Bayard’s photograph contextualizes the self-portrait as the image of a man scorned – an individual left to die by a heartless society. Based on the description Bayard provides of the image, Frizot explains that “Bayard himself – [is] unrecognized by society (government, scientists, newspapers).”\textsuperscript{249} Frizot elaborates on the fate that Bayard suffers at the hands of an indifferent society: “The man who had invented the direct positive process in 1839 complains, a year later, that people had preferred Daguerre to him and that his only recourse is

\textsuperscript{246} Michel Frizot. \textit{A New History of Photography}, n.p.
\textsuperscript{247} Michel Frizot. \textit{A New History of Photography}, n.p.
\textsuperscript{248} Michel Frizot. \textit{A New History of Photography}, n.p.
\textsuperscript{249} Michel Frizot. \textit{A New History of Photography}, n.p.
suicide.” The particular interest of this photograph is not the fact that the man depicted within its frame is dead, but instead that the image is a purported self-portrait of a dead man. Amelia Jones explains that, based on the obvious deception involved in the production of Bayard’s photograph, the truth-value of the image is compromised:

Bayard’s body is thus delivered up in its seemingly incontrovertible “realness” only simultaneously to put the lie, at this very beginning of photography, to this apparent truth value of photography. For, if Bayard had truly been drowned, how could he have fabricated this self-portrait? His body could not have been both places (in front of and behind, or at least guiding, the camera) and in both states (alive and dead) at the same time.

By titling the image the “Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man,” Bayard confronts the truth-value of the photograph. Frizot describes this image as “the very first fictional photograph,” in which “Bayard exploits fully the veracity of the photograph, insisting, for example, on the decomposition of the head and the hand (a summer tan, reinforced by the lack of sensitivity of silver salts to brown or red colors).” What is especially revealing about Bayard’s self-portrait is the staging of his own death within the photograph’s frame. Amelia Jones suggests that by staging his own death through the medium of the self-portrait, Bayard “gets at something fundamental about the body in relation to the image, something that, indeed, provided the major impetus of the development of photographic technology: the desire for the image to render up the body and thereby the self in its fullness and truth.” In his analysis of Bayard’s image, Michel Sapir suggests “that the self-portrait can be read as a crossroads at which issues of recognition,

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250 Michel Frizot. *A New History of Photography*, n.p. Bayard suffers the same indifference in this chapter on photography as we acknowledge Daguerre’s influential role in the history of photography, while having overlooked the influence of Bayard on the photographic process until now.
authorship, display, visibility, truth and illusion meet and play off of one another.”

Through his performance of death in his photograph, Bayard raises important questions on the issues of representation in photography: “By presenting suicide as an act of melodramatic performance Bayard questions precisely this Realistic pretense of the photographic medium to achieve immediacy and truthfulness.” It is through his performance of death that Bayard is able to provoke certain questions on self representation in the photographic image: “The photograph focuses on death as the locus for a problematics of representation; it plays on the tension between the notion of death and visualization as a means of authentication, and the inauthenticity inherent in the act of making death visible.” As Sapir writes, “Bayard’s critique […] is especially poignant since it is articulated in the form of a photograph.” Within the context of our study on autobiography, Bayard’s photograph becomes relevant on several levels: First, through a clever combination of word and image relations, Bayard is able to stage photography as a self-reflexive and contemplative practice. Second, he alludes to photography as a performance of identity through the medium of the self-portrait. And finally, by introducing subjective

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258 When linking the relevance of Bayard’s image to our study on photography, the possibilities become endless: Self-portrait of A Drowned Man raises so many important questions on self representation in the photograph and the contradictions that it provokes: life and death, science and art, truth and fiction, etc. Bayard’s contribution to the self-portrait, as discussed in this chapter, allow us to begin to contextualize photography within our study on autobiography and to reflect on the role that photography plays in practices of self-representation.
259 In his analysis of Bayard’s Self-portrait As a Drowned Man, Michal Sapir gives a wonderful interpretation of the aspects of performance in the image. Sapir calls attention to the props: the hat and vase, and he interprets the symbolic value that these objects hold in the interpretation of the photograph: “Looking at the photograph itself, we can detect other ways in which it ironizes its own statement. A large straw hat hanging next to the propped-up corpse demands our attention, creating a triangle with Bayard’s dark face and hands. The hat is in the shadow compared to the very white body, and it is not situated in the center of the picture, either compositionally or thematically. Yet it is highly visible, perhaps because of the gap it poses for interpretation. What can we say about this enigmatic hat? It turns out that the outsize hat is a recurrent motif in Bayard’s work, a kind of signature of the photographer. As such it becomes a self-reflexive gesture in which fiction enters the ‘reality’ of the picture, and the
elements in the interpretation of his photographic image, he illustrates his performance of identity as a deconstruction of the reality depicted within the photograph’s frame. Through the use of the self-portrait, Bayard manages to turn the camera’s lens onto man and consequently, to turn the practice of photography into a transformative act of interpretation.

1.4 Photography as a Transformation of Reality

In their discussion of photography, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison contextualize the “mechanical” function of photography within artistic practices:

When the term ‘mechanical’ was applied to photographs prior to circa 1880, it referred to the process by which light imprinted an image on specially prepared metal, paper, or glass. Because the image was likened to a drawing or engraving, the absent human hand implied the word ‘mechanical’ was that of the artist, not the photographer. Fixated upon the delineation of the image itself, early photographers and their audiences compared photography to drawing.260

As Marc Tamisier suggests, photography is a complex representational practice that is described as espousing conflicting values: “La photographie est, aujourd’hui, traversée de toutes parts par des inventions techniques, des ambitions artistiques, et finalement travaillée par une redéfinition paradoxical presence of Bayard as both the author and the dead person is highlighted. In addition, the hat receives signification in relation to the face, which it parallels. Its frontal placement somehow mocks the frontality of the face as a promise of straightforwardness and open visibility; in this position the hat suggests, rather, concealment, which brings to mind the association of the frontal face of the dead with masquerade. The crescent-shaped shadow on the hat mimics the shadow cast by the corpse’s chin. Thus, according to Jammes and Janis, “an incident of shadow or highlight becomes the substance of a new sort of objecthood that wittily imitates other renditions of the real” (p.20). In other words, this mimicry points to the extent to which a process of objectification is needed in order to render an ‘authentic’ representation of the dead body. Similarly, the hat’s rigid circularity highlights the awkward rigidity of posture and the static insensibility of the photographed body, a result of the relatively long exposure time necessary to create the image in the camera obscura. Finally, in commanding the viewer’s attention, the hat overturns the hierarchy of objects in the picture: “like a target (or a lens) it forces surrounding things into peripheral vision” (p.20). The enigma of the hat is precisely its signification: it creates disruptions in the coherence of the image, thus putting in question its innocent transparency as a representation of the real.” (“The Impossible Photograph: Hippolyte Bayard’s Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man,” p.625-626).

de sa fonction réaliste, laquelle n’a pas abouti et paraît maintenant définitivement perdue.”

As we have already suggested, many theorists of photography have viewed the photographic image as a cultural document: “What photographers frequently document, especially in a large body of work, is an *attitude* or attitudes that are powerful parts of the photographer’s cultural environment, [...] [photographs] are significant and revealing cultural documents.”

André Rouillé writes that as cultural artifacts, photographs are understood to purportedly manipulate aspects of the reality that they record: “La photographie n’enregistre jamais sans transformer, sans construire, sans créer.”

It is from this perspective of photography as a cultural artifact that the medium is revealed as a transformation of reality. According to Philippe Dubois, it is virtually impossible for the photographic image to fully render the three-dimensional world that it portrays: In Dubois’s words, “[il est pratiquement impossible pour une photo de] rendre compte de toute la subtilité des nuances lumineuses, et pas seulement en réduisant le spectre des couleurs à un simple jeu de dégradé du noir au blanc.”

The inability to fully visualize the scene of reality depicted in the photographic image presents some problems with respect to the perception of photography as a factual record; contemporary theory recognizes photography as a visual representation of social reality. As Régis Durand suggests, photography offers a deeper, contemplative view of the world:

La photo n’est plus dans une simple relation de réception ou de description du monde (à supposer qu’elle ne l’ait jamais été). Elle est devenue spéculative, inventant ses propres concepts, s’efforçant de donner une pensée du monde en même temps que son image.

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263 André Rouillé. *La photographie*, p.94.
Contemporary photography is defined as a sophisticated mode of representation that is constructed and framed through social and ideological processes. Contrary to the virtues of photography as a simple reproduction of reality, current theoretical debates on the medium have broadened the scope and depth of the practice of photography to elicit meaning in the image:

Debates within the theory, practice and criticism of photography [...] set out to challenge the notion of the autonomous creative artist, to question the idea of documentary “truth” and to interrogate the notion of purely visual languages. The intention is to situate photography within broader theoretical debates and understandings pertaining to meaning and communication, visual culture and the politics of representation. [...] photography [is] considered a practice of signification; that is, specific materials worked on for specified purposes within a particular social and historical context.  

Current theoretical developments on photography suggest the medium’s potential to carry and transmit meaning. Nevertheless, modern critics indicate that the photographic image alone does not convey meaning to its viewers; instead, it acquires significance through its social context:

The meaning of a photograph, like that of any other entity, is inevitably subject to cultural definition. The task here is to define and engage critically something we might call the ‘photographic discourse.’ [...] This general definition implies, of course, that a photograph is an utterance of some sort, that it carries, or is, a message. However, the definition also implies that the photograph is an “incomplete” utterance, a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability. That is, the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context determined.

Meaning is attached to the photographic image through the participation of the viewer. Jake Blakemore suggests that the photograph is not an independent source of meaning when he writes that “meaning is not inscribed indelibly in the image, to be read off and immediately understood by the viewer.” Blakemore links the viewer to the photograph’s meaning when he continues to insist that “meaning is formed in the space between the viewer and the image. It is constructed from the complex of experiences, of personal history, and of the emotional need with which the

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267 Allan Sekula. On the invention of photographic meaning, p.3-4.
In an effort to expand the discussion regarding the subjective nature of the photographic image, Blakemore places emphasis on the viewer’s personal reaction to the photograph to elicit meaning from the image. Since the photographic image is described as having both objective and subjective characteristics in its ability to convey meaning, it gives rise to a paradox. Barthes alludes to this paradox when he describes the photograph as being characterized by the coexistence of two conflicting messages:

The photographic paradox can then be seen as the coexistence of two messages, the one without a code (this would be the photographic analogue), the other with a code (this would be the ‘art,’ or the treatment, or the ‘writing,’ or the rhetoric of the photograph)… how then can the photograph be at once ‘objective’ and ‘encroached upon,’ natural and cultural?269.

W.J.T Mitchell understands and acknowledges the paradoxical tendencies of photography when he writes that “the paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted message and a connoted message […] it is that the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message without a code.”270 He then explains Barthes’s photographic paradox in greater detail:

One connotation always present in the photograph is that it is a pure denotation; that is simply what it means to recognize it as a photograph rather than some other sort of image. Conversely, the denotation of a photograph, what we take it to represent, is never free from what we take it to mean […] Connotation goes all the way down to the roots of the photograph, to the motives for its production, to the selection of its subject matter, to the choice of angles and lighting. Similarly, “pure denotation” reaches all the way up to the most textually “readable” features of the photograph: the photograph is ‘read’ as if it were the trace of an event.271

Mitchell’s description of the photograph points to the “unique properties of the medium or the photograph’s status as a text,”272 which offers a contradiction in its representation of reality:

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The paradox of photography is in the phenomenon of the coexistence of a message without a code and a message with a code in the same photo. This way, a scene of reality out there is metamorphosed into a scene of a culture. In this process, a message without a code is contaminated by a message with a code. This contamination process brings about a paradoxical reversion.²⁷³

The terms that Barthes uses to refer to the two levels of meaning in the photograph are “denotation” and “connotation”: “A denotation is ‘what we see’, what can be described as simply ‘there’ in the picture. Connotation is the immediate cultural meanings derived from what is seen, but it is not actually in the picture.”²⁷⁴ What connotation specifically alludes to is “the imposition of a second meaning” on the photograph’s expression of reality; it is intended to “represent […] a coding of the photographic analogue.”²⁷⁵ The distinction between denoted and connoted messages is best expressed through the different levels of production involved in photography, which mainly constitute the subjective choices made by the photographer when taking a photograph: “Connotation, the imposition of second meaning on the photographic message proper, is realized at the different levels of the production of the photograph (choice, technical treatment, framing, lay-out) and represents, finally, a coding of the photographic analogue.”²⁷⁶ Through its various levels of production, the photographic image presents a subjective interpretation of the world. Other factors also influence the photograph’s ability to transform reality, such as its tendency to present only fragments of the world and to present this world within the limited frame of a flat or two-dimensional image. In its inclination to limit its representation of the world, “what [the photograph actually] represents is [understood to be a]
fabricated” version of reality. As Nicolas Fève affirms, behind the photo’s aesthetic of fragmentation lies the representation of the photographer’s ideological and subjective interpretation of the world:

L’instantanéité inhérente à l’acte photographique […] fait de la photographie un art de la fragmentation. Avant d’abstraire, la photographie extrait du réel un fragment de temps et un fragment d’espace. Elle est donc une rupture qui instaure un avant et un après, voire une blessure pour le spectateur. En outre, derrière l’espace fragmenté de la photo, il faudrait plutôt dire devant, se cache un point de vue et un seul, celui du photographe.

The photographer is not a passive figure who produces visual images for public consumption; instead, he is identified as an agent who guides the interpretation of the image as a direct reflection of his own subjectivity: “Le photographe est essentiellement témoin de sa propre subjectivité, c’est-à-dire de la façon il se pose, lui, comme sujet en face de l’objet.” The photographer’s subjectivity plays an important part in the interpretation of a photograph, since “inevitably [he] is a part of the situation he depicts.” Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison support Arnheim’s argument and provide greater detail of the extent to which the photographer’s subjectivity is involved in the production of an image:

Historians of photography point out the considerable skill and judgment required to make a photograph; nature emphatically does not paint itself by itself. Historians of art call attention to the aesthetic context that shaped the making and seeing of photographs, even scientific and medical ones. Historians of science note that nineteenth century photographers and scientists and their audiences were perfectly aware that photographs could be faked, retouched, or otherwise manipulated. Almost any article of the period on how to make a photograph for scientific purposes gives pages of detailed, difficult

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277 Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p.88. The limitations of the photographic image become especially pertinent in the case of the black and white photograph, in which a limited perspective of the world is offered: “Black-and-white photographs are more of an abstraction of a subject than are color photographs: […] they more readily convey drama or allow for creative interpretation of the subject.” (Warren, Bruce. *Photography: The Concise Guide*, p.17). Black and white photographs are an important feature in the autobiographical narrative of Roland Barthes and contribute to the interpretation both of the images and of the written.


instructions; it required effort and artifice to persuade nature to imprint its image. In what sense, then could these images be described by atlas makers as objective and mechanical?  

As an active agent in the photographic process, emphasis is placed on the role of the photographer as “auteur” of the photographic image: “In this sense, we can view the photographer as co-auteur, and the work as the summation of a visual style in which content and form are the visual reflection of a photographic discourse and grammar, as much as they are in writing and film.” In his role as an auteur, the photographer’s creative involvement assigns the image its subjective or expressive value and challenges the character of the photographic image as an objective mode of representation:

La valeur de miroir, de document exact, de ressemblance infaillible reconnue à la photographie se trouve remise en cause. La photographie cesse d’apparaître comme transparente, innocente, réaliste par essence. Elle n’est plus la véhicule incontestable d’une vérité empirique […] nous verrons se développer diverses attitudes allant toutes dans le sens d’un déplacement de cette puissance de vérité, de son ancrage dans la réalité vers un ancrage dans le message lui-même par le travail (le codage) qu’elle implique, surtout sur le plan artistique, la photo va se faire révélatrice de vérité intérieure (non empirique). C’est dans l’artifice même que la photo va se faire vraie et atteindre sa propre réalité interne. La fiction rejoint, voire dépasse, la réalité.

By manipulating reality to create a desired mood or effect in the photographic image, the photographer, in his role as a realist, becomes an artist of sorts: “Artists, even militantly realistic ones, agreed that their very presence meant that images were mediated. […] the reproduction of nature by man will never be a reproduction and imitation, but always an interpretation… since man is not a machine and is incapable of rendering objects mechanically.” In his role as artist, the photographer undermines the mimetic function of photography by mastering the art of photographic manipulation; the photographer’s subjective involvement in the production of the

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281 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. Objectivity, p.133.
284 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. Objectivity, p.147.
image serves to alter the photograph’s alternate interpretation as a kind of “magic.” According to Barthes, the photograph’s subjective meaning is revealed through what he refers to as the Studium. For Barthes, the Studium, or the constructed scene, helps to convey the photographer’s intentions:

To recognize the studium is inevitably to encounter the photographer’s intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which the studium derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. […] It is rather as if I had to read the Photographer’s myths in the Photograph, fraternizing with them but not quite believing in them. These myths obviously aim (this is what myth is for) at reconciling the Photograph with society […] These functions are: to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire.285

As Barthes suggests, although the photographer manipulates the presentation of reality in the photograph, it is mostly through the role of the spectator that meaning is injected into the image. As a result, the subjective quality of the photograph is not only attributable to the photographer through his involvement in the production of an image, but it also lends itself to the viewer’s participation in the creation of meaning. In other words, the photographer transforms the technical operations of photography into a series of artistic and creative judgments through the interpretative framework of the viewer. As Walter Benjamin writes, “when photography takes itself out of the contexts established […] and frees itself from physiognomic, political and scientific interests, then it becomes creative.”286 The “emphasis on meaning and social context [in the photographic image] provide[s us with] a platform and introduction for […] more sophisticated analytical work on photography.”287 Critics claim that the photograph’s meaning is communicated through the unique relationship between the photographer and the viewer. In this context, the relationship between the photographer and the viewer engages a “contract” of sorts

287 David Bate. Photography: the key concepts, p.28.
in the production of meaning: “There’s a silent agreement between the photographer and the viewer about the intentions and meaning of a work.” In its status as a discursive art form, photography becomes a communication medium that demands high levels of creative, analytical and intellectual reasoning from both parties involved in its interpretative processes. Due to its complex relationship with reality, Régis Durand argues that photography is a sophisticated mode of thinking:

Dans le meilleur des cas, la photographie tranche dans le vif, elle délie des entrelacs de sens enfouis, déplie et expose des zones de tensions et de contradictions. Elle nous met en face d’un fragment de réel (pas de réalité extérieure seulement, mais de notre réel le plus intime, celui qui est fait d’une somme obscure d’affects et de désirs inconscients). C’est ce qui me fait penser que la photographie a un grand avenir devant elle dans la création contemporaine. Car artistes et spectateurs découvrent continuellement qu’une photographie peut libérer une énergie considérable, peut être porteuse d’une pensée complexe (une pensée qui fait souvent défaut à un art devenu dans certains cas une pratique de petits maîtres, de stratégies maniéristes.

When describing photography as a complex mode of thinking, Durand alludes to the promising prospects attached to the “future” of the medium. Current discussions on the medium are attracting increased attention from researchers in a variety of academic disciplines that lie outside the visual arts. Edward Welch and J.J Long trace the evolution of photography into a multidisciplinary field of inquiry by alluding to its increased use in other domains of research:

Contemporary theorists of autobiography aim […] to relocate the authority to speak about photography in domains (linguistics, psychoanalysis, culture materialism) lying beyond the reach of existing experts and agents of legitimation – domains, moreover, into which […] such experts would refuse to venture because of the challenge they represented to their vision of creative practice and the way in which they revealed photography not as innocent art form, but as implicated in complex processes of signification within society.

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288 David A Ross, Jürgen Harten and Trever J. Fairbrother. *American art of the late 90s/Amerikanische Kunst der späten 80er Jahre*, p.176.


As a complex and multifaceted mode of thinking, photography may be understood as a medium that is dependent on its particular social context and that conveys its meaning through the connotative functions of language.

1.5 The Social Aspects of Photography: A complex and Multidisciplinary Mode of Expression

Debates on photography are not bound by the interpretation of the image as an exact “copy” of reality, nor do they linger on the argument of photography as an artistic mode of representation. Instead, discussions on photography tend to place emphasis on the medium as a highly complex and sophisticated form of expression that is both an objective and subjective mode of representation:

Photography is such a complex medium because it is a clearing house of the ideas and beliefs of photographers, the photographed and the interests of viewers. These readings are frequently contradictory, provoking either empirical or aesthetic interpretations. Greater awareness should be given to the role and function of surfaces and appearances. A photograph is able to slice a moment from time, and encourage excessive, hyperactive readings.\(^{291}\)

The capacity of the photograph to incite the viewer to become engaged in an act of interpretation is very important to the study of photography. It is within the “paradox” that photography becomes a productive medium of study. This way of looking at photography points to the importance of the photographic image as a mode of expression that is underpinned by social attitudes and values. As early as the 1930s, Walter Benjamin alludes to the social functions of the photographic image:

In our age there is no work of art which is regarded with as much attention as a photograph of oneself, one’s closest relatives and friends, one’s sweetheart, wrote Lichtwark as early as 1907, thereby shifting the investigation from the sphere of aesthetic distinctions to social functions. Only from this standpoint can the investigation go forward again. It is indeed characteristic that the debate should have hardened most of all

over the questions of the aesthetics of photography as art, while for example the so much less questionable social fact of art as photography scarcely received a glance.\textsuperscript{292}

As Barthes explains it so eloquently, the spectator is “interested in photography only for ‘sentimental’ reasons; [He] want[s] to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: [The Spectator] sees, […] feels, hence […] notices, […] observes, and […] thinks” when looking at a photograph.\textsuperscript{293} When Barthes distinguishes between the act of looking and seeing, he replaces the spectator’s ability to see the photograph with his ability to perceive or to contemplate its meaning. On this point, he writes: “Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.”\textsuperscript{294} According to Barthes, “to scrutinize means to turn the photograph over, to enter into the paper’s depth, to reach its other side (what is hidden is for us Westerners more “true” than what is visible).”\textsuperscript{295} It is by analyzing the photographic image as a complex and personal interpretation of the world that the spectator is able to look beyond its two-dimensional frame and search for a deeper, more emotional interpretation. As Barthes explains, to break with conventional methods of viewing photography, the viewer must first internalize the image and respond to it emotionally. Barthes offers an example of the viewer’s ability to access personal memories and emotions while viewing a photograph when he describes his own reaction to a journalistic photograph of a war scene. When describing the photograph, Barthes suggests that the documentary value of the photograph leaves little to the spectator’s imagination and he expresses his desire to connect emotionally to the photograph:

Trying to make myself write some sort of commentary on the latest ‘emergency’ reportage, I tear up my notes as soon as I write them. What – nothing to say about death,

\textsuperscript{292} Walter Benjamin. “A Short History of Photography,” p.22.
suicide, wounds, accidents? No, nothing to say about these photographs in which I see surgeons’ gowns, bodies lying on the ground, broken glass, etc. Oh, if there were only a look, a subject’s look, if someone in the photographs were looking at me! For the Photograph has the power – which it is increasingly losing, the frontal pose being most often considered archaic nowadays – of looking me straight in the eye (here, moreover, is another difference: in film, no one ever looks at me: it is forbidden – by the Fiction).296

When Barthes writes that he’d like someone to look him “straight in the eye,” he appears to challenge the viewer of photographs to look past the documentary value of the image and to see something much more.297 The denotive aspects of photography incite indifference in the viewer who is able to “see” but is not able to “perceive” the scene that is captured in the photographic image. In other words, the spectator who simply “sees” the image is unable to penetrate its meaning in order to contemplate it. As a result, for Barthes, there is nothing to be said about the documentary photograph, because the “copy” only intends to show the viewer a segment of reality and does not require that this reality be interpreted. In order to see photography as a medium of subjective expression, we must first free the photographic image from its role as a mirror. Analyzing the subjective qualities of photography allows us to broaden and deepen our analysis of the photograph as a site of meaning:

The most important feature of the phenomenon of the photograph in society [is the following]: photographs mean. The various forms of photographic practice contribute to the production, reproduction, dissemination, of the everyday meanings within the framework of which we act. […] The idea of photography as something used to engender meanings has of course been with us as long as the notion, particularly prevalent during the heyday of the picture-magazine, that photography is a language. However, although it had long been common for people to refer to ‘the language of photography’, it was not until the late 1950s to mid-60s that there was any real interrogation of the supposed analogy between ‘natural language’ – speech and writing – and signifying systems other than language, systems like photography.298

297 We will analyze the challenges that Barthes presents to the viewers of his photographs at great length in our chapter on Roland Barthes. As we will see in our next chapter, Barthes forces his readers to look past the documentary value of his photographs and to engage in an interpretative viewing of them.
Since the viewer is forced to look beyond its frame to judge its significance, Philippe Dubois explains that the photograph’s meaning lies outside of its definition as a simple documentary medium: “[la signification de la photo lui] est extérieure, elle est essentiellement déterminée par (son) rapport effectif à (son) objet et à (sa) situation d’énonciation (cf. les déictiques et “shifters” en linguistique).”\(^{299}\) Contemporary photography does not impose an arbitrary explanation of reality on its spectator, but instead leaves the viewer with the freedom to attribute his or her own meaning to the image. Each spectator brings a unique perspective to each act of viewing images that varies from the experiences of others. When Dubois compares the overlapping layers of meaning in photography to the role of “the shifter,”\(^{300}\) he draws on the model of linguistics to describe the processes of meaning in the photograph in terms of a language. In describing the use of shifters in the theory of photography, Laura Mulvey quotes Ann Banfield, who, writing about *Camera Lucida*, “suggests that Barthes’s use of the shifter, or deixis, marks a point at which language may simply not be adequate to describe the photograph’s tense”\(^{301}\):

> Like Proust, Barthes’s effort is to find the linguistic form capable of recapturing a present in the past, a form that it turns out spoken language does not offer. This now-in-the-past can be captured not by combining tenses but by combining a past tense with a present time deictic: the photograph’s moment was now.\(^{302}\)

The idea of photography as a language, or as a phenomenon that has certain linguistic characteristics, is made especially evident through the meaning of the word *photography*, which

\(^{299}\) Philippe Dubois. *L’acte photographique et autres essais*, p.48.

\(^{300}\) Henrik Birnbaum provides a more detailed description for the term “shifter”: “the term ‘shifter’ [is designated as] a set of grammatical units in which the general meaning cannot be defined without reference to the specific message. […] Jakobson identified shifters as items which belong to the larger class of indexical symbols. As a typical example of shifters, which thus are those constituents of a linguistic code that necessarily refer to a given message, Jakobson pointed to the personal pronouns. […] he suggested that indexical symbols — among them the personal pronouns — be considered a complex category where code and message overlap,” (“*Odmah* – a shifter of Serbo-Croatian in intralingual and contrastive perspective,” p.61).

\(^{301}\) Laura Mulvey. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, p.57.

\(^{302}\) Ann Banfield in Laura Mulvey’s *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, p.57.
is translated from Greek as “writing with light.” Since the effects of light in photography are used to interpret and express ideas, photography is assigned certain linguistic characteristics:

Quand on dit que la photo est un langage, c’est faux et c’est vrai. C’est faux, au sens littéral, parce que l’image photographique étant la reproduction analogique de la réalité, elle ne comporte aucune particule discontinue que nous pourrons appeler signe: littéralement, dans une photo, il n’y a aucun équivalent du mot ou de la lettre. Mais c’est vrai dans la mesure où la composition, le style d’une photo, fonctionne comme un message second qui renseigne sur la réalité et sur le photographe: c’est ce que nous appelons la connotation, qui est du langage. Or les photos connotent toujours quelque chose de différent de ce qu’elles montrent au plan de la dénotation: c’est paradoxalement par le style, et par le style seul, que la photo est du langage.303

By associating the system of linguistic signs to the vocabulary of photography, meaning in photography is acknowledged as something that is created culturally, within particular historical, social and cultural contexts. In its role as a language medium, photography develops its own rhetoric: “The text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to ‘quicken’ it with one or more second-order signifieds. In other words, and this is an important historical reversal, the image no longer illustrates the words; it is now the words which, structurally are parasitic on the image.”304 Language becomes the source through which meaning is encoded in the photographic image and communicated to others. As Nicolas Fève suggests, photography is deeply embedded with language in such a way that language becomes central to the photographic image’s meaning: “Dans le mouvement lecture-vision entre les photos et l’écrit, c’est l’écrit qui va déterminer si l’image est jugée vraie ou bien s’il s’agit d’un simulacre. Car la photo ne dit rien, ne parle pas: elle est un vouloir-dire, tout au plus un cri.”305 In his article entitled “A short...
history of photography," Walter Benjamin also alludes to the possibility of referring to the photographic image in terms of a language:

One thing, however, neither Wiertz nor Baudelaire grasped and that is the possibilities which lie in the very authenticity of photography. This authenticity cannot forever be circumvented by the reportage of cliché which forms only verbal associations in the reader. The camera becomes smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture transitory and secret pictures which are able to shock the associative mechanism of the observer to a standstill. At this point the caption must step in, thereby creating a photography which literarisethesrelationships of life and without which photographic construction would remain stuck in the approximate. ‘The illiterate of the future’, it has been said, ‘will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph.’

In describing the connection that Benjamin makes between photography and language, Shepherd Steiner writes that Benjamin “understand[s] photography […] as a language of translation that hinges on the literalization of figures, objects and things in the everyday historical world. Thus, as readers of Benjamin’s essay, we move from photographs that resemble clouds and that form a constellation of images around which Benjamin discusses his key notion of aura to photographs that are like words, and which form a second constellation of images around which he discusses his no less important notion of allegory. In fact, the essay tracks a movement from looking to reading photographs. In its relationship with language, photography does not operate through realism alone but can also be understood to function through a connotative force. According to Barthes, it is the connotative dimension of photography that inspires and gives meaning to the medium:

Une grammaire de la photo est impossible, parce que, dans la photo, il n’y a pas de discontinu (de signes); tout au plus pourrions-nous établir un lexique des signifiés de connotation […] Si nous voulons vraiment parler de la photographie à un niveau sérieux, il faut la mettre en rapport avec la mort. C’est vrai que la photo est un témoin, mais un témoin de ce qui n’est plus. […] Chaque acte de lecture d’une photo […] chaque acte de capture et de lecture d’une photo est implicitement, d’une façon refoulée, un contact avec

ce qui n’est plus, c’est-à-dire avec la mort [...] la photographie: comme une énigme fascinante et funèbre. 308

For Barthes, the meaning of photography is intricately connected with death. 309 This becomes especially pertinent in *Camera Lucida*, in which he makes explicit associations between photography and death:

Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. *Life/Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print. With the Photograph, we enter into *flat death*. 310

In his discussion on photography in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes links his description of death to the theater:

If Photography seems to me closer to the Theater, it is by way of a singular intermediary (and perhaps I am the only one who sees it): by way of Death. We know the original relation of the theater and the cult of the Dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead: the whitened bust of the totemic theater, the man with the painted face in the Chinese theater, the rice-paste makeup of the Indian Katha-Kali, the Japanese No mask… Now it is this same relation which I find in the Photograph; however “lifelike” we strive to make it (and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mythic denial of an apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead. 311

In Japan, the storytelling and acting in the Noh Theater are highly deliberate and symbolic. The actors, who use very little props, wear masks and use specific gestures that are only

309 The view of the photographic image as a representation of death is a subject that is discussed at length by a number of specialists of photography. Similar to Barthes, Susan Sontag links photography to death when she refers to all photographs as “memento mori”; “To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.” (*On Photography*, p.15). Liz Wells elaborates on Sontag’s argument when she writes about the power of the photographic image to render a living body immobile: “Photography renders the living immobile, frozen: the living person photographed may subsequently die, but remains preserved in the photograph.” (*Photography: a critical introduction*, p.189). See also Linda Haverty Rugg who describes photography as a form of cenotaph: “Photographs […] could be imagined as cenotaphs, for they indicated through them presence what is no longer here (*Picturing ourselves: Photography & Autobiography*, p.26).
comprehensible within the context of the Noh Theater. What is especially important about the
Noh Theater is that it is an extremely complex, highly visual production that carries important
symbolic and cultural significance. By comparing photography to a theatrical performance, one
that is closely affiliated with death, Barthes approaches the discussion on the photographed
subject in terms of an anticipated “return of the dead”\(^\text{312}\):

> Ultimately, according to Barthes’s reading, photography links up with an older
> representational form, theatre, to share the universal relay, death. Photography is said to
> be a ‘denatured theatre’, a scene from which ‘death cannot ‘be contemplated, ’ reflected
> and interiorized’; [...] Photography, in this sense, promises the foreclosure of Aristotelian
> aesthetics, that is, the denial of the reconstitution of Self, of the wholeness of Subject, of
> the self-sufficiency of representation. Barthes makes this especially clear in dwelling on
> photography’s role as a medium of autobiography. Discussing his own photographic
> portraiture, he reflects on his discomfort with the artistic medium to which he is
> compellingly drawn.\(^\text{313}\)

Barthes is able to turn the gaze towards himself in \textit{Camera Lucida} and offers a new perspective
on the photographic image as a performance of death. The notion of death allows Barthes to
assign meaning to the photographic image as a performance:

> Like performance or theatre, photographs focus seeing and attention in a certain way. Just
> as performances are set apart as non-ordinary activities, so photographs are apart,
> separated from the flow of life; they are of other times and other places. Performances,
> like photographs, embody meaning through signifying properties, and are deliberate,
> conscious efforts to represent, to say something about something.\(^\text{314}\)

The performative aspects of the photographic image become an important aspect in our study on
autobiography; understanding photography as a performance will allow us to shift our analysis
on the illustrated autobiographical narratives of Sophie Calle and Roland Barthes from a
documentary approach to a more sophisticated and nuanced use of photography in the
construction of identity narratives.

\(^{313}\) Timothy Murray. \textit{Like on film: ideological fantasy on screen, camera, and canvas}, p.67.
1.5.1 Photography as Performance

At first glance, an irreconcilable contradiction between the nature of photography and performance seems to exist. [...] In spite of these differences, for the entire history of performance, photography has been its faithful companion (or, rather, its shadow) and has provided the only evidence of its ephemeral existence.\(^{315}\)

Diane Neumaier suggests that although it would seem contradictory to introduce performance as a topic in discussions on photography, both photography and performance are concepts that could very easily be analyzed within the same framework. It may even seem strange to include the topic of performance within the study of literature since performances most commonly allude to live theatrical productions in which individuals tell a story through physical gestures and movements. Nevertheless, it is quite possible to speak of performance within the context of a literary work, even if that literary work only uses photographs as source material. Photographs have performative qualities. And within the framework of a literary text, especially in the case of the personal narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle, photographic images can interact with the written material to forge innovative models of performative writing. Anne Marsh bridges the gap between photography and performance when she writes about photography as a medium of performance. She states that “photography is a performative representational practice that has aspects in common with the theatre.”\(^{316}\)

In the scope of our study on photography, our aim is to move away from the documentary function of the photographic image to explore the different ways in which a photograph is able to carry meaning within a literary text. Peggy Phelan takes a first step at moving the photograph

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\(^{315}\) Diane Neumaier. *Beyond memory: Society nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art*, p.91.

\(^{316}\) Anne Marsh. *The Darkroom: Photography and the theatre of desire*, p.49. Peggy Phelan also states that “all [...] photography is fundamentally performative.” (*Unmarked: the politics of performance*, p.35).
away from its commitment to reality when she assigns a performative function to the photograph: “The performative nature of […] photography complicates the traditional claims of the camera to reproduce an authentic ‘real’. Champions of photography at the turn of the century praised the camera for capturing nature so adequately that photography made art ‘the same’ as nature.”

Since photography lends itself to a subjective interpretation of reality, the act of picture taking points to the photographer as an artist of sorts and to the photograph as the artist’s subjective point of view: “There are certain factors crucial to the nature of the photographic image which are wholly determined by the photographer, regarding which he or she has to make a conscious, artistic decision, which makes photography a creative process controlled by the photographer.” The image then becomes the vehicle through which the photographer is able to express himself creatively:

Parmi les tendances actuelles, on peut distinguer deux grands courants: les photographes pour lesquels l’image est un moyen d’exprimer, à travers leurs propres sentiments, les préoccupations de notre temps. Ils se sentent concernés par les problèmes humains et sociaux, ce sont des engagés. Pour d’autres la photographie est un moyen de réaliser leurs aspirations artistiques personnelles.

Despite the photographer’s involvement in the photograph’s creative processes, the interpretation of the image is ultimately left to the spectator; it is only through the gaze of the viewer that the photographic image becomes an object of contemplation and a site of meaning:

318 Akane Kawakami. *A self-conscious art: Patrick Modiano’s Postmodern fictions*, p.61. Leszek Brogowski compares the photographer to the artist when he writes about the photographic act as an artistic practice: “L’apparition de la photographie a provoqué un trouble profond dans la culture artistique: les peintres imitaient les photographes pour prouver qu’ils étaient capables de faire aussi bien qu’eux, et les photographes imitaient les peintres pour prouver que la photographie était un art.” (p.145). Since the photographer has become a sort of artist in his representation of reality, he is presented from a subjective point of view: “Progressivement, parfois subrepticement, mais aujourd’hui plus que jamais, la photographie est tirée vers une *esthétisation* et une dramatisation, qui l’éloignent de son ambition initiale consistant qu’à n’être qu’une trace de la réalité, et l’approchent de cette autre ambition, pendant longtemps désignée comme ‘photographie artistique’ (sic !), consistant à faire de la photographie une matière plastique malléable, et de ce fait incapable de simplement et objectivement refléter le monde et ses événements.” (“Zola fuit hic le documentaire: dispositif photographique, dispositif littéraire,” p.145).
Seeing is one of the major modes of receiving information about the world, but even though seeing has often been aligned with believing, the belief or interpretation received from the image field is always a matter of the subject’s perception and interpretation. This, in turn, may alter depending on the cultural, social or political perspective of the viewer and his or her knowledge about the image transmission in terms of representation.  

Each viewer interprets an image based on his or her own knowledge of the world. Just like no two photographers will take the same photograph of the same scene of reality, no two spectators will interpret the same photograph in the exact same way. An awareness of the different levels of subjectivity that underpin the practice and the study of photography will allow us to better understand how the photographic image functions performatively within the space of the written text. Although it is a topic that remains largely unexplored in the field of literary studies, the photograph’s interaction with the written text has the capacity to produce a narrative that could be described as performative. In our analysis of Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical texts, we will be taking particular note of the different ways in which photography is introduced into the narrative space to create examples of performative writing. When they are integrated into the written text, photographs perform, but they perform in a different way than the written text; through word and image relations, the photographs do more than illustrate the accompanying text; the images interact with the written material to produce what Diane Neumaier refers to as a “conceptual performance”:

The contemplative character of conceptualist works bring to the forefront various forms of documentation such as photography […] As a rule, for the conceptualists, such secondary materials serve […] only as points of departure in the unfolding of the chain of intellectual events, which take place in the consciousness of the spectator. […] In conceptual performances documentation acquire[s] a special meaning, frequently turning into an independent form of art. All conceptual performances are oriented in one way or another toward documentation – the juxtaposition of an action unfolding in physical space and time, and the immediate experience of the event with its symbolic (visual or textual) reflections. In many performances the photographs do not document the event

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but rather served as an invitation to the spectator to take part in a speculative ‘action-game.’ Instead of reminding the spectator of the event, photographs [are] there to delineate the trajectory along which the consciousness of the spectator becomes involved in an original speculative performance.\footnote{Diane Neumaier. Beyond memory: Society nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art, p.92.}

The idea of involving the viewer in a speculative “action-game” is particularly relevant in the illustrated autobiographical narratives of Calle, in which the artist photographs her conceptual art installations and includes the images in her texts. In this regard, the artist documents “real-life” art installations and reconceptualizes these performances into a book format. On the other hand, the notion of a “conceptual performance” could also easily apply to Barthes’s autobiography, but in a completely different way. Barthes is by no means a photographer and does not take his own photographs. The images he includes in his text are images he chooses to show to his readers from a repertoire of photographs that he has assembled over the years. The performative value of the text could be discussed on an imaginary level. Barthes does not engage in “real-life” performances. Instead, he writes a conceptual text in the sense that it stages and performs the intellectual and ideological orientations of the author strictly through interplays between word and image relations; Barthes’s autobiography is performative in the way that it engages its problematics through the self-reflexive construction of the text and the purposeful juxtaposition of ideas with photographic images:

Many conceptual works are built on revealing the linguistic constructions in the basis of the seen, and on revealing the (now always obvious) links between how and what we see and language that dictates to the consciousness its norms and perception. Conceptual performance also frequently investigates this interrelationship. Proper comprehension of many of the photographism conceptual performances requires the existence of a special context – a textual commentary, a literary history, a theme – that exists only on the level of language.\footnote{Diane Neumaier. Beyond memory: Society nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art, p.98.}
We will further explore the performative aspects of Barthes’s and Calle’s texts within the chapters dedicated to their autobiographical prose; in these chapters we will address the interactive and often performative dimension that is evoked through word and image relations.

2 Word and Image Relations: The use of Photography in Autobiographical Writing

2.1 Word and Image Relations in Literature

As we have already suggested, photographic images play an important role in the construction of identity in the personal narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle. The photographic images interact with and are an essential part of the narrative structure of each of our authors’ texts. Liliane Louvel writes that the introduction of photographic images in a literary text engages a “co-presence of two systems of representation.” When writing about the role that the photographic image plays in literature, Philippe Ortel alludes to the relationship that exists between the written text and the images in terms of a “double system of reference”:

Le livre illustré dote d’abord le texte et l’image d’un double système de référence, l’un manifeste, l’autre implicite. Chaque type de signe renvoie par nature à l’univers fictif ou réel qu’il est naturellement chargé de représenter, mais aussi discrètement à son partenaire dans le dispositif du livre, que la relation entre eux soit de redondance ou d’écart.

For some excellent studies on the relationship between verbal and visual modes of representation, see: (Béguin-Verbrugge, Annette. Images en texte, images du texte: dispositifs graphiques et communication écrite); (Brunet, François. Photography and literature); (David Cunningham. Photography and literature in the twentieth century); (Rosalind Silvester and Alan English. Reading images and seeing words); (Alex Hughes. Phototextualities: intersections of photography and narrative); (Liliane Louvel, Jean-Pierre Montier and Philippe Ortel. Littérature et photographie); (Philippe Ortel. La littérature à l’ère de la photographie: enquête sur une révolution invisible); (Jérôme Thélot. Les inventions littéraires de la photographie); (Megan Rowley Williams. Through the negative: the photographic image & the written word in nineteenth-century American literature).


Philippe Ortel. La littérature à l’ère de la photographie: enquête sur une révolution invisible, p.19. In his description of “a double system of reference” in word and image relations, Philippe Ortel seems to follow Barthes’s example on the paradoxical rapport that exists between the denoted and connoted messages of photography. Ortel uses the terms “a manifest message” (in the place of the denoted message) and “an implicit message” (in the place of the connoted message) to describe this relationship.
Whether the relationship between the written text and visual images is one of redundancy or of difference, it is nevertheless mediated by a strong interaction between the explicit and implicit connections that are made. W.J.T Mitchell writes about this “co-presence” in the literary text in terms of a discursive or narrative suturing of the verbal and the visual:

The normal structure of this kind of image-text involves the straightforward discursive or narrative suturing of the verbal and visual: texts explain, narrate, describe, label, speak for (or to) the photographs; photographs illustrate, exemplify, clarify, ground, and document the text.\footnote{326}{W.J.T Mitchell. \textit{Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation}, p.94.}

When considering the relationship between the verbal and the visual, Philippe Dubois notes that images, more specifically photographs, do not signify in and of themselves, but rely on external sources of meaning: “Les photos, à proprement parler, n’ont guère de signification en elles-mêmes: leur sens leur est extérieur, il est essentiellement déterminé par leur rapport effectif à [...] leur situation d’énonciation.”\footnote{327}{Philippe Dubois. \textit{L’acte photographique et autres essais}, p.48.} Based on Dubois’s remark on the photograph’s reliance on its situation of enunciation to convey meaning, we could say that “the structure of the photograph is not an isolated structure; it is in communication with at least one other structure, namely the text.”\footnote{328}{Roland Barthes. \textit{“The Photographic Message,”} p.195.} To account for the interaction that occurs between verbal and visual modes of expression in literature, Ortel suggests that some significant effects arise from this relationship: “Du jeu réglé du texte et de l’image surgissent des effets qu’on ne trouverait ni dans l’un ni dans l’autre pris séparément. Le dispositif photo-littéraire est devenu un moyen d’expression à part entière.”\footnote{329}{Philippe Ortel. \textit{La littérature à l’ère de la photographie: enquête sur une révolution invisible}, p.17.} According to Ortel, when text and image are combined, they forge a distinct form of expression: “(ce rapport entre le texte et l’image) décrit un type d’organisation dans lequel les
éléments gardent leurs particularités tout en collaborant à une fin unique.”

Louvel shares Ortel’s perspective regarding the collaborative relationship that exists between the text and the image when she writes about the tension that is created by their interaction: “l’oscillation qui effectue le battement entre image et langage représente un va-et-vient fécond, […] elle produit une tension, un écart, semblable à celui des figures situées entre signifié et signifiant.”

The “copresence” of these two modes of expression creates an undercurrent of tension that is best understood in terms of a “paradox,” according to Barthes: “The […] paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the analogue), the other with a code (the “art,” or the treatment of the “writing,” or the rhetoric, of the [image]).”

The comments made by Ortel and Louvel correspond to the problematics of the text/image interface: Far from representing independent modes of expression, when placed in a book, images interact with writing to create meaning in the text when those images are placed in a book. Nevertheless, the interaction between words and images also engages conflicting perspectives. It is in this manner that the encounter between the “verbal” and “visual” forms of expression engenders various difficulties in the construction of meaning in a text:

Overall, there is a high degree of complementarity between text and photo (image): the photo basically illustrates the text or can be seen as a revelation of the text, in the same way as the text may be viewed as a revelation, or possibly an expression of the photo. However, within this complementarity, there are instances where text and photo fulfill opposite functions: the photo (unlike the text) can show hidden meaning, the ‘unalterable,’ the ‘unformulated’ or ‘unformulatable’ and is, in this sense, close to the unconscious; the text is however conscious expression which can also describe visually unrepresentable or unshowable elements such as context, or indeed anything outside the confines of the photographic frame.

The word and image interaction could pose certain challenges to the interpretation of a literary text; the co-presence of two distinct systems of representation could serve to complicate the act of reading and destabilize meaning in the text. The written text conveys meaning through linguistic signs, whereas visual images transmit a message through iconic signs. To emphasize the complexity of word and image relations within the space of the literary text, Ortel attaches particular importance to the role of the reader in the construction of meaning. He implicates the reader in this interaction between the text and the image, since it is the reader who, based on his reading of the text, creates and reveals the meaning of the text:

Les signes textuels et iconiques se médiatisent en effet partiellement dans l’esprit du lecteur une fois qu’il a mémorisé les images et qu’il s’est immergé dans le récit. Quand la lecture s’approfondit, chaque système sémiotique se transforme en outil interprétatif, capable d’agir sur son partenaire. En termes peirciens, chacun devient un interprétant pour l’autre, ce qui veut dire qu’une fois intérieurisés et devenus des objets mentaux, textes et images échangent un certain nombre de leurs composantes respectives.

The interplay between text and image forms a coherent narrative in the mind of the reader. For the reader, words provide necessary information about the images and the pictures illustrate and reflect the events described in the text. When words and images collaborate mutually in the space of a literary text, they are dependent on the intellectual capacities, the cognitive strategies, the imagination, and the cultural context of the reader. When words and images are integrated into a particular framework, such as in the context of personal writing, they are interpreted in a certain way. In our study on word and image relations, in particular between photography and autobiography, the text-image dialogue serves to raise questions concerning the representation of identity.

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334 On this subject see Annette Beguin-Verbrugge: “L’image a sa place dans le discours. Elle est traversée par le flux du discours; elle fait corps avec le texte; elle se noue à la parole, s’amalgame à elle dans la construction mentale du lecteur.” (Images en texte, Images du texte: Dispositifs graphiques et communication écrite, p.28).

335 Philippe Ortel. La littérature à l’ère de la photographie: enquête sur une révolution invisible, p.20.
2.2 Word and Image Relations: Photography and Autobiography

In our brief study on the introduction of photographic images within the context of autobiographical writing, it is important to note that although these two systems are quite distinct in their presentation of reality, they are similar in their interpretative approaches to this same reality. Thus these two modes of expression are closely intertwined in their representation of the world. In the context of autobiographical writing, photography applies the same theoretical approaches to the representation of reality: Retrospection, which is a condition of autobiography, is also an important element of photography in its representation of the world. For this reason, in the context of autobiographical writing, the retrospective character of the photographic image, in its representation of the personal experience of its author, forces us to throw a retrospective glance on the author’s personal history. Regarding the collaboration between photography and autobiography, other themes intersect: Photography and autobiography are analyzed from a theoretical framework in which concepts such as truth, authenticity, memory, and alterity are emphasized to guide the interpretation of past events. As a result, photography faces the same problem as autobiography as an objective and faithful representation of the world. In this regard, the collaboration between photography and autobiography reveals the self-referential and self-reflexive character of both modes of representation: “Autobiographical texts and photographs express a consciousness of the problem of referring to the self in language and image.” In the context of our study, an integrated vision of photography and autobiographical writing, in a role

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336 See also Timothy Dow Adams, who writes about the self-referential character of the text-image relationship: “Both media are increasingly self-conscious, and combining them may intensify rather than reduce the complexity and ambiguity of each taken separately.” (Light writing & life writing: photography in autobiography, p.xxi).

337 Linda Haverty Rugg. Picturing ourselves: Photography and Autobiography, p.2. See also François Brunet, who writes about the use of photography within literature for its transformative properties: “Many signs suggest that photography, or at least some prominent branches of it, have indeed managed to espouse literature, while much literature has increasingly turned to photography for the renewal of its sources and forms – to the point of producing a hybrid, a ‘photo-literature’ or ‘photo-textuality’ concerned primarily with the exploration of its own structures and practices.” (Photography and Literature, p.11).
of complementarity, allows us to deepen our knowledge of these two modes of expression and our understanding of the dynamic relationship of exchange and mutuality which exists between these two systems of representation. Our main objective is to analyze how the introduction of photographic images in autobiographical texts, in particular Barthes’s and Calle’s narratives, serve to question the representation of identity in verbal and visual modes of expression. As with other writers (Brossard, Leiris, Loti, Ernaux, Guibert) it is evident that the introduction of photographic images within Barthes’s and Calle’s life narratives adds a layer of complexity to the analysis of their texts.

2.2.1 Word and Image Relations in the Construction of the Autobiographical Subject

As affirmed by Timothy Dow Adams, photography and autobiography share the same remarkable power to provide an authentic and reliable testimonial of the reality that they represent: “Autobiography and photography are commonly read as though operating in some stronger ontological world than their counterparts, fiction and painting, despite both logic and a history of scholarly attempts that seem to have proven otherwise.” According to Danièle Méaux, within the space of the retrospective narrative, photography is recognized as a piece of testimony: “Dans certains récits rétrospectifs, la photographie est présentée comme pièce à

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conviction, label d’authenticité ou encore source d’informations sur le passé.”

As Nicolas Fève explains, both photography and autobiography are referential modes of expression: “L’image photographique et l’autobiographie relèvent toutes les deux d’un genre référentiel.” Since it holds a special relationship with reality, the autobiographical text could be compared to the photographic image in its portrayal of the world. In this respect, within the context of personal writing, verbal and visual signs collaborate to communicate the author’s personal experiences: “les images et les textes, qui introduisent dans le registre de l’intime, se donnent comme traces d’une expérience; la solidarité qui existe entre la photographie et le vécu est nettement affirmée.” Within the context of intimate writing, the photograph illustrates the personal experiences of the book’s author: Since photography is “an emanation of [...] reality,” in the context of life writing, it serves to document the presence of “a real body.”

As Linda Haverty Rugg suggests, the photographic image attests to the author’s presence in the text: “The integration of photographs into the autobiographical act highlights the presence of the author’s body and seems to claim the body as the source and focus of the autobiographical text.” As a “visual metaphor” of the author’s body in the text, the photographic image seems to attest to the anthropomorphic character of the autobiographical subject: “Photographs as physical evidence re-anchor the subject in the physical world, insist on the verifiable presence of

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341 Nicolas Fève. “Rhétorique de la photographie dans l’autobiographie contemporaine: *Des Histoires vraies* de Sophie Calle,” p.157. See also Timothy Dow Adam’s argument that photographs act as supplements to a text: “The commonsense view would be that photography operates as a visual supplement (illustration) and a corroboration (verification) or the text – that photographs may help to establish, or at least reinforce, autobiography’s referential dimension.” (*Light writing & life writing: photography in autobiography*, p.xxi).
an embodied and solid individual.”\textsuperscript{346} It is through the representation of the photographic image that the author’s self is emphasized in the text and that the written text constitutes a public document that lends itself to a multitude of interpretations: “Images can represent the most intimate expression of ourselves – our body, the self normally exposed only to those whom we see and/or know – and images allow the escape of our private or guarded public sphere into the unguarded public.”\textsuperscript{347} By using the photographic image to illustrate identity in the text, the author reveals himself the most to his reader-spectator. For the reader of an autobiography, photography is the most immediate access to the autobiography of another person:

Photographs may be the closest we get to another’s autobiography. The photographic collections we leave when we die are approximations of the life story that remains typically unwritten. And because in our life we view them through our eye and our I, Photographs that have significance for us are often autobiographical, although often they are those in which this is not conscious to us […] photographs are closer to life as it is lived.\textsuperscript{348}

It is therefore in its exact representation of the identity and experience of an individual that the photographic act compares to the autobiographical act in its representation of the personal story of an individual: “The photographic act is an autobiographical one.”\textsuperscript{349} Nevertheless, both autobiography and photography use different strategies in their presentation of the personal experiences of an individual. As a result, the relationship between photography and autobiography serves to challenge the “exact” representation of an individual’s life story.

\textsuperscript{348} Jay Prosser. \textit{Light in the Dark Room: photography and loss}, p.8-9.
\textsuperscript{349} Akane Kawakami. “‘Un coup de foudre photographique’: autobiography and photography in Hervé Guibert,” p.212.
2.2.2 Photography as a Transformation of Lived Experience in Autobiographical Writing.

If we were to analyze photography and autobiography only as sister arts, our study of these two modes of expression would be limited. As Marie-Dominique Garnier eloquently explains, it is equally important to study the differences between photography and the written text:

S’il est possible d’établir certains parallèles entre le texte et l’image, les choses semblent se situer à un plan qui dépasse l’analogique. C’est de façon indirecte, détournée, dans l’écart, qu’il faut chercher en quoi le texte [...] [est] influencé par la pratique photographique.  

As Timothy Dow Adams affirms, photography and autobiography both represent modes of expression that are far more complex and dynamic than simple analogical arts: “What I have often described as autobiography’s most salient feature – an attempt at reconciling authors’ sense of self with their lives through an art that simultaneously reveals and conceals – is at the heart of the photographic act as well.”  

Thus, the introduction of photographic images in the autobiographical narrative complicates the representation of identity in the text: “Les photographies se conjuguent au texte pour construire des formes narratives complexes, oscillant entre autobiographies et fictions.”

Photography and autobiography represent complex modes of expression that not only represent reality as it is, but also transform it: “L’autobiographie, bien sûr, est omniprésente tant […] précisément comme la photographie elle ‘articule de manière complexe’ ancrage dans le réel et ouverture à l’imaginaire.”

It is for this reason that the convergence of both disciplines within our thesis renders our study more complex. When they

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are combined within the space of the same text, the similarities shared between photography and autobiography question the relationship of these two modes in their representation of reality:

Lorsqu’ils sont confrontés, textes et photographies produisent parfois incongruités, décalages ou incompatibilités. La première des structures paradoxales à mentionner se développe dans la rhétorique de la présence et de l’attestation de vérité déployée de manière massive dans l’ensemble de discours qui accompagnent l’invention de la photographie et ses premières décennies d’existence.  

As an analogical art, photography seems to contradict the analogy frequently employed by autobiographical narratives. Since the photographic image constitutes a paradox in its representation of the world, when it is paired with autobiography in a complementary role, it serves to compare and illustrate the complex structures of autobiography in its representation of reality:

Photography may stimulate, inspire, or seem to document autobiography; it may also confound verbal narrative. Conversely, autobiography may mediate on, stimulate, or even take the form of photography. In my view, text and image complement, rather than supplement, each other; since reference is not secure in either, neither can compensate for lack of stability in the other. Because both media are located on the border between fact and fiction, they often undercut just as easily as they reinforce each other.  

Thus, in their collaboration with the personal narrative, photographic images serve to illustrate the fundamental problems of conventional autobiography as an objective and realistic form of representation; within the context of autobiographical writing, the photographic images bring alternative perspectives to the traditional view of the genre: “L’image photographique dans l’autobiographie soulève des enjeux très variés.” As Nicolas Fève affirms, as subjective modes of expression, photography and autobiography collaborate to articulate the challenges of constructing identity in personal writing: “La question de l’image photographique dans le texte

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autobiographique soulève le problème du ‘pacte’ pour reprendre l’expression de Lejeune. Ce problème se trouve à deux niveaux différents [...] au niveau du texte et au niveau du corpus des photos.”

Similar to photography, the autobiographical narrative refers to something that is outside of its field of reference and it is for this reason that it is compared to a subjective phenomenon:

Autobiography, like photography, refers to something beyond itself; namely, the autobiographical or photographed subject. But both autobiography and photography participate in a system of signs that we have learned to read – at one level – as highly indeterminate and unreliable. Below that level of doubt rests, in some persons, the desire to accept the image or the text as a readable reference to a (once-) living person. The insertion of photography (either as object or metaphor) into an autobiographical text can thus cut both ways. On the one hand, photographs disrupt the singularity of the autobiographical pact by pointing to a plurality of selves. [...] On the other hand, photographs in an autobiographical context also insist on something material, the embodied subject, the unification (to recall the autobiographical pact) of author, name, and body.

In its subjective representation of the world, a photographic image can offer many perspectives on an object. Within the context of autobiographical writing, photographs offer several perspectives on a single person: “Photographs, which can display many views and variant versions of the same person, simply supply a visual metaphor for the divided and multiple (“decentered”) self.” Since photographic images present several versions of the same person within the context of an autobiographical narrative, they challenge the pact as defined by Philippe Lejeune: “The presence of photographs in autobiography [...] offers a visualization of

357 Fève, Nicolas “Rhétorique de la photographie dans l’autobiographie contemporaine: Des Histoires vraies de Sophie Calle,” p.158.
359 Linda Haverty Rugg. Picturing ourselves: Photography & Autobiography, p.1. On this subject, see also Silvester and English: “Generally, photography can be seen as constituting the image-equivalent of autobiography in that it too records the events of a given moment; but in abstracting discrete elements of time and space from a more complex whole, the photo represents not a unitary self, but a fragmented and even disoriented one.” (Reading Images and Seeing Words, p.12).
the decentered, culturally constructed self. Since both photography and autobiography are problematic in their representation of reality, it is in their collaboration that photography and autobiography articulate identity as a complex phenomenon that is defined by multiple and often contradictory ideologies:

Photographs and text sit uneasily together, as one can never encompass the other. The photograph can never fully represent the text, just as the text can never exhaust all the image says, hence the decision by some autobiographers to leave out the photographs. The two do not come together in synthesis, there is always some kind of tension between them. So, even when dealing with the most referential of art forms, the autobiographer has constantly to deal with the complex relationship between the autobiographical process and fiction.

As it has already been noted, the photographic image stands in as the author’s anthropomorphic self in the autobiographical narrative. However, as Susan Sontag explains, the photographic image can also be interpreted in terms of an absence: “A photograph is both a pseudo presence and a token of absence.” Sontag’s remark recalls Barthes’s comments in Camera Lucida. By referring to the “noeme That-has-been”, Barthes describes the photograph as a testament of absence; he explains that “what the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially.” Barthes continues to explain that, in photography, he “can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past.” It is in this respect that Linda Haverty Rugg describes the relationship between photography and autobiography in terms of a

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paradox, which is the simultaneous experience of the absence and the presence of a particular subject:

Autobiographical texts and photographs likewise indicate both an absence (of the body) and a presence (of life); they announce life in the midst of death as much as they anticipate death in the midst of life. They mark the place from which the autobiography came, even as they attest to the absence of the autobiographer.\footnote{366}{Linda Haverty Rugg. \textit{Picturing ourselves: Photography \& Autobiography}, p.27.}

As Margherita Leoni-Figini proposes in her analysis of \textit{Camera Lucida}, Barthes believes the referent is present in the image but absent in reality: “Le référent […] est toujours là dans l’image et pourtant absent dans la réalité. La photographie produit donc un paradoxe, car elle pose d’un même mouvement l’absence et la présence passée d’un même objet. Ce passé introduit le rapport au temps qui est central dans la photographie.”\footnote{367}{Margherita Leoni-Figini. “Roland Barthes,” p.16.} Referring to the temporal dimension of “that has been,” the photographic image shows an object that, immobilized by the camera in a specific moment in time, is no longer an accurate representation of reality, but rather a representation that is exclusive to the photographic image. By refusing to talk about the photographic act as a simple reproduction of the world around us, Walton argues against the analysis of the photographic image as an analogous representation of reality: “There is no such illusion. Only in the most exotic circumstances would one mistake a photograph for the objects photographed. The flatness of photographs, their frames, the walls on which they are hung are virtually always obvious and unmistakable.”\footnote{368}{Kendall L Walton. “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,” p.249.} Since photography is no longer just a “copy” of reality, but an “emanation of past reality,”\footnote{369}{Roland Barthes. \textit{Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography}, p.88-89.} in the context of autobiographical writing, photography serves to illustrate the referential dilemma that exists in autobiographical writing.\footnote{370}{See Timothy Dow Adams, who writes about the shared problematics between autobiography and photography: “A consideration of photography within life writing is a uniquely valuable way to look at the referential dilemma...”} Similar to the photographic image,
the autobiographical text refers to temporal processes, namely, it is often described as a retrospective narrative. At first, it appears that the person who writes an autobiography intends to describe his life story exactly as it occurred. However, in contemporary models of autobiographical writing, autobiographers can distort reality through the use of discursive and narrative strategies deployed in the text. For this reason, contemporary autobiography breaks with the reality that it intends to represent. Assigning a double function to the memorial dimension of photography and autobiography permits each mode of expression to become a renewal of its conception of the mirror: “The mere presence of photography challenges traditional forms of autobiographical narrative by calling into question essential assumptions about the nature of referentiality, time, history, and selfhood.” The dialogue between photography and autobiography brings together two modes of expression to present identity as a phenomenon that is contextual and negotiated within a set of interactive processes:

Another function of photographs, both actual and metaphorical, is their reference to remembering, which is a bringing of the past into the present moment. All photographs (even Polaroids) represent past time and stand in the present as a link to the past. In that way, photographs also represent the physical (or, at least, metaphorically physical) principle of reintegration in autobiography and photography: subject and object, self and other, body and voice.

In the autobiographical narratives privileged in our study, photography serves to illustrate the problem of the singular identity of the subject in personal writing.

from another point of view. However, the history of referentiality in photography has run almost a parallel course to autobiography’s.” (Light writing & life writing: photography in autobiography, p.xvi).

371 On the subject of the memorial dimension of autobiography and photography, see Linda Haverty Rugg: “In the autobiographies of authors living during the photographic era, photography becomes an obvious metaphor for memory. The process of remembering and the subsequent inscription of the memory, both essential to the autobiographical act, find a perfect image in the photograph.” (Picturing ourselves: Photography & Autobiography, p.23).


2.2.3 Word and Image Relations in the Autobiographical Narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle

In the autobiographical narratives that will be analyzed in our study, the relationship between text and image plays a major role in the construction of the autobiographical subject. In the narratives of Roland Barthes and Sophie Calle, photography interacts with language to finally present the author’s self as a marker of difference. Both Barthes and Calle attest to an acute awareness of the paradoxical nature of the referential status of the photographic act and of autobiographical writing. By introducing visual images in their narratives, both Barthes and Calle are involved in the animation of two distinct debates: The first is oriented towards the instance when visual images enter the autobiographical act to strengthen the referential status of the autobiographical subject; the second is oriented towards the instance when the visual images accompany the life narrative to question the referential status of the autobiographical subject.

The photographic images in the narratives of Barthes and Calle have three functions: to question the referentiality of the autobiographical text, to challenge the autobiographical canon and then to renew the autobiographical genre. It is through the text-image relations in their life narratives that Barthes and Calle force us to rethink the very definition of autobiography, and thereafter, to change our perspective on the traditional model of self representation. The main objective of our thesis on word and image relations is to assign an innovative character to the life narratives of Barthes and Calle. It is through their manipulation of visual and verbal phenomena that Barthes and Calle are able to forge complex links between text and image that transcend the boundaries of autobiographical writing to express identity as a cultural and artistic phenomenon. Thus, an interdisciplinary study provides us with the means to locate the narrative strategies involved in the construction of the autobiographical subject in Barthes’s and Calle’s narratives. In our study on autobiography, photography enacts the same problems regarding the representation of
objective and subjective realities. In our chapters devoted to Barthes and Calle, we will attempt to show that photographs are much more than simple illustrative or neutral sources of information when placed in a book; in these autobiographies, photography interacts with the narrative structure to highlight the negotiations and the tensions that exist between historical accuracy and authorial invention.
Figure 1: Hippolyte Bayard’s *Autoportrait en noyé*
Chapter 3
Self as literature/literature as self in
Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes

La littérature n’est qu’un lieu de passage, un champ d’expérience, dont la justification est de nous aider à vivre, à établir des rapports plus justes avec le monde et avec nos semblables. La critique littéraire débouche ainsi hors littérature, dans la vision d’une “réalité supérieure” qui n’est pas emprisonnée dans les textes littéraires eux-mêmes, mais qui est la finalité à laquelle tous les grands textes se subordonnent.374

In 1975 Roland Barthes published Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, a text that would later be recognized as his autobiography. During this time, autobiography theory was just gaining in popularity in academic circles, and theorists such as Georges May and Philippe Lejeune were just being acknowledged for their roles in developing a theoretical framework for the genre. The autobiographical narratives of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Les confessions), André Gide (Si le grain ne meurt), François René de Chateaubriand (Mémoires de ma vie and Mémoires d’outre-tombe), Georges Perec (W ou le souvenir d’enfance), and St. Augustine (Confessions) were among the works that had inspired theorists such as May and Lejeune to create a theoretical model for classifying the genre. With the establishment of autobiography, examples of self-representation that were using unconventional methods of writing were beginning to emerge. Theorists of autobiography identified this rising number of experimental personal narratives as a “new wave of autobiographical writing.”375 One critic, Fabien Arribert-Narce, associated the

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374 Jean Starobinski. Table d’orientation, p.116.
375 For a detailed explanation of what is described as a “new wave of autobiography” see Phillip Holden, who speaks of this new wave more in terms of the recent change in autobiography criticism: “Now a third wave of autobiography criticism challenges the concept of a unified, sovereign subject” that founds “Western” narratives of progress and reason. If the “unitary self of liberal humanism” still has power in a new millennium, Smith and Watson suggest, it is increasingly being challenged by […] narratives that resist, and that emphasize different kinds of subjectivity – performative, community-based, or flexible selves. This new wave of autobiography criticism, then,
publication of Barthes’s personal narrative with a new form of writing in French literature, especially in the field of autobiographical writing:

The publication of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* in 1975 […] opened a new era in French literature. The books, both of which combine photographs and texts in an original attempt at self-representation, deeply influenced French critics and writers of the time. Hervé Guibert’s *L’image fantôme* (*Ghost Image*) published in 1981 and Marguerite Duras’s *L’Amant* (*The Lover*) from 1984 followed directly in Barthes’s footsteps. This corpus of works using photographs in an autobiographical context has continued to increase since this period.376

*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* continues to be cited by critics as being at the forefront of a new wave of autobiographical writing that emerges in the 1970s. At the time of its publication, the writing strategies used in Barthes’s book had not been previously acknowledged by theorists as typical features of autobiography. Shortly after its publication, many of the elements found in Barthes’s personal narrative were increasingly being used in the life narratives of other influential writers. As a result, the limits of autobiography were being pushed in new directions. A few examples of the personal narratives that had incorporated elements from Barthes’s autobiography were Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Le miroir qui revient* in 1985, Nathalie Sarraute’s *Enfance* in 1983, Hélène Cixous’s *Photos de racines* in 1994, Sophie Calle’s *Doubles jeux* in 1998, and Annie Ernaux’s *L’Usage de la photo* in 2005. The various approaches presented by these authors in their autobiographies, and that find their origins in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, include the use of fragments to disrupt the narrative sequence (Sarraute), the incorporation of fictional elements in the storytelling process (Robbe-Grillet, Duras, Calle), and the introduction of photographic images in the narrative (Duras, Ernaux, Cixous, Calle).

drawing on the apparatus of contemporary literary theory – in particular poststructuralist, postcolonial, and feminist readings – is very much in line with a concomitant expansion in practices of life writing.” (*Autobiography and Decolonization: Modernity, Masculinity, and the Nation State*, p.39).

Although *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* differs in content and presentation from the privileged list of texts that had been dubbed by critics as the “classics” of autobiography and that have helped anchor personal writing within a particular discursive and generic framework, it has managed to secure for itself a prominent place within autobiography theory. Philippe Lejeune acknowledges Barthes’s text as a classic piece of writing in its own right and views it as contributing to studies on autobiography: “Barthes’s self-portrait will probably remain a classic example for studying [identity] problems. He sought maximum flexibility for fear of being trapped.” The recognition of new styles of writing within the genre of autobiography serves to “complicate and enrich the generic possibilities of life-writing practices.” As Paul Jay explains, Barthes’s book highlights the issues of identity in autobiographical writing:

[Barthes’s] book constitutes a kind of ‘autobiography’ that in fact explodes the form of autobiography itself, since Barthes is written into his text as a disappropriated subject in a way that radically (and appropriately) deconstructs its very shape. A modern text like Barthes’s however, does not necessarily, as Michael Sprinker has suggested, constitute the ‘end’ of autobiography, since people will no doubt continue to write quite traditional ones. But it is a representation of a particular end to which it has come. As puzzling as its literary form and its ideas about writing and subjectivity may be, *Roland Barthes*, in its self-consciousness about its self-reflexivity, simply foregrounds and makes explicit problems and questions that have had a presence in autobiographical works since Augustine.

*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, along with other contemporary models of life writing, not only emphasize the problems associated with representing identity in literature, but are representative of the shifting notions of identity in the West: “These writers have fashioned their autobiographical works under the influence of changing ideas about the self and its literary

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377 As we have already outlined in our chapter on autobiography, the practice of autobiographical writing has been defined within specific guidelines. Please refer to our chapter on autobiography for a more detailed explanation.
representation.” As it was suggested in our study of autobiography, autobiography is a mode of writing that documents the changing perspectives on identity in society. Barthes’s unique writing style was considered to be more symptomatic of the social issues that arose in the West during the 1960s and 1970s than a mere act of rebellion. The social and political movements that marked the 60s and the 70s had created new opportunities for self-expression, self-awareness, personal growth, and change in ways that were not previously experienced in the West and from individuals who did not have an authoritative voice in society. These social movements have been instrumental in providing a context for new modes of expression; terms such as Postmodernism (Jean-François Lyotard), Deconstructionism (Jacques Derrida, *De la grammaïologie*, 1967), Post Structuralism (Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva), Feminism (Julia Kristeva, Bracha Ettinger, Simone de Beauvoir) began to emerge in academic criticism to describe new strategies of meaning in literature.

Although Barthes is often associated with these terms, our objective is not to restrict our study to a particular movement or school of thought in academic thinking. Instead, our aim is to analyze *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* with the ultimate goal of identifying and outlining the

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383 Steve Richards suggests that with the movements of the late 60’s and early 70’s came liberal attitudes and more freedom for the individual. He writes that the social movements of the 60’s resulted in a decade of changes in different aspects of culture, which would seem to suggest that crucial changes were taking place until early 80’s: “A convergence of cultural, political, and social upheaval marked the 1960’s, resulting in a decade of unprecedented change […] The emergence of a counter-culture and the social revolution that followed brought liberal attitudes, demands for greater individual freedoms, and the desire to break free from traditional societal norms. The generation that grew up during the 60’s rebelled against post WWII conservative values and is best remembered for the resulting hippie and drug cultures, the sexual revolution, the anti-war movement, radical student lead protests, and the demand for more freedoms for women and minorities.” (*Listen to the Music: The Words you Don’t Hear When you Listen to the Music*, p.17).
different strategies used in the text to raise important questions on the representation of identity and its relationship to culture and literature.

In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Barthes’s focus is primarily on the practice of self-representation. As Lejeune explains, it is through the model of autobiography that Barthes is able to present the practice of life writing as a form of critical thinking and writing:

He sought maximum flexibility for fear of being trapped […] This work of self-criticism is one volume in a series whose precise nature is ambiguous, for the compiler usually pieces together a collection of passages to form a picture of ‘X written by himself.’ But the self-portrait thus formed is subordinated to the critical presentation also contained in the text. What happens if the author ‘himself’ slips into the role of critic? Barthes tries it. He rereads his own works, pencil in hand, observing and revising, trying to escape the weight of the ‘I.’

Barthes’s personal narrative provides a fascinating look at the representation of identity from the vantage point of critical theory. In the context of our present study on *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, our general strategy is to focus on Barthes’s narrative as a performative model of critical writing, in which the traditional and binary conceptions often called upon in the study of photography and autobiography are confronted: public/private, fact/fiction, reality/imagination, present/past, individual/collective, and traditional/contemporary modes of representation.

1 Reading *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: The Division of our Analysis

To establish Barthes’s autobiographical narrative as a model of performative writing, we will divide our chapter into five main parts. In each of these parts, the aim will be to examine the various elements underlying the performative dimension of Barthes’s text. In the first part of this

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chapter entitled “Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes” in the ‘Écrivains de toujours’ collection,” we will discuss the circumstances that influenced the writing of Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes to add some context to Barthes’s personal narrative. In the second part of our chapter entitled “Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes: the anti-autobiographical narrative,” we will provide a general introduction to the text, which will include a few remarks on the difficulty critics have had with classifying it as an autobiography. In the third part of our chapter entitled “Barthes’s Personal Photographs: the family without familialism in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes,” we will examine the role that Barthes’s personal photographs play in the interpretation of his text. In the fourth part of our chapter, entitled “Relationships of intertextuality in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes,” we will examine how Barthes uses his photographs to stage other important relationships in the narrative; the social relationships illustrated in the images are translated in the written text through intertextual relationships. In part five of this chapter, entitled “Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes: autobiographical writing as a critical performance of Barthes’s identity as writer and critic,” we will consider how relationships of intratextuality become vital components in the construction and interpretation of Barthes’s autobiographical subject. Our reading of Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes as a performative text plays an essential role in linking our chapter on Barthes to our analysis of Sophie Calle’s autobiographical writing. Although both authors take different approaches to performative writing, both incorporate word and image relations in their autobiographical practices. To link Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes to a performative style of writing, we must first understand how Barthes constructs his text and how the various elements of its construction encourage us to interpret the ideas and values contained within it as performative.

In order to present the autobiographical subject as a phenomenon that is strictly constructed and performed through writing, Barthes combines words and images in his narrative
as a strategy to transcend the parameters of autobiography. Steven Ungar explains how one of Barthes’s goals in his text is to develop personal writing outside the framework of autobiography: “With the turn toward a view of writing as excess, Barthes’s critical vision is clearly paradoxical, opposed to the canons of a structural practice, where one of the tenets of that practice was to stay within the text. Barthes expresses a tacit rejection by looking for a way out.”

Barthes’s desire to situate identity outside the framework of autobiography is primarily what links our two studies on Barthes and Calle. As we will see in our chapter on Calle, she – like Barthes – situates her autobiographical subject outside the traditional framework of autobiography through performance art practices. Although Barthes shares in Calle’s desire to expand the boundaries of autobiographical writing, he does so by remaining within the confines of the written text. Calle removes personal writing from the textual frame to project identity into the social realm as the product of social interactions and relationships with others. Barthes takes a completely different approach by devoting his autobiographical project exclusively to the processes of writing. While Calle’s approach to autobiography is centered on her identity as a performance artist, Barthes’s approach is defined by his role as a French intellectual for whom writing constitutes a powerful source of self-identification. One area in which both Barthes and Calle take similar approaches to their practices of self-representation is through the introduction of photography into their practices of life writing.

1.1 Words and Images in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes

Word and image relations constitute an important element in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes. Having been one of the earlier autobiographers to introduce photographic images into his text, Barthes has also inspired other writers to incorporate images in their autobiographical

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In our study on Barthes, we will not only examine how words collaborate with images to provide a framework for the analysis of identity in Barthes’s autobiography, but we will also take into account how the verbal and visual connections suggest other significant relationships in the text, in particular intratextual and intertextual relations. Our study on the word and image relationships in Barthes’s autobiography will be structured using three concepts which are fundamental to the narrative and discursive form of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: intratextual relationships, intertextual relationships, and performative writing.

### 1.2 Intertextuality/Intratextuality as Forms of Self-writing in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

The objective of our analysis on *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is to demonstrate how the various relationships established within Barthes’s text collaborate to frame the autobiographical subject as a product of writing that is bound by the writing processes that inform it and its complex relationships with the author’s everyday life. Intertextual and intratextual relationships are introduced in Barthes’s text to present the personal narrative as an open dialogue with other texts. The different examples of writing that are introduced in Barthes’s text illustrate his conception of autobiographical writing (as well as other forms of writing) as a dynamic exchange between the writer and his reader, a space in which multiple texts meet, converge, overlap, and contradict one another. The relationships created in the text expose the autobiographical subject not as a solitary construction that is focused solely on singularity, but

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386 Paul Jay explains that the use of photography in autobiography has increased significantly since the publication of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: “Photography has manifested its influence on literary works since its creation in the 19th century, either praised or despised by the authors referring to it. In the contemporary period, its presence has strengthened more particularly in the novelistic field and in autobiographies [...] *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* [...] deeply influenced French critics and writers of the time. [The] corpus of works using photographs in an autobiographical context has continued to increase since this period.” (*Being in the Text: Self-representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes*, p.49).

387 Please note that the term “intratextual” (intertextuality) is used interchangeably with the word “autotextual” (autotextuality).
more as a relational phenomenon that is mediated through complex processes of alterity. This relates back to the argument presented in our chapter on autobiography, in which we refer to Smith and Watson’s description of the autobiographical narrative as a complex relationship between language and its social context. For Barthes, the intertextual relationships introduced in his autobiographical narrative reflect important strategies used by the author to stage the writing processes involved in the construction of the autobiographical subject as a performance of the author’s social and linguistic context.

### 1.3 The Intertextual Subject

Through the concept of intertextuality, Barthes introduces authors such as Proust, Marx, Gide, Balzac, Zola, etc., into his narrative framework. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the introduction of “iconic” figures from various research fields, such as Sade, Freud, Brecht, and Pasolini, serve to illustrate Barthes’s autobiographical writing as a cultural act. Every reference to the various figures implies very specific ideologies in Barthes’s narrative. Through the numerous cultural references he makes in his text, Barthes brings intratextuality, intertextuality, and performative writing together as strategies in his practice of self-writing. The various fragments of ideas, concepts and themes introduced into the text through intertextual relationships depict the various social and cultural influences that inform the development of Barthes’s own ideas on literature and writing. They also act to present his autobiographical subject as multiple and fragmented.

### 1.4 The Intratextual Subject

The fragmentary character of Barthes’s text is even more relevant when he introduces fragments of titles, themes, ideas, etc., from some of his own critical works into his autobiographical narrative. Intratextual relationships come into Barthes’s text to perform the
author’s personal ideological convictions as a vital component in the representation of his identity. The introduction of Barthes’s own literary corpus within the autobiographical text serves as a metaphor for the fragmentation of his own body (of work) within the context of writing.

1.5 The Autobiographical Subject as a Cultural Performance

Our analysis on the performative aspects of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* will attempt to illustrate how Barthes constructs his personal identity in his text through the complex staging of his personal ideology – depicted primarily through the introduction of his own critical works and essays into the text. The different visual and textual strategies used in his personal narrative contribute to the innovative and performative elements of his autobiographical writing. Even in the current critical climate, performativity in autobiography is a fairly innovative concept – a concept that was clearly used by Barthes decades ahead of his time. In order to consider the role that the various relationships in the text play in the presentation of Barthes’s autobiography as a performative text, our analysis of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* will take an interdisciplinary approach; to consider the complex layers that are revealed in his narrative, we will call upon the theories of autobiography, the family album, intertextuality, and intratextuality throughout our analysis. The interdisciplinary approach adopted in this chapter will highlight Barthes as a trailblazer who introduces new methods of analysis in the study of contemporary autobiography, even 40 years after it has been written. Our analysis on *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* will begin with a study on the book’s inclusion in the collection “Les Écrivains de toujours.”
Although not many critics have gone into detail about the literary context in which *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is framed – as a book belonging to a collection written by a variety of well-established writers – it becomes a crucial element in understanding the way in which *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is constructed and the way in which Barthes wanted it to be read. *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is part of a collection that was begun in 1951 by Paul Flamand, editor of Éditions du Seuil, under the title “Les Écrivains de toujours.” Flamand initially entrusted Albert Béguin, the Swiss critic and scholar, to oversee the collection: “Paul Flamand lui suggérant de se charger de la collection de poche consacrée aux grands écrivains dont il rêvait et à laquelle le patronage de Béguin assurerait le prestige souhaité.” Béguin supervised the series until he was succeeded by Francis Jeanson. In 1955, Monique Nathan took over as head of the collection, and shortly after, Denis Roche took control. Headed by several different individuals over the years, the collection maintained its overall integrity, with the exception of a few minor changes. In a biography he writes on Flamand, author Jean Lacouture provides a brief description of the “Écrivains de toujours” collection and its contents under the direction of Béguin:

Comme le directeur du Seuil, le grand essayiste, vit d’emblée qu’il s’agissait, non de mettre les grands écrivains à la portée intellectuelle et commerciale du grand public mais, face à la tradition analytique sorbonnarde, de rendre aux ‘Écrivains de toujours’ une vie de contemporains. Le projet tendait à mettre le plus grand monde en communication directe avec le génie, par l’entremise d’un homme de culture vivante. Opération de médiation, de greffe, de mise à jour? Et pour que les choses soient plus claires – après tout, Albert Béguin était aussi un pontife couvert de lauriers –, Paul choisit de lui adjoindre un bouillant franc-tueur, ce Francis Jeanson qui ne craignait pas d’agiter la maison de rue Jacob et dont l’esprit de rébellion allait se manifester de façon plus

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périlleuse qu’en dessinant des moustaches sur le visage de la Marquise de Sévigné. Mais l’accord donné par Béguin à cette collaboration n’eut pas beaucoup de conséquences, la mort de Mounier l’appelant à la direction d’Esprit, qu’il assuma aussi pleinement que chacun l’espérait. Si bien qu’en ayant patronné l’idée, Albert Béguin ne fut guère associé à la création et du développement d’‘Écrivains de toujours’ qu’en tant qu’auteur du très beau Pascal.  

As Lacouteur’s description reveals, the series was aimed at making the great writers of literature more accessible to the public through the intervention of contemporary writers. Mireille Ribière provides a more detailed description of the nature of the project:

‘Écrivains de toujours’ was an illustrated, pocket-sized series aimed at a wide readership, which had proven extremely successful since its launch in 1951. The originality of the series rested on the fact that it consisted of a biographical essay and a thematic overview of the work of the writer under scrutiny, illustrated by extensive extracts from their work, hence the subtitle ‘par lui-même’ (by himself).

The collection takes on a biographical dimension as each book is written about a classic literary figure by a well-known contemporary writer. In the monthly journal Biblio, the following description is given for the biographical project that is undertaken in the “Écrivains de toujours” series:

En établissant pour ainsi dire un dialogue entre l’écrivain considéré dans sa propre vie et ce qu’il exprime ou traduit de lui-même par le truchement de ses personnages, cette nouvelle et très originale collection nous permet de connaître, comme par une véritable imprégnation, l’auteur – ‘l’auteur de toujours,’ assuré de la survie littéraire – auquel est consacré chaque volume. Le lecteur l’accompagne et le comprend, en revivant avec lui ses souvenirs personnels et en voyant se préciser sous ses yeux les significations maîtresses de son œuvre. Le choix des écrivains et celui de leurs présentations montrent que cette collection s’ouvre à tous les courants intellectuels, spirituels et philosophiques de la culture française.

391 See Jean Lacouture who speaks about aesthetic presentation of the collection to make it more accessible to the public: “Jusqu’alors, la réduction du format de poche d’un ouvrage connu, rendu facile à manier, peu coûteux, était considérée comme une opération de conservation ou de vulgarisation commode, à but essentiellement lucratif. Une correction apportée au coût de l’opération culturelle qu’est l’achat d’un livre. Petit format, bon marché: tout était dit, et les pontifes fermaient les yeux.” (Paul Flamand, éditeur. p.112).
393 This excerpt from Biblio was taken from Fabula’s web page. (Debaene, Vincent. “Atelier de théorie littéraire: La collection ‘Écrivains de toujours’ (1951-1981),” n.p.).
What is particularly interesting about the collection is that images become an important part of
the project’s agenda. Word and images come together in the various texts belonging to the
collection to document the life story of the featured author. The first five books of the series
appear in the summer of 1951 and are devoted to Colette, Victor Hugo, Flaubert, Stendhal, and
Montaigne. True to the project’s original purpose, each of these books on the giants of French
literature includes a second author in the organization and presentation of the written text and in
the compilation of images: The text and images in *Victor Hugo par lui-même* are presented by
Henri Guillemin, a well-known French historian and literary critic; The written text and the
images in *Stendhal par lui-même* are presented by Claude Roy, a French poet and essayist; the
written text and images in *Montaigne par lui-même* are presented by Francis Jeanson, a French
philosopher and one of the directors of the “Écrivains de Toujours” series; the written text and
images in *Flaubert par lui-même* are presented by Jean de la Varende, a French writer and
biographer; the written text and images in *Colette par elle-même* are introduced by Germaine
Beaumont, a French journalist and novelist, and assembled by André Parinaud, also a writer and
journalist. At the time that the “Écrivains de Toujours” collection was published, literary figures
such as Victor Hugo, Stendhal, Montaigne, and Flaubert had already passed away and obviously

394 Fabula’s website provides a detailed description of the decision to include images in the “Écrivains de toujours”
collection: “La forme originale du titre (qui prête à toutes sortes de malentendus, d’où une indexation assez
chaotique dans les catalogues bibliographiques) est la suivante: ‘‘X par lui-même’. Images et textes présentés par
Y’. Il arrive que le sous-titre varie légèrement (ainsi le Saint-Exupéry par lui-même est-il sous-titré ‘essai illustré de
Luc Estang’). Chaque ouvrage compte 192 pages. Sauf cas particulier (par exemple, Sartre par lui-même en 1955),
la composition est la suivante: une notice bibliographique, une présentation des grands thèmes de l’œuvre, un choix
de textes (précédés chacun d’une notice), et une bibliographie. […] À sa maquette […] outre le portrait de l’écrivain
qui figure en couverture, les ouvrages de la collection comportent de nombreuses illustrations d’une qualité
inhabituelle pour des livres d’aussi petite taille et présentées selon une mise en page originale, voire audacieuse.
Mais plus encore que la présentation de ces illustrations, c’est leur nature même qui donne à la collection son
identité: sont privilégiées les reproductions de manuscrits, les documents souvent privés, parfois les dessins signés
de l’auteur. Les photographies de famille ou les clichés des lieux de l’enfance créent un sentiment d’intimité et de
proximité avec “l’écrivain de toujours”, encouragé par la lecture sensible, voire amoureuse, que les commentateurs
proposent des œuvres, refusant le plus souvent explicitement la glose savante.” (Debaene, Vincent. “Atelier de

could not add input to the “par lui-même” series. Nevertheless, some authors such as Colette, who became the subject for one of the volumes in the collection, were still living when their biographical accounts were being written and were in the position to add details and photographic images to their biographies.\(^{395}\) The collaboration between the subject of each volume of the “par lui-même” series and his or her biographer was not a fortuitous one. Many of the writers who were chosen to pen the stories of other famous authors in the collection shared some connection with the author they were writing about. For instance, Germaine Beaumont, the woman who wrote the “par elle-même” volume on Colette was a close and personal friend of hers. In 1956, Seuil decided to group the “Écrivains de toujours” series into a larger collection of books under the title “Microcosme.” The direction that the collection took during this new phase of the project’s development tended to have a greater focus on word and image relations and on the author’s ability to exercise more creative freedom in writing the text.\(^{396}\)

The description of the “Écrivains de toujours” project was then revised and the following presentation for this sub-category of books within the “Microcosme” collection was provided:

Origine […] l’idée en revenait à Albert Béguin qui rêvait de livres associant étroitement l’image et le texte. Dans les livres de vulgarisation, c’était une manière de révolution; on


\(^{396}\) Fabula’s website provides a description of the word and image dialogue in the “Écrivains de toujours” project under its new title ‘Microcosme’: “L’image devient dramatique, le texte et l’illustration s’imbriquent, se heurtent, entretiennent un dialogue, en bref deviennent les éléments d’un montage comme dans un film […] un format pratique, un texte court, à la fois sérieux et léger, une grande liberté laissée à l’auteur pour exprimer sa personnalité: telles sont les vertus de ‘Microcosme.’” (Debaene, Vincent. “Atelier de théorie littéraire: La collection ‘Écrivains de toujours’ (1951-1981),” n.p.).
accordait à des livres de bon marché, destinés au grand public, des soins d’ordinaire réservés aux ouvrages de prix […] 

L’esprit de la collection: portrait d’un écrivain pour lequel le critique demande l’aide de l’écrivain lui-même. Malraux, par exemple, a annoté le texte de Gaëtan Picon qui lui était consacré. Dans tous les cas, une importante patrie anthologique justifie le sous-titre, “écrivain par lui-même.”

Signes particuliers: on s’efforce d’équilibrer les parutions concernant les classiques et les auteurs contemporains, français et étrangers, en attendant d’aborder très prochainement l’antiquité grecque et romaine […] 

Les auteurs: les rencontres ne sont pas fortuites: La Varende est du même pays que Flaubert, Claude Roy aime bien Stendhal, et Laclos aurait aimé Vaillant. Béguin fut l’amie Bernanos et Jeanson a été celui de Sartre.

Les grands succès: Saint Exupéry, Malraux, Bernanos, et Sartre. La curiosité du public va de préférence aux contemporains. 397

As Vincent Debaene explains in his description, the “Écrivains de toujours” project had undergone some changes throughout the years; in 1975, the collection, originally centred on French culture, had broadened its subject matter to include other writers: The collection featured writers in areas such as philosophy and antiquity, as well as authors outside the scope of French literature, such as William Shakespeare (no. 22), Goethe (no. 27), Tchekhov (no. 30), and Virginia Woolf (no. 35). Among the extensive list of writers who are featured in the collection are Pascal (no. 6), Zola (no.7), Giradoux (no. 8), Baudelaire (no.9), Montesquieu (no.10), Proust (no.11), Malraux (no.12), Diderot (no.13), Mauriac (no.14), Saint-Simon (no.15), Laclos (no.16), Montherlant (no.17), Corneille (no.18), Michelet (no.19), Apollinaire (no.20), etc. The collection came to an end in 1981, with the publication of the last book Racine par lui-même, written by Jean-Louis Backès. In the 30 years since the collection began, 106 books were published under the “Écrivains de toujours” label.

397 This excerpt from Gilles Lapouge and Maurice Barrois. “Collections de notre temps: Microcosme,” n.p. was quoted on Fabula’s Website. (Debaene, Vincent. “Atelier de théorie littéraire: La collection ‘Écrivains de toujours’ (1951-1981),” n.p.).
Among the large number of volumes belonging to the collection was *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (no. 96). When considering Barthes’s text, it is important to mention that Barthes does not make his debut in the series with his book on himself: Volume number 19 of the collection, *Michelet par lui-même*, was published several years prior to *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and was also written by Barthes. In this respect, Barthes’s first experience with the “par lui-même” series is not through *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, but via his role as biographer in *Michelet par lui-même*, which was published 21 years earlier, in 1954. When discussing the volume that Barthes writes on Michelet, Ribière explains that prior to the publication of *Michelet par lui-même*, Michelet was an author who had interested Barthes for many years and on whom Barthes collected many notes as far back as his school years. According to Ribière, “for many years, Barthes’s readers did not quite know what to make of his obvious fascination for Michelet – the only writer whose work he claimed to have read in its entirety.” And although this book, “which was after all a biography of sorts, seemed so much at odds with Barthes’s concerns that it was considered as quite apart from the main thrust of his thinking,” it became an important source of reference and a key to understanding Barthes’s ideas on himself in the same series entitled *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. “*Michelet par lui-même* came to be considered a key to the late Barthes, and perhaps one of his most important

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398 Mireille Ribière explains that Barthes had studied Michelet for several years prior to writing the book: “The Michelet project had begun […] as a collection of approximately 1,000 index cards carrying observations and quotations. When Barthes was commissioned by Éditions du Seuil to write a book on Michelet for their ‘Écrivains de toujours’ series, all he needed to do was to decide on an appropriate order for these notes and elaborate on them […] Barthes obediently adhered to the overall format of the series, but his approach to his subject was somewhat novel. The forward warns the reader that, contrary to expectations, ‘the book is not offering an overview of Michelet’s thought and life, and still less an explanation of the former by the latter.’ Instead it focused on those themes – words and images – that are repeated throughout Michelet’s prolific and diverse œuvre in order to try and recover, through a kind of Psycho-sexual approach, ‘the structure’ of Michelet’s existence, or ‘better still an organised network of obsessions.’” (“Barthes – The Early Years,” p.3.).


Whether *Michelet par lui-même* is one of Barthes’s most important books, is debatable. However, what is interesting about Ribière’s explanation of it is that it provides keys to understanding Barthes’s later writings. Barthes’s *Michelet* incorporates a series of narrative strategies that are also used in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: “On the formal side, a rejection of the linear approach afforded by chronology in favour of the fragment, and from the thematic point of view, an emphasis on the link between writing and the body, between literary imagination and corporeal experience.” In *Michelet par lui-même*, like later in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, fragments are used by Barthes to present various biographical aspects in a way that resists both the traditional approach taken by authors writing in the series and who preceded Barthes’s *Michelet*, and the approach taken by other writers who had undertaken and theorized the biographical genre. Rather than present a conventional biography, Barthes develops a narrative that merges elements from Michelet’s professional and personal life in a way that is creative and highly characteristic of Barthes’s own practice of confounding critical works and personal writing in his later works: *La Chambre claire, Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. The introductory paragraph of *Michelet par lui-même* opens with a denial of the biographical nature of the text:

> Le lecteur ne trouvera dans ce petit livre ni une histoire de la pensée de Michelet ni une histoire de sa vie, encore moins une explication de l’une par l’autre.

> Que l’œuvre de Michelet, comme tout objet de la critique, soit en définitive le produit d’une histoire, j’en suis bien convaincu. Mais il y a un ordre des tâches: il faut d’abord rendre à cet homme sa cohérence. Tel a été mon dessein: retrouver la structure d’une existence (je ne dis pas d’une vie), une thématique, si l’on veut, ou mieux encore: un réseau organisé d’obsessions. Viennent ensuite les critiques véritables, historiens ou psychanalystes (freudiens, bachelardiens ou existentiels), ceci n’est qu’une pré-critique: je n’ai cherché qu’à décrire une unité, et non à en explorer les racines dans l’histoire ou dans la biographie.

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Quant aux illustrations, je les ai conçues en fonction de l’homme, et fort peu en fonction de sa vie ou de son temps. J’ai donné à peu près tous les visages de Michelet, et pour le reste, m’autorisant de l’espèce de regard passionné dont il a interrogé tout objet historique, j’ai choisi librement quelques pièces de ce que pouvait être le ‘musée imaginaire’ de Michelet. 

Barthes’s introduction becomes an anti-practice of sorts through its negation of Michelet’s biographical stance. This subverts the common practice of classic writers who often include an introductory statement in their texts to assert the generic properties of their writing. An example of this practice is provided in our chapter on autobiography where we discuss Montaigne’s note to the reader at the beginning of his essays. For the most part, Barthes follows the organizational structure imposed by the “Écrivains de toujours” project: similar to the way in which the other volumes of the collection are organized, in *Michelet par lui-même*, Barthes adds a chronological list with important dates in Michelet’s life at the beginning of the text, which is followed by the written narrative on Michelet, a supplementary chronology, end notes, and a final bibliography. Like other books in the collection, Barthes integrates images throughout the text. However, he tells us that the images reveal very little about Michelet’s life. Furthermore, he exercises a certain amount of freedom with respect to the content of his writing. From the very beginning, Barthes informs us that neither Michelet’s life story nor his thinking would be found in the pages to follow. Already in the introduction of his book on Michelet, Barthes tries to undermine the text’s biographical focus, which involves the expectation that Michelet’s personal details are the primary focus of the narrative. Instead, as Barthes’s introduction reveals, the featured author’s portrait is presented through a thematic or organized network of recurring ideas that Barthes refers to as “obsessions”; these ideas are divided into a series of fragments. Barthes’s approach in

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Michelet par lui-même becomes suggestive of the strategies found more extensively in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes.

When Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes was published in 1975, and Barthes stepped into the role of writer of the book to be written on himself, the interpretation of this self-referential text took on a very complex dimension within the context of the “Écrivains de toujours” collection to which it belongs. Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes is the only volume in the series that was written by and based on one and the same author. Timothy Scheie writes about the irony associated with writing the Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes for the series:

The irony of Barthes writing his own volume for this series blurs the line between writer and commentator, author and editor, object and subject, language and metalanguage, and further contributes to the multiple and fragmented images of Barthes that emerge in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes. 404

Similar to his approach in Michelet par lui-même, Barthes writes his autobiography as a form of criticism and he divides his written text into fragments. Overall, Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes follows the same general format of Michelet par lui-même. In both texts, Barthes incorporates word and image relations. Like in Michelet par lui-même, in which Barthes alludes to his album of photographs as a “musée imaginaire,” in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Barthes uses the same terminology, stating that the photographs “will never be anything but imaginary.” 405 Although Michelet par lui-même provides tools of interpretation in the reading of Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, in his autobiography, Barthes takes word and image relations to a whole new level by staging the photographs as a crucial aspect in the construction of meaning in the text. When considered within the scope of the “Écrivains de toujours” project,

404 Timothy Scheie. Performance Degree Zero, p.204.
405 The words used by Barthes in his autobiography are as follows: “Ce que je dirai de chaque image ne sera jamais qu’imaginaire.” (Roland Barthes. Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, p.7).
and when compared to *Michelet par lui-même* within the same series, Barthes comes back to the biographical project with his *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and presents a much more performative and innovative narrative, in which his own life experiences become the subject of writing.

### 3  *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: the Anti-Autobiographical Narrative

*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* has become an important text in autobiography studies and has generated great interest from critics in several academic disciplines in Europe and in North America. In the majority of these studies, critics have continued to express apprehension over labelling the text as an autobiography. The interpretations offered within the different studies on *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* have been as numerous as the articles that have been written on the book: Gerald Kennedy analyzes *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* as an autobiographical narrative; Michael Sheringham alludes to the text as a “new autobiography”; Françoise Gaillard describes Barthes’s narrative as a “biography,” whereas Ben Stoltzfus refers to it as “a fictography”; Anna Whiteside describes the book as an “anti-autobiography.” The various readings given by critics attest to the difficulty of assigning a single interpretation to the book.

When considering *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* within the scope of the “Écrivains de toujours” series, the book presents several challenges to the reader; as we have already

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mention, the primary focus of the collection was biographical and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* reads more like an autobiography.\(^{411}\) When sole consideration is given to the scope of the “Écrivains de toujours” project – in which the books belonging to the collection carry a biographical theme – the fact that Barthes writes a biography on himself, becomes a crucial element in the text’s interpretation. Is *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* a biography? Is it an autobiography? Or should it be read as a fictional text? What are the factors that play in determining whether Barthes’s text is auto-bio-graphical in nature or fictional? Is it important to assign a single genre to *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*? It is our contention that *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is a form of life writing in which Barthes undermines the practice of self-representation through a series of narrative techniques and strategies\(^{412}\): “[his] approach to writing autobiographically […] constitutes a kind of anti-practice.”\(^{413}\) Barthes took a very deliberate approach in the construction of his autobiographical text, and clearly wanted to create a specific context of meaning when writing his personal narrative. In order to understand how his text represents a deliberate effort to undermine self-referential writing, it could be analyzed with respect to its position within two main frameworks: First, within the context of the “Écrivains de toujours” collection; second, within its broader spectrum of autobiographical writing.

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\(^{411}\) Anna Myatt suggests that Barthes’s text has difficulty establishing an autobiographical pact with its reader: “*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is an autobiographical text: “Barthes’s autobiography, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, is in many senses an extraordinary work. From the very outset, the hand-written inscription inside the cover, ‘Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman’ seems to pose a direct challenge to those who hold any faith in a clear distinction between autobiography and other forms of writing, particularly those who look for the establishment of some sort of ‘autobiographical pact’ between the reader and the author.” (Myatt, Anna. “Roland Barthes: Role Play in Autobiography and Photography,” p.83).

\(^{412}\) As Fabien Arribert-Narce suggests, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* cannot be referred to as an autobiography in the traditional sense of the term because of Barthes’s critical view of the genre: “None of Barthes’s texts could be said to be an autobiography in the traditional sense of the term, despite his desire to express what we might call an autobiographical content. This is mainly because Barthes is very critical of this particular literary genre, which he refers to using the contemptuous expression ’[auto]biochronography.’ Like many other thinkers of his time (Blanchot, de Man, Derrida), he denounces the illusions involved in conventional autobiographical writing: this includes a referential illusion (that is to say, the illusion that a human life can follow something like a destiny and can have a meaning.” (“Roland Barthes’s Photobiographies: Towards an “Exemption from Meaning,”” p.240.

3.1 Barthes vs. The “Les Écrivains de toujours” collection

In part two of our chapter, we have discussed the predominantly biographical focus of the “Écrivains de toujours” series, as well as the format that was chosen for the collection. What is important to mention is that since the texts written within this series were written within specific guidelines, the collection developed its own canon. “Les Écrivains de toujours” restricted its selection of featured authors to the most celebrated social, cultural, and literary figures. Each volume respected a certain format: On the cover of most of the texts belonging to this series, is an image bearing the likeness of the author that is being featured in the book. Just inside the cover, is a handwritten sample taken from a page of the featured author’s own writing, followed by a photograph or illustration of the individual in question or a landscape that has an important significance to the writer. The narrative that follows is written in prose and outlines certain details related to the subject’s personal life and literary career. Scattered throughout the different volumes belonging to the collection are illustrations, caricatures, photographs, manuscript pages, correspondences, artwork, posters, advertisements, handwritten excerpts, journal entries, book excerpts, illustrated book covers, newspaper clippings and other visual supplements to document the details described in the written text. When compared to the other books belonging to the “Écrivains de toujours” collection, Barthes’s text stands out for several reasons. First, the “par lui-même” title chosen for the series differs from the one chosen by Barthes for his book. The title chosen for the collection is deceptive since it implies that the individual writing the text and the subject of the narrative are one and the same person. When Barthes wrote Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes for the series, he changed the “par lui-même” title to reflect the changing
focus of his own text within the collection. Already, with the title change, we make note of a significant reversal in the attribution of authorship within the series. With Barthes as the sole author of his personal narrative, he changes the format of the “X par lui-même” series – from a biographical project to an autobiographical project. The mirror effect created in the title of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* through the use of language recalls our discussion on life writing in our chapter on autobiography when we examine Georges Gusdorf’s characterization of the autobiographical narrative as “the mirror image of a life.” The title is used by Barthes to suggest that both the subject and the object of writing are represented by one and the same person.

One way in which *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is comparable to the other books published within the “Écrivains de toujours” collection, is that it is accompanied by images.

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414 Rachel Gabara credits Barthes for the title change: “*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* was published in 1975 by Les Éditions du Seuil in a series called ‘Écrivains de toujours.’ This series had until then consisted of titles of the format *X by Himself [par lui-même]* for this series in 1954. He knew the series well, then, and made a conscious choice to entitle his book *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* rather than *Roland Barthes par lui-même*, a fact forgotten or repressed by the striking number of critics who revert to the established title of the series when citing Barthes’s contribution to it. Another common error has been to refer to the book simply as *Roland Barthes*, a shorthand which omits the crucial repetition in the title. I insist on this since by calling the text *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* instead of *Roland Barthes by Himself* Barthes put into question the very possibility of the ‘par lui-même,’ of writing about ‘oneself.’ The placement of ‘by Roland Barthes’ within the title of the book highlights the question of authorship and its connection to the reflexive nature of autobiographical writing. The author of this text will be writing about the writer writing about the writer; the process of autobiography will be interrogated in the process of autobiography.” *(From Split to Screened Selves: French and Francophone Autobiography*, p.2-3).

415 The description of the autobiographical text as a mirror intends to emphasize the self-referential function of the genre. For a detailed discussion of this concept, see our chapter on autobiography.

416 At the beginning of his narrative, Barthes acknowledges the participation of some secondary figures in his writing project: “Je remercie les amis qui ont bien voulu m’aider dans la préparation de ce livre. “Jean-Louis Bouttes, Roland Havas, François Wahl, pour le texte.” He also identifies a few individuals as the photographers for a few of the images that he includes in his text: “Jacques Azanza, Youssef Baccouche, Isabelle Bardet, Alain Benchaya, Myriam de Ravignan, Denis Roche, pour les images.” At the end of his text, he also references other individuals (Roger Viollet, Carla Cerati, Jerry Bauer) and sources (postcards, Encyclopedias, Magazines) for his photographs. Many of the acknowledgements for the images are associated with photos taken of Barthes in his professional life. Whereas the images of his younger years remain uncredited, except for postcard snapshots (Bayonne) and encyclopaedic images (Captain Binger). It would be interesting to take a closer look at the relationships between the different individuals and/or sources involved in his selection of Barthes’s images and the influence that these collaborative relationships have on the construction of Barthes’s autobiographical subject in the text. (*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, p.4.).
Images play an important role in the construction of meaning in Barthes’s autobiographical narrative. The central role of the images introduced in the text is emphasized by the primary position that Barthes assigns to them:

The *Barthes* begins with 40 pages of annotated photos, a nostalgic review of Barthes’ prehistory and a visual staging of his past. Images are the dividend of pleasure which Barthes allows himself in order to keep scientific pretence at bay and regain contact with himself (“avec le ça de mon corps”).

However, we notice an important difference between Barthes’s text and the other volumes published within the “Écrivains de toujours” collection. In Barthes’s narrative, the majority of the images are presented at the beginning of the text, while in the other books the images are scattered throughout the text:

Voici, pour commencer, quelques images: elles sont la part du plaisir que l’auteur s’offre à lui-même en terminant son livre, ce plaisir est de fascination (et par là même assez égoïste). Je n’ai retenu que les images qui me sidèrent, sans que je sache pourquoi (cette ignorance est le propre de la fascination, et ce que je dirai de chaque image ne sera jamais qu’imaginaire).

Barthes tells his readers that the selection and presentation of his images at the beginning of the narrative reflect his own personal choices. Fabien Arribert-Narce explains that Barthes’s use of photographs in his project influence the interpretative processes of the narrative: “This project […] directly inspired by the characteristics of photography, renews considerably the codes and the rules of autobiography as a genre.”

Unlike the other books that belong to the “Écrivains de toujours” project, in which images are added to the text as mere supplements to the written text, in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the use of images is deliberate and plays an important role.

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418 Barthes also includes a small number of images within the written text.
role in the construction of meaning in the text. Through the word and image interplay, Barthes presents his autobiography as a critical commentary on self-referential writing practices.

4 Barthes’s Personal Photographs: the ‘family without familialism’ in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

It is important to acknowledge that Barthes has become one of the most influential critics on the study of photography theory and that many of his ideas can be applied to the interpretation of his autobiographical narrative. It is thanks to the theoretical contributions that Barthes and his contemporaries have made to the study of images that visual studies have become so important in various fields of academic inquiry. The photographic images in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* may at first appear irrelevant to the reading of the written text that follows. However, as we will demonstrate, they play an important role in this text. As we pointed out in our chapter on photography, the introduction of photographic images in a literary text engages a “co-presence of two systems of representation.” The introduction of photographic images is never gratuitous; photographs interact with and are an essential part of the narrative structure. In our analysis of the photographs introduced in Barthes’s text, our objective is to examine how these images create meaning in the text. Katharine Morseberger elaborates on Barthes’s decision to begin his

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421 Fabien Arribert-Narce states that the images become a crucial aspect in interpreting Barthes’s text: “If Barthes’s photobiographical project never took shape in a single volume, it constitutes nonetheless an invaluable reflection on the potentialities of photography as an autobiographical support. As such, Barthes’s project, whether unrealised or unrealisable, renews considerably the theory of autobiography, showing that […] this literary genre is not necessarily the realm of signification, linearity and unity (narrative). Barthes’s effort to base his attempt at self-expression on photography may only be one way to acknowledge the importance of photographs in personal writing, but it nonetheless constitutes an important intellectual and aesthetical move – a landmark as far as the autobiographical genre is concerned.” (“Roland Barthes’s Photobiographies: Towards an “Exemption from Meaning,” p.251.).

422 This is an expression used by Barthes in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

423 Among Barthes’s most influential writings on the image, in particular the photograph, are *La Chambre claire*, “Le message photographique,” and “La rhétorique de l’image.”

text with images: “Roland Barthes begins with its end. The images (mostly photographs of family, friends, and the author) at the beginning of the text are ‘the author’s treat to himself, for finishing the book.’” Barthes places the photographic images at the beginning of his autobiographical narrative as a pre-text, in both senses of the word, to introduce the concept of self into the writing process and to suggest a few strategies in its interpretation. At the beginning of his text, Barthes claims that the photographic images are an intrinsic part of his project and play an important role in the representation of his identity:

Embrassant tout le champ parental, l’imagerie agit comme un medium et me met en rapport avec le ‘ça’ de mon corps; elle suscite en moi une sorte de rêve obtus, dont les unités sont des dents, des cheveux, un nez, une maigreur, des jambes à longs bas, qui ne m’appartiennent pas sans pourtant appartenir à personne d’autre qu’à moi: me voici dès lors en état d’inquiétante familiarité: je vois la fissure du sujet (cela même dont il ne peut rien dire).

Barthes’s description of his images in terms of a “fissure in the subject” provides some insight into Barthes’s conception of himself: “Le ‘ça’ de mon corps”; “qui ne m’apartiennent pas”; “la fissure du sujet.” The photographs could also be interpreted as deconstructive tools with respect to the book’s interpretation. Fabien Arribert-Narce argues that Barthes’s use of photographic images can be seen as an attempt to change the conditions of autobiographical writing:

427 As mentioned in the pages above, “deconstruction” is a term that is originally associated with Jacques Derrida’s De la grammatologie. Derrida argues that “deconstruction” should be used as a strategy for all texts in which binary oppositions generate meaning – with the objective to deconstruct the meaning. As we have mentioned in our chapter on autobiography, autobiographical writing is articulated through binary oppositions: subjective/objective, individual/collective, public/private, etc. For an elaborate description of “deconstruction,” see Derrida’s De la grammatologie.
428 Martha Sturken suggests that photographs held a deconstructive value for Barthes: “Barthes influenced a broad range of work on the role of the photograph in depicting and producing the past as a means to deconstruct and as counter-memory.” (“Imaging Postmemory/Renegotiating History,” p.10.).
The use of photography changes the forms and the conditions of autobiographical expression. Indeed, grafted photographic bodies involve a tension between two forms of structure, the Narrative and the Album, and between two forms of reception, seeing and reading.\textsuperscript{429}

In our previous chapter on photography, we also allude to the role that photography plays within autobiographical texts; these images challenge traditional forms of autobiographical writing by calling into question assumptions about the nature of referentiality, time, history and selfhood.\textsuperscript{430}

The photographs in Barthes’s narrative are accompanied by captions, which are intended to orient the reader’s interpretation of his text. Through the collaboration between words and images, the family relations that are shown in the photographs point to other important relationships of affiliation in the written text. Before we begin our analysis of word and image interactions in Barthes’s narrative, we will take a closer look at the role that the images play within Barthes’s autobiographical text.

\section{4.1 Converging realities: The Role of Photography and Autobiography in the Construction of a Family Album}\textsuperscript{431}

Word and image interactions constitute the driving force behind the construction of identity in Barthes’s autobiographical narrative. Since Barthes includes family photographs at the beginning of his text, understanding what constitutes a family album becomes an important aspect in the interpretation of \textit{Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes}\.\textsuperscript{432} Kept in the possession of

\textsuperscript{430} See our chapter on photography for a discussion on the use of photography in autobiography and the challenges that it presents for the interpretation of identity.
\textsuperscript{431} Please note that parts of this section on the family album have been reproduced in an article that I have written and that was published in 2010. (Rosa Saverino. “Performances of Self: Becoming the family album in Rafael Goldchain’s \textit{I am My family}.”).
\textsuperscript{432} For theories on the Family album, see (Marianne Hirsch \textit{Family frames: photography, narrative, and postmemory}); (Yeon-Soo Kim, \textit{The Family Album: Histories, Subjectivities and Immigration in Contemporary Spanish Culture}); (Annette Kuhn, \textit{Family Secrets. Acts of Memory and Imagination}); (Martha Langford. \textit{Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums}).
the family it depicts, the family photo album has become a collective diary of sorts, in which visual memories – typically photographic – are preserved for posterity. The album stands as part of the family’s heritage through which memories and myths are exchanged and passed on from one generation to the next. The family album becomes the perfect medium through which to explore the issues of photography and autobiography, since it engages photographic images in acts of personal storytelling. Martha Langford explores the relationship that exists between words and images in the photo album: “The family album […] certainly satisfies the immense need for a story [le dit], which for lack of written documents [l’écrit] haunts each family. As Langford explains, words and images participate mutually in the articulation of identity in the family album: “The album functions as a pictorial aide-mémoire to recitation, to the telling of stories.” Irène Jonas compares the family album to a form of personal writing when she explains that family photographs are read through an autobiographical lens: “[L’album de famille] se lit […] essentiellement à travers un discours d’ordre autobiographique.” Since the family’s history is primarily told through photographic images in the album, its main function is to stage the family’s collective history as a single identity in this form of a pictorial

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433 Before the advent of digital photography, the photo album represents a common object in the homes of many middle class families. Anne-Marie Garat analyzes the important role that the family album plays in the preservation of the identity and collective history of these families: “Dans chaque maison, il y a au moins un livre, un roman: l’album des photographies de famille. Ces photographies d’anonymes, ces images sans qualité, je les collecte depuis longtemps, je les aime, elles m’émuevent. Elles ont fini par constituer mon album imaginaire, aux visages inconnus et familiers. Elles m’ont instruite sur ce que je cherche en écrivant, un certain rapport au monde et à sa représentation. Je voudrais que ce livre éclaire. Qu’il dise quelle lumière peut nous venir de ces images de rien, de ce roman de la vie ordinaire.” (Photos de famille, p.7.).

434 Martha Langford, Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums, p.5.

435 Martha Langford, Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums, p.5. Similar to Langford, Marianne Hirsh alludes to the narrative processes at work in the family album. Hirsch explains that “family pictures depend on such a narrative act of adoption that transforms rectangular pieces of cardboard into details containing lives and stories across continents and generations.” (Family frames: photography, narrative, and postmemory, p.xii.).

representation. At the same time, the family album becomes evidence of the individual’s ability to integrate himself within various spheres of social life. By capturing the various events and daily scenes of the family’s collective memory, “the family album amounts to an expression of identity” that is simultaneously the articulation of collective and individual experiences. In its visual representation of the various members of a family, the photo album represents the family unit as an intersubjective phenomenon. François Komoin explains how a family becomes the expression of a single identity: “la famille est définie, au sens large, comme un ensemble de personnes descendant d’un auteur commun et rattachées entre elles par le mariage et la filiation et au sens étroit, comme un groupe formé par les parents et leurs descendants.” As a social institution, the family is linked to a larger community; it participates in the traditions and formal conventions of society. The family is described both as “an individual, personal experience and also a social institution.”

The family is an affiliative group, and the affiliations that create it are constructed through various relational, cultural, and institutional processes – such as ‘looking’ and photography, for example. Families are shaped by individual responsiveness to the ideological pressures deployed by the familial gaze.

On the topic of the family’s integration into an album, see also Pierre Bourdieu, who describes the photographic camera as the family’s collective property: “l’appareil photographique est souvent la propriété indivise du groupe familial, on voit que la pratique photographique n’existe et ne subsiste la plupart du temps que par sa fonction familial, à savoir de solenniser et d’éterniser les grands moments de la vie familiale, bref, de renforcer l’intégration du groupe familial en réaffirmant le sentiment qu’il a de lui-même et de son unité.”

See also André Héraclio Do Rêgo who describes the family album as providing an image of integration for the individual: “[Dans l’album de famille], la photographie a pour fonction de réunifier et de recréer le groupe familial et de transmettre une image d’intégration, voire une image idéale de la famille […] En ce sens, on peut [y] observer une dimension interne et une dimension externe de la représentation de la famille. La première, associée aux fonctions de la mémoire et de l’intégration, se rapporte à la vie familiale en soi, avec son espace, ses temps forts et sa hiérarchisation. La seconde, associée aux fonctions de la communication et de la domination, est plus spécifiquement orientée vers la transmission et l’imposition d’une certaine image à la société.”

Martha Langford. p.95.


Paul Stephens and Andrew Leach, p.179.

The family album provides some insight into the representation of various individuals, who are connected through networks of kinship, and the relationships that these individuals have both as a group and with the world: “Family photographs are also socially constructed artefacts. They operate at the juncture of private life and public mythology, naturalizing both.”\textsuperscript{443} Thus the family album participates in the identification of certain family members within the family’s heritage, and serves to situate this group within a broader social context.\textsuperscript{444} As we previously mentioned in our chapter on photography, the photographic image is a mode of expression that is underpinned by social attitudes and values.\textsuperscript{445} Family photographs not only link the individual to a family, but are also a means of connecting a family to social values and rituals. According to Pierre Bourdieu, family photographs depict individuals as a social group: “Ce qui est photographié et ce qu’appréhende le lecteur de la photographie, ce ne sont pas, à proprement parler, des individus dans leur particularité singulière, mais des rôles sociaux […] ou des relations sociales.”\textsuperscript{446} Bourdieu is also careful to link family photographs to the portrayal of the

\textsuperscript{443} Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler. \textit{Pregnant Pictures} p.82.

\textsuperscript{444} Isac Chiva and Utz Jeggle explain that family photographs maintain family relationships, they reinforce the family's collective memory, and inscribe it within society through its participation in social rituals: “Les photographies surtout sont venues, à mesure que leur emploi se généralisent, prendre place à côté des emblèmes familiaux traditionnels, parfois même elles les remplacent. Portraits des aïeuls et des enfants, photos de solennités et des festivités qui jalonnent le déroulement de la vie de famille; ces photographies exposées en évidence sur les murs ou discrètement posées sur les meubles, ou soigneusement serrées dans l’album de famille, ont pour fonction ‘de théâsurier l’héritage familial’. Distribuées, échangées entre les membres de la parentèle, elles participent au maintien des relations de famille. Contemplées, commentées ‘en famille’, elles concourent, au même titre que les papiers de famille ou les objets hérités à l’insertion des nouveaux venus, au renforcement de la mémoire du groupe. Les usages sociaux auxquels la photographie a donné lieu contribuent donc de véritables rites de mémorisation et d’intégration à la famille.” (\textit{Ethnologies en miroir: La France et les pays de langue allemande}, p.106.).

\textsuperscript{445} In our chapter on photography, we discussed how looking at photographs plays an important role in the social dimension of the photographic image. As we mentioned in our study, Barthes distinguished between “looking at” and “seeing” photographs. See our chapter on photography for a more detailed description.

\textsuperscript{446} Pierre Bourdieu. \textit{Un art moyen}, p.45. See also André Héraclio Do Rêgo who writes about the family album’s function of articulating the notion of integration with respect to an individual’s identity: “La photographie est donc un rite de culte domestique dans lequel la famille est à la fois sujet et objet. Elle est le signe d’intégration. Dans ce sens, les portraits ne reflètent pas les conflits du groupe familial, ne montrent pas les moutons noirs, les fils prodigues ou les personnes qui, pour quelque raison que ce soit, sont maintenues à l’écart.” (\textit{Famille et pouvoir régional au Brésil: Le coronelismo dans le Nordeste}, p.200).
family’s engagement in social rituals: “[la photographie] fournit le moyen de solenniser (l)es moments culminants de la vie sociale où le groupe réaffirme solennellement son unité.” In a similar fashion, André Héraclio Do Rêgo suggests that the family album is the preferred instrument of the family’s integration into social life, but that this life is always portrayed in a positive or idealized light: “La photographie […] elle doit être donnée aux parents et aux amis. L’un de ses buts est de faire circuler, entre les membres d’une certaine classe sociale, leurs images idéales, celles qui ont contribué à la formation et à la sédimentation d’une conscience de classe dominante.” The family’s involvement in social activities – usually related to special occasions or the happier moments in life – creates an ideal image of the family. Family photographs are therefore testimonials to a reality that is far more ideal than real, since they mostly establish a view of the family as happy and harmonious. They create an idealized representation of the family, in which members enjoy a sense of belonging and identification. By integrating autobiography and photography into a performance of family life, Barthes stages the multifaceted aspects of his identity and its representation in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes within a larger social network. In our chapter on autobiography, we discuss how the social aspect of identity is revealed in the autobiographical text through the medium of language. Within the context of self-referential writing, not only is identity constructed through language, but language is the only way to reflect upon lived experiences. Language plays a vital role in autobiographical writing, but it is also important in bringing about a deeper awareness of self in relation to others. The family members and friends that are shown in Barthes’s images play an important role in engaging meaning in the text. Since, as Martha Langford explains, “personal albums reflect the predilections and experiences of the compilers whose collections […] or

448 Heráclio de Rêgo, Famille et pouvoir régional au Brésil: Le coronelismo dans le Nordeste, p.201.
family histories they are." In other words, the family album becomes more a reflection of the experiences of its compiler than of the many figures that are portrayed within it. As the compiler of the album in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Roland Barthes transforms the processes of introspection and self-analysis in autobiographical writing into an analysis of identity as a multi-faceted representation of social life.

### 4.2 Word and Image Relations in Barthes's Family Album

As Barthes explains in an interview that appeared after the publication of his autobiography *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the photographs he includes in his narrative have a rhetorical (argumentative) function: “Les photos que j’ai données ont une valeur essentiellement argumentative. Ce sont celles dont je me servais dans le texte pour dire certaines choses.” Although photographs do communicate with the written text to create meaning, the placement of images within a book also influences the way meaning is created in the text’s narrative: “Our understanding of a text crucially depends on its visual presentation, that is, its spatial encoding […] Thus, spatial aspects such as layout and material presentation influence […] reading.” For Barthes, the photos do much more than just support the written text, looking at a family album inspires a meaningful story: “La lecture de l’album de photos produit à la fin l’invention d’une histoire. Ainsi est né un album de famille […] dans lequel on peut voir non seulement nos grands-parents, nos parents et nous mêmes, mais aussi la vieille qui a toujours

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449 Martha Langford. p.6.


451 Silke Horstkotte. Silke. “Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W.G. Sebald and Monika Maron,” p.62. According to Horstkotte, the separation of the photographic images from the written text is a common practice to biographical writing: “Not surprisingly, in biography and historiography but also in literary photo-texts, reproduced photographs are often sectioned off from the body of the verbal text.” (“Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W.G. Sebald and Monika Maron,” p.51.).
voulu rester invisible. Une collection de photos imaginées…”452 As we have already argued in our chapter on photography, within the context of personal writing, verbal and visual signs collaborate to portray the author’s personal experiences and they also encourage the reader in adopting a certain intellectual posture while reading the text. For instance, the family photos that Barthes introduces in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* are accompanied by biographical details and personal documents that trace the author’s personal history and genealogy. As it was suggested in our study of photography and autobiography, these two media have the power to represent but also to transform reality. It is predominantly through the photographic images that Barthes’s family life is presented. However, the written text reveals another story and influences the way this family life is portrayed. In order to understand how the images collaborate with the written text to construct Barthes’s autobiographical subject, we will take a closer look at the details in his photographs.

4.3 Barthes’s Photographs as a Performance of Identity

In our chapter on photography, we have already discussed that photography and performance are concepts that can easily be analyzed within the same framework. Many theorists of photography have acknowledged the performative value of photographic images. Anne Marsh writes that “photography is a performative representational practice that has aspects in common

with the theatre.”  Peggi Phelan suggests that “all portrait photography is fundamentally performative”; Martha Langford acknowledges the performative aspects of the family album and proposes that “the album is an instrument of collective show and tell […] An album is a […] photographic performance.” The photographic album that Barthes introduces at the beginning of his text introduces the important themes and questions explored by Barthes concerning the representation of his autobiographical subject in the text. The family photographs set the stage for the articulation of Barthes’s personal identity as multiple, changing and contingent on a variety of social factors. As Anne Marsh suggests, alterity is one of these factors that is enhanced by the photographic process:

Photography is primarily performative. It is a picture-making process that enables the subject being photographed to become Other, either through conscious or unconscious ‘intention’ or manipulation […] The photographic process enables the photographer to create meaning through transformative processes, via mechanical, chemical and theatrical direction or by neglecting or undermining these means of making a picture.

In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the concept of alterity is initially presented in the photographs depicting Barthes at various stages of maturity: from birth to adulthood; in Barthes’s photo album, we see Barthes as a baby (p.27), a toddler (p.28,29), a young boy (p.9, 30), an adolescent (p.14,33,34,36,37), and an adult (pp.35,40,43,44,45). The photographs also

454 Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, p.35. Portrait photography could be considered performative because of the staging techniques that it often uses in its representation of an individual: props, make-up, lighting techniques, costumes, background, etc. Often portraits are taken by a professional photographer who has experience in staging the portrait and a professional-grade camera to achieve a certain effect.
457 Linda Haverty Rugg also explains that photographs are capable of showing a single individual from several different perspectives through relations of alterity: “Photographs, which can display many views and variant versions of the same person, simply supply a visual metaphor for the divided and multiple (‘decentered’) self in the text.” *Picturing ourselves: Photography & Autobiography*, p.1.
depict Barthes in his various roles as a son, a brother, a grandson, a nephew, a great grandson, a friend, a colleague, and an intellectual. In one famous excerpt, Barthes compares two portraits of himself: one taken in 1942, the other in 1970 (Fig.2):

Mais je n’ai jamais ressemblé à cela!

-Comment le savez-vous? Qu’est-ce que ce “vous” auquel vous ressembleriez ou ne ressembleriez pas? Où le prendre? À quel étalon morphologique ou expressif? Où est votre corps de vérité? Vous êtes le seul à ne pouvoir jamais vous voir qu’en image, vous ne voyez jamais vos yeux, sinon abêtis par le regard qu’ils posent sur le miroir ou sur l’objectif (il m’intéresserait seulement de voir mes yeux quand ils te regardent): même et surtout pour votre corps, vous êtes condamné à l’imaginaire.458

Faced with two versions of himself, Barthes refuses to acknowledge that either of the two images is a photograph of him. He even uses different pronouns to speak of himself: The first-person “je,” and the second-person (“tu” and “vous”). The personal pronouns used by Barthes articulate his sense of agency within the space of his autobiographical narrative.459 Through the example of his self-portraits, he illustrates how his use of language injects his images with meaning.460

The images collaborate with the written text to provide insight into the author’s presentation of

459 The concept of agency refers to a person’s ability to reflect upon his own sense of ownership for the actions that he carries out. It is most associated with theories of philosophy and often related to the ideas of Hegel (Phenomenology of Spirit), Kant (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals), and Kierkegaard (The Sickness Unto Death). When contextualizing “agency” within the space of the written text, it could easily relate to the self-reflexive qualities of the narrative. Within the scope of Barthes’s autobiography, the concept of agency refers to his awareness of his own authorial influences in his practice of self-referential writing. By commenting on a self-portrait of himself, Barthes is commenting on the self-portrait that unfolds in his text through writing. As Marco Gemignani notes: “The narrative emphasis on authorship combines with the postmodern death of the author in underscoring the importance of the social context, cultural discourses, and relations that justify a particular way of constructing, ordering, and sharing that cannot be considered just personal. As a consequence, agency does not belong to the individual, who either does or does not own it. Like a text, agency develops in the relations among authors, readers, cultures, and agendas as well as among the said, the not-said, and the counter-narrated. […] Once agency is seen and understood within the complex web of language-based […] relations, […] then subjects can start re-interpreting and re-authoring the narratives that, previously, had them as passive and inert victims of the circumstances.” (Narratives of identity, home and return of kosovarian refugees: steps toward a postmodern sense of agency, p.88-89.).
460 As we mentioned in our chapter on photography, in “Le message photographique,” Barthes alludes to two levels of meaning in the photograph and refers to them as “denotation” and “connotation”: Denotation alludes to the photograph’s function as a faithful reproduction of reality and to its ability to provide accurate visual evidence. Connotation refers to the ways in which meaning is assigned to the photograph through the introduction of a second system of representation: language.
himself in his text. In one of his textual fragments entitled “La défection des origines,” Barthes “work” becomes “anti-genetic” through an act of acculturation:

Son travail n’est pas antihistorique (du moins il le souhaite), mais toujours obstinément antigénétique, car l’Origine est une figure pernicieuse de la Nature (de la Physis) […]

Pour déjouer l’Origine, il culturalise d’abord à fond la Nature: aucun nature, nulle part, rien que l’historique; puis cette culture, (convaincu avec Benveniste que toute culture n’est que langage) il la remet dans le mouvement infini des discours, montés l’un sur l’autre (et non engendrés) comme dans les jeux de la main chaude.461

When Barthes describes his “work” (travail) as “anti-genetic” (obstinément antigénétique), identifies its impetus as “the abandonment of origins” (pour déjouer l’Origine), and reveals its strategy as an “acculturation of nature,” he draws obvious parallels between the construction of his autobiographical subject in the written text (through his confrontation of the referential claims of conventional autobiography) and in the images (through his confrontation of the referential function of photography). When he refers to his personal narrative as “stubbornly antigenetic,” he refers to his writing as a practice that works against dominant ideology, in the sense that he does not follow all of the conventions of autobiography. At the same time, Barthes’s remark about the “acculturation of nature” in his work suggests how the photographic images – which make special claims to reality, authenticity and truth – carry symbolic meaning in his text. Within the scope of photography and autobiography, Barthes defies our common conceptions on how these self-referential practices should relate and interact in their representation of his personal identity. Through the use of captions for his photographic images, Barthes suggests an interpretation of his autobiographical subject as multiple and fragmented.

4.4 Representations of Self: Barthes’s Family Photographs as an Articulation of his Sociocultural Context

The different individuals portrayed in the family photographs in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* are all connected to Barthes through social relationships: His mother, his father, his grandparents, his great grandparents, his aunt, his colleagues, his friends are all depicted in the images that are reproduced in the text. Pictures of Barthes are also integrated into the family album. To create a family atmosphere, Barthes incorporates some photographs of the domestic and urban scenes from his childhood and his adult years. In a description that he provides of his grandfather, Barthes confirms his connections to a lineage and a family through the representation of the photographs: “Me voilà pourvu d’une race, d’une classe. La photo, policière, le prouve.”\(^462\) The numerous individuals depicted in Barthes’s family photographs provide evidence of his membership in this social group and allow him to illustrate how he identifies himself through his social relationships. For instance, his middle-class upbringing is outlined in the captions that accompany several of the photographs; in the description he provides of the photographic images of his grandmothers, he links their identities to their social status: “L’une était belle, parisienne. L’autre était bonne provinciale: imbue de bourgeoisie – non de noblesse, dont elle était pourtant issue –, elle avait un sentiment vif du récit social qu’elle menait dans un français soigné de couvent où persistaient les imparfaits du subjonctif.”\(^463\) Even in the description of his grandfather’s family, Barthes alludes to the bourgeois profession of this genealogical branch: “D’où viennent-ils? D’une famille de notaires de la Haute-Garonne.”\(^464\) In another instance, for two photographs that he places on the same page and that depict family

members engaging in a ceremonial afternoon tea (Fig.3), he provides the following caption: “De
génération en génération, le thé: indice bourgeois, et charme certain.”

In the first photograph depicting family members partaking in afternoon tea, Barthes identifies his father and paternal grandmother, who are sitting at a table. Placed on the table is what appears to be a porcelain teapot and cups. In the second photograph, illustrating family members sitting down at a table, Barthes identifies his brother and mother as the individuals who appear to be drinking tea. The representation of the afternoon tea ritual places emphasis on the importance and loyalty to certain family traditions; these photographs attest to the participation of Barthes’s family in certain bourgeois ideals. By directing the attention of his readers to the social customs and rituals that his family engages in, Barthes encourages his readers to view his identity in terms of its social engagement with others. Nevertheless, he challenges the bourgeois ideals that are depicted in his images:

Or, il faut le reconnaître, ce sont seulement les images de ma jeunesse qui me fascinent.
Cette jeunesse ne fut pas malheureuse, grâce à l’affection qui m’entourait; elle fut
néanmoins assez ingrate, par solitude et gêne matérielle. Ce n’est donc pas la nostalgie
qu’un temps heureux qui me tient enchanté devant ces photographies, mais quelque chose
plus trouble.

One image in particular that links Barthes’s family to social history is the photograph of his maternal grandfather Louis-Gustave Binger (Fig.4). The image, which is a lithography of Captain Binger, a well known French officer and explorer of West Africa, alludes to the historic and social contributions of the Captain. To emphasize the impact that Captain Binger had on French society, Barthes adds an excerpt from the Larousse Encyclopaedia describing the impact his grandfather had on French culture and society: “‘Binger (jé), (Louis-Gustave), officier et
administrateur français, né à Strasbourg, mort à l’Isle-Adam (1856-1936). Il explora le pays de la

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boucle du Niger jusqu’au Golfe du Guinée et la Côte d’Ivoire’ (Larousse).”

Captain Binger’s influence is important to the history of France since he was responsible for negotiating boundary treaties with the United Kingdom and had initiated relations with the French Colony of Grand-Bassam. In his photographs, Barthes’s attempt to associate the family legacy with a cultural icon such as Captain Binger, represents a desire on Barthes’s part to link the family’s collective history to the broader narrative of society.

4.5 The Refracted/Distorted Mirror: Undermining the Referential Claims of Photography in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

As objects that preserve a family’s collective memory, when family photographs are assembled within a book, they create an illusion of continuity between the past and the present and allow the author to further explore his family’s personal history through writing. In Barthes’s personal narrative, the retrospective practices of autobiography and photography are combined to undermine the referential claims of both mediums. As we have already mentioned in our chapter on photography, both photography and autobiography are only capable of showing reality from the vantage point of the past. The past becomes a recurring theme of the visual narrative that unfolds in Barthes’s family album. Barthes’s family history is narrated as a series of irretrievable moments that are related to the issues of absence and death. This recalls our discussion in our chapter on photography when we quote Barthes in *Camera Lucida (La Chambre claire)*; Barthes writes about photography as “an emanation of past reality.”

There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. And since this constraint exists only for Photography, we must consider it, by reduction, as the very essence, the noeme of photography. […] The name of Photography’s

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noeme will therefore be: ‘That-has-been.’ Essentially, what Barthes is suggesting when he introduces the “noeme” of photography is the photograph’s ability to attest to the fact that the object or person that has been captured in the photographic image has been there. Barthes argues that photography is able to “print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object” and for this reason, it “is literally an emanation of the referent.” However, the photograph is only capable of depicting the presence of a “missing being.” The ancestors, landscapes, and events depicted in the black and white photographs bear witness to a bygone era. In one image, Barthes brings the reader’s attention to “the white snout of the streetcar of [his] childhood” and writes that the tram shown in the photograph is no longer in service. In another photograph that he includes in his album, Barthes points out that the building pictured is the home of his paternal grandparents where he spent his summers as a child. Nevertheless, with respect to the house, Barthes reveals that it no longer exists: “Cette maison a aujourd’hui disparu, emportée par l’immobilier bayonnais.” Like the familiar scenes of his past, despite the connections he shares with the individuals depicted in the photographs, many of these relationships are characterized in terms of an absence, specifically in relation to their social networks. For example, Barthes reveals that his father’s sister did not engage in social relationships and was lonely all of her life: “La sœur du père: elle fut seule toute sa vie.” Moreover, he tells us that his grandfathers were excluded from social discourses, when explains

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471 See Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, p.22: Barthes uses the following description for a photographic image of the old tram in Bayonne: “Le museau blanc du tram de mon enfance.”
that they barely spoke: “les deux grands-pères […] ne tenaient aucun discours.”\textsuperscript{475} The themes of absence and death in the photographic images play an important role in articulating the theme of absence in the text, specifically in relation to Barthes’s identity. Through his genealogical associations, Barthes inherits a sense of social awkwardness with his dominant social context. It is because of his grandfathers’ silence that Barthes is unable to identify with them. Barthes’s incapacity to relate to a father figure becomes even more apparent with the photographic image of his father. In the description he provides of his father, Barthes reveals that he passed away at a young age: “le père, mort très tôt (à la guerre), n’était pris dans aucun discours du souvenir ou du sacrifice. Par le relais maternel, sa mémoire jamais oppressive, ne faisait qu’effleurer l’enfance d’une gratification presque silencieuse.”\textsuperscript{476} Barthes explains that he never had the opportunity to identify with his father and uses the definite article “le” to refer to him (“the”) instead of using the possessive adjective “mon” (“my”). The deliberate omission of the possessive article to describe his father, attests to Barthes’s inability to relate to him on a personal level.\textsuperscript{477} By assembling a family photo album that is just as much a certificate of absence as it is a mark of presence, Barthes depicts his family as a group that was deprived of its domesticity; in Barthes’s words, the photos illustrate “la famille sans familialisme.”\textsuperscript{478} The family album portrays Barthes’s ancestors as being removed from familial and social contexts. Barthes remains the only

\textsuperscript{475} Roland Barthes. \textit{Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes}, p.16-17.
\textsuperscript{477} In one of our discussions on Barthes’s chapter, Professor James Cahill makes an interesting observation on the father-son dynamic in Barthes’s text, especially in his images. He states that the image of the paternal figure could also be alluding to Lacan’s concept of “le père ou le pire.” There is a definite connection between Lacan’s theories and Barthes’s personal narrative, which is especially evident in the photographic images: the fact that Barthes describes his photographs as an “imaginaire” that “sera donc arrêté à l’entrée dans la vie productive […] l’écriture,” (p.8), the image of the young Barthes sitting on his mother’s lap and captioned as “Le stade du miroir”, (p.27), etc. (Roland Barthes. \textit{Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes}.) We are aware of this strong connection, and it would be an interesting topic to explore in greater detail in future discussions on the word and image relations in \textit{Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes}.
constant and recognizable individual in the photographic images and the only consistent 
articulation of identity in the family’s collective history. In a photographic representation of 
Barthes alone at the beach (Fig. 5), he provides the following description: “Nous, toujours 
nous.”479 Through the use of the first-person plural subject pronoun (“nous”/“us”) to describe the 
photograph of himself, Barthes expands his perception of himself to incorporate the articulation 
of a collective identity. It is pertinent to recall at this point of our analysis Martha Langford’s 
explanation of the family album as being more a reflection of the desires and the identity of the 
compiler than of the ideologies of the family in question. In our analysis of Barthes’s 
photographs, we can’t help but compare them to Hippolyte Bayard’s Autoportrait en noyé480; 
Barthes’s depiction of his family serves as a social commentary on his own self-portrait in 
Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, through which issues of recognition, authorship, display, 
and truth are played out and examined. Through his performance of a family deprived of its 
social function, Barthes raises important questions on the issues of representation in 
autobiographical writing.

4.6 Identity as the Subject of Writing

Although the photographs provide certain insights into Barthes’s life and enhance the 
autobiographical nature of his narrative, the true source of meaning in Roland Barthes par 
Roland Barthes lies in the written text. The photographic images develop Barthes’s initial 
arguments with respect to the construction of identity within autobiographical writing. 
Nevertheless, Barthes presents his family album in a way that emphasizes the text’s transition 
into writing through the captions that he uses to describe them. The images collaborate with the

479 Roland Barthes. Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, p.34.
480 For our description of Hippolyte Bayard’s Autoportrait en noyé, see our chapter on photography.
written text in order to place emphasis on Barthes’s personal and intellectual development as a writer and a critic. Barthes’s family photographs serve to anchor his identity in the text as the subject of writing. One must first recognize that the images follow the book’s pagination, which we believe attests to the integral role the photographs play as a part of the reading process in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

5 Relationships of Intertextuality in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

The intertextual relations suggested in the images allude to more meaningful relationships between Barthes’s texts and its intertexts. The referential claims made by certain theorists of photography and autobiography, which are discussed at greater length in chapters 1 and 2, become the starting point in our analysis of Barthes’s narrative. The referential status of Barthes’s autobiography is challenged through its subject matter, which does not present a “retrospective prose narrative” that presents the “personal details” of “his existence.” Barthes’s written text reflects the economic style of the family album; the narrative is organized in short

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481 As Jean-Michel Piar explains, the family album offers effective tools of analysis to inject writing with meaning: “[Dans le cadre de notre étude], l’album de famille nous offre un outil d’analyse de tranches de vie qui témoignent de l’intégration […] la photographie vient ici compléter l’écriture, elle est prise comme un instrument d’exploration qui permet de rendre compte d’une expérience entre la chose vue ou vécue et la chose pensée. Finalement de ce que l’écriture omet, la photo la suggère et réciproquement. Ce sont donc deux écritures complémentaires, les unes scripturales et les autres picturales. La mémoire collective est souvent faite d’images sur lesquelles on ne parvient pas à mettre des mots.” (*Shanghai à la Française*, p.188.).

482 According to Silke Horstkotte, an analysis of the word and image dialogue brings about the important role that the visual plays in the reading process: “Studying the spatial relationship of photography and text thus leads to a heightened awareness of reception processes, especially of how visual perception affects our reading of verbal as well as visual texts.” (“Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W.G. Sebald and Monika Maron,” p.74.).

483 The photographs still play an important role in the construction of meaning in the text: “la structure de la photographie n’est pas une structure isolée; elle communique au moins avec une autre structure, qui est le texte […] dont […] la photographie est accompagnée.” Barthes, *Le message photographique*, p.127.
paragraphs that create an effect similar to that of the photographic snapshots included in the album. The written text is divided into paragraphs and subtitled. Each fragment is organized by its subtitle, based on alphabetical order. The different subjects used in the short paragraphs give the impression of not having any connection to or relationship with Barthes’s personal history. For example, in one fragment, subtitled “L’imaginaire,” he provides the following description:

484 The complete list of paragraph titles is as follows: Actif/réactif; L’adjectif; L’aïse; Le démon de l’analogie; Au tableau noir; L’argent, Le vaisseau Argo; L’arrogance; Le geste de l’aruspice; L’assentiment, non le choix; Vérité et assertion; L’atopie; L’autonymie; La baladeuse; Quand je jouais aux barres…; Noms propres; De la bêtise, je n’ai le droit…; L’amour d’une idée; La jeune fille bourgeoise; L’Amateur; Reproche de Brecht à R.B.; Le chantage à la théorie; Charlot; Le plein du cinéma; Clausules; La coïncidence; Comparaison et raison; Vérité et consistance; Contemporain de quoi?; Éloge ambigu du contrat; Le contretemps; Mon corps n’existe…; Le corps pluriel; La côtelette; La courbe folle de l’imago; Couples de mots-valeurs; La double crudité; Décomposer/détruire; La déesse H.; Les amis; La relation privilégiée; Transgression de la transgression; Le second degré et les autres; La dénotation comme vérité du langage; Sa voix; Détacher; Dialectiques; Pluriel, différence, conflit, Le goût de la division; Au piano, le doigté…; Le mauvais objet; Doxa/paradoxa; La Papillonne; Amphibologies; En écharpe; La chambre d’échos; L’écriture commence par le style; À quoi sert l’utopie; L’écrivain comme fantasme; Nouveau sujet, nouvelle science; Est-ce toi, chère Élise…; L’ellipse; L’emblème, le gag; Une société d’émetteurs; Emploi du temps; Le privé; En fait…; Éros et le théâtre; Le discours esthétique; La tentation ethnologique; Étymologies; Violence, évidence, nature; L’exclusion; Céline et Flora; L’exemption de sens; Le fantasme, pas le rêve; Un fantasme vulgaire; Le retour comme farce; La fatigue et la fraîcheur; La fiction; La double figure; L’amour, la folie; Forgeries; Fourier ou Flaubert?; Le cercle des fragments; Le fragment comme illusion; Du fragment au journal; La fraîse; Français; Fautes de frappe; Le frisson du sens; L’induction galopante; Gaucher; Les gestes de l’idée; Abgründ; Le goût des algorithmes; Et si je n’avais pas lu…; Hétérologie et violence; L’imaginaire de la solitude; Hypocrisie; L’idée comme jouissance; Les idées méconnues; La phrase; Idéologie et esthétique; L’imaginaire; Le dandy; Qu’est-ce que l’influence?; L’instrument subtil; Pause: anamnèses; Bête?; La machine de l’écriture; À jeun; Lettre de Jilali; Le paradoxe comme jouissance; Le discours jubilatoire; Comblement; Le travail du mot; La peur du langage; La langue maternelle; Le lexique impur; J’aime, je n’aime pas; Structure et liberté; L’acceptable; Lisible, scriptible et au-delà; La littérature comme mathésis; Le livre du Moi; La loquèle; Lucidité; Le mariage; Un souvenir d’enfance; Au petit matin; Méduse; Abou Nowas et la métaphore; Les allégories linguistiques; Migraînes; Le démoli; La mollesse des grands mots; Le mollet de la danseuse; Politique/morale; Mot-mode; Mot-valeur; Mot-couleur; Mot-manual; Le mot transitionnel; Le mot moyen; Le naturel; Neuf/nouveau; Le neutre; Actif/passif; L’accommodation; Le numen; Passage des objets dans le discours; Odeurs; De l’écriture à l’œuvre; “On le sait”; Opacité et transparence; L’antithèse; La déflection des origines; Oscillation de la valeur; Paradoxa; Le léger moteur de la paranoïa; Parler/embrasser; Les corps qui passent; Le jeu, le pastiche; Patch-work; La couleur; La personne divisée?; Partitif, Bataille, la peur; Phases; Effet bienfaisant d’une phrase; Le texte politique; L’alphabet, L’ordre dont je ne me souviens plus; L’œuvre comme polygraphie; Le langage-prêtre; Le discours prévisible; Projets de livres; Rapport à la psychanalyse; Psychanalyse et psychologie; “Qu’est-ce que ça veut dire?”; Quel raisonnement?; La récession; Le reflex de structural; Le règne et le triomphe; Abolition du règne des valeurs; Qu’est-ce qui limite la représentation?; Le retentissement; Réussi/raté; Du choix d’un vêtement; Le rythme; Que ça se sache; Entre Salamanque et Valladolid; Exercice scolaire; Le savoir et l’écriture; Le valeur et le savoir; La scène; La science dramatisée; Je vois le langage; Sed contra; La seiche et son encre; Projet d’un livre sur la sexualité; Le sexy; Fin heureuse de la sexualité?; Le shifter comme utopie; Dans la signification, trois choses; Une philosophie simpliste; Singe entre les singes; La division sociale; Moi, je; Un mauvais sujet politique; La surdétermination; La surdité à son propre langage; La symbolique d’État; Le texte symptomal; Système/systématique; Tactique/stratégie; Plus tard; Tel Quel; Le temps qu’il fait; Terre promise; Ma tête s’embrouille; Le théâtre; Le thème; Conversion de la valeur en théorie; La maxime; Le monstre de la totalité.
L’effort vital de ce livre est de mettre en scène un imaginaire. “Mettre en scène” veut dire: Échelonner des portants, disperser des rôles, établir des niveaux et, à la limite, faire de la rampe une barre incertaine. Il est donc important que l’imaginaire soit traité selon ses degrés (l’imaginaire est une affaire de consistance, et la consistance, une affaire de degrés), et il y a, au fil de ces fragments, plusieurs degrés d’imaginaire. […]

Le rêve serait donc: ni un texte de vanité, ni un texte de lucidité, mais un texte aux guillemets incertains, aux parenthèses flottantes (ne jamais fermer la parenthèse, c’est très exactement: dériver). Cela dépend aussi du lecteur, qui produit l’échelonnement des lectures.  

As we have suggested in our chapter on autobiography, in which we reference Philippe Lejeune, autobiographical writing is often related to a specific tradition of writing that conforms to certain conventions. Barthes’s narrative challenges the conventions of autobiography through its non-linear, impersonal, and fragmented writing style. In its ability to acknowledge its own self-reflexivity, Barthes’s text alludes to the different writing processes that are engaged in its construction. What is especially interesting about Barthes’s personal narrative is that the images do not function alone, but contextualize themselves collectively to create meaning in the text. 

The intertextual relationships that exist in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes are found in the collaboration between words and images: “The photographic text, like any other, is the site of a complex intertextuality; an overlapping series of previous texts ‘taken for granted’ at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture.”


486 Victor Burgin also describes the photograph in terms of a text that engages in relationships of intertextuality to create meaning: “The intelligibility of the photograph is no simple thing; photographs are texts inscribed in terms of what we may call “photographic discourse,” but this discourse, like any other, engages discourse beyond itself, the “photographic text,” like any other, is a site of complex “intertextuality”, an overlapping series of previous texts “taken for granted” at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture.” (“Looking at Photographs,” p.144.).

487 Silke Horstkotte. “Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W.G. Sebald and Monika Maron,” p.74. Annette Kuhn also examines the intertextual properties of photographic images by referring to their interpretation in terms of a “network of discourses” or an “intertext”: “memories evoked by a photo do not simply spring out of the image itself, but are generated in a network, an intertext, of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all these and cultural contexts, historical moments.” (Family Secrets. Acts of Memory and Imagination, p.12.).
5.1 Writing Life in Life Writing: Autobiography as a Critical Writing Practice in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

Insofar as the performative is an *act* then, [...] scholars – in trying to forge a performative mode of critical writing – have underscored Roland Barthes’s view that criticism is, in some very crucial ways, an *act undertaken by the critic*: Criticism is not at all a table of results or a body of judgements, it is essentially an activity, i.e., a series of intellectual acts profoundly committed to the historical and subjective existence [...] of the man who performs them. \(^{488}\)

For Barthes, the crux of the challenge associated with autobiography is that it is a practice that is confined within the boundaries of writing. In our chapter on autobiography, we discuss how Lejeune alludes to the autobiographer’s role as a figure who becomes actively engaged in the creation and exhibition of his own image through writing. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Barthes addresses the problems of self-representation by constructing his personal narrative in a way that emphasizes the literary impulses that animate his text. Barthes’s autobiography is a self-reflexive narrative that is aware of its own existence as a text. \(^{489}\) If the autobiographical subject cannot be anything other than a literary construct for Barthes, then the referential function of autobiography is undermined. Within the framework of autobiography,

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\(^{489}\) For an excellent discussion on the reflexive properties of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, see Han-liang Chang: “The autobiographer’s attempt at recovering his life is called into question by his act of writing. [...] Roland Barthes’s *Roland Barthes* is a reflexive work par excellence. It is not reflexive in the mimetic sense that the life of Roland Barthes generates a text of his namesake. Such an idea presupposes the a priori existence of an *hors-texte* (life) beyond the text and the myth of their filiation. On the contrary, Barthes’s is a project to efface the self from the text by negating its generative function: “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin.” [*Roland Barthes, “The Death of The Author”*] *Roland Barthes* is reflexive in that it serves as a critique and *ars poetica* of the genre; it is an “autobiography” – a term provisionally used for lack of a better one – as much as it is an autobiography on autobiography. But it renounces any attempt at becoming alive (bio) to oneself (auto) in the realm of writing (graphy), and its generic status cannot be identified and effaced before the generic concept is reversed and displaced. In other words, *Roland Barthes* receives its force as autobiography from *Roland Barthes* functioning as a critique of autobiography, but the force it receives is at the same time discharged by *Roland Barthes* postulating itself as an *ars poetica* and thus closing the concept of the genre. Roland Barthes’s critique on the traditional concept of autobiography is directed at mimesis, especially the autobiographer’s insistence on the sovereignty of the self.” (“The Anonymous Autobiographer: Roland Barthes/Shen Fu,” p.68).
language is only capable of articulating reality by reproducing language. As a result, literature, in particular autobiography, is not capable of recreating experiences in the real world. André Gardies explains that Barthes’s autobiographical subject does not refer to an individual, but instead to different acts of writing: “Le sujet de l’autobiographie n’est pas l’auteur, mais l’écriture: l’au delà du texte, c’est encore du texte. À qui en douterait, le Roland Barthes par lui-même propose une réponse décisive.”

If we were to elaborate on André Gardies’s explanation, our argument would be that identity is not something that can be recreated or found in a written text. Instead, what could only be reproduced within the space of a text are other instances of writing; a book can never become a surrogate for an individual’s personal experiences in the real world. A book is always a book; it is a collection of sheets of paper or other material – blank or written, or printed, fastened together – a two-dimensional composition of words on paper. The reproduction of the dynamic existence of man in all its complexity within the space of a written text is an impossible task.

Barthes begins his autobiographical text with the following sentence: “Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman.” By insisting that his story be read as if spoken by a character from a novel, he places emphasis on the literary merits of his written work, since a character in a novel carries no meaning outside the realm of language and has no existence outside the limits of the text:

A character in a novel has no other existence outside the language of the text. But at the same time, the autobiography is also constructed by the self-same character, because it is spoken by the character, ‘dit par un personnage de roman.’ Barthes would thus seem to say that an autobiography constructs, and is at the same time constructed by, a fictional

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subject. The answer to the question ‘Can I write what I am?’ turns into ‘By writing, I am what I write.’

Barthes presents autobiography as a hybrid form of writing that is situated between the genres of “life writing” and “critical essay.” The connections established between the practices of self-referential and critical writing in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* are made evident through the text’s construction. Barthes’s ideas about the representation of identity in literature are framed within his critical ideas on writing and performed through word and image relations. Although Barthes makes no explicit mention of the representation of his identity as a textual medium, there are several instances in his narrative that certainly imply the metaphor of the body as text. One instance is found in the illustration Barthes entitles “Anatomie,” (Fig.6) in which a skeletal figure, with tree branches in place of its bones, is linked to the practice of writing. In the legend he provides for the illustration, Barthes connects the body depicted in the illustration to writing through word and image relations: “Écrire le corps, Ni la peau, ni les muscles, ni les os, ni les nerfs, mais le reste: un ça balourd, fibreux, pelucheux, effiloché, la houppelande d’un clown.” What is particularly interesting about this image is that Barthes does not include it at the beginning of his text with the other photographs, but places it at the end of his book. To a certain extent, by removing the image from the image-repertoire, Barthes illustrates how the “body” is removed from the self-representational context created in the images and placed within his “body of writing.” This image also differs in the representation of Barthes’s identity since it

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493 Dorothy Kelly observes that Barthes constructs the self as a text: “Barthes does not actually say that the self is structured like a text: he shows it because his very text is structured like a self: it has imaginary (the photographs), the symbolic (the text), and the real (the actual book) aspects. His text is multiple, like the self […] And his text is made of fragments, like the split self.” “The Cracked Mirror: Roland Barthes’s Anti-Autobiography *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*,” p.126.


is not a photograph, but an illustration. The skeletal body depicted in the “Anatomie” image is associated further with writing in another section of Barthes’s text, in which the tree becomes a symbol for writing. Barthes includes the following description next to a photograph of palm trees that he includes in his text (Fig.7):

Vers l’écriture.

Les arbres sont des alphabets, disaient les Grecs. Parmi tous les arbres-lettres, le palmier est le plus beau. De l’écriture, profuse et distincte comme le jet de ses palmes, il possède l’effet majeur: la retombée.

Through the various examples provided by Barthes in his autobiographical narrative, the act of writing is linked to the author’s body. Through the metaphor of the tree, the body becomes an analogy for the hypertext, in which multiple meanings are possible. Although photographic images and illustrations are introduced into Barthes’s narrative to document his personal story, Barthes’s main objective is to show how the subject is constructed in autobiographical writing through language: “Barthes [is] deeply concerned with the body, both as creating the text and being created by the text, inscribing [his] own bod[y] into the text.” Sébastien Huber alludes to Barthes’s views concerning the link between life and literature: “Selon l’intuition d[e] Roland Barthes […], il y [a] une équation entre la vie et l’invention littéraire; comme si l’existence

496 Illustrations recall the act of drawing more than photographs do since drawing is closely related to the act of writing, which requires that a writing instrument (pen/pencil) be put to paper to create a meaningful image.


498 Lena Holm Christensen compares the notion of the hypertext to Barthes’s definition of the ‘writerly text’. Holm quotes Johan Svedjedal when she provides a definition of the hypertext: “Hypertexts offer readers many paths and have no fixed structure. They may be called non-linear, multilinear, nonsequential, multisequential, or multicursal, the point always being that traditional literary works are nearly always linear or monosequential. Such multisequential hypertexts may be said to be ‘writerly’ rather than ‘readerly’ in Roland Barthes’s sense of the word. Freed from the restraint of the author’s way of structuring the work, the reader can make his or her own choices. (Svedjedal “A note on the Concept of ‘Hypertext’” 3).” Christensen, Lena Holm. Editing Emily Dickinson: The production of an Author. New York: Routledge, 2008, p.132. According to Christensen, “hypertextual structures are interpreted as representing a concrete opposition to notions of centre, margin, hierarchy and linearity by offering networks, links, nodes and multi-linearity, thereby concretizing the poststructuralist theorizations of ‘text.’” (Editing Emily Dickinson: The production of an Author, p.132.).

n’était qu’une conséquence de l’écriture, comme si, enfin, ‘écrire sur soi [est] fatalement une
invention de soi…” 500 Within the context of autobiography, for Barthes, identity (“self”) becomes synonymous with writing. 501 He depicts human existence as an extension of writing, and provides an example of the link between life and literature in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes in the fragment Barthes entitled “L’amour, la folie”:

Order du jour de Bonaparte, Premier consul à sa garde: “Le grenadier Gobain s’est suiciéd par amour: c’était d’ailleurs un très bon sujet. C’est le second événement de cette nature qui arrive au corps depuis un mois. Le Premier consul ordonne qu’il soit mis à l’ordre de la garde qu’un soldat doit vaincre la douleur et la mélancolie des passions; qu’il y a autant de vrai courge à souffrir avec constance les peines de l’âme qu’à rester fixe sous la mitraille d’une batterie…”

Ces grenadiers amoureux, mélancoliques, de quel langage tiraient-ils leur passion (peu conforme à l’image de leur classe et de leur métier)? Quels livres avaient-ils lus – ou quelle histoire entendue? […]


In this passage, Barthes suggests that the body is intimately connected with language and that the literary experiences of each man play a decisive role in his life: “For Barthes, the “theme” which most aptly defines the […] self is one that relates the self to a text.” 503 Literature becomes interchangeable with human existence in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes: “And in the context of the belief that ‘our life comes from books’ – that our lives are in some sense a

501 See Dorothy Kelly, who describes autobiography as a text that performs identity through language: “This concept of the co-production of self and text is utterly opposed to the concept of the naming of self, and of the limiting of the self through text. The self is not something that pre-exists as a thing which language will later be used to represent; this would be the constative understanding of autobiography as a text which describes a pre-existing, non-linguistic entity. Rather, it is language which constructs the self in the performative sense: one is only by saying that one is. ‘Je ne serais rien si je n’écrivais pas.’” (“The Cracked Mirror: Roland Barthes’s Anti-Autobiography Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes,” p.125.).
repetition and imitation of our reading – “to change the book is to change life itself.”

This notion of man’s co-dependence with literature becomes a prominent theme in Barthes’s writing, on which his whole perception of life writing is suggested and performed in the written portion of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

5.2 Transforming Personal Identity into a Text in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

In order to understand how identity is formulated in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* as an extension of literature, it is important to analyze how a written text is constructed to convey meaning. Since books operate solely within the limits of writing, they can only act as testimonies to the experiences of man within the limitations of language. We have already established the link between writing and the autobiographer’s self image in our chapter on autobiography when we discussed Estelle Jelinek’s claim that “autobiography is an amalgam of one’s self image, one’s process of thinking and feeling, and one’s talent as a formal writer.”

Acknowledging the autobiographical text for what it is – a book and nothing more – contradicts Lejeune’s claim that “the ontological presence of [the autobiographer’s] self (this ‘real’ person) is not in doubt.” Aware of the restrictions of writing, Barthes casts doubt on the ontological certainty of autobiography; he does not present his personal narrative as an exact record of the day-to-day events that surround his own life, but as a text that situates his personal identity within a wider

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505 Pierre Macherey writes about the limitations of literature in its representation of reality: “The book does not propose an externally verifiable truth, within fixed limits, limits fixed with if not by the text […] the reader enters the book as though it was another world, the act of reading requires a certain number of implicit or explicit presuppositions – most important, this is a book, nothing other than a book; failing this, we are no longer engaged in reading, but are dreaming or bored.” (*A Theory of Literary Production*, p.71.).
cultural context – in particular within the scope of literature. Christopher Lee writes about the

textual dimensions that frame the subject of autobiography:

Just as the living (author) can confer life onto the voiceless, so too can lifelessness be
conferred on the living. This is precisely what happens once the author is textualized into
an autobiographical subject: he or she becomes a material of narrative, a linguistic figure
that can no longer be securely tethered to an external, living, referent. It is precisely in
this sense that we should understand the status of the autobiographical impulse in Roland
Barthes par Roland Barthes. 508

As Christopher Lee suggests, autobiographical writing is limited in its ability to capture the full
extent of man’s existence. At the time when he was writing his personal narrative, Barthes had
already addressed the challenges associated with the referential claims of writing. In one of his
most influential articles on the topic of writing that we also cite in our chapter on autobiography,

“La mort de l’auteur,” Barthes confronts the referential function of writing:

L’écriture est destruction de toute voix, de toute origine. L’écriture, c’est ce neutre, ce
composite, cet oblique où fuit notre sujet, le noir et blanc où vient se perdre toute identité,
à commencer par celle-là même du corps qui écrit. Sans doute en a-t-il toujours été ainsi:
dès qu’un fait est raconté, à des fins intransitives, et non plus pour agir directement sur le
réel, c’est-à-dire finalement hors de toute fonction autre que l’expérience même du
symbole, ce décrochage se produit, la voix perd son origine, l’auteur entre dans sa propre
mort. 509

Barthes writes that contemporary literature places far too much emphasis on the author and often
confuses the need to link the content or subject matter of the writing project to the author’s
personal identity:

L’auteur règne encore dans les manuels d’histoire littéraire, les biographies d’écrivains,
les interviews des magazines, et dans la conscience même des littérateurs, soucieux de
joindre, grâce à leur journal intime, leur personne et leur œuvre; l’image de la littérature
que l’on peut trouver dans la culture courante est tyranniquement centrée sur l’auteur, sa
personne, son histoire, ses goûts, ses passions. 510

508 Christopher Lee. The semblance of identity: aesthetic mediation in Asian American Literature, p.96.
Barthes explains that contrary to the insistence of contemporary culture, writing does not restore the author’s identity to the text. Instead, he explains that writing influences a sort of death of the author. To link writing to the metaphor of death, Barthes uses Proust’s strategy of writing as an example: “Proust a donné à l’écriture moderne son épopée: par un renversement radical, au lieu de mettre sa vie dans son roman, comme on le dit si souvent, il fit de sa vie même une œuvre dont son propre livre fut comme le modèle.” In his description of Proust’s writing style, Barthes alludes to Proust’s attempt to transform his life into a work, in which the writing project takes primacy over the writer’s own identity in the text. The novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* becomes the ideal example of writing in which the literary project takes precedence over the author’s life story: “*In Search of Lost Time* (is described as) a fictional autobiography by a man whose life almost mirrors that of Marcel Proust.” Proust’s strategy of “death through writing” in his literary project greatly influences the approach Barthes takes in his own autobiographical narrative. For Barthes, the act of writing removes the author’s identity from the text through the use of language: “Language is always prior to any act writing and so authors draw upon what has already been written to produce writing that will be meaningful for their readers.” Since language precedes every instance of writing, Barthes explains that it is language that creates meaning in a text and not the author: “c’est le langage qui parle, ce n’est pas l’auteur […] seul le langage agit, ‘performe’ et non ‘moi’.” As a result, the author is merely an instrument of writing; in every text it is language that has the potential to carry meaning:

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514 Roland Barthes. “La mort de l’auteur,” p.62. See also our chapter on autobiography.
Enfin, hors la littérature elle-même (à vrai dire, ces distinctions deviennent périmées), la linguistique vient de fournir à la destruction de l’Auteur un instrument analytique précieux, en montrant que l’énonciation dans son entier est un processus vide, qui fonctionne parfaitement sans qu’il soit nécessaire de le remplir par la personne des interlocuteurs: linguistiquement, l’auteur n’est jamais rien de plus que celui qui écrit, tout comme je n’est autre que celui qui dit je: le langage connaît un ‘sujet,’ non une ‘personne,’ et à ce sujet, vide en dehors de l’énonciation même qui le définit, suffit à faire ‘tenir’ le langage, c’est-à-dire à l’épuiser.\(^{515}\)

Within the context of autobiographical writing then, Barthes believes that the text – or the language that constructs it – is not characterized by a person or an identity, but instead finds its meaning through its enunciative context:

Le scripteur moderne naît en même temps que son texte, il n’est d’aucune façon pourvu d’un être qui précéderait ou excéderait son écriture, il n’est en rien le sujet dont son livre serait le prédicat; il n’y a d’autre temps que celui de l’énonciation, et tout texte est écrit éternellement ici et maintenant. C’est que (ou il s’ensuit que) écrire ne peut plus désigner une opération d’enregistrement, de constatation, de représentation, de ‘peinture’ (comme disaient les Classiques), mais bien ce que les linguistes, à la suite de la philosophie oxfordienne, appellent un performatif, forme verbale rare (exclusivement donnée à la première personne et au présent), dans laquelle l’énonciation n’a d’autre contenu (d’autre énoncé) que l’acte par lequel elle se profère.\(^{516}\)

In our chapter on autobiography, we argued that language becomes the medium through which the author’s identity is performed and interpreted. Through his understanding of writing as a sort of “death of the author,” Barthes chooses to exclude personal details from his autobiographical text. He decides instead to focus on his personal narrative as a writing project that is preceded by a rich literary culture and heritage. What is particularly impressive about Barthes’s autobiography is that it is written in a way that incorporates a diverse body of written work into


\(^{516}\) Roland Barthes. “La mort de l’auteur,” p.64.
the fabric of the personal narrative.\textsuperscript{517} In “La mort de l’auteur,” Barthes explains that the written
text is a space in which various kinds of writing intersect and contradict one another:

Nous savons maintenant qu’un texte n’est pas fait d’une ligne de mots, dégageant un sens
unique, en quelque sorte théologique (qui serait le ‘message’ de l’Auteur-Dieu), mais un
espace à dimensions multiples, où se marient et se contestent des écritures variées, dont
aucune n’est originelle: le texte est un tissu de citations, issues de mille foyers de la
culture. […] La vie ne fait jamais qu’imiter le livre, et ce livre lui-même n’est qu’un tissu
de signes, imitation perdue, infiniment reculée.\textsuperscript{518}

The only reality for texts is that they can reproduce themselves within other texts through the
medium of language. Like Proust in \textit{À la recherche du temps perdu}, who “did not conceive of
literature as the transparent expression of the author’s biography, [and who] did not transform his
life into a literary work,”\textsuperscript{519} Barthes transforms his own life into a “literary” work in \textit{Roland
Barthes par Roland Barthes}. In his personal narrative, Barthes does not associate his identity
with his person. Instead, he writes his autobiography as a text in which several models of writing
intersect and overlap:

Ainsi se dévoile l’être total de l’écriture: un texte est fait d’écritures multiples, issues de
plusieurs cultures et qui entrent les unes avec les autres en dialogue, en parodie, en
contestation; mais il y a un lieu où cette multiplicité se rassemble, et ce lieu, ce n’est pas
l’auteur, comme on l’a dit jusqu’à présent. C’est le lecteur: le lecteur est l’espace même
où s’inscrivent, sans qu’aucune ne se perde, toutes les citations dont est faite une écriture,
l’unité d’un texte n’est pas dans son origine, mais dans sa destination, mais cette
destination ne peut plus être personnelle: le lecteur est un homme sans histoire, sans
biographie, sans psychologie; il est seulement ce quelqu’un qui tient rassemblées dans un
même champ toutes les traces dont est constitué l’écrit.\textsuperscript{520}

\textsuperscript{517} Pierre Macherey explains that every “book is always the site of an exchange, its autonomy and its coherence are
bought at the price of that otherness […] A true reading, one which knows how to read and knows what reading is,
ignores none of this multiplicity.” (\textit{A Theory of Literary Production}, p.100.).
By presenting the autobiographical subject as a phenomenon through which several acts of writing intersect and contradict one another, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* performs its own textuality.

### 5.3 Intertextuality

The social relations that are illustrated in the images through family and social connections are exhibited in the written text through intertextual references. Intertextuality is used by Barthes as a strategy to connect his life writing to his social context in meaningful ways. This idea is well developed by David W. Smit when he compares writing to a “social activity”:

> Writing [is] a social ‘activity.’ [It is] not ‘a common system through which individual minds can communicate’ but rather as ‘a real interaction among social groups and individuals. In addition, […] writing necessarily involves audiences. […] ’writing is a way of interacting with others – a social activity’; ‘it is part of the way in which some people live in the world.’

Writing is considered to be a social activity *par excellence* because it is a medium through which individuals exchange ideas and communicate with others. As we have already mentioned in our chapter on autobiography, the autobiographer’s social relationships in the real world are portrayed in the written text through the use of intertextuality. Michael Smith writes about our connections in the world through literature when he states that “in order to understand literature, we must also make connections between the texts that we read and the text of our lives.” In his narrative, Barthes associates his personal identity with notions of alterity through the act of

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522 Terry Eagleton writes that all literary texts find their origins in other texts: “All literary texts are woven out of other texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear the traces of ‘influence’ but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings that precede or surround the original work. There is no such thing as literary originality, no such thing as the ‘first’ literary work, all literature is ‘intertextual’. A specific piece of writing thus has no clearly defined boundaries: it spills over constantly into the works clustered around it, generating a hundred different perspectives which dwindle to vanishing point.” (*Literary Theory*, p.138.).

writing. He stages the autobiographical subject as a social, cultural and relational phenomenon through intertextuality; these relationships emphasize the interchangeability between Barthes’s personal experiences and his literary influences. For Barthes, who is almost exclusively known as an academic and a critic, “life” and “writing” are inseparable, and his autobiographical text is constructed in a manner that reflects on the connections that exist between life and literature. Barthes’s use of intertextuality in his personal narrative not only serves as a strategy to challenge dominant discourses, but also to frame his autobiographical subject within a literary framework.

5.4 Intertextuality as a Deconstructive Tool in Roland Barthes
par Roland Barthes

To understand how the intertextual references that are woven into the narrative participate in the construction of Barthes’s identity, we must first understand what impact intertextual relationships have within the space of autobiography. Siobhan O’Flynn writes about the use of intertextuality in autobiography as a deconstructive tool: “[intertextuality] deconstructs the authority of the text, in that any text and any writing exist within a community of other texts and other writers.” O’Flynn also explains that intertextuality reflects a strategy used by an author to disrupt, deconstruct and transgress dominant discourses within his own practices of writing:

When a narrative includes quotations from theory, or cites theory, the author is not necessarily succumbing to the authority of the theorist or that idea, but is in fact

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524 See also Graham Allen who states that Barthes uses intertextuality to challenge dominant notions on the role of the author in the act of writing: “Barthes employs intertextual theory to challenge long-held assumptions concerning the role of the author in the production of meaning and the very nature of literary meaning itself. For Barthes, literary meaning can never be fully stabilized by the reader, since the literary work’s intertextual nature always leads readers on to new textual relations.” (Intertextuality, p.3.).

deconstructing the theory, destroying the commentary, at the same time as she is interrupting the narrative.  

In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the use of intertextuality represents a self-reflexive strategy for Barthes to favour a plural mode of writing and to bring attention to the community of texts that have informed his work as a literary critic. By introducing intertextuality into his personal narrative, Barthes presents his autobiographical subject as an extension of society through the use of writing techniques and practices. Barthes is an individual who has matured into an important writer as a result of the writers who have influenced him. In order to highlight his development as an iconic writer and critic within French society, Barthes evokes the various figures that have inspired his own writing within his personal narrative.

### 5.5 Intertextuality in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

As we have already mentioned in the pages above, the first signs of intertextuality in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* are found in the photographic images. In the caption he provides for a postcard of the city of Bayonne, Barthes’s childhood memories are evoked through intertextual references to literature:

Bayonne, Bayonne, ville parfaite: fluviale, aérée d’entours sonores (Mouserolles, Marac, Lachepaillet, Beyris), et cependant ville enfermée, ville romanesque: Proust, Balzac,

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527 Siobhan O’Flynn writes about the strong connection that exists between writing and reading: “We need to constantly read what the community writes in order to discover where we are positioned in the ideological wars of our time. Engaging the texts of the community inside your text is a way of clarifying our relationships to each other’s thoughts and disabusing ourselves of our ideological and intellectual delusions.” (Siobhan O’Flynn. “Challenging the Cartesian self: Autobiography as an intertextual/interrelational discourse in the works of Aritha van Herk and Kristjana Gunnars,” p.67.)
Barthes’s description of Bayonne offers insight into the way in which he would like the personal story to be interpreted. By linking the fictional universe of Proust, Balzac and Zola (Plassans) to his own past, Barthes connects his personal history to a very complex network of intertextual relationships. Through the symbolic associations created by the mention of these authors, Barthes introduces fictional writing into his personal narrative. In Balzac’s novels, including the series that he refers to as *La Comédie humaine*, which was inspired by Dante Alighieri’s *La divina commedia*, Balzac depicts the different social classes of his time and the various individuals who composed them. In his novels, Balzac constructs a very realistic fictional world where the same characters re-appear in different novels as if they were historical figures with an existence in the real world, outside of the fictional setting of the novel. *La Comédie humaine* and its recurring characters have influenced other great figures of literature in France, including Émile Zola in the *Rougon Macquart* series and then Marcel Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. By introducing Proust, Balzac and Zola into his autobiographical narrative, Barthes engages these authors in his text to convey certain ideas about his own existence in French society and culture. In his description of the postcard of Bayonne, the place where he spent most of his childhood summers, Barthes identifies certain themes in the novels of Proust, Balzac and Zola to describe the city: “la ville enfermée” and “romanesque” of “Plassans” that recalls the fictional writing of Zola; “l’imaginaire primordial de l’enfance” and “l’histoire comme odeur” that brings up popular themes in Proust; “la bourgeoisie comme discours” that is typical in Balzac’s writing. These themes allow Barthes to frame his childhood memories with fictional details. By presenting his past through the lens of fictional scenes and events, Barthes links his

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childhood memories to the writing practices of these literary giants and narrows the gap between life and writing. Particular emphasis is placed on the interpretation of his autobiographical subject as a fictional character when Barthes stresses the connection between his life and his literary production:

Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman – ou plutôt par plusieurs. Car l’imaginaire, matière fatale du roman et labyrinthe des redans dans lesquels se fourvoie celui qui parle de lui-même, l’imaginaire est pris en charge par plusieurs masques (personae) échelonnés selon la profondeur de la scène (et cependant derrière). Le livre ne choisit pas, il fonctionne par alternance, il marche par bouffées d’imaginaire simple et d’accès critiques, mais ces accès eux-mêmes ne sont jamais que des effets de retentissement: pas de plus pur imaginaire que la critique (de soi). La substance de ce livre, finalement, est donc totalement romanesque. L’intrusion, dans le discours de l’essai, d’une troisième personne qui ne renvoie cependant à aucune créature fictive, marque la nécessité de remodeler les genres: que l’essai s’avoue presque un roman: un roman sans noms propres.\(^{529}\)

Through the alternating fictional worlds of Balzac, Proust and Zola, Barthes demonstrates how the substance of his personal writing is “romanesque” or fictional in the sense that it is confined within the framework of literature. By presenting his personal experiences as a text, Barthes shows how, within the context of “life writing”, “life” becomes synonymous with “writing.” He must necessarily construct his identity in relation to a text where notions of referentiality are challenged.\(^{530}\) Barthes presents his autobiographical subject as a phenomenon that is framed within a specific literary tradition, through which different concepts and themes, both his own and those of other writers, are combined. He draws on a variety of cultural references to construct his autobiographical subject. He introduces some key concepts into his narrative to

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\(^{530}\) Albert Genon explains how Barthes’s autobiographical subject cannot be anything other than a literary construct: “En proposant un ‘fictif de l’identité’ selon le formule de Roland Barthes, le sujet narré se fait double fantomatique, être de langage, se parlant, s’inventant lui-même. Ainsi, pour citer de nouveau Barthes, ‘le sujet, dispersé, inconstitué, ne peut se saisir qu’au prix d’un imaginaire.’ Le sujet n’est plus un, ne peut plus être un puisque l’identité s’exprimant dans l’univers romanesque n’obéit plus aux lois référentielles, la création de cet autre moi-même dans l’espace littéraire vient à dissoudre le sujet, à le fracturer, le disséminer et le pluraliser. Ce ‘nouveau sujet’ de l’ère du soupçon ne peut alors que complexifier le regard critique sur toute entreprise littéraire se penchant sur le moi.” (*Hervé Guibert: Vers une esthétique postmoderne*, p.167).
challenge established notions of self-referential writing. The references that Barthes makes in his text allow him to explore identity as a phenomenon that is constructed through processes of interaction. As one of France’s most celebrated intellectuals, Barthes has drawn from a large number of influences in his writing as a means to develop and refine his own discourse; his writing still exerts a powerful influence in academic thinking to date. In his own role as a critic, Barthes had become familiar with the works of celebrated figures of French culture, which were often the subject of his writing projects. In one of the excerpts from *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, entitled “la chambre d’échos,” Barthes explains how he identifies himself as the echo of his social and cultural milieu through the medium of writing:

Par rapport aux systèmes qui l’entourent, qui est-il? Plutôt une chambre d’échos: il reproduit […] les pensées, il suit les mots: il rend visite, c'est-à-dire hommage, aux vocabulaires, il invoque les notions, il les répète […] mais l’intertexte qui est ainsi créé est à la lettre superficiel: on adhère librement: le nom (philosophique, psychanalytique, politique, scientifique) garde avec son système d’origine un cordon qui n’est pas coupé mais qui reste: tenace et flottant.531

When Barthes refers to his identity in terms of an echo, by reproducing the ideas and concepts of other authors in his writing projects, he presents identity as a linguistic phenomenon that emerges from social discourses. The notion of “echo” in the construction of Barthes’s identity, brings to mind the “echo effect” described by Laurent Jenny in his very well known article “The Strategy of the Form.”532 Jenny’s “echo effect” refers to the repetition of ideas and concepts from one text to another, through which every act of writing is an act of remembrance in which every text is reflected in another.

532 Laurent Jenny borrows Mallarmé’s concept of the “echo” to refer to the relationships of intertextuality that exist in all texts: “Lorsque Mallarmé écrivit: “Plus ou moins tous les livres contiennent la fusion de quelque redite comptée”, il souligne un phénomène qui, loin d’être une particularité curieuse du livre, un effet d’écho, une interférence sans conséquence définit la condition même de la lisibilité littéraire. Hors de l’intertextualité, l’œuvre littéraire serait tout simplement imperceptible, au même titre que la parole d’une langue encore inconnue.” (“La stratégie de la forme,” p.257.).
In his narrative, Barthes names and cites many iconic figures of art, history, literature, philosophy, theatre, linguistics, cinema, etc. The different references made in his text can be arranged in thematic order. One of the themes that emerges in the narrative, and that we have already mentioned, is fictional writing: the novelists to which Barthes refers in his text are Balzac (p. 61,86), Chateaubriand (p. 74,76), Gide (p. 89,91,94), Proust (p. 83, 100, 122, 129, 152), Sade (p. 65,81,85,130,147), Verne (p. 124), and Zola (p. 109). Philosophy is another theme that is addressed in the text through Barthes’s mention of authors such as Hegel (p. 111, 146), Marx (p. 62,74,85,96,119), Nietzsche (p. 100,141,149) and Sartre (p. 96,97,107). Barthes explores the theme of psychoanalysis when he refers to icons such as Freud (p. 70) and Lacan (p. 74). He also addresses the subject of linguistics with the authors Benveniste (p. 124) and Saussure (p. 141). Other subjects are evoked in Barthes’s narrative: performance art, in particular classical music (Bach, Brahms, Mozart et Schubert, p. 150); theatre (Brecht (p. 96, 100, 107, 109, 135, 147), Handke (p. 103) and Racine (p. 80, 119, 124, 127); and cinema (Pasolini (p. 132) and Rivette (p. 152)). The introduction of prominent figures of French culture within Barthes’s text establishes the theoretical and ideological foundations of his narrative, and articulates the autobiographical subject within a specific sociocultural context. To a certain extent, the intertextual references used by Barthes force a reading of his personal narrative as a critical essay; the various themes that arise from the different references provide tools of analysis through which the reader must navigate to “interpret” the author’s stance on personal writing. As

533 Blaise Bayili stresses the importance of culture in human existence; culture has anthropological meaning, it defines human existence, our socio-personal relationships, and contributes to our perception of reality: “Pour comprendre l’inculturation, on ne sait négliger, dans son processus, les présupposées anthropologiques. C’est-à-dire la perception de l’homme comme être culturel, ce qui induit que la personne est définie par sa culture en tant qu’individu et communauté. La culture est une donnée proto-primaire car, comme le dit si bien L. Boff, tout ce qui est humain est culturel, quel que soit le niveau où nous considérons le phénomène humain. La culture est le lieu de l’homme, c’est là que s’élabora le “Nous” existential qui structure la vie en ses réalités, et relations sociales et personnelles.” (Culture et inculturation: approche théorique et méthodologique, p.163.)
a result, the many references and quotations assembled in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* participate in presenting this text as a mode of writing that attests to the author’s critical reflections on the practice of self-referential writing. Barthes alludes to the function of the personal narrative in his fragment “Le livre du Moi”:

Le livre du Moi

Ses ‘idées’ ont quelque rapport avec la modernité, voire avec ce qu’on appelle l’avant-garde (le sujet, l’Histoire, le sexe, la langue), mais il résiste à ses idées: son ‘moi,’ concrétion rationnelle, y résiste sans cesse. Quoiqu’il soit fait apparemment d’une suite d’‘idées’; il est le livre du Moi, le livre de mes résistances à mes propres idées; c’est un livre récessif (qui recule, mais aussi, peut-être, qui prend du recul). Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman – ou plutôt par plusieurs.⑤③④

This fragment is one of the most meaningful excerpts in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Barthes’s commentary on self-referential writing (“Le livre du Moi”) makes important allusions to his own autobiography as a book of ideas. The groundbreaking moment in the narrative occurs when we recognize Barthes’s text as a process of interpretation, something that had not previously been attempted by autobiographers. By subjecting his personal narrative to a comparison of fictional writing, Barthes writes his text as an interpretative work. As any student of literature knows, most novels are analyzed in relation to their social, cultural and historical contexts. Literary analysis is often performed through and supported by references to different sources of culture and scholarship; Barthes included often draws from a variety of cultural figures to analyze texts. With *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, what we see for the first time is an autobiography that is not written only to be read, but to be interpreted just as any other literary text would be.

5.6 Literary and Social Criticism as Forms of Personal Writing

It is important to mention that at the time when Barthes wrote *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, intertextuality was considered a taboo practice in autobiographical writing. The use of intertextuality in this text becomes a strategy for Barthes to experiment with the conventions of autobiography. The multiple intertextual references attest to his intellectual capabilities (the fact that he is well read), possibly hinting at the fact that all writers are influenced by past readings. Barthes’s development into an intellectual is largely due to the influence that other writers of Western culture had on him; he is able to recognize himself as an iconic figure, but only in relation to other prominent figures of culture. Barthes wrote extensively on certain authors and many of his critical works have become essential sources in cultural analysis: *Michelet par lui-même* (written on the French historian Jules Michelet) ; *S/Z* (Based on Balzac’s *Sarrasine*); *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Based on the writing of the Marquis de Sade, Charles Fourier, and Ignatius Loyola); *Sur Racine* (Based on Racine’s tragedies); *Le Plaisir du texte* (Proust). Although Barthes wrote extensively on the works of other individuals, these texts essentially point to his own legacy of writing. As monuments to his own intellectual parcours, these texts demonstrate how the writing practices of others contribute to Barthes’s own identification as a writer. For example, Barthes speaks of himself as an “imaginary” figure when he quotes Marx:

Marx: ‘De même que les peuples anciens ont vécu leur préhistoire en imagination, dans la *mythologie*, nos avons, nous Allemands, vécu notre posthistoire en pensée dans la philosophie. Nous sommes des contemporains *philosophiques* du présent, sans être ses contemporains *historiques.*’ De la même façon, je ne suis que le contemporain imaginaire de mon propre présent: contemporain de ses langages, de ses utopies, de ses systèmes (c’est-à-dire de ses fictions) bref de sa mythologie ou de sa philosophie, mais non de son histoire, dont je n’habite que le reflet dansant: *fantasmagorique.*

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The references that Barthes makes to the “classic” figures of culture, such as Marx, Brecht, Freud, Sade, Proust, etc., reveal just as much about Barthes as they do of the figures themselves. Barthes attests to this fact when he writes that criticism is a practice that reveals more about the critic than about the object of criticism:

Comment croire en effet que l’œuvre est un objet extérieur à la psyché et à l’histoire de celui qui l’interroge et vis-à-vis duquel le critique aurait une sorte de droit d’extériorialité? Par quel miracle la communication profonde que la plupart des critiques postulent entre l’œuvre et l’auteur qu’ils étudient, cesserait-elle lorsqu’il s’agit de leur propre œuvre et de leur propre temps? Y aurait-il des lois de création valables pour l’écrivain mais non pour le critique? Toute critique doit inclure dans son discours (fût-ce de la façon la mieux détournée et la plus pudique qui soit) un discours implicite sur elle-même; toute critique est critique de l’œuvre et critique de soi-même; pour reprendre un jeu de mots de Claudel, elle est connaissance de l’autre et co-naissance de soi-même au monde.\(^{536}\)

The relationships of intertextuality established in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* give expression to Barthes’s perception of himself as a writer. Barthes discusses the role of criticism in his narrative as a strategy of interpretation: “L’opération critique consiste à déchiffrer l’embarras des raisons, des alibis, des apparences, bref tout le naturel social, pour rendre manifeste l’échange réglé sur quoi repose la marche sémantique et la vie collective.”\(^{537}\) When the intertextual relationships are further analyzed, they represent a movement towards the intimate. In an excerpt that he entitles “Qu’est-ce que l’influence?,” Barthes discusses the evolution of the subject of writing as a result of his readings; he links his readings to his own identity:

On voit bien dans les *Essais critiques* comment le sujet de l’écriture ‘évolue’ (passant d’une morale de l’engagement à une moralité du signifiant): il évolue au gré des auteurs dont il traite, progressivement. L’objet inducteur n’est cependant pas l’auteur dont je parle, mais plutôt ce qu’il m’amène à dire de lui: je m’influence moi-même avec sa

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permission: ce que je dis de lui m’oblige à le penser de moi (ou à ne pas le penser, etc.).

With each allusion that is made to the different figures of culture in his text, Barthes traces his own history through connections to the writing of others. In another fragment of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, he describes how Bataille’s writing “describes” him:

Bataille, en somme, me touche peu: qu’ai-je à faire avec le rire, la dévotion, la poésie, la violence? Qu’ai-je à dire du ‘sacré,’ de l’ ‘impossible’? Cependant, il suffit que je fasse coïncider tout ce langage (étranger) avec un trouble qui a nom chez moi la peur, pour que Bataille me reconquière: tout ce qu’il écrit, alors, me décrit: ça colle.

One of the figures with whom Barthes relates on a very personal level and who is cited repeatedly is Proust. As noted above, Proust represents an important part of Barthes’s writing practice. This becomes evident in *Le Plaisir du texte*, in which he devotes a significant portion of the text to Proust. With respect to the references that Barthes makes to Proust in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, in a fragment he entitles “Odeurs,” he reveals that the nostalgia that is brought on by sensorial memories in Proust’s writing (the smell of the Madeleine for instance), evoke certain motifs of his own past:

Chez Proust, trois sens sur cinq conduisent le souvenir. Mais pour moi, mise à part la voix, moins sonore au fond que, par son grain, parfumée, le souvenir, le désir, la mort, le retour impossible, ne sont pas de ce côté-la; mon corps ne marche pas dans l’histoire de la madeleine, des pavés et des serviettes de Balbec. De ce qui ne reviendra plus, c’est l’odeur qui me revient. Ainsi de l’odeur de mon enfance bayonnaise: tel le monde encerclé par le mandala, tout Bayonne est ramassé dans une odeur composée, celle du Petit-Bayonne (quartier entre le Nive et l’Adour): la corde travaillée par les Sandaliers, l’épicerie obscure, la cire des vieux bois, les cages d’escalier sans air, le noir de vieilles Basquaises, noires jusqu’à la cupule d’étoffe qui tenait leur chignon, l’huile espagnole, l’humidité des artisanats et des petits commerces (relieurs, quincailliers), la poussière de papier de la bibliothèque municipale (où j’appris la sexualité dans Suétone et Martial), la colle des pianos en réparation chez Bossière, quelque effluve de chocolat, produit de la ville, tout cela consistant, historique, provincial et méridional. (Dictée.)

(Je me rappelle avec folie les odeurs: c’est que je vieillis.)\(^5\)

By recalling Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Barthes looks back on the past with nostalgia, especially his youth, for which only memories and a few photographs remain. At the mention of the Madeleine of Proust’s childhood, Barthes recalls his youth in Bayonne. It is by recalling Proust’s novel that Barthes finally realizes that memory engages “le retour impossible au passé”\(^6\) and that his own story differs from Proust’s. In many essays dedicated to the study of autobiographical narratives, memory is often treated as a fundamental element; if one is to write one’s life story, one must in some way or another resurrect the past. By integrating elements of Proust’s writing into his autobiographical text, Barthes is able to manipulate memory and to rewrite the past through the fictional model of writing: the smell of the Madeleine of Proust’s youth is replaced by the familiar smells of Bayonne from Barthes’s childhood. Barthes’s personal writing, which is superimposed on the classical example of Proust’s madeleine, engages in the rewriting (“co-naisance de soi au monde”) of classical conventions; in the narrative, Barthes exchanges his personal experiences with those of Proust to comment on the processes of memory involved in the “remembrance of things past” (*À la recherche du temps perdu*). When he refers to the smells of Bayonne, Barthes not only acknowledges the differences that exist between his personal experiences and the intimate events recounted by Proust in his novel, but he also distinguishes between his own subjective experiences as an ageing individual; he recalls his past at Bayonne as an older man who is sensitive to odours. As the example of the Madeleine reveals, the different cultural references that Barthes includes in his text allow him to recontextualize classical models of writing within his own personal experience of writing. What


\(^6\) This expression calls heavily on Proust’s own title for his novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. 
is interesting about many of the references that Barthes makes in his text is that they are often associated with individuals with ideas – individuals who have introduced original concepts or ways of thinking in our culture. These individuals have pushed thinking forward and have been analyzed extensively and quoted *ad infinitum*. The reference made to Sade, for example, evokes liberalism or the freedom of expression in writing (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*). The reference made to Pasolini, the Italian film director, evokes controversy, since he was often the center of censorship. In his films, Pasolini portrays characters at the margins of society and expresses unconventional ideas related to topics such as fascism and homosexuality. *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 days of Sodom*) is a film written and directed by Pasolini based on the Marquis de Sade’s book *120 journées de Sodome*. The plot is divided into four segments to mimic Dante’s inferno. *Salò* transposes the setting of the Marquis de Sade’s book from 18th century France to the days of Benito Mussolini’s regime in Italy. The film, which features graphic displays of sexual violence and torture, was banned in several countries. The screenplay for this movie was written in collaboration with Sergio Citti with the use of extended quotes from Roland Barthes’s *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* and Pierre Klossowski’s *Sand mon prochain*. In 1976, Barthes was one of the only critics who had seen the film and reviewed it in an article “Sade-Pasolini” that was published in *Le Monde*. Barthes’s writings on Sade and Pasolini attest to how his practice of criticism had in some way reflected his own influences in culture; Barthes, who writes about Sade in a book (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*), which is quoted by Pasolini in his film *Salò* (the screenplay’s use of extended quotes from Roland Barthes’s *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*), writes a critique on Pasolini’s film (“Sade-Pasolini”). This attests to Barthes’s own complex entanglement in critical writing and in culture. Each figure quoted by Barthes in his autobiographical narrative is only one fragment in an infinite source of ideas that co-exist and contradict each other within the space of Barthes’s own text. Each fragment represents just one
element in Barthes’s extensive writing practice and illustrates how his sensibility as a critic and writer has influenced the way he identifies with and positions himself within the broader cultural dialogue. Due to some important influences in his critical writing, such as Sade for example in Barthes’s book *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, Barthes has been able to assert his own influence in French culture as a critical writer.

The introduction of iconic figures in Barthes’s text introduces important analytical and theoretical perspectives in Barthes’s own mode of thinking; these figures represent the ideas that have shaped Barthes’s own innovative writing style, especially in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. In *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, for instance, Barthes writes about how the Marquis de Sade, Charles Fourier and Ignatius Loyola are “Logothètes” or founders of language; according to Barthes each of these authors were successful in introducing a form of writing that had not previously been known:

La langue qu’ils fondent n’est évidemment pas une langue linguistique, une langue de communication. C’est une langue nouvelle, traversée par la langue naturelle (ou qui la traverse), mais qui ne peut s’offrir qu’à la définition sémiologique du Texte. Cela n’empêche pas cette langue artificielle (peut-être parce qu’elle est ici fondée par des auteurs anciens, prise dans une double structure classique, celle de la représentation et du style […] leur activité de logothètes, nos auteurs, semble-t-il, ont eu recours tous les trois aux mêmes opérations.\

Each figure quoted by Barthes is only one fragment in an infinite source of ideas that co-exist and contradict each other within the space of Barthes’s writing. Each fragment represents just one element in Barthes’s entire body of writing and illustrates how Barthes’s sensibility as a critic

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542 The term “Logothete” was an administrative title that was used during the Roman Empire. It referred to an individual who held a senior administrative role in the government, similar to the modern role of minister or secretary of state. The meaning of the word in Greek is “one who sets the word.”

critic and writer has influenced the way he identifies and inscribes himself in writing. Due to some important influences in Barthes’s critical writing, Barthes has been able to develop his own unique style as a critical writer who has often been associated with innovative thinking.

5.7 Critical Reading as an Expression of Self-Representation in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes

Before establishing his reputation as an academic, Barthes spent a significant amount of time reading. The practice of reading had become an important aspect in Barthes’s own development as a writer, especially in his role as a critic. In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Barthes emphasizes the significant part that reading plays in his everyday life:

Pendant les vacances, je me lève à sept heures, je descends, j’ouvre la maison, je me fais du thé, je hache du pain pour les oiseaux qui attendent dans le jardin, je me lave, j’époussette ma table de travail, j’en vide les cendriers, je coupe une rose, j’écoute les informations de sept heures et demie. À huit heures, ma mère descend à son tour; je déjeune avec elle de deux œufs à la coque, d’un rond de pain grillé et de café noir sans sucre; à huit heures et quart, je vais chercher le Sud-Ouest au village; je dis à Mme. C.: il fait beau, il fait gris, etc.; et puis je commence à travailler [...] Je me couche à dix heures et lis à la suite un peu de deux livres: d’une part un ouvrage de langue bien littéraire (les Confidences de Lamartine, le Journal des Goncourt, etc.), et d’autre part un roman policier (plutôt ancien), ou un roman anglais (démodé), ou du Zola. 544

Reading becomes second nature to Barthes, and is structured into his daily routine, along with cutting bread for the birds and the formalities he exchanges with Mme. C. In the fragment he entitles “Emploi du temps,” he elaborates further on the connection between reading and his daily activities:

Je vis dans une société d’émetteurs (en étant un moi-même): chaque personne que je rencontre ou qui m’écrit m’adresse un livre, un texte, un bilan, un prospectus, une protestation, une invitation à un spectacle, à une exposition, etc. La jouissance d’écrire, de produire, presse de toutes parts, mais le circuit étant commercial, la production libre reste engorgée, affolée et comme éperdue, la plupart du temps, les textes, les spectacles vont là où on ne les demande pas, ils rencontrent, pour leur malheur, des ‘relations,’ non des amis, encore moins des partenaires, ce qui fait que cette sorte d’éjaculation collective

544 Roland Barthes. Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, p.79.
de l’écriture, dans laquelle on pourrait voir la scène utopique d’une société libre (ou la jouissance circulerait sans passer par l’argent), tourne aujourd’hui à l’apocalypse.

By describing his social encounters as experiences through which his peers transmit writing to one another, Barthes relates his existence in the world as an experience of intertextuality; he describes his social relationships as intertextual exchanges, through which his life is inextricably linked with literature (in the same way his own writing is linked to other practices of writing). His different experiences of reading have grown to represent fundamental aspects of his own career as a writer:

Sans doute, n’y-a-t’il plus un seul adolescent qui ait ce fantasme: être écrivain! De quel contemporain vouloir copier, non l’œuvre, mais les pratiques, les postures, cette façon de se promener dans le monde, un carnet dans la poche et une phrase dans la tête (tel je voyais Gide circulant de la Russie au Congo, lisant ses classiques et écrivant ses carnets au wagon-restaurant en attendant les plats; tel je le vis réellement, un jour de 1939, au fond de la brasserie Lutéïa, mangeant une poire et lisant un livre)? Car ce que le fantasme impose, c’est l’écrivain tel qu’on peut le voir dans son journal intime, c’est l’écrivain moins son œuvre: forme suprême du sacré: la marque et le vide.

In this passage, Barthes alludes to an incident where he imagines Gide on a train in 1939. From a distance, Barthes pictures Gide engaging in a private moment as he dines on a pear and reads a book. In Barthes’s fantasy, Gide never becomes anything other than the writer Gide – even at his most mundane level (eating a pear on the train). The notion that Gide is reading his own published material in Barthes’s fantasy illustrates how Barthes engages the writer (Gide) in the reading of his own writing (Gide’s works) and reflects Barthes’s own perception of himself as a writer. In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Barthes cites Gide as one of his most important influences:

Peut-on – ou du moins pouvait-on autrefois – commencer à écrire sans se prendre pour un autre? À l’histoire des sources, il faudrait substituer l’histoire des figures: l’origine de l’œuvre, ce n’est pas la première influence, c’est la première posture: on copie un rôle,

546 Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, p.76-77.
puis, par métonymie, un art: je commence à produire en reproduisant celui que je voudrais être. Ce premier vœu (je désire et je me voue) fonde un système secret de fantasmes qui persistent d’âge en âge, souvent indépendamment des écrits de l’auteur désiré.


Barthes attributes his authorial origins to Gide; he admits that the first article he wrote is written in Gide’s style. In his influences on Barthes’s origins in writing, Gide becomes a “father figure” to compensate for the father Barthes that had not known as a child. In “Le cercle des fragments” on the topic of the fragment, Barthes writes that “son premier texte ou à peu près (1942) est fait de fragments; ce choix est alors justifié à la manière gidienne.” In this excerpt, Barthes demonstrates how he connects himself to Gide’s body of work through the fragment; his predilection for the fragment (S/Z, Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Michelet par lui-même, Sur Racine, La Chambre claire, Le plaisir du texte, Mythologies, etc.) is connected to Gide’s own economic and fragmented style of writing (L’arbitraire, Thésée, La porte étroite, Le grincheux, Les cahiers et les Poésies d’André Walter, Lafcadio, etc.). Barthes’s understanding of himself through the representation of the fragment is especially evident in his description of “La côtelette”:

La côtelette

Voici ce que j’ai fait un jour de mon corps:

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À Leysin, en 1945, pour me faire un pneumothorax extrapleural, on m’enleva un morceau de côte […] Je gardai longtemps dans un tiroir ce morceau de moi-même, sorte de pénis osseux analogue au manche d’une côtelette d’agneau […] Et puis, un jour, comprenant que la fonction de tout tiroir est d’adoucir, d’acclimater la mort des objets en les faisant passer par une sorte d’endroit pieux, de chapelle poussiéreuse où, sous couvert de les garder vivants, on leur ménage un temps décent de morne agonie, mais n’allant pas jusqu’à oser jeter ce bout de moi-même dans la poubelle commune de l’immeuble, je balançai la côtelette et sa gaze, du haut du balcon, comme si je dispersais romantiquement mes propres cendres, dans la rue Servandoni, où quelque chien dut venir les flairer.

The representation of the cracked rib becomes a strategy for Barthes to write about his body in terms of a fragment. When related to its biblical intertext, the cracked rib takes on special meaning. In the Second Book of Genesis, God – the father of all creation – creates man and woman in his likeness. God removes a rib from man (“Adam”) while he is sleeping to create woman (“Eve”). Within the context of Barthes’s autobiographical writing, the interaction between the different textual fragments reveal Barthes’s writing as a complex, dynamic and plural phenomenon that finds its origins outside the frame of his own body of writing. When contextualizing Barthes’s origins in relation to Gide’s writing, it is really difficult to overlook the striking similarities between some of the photographs that are included in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes and those found in Gide par lui-même. (Fig.8, Fig.9) Although this may

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550 The reference to the rib from the Book of Genesis 2:21 is as follows: “Then the Lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him. Then the man said, ‘At last, here is one of my own kind – Bone take from my bone, and flesh from my flesh. Of man. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one.’” *The Good News Bible.*
551 These images have been arranged in two columns. The column on the left features Barthes’s photographs (*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*). The photographs to the right are from *Gide par lui-même*. To our knowledge, the similarities between Barthes’s and Gide’s photographs in the “Écrivains de toujours” collection have not been discussed in previous interpretations of Barthes’s text. What is most striking between the photographs is that some of Barthes’s most studied and most discussed images – “Le stade du miroir” and the blurred image of his mother (Fig. 9) share similarities with the photographs in Gide’s biography. Gide’s image of a young child with his mother mirrors Barthes’s image of himself with his own mother. The comparison between the blurred photograph of Barthes’s mother (“Eve”) alongside the blurred male figure depicted in Gide’s photograph (“Adam”) evokes our discussion of the rib – in its biblical context – and Barthes’s origins as a writer. Although *Gide par lui-même* was not written by Gide, but by Claude Martin in 1963, it is part of the “Écrivains de toujours” collection to which
represent a lucky coincidence, the similarities between the images in *Gide par lui-même* and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* could provide an example of how the text acknowledges its own origins within the “Écrivains de toujours” collection. The description of the dog in the fragment regarding the rib describes how Barthes’s body becomes an act of consumption. Within the context of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the different fragments used in the text contribute to Barthes’s own body of writing as an act of consumption (within the context of the “Écrivains de toujours” collection with *Michelet par lui-même* and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, and within autobiographical writing) through an interpretative reading of the narrative.

For Barthes, meaning in every text is essentially determined by the reader.

6 *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: autobiographical writing as a performance of Barthes’s identity as a writer and a critic

During the last years of his life, writing had become a highly personal experience for Barthes. The introspective nature of his last writing projects reflects his understanding that his intellectual work is an integral part of his critical theory. It is especially in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (1977), and *La Chambre claire* (1980), which feature Barthes’s very personal approach to critical writing, that his critical thought is intimately linked to his own perception of self. Maurice Vernes reiterates the idea of a strong link between the intellectual writer and his writing when he suggests in very colourful terms that “l’encre qui coule de la plume des savants a plus de valeur que le sang.”

552 In his

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*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* belongs. This discovery adds new dimensions to our discussion on Barthes’s photographs and Barthes’s role as a primary agent of meaning in his text.

552 Maurice Vernes. “Influences chrétiennes dans la littérature religieuse de l’Islam,” p.188.
autobiographical narrative, Barthes integrates a few images to demonstrate how his body is represented through writing. In one particular image that he integrates among the family photographs and that he captions “La tuberculose-rétro,” he includes an old medical chart that was used to monitor the tuberculosis that he contracted as a teenager. Barthes describes the chart as a way of “writing one’s body within time” (Fig.10): “(Chaque mois, on collait une nouvelle feuille au bout de l’ancienne; à la fin, il y en avait des mètres: façon-farce d’écrire son corps dans le temps).” In a textual fragment he entitles “L’ellipse,” Barthes explains that writing runs through the human body – “l’écriture passe par le corps”\(^\text{553}\) – in a similar fashion as blood, which runs through a human’s veins:

Quelqu’un l’interroge: ‘Vous avez écrit que l’écriture passe par le corps: pouvez-vous l’expliquer?’

Il s’aperçoit alors combien de tels énoncés, si clairs pour lui, sont obscurs pour beaucoup. Pourtant, la phrase n’est pas insensée, mais seulement elliptique: c’est l’ellipse qui n’est pas supportée. À quoi s’ajoute ici, peut-être, une résistance moins formelle: l’opinion publique a une conception réduite du corps: c’est toujours, semble-t-il, ce qui s’oppose à l’âme: toute extension un peu métonymique du corps est taboue.\(^\text{554}\)

In this excerpt, Barthes discusses how certain expressions he uses are sometimes unclear to others.\(^\text{555}\) The notion of difference is important in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* when considering the book’s uncertain boundaries, since it is located at the confluence of several genres: autobiography, biography, fiction, theoretical/philosophical essay, etc. Barthes’s experience of difference becomes a crucial aspect in the interpretation of his text; as an individual who stands out from his social context, the intertextual relationships that frame Barthes’s identity within the narrative become secondary sources to the text’s intratextual


\(^{555}\) This recalls Barthes’s remark about Sade, Fourier and Loyola as “Logothètes.” Barthes has managed to create his own “codes” or language through his writing practices.
undercurrent. Through relationships of intratextuality, Barthes’s written text stages the themes illustrated in the photographs; like the photograph of Barthes at the beach, in which his identity becomes the focal point for the articulation of the family’s collective identity in the family album, Barthes creates an effect of self-referential writing in his book by introducing intratextual references throughout his narrative. Within the context of autobiographical writing, the references made in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* to his earlier publications become metaphors for the self in the text – as Barthes’s own writings adopt a strong self-referential dimension in his narrative: “Le texte de *Roland Barthes*, argumentatif et polyphonique, est un autoportrait intellectuel de l’écrivain et de son œuvre, qui tend à éviter le démonstratif et l’anecdotique.”

Despite the references made by Barthes to various sources of culture, his own ideas take precedence in the construction of meaning in the text. Barthes’s earlier publications, which serve to introduce his own ideologies and theoretical concepts into his autobiographical narrative, act as intertexts to his practice of personal writing.

### 6.1 Intratextuality in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

What is important to understand with the writing of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is that most of the important figures mentioned in his autobiographical narrative – individuals who have contributed to the development and the evolution of ideas in society – also contribute to Barthes’s own theoretical conception of language, literature and the writing by which these are unavoidably created. As we have already discussed in our previous section on intertextuality, Barthes wrote critical essays on several icons of French culture: Gide (*Le Magazine Littéraire*);

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557 Anne Hershberg-Pierrot states that the autotextual references in Barthes’s text are what foreground the text’s reading: “[les] références autotextuelles sous-tend la lecture du texte.” Hershberg-Pierrot, Anne. (“Inédits de Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes: Ellipses et mémoire,” p.14.).
Brecht, Bataille, Chateaubriand, Baudelaire (*Essais critiques*); Racine (*Sur Racine*); Sade and Pasolini (*Le Monde*); Saussure (*Éléments de la sémiologie*), Balzac (*S/Z*), etc. Through the influence that they had on his own development as a writer, these figures come into Barthes’s personal narrative to reflect his own practice of writing. The ideas of these iconic figures have inspired the revolutionary ideas and concepts that Barthes has implemented in his own body of writing throughout his career as an intellectual.

6.2 Defining Autotextuality/Intratextuality

Before we begin our analysis on the intratextual relationship in Barthes’s narrative, we would first like to define autotextuality/intratextuality to demonstrate its relevance within our study. The practice of autotextuality is a strategy that allows an author to reproduce excerpts from his own published material into the space of a single text. Autotextuality is defined as a “parallel practice to intertextuality, consisting of an author’s quoting from, alluding to, or variously revisiting his or her own earlier writing.”

The concept of autotextuality is mostly associated with Lucien Dällenbach’s very famous article “intertexte et autotexte.” Although Dällenbach is recognized as the first critic to have elaborated on the concept of autotextuality, he was inspired by the ideas of Jean Ricardou and Gérard Genette. Dällenbach defines the different types of intertextuality that emerge from the relationships between texts:

Une discrimination est établie entre *intertextualité générale* (rapports intertextuels entre textes d’auteurs différents) et *intertextualité restreinte* (rapports intertextuels entre textes du même auteur). Or cette démarcation n’est pas superposable à celle que propose *Pour une théorie du roman* (1971) où, soucieux de mettre en cause l’unité d’une œuvre et la notion correlative d’Auteur, Ricardou en arrivait fort logiquement à distinguer entre une *intertextualité externe* entendue comme rapport d’un texte à un autre texte et une *intertextualité interne* comprise comme rapport d’un texte à lui-même.

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Autotextuality creates an effect of *mise en abyme*; since it establishes a series of internal dialogues within the space of a single text. According to Dällenbach, autotextuality involves the concept of self-citation within a text and is a self-reflexive practice that opens up a text to multiple meanings: “Different from theories of intertextuality, Dällenbach suggests that through autotextuality a text reflects upon itself, both structurally and in terms of content, and establishes dialogues within itself through internal repetition.”

The autotextual relationships in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* are intended to engage Barthes’s own ideas on writing in the construction of his text.

### 6.3 The role of Intratextuality in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

By introducing previous publications into his autobiography, Barthes recontextualizes the retrospective and self-referential apparatuses of autobiography to create his own unique model of personal writing. By studying the manuscript of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Amin Kotin Morimer acknowledges that prior to writing his autobiography, Barthes undertakes a rereading of his earlier writings:

*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes: étude sur l’écrivain ou autobiographie? Lorsque Barthes, invité par Denis Roche, prend à la lettre l’idée de la série des “Écrivains de toujours” connu aussi sous le titre l’auteur “par lui-même”, son premier travail est la relecture de ses propres livres. Réfugié à Urt à Juan-les-Pins, il se donne le pensum de tout relire, pour produire un travail sérieux, ou du moins pour imiter le type de produit qui constitue le genre sur un écrivain sans avoir au préalable lu l’œuvre: son travail consiste alors à relire. Barthes est cependant le seul, encore à cette date, dont la relecture double exactement l’écriture: il est le seul à avoir écrit l’œuvre de l’écrivain qu’il relit. Le moi de la lecture double le moi de l’écriture.*

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Through the evidence provided in his manuscript, Amine Kotin Mortimer explains that Barthes’s personal narrative represents both a rereading and a rewriting of his own body of writing: “La réécriture de l’autoportrait prend d’abord la forme d’une ‘vaste opération de légitimation littéraire de ses propres écrits par Barthes.’” Mortimer observes that Barthes was the only author to have re-read his entire œuvre in order to write his autobiography. Barthes references his publications in the published version of his text: *Mythologies; S/Z; Critique et vérité; le Degré zéro de l’écriture; Essais critiques; L’Empire des signes; Michelet par lui-même; Nouveaux essais critiques; Le Plaisir du texte; Sade, Fourier, Loyola; Système de la mode; Sur Racine*. He also quotes his œuvre extensively in his autobiography. For Barthes, the task of rereading his earlier publications becomes a practice that is essential to the project he undertakes in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: “L’activité essentielle consiste à se relire pour s’écrire.” The self-referential, self-reflexive, and self-introspective perspectives of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* are all achieved through the introduction of Barthes’s own body of writing within his autobiographical text: “L’entrée dans cette écriture des écrits antérieurs, sorte d’auto-intertextualité, en constitue la voie majeure: autoportrait serait auto-intertextualité.” By alluding to its self-reference and reflexivity through its construction, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* becomes a model of performative writing.

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565 Barthes suggests the performative character of writing in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* when he describes writing in terms of a theatricalization: “Pour fonder jusqu’au bout une langue nouvelle, une quatrième opération, qui est de théâtraliser. Qu’est-ce que théâtraliser? Ce n’est pas décorer la représentation, c’est illimiter le langage […] il ne reste plus qu’un scénographe: celui qui se disperser à travers les portants qu’il plante et échelonne à infini.” (*Oeuvres complètes: Tome 2*, p.1043.).
6.4 Framing the Autobiographical Subject as a Performative Model of Writing

Performative writing becomes relevant in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* when the intratextual relationships in the text are interpreted in connection with the family photographs. As we have already mentioned in the previous pages, autotextuality refers to relationships of intertextuality within the space of a single text. However, unlike *inter*-textuality, the texts that are engaged in an autotextual (*intra*-textual) network are written by one and the same author. Like the family album that portrays Barthes in his different social relationships, the intratextual networks in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* play an important role in constructing the autobiographical subject through relationships of affiliation to a particular group through the filter of writing. Barthes’s writing corp(u)s becomes a metaphor for the body in the text and sets the tone for the performative aspects of his writing. Autotextuality represents a strategy through which Barthes is able to connect his ideological convictions (*mythologies*) to the construction of his autobiographical subject. The introduction of Barthes’s own body of texts in his autobiography establishes a clearer sense of his identity amidst the fragmentary, non-linear, style of writing of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. In order to illustrate how Barthes incorporates intratextual relationships in the construction of his autobiographical subject, we will draw from a few examples from his narrative.

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566 Henry Sayre describes Barthes’s approach to writing as performative: “Critics have recognized their own implication in the work they discuss, and they have defined their own activity, at least implicitly, as a performance generated by the work itself. Of all critics, Roland Barthes has probably tested this terrain most rigorously. One of the most persistent metaphors in Barthes is his sense of writing as a performance.” (*The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*, p.252.).

567 It would be interesting to link Louis Althusser’s ideas on “ideological state apparatuses” to our analysis of Barthes’s autobiographical text. According to Althusser, a person’s choices, preferences, desires, and ideas are all based in social practices. And it is through these socials practices that a sense of identity emerges. See Althusser’s “Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d’État.”
6.5 Le Degré zéro de l’écriture and its Contribution to Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes

One of the intratextual references in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes is Le degré zéro de l’écriture. The message that is communicated in this book and that becomes relevant to Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes is that all acts of writing are based in wider social and ideological beliefs and values: “C’est sous la pression de l’Histoire et de la Tradition que s’établissent les écritures possibles d’un écrivain donné: il y a une Histoire de l’écriture.” As a result of the traditions and conventions that inform every writer’s work, Barthes suggests that every writing practice engages its author in choices of style, form and content based on previous influences. From Barthes’s perspective, the intellectual’s cultural influences play an important role both in his ability to associate himself with a specific tradition of writing and to assert his own point of view within this tradition:

Rejoindre une parole close par la poussée de tous ceux qui ne la parlent pas, c’est afficher le mouvement même d’un choix, sinon, soutenir ce choix: l’écriture devient ici comme une signature que l’on met au bas d’une proclamation collective (qu’on n’a d’ailleurs). Ainsi adopter une écriture, c’est faire l’économie de toutes les prémisses du choix. Toute écriture intellectuelle est donc le premier des ‘sauts de l’intellect.’ Au lieu qu’un langage idéalement libre ne pourrait jamais signaler ma personne et laisserait tout ignorer de mon histoire et de ma liberté, l’écriture à laquelle je me confie est déjà toute institution, elle découvre mon passé et mon choix, elle me donne une histoire, elle affiche ma situation, elle m’engage sans que j’aie à le dire.

When we understand Barthes’s position on intellectual writing and its place within a specific social, cultural and historical context, his ideas begin to unravel the complex construction of Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes. The numerous intertextual references in his autobiography act to situate his writing within a wider cultural context, since Barthes tells us that a writer’s “language” and “style” stem from earlier influences: “La langue est donc en deçà de la

568 Roland Barthes. Le Degré zéro de l’écriture, p.16.
Littérature. Le style est presque au-delà [...] des images, un débit, un lexique naissent du corps et du passé de l’écrivain et deviennent peu à peu les automatismes de son art.”

Barthes describes both language and style as “automatic reflexes” in a writer’s own practice of writing (“automatismes de son art”). Nevertheless, the writer, in particular the intellectual, is still capable of developing a unique mode of writing within established conventions:

Qu’en dépit des efforts de l’époque, la littérature n’a pu être liquidée: elle forme un horizon verbal toujours prestigieux. L’intellectuel n’est encore qu’un écrivain mal transformé, et à moins de se saborder et de devenir à jamais un militant qui n’écrit plus (certains l’ont fait, par définition oubliés), il ne peut que revenir à la fascination d’écritures antérieures, transmises à partir de la Littérature comme un instrument intact et démodé. Ces écritures intellectuelles sont donc instables, elles restent littéraires dans la mesure où elles sont impuissantes, et ne sont politique que par leur hantise de l’engagement.

In his description of the intellectual as an individual who regards his previous literary influences as outdated (“démodé”), Barthes suggests that the intellectual is a “badly transformed writer.” In his own role as an intellectual (un écrivain mal transformé), Barthes transgresses the dominant discourses of literature and reading to create his own innovative mode of writing. Although language restricts the thought processes of a writer to his cultural context, it is still possible for the writer to develop his own codes within the limitations of language. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Barthes is able to illustrate his own unique contribution to writing through the relationships of intratextuality that he introduces in his text; it is through his intratextual references that Barthes is able to maintain his sense of agency within the social and cultural conventions that inform his writing. Through the filter of *Le degré zéro de l’écriture*, he demonstrates how *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is a form of “Barthesian discourse”:

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Words such as “l’utopie,”⁵⁷₂ “l’universalité sociale,”⁵⁷₃ and “l’idéologie bourgeoise,”⁵⁷₄ which originate in *Le degré zéro de l’écriture*, are reproduced in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* to provide meaning. Other “Barthisms” also appear in the text through additional references to Barthes’s other publications: “Doxa,” “Paradoxa,” “Scriptible,” “Lisible,” “Studium,” “Punctum,” etc. These words demonstrate how Barthes has succeeded at creating his own language in writing. More importantly, through the introduction of his own terminology in the text, Barthes demonstrates how his writing has become performative in the sense that it has inspired new ideas and concepts in autobiographical discourse.

### 6.6 S/Z and the writerly model of writing

The ideas and concepts communicated in a text can only be interpreted as innovative through the participation of a reader. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, a large number of references are made by Barthes to suggest that in his autobiographical narrative, it is an active mode of writing that is preferred and privileged by the author:

*Actif/réactif*

Dans ce qu’il écrit, il y a deux textes. Le texte I est réactif, mû par des indignations, des peurs, des ripostes intérieures, de petites paranoïas, des défenses, des scènes. Le texte II est actif, mû par le plaisir. Mais en s’écrivant, en se corrigeant, en se pliant à la fiction du Style, le texte I devient lui-même actif; dès lors il perd sa peau réactive, qui ne subsiste plus que par plaques (dans de menues parenthèses).⁵⁷⁵

The key to understanding the distinction Barthes makes between “active” and “reactive” texts in his autobiography is found in his book entitled *S/Z*; Barthes uses the words “writerly” (scriptible) and “readerly” (lisible) as synonyms for “active” and “reactive” texts. In our chapter on

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autobiography, we describe Barthes’s concepts of readerly/writerly texts at greater length. We distinguish between the two types of texts in the following manner: The “readerly” texts are written in a traditional style, since they follow a linear structure of thought and comply with certain guidelines on content and style. Meaning in the readerly text is singular, stable, and unchanging, and the reader is depicted as a mere receiver of information. The “writerly” (scriptible) texts do not provide the reader with a model of pre-determined meaning in the text. Opposite the readerly text, the writerly text aims to deconstruct the literary norms and conventions established by classic models of writing. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson affirm that autobiographical narratives are performative in the way that they engage readers in their interpretation: “Autobiographical narratives, then, do not affirm a ‘true self’ or a coherent and stable identity. They are performative, situated addresses that invite their readers’ collaboration in producing specific meanings for the ‘life.’” Barthes constructed his personal narrative in a “writerly” fashion to involve his readers in an active process of reading. The intertextual and autotextual references introduced in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* emphasize its function as a practice of reading. The non-linear and complex structure of the text alludes to its function as a practice of interpretation.

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576 For specific quotations from Barthes’s *S/Z* on “readerly” and “writerly” texts, see our chapter on autobiography.
577 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: women, autobiography, image, performance*, p.11.
578 As Norman Denzin confirms, performative writing engages the reader in an act of performative reading: “Performative writing requires performative reading, an active, collaborative form of reading. As Jones (1997) observes, performative reading creates a union between reader and writer that is […] simultaneous, sketch-driving, improvisational, incorporative, circular, and transformative.” In a performative reading, the reader finds “a point of interest on the page, and lingers or moves on to another” (p.72). The reader scans, fast-forwards, gazes at a line, and then turns back. […] Performance writing […] is writing that is meant to be read, performed.” (p.94). *(Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*, p.94).*
6.7 “The Death of the Author” and Performative Reading

As a text that encourages a writerly interpretation, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is constructed in a manner that parallels the basic ideas underlying “La mort de l’auteur.” As we have already discussed in the previous pages, in this article, Barthes questions reading practices that attempt to connect a text’s meaning to its author. For Barthes, the focus of every act of reading should be the meaning created in the text, and not the author writing it. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, he demonstrates how he removes himself from the context of writing through the omission of his personal details (“life story”) from his autobiography. Barthes explains that readers should focus instead on untangling the various meanings of the text by reading it through the historical and cultural milieu in which it was written. Although he does not explicitly refer to intertextuality in “La mort de l’auteur,” Barthes’s argument introduces this concept as a strategy to reading texts. By placing emphasis on the processes of interpretation that underlie the text’s construction, Barthes is able to draw the reader’s attention away from the intimate aspects of his life to focus on the intellectual practices that inform his work.

6.8 The role of *Mythologies* in the construction of Barthes’s autobiographical subject

Another book that Barthes quotes in his autobiographical text and that helps unravel meaning in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is his text *Mythologies*. In this book, Barthes’s essays on a

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579 We have already quoted this excerpt from Barthes’s “La mort de l’auteur” in the previous pages. However, we would like to emphasize Barthes’s ideas concerning the “text” as the product of multiple writings: “Ainsi se dévoile l’être total de l’écriture: un texte est fait d’écritures multiples, issues de plusieurs cultures et qui entrent les unes avec les autres en dialogue, en parodie, en contestation; mais il y a un lieu où cette multiplicité se rassemble, et ce lieu, ce n’est pas l’auteur, comme on l’a dit jusqu’à présent. C’est le lecteur; le lecteur est l’espace même où s’inscrivent, sans qu’aucune ne se perde, toutes les citations dont est faite une écriture, l’unité d’un texte n’est pas dans son origine, mais dans sa destination, mais cette destination ne peut plus être personnelle: le lecteur est un homme sans histoire, sans biographie, sans psychologie; il est seulement ce quelqu’un qui tient rassemblées dans un même champ toutes les traces dont est constitué l’écrit.” (“La mort de l’auteur,” p.66-67.).
wide range of topics such as “the world of wrestling,” “the romans in film,” “the writer on
holiday,” “blind and dumb criticism,” “soap-powders and detergents,” “toys,” “striptease,”
“photography and electoral appeal,” “plastic,” “the face of Garbo,” “La grande famille des
hommes,” etc., explore how ideological beliefs – “myths” as Barthes refers to them – reinforce
common assumptions about ourselves and the world around us. In this book, he writes about how
our fundamental beliefs are deeply rooted in social and cultural institutions and engages in a
discussion that is similar to the ideas that are developed in Le Degré zéro de l’écriture. He
compiles a series of essays in which he tries to reflect on some of the myths of French daily life:
“De réfléchir régulièrement sur quelques mythes de la vie quotidienne française.”580 In this text,
Barthes’s objective is to connect daily living to a cultural heritage that is made up of myths,
semitic codes and discourses that lead to collective experiences of reality. This becomes
relevant to the way in which he constructs his autobiographical subject in Roland Barthes par
Roland Barthes – as an extension of its social and cultural milieu. The excerpt “La grande
famille des hommes” is particularly relevant to our study on Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes:

On a présenté à Paris une grande exposition de photographies, dont le tout était de
montrer l’universalité des gestes humaines dans la vie quotidienne de tous les pays du
monde: naissance, mort, travail, savoir, jeux imposent partout les mêmes conduites: il y a
une famille de l’Homme.

The Family of Man, tel a été du moins le titre originel de cette exposition, qui nous est
venue des États-Unis. Les Français ont traduit: La Grande Famille des Hommes. Ainsi,
ce qui, au départ, pouvait passer pour une expression d’ordre zoologique, retenant
simplement la similitude des comportements, l’unité d’une espèce, est ici largement
moralisé, sentimentalisé. Nous voici tout de suite humaine, dont l’alibi alimente toute une
partie de notre humanisme.581

In his description of the exhibit, Barthes links human actions in their daily lives to a more
general classification of the “Family of Man” through is description of the photographic exhibit.

Within his own presentation of family photographs in his autobiography, Barthes navigates through his perception of himself as an individual belonging to a family, which belongs to a broader social network. The metaphor of the family is introduced in Barthes’s text to stage the interpretation of his autobiographical subject through complex social relationships. The introduction of Barthes’s own writings in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* demonstrates how the relationships of affiliation in the photographs are transposed to the written text to create a unique and innovative example of personal writing.

7 Conclusion

In one of the anecdotes that Barthes includes in his personal narrative, he describes one of his childhood memories:

> Un souvenir d’enfance

Lorsque j’étais enfant, nous habitions un quartier appelé Marrac: ce quartier était plein de maisons en construction dans les chantiers desquelles les enfants jouaient: de grands trous étaient creusés dans la terre glaise pour servir de fondations aux maisons, et un jour que nous avons joué dans l’un de ces trous, tous les gosses remontèrent, sauf moi, qui ne le pus: du sol, d’en haut, ils me narguaient: perdu! seul! regarde! exclu! (être exclu, ce n’est pas être dehors, c’est être *seul dans le trou*, enfermé à ciel ouvert: *forclos*): j’ai vu alors ma mère: elle me tira de là et m’emporta loin des enfants, contre eux.

This passage is one of the few fragments in Barthes’s text in which the author reveals personal details. In the fragment, Barthes tells us of an incident that occurred when he was a little boy. He explains that as a child he would often play with the neighbourhood children; they would run around building sites where new homes were being built. According to Barthes, huge holes had been dug in the soil for the foundations of the houses, and one day, while he and the other children were playing inside one of these holes, everyone had managed to climb out except for him. When they realized he couldn’t get out, the children looked down on him and teased him.

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for being alone, lost, excluded in the space below. Yet, Barthes writes that “to be excluded is not to be outside, it is to be alone in the hole.” This incident becomes pertinent to Barthes’s own position within the framework of autobiographical writing. In 1975, when he published his personal narrative, his approach to autobiography was unprecedented; critics did not quite know how to interpret the text and struggled to keep it within the parameters of autobiography. Barthes looked for a way out of the restrictive conventions of the genre, through the use of innovative writing strategies, and he found it.

In Barthes’s narrative, in which meaning is “trapped” within the written text, the reader is forced to navigate through verbal and visual cues in order to grasp some semblance of order amidst the narrative’s chaotic arrangement. The fragmented and impersonal style of the narrative challenges readers expecting to find an autobiography – in the conventional sense – within its pages. Our attempt to work through the complex construction of the text in this chapter began with a study on the book’s origins; as we discussed the circumstances through which Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes came about – as part of a larger collection of biographical texts in Seuil’s “Les Écrivains de toujours” series – we began to establish a sense of the book’s anti-genetic classification and applied that theory to the text’s broader conflicts with autobiographical writing. A discussion on Barthes’s images, which presented a sort of “family album” of his youth and early career, initiated our discussion on the role that word and image relations play in the text. As we looked at the images closer, and as we read the captions that accompanied them, we started to disentangle the different relationships that were created through the text-image interchange. As we delved deeper into the written text, the relationships that contributed to the construction of Barthes’s autobiographical subject began to take shape and the text’s meaning emerged. As we mentioned in the previous pages of this chapter, Barthes begins his autobiographical text with the following sentence: “Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par
un personnage de roman.”

Through this key phrase, he places emphasis on the literary merits of his written work, since a character in a novel carries no meaning outside the realm of language, and has no existence outside the limits of the text. The images, which connect Barthes’s existence to the fictional universes created by Proust, Balzac, and Zola, point to other important social relationships that are created in his narrative through the concept of intertextuality. As our investigation of Barthes’s autobiography delved deeper into the relationships of affiliation that are suggested in the text through writing, we remarked another important network of intertextual relationships in the text – that of intra-textuality – between Barthes’s autobiography and his previous publications. Through the intratextual references he makes in his text, the construction of the narrative emerges as a performance of his critical attitudes towards the practice of self-representation both in writing and in images. Since Barthes has written numerous theoretical articles on the theory of photography and on the practice of writing, his ideas begin to take shape in his text through the narrative’s construction and through its fragmented representation of identity.

In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Barthes includes the fragment “Le monstre de la totalité” (the monster of totality). He provides the following description for this fragment:

‘Qu’on imagine (s’il est possible) une femme couverte d’un vêtement sans fin, lui-même tissé de tout ce que dit le journal de Mode…’ (SM, 53) Cette imagination, apparemment méthodique, puisqu’elle ne fait que mettre en œuvre une notion opératoire de l’analyse sémantique (‘le texte sans fin’), vise en douce à dénoncer le monstre de la Totalité (la Totalité comme monstre). La Totalité tout à la fois fait rire et fait peur: comme la violence, ne serait-elle pas toujours grotesque (et récupérable alors seulement dans une esthétique du Carnaval)?

Autre discours: ce 6 août, à la campagne, c’est le matin d’un jour splendide: soleil, chaleur, fleurs, silence, calme, rayonnement. Rien ne rôde, ni le désir, ni l’agression; seul

le travail est là, devant moi, comme une sorte d’être universel: tout est plein. Ce serait donc cela, la Nature? Une absence… du reste? La Totalité?\textsuperscript{584}

Barthes’s fragment is dated the 6\textsuperscript{th} of August to September 1974. Since the book was published in 1975, one can’t help but think that the ideas presented in this excerpt were intended to reveal Barthes’s thoughts on the autobiographical project that lay ahead of him. This obvious reversal in the order of writing – in which Barthes starts his book with its ending\textsuperscript{585} and then ends the book with its beginning – is revealing of his thoughts on the task he undertakes in the writing of his autobiography. Faced with the daunting task of the project of “totality” in his autobiography, Barthes’s decision to end his text at its beginning creates an effect of *mise en abyme* of writing, for which the reader, who happily reaches the text’s end, must start over again. The effect of *mise en abyme* in Barthes’s narrative performs a literal subversion of the claims of autobiography in providing the authoritative and final word on the life story of its author and also reveals the daunting task faced by the reader to interpret and unravel the complex structure of this text.

In our next chapter on Sophie Calle, we will look at another author of contemporary French writing who introduces photographic images into her autobiographical texts to participate in the construction of the autobiographical subject. Like Barthes, Calle’s narratives represent a performative style of writing. However, as our analysis in the following chapter will demonstrate, both authors take a different approach to integrating photographic images within

\textsuperscript{584} Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975, p.156. Concept of totality has been studied extensively by scholars of philosophy (Hegel, Marx) and literature (Barthes, Derrida, de Man), but has been theorized by these critics in different contexts and for different purposes. The topic of totality is relevant in our study on autobiography because most autobiographies are written with the assumption that a complete account of the life story of its author can be found in the text and that the story recounted is restricted to the author’s individual existence.

\textsuperscript{585} As we may recall, Barthes writes the following explanation at the beginning of his autobiographical narrative to describe the images that are found at the beginning of his text: “Voici pour commencer, quelques images: elles sont la part du plaisir que l’auteur s’offre à lui-même en terminant son livre.” Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, p.7.
the space of their autobiographical narratives. As we will see in our chapter on Calle, she is a performative artist who breaks the rules of conventional autobiographical writing through her own creative blend of art and self-expression.
Figure 2: Mais je n’ai jamais ressemblé à cela!
Figure 3: De génération en génération, le thé

De génération en génération, le thé : indice bourgeois et charme certain.
Figure 4: Le capitaine Binger
Figure 5: Nous, toujours nous…

« Nous, toujours nous »...
Figure 6: Anatomie
Figure 7: Vers l’écriture
Figure 8: Barthes vs. Gide
Figure 9: Barthes vs. Gide
Figure 10: La tuberculose-rétro
Chapter 4
The Autobiographical Writing of Sophie Calle

The strength of Calle’s work lies in her ability to evoke and challenge the limits of human experience and behaviour, surreptitiously invading and helping to redefine our own daily rituals and obsessions.\(^{586}\)

Sophie Calle is an artist who introduces the concept of personal identity into her work to confront ideas about individuality and its representation. Widely known and extensively exhibited in the United States and Europe, she is a key figure in French contemporary art whose work combines autobiography and art in strikingly innovative ways. As Anne Sauvageot explains, Calle approaches her art from a very personal point of view: “[elle] nous fait présent de son intimité et nous ouvre les portes de sa vie privée en nous donnant à la partager, [elle] se dit, se montre et s’affiche.”\(^{587}\) As a conceptual artist\(^{588}\) who introduces autobiographical elements into her artistic practices, Calle establishes relations between visual and verbal modes of representation as a means to stage art as a process of personal introspection and self discovery. Since self-expression constitutes an essential element of her work, she is often described as an “artist in the first person”\(^{589}\) who re-imagines and reframes autobiographical writing through art. By combining both mediums, Calle explores the ways in which individual identity is framed and constructed through social and cultural interactions. It is through the use of art as her privileged


\(^{587}\) Anne Sauvageot. Sophie Calle, l’art caméléon, p.9.

\(^{588}\) Concept art or conceptual art is an art form that uses concepts or ideas in a work as the main concern of artistic expression. In most cases, conceptual art has a tendency to be controversial, as it is created to challenge dominant assumptions and aims to provoke reactions in its audience. Some key figures of conceptual art are Marcel Duchamp, Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Sol LeWitt, Lawrence Weiner, etc. For further reading on the topic, see: (Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson. Conceptual Art: A critical Anthology); (Michael Corris. Conceptual art: theory, myth and practice); (Peter Osborne. Conceptual Art).

medium of self-representation, that her autobiographical narratives engage a perception of the “in between,” since they are situated between art and reality, between truth and fiction, between objectivity and subjectivity. Although we have argued in our chapter on autobiography that personal writing combines both subjective and objective elements, Calle tends to place emphasis on the subjective properties of autobiography through the use of artistic practices. In order to explore new areas of self writing, Calle’s projects set autobiography against other practices with conflicting conventions to illustrate how autobiography is a highly complex, provocative, and self-conscious form of expression.

Although Calle uses film (No Sex Last Night and Où et Quand Berck?) and audio CDs (La visite guidée and Prenez soin de vous) in some of her projects to accompany her written material, she mostly uses photographic images to illustrate her autobiographical narratives. With photography as the privileged medium of artistic expression within her narratives, she is able to introduce these literary and visual genres into other fields of practice and study. By integrating photography into the narrative frame of each of her texts, Calle offers valuable insight into contemporary debates on autobiography and its use of images to challenge and innovate life writing. As we have already outlined in our chapter on photography, the introduction of photographic images in the autobiographical narrative complicates the representation of identity in the text. In our present chapter, our focus will be on the use of photographic images in Sophie Calle’s texts entitled Doubles jeux, La visite guidée and Appointment with Sigmund Freud. We will analyze the ways in which photography is introduced into these texts as a

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590 For a more detailed look at the subjective dimension of autobiography see our chapter on autobiography. See also Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Reading Autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives, p.15-16. 
591 For an explanation on the relationship between photography and autobiography, please see our chapter on photography.
strategy used in the construction of the autobiographical subject. We have chosen to study these three texts for two main reasons: Each text plays an important role in engaging the theoretical issues outlined in our previous chapters on autobiography and photography. Moreover, these texts provide excellent examples of how Calle introduces photography into her autobiographical narratives to demonstrate “identity as a performative and fundamentally interactional discursive process.”

In order to lend direction to our analysis of Calle’s autobiographical writing, the three books that we are studying in this chapter will follow a certain order of presentation. This analysis will trace Calle’s autobiographical writing from a literary mode of production to a more collaborative, performative and interdisciplinary practice. Our analysis of *Doubles-jeux* will be framed within an evolutionary perspective as Calle’s writing within the project itself becomes increasingly innovative from one book to the next. This will be followed by an analysis of *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, which will attest to the increasingly performative character of the artist’s more recent work. Our study of Calle’s three texts will allow for a discussion of the shifting conventions of contemporary autobiography. Although we have already introduced the concept of performativity in our chapter on Barthes, in this chapter dedicated to Calle, our intention is to study performativity in autobiography from a completely different perspective. In our chapter on Barthes, our focus was restricted to the analysis of autobiography as a performative act that is confined within the space of the written text. However, in our present chapter on Sophie Calle, we will demonstrate how the artist’s contemporary model of self-referential writing has moved the practice and study of autobiography outside the boundaries of the literary text and into the social realm. *Doubles-jeux* will remain the main focus of interest in this chapter, and as we have already mentioned, our

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extended analysis of *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* is intended to place emphasis on the performative aspects of Calle’s writing. In our discussion on *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, we suggest that Calle reframes the practice of autobiography – traditionally defined as a retrospective prose narrative of an individual, whose focus is the individual’s life – as a phenomenon that is shaped by its social and cultural context. Although the three texts that comprise our analysis of Calle’s autobiographical writing will not each receive the same degree of attention in our study, they are all important texts as they mutually underscore the highly performative direction that Calle’s autobiographical projects and autobiography in general, have taken in recent years.

In *Doubles-jeux*, Calle takes us right into the heart of contemporary debates surrounding autobiographical writing as a performative practice. Much in the same way that *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* serves as an illustration of performative writing through intertextual relations, Calle constructs her autobiographical subject through an intertextual relationship with Paul Auster’s novel *Léviathan*. Similar to Barthes’s autobiographical narrative, the self-reflexive and performative characteristics of *Doubles-jeux* could also be attributed to certain intratextual connections within the text itself. As we will show later in our analysis, these inter/intra-textual relationships in *Doubles-jeux* are transposed to the photographic images, which play an important role in presenting the autobiographical subject through a network of relationships. As we have mentioned in our chapter on autobiography, identity is an interpersonal and relational phenomenon that emerges at the intersection of multiple and conflicting discourses.\(^{593}\)

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\(^{593}\) As already discussed in our chapter on autobiography, as a social being, the individual’s tendency to situate his or her personal identity within the context of collectivity becomes increasingly evident in the autobiographical text: “In the process of writing, the autobiographer fashions a persona, mobilizes an identity to navigate and question the public he inhabits. That writing is about self-fashioning [and] suggests the autobiographer’s consciousness of identity as multiple and fluid. Autobiography might then be understood as the process by which the autobiographer
Doubles-jeux. Calle combines words and images to reveal how the autobiographical subject emerges as the product of “relationality.”

La visite guidée is an exhibition catalogue that documents the exhibit “Absence” held by Calle at the Boymans-van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam in 1994. Photographs are introduced into the narrative to provide a visual reference for the display pieces and to support the narrative descriptions. In this text, Calle frames the autobiographical narrative within the context of the museum exhibit; she stages self-representation as a process of discovery and exploration by placing some of her personal objects among the objects belonging to the museum’s permanent collection. In order to explore identity as a concept that is framed within particular social and cultural contexts, Calle moves autobiographical writing outside of the textual frame and into the social realm through the cultural experience of the museum visit. In this part of our analysis, our goal is to examine the strategies used by Calle to perform identity as a site of cultural meaning and interpretation. Through the mechanism of the guided tour, Calle presents the autobiographical subject as an object of study to be analyzed, understood, and commented upon.

Simply put, ‘relationality’ is a concept that refers to man’s identity in relation to others. As Christopher West writes on the topic, “Man is not fully himself when he is ‘alone.’ He can only find himself in relation. Thus, […] relationality enters the definition of the human person […] to be a person ‘means both’being subject’ and ‘being in relationship.’ This starkly contrasts with the radical individualism promoted in the west today.” (Theology of the Body Explained, p.81.).

See especially our comments in our chapter on autobiography related to Nichole Rustin’s remarks concerning the individual’s tendency to situate his or her personal identity within the context of collectivity. By framing her writing within a specific social context, Calle opens up her narratives to the public, as texts to be analyzed and commented upon.
In her project entitled *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle re-enacts the processes of self-investigation and self-discovery – similar to those already experienced in *La visite guidée* – through another museum visit. In this book, Calle documents an exhibit held at the Freud Museum in England in 1999. By exhibiting previously exhibited personal objects, and by placing these objects among Sigmund Freud’s personal relics and artifacts at the Museum, she provides a new context through which to examine and interpret her familiar objects and their accompanying narratives. Much like the strategies used by Calle in her other art projects to construct the autobiographical subject, in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, the different layers of identity unfold through word and image relations. By framing her own processes of self-inquiry within the larger context of Freud’s influential life and work, Calle stages autobiographical writing as a revisionary return to the canon. Within the symbolically charged setting of the Freud Museum, Calle’s personal narratives perform autobiography as a process through which the past is consciously re-collected, re-experienced, and re-lived.

In order to explore the intricacies of Calle’s life writings, our analysis of her narratives will introduce a variety of topics: fiction, intertextuality, photography and performance. To introduce the topics of fiction, intertextuality and performance in our study of Calle’s narratives, and to understand their relevance within the context of contemporary life writing, we have analyzed them in greater detail in our chapter on autobiography. Although Calle is predominantly recognized as an artist, it is important to note that writing constitutes a dominant part of her artistic production. Even though she has exhibited a large number of works in many galleries and museums around the world, her rise to fame is mostly due to the publication of her

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596 In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle uses personal objects that we already see in her previous publications, such as *Doubles-jeux* and *La visite guidée*.

597 To better understand how these topics operate within our own study of Calle, see our chapter on autobiography.
artistic projects and the recognition that her books have received from literary scholars.

Commenting on the artist’s relationship to writing, Johnnie Gratton, a professor of French at Trinity College Dublin and one of the earlier scholars to study Calle’s written material, attracts attention to her dual role as both artist and writer:

Sophie Calle is both a writer and a photographer, and rarely one without the other. This double focus is accommodated in two main forms. The first, and the one that usually appears first, is the installation exhibited in an art gallery or museum […] But Calle has also found a rewarding outlet in the form of book publications based on the same kind of text-photo juxtaposition – and […] by virtue of being compacted into and redistributed across a sequence of pages, the published work tends all the more strongly to bear out the description of herself that Calle is said to favour: that of ‘narrative artist’ (which neatly sidesteps the more frequently bestowed label of ‘conceptual artist’). Calle’s work has become renowned for the stimulating and often controversial ways in which it crosses […] boundary lines.598

Through the publication of several of her art installations, Calle has been able to situate her artistic practice within an evolving literary framework. As a result, she is able to merge art with literature in very interesting ways and succeeds at presenting her art projects as experimental models of self-expression. An excellent example of how Calle is able to transform her art into a form of literature – of the unconventional kind – is to be found in her publication of Doubles-jeux. In Doubles-jeux, she blends the artistic with the literary by creating an intertextual relationship with Paul Auster’s novel Léviathan. Through the use of intertextuality, she is able to position her art work within a literary context in order to create a uniquely creative and playful style of autobiographical writing.

598 Johnnie Gratton. “Experiment and experience in the phototextual projects of Sophie Calle,” p.157. In his article, Johnnie Gratton describes Calle’s artistic projects as “phototextual projects.” He assigns this title to Calle’s works mostly because of the way that her texts are structured; although they are in book format, Calle’s installations and published works are not literary – in the traditional sense of the word. Nevertheless, Calle has successfully integrated her works into the realm of literary criticism. Since Gratton’s article, which was published in 2002, Calle’s work has been continuously analyzed within debates on autobiography. Many literary critics have studied her work and these articles have been included in anthologies dedicated to the study of literature. In their book of collective works on the topic of autobiography and personal writing entitled Métamorphoses du journal personnel: De Retif De la Bretonne à Sophie Calle (2006), Catherine Viollet and Marie-Françoise Lemmonier-Delpy include a chapter on the artist. I have also written an article for a anthology entitled Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature: Rewriting Texts/Remaking Images (2010) on the topic of Calle’s autobiographical writing.
1 *Doubles-jeux*: The Double Game between Paul Auster’s *Léviathan* and Sophie Calle’s autobiographical narrative

*Doubles-jeux* is the title that Calle assigns to one of her projects that was originally presented as an art exhibit entitled “Doubles-jeux.” The exhibit was held at the Centre National de la Photographie in Paris from September 9 to November 2 1998 and was published later that year by Actes Sud as a box set of seven books (Fig.11): *De l’obéissance* (Livre I); *Le rituel d’anniversaire* (Livre II); *Les panoplies* (Livre III); *À suivre* (Livre IV); *L’hôtel* (Livre V); *Le carnet d’adresses* (Livre VI); and *Gotham Handbook* (Livre VII). The published version of *Doubles-jeux* becomes a point of interest in the broader context of our analysis on the shifting conventions of contemporary autobiographical writing. The narrative sequences in *Doubles-jeux* “take the form of a double game, between the autobiographical work of Sophie Calle and the fiction of Paul Auster.”⁵⁹⁹ As a result of its unconventional approach to the practice of self-expression, *Doubles-jeux* challenges firmly established notions of autobiographical writing. Based on its editor’s description that *Doubles-jeux* represents “an imaginative interplay of fact and fiction,” and “creates a publication of endless intrigue and layers: part novel, part diary, part artist’s book,” Calle’s project also alludes to the transformative role of self-representational narratives. By merging her artistic self-expression with the imaginative writing of Paul Auster, Calle’s art enters into a dialogue with Auster’s literary fiction to create an innovative model of life writing in which intertextuality and alterity play a fundamental role. In her study on *Doubles-jeux*, Daphne Merkin refers to Auster’s favourable impressions of Calle’s writing skills: “Indeed, Auster describes Calle, with whom he seems to share a mutual admiration of society, as ‘a

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⁵⁹⁹ This excerpt is taken from the publisher’s description (Violette Editions) of *Doubles-jeux*. An online version is available at: http://www.violetteeditions.com/books/previously_published/Double_Game_Hardback.html
storyteller using means that are unusual. She is essentially a writer. Her prose is actually very good.”

Extending Auster’s description of Calle’s writing style as “unusual” to the autobiographical project that she undertakes in *Doubles-jeux*, Philippe Piguet describes the text as a form of literary experiment:

Exemplaire de la démarche de l’artiste, cette publication regroupe un certain nombre de travaux que celle-ci a réalisés au fil des années 1980 et qui trouvent là comme une seconde vie, en même temps que cette situation duelle a entraîné l’artiste à expérimenter de nouvelles aventures. ‘Séduite par ce double, précise-t-elle encore, j’ai décidé de jouer avec le roman de Paul Auster et de mêler à mon tour et à ma façon, réalité et fiction.’ L’idée de Sophie Calle a été de reprendre à son compte certains des faits et gestes auxquels l’écrivain soumet son héroïne de sorte à se rapprocher au plus près de Maria, à ce point même qu’on ne sait plus très bien qui est qui. Mettant en acte certains des rituels imaginés par Paul Auster, Sophie Calle s’est ainsi transformé elle-même en personnage de roman. C’est dire si elle cultive l’art de l’imbroglio et comment son art s’apparente finalement à celui d’une sorte de jeu de rôle avant la lettre.

As Piguet suggests, it is through an intertextual dialogue with Paul Auster’s *Léviathan* that *Doubles-jeux* can be described as a revisionary act of writing. As indicated in the book’s title, *Doubles-jeux*, the strategy used by Calle is to playfully illustrate how the “great divide” between art and daily life can be bridged. The book’s title acquires its meaning through the introduction of a series of textual and visual strategies aimed at complexifying and undermining the relationship between fact and fiction throughout the narrative. The “double game” to which Calle refers in the title of this extraordinary book is explained at the beginning of each text belonging to the *Doubles-jeux* box set. She provides a two-page description of certain “rules of the game,” which the reader must respect. In these rules, she lays out the framework of her narrative and establishes a pact of sorts with her reader:

La règle du jeu

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600 Daphne Merkin. “I Think, Therefore I’m Art,” p.98.
Dans le livre *Léviathan*, paru aux éditions Actes Sud, l’auteur, Paul Auster, me remercie d’avoir autorisé à mêler la réalité à la fiction. Il s’est en effet servi de certains épisodes de ma vie pour créer, entre les pages 84 et 93 de son récit, un personnage de fiction prénommé Maria, qui ensuite me quitte pour vivre sa propre histoire.

Séduite par ce double, j’ai décidé de jouer avec le roman de Paul Auster et de mêler, à mon tour et à ma façon, réalité et fiction.

In this introductory paragraph, Calle reveals important information about how *Doubles-jeux* should be read. She explains that *Doubles-jeux* cannot be interpreted as an isolated narrative, but should be read instead as a dialogue between texts, namely between her own autobiographical experiences and Auster’s fictional writing. Calle informs us that in his novel, Auster creates a fictive character, Maria Turner, whose profile is inspired by Calle’s personal life. As Petra Gördüren explains, the rules established by Calle allow her to exploit, in an indiscrete fashion, her artistic freedom: “By laying down the ‘rules of the game’ before carrying out such a project, it is possible for the artist to distance herself from the often very private theme of her works. The regulated indiscretion with which Sophie Calle approaches the life of strangers becomes a formal strategy and guarantees artistic freedom.”

Thus, the relationship of intertextuality between Calle’s autobiographical narrative and Auster’s novel constitutes a highly original project in which Calle blurs the boundaries between the autobiographical narrative and the novel.

The majority of the autobiographical references given in *Doubles-jeux* are paired with a fictional counterpart. In other words, many of the autobiographical elements included in Calle’s narrative are accompanied by a fragment from *Léviathan* that presents Auster’s interpretation for the same event. One great example of the collaboration between fact and fiction in *Doubles-jeux* is presented in the autobiographical text that Calle entitles *L’hôtel (Livre V)*:

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Le lundi 16 février 1981, je réussis, après une année de démarches et d’attente, à me faire engager comme femme de chambre pour un remplacement de trois semaines dans un hôtel vénitien. On me confia douze chambres du quatrième étage. Au cours de mes heures de ménage, j’examinai les effets personnels des voyageurs, les signes de l’installation provisoire de certains clients, leur succession dans une même chambre. J’observai par le détail des vies qui me restaient étrangères.

Le vendredi 6 mars 1981, mon remplacement prit fin.

This autobiographical fragment is followed on the same page by Auster’s interpretation for the same event. The fragment, taken from Léviathan, is a fictional rendering of the true events outlined by Calle in L’hôtel (Livre V):

Pour son projet suivant, Maria avait trouvé un emploi temporaire de femme de chambre dans un grand hôtel du centre de la ville. Son but consistait à rassembler, sans toutefois se montrer importante ni se compromettre, des informations sur les clients. En fait, elle évitait délibérément ceux-ci, se limitant à ce que pouvait lui apprendre les objets éparpillés dans leurs chambres. À nouveau, elle prenait des photos: à nouveau, elle inventait des vies à ces gens sur la base des indices dont elle disposait. C’était une archéologie du présent, pour ainsi dire, une tentative de reconstituer l’essence de quelque chose à partir des fragments les plus nus: le talon d’un ticket, un bas déchiré, une tache de sang sur le col d’une chemise.

In these two excerpts, reality and myth merge in the narrative to disrupt the documentary aspects of Calle’s work. In Auster’s interpretation, we take particular note of an embellished version of the events depicted in Calle’s autobiographical fragment. Moreover, in Auster’s passage, we remark an obvious departure from the first-person perspective traditionally used in autobiography to the third-person-singular form that is a characteristic feature of fictional works. In Calle’s fragment, she discusses her own experience as a chambermaid. In Auster’s excerpt, the same events are recounted, but they are told from another person’s point of view (Auster) and described as someone else’s personal experience (Maria). In this compromise between fact and fiction, which is characterized by the textual overlapping of fragments from Calle’s past.

603 Calle, Sophie. L’hôtel, p.9.
604 Calle, Sophie. L’hôtel, p.9.
autobiographical works, combined with excerpts from Auster’s *Léviathan*, she presents the autobiographical text as a “*mise en abyme*” of self-fictionalization. By weakening the authenticity of autobiographical expression in her text, Calle shifts the focus of self-representation from a static model to a more open negotiating style. Through this interplay between fact and fiction, Calle emphasizes the construction of identity through the practice of writing: She possesses “the belief in the construction of identity through writing as manipulation […] and through the line between factual and fictional identity, subjectivity, time and memory. The interaction and at times subversion of these factors leads us to rethink the very structure of the process of self-definition as one not necessarily bound by conventional laws but open to multiple possibilities.”

As we have already observed in our chapter on autobiography, it is due to the subjective nature of language that the singular subject of conventional autobiography is defined within seemingly contradictory boundaries, since “the genre of auto/biography is a mode of discursive practice – the major function of which is to construct a continuous, unified personal identity at the intersection of the multiple, discontinuous, fragmented and often contradictory socio-cultural positionings available.” The dual aspect of Calle’s identity in *Doubles-jeux* – where fiction and reality are interchangeable – is just one element in a complex network of conflicting relationships between personal identity and figures of alterity in the text.

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605 The term “*mise en abyme*” was coined by the French writer André Gide in his novel *Les Faux Monnayeurs*. This concept is used to refer to the insertion of a work within a larger work. It is carried out in Calle’s book through the literal insertion of Auster’s novel within the autobiographical narrative.

606 Joost de Bloois. “Introduction. The artists formerly known as... or, the loose end of conceptual art and the possibilities of ‘visual autofiction,’” n.p.


608 Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey. *Representing lives: women and autobiography*, p.165. In our chapter on autobiography, we also discussed the use of different personal pronouns in autobiography as a strategy of alluding to the intersubjective character of the author’s identity.
1.1 The Construction of Identity in *Doubles-jeux*

*Doubles-jeux* combines a selection of autobiographical projects that were originally published by Calle in the 1980s. When Paul Auster decided to write a novel in 1992 and base his character Maria – and the events of her life – on the true-life experiences of Calle, she was inspired to retell her own autobiographical experiences through a fictional lens. When Calle published her exhibit as a box set of seven volumes, she did not assign a random order to her texts, but instead she organized her project in a specific sequence. At the beginning of each book in the *Doubles-jeux* project, under the section entitled “La règle du jeu,” she explains how she divides her project of seven texts into three main parts or themes.

Calle explains that in Part I of her narrative, she takes the fictional events that Auster invents in *Léviathan* for his character Maria and incorporates them into her own daily routine by performing Maria’s rituals over the course of one week: December 8-14 1997. In the description she provides to the reader, Calle identifies *Livre I* of *Doubles-jeux* entitled *De l’obéissance* as the only book that is included in the first part of her project:

**La vie de Maria et comment elle a influencé celle de Sophie (Livre I):**


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609 In the opening remarks of *Doubles-jeux*, Calle explains how each of the three parts should be read. In Part I, Calle re-enacts the scenes created for Maria by Paul Auster in his novel: “I. The life of Maria and how it influenced the life of Sophie. In *Léviathan*, Maria puts herself through the same rituals as I did. But Paul Auster has slipped some rules of his own inventing into his portrait of Maria. In order to bring Maria and myself closer together, I decided to go by the book. The author imposes on his creature a chromatic regimen which consists in restricting herself to foods of a single color for any given day. I followed his instructions. He has her base whole days on a single letter of the alphabet. I did as she does” (*De l’obéissance*, p.2).

610 Sophie Calle. *De l’obéissance*, p.4.
In this first part, the fictional events carried out by Maria orient the reading of the text for which Calle is the narrator and the subject, but not the author, for the events that unfold in the story. In this part of her project, she decides to reproduce the fictional events written by Auster in his novel for his character Maria through performance art. Maria becomes the driving force behind the construction of identity in the text, since Calle takes the fictional elements created by Auster for his character and adapts them to her life. By enacting the fictional elements invented by Auster to describe his character Maria, Calle is able to lay the groundwork for her practice of self-expression in *Doubles-jeux*.

In the second part of the *Doubles-jeux* project, Calle engages in a literal act of rewriting through the re-publication of a select number of her previously published projects; the material chosen for republication contains the autobiographical elements that had inspired Auster to create a character profile for Maria Turner. Calle names the books that are grouped into this part of her project: *Le rituel d’anniversaire* (Livre II), *Les panoplies* (Livre III), *À suivre* (Livre IV), *L’hôtel* (Livre V), and *Le carnet d’adresses* (Livre VI). She provides the following description for this part of her project:

**La vie de Sophie et comment elle a influencé celle de Maria (Livres II, III, IV, V, VI)**

Ces rituels que Paul Auster m’a “empruntés” pour façonner Maria sont: la suite vénitienne, la garde-robe, le strip-tease, la filature, l’hôtel, le carnet d’adresses, le rituel d’anniversaire. *Léviathan* m’offre l’occasion de présenter les projets artistiques dont s’est inspiré l’écrivain et que désormais nous partageons, Maria et moi. 611

In this section of *Doubles-jeux*, in which she groups the majority of her texts, Calle reclaims authorship of the narrative by showing how her autobiographical experiences have inspired fictional events in *Léviathan*; she presents herself as the author and narrator to become the

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611 Sophie Calle. *De l’obéissance*, p.5.
protagonist with Maria for the experiences that they share. However, Calle’s real-life artistic projects take precedence over Auster’s fictional creation when she attempts to overwrite Maria’s identity as the primary source of self-representation in the narrative. In this part of *Doubles-jeux*, emphasis is placed on the autobiographical subject as a real person who exists in the real world.  

In Part III of the project, the autobiographical subject is presented as an extension of the author’s “real contact” with the “real world.” Calle gives the following description for Part III of her project, which only includes the book *Gotham Handbook* (*Livre VII*):

**Une des nombreuses façons de mêler la fiction à la réalité, ou comment tenter de devenir un personnage de roman (*Livre VII*):**

Puisque, dans *Léviathan*, Paul Auster m’a prise comme sujet, j’ai imaginé d’inverser les rôles, en le prenant comme auteur de mes actes. Je lui ai demandé d’inventer un personnage de fiction auquel je m’efforcerais de ressembler: j’ai en quelque sorte offert à Paul Auster de faire de moi ce qu’il voulait et ce, pendant une période d’un an maximum. Il objecta qu’il ne souhaitait pas assumer la responsabilité de ce qui pourrait advenir alors que j’obéirais au scénario qu’il avait créé pour moi. Il a préféré m’envoyer des *Instructions personnelles pour Sophie Calle afin d’améliorer la vie à New York (parce qu’elle me l’a demandé...)*. J’ai respecté ces directives. Le projet s’intitule *Gotham Handbook* (*New York, mode d’emploi*).  

Based on the description she provides, Calle tries “to become a character out of a novel” ("*devenir un personnage de roman*") by asking Auster to assign “personal instructions” to her ("*des instructions personnelles*") that she agrees to carry out. In this part of her project, Calle is both narrator and subject of the written text, authored by Auster. She transforms the tradition of autobiographical writing into a performative practice. Similar to Roland Barthes’s approach, who

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612 Leigh Gilmore touches upon the concept of the “real” identity of the autobiographer and the representation of this identity within the written text: “The autobiographical subject represents the real person not only as a metaphor of self, as Olney has described, wherein the self in the text transcends its materiality and becomes an emblem for a person’s striving.” For a more detailed explanation *Autobiographies: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-representation*, p.67-68.

613 Sophie Calle, *De l’obéissance*, p.4.
also confronted traditional and binary conceptions of fiction and of autobiography in the exergue presented at the beginning of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*: “Tout ceci doit être lu comme dit par un personnage de roman,” Calle writes about how she is able to step into the role of a fictional character through her collaboration with Auster. Through her performance of Auster’s instructions, she transports the literary space of writing into the rich urban landscape of New York City and places emphasis on the autobiographical subject as a real person who exists in the real world.

By assigning an order to the reading of *Doubles-jeux*, and by framing the reading process within a specific set of rules, Calle weakens the autobiographical pact with her reader; the reading order that she imposes on her narrative project suggests an evolution in the presentation of *Doubles-jeux* from a strictly literary medium to a highly performative act of self-representation. Calle experiments with identity in *Doubles-jeux* by playing with the most fundamental premise of autobiographical writing that we discuss in our chapter on autobiography: the identity between the author, the narrator and the autobiographical subject. Auster’s use of the third-person-singular pronoun (“she”) to describe Maria’s identity in his novel is in a dialectical relationship with Calle’s first-person-singular pronoun (“I”) used in the autobiographical excerpts that refer to herself. In each part of her book, Calle takes liberties with the practice of autobiography and adopts multiple subject positions to articulate her conception of identity and of subjectivity. In her narrative, she reframes autobiographical writing as a phenomenon that is part of “wider habitual or recurring networks of collective activity.”

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614 As we have outlined in our chapter on autobiography, Philippe Lejeune states that the autobiographer, the narrator, and the protagonist of the text must all share the same identity: “The acquisition of the proper name is no doubt as important a stage in the story of the individual as the mirror stage.” (*On Autobiography*, p.21.).

uses Auster’s instructions as a strategy to place emphasis on the autobiographical subject as a literary construction that is shaped by social and cultural assumptions and expectations. In order to contextualize her autobiographical writing within the framework of literature, Calle creates intertextual relationships between her autobiographical narratives and Auster’s fictional writing. Before we begin our discussion of the intertextual nature of Sophie Calle’s *Doubles-jeux*, we would like to briefly define intertextuality in order to understand the role that it plays in Calle’s narrative.

### 1.2 Intertextuality in the Autobiographical Narrative

Within the scope of our study on autobiographical writing, intertextuality will be studied as a mutual exchange of meaning between two or more texts. In Marc Eigeldinger’s words, intertextuality could be defined as a “dialogue” between two or more texts: “l’intertextualité se déploie comme un échange, un dialogue entre deux ou plusieurs textes, une sorte de greffe opérée sur le vaste corps de l’écriture.” Gérard Genette also defines intertextuality as the relationship between two or more books, where the ideas found in one text are present in another: “As a relationship or co-presence between two texts or among several texts, that is to say […] as the actual presence of one text within another.” Michael Riffaterre adds an interesting perspective to the definition of intertextuality when he refers to the vital role that the reader plays in the intertextual relationship: “L’intertextualité est la perception par le lecteur de rapports entre une œuvre et d’autres, qui l’ont précédée ou suivie. Ces autres constituent l’intertexte de la première.”

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618 Michael Rifatere. “La trace de l’intertexte,” p.4. According to Michael Rifatere, the intertext is defined as all of the texts that a person will have read during their life: “[l’intertexte est] l’ensemble des textes que l’on peut
judgment and perception to justify the relationship that exists between two texts. It is important to note that despite their relationship of mutual exchange, each text has its own context. Through the use of intertextual references, the text becomes a space where several meanings intersect and in which several interpretations are possible: “Le propre de l’intertextualité n’est donc pas de révéler un phénomène nouveau, mais de proposer une nouvelle manière de penser et d’appréhender des formes d’intersection explicite ou implicite entre deux textes.”

As Graham Allen suggests, the introduction of one or more texts within another provides new possibilities for the creation of meaning: “However it is used, the term intertextuality promotes a new vision of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy.” Within the context of autobiography, intertextuality becomes a practice of innovation; in autobiographical writing, instances of intertextuality destabilize the univocal perspective of the author. Allen writes about the fresh approach that intertextuality brings to the reading of a text. Furthermore, a working knowledge of intertextual theory and practice allows the reader to transcend dominant views concerning the practices of writing and reading: “Without a working knowledge of intertextual theory and practice, readers are likely to retain traditional notions of writing and reading, notions which have been radically challenged since the 1960s.”

In contemporary autobiographical writing, the introduction of intertextuality within the context of personal narratives serves to undermine practices of self-referential writing and introduce new ways of reading:

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rapprocher de celui que l’on a sous les yeux, l’ensemble des textes que l’on retrouve […] à la lecture d’un passage donné.” (“La trace de l’intertexte,” p.4.)

What is characteristic of intertextuality is that it introduces a new way of reading which destroys the linearity of the text. Each intertextual reference is the occasion for an alternative: either one continues reading, taking it only as a segment like any other, integrated into the syntagmatic structure of the text, or else one turns to the source text, carrying out a sort of intellectual anamnesis where the intertextual reference appears like a paradigmatic element that has been displaced, deriving from a forgotten structure. But in fact the alternative is only present for the analyst. These two processes really operate simultaneously in intertextual reading— and in discourse— studding the text with bifurcations that gradually expand its semantic space.622

Within the space of the autobiographical narrative, which traditionally follows a structured chronological order, intertextuality disrupts the linearity of the text. Since a text works in close collaboration with its intertext, this relationship has the potential of being perceived as an act of rewriting— of “réécriture”:

L’intertextualité est donc le mouvement par lequel un texte réécrit un autre texte, et l’intertexte l’ensemble des textes qu’une œuvre répercute, qu’il se réfère à lui in absentia (par exemple s’il s’agit d’une allusion) ou l’inscrire in praesentia (c’est le cas de la citation). C’est donc une catégorie générale qui englobe des formes aussi diversifiées que la parodie, le plagiat, la réécriture, le collage […] Cette définition englobe ainsi des relations qui peuvent donner lieu à une forme précise— la citation, la parodie, l’allusion.623

Within the context of our study, it is important to understand the role that intertextuality plays in autobiographical writing, in particular in Calle’s self-referential writing. The use of intertextuality in autobiography is almost inconceivable since it contradicts the notions of autonomy and singularity on which autobiography is founded.624 As we have already discussed in our chapter on autobiography with Philippe Lejeune’s definition of the genre, autobiography is defined as a narrative that is written by an individual in the first-person perspective, with the primary focus being placed on his or her individual life.625 Within the context of autobiography,

624 When we are referring to the contract of authenticity in autobiographical writing, we mean to recall Philippe Lejeune’s autobiographical pact, which we have outlined in our chapter on autobiography.
625 See Philippe Lejeune’s definition in our chapter on autobiography. See also On Autobiography, p.4.
intertextuality presents itself as a way to open the text to new possibilities of meaning, where the related issues of authenticity and truth are contested: “L’intertextualité a pour fonction essentielle de perturber, de détourner les codes; car elle répond toujours à une vocation critique, ludique et exploratoire.” Marc Angenot explains that an intertextual approach could be put into place as a means to make canonical writing evolve: “L’approche intertextuelle peut avoir pour effet de briser la clôture de la production littéraire canonique pour inscrire celle-ci dans un vaste réseau de transaction entre modes et statuts discursifs […] Il y a là une attitude nouvelle quant à la place même qu’occupe le littéraire dans l’activité symbolique.” Angenot’s remark becomes pertinent in Calle’s autobiographical writing, since intertextuality represents an important strategy in Calle’s production to question the conventions of autobiographical writing.

1.3 The Role of Intertextuality in *Doubles jeux*

To understand how Calle uses intertextuality as a writing strategy in her text, we must first understand how intertextuality is incorporated within the narrative frame of her text(s). To begin this process, we will first look at Auster’s *Léviathan* in greater detail. The subtle interplay between fact and fiction in *Léviathan* becomes highly relevant when it is studied alongside *Doubles-jeux*. What is interesting about Auster’s novel is that the narrator, a writer named Peter Aaron, tells his story in an intimate first-person voice. Aaron reveals to us that the story he is telling is that of a close friend of his, Benjamin Sachs, who passes away not long before Aaron begins writing his story. As the story unfolds, a closer look at the biographical details of the narrator of *Léviathan*, whose initials “P.A” reflect those of Paul Auster, reveals a number of coincidental details with Auster’s own autobiographical events. We learn from Aaron that his

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wife’s name is Iris.\textsuperscript{628} From his own biographical details, we know that Auster is married to a woman named Siri, which is “Iris” spelled backwards.\textsuperscript{629} Other striking biographical similarities exist between the narrator and the author of \textit{Léviathan}. Both Aaron and Auster are writers by profession. Aaron, like Auster, has graduated from Columbia University in New York and has lived in France for several years as a translator. While Aaron translates a French book entitled \textit{A History of Modern China}, Auster has also translated several books written by French authors such as Stéphane Mallarmé.\textsuperscript{630}

In \textit{Léviathan}, Aaron takes on the role of Auster’s “fictive double.” Much like \textit{Doubles-jeux}, the story presented in \textit{Léviathan} confounds identity between the author, the narrator, and protagonist, and constitutes a strategic play between reality and fiction. In Auster’s novel, the central character, Peter Aaron, is a novelist working on a biographical text called \textit{Léviathan},\textsuperscript{631} which is the same title that Auster gives to his novel in which Aaron is himself a character. The plot of \textit{Léviathan}, in which an author (Paul Auster) writes about another author (Peter Aaron) writing a book with the same title (\textit{Léviathan}), inspires an endless succession of internal duplications within Auster’s novel, which we also find in Calle’s \textit{Doubles-jeux}. Unlike Calle, Auster never acknowledges that his novel is inspired by his own life and personal experiences. He does however acknowledge that his novel has borrowed autobiographical elements from Calle’s own life. On the copyright page of the English version of \textit{Léviathan (Leviathan)}, the

\textsuperscript{628} Paul Auster. \textit{Léviathan}, p.113.
\textsuperscript{629} Paul Auster’s wife is the writer Siri Hustavedt, whom he married in 1981.
\textsuperscript{630} It is important to acknowledge that after my own analysis of Paul Auster’s \textit{Léviathan}, I discovered that Anna Khimasia makes the same observations on the similarities between Paul Auster’s autobiographical details and the description of his fictional character Paul Aaron. Anna Khimasia’s description is however more detailed and more expansive than the explanations found here. For a more detailed description, see Anna Khimasia’s “Authorial Turns: Sophie Calle, Paul Auster and the Quest for Identity.”
\textsuperscript{631} Paul Auster. \textit{Léviathan}, p.159.
editor emphasizes the fictional aspects of the book; this remark is omitted from the French version of the novel:

PUBLISHER’S NOTE: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.632

In her study of Auster’s Léviathan, Anna Khimasia suggests that, since we are aware of the intentional mixture between fiction and reality in the novel (through the borrowing of the details of Calle’s life and through the intersections between Auster’s life and his own fictional double Aaron) the disclaimer seems to be an attempt to fictionalize reality and bring fiction into reality633:

It is important to note that this publisher’s note does not appear in any other of Paul Auster’s books published by Penguin. We, however, also already know that Auster’s writing does draw on facts like his use of real people and events such as Sophie Calle and her projects. So the publisher’s disclaimer seems to highlight the self-conscious attempt to make the real fictive, the fictive real.634

It is important to note that Auster himself, on his page of acknowledgements, refers to the mixture between reality and fiction in his novel by thanking Calle for her permission to use the facts of her life in the writing of his novel. According to Khimasia, the special interest of the disclaimer in Léviathan is based on the fact that all novels written by Auster mix fact with fiction. Khimasia notes that the intent of highlighting the fictional nature of the book serves to confirm its highly self-reflexive content. In the book itself, this is accomplished by focusing on the relationship between the fictional Aaron and his creator’s (Auster) own identity: “By presenting Aaron in the act of writing, Auster draws attention to both the fictionality of his narrative and also his role in the creation of this fiction (which overlaps with his extra-textual

632 Paul Auster. Léviathan, copyright page.
life).” Similar to Auster’s novel, the deliberate mixing of fact and fiction in *Doubles-jeux* questions issues related to the authenticity and reliability of Calle’s autobiographical expression.

At the beginning of each of the volumes belonging to the *Doubles-jeux* box set, Calle confirms the important role that Auster’s writing plays in her autobiographical narrative:

“L’auteur remercie tout spécialement Paul Auster de l’avoir autorisée à mêler la fiction à la réalité.” Similarly, in his novel, Auster expresses gratitude to Calle for allowing him to draw on some events of her life and to incorporate them in his novel: “L’auteur remercie tout spécialement Sophie Calle de l’avoir autorisé à mêler la réalité à la fiction.”

*Doubles-jeux* comes close to a kind of “autofiction” or *fictionalized* autobiography – defined in our chapter on autobiography as a hybrid genre of writing, which is positioned between autobiographical narrative and fiction – through which Calle manipulates the presentation of her autobiographical subject.

As we have already mentioned, in *Doubles-jeux*, Calle explicitly associates her identity with that of Maria Turner and she allows us to compare the details between her own life and the description provided by Auster for his character by placing her autobiographical narratives alongside Auster’s fictional description for the same events. An intertextual reading of Auster’s character Maria Turner allows the reader to appreciate the literary character of Calle’s work and to evoke her own imaginative approach to autobiographical writing:

An interesting feature of the book is the character Maria Turner, modeled after French artist Sophie Calle. Her autobiographical work consists of bizarre and compulsory instructions she lays down for herself. They enable Calle to abandon paved paths and

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636 Sophie Calle includes this description at the beginning of each of the seven volumes that belong to the *Doubles-jeux* project.
637 Paul Auster. *Léviathan*, p.3.
enter unknown territory. In one of her projects – that appears in *Leviathan* as well – Calle hired a private detective to shadow and photograph her during a period of time […] These disturbing pictures lure the viewer into a parallel and highly paranoid world that bears a close resemblance to the actual life of several characters in books.\(^{638}\)

The overlapping dialogues, or in Laurent Jenny’s words the “echo effect,”\(^{639}\) created by the intertextual relationships between *Léviathan* and *Doubles-jeux* serves to present the autobiographical subject through an effect of *mise en abyme*. What makes Calle’s autobiographical task even more intriguing and original in *Doubles-jeux* is that she transposes the intertextual reading of her narrative to the photographs that she introduces into the text.\(^{640}\)

### 1.4 The *Double Game* between Photography and Autobiography

Word and image relations, in particular the collaboration between photography and autobiography, are at the core of Calle’s autobiographical writing. It is through the connections and the tensions that exist between verbal and visual forms of expression in her texts that Calle addresses the key issues of sincerity, singularity, and subjectivity in autobiography. As we have argued in our chapter on photography, both autobiography and photography are characterized by a remarkably powerful ability to provide authentic and reliable evidence of the realities that they portray. However, both media are also highly subjective forms of expression and collaborate to

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\(^{639}\) Laurent Jenny. “The Strategy of Form,” p.34.

\(^{640}\) If we consider the arguments presented in our chapter on photography, with W.J.T Mitchell’s description of the photograph as a text, then it becomes quite possible to imagine the ability of photographic images to engage in intertextual relationships. See our chapter on photography for W.J.T Mitchell’s description of the photograph’s unique properties and its ability to be read as a text: “The photograph is ‘read’ as if it were the trace of an event.” Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.284.
articulate the problems of representation in language and in visual art.\textsuperscript{641} This becomes especially evident in Sophie Calle’s autobiographical writing.

In her role as a conceptual artist, or in Johnnie Gratton’s words, as “a narrative artist,” Calle illustrates the various visual and aesthetic challenges that self-referential practices present to artists. On an aesthetic level, an effect of \textit{mise en abyme} is created by Calle by literally inserting a few pages from Auster’s novel within her text.\textsuperscript{642} However, a more unique approach taken by Calle to emphasize the word and image interchange in her project is to transpose the fictional elements of her narrative to the photographic images.

It is Anne Sauvageot’s astute analysis of Calle’s text \textit{Doubles-jeux} that has inspired us to transmit the intertextual relationship that exists in the written text of \textit{Doubles-jeux} to the photographic image that serves as the cover of \textit{De l’obéissance (Livre I)} (Fig.12, Fig.13):

Following the publication of \textit{Leviathan} in 1994, Sophie Calle literally radicalizes mimetism through the character Maria by deciding to obey the novel. In this respect, Calle decides to adopt the appearance of duality by taking on the representation of the double B in plagiarizing the photograph that the \textit{Paris-Match} of November 2 1989 portrayed of Brigitte Bardot, surrounded in her bed with cats and dogs […] In the \textit{Double Game} photograph, Sophie Calle, imitating Bardot with her hair and fashion style, is sitting in the same way as Brigitte Bardot, who happens to be the heroine of the SPA,\textsuperscript{643} in the vast bed that she shares with animals.\textsuperscript{644}

In the photographic image (Calle imitating Bardot) and in \textit{Doubles-jeux} (The introduction of Auster’s fictional character Maria into the narrative), Calle takes on several personas. This

\textsuperscript{641} See our chapter on photography for a detailed explanation. Se also Linda Haverty Rugg (\textit{Picturing ourselves: Photography & Autobiography}, p.2) and Timothy Dow Adams (\textit{Light writing & life writing: photography in autobiography}, p.xiv-xv), who write about the role that photography plays in autobiography to anchor the author’s identity in the text and to present the autobiographical subject as multiple and fragmented.

\textsuperscript{642} In the English translation of \textit{Doubles-jeux}, entitled \textit{Double Game}, Calle literally inserts pages from Paul Auster’s novel into her text; these pages contain the Auster’s description of Maria Turner.

\textsuperscript{643} The SPA, or the “Société Protectrice des Animaux” is a French association that is dedicated to the humane care and protection of animals. Brigitte Bardot is the spokesperson for the SPA.

\textsuperscript{644} This is a translation of the original excerpt in French that I had translated for a conference paper. Anne Sauvageot. \textit{L’art caméléon}, p.34-35.
posturing becomes even more evident when taking into account other photographic images used in *Doubles-jeux*. In some of these the photographs, we see Calle engaging in different roles: a strip-tease artist (*Les panoplies, Livre III*), a chambermaid (*L’hôtel, Livre V*), a detective (*Carnets d’adresses, Livre VI*), a spy (*À suivre, Livre IV*), an artist (*Gotham Handbook, Livre VII*), etc. Language and photography are so deeply interconnected that language sometimes becomes interchangeable with Calle’s visual content. For instance, there are visual excerpts of Calle’s diary, images of newspaper clippings and typewritten personal letters, and notes of commentary from spectators of her performance art installations, inserted into the visual field of *Doubles-jeux*.

In *Doubles-jeux*, self-representation is used as a springboard for artistic expression⁶⁴⁵; it represents just one of Calle’s many artistic projects for which autobiography is used as the privileged mode of literary expression. By co-mingling word and image in a deliberate network of relationships, Calle writes a life narrative that is self-conscious in its rejection of a stabilized, univocal representation of the autobiographical subject. In fact, text and images represent an accurate portrait of Calle’s multi-faceted identity as a writer, photographer, and artist. In re-thinking autobiography in *Doubles-jeux* through an intertextual collaboration with Auster’s novel, Calle uses performance art as a strategy to engage and to highlight the performative character of self-representation. Other examples of intertextuality are visible in Calle’s photographic images and help to illustrate the ways in which she exploits the concept of performativity in her autobiographical writing through the use of photography. One image in particular that recalls the performative aspects of her autobiographical works is the photograph

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⁶⁴⁵ Elisabeth Couturier also remarks that autobiography is the main source for Calle’s artistic expression, in which she blurs the boundaries between art and life to take great liberties with the representation of daily life (“Sophie Calle recherche désespérément,” p.66.).
on the cover of her book *Histoire vraies + dix* (Fig.14). Although this book is not included in the *Doubles-jeux* box set, many of the photographs used in this text – and their accompanying narrative descriptions – are recycled in *Doubles-jeux*. On the cover of *Des histoires vraies + dix*, there is a bare-breasted image of what we imagine to be Calle’s torso. This woman, whose face is not visible, grasps her left breast with her left hand. For the individual who is familiar with performance art, particularly the art of strip-tease, this image recalls the artistic practice of Annie Sprinkle – especially the artistic project that she refers to as the “Bosom Ballet” (Fig.15). This intertextual relationship between Calle’s photographic image and those of Annie Sprinkle are very important in the interpretation of Calle’s autobiographical writing as performance art. As a narrative artist, Calle is able to recontextualize her autobiographical project by writing within other symbolically charged sites of meaning in society and culture.

### 1.5 Intratextual Relations

The intertextual relations that contribute to the construction of Calle’s autobiographical subject in *Doubles-jeux* are underscored by a more complex set of internal relationships in the text. The interpretation of *Doubles-jeux* is not only regulated by its intertextual reading with Paul Auster’s *Léviathan*, but it is also shaped by an intra-textual network of autobiographical writing, between *Doubles-jeux* and other autobiographical texts written by Calle. The intertextual dialogue between *Léviathan* and *Doubles-jeux*, both in the written text and in the photographic images, is central to the reading of *Doubles-jeux*. It is through her “republication” of previous autobiographical projects that Calle is able to re-present her past experiences in another context.

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646 Paul Booth distinguishes between intertextuality and intratextuality: “Intertextuality and intra-textuality both hinge on reconceptualizations of the definition of text. Intertextuality sees texts as spread out, open, and defined by the connections between discrete units. Intra-textuality, alternately, sees documents as complete, whole, and unified entities, defined by the connections within internal elements […] there is both an inward (intra-) and an outward (inter-) movement when reading between texts. (*Fandom: New Media Studies*, p.57-59). We also explain intratextuality in our chapter on Barthes.
and to create an intertextual dialogue within *Doubles-jeux* itself. Within this intratextual
dialogue, her autobiographical subject is presented from a variety of perspectives: First, by
republishing previously exhibited and published projects, Calle provides an alternate version for
each of her republished works. Secondly, intratextual relations are not only found in the
republication of earlier autobiographical projects in *Doubles-jeux*, but there are also two versions
of the text that have been published: One version was published in French and the other was
published in English. The difference between both versions is not just an issue of translation;
there is a striking difference between the two translations, which further complicates the
interpretation of *Doubles-jeux*. Thirdly, the fragmentary construction of the project is attributed
to the fragmentary reading that it imposes on the reader, through its division into several
volumes. The different layers of writing and reading in Calle’s project provide multiple
perspectives for the interpretation of Calle’s representation of her life, ambitions and artistic
production. It is through these various media (text and photography), intertexts (*Léviathan*) and
intratexts (the different versions of *Doubles-jeux*), and processes of writing and re-writing, that
Calle presents herself as a fragmented autobiographical subject.

An example of the practice of rewriting in Calle’s project is found in the excerpts of
*Léviathan* that are reproduced at the beginning of *De l’obéissance (Livre I)*. In the English
version of *Doubles-jeux*, Calle inserts actual pages from Auster’s novel, which contain the
character description for Maria Turner, at the beginning of her text. However, in the French
version of *Doubles-jeux*, Calle reproduces the excerpts from Auster’s novel at the beginning of
*De l’obéissance (Livre I)*. In both the French and English versions of *Doubles-jeux*, the fictional
excerpts from Auster’s novel are punctuated with Calle’s handwritten editorial comments and
corrections in red ink (Fig.16). Calle crosses out and replaces Auster’s fictional descriptions with
factual information. On one of the pages of Auster’s novel, he writes a description of certain
events relating to the experiences of his character Maria: “Quelque temps plus tard, un homme avait fait des avances à Maria dans la rue. Le trouvant très antipathique, elle l’avait repoussé.” Calle’s overlapping editorial changes modify the facts presented by Auster: “Quelque temps plus tôt, elle avait suivi un homme dans la rue.” The obvious discrepancies between Auster’s imaginary events and Calle’s real-life experiences call attention to the performative and self-reflexive nature of Calle’s book, both in its ability to rewrite history and to acknowledge its own revisionist agenda.

1.6 Rewriting the Past in Doubles-jeux

Rewriting the past is important to the autobiographical project in Doubles-jeux. By gathering and modifying previously published narratives within the space of a single text, Calle creates an intertextual relationship that provides a new perspective both on her own personal history and on the practice of autobiography. The various intratextual relationships that are found in Doubles-jeux allude to the processes of self-creation at work in the narrative. Along with contemporaries such as Cindy Sherman, Miranda July and Marlene Dumas, Calle has changed the way that lives are captured on paper. In response to the challenges of self-representation explored in contemporary autobiographical texts, such as Calle’s Doubles-jeux, the way we read and talk about autobiographical writing is constantly changing; as we have already outlined in our chapter on autobiography, the definition and theorization of autobiography is engaged in a constant act of revision to reflect the ever-changing notions of self and identity and the way they are portrayed in literature.

647 Sophie Calle. De l’obéissance, p.15. The excerpt has been reproduced exactly as it is presented; the crossed out words are also crossed out in Calle’s text. See Fig.16 for a better idea of how the editorial marks are presented in De l’obéissance.
The presentation of the French edition of *Doubles-jeux* as a box set already engages a relationship of intertextuality by staging the project’s reading process as the collaborative reading of several texts in the interpretation of a single work. It is also important to note that the relationship of intratextuality is also depicted in the photographic images introduced in *Doubles-jeux*, which are also recycled and re-used by Calle in other autobiographical projects such as *Histoires vraies + dix, La visite guidée, Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, etc.

Intratextual relationships take on a significant role in the construction of meaning in *Doubles-jeux*. In his description of the book, Philippe Piguet affirms that Calle’s autobiographical works that were originally published in the 1980s find a second life in *Doubles-jeux* through republication. The republication and revision of previous writings in *Doubles-jeux* associates autobiographical writing with a symbolic act of recalling the past; Calle engages the retrospective character of autobiographical writing in a process of rediscovering and reinventing the past through a revisionary act of writing. The book’s process of looking back on past autobiographical experiences to create new memories constitutes a sort of *mise en abyme* of self-introspection and alludes to the self-reflexive quality of the book. Calle’s intentional style of writing encourages the reader to contemplate identity rather than carry out a simple reading of the text. It is in this respect that Calle engages her reader in an interpretative reading of the autobiographical narrative, which is a characteristic feature of fictional writing.

### 1.7 The Construction of *Doubles-jeux* through Intratextuality

Since the story told in *Doubles-jeux* is divided into several volumes, the reader is encouraged to interpret Calle’s personal events not as a linear story, but rather as a series of

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separate events. In Book I, *De l’obéissance*, Calle takes the fictional details imagined by Paul Auster for his character Maria and attempts to re-enact them in her own life. Borrowing from the fictional events imposed on the character that Auster creates based on Calle’s personal life, in *De l’obéissance* (*Livre I*), Calle stages the notion of identity in writing as an arbitrary creation, whose attributes and meaning could be modified and re-interpreted. Some of the arbitrary rules that Calle follows include the imposition of a daily diet during the week of December 8 to 14, 1997. Calle follows this diet while also imposing a colour scheme to each menu option. Moreover, Calle highlights the notion of the arbitrary in this book by imposing signs to her daily living that she must live by for a specified amount of time. *Le rituel d’anniversaire* (*Book II*), presents the story of a ritual that Calle follows every year on her birthday between October 9, 1980 and October 9, 1993. *Les panoplies* (*Book III*) is divided into two parts: “*La garde robe,*” which is dated as far back as 1985, and “*Le strip-tease,*” which dates back to 1981. In *À suivre* (*Book IV*), Calle presents the narration under the troubling theme of “stalking.” In this book, she follows a gentleman on a trip to Venice and documents the experience through photographs and written text. She divides the book into three parts or stories: “*Préambule,*” which dates back to 1979; “*Suite vénitienne,*” which dates back to 1980; and “*La filature,*” which dates back to 1981. In Book V (*L’hôtel*), Calle presents the story of the time when she was hired in a hotel as a chambermaid in Venice between February 16 and March 6, 1981. During this time, she looked through the personal belongings of hotel guests and photographed various personal items belonging to them, which she includes in the book. In Book VI (*Le carnet d’adresses*), Calle writes about the time when she finds an address book in June 1983 and decides to set out on a quest to learn the intimate details relating to the identity of the address book’s owner. Calle contacts the people who are listed in the book and conducts interviews with them to ask personal questions about the book’s owner. In Book VII (*Le Gotham Handbook*), Calle asks the novelist
Paul Auster to write up a list of instructions for her that she would follow during a short stay in New York City, with the goal to improve life in New York. In each of the books, Calle frames personal writing within certain arbitrary parameters to enact personal writing within established conventions. Like with the “rules of the game”, Calle re-negotiates the terms of autobiography in order to re-imagine its formal conventions into a more performative style of writing. It is by following Calle’s “rules of the game” that the reader is expected to adopt a particular interpretative approach in *Doubles-jeux*. Through the rules she imposes, Calle divides the interpretation of the autobiographical narrative into three specific acts of reading: In the first part, the autobiographical subject is framed as an artful invention (Book I); in the second part, Calle presents her identity as a series of performances within specific cultural contexts (Books II, III, IV, V, VI); in the third part (Book VII), to enhance the value of her autobiographical subject as a performance that is situated within specific cultural contexts, Calle goes to New York City and follows a list of personal instructions that are written for her by Auster. In each act of reading, the excerpts from Auster’s novels are divided in such a way that they guide the interpretative approach of Calle’s autobiography into a more performative way of reading and writing.

### 2 Part I in *Doubles–jeux*: Reformulaiting the Arbitrary by Breaking the Rules of autobiography in *De l’obéissance*

In *De l’obéissance (Livre I)*, Sophie Calle puts the expectations and conventions of autobiography to the test. In the first book of the *Doubles-jeux* series, she creates her own set

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649 In this section, the aim is to draw parallels between the conventions of autobiography discussed in our chapter on autobiography and the strict rules that Calle imposes on herself in *De l’obéissance*. For a description of the conventions of autobiography, please see Philippe Lejeune’s definition of the genre in our chapter on autobiography.
of rules for the interpretation of her text. Provided that the reader obeys Calle’s rules and reads this book first, it is here that his first impressions are formulated. It is in *De l’obéissance* that Calle lays out the framework for her project. Calle plays on the notion of the arbitrary throughout Book I: The title of the book, *De l’obéissance*, suggests that it represents a manifesto of sorts, dealing with notions of “obedience.” In the rules set out by Calle for the reader of *De l’obéissance*, she decides to follow the path set out by Paul Auster for his fictional character Maria Turner. The book, which is divided into two parts – “le régime chromatique” and “Des journées entières sous le signe du B, du C, du W” – provides examples of how Calle subjects herself to arbitrary rules and situations. In “le régime chromatique,” for example, she decides to follow a culinary diet during the course of one week. Inspired by Auster’s character Maria, Calle decides to impose a different menu option for each day of the week. She also takes the arbitrary nature of the task further by imposing a colour scheme to her daily menu options. What this means is that for each day of the week, she chooses her menu solely by attributing a specific colour to it: On Monday, for example, Calle chooses orange as her menu choice (Fig.17). She must adhere to this arbitrary menu by choosing orange menu items such as carrot purée, shrimp, melon and orange juice. Throughout the rest of the week, Calle documents this chromatic diet by writing out the menu items and attaches a photograph with each description: On Tuesday, she prepares a “red” menu; on Wednesday she follows a “blue” menu; on Thursday she submits herself to a “green” menu; on Friday she eats from a “yellow” menu; on Saturday, she imposes a “pink” menu. We notice that Calle commits to and follows each menu choice as she provides evidence with photographic images. In the photographs, we also notice that she not only restricts these rules to her food choices, but that she also extends the chromatic rules to the colour of her plates and the cutlery she uses for each menu item. Through the chromatic diet, the reader is able to understand how personal experience is articulated in the written text from a pre-established set
of rules. In the second part of De l’obéissance, Calle continues her narrative with the notion of the arbitrary, by living “des journées entières sous le signe du B, du C, (et) du W.” Again, like in the first part of De l’obéissance, Calle explains how she passes her days by following certain arbitrary rules. With respect to the sign “B,” Calle offers a list of words that correspond to this letter: “B comme la Belle et le Bestiaire, comme Bécasse, Bourrique, Bourricot, Bique, Blatte, Butor, Blaireau, Bigorneau, come Braire, Bêler, Beugler, Bêtifier.”

Although Calle does not explain this list of apparently random words, on the next page she includes a photographic image of herself sitting on a bed, covered with a sheet with blue insects imprinted on it. She is wearing a wig and is surrounded by animals: owls, a rooster, a cat, a dog, a fox, a goat, a bull. In the next section, with respect to the sign “C,” Calle reveals to us that she lives “la journée du lundi 16 février 1998 sous le signe du C de cimetière.”

In the photographic images that she includes in her text, we see that Calle is at a cemetery, which she reveals as Montparnasse cemetery. In the pages that follow, Calle writes the following words: “C comme Calle et Calle au cimetière” along with a list of sentences and words that begin with the letter “C” and that are intended to describe the day she spends at the cemetery:

Clopin-Clopant, Cheminons, Complices, du Côté de Cette Concession au cimetière Circonvoisin et Causons du Courroux Céleste, sans Crainte des Caprices du Calendrier, Céans, pour Configurer une Citation à Comparaitre devant la Camarade et nous Concilier la Clémence des Cieux, Choquons nos Coupes de Champagne, Convenant Combien la Chance nous a Comblés. Conversons, Candides, du Choix du Cercueil – Classique, Chic, Confortable, Cossu… –, des Croque-morts, du Corbillard, Des Couronnes et des Cantilènes Caressantes Chantonnées en Chœur, a Capella, par le Cercle des Copains. A Contrecœur, Concluons la Conversation par Ce Contrariant Constat : Certes, Ces Cadavres, Ces Charognes Cohabiteront Coude à Coude, Côte à Côte et au Calme; Cependant ils Croupiront, Captifs de Ce Caveau que Chacun de son Côté nous Contemplons Complaisamment, conformément aux Conventions, Consacrons en

650 Sophie Calle. De l’obéissance, p.41.
651 Sophie Calle. De l’obéissance, p.45.
Other than the arbitrary value imposed to them, the words provided by Calle under the sign of “C” appear meaningless within the context of the autobiographical narrative; they do not contain any personal information related to Calle, they are not narrative in prose, they do not present a retrospective view of Calle’s existence, but they do provide a description in both present and future tenses. On the following page, we notice a photograph of Calle sitting on a tomb. The tomb has the following inscription written on it: “Ciao Ciao.” In the photograph, we also see her father standing in front of the tomb. Calle continues with the sign “C” when she reveals that she had then passed “la journée du 19 mars 1998 sous le signe de Confession.” Calle provides us with a complete list of words that start with the letter “C” and are related to the word “Confession.” On the following two pages, there is a large photograph in which we recognize Calle in a church. She is sitting in the third row and looking towards the altar in what seems to be a moment of deep contemplation. Finally, when referring to the final sign, which is “le signe du W,” Calle reveals to her readers that she chose to “réunir dans une seule action tous les mots commençant par la lettre W qu’elle a trouvés dans un dictionnaire Harrap’s de poche français-anglais. p.321.” She adds a small excerpt of the dictionary page she selects for the letter “W” that shows the words: “Wagon; Walon,onne; Walkman; Waters; Watt; Week-end; Western; Whisky.” On the following page, Calle writes: “W, comme Week-end en Wallonie.”

652 Sophie Calle. De l’obéissance, p.47.
655 Sophie Calle. De l’obéissance, p.57.
656 Sophie Calle. De l’obéissance, p.58.
develops this idea further on the next page, while explaining to us that she uses all the words that appear on the dictionary page to organize a weekend in Wallonie:


The two photographs that follow this paragraph provide evidence of the weekend that she spent aboard the train that is en route to Liège (Fig.18). The images display the objects that are described in the list of words provided by Calle on the previous page: _W ou le souvenir d’enfance_ by Perec; _Le Western_; _approaches mythologies auteurs-acteurs filmographies_ by Raymond Bellour; a book by Walt Whitman; a Walkman; a bottle of whisky, etc. In both parts of _De l’obéissance_, it is evident that an important relationship exists between the written text and the photographic images; the photographs are introduced into the book to insist on the concept of the arbitrary in the construction of Calle’s identity in the text. In other words, the autobiographical subject is constructed based on certain arbitrary rules that confront notions of self in writing and in photography. As Anne Sauvageot explains, Calle’s strategy is to replace the conventions of autobiography with her own set of rules: “Pour tromper l’ennui, l’habitude, la monotonie du quotidien, Sophie Calle invente ainsi des jeux et rituels qui doivent obéir à des règles strictes. À l’arbitraire, à l’absurde de la vie, elle répond par un autre arbitraire, par une autre absurdité: ‘La règle du jeu’, texte fondateur de son œuvre. Sophie Calle se donne des contraintes.”658 It is from this perspective that Calle is able to comment upon the pre-established

658 Anne Sauvageot. _L’art caméléon_, p.44.
conventions of life writings as absurd. She does this by staging the construction of the autobiographical subject through her own set of exaggerated rules. With respect to the part entitled “Le régime chromatique,” we take note of a slight refusal of the arbitrary at the end of the week of the 8-14 December 1997, especially on Sunday, when Calle confirms that she has disobeyed the chromatic diet (Fig.19): “j’ai personnellement préférée jeûner car c’est bien joli les romans mais il n’est pas forcement délectable de les respecter à la lettre.” By breaking her own rules in the text, Calle attests to her distaste for the arbitrary through “le régime chromatique” and expresses a certain degree of liberty within a framework of pre-set rules. It is by reformulating the conventions of autobiography with a new set of requirements that Calle is able to alter our perception of what constitutes an autobiography, the truth status of photographic images, and the legitimacy given to self-referential practices.

3 Part II: Performing Identity: From Writing to Performance in Les panoplies

As we have already mentioned, Calle groups Books II to VI of Doubles-jeux in the second part of her “rules of the game.” In this part of the rules she assigns, there is a very important reversal that takes place, since it is no longer Paul Auster’s fictional character (Maria) influencing Calle’s actions, but Calle’s own activities that are influencing the experiences of Auster’s fictional character. In part two of Calle’s “rules of the game,” writing no longer represents the driving force behind the interpretation of the text. Instead, Calle’s art installations become the inspiration for the project in Doubles-jeux. In Books II to VI, Calle decides to

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660 In our chapter on photography we discuss how photography is recognized as being closely connected to reality. Because of its link to reality, photography is often understood to provide a “real” and “authentic” rendering of the world. For a more elaborate explanation of this concept, see our chapter on photography.
republish only those projects that were a direct influence on Auster’s portrayal of the fictional character Maria. Through the influence she has on Auster in his creation of Maria, Calle illustrates how identity is not an isolated, autonomous concept, as autobiography perceives it, but a relational phenomenon that is rooted in social experiences. The analysis we have performed in our chapter on autobiography has helped us to understand that identity is a socially constructed phenomenon that is shaped by social relationships and that evolves over time. Lejeune supports this notion when he states that “we are constituted as subjects only in relation to others.” This idea becomes even more evident when we consider Calle’s text “Le strip-tease.” Although Calle includes five of the books belonging to Doubles-jeux in this part of the “rules,” we will focus mostly on the section entitled “Le strip-tease” in Les panoplies (Livre III).

*Les panoplies*, which is the third book in the box set of *Doubles-jeux*, consists of two parts: *La garde-robe* (p.8-17) and *Le strip-tease* (p. 18-45). In the section entitled *Le strip-tease*, Calle documents her experience as a stripper at a strip joint in Paris in 1979. A brief description of this event is found in another one of Calle’s books entitled *Histoires vraies + dix*:

J’avais vingt-sept ans. Engagée comme strip-teaseuse dans une baraque foraine installée pour les fêtes de Noël au carrefour du boulevard de Clichy et de la rue des Martyrs, je devais me déshabiller dix-huit fois par jour entre seize heures et une heure du matin.  

Calle documents her engagement as a strip-tease artist through a series of photographs. The 20 photographs (plus an additional photo on the cover of *Les panoplies*) that provide evidence of Calle’s experience as a stripper, offer the most striking example in the *Doubles-jeux* project of Calle’s construction of the autobiographical subject through the concept of performance (Fig.20). Strip-tease is a stage performance that involves the public disrobing by an individual for an audience:

Striptease is a spectacle. Undressing occurs casually, sometimes without style and grace, and probably lacking in costume and prop, while striptease implies ritual and performance, allure, tension, and, generally speaking, an audience, as well as exhibitionism, with all of the flagrant come-hither posturing that that word implies.662

In *Le strip-tease*, through the staging of the strip-tease performance, Calle appears to expose her private life more than in any of her other narratives belonging to the *Doubles-jeux* box set. However, like the other texts belonging to the *Doubles-jeux* project, the initial promise of intimacy implied by the strip-tease performance is not what it first seems. Depicted in the first photograph of the text are six women on a stage, including Calle. According to the narrative’s title, *Le strip-tease*, we surmise that these women, Calle included, are all engaging in the act of strip-tease. The photographs that follow show the progression of Calle’s strip-tease show; in each successive picture, Calle is less dressed than in the previous image. The various photographs of Calle as a stripper provide an alternate perspective to the staging of her “intimate” self within the text. The scenes of self-exposure depicted in the photographic images of Calle’s strip-tease act become a strategy for the artist to stage the illusion of intimacy in autobiographical writing by placing her in a literal act of unveiling through the strip-tease performance. In the photographs, the eye is always drawn to Calle’s image; it is her body that takes the forefront in almost every photograph. Since Calle dominates the visual field in the majority of the images, her identity becomes the main focus of interest in the text. Even in the photographs where she can be seen among the other women, the gaze is fixated on her because the reader knows that this is her project.

The story that unfolds in the text through word and image relations takes on a more symbolic significance through the art of strip-tease; the elusive character of Calle’s identity in the text takes on a significant value through its visual analogue. In the first photograph of *Le strip-tease*, in which Calle is seen with five other women, we notice that the women are all standing on stage, staring at a man who is standing apart from them and speaking into a microphone. The man seems to be the presenter of the strip-tease show, which will soon begin. Each woman is on stage, in front of the audience, in order to present herself to her viewers prior to the show’s commencement. In the second photograph, Calle advances to the forefront to take the stage, while the other women remain in the background. In this photograph, Calle is removing one of the gloves that she is wearing, while the presenter gestures towards her as if to present her to the crowd. The show begins, and in the next frame, Calle is alone on stage, with a serious look on her face, ready to make her debut. The 17 photographs that follow display Calle’s strip-tease presentation. She is wearing a black dress, a fur stole, black tights, black heels, a veil, a hat, and a blonde wig. The series of photographs shows the progression of her strip-tease show; in each successive picture, she is less dressed than in the previous image. The final photograph on the last page of the narrative, takes us to the end of the strip-tease act; Calle is now backstage and is no longer wearing her wig. In this photograph, she appears to be unconscious, lying on the floor with her eyes closed. The show is over. Calle confirms the presence of her identity in the text through word and image relations. Looking at the photographs closely, we notice that there are some inconsistencies with her outfit. In the photographs of Calle,  

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663 Brian McNair alludes to the important connection that exists between words and images and the strip-tease performance. According to McNair the strip-tease performance is not necessarily erotic, but could also allude to something more meaningful: “The words and images one encounters in striptease culture are not necessarily erotic, although they may well be about eroticism. They may contain nakedness, self-exhibition, and self-revelation, of a literal and metaphorical kind, but they will rarely aim for sexual arousal in the audience. They are closer to anthropology than pornography in their focus on the discovery and explanation of sexual phenomena.” (*Striptease Cultre: Sex, Media and the Demoralization of Desire*, p.88).
with the exception of one image, she is wearing the same black dress. In just one of the photographs, she is wearing a black and white dress. Moreover, the fur stole she wears in some of her photographs is not the same fur stole that she is wearing in others. There is quite a remarkable difference in the fur stole that she is wearing in one particular photograph; it is much longer than the one she is wearing in the other images. The discrepancies that are revealed in the images serve to disrupt the sequence of the visual narrative. The viewer connects to Calle’s personal story as a fragmentary presentation of identity through visual clues. The visual elements in the images are very important in perceiving other strategies that are at play in Calle’s project that serve to disrupt the reading of the autobiographical narrative. Calle includes very little written text in Le strip-tease. Nevertheless, she constructs an alternative reality to the story presented in the text through the conceptual apparatus of photography. Since very little writing guides the interpretation of meaning in Le strip-tease, Calle removes the practice of self-expression from the literary space to reframe autobiography as practice that is implicated in culture. As we may recall, in our chapter on photography, in the section entitled “Photography as a symbolic representation of reality,” we elaborate on the idea that photography is a symbolic practice where meaning is generated through several levels of connotation. As a culturally-determined phenomenon, strip-tease provides a lens through which to explore autobiography as a culturally-mediated object. As a result, Calle is able to impose a particular reading of her text through the strip-tease performance. Within the context of Calle’s writing in Doubles-jeux, the

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664 One figure who is credited in our chapter for having developed the idea of photography as a “connoatative” practice is Roland Barthes. For a detailed overview of this concept, please consult our section entitled “Photography as a symbolic representation of reality” in our photography chapter.

665 We would like to recall Rachel Shteir’s definition of strip-tease as a ritualistic performance. Once we understand strip-tease as a contrived or pre-meditated practice, we are able to connect this to Calle’s intentional writing style.
art of strip-tease alludes to the ritualistic and performative aspects of her autobiographical subject.

Calle’s strategy in *Le strip-tease* is to convey meaning through the photograph’s visual field. By inserting language into her photographs, Calle’s strategy is to transfer the practice of autobiography from a written text to a visual or symbolic representation. This becomes especially relevant when we consider how Calle allows the images in *Le strip-tease* to occupy a large portion of the written text; in *Le strip-tease*, she devotes 21 pages of her text to the photographic images, while she only consecrates a total of 3 pages to the written text, including the title page. In the very first photograph of *Le strip-tease*, a large neon sign of the word “Eros” is placed above the stage where the strip-tease act is taking place (Fig.21). The word is only half illuminated, and the illuminated part is positioned directly above Calle. Due to its size, the word occupies a significant portion of the photograph’s visual field. It is in this manner that the neon sign provides a clearer image of the ideas that the artist is trying to convey in her text. The word “Eros” acts to assign a second layer of meaning to the images through the concept of desire. “Eros,” a word that has its origins in ancient Greek, carries the meaning of love or desire. Within the space of Calle’s narrative, the word “Eros” takes on a very suggestive meaning 666: “Eros signifie l’amour, d’ordre essentiellement charnel, visant à la satisfaction des désirs sensuels, des

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666 In one of our discussions on Sophie Calle’s *Le strip-tease*, Professor James Cahill offered some insightful observations on the concept of “Eros” within Calle’s project. According to Professor Cahill, the term could be interpreted in the sense intended by Freud. In Freud’s theory, *Eros*, also referred to as *libido*, not only refers to sexuality, but also to the life instinct that is the driving force behind all human behaviour. In *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, we are told that “Freud employs it in his final instinct theory to connote the whole of the life instincts as opposed to the death instincts.” This observation becomes relevant in our study of Calle since, as Professor Cahill suggests, the concept of *Eros* is intimately connected to the autobiographical drive in Calle’s project. Although we do not examine this relationship within Calle’s text, it would certainly be a topic of interest in future discussions of Calle’s allusion to “Eros” in *Le strip-tease*. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.153.)
impulsions sexuelles.” The sexual impulses that are suggested in the photographic images are very much part of the game that Calle presents in *Le strip-tease* through word and image relations. Although strip-tease is commonly associated with the fulfillment of male desire, it goes well beyond the automatic and repetitive motions of the pole or lap dance. Instead, it is an activity that is heavily steeped in ritual behaviour and social interaction. In *Mythologies*, Barthes approaches the topic of strip-tease as a cultural myth. In his description of the strip-tease performance, Barthes identifies a contradiction in the medium’s sole premise of desire. According to Barthes’s definition of strip-tease, it is an activity that is completely removed from the sexual or intimate context within which it is framed:

Contrairement au préjugé courant, la danse, qui accompagne toute la durée du strip-tease, n’est nullement un facteur érotique. C’est même probablement tout le contraire: l’ondulation faiblement rythmée conjure ici la peur de l’immobilité: non seulement elle donne au spectacle la caution de l’Art (les danses de music-hall sont toujours “artistiques”), mais surtout elle constitue la dernière clôture, la plus efficace, la danse, faite de gestes rituels, vus mille fois, agit comme un cosmétique de mouvements, elle cache la nudité, enfouit le spectacle sous un glacis de gestes inutiles et pourtant principaux, car le dénuement est ici relégué au rang d’opérations parasites, menées dans un lointain improbable.

According to Barthes, strip-tease cannot be an erotic or intimate form of expression because of the circumstances under which it is enacted; strip-tease is a staged performance in every sense of the word, in which the artist takes the stage, and skilfully retains an element of distance, while

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667 This excerpt was taken from an online dictionary: “Le Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.” To consult the reference, visit: [http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/fast.exe?mot=Eros](http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/fast.exe?mot=Eros)

668 During the strip-tease act, women embody a gross exaggeration of femininity in order to attract male desire: “In exotic dance clubs, women at work must act like women by embodying traditionally female behavior and roles as well as by dressing and behaving femininely. Because the central features of the organizational culture within exotic dance clubs are the commodification and commercialization of women’s sexuality, the clubs are premised on the consumption of women’s bodies and the presence of those bodies in hegemonic male fantasies. Thus, women work not only as women but as sexualized women.” (Mary Nell Trautner. “Doing Gender, Doing Class: The Performance of Sexuality in Exotic Dance Clubs,” p.772.).


670 M.G Levine describes the strip-tease act as a practice of maintaining a conceptual distance between public and private space: “The stripper’s performance depends on the implication of distance and inaccessibility. At close
creating the illusion of intimacy through a sequence of calculated gestures.\textsuperscript{671} Within the context of Calle’s project in \textit{Doubles-jeux}, strip-tease takes on meaning through the skilled artistry with which Calle approaches her performance art practices; she creates the illusion of intimacy with her readers through the “rules of the game.” The concept of a game is highly relevant within the strip-tease culture itself, which engages what critics refer to as a “confidence game” between the strip-tease performer and her male viewer. The “confidence game” puts the strip-tease artist in a relationship of power and control with her male audience:

From the flirtatious pull of her garter to the counterfeiting of emotional intimacy, the stripper, or exotic dancer, entices and entertains customers through a complex negotiation of power. Using a structure that resembles a ‘confidence game’ […] strippers manipulate symbolic communication and create emotional control over their patrons. All the while, however, their customers still possess a pervasive power: the sex-object role dancers must assume and perform is defined and managed by men and their desires.\textsuperscript{672}

Calle’s engagement in the act of strip-tease is very evocative of her role as autobiographer in the text. The “confidence game” is highly relevant to Calle’s practice of self-expression in \textit{Doubles-jeux} as it recalls her own sense of agency and control within the writing processes of the

\textsuperscript{671} As M.G. Levine explains, through her performance, the strip-tease artist becomes just as unreal and intangible as a fictional character: “What we are seeing is an ephemeral image, a construction of eroticism as unreal and intangible as a character in a film. We know this but choose not to believe it.” Striper Heidi Mattson writes: “Nothing was what it appeared. Most of these women took multiple names, matching their multiple personalities. Image, reality, manipulation, fantasy, it was a stew of deception.” (“Striptease: The Art of Spectacle and Transgression,” p.67.). As Petra Gördüren explains, the artist distances herself from the private themes of her works as a strategy to guarantee artistic freedom within her practice of autobiography. (Petra Gördüren “On the Trail of The Ego: Sophie Calle’s Pursuits.”).\textsuperscript{672} Lisa Pasko also refers to the different personas that the strip-tease artist adopts for her performance: “Strippers use different masks and guises, falsify social relationships and vary social roles […] They are experienced emotional managers and excellent scholars of human nature. The confidence game is an act of trust development, fake pretences and duplicity in order to acquire some kind of gain.” (Lisa Pasko. “Naked Power: The Practice of Stripping as a Confidence Game.” p.53.).

\textsuperscript{672} Lisa Pasko. “Naked Power: The Practice of Stripping as a Confidence Game,” p.50.
autobiographical narrative. In her “Double Game” with Paul Auster, for which her previously published projects constitute the inspiration behind Auster’s fictional writing, Calle’s artistic processes exercise a considerable amount of control over Auster’s own conscious assertion of agency and control within his own writing processes. Through her strip-tease performance, Calle re-asserts her capacity to manipulate and control the conditions of intimacy that underlie the practice of self-representation. The art of strip-tease becomes analogous to Calle’s approach to self-referential writing in the *Doubles-jeux* project, where the illusion of intimacy and relationships of social interaction become the primary themes behind her work. Another text in which she constructs her autobiographical subject through processes of social interaction is *Gotham Handbook*. In this book, Calle provides another example of how her identity becomes a product of social relationships through a form of street art.

4 Part III: *Gotham Handbook* – Autobiography as Performance

In her “rules of the game,” Calle reveals the circumstances under which the *Gotham Handbook* project came about:

> Je lui ai demandé d’inventer un personnage de fiction auquel je m’efforcerais de ressembler: j’ai en quelque sorte offert à Paul Auster de faire de moi ce qu’il voulait et ce, pendant une période d’un an maximum. Il objecta qu’il ne souhaitait pas assumer la

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673 It would be interesting to work through a more detailed analysis of Calle’s strip-tease act through Judith Butler’s ideas on performance. Although Butler takes a feminist approach to performance theory, the male-female dynamic created between Calle and Auster in *Doubles-jeux* could certainly be analyzed further through Butler’s ideas on gender, sex and sexuality. Butler argues that identity is a culturally-constructed phenomenon; she focuses primarily on the construction of identity as it relates directly to gender and sexuality in men and women. For her theories on gender performance see *Subjects of Desire, Gender Trouble, Bodies That Matter*, and other works written by Butler.

674 Street art is a form of art that is developed in public spaces. Street art has been characterized as a form of artistic practice that challenges art by situating it within contexts that are not typically considered artistic. Although our study focuses mostly on how art influences the representation of personal experiences in autobiographical writing, it would be interesting to enact a reversal in this analysis to determine how the practice of autobiography within art has also impacted artistic expression.
Although Calle’s initial request was denied by Auster, who did not feel comfortable with the prospect of dictating the artist’s actions, he eventually conceded, and on March 5, 1994, wrote her a list of rules that she would agree to follow. In September of the same year, Calle went to New York City with Auster’s instructions, which she would follow with precision during a one-week period. By accepting his instructions, Calle surrenders authorial control to Auster and becomes a fictional character within her own practice of autobiographical writing:

“She becomes the protagonist in a New York City story shaped by Auster’s prescriptions, but ultimately told through [her] sharp observations and documentary-style photographs.”

The narrative takes on a new dimension when Calle decides to introduce a secondary author – Auster – in the construction of her text. To emphasize the innovative character of *Gotham Handbook* within the scope of Calle’s *Doubles-jeux* project, it is important to mention that it is the only volume in the *Doubles-jeux* series that features a project that is completely original to both Calle and Auster’s writing; the narrative in *Gotham Handbook* is produced solely from the collaboration between Calle and Auster in *Doubles-jeux*. In this book, Calle’s objective is to present the autobiographical subject as both a figment of Auster’s imagination – a fictional character – that comes to life as a person living and interacting with other individuals in the real world.

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675 Sophie Calle. “La règle du jeu.” *De l’obéissance*, p.4-5.
677 To see the online review visit http://www.catherinekrudy.com/writing/doublegame.html
678 This is a common occurrence in the autobiographical writing of Sophie Calle to have her bring in another author in her personal writing. Often, the author/artist engages another writer in the construction of her subject in personal writing. In *Gotham Handbook*, she asks Paul Auster to dictate a series of events that she decides that she will carry out. She also does this in *La visite guidée*; she hires a professional writer to write her a love letter, which she
work deals with popular culture through writing and art and whose art installations project writing into the public sphere. Through her enactment of Auster’s instructions, Calle is able to transform the literary space into a series of performances in the real world.

Calle documents the details of her experience in *Gotham Handbook: New York, mode d’emploi* through the introduction of photographic images within the written text. *Gotham Handbook* is a 96-page book, containing 81 photographs. Auster’s guidelines are separated in the text into four main themes: “Sourire” (Smiling); “Parler à des inconnus” (Talking to Strangers); “Mendiants et sans abri” (Beggars and the Homeless); “Adopter un lieu” (Adopting a space).

With respect to the instructions related to smiling, Auster explains to Calle that she should smile at people she meets on the street:

> Souris quand la situation ne l’impose pas. Souris quand tu es en colère, quand tu te sens malheureuse, quand tu sens très malmenée par la vie – et vois quel effet ça fait. Souris à des inconnus dans la rue. New York peut être dangereuse, tu dois donc être prudente. Si tu préfères, ne souris qu’à des femmes (les hommes sont des brutes, il ne faut pas leur donner d’idées fausses). Souris néanmoins aussi souvent que possible aux gens que tu ne connais pas.

Through Auster’s first stipulation that Calle smile to strangers, we encounter the notion of the arbitrary in *Doubles-jeux* once more: “[…] j’ai le devoir de lui obéir. C’est le jeu, je dois me soumettre. Si j’accomplis cette mission, peut-être m’offrira-t-il, en récompense, la fiction que je lui ai demandée.”

By requiring that Calle smile, even when “la situation ne l’impose pas,” Auster’s instructions act as a means of channelling the artist’s experiences through pre-

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includes as part of the exhibit. Her exhibit also includes a love letter written by her ex-husband Greg Shephard. In *Douleur Exquise*, in order to relate the heartache brought on by the abrupt end of one of her romantics relationships, Calle asks people to write about the onset of their own heartache following their own experiences of a break-up.


determined structures. Through the practice of smiling, Auster allows the artist to interact with the public while retaining a certain element of distance. \(^{681}\)

In Auster’s second clause, in which he asks Calle to talk to strangers, he instructs her to initiate conversations with people she does not know:

Il y a des gens qui te parleront après que tu leur auras souri. Tu dois t’y préparer à l’aide de quelques remarques flatteuses. Certains d’entre eux te parleront parce qu’ils se sentent gênés, menacés ou insultés par le signe de sympathie que tu leur envoies […] Lance aussitôt un compliment désarmant: ‘Non, j’admirais seulement votre belle cravate.’ Ou: ‘j’adoire votre robe.’ D’autres te parleront parce qu’ils ont l’âme bienveillante et sont heureux de répondre aux ouvertures humaines qui se présentent à eux. […] Si tu te trouves à court de choses à dire, aborde le sujet du temps qu’il fait. […] Alors que tant de choses nous séparent, qu’il y a dans l’atmosphère tant de haine et de discorde, il est bon de se souvenir des choses qui nous rassemblent. Plus nous insisterons sur celles-ci dans nos rapports avec les inconnus, meilleur sera le moral de la cité. \(^{682}\)

By stipulating that Calle engage strangers in conversation, through politeness and social formalities, Auster’s instructions act as a means of framing Calle’s artistic activity as a form of social engagement and action. This is further enforced when Auster restricts Calle’s interaction with others to beggars and homeless people:

Je ne te demande pas de réinventer le monde. Je voudrais seulement que tu y sois attentive, que tu penses à ce qui t’entoure plus qu’à toi-même. Au moins lorsque tu es dehors, lorsque tu marches dans la rue d’un lieu à un autre. N’ignore pas les malheureux. Ils sont partout, et l’on peut si bien s’habituer à les voir qu’on en arrive à oublier leur présence. N’oublie pas. Je ne demande pas de donner tout ton argent aux pauvres. Même si tu le faisais, la pauvreté subsisterait (et comporterait un membre de plus dans ses rangs). En même temps, il est de notre responsabilité en tant qu’êtres humains de ne pas endurcir nos cœurs. Il faut agir, si petites ou désespérées que nous paraissions nos actions. \(^{683}\)

In these instructions, Auster tells Calle to be more aware of (apprivoiser) the people around her; he mentions that it is our responsibility as humans not to be “cold hearted.” By asking her to


become aware of her surroundings and to reach out to the less fortunate, he projects Calle’s sense of social engagement and belonging onto the urban landscape. This becomes relevant when considering the individuals with whom Auster puts Calle into contact; more than any other social group located within city limits, beggars (sitting on city pavements) and homeless people (sleeping on park benches or city streets) epitomize city living, since they usually occupy public places such as city streets, parks, city transit, markets, coffee shops, etc., and ask for cigarettes, pocket change, and other items.

For the last and final stipulation, “Adopter un lieu,” in which Auster instructs Calle to adopt (apprivoiser) a space, he asks her to find a place in New York and to treat that spot as if it belongs to her:

Il n’y a pas que les gens, à New York, qui sont négligés. Les choses aussi le sont. […] Choisis un endroit dans la ville et mets-toi à y penser comme s’il t’appartenait. Peu importe où, et peu importe quoi. Un coin de rue, une entrée de métro, un arbre dans le parc. Assume cet endroit comme si tu en étais responsable. Nettoie-le. Embellis-le. Penses-y comme à une extension de ce que tu es, comme à une partie de ton identité. Aie vis-à-vis de lui l’amour-propre que tuaurais pour ta propre maison.  

For this particular proposition, Auster contextualizes his instructions within the conventions of autobiography – by requiring that Calle stage the chronological (“Vas-y tous les jours”), the documentary (“Restes à observer tout ce qui s’y produit”; “Prends des notes”), and the daily rituals (“Enregistre ces observations quotidiennes”) that underscore autobiographical writing. When Calle describes the task of public adoption that she undertakes, she reveals that she decides to choose a phone booth located at the corner of Greenwich and Harrison (Fig.22):

Dernière clause: ADOPTER UN LIEU PUBLIC

Je choisis la cabine téléphonique située au carrefour des rues Greenwich et Harrison. C’est une cabine double. Je m’approprie le côté droit. Pour l’embellir, j’achète du Glass

Plus pour nettoyer les vitres, du Brasso, pour faire briller les métaux, une bombe de peinture vert pré, six blocs notes, six crayons, un miroir, un tube de colle, deux chaînes d’environ 4 mètres, deux cadenas, un bouquet de roses rouges, sept cartes postales, un cendrier, deux chaises pliantes et un exemplaire du dernier numéro de *Glamour Magazine*.

Dans la nuit du mardi 20 septembre 1994, je prends possession de la cabine téléphonique, je commence par épousseter et astiquer. Deux hommes m’observent. L’un d’eux me demande: “vous faites aussi les carreaux à domicile?” Dois-je inaugurer la corvée du SOURIRE? Je préfère remettre cette besogne à demain et décide de ne pas répondre car – c’est vous qui l’avez dit Paul – les hommes sont des porcs. Cinq minutes se sont à peine écoulées, et déjà mes craintes sont confirmées: ils me prennent pour une cinglée. 685

Although this is not a fact that is easily known to people who are not familiar with the city, there is no “Harrison Street” in New York City, especially near Greenwich. This demonstrates how the fictional remains an underlying aspect in the construction of Calle’s practice of autobiography in *Gotham Handbook*. She follows Auster’s instructions, sets up her “petit chez moi” in a public space and observes how this space is occupied and enjoyed by the public. As instructed, she keeps a log of the comings and goings of complete strangers who come into contact with her newly adopted space:

**Cabine téléphonique:**


Calle adopts the space as her own by accessorizing the phone booth with personal items that would typically be found in a home or private area: flowers, a magazine, sitting chairs, etc. Her second run in with the “porcs” that she encounters a day earlier attests to her growing familiarity

with the neighbourhood and its residents. Through her interaction with “visitor no. 1,” we notice the stranger’s discomfort with the intimate familiarity of the public space. We also see how Calle, by literally forcing the visitor into her newly adopted space, frames the public setting with an intimate context; she immerses herself into public culture, she transforms the experience into a personal narrative and gives her work a sense of creativity, community and cultural exchange.

The urban space is linked to personal experiences through her accessories, daily visits, chronological account, and personal observations of the happenings and people in and around the phone booth. Through Calle’s portrayal of the urban landscape as an extension of her own identity, the phone booth stands in as a tangible surrogate for her personality and concept art, through which objects become interchangeable with the owner’s identity in order to allow the artist to operate a certain element of distance with her own work and to allow others to engage in its interpretation. As we have outlined in our chapter on autobiography, the reader plays a central role in the interpretation of the personal narrative. By projecting her narrative onto the public space, Calle inverts the processes of introspection in autobiography to transfer the focus of analysis from the individual (self-analysis, self-reflection) to a discriminating public (her readers).

The projection of Calle’s personality onto a public space in *Gotham Handbook* marks an important reversal in autobiographical writing and reveals the processes that underlie Calle’s own self-representational practices; in the majority of her autobiographical narratives, personal writing is not presented in an intimate, isolated context, but within a broader social framework. To testify to the importance of art within specific social and cultural contexts, Calle includes a copy of the comments and suggestions she receives from the various individuals who come into contact with the phone booth (Fig.23): “This is scary, too scary!”; “very good, a true New Yorker!”; “I like the generosity of it, it is unusual to do. If you’re trying to be discovered, it’s far
less interesting.”; “why do you do this? It’s weird, but kind.”; “only an artist would think to do something like this – always the need to improve on something as well as the need to create beauty, comfort and need to give a sense of dimension to the simple things in life.”. The comments provided by the audience, some of which reflect our own interpretation of Calle’s work in *Gotham Handbook*, attest to the difficult task of classifying her work. Through the exchange of authorial roles with Auster, through her association with the fictional character Maria, and through the projection of her personality on public spaces in *Doubles-jeux*, Calle confuses the roles between the author (Sophie Calle vs. Paul Auster), narrator (Sophie Calle vs. Maria Turner) and protagonist (Sophie Calle vs. Phone Booth) to illustrate the shifting boundaries of agency and authority in practices of writing and in art. In the relationships of exchange that are created between writing and art, and exemplified through Calle’s creative interaction with Auster, she demonstrates how art and writing are connected in her artistic practice.

While Calle is limited by the actions imposed on her by Auster, she also illustrates how she exercises a certain amount of freedom within his rules.

L’homme évoque ensuite sa résistance au froid. Au bout d’un quart d’heure, je commence à trouver que la conversation a suffisamment duré. Il ne semble pas partager ma lassitude. Je me rappelle les mots de Paul: “Essaie de faire durer ces conversations aussi longtemps que tu pourras”, mais ils ne me font aucun effet. Je décide donc de désobéir: je l’interromps et je m’éloigne prestement.

688 In a letter, dated the 6 of March 1994, that he writes to Sophie Calle and that he adds to his list of instructions, Paul Auster admits that he kept his instructions slightly vague in order to leave a certain amount of liberty to Calle. This letter has been omitted from the French version of *Gotham Handbook*: “Well, here’s something, in any case. I did it after we talked yesterday – and though it’s short on details – it might inspire some interesting activities. I wanted to leave it open enough so that you could find your own way through the ideas. I hope that you’re not too disappointed by the “lightness” of what I’ve proposed. In any case- be well, and get in touch when you can. Paul.” This letter is published in the English version of *Doubles-jeux* only. (Sophie Calle. *Double game*, p.237).
When discussing Auster’s list of instructions, Calle notes that he omits certain important details; she writes that he forgets to specify whether she should count the number of smiles that are given each day: “Le seul problème sera de comptabiliser le nombre de sourires qui me seront adressés chaque jour. Paul n’a pas précisé si je devais également compter les sourires. Un oubli sans doute. J’ajoute cette tâche au Manuel”. At the same time, although he requires that Calle give compliments to strangers who speak to her, Auster still allows her to choose her own remarks of flattery. Calle acknowledges that she is able to exercise a certain amount of liberty within the rules that Auster imposes on her: “Dans la soirée, je relis le *Gotham Handbook* et me rends compte que je ne suis pas censée attendre qu’on me réclame quelque chose; c’est moi à décider qui est dans le besoin.” Through her relationship with Paul Auster, Calle is able to stage the processes of alterity within her own alternating practices of autobiographical writing and conceptual art.

*Doubles-jeux* provides an excellent example of how Calle experiments with autobiographical writing through the use of art. In our analysis of this project, our goal was to demonstrate how Calle takes the literary tradition of autobiographical writing to transform it into a highly performative art practice. As our analysis of *Doubles-jeux* has shown, Calle’s writing within the project itself becomes increasingly innovative from one text to the next. Although we begin our discussion of *Doubles-jeux* on the project’s underlying literary values, our analysis gradually shows how Calle transcends the conventional format of autobiography – as a practice that is confined within the bound structure of a book – to move the practice of self-representation into the social realm. Nevertheless, Calle has not just written one autobiography, as most people

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do; the artist’s autobiographical art has spanned to include four decades (from the 1980s to the present) and has produced countless other projects that are autobiographical in nature. For this reason, we have decided to incorporate other examples of the artist’s autobiographical projects into our study. At the same time, we feel compelled to draw on Calle’s other work to provide a stronger emphasis on the artist’s perception of self as a social-interactional process, rather than a simple experience of reading. The practice of projecting her identity onto the “cultural landscape” in *Doubles-jeux* is also found in her later works, such as *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*; in these texts, autobiographical writing is projected onto the museum space in order to be interpreted within a specific cultural framework. An extended analysis of *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* will attest to the increasingly performative character of Calle’s more recent work.

5 Identity as a Cultural Phenomenon in *La visite guidée*

In *La visite guidée*, similar to her approach in *Gotham Handbook*, Calle moves the practice of self-referential writing outside of the textual framework and into the social realm. As a result, an analysis of this text becomes a relevant topic within our chapter on Calle’s practice of autobiography, and acts to enrich our study on *Double-jeux*. In *La visite guidée*, Calle reconceptualizes the practice of autobiographical writing into a cultural production that works across diverse disciplines in the fine arts, performance arts, literature, etc.

*La visite guidée* was originally presented at the Boymans-van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam, Netherlands, March 27th – May 29th 1994 as part of an exhibit entitled “Absent.” In 1996, the museum took charge of publishing the exhibit in the format of a booklet, under the same title *La visite guidée*. In the text, the photographs of the exhibit are accompanied by a narrative description and an audio CD containing Calle’s voice. In this booklet, she transforms
the museum space into the site of autobiographical writing. Despite the unconventional way in which the text is presented, the narrative structure is in a certain sense autobiographical because its main focus is on the personal aspects of Calle’s life.

5.1 *La visite guidée* and the Autobiographical Pact

Different elements of autobiographical writing are present in the textual presentation of Calle’s exhibit. The autobiographical aspects of *La visite guidée* are identified in the preface:


Cette présentation était évidemment éphémère, mais nous avons souhaité en conserver la trace dans cette plaquette réunissant à la fois des objets exposés, les textes correspondants et un disque compact de la musique.

In this short introduction, readers are informed of the autobiographical dimension of the guided tour. The preface announces that the objects exhibited are personal objects belonging to Calle that have been “scattered around the museum and commented by autobiographical references.”

The autobiographical character of the project is then confirmed in the recording of Calle’s voice; the audio CD that accompanies the booklet repeats each autobiographical excerpt word for word. Calle’s voice recording, which functions as “the omniscient narrator” for the exhibit, provides evidence of the author’s identity in the written text. Since it is Calle who lends her voice to the narration of each autobiographical notice, she seals the autobiographical pact with

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692 Sophie Calle. *La visite guidée*, p.1. Since *La visite guidée* has not been paginated, for the purposes of our study, we have paginated the booklet starting from the preface: the preface will thus be considered as the first page of the booklet and the pages to follow will be consecutively enumerated.

693 The autobiographical notices are written in Dutch, English and French. However, Calle’s voice recording is available in English only.

the reader and at the same time offers interpretative strategies for the analysis of the written text. By narrating her personal experiences within the context of the museum visit, she assumes the role of historian in the practice of self-representation. It is in the context of autobiography that each narrative excerpt simulates a diary entry. What is especially interesting about each of the personal narratives in *La visite guidée* is that they tell Calle’s personal story through the *mise en scène* of inanimate objects; the objects are used as symbols of Calle’s everyday life and act as surrogates for her identity within the space of the museum. Each autobiographical excerpt has the name of a familiar object such as “le lit” (the bed), “le sceau en plastique” (the plastic bucket), “la lame de rasoir” (the razor blade), “l’assiette à dessert” (the dessert plate), “la tasse de café” (the coffee cup), “le téléphone” (the telephone), “le peignoir” (the robe), “Télé Star” (TeleStar), etc. The majority of the items described in the text are functional objects of everyday usage. To a certain degree, these objects introduce the seemingly mundane details of Calle’s daily life into the museum space; each object is associated with a specific event in her life. For example, the “Téléstar” magazine – the French equivalent of the “TV Guide” with listings of TV shows and TV-related news – provides a daily schedule of television programs. Calle attaches a

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695 The striking parallels between Sophie Calle’s personal narratives and Michel Leiris’s autobiographical writing, in particular in his text *La règle du jeu*, were brought to my attention by Professor Cahill. Leiris’s *La règle du jeu* combines four previously published works, all autobiographical in nature, into one text: *Biffures*, *Fibrilles*, *Fourbis*, and *Frêle bruit*. Of particular interest in Leiris’s writing is his practice of transposing the strategies and ideas of ethnography to self-writing: his carefully collected thoughts, impressions, memories, daily events, etc., are placed on cards and filed away for future consultation and analysis. For Leiris, a curator at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris – a museum that is dedicated to the collection of objects that express the social and cultural dimensions that define man’s existence – self-writing represented a dual practice of anthropology and autobiography. Although Calle has not explicitly confirmed any connection, her work does mirror Leiris’s practices of writing (*La règle du jeu* in *Doubles-jeux*) and collecting objects (*La visite guidée*, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, *Histoire vraies + dix*) in relation to autobiographical writing. A comparative analysis of both authors would undoubtedly confirm and extend our observations on Calle’s writing and its meaning as an expression of her social and cultural context.

696 The diary consists of a subgenre of autobiography. According to Béatrice Didier, in her book entitled *Le journal intime*, “l’auteur prétend noter au fil des jours et comme au hasard ce qui lui vient au bout de la plume.” (p.7) In this manner, each diary entry represents “le désir de (l’auteur) de laisser une relation écrite de l’emploi des jours, […] des événements mémorables ou même très quotidiennement banals.” (p.18). Since the diarist writes daily, the events that are recounted in the diary are sometimes mostly banal descriptions of daily living. (*Le journal intime*, p.7.).
certain degree of personal importance to each object. With respect to “Téléstar,” she tells us that it carries a sentimental value because it belonged to her grandmother before she died:

Télé Star


After her grandmother’s death, Calle tells us that she goes to her grandmother’s apartment “in search of a souvenir.” According to the author, she decides to take the TV guide placed on her grandmother’s coffee table. Since the objects are directly related to her past, they provide concrete evidence of Calle’s real-life existence in the written text. Thus Sophie Calle links her intimate stories to the physical objects that are illustrated in the photographs in order to stage the referential framework of autobiography and photography, on which we have elaborated in our chapters on autobiography and photography.

5.2 The Role of the Photographic Image in the Representation of the Autobiographical Subject in *La visite guidée*

In *La visite guidée*, the photographic images collaborate with the written text to construct identity. Due to the indexical relationship between the photographic image and its referent, in the context of life writing, the photograph alludes to the presence of a “real body” in the written text. In our chapter on photography, we refer to Linda Haverty Rugg’s observation that within the context of autobiography, the photographic image attests to the author’s presence in the text:

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697 The following list represents a full list of the personal objects exhibited in *La visite guidée*, in order of appearance: Le lit, Le sceau en plastique, Le lame de rasoir, L’assiette à dessert, La tasse de café, Lettres (2), Lettres (3), Lettres (4), Lettres (5), Télé Star, Le téléphone, Le polaroid, Le drap, La robe de mariée, Le peignoir, La cravate, La perruque blonde, Lettres (1), La chaussure rouge, Le talon-aiguille, La peinture du XIX\(^\text{e}\) siècle.

“The integration of photographs into the autobiographical act highlights the presence of the author’s body and seems to claim the body as the source and focus of the autobiographical text.” However, on closer inspection of the photographic images that are introduced in the text, it is disconcerting to see that none of the images includes Calle. Instead, Calle chooses to represent the various events that frame her personal experiences through the detailed description of the individual objects. In *Le système des objets*, Jean Baudrillard writes that the object of daily life, including the collector’s item, is strongly related to the identity of its collector:

Admettons que nos objets quotidiens sont en effet les objets d’une passion, celle de la propriété privée, dont l’investissement affectif ne cède en rien à celui des passions humaines, une passion quotidienne qui souvent l’emporte sur toutes les autres, qui parfois règne seule en absence des autres. […] Les objets dans ce sens sont, en dehors de la pratique que nous en avons, à un moment donné, autre chose de profondément relatif au sujet, non seulement un corps matériel qui résiste, mais une enceinte mentale où je règne, une chose dont je suis le sens, une propriété, une passion.

As a “visual metaphor” of Calle, each object exhibited participates in staging Calle’s life within the museum space. Many personal items illustrated in the pictures, such as “la robe de mariée” (the wedding dress), “la perruque blonde” (the blond wig), “la chaussure rouge” (the red shoe) and “le talon aiguille” (the high heel), are objects that are designed exclusively for the human body. The blonde wig also appears in Calle’s other projects, such as in the narrative entitled “Le strip-tease,” in which Calle is wearing the blond wig during her performance and in *Suite vénitienne*. As Anna Khmiasia remarks, “the blonde wig, also seen in *Suite vénitienne*, is often a stand-in or sign for Calle’s *performative self*. It is connected to disguise and the hiding of self - it

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700 Jean Baudrillard. *Le système des objets*, p.120.
701 The expression “visual metaphor” is used by Linda Haverty Rugg. (*Picturing ourselves: Photography and Autobiography*, p.1.).
is both self and not self.” 702 Other objects featured in La visite guidée also appear in Calle’s other works. As a result, the objects in La visite guidée create a strong intertextual undercurrent of quotations and allusions to Calle’s other artistic projects. Calle’s strategy of framing identity as a product of social interaction in Gotham Handbook is even more evident in La visite guidée, in which she projects her personal narrative onto external objects through the representation of the guided tour. 703 The relationship between the visual and the verbal in the construction of Calle’s identity is made explicit in the photographic image that the author entitles “Le Drap” (the sheet) (Fig.24). Embroidered on the sheet are the initials “S C,” which refer to Sophie Calle. Similarly, autobiographical writing engages the author in an act of self-revelation before an audience. The brief autobiographical narratives, combined with the photographic images of Calle’s objects, establish a radical opposition between Calle’s private and public life and contribute to the fragmentary construction of the autobiographical subject in the text. The tension created in the personal narrative between the private and public aspects of identity, suggested through word and image relations in the text, is further complicated by the concept of the museum visit. 704


703 In sociology, there is a term used to refer to the process through which an individual projects meaning onto objects: “Symbolic Interaction Theory.” A detailed definition of “Symbolic Interaction Theory” is given on a website dedicated to the study of sociology: “The symbolic interaction perspective, also called symbolic interactionism, is a major framework of sociological theory. This perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction. Although symbolic interactionism traces its origins [in the] assertion that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world […] Symbolic interaction theory analyzes society by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviors. Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believe that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what is objectively true. Thus, society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another’s behavior and it is these interpretations that form the social bond.” For a more detailed explanation, visit the website at: http://sociology.about.com/od/Sociological-Theory/a/Symbolic-Interaction-Theory.htm

704 Réal Lussier confirms that photography maintains “des rapports avec les sphères privée et publique et qu’elle en a relativement modifié la frontière” (p.12) and that “la photographie est associée aux domaines privé et public. Que ce soit avec le portrait officiel, le document social ou la photo de famille, elle aide à façonner l’identité intime et publique de l’individu.” (p.11). (Tenir l’image à distance.)
5.3 *La visite guidée* as Conceptual Art: Word and Image Relations

Sophie Calle experiments with the construction of the autobiographical subject by presenting identity in a completely different historical and social context through the guided tour at the Boymans-van Beuningen museum. As a result, within the space of the museum, autobiography is perceived and studied from another perspective:

[Le musée est] une institution permanente […] au service de la société et de son développement, ouverte au public et qui fait des recherches concernant les témoins matériels de l’homme et son environnement, acquiert ceux-là, les conserve, les communique et notamment les expose à des fins d’études, d’éducation et de délectation.705

The exploration of Calle’s identity through the guided tour combines text and image in a collaborative relationship. Exhibited among the many artefacts belonging to the museum, Calle’s intimate objects are assigned a scientific value and bear an aura of authenticity. When writing about antiquities, Jean Baudrillard notes that the artifact could be described in terms of a passion for collecting: “Il y a des affinités profondes entre les deux, dans la régression narcissique, [et] dans le système d’élision du temps […]. Cependant il faut distinguer dans la mythologie de l’objet ancien deux aspects: la nostalgie des origines et l’obsession d’authenticité.”706 Within the context of the museum exhibit, the objects belonging to Calle’s private collection are transformed into objects of study. Through the representation of cultural artefacts in *La visite guidée*, the retrospective glance of autobiographical writing is framed within a broader context.

As we have already noted in our chapter on autobiography with Lejeune’s definition of the

705 This definition was taken from the “Conseil International Des Musées” (L’ICOM). To consult the counsel’s website please visit: [http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_fr.html](http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_fr.html)
genre, life writing is usually written in the past tense. In this respect, in the context of the museum, the retrospective glance projected onto Calle’s personal experiences encourages us to acquire a specific glance backwards at Calle’s personal story. Although Calle’s personal objects act to anchor the autobiographical subject in reality, the inanimate objects also serve to depict the subject in terms of an absence. The portrayal of identity through the theme of absence is made even more explicit when considering the original title of *La visite guidée*, which is “Absent.” In our chapter on photography, we refer to Susan Sontag’s theory that the photographic image can also be interpreted in terms of an absence: “A photograph is both a pseudo presence and a token of absence.”

This becomes true when we analyze the photographs since, as we have already mentioned in the previous pages, none of the photographic images show Calle. The construction of the autobiographical subject within the museum space is an ideal setting to begin a discussion on the representation of the past since the museum, much like autobiography and photography, is also characterized by a close relationship with the past. Classified among the museum’s antiquities, which are now obsolete objects of display – such as terracotta vases, decorative plates, a vintage projector, antique cameras and shoes – Calle’s personal objects are associated with a distant and unrecoverable past. Nevertheless, there is a marked opposition between the museum objects and those belonging to Calle.

We notice a very strong visual contrast between Calle’s modern objects and the museum’s collection; her plastic red bucket stands apart from the museum’s terracotta pots

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707 Sontag’s remark recalls the arguments that Barthes formulated in *Camera Lucida*. While alluding to the “*noème that-has-been,*** Barthes describes photography as a testimony of absence in its relationship with the past. He explains that “ce que la photographie reproduit […] n’a lieu qu’une fois” (*La Chambre claire*, p.15). Barthes also explains that he does not attempt to reinstate “ce qui est aboli (par le temps, la distance), mais d’attester que cela que (l’on) voit dans l’image photographique a bien été.” (*La Chambre claire*, p.121). By referring to the temporal dimension of “that has been,” the photographic image testifies to an object which, immobilized by the photographic camera in a precise moment, is no longer an exact representation of reality.
(Fig.25); her coffee cup does not match the classic teapots belonging to the museum; her red shoes are easily identifiable from the historical shoes on permanent display at the museum (Fig.26). The exhibition of Calle’s personal objects within the museum’s permanent exhibit creates a tension in the temporal content of the autobiographical text. As Julie LeBlanc suggests, this tension is at the heart of traditional autobiography: “Par son activité mémorielle, l’acte autobiographique devient […] une chasse aux souvenirs, un lieu où le passé est repensé et redécouvert.”

Using the museum space as a traditional site for the objective representation of a human’s existence, Calle not only succeeds in creating a tension between the past and the present, but she also manages to transgress the limits of the autobiographical genre. Within the context of the museum exhibit, the practical objects belonging to Calle stand apart from the outdated and traditional focus of the museum’s collection. It is in this respect that her objects serve an important function within the space of the museum; Calle’s personal objects become references of modernity and innovation in the articulation of her identity as a cultural phenomenon.

Calle introduces an element of subjectivity in her personal narrative through the exhibition of her personal objects. The scientific and objective details often associated with the museum space are challenged by Calle in the narrative description she provides for her objects. Janet Marstine explains that the object belonging to the museum collection is far from being an item of authenticity and objectivity:

When we look at a museum object we might think that we see something pure and ‘authentic’ – untouched since its creation. We have a tendency to see museum objects as unmediated anchors to the past. […] But […] objects have an ‘afterlife’ which must be acknowledged if we are able to be critical thinkers. Decisions that museum workers make […] all impact on the way we understand objects. Museums are not neutral spaces that

speak with one institutional, authoritative voice; museums are about individuals making subjective choices.\textsuperscript{709}

In this respect, in the exhibition of self-identity, for Calle the artifact must thus be regarded as a pure invention, a man-made object, rather than as a historical object. Juxtaposed alongside the museum’s collection, the personal items belonging to Calle point to readymade works of art.\textsuperscript{710}

The readymade is an object of everyday usage that an artist selects and repurposes as an art object. The artist exhibits the object in such a way that it loses its primary function. To change the object’s intended purpose, the artist uses language in order to assign new meaning to it: “le langage porte en lui-même sa propre subversion.”\textsuperscript{711}

5.4 Challenging Autobiography through Word and Image Relations in \textit{La visite guidée}

Sophie Calle’s personal objects resist an objective representation. The paradoxical nature of her identity, which is articulated in the text as both an objective and subjective phenomenon, is illustrated through the interchangeable relationship between words and images in \textit{La visite guidée}. Similar to the approach taken in \textit{Le strip-tease}, with the use of the word \textit{Eros}, Calle incorporates language within the photograph’s visual field to emphasize the role of word and image relations in the construction of meaning in the text. By introducing love letters as objects of display in her exhibit, Calle reconceptualizes the site of writing into an art object. Of the 20 personal objects exhibited, the love letter plays an important role in Calle’s narrative, since it is exhibited six times: “Lettres (2),” “Lettres (3),” “Lettres (4),” “Lettres (5),” “Lettres (1),” and

\textsuperscript{709} Janet Marstine. \textit{New Museum Theory and Practice}, p.2.

\textsuperscript{710} As Paul Wood suggests, the idea of the readymade is centred around the selection of a manufactured object. The chosen object is then treated as a work of art: “As early as 1913, Duchamp began to take objects that had not originally been made as art objects, but as ordinary, utilitarian things, and to transplant them from their normal context of use into an alien context, an art context.” (\textit{Conceptual Art}. London: Tate Publishing, p.11.).

\textsuperscript{711} Marina Yaguello. Alice au pays du langage. Pour comprendre la linguistique, p.24.
“La peinture du XIXe siècle.” When describing the exhibit piece she entitles “Lettres (2),” Calle stresses the autobiographical elements that frame the object:


Her description of “Lettres (2)” is revealing on several levels. It is in her desire to become the object of affection that she hires a public scribe to write her a love letter. In this letter, Calle is both the subject and the object of the personal narrative. Yet the engagement of the public scribe in the role of author undermines Calle’s own role as the sole author of personal writing in La visite guidée; Calle is presented as both the subject and object of writing, but she is not the author of the intimate text, which recalls her intertextual relationship with Paul Auster in Doubles-jeux. Calle manipulates the representation of identity once again in the description that she gives for the exhibit piece entitled “Lettres (4):


By swapping the letter “H” with the letter “S” in the love letter written by her ex-husband Greg Shephard to another woman, Calle points to certain issues with self-representation in her narrative. In the autobiographical notice entitled “le talon aiguille,” for example, there are actually two pairs of high heel shoes in the photographic image. As a result, Calle’s “high heel”

713 Sophie Calle. La visite guidée. p.17.
has two possible referents in its photographic image and multiple referents become possible in the articulation of Calle’s singular identity (Fig.26). The representation of identity as multiple and highly subjective is communicated in the text through the various languages used to describe the objects; every object is accompanied by the same description in Dutch, English and French. It is through what Felicity Nussbaum describes as “multiple subjectivities” that Calle is able to deconstruct the singular subject of autobiography in her text. The objective character of the personal narrative is weakened further by the fictional elements that are introduced in Calle’s love letters. In both of the letters that we have studied, “Lettres (2)” and “Lettres (4)” – the letter written by the public scribe and the other letter written by her ex-husband – Calle undermines her role as sole author of the personal narrative by engaging others in the act of writing. Even though she is not the author for any of the love letters she exhibits, Calle remains both subject and object of the personal narrative. In the exhibit entitled “Lettres (2),” she presents autobiography as a form of fiction writing. In this letter, the author of the letter – the public scribe – provides us with an illusion of intimacy since Calle hires him to write a letter that professes a profound love for her that is not based on reality; the public scribe is a complete stranger to Calle. She explains that the scribe writes seven pages “in verse.” The poetic style of writing in the scribe’s love letter contradicts the claims of truth in autobiography. Similarly, the letter written by Shephard demonstrates the expression of Calle’s identity as an artifact, in its definition as a man-made invention, through the falsification of the facts presented in the letter, brought on by Calle’s editorial change. By designating herself as the subject of Shephard’s love letter, written for another woman, Calle changes the letter’s intended purpose to shift the focus of the intimate reading onto her. In the letters written by the public scribe and her ex-husband, identity is
constructed as a means to deconstruct “les images stigmatisantes et fixistes imposées par les discours dominants” of autobiography.\footnote{Claire Cosée. \textit{Faire figure d’étranger: Regards croisés sur la production de l’altérité}, p.1.}

Of all the exhibit pieces displayed in \textit{La visite guidée}, the only time that Calle recognizes herself is in the item she entitles “La peinture du XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle” (the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century painting), which is a painting that depicts a young girl sitting at a writing table with a letter in one hand and a writing utensil in the other. Calle explains that the painting was given to her by Shephard and she comments on the uncanny resemblance that she shares with the girl depicted in the painting: “Il m’envoya une petite peinture du XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle, \textit{La lettre d’amour}. C’était le portrait d’une jeune femme qui me ressemblait étrangement.”\footnote{Sophie Calle. \textit{La visite guidée}, p.43.} “La peinture du XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle” is the last object exhibited by Calle in \textit{La visite guidée} (Fig.27). By shifting the attention away from the photographic image to concentrate instead on the artistic canvas, Calle transforms the way in which her identity is perceived in the text. Through the representation of the painting, the autobiographical subject is articulated as a form of artistic expression. By linking her identity to that of the woman depicted in the artwork, Calle provides yet another example of how self-referential writing becomes an extension of artistic practice. A close look at the painting reveals that the woman is holding a pen in her hand. In front of her, there is a sheet of paper. She appears to be engaged in the act of writing. The title of the painting is “La lettre d’amour,” and it is through the relationship between words and images that we are able to guess that the woman is writing a love letter. Since Calle compares herself to the young woman who “strangely resembles her,” she comments on her own position as the author of the personal narrative.
In *La visite guidée*, Calle creates an innovative model of personal writing through a guided museum tour. By staging the interactive aspects of identity through the museum visit, she is able to show how her self-identity is constructed and bound by its social, cultural and spatial context. Similar to the construction of identity in *La visite guidée*, in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle explores the concept of self-identity once again through the guided tour.

*Appointment with Sigmund Freud* is the last text in our study. Although our analysis of this text is brief, it represents a crucial component in the development of our arguments on Calle’s autobiographical writing as unconventional. In this book, the visit that is staged at the Freud Museum provides an excellent example of Calle’s unique approach to autobiography; within the space of the museum, Calle’s personal narratives are read through a specific cultural and historical context. Within the setting of Freud’s former home and office, Calle stages the introspective and investigative processes of autobiography through the prism of Freud’s psychoanalytic theories on self-analysis. By addressing the canon of Freud’s work to engage her own creative processes of self-analysis in the text, Calle demonstrates how her autobiographical interventions are articulated outside of their social/cultural conditions. This book becomes the basis of our analysis to emphasize the self-reflexive nature of Calle’s projects, both in their ability to transform history and to reveal their own revisionist proclivities. Our analysis on *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* is an ideal way for us to study how Calle extends the canon of autobiography to encompass not just written works, but also visual, conceptual and performance art.
Between Self-discovery and Artistic Creation: The Case of Sophie Calle in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*

6.1 The Freud Museum

In her artistic installment entitled *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle occupies Freud’s home to establish his intimate space as the privileged site for her own processes of self-analysis and self-realization. Freud’s home is currently known as the Freud Museum, and is located at 20 Maresfield Gardens in London, England. The museum’s official website provides a detailed description of the home and its collection:

> The Freud Museum occupies the former home of Sigmund Freud and his family. The focus of the museum is Freud’s library and study, preserved just as it was during his lifetime, and containing his remarkable collection of Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Oriental antiquities. In all, the museum houses almost two thousand items, including the desk where Freud often wrote and the famous couch where many of his patients reclined to reveal their innermost thoughts. […] The museum’s central function is to celebrate the lives and works of Sigmund and Anna Freud, but it also [stands] as a cultural and research center for psychoanalysis.  

The building’s literal transformation from a private residential property to a public domain dedicated to the preservation and advancement of the psychoanalytic legacy, which is essentially embodied by Freud himself, becomes a subject of particular interest the minute Calle enters the space with her own revisionist agenda. Contemporary art was not well received by Freud, who favoured his antiquities to modern works of art, and who considered himself a man of science. Despite his distaste for modern art, the museum has recently begun to exhibit contemporary art installations: “[The Freud] Museum […] ha[s] recently welcomed the involvement of artists and

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716 The Freud Museum’s website offers details about the location and contents of the museum. The museum’s website may be visited at: [http://www.freud.org.uk/about/](http://www.freud.org.uk/about/)
the display of contemporary work as a means to demonstrate, in their different ways, the continuing cultural resonance of psychoanalysis."\(^\text{717}\) As Lilian Chee confirms, the "artistic interventions [that take place in the Freud Museum] use Freudian inspired objects as controversial levers to simultaneously affirm, challenge or complicate the interior’s historical and cultural meanings."\(^\text{718}\) Calle stages the word and image relations in her text to place the autobiographical subject into the public discourses of psychoanalysis and of conceptual art.

### 6.2 Freud’s Objects

The majority of the objects housed and exhibited at the Freud Museum carried special meaning for Freud: "The collection itself reflects the taste of someone more concerned to accumulate objects with meaning for him than to acquire items which would be impressive to a small band of fellow collectors."\(^\text{719}\) The meaning assigned to the objects found in Freud’s home runs parallel to his ideas on psychoanalysis: "[Freud] confessed that his passion for collecting was second in intensity only to his addiction to cigars."\(^\text{720}\) The importance of Freud’s personal collection is also evident in his use of archaeology as a metaphor for psychoanalysis. According to Freud, while conscious material “wears away,” what is unconscious is relatively unchanging.\(^\text{721}\) Comparing the concepts of the conscious and unconscious to archaeological objects, Freud connects the idea of the burial to his concept of the unconscious: “I illustrated my remarks by pointing to the antique objects about my room. They were, in fact, I said, only

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\(^\text{718}\) Lillian Chee. “Living with Freud,” p.80.

\(^\text{719}\) This description is posted on the Museum’s website at: http://www.freud.org.uk/about/

\(^\text{720}\) This description is posted on the Museum’s website at: http://www.freud.org.uk/about/

\(^\text{721}\) In psychoanalysis, “the unconscious” is mostly a concept that is affiliated with Freud’s theories and refers to a person’s repressed memories, feelings, thoughts, etc. For a detailed description of the concept see Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis who define “the unconscious” as it applies to Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis. (The Language of Psychoanalysis, p.474-476.).
objects found in a tomb, and their burial had been their preservation.” Similar to Freud’s remarks on antiquities, in her discussion of the museum object, Janet Marstine explains that “in the museum, things are more than just things; museum narratives construct national identity and legitimize groups.”

Calle’s artistic intervention within the space of the museum elicits renewed interest in Freud’s antiquities by engaging them in a mise en scène of self-analysis through word and image relations.

### 6.3 Calle at the Freud Museum

In the introduction she provides of her project, Calle explains to us that for *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, she was asked by curator James Putnam to exhibit at the Freud Museum: “In February 1998, I was invited by James Putnam to create an exhibition in London at 20 Maresfield Gardens, where Dr. Sigmund had lived, for a short time, and died. This house and its contents are preserved at the Freud Museum.” As Calle explains further, she accepts Putnam’s invitation after having a vision of her wedding dress laid across Freud’s couch (Fig.28). In her brief description, Calle reveals the inspiration behind her project and offers some insight into her own personal engagement in the artistic project:

> After having a vision of my wedding dress laid across Freud’s couch, I accepted. I chose to display relics from my own life amongst the interior of Freud’s home and also to select objects from his personal collection which relate to stories I wished to tell. My texts were printed on small pink cards placed next to these selected items. The exhibition, entitled “Appointment,” took place from February 12 to April 25, 1999.

In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, similar to her approach in *La visite guidée*, Calle selects relics from her past and displays them alongside artifacts from Freud’s collection. The

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photographed objects are accompanied by narratives to add context. She selected each personal object primarily because it is affiliated with an event in her life. In the floor plan she publishes of the exhibit, Calle integrates her objects into the museum’s permanent collection by listing them as part of the museum’s contents. Through word and image interactions, she injects her objects with powerful associations to Freud’s life and legacy and as a result, provides new insight into her own personal experiences. As we have already mentioned in our analysis of *La visite guidée*, an object, especially an object belonging to a collection, is inherently identified with its collector. As extensions of the personal tastes and desires of the individual who collects them, these objects become visual metaphors in the text for the narcissistic transference of their symbolism to the identity of the collector. Within the context of Calle’s personal writing, each object exhibited in the Freud Museum contributes to Calle’s own narcissistic portrayal of identity in the narratives. By projecting her personal thoughts and desires – from the most mundane to the most private – onto Freud’s intimate space, Calle makes use of Freud’s home to associate the interpretation of identity with the techniques of introspection and self analysis.

### 6.4 Calle Meets Freud

Photography and autobiographical writing participate mutually in the construction of Calle’s autobiographical subject in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*. Many of the challenges that Calle faces in presenting identity in the text run parallel to the shared problematics of photography and personal writing that we have already discussed in our chapter on photography.

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725 There are a total of 31 narratives.
726 This intends to relate to Freud’s concept of transference. The definition of transference is very broad and difficult to restrict to a single explanation. Within the context of our study on Freud, the best explanation that applies is the idea of transference between the analyst and his patient; Transference takes place when the patient “transfers” his anxieties and past traumas and/or experiences onto the analyst. Through transference, the analyst becomes a sounding board through which the patient talks himself through a resolution or cure. For a detailed overview of the concept of transference, see (Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.456-461).
In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, the presentation of words and images places Calle’s artistic project at the center of contemporary debates on autobiography by integrating photography and autobiography into a performance of self-reflection within the context of the museum visit. Much like *La visite guidée*, in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle connects the symbolism of the museum space to self-referential practices. As an institution dedicated to the memorialization and preservation of the past, Calle ties the retrospective nature of the museum with that of photography and personal writing to create an original work of self-expression.

6.5 The Construction of Identity in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*

In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle revisits previously published material with a predominantly autobiographical focus and recontextualizes this work within a new framework. *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, published in 1999, revamps one of Calle’s autobiographical projects entitled *Des histoires + dix* – originally published in 1994, 5 years prior to the publication of *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*. Through their re-publication, the objects and personal narratives from *Des histoires + dix* find a second life, or in Marstine’s words “an afterlife,” in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*. Within the space of the museum, Calle’s personal objects and their accompanying narratives are re-collected and re-experienced in a completely different historical and social context. By staging a retrospective glance to her past experiences, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* engages autobiographical writing in a symbolic act of recalling the past; the processes of self-reflection that are implicated in the practice of autobiography are

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727 As we have already established in our chapter on autobiography, and as we have already mentioned in our analysis of *La visite guidée*, Philippe Lejeune’s definition of the genre identifies retrospection as a condition of autobiography. It is in this respect that, in the context of the museum, the retrospective glance projected on the museum objects inspires us to interpret the setting as part of Calle’s personal story.

re-enacted through the conceptual lens of psychoanalytic theory. What makes Calle’s autobiographical task even more intriguing in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* is that the artist takes the issues of self and identity in personal narratives and transfers them to the photographic images. Going back to Calle’s remark about James Putnam’s request to have her exhibit at the Freud Museum, we recall that it is in fact a vision of her wedding dress laid across Freud’s couch that leads her to accept his invitation. In the photographic image reproducing this vision (Fig. 28), Calle’s personal garment – the wedding dress – acts as a surrogate for the artist’s own experiences of intimacy in the text. Freud’s couch, which is located in Freud’s study and on which Calle’s wedding dress is placed, provides a contextual backdrop to Calle’s art installation.  

Mignon Nixon explains that Freud’s office contains a large number of objects. These objects were strongly linked to Freud’s ideas on psychoanalysis:

> The consulting room [represents] a repository of past civilizations embodied in the serried rows of so many statuettes, figured vases, reliefs, textiles, and objets d’art of every description. For Freud […] the very model of psychoanalysis is collecting – “Freud opened up a whole set of related fields, of phenomena, whose scientific study would require assiduous and painstaking collections, dreams, jokes, parapraxes, early memories. […] And it is alongside these distinctively Freudian collections […] that we should place his contemporaneous collection of antiquities, a treasury displayed exclusively in the consulting room and study as one index of “its intimate connections with his psychoanalytic work.”

It is in this respect that Freud’s space, which acts as the backdrop to Calle’s exhibit, serves the purpose of injecting Calle’s personal objects with powerful associations to Freud’s life and legacy of psychoanalysis. Within the space of the Freud Museum, Calle provides new insight concerning her past experiences. The psychoanalyst’s couch serves as a visual icon for the processes of self-inquiry at work in the text, through which Calle projects her own intimate

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729 Mignon Nixon elaborates on the function of the couch: “One function of the couch, therefore, is to keep analyst and analysand apart, to prevent them from becoming visually, or reflectively, entangled.” (“On the couch,” p. 50.).
thoughts, feelings, and desires onto her surroundings.\textsuperscript{731} Placed in the museum as part of its permanent exhibit, Calle’s personal relics all engage the same processes of self-inquiry that are made explicit in the example she provides through the wedding dress. For example, the personal object that Calle refers to as “the dice” (Fig.29), deliberately placed in a ring box that is suggestive of a marriage proposal, is framed by the same processes of self-inquiry as the wedding dress. Surrounded by Freud’s overpowering collection, Calle’s personal objects become the emphasis of self-expression in the book – in large part due to the personal narratives that accompany them. As we flip through the pages of \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud} and glance at the various rooms and their contents, we make particular note of the fact that Calle’s personal stories pervade the museum space; we learn of her appointment with a psychoanalyst for bad breath (Bad Breath),\textsuperscript{732} her brief stint as a strip-tease artist (The Strip-tease),\textsuperscript{733} her dilemma of being flat-chested as a teenager (The Breasts),\textsuperscript{734} her unreciprocated love for her husband (The Rival),\textsuperscript{735} her failed attempt at plastic surgery (The Plastic Surgery),\textsuperscript{736} her great aunt Valentine who died at the age of 100 (The Sheet),\textsuperscript{737} the three cats she once owned (The Cats),\textsuperscript{738} the fake wedding she staged (The Fake Wedding),\textsuperscript{739} her coffee date with an intellectual (The Coffee

\textsuperscript{731} As the publisher of \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud} explains - “Calle’s own texts and personal objects (are) juxtaposed with objects from Sigmund Freud’s personal collection. [...] \textit{Appointment} features fragments from the artist’s own [...] life story - characteristic texts that reveal intimate secrets and unravel some of Calle’s childhood memories as well as her adult relationships. Calle’s references to certain mementos and the emotionally charged events with which they are associated have many parallels to Freud’s own psychoanalytic theories and his passion for collecting.” (Violette Editions)
\textsuperscript{732} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.40-43.
\textsuperscript{733} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.18-21.
\textsuperscript{734} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.26-29.
\textsuperscript{735} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.118-121.
\textsuperscript{736} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.98-101.
\textsuperscript{737} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.106-109.
\textsuperscript{738} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.46-49.
\textsuperscript{739} Sophie Calle. \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, p.62-65.
Cup), etc. With each object displayed, Calle is able to piece together the various elements that comprise her past through processes of self reflection that follow Freud’s own ideas on self-analysis. As the museum’s curator James Putman eloquently puts it: “Sophie Calle’s texts, which reveal her compulsive rituals, obsessions and fantasies, have inevitable parallels with [the] psychoanalyst’s case book, where memory, imagination, emotion, desire and loss are interwoven.”

Inspired by Freud, Calle’s art exhibit stages a form of “talking cure”; by revealing her personal experiences, the artist enters into a dialogue of “transference” with the absent Freud to engage the reader in new ways of interpreting identity and self. The concept of transference is made especially evident in the two photos of Calle and Freud where, in a double-framed shot and in an obvious mirroring of identity, Calle follows in the footsteps of Freud (Fig.30). In this meeting between Freud and Calle, Calle takes on the role of analysand, while Freud assumes the role of the analyst. Mignon Nixon explains that psychoanalysis is an encounter between “two people talking in a room”:

> Psychoanalysis is an encounter between ‘two people talking in a room.’ The strange dynamic between analyst and analysand, however, is also a ritual that unbalances social intercourse through a series of calculated discrepancies: one speaks while the other listens in silence; one reclines while the other sits upright; one is charged with the exercise of singular self-restraint, while the demand on the other is to speak freely as possible. […] the work of analysis depends on the ‘essential dissymmetry in the relation’ in order for the transference to develop and evolve. (p.48) As Laplanche observes, there is an

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742 In Freud’s psychoanalytic theories, the “talking cure” represents “a cathartic method [that engages] the verbalisation of repressed (talking cure)” emotions. (Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.460.).
743 See Mignon Nixon for a straightforward definition of the concept of Transference: “Transference, writes Laplanche, is “the very milieu of analysis, in the sense of its surrounding environment” the milieu of transference, he observes, is most perceptible when change is in the air, for “one notices a milieu less when one is plunged in it, more so when it is rather briskly altered or when one leaves it.” (“On the couch,” p.73.). She also writes that “Kolbowksi reflects on the role of the artist, even the most self-effacing conceptual artist, as a figure of transference.” (“On the couch,” p.73).
‘essential dissymmetry’ in the analytic situation, a distance... that is preserved especially by the silence of the analyst.\textsuperscript{744}

As Mignon Nixon explains, the psychoanalytic process depends on the “essential dissymmetry in the relation” analyst-analysand, in order for the transference to take place.\textsuperscript{745} It is in this respect that, as the book’s title suggests, Calle takes on an \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud} to stage the processes of self-reflection implicated in her art project.\textsuperscript{746} The silence that permeates the intimate setting of the Freud Museum is broken when Calle occupies the museum to recount her own life stories through an important process of association with the objects that reside within its walls. Calle’s objects and personal narratives interact with the museum space first, to enact the processes of self-examination associated with Freud’s legacy and second, to rethink the museum’s interior, and its legacy of psychoanalysis, within a new imaginative framework.\textsuperscript{747}

\section*{6.6 Rewriting the Canon in Calle’s Autobiographical Writing}

In \textit{Appointment with Sigmund Freud}, Calle stages autobiographical writing as a conceptual art performance. By presenting the concept of identity as a continuously changing phenomenon in her artistic works, Calle projects the same processes of reconceptualization to the

\textsuperscript{744} Mignon Nixon. “On the couch,” p.66.
\textsuperscript{746} In a more detailed analysis of the dialogue between Calle and Freud, it would be interesting to examine and compare Calle’s practice of autobiography, which is a highly innovative, to Sigmund Freud’s own autobiographical writing in \textit{An Autobiographical Study} (1925), which follows a very traditional model of writing. The first lines of the autobiography read as follows: “I was born on May 6th, 1856, at Freiberg in Moravia, a small town in what is now Czechoslovakia. My parents were Jews, and I have remained a Jew myself. I have reason to believe that my father’s family were settled for a long time on the Rhine (at Cologne), that, as a result of a persecution of the Jews during the fourteenth or fifteenth century, they fled eastwards, and that, in the course of the nineteenth century, they migrated back from Lithuania through Galicia into German Austria. When I was a child of four I came to Vienna, and I went through the whole of my education there.” (Sigmund Freud. \textit{An Autobiographical Study}, p.1.).
\textsuperscript{747} Mignon Nixon describes the psychoanalytical process as a process of renewal: “What returns attention to the milieu of psychoanalysis, according to Laplanche, is change, when the milieu is altered, it attracts fresh notice. This occurs especially when the analysand “acts out” by committing “an infidelity to the analytic relation. The patient actualizes desire, goes outside the relationship, acts on an impulse (to have an affair, in the classic scenario), rather than bringing this wish to analysis. Freud called this lateral transference, an action that sidesteps the analyst.” (“On the couch,” p.66.).
practice of autobiography. Calle’s project becomes self-conscious of its own processes of writing the self into existence; many of the intimate objects exhibited by Calle either allude to personal writing or are actually composed of personal letters. The object that Calle refers to as “the Rival” is in fact a love letter (“Lettres 4”) that her ex-husband writes and that we see in La visite guidée. Other objects suffer the same fate in Appointment with Sigmund Freud and serve to fragment the representation of identity in the text: The exhibit piece entitled “Le sceau rouge” in La visite guidée is entitled “The Divorce” in Appointment with Sigmund Freud; the exhibit piece entitled “La peinture du XIXe siècle” is entitled “The Hostage” in Appointment with Sigmund Freud; the exhibit piece entitled “TéléStar” is entitled “The TV Guide” in Appointment with Sigmund Freud, etc. By exhibiting and renaming the same object(s) from one artistic project to the next, Calle illustrates how identity becomes fragmented and how personal writing becomes a site of transformation and renewal within her artistic practice. Not only does the letter play an important role in illustrating how Calle is able to re-imagine identity within the context of personal writing. At the same time, it attests to Calle’s presentation of contemporary autobiography as a practice that is in a state of continuous change and transition. For Calle, the exhibit piece entitled “The Rival” is just one of many examples in Appointment with Sigmund Freud for which self-expression becomes a narrative project through which identity is not only presented as a subjective phenomenon, but also Calle’s own subjective assimilation and integration of the Freud Museum. By staging the processes of rewriting through the symbolism of the Freud Museum and its legacy, Calle is able to enact personal writing as a reconceptualization of the canon.

7 Conclusion

Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée, and Appointment with Sigmund Freud were chosen for our study because they offer compelling examples of contemporary autobiographical writing that
require an interdisciplinary approach to their analysis and interpretation. In *Doubles-jeux*, words and images are combined to confound art with literature through intertextual relationships with Auster’s fictional writing. In *La visite guidée*, the literary force of autobiography is recontextualized within the museum setting; autobiography becomes the backdrop for the artistic and creative space in which Calle’s personal stories are framed and exhibited through the use of objects. In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle extends the boundaries of autobiography even further by demonstrating how her processes of self-analysis and self-investigation are revealed through the placement of everyday objects within a specific social and cultural context. Through the analysis of these three books, we have demonstrated that Calle’s various autobiographical projects provide different angles from which to address a common thread of autobiography as both a social activity and a performative practice.

By co-mingling word and image in a deliberate network of relationships, Calle writes narratives that are self-reflexive in their rejection of a stabilized, univocal representation of the autobiographical subject. Although Calle’s texts do not remain within the defined boundaries of traditional autobiography, they present an accurate portrait of the multi-faceted identity of Calle as writer, photographer and artist. Calle’s innovative use of photography within the context of the personal narrative raises important questions about a series of dichotomies that theorists often call upon in their study of photography and life narratives: public/private, fact/fiction, reality/imagination, present/past, individual/collective, traditional/contemporary modes of representation. In the majority of her projects, Calle combines autobiography and photography in such a way that both media interact to represent identity as a phenomenon that is constantly changing within its social and cultural contexts. By situating identity in society and in culture, Calle’s narratives have extended the definition of autobiography onto a much broader canvas that encourages disciplinary diversity in several ways. Julie Rak makes note of the changing status of
identity in personal writing, in particular the changing climate of autobiographical writing: “This sense that the subject could be plural, multiple, and socially constructed has moved the study of autobiography away from attempts to bridge gaps between self, text and life and linked it to other forms of cultural production.”

As we have demonstrated with our analysis of *Doubles-jeux*, *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle has removed autobiography from its literary comfort zone; although writing still represents a major component of her artistic practice, she was one of the first artists in France to introduce the topic of artistic expression into academic discussions on French autobiography. Through Calle’s artistic interventions, self-representation has become conceivable in other forms of expression other than writing: a phone booth, a plastic bucket, a high heel shoe, a wedding dress, a bed sheet, etc., all have a story to share about Calle’s existence. These objects join the ranks of Proust’s madeleine to recontextualize the object of writing into a thought-provoking visual representation of the author’s experience in the world. Calle presents her autobiography in a way that encourages us to consider how she connects the events in her own life to her surroundings, how she stimulates our sensitivity to the visual world through her experiences of art, and how she interprets art as a response to her own experience of the world.

### 7.1 The Future of Autobiography

In 2008, Calle published a book entitled *Où et Quand? –Berck*. In this text, she subverts autobiographical conventions once more by tampering with the retrospective quality of the genre. The premise of the book, in which Calle asks a seer to predict her future, is to present the

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autobiographical narrative primarily as a foretelling of future events that stands in contrast to the retrospective qualities of the genre. Calle subverts expectations of autobiography by producing a reversal in the chronological presentation of personal events in the book. By projecting a glance towards the future, Calle not only predicts the direction in which her personal experiences are going, but much like her previous artistic projects, Calle continues to take autobiography into unexplored terrain.
Figure 11: Coffret *Doubles-jeux*
Figure 12: *De l'obéissance*
Figure 13: Brigitte Bardot
Figure 14: *Histoires vraies + dix*
Figure 15: Bosom Ballet
plus ou moins, que Maria avait déboulé dans sa carrière artistique. D’autres travaux avaient suivi, tous engendrés par le même esprit d’investigation, le même goût passionné du risque. Son sujet était l’œil, la dramaturgie de l’œil qui regarde en étant regardé, et ses œuvres manifestaient les mêmes qualités qu’on trouvait chez Maria : une attention méticuleuse au détail, la confiance accordée aux structures arbitraires, une patience frisant l’insoutenable. Afin de réaliser l’un de ses projets, elle avait chargé un détective privé de la suivre à travers la ville. Pendant plusieurs jours, cet homme avait pris des photos d’elle tandis qu’elle faisait ses rondes, il avait noté dans un petit carnet ses moindres mouvements sans rien omettre dans son rapport, pas même les événements les plus banaux, les plus éphémères : traversée d’une rue, achat d’un journal, arrêt café. C’était un exercice tout à fait artificiel, et pourtant Maria avait trouvé grisant que quelqu’un s’intéresse à elle aussi activement. Des acteurs microscopiques y trouvant des significations nouvelles, les gestes les plus routiniers se chargeaient d’une rare émotion. Au bout de quelques heures, elle s’était prise d’affection pour le détective au point d’avoir presque oublié qu’elle le payait. Quand il lui avait remis son rapport à la fin de la semaine elle avait eu l’impression, en examinant les photographies d’elle-même et en lisant les chronologies exhaustives de ses faits et gestes, qu’elle était devenue quelqu’un d’inconnu, qu’elle s’était transformée en une créature imaginaire.

Pour son projet suivant, Maria avait trouvé un emploi temporaire de femme de chambre dans un grand hôtel du centre de la ville. Son but consistait à rassembler, sans dette femme, tous les informations sur les clients. En fait, elle évitait délibérément ceux-ci, se limitant à ce que pouvaient lui apprendre les objets éparpillés dans leurs chambres. A nouveau, elle prenait des photos ; à nouveau, elle inventait des vies à ces gens sur la base des indices dont elle disposait. C’était une archéologie du présent, pour ainsi dire, une tentative de reconstituer l’essence de quelque chose à partir des fragments les plus nus : le talon d’un talon, un bas déchiré, une tache de sang sur le col d’une chemise.

Quelque temps plus tard, un homme avait fait des avances à Maria dans la rue. Le trouvant très antipathique, elle l’avait repoussé. Le soir même, par pure coïncidence, elle le rencontra à un vernissage dans une galerie de SoHo. Ils s’étaient parlé à nouveau et il lui avait appris cette fois qu’il partait le lendemain en voyage à la Nouvelle-Orléans avec une petite amie. Maria avait alors décidé d’aller aussi et de le suivre partout avec son appareil photographique pendant la durée entière de son séjour. Il ne lui inspirait aucun intérêt, et la dernière chose qu’elle cherchait était une aventure amoureuse. Elle avait l’intention de rester cachée, d’éviter tout contact avec lui, d’explorer son comportement visible sans présumer d’interpréter ce qu’elle verrait. Le lendemain, elle avait pris l’avion à la Guardia pour la Nouvelle-Orléans, s’était installée dans un hôtel et avait fait l’acquisition d’une permuque blonde. Pendant trois jours, elle s’était adressée à des douzaines d’hôtels afin de découvrir où il logerait. Elle avait fini par le dénicher et, pendant le reste de la semaine, elle avait marché derrière lui comme une ombre en prenant des centaines de photographies, en détaillant chaque lieu où il se rendait. Elle rédigeait également un journal, et une fois arrivé le moment où l’homme devait rentrer à New York, elle était revenue par le vol précédent – de manière à l’attendre à l’aéroport et à réaliser une dernière série de photos lorsqu’il descendrait de l’avion. C’était pour elle une expérience complexe et troublante, dont elle était sortie avec l’impression d’avoir abandonné sa vie pour une sorte de néant, comme si elle avait photographié quelque chose qui n’existait pas. Au lieu d’un
Figure 17: Le régime chromatique: lundi

LUNDI : ORANGE

Menu imposé :

*Purée de carottes*
*Crevettes*
*Melon*

Paul Auster ayant oublié de mentionner la boisson, je me permets de compléter son menu avec du :

*Jus d’orange*
Figure 18: W, comme week-end en Wallonie
Figure 19: Le régime chromatique: dimanche

Les menus furent tirés au sort et chacun s'acquitta consciencieusement, quoique sans enthousiasme, de sa tâche. J'ai personnellement préféré jeûner car c'est bien joli les romans mais il n'est pas forcément délectable de les respecter à la lettre.
Figure 20: Le strip-tease
Figure 21: Eros
Figure 22: La cabine téléphonique
Figure 23: La cabine téléphonique, commentaires
Figure 24: Le drap
Figure 25: Le sceau en plastique
Figure 26: La chaussure rouge
Figure 27: La peinture du XIXe siècle
**Figure 28:** The Wedding Dress
Figure 29: The Dice
Figure 30: Calle meets Freud

Dr. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) in the gardens of his London home at 20 Maresfield Gardens, courtesy the Freud Museum

Sophie Calle wearing Sigmund Freud's overcoat
Conclusion
A Retrospective Look At
Barthes’s and Calle’s Visual Narratives

In our thesis, we have examined two authors of French contemporary literature, with a particular focus on the use of photography in the life narratives of Roland Barthes (Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes) and Sophie Calle (Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée, Appointment with Sigmund Freud). We studied how these two media participated in the representation of identity within the autobiographical narratives of our two authors. In order to organize our analysis of word (autobiography) and image (photography) relations in the literary corpus chosen for this thesis, we have introduced key theoretical concepts into our study to help us with our analysis of Barthes’s and Calle’s texts and have divided our study into 4 chapters.

In Chapter 1, we provided a brief outline of the theory of autobiography. In this chapter, we called upon critics such as Philippe Lejeune, Georges Gusdorf, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Elizabeth Bruss, Jean Starobinski, Estelle Jelinek, etc., to establish a framework within which to discuss autobiography. In order to include Barthes’s and Calle’s highly subjective self-representational narratives within discussions of autobiographical writing, we traced the study of autobiography along an evolutionary parcours to show how the definition of the genre has shifted to be more inclusive of a broader range of texts that fall outside of its conventional bounds. We organized our arguments in a way that traced autobiography from its definition as an accurate and objective mode of representation to a more subjective model of self-expression. By acknowledging the subjective nature of autobiographical writing, we connected its description to other more “subjective” forms of literature, expanded our understanding of the complex issues that surround autobiography, and contextualized it within an increasingly subjective framework (self-referential narrative, biography, fiction, autofiction). An essential aspect in linking
autobiography to a more subjective mode of representation was through our discussion on the important role that the reader plays in the construction of identity in autobiographical writing. By placing emphasis on the reader’s function as an important source of meaning in autobiography, we were able to compare the autobiographical text to a more performative model of writing. As we recall, the concept of performative writing was an important theme in our thesis as it served to link our discussions on both authors. Our analysis of autobiography was also linked to our study of photography in Chapter 2, through the exploration of similar themes in both media, and through the structure selected for the presentation of both chapters.

In Chapter 2 of our thesis, we provided a brief outline of the theory of photography. We divided this chapter into two main parts: the first part was dedicated to our study of photography, while the second part included a brief discussion on word and image relations, in particular the relationship between photography and writing. In the first section of this chapter, we called upon critics such as Philippe Dubois, Roland Barthes, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, Susan Sontag, Victor Burgin, Hans Belting, André Rouillé, Walter Benjamin, etc., to establish a framework within which to discuss photography. To understand how the photographic images introduced in Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical narratives interact with the written text, we needed to first understand how photography functions as a mode of expression, and what it

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As already outlined in the introduction of our thesis, it is important to re-iterate that while the presentation of these first two chapters may have appeared to inscribe into our study a teleological account of autobiography and photography that moved from a conservative, stable, and naive past way of thinking to a radical, dynamic, and sophisticated and reflexive contemporary approach, our sole objective was to identify the principal arguments underlying the theories of autobiography and photography in a way that reflected and supported the arguments presented in our chapters of literary analysis. Our objective was to demonstrate how scholars have continued to shift their perceptions of autobiography to reflect a more performative and interdisciplinary framework. This change, of course, has followed the emergence of autobiographical narratives that incorporate a more interdisciplinary and performative approach to their writing. It was not our intention to suggest that contemporary examples of life writing have more merit than their earlier and more conventional counterparts. However, it is almost impossible to illustrate how contemporary examples of writing use more dynamic and performative strategies of writing without implicating our analysis within some form of evolutionary process.
conveys within the context of autobiography. Similar to the approach taken in our chapter on autobiography, we organized our arguments in a way that traced the representation of photography from its definition as an accurate and objective mode of representation to a more subjective form of expression. By organizing our chapter in this way, our intention was to structure our arguments alongside those presented in our previous chapter on autobiography in order to draw parallels between the shared problematics of both media. As our previous analysis has demonstrated, autobiography is a mode of representation that is framed within shifting conventions: historical/artistic; objective/subjective; present/past; individual/collective; reality/imagination. In our chapter on photography, it was our aim to demonstrate how the photographic medium was also theorized within these same problematics and how similar concepts could be applied to its study and interpretation: fiction; performance; self-representation (especially with our example of Bayard’s self-portrait). Since our discussion on autobiography began with a description of its formal conventions and moved towards a more subjective rendering of the genre, our idea was that by organizing our photography chapter in this manner, we could begin to make certain implicit similarities and/or differences between the two media explicit. The chapter began with a discussion on the “mimetic” or “referential” focus of the photographic image, and we compared this feature to the photograph’s visual predecessor: the artistic painting. Our explanation of photography as a “mirror” of reality was followed by our description of the photographic camera as an automatic recording device that reproduces “reality” and that requires no interpretation. However, our focus was shifted to a more subjective rendering of photography as a medium of expression. With the description of Hippolyte Bayard’s *Autoportrait en noyé*, we began to look at the more expressive and interpretative character of photography in its ability to communicate ideas. Dubbed as the “first fictional self-portrait,” Bayard’s photograph introduced the concept of self-representation as a more subjective mode of
representation within the framework of our discussion on photography. Our study then turned its attention to the artistic and social uses of photography. Similar to the autobiographical narrative, the photographic image engages collaboration between the reader and the author, and acts as a platform for the construction of meaning. Through the photograph’s ability to generate meaning, we were able describe it as a performative medium. The second part of our chapter was dedicated to a discussion on word and image relations. We first began with an overview of the role of photography in literature and then ended our discussion on photography with a brief description of the verbal and visual collaboration between photography and autobiography. By presenting arguments supporting the collaborative relationship between the verbal and the visual, the task that remained was to apply our knowledge of the word and image collaboration in Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographical texts. The analysis of our literary corpus began with our study of Barthes’s *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

In Chapter 3 of our thesis, we began our literary analysis with Roland Barthes’s *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. In his text, Barthes provides us with an intellectual autobiography that presents itself as a critical essay on the self-referential practices of autobiography and photography. As we have seen in our study of the text, in order to work through Barthes’s ideas, it was necessary to draw on research and scholarship from a variety of traditions and disciplines. Although our ideas on autobiography and photography formed the foundation of our study on Barthes, we also introduced other concepts, such as the family album (François Komoin, Martha Langford, Pierre Bourdieu, Marianne Hirsch, Anne-Marie Garat) intertextuality (Laurent Jenny) and intratextuality (Lucien Dällenbach) into our analysis of Barthes’s narrative, and we studied certain elements of Barthes’s own œuvre (*Le degré zéro de l’écriture*, *S/Z*, *Mythologies*, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, “La mort de l’auteur,” “le message photographique,” *La Chambre claire*, etc.) to compliment our reading of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. As we have argued in this
chapter, it is mainly through the use of visual and verbal strategies that Barthes manages to create important relationships in his text in a manner that implicates his ideological convictions in the construction of his autobiographical subject. The relationships created in the text (word and image, intertextual, intratextual) present Barthes’s narrative as a performative model of critical writing. To add context to our study, we began our analysis with a discussion on the circumstances that influenced the writing of the text as part of Seuil’s biographical collection entitled “Les Écrivains de toujours.” When discussing Barthes’s non-conformist narrative within the scope of the “Écrivains de toujours” project, we extended our observations of its unconventional format to its broader classification of autobiography. Barthes’s family album initiated our discussion on the role that word and image relations play in the construction of identity in the text. When studied in close conjunction with the written text, the images began to reveal the textual strategies used by Barthes to construct his autobiographical subject. As our analysis of the written material illustrated, the relationships of affiliation that are suggested in Barthes’s images are made clear in his text through the intertextual and intratextual references and allusions. Through the relationships of intertextuality and intratextuality that Barthes introduces in his text, we concluded that the construction of the narrative emerges as a performance of his ideological convictions concerning the practice of self-representation both in writing and in images.

Our analysis of Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes has been a truly rewarding and intellectually stimulating experience. From the perspective of conventional autobiographical writing practices, the interpretation of this book becomes quite daunting – almost inconceivable. However, once we expand our horizons to include a broader theoretical apparatus into our interpretation of this text, we break through the deadlock of unending mise en abyme, become an integral part of the book’s processes of meaning, and enter into a productive dialogue with
Barthes about his life and work as one of the leading intellectuals of contemporary French culture. The infinitely overlapping references and allusions in this text create an equally infinite number of perspectives from which to approach a reading of Barthes’s autobiography. Although we have demonstrated how this text represents an innovative model of contemporary life writing – in its capacity to extend the boundaries of autobiography beyond its conventional practices of reading and writing – we are aware that there is an endless host of other possibilities from which to explore Barthes’s text, in both what was already articulated in our analysis and what was entirely omitted. Although we do integrate an interpretation of Barthes’s images into our study of his narrative, we have restricted our study to the selection of the photographs that were most pertinent to our literary analysis. To provide a more detailed description of the word and image dimension of our study, it would be essential to take a closer look at the photographs that were not included in our study to establish how they also participate in the construction of meaning in the text. To extend our study of word and image relations even further with respect to our analysis of the written text, we could have explored Barthes’s use of the “Imaginaire” and the other themes that he evokes in his narrative (“le moi,” “l’imaginaire,” “le stade du miroir,” “le symbolique, “le réel”) through a reading of Lacan’s theory. Although an intertextual reading of Lacan’s theories with Barthes’s autobiographical text has already been studied at great length by literary scholars, it would add a new dimension to our own analysis of the word and image relations in Barthes’s text – in its movement from an “impossible imaginary” – through its presentation of the images – towards its more productive interpretation as “the labour and the

pleasure of writing. Finally, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is not considered to be Barthes’s only piece of autobiographical writing in which the word and image collaboration is part of the text’s processes of meaning: *La Chambre claire* is another of Barthes’s books which explores self-referential writing from the perspective of verbal and visual relations. Although we do include elements from *La Chambre claire* in our study, in future discussions of Barthes’s autobiographical writing, it would be interesting to engage *La Chambre claire* in a comparative analysis with *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* is also sometimes considered as forming a trilogy with these two texts, and future consideration of its role within Barthes’s autobiographical writing would also add another dimension to our analysis of Barthes’s autobiographical writing. Considering the aspects that remain to be explored in our interpretation of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, we understand how the text escapes from a “totalizing” interpretative framework, in particular within our own analysis of it. Our extended analysis of word and image relations in autobiography was continued in our following chapter, with a study of the self-representational narratives of Sophie Calle.

In Chapter 4 of our thesis, we applied the concepts explored in our previous three chapters to our analysis of Sophie Calle’s autobiographical narratives *Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée*, and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*. As we have established in this chapter, Calle is a performance and conceptual artist who integrates autobiographical elements into her artistic practice. Similar to our study of Barthes’s autobiography in Chapter 3, our focus in this chapter was to determine how the artist introduces photographs into her autobiographical narratives to convey meaning. However, our exploration of Calle’s narratives also demonstrated how her approach to autobiographical writing is completely different from the approach taken by Barthes.

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Our analysis on Barthes was restricted to the study of autobiography as a performative model of literary writing, whereas our study on Calle represented a more extreme model of literature through its use of conceptual and performance art practices. As we have established in this chapter, although we have chosen to study three of Calle’s texts, emphasis was placed on our study of *Doubles-jeux* because of the text’s strong literary orientation. An extended analysis of *La visite guidée* and *Appointment with Sigmund Freud* was intended to add emphasis to the performative aspects of Calle’s autobiographical writing. In our discussion of *Doubles-jeux*, we demonstrated how Calle transforms the literary practice of autobiography into an artistic form of expression through intertextual relations with Paul Auster’s *Léviathan* (*Leviathan*). In this section, we argued that Calle’s writing within the project itself becomes increasingly innovative from one book to the next. As our study of *Doubles-jeux* has shown, through a collaborative effort with Paul Auster, Calle’s self-referential art practices removed autobiographical writing from its literary context to place it within the public realm. Our analysis continued with a study of *La visite guidée*. *La visite guidée* is an exhibition catalogue that documents the exhibit “Absence” held by Calle at the Boymans-van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam in 1994. As our discussion of this text demonstrated, Calle was able to provide an example of how autobiographical writing could be framed within different social contexts through the example of the guided tour in her exhibit “Absent.” By expressing her personal story through the exhibition of her personal objects within the museum’s display cases, she presents the autobiographical subject as an object of study to be analyzed, understood, and commented upon through a guided museum visit. In the last text that we analyzed in this chapter, *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle re-enacts the processes of self-investigation and self-discovery that are studied in *La visite guidée* through the presentation of another museum visit. In this book, Calle documents an exhibit held at the Freud Museum in England in 1999. By exhibiting previously exhibited
personal objects, and by placing these objects among Sigmund Freud’s personal relics and artifacts at the Museum, she provides a new context through which to examine and interpret her familiar objects and their accompanying narratives. Much like the strategies used by Calle in *Doubles-jeux* and *La visite guidée*, in *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, the autobiographical subject is constructed through word and image relations. As our analysis of this text has shown, it is within the symbolically charged setting of the Freud Museum that Calle’s art practice represents autobiography as a process through which the past is consciously re-collected, re-experienced, and re-lived. By framing her own processes of self-inquiry within the larger context of Freud’s influential life and work, Calle stages autobiographical writing as a revisionary return to the canon. Similar to our study of Barthes’s autobiographical text, our analysis of Calle’s personal narratives certainly have not provided the final word on Calle’s life narratives. First, our analysis has only incorporated 3 of the numerous personal narratives that she has published: *Prenez soin de vous, M’as tu vue?, Les dormeurs, Douleur Exquise, Où et Quand? –Berck-, Où et Quand? –Lourdes, - Où et Quand? –Nulle part-, En finir, Histoires vraies + dix, L’EROUV de Jérusalem, Disparitions, Fantômes, Double Game* (English translation of *Doubles-jeux*), *Souvenirs de Berlin-Est, A survey, Les aveugles*, etc. The 3 texts that we selected for our analysis of Calle (*Doubles-jeux, La visite guidée, and Appointment with Sigmund Freud*) were chosen to show an increasingly performative tendency in her writing and autobiographical production. Calle is still an active member of the art community who continues to produce and publish her autobiographical projects. Although there is so much to Calle’s autobiographical narratives

752 In *Appointment with Sigmund Freud*, Calle uses personal objects that we already see in her previous publications, such as *Doubles-jeux* and *La visite guidée*.

753 In an article that *The New York Times* published as recently as June 2012, Claudia Barbieri informs the reader that Calle is currently working on a new project “Rachel, Monique,” which features themes related to her mother’s death in 2006. The project incorporates Calle’s reflections on her mother’s life, which are accompanied by a video.
that remains to be written (especially since she is also still writing autobiographical texts), our study of her narratives has been as enjoyable and rewarding as our analysis of Barthes, but for different reasons. It is through Calle’s work that we are able to consider autobiographical writing outside of the framework of literature.

Although the focus of this thesis is in French studies, it is written in English in order to appeal to a broader academic audience. Our objective is to make our study more accessible to the English language scholars who are already exploring the concept of performative writing in literature. To facilitate the reading process for this particular audience, we have tried to keep our theoretical chapters as accessible as possible by providing English translations for several of the French theorists cited. For the theorists whose works have not been translated, the original French reference was retained. In our literary analysis of Barthes’s and Calle’s narratives, we have kept all of our references in their original language to remain consistent with the literary texts studied, which were also kept in their original language. In writing this thesis in English, our hope is that we will not only open a dialogue with scholars of French, but also with other researchers in other disciplines and areas of specialization.

Our thesis incorporated a wide range of theoretical concepts: intertextuality, intratextuality, photography, autobiography, autofiction, fiction, biography, family albums, word and image relations, and performance (strip-tease for instance). The interdisciplinary focus of our analysis required that we look at and incorporate the analysis of several theories within this

of “a minute-by-minute video recording of her death in 2006.” (“Sophie Calle: Tapes, Diaries, and Burial Plots,” n.p.)
thesis to illustrate the validity of our arguments and to emphasize the performative properties of Barthes’s and Calle’s autobiographies.

Barthes and Calle are two figures of contemporary French literature who are rarely discussed or analyzed within the same literary contexts. Although both have been instrumental in promoting ideas about French culture to an international audience, they have often garnered different reactions, amongst different scholars, who work in different fields of inquiry. The interdisciplinary focus of our thesis joined these two influential figures in a comparative discussion on word and image relations in autobiographical writing. Combining these two very different individuals in this study has allowed us to explore French literature from a rich and intra-disciplinary perspective – within the thesis itself. Both authors have enriched our own understanding and interpretation of French literature, autobiographical narratives, and word and image relationships. In some respects, this thesis would not have been possible without Barthes. Barthes’s influence on the use of photography in autobiography – from which a large number of illustrated autobiographical narratives emerged – paved the way for narratives such as Calle’s. At the same time, if Calle had not been part of our discussion on Barthes, this thesis would have taken a completely different direction. Without Calle, we ask ourselves if we would have even considered the performative aspects of Barthes’s autobiographical writing. And we wonder if Barthes’s attempt to transgress the autobiographical genre would have been as pronounced without our analysis of Calle’s own efforts to remove the genre from its literary framework and place it into the public domain? Both authors have written the same autobiography, but in very different ways. Due to his status as a French Semiotician and Critic, Barthes’s autobiography becomes a productive exchange of ideas and concepts with his readers. As for Calle, her approach is to present this exchange through her conceptual and performance art practices. Despite the numerous differences between these prominent writers, they have come together in
this thesis to inspire a rich collaboration and have provided a complex platform from which to study autobiographical narratives.
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