

ÉTAT PRÉSENT AUTOFICTION IN THE FEMININE

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L'autobiographie traditionnelle étant devenue impraticable, tout discours sur soi tend à devenir peu ou prou autofictionnel.

(Mounir Laouyen)¹

Nous savons encore fort peu de choses sur ce que serait l'autofiction.

(Régine Robin)²

Autofiction has been central to the proliferation of self-narrative experiment in France for over thirty years, burgeoning from debates about the impossibility of autobiography as traditionally conceived,³ dissolving generic boundaries, and reaching across contexts and media. By definition unstable, prospective rather than retrospective, autofiction is appropriate to the unsettled post-Freudian subject whose confidence is placed in the 'act-value' rather than the 'truth-value' of narrative.⁴ Despite some consensus that selves are most productively explored when distinctions between 'truth' and 'fiction' are shattered, autofiction's validity has been hotly debated since the neologism was first proposed in Serge Doubrovsky's 1977 work *Fils*.⁵ Critics and practitioners have theorized the slippery hybrid;⁶ major colloquia and related publications have interrogated its

¹ Mounir Laouyen, 'Préface', in *Les Nouvelles Autobiographies/New Autobiographies*, ed. by M. Laouyen (= special issue of *L'Esprit créateur*, 42.4 (2002)), pp. 3–7 (p. 5).

² Régine Robin, 'L'Autofiction: le sujet toujours en défaut', in *Autofictions et cie*, ed. by Serge Doubrovsky, Jacques Lecarme, and Philippe Lejeune, Cahiers du RITM, 6 (Nanterre: Université Paris X-Nanterre, 1993), pp. 73–86 (p. 76).

³ For exploration of the cusp between autofiction and earlier self-narrative experiment see Claire Boyle, *Consuming Autobiographies: Reading and Writing the Self in Post-War France* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007), esp. 'Autobiography: Orthodoxies and Paradoxes', pp. 11–29. See also *Les Nouvelles Autobiographies* [see n. 1 above] (hereafter, all cross-references to works previously cited will be indicated as follows: [see n. x]); Bruno Blanckeman, 'De l'autobiographie aux récits de soi', in *Histoire de la littérature française du XX^e siècle*, 11: *Après 1940*, ed. by Michèle Tournet (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), pp. 480–91; and Dominique Viart and Bruno Vercier, 'Variations autobiographiques', in *La Littérature française au présent: héritage, modernité, mutations*, 2nd edn (Paris: Bordas, 2008), pp. 29–64.

⁴ Johnnie Gratton draws this distinction in his entry 'Autofiction', in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, 1: A–K, ed. by Margaretta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 86–87 (p. 86).

⁵ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Galilée, 1977). Doubrovsky was responding to a challenge set by generic criteria established in Philippe Lejeune's seminal *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

⁶ Essential reading includes Jacques Lecarme, 'L'Autofiction: un mauvais genre?', in *Autofictions et cie* [see n. 2], pp. 227–49; Marie Darrieussecq, 'L'Autofiction: un genre pas sérieux', *Poétique*, 107 (1996), 369–80; Vincent Colonna, *Autofictions et autres mythomanies littéraires* (Auch: Tristram, 2004); Philippe Gasparini, *Est-il je? Roman autobiographique et autofiction* (Paris: Seuil, 2004); Philippe Vilain, *Défense de Narcisse* (Paris: Grasset, 2005); Yves Baudelle, 'Autofiction et roman autobiographique: incidents de frontière', in *Vies en récit: formes littéraires et médiatiques de la biographie et de l'autobiographie*, ed. by Robert Dion and others (Québec: Éditions Nota bene, 2007), pp. 43–70; Philippe Vilain, *L'Autofiction en théorie: suivi de deux entretiens avec Philippe Sollers et Philippe Lejeune* (Paris: Éditions de la Transparence, 2009); *Je & moi*, ed. by Philippe Forest (= *Nouvelle Revue française*, 598 (October 2011)), which gathers short essays from nineteen writers including Christine Angot, Camille Laurens, and Catherine Millet; and *Fictions de soi/Self Fictions*, ed. by Barbara Havercroft and Michael Sheringham (= *Revue critique de fixation française contemporaine/Critical Review of Contemporary French Fixxion*, 4 (June 2012), <<http://www.revue-critique-de-fixxion-francaise-contemporaine.org>; [accessed 10 August 2012]), which includes

forms;⁷ a website has been established;⁸ several studies have summarized the evolution of theoretical debate;⁹ still others have suggested productive templates for considering the creative fissures and fractures at work in autofiction.¹⁰

As the French academy has grappled with autofiction's premises, it has most frequently sought to relate them to 'safe' (male/canonical) authors, treating as secondary the substantial range of experimentation by new women writers that constitutes some of autofiction's most distinctive practice.¹¹ Important debates about gender-specific production and consumption of autofiction or about how the rise of autofiction inflects the broader narrative of women's relationship to autobiography have scarcely begun to unfold.¹² Their progress has doubtless been impeded as women's work has borne the brunt of misgivings about autofiction's legitimacy.¹³ It is nevertheless clear that a distinct phase in women's self-narrative in French is under way; one that is remarkable for the extraordinarily difficult material it explores, for the sophisticated channels of self-apprehension it furrows, and for its fertile repositionings of the 'I'. Most critical appraisal of this evolution has come from outside France,¹⁴ although the 2008 Colloque de Cerisy on autofiction represented an important shift in that it produced an

articles on Christine Angot, Nina Bouraoui, Nicole Brossard, Annie Ernaux, and Nathalie Rheims, as well as an interview with Chloé Delaume.

⁷ A conference at Nanterre in 1992 produced *Autofictions et cie* [see n. 2]; the 2008 conference *Autofiction(s)* at Cerisy-la-Salle produced *Autofiction(s): colloque de Cerisy*, ed. by Claude Burgelin, Isabelle Grell, and Roger-Yves Roche (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2010).

⁸ <autofiction.org> by Arnaud Genon and Isabelle Grell.

⁹ Johnnie Gratton, 'Autofiction' [see n. 4]; Elizabeth Molkou, 'L'Autofiction: un genre nouveau?', in *Beginnings in French Literature*, ed. by Freeman J. Henry (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 155–68; Jean-Louis Jeannelle, 'Où en est la réflexion sur l'autofiction?', in *Genèse et autofiction*, ed. by J.-L. Jeannelle and Catherine Viollet (Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2007), pp. 17–37; Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, *Autofiction et dévoilement de soi* (Montréal: XYZ, 2007); Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction: une aventure du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 2008); Elizabeth Jones, 'Autofiction: A Brief History of a Neologism', in *Life Writing: Essays on Autobiography, Biography and Literature*, ed. by Richard Bradford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 174–84.

¹⁰ For instance, the notion of self-welcoming elaborated in *De soi à soi: l'écriture comme autoshospitalité*, ed. by Alain Montadon (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2004).

¹¹ The sole essay on a woman writer in *Autofiction et cie* [see n. 2] is Danielle Deltel's fleeting argument for Colette's *La Naissance du jour* (1928) as an early autofiction: 'Colette: l'autobiographie prospective', pp. 123–34. A substantial dossier in *Le Magazine littéraire*, 409 (May 2002) gives scant indication of women's participation in the evolution of self-narrative: 'Les Écritures du moi: de l'autobiographie à l'autofiction', pp. 18–66. Exceptions to this neglect include Thomas Clerc's *Les Écrits personnels* (Paris: Hachette, 2001), which gives serious treatment to Christine Angot and Sophie Calle; and Viart and Vercier, in 'Variations autobiographiques' [see n. 3], who draw Régine Robin, Sabine Machet, Hélène Cixous, Catherine Millet, and Chloé Delaume into their exploration of the distinctiveness of contemporary modes of *écriture de soi*. Ouellette-Michalska, in *Autofiction et dévoilement de soi* [see n. 9], also covers several contemporary women writers of autofiction.

¹² Boyle's observation that feminist autobiography scholarship has been slow to engage with new forms of self-writing (*Consuming Autobiographies* [see n. 3], p. 17) is well founded.

¹³ Camille Laurens's rebuttal of misogynistic criticisms levelled at women's autofiction can be found in '(Se) dire et (s')interdire', in *Genèse et autofiction* [see n. 9], pp. 221–28 (p. 228).

¹⁴ The following landmark publications analyse women's writing around the turn of the millennium and contain case studies of autofictional works: *Nouvelles écrivaines: nouvelles voix?*, ed. by Nathalie Morello and Catherine Rodgers (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); *Women's Writing in Contemporary France: New Writers, New Literatures in the 1990s*, ed. by Gill Rye and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); *Hybrid Voices, Hybrid Texts: Women's Writing at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. by Gill Rye (= special issue of *Dalhousie French Studies*, 68 (2004)); *A New Generation: Sex, Gender, and Creativity in Contemporary Women's Writing in French*, ed. by Gill Rye (= special issue of *L'Esprit créateur*, 45.1 (2005)); and *Nomadismes des romancières contemporaines de langue française*, ed. by Audrey Lasserre and Anne Simon (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2007).

energetic clutch of essays by women practitioners.¹⁵ It also inspired the autofictional manifesto of writer-performer Chloé Delaume, an impassioned and critically astute argument for autofiction's potential.¹⁶

The spectrum of practices of the 'I' in women's autofiction needs charting. At one extreme Delaume engages in repeated autofictional self-repositioning; at the other Annie Ernaux claims a sociologically driven 'I' that, far from constituting 'un moyen de [...] m'autofictionner', is transpersonal and sometimes scarcely gendered.¹⁷ Distinctive territories of self-fictionalization are staked out between these positions by writers such as Amélie Nothomb,¹⁸ Camille Laurens,¹⁹ Christine Angot,²⁰ Régine Robin,²¹ and Marie Darrieussecq.²²

Through Catherine Cusset, Catherine Millet, Alina Reyes, and a number of other women writers, autofiction's self-splitting and dissociation are linked to new, affirmative spaces of feminine desire.²³ Sarah Cooper credits Cusset with creating a distinctive, guilt-free libertinage,²⁴ while Philippe Lejeune hails Millet's controversial elaboration of Catherine M's sex life as 'un acte anthropologique original et courageux'.²⁵ The impact of these unusual experiments derives, in part, from their authors' owning of excessive, sometimes violent, experiences, which are the more readily explored through autofictional distancing.

¹⁵ *Autofiction(s): colloque de Cerisy* [see n. 7] contains essays by Camille Laurens, 'Qui dit ça?', pp. 25–34; Catherine Cusset, 'Je', pp. 35–42; Régine Robin, 'Doublés et clones dans mes œuvres de fiction', pp. 83–94; and Chloé Delaume, 'S'écrire mode d'emploi', pp. 109–26.

¹⁶ Chloé Delaume, *La Règle du je. Autofiction: un essai* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2010). Delaume's manifesto is partially structured through an account of her confrontation with the critical establishment at Cerisy.

¹⁷ Annie Ernaux, 'Vers un je transpersonnel', in *Autofictions et cie* [see n. 2], pp. 219–22 (p. 221). Camille Laurens's challenging of Ernaux's position on the 'I' makes interesting reading: while Ernaux 'se targue de ne rien inventer', Laurens sees her work as autofictional in the Doubrovskyan sense; see 'Affronter l'épreuve du vrai', *Le Monde des livres*, 29 April 2003, p. 16. Delaume also refers to Ernaux as a writer of autofiction (*La Règle du je* [see n. 16], p. 46).

¹⁸ See Hélène Jaccomard, 'Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Nothomb', in *Les Nouvelles Autobiographies* [see n. 1], pp. 45–57 (p. 45); Margaret Topping, 'Orientalism and Fairytale in Amélie Nothomb's Autofictions', in *Redefining the Real: The Fantastic in Contemporary French and Francophone Women's Writing*, ed. by Margaret-Anne Hutton (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 245–60; and Mark D. Lee, *Les Identités d'Amélie Nothomb: de l'invention médiatique aux fantasmes originaires* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

¹⁹ See Yves Baudelle, 'Camille Laurens ou le "Jeu brillant" de l'écriture de soi', in *Le Roman français de l'extrême contemporain: écritures, engagements, énonciations*, ed. by Barbara Havercroft, Pascal Michelucci, and Pascal Riendeau (Québec: Éditions Nota bene, 2010), pp. 295–318. Laurens discusses her approach to autofiction in an interview with Florent Georgesco in the latter's *Camille Laurens* (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2011), pp. 7–109.

²⁰ See Shirley Jordan, 'Reconfiguring the Public and the Private: Intimacy, Exposure and Vulnerability in Christine Angot's *Rendez-vous*', *French Cultural Studies*, 18.2 (2007), 201–18.

²¹ Régine Robin, *Le Golem de l'écriture: de l'autofiction au cybersoi* (Montréal: XYZ, 1997). Robin's interest in autofiction across media is rendered more complex by her exploration of Jewish identity.

²² See Catherine Rodgers, 'Aux limites du moi et du monde: questions d'identité dans *Le Pays* de Marie Darrieussecq', in *Le Roman français de l'extrême contemporain* [see n. 19], pp. 403–22.

²³ See Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, 'Des femmes à l'avant-scène de l'autofiction', in *Autofiction et dévoilement de soi* [see n. 9], pp. 79–100. See also Shirley Jordan, 'Close-up and Impersonal: Sexual/Textual Bodies in Contemporary French Women's Writing', in *Focalizing the Body in Contemporary Women's Writing and Filmmaking in France*, ed. by Gill Rye and Carrie Tarr (= special issue of *Nottingham French Studies*, 45.3 (2006)), pp. 8–23.

²⁴ Sarah Cooper, 'Reconfiguring Sexual-Textual Space: The Seductions of Catherine Cusset's *Jouir*', in *A New Generation* [see n. 14], pp. 38–47.

²⁵ Quoted in Kamel Riahi, *Ainsi parlait Philippe Lejeune: écriture de soi, autobiographie, journal intime, autofiction, mémoires* (Tunis: Travelling, 2009), pp. 48–49.

The privileged connection between women's autofiction and trauma requires further analysis. How does combining fact and fictional material allow practitioners (for example, Angot, Robin, Geneviève Brisac, Chantal Chawaf, Danielle Sallenave, Hélène Duffau, to name a few) to respond to rape, incest, violence, illness, and death? The trope of the wound has been fertile here, not least for the tension it embodies between rending and repair.²⁶ Practitioners as diverse as Delaume and Nina Bouraoui interrogate wounding within urgent autofictional experiments that are locked into violent trauma and self-(re)invention.²⁷ For Anne-Marie Garat, the autofictional fault line is a unique locus for confronting emotional wounds that are beyond articulation.²⁸ Trauma is also seen to lend particular shapes and rhythms to autofiction. Connecting autofiction to the Shoah in 'L'Autofiction, un genre nouveau?', Elizabeth Molkou observes how Robin's wounded writing abandons structurally any hope of coherence or continuity;²⁹ the multiple fractures that complicate Angot's nervous autofictional stream are linked by several critics to the underlying self-fracturing experience of incest;³⁰ Barbara Havercroft notes the starved autofictional prose through which Brisac offers up her anorexic body;³¹ Cusset sees her own autofiction as constructed around the 'mise à jour d'une culpabilité'.³² A number of narratives of unresolved pain are shaped, in Doubrovskyan fashion, through the foregrounding of psychoanalytic processes,³³ while the analytic encounter is proposed as a model for the reader-writer relationship in Angot.³⁴ Certain of the formal features of contemporary *écriture de soi* highlighted by Dominique Viart and Bruno

²⁶ See Kathryn Robson's *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), as well as her analysis of Chawaf's 'melancholic autofiction' in *Women's Writing in Contemporary France* [see n. 14], pp. 53–64. Barbara Havercroft's *Unspeakable Wounds: Personal Trauma in Contemporary Women's Autobiographical Writings* (forthcoming) explores autofictional writing as a means of managing pain and controlling its legacy. Trauma in Nothomb, Chawaf, Malika Mokeddem, and others is studied in *Representations of Trauma in French and Francophone Literature*, ed. by Nicole Simek and Zahi Zalloua (= special issue of *Dalbusie French Studies*, 81 (2007)).

²⁷ See Delaume's *La Règle du je* [see n. 16] and the distinction made there between 'chanter sa plaie' and 'chanter par sa plaie' (pp. 71–75). On Bouraoui see Helen Vassallo, 'Wounded Storyteller: Illness as Life Narrative in Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 43.1 (2007), 46–56. Current doctoral research by Sara Leek explores images of bleeding, (affective) haemorrhaging, and (textual) clotting in Bouraoui's autofiction, as well as the author's concept of 'l'écriture qui saigne' (*Mes mauvaises pensées* (Paris: Stock, 2005), p. 6).

²⁸ Anne-Marie Garat, *Dans la pente du toit* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

²⁹ Molkou, 'L'Autofiction: un genre nouveau?' [see n. 9], p. 166. She also discusses Serge Doubrovsky, Georges Perec, and Patrick Modiano, and follows Pierre Lepape (see his 'Au-delà de l'autofiction', *Le Monde*, 6 November 1998, p. 21) in connecting autofiction to the Shoah.

³⁰ For example, Isabelle Cata and Eliane Dalmolin, 'Écrire et lire l'inceste: Christine Angot', *Women in French Studies*, 12 (2004), 85–101. See also Gill Rye, 'Public Places, Intimate Spaces: Christine Angot's Incest Narratives', in *Women and Space*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Shirley Jordan (= special issue of *Dalbusie French Studies*, 93 (2010)), pp. 63–74.

³¹ Barbara Havercroft, 'Pour une rhétorique de l'agentivité: anorexie et autofiction dans *Petite* de Geneviève Brisac', in *La Rhétorique au féminin*, ed. by Annette Hayward (Québec: Éditions Nota bene, 2006), pp. 401–20.

³² Catherine Cusset, 'L'Écriture de soi: un projet moraliste', in *Genèse et autofiction* [see n. 9], pp. 197–209 (p. 209).

³³ For example, Bouraoui's *Mes mauvaises pensées* [see n. 27] is structured around meetings with her analyst; Josiane Chabel's *Rex Hotel: autofiction* (Paris: Éditions du Cheval Noir, 2008) defines autofiction as a 'récit autobiographique qui met en parallèle écriture et psychanalyse' (p. 6).

³⁴ Anne Simon and Christine Détrez, in *A leur corps défendant: les femmes à l'épreuve du nouvel ordre moral* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), argue that Angot's reader is constructed as a 'psychanalyste virtuel' (p. 175).

Vercier — concentric narrative that drills down repeatedly into the same material; vertiginous exhaustivity; immediacy; proximity to the act of writing³⁵ — are particularly salient in women's autofictional projects.

Several studies explore the ethical terrain surrounding autofiction, including issues of authenticity and integrity and legal intervention over privacy rights.³⁶ A bitter quarrel illustrating the intensity of investment in first-person writing, as well as what is at stake on the truth/fiction fault line, erupted in 2007 on the publication of Darrieussecq's *Tom est mort*.³⁷ Camille Laurens saw this harrowing (fictional) account of a mother's loss of her baby as an obscene reworking of her own (factual) book of mourning, *Philippe*,³⁸ and accused Darrieussecq of 'plagiat psychique'.³⁹ Darrieussecq's defence, an extensive exploration of owned versus imagined experience in first-person writing, was elaborated in a range of publications.⁴⁰ Intriguingly, the post-history of this battle spills over into Laurens's subsequent autofictional book.⁴¹ Equally intriguingly, and linked to autofiction's connection with trauma discussed above, it was after writing *Philippe* that Laurens eschewed both fiction and autobiography and began to elaborate her own autofictional practice, a move that is sharply illustrative of the strategic attractiveness of the autofictional 'I'.

Readers as well as writers invest intensively in the 'I'. If, as Claire Boyle claims, reader–writer relations in autobiography are riddled by anxiety and mutual distrust, autofiction potentially amplifies that relationship.⁴² Further study is needed of how women writers and readers construct each other in autofiction. Christine Angot's determination to leave her reader in doubt, the consequences of which are analysed by Gill Rye,⁴³ violently challenges the (specifically gendered) pacts of trust that have underpinned much women's writing and reading. Rye shows how Angot's reader is caught up in limit-testing accounts that probe the various ways readers consume autobiographical subjects. Angot's aggressive stance is at one end of a fertile spectrum of new practices that are

³⁵ Viart and Vercier, 'Variations autobiographiques' [see n. 3].

³⁶ See Emmanuel Pierrat, 'Le Pêril autofictionnel (droit et autofiction)', in *Autofiction(s): colloque de Cerisy* [see n. 7], pp. 483–91; and Cusset, 'L'Écriture de soi' [see n. 32], p. 209. See also Laurens's account of censorship, self-censorship, and legal issues in '(Se) dire et (s')interdire' [see n. 13].

³⁷ Marie Darrieussecq, *Tom est mort* (Paris: P.O.L., 2007).

³⁸ Camille Laurens, *Philippe* (Paris: P.O.L., 1995).

³⁹ In 'Marie Darrieussecq ou le syndrome du coucou', *La Revue littéraire*, 32 (autumn 2007), 1–14. See Camille Laurens, 'Annexe: enjeux d'un conflit', in *Autofiction(s): colloque de Cerisy* [see n. 7], pp. 495–506, where it is followed by Darrieussecq's response, 'La Fiction à la première personne ou l'écriture immorale', pp. 507–25. Laurens's 'Qui dit ça?' [see n. 15] returns to the quarrel. Annie Richard's 'Plagiat psychique' (<http://presSES.univ-lyon2.fr/files/AnnieRichard_1.pdf> [accessed 10 August 2012]) analyses what the dispute tells us about autofiction and the contemporary subject.

⁴⁰ In addition to 'La Fiction à la première personne ou l'écriture immorale' [see n. 39], see Marie Darrieussecq, *Rapport de police: accusations de plagiat et autres modes de surveillance de la fiction* (Paris: P.O.L., 2010).

⁴¹ Camille Laurens, *Romance nerveuse* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010). The early stages of the book retrace the affair, 'disguising' Darrieussecq as a writer named Dolorosa.

⁴² Boyle's concern (*Consuming Autobiographies* [see n. 3]) is with the image of the reader constructed by her chosen writers (Sarraute, Cixous, Péc, and Genet), with their reluctance to be 'consumed', and with the tactics they develop to discourage reader identification.

⁴³ Gill Rye, "Il faut que le lecteur soit dans le doute": Christine Angot's Literature of Uncertainty', in *Hybrid Voices, Hybrid Texts* [see n. 14], pp. 117–26; and 'Christine Angot et l'écriture de soi', in *Le Roman français de l'extrême contemporain* [see n. 19], pp. 423–39.

bringing readers and writers repeatedly to renegotiate the terms of their encounter. This renegotiation does not, however, imply loss of the rich connectivity attained through women's self-narrative.⁴⁴ Annie Richard notes the 'autorité inouïe' and the 'force illocutoire' of the autofictional 'I' and argues for the value to readers of its extreme vulnerability;⁴⁵ Darrieussecq's defence of autofiction points to the integrity involved in acknowledging 'la part de brouillage et de fiction due [...] à l'inconscient';⁴⁶ while Hélène Jaccomard argues that autofiction *does* offer a pact with the reader, if an oxymoronic one.⁴⁷ As a distinctive meeting place, autofiction prioritizes rehearsal, experiment, and adventure.

The sense of fracture and self-estrangement inherent in autofiction surfaces in specific ways in women's articulations of culturally hybrid identities. Analysing the work of women writers from Belgium (Nothomb and Suzanne Lilar), Senegal (Ken Bugul), the Caribbean (Maryse Condé), and Algeria (Bourauoui and Assia Djebar), Natalie Edwards and Christopher Hogarth's edited volume *This 'Self' Which Is Not One* probes the uses and effects of the fragmented and pluralized 'I'.⁴⁸ Hybridity, *métissage*, structural fragmentation, and multi-voicing are shown to be productive responses to inherently unstable subject positioning.

Exploring similar terrain, *Les en]Eux de l'autobiographie dans les littératures de langue française*, edited by Susanne Gehrmann and Claudia Gronemann, shows how writing from Québec, Africa, the Antilles, and the Maghreb disengages from Western logic.⁴⁹ Threaded through the volume's essays on Djebar, Bugul, Robin, Malika Mokeddem, and Nicole Brossart are investigations of uprooting, disinheritance, language, the body, indigenous literary traditions, and, importantly, of the stakes of coming to writing, self-situating, and finding voice as a woman within a specific sociocultural heritage. Françoise Simonet-Tenant probes related questions in a recent study,⁵⁰ while the effects of self-fictionalization and the deconstruction of autobiographical authority are analysed by Lisa McNee in an essay comparing the truth/fiction dichotomy in African writers Bugul, Mokeddem, and Marie-Thérèse Humbert.⁵¹ McNee detects in their work an

⁴⁴ Claims by Viart and Vercier that connectivity in women's writing has been displaced by individualism and irony ('Écritures féminines', in *La Littérature française au présent* [see n. 3], pp. 337–41) overlook the strong collective experiences and the shared concern with identity politics that still constitute meeting places for many women readers of autofiction.

⁴⁵ Richard, 'Plagiat psychique' [see n. 39], p. 11.

⁴⁶ Darrieussecq, 'L'Autofiction: un genre pas sérieux' [see n. 6], p. 377.

⁴⁷ Hélène Jaccomard, *Lecteur et lecture dans l'autobiographie française contemporaine* (Geneva: Droz, 1993). Jaccomard makes the argument à propos of Doubrovsky (pp. 81–101), but it is transferable.

⁴⁸ *This 'Self' Which Is Not One: Women's Life Writing in French*, ed. by Natalie Edwards and Christopher Hogarth (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010). See also Natalie Edwards, *Shifting Subjects: Plural Subjectivities in Contemporary Francophone Women's Autobiography* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

⁴⁹ *Les en]Eux de l'autobiographie dans les littératures de langue française: du genre à l'espace, l'autobiographie postcoloniale, l'hybridité*, ed. by Susanne Gehrmann and Claudia Gronemann (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).

⁵⁰ Françoise Simonet-Tenant, 'Francophonie et écritures de soi', in *Le Propre de l'écriture de soi*, ed. by F. Simonet-Tenant (Paris: Téraèdre, 2007), pp. 151–79.

⁵¹ Lisa McNee, 'Fantasmes du réel: le discours autobiographique chez les écrivaines francophones', in *Diversité culturelle et désir d'autobiographie dans l'espace francophone*, ed. by Driss Aïssoui (= special issue of *Dalbousie French Studies*, 70 (2005)), pp. 129–44. See also, on the unsettling of generic assumptions, Hélène Jaccomard and Jean-Marie Volet, 'Pacte autobiographique et écrivaines francophones d'Afrique noire', *Présence francophone*, 41 (1992), 9–26.

almost compulsive *mise en doute* of autobiographical authority and argues that autofictional strategies of self-camouflage and *brouillage de piste* allow simultaneously for exploratory opening up and self-protection of what she conceptualizes as nomadic identities.

Renée Larrier sees francophone Caribbean autofiction as a restorative counterweight to the legacy of muting endured in slavery, colonialism, and patriarchy.⁵² The autofictional 'I' is both witness and performer, 'restor[ing] subjectivity, construct[ing] a much-needed archive, disrupt[ing] conventional literary and cinematic representations, and chang[ing] our understanding of Martinican, Guadeloupian and Haitian communities'.⁵³ For Larrier, the principles of *danmyé*, a combat dance grounded in interaction, negotiation, improvisation, and positionality, inform the construction and ethos of Caribbean autofiction. The productive notion of autofictional 'dancing' is seen in Maryse Condé's writing, which, Larrier argues, subverts metropolitan practices of autofiction, allowing the 'I' to rove among characters and perspectives, and questioning the adequacy of single-witness testimony. Condé writes in such a way, argues Larrier, as to 'combine autofiction with collage text[ile]'.⁵⁴

What emerges from these studies is a sense of the enrichment of women's self-narrative by postcolonial theories and non-Western perspectives on subjectivity, authorship, writing, history, and memory. Autofiction is seen to be linked to promoting individual and social change and to constructing identity in situations of tension and in locations outside metropolitan France. It is precisely the study of what cultures beyond the Franco-French literary scene have been making of autofiction that was the subject of the second conference on the field at Cerisy-la-Salle (16–23 July 2012). Entitled 'Culture(S) et autofiction(S)' and organized by Isabelle Grell and Arnaud Genon, this forum focused on how autofictional writing has been transformed as it has been harnessed to express a wide range of cultural realities.⁵⁵ Debates pursued include autofictional practice in women writers from the Maghreb, political dimensions of women's autofiction, and the relation between autofiction and American post-feminism.

As a practice of the subject, autofiction exceeds the boundaries of discipline and media. Several critics have explored how Sophie Calle's mixed-media life narratives probe connections between autobiography and fictional scripts.⁵⁶ A key practitioner of specifically feminine autofictional practice, Calle powerfully explores vulnerability, returns magnetically to paradigmatic experiences of

⁵² Renée Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁵⁵ The programme is available on <autofiction.org>.

⁵⁶ For instance, Johnnie Gratton, 'Sophie Calle's *Des histoires vraies*: Irony and Beyond', in *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, ed. by Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), pp. 182–97; Filer (*Sophie Calle*)/*Shadowing* (*Sophie Calle*), ed. by Bernard Gervais and Maité Snauwaert (= *Intermédialités*, 7 (2006)); and Annie Richard, 'La Famille autofictive de Sophie Calle', in *Affaires de famille: The Family in Contemporary French Culture and Theory*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 139–50.

disappointed love, and defines her work as therapeutic — a way of ‘taking care of herself’.⁵⁷ Critical reception of Calle often reconnects women’s autofiction and narcissism, ignoring how, as Véronique Montémont and Françoise Simonet-Tenant argue, her capacious, polyphonically structured works make ample space for others.⁵⁸ If, as Mounir Laouyen observes, autofiction is ‘le lieu où le sujet se perd et se dissout dans la multiplicité’,⁵⁹ Calle’s installations and phototexts are surely exemplary of this phenomenon. The potential of photography within autofiction is explored in a recent cluster of self-narrative works by Ernaux, Laurens, Marie NDiaye, and Anne Brochet, each consisting of a written narrative haunted by embedded photographs, each questioning the status of (analogue) photography as evidence that might lead to the self.⁶⁰ NDiaye’s recalcitrant *Autoportrait en vert* is analysed by Daisy Connon as a phototextual exercise in ‘uncanny autofiction’ whose very subject is ‘the problematics of selfhood and self-representation’.⁶¹

A rich seam of autofictional experiment is to be found in women practitioners of the *bande dessinée*, wherein autofiction’s problematic of self-estrangement, as well as its potential of self-generation as other, are played out very concretely. In studies of autofictional cartoon art by practitioners such as Nine Antico, Florence Cestac, Élodie Durand, Lisa Mandel, Pauline Martin, and Aude Picault, Ann Miller analyses articulations of gender, depictions of the female body, and the widespread emphasis on mourning and loss.⁶² Miller also traces the articulation within women’s graphic autofiction of self-splitting across cultural divides, in work by Lebanese, Belgian, and Quebec creators as well as that of Iranian Marjan Satrapi.⁶³

Women’s self-narrative in film also tests fact/fiction boundaries, as Shana McGuire shows in a comparative analysis of work by Dominique Cabrera, Catherine Breillat, and Agnès Varda.⁶⁴ Varda’s complex, performative reinvention of her entire life in *Les Plages d’Agnès* (2008) shunts visual self-narrative into

⁵⁷ Sophie Calle, *Douleur exquise* (Arles: Actes sud, 2003) and *Prenez soin de vous* (Arles: Actes sud, 2007).

⁵⁸ Véronique Montémont and Françoise Simonet-Tenant, ‘Sophie Calle, *Douleur exquise*’, in *Métamorphoses du journal personnel: de Rétif de la Bretonne à Sophie Calle*, ed. by Catherine Viollet and Marie-Françoise Lemonnier-Delpy (Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2006), pp. 207–29.

⁵⁹ Laouyen, ‘Préface’, in *Les Nouvelles Autobiographies* [see n. 1], pp. 3–4.

⁶⁰ See Shirley Jordan, ‘Chronicles of Intimacy: Photography in Autobiographical Projects’, in *Textual and Visual Selves: Photography, Film, and Comic Art in French Autobiography*, ed. by Natalie Edwards, Amy L. Hubbell, and Ann Miller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pp. 51–77.

⁶¹ Daisy Connon, ‘Marie NDiaye’s Haunted House: Uncanny autofiction in *Autoportrait en vert*’, in *Redefining the Real* [see n. 18], pp. 245–60 (p. 245).

⁶² Ann Miller, ‘Gender and Autobiography’, in *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-Language Comic Strip* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), pp. 229–41. Miller’s studies of loss, mourning, and the body in women’s autofictional *bande dessinée* will appear in her monograph *Approximately Autobiographical* (forthcoming with University of Wales Press).

⁶³ Ann Miller, ‘Marjan Satrapi’s *Persepolis*: Eluding the Frames’, in *Watch This Space: Women’s Conceptualisations of Space in Contemporary French Film and Visual Art*, ed. by Marie-Claire Barnet and Shirley Jordan (= special issue of *L’Esprit créateur*, 51.1 (2011)), pp. 38–52. On *Persepolis* see also Hillary L. Chute, ‘Graphic Narrative as Witness: Marjan Satrapi and the Texture of Retracing’, in *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 135–73.

⁶⁴ Shana McGuire, ‘Vers un “nouveau réalisme intérieur”: l’autoreprésentation féminine à l’écran’, in *Diversité culturelle et désir d’autobiographie* [see n. 51], pp. 71–82.

some entirely new places.⁶⁵ Finally, web-based autofiction gives scope for innovation that has enthused practitioners such as Robin⁶⁶ and Delaume.⁶⁷ Delaume in particular, whose work is as yet under-studied, has created avatars and interactive autofictional games, tracing what will surely be some of autofiction's forthcoming terrain. Women's autofictional practices in French, then, are visual and intermedial as much as written.

Where traditional autobiography was seen by feminist critics as uncongenial to women, autofiction has proved singularly propitious. Women have played a significant role in shaping its evolution across media, but its fertility for feminine subjects remains under-theorized. Analysis of individual practitioners is scattered over a range of critical works where gender is seldom a central analytic thread and where links to the broader history of women's self-narrative are made only patchily. There is a need for more concerted study of individual practitioners and also, more broadly, of the formal and thematic features that have become dominant in women's self-narrative in French since autofiction displaced autobiography. What are the distinctive ways in which women inflect the autofictional 'script' as they use it to shape their experience?⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Claire Boyle's 'Self-Fictions and Film: Varda's Transformative Technology of the Self in *Les Plages d'Agnès*', in *Fictions de soi/Self Fictions* [see n. 6], pp. 59–71. Boyle sees Varda's autofictional film as self-enabling and argues that it demonstrates a 'Foucauldian ethos of care of the self' (p. 60). See also Mireille Brioude 'Varda et l'autoportrait fragmenté: du film à l'exposition', *Image & Narrative*, 19 (2007), <<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/autofiction/brioude.htm>> [accessed 10 August 2012].

⁶⁶ Robin, *Le Golem de l'écriture* [see n. 21].

⁶⁷ See the special issue of *Le Matricule des anges*, 100 (February 2009) on Delaume.

⁶⁸ I allude here to Michael Sheringham's 'Changing the Script: Women Writers and the Rise of Autobiography', in *A History of Women's Writing in France*, ed. by Sonya Stephens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 185–203.