CHAPTER 1

Introduction: From Autofiction to the Autofictional

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The apparent simplicity of the etymology of "autofiction"—designating texts that have something to do with the self and with fiction—is belied by the proliferation of meanings and practices with which it is associated. Critical writing on autofiction will usually mention one or more of the following characteristics, all of which can characterize autofictional texts, but none of which is unique or defining: a combination of real and invented elements; onomastic correspondence between author and character or narrator; and stylistic and linguistic experimentation. Where critics or theorists focus more on the context of production and reception, we also find references to a double pact—autobiographical and fictional—or to a combination of, or oscillation between, reading modes. Perhaps the only thing on which everyone can agree is indeed that basic etymological claim: autofiction has something to do with the self and with fiction. But even this

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seems to be up for debate, as several recent autofictional practitioners have proclaimed a turn away from fiction. Sheila Heti, for example, has said that she is "[i]ncreasingly […] less interested in writing about fictional people, because it seems so tiresome to make up a fake person and put them through the paces of a fake story" (Heti 2007). Heti's lack of interest in invented people does not equate to a rejection of any form of fictionality, of course, but it nonetheless puts strain on the term "autofiction." So too does Rachel Cusk's comment, in a review essay on Yiyun Li's work, that, while the denominator "novel" has become a norm for autofictional texts, this is difficult to justify, "especially when the work cannot be understood without its autobiographical basis" (2019).

The impossibility of reaching a satisfactory consensus on the definition of autofiction prompts arguments that it is best to dispose of the term altogether, to replace it with "life writing," perhaps with the addition of a modifier such as "experimental" or "hybrid." It quickly becomes apparent, however, that such labels do little to delineate the specific kinds of hybridity and experimentalism we find in autofictional texts, and would hence lose the conceptual focus that "autofiction" provides. The term is clearly problematic, possibly flawed, which may have to do with Serge Doubrovsky's coining it in passing to describe one particular book, *Fils* (1977). Doubrovsky himself clearly felt that it needed further development, having proposed various descriptions of autofiction in the course of his career (see, e.g., Dix 2018, 2–5; and Wagner-Egelhaaf, this volume). Many other writers, critics, and theorists have since contributed to revising, fine-tuning, and often also challenging autofiction as a concept—a process that began in French criticism and then spread more widely. The term and concept are now firmly established in German-language, Anglophone, and Scandinavian criticism (for an overview of the term's development, see, for instance, Jones 2010; Ferreira-Meyers 2018), but has not yet caught on globally, as we will see in the discussion of Egyptian literature and literary criticism in this volume (Chap. 11). Autofiction, it seems, requires continuous reconsideration in order to accommodate the variety of texts that writers, critics, and readers feel should be discussed under the label. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, autofiction as term, concept, and literary practice persists and is thriving more than ever.

A recent issue of *The Times Literary Supplement* speaks of a current "fashion for autofiction" and features an article by Alice Attlee, in which she acknowledges the "booming popularity of autofiction," as well as the difficulty of defining it as a genre, claiming that "it requires if not a new,

then a reconsidered, critical response" (2019). Armine Kotin Mortimer (2009, 22) proclaimed over ten years ago that a "consensus definition has become impossible," and perceives "a collective will to blur the boundaries of the genre as much as possible: the more fluid the definition, the happier the collective thinking is." Hywel Dix, too, begins his 2018 edited volume on *Autofiction in English* by stressing "that there is no single definition of autofiction either in English or in French" (2). Dix also reminds us, however, in a comparison with the history of the concept of intertextuality, that the development and extension of applications of a term need not mean loss of meaning or imprecision. Rather, they can be taken positively as "symptoms of a rich, vibrant and expanding field" (9). The introductory text to the website autofiction.org, dedicated to the discussion of the concept and of autofictional texts, offers a similarly optimistic description of autofiction's indefinability:

> Autofiction has established itself as one of the most open and lively fields in contemporary literature. It is a complex notion to define, connected to the author's defiance with regard to autobiography, *romans à clef*, the constraints or illusions of transparency; a notion that is enhanced by its many extensions even as it robustly resists the incessant attacks to which it is subjected. (autofiction.org, n.d.; our translation)

This volume embraces the openness of autofiction as a concept, as well as the critical dialogue it has inspired. The chapters, both individually and collectively, offer innovative responses to a continuously flourishing literary phenomenon. These responses include reflections from several critics who have contributed substantially to shaping our understanding of autofiction in recent years, and who offer new perspectives here, as well as contributions from new voices that expand on and challenge established approaches.

The shift from the noun and genre-descriptor "autofiction" to the adjective "autofictional," in this study's title, creates the necessary flexibility for extending and revising our understanding of the concept. While some individual chapters do propose possible definitions of autofiction, including new subcategories of autofictional texts, the volume as a whole does not aim to arrive at a uniform definition, and much less to impose one. Instead, it expressly extends the texts and phenomena that can be considered autofictional and fosters a dialogue between a range of different approaches and case studies in order to foreground the diversity of

autofictional practice and criticism. It explores the autofictional as a mode, moment, and strategy that can appear in a variety of texts across time. As part of this cross-disciplinary approach, the volume considers how autofictional strategies relate to, work in, and work with different text types and media, such as photography, film, the diary, and the self-portrait. There is a strong focus, moreover, on the effects, or potential effects, of autofictional techniques, signals, and structures within a given literary work, as well as on its context of production and reception.

This approach allows us to bring into view texts, forms, and media that have not traditionally been considered in the light of their autofictional dimensions, to illustrate the many affordances of autofiction as theoretical lens and aesthetic strategy, and to propose new ways of exploring autofictional writing and its surrounding structures. Authors in this study do speak of autofiction as a genre but also of modes of autofictional writing and modes of autofictional reading, of an autofictional sense of self and of an autofictional approach to self-presentation, of how texts create and enhance a sense of the autofictional, and of degrees of autofictionality. The different chapters feature many major names that commonly arise in discussions of autofiction (including Doubrovsky, Annie Ernaux, Hervé Guibert, Christine Angot, Felicitas Hoppe, Jenny Diski, Philip Roth, Cusk, Olivia Laing, Siri Hustvedt, Ben Lerner, and Karl Ove Knausgaard) but also draw our attention to the autofictional dimensions of texts which have barely featured, if at all, in the conversation to date. The latter include precursors—writers who developed autofictional techniques before Doubrovsky's coinage of the term, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Claude Cahun, and Doris Lessing—and contemporary authors who are more typically discussed under headings such as postcolonialism or cosmopolitanism rather than autofiction, including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Justin Cartwright.

Certainly, this volume's extension of the concept of autofiction means a broad application, perhaps too broad for the likings of some, but the chapters assembled here demonstrate what is gained from an encompassing approach of this kind. It sparks a productive discussion of the phenomena that cluster around a certain kind of text, one that remains difficult to pin down not least because a dominant (but again, by no means defining) characteristic of autofictional writing is that it challenges conventions, resisting traditional autobiographical and novelistic modes but also constantly reinventing itself.

It is through the volume's broadening of the parameters of the term and concept that the diversity and global range of autofictional practice becomes apparent. As the conversation on autofiction thus far has taken place principally in Western Europe and North America, the case studies that typically take center stage are from these same traditions. French, Anglophone, German, and Scandinavian texts make up the most iconic examples, as critics and authors reflect on, and clash over, the application of "autofiction" as a genre label; works by Knausgaard, Angot, and Hoppe have triggered some of the more public and virulent of these debates. In each of these contexts, autofictional practice has proliferated together with the term's increasing embeddedness in critical discourse. The state of the field elsewhere in Europe, however, and indeed globally, varies considerably. Despite Spain's geographical and cultural proximity to France, Spanish texts have featured very infrequently to date in international discussions on the autofictional (see, e.g., Manuel Alberca 2007). Likewise, in Italy, while Elena Ferrante's "Neapolitan Novels" have recently received attention as an example of "autofiction," there is certainly a need for further investigation of Italian autofictional works. Lucia Boldrini and Julia Novak, in their volume *Experiments in Autobiography: Intersections of Auto/Biography and Fiction* (2017), make strides in including case studies from European countries that are typically underrepresented in discussions of life writing, referring to Spanish, Italian, and Austrian literature, although only Spanish Mexican author Jordi Soler's work is discussed explicitly as an autofictional experiment. An important body of work is slowly emerging on autofictional practices in other European countries (to give two examples, Lut Missinne discusses Dutch autofictional works [2013, 2019] and Stavrini Ioannidou's doctoral thesis has put forward a case for the existence of autofiction in Greek literature even before the emergence of the term [2013]). The website autofiction.org provides helpful, albeit inevitably selective and incomplete, lists of autofictional works from Latin America, the Caribbean, the Arab world, and Africa. Although these are important steps toward broadening our perception of autofictional texts, they also show that there is clearly still much need for a more inclusive perspective and much room for future research.

In *The Autofictional*, we take a further step toward a more global perspective by shining a light on select underrepresented practices, traditions, and cultures, both within and outside of Europe, and by putting these into dialogue with the more established traditions. This volume does not only establish the presence of the autofictional in other cultures, forms, and

media but also demonstrates how the inclusion of these diverse examples challenges and develops current conceptions of the autofictional. The *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction* (2019), edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, is pioneering in providing an overview of autobiographical practices across the globe and in different media. The present volume instigates a dialogue between several case studies and forms that the handbook brings into view, with a specific focus on the autofictional, rather than on autobiographical life-writing practices more generally. It addresses, for example, the correspondences between autofiction and the Japanese tradition of the I-novel, the function of the autofictional in documentary cinema and that of the diary in the autofictional, and vice versa. The volume considers the affordance of autofictional techniques in contemporary South African self-portraiture and the potential role that the incorporation of the term could play in the reception of life writing in the Arabic tradition. As well as establishing possible connections between these cultures, forms, and media, this dialogue also testifies to the very different ways in which the autofictional functions across different places and times.

To date, few studies on autofiction have attempted to start this kind of conversation. Dix's *Autofiction in English* addresses cultural specificities, asking whether the concept is applied in the same way in Anglophone works as it is in the French context, or whether the concept itself changes and evolves upon entering new cultural contexts (2018, 9). He concludes that certain characteristics play a more conspicuous role in the British tradition than they do in the French: these include intersubjectivity, seriality, metafiction, and intertextuality, as well as attention to the therapeutic possibilities of the act of writing. Karen Ferreira-Meyers notes in addition that, in the Anglophone world, autofiction is perceived primarily as a mode rather than as a genre (2018, 41). Laura Marcus's contribution to the present volume further develops such comparisons by demonstrating that French autofictional works exhibit features that are not as prevalent in British ones, particularly the prominent intersection of photography and narrative. In this volume, the French tradition remains a crucial part of the discussion and an important reference point in many of the chapters, but it is brought into dialogue with a broad range of traditions, with the effect of reshaping, expanding, and enriching our understanding of the autofictional.

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In light of the recognition that "autofiction" as a term is problematic and that a consensus definition is neither attainable nor necessarily desirable, Part I of this study considers how we might find new, productive ways of approaching autofiction and the autofictional. Wagner-Egelhaaf opens with "Five Theses on Autofiction/the Autofictional," and her first thesis is one on which this volume's overall approach is based; namely, that we still need the term and that the critical discussion which surrounds it is of value for how it continuously challenges us to reconsider the concept and the texts we discuss in relation to it. She shows the advantages of an open and flexible understanding of the autofictional as a conceptual matrix with scalable parameters. From this perspective we see the autofictional as a latent dimension of autobiographical writing in general (her second thesis) and understand that imagined and supernatural elements can support autobiographical reference (her third thesis) and that there is an oscillation between fictionality and factuality in autofictional texts (her fifth thesis). Her approach is rooted in a performative understanding of writing, which becomes most evident in her fourth thesis when she elaborates on the "Strange Loops and Real Effects" of her chapter's title: she considers how art and life cross-influence one another insofar as the fictional affects our perception of the real, and shows this to be true not only for her contemporary examples (Doubrovsky, Knausgaard, Hoppe, and Thomas Glavinic) but also for Goethe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In an important response to the problematics inherent in the combination of the constituents "auto" and "fiction," Alison James asks what exactly is "The Fictional in Autofiction." She shows in a discussion of works by Ernaux, Cusk, Laing, Knausgaard, Christophe Boltanski, and Camille Laurens how narratological and rhetorical theories of fictionality can help discern different forms and degrees of fictionality in autofictional texts, thus enabling us to better understand the workings of this type of writing, and how autofictional practice in turn helps refine theories of fiction and fictionality. James proposes, for example, the important distinction between fictionality and fictionalization, the latter term describing the transposition of real-life elements into fictional form. Finally, her approach brings to light the various effects that distinct configurations of the interplay of fact and fiction in autofictional texts can create, a dimension subsequently explored in more detail in the chapters by Alexandra Effe and Alison Gibbons, and by Arnaud Schmitt, as well as throughout Part II of this volume.

Effe and Gibbons offer a "Cognitive Perspective on Autofictional Writing, Texts, and Reading." They argue for the necessity of considering textual signposts in combination with the cognitive-affective dynamics of production and reception of a given text. They note that existing accounts of autofictional writing and reading rely primarily on the conjectures of individual critics, and propose that we should consider instead how authors themselves describe their acts of autofictionalization, and what we can surmise about readers' responses on the basis of empirical research into textual processing. Effe and Gibbons approach the three constituents of their holistic approach through data from self-reports by the three authors of their case studies (Roth, Laing, and Lerner), through empirical, psychological studies into differences between fictional and factual reading modes, and through close textual analysis of the formal makeup of *The Facts* (1988), *Crudo* (2018), and *10:04* (2014). They simultaneously extend and fine-tune definitions of autofiction by offering definitions of autofictional modes of writing and autofictional modes of reading. Their focus on both author and reader, and on psychological motivations and cognitive effects, allows them to show potential affordances and effects of autofictional modes, thus looking ahead to those illustrated in Part II.

Schmitt suggests moving away from trying to define what autofiction is and toward describing how it works, that is, toward "The Pragmatics of Autofiction." Taking up an example from the previous chapter—Lerner's *10:04*—and adding Siri Hustvedt's *Memories of the Future* (2019), he provides us with helpful terminological distinctions for approaching the workings of autofictional texts with more precision, specifically for describing which textual and paratextual elements invite an autofictional reading. He distinguishes between primary, necessary characteristics and secondary, supplementary ones. Without onomastic correspondence—which in autofictional texts often takes the form of a first name or initials, thus simultaneously inviting and resisting the identification of author and character—autofiction, in his understanding of the term, cannot exist. Recognizing that, while this criterion may be necessary, it is not sufficient in and of itself as autofiction ultimately depends on the reader, Schmitt argues that autofiction really only exists if readers make the connections between author and character that the text offers and find them fruitful. Other characteristics such as metafictional elements, the foregrounding of the fallibility of memory (thematically and through narrative strategies), and apostrophic addresses to readers are not absolutely necessary but enhance the sense of the autofictional (hence his designation of them as

"enhancers"). Overall, the chapter foregrounds the importance of peritextual but also epitextual material in the reception of texts as autofictional. The latter becomes crucial in particular for the application of the concept to texts not previously or usually discussed under the label of "autofiction," such as the postcolonial and Egyptian texts in Chaps. 10 and 11.

Part I closes with Ricarda Menn and Melissa Schuh's chapter on how to approach "The Autofictional in Serial, Literary Works." They take up Doubrovsky's focus (in his initial definition of the term "autofiction") on the fragmentation of the self in order to pay more attention to the incompleteness that is characteristic of autofictional projects. Menn and Schuh therefore invite us to consider how this takes form in serialized publications and show what it means to consider an author's entire oeuvre or a series of works as a dynamic site of self-expression and as an autofictional act. They propose considering serial, literary autofiction as a distinct subcategory of autofictional texts, and distinguish between different forms of seriality. With reference to texts ranging from the early twentieth to the twenty-first century—Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915–1938), Lessing's autobiographical, fictional, and hybrid works, and Cusk's *Outline* trilogy (2014–2018)—they show how serial publications and structures challenge autobiographical unity and coherence, and how, in so doing, they productively interconnect with, and enhance, these thematic and representational concerns in autofictional texts. They argue that autofictional and serialized forms of self-writing present a discontinuous, non-linear, contingent, and multi-faceted sense of self—what we might, in other words, call an autofictional sense of self.

Each of the five chapters in Part I offers a distinct, and distinctly new, way of approaching the autofictional. The connections and variations between them come to light in the overlaps in the selection of authors and texts discussed. For instance, we see Lerner's *10:04* approached with a cognitive perspective on autofictional modes of writing and reading, and with a focus on pragmatic ways of signaling ambiguity over the proximity between author and character. We consider Cusk's *Outline* trilogy with regard to the question of what precisely is fictional and fictionalized in this work, and from the angle of her serial form of self-presentation; and we are invited to think about what kind of fact/fiction configuration is at play in Laing's *Crudo*, as well as about the potential cognitive affordances her act of autofictionalization has for her and for her readers. By rethinking the theoretical and methodological bounds of what is autofictional and how we can study it, this part of the volume opens up the discussion to the

wide spectrum of forms and contexts of the autofictional that are explored in the remainder of the volume.

Part II considers the affordances and effects of autofiction as a literary strategy. Examining the autofictional as both a writing and reading technique, the chapters focus on what is gained from the application and extension of the term, and from the adoption of autofictional practices. Hanna Meretoja shows, under the title of "Metanarrative Autofiction," how what she views as a new twenty-first-century subgenre of autofictional texts affords new perspectives on, and has the potential to heighten, the collective narrative agency of readers and writers. She understands by "metanarrativity" a kind of self-reflexive storytelling that critically engages with larger cultural narrative templates and their role in how we make sense of our lives. Using the examples of Ernaux's *Les Années* (*The Years*) (2008), Knausgaard's *Min kamp* (*My Struggle*) (2009–2011), and Finnish singer-songwriter Astrid Swan's *Viimeinen kirjani* (2019, *My Last Book*), Meretoja illustrates how the texts comment on and offer alternatives to existing master-narratives about aging, illness, masculinity, or fatherhood. Autofictional texts, she shows, are particularly well placed to alert us to the ways in which our lives and our self-understanding are determined by dominant and normative cultural narrative models. They also help us to challenge these narratives, and to actively choose the ones we use to interpret our lives and selves because autofiction often pivots on the relation between what is real and what is imaginary, and on the relation between our lives and their narrativization.

Helle Egendal continues the exploration of the affordance of the autofictional for exposing normative social models in "Multilingual Autofiction: Mobilizing Language(s)." She argues that in post-migrant literature published since the 1990s, a new mode, multilingual autofiction, has emerged that highlights and resists the monocultural assumptions shaping the social and political context in which the respective texts are published. Her three case studies, written by German-Turkish, Swedish-Tunisian, and Danish-Palestinian authors, demonstrate that this mode transverses different countries and cultures. Egendal considers both the aesthetic scope and the political potential of this autofictional mode, in which the authors use polyphony and polyglossia to express and negotiate their multilingual identities. The flexibility and diversity that the autofictional affords in this respect is further mobilized in these texts to penetrate political discourses on migration, transculturality, and racism. By considering the reception of

these texts and the public engagement of their authors, Egendal directs our focus to the political and social affordances of the autofictional.

Turning our attention to the autofictional in the visual arts, Ferreira-Meyers and Bontle Tau continue the discussion of social affordances in "Visual Autofiction: A Strategy for Cultural Inclusion." They argue that the autofictional is being employed in the creative practice of contemporary South African artists to initiate cultural inclusion within a field that has historically favored European visual narratives and excluded many others. Focusing on Tau's self-portrait photography, they explore the ways in which the autofictional enables a practice of self-narration which is ever-changing in terms of the viewpoints adopted and offered. The role-playing and constant repositioning of selves and stories that autofictional techniques afford offers a means through which artists can figuratively insert themselves into the Western tradition of portraiture: Tau assumes the classical postures in which white, Western women have typically been represented, and in so doing highlights the virtual absence of black protagonists in the canon. Ferreira-Meyers and Tau consider how autofictional self-portraiture highlights the skewed nature of representation in this tradition, and how it might better accommodate the diversity of selves and stories of creative practitioners.

Dix's chapter "Autofiction, Post-conflict Narratives, and New Memory Cultures" demonstrates the affordance of autofictional techniques for creating new forms of public commemoration. This affordance is utilized in particular, he argues, by contemporary postcolonial writers in post-conflict societies. Focusing on Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Cartwright's *Up Against the Night* (2015), Dix shows how both texts use autofictional structures and techniques to forge a form of cultural memory of the Nigerian Biafran War of 1967–1970 and of the massacre of Zulus by Boers in 1838, respectively. In both cases, this form of cultural memory is simultaneously individual (albeit concerning events before the authors' lifetime) and collective, and aspires to post-conflict reconciliation. Dix's analysis foregrounds the importance of the context of reception and of the paratextual and intertextual signals that invite autofictional readings in the absence of onomastic correspondence. His analysis of Adichie's and Cartwright's works through an autofictional lens enables an enriched understanding of their effects and of how these are engendered—an understanding achieved through his extension of the term.

Hala Kamal, Fatma Atef Massoud, and Zainab Magdy subsequently explore this extension of the term in "Autofiction as a Lens for Reading

Contemporary Egyptian Writing." In a literary tradition where "autofiction" has not yet entered into the critical discourse and life writing is typically situated within the domain of biographical and historical studies, the authors demonstrate the affordances of autofiction as a strategy for writing and reading Egyptian texts. Using three different case studies, Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964), Radwa Ashour's *Atiaf* (*Specters*) (1999), and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2010), they consider evidence of autofictional readings in the texts' reception, how the authors themselves invite autofictional readings through the use of paratextual material and self-reflexive commentary, and how the concept of the autofictional might resist the dominant trend in critical reception of reading women's writing as being straightforwardly autobiographical. Their readings highlight the insights that adopting the autofictional as a critical lens can provide into constructions of identity, memory, and experience at the intersections of reality and the imagination in Egyptian literature.

Together, the chapters in Part II testify to the value of extending the concept of the autofictional to encompass a variety of texts, traditions, and cultures. Inviting new kinds of examples and new voices into the discussion brings to light the many dimensions of the autofictional and the reach of its engagement with narratives of identity beyond the bounds of the text. The social, political, and literary affordances of autofictional techniques and readings emerge powerfully in these chapters and, as we have seen, are centrally linked to form. The final section explores in depth the manifold forms that the autofictional can take and with which it engages, and some of the diverse media in which it can be found.

Part III of the volume discusses how the autofictional functions in different forms and media (the diary, the Japanese I-novel, the literary self-portrait, film, and photography), and how these forms and media work in turn in autofictional texts. Through the lens of this range of case studies, the section demonstrates the insights that are gained from the inclusion of diverse socio-historical, cultural, and political contexts in conversations on the autofictional. Anna Forné and Patricia López-Gay explore the affordances of autofiction as they emerge in a different medium in "Autofiction and Film: Archival Practices in Post-Millennial Documentary Cinema in Argentina and Spain." Focusing on films that respond to two different crises, they approach the autofictional as a contemporary cinematic mode that can unsettle the paradigm of the archive as static evidence of a given reality. The first part of the chapter engages with the documentary trilogy *Los rubios* (*The Blonds*) (2003), *Restos* (*Remains*) (2010), and *Cuatreros*

(*Rustlers*) (2016), directed by Albertina Carri. Carri's parents were among the 30,000 people "disappeared" by the military during the last dictatorship in Argentina, and the trilogy reflects on the resulting crisis of memory construction for the second generation. The second part discusses the self-reflexive responses of Spanish filmmakers to the Iberian financial crisis in Mercedes Álvarez's *Mercado de futuros* (*Futures Market*) (2011) and Víctor Erice's *Vidros partidos: Testes para um filme em Portugal* (*Broken Windows: Tests for a Film in Portugal*) (2012). In exploring what they describe as the aesthetics of ambiguity that underpins these films, Forné and López-Gay demonstrate the ways in which the autofictional reveals and challenges the generic limits of documentary film, and invites new reflections on processes of memory construction.

Justyna Kasza turns to a very different cultural context in "Autofiction and *Shishōsetsu*: Women Writers and Reinventing the Self" to draw out the relationship between autofiction and another form with which it has not traditionally been linked: the Japanese I-novel. Kasza notes that the link between language and the reinvention of the self in literature comes to the fore in *shishōsetsu*, a form which originates in the lack of a fixed and stable first-person pronoun in Japanese. Yet, despite the seeming cultural specificity of this form, *shishōsetsu* has much in common with the autofictional in its scope for modifying, creating, and re-creating the supposedly unitary self, as well as with the debates that surround the label. Both concepts prove elusive in attempts to establish a fixed definition, and both labels are as often rejected as they are accepted by the authors to whose work they are applied. Kasza investigates this relationship in depth in relation to three contemporary women writers: Kanai Mieko, Sagisawa Megumu, and Mizumura Minae, who use the form to negotiate national, lingual, and gender identities and to redefine the self. By putting the two forms into conversation, she shows that *shishōsetsu* exceeds the borders of national literature and expands the scope of discussions of the autofictional, which rarely feature Japanese works.

Sam Ferguson proposes that there is also an important, and largely unexplored, relationship between "Autofiction and the Diary." He argues that the diary, a form often perceived as "antifictional," has in fact played a key role in shaping the practices of the generation of French autofictional writers that emerged in the 1990s. Ferguson proposes that there is a shift in autofiction from its orientation toward autobiographical modes of writing in the previous generation, visible in Doubrovsky's work as well as the work of writers including Roland Barthes, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and

Marguerite Duras, toward a diaristic mode of writing. He takes Guibert and Angot to be the key proponents in this reorientation, and through close analysis of their experimental writing projects in *Voyage avec deux enfants* (*Journey with Two Children*, 1982) and *Léonore, toujours* (*Léonore, Always*, 1993), respectively, he shows how the diary serves as the basis from which the authors challenge established literary forms and forge new approaches to writing the self. The dialogue he uncovers between the diary and the autofictional complicates the modalities of truth, fiction, and self-representation in both forms.

The final two chapters focus on different forms in the French context, drawing them into dialogue with British literature. Ben Grant reflects on the relationship between "Autofiction and Self-Portraiture" in the literary tradition, as it is defined by Michel Beaujour. The two are united, Grant argues, in opposing autobiography's claim to giving a "truthful" account of its subject, but while autofiction does so primarily by emphasizing fictional constructions of the self, self-portraiture primarily foregrounds the self's fragmentary nature. Grant proposes that we should regard self-portraiture and autofiction as two poles in life writing, which represent two different conceptions of the self, but which can coexist with varying degrees of visibility. He explores this coexistence in the work of British writer Diski and French author and photographer Cahun, arguing that while both their oeuvres invite autofictional readings, they should be seen first and foremost as self-portraitists. Starting from the very different relationship between narcissism and creativity that emerges in self-portraiture compared to in autobiographical writing, Grant analyzes the points of intersection and divergence the two traditions self-portraiture and autofiction.

Remaining in the field of visual self-representation, Laura Marcus's chapter traces the relationship she discerns between "Autofiction and Photography." Rather than representing the reflected self, she observes, visual artist and literary autobiographer alike turn inward to find their self-image. Marcus analyzes the ways in which photography has intensified and reshaped the relationship between memory, image, and text in literary self-representation. She argues that the connections between life writing, memory, and photography are at their most prominent in autofictional works, in which photographs become an important site for their play with the porous boundary between autobiography and fiction. Her comparative study explores the role that photographs play in negotiating shifting identities, with a specific focus on images of seeing and mirroring. She

turns first to transsexual life-writing texts by Anglophone authors, in which she sees a striking incidence between photographs and self-representation, before considering the relationship between photography and/as absence in the work of Ernaux. Marcus demonstrates that there is a compelling link between the intersections of the visual and verbal, photography and narrative, in these texts and those of the autofictional mode, and explores the prevalence of this phenomenon in French literature compared with its British counterpart.

As a whole, Part III demonstrates how a comparison of the autofictional across different forms, media, and cultures reveals its diversity, range, and global reach, and the many shapes it can assume at different times and in different contexts. The connections uncovered in these comparisons offer insight into the function of the autofictional in these literary and visual forms and media, and into how these work in turn in autofictional texts. Perhaps most importantly, these chapters show, as does the volume overall, how our understanding of the autofictional, and of its different forms and affordances, is enhanced when they are approached from diverse angles and drawn into dialogue.

This dialogue takes place within chapters, within sections, and across them. Schmitt's, Effe and Gibbons's, and Dix's chapters all underscore the importance of considering how exactly autofictional texts trigger a certain kind of reading, and to what effect. Menn and Schuh investigate how these effects can be created across a series of works, and this serial staging of the self in autofictional writing resonates with the visual staging of the self in different guises and across time that Ferreira-Meyers and Tau explore. Their contribution on self-portrait photography speaks to Grant's chapter on literary self-portraiture, and together the visual and the literary tradition serve as the starting point for Marcus's analysis of the role of photographs in autofictional texts. Ferguson draws a parallel between the symbolic attachment to the truth that the photograph represents and the role of the diary in developing this French autofictional practice. The productive, yet paradoxical, relationship that transpires between these two forms invites comparison, too, with Kasza's exploration of autofiction and *shishōsetsu*, a form considered to be rooted in the specifics of the Japanese language, but whose scope is shown through this comparison to be much wider.

That the dialogue between autofiction and *shishōsetsu* invites us to rethink our understanding of both forms testifies to the gains of an expanded concept of autofiction and the autofictional for critical

readings. The new insights that autofiction as a critical lens affords are prominent in Kamal, Massoud, and Magdy's discussion of Egyptian life writing. An important insight gained in their application of autofiction as a concept to Arab literature is that autofiction's affordances are not only literary and critical but also political and social, a perspective that emerges powerfully in Egendal's study of transcultural autobiographical literature, in Dix's discussion of postcolonial texts in post-conflict societies, and in Forné and López-Gay's exploration of Argentinian and Spanish documentary cinema. All three of these chapters illustrate the potential that Meretoja describes for the autofictional to challenge dominant cultural narrative models. This grounds the practice's real-world relevance, which comes to the fore in Wagner-Egelhaaf's discussion of Doubrovsky's autofictional works. Effe and Gibbons's holistic and cognitive approach to autofictional texts, and modes of writing and reading, offers a new way of substantiating our critical hypotheses on such real-life effects. In the volume's various extensions and modifications of term and concept, James's chapter helps us to differentiate between the kinds of fictionalization and modes of fictionality we find in different autofictional texts.

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Across the chapters, we see autofictional practice and criticism take many different shapes, and it is on these differences as much as on the intersections between chapters and approaches that this volume's contribution is based. The volume sets out to expand the concept with a view to creating a heterogeneous, malleable, and ongoing discourse on the autofictional. Our hope is that, in the reading of this volume, many more connections and comparisons will be made, and many more conversations on the autofictional will take place. Overall, the volume offers the kind of "reconsidered, critical response" that Attlee calls for in her recent article on autofiction. Perhaps, as the conversation develops, we will turn more toward the pragmatics of autofiction, and adopt a holistic and cognitive perspective, focusing on how, why, and in which contexts authors write texts that readers perceive as autofictional. Perhaps we will pay more attention to autofictional strategies and structures as they emerge across an author's oeuvre, or in intertextual relations between parts of a series. Perhaps we will be more open to recognizing autofictional moments in

works that do not seem to fit the generic category, as well as in media other than literature: visual art, photography, painting, and film, to name but a few. Perhaps, in adopting this more encompassing approach, we will be receptive to the ways in which our understanding of texts from countries and literary traditions where autofiction does not (yet) exist as a concept changes if we approach them through an autofictional lens, and to how such texts can, in turn, enrich and transform our understanding of autofiction and the autofictional.

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