CHAPTER 2

Of Strange Loops and Real Effects: Five Theses on Autofiction/the Autofictional

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Critical thinking works productively by perpetually reconsidering terms and concepts. This is evident, for example, in the case of Sigmund Freud's concept of narcissism and Michel Foucault's notion of discourse. Both of these terms have prompted a range of interpretations and revisions, by these theorists themselves as well as by other critics. One could say that the more flexible and contested a term, the more lively and stimulating the critical debate about it. In this chapter, it will become evident that the debate around and criticism of autofiction should, in fact, be considered evidence of the strength of the concept, at least as long as one is open to a flexible mode of thinking.

Since its 1977 appearance on the cover of Serge Doubrovsky's *Fils* in its oft-quoted, but somewhat enigmatic, description "Fiction, of strictly real events and facts; *autofiction* if you like"[1] (Groneman 2019a, 241), the term "autofiction" has seen a lively reception in literary studies, especially in research on the genre of autobiography. The term's—or rather the

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A. Effe, H. Lawlor (eds.), *The Autofictional*, Palgrave Studies in Life Writing, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78440-9_2

concept's—career started in France where, in the following years, writers and critics such as Jacques Lecarme, Vincent Colonna, Marie Darrieussecq, and Philippe Gasparini picked up, deepened, and diversified the discussion (Doubrovsky, Lecarme, and Lejeune 1993; Darrieussecq 1996; Colonna 1989, 2004; Gasparini 2008; Grell 2014; autofiction.org, n.d.). Doubrovsky's term soon made its way into other European academic contexts (Groneman 1999; Wagner-Egelhaaf 2013; Casas 2012). The English-speaking world remained reluctant for a long time, perhaps because in the Anglophone context the common umbrella term "life writing" already encompasses modes between fact and fiction. Whereas many scholars, mostly of the younger generation, quickly picked up the term "autofiction," others have remained skeptical. For instance, Beatrice Sandberg, who wrote on Karl Ove Knausgaard's autobiographical book project *Min kamp* (*My Struggle*) in 2013, well before the international Knausgaard hype started, declared that we do not need the term "autofiction" as we have "autobiographical writing" (or "autobiographisches Schreiben" in German) to describe texts that practice a less traditional form of autobiographical writing (Sandberg 2013, 374–375; see also Schmitt 2010). Indeed, one can easily argue that there is no need for the term "autofiction" on the basis that we have the terms "life writing" and "autobiographical writing." These terms are, without a doubt, useful umbrella terms that cover different forms of (auto)biographical testimony. However, when it comes to differentiating and specifying these forms, a more systematic and refined terminology is needed.

What has furthermore made critics skeptical about the term "autofiction" is that, from the beginning, critics have appropriated the concept in their own way, interpreting it according to their own needs and critical background. Certainly, there is a difference between conceiving autofiction as, for instance, a "linguistic adventure" (Doubrovsky 1993, 207; my translation) and as self-fictionalization (see Genette 1982, 293). The German critic Frank Zipfel has differentiated three definitions of autofiction in one and the same essay. First, Zipfel argues, autofiction can designate the constructive mode of every autobiography; second, texts where the author and the protagonist share the same name in combination with an index of fictionality; and, third, texts in which we find an oscillation between the autobiographical and the novelistic pact, as they have been conceived of by Philippe Lejeune (Zipfel 2009, 284–314, 299). Doubrovsky himself has, in the course of the debate on autofiction, stressed various aspects or elements that are crucial to the concept in his

opinion: the autobiographer presents himself or herself as an ordinary person and makes the self interesting by means of writing, the autobiographical and novelistic (or fictional) pacts are both subscribed to at the same time, self-invention happens through the process of remembering, there occurs an assembling/putting together of the self, there is an adventure of language, and the autofictional has an effect on the real life of the author, just to mention the most important ones for the discussion to follow (Doubrovsky 1993, 207–217). For purists looking for unambiguous terms and definitions, the fact that Doubrovsky himself named different aspects in his definition of autofiction must appear as deeply frivolous, whereas less dogmatic minds may acknowledge the multi-faceted potentiality and creativity of more positively open notions.

This chapter does not, as some critics have tried to do, attempt to define "autofiction" as a distinct genre that should be clearly separated from either autobiography or the novel. Rather, it proposes conceiving of autofiction or—perhaps better—"the autofictional" as a conceptual matrix with scalable and interactive dimensions. This open and flexible understanding of autofiction is in line with the present volume's overall approach. In the following, five theses will be put forward in order to further elaborate upon the concept of autofiction and the autofictional as flexible, critical tools. These theses will be substantiated through examples from different languages, cultures, and periods in order to acknowledge the diversity and range of autofiction/the autofictional.

There Is a Need for the Term "Autofiction"

The first thesis is that we need the term "autofiction." A great number of scholars have sought to define and work with the term. This demonstrates that there has been, and still is, an obvious need in literary studies, especially in the field of autobiographical research, to grasp the vibrant interrelation between life and text, fiction and real, and for which there is no appropriate alternative concept. This perceptible need alone justifies the term's existence, but certainly not its sloppy use. The various definitions of autofiction should be understood as both drawing attention to and manifesting the great diversity of literary forms of self-presentation between fact and fiction. Nevertheless, scholars who use the term "autofiction" should clearly state how they understand it. Simply dropping in the word without further explanation raises questions and leads to suspicion that the popular term has been used uncritically and unthinkingly.

The Autofictional Is a Scalable and Latent Dimension in All Autobiographical Writing

This chapter's second thesis maintains that the autofictional is an intrinsic mode within the autobiographical that can be performed in various ways and with changing intensity. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, for instance, called his autobiography, published in four volumes between 1811 and 1833, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, thereby already drawing attention in the title to the poetic or fictional element. Robert R. Heitner, in 1987, translated the title as *Poetry and Truth*, whereas John Oxenford, in 1882, chose *Fiction and Truth*. These two different translations reflect the variable understanding of the word "Dichtung." In contemporary German one would read "Dichtung" as "poetry," in the sense of verse. While *Dichtung und Wahrheit* does indeed include some poems, in this instance, "Dichtung" can by no means be reduced to poetry. When Goethe composed this text, "Dichtung" would have been understood to designate a literary mode more generally. Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* has played a dominant part in the scholarly reflection on the genre of autobiography, at least in the German tradition (Dilthey 1981, 244–246; Wagner-Egelhaaf 2005, 166–174). *Dichtung und Wahrheit* implicitly presents its own autobiographical theory, as do Goethe's letters, and in his talks with Johann Peter Eckermann, Goethe's interlocutor in later years, we find statements clarifying Goethe's ideas about the autobiographical. He explains to Eckermann that the use of the symbolic is the main characteristic of what he refers to as "poetry," leading one to wonder whether he would have used the term "autofiction" had it existed in his time.

As the title of his autobiography indicates, Goethe attributed an important role to the poetical in autobiographical writing. He makes this explicit in a letter to King Ludwig of Bavaria, dated December 17 and 27, 1829:

> As far as the somewhat paradoxical title of the confidences from my life, Truth and Poetry, is concerned, it was inspired by the experience that the public always has some doubts about the truthfulness of such biographical attempts. To counter this, I confessed to a kind of fiction, driven, as it were, without necessity, by a certain spirit of contradiction, for it was my most serious endeavor to represent and express, as far as possible, the actual fundamental truth, which, as far as I understood it, had prevailed in my life. However, if such a thing is not possible in subsequent years without letting recollection, and hence imagination, work and one always falls into the trap of exercising the poetic capacity, so to speak, then it is clear that one will lay

> out and emphasize the results and our current perceptions of the past more than the details as they occurred at the time. (Goethe 1993, 209; my translation)[2]

Tellingly enough, Goethe uses the word "fiction" and he refers to "imagination," which he identifies as "the poetic capacity," in his search for what he calls the "fundamental truth" in autobiography. This fundamental truth is not composed of empirical facts but is brought forth by the poetic capacity. For this reason, he included elements such as the fairy tale "The New Paris" in *Poetry and Truth*, which, he reports, he told to other children when he was a boy; Goethe actually composed the fairy tale much later. In the form in which it appears in *Poetry and Truth*, it is an artfully composed tale from the pen of a mature Goethe. However, this dreamlike story, full of fancy, conveys what Goethe wanted to present as the truth about a certain phase of his life. Furthermore, he invented love affairs for his younger years that did not actually take place, at least based on what we know. There is one episode, for instance, where the narrator recounts a relationship the young Goethe had as a student in Strasbourg. According to the narration, Goethe made friends with his dance instructor's two daughters. He fell in love with the younger, Emily, while the elder, Lucinde, fell in love with him. The situation became complicated and Goethe decided to leave the dance master's house. In the moment of parting, Lucinde suddenly kisses him but curses him with the kiss so that the next girl that Goethe kisses would be forever unlucky. Of course, Lucinde's intention is to prevent Goethe from kissing her sister. The autobiographical narrator indeed takes the curse very seriously, reporting that he did not dare to kiss Friederike, a girl with whom Goethe had a real relationship as a student in Strasbourg, for a long time and he even uses this fictive and fictional cursed kiss as a motif when describing the end of his affair with Friederike, whom he eventually left (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2020, 109–126). This motif of the cursed kiss illustrates that there is an intricate interweaving of fiction and life. Goethe, who, in the German tradition of life writing, is considered a canonical autobiographer, changed the chronological order of life events for the sake of a more rounded narrative. For example, in reality, the drama *Clavigo* was written earlier than *Werther*, whereas in the autobiography, it seems to be the other way round. Goethe might have argued for an autofictional mode on the basis that he considered poetry and fiction to be more adequate producers of autobiographical truth than mere facts could be. Where Zipfel's first definition

acknowledges the necessarily constructive dimension of every autobiography as autofictional (2009, 299), the position taken in this chapter conceives of the fictional element in autobiography as deliberately introduced and artistically handled.

Researchers have discussed autofiction as a separate genre, distinct from autobiography, novel, and autobiographical novel. Against the backdrop of Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, it seems more appropriate to conceptualize the autofictional as an inherent dimension of autobiographical writing, that is, as a latent force that can be activated in different ways and to different degrees. The autofictional is scalable. There may be more factuality as in Annie Ernaux's *Les Années* (2008) or in Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton* (2012), texts which refer to a plenitude of historical events that the reader likely also remembers, or there may be much more fictionality as in Felicitas Hoppe's *Hoppe* (2012), discussed below. However, there is no factuality without fictionality if one takes into account that even the order in which facts are presented creates somewhat fictional relations. This is certainly not an argument for panfictionalism, as panfictionalism claims that everything is fictional and considers the fictional as opposite to the factual. The argument brought forward here is that fictional elements shape the perception of the factual. The title of Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* suggests that "poetry" and "truth" are equally involved in the narrative of Goethe's life. However, the crucial point of Goethe's concept is that he takes poetry as the driving force of truth. In this sense, the structural make-up of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* remains in a sort of balance between factuality and fictionality, although, of course, it is impossible to differentiate between how much is real and factual, and how much is fiction within the text. Such differentiation would not even be especially fruitful for critical discussion.

Imagination Supports Autobiographical Reference

The third thesis of this chapter highlights the constructive role of imagination and invention in the autofictional. One can observe that quite a lot of texts in contemporary literature demonstratively combine elements from their author's real life with the supernatural. One prominent example from the field of German literature is Felicitas Hoppe's *Hoppe* (2012), which has received much critical attention and acclaim because of its sophisticated autofictional form. The title enacts one of Lejeune's criteria for autobiography, the identification of the name of the protagonist with

the name of the author, yet there is something disconcerting about the plain and somewhat brutal title of just *Hoppe*.

Hoppe is the story of a girl named Felicitas Hoppe who was born in Hameln, a town in Lower Saxony. Felicitas grows up with her father in Canada and Australia and later lives in the United States. Many aspects of this book are absolutely fantastical, yet the fantastical is combined with facts and figures from the author's life. Thus, the back cover of the book tells the reader that *Hoppe* is "Hoppe's dream biography." On the one hand, this indicates invention comparable in nature to Goethe's invented episodes and fantasies, such as the fairy tale "The New Paris." On the other hand, it takes account of the idea that desires and dreams are an intrinsic element of a person's existence and perhaps disclose more, and different, things about a person than mere biographical data in chronological order. The way in which *Hoppe* links the factual and the fictional, by integrating real-life details into fantastical accounts and insisting on the truth of the fantastical, creates a delightful play with factual and invented information. There are also episodes in the text that appear entirely unbelievable and foreground their fantastical character, for instance, when the narrator tells us that Hoppe can understand and speak any language without ever having learned it. The fact that Felicitas presents herself as a linguistic miracle can be read as a reflection of the autofictional potentiality of language (Egendal, this volume). The choice and combination of words, as well as the different tones adopted, may also produce autofictional effects, for instance, when the narrator of *Hoppe* imitates scholarly discourse and thus puts the protagonist, Hoppe, at a playful ironic distance. This dimension may be related to what Doubrovsky called "the adventure of language" (1993, 213; my translation) and, indeed, *Hoppe* mimics not only academic discourse but also the genre of the adventure novel when Felicitas is presented as the hero of odd and unbelievable adventures. *Hoppe*'s narrated adventures are, however, a mere "pleasure of the text" in Roland Barthes's sense of directing attention to the play of words rather than the meaning of a text (Barthes 1973).

Combining the fantastical and the factual is also characteristic of the Austrian writer Thomas Glavinic's so-called Jonas novels. Glavinic has published a series of books centered on a protagonist called Jonas: *Die Arbeit der Nacht* (2006), *Das Leben der Wünsche*, published (2009), *Das größere Wunder* (2013), and, finally, *Der Jonas-Komplex* (2016). The character Jonas seems to be the same person in all of the books, but although there are episodes that reappear in all books, the story worlds are different

and do not form a traditionally serial autofictional work (Schuh and Menn, this volume). Furthermore, Jonas shares biographical features with the author and there are strange, fairytale-like events. For example, one morning the protagonist gets up and finds the world completely empty of people and is seemingly the only person left. On other occasions, he finds that all his wishes are being miraculously fulfilled. Yet, the persistent use of the name Jonas and the interweaving of the four Jonas-lives create a specific effect of real-world reference. For the reader who has read all of the books, the individual texts seem to refer to a shared story world, but one cannot be sure whether Jonas is the same character in all of them. There seems to be a world beyond the text. However, this world beyond is, first and foremost, another text. Jonas's persistent, ghostly reappearance in the different texts and the reader's memory of what they have already read about his life in the different texts create the impression of a powerful fictional persona driven by an intense (auto-)biographical energy behind the texts. This effect is produced by the work's strategic and artfully staged intertextuality.

Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard's six-volume autobiographical project *Min kamp* (*My Struggle*) (2009–2011) has frequently been referred to as autofictional, and even as a paradigm of autofictionality. Knausgaard's claim that he has written his life exactly as it was rather than producing an artful autobiography invokes Doubrovsky's argument that autobiography is for great men while autofiction can be practiced by everybody. Autofiction, Doubrovsky says, should tell everything, a claim previously made by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Confessions* (published 1782/1789). For Doubrovsky, therefore, autofiction is more realistic than autobiography. The enormous international success of Knausgaard's work seems to reflect a new need for the real as he narrates seemingly everything about his life in great detail, even the most boring and unspectacular events (see also Schmitt 2017). This is consistent with Knausgaard's claim that he has abandoned the sophisticated artistic form, and with his use of a language that, in contrast to Doubrovsky, renounces linguistic experimentation. It is the hyperrealism, among other characteristics, of Knausgaard's writing that has caused critics to perceive *Min kamp* as autofiction, as the hyperrealistic mode of his narration shines a bright spotlight on details that may thus appear artificial. Attempts to play off an allegedly traditional poststructuralist paradigm of the autofictional against a new need for the real fall short, as reality is, of course, always mediated. The opening of the first volume of

A Death in the Family demonstrates, quite vividly, the fictional character of Knausgaard's reality effects:

> FOR THE HEART, life is simple: it beats for as long as it can. Then it stops. Sooner or later, one day, this pounding action will cease of its own accord, and the blood will begin to run towards the body's lowest point, where it will collect in a small pool, visible from the outside as a dark, soft patch on ever whiter skin, as the temperature sinks, the limbs stiffen and the intestines drain. These changes in the first hours occur so slowly and take place with such inexorability that there is something almost ritualistic about them, as though life capitulates according to specific rules, a kind of gentleman's agreement, to which the representatives of death also adhere, inasmuch as they always wait until life has retreated before they launch their invasion of the new landscape. By which point, however, the invasion is irrevocable. The enormous hordes of bacteria that begin to infiltrate the body's innards cannot be halted. Had they but tried a few hours earlier, they would have met with immediate resistance; however, everything around them is quiet now, as they delve deeper and deeper into the moist darkness. They advance on the Haversian canals, the crypts of Lieberkühn, the islets of Langerhans. They proceed to Bowman's capsule in the kidneys, Clark's column in the Spinalis, the black substance in the mesencephalon. And they arrive at the heart. As yet, it is intact, but deprived of the activity to which end its whole construction has been designed, there is something strangely desolate about it, like a production plant, that workers have been forced to flee in haste, or so it appears, the stationary vehicles shining yellow against the darkness of the forest, the huts deserted, a line of fully loaded cable buckets stretching up the hillside. (2012, 3)

This passage almost makes the blood freeze in the veins as the apparently factual and unemotional description of the process of bodily decay, reaching as deep as the microscopic level and seemingly based on scientific medical knowledge, appears excessively sharp and hyperrealistic. At the same time, the image presented is a product of the imagination, especially given that the biological process of decay is depicted through the use of metaphors such as "a small pool," "gentleman's agreement," "invasion," or "landscape." At the end of the book, it is the protagonist's father who dies, and thus the opening passage, which seemingly describes a general phenomenon of human life, that is, death, becomes personal. Strikingly, both the beginning and end of this autobiographical narrative are about life, as well as about death. This connective literary frame is certainly a sophisticated fictional technique. The passage quoted is a paradigm of

how referential description within a text and the fictional mode consistently tilt into one another. The example of Knausgaard supports this chapter's third thesis that imagination by no means contradicts autobiographical reference but may even fundamentally support it. The same holds true for what has been said on Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Imagination, and even the use of fantastical elements, may highlight the claim of truth in life writing by giving emphasis to what is related and attracting the reader's attention, as has been shown by the example of the fairy tale in Goethe's autobiography.

Autofiction Produces Real-Life Effects

This chapter's fourth thesis highlights a dimension hinted at by Serge Doubrovsky, but largely neglected or overlooked in the critical debate on autofiction: the fact that autofiction produces real-life effects and should, therefore, be considered fundamentally performative. In *Le Livre brisé*, published in 1989, Doubrovsky writes about his marriage and his wife Inge's alcoholism. As the reader is informed at the end of the book, the author worked on the manuscript between May 1985 and May 1988 (1991, 612) and during this period, in November 1987, Ilse died of an alcohol overdose (1993, 216). In the text, Doubrovsky discloses that the couple had worked on the book together. While autobiography, he explains, is a retrospective genre in the face of death, his wife wanted them to tell "a story of life" (1991, 452).[3] Ilse's death causes the book to break, indicated by the participle *brisé* in the title. Her death, imagined as possibly suicide by the author himself (Gronemann 2019b),[4] can be seen as the fulfillment of what was already laid out in the book. The autofiction "in a stroke" (Doubrovsky 1993, 217; my translation) turned into an autobiography he resumes. What he experienced in his life as a dreadful shock of the unexpected, which crushed him, namely Ilse's death, he tells us, seems to be presented in his text as the progression of the inevitable. The retrospectively reported problems of this marriage actually became, after the death of Ilse, forward-looking signs.[5] Doubrovsky explains that he continued to write his autofiction until he completely lost control of the project. The real was assassinated in the games of fiction that were telling the truth even though the author was not aware of it (1993, 207). This analysis by Doubrovsky himself of what happened to him upon the death of his wife can be taken as proof that autofiction is not merely a postmodern joke or sliding effect of linguistic signs, as some critics have claimed. Rather,

autofiction, as Doubrovsky's case demonstrates, may have a very serious background indeed, as well as disquieting consequences for the author's life.[6]

The idea that autobiographers not only aim to represent their lives by writing about them truthfully, albeit in a more or less fictional mode, but that their autobiographical project has a real effect on their life was not a completely new insight offered by Doubrovsky. In his seminal text on "Autobiography as De-facement" from 1979, Paul de Man put forward the view that autobiographical writing, first and foremost, produces the life which it depicts. "We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences," de Man writes, but then asks whether we cannot "suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?" (1979, 920). This statement draws attention to the fact that writing one's autobiography is not to be considered a divide between life and text but that the act of writing itself is part of the life that is autobiographically represented. Hence, the act of autobiographical writing is the crucial point where life and writing merge.

This real-life effect, with its potentiality to merge life and writing, as a crucial feature of autofiction triggers the thought that we can visualize the performative text/life relation using the strange loop figure also known as the Möbius strip. This has already been suggested in an earlier article that demonstrates the theoretical productivity of the strange loop figure (see Wagner-Egelhaaf 2015). The Möbius strip, ingeniously used as the core device in drawings by the Dutch artist M. E. Escher (1898–1972), permanently twists outside and inside so that it becomes impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins. Douglas R. Hofstadter discussed the Möbius strip as a recurrent structural pattern in cultural production in his famous book *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (1979). In his view, it has proven eminently productive in various cultural constellations that struggle to overcome dichotomous explanations. When applied to the discussion of autofiction, the strip can be viewed as both subject and object, life and writing, twisting into each other, and thus as deconstructing the oppositions.[7] However, to function as a successful conceptualization of autofiction, this strange loop must be understood as being in continuous motion, as a dynamic process. If a person contemplates their life, the contemplation, in the very moment it takes place, turns into an

element of the life that the person is reflecting on. For autofiction, this permanently twisting movement forms a constitutive principle that renders the text performative.

Autofiction Oscillates Between Fictionality and Factuality

While the fourth thesis focuses on the author and the effects of the text on their life, the fifth considers the effects that autofictional texts have on the reader. Drawing on Philippe Lejeune's notion of the "autobiographical pact" (1975),[8] Doubrovsky called his books "neither autobiographies nor completely novels, caught in the turnstile, the in-between of the genres, subscribing at the same time and contradictorily to the autobiographical pact and the novelistic pact, perhaps in order to abolish their limits or limitations" (1993, 210; my translation).[9]

The turnstile imagery is reminiscent of Paul de Man's image of the revolving door, which he uses to describe the rhetoricity of language. People enter revolving doors when they want to get inside a building or a closed area. However, the revolving door, at the same time and in the same movement, guides them outward again (De Man 1979, 921). Some critics doubt that one can subscribe to the autobiographical and the fictional pact at the same time; Arnaud Schmitt, for example, asks, "Can one really understand a textual segment as being both referential and fictional?" (2010, 128). Schmitt answers that it would be cognitively impossible to adhere to the autofictional and the fictional pact simultaneously. With reference to Philippe Gasparini, who struggled with the same problem, he contemplates that "simultaneous" could probably be understood as "ceaselessly alternating" between referential and fictional readings (Schmitt 2010, 128; see also Gasparini 2004, 13, who speaks of "a simultaneous double reading"; my translation), yet he doubts the practicality of this ceaseless movement in the concrete act of reading. However, he also concedes that this confused state between autobiography and fiction could be received as an aesthetic pleasure. Zipfel, in his third definition of autofiction, allows the two Lejeunian pacts to oscillate. One can conceive how, in the practical act of reading, this may indeed be a challenge that results in the reader's confusion and/or aesthetic pleasure. Seen as a model of autofiction, however, it gets right to the heart of the matter, namely, the being in-between or, alternatively, both autobiographical and fictional.

This intriguing oscillatory movement is compatible with the strange loop figure introduced in the previous section; the oscillation between fact and fiction imperceptibly twists the real and the fictional. Thus, slippery autofiction presents itself as a dynamic and versatile mental concept which alternately brings one or the other dimension into the foreground while still allowing the other to permanently resonate.

In German-language literature, authors from the first decade of this millennium have made extensive use of this principle of oscillation. Thomas Glavinic's *Das bin doch ich* (translatable—albeit inadequately—as "That's me, isn't it?"), published in 2007, tells the story of an Austrian author named Thomas Glavinic, who wrote a book titled *Die Arbeit der Nacht* which had come out the previous year. *Das bin doch ich* deals with, among other topics, the marketing process of *Die Arbeit der Nacht*. The book is a somewhat satirical depiction of the literary market. The title, *Das bin doch ich*, refers to an episode in the text where the protagonist reads a feuilleton review. The author of this review praises Daniel Kehlmann, a very successful German writer who has won many literary prizes, as "Germany's best writer of his generation." "Das bin doch ich" (41)—alternatively translated as "What? No, that's me!"—is the spontaneous and indignant reaction of Glavinic's protagonist, who is a good friend of Daniel Kehlmann's in both the book and in reality (Jensen and Tamm 2013). The bemusing autofictional clou is located in the seemingly harmless colloquial wording of the title: *Das bin doch ich*, with *doch* being virtually untranslatable into English. It indicates the speaker's defiant and indignant claim that, surely, nobody other than himself could be Germany's best writer of his generation. At the same time, the wording of "Das bin doch ich" performs an act of comic self-identification or self-assertion as a reaction to an obvious feeling about the protagonist's uncertainty about who or what he is. Thus, this is a simultaneously funny and serious reflection of the first-person speaker's hybrid autofictional status; readers may ask themselves whether Glavinic's book is an autobiographical confession or a fictional joke.

Glavinic's book has been labeled "metafiction," which, of course, it is. However, "metafiction" as a label is not precise enough. It does not address the fact that the protagonist seems to be recognizable as the author, that he bears the same name as the author, and that he has written the same book as the author. These parallels do offer an autobiographical pact according to Lejeune. There are other characters in the book who seem to be real-world persons, too. In addition to the aforementioned Kehlmann, real-life

author Jonathan Safran Foer makes an appearance at the beginning of the book when the protagonist attends a reading by him. Therefore, the question of how autobiographical the book is arises again and again—and yet the reader continually doubts. The narrator's somewhat mocking tone and the all too frank disclosure of politically incorrect thoughts and embarrassing personal weaknesses arouse suspicion. On the one hand, these features of the book connect with confession and self-exploration as traditional characteristics of the genre of autobiography, and on the other hand, they ironically counteract these exact same genre features.

Another example that demonstrates the oscillation of pacts is Felicitas Hoppe's previously mentioned *Hoppe*. In *Hoppe*, two telling paratexts attract attention right at the beginning of the book. The reminder "The spoken word holds for family members!"[10] is inserted between the main title and the table of contents. Yet, no matter how one reads this sentence, whether as the author distancing herself from the written text or merely from its fictitious factuality, it seems to refer to binding extratextual oral conversations with family members. As only the text is accessible for literary analysis, this preamble, which sounds authentically personal, places the book in a hard to define, but clearly marked, relationship with the biography of the author. Immediately after the table of contents, the reader finds as chapter "0. Felicitas Hoppe, *22.12.1960 in Hameln, is a German writer. *Wikipedia*." *Wikipedia* is often used to find information quickly, although it is not generally held to be an entirely reliable source. Furthermore, it is equally clear that many personal entries in *Wikipedia* are authored by the persons whose lives and achievements are presented themselves—which makes the *Wikipedia* entries in question autobiographical texts. This is, however, not the case with the entry for Felicitas Hoppe (personal communication, April 8, 2020).[11] Surely, the *Wikipedia* reference is an ironic comment on which sources people consult and the questionable reliability of these sources. Thus, the fact that the book cites the *Wikipedia* entry constitutes a play with the relationship between fiction and facts. *Hoppe* not only incorporates the so-called factual into the text, but, by doing so, extends the textual story world into the realm of the factual—even if *Wikipedia* is an ambivalent source for facts, whatever we consider *facts* to be.

Included right at the beginning of the book, these two paratexts signal real-world referentiality which they question at the same time. The first two sentences of the current German *Wikipedia* entry are as follows: "Felicitas Hoppe (* 22. Dezember 1960 in Hameln) ist eine deutsche

Schriftstellerin. Sie ist Trägerin des Georg-Büchner-Preises 2012" ("Felicitas Hoppe [* 22 December 1960 in Hameln] is a German writer. She is the winner of the Georg Büchner Prize 2012"; my translation). The entry further reports that Hoppe was born the third of five children in Hameln, where she also went to school. This could mean that the four brothers and sisters mentioned in the book do actually exist in Hoppe's real life, even though the book confronts us with the sentence "The Hameln childhood is pure invention" (Hoppe 2012, 14; my translation). Incidentally, the English version of *Wikipedia* does not mention the siblings. It begins with the information that "Felicitas Hoppe (born 22 December 1960 in Hamelin, Lower Saxony) is a German writer" and that she "was born in Hamelin, Lower Saxony, and grew up there." Certainly, the text is not simply to be read in terms of what is factual and what is fictional—yet *Hoppe* provokes this reading in order to make fun of it at the same time (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2018). By mixing factual and invented information, *Hoppe* makes the factual appear fictional and the fictional appear factual and makes the reader oscillate between the two modes.

* * *

Five theses on autofiction—are they just isolated observations or is there a deeper connection between them? The first thesis justifies the term "autofiction": its frequent and ongoing use indicates an obvious epistemological need. The term is most useful, this chapter claims, not as a strict genre denominator but as a flexible concept with scalable parameters. The second thesis recognizes that autofiction is an inherent dimension of autobiography in general and argues against autofiction as a separate genre. Thesis three highlights imagination and even the supernatural as a potential feature of autofiction that in no ways speaks against (auto-)biographical relevance. Thesis four reinforces this point through the claim that the fictional element (which may include imagination, the fantastical, and the supernatural) has real-life effects and may produce what it narrates. Finally, the fifth thesis argues for understanding autofiction as oscillating between fictionality and factuality, that is, for a dynamic mode, in order to reflect on the fictionality of the factual and the factuality of fiction. In how the autofictional is conceptualized in this chapter, these five aspects work together. Autofiction may flexibly bring one or other aspect to the foreground while all of them, to varying extents, resonate together in texts that can be qualified as autofictional.

Notes

1. "Fiction, d'événements et de faits strictement réels; si l'on veut *autofiction*."
2. "Was den freilich einigermaßen paradoxen Titel der Vertraulichkeiten aus meinem Leben Wahrheit und Dichtung betrifft, so ward derselbige durch die Erfahrung veranlaßt, daß das Publikum immer an der Wahrhaftigkeit solcher biographischen Versuche einigen Zweifel hege. Diesem zu begegnen, bekannte ich mich zu einer Art von Fiktion, gewissermaßen ohne Not, durch einen gewissen Widerspruchs-Geist getrieben, denn es war mein ernstestes Bestreben das eigentliche Grundwahre, das, insofern ich es einsah, in meinem Leben obgewaltet hatte, möglichst darzustellen und auszudrücken. Wenn aber ein solches in späteren Jahren nicht möglich ist, ohne die Rückerinnerung und also die Einbildungskraft wirken zu lassen, und man also immer in den Fall kommt gewissermaßen das dichterische Vermögen auszuüben, so ist es klar daß man mehr die Resultate und, wie wir uns das Vergangene jetzt denken, als die Einzelnheiten, wie sie sich damals ereigneten, aufstellen und hervorheben werde."
3. See Doubrovsky 1991, 452: "L'autobiographie est un genre posthume. Elle voulait de nous un récit à vif." "À vif" is usually translated as "raw," but in the context in question, it refers to "unsophisticated life."
4. In "Textes en main," Doubrovsky says that his wife's death was an accident. However, he also says in *Le livre brisé* that he had called her "suicide wife, kamikaze woman" and that he had written that he would kill a woman with every book (see Doubrovsky 1993, 132; my translation).
5. "L'autofiction est devenue d'un seul coup autobiographie. De rétrospective, elle s'est faite prospective. Ce que j'ai ressenti dan[s] ma vie comme le choc effroyable de l'imprévu, qui m'a écrasé, le livre semble le présenter comme la progression d'un inéluctable" (Doubrovsky 1993, 217).
6. This aspect has been further developed on the basis of Foucault's concept of "subjectivation" by Innokentij Kreknin (2014).
7. Significantly, Douglas R. Hofstadter has also published an autobiography under the symbol of the strange loop; see Hofstadter (2007). The discussion of this very special case of autobiography/autofiction will have to take place elsewhere.
8. Lejeune's concept of "the autobiographical pact" has been, for good reasons, extremely influential in the scholarship of autobiography. However, it has also been criticized, especially by poststructuralist critics who objected that the autobiographical "I" is far from a stable and recognizable entity and that an author, a narrator, and a protagonist could never be identified. This is true from a poststructuralist, or better deconstructive, perspective, but from a deconstructive perspective nothing can ever be identified.

Lejeune's idea of the autobiographical pact is to be seen in the vein of reception theory, the heyday of which fell exactly in the time when Lejeune elaborated on this concept. Viewed from this perspective, the autobiographical pact maintains that a reader who realizes that author, narrator, and protagonist share the same name, and who reads on the book cover a subtitle such as "My Life" or "Autobiography," is inclined to read the book as an autobiography. On the basis of this pragmatic reading, the concept of the autobiographical pact is an appropriate auxiliary concept for the conceptualization of autofiction.

9. "Ni autobiographies, ni totalement romans, pris dans le tourniquet, l'entre-deux des genres, souscrivant à la fois et contradictoirement au pacte autobiographique et au pacte Romanesque, peut-d'être pour en abolir les limites ou limitations."
10. "Für Familienmitglieder gilt das gesprochene Wort!"
11. Thanks to Stefan Neuhaus for establishing the contact and thanks to Felicitas Hoppe for her immediate and open reply.

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