5

Autonarration, *I*, and Odd Address in Ben Lerner's Autofictional Novel *10:04*

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5.1 Introduction: Autofiction and Narrative Pronouns

In Ben Lerner's (2014) novel *10:04*, the central character, Ben, watches the video installation *The Clock* by Christian Marclay (2010). *The Clock* is a real work of video montage, splicing together filmic scenes referencing the time. Crucially, *The Clock* runs for 24 hours and is synched with real time. When—in *The Clock*—the audience see the clock tower in *Back to the Future* struck by lightning at precisely 10:04 pm, sending Marty McFly back to the future, it is 10:04 pm. *The Clock* received widespread praise and Lerner's character Ben is aware of its description as "the ultimate collapse of fictional time into real time, a work designed to obliterate the distance between art and life, fantasy and reality" (Lerner 2014: 54). Lerner's explanation of *The Clock*'s ontological distortions also stands as a fitting account of *10:04* as a work of contemporary autofiction, a hybrid literary genre distorting reality and textuality by conflating

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A. Gibbons, A. Macrae (eds.), *Pronouns in Literature*,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95317-2_5

the authorial signature of the self (*auto-*) with a character (*-fiction*). Lerner's use of pronouns and what I herein term 'autonarration' are central to this effect.

Coined by French novelist and critic Serge Doubrovsky, who used it as a generic descriptor on the cover of his novel *Fils* (1977), 'autofiction' originally designated Doubrovsky's own writing as well as an emergent literary trend in 1970s France. Given its genealogy, it is perhaps unsurprising that autofiction has received most attention in French criticism. It has since grown in popularity, with both autofiction and related criticism appearing in English. Defined narrowly, autofictional texts may be identified as fiction (to a greater or lesser degree) and the central character shares the name of the author. Examples include: Chris Kraus' (1998) *I Love Dick*, Dave Eggers' (2001) *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Frédéric Beigbeder's (2004) *Windows on the World*, and Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle* series (2013 [2009]—forthcoming). A broader definition allows for other forms in which the central character does not take the author's name (e.g. at all, a variation, or they remain nameless), for instance: *Every Day Is for the Thief* by Teju Cole (2014 [2007]), *Shanghai Dancing* by Brian Castro (2008), *Kapow!* by Adam Thirlwell (2015) and *The Wallcreeper* by Nell Zink (2015).

In strict autofiction, the author-character is the narrating first-person *I* of the fiction. The use of pronouns is therefore of central importance. However, whilst many scholars mention the narrative *I* of autofiction, a rigorous exploration of autofiction's narrative voice has not previously been undertaken. Instead, autofiction is usually referenced as a genre and used to give context for the literary criticism of a work; alternatively, its mention is a way to relate fictional events to an author's life. More recently, autofiction has been discussed as a genre that expresses distinctively contemporary concerns in the way it represents and questions selfhood, ontology, truth and memory. Indeed, I have elsewhere described contemporary autofiction as metamodern (a paradigm of the post-postmodern) (Gibbons 2017; see also Gibbons 2016; Sturgeon 2014).

Focusing on Ben Lerner's *10:04*, this chapter investigates the stylistic composition of autofiction, with particular emphasis on pronoun usage. I begin in section two by contextualising the novel in relation to Genette's (1993 [1991]) judgement of autofiction and Lejeune's (1989) tabular

mapping of fiction and autobiography. In section three, I outline a cognitive-stylistic model of autofiction. Following this—in sections four, five, six, and seven—I undertake stylistic analysis of pronoun usage in *10:04* considering, in turn, first-person and third-person (auto-)narration, second-person address, and the impact of intertextuality on the referential value of pronouns. Ultimately, this chapter breaks new ground for the study of autofiction in English—itself a nascent area of scholarly attention—by providing a replicable, text-driven account of the linguistic style and narrative voice of autofiction. My account is grounded in cognitive stylistics and consequently, the chapter also advances knowledge about readerly interpretation of autofiction and autonarrational devices.

5.2 The (Dis)Honesty of Autofiction and Its Phantasmatic Pact

"We sat and watched the traffic and I am kidding and I am not kidding when I say that I intuited an alien intelligence, felt subject to a succession of images, sensations, memories, and affects that did not, properly speaking, belong to me" (Lerner 2014: 3). So writes Ben Lerner, on the opening page of *10:04*. Such a statement is an apt beginning to a work of contemporary autofiction: Ben Lerner's first-person narrator, Ben, experiences perceptions and emotions that he feels unable to claim as his own: he negates such ownership using the syntactic negator "not" ("did not… belong to me") whilst qualifying the negation with the adverbial phrase "properly speaking". The qualification covertly suggests an improper, less legitimate tenure. The "alien intelligence" felt by this first-person narrator is also recognised in the stylistic parallelism when the narrator categorically asserts his insincerity before directly negating it: "I am kidding and I am not kidding".

Lerner's paradoxical statement is somewhat evocative of the words of Genette in his attempt to formulate the 'voice' of autofiction. Doing so, Genette dismisses autofiction as "contradictory", both in its generic title, 'autofiction', "and the proposition it designates: 'It is I and it is not I'" (1993 [1991]: 77). What bothers Genette is "the intentional contradictory

pact of autofiction ('I, the author, am going to tell you a story of which I am the hero but which never happened to me')" (76). Part of the problem for Genette seems to be that whilst the act of calling the character by the author's name implies that the work evokes referential reality, the referential gesture is undercut by the generic classification of the work as fiction.

Diagrammatically mapping the voice relations of autofiction (see Fig. 5.1), Genette argues: the relationship between author and character is judicial (the author is semantically responsible for the hero); between narrator and character, it is syntactic (usually based on the linguistic use of first-person *I* to conflate speaker with subject); and the relationship between author and narrator is pragmatic because, he says, it "symbolizes the author's serious commitment with regard to her narrative assertions" (1993 [1991]: 78).

For Genette, A-N is the central relation concerned with the veracity of the narrative. The relation between author and narrator directly impacts the fact- or fictionality of the text and the perceived authenticity of the Author-Narrator-Character. It is on these grounds of truth-value that Genette distinguishes between "true" and "false autofictions" and speaks of "veiled autobiographies" (77), the implication being that autofiction is unethical and a disingenuous genre.

Following Genette, we could say that in Lerner's impossible parallelism "I am kidding and I am not kidding", even the narrator's protestation of truth is duplicitous. That is, the cognitive foregrounding triggered by negation in "I am not kidding" serves to emphasise the narrator's fabrication, the act of kidding, in order to deny it. However, the uncannily

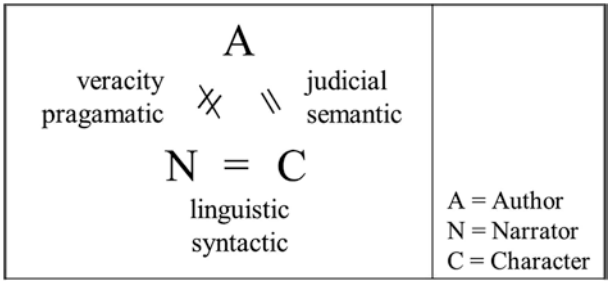

Fig. 5.1 Genette's voice relations for autofiction

experienced "images, sensations, memories and affects" to which the narrator refers are "the ability to perceive polarized light; a conflation of taste and touch as salt was rubbed into the suction cups; a terror localized in my extremities, bypassing the brain completely" (2014: 3). Prior to this statement, Ben has eaten "an outrageously expensive meal in Chelsea that included baby octopuses" (3) and the successive phenomena are embodied attributions as the narrator appears to experience the sensual impressions of an octopus. Humans, for instance, cannot distinguish polarised light, but an octopus can. In interview, Lerner comments that the character Ben is experiencing "inklings of orders of perception beyond his individual body" (Lin 2015). Lerner's statement therefore is not merely a witty, ironic quip that separates yet blurs author and narrator-character. It is not about deception but, just like autofiction, it is about empathic projection and vicarious experience.

Phillipe Lejeune's (1989) earlier but now seminal structural categorisation of autobiography is perhaps a more sympathetic model of autofiction, particularly since Lejeune's theorisation intimates the relational quality of autofiction. That is, it implies that autofiction evokes a network of subjectivities, connecting real writers, fictional writer-characters, fictionalised readers, and real readers. Lejeune charts the onomastic correspondence between author, narrator, and character with a novel's assertion to be fictional or autobiographical (see Fig. 5.2).

Protagonist's name / Pact	≠ author's name	indeterminate naming / no name	= Author's name
Fictional	NOVEL	NOVEL	
Unclear status	NOVEL	indeterminate	AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Autobiographical		AUTOBIOGRAPHY	AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Fig. 5.2 Lejeune's chart of fictional and autobiographical pacts

The blackened squares represent the fact that Lejeune cannot recall a novel which acknowledges its own fictionality and in which author and character have the same name, though he adds: "Nothing would prevent such a thing from existing, and it is perhaps an internal contradiction from which some interesting effects could be drawn" (1989: 18). Lejeune goes on to posit that works that cannot be defined as either autobiography or fiction but are rather "one *in relation* to the other" evoke a "double blow, or rather double vision—double writing" (27; original emphasis). Such works open up an "autobiographical space" (27) that is not underwritten by the autobiographical pact that the named protagonist is self-identical with the author. Rather, the pact between author and reader which underwrites autofiction is "phantasmatic": readers are invited to "read novels not only as fictions referring to a truth of 'human nature,' but also as revealing *phantasms* of the individual" (27; original emphasis). These phantasms exist in a network with one another: in autofiction, the author figure (as a character) is not the author her/himself, but rather a textual counterpart that offers an illusion of being the real author. Despite writing earlier than Genette then, Lejeune conceives of the opposition between fact and fiction less rigidly (and, consequently, of autofiction less disdainfully). Whilst autobiography is (supposedly) factually truthful, the phantasmatic pact allows autofiction not to be fact as such but to express at least a form of subjective truth.

Lejeune's work is an important foundation for a cognitive-stylistic account of autofiction because he explicitly recognises the interplay between textual features (such as voice relations), paratextual signals (such as compositional descriptors, like 'a novel'), and the interpretative role of the reader. In his words, his thinking is grounded "on the global level of *publication*, of the implicit or explicit contract proposed by the *author* to the *reader*, a contract which determines the mode of reading of the text and engenders the effects which, attributed to the text, seem to us to define it as autobiography" (1989: 29; original emphasis). Furthermore, he claims that "readers have become accustomed to feel the presence of the author (of his unconscious) even behind productions that do not seem autobiographical, so much have phantasmatic pacts created new habits of reading" (29).

This certainly seems to be the case with Ben Lerner's *10:04*. Offering a précis of *10:04* as part of her interview with Lerner, Witt compares Ben the

character's relationship with his (fictional) best female friend Alex to Lerner's own real-world marital status (2015). Similarly, Barnes writes (2015: 331):

> How much of this personal material is factually accurate remains, of course, Lerner's business. There are clear differences—the real Ben has been married for some years—but there is enough overlap elsewhere in the book to suggest that […] the book might not be entirely fantastical.

Witt's and Barnes' comments demonstrate the evocation of the phantasmatic pact. As readers, it is not our business what is and what is not true with regards to the author's actual personal life. Nevertheless, both Witt and Barnes were compelled by curiosity; the autobiographical dimension is clearly a seductive force.

My consideration of *10:04* is not concerned with isolating truth from invention. I take a cognitive-stylistic approach that seeks to marry textual dynamics with readerly cognition. Readers could, of course, conduct their own research, fact-checking Lerner's relationship to his self-named character in *10:04*, but even then, it would be impossible to verify each and every narrative detail. Autofiction deliberately blurs fact and fiction and the act of reading it therefore requires phantasmatic interpretation and imagination. I focus on the stylistic devices that Lerner exploits to produce such ontological blurring and resultantly generate the phantasmatic pact between writer and readers. These stylistic devices are compiled in the cognitive-stylistic model of autonarration, introduced in the next section.

5.3 The Style of Autofiction: Autonarration

A starting point for considering the stylistic composition of autofiction is Doubrovsky's own claims about the genre, compiled by Gasparini (2008) into a ten-part list and presented in English by Ferreira Meyers (2013: 25–26):

1. onomastic identity of the author and the hero-narrator;
2. the subtitle: "novel";

3. primacy of the narrative;
4. search for an original form;
5. a type of writing with "immediate verbalisation";
6. reconfiguration of linear time;
7. wide use of the present tense;
8. a commitment to tell only "strictly real facts and events";
9. the urge to "prove its truth";
10. a strategy to grip the reader.

This list has several failings. Firstly, it suffers from prescriptiveness, but this is true of any act of registering generic features. More disconcertingly, it serves foremost to characterise Doubrovsky's *own* autofictional practice (Vilain 2010; discussed in English in Ferreira Meyers 2013: 26). Ferreira Meyers also criticises it for overlooking intertextuality (2013: 26). Finally, the list does not suffice as a stylistic account of autofiction either, despite Dyx's claim that "it is above all on a stylistic basis that Doubrovsky differentiates autofiction from autobiography" (2017: 161). Many of the list's features (namely 3, 8, 9, and 10) can only be judged subjectively (not stylistically) by readers and/or critics alike. Furthermore, point 10—"a strategy to grip the reader"—is ambiguous to the point of uselessness. I propose instead a text-driven account of the compositional features of autofiction: the cognitive-stylistic model of autonarration.

I use the term 'autonarration' deliberately in order to distinguish autofiction as a literary genre from autonarration as a series of stylistic features. It is therefore worth mentioning that the term 'autonarration' has been used previously. Rajan (1998) employs it to account for the inclusion of autobiographical elements in writing from the romantic period. Summarising her conception, she explains, "a specific form of this larger discourse [Romanticism and its use of personalised, historicised *I*], autonarration involves not simply the author's entry into the text through the first-person pronoun, but a sustained rewriting in fictional form of events from the author's life" (1998: 221). Toth (2006) uncouples Rajan's concept from Romanticism by subsequently applying 'autonarration' to Hemingway's writing. Rajan's and Toth's use of 'autonarration' more or less corresponds to the generic use of 'autofiction': indeed, Rajan refers to it as a "genre" (1998: 231). Thus, whilst Rajan emphasises the use of the

first-person pronoun, she does not produce a stylistic explanation of autofictional narration. Likewise, although Rajan does, as we shall see, offer some brief remarks about readerly interpretations, these lack cognitive foundations and are not developed in response to specific textual devices.

Schmitt (2014) also uses '-narration' in place of autofiction as a genre descriptor. Like Genette (1993 [1991]), Schmitt considers 'autofiction' problematic since it implies that we must read such texts as either fact, which he sees as misleading, or as fiction, in which case it is uncoupled from ethics due to the loss of referential value. Unlike Genette though, Schmitt's objection is with the name rather than the genre *per se*. Thus, he suggests renaming it as "self-narration" (Schmitt 2014: 129). Precisely because Schmitt's solution is only appellative, it too disappoints. For one thing, the genre itself remains unchanged, with the additional drawback that 'self-narration' could also encapsulate any writing about the self (with or without requiring referential reality) that uses linguistic devices considered characteristic of fictional writing. Thus, autobiography (however slippery a term that may be) could also classify as self-narration. Moreover, since Schmitt does not explicate the formal features of self-narration, we are no closer to knowing how autofiction blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. My cognitive-stylistic model of autonarration therefore pioneers a text-driven approach to autofiction.

The model is structured using three fields from the cognitive-stylistic framework of deixis (see Gibbons and Whiteley 2018: 162–174; Stockwell 2002: 41–57). Deictic expressions rely on embodied cognition because their reference is defined by context. The referent of pronouns, which are part of the perceptual deictic field (concerned with subjective participants), can shift, for instance. Thus when, throughout this chapter, I've used the first-person pronoun *I*, as my reader(s) you will have interpreted it to represent Alison Gibbons, the named author and writing subject. However, if I write that, in interview, Ben Lerner says "I'm aware of narrating certain experiences" (Lin 2015), you do not continue to connect Lerner's "*I*" to me. Instead, you reorient your interpretation in relation to the deictic centre of the discourse. Lerner's "*I*" therefore has self-reflexive reference; it signals Ben Lerner.

The cognitive-stylistic account of deixis is particularly valuable for the autonarrational model since it includes two dimensions of discourse

deixis, expressions that refer to the discourse from which they emanate: compositional deixis encodes literary genre, while textual deixis metatextually foregrounds the text itself.

Cognitive-Stylistic Model of Autonarration

1. Perceptual Deixis:
   (a) onomastic identity of author and narrator-character (e.g. they share a name);
   (b) narration usually, though not always and not always consistently, occurs in first-person;
   (c) direct address to the reader of fiction.

2. Composition Deixis:
   (a) paratextual signals of fictionality (e.g. the descriptor 'a novel');
   (b) textual signals that trouble the status of the text as fictional (e.g. blending fictionalised elements with real verifiable details).

3. Textual Deixis:
   (a) metatextual references;
   (b) references to the act of writing as a process;
   (c) references to other authors;
   (d) references to related acts of publishing/marketing novels;
   (e) intertextual references to real-world artefacts: e.g. newspaper articles or to novels, stories, poems, including those published by the author.

I have not explicitly included temporal or spatial deixis in this model since these fields are not exploited consistently in autonarration. I would, nevertheless, agree (with Doubrovsky and Gasparini, above) that many autofictions reconfigure linear time. Spatio-temporality should, therefore, be determined by text-driven analysis.

Aspects of the model—namely the onomastic correspondence between author and narrator-character and discussions of fictionality—reinforce critically-agreed features of autofiction, developing them in relation to textual devices. In what follows, I analyse the autonarrational strategies of *10:04*.

5.4 First-Person Autonarration and Phantasmatic *I*

Ben Lerner is an American poet and novelist. His award-winning debut *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011a) was loosely autofictional, featuring a self-absorbed narrator called Adam Gordan whose experiences as a Fulbright scholar in Madrid mirror the author's own. *10:04* is Lerner's second book and is autofiction in a stricter sense: paratextual signals explicitly describe it as "A Novel" and there is an onomastic correspondence between author Ben Lerner and his central narrating character, Ben. In the opening, Ben looks out over the city of New York from the high line. Whilst doing so, the narrator experiences the paradoxical empathic sensation of both being himself but also being another (an octopus), intuiting "an alien intelligence" as he put it (Lerner 2014: 3). The narrator, it turns out, "was saying these things out loud to the agent" (4). At dinner prior to this moment, a literary agent has offered Ben "a "strong six-figure" advance" (4) for a novel to be developed out of a short story he published in *The New Yorker*.

Such textual deictic references reoccur throughout *10:04*, with Ben the narrator discussing the authorial choices and writing process behind his second novel. Moreover, *The New Yorker* story in question, 'The Golden Vanity' (2012), is published as the second chapter (of four) in *10:04*. Part of one of Ben Lerner's poems ('The Dark Threw Patches Down Upon Me Also') similarly appears in the third chapter (2014: 172–176) which is purportedly written by the narrator on a residency in Marfa, Texas—a residency which, not incidentally, Lerner also undertook and which the originally published poem foregrounds through its spatio-temporal attribution "Marfa, June 2011" and the line "I am an alien here with a residency" (2011b).

Textual deixis therefore foregrounds not only that Ben the narrator-character is a novelist—as he says, "I was a published author" (2014: 11)—but also that his works match those of Ben Lerner, the real-world author. This is the sort of doubled reference to which Lejeune referred. Lerner the author and Ben the character exist for readers as overlapping but ultimately irreconcilable phantasms of the authorial figure. In

autofiction, the matches and mismatches between authors and their corresponding narrator-characters are significant. Rajan writes that the "fact that the author is and is not represented by [the] textual surrogate has significant consequences for the reading process" (1998: 222). Reading autofiction thereby "involves a series of (mis)recognitions in which we cannot be quite sure of the relationship between textuality and reality. These misrecognitions generate a series of complex intertextual relationships between what is and what could be" (1998: 222). In *10:04,* intertextual relationships are generated between the narrative of the novel and the reader's construction of Ben Lerner's real life (based on extra-textual knowledge) as well as between *10:04* and the texts by Lerner that are referenced or included in the novel.

Discussing his inclusion in *10:04* of 'The Golden Vanity' and 'The Dark Threw Patches Down Upon Me Also', Lerner seems aware of this interplay: "the story and the poem are obviously changed by being placed in the novel, so in a sense they are no longer the works that preceded the novel. […] they're recontextualized […] and, while they're materially identical—every word is the same—they're utterly transformed. Like a world to come" (Lin 2015). Lerner's closing simile here echoes *10:04*'s epigraph which recounts a Hassidic story in which "the world to come" mirrors the world in the present: "Everything will be as it is now, just a little different" (Lerner 2014). As in Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, the intertextual relationships and ontological oscillations of *10:04* create, on one hand, convergence between fiction and reality leading to the illusion of the autobiographical; on the other hand, divergences that accentuate fictionality.

Given such doubled ontological reference, it is perhaps no surprise that in *10:04*, the second novel Ben (the character) is writing is "another novel about fraudulence" (2014: 119), "a novel about deception" (137), in which the "the author tries to falsify his archive" (118). It might consequently be tempting to agree with Genette's assessment of autofiction as dishonest. However, Lerner argues: "the self referentiality of my novel is a way of exploring how fiction functions in our real lives—for good and for ill—not as a way of mocking fiction's inability to make contact with anything outside itself" (Lin 2015). Lerner's textual deictic strategies are central in this respect because they highlight the interplay between fiction and reality and thus generate the phantasmatic pact underwriting autofiction.

Ben the author and Ben the character are both phantasms since both are cognitive constructs: although there is a real Ben Lerner who actually wrote *10:04*, readers can only access an extra-textual counterpart they imagine. This extra-textual Lerner cannot be blended seamlessly with Ben the textual 'I' of the novel because of known differences between them in autobiographical terms (such as marital status). Reading Ben as a phantasm of Lerner demonstrates not that autofiction is dishonest or that identity is a textual construct; rather, both fiction and identities are social, relational experiences. By reading novels, we connect to the lives and selves of others and precariously experience the veracity of fiction.

5.5 Third-Person Autonarration: *He* as *I* and Acts of Misremembrance

At the end of the first chapter, the narrator talks about writing *The New Yorker* story 'The Golden Vanity'. Like *10:04*, the story is autofictional and "would involve a series of transpositions" (2014: 54) of narrative events already described in Chapter 1 of the novel. For instance, the narrator claims, "I would change the names: Alex would become Liza" (2014: 54) and "the protagonist—a version of myself: I'd call him 'the author'" (55). These statements concern the perceptual deictics of the story, prompting readers, as they read the second chapter, to construe the characters as what Fauconnier and Turner (2002) have called conceptual blends: The third-person 'author'/'he' blends with Ben the narrator-character and the reader's extra-textual author construct; Liza is blended with Alex; and so on. Thus, despite the shift from first- to third-person, the second chapter continues to be styled as autonarration.

In third-person, then, the second chapter ends: "he realized: I do remember the drive, the view, stroking Liza's hair, the incommunicable beauty destined to disappear. I remember it, which means it never happened" (2014: 81). This is one of several episodes in *10:04* in which the reality of memory is called into question. Moving into the first-person consciousness of "the author", the use of emphatic "do" in "I do remember" stresses the veracity of the memory, whilst the definite article ("the drive", "the view") implies the vivid certainty with which the narrator

recalls the experience. Despite this, and in another phrase reminiscent of Genette's frustration, "it never happened".

Later in the novel, the narrator muses about the experience of crossing Manhattan Bridge (2014: 134–135):

> Whenever I walked across Manhattan Bridge, I remembered myself as having crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. This is because you can see the latter from the former, and because the latter is far from beautiful. I looked back over my shoulder at lower Manhattan and saw the gleaming, rippled steel of the new Frank Gehry building, saw it as a standing wave […] But by the time I arrived in Brooklyn to meet Alex, I was starting to misremember crossing in the third person, as if I had somehow watched myself walking beneath the Brooklyn Bridge's Aeolian cables.

The narrator describes a fracturing between reality and remembered experience. Interestingly, the clause "I remembered myself" uses the first-person as both subject and object of the proposition. Considering the relationship between real-world author and narrator, Rajan argues that authors create "subversions of themselves referred to by the pronoun 'I'" (1998: 221). This is not unique to autonarration, though: as this clause demonstrates, the division of the self into subversions can be an effect of co-referential pronouns as well as a perceptual deictic split between a narrating-*I* and a narrated-*I*. Drawing on Lakoff's (1996) study of conceptual metaphor and selfhood, Emmott has argued that co-referential pronouns "actually denote different sets of properties rather than signalling identical notions" (2002: 156). Co-referentiality in *10:04* creates a distinction between 'I' and 'myself', splitting the self both linguistically and metaphorically. The split is furthered in perceptual deictic terms in the next sentence when the narrator introduces second-person *you* ("you can see the latter from the former") which appears to function both self-reflexively as well as in a generalised manner to readers. Through the course of the passage, the disassociation described by the narrator takes effect stylistically: it starts with first-person *I*, then splits the self into a narrating- and narrated-*I* through co-referentiality, before the ambiguous (self-reflexive and generalised) second-person *you* creates further perceptual distance between the narratorial voice and the perceptual subject of the narrative.

Thus, despite the return of the first-person, by the end of the passage, the narrator begins to "misremember crossing in the third person".

At this point, two images are included with the captions "*Our world*" and "*The world to come*" (2014: 135; original emphasis). Despite the differing captions, the images are identical: a man stands on Brooklyn Bridge and looks across the water. Significantly, this man is not Ben Lerner: he *is* a third person, not Ben Lerner the author, nor Ben the narrator whom readers are likely to have imagined based on the author photograph on the book's dust-jacket. Whilst the images highlight a disjunction between fiction and reality then, the captions emphasise the illusion that *10:04*, as a work of autofiction, proffers. In its use of first-person plural "*Our*", the former caption both suggests the social nature of experiential reality and emphasises the illusion that the real reader and Ben Lerner (both textual and real) share ontological territory.

The potential intensity of an imagined experience ("it never happened") and the marked contrast between the figure in the photographs and Ben Lerner are implicit ruminations on the relationship between fiction and reality. Just as in the epigraph, the present ("*Our world*") and "*The world to come*" appear the same, yet Lerner insists they differ in some indistinguishable way. In interview, Lerner claims that if his real-life experience is transposed into one of his fictions, "those stories—not the experiences themselves—might become material for art" (Lin 2015). Real-world experience does differ from fiction, but once the moment is gone, how reality and fiction differ is indistinguishable. Memories, like fiction, are no longer actual, however close to reality they seem. They become stories through which we understand ourselves and others, just as fiction is a way to understand ourselves and our world.

5.6 Odd Second-Person Address: Referencing the Reader

The next aspect of *10:04* to be discussed is Lerner's use of second-person address. Second-person *you* as apostrophic address to the reader is infrequent in *10:04*. When it does occur, it is consequently startling and the

emotive effect is forceful. In the first chapter, Ben introduces his relationship with Alex. They are friends but it is a close relationship and they often share the details of their more intimate or emotional life events with one another whilst walking around the city (2014: 8):

> Which meant we'd eat a lunch in silence or idle talk, only for me to learn on the subsequent walk home that her mother had been diagnosed in a later stage. You might have seen us walking on Atlantic, tears streaming down her face, my arm around her shoulder, but our gazes straight ahead; or perhaps you've seen me during one of my increasingly frequent lacrimal events being comforted in kind while we moved across the Brooklyn Bridge, less a couple than conjoined.

Apostrophic second-person directly addresses the reader. On the surface, it appears to suggest that the narrative is verifiable. The epistemic modal "might" and adverb "perhaps" allow for possibility or doubt, but ultimately "you", the apostrophically addressed reader, *could* have seen Ben Lerner in real life in New York (after all, he lives in Brooklyn). There is also, however, a deeper autonarrational doubling in Lerner's use of "you". Just as Ben, the narrating-*I*, is not the real Ben Lerner, the apostrophically addressed "you" is not the real reader, but an implied reader (Booth 1983). This phantasm or textual counterpart of the reader thus demonstrates that readers' experiences of *10:04*, however visceral, are similarly only subjectively true; they too are stories.

Ben and Alex are also walking together at the end of *10:04*. This time, New York's streets are in darkness, with much of the city having lost power because of the force of Hurricane Sandy (2014: 236–237):

> It was getting cold. We saw a bright glow to the east among the dark towers of the Financial District, like the eye-shine of some animal. Later we would learn it was Goldman Sachs, see photographs in which one of the few illuminated buildings in the skyline was the investment banking firm, an image I'd use for the cover of my book—not the one I was contracted to write about fraudulence, but the one I've written in its place for you, to you, on the very edge of fiction.

Second-person apostrophic address to readers occurs alongside textual deictic references to *10:04* both as a novel and as a material object that real readers hold in their hands. These stylistic features serve to blend the narrative "I" at this point with the reader's extra-textual conception of the author. Moreover, the oppositional structure (e.g. *not X but Y*) implies that Lerner does not consider *10:04* to be fraudulent, dishonest. Contrastingly, *10:04* is honest precisely because it is a literary work of autofiction. Sitting "on the very edge of fiction", Lerner has written it "for you, to you". Discussing "not the one I was contracted to write about fraudulence, but the one I've written in its place for you, to you, on the very edge of fiction", Lin compliments Lerner: "I like how that sentence can apply to the narrator describing *10:04* from within the fiction or you, Ben Lerner, describing your novel from the outside"; Lerner replies "Yeah. The edge of fiction flickers" (Lin 2015). The perceptual deictic dynamics in this passage, the phantasmatic *I*s and *you*s, alongside textual deictic framing of *10:04* as the book being read by readers, double the ontological reference of *10:04*. A mixture of fiction and reality—at its very edges—is the closest we can get to authentic truth.

5.7 Intertextual *I* and Collective Second-Person Plural

The novel ends with the first-person narrator acknowledging his readers, which Lerner refers to earlier in the novel as "a collective person, a still uninhabited second person plural to whom all the arts, even in their most intimate registers, were nevertheless addressed" (2014: 108). Fittingly, the narrator does this through imagination and intertextually appropriating Walt Whitman (2014: 240):

> Sitting at a small table looking through our reflection in the window onto Flatbush Avenue, I will begin to remember our walk in the third person, as if I'd seen it from the Manhattan Bridge, but, at the time of writing, as I lean against the chain-link fence intended to stop jumpers, I am looking back at the totaled city in the second person plural. I know it's hard to understand / I am with you, and I know how it is.

Readers will recognise Whitman's words because Ben explains, on his residency in Marfa in Chapter four of *10:04*, that the "only book" he brought with him was "the Library of America edition of Whitman" (Lerner 2014: 167). Whitman, Ben thinks, "is always projecting himself: 'I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence; / I project myself—also I return—I am with you, and know how it is'" (2014: 168). These lines come from Whitman's poem 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry' (from *Leaves of Grass*), the name of which creates its own intertextual relationship with Ben's bridge-crossings in *10:04*. Furthermore, in their reference to projection and to the empathic connection implied in the phrase "I am with you", Whitman's words fittingly frame Lerner's autofictional project by highlighting the imaginative projection of subjectivities in fiction and their relationality.

Katz (2016) has traced the relationship between Lerner's two novels, *10:04* and *Leaving the Atocha Station*, and poetry, commenting particularly on the importance of Whitman. Katz reveals that the second quoted line from Whitman (starting "I project…") "is quite simply not to be found" in the Library of America edition that Ben claims to be reading; this, Katz explains, is because "Whitman edited it out of the final 'deathbed' edition of *Leaves of Grass*—the one used by the Library of America" (2016: 15). Katz therefore concludes that "*10:04* ends with a line which was retrospectively made to fade out from the future it imagines"; Whitman erased the line from the poem only for Lerner to reinsert it "into an edition of Whitman in which it doesn't exist" (2016: 15). As such, Katz views Lerner's intertextual play with Whitman in *10:04* as another metaphor for the same-yet-different "world to come".

Katz' interpretation is astute yet he overlooks one small but important detail. By focusing on the effect of Lerner's intertextual echo on the ontology of Whitman's poem, Katz neglects the corresponding same-yet-different "world to come" observable in Lerner's closing words themselves. Significantly, in *10:04*'s ending, there *is* a difference: Whitman's words are not quoted verbatim by Lerner. Whitman wrote "I am with you, and know how it is"; Lerner writes "I am with you, and *I* know how it is" (2014: 240; my emphasis). Whilst the first "I" was written originally by Whitman, the second is Lerner's addition. Thus, whilst the two first-person pronouns appear to be co-referential, they in fact have differing

originating reference points, though Lerner of course also participates in the first, through his appropriation and adoption of Whitman's words and—by extension—subject position. Speaking of Whitman's inability to write memoir, Ben decides that if Whitman "presented a picture of irreducible individuality, he would lose his ability to be 'Walt Whitman, a cosmos'—his 'I' would belong to an empirical person rather than constituting a pronoun in which readers of the future could participate" (2014: 168). Just as Lerner participates in Whitman's "I", readers can participate in Lerner's through their imagination as they read *10:04*. Similarly, they can accept the perceptual positioning of the second-person, but in the knowledge that even an apostrophic "you" is implied and collective: it embraces all potential readers. In *10:04*, and perhaps most clear in Lerner's final intertextual phrase, Lerner refuses to write a narrative-*I* that is empirically Ben Lerner the author. Whatever truth may be present in *10:04*, it is not autobiographical, but autofictional.

5.8 Conclusion

The starting point of this chapter was the premise that the study of autofiction has neglected the stylistic features that create what Lejeune saw as the genre's "double blow, or rather double vision—double writing" (1989: 27). The effect of this doubling, Lejeune claims, is akin to stereography, a process that fools the eye into seeing a 3-dimensional image from the combination of a pair of 2-dimensional images. My analysis, focusing on the deictic fields outlined in the cognitive-stylistic model of autonarration, explicates the textual dynamics that generate autofiction's stereoscopic effect. Overlaps and conflicts between intertextual artefacts, as well as between phantasms of author (using first- and third-person narration) and reader (using apostrophic *you*) create doubled ontological reference points, auto– and –fiction. These are then conceptually blended even whilst they exist in tension (double-vision) in readers' imaginative experiences of autofiction.

10:04 exhibits features in each field of the cognitive-stylistic model of autonarration. In terms of compositional deixis, *10:04* announces itself paratextually as a work of fiction, whilst textual deictic devices ground a

reading of the narrator-character as the authorial figure. In the perceptual field, there is an onomastic correspondence across author-narrator-character voice relations. Considering pronouns, although the novel is predominantly written in first-person, it also makes use of third-person in the second chapter. However, it does so in a way that sustains autonarration whilst suggesting the role that fiction plays in our self-conceptions. Lerner also uses second-person address to the reader: on one hand, this creates the illusion that the narratorial *I* and real reader share ontological territory; on the other, it strengthens the phantasmatic pact.

The perceptual dynamics constructed by Lerner in *10:04* ultimately suggest the honest value of fiction as a social experiential phenomenon: people tell each other stories. Indeed, Lerner claims, "My concern is how we live fictions, how fictions have real effects, become facts in that sense, and how our experience of the world changes depending on its arrangement into one narrative or another" (Lin 2015). Correspondingly, when watching Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, Ben rejects the academic celebration of it as creating the "ultimate collapse" by instead reconceiving of it as an ontological flicker between fiction and reality and relocating it in personal experience: "I watched time in *The Clock*, but wasn't in it, or I was experiencing time as such, not just having experiences through it" (2014: 54). Velasco describes *The Clock* as offering "a weird kind of realism" (2011: 201); perhaps this is also true of autofictions and Lerner's *10:04*. The '*I*'s, '*he*'s, and '*you*'s of *10:04* are not real, they are phantasms of the real.

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