

# Everybody's Autotheory

Max Cavitch

---

*Abstract* This essay historicizes the emergence of the term *autotheory* as the signifier of a mode of autobiographical writing and reading based primarily on intersubjective histories and relational ontologies. Instead of trying to define autotheory as a neatly circumscribed “subgenre” of autobiography, it argues that the term stands for a contemporary disturbance in the entire autobiographical field—a disturbance that, thanks in large part to the queer and feminist genealogies that inform it, helps disrupt the close association of autobiography and the prizing of ontological certainty and reorients the autobiographical pursuit of (self-)recognition away from the scripts of neoliberal individualism and toward the self's more radical and formative intersubjectivity.

*Keywords* autobiography, autotheory, feminism, genre, intersubjectivity

## **Autotheory as Neologism, Makeshift Canon, and Style of Participation**

Initially, the word *autotheory* may seem a contradiction—for what is theory if not a propositional account of general (rather than idiosyncratic) principles? Yet the term is being more and more widely used to designate a kind of autobiographical writing that feels out its object (which is also its subject) in a space that is both analytic and personal. Arianne Zwartjes (2019) calls attention to autotheory as an embattled feminist tradition of theorizing both from and in the first person; she calls its fusion of the traditionally masculine realm of “research” and the traditionally feminine realm of “imagination” a “chimera of research and imagination,” evoking Hesiod’s fire-breathing female monster. Yet it is no longer (if it ever was) an exclusively feminist tradition. Over the past several decades, especially, forms of feminism and many other

I wish to thank Nancy Bentley, Lauren Berlant, Annabel Kim, and Carolyn Williams for their incisive readings of earlier drafts of this essay and, especially, Marshall Brown for his peerless editing.

*Modern Language Quarterly* 83:1 (March 2022)

DOI 10.1215/00267929-9475043 © 2022 by University of Washington

movement-allied styles of thinking (such as critical race theory and queer theory) have opened up more and more expressive and conceptual space for the articulation of intersectional identities that resist both coercive typification (or serialization) and the easy complacency of conventional life scripts (Soriano 2018).

Stacey Young (1997: 14) first used the adjective *autotheoretical* to describe a set of intersectional feminist works that confront “questions of women’s subjectivity in the nexus of multiple and intersecting systems of power . . . [investigating] the workings of these systems at the level of daily life, with the potential of moving from the structural to the individual and back again.”<sup>1</sup> In the original, Spanish edition of *Testo Yonqui* (*Testo Junkie*), Beatriz Preciado, who later transitioned to Paul B. Preciado (2008: 15), launched the term *autoteoría* as a primary designation for experimental hybrids of the autobiographical and the theoretical by authors traditionally marginalized in relation to both of these logocentric fields. The term has since been adopted by or on behalf of subsequent authors for similar works of their own, such as Ames Hawkins’s *These Are Love(d) Letters* (2019), Emma Lieber’s *Writing Cure* (2020), Maggie Nelson’s *Argonauts* (2015), Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* (2016), Frank B. Wilderson III’s *Afropessimism* (2020), and Kate Zambreno’s *Book of Mutter* (2017). It has also been applied to various works predating its coinage, such as Sigmund Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Clarice Lispector’s *Água Viva* (1973), Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* (1980), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Dialogue on Love* (1999).<sup>2</sup>

Neither a parody of theory nor a do-it-yourself theory for the uncredentialed, autotheory also signifies something very different from the autobiography of a theorist (e.g., Louis Althusser’s *The Future Lasts Forever* [1992]). That is, the designation *autotheory* implies neither amateurishness nor any theoretical or philosophical vocation on the author’s part.

<sup>1</sup> Nancy K. Miller’s book *Getting Personal* is a crucial precursor to later formulations, as autotheory, of what Miller (1991: 3) calls “personal criticism”—of which she asks, among other things, “Is it a new stage of theory?”

<sup>2</sup> This is always the way with genre formation. The word *autobiography*, for example, was coined in the late eighteenth century and thereafter retrospectively ascribed to much earlier works by Saint Augustine, Margery Kempe, Benjamin Franklin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and others (see Cavitch 2012).

Nor, moreover, is it a narcissistic banalization of the inevitable relation between life and thought (practice and theory, the personal and the political, etc.).<sup>3</sup>

Rather than seek definitional clarity to enable a kind of generic flag planting, the present essay historicizes the emergence of *autotheory* as the resonant signifier of a preexisting mode of autobiographical practice that restores the intersubjective histories and relational ontologies from which so many continue to be alienated—even, in recent decades, as the global “memoir boom” has made it much easier for marginalized subjects to tell and to publish their “own” stories. Hence autotheory is not a neatly circumscribed “subgenre” of autobiography but the signifier of a contemporary disturbance in the autobiographical field. *Autotheory* more and more commonly evokes ways of “doing” (i.e., both writing and reading) autobiography that, thanks in large part to the queer and feminist genealogies that inform them, upset the autobiographical apple-cart of masculinist (and hegemonic feminist) subjective universalism.

On this view, the classically “disembodied” subject of liberalism gives way, in works of autotheory, to the usually muted or throttled propositional colloquies that so many of us keep having (no matter how privileged or disprized our self-identifications may be), with ourselves and our others, about how to metabolize the by-products of thinking our own embodied histories. Such efforts make for restive writing as authors like Nelson set out to wrangle both idiosyncrasy (*autós*) and conceptuality (*theōría*)—arguing, communing, and reckoning with themselves even as they proposition others with general principles. Such authors bravely face the personal wreckage of their borrowed idealities while seeking to brace others for responses to questions they either have kept asking in desperation or have simply not known how to pose. Because Nelson (2015) has done this so well, *The Argonauts* has become, for now, everybody's go-to example of autotheory.<sup>4</sup> In the brief time since the term was

<sup>3</sup> There is, of course, a long post-Cartesian tradition of conceiving philosophy in autobiographical terms, from Hume and Fichte to Nietzsche, Derrida, and Badiou, as well as a widely recognized genre of “philosophical autobiography” (see, e.g., Schuster 2003). Autotheory is not necessarily radically dissimilar from either autobiographical philosophy or philosophical autobiography, but the works with which the term is associated tend to be far more skeptical of subjective transcendence and especially of subjective universalism. See also Cowley 2015.

<sup>4</sup> It is likely that popular and critical acclaim for Nelson's book, which foregrounds the self-designating term *autotheory*, helps account for its superior traction to precursor

coined, dozens of writers—queers and feminists, especially, for reasons that will soon become even clearer—have added their books to this makeshift canon.<sup>5</sup>

While the term *autotheory* may sound solipsistic, autotheory addresses the need for relational, rather than merely reflexive, self-narration—including the need to attend to the intersubjectivity of writing and reading. Hence it is especially ill advised to assert a single, prescriptive definition of autotheory as a subgenre of autobiography. Indeed, such classificatory pedantry is the *bête noire* of literary history. Genre is our most flexible and generative way of organizing literary works. Genres, like classifications of any kind, are meaningful (and not pernicious) only to the extent that they describe rather than prescribe and attend to the dynamics and unorthodoxies of any given work's participation in the genre or genres with which it is associated by some internal or external designation.<sup>6</sup>

Some autobiographies participate so fully and freely in other genres that new classificatory terms, such as *autofiction*, *autoethnography*, and now *autotheory* have emerged to describe them. Because the genre of autobiography includes so many works that participate vigorously in questions of the human condition, whole disciplines—such as ontology, epistemology, phenomenology, and ethics—are often recognized as participants in it. When asked to characterize his “primary interest” in the fields of literature and philosophy, Jacques Derrida (1992: 34) replied that “‘autobiography’ is perhaps the least inadequate name, because it remains for me the most enigmatic, the most open, even today.” My own

---

cognates such as *personal criticism*, *autocritique*, *critical memoir*, and *life thinking*. Yet, as Robyn Wiegman (2020: 1) notes, the wide variety of styles and theoretical paradigms that now travel under the aegis of autotheory make it “important to resist the lure to position *The Argonauts* as the genre’s North Star.” Indeed, as the present essay argues, reifying autotheory as a genre is itself important to resist.

<sup>5</sup> In this essay my focus on books is not meant to imply that autotheoretical works in other media are less important or influential in the history of reflexive aesthetic modalities. For more on autotheory and other media, see Bal 2015 and Fournier 2018.

<sup>6</sup> “Every text,” writes Jacques Derrida (1980: 212), “participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the *trait* of participation itself.” In some autobiographies this trait of participation is plain, whereas in others it must be “brought out,” as someone might say about the color of my eyes.

antinomian view is that *autotheory* has become the least inadequate name for certain contemporary efforts to rewrite and reread selves, allowing us, moreover, to read back into earlier autobiographies (as we must keep doing with any genre) the heterogeneity and transgressiveness they would otherwise be taken, in the name of one ideological apparatus or another, wholly to resist.

Of course, ideological apparatuses (families, schools, churches, clubs, courts, legislatures, media, unions, industries, etc.) may help build genres as well as police them. Nineteenth-century medicojuridical apparatuses, for example, gave rise to the genre of the case study by providing detailed accounts of subjects (patients, criminals) who deviated from the norms of health and morality that they aimed to establish and enforce. The case study, in turn, helped clarify certain means and motives for autobiography. For instance, Althusser's *The Future Lasts Forever* embroiled its author (still the chief theorist of ideological apparatuses) and many of its readers in vigorous contestation over the book's forensic, diagnostic, therapeutic, and social values (see Althusser 1993). Althusser's lifelong psychiatric illness and his murder of his wife, H el ene Rytman, helped ensure that his book would function as a case study, not only as an autobiography in the grand French tradition to which he also repeatedly alludes. However, in the three decades since Althusser's book was published, three factors—ideological apparatuses that work to reify theory, the mighty resurgence of identity politics, and the global memoir boom—have together helped precipitate a new term, *autotheory*, better to characterize reflexively relational autobiographies, including many written well before its advent and beyond marginal and minoritized subject positions.

### **Reclaiming Subjectivities: Queer and Feminist Genealogies**

No matter what one's subject position, life is a series of collisions and negotiations with the various norms and laws that shape and contain such positions in one's time and place, and it is important to stipulate that *autotheory* is not the badge of any particular form of what the sociologist Erving Goffman (1986) has called "spoiled identity." Yet moving through life with one or more socially discredited attributes is often associated with the heightened tolerance for ambivalence about identity

that characterizes autotheoretical works. This helps account for the fact that queers, like feminists, have ready-to-hand traditions of autobiographical writing that include disproportionately large numbers of works, both old and new, that “do” autobiography in ways we might now be inclined to recognize as autotheoretical—works by interrogative, propositionally minded authors living and thinking beyond the pale of the sorts of socially secured identities that have at least seemed to offer the “right sort” of person a legitimate place in history, a place often ensured by means of more conventional autobiographies. One such autotheoretical work is Ralph Werther’s *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (1918), which, more than a century ago, strove to bring to light the “idiosyncrasies and secret practices” of others who, like himself, occupied one or more of the “innumerable stages of transitional individuals” hitherto seen by others (and even by many such individuals themselves) as ill, abject, unnatural, and forever to be outcast (Werther 2008: 40, 21). Paradoxically, this involved inventing, refurbishing, and legitimizing a number of relatively discrete categories, or identities, that could serve as collective bulwarks against the uncertainty, isolation, shame, and ignominy of not belonging, while helping corral—or serialize through nomenclature—the “innumerable stages of transitional individuals” (Foucault 1980: 71–73). Werther’s ambivalence toward bounded serializations (understood as finite social identities) pops up repeatedly, as in his assurance that his *Autobiography* “discloses not only the life of an androgyne per se, but that of a ‘fairie’ or ‘petit-jesus,’ the life of which rare human ‘sport’ (in the biological sense) your author was apparently also predestined to live out in a way immeasurably more varied than falls to the lot of the ordinary fairie” (Werther 2008: 20).<sup>7</sup> Werther details his history, physiology, behavior, and psychology as “an androgyne” while taking frequent opportunities to distinguish himself from those whose aspiration for a revalued and recognized identity he nevertheless sincerely shares.

Werther’s (2008: 53) desire “to know the mysteries of my peculiar life” motivates both the bold assertion of his God-given and unshakable identity as an androgyne and the spirited exploration of his idiosyncrasies—and of the mutability of identity as such. “Your author,” he tells us, “is really

<sup>7</sup> On bounded and unbounded serializations, see Anderson 1998: 29–45.

a woman whom Nature disguised as a man,” and the theory of androgyny he lays out in his *Autobiography* is both physiologically and psychologically essentializing: androgyny is to him something innate and irreversible (when it comes to his androgyny, he frequently insists that he is “irresponsible” [25], though while he means “through no fault of his own” the word also resounds with recklessness and delinquency). However, the terms of his self-identification also shift according to circumstance and whim, to the extent that one may recognize in his book an incipient “queering” of identity—or a “queer” identity *avant la lettre*. Lacking yet, in its historical moment, a clearly articulated spirit of proud militancy, or a shared minoritarian political program, or a collective vision of tribal potency, or a broad movement for legal and bureaucratic liberation, or even a collaborative intellectual field of self-historicization, Werther's *Autobiography* nevertheless belongs to an early archive of shared queer rhetorical practices that precede the more normative, institutionalized rhetoric of the homophile and gay liberation movements (along with the autobiographical writing they inspired and celebrated) from the 1940s to the 1980s.

The queering of identity in autobiographical writing like Werther's is an alternative to the bounded serializations that prevail—thanks, often, to their punitive powers of hypostatization and defensive projection—in twentieth-century life writing. Werther found it no less remarkable than Denise Riley (2000: 31) that “something which is so evidently mutable and plastic as an ‘identity’ should be periodically invoked and hunted as if it had the hard permanence of diamonds.” Diamonds, after all, are mined and cut; they are not like the impermanent subjects whose subjection Barthes (1989: 291), another early autotheorist, eloquently appraised: “To proclaim yourself something is always to speak at the behest of a vengeful Other.” Every socially recognized identity, whether cherished or despised, has an injunctive dimension, and to defy these injunctions is to risk—or, in his case, to pursue—the “disintegration” that David Wojnarowicz proclaims in the title of his autotheoretical memoir.

The amplitude of the late twentieth-century tribal warfare that Wojnarowicz (1991: 37–38) sees cranked up all around him, in his road memoir of the United States during the Reagan-Bush era, is fueled by vengeance—including, potentially, his own:

We are born into a preinvented existence within a tribal nation of zombies and in that illusion of a one-tribe nation there are real tribes. . . . But when the volume of that war reaches epic dimensions, and when the person hearing it fails to connect with another member of the same tribe who can acknowledge the sound, that person can one day find themselves at the top of a water tower in suburbia armed with a high-powered rifle firing indiscriminately at the ants crawling around below. That person can one day find himself running amok in the streets with a handgun; that person can one day find himself lobbing a grenade at the forty-car motorcade of the president; or that person can end up on a street corner, homeless hungry and wild-eyed, punching himself in the face or sticking wires through the flesh of his arms or chest.

The badlands and borderlands of Wojnarowicz's America are largely unnamed and abstracted, though they do include some humanizing signposts (e.g., the Native American people he encounters in various southwestern states) and the palpably grimy blocks, docks, and derelict buildings of a now largely erased Manhattan netherworld. Outcasts abound, not least because so many, like Wojnarowicz, have cast themselves loose from the roles that normative life scripts would impose on them. However, there are plenty of ready-made life scripts for outcasts as well, which are especially easy for the poor and the despised and the ill and the dissident to fall, or be pushed, into. An outcast who, like Wojnarowicz, writes an autobiography not only risks falling into one of these roles but also risks writing yet another such script, which the desperate might cling to, thinking that it could save them from drowning in the slurry ponds and backwaters of America's countless sites of internal exile: "Each public disclosure of a private reality becomes something of a magnet that can attract others with a similar frame of reference" (121). Yet if such disclosures trouble the binaristic logic of public-private, then their attraction need not be that of passive submission, for "each public disclosure of a fragment of private reality serves as a dismantling tool against the illusion of ONE-TRIBE NATION; it lifts the curtains for a brief peek and reveals the probable existence of literally millions of tribes. The term 'general public' disintegrates" (121). One could think of all auto-theoretical works, old and new, as "memoirs of disintegration," in that phrase's two genitive senses: autobiographical writing that is both "about" the disintegration of liberal notions of self-other relations and also "constituted by" disintegrated figures of monadic selfhood.



To stand for another—or for many others—is, necessarily, to submit to some degree of depersonalization. To be a representative person, I must become, to some extent, impersonal. That is, I must allow some aspects of what is peculiar to me as an individual entity to be suspended, occluded, or projected. As Sharon Cameron (2007: ix) notes, impersonality “is not the negation of the person, but rather a penetration through or a falling outside the boundary of the human particular.” To think, thus, of breaching this boundary is to stipulate the existence of such a boundary: some version of what Norbert Elias (1985: 52) calls “*Homo clausus*.” These boundaries, of course, are notional and pragmatic, like the boundaries on a map. Like the boundaries on a map, they remain meaningful only as long as various kinds of work (psychic, political, etc.) sustain them. In Cameron’s (2007: ix) words, impersonality “disrupts elementary categories we suppose to be fundamental to specifying human distinctiveness.” Many feminist autobiographers, for example, have sought to augment or eclipse what is personal to themselves as individual entities in order better to stand for others and to speak on their behalf.

Much of the history of feminist autobiography—and its precursory relation to autotheory—is a history of strategic impersonalism, chiefly because, in efforts to understand the human condition, the very notion of representativeness has continued, stubbornly, to be linked to the supposed universalism of maleness. Thus, in a 1940 letter to Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf (1980: 453) wrote, with a meaningfulness that transcends the claim’s technical inaccuracy, that “there’s never been a womans [*sic*] autobiography.” Nearly half a century later Barbara Johnson (1987: 154) could say with justice that

the very notion of a self, the very shape of human life stories, has always, from Saint Augustine to Freud, been modeled on the man. . . . Rousseau’s—or any man’s—autobiography consists in the story of the difficulty of conforming to the standard of what a *man* should be. The problem for the female autobiographer is, on the one hand, to resist the pressure of masculine autobiography as the only literary genre available for her enterprise, and, on the other, to describe a difficulty in conforming to a female ideal which is largely a fantasy of the masculine, not the feminine, imagination.

The three decades since Johnson wrote these words have radically transformed the landscape of autobiographical writing, not only because so

many new autobiographical and autotheoretical works by women have appeared but also because the deep historical archive of women's autobiographical writing has been rediscovered and reread in light of new intersectional social histories, feminist historiographies, and the progressive deconstruction of what Johnson still found it difficult not to call "the feminine imagination."<sup>8</sup> Neither Rousseau nor Woolf can now so easily be read with the masculinist mindset Johnson described. This doesn't mean that autobiographies cannot still be written with that mindset or that the need for women and transgendered persons, especially, to continue experimenting, autotheoretically, with the potential representativeness of non-cis-male genders has been obviated.

### **Autotheory and the Nonhegemonic Subject**

Yet the politics of representativity always risks being reduced to catachrestic sloganeering of the "I am Spartacus" variety (widely deployed recent examples include "I am Salman Rushdie," "I am Trayvon Martin," "I am Mohamed Bouazizi," "I am Ai Weiwei," "I am Matthew Shepard," "I am Christine Blasey Ford," and "I am Eric Garner"). Such slogans, meant to exceed even empathy and solidarity in their literalist assertions of identity, have proved highly effective, politically. But unlike the recaptured Roman slaves in Stanley Kubrick's cinematic rendition of the Third Servile War, who know that claiming "I am Spartacus" means near-certain death, most modern protesters risk little or nothing by adopting this strategy, which can have the unintended effect of dissolving the specificity of the named person's experience into an abstract principle like equality or human rights.

However, there are other kinds of scenes (as well as other kinds of slogans, e.g., "I can't breathe") that make room for the reciprocally constituting narrations of nonidentical subjects—what Jean-Luc Nancy (1991: 4) calls "the singular existent that the subject announces, promises, and at the same time conceals." I am not Eric Garner. But if I speak, in my own voice, the last words he uttered in his, I am able to announce, promise, and also conceal myself as a singular existent with my own singular experience of vulnerability, and others can speak the same

<sup>8</sup> Thus Young (1997: 61) later foregrounds the autotheoretical as, against a singular "feminist imagination," the "embodiment of a discursive type of political action, which decenters the hegemonic subject of feminism."

words back to me as part of an exchange or dialogue. Sedgwick's auto-theoretical *Dialogue on Love* is about the necessary politicization of a traditionally depoliticized space: the psychoanalytic consulting room. The reciprocally constituting narrations of Sedgwick and her psychoanalyst depend not on "echoing and mirroring" but on a meeting place where certain political affinities not only exist between them but also are understood to condition the work they undertake together (Sedgwick 1999: 7). Sedgwick's description of their first encounter includes historical analogies (e.g., between psychic defenses and "the Maginot Line"), a litmus test of her analyst's feminism, anxiety about whether he is able to question his "entitlement to exist," and a postsession meditation on the political meaning of his possible "stupidity," for, she writes, "in the real world, stupidity isn't a lack but an aggressively positive, entitled presence" (9–11). Thus, even in a "dialogue on love" (or indeed even in a love affair), the roles of narrating self and narrated self may become entwined in a form of political action in which I can represent you (e.g., by saying for myself, rather than merely echoing, the words you have just said—words like "I can't breathe" or "I love you").

### **Autotheory and Addressivity; or, Something Strange to Me at the Heart of Me**

Most works of autotheory, like most autobiographical writing, address an implied reader who is not yet a subject but becomes a subject—an accomplice—every time anyone opens the book. The second-person pronoun may further, or differently, stimulate the reader's sense of complicity, whether the address is to a generalized or abstract reader, or to a particular individual or entity, or reflexively to the writer. Indeed, the authorial second person tests *your* readiness to be called to account, even if the explicit addressee is someone else. The "you" in *Citizen*, Rankine's autotheoretical memoir of being Black in America, is almost instantly recognizable as the author. Nevertheless the reader's impression of being spoken to directly, the fantasy of being recognized, singled out for attention, even necessary, is hard to shake—not least because it is the transcendentalizing fantasy of citizenship that Rankine (2014: 139) calls "the immanent you." I may not be able authentically to enter into Rankine's raced self-attributions, yet from my own nests and plots of category resistance (woman, not woman, poor, not poor, cis-, trans-, African

American, not African American, Democrat, anarchist, racist, utopian, old, not old, citizen, abuser, abused, etc.) I continue to feel both intimidated and—though I am nothing like the target others make of her—intimidated, and I go on reading with my own peculiar “stammer of disengagement,” my own special “guilt at refusing guilt” (Riley 2000: 85).

If someone overhears me talking to myself when I think I’m alone, they may well learn things about me that I would not have chosen to share (that I talk to myself in gibberish, for example). If I read someone writing to herself, referring to herself in the second person, I might feel as if I were in the presence of an affectionate couple making a very open show of how little they care about being observed. I witness, as it were, a public display of *autoaffection*—not merely signs of self-love or self-regard (though these may be evident) but traces of the more complex and fundamental self-experience of being non-self-identical that is endemic to autotheoretical works. Rankine, for instance, continues to address herself as another, as “you”—whether it is the “you” of a largely ignored childhood, or the “you” of the hand that now writes the word *you*, or the “you” that imagines “you” always “inside” a body that “you” want to think of as always being the same body, or the “you” that hears “you” say “you” and will go on listening for “you” until “you” are no more. She makes, in short, a rhetorical concession to self-difference, to the heteronomy of subjectivity, to autoaffection. “Memory is a tough place. You were there. If this is not the truth, it is also not a lie” (Rankine 2014: 64). To Rankine, memory can feel like a place you never were; it can feel inwardly external—her own, yet from somewhere she’s not, someone she isn’t.

The structure of this feeling of the inwardly external has had many names: Augustine’s *God*, Descartes’s *cogito*, Locke’s *property*, Kant’s *autonomy*, Freud’s *unconscious*, Lacan’s *Other*.<sup>9</sup> As a key concept in his lifelong

<sup>9</sup> “You were waiting within me while I went outside me” (Augustine 2006: 234); “*I think, therefore I am*” (Descartes 1998: 18); man is “*Proprietor of his own Person*” (Locke 1988: 298); “The will is thus not solely subject to the law, but is subject in such a way that it must be regarded also *as legislating to itself*, and precisely for this reason as subject to the law (of which it can consider itself the author)” (Kant 2002: 49); “Very powerful mental processes or ideas exist . . . which can produce all the effects in mental life that ordinary ideas do (including effects that can in their turn become conscious as ideas), though they themselves do not become conscious” (Freud 1961a: 14); “Something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me” (Lacan 1992: 71).

effort to deconstruct these and other names for the inwardly external, Derrida (1997: 166) called it *autoaffection* and described it as the modality of self-experience that “constitutes the same (*auto*) as it divides the same.” In other words, we are not subjects who may *become* riven (as a traumatized person may become split into many dissociated selves). Rather, we are subjects *because* we are riven: autoaffection “produces sameness as self-relation within self-difference; it produces sameness as the nonidentical” (Derrida 1973: 82).

By taking advantage of the linguistic confusion between denotation and reference, Rankine's second-person self-address dramatizes autoaffectivity: the “you” of *Citizen* is both addresser and addressee, doer and done-to, the affecting and the affected. So too is the “you” of many of Derrida's own philosophical stagings of intersubjectivity, as in *La carte postale* (*The Post Card*, 1980) and *Circonfession* (*Circumfession*, 1991). Like Derrida, Rankine never presumes to be thoroughly in control of her disclosures or to know intimately the person she's addressing. Because I, too, am the person she's addressing, I'm being asked to consider what variables (conscious and otherwise) might be in play as I find myself caught up in various enactments that include versions of the racist scenarios Rankine sketches from a life that is her own yet not only her own. Still balancing Rankine's weighty indictment of American racism, is it any wonder that I seek to swallow it up in my own auto(biographical) theorizing? I see Rankine seeing me, and I want to say, here, “Hey, that's not me!” The police officer's accusatory “Hey, you there!” is, according to Althusser (1971: 174), only “a quite ‘special’ form” of a multiplicitous and circumambient set of ideological “apparatuses” that “recruit” (seduce, lure, indict, inveigle, accuse, credit, nominate) us as part of our ongoing, ever-faltering subjectivation. We may accept, resist, or refuse interpellation—consciously or unconsciously—in our efforts to manage, one way or another, the inevitable disquiet it provokes. But fundamentally, it is recognition that we seek, and, because the normative is always kaleidoscoped by the psychological, misrecognition is what we get and what we must make do with.

### **Autotheory and the Relational Ontologies of Modernism**

Making do with what we get is one of the leitmotifs of Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), which, noncoincidentally, is also, as

Adriana Cavarero (2000: 81) points out, a “dialogue on love” (in what she would surely recognize as Sedgwick’s sense). Stein writes; Toklas types. Toklas edits; Stein demurs or acquiesces. Toklas narrates what Stein invents, and Stein publishes what Toklas says. Stein plays the role of the narrated self, and Toklas plays the role of the narrating self. Stein appears to herself as she appears to Toklas, who appears to Stein as Stein wants her to appear. Theirs is no mere collaboration but a *conscriptio*: a blurring, conjoining, and undoing of reflexive subjectivities to which works of what we now call autotheory give life and for which the neologism *autotheory* presupposes a history—a history of disruptions (like Stein and Toklas’s) to the genre of autobiography and its traditional commitment to the distinctness of subjects (Stein 1933).

One locus of disruption is the discourse of maternity, as in Stein’s various figural and semiotic experiments—many of them at least semiautobiographical—with the recuperation of the maternal body, from *Tender Buttons* (1914) to *The Mother of Us All* (1946). This is one reason why works of autotheory so often dwell on the illusory nature of body intactness and on destabilizations in childbirth and in parent-child relationships, as in Zambreno’s *Book of Mutter*, Julietta Singh’s *No Archive Will Restore You* (2018), Colin Dayan’s *In the Belly of Her Ghost* (2018), and Nelson’s *Argonauts* (which points out that the spectacle of a pregnant woman in public “disrupts our usual perception of an other as a *single* other” [Nelson 2015: 91]). In these books, all published within the past few years, the conceptual generality that Stein (among other modernists) so robustly deconstructed continues, for the most part, to obscure the persistent conjunction of subjectivation and matricide (which Julia Kristeva [1989: 27–28] calls “our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation”).<sup>10</sup> *Autotheory* thus names a keen responsiveness, in some of the most interesting—and popular—contemporary autobiographical writing, to widespread displacements (e.g., in psychology, anthropology, and linguistics) of substantivist ontologies by relational

<sup>10</sup> On “matrixial” spaces, see Ettinger 2006. The ongoing destabilization of feminist theory by the question of the maternal has been one of the conditions of autotheory’s emergence as (among other things) a polyvocal discourse of maternity—a discourse in which worrying over the conditions of individuation seems increasingly beside the point, as individuation (the ostensive achievement of ontological security) seems less and less conceptually persuasive, despite its (strategic) political necessity.

alternatives, which makes it harder and harder to speak meaningfully of a monadic ego that precedes or exists apart from a matrix of self-other relations.<sup>11</sup>

The modernist autobiographical project of Stein and Toklas—which includes *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), from which the present essay's title is derived<sup>12</sup>—bears the impress of their friend Alfred North Whitehead's (1929) process metaphysics: one of the foundations of contemporary relational ontologies, in which subjectivation is understood to be an ongoing process of collation, or concrescence. Stein's (1998: 288) emphasis on linguistic enactment rather than emplacement and her theorization of repetition as “insistence” also recall Ernest Fenollosa, whose touchstone essay of 1903 asserts that “relations are more real and more important than the things which they relate” (Fenollosa and Pound 2008: 54). The ontological questions raised by Stein and Toklas make their autobiographical project an important precursor to the work of many recent autotheorists, including Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart (2019: 5) in their book *The Hundreds*, in which the sluices of authorship, voice, address, succession, causality, being, event, citation, paratext, historicity, and ephemerality all open onto “an experiment in keeping up with what's going on.”

“An experiment in keeping up with what's going on” sounds, in fact, a lot like a definition of modernism, with its anxious exuberance over the new and with its newly self-estranged subjects hustling to keep pace with the fast-receding possibility of self-knowledge. By the late nineteenth century autobiography was commonly predicated on realism, chronology, and the presumptive isomorphism of a self-reflexive author and the narrated subject, and it then had a hard time, in the early twentieth century, keeping up with what was going on in a world transformed by Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, and eventually Heisenberg.

<sup>11</sup> The two chief psychoanalytic theorists of relational matrices remain Bracha L. Ettinger (2006) and Stephen A. Mitchell (1988). One of their many important points of congruence is that neither accedes to the reductive opposition of the matrixial to the phallic.

<sup>12</sup> The other works are Toklas's *Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* (1954), *Aromas and Flavors of Past and Present* (1958), and *What Is Remembered* (1963) and Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and *Wars I Have Seen* (1945).

Indeed, Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is often regarded as a sign of the "late" Stein's failure to keep up with what was going on in the experimental or avant-garde writing that responded in large part to her earlier work, as if its relative accessibility and its commercial success were merely audacious or a simple satire of modernism's assimilation by the capitalist machinery of public relations.

Yet of course that is precisely what was going on as Stein and Toklas conscribed their *Autobiography*. Edward Bernays, for example, in the midst of revolutionizing the semiotics of mass persuasion, was also trying to convince his uncle, Sigmund Freud, to write his autobiography. A few years earlier Freud had published a brief narrative recounting his professional role in the development of psychoanalysis (1925). But Bernays was asking for something more personal. "Impossible," Freud (1961b: 391) replied. "A psychologically complete and honest confession of life [*vollständige und aufrichtige Lebensbeichte*] . . . would require so much indiscretion (on my part as well as on that of others) about family, friends, and enemies, most of them still alive, that it is simply out of the question." In his letter to Bernays, Freud went on to impugn the genre, as if no one were capable of "so much indiscretion"—indeed, as if no writer of his or her life story could sustain the requirements of honesty. "What makes all autobiographies worthless," he told Bernays, "is, after all, their mendacity" (391).<sup>13</sup> It is ineffably charming to hear Freud gruffly denouncing, as late as 1929 and to one of the chief architects of modern public relations, the indiscretion and mendacity that he had proved were always endemic to anybody and everybody's "confession of life."

Indeed, Stein was well aware that both the indiscretion and the mendacity that percolate through any "confession of life" consist of both conscious and "unconscious" advertencies. Encouraged by her brother Leo, Stein had begun using Freudian terms (including *unconscious*) in her sprawling early novel *The Making of Americans*, and Freud eventually supplanted William James in her thinking about psychology.

<sup>13</sup> In a much earlier letter to his then-fiancée, Martha Bernays (the sister of Edward's father), Freud (1961b: 74) accused John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (1873) of being "prudish" and "unearthly."



Psychoanalysis appealed to Leo, in part, as a critique of empirical realism in the writing of history, and Stein's discussions with him on this matter may color her representation of historical details in the *Autobiography*, where, for example, she ironizes the circumstances of her own birth by telling us—in Toklas's voice—that she has “often begged her [Stein] to be born in California but she has remained always firmly born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania” (Stein 1933: 85).<sup>14</sup> Is this quip about fidelity to fact, or is it about allegiance to place? Either way, it tells something importantly (auto)biographical about Stein that she continued to “choose” a condition she could not possibly have chosen. Such a parody of what Paul John Eakin (1992: 28) quite misleadingly calls autobiography's “referential aesthetic” goes beyond sociable irony to offer a trenchant reminder of the extent to which certain forms or deficits of facticity might not only undermine an autobiographer's credibility but also threaten an autobiographer's—or anyone else's—civic and social being.

For of course it was Toklas who had been born in California—and who fled San Francisco in 1906, shortly after its destruction by earthquake and fire, into what must have seemed, in retrospect, the waiting arms of Gertrude Stein, whom Toklas met the day after her arrival in Paris and who made her one of the most famously queer “wives” in literary history. It is hard to imagine how, from 1910 until Stein's death in 1946, Toklas ever kept her hat on, with all those geniuses swirling about her at the salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, where “everybody brought somebody” at virtually any time (Stein 1933: 50). Nevertheless, at the center of that vortex, the two of them made life together the subject of a variety of autobiographical works, some signed by one, some by the other, and all of them raising the same spousal question Nelson (2015: 46) poses in her “confession of life” with Harry Dodge: “*How can a book be both a free expression and a negotiation?*”

<sup>14</sup> On Leo Stein, psychoanalysis, and history, see Fuller 1950: 192. Despite his conviction that, in light of Freud's work, history seemed to him “a mare's nest of illusory knowledge” (192), Leo nevertheless found occasion, in his unfinished autobiography, to remark on Gertrude's carelessness about dates, “which is perhaps unfortunate if there is to be any concern at all for facts” (190). In a letter to his cousin Fred Stein shortly before Gertrude's death, Leo confessed that “I was for a while annoyed when her Toklas book was published because of all the lies in it, but that has long since passed” (291).

### Everybody's Responsibility

Like Stein and Toklas, Nelson and Dodge are negotiating not just the contents of an autobiographical narrative but also the phenomenology of an ethical relation. To whom and for whom am I responsible? In one form or another such questions are at the heart of even the least reflexive autobiographical writing—questions not of mere dutifulness and prescribed behavior but of the always conflictual, even paradoxical, demands, defying strict ethical calculation, that all of us routinely face in relation to others. Indeed, to speak of oneself is already to speak of others: at the very least, the others in relation to whom one's self is constituted, beginning, for most of us, with our parents. In the moments of what we often call self-doubt—be the circumstances exigent or trivial—we most keenly experience, unconsciously, the opacity of our primary relationality. As Judith Butler (2005: 20) puts it, “If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that opacity seems built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency.” We know that human beings are born wholly unable to care for themselves; other primate newborns also depend on caregivers, but their brains are far more developed than those of human neonates, whose utter helplessness (and genetic predisposition for attachment) ensures their relational constitution as subjects and their early development of intersubjective capacities. From the get-go we are dependent on other subjects, and they have needs and desires that are themselves intersubjectively shaped. Because so much of our earliest, most consequential experience of relating and relatedness is not available to conscious memory, even our most “selfish” responses are never entirely our own.

“My” autobiography can only be a story *of* (both *by* and *about*) others—the others I am (intrapsychically) and the others in whose existence I share (interpersonally). The psychological myth of the isolated mind and the philosophical myth of the monadic, solitary ego have given way to intersubjectivist turns in both disciplines: the psychoanalytic recognition of the full conscious and unconscious participation of both parties to the analytic encounter and the extension of that recognition to the development and structure of all intrapsychic experience; and the philosophical critique of schools of thought in which the “other” is a mere object of my perception and not in any way determinative of my

own being. *Autotheory* reasserts autobiography's staking of its claim where psychoanalysis and philosophies of the other intersect—or, better, interrupt each other, cutting into the flow, bringing out muted colorations, chasing choral vanishings, breaking and breaking back against currents of orthodoxy, looking and looking again at asymmetrical reciprocities. One of the distinctive formal features of Nelson's *Argonauts* is the marginal notation of the names of the "other" theorists it cites or evokes, many of whom—including Judith Butler, Anne Carson, Michel Foucault, Jane Gallup, Julia Kristeva, Paul B. Preciado, Denise Riley, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and D. W. Winnicott—have written and/or written about autobiographical works, all of them in adumbration of the fact that *autós* is always a conscription of *állos*, just as life is always with others, however bizarre, or alienating, or painful, or merely inconvenient that may sometimes be.<sup>15</sup>

Thus *autotheory* marks a predilection for autobiographical writing (and reading) that augments appreciation of relational ontologies and that helps in confronting the ethical challenges (i.e., the responsibilities) that substantivist ontologies, shored up by neoliberal austerities, tend to keep at bay. Many traditional autobiographies, after all, universalize (from) a particular subject position, a tendency that Stein both indulges and satirizes in *Everybody's Autobiography*. Works of autotheory, by contrast, variously stipulate that, whatever boundedness there may be to the self, its history is a dizzying cascade of interpersonal encounters. Individual histories are largely constituted by shared experiences—shared in the double sense of *participated in* and *communicated to*. We would be nothing without them. Yet to what extent do they belong to us? To what extent are they ours to publish or withhold? What degree of circumspection do we owe the living? What sort of discretion, if any, do we owe the dead?

<sup>15</sup> The intersubjectivist perspective that informs this essay has, of course, been preceded by similar understandings, developed in different ways, of the fundamental otherness or multiplicity of the self, such as Martin Buber's (2002: 71) rejection of a philosophically degenerate, individual self "no longer exposed to the claim of otherness"; Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) sociolinguistic view of the self as dialogic; and Gregory Bateson's (1972) anthropological theory of mind as a system that is neither coincident with one's physical body nor distinct from the social and ecological structures in which it is immanent. Against these and many other critical alternatives, as Wayne C. Booth (1988: 239) notes, "the notion of the self as individual and essentially private has proved astonishingly persistent."

After both of his parents had died, John Berger (1986: 3) said that it “would be a natural moment to write an autobiography. My version of my life can no longer hurt either of them.” Perhaps here he is avowing a conscious or unconscious temptation to revenge himself on his parents for the hurts that parents are liable to inflict, wittingly and unwittingly. Not least because so many hurts are imagined, it is all too easy to be lured into a position of righteousness when one’s fear of contradiction has been diminished. One also may infer the persistence of a young child’s fear of punishment. “My version of my life” is no longer, one may imagine Berger saying, prompted by the need to explain, justify, or exculpate myself before a powerful parental authority. Yet, of course, my early incorporation of that interrogative, potentially punitive authority is part of any version of my life that I could tell, no matter how silent I might be about the suffering I have endured or inflicted, or wished to inflict, on others.

### **Making a Meal of It**

Toklas began publishing autobiographical works only after Stein’s death and with some diffidence, despite the encouragement of publishers like Simon Michael Bessie, who finally coaxed from her *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*—a “mingling of recipe and reminiscence” that, for the first time, helped the world see her as more than the willing chef and shadow of another great woman (Toklas 2010: xix). She met the skepticism of certain friends (“But, Alice, have you ever tried to write” etc.) with a valedictory rejoinder to the perceived presumptiveness of her effort: “As if a cook-book had anything to do with writing” (280)—*writing*, of course, being an all-too-convenient synecdoche for Stein and for the autobiography that Stein had (hadn’t she?) already written for her. Today, given the common mixing of “food writing” and “life writing,” Toklas’s valediction would sound facetious. But in 1954 it mimicked what was then the typical relegation of the cookbook genre to the subliterate realm (by many lights the realm, until fairly recently, of autobiography as well).<sup>16</sup> Toklas’s disingenuousness here smacks unremarkably of

<sup>16</sup> The locus classicus remains Paul de Man’s (1979: 919) essay “Autobiography as De-facement,” with its effete and slithery facetiousness regarding autobiography’s “incompatibility with the monumental dignity of aesthetic values.”

(auto)aggression as well as of the more piquantly interrogative note: what *did* she have “to do with” Stein, either before or after Stein’s death? The preposthumousness of their licentious intercourse (textual and sexual) is, at least superficially, mourned in Toklas’s signed autobiographies. Yet the authorial I-that-is-not-one of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is not, after 1946, rendered simply or merely a trace of “what is remembered.” For the mechanism of incorporation, the reiteration of feeding, and the prizing of the recipe as a figure for what can be eaten again and again without, however, being fully assimilated (introjected) all suggest that “writing,” for both Toklas and Stein, is a condition of the relational ontology that *autotheory* now helps designate.

Our strong motivations for making ourselves intelligible, beginning with infantile hunger and followed by the increasingly polymorphous and increasingly verbal satisfactions of orality, encounter comparably powerful headwinds. Stein’s early prose sketches, like her friend Picasso’s early cubist paintings, represented the disturbances endemic to human self-fashioning, all the way from learning to boil an egg to writing an autobiography to sidestepping the disarray of the wrong person’s desire. These disturbances are mediated by objects (a boiled egg, an ego ideal, an other) that may be, in the language of psychoanalysis, either incorporated (greedily pulled into the ego, as compensatory fantasies of possession) or introjected (reached for, so as to dismantle repressive mechanisms and to broaden the ego’s attachment to the world, including other empirical subjects).<sup>17</sup> A passion for cooking, eating, and recipes is by no means indicative of a pathological tendency toward phantasmic incorporation (though “the passionate reading of elaborate recipes in very large cook-books” is an ever-reliable means of pursuing hallucinatory satisfaction [Toklas 2010: 214]). But in Stein and Toklas’s autobiographical project, it “brings out” less salient features or flavors of objects that evade their own mediating function and thus their own naming or intelligibility.

<sup>17</sup> In Maurice Sendak’s (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*, the Wild Things call out to the departing figure of Max: “Oh please don’t go—we’ll eat you up—we love you so!” Max, of course, says, “No.” The definitive account of the mechanisms of incorporation and introjection remains the group of essays assembled in part 4 of Abraham and Torok 1994.

“Before coming to Paris,” Toklas (2010: 29) writes in her *Cook Book*, “I was interested in food but not in doing any cooking.” However, once installed in the rue de Fleurus, she rose rapidly from *commis* to *chef de cuisine*, with an ever-expanding and boldly experimental repertoire as well as a set of skills that included the fine art of culinary murder. For she quickly learned that “before any story of cooking begins, crime is inevitable” (37)—inevitable not only as part of the chef’s *métier*, stabbing carp, throttling ducks, and smothering pigeons (“I laid out one by one the sweet young corpses” [40]), but also in every recipe that has traveled by means of a crusade, a conquest, or an occupation. Spaniards, Greeks, Poles, Sicilians, and Turks tasted in every variant of iced vegetable soup the blood of conquistadors, janissaries, pirates, and muleteers (49–53). A recipe, say for Segovian gazpacho or Turkish cacik, is a fantasy of preservation; it mediates an “intrapsychic state of affairs it is supposed to protect” (e.g., love of a lost homeland) and a “metapsychological reality that demands a change” (e.g., the substitution of a new ingredient for one that is no longer available, due to displacement or privation) (Abraham and Torok 1994: 126). Tasting and swallowing may produce a magical satisfaction, not always or necessarily of hunger but of a longing for what food symbolizes, whether what is symbolized is a persistently inhibiting object of desire or the new object of a libidinal reorganization. Toklas, who surely understood or at least intuited that eating is a mimesis of incorporation, subtitled her second autobiographical cookbook *A Book of Exquisite Cooking*—an allusion to the surrealist game of enlisting its participants’ unconscious minds in the graphic production of *un cadavre exquis*. What Maria Torok calls “the fantasy of the exquisite corpse” is a fantasy of “nonintrojection.” For when,

in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the love-object we miss, this means that *we refuse to mourn* and that we shun the consequences of mourning even though our psyche is fully bereaved. Incorporation is the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us. In fine, incorporation is the refusal to introject loss. (Abraham and Torok 1994: 126–27)

But what if this diremptive model of subjectivity seeking a recovered totality is a fantasy? What if the fantasy of the exquisite corpse is precisely

the substantivist ontology it refuses to mourn, the full import of the loss of which would be the very transformation that Stein and Toklas discovered in their experience of relational ontology?

Cooking and eating were tremendously important dimensions of that experience, as were the shifting intervals of abundance and scarcity that characterized the decades they spent together.<sup>18</sup> For Stein and Toklas, the vicissitudes of their earlier era's food supply, amply documented in Toklas's *Cook Book*, provided an object lesson in what Abraham and Torok (1994: 127) might have called an object lesson in "the communion of 'empty mouths'" —a kind of imaginal recurrence of the mother's provision for the preverbal neonate's hollow of hunger. But in psychoanalytic terms, such notions of a primary emptiness depend on a substantivist ontology that, even in the consulting room's asymmetrical dyad (now better understood as an asymmetrical reciprocity), increasingly seems fallacious.

Thus there is no contradiction between the relational ontology I am associating with Stein and Toklas's autobiographical project and Stein's vaunted prizing of what she calls "vital singularity," which is not a synonym for "ontological security" but its opposite: a refusal of the homogenizing, defensive mechanisms spurred by the requirements of pseudoautonomous functioning in an industrialized world of atomistic uniformity:

I say vital singularity is as yet an unknown product with us, we who in our habits, dress-suit cases, clothes and hats and ways of thinking, walking, making money, talking, having simple lines in decorating, in ways of reforming, all with a metallic clicking like the type-writing which is our only way of thinking, our way of educating, our way of learning, all always the same way of doing, all the way down as far as there is any way down inside to us. We are all the same all through us, we never have it to be free inside us. No brother singulars, it is sad here for us, there is no place in an

<sup>18</sup> These were decades of global war and economic depression, culminating by the end of Stein's life in a massive postwar acceleration in consumption of fossil fuels. The possibility that the metaphysics of substantivist ontology are fundamentally reductive—or even unhinged—is now the burden of hope in our post-Freudian, late capitalist world, in which the continued subordination of relation to being can at last be recognized as a planetary existential threat. For example, the swallowing up of material resources is finally recognized for its excremental lethality as the waste products of mass consumption themselves consume an increasingly large share of the very resources on which our substantivist fantasies of incorporation depend.

adolescent world for anything eccentric like us, machine making does not turn out queer things like us, they can never make a world to let us be free each one inside us. (Stein 1995: 47)

*Brother singulars, eccentric like us, queer things:* Stein's vital singularities are relational beings, beings not "well behaved," as one says of certain mathematical objects that frustrate definition and defy individuation. To "be free each one inside us" is Stein's version of Sándor Ferenczi's (1912) original concept of introjection, presented in an essay published around the time Stein finished writing her relentlessly participial novel, *The Making of Americans* (which was not published until 1924). The sharing, or partaking, of autoerotic interests with other subjects is precisely what substantivist ontologies militate against, not least by insisting that subjects can—and should be understood to—speak for themselves. The possibility that subjects need not—and perhaps cannot—do so is the basis for Stein and Toklas's experiment in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which sheds the pretense that autobiographies must (mustn't they?) be written both by and about the same discrete, autonomous subject. That Stein is a signatory to Toklas's autobiography is no paradox, no forgery, and no betrayal, yet to call it, instead, a collaboration would also be insufficient, just as one would never call enjoying a meal together a "collaboration."

### Collation

Thus I am tempted to introduce the word *collation* to describe both book and meal. Collation is a stylistic feature of both Stein's and Toklas's writing and a convention of the cookbook genre. It is a meal to be shared in abeyance of the pangs of self-mortification—a kind of counter-sacrament, a provision for the relaxation of rules governing the body's discipline through fasting (e.g., during Lent or Ramadan). Collation interrupts, without betraying, "the communion of 'empty mouths'" to which the soul or the ego may be devoted, as one-among-many, through a shared, ritualized return to the state of dependency that fasting is meant, symbolically, to master. In collation's shared satisfaction of hunger, participants concede the illusion of such mastery, the illusion of nondependency, and, if only temporarily, embrace an unwilled relationality, an interdependent state of being not one-among-many but one-



*of-many*.<sup>19</sup> If, according to Emmanuel Levinas (1991: 213), the other is what “tears me from my hypostasy,” then it is in “the *collation* of meaning between ‘me’ and the other and also in my alterity to myself” that “I see myself on the basis of the other, I expose myself to the other, I have accounts to render.” Having such “accounts to render” (*des comptes à rendre*) is no mere matter for the settlement of debtor-creditor relations but a perpetual responsibility to fathom one’s ethical relation to the other without encrypting oneself in what Butler (2005: 135) calls “the inward mutilations of conscience.” Toklas’s *Cook Book* is an ethical as well as a formal collation of recipes (receipts) in its rendering of accounts between herself (as one-of-many) and her others as they interrupt together (often, literally, by breaking bread) the fantasy of nonintrojection.

Collation, as a formal characteristic (or as the strong residual impression of a method), is shared by many works of autotheory. Of course, autobiographical writing has always taken myriad forms. The design, arrangement, and coordination of its elements are perhaps more variegated than those of any other narrative genre.<sup>20</sup> As a temporally extended discursive vehicle, narrative depends heavily on the view one is willing or able to take of the diachronicity of human experience. Causality and temporal succession; chronological sequencing; developmental stages; intentional states; knowledge registers; powers of assimilation and comprehension; epistemic and referential variance; relations of logic, association, and distribution; and modes of precipitancy, inference, deduction, and accumulation all factor into anyone’s construction or perception of a text’s narrativity (see Bruner 1991). For example, the fidelity to chronological order of Jean Rhys’s unfinished autobiography,

<sup>19</sup> Being one-of-many is what Nancy (2000: 41) calls “being singular plural,” though, in his elaboration of the concept, he prefers the preposition *with*: “*with* as the exclusive mode of being-present, such that being present and the present of Being does not coincide in itself, or with itself, inasmuch as it coincides or ‘falls with’ [*tombe avec*] the other presence, which itself obeys the same law. Being-many-together is the originary situation; it is even what defines a ‘situation’ in general. Therefore, an originary or transcendental ‘with’ demands, with a palpable urgency, to be disentangled and articulated for itself. But one of the greatest difficulties of the concept of the with is that there is no ‘getting back to’ or ‘up to’ [*remonter*] this ‘originary’ or ‘transcendental’ position; the with is strictly contemporaneous with all existence, as it is with all thinking.”

<sup>20</sup> In a florid instance of the taxonomical imperative, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010: 253–86) identify “sixty genres of life narrative.”

*Smile Please* (1979), feels rote and mechanical because its succession of sketches and fragments reflects no interest at all in the question of causality. In contrast, Barthes's (1977: 148) autobiography, also a collation of sketches and fragments, actively frustrates the recognition of causal connections, defying chronological arrangement in favor of alphabetical order—a formal choice that “erases everything, banishes every origin.” Both authors favor the heteroclitite and accidental. Yet Rhys's chronological arrangement implies a causality left unexplored, whereas Barthes's seemingly arbitrary coordination of elements, strung on an alphabetical chain, challenges, autotheoretically, conventional expectations of a mimetic relation between an autobiography's form and the consequential unfolding of the life it represents—though by alluding, formally, to the long didactic tradition of alphabets, hornbooks, and primers, Barthes nods at his book's inability wholly to escape disciplinary coordination (not to mention his wink at the clipped autobiographical pronouncement of Christ's eternity: “I am Alpha and Omega”).

The most formally conventional autobiographies are, naturally, the most numerous. Yet there are scores upon scores of autobiographies that look—and read—nothing like them. Autobiographical writing can take the form of an alphabet (like Barthes's), a novel (Marguerite Duras), an essay (Jonathan Edwards), a poem (William Wordsworth), a *bande dessinée* (Marjane Satrapi), a *gekiga* (Yoshihiro Tatsumi), a journal (John Winthrop), a letter (Oscar Wilde), a footnote (Jacques Derrida), a diary (Michael Wigglesworth), a case study (Daniel Paul Schreber), or, for Toklas, a cookbook. Those that depend—or are made to seem to depend—most heavily on the collation of discontinuous parts have many ways of naming what is being “brought together”: “recipes” (Toklas), “exiguous anecdotes” (J.-B. Pontalis), “specimens” (Walt Whitman), “traces of the instant” (Hélène Cixous), “meetings” (Buber), “hundreds” (Berlant and Stewart), “aporetographs” (Derrida), “biographemes” (Barthes), and, in D. A. Miller's (1992: 48) eloquent interpretation of Barthes's neologism, “an incident dislodged from the teleology of plot; a gesture excised from the consistency of character”—“dislodged” or “excised,” that is, from their fully “proper” contexts to be placed in divergent arrangements less thoroughly wedded to substantivist ontologies and thus to be held more accountable to the

stories of relational ontology recognized in the term *autotheory*. One might suggest that what works of autotheory tend to collate are, in Levinas's sense, *propositions toward the rendering of accounts*.

A good example of this from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is its liberal use of the rhetorical figure of hypostrophe—those taps, as if from a shepherd's staff, signaling the need for a course correction, a return from waywardness. Over and over, the reader is called to witness a reversion: “But to come back to” (Stein 1933: 10); “As I was saying” (17); “But to return” (37); “now to go back again” (74); “And now once more to return to the return” (77); “But to go back” (110); “But I am once more running far ahead” (112); “To return to” (282); “To go back again” (284); and so on. One potential effect of this trope's repetition is to make the text seem more spontaneous—less constrained by a sequential logic or chronology—because it must so frequently be brought to heel, as if by a monitory consciousness intent on portraying itself in the act of remembering to revert to the point at which its sequential logic, along with the vigilance necessary to sustain it, was overwhelmed. There are dozens of such voltas in the *Autobiography*, all serving its default status as a mimesis of self-referential discourse. For who, other than Alice B. Toklas, is more likely to distract the author of Alice B. Toklas's autobiography from its own attending subject? And what could appeal more strongly to a referential aesthetic than the vicissitudes of an embodied attentiveness suborned to waywardness by the complex specularity of her self-understanding? It matters not at all who signs the work as long as its claim to referentiality is not risible—that is, as long as its claim is grounded in a relational ontology.

*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* rejects the substantivist principle that securing ontological certainty for an attending (or “knowing”) subject is both the premise and the purpose of self-referential discourse. Its grammatical subject (“I”) is at once Stein and not-Stein, Toklas and not-Toklas. Each of them “utters” it, and its perlocutionary effect is collation rather than individuation. Their I-that-is-not-one helps restore the history of the autotheoretical subject to the history of relationality, which, “in the manner of most intimate links, blurs the character of both partners to the arrangement” (Riley 2000: 15). There is the danger that this “blur” could easily be taken as a figure for the consubstantial ontology of the couple, whether ecclesiastical (“one flesh”) or civil (“union”),

as if Stein and Toklas's "intimate link" were simply a queer mode of accessing the ordinary, as "husband" and "wifey." However, this "blur" can also be taken as a figure for an ontology conceived not as limit but as possibility—a figure for the open-endedness of what Foucault (1997: 316) calls "a critical ontology of ourselves," a "test of the limits we may go beyond," including the limits of subject-object dualism and subjective universalism. "A critical ontology of ourselves" is another characterization of autotheory, not least at a time when so much theoretical work in the humanities and social sciences has sought to undermine, and even to "repair," the historically persistent opposition between epistemology and ontology.

The consequences (direct and indirect) of a critical ontology—of ourselves, of history—for both the writing and the study of autobiography have chiefly to do with the questions of responsibility outlined above. A "critical" ontology, in Foucault's sense, is inherently agential. He asks, in effect: How do we *go about being constituted* as responsible subjects of our own actions? Subjectivation is neither universal nor autonomous; we contribute to and are constituted by contingent effects of relationality. In other words, historicity is the condition, but not the limit, of ethics, and ethics is, in Foucault's view, chiefly to be centered, both rationally and affectively, on the present moment. There are no universal structures of self-government, but it seems safe to say that there will always be contingent modes that govern individuation and that tend to induce what Foucault calls "docility." Historically, the chief lures of docility have been the sorts of fantasies of uniqueness and autonomy that can be sustained only by substantivist ontologies, which is why, to be "critical," an ontology must be relational. Whatever defensive mechanisms might have helped prompt Stein to write *Everybody's Autobiography* as a kind of follow-up to *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, it is not a recipe for subjective universalism. Even the ambiguity of the book's title breaks it down. It is at once an autobiography that could be anybody's, obviating the need for anyone else to write one; an autobiography of the totality of persons, the story of humanity; an autobiography that is for everybody, something produced for universal consumption and satiation; and an argument that everybody already constitutes an autobiography, whether or not they go on to write one . . . or, as Stein (1937: 3) puts it in the opening sentence, to "do" one.

### Hundreds . . . and Counting

Stein's frequent substitutions of "doing" for "writing" bring to mind, in this context, Elizabeth W. Bruss's (1976: 7) influential theory of autobiography as "a distinct category of action"—echoed in Wiegman's (2020: 1) characterization of autotheory as "a contemporary mode of textual performance." It is quite true that autobiographical writing has never been distinguished by a stable set of formal requirements (like, say, sestinas or diaries); "there is," as Bruss (1976: 10) rightly puts it, "no intrinsically autobiographical form." However, as a "category of action" (or "performance"), it is anything but "distinct." Autobiographies are new tracings of many actions, including actions only retrospectively recognized to be among what Whitman (1996: 714), in his 1882 autobiography, *Specimen Days*, calls its "go-befores and embryos." If autobiographies "act," they do so not in a "distinct" way (like, say, epithalamia or thrillers) but in the most varied and unpredictable manners. As genres go, none is more versatile or more open to contingency, including the contingency of the self (*autós*) that everybody, in one way or another, experiences themselves to be. Like anybody's autobiography (including *Everybody's Autotheory*), *The Hundreds* exists from beginning to end on a temporal scale that is chiefly that of the human life span (but whose?): snapshotting childhoods, profiling companions, crashing personal archives, calling family witnesses, dragging us down memory lane and skid row with equally sketchy figures, hailing different and indifferent contemporaries, and, all the while, intimating mortalities. How many of us, after all, will live to be "a hundred," whether we are *in The Hundreds* or *of it*? Is this book *anybody's* autotheory? How, as a work of autotheory, does it *count* its numerary subjects?

Berlant and Stewart are the kindred of precursors like Stein and Toklas and of contemporaries like Nelson. But their book makes autotheory a team contact sport. By *contact* I mean any and all manners of mucking around with others, including readers, who must themselves be willing accomplices to various forms of rule breaking—rules of narrative, of body intactness, of personhood, and, of course, of received ideas. By *sport* I mean not only a game of skill and exertion but also a public romp, or flourish and display of a striking variation from type, while sharing the effort to think one's own history, all according to quite

arbitrary rules: chiefly, that the words they write must appear in their book in multiples of one hundred. They operate, thus, like the imagined author that Vladimir Nabokov (1989: 290–91) describes in his 1966 autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, who, “in a fit of lucid madness, has set himself certain unique rules that he observes, certain nightmare obstacles that he surmounts, with the zest of a deity building a live world from the most unlikely ingredients—rocks, and carbon, and blind throbbings.” (And make no mistake: both Berlant and Stewart have sworn themselves to building live worlds.) To read the book, *The Hundreds*, that they wrote this way is to witness two energetic utopian polymaths talking “in the details and tones of a conspiratorial co-competence” (Berlant and Stewart 2019: 77). Describing their work as “an experiment in keeping up with what’s going on” is also not a bad characterization of autotheory (or even of autobiography), if one understands *experiment* in a speculative and reflexive rather than scientific way (e.g., an *essay* in criticism). “When it comes to experiments,” they write, “I commit my mouth” (86), and the rest of their bodies, too, have “their own ideas” (87)—including ideas about choices that are also ideas about death. “Who lives in the long run,” they ask, “now?” (94).

The voices Berlant and Stewart speak in are something like theirs: the voices of two speaking as one; the voices of each ventriloquizing the other; the voices some people would recognize as one or the other’s; the voices of people they cite circumambiently; the voices sometimes pretending, sometimes presuming, to be “mine” or “hers”; the voices no one would own up to, even if they could. Much of what they say could be corroborated: a guessing game for intimates or a hunt for future biographers. The authors both exist, both in fact and in theory, as their deviant signatures (here and elsewhere) attest and as they have existed for one another: in collaboration, in confrontation, in subordination, in kind, in jest, in all seriousness, and all for the purposes they have harbored with and against one another, as numerary subjects, while counting again and again to one hundred, all the way to the end, which, they tell us, is “not over yet” (Berlant and Stewart 2019: 135)—not over yet, in part, because other voices have yet to be heard from in the five “indexes” (one—*yours*—not even written yet) that they have commissioned, in keeping with their view that “indexing is the first interpretation of a book’s body” (ix). This may explain why they have placed “your”

index (the two blank pages included “for your indexing pleasure”) last, lest you be insubordinate with your fingering (*indicis*) of their body (155).

The body of *The Hundreds* is a playful (ludic) body. Its brief prefatory section is called “Preludic,” and in it the authors say little, not wanting to spoil the sport. For example, there is a lot of pronoun play. Berlant (2011) and Stewart (2007) sometimes dress themselves up in the royal “we,” befitting as well as ironizing their high office among theorists of the ordinary. And “you,” whoever you are, have no choice but to join in; “you” are implicated, conscripted, seduced, even though *you* usually means “one,” as in “everyone” or “one in a hundred.” *I, me, mine, we, us, ours, you, your, yours, he, him, his, hers, her, she, they, them, their, theirs*—all direct the indirection. (You halve me, have you not?) In any case, the indivisible *I* need not be indexed here. “There is no there there,” as Stein (1937: 289) puts it in *Everybody's Autobiography*. And in *their* book Berlant and Stewart (2019: 153) authorize Stephen Muecke (in their fourth index) to remind us all that “the right kind of accessory matters,” thereby further reminding us that all readers (i.e., indexers: pointers, gesturers, discoverers [*see also* accomplices]) are accessories, not after the fact but to the matter at hand. As a ludic body itself, *The Hundreds* jostles with various scenes of bodies just playing around. Some are scenes of physical exercise, whether athletic or compositional—scenes of anticipation, practice, and preparation and, often, scenes of tumbling onto something new, perhaps in the form of a stranger met at the gym while sweating the same contraption, or your writing partner, who shows up once again to work out with you where something unexpected is happening. Something unexpected is always happening that could both use our attention and fumble with our propositions. Berlant and Stewart ask each other: “Are you going to stand for that?” And they each answer: “Yes, let’s.” And they do so to “play with the scale of life across the madness and languor of being historical” (99) by playing, together, with a type of relational “I,” playing to a contemporary taste, not merely for theoretically minded work attuned to what Stuart Hall (2017: 63, 99) calls “the inner psychic dynamics of the theorist” but for an experience of thinking-as-relation, a “conspiratorial co-competence,” that could be anybody’s, or everybody’s.

Everybody’s, precisely because it takes relationality as the premise, not the consequence, of being—deidealizing “ontological security” for an era that has forgotten not just its contingency but also its political

dangers, including the pursuit of recognition rather than the cultivation of responsibility. One of the reasons for the post–Cold War explosion of autobiographical writing (the “memoir boom”) is its internal acceleration of this frenzied pursuit of a secure and secured ontology, legitimized and encouraged by post-Keynesian markets and policies and their ideological foundation in radical methodological and competitive individualisms. Autobiography is, in one sense, the neoliberal genre par excellence. However, in another sense—a sense that inspired and continues to animate the cognomen-retronym *autotheory*—it might be one of the most important kinds of writing for our era of craved, but radically occulted, self-understanding, a genre in which the frustrated solitary pursuit of recognition finds redirection as a vital, counter-neoliberal pursuit of shared ways of managing our radical and formative intersubjectivity.

---

**Max Cavitch** is associate professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is also codirector of the Psychoanalytic Studies program and faculty affiliate of the graduate groups in comparative literature and history. He is author of *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* (2007) and of numerous essays on American literature, cinema, poetry and poetics, and psychoanalysis. He also edits the blog *Psyche on Campus*. With Brian Connolly, he is coeditor of the forthcoming volume *Situation Critical! Critique, Theory, and Early American Studies*, and he is completing another monograph, tentatively called *Passing Resemblances: A Critical Inventory of Autobiography*.

## References

- Abraham, Nicholas, and Maria Torok. 1994. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Nicholas T. Rand. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Althusser, Louis. 1971. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, 127–86. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Althusser, Louis. 1993. *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, translated by Richard Veasey. New York: New Press.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1998. *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. London: Verso.
- Augustine. 2006. *Confessions*, translated by Garry Wills. New York: Penguin.



- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bal, Mieke. 2015. "Documenting What? Auto-theory and Migratory Aesthetics." In *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, edited by Alexandra Juhasz and Alisa Lebow, 124–44. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, Roland. 1989. *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. San Francisco: Chandler.
- Berger, John. 1986. "Her Secrets (For Katya)." *Threepenny Review*, no. 26: 3.
- Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Kathleen Stewart. 2019. *The Hundreds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Booth, Wayne C. 1988. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bruner, Jerome. 1991. "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1: 1–21.
- Bruss, Elizabeth W. 1976. *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Buber, Martin. 2002. *Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments*, translated by Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2005. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Cameron, Sharon. 2007. *Impersonality: Seven Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cavarero, Adriana. 2000. *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, translated by Paul A. Kottman. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Cavitch, Max. 2012. "Genre." In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Roland Greene, 551–54. 4th ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cowley, Christopher, ed. 2015. *The Philosophy of Autobiography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- de Man, Paul. 1979. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* 94, no. 5: 919–30.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1973. *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, translated by David B. Allison. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1980. "La loi du genre / The Law of Genre," translated by Avital Ronell. *Glyph* 7: 176–232.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1992. "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida." In *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge, 33–75. New York: Routledge.

- Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Descartes, René. 1998. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Donald A. Cress. 4th ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
- Eakin, Paul John. 1992. *Touching the Word: Reference in Autobiography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 1985. *The Loneliness of the Dying*, translated by Edmund Jephcott. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ettinger, Bracha L. 2006. *The Matrixial Borderspace*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fenollosa, Ernest, and Ezra Pound. 2008. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, edited by Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stillers, and Lucas Klein. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Ferenczi, Sándor. 1912. "Zur Begriffsbestimmung der Introjektion." *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse* 2, no. 4: 198–200.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *An Introduction*. Vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, Michel. 1997. "What Is Enlightenment?" In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Catherine Porter, 303–19. New York: New Press.
- Fournier, Lauren. 2018. "Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice." *a/b: Auto/biography Studies* 33, no. 3: 643–62.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1961a. *The Ego and the Id*, translated by James Strachey. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19. London: Hogarth.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1961b. *Letters of Sigmund Freud, 1873–1939*, translated by Tania Stern and James Stern. London: Hogarth.
- Fuller, Edmund, ed. 1950. *Journey into the Self: Being the Letters, Papers, and Journals of Leo Stein*. New York: Crown.
- Goffman, Erving. 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Touchstone.
- Hall, Stuart. 2017. *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Johnson, Barbara. 1987. *A World of Difference*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2002. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Allen W. Wood. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1989. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1992. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, translated by Dennis Porter. New York: Norton.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1991. "Philosophy and Awakening." In *Who Comes after the Subject?*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, 206–16. New York: Routledge.

- Locke, John. 1988. *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, D. A. 1992. *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Miller, Nancy K. 1991. *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*. New York: Routledge.
- Mitchell, Stephen A. 1988. *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. 1989. *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. New York: Vintage.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1991. Introduction to *Who Comes after the Subject?*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, 1–8. New York: Routledge.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. 2000. *Being Singular Plural*, translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Nelson, Maggie. 2015. *The Argonauts*. Minneapolis: Graywolf.
- Preciado, Paul B. [Beatriz Preciado]. 2008. *Testo Yonqui*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.
- Rankine, Claudia. 2014. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis: Graywolf.
- Riley, Denise. 2000. *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Schuster, Shlomit C. 2003. *The Philosopher's Autobiography: A Qualitative Study*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1999. *A Dialogue on Love*. Boston: Beacon.
- Sendak, Maurice. 1963. *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2010. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Soriano, Jen. 2018. "Multiplicity from the Margins: The Expansive Truth of Intersectional Form." *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* 5, no. 1. [www.assayjournal.com/jen-soriano-multiplicity-from-the-margins-the-expansive-truth-of-intersectional-form-51.html](http://www.assayjournal.com/jen-soriano-multiplicity-from-the-margins-the-expansive-truth-of-intersectional-form-51.html).
- Stein, Gertrude. 1933. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Stein, Gertrude. 1937. *Everybody's Autobiography*. New York: Random House.
- Stein, Gertrude. 1995. *The Making of Americans*. McLean, IL: Dalkey Archive.
- Stein, Gertrude. 1998. "Portraits and Repetition." In *Writings, 1932–1946*, edited by Catherine Stimpson and Harriet Chessman, 287–312. New York: Library of America.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Toklas, Alice B. 2010. *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Werther, Ralph. 2008. *Autobiography of an Androgyne*, edited by Scott Herring. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. 1929. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Whitman, Walt. 1996. *Specimen Days*. In *Poetry and Prose*, edited by Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America.
- Wiegman, Robyn. 2020. "Introduction: Autotheory Theory." *Arizona Quarterly* 76, no. 1: 1–14.
- Wojnarowicz, David. 1991. *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. New York: Vintage.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1980. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann. Vol. 6. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Young, Stacey. 1997. *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Zwartjes, Arianne. 2019. "Autotheory as Rebellion: On Research, Embodiment, and Imagination in Creative Nonfiction." *Michigan Quarterly Review*, July 23. sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2019/07/autotheory-as-rebellion-on-research-embodiment-and-imagination-in-creative-nonfiction.