

10 Narrating(-)Life

'Narrating life'¹ – this phrase warrants some investigation. Who is the 'agency' or the 'subject' in this phrase, 'narrating' or 'life'? Who, or what, is narrating life? Which would mean that life was an object (or being subjected to narration), as if life was 'in need of' narrating in order to become what it 'is'. Or, instead, might life be the narrator or the narrating instance: life that expresses itself through narration? In both cases, life 'as such' would be something 'outside' narration (while being in need of it) but, as such, it would remain invisible (at least for the (human?) observer). However insistent the questioning, life would not be able to yield its secrets 'outside' or 'without' narration. But life would always be ventriloquised by some (human?) narrator – unless, by some magical process of inscription, life was to do the narrating and writing 'itself' (which would presuppose a 'self', or at least some 'sense of self', self-reflexivity and thus consciousness, or at least iterability, in the Derridean sense – life itself).

There is, another way of reading the phrase – narrating life – life that is narrated. Following this third avenue, one might wish to hyphenate the two components: narrating-life. One might argue that this would be quite a surprising but also not entirely foolish definition of *literature*. The 'author' (Roland Barthes's 'scriptor') would have a narrating-life (and, presumably, a non-narrating one besides). The text would show or open up the possibility of a narrating-life (as well as a 'narrated-life'). In so far as a text is some form of 'writing' or 'inscription', narrating-life would be quasi-synonymous with it.

Without discarding any of these, what all these possibilities provide for is an immense expansion of the meaning of life writing. Narrating life – understood either as the writer's task or as the curious agency acquired by life to tell its own stories – raises the question of who: who does the narrating? Who is the subject of so-called 'life writing'? Life writing – a form of writing formerly known as 'autobiography' – is a literary but maybe also non-literary, scientific, ecological genre. To what extent could life-writing be understood as that special kind of genre and practice that may offer a privileged site (or a 'laboratory') for imagining and 'emploting' life, or ways of narrating life? Would life express itself *necessarily* through writing or 'fiction'? And, the reverse, is there any fiction that would not be somehow about life, or at least *a* life? All the difference of course lies in the indefinite article: a life or life (or indeed Life, as some transcendental entity or principle). That's life! Nobody would say: that's *a* life, or maybe only in the sense: here goes another life... i.e. another death. Life as this enigmatic life force, the animation of the inanimate, the divine spark, or spirit, this *je-ne-sais-quoi* that transforms dead 'matter' into, what exactly? Whereas a life, 'my' life, this countable (countable to a degree that it is always unique – this life, mine, the only one I have, but which of course is not really 'mine' at all, strictly speaking), finite, irreversible, 'tragic' and laughable period of time that I must narrate to myself to make it mine, this little life, this fallen life of a demiurge, is the proper subject of

¹ Some parts of this essay have also appeared in Stefan Herbrechter, "Posthumanism, Subjectivity, Autobiography", *Subjectivity* 5.3 (2012): 327-47.

autobiography. Life, the one with a capital 'L', the cyclic, always evolving and (self)transforming, 'energetic' principle or force, on the other hand, would call for life writing (or even life-writing or, ultimately, lifewriting – one word).

The relationship between fiction or literature and life is an age-old theme: what happens to life, what happens to 'my' life, while I am narrating it? Is the 'I' who does the narrating (regardless in which person 'I' am narrating my story, it is always an 'I' that is being told) the same 'I' as the one that is narrated? The gap between 'I' and 'I', in fact, that is where life, the real one, the living one, must be taking place. Narrating and living, in fact, mutually exclude each other it would seem. While I am writing I am living elsewhere, or my 'body' at least is living 'elsewhere'. Literature – auto-biography, life writing – would not only be a substitute for life, or a lesser (or, indeed, higher) form of life – it would positively exclude living 'as such', if living were to be understood as 'being at one with oneself', 'mere' being, even less than *Dasein* (being-there). Might this be the special appeal but maybe also the deep mistrust or even hatred ('at least since Plato') that literature, fiction, poetry have sometimes inspired? That fact that literature 'lives off' life, that it parasites, replaces, virtualises life 'itself' might be a waste of time if not life. Literature *or* life (as Jorge Semprun so aptly and provocatively put it.²

Semprun's question – *l'écriture ou la vie?* – arises out of a context in which life was at its most precarious, life at its 'barest', or where biopolitics turned into 'zoopolitics', namely the 'death camp'. Zoopolitics and zoography – since Giorgio Agamben revived the ancient Greek distinction between bios and zoē – are concepts that deeply affect the notion of life writing. What life is being narrated, or which of the two lives does the narrating – bios or zoē? One would assume that something conscious like an autobiography would be based on bios, or life-as-it-makes-sense-to-a-me. 'I' am the 'subject' of (or maybe to?) 'my' life, which is of course based on a social process of negotiation with others (people, institutions, objects, environments etc.). Life writing in this sense is inextricable from 'biopolitics' because it is in itself an (auto- and hetero-)biopolitical act. Zoography is an entirely different matter. No 'I' can write its own zoography since the inscription process on life, a life, is always done at a level that goes beyond and remains below individual and traditional forms of agency. The life of zoē writes and 'narrates' itself (through 'my' body). It is also a form of narrating life, but one that no longer distinguishes between human and nonhuman, object and subject, world and thing. It also goes beyond (or remains 'below', or indeed 'before') any biopolitics, because of its purely processual and distributive, disseminal and transformative logic. The full meaning of the phrase 'narrating life', arises out of the difference and the interaction between bios and zoē and asks, more specifically of literature – that discourse most 'in tune' with narrativisation, one might say – how its imagination might affect and be affected by the emergence of a critical awareness of bio- and zoopolitics. Under the conditions of the global appropriation and strife over 'life' (as material, commodity, transcendental signified and signifier) how to carry on narrating? Under the conditions of a generalised biopolitics, what historical and contemporary mutations of literature, what strategies of immunity, mutation, and

² Jorge Semprun, *Literature or Life* (New York: Viking, 1997).

contagion of textual and critical practices do writers of fiction, literature, drama or poetry foreground in order to address and maybe even produce the future and/or the survival of literature or fiction and thus the narrating of 'life'?

Narrating life thus understood challenges all forms of writing, but literature in particular. It forces a return to writing as a 'bio-logical' act. It is organic, biopic, literally – if that were possible. Narrating as a bio-(logical, political, semiotic) act can only be thought in the terms of mutation, contagion and immunity. In focusing on new forms of life writing, e.g. posthuman (auto-)biographies, (science) fictional accounts of (alien) life forms and their transmutations, narratives and subjectivities without, after, or before humans, and practical contagions between real and fictional, literary and scientific, human and nonhuman discourse and the resistance to these – their specific (auto and hetero)immunisations. What kind of allergic reactions does narrating life produce today? What are the symptoms it provokes?

Subject to (a) Life

I am developing (...) a sustainable brand of nomadic ethics. The starting point is the relentless generative force of bios and zoē and the specific brand of transspecies egalitarianism that they establish with the human. The ecological dimension of philosophical nomadism consequently becomes manifest and, with it, its potential ethical impact. It is a matter of forces as well as ethology (...). The vital politics of life as zoē, defined as a generative force, resets the terms of the debate and introduces an ecophilosophy of belonging that includes both species equality and posthumanist ethics.³

To explore some of these questions the phrase 'narrating life' raises in the current ('posthumanist' if not 'posthuman') context, I am first returning to the genre of auto-bio-graphy. All three ingredients of auto-bio-graphy are becoming increasingly unstable: autoaffectation, the historicity and materiality of 'life', and the agency and subjectivity of writing. Affect studies, posthumanist theories of materialism, and deconstruction and new media theory have all been contributing to and commenting on this development. Within the history of *auto-bio-graphy* as a genre or mode of narrating the 'story of a life' the most recent shift has been the move outlined above: from (auto)biography to life writing. Life, in turn, has become the main focus of current theories located between the (post)humanities, new media and the (life) sciences. It therefore seems appropriate to explore the fallout of these changes under this heading: i.e. 'life writing'. It is no coincidence that this is happening at a time when the effects of contemporary biopolitics are being discussed ever more urgently and controversially.

³ Rosi Braidotti, "The Politics of Life as *Bios/Zoē*", in: Anneke Smelik and Nina Lykke, eds., *Bits of Life: Feminism at the Intersections of Media, Bioscience, and Technology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), p. 183.

In the context of contemporary literary criticism on life writing Gillian Whitlock raises the stakes by joining together the autobiographical and the human: “what it means to be human is a question that is fundamental to autobiographical narrative, and embedded in the history of autobiography in western modernity”.⁴ As soon as one narrates the life of the ‘human’ (i.e. no longer in the sense of a self-evident ‘liberal humanist individual subject’) from the constructed vantage point of a no-longer-quite-human form of narration or narrator, one enters posthumanist territory and one begins narrating ‘posthuman’ lives, as Sidonie Smith explains:

As the posthuman gets a life, it will be fascinating to observe and engage adaptations of narrative lives routed through an imaginary of surfaces, networks, assemblages, prosthetics, and avatars.⁵

The posthumanisation of life writing raises an infinity of questions. However what these questions share is the fact that they are all questions of life and death.

Life writing and autobiography – always a popular genre – have been raising renewed critical interest, and the ‘autobiographical’ – always at the heart of theory, especially deconstruction – has been thoroughly problematised. All its constituents, in fact, auto-bio-graphy, especially in a posthumanist context, have developed a life of their own, so to speak. The automatism of the prefix ‘auto-’, rather than simply shoring up some form of self-identity – a self writing itself – has turned against its self. The reflective narcissism that underlies any form of identity has been problematised by two very different ‘autos’: autoaffection and autoimmunity.

The ‘bio’ in *autobiography*, under the condition of generalised biopolitics in the late 20th and early 21st century referred to above has rendered the obvious materiality (or matter-reality) of life more precarious and more fleeting. It is becoming increasingly problematic to say: ‘this is “my” life’. Instead, the Deleuzian (post-vitalist) impact has turned life into pure ‘immanence’; and it has transformed it into a precarious ‘haecceity’.

Likewise, the suffix ‘-graphy’ has shifted from designating a mere recording or inscription process – because of the ‘decentring’ of the subject *of* writing – towards an idea of writing whose agency is not that of a conscious or unconscious individual ego but has acquired a much more ‘distributed’ agency.

This ongoing ‘deconstruction of auto-bio-graphy’ is an undoing of the humanist foundations of self-identity. The very idea of autobiography relies on a subject (or a narrator) who is capable of remembering, interpreting and identifying with his or her (or ‘its’?) life story. It is a very specific form of embodiment that usually conveys trust in the impression that the subject of the narration is identical to the subject of the narrative. This is, in fact, what guarantees self-sameness, i.e. an assurance that ‘I’ *am* ‘me’. Many complications trouble this model of autobiographical consciousness,

⁴ Gillian Whitlock, “Post-ing Lives”, *Biography* 35.1 (2012): v.

⁵ Sidonie Smith, “Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries”, *PMLA* 126.3 (2011): 571.

usually referred to as 'Cartesian': there are, first of all, the earlier blows against this self-conscious 'I' from the figures referred to earlier (whose work is sometimes grouped under the term 'hermeneutics of suspicion'). Nietzsche critiques the objectivity and the truth of the subject through his notion of the 'will to power'. Freud's main claim is that the ego is not the master in its own house, i.e. the autobiographical 'I' cannot be trusted with its own story because it is partly written by other, namely unconscious, forces, under the influence of protective mechanisms, censorship and unconscious desires. Marx adds the idea that a subject is subject to ideologies and therefore not fully aware of its implication in larger political schemes, i.e. one could adapt Marx's famous dictum and say: humans write their (autobiographical) stories but not under the conditions of their own making. Darwin, of course, detects another logic at work in human undertakings. There are at least two versions of autobiography in every human subject – the *individual* biography and the autobiography of the *species*, which stand in a kind of dialogue with each other and which are largely determined by biology, genetics and evolution. Poststructuralism further radicalises these forms of suspicion, all directed against the idea that subjects are free and competent to give an accurate account of themselves, by problematising a number of aspects, many of them related to the specific understanding of language (as based on Saussurean linguistics, namely that language is an abstract and culturally constructed system of differences). Lacan rereads Freud in terms of linguistics and differentiates within each subject between an imaginary (narcissistic), symbolic (social) and real (unconscious) order. The conscious subject, for Lacan, is based on a double misrecognition – a narcissistic misrecognition with an idealised other and a social misrecognition based on an equally narcissistic illusion of mastering language. Both identity and language, however, come from an other, which means that the subject is identified and spoken rather than being in control of his or her auto- (or, as a result, rather, auto-hetero-) biography.

Althusser brings together Lacanian psychoanalysis, a Marxist understanding of ideology and aspects of (Saussure's and Benveniste's) linguistics. For him, the subject is fundamentally an addressing device, a pronoun shifter that allows to connect between a 'you' with a 'me/I/we', and to switch between these, through the mechanism of hailing. It is because subjects can be subjected to an address (by other subjects) that they can become subjects in the first place. A subject is therefore first and foremost a position or positioning, or a vulnerability in terms of lacking awareness about the very fact of being positioned (hence the ideological misrecognition of the liberal humanist subject being interpellated as 'free'). The necessary but unacceptable position of the subject of autobiography would lie in the fact that 'I' write about my 'self' as the 'free' subject of my own (life) narrative, or 'I' 'am' the main character in 'my' 'own' life story.

Foucault adds to this an analysis of the larger discursive power structures that work as much at a 'micro', or, individual, level, as on a larger, societal, or 'macro', level. Instead of oppression, modern societies rely on self-disciplining through processes of bio-politics, subjectivity and embodiment. A subject for Foucault is a subject of (i.e. both exercising and receiving) power who adapts to socio-political pressures by working on 'it(s) self'. An autobiography in the Foucauldian sense can therefore only

be the inscription of biopolitics into a narrative by a more or less empowered self as subject.

Both Levinas and Derrida stress another aporia at the heart of the subject and therefore of autobiography. There is a temporal and spatial delusion at work in the idea of a subject's self-presence. The subject is the effect of an 'Other' (who, in Levinas's theological model, is ultimately God, as experienced in the face of another human; in Derrida, this other is an unknowable, who or that has the structure of a trace or of '*différance*' – a 'non-present' presence that can never be made present as such because it is always deferred and thus always differs from itself, like a trace). This other always precedes and gives rise to the subject's impression of self-presence and identity – an identity which is, in fact, always merely an identity that comes to 'me' from an 'earlier' but 'unknowable' 'Other'.

In order to show the implications of this deconstruction of the autobiographical it is helpful to return to Paul de Man's notion of autobiography as 'defacement'. The deconstruction of autobiography, as usual, begins with a raising of the stakes or the generalisation of the autobiographical genre:

[autobiography] (...) is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject. This specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding, but this merely makes explicit the wider claim to authorship that takes place whenever a text is stated to be *by* someone and assumed to be understandable to the extent that this is the case. Which amounts to saying that any book with a readable title page is, to some extent, autobiographical.⁶

As de Man continues: "The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions".⁷

The key figure of the autobiographical genre is prosopopeia [*prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)], which is "the trope of autobiography, by which one's name (...) is made as intelligible and memorable as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration".⁸ As de Man explains:

⁶ Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement", *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

As soon as we understand the rhetorical function of prosopopeia as positing voice or face by means of language, we also understand that what we are deprived of is not life but the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding. Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause.⁹

The masked subjectivity of autobiography thus significantly challenges the autoaffective desire that underlies the autobiographical urge.

A further complication is then provided by Derrida through the notion of auto-hetero-bio-graphy:

Autobiography, the writing of the self as living, the trace of the living for itself, being for itself, the auto-affection or auto-infection as memory or archive of the living would be an immunizing movement (...), but an immunizing movement that is always threatened with becoming auto-immunizing, as is every *autos*, every ipseity, every automatic, automobile, autonomous, autoreferential movement. Nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography, poisonous for itself in the first place, auto-infectious for the presumed signatory who is so auto-affected.¹⁰

Furthermore, the 'poisonous' nature of auto(hetero)biography is exacerbated by the fact that, like any text or writing, inscription comes at the price of iterability. Not only do 'I' write 'my' autobiography (literally or metaphorically) as if I were an 'other' but I also, in writing it, I am doing so 'as if I were dead', hence Derrida's additional twist: autobiography is in fact 'auto-hetero-*thanato*-graphy':

But what does it mean to be dead, when you are not totally dead? It means that you look at things the way they are as such, you look at the object as such. To perceive the object as such implies that you perceive the object as it is or as it is supposed to be when you are not there... So, to relate to an object as such means to relate to it as if you were dead. That's the condition of truth, the condition of perception, the condition of objectivity, at least in their most conventional sense. (18) (...) What is absolutely scary is the idea of being dead while being quasi-dead, while looking at things from above, from beyond. But at the same time, it is the most reassuring hope we have that, although dead, we will continue to look, to listen to everything, to observe what's going on. (20) (...) I think it is bearable only because of the as if: 'as if I were dead'. But the as

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002): 415)

if, the fiction, the quasi-, these are what protect us from the real event of death itself, if such a thing exists.¹¹

If every autobiography is written from the autoaffective point of view 'as if I were dead' the shift towards life writing might itself be seen as an 'autoimmunitarian' reaction in the context of generalised biopolitics.

Following the biopolitical shift from autobiography or life writing to a posthumanist notion in which the (grammatical) subject or agent of the phrase can no longer clearly be disentangled from its object opens up the possibility for all kinds of postanthropocentric forms of life writing to emerge. In fact, the very 'bios' in autobiography – as proposed above – dissolves and generalises at the same time.

The autobiographic genre thus 'faces' further proliferation and fragmentation as a result of a posthumanist and postanthropocentric ecology. Every component of the term 'auto-bio-graphy' is being challenged afresh by posthumanism: to briefly recapitulate, the *auto-* in *autobiography* is seen as an instance of auto-affection, which relies on an inappropriable (inhuman) other. The *bio-* in *autobiography* is exposed to the challenge as to what constitutes the *biological* element in every narration of a 'life'; finally, the question of writing in *autobiography* is being raised again with more urgency by new forms and media of inscription. It is, for example, worth remembering that the Derridean notion of the trace was from the start never restricted to any human logic of writing, or to forms of inscription exclusively effectuated by human subjects.¹² Under these conditions, it is no surprise that as the forms of subjectivity proliferate the genre of autobiography becomes more and more fragmented and subdivided into *autofiction*, life writing, memoir, *autobio(s)copie*, etc.¹³

The autobiographical genre is the embodiment of the aporia of subjectivity: who is the addressee of one's autobiography? Derrida explains the conundrum at the heart of the autobiographical by, first of all, insisting on the problem of self-identity and the name, i.e. 'Am I that name?', and on the question of who is behind the figure of figuration, the defaced behind the face? Judith Butler's explanation, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, is very helpful here:

The 'I' can tell neither the story of its own emergence nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, which are prior to one's own emergence as a subject who can know, and so constitute a set of origins that one can narrate only at the expense of authoritative knowledge.¹⁴

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, "As if I were dead" – *An Interview with Jacques Derrida* [1995] (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2000), p. 22.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 9.

¹³ Cf. for example Philippe Lejeune, *Les Brouillons de soi* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 37.

Derrida articulates the problematic desire behind the autobiographical impulse through the relationship between auto-affection and death, i.e. the autobiographical 'scene of writing' necessarily passes through death (as seen in the passage from 'As if I Were Dead' quoted above) and the impossibility of externalising one's innermost autobiographical experience. But what does it mean to be dead, when at the moment of writing (or speaking) you are obviously alive? It means, according to Derrida,

that you look at things the way they are *as such*, you look at the object *as such*. To perceive the object as such implies that you perceive the object as it is or as it is supposed to be when you are not there (...). So, to relate to an object *as such* means to relate to it as if you were dead. That's the condition of truth, the condition of perception, the condition of objectivity, at least in their most conventional sense.¹⁵

It is the necessarily *fictional* aspect of the autobiographical or of life writing in general, that allows both for the best and the worst, absolute fear and uplifting hope, that constitutes the autobiographical impulse or desire:

What is absolutely scary is the idea of being dead while being quasi-dead, while looking at things from above, from beyond. But at the same time, it is the most reassuring hope we have that, although dead, we will continue to look, to listen to everything, to observe what's going on (...) I think it is bearable only because of the *as if*: 'as if I were dead'. But the *as if*, the fiction, the *quasi-*, these are what protect us from the real event of death itself, if such a thing exists.¹⁶

An autobiography is thus, strictly (fictionally) speaking, 'deadly' in the sense that it requires a self-positioning based on an identification with another, objectified, or 'dead', me – a relation to me as other that is regulated by unpredictable, because unconscious, processes of auto-immuno-in- or affection.

From Life Writing to Lifewriting: Postanthropocentrism and Autobiography

At this point, it is important to stress that sustainability is about decentering anthropocentrism. The ultimate implication is a displacement of the human in the new, complex compound of highly generative posthumanities. In my view, the sustainable subject has a nomadic subjectivity because the notion of sustainability brings together ethical, epistemological, and political concerns under cover of a nonunitary vision of the subject (...). 'Life' privileges assemblages of a heterogeneous kind. Animals, insects, machines are as many fields of forces or territories of becoming. The life in me is not only, not even human.¹⁷

¹⁵ Derrida, "As if I were dead", p. 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 22.

¹⁷ Braidotti, "The Politics of Life as *Bios/Zoē*", pp. 189-190.

An additional complication in the proliferation of the autobiographical is the question of 'zoography' (or, the involvement of the "animal autobiographique", in giving an account of oneself, already alluded to above).¹⁸ What part does 'my' animal-life (i.e. the human body or embodiment as such) – the zoē as opposed to the bio of any 'me'¹⁹ – play in life writing or autobiography? There always seems to be an elusive zoographical trace underneath and a zoo-ontological other who precedes and 'writes', a biography, as Judith Butler explains:

To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one's life. There is a history to my body of which I can have no recollection (...). If there is, then, a part of bodily experience as well – of what is indexed by the word exposure – that cannot be narrated but constitutes the bodily condition of one's narrative account of oneself, then exposure constitutes one among several vexations in the effort to give a narrative account of oneself. There is (1) a non-narrativizable exposure that establishes my singularity, and there are (2) primary relations, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life, and so (3) a history that establishes my partial opacity to myself. Lastly, there are (4) norms that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. This last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by (5) the structure of address in which it takes place.²⁰

Death and obliteration at the heart of the autobiographical autoaffection are thus to be taken literally, following Butler: "To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one's life. There is a history to my body of which I can have no recollection".²¹

The indispensable writing body has its own zoographical ways of inscription that may not be articulable in traditional forms of autobiographical writing and works against the idea that autobiography as a genre usually relies on the authenticity of (bodily) experience. There is thus always an experience of dispossession (or desubjectification) at work, which is experienced (or inscribed, registered) at a material, bodily level, and which is the necessary precondition for autoaffection to arise in the first place, but which can never be narrated as such. The body who experiences (or is materially inscribed by) the *autobiography* can never *be* the body who narrates the *autobiography*. There is, in fact, a disjuncture between bodies at work within the autobiographical process: material, somatic, phenomenological, narrating and narrated, to name but a few. This disjuncture is mediated and produced by technics (from speaking and writing to microchips and new social media)²² and is giving way to

¹⁸ Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", p. 415.

¹⁹ Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*; pp. 38-39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²² Cf. Smith, "Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries", pp.570 ff.

the awareness that an autobiography is always a recording of two identities, an individual, 'personal' one, that is singular, a 'haecceity', as well as a species, 'bodily' one, that is entangled with its technical and planetary environment.

In the context of an emergent global environmental consciousness as well as ambient 'species angst' regarding the survival of human and nonhuman life on Earth, the genre of lifewriting is taking on species and planetary dimensions. Autobiography in the Anthropocene, or lifewriting in the face of extinction, however, should maybe be regarded with some scepticism, as Claire Colebrook cautions:

History is no longer a human narrative, and human narratives themselves seem to incorporate forces that are no longer human (...). [N]ot only have we humanized the emergence of humans from deep time (by regarding evolution as being oriented towards adaptation), but we have also domesticated the sense of the human end (...). Rather than celebrating or affirming a post-human world, where man no longer deludes himself with regard to his primacy or distinction, and rather than asserting the joyous truth of ecology where life is finally understood as one vast, self-furthering interconnected organic whole, we should perhaps take note of the violent distinction of the human. For some time now, humans have been proclaiming their capacity to render themselves figurally extinct. All those claims for man's specialness, for the distinction of reason, for human exceptionalism have given way to claims for unity, mindfulness, the global brain and a general ecology (...). But his sense of human absence is not only delusional; it is symptomatic and psychotic (...) precisely when man ought to be a formidable presence, precisely when we should be confronting the fact that the human species is exceptional in its distinguishing power, we affirm that there is one single, interconnected, life-affirming ecological totality.²³

The 'figural' disappearance of the human (singular and species) is inscribed in the very desire of autobiographical autoaffection. At a time of growing extinction threats and planetary entanglement it would be hazardous to forget this. Life is nothing outside narration – humans' special responsibility, one could say. But without life there would be nothing to narrate, of course. This is where we enter the territory of posthumanist literature more generally I would argue – the auto-bio-graphy of the human under the conditions of its own disappearance in the variety of its forms, genres and narrative media.

²³ Claire Colebrook, "Introduction: Extinction. Framing the End of the Species", in: Colebrook ed. *Extinction* (Living Books About Life, 2011), n.p.; available online at: <http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org/books/Extinction/Introduction> (accessed 30/11/2023).