



**PALGRAVE STUDIES IN LIFE WRITING**  
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# Hybridity in Life Writing

*Combining  
Text and Images*

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*Edited by*  
Arnaud Schmitt

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# Palgrave Studies in Life Writing

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Arnaud Schmitt  
Editor

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# Introduction

*Arnaud Schmitt*

In 1475, Konrad von Megenberg authored one of the first illustrated natural history books, *Das Buch der Natur*. Printing at the time was still a fledgling process and illustrations were made possible thanks to the use of woodcuts. Konrad's book became quite popular, and "passed through six editions before the year 1500" (Locy 238). It is supposedly one of the first printed books to mix words and images (woodcuts of animals and plants based on drawings). The interesting part is that as soon as hybridity appeared, a comparative element was set in motion. What is the value of the text compared to the value of the images and vice-versa? The evaluation of the actual quality of the hybrid strategy per se, of the combination of the two elements, will only come into play several centuries later. In *Das Buch der Natur*'s case, the scientific dimension of the text, for instance, is limited as "the text preserves for us the medieval lore about animals, plants and stones, but it is not descriptive science." Locy goes further by stating: "The descriptive part of the book is disappointing. The art of description rests on good observation and at this period independent observation had not been developed" (245). Indeed, the text was strongly influenced by

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writers of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages. The plates of woodcuts logically represented the main attraction of the book, similarly to what happened, for instance, in the nineteenth century when photographs met words within books for the first time. For a contemporary reader, one of the many fascinating aspects of Konrad von Megenberg's book is how it organizes its own bimedia structure<sup>1</sup> and how the very same organization can be found in more recent works. What also hasn't changed since then is how, as soon as an author decides to resort to two media instead of one, a form of organization, even of articulation has to be found, and, almost as a corollary, how the notion of imbalance is constitutive of text/image hybridity.

To some extent, the matter of the text/image relationship in a hybrid context is a political one. The type of politics I am referring to entails a variety of positions and degrees of power relations best summed up thus: Are words more powerful in their descriptive mode than images, or is it the other way around? What happens when both media meet in the same work, confined within same pages? What type of (asymmetrical) relations of subordination is implemented? Can an image, any image, make sense narratively without any text attached to it? The answer to this question is complex and multifarious as it all depends on what you expect a narrative to be. W. J. T. Mitchell, for instance, mentions "the kinds of photographic essays which contain strong textual elements, where the text is most definitely an 'invasive' and even domineering element" (286). The description of the text as a "domineering" and yet "invasive" element often accurately encapsulates the power relations between text and images when they cohabit. But knowing whether photography, the most technologically advanced form of images, can narratively stand on its own two feet is not a question this collection will ask; it will instead ask the same phenomenological question, in various forms applied to various contexts: what happens when hybridity is implemented, whether in a graphic memoir, in an illustrated text or in a more unusual aesthetic project, comprising text and images? We will see that as different as the context might be, there are common or at least familiar strategic and even cognitive choices and effects.

Logically, when it comes to autobiography, these choices and effects must fulfil a self-narrating purpose, which is fundamentally distinct from

<sup>1</sup>"Each of the twelve parts into which the book is divided is preceded by a general introduction in which one often finds moralizations and expression of theological view" (247).

hybridity in a fictional framework and its “playful, shared pretence” (“feintise partagée ludique,” Schaeffer 102). However, words and images in any autobiographical work similarly establish a balance of power, one that requires investigation as the autobiographical narrative hinges on it. From a historical point of view, this balance of power may also result from the evolution of each medium’s status, as an art form or cultural artefact. For instance, Teresa Bruś, one of this book’s contributors, argues that “*The Pencil of Nature*, presented to the public in 1844, is the first autobiographical book of a photographer. [...] aligning the ‘art’ of photography with a rhetorical, if not a literary, project.” But in *Photography and Literature*, François Brunet points out that Talbot’s work remained an isolated effort until the beginning of the twentieth century and “the growing recognition of photography as a distinct art form” (8–9). This new status might explain why it suddenly became more natural to associate words and photographs, similarly to what had been done previously in illustrated books with words and drawings, for instance.

In terms of hybridity, the shift from drawings or paintings to photographs did not only have technical implications, especially in an autobiographical context, it also had ontological consequences. Indeed, photography produced images that were suddenly regarded as closer to reality, even as close to reality as any image could get: an imprint of reality in other words, especially as exposure time became shorter thanks to technological improvements. When considering the likeness of photographs and phenomenological reality, in other words photography’s ability to copy the real, theorists often start with Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, and “Barthes’s fundamentally melancholic attachment to the medium” (Jordan 74). This text has become a theoretical topos and is mentioned in a host of research articles or books on photography (published after 1980 of course). So much so that it has led Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri to note that, as soon as one deals with “[t]he photograph’s particular power to record the real world,” it is “unfortunate that many literary scholars who approach the topic rely unquestioningly on Roland Barthes’s still-influential *studium/punctum* dichotomy” (17). As seminal (and still very relevant) as this dichotomy can be, I find Horstkotte and Pedri’s remark particularly pertinent as always entering a building through the same door prevents you from considering other perspectives or predetermines the theoretical steps that you take. Furthermore, I have noticed that certain liberties have been taken with Barthes’s own theory of photography which has only become a theory by being interpreted and overinterpreted for

decades but originally *Camera Lucida* was simply an essay on his *relation with* photography, and more accurately with certain photographs. Furthermore, Barthes's famous remark about photography always carrying its referent with it has often been equated with a photograph's integral likeness to a piece of reality, but the French scholar's view of photography, by being so personal, did not systematically allow for such commanding interpretations. For instance, Barthes does not equate a photograph with a copy of the real, but with an expression of the past. The referent it carries all the time is first and foremost a tie to the past, a mnemonic tool that allows you to think, write in the present about the past. Linda Haverty Rugg writes: "while Barthes proposes that photographs are analogues of reality, I would like to propose that they are that but not only that; I would argue that they are also analogues of memory, and consequently analogues of thought" (25), but to some extent, this is exactly what Barthes also proposed and his so-called claim that "photographs are analogues of reality" is overshadowed by another aspect of a photograph, that is to say its capacity to conjure up the past, and it remains in all his writings about photography under-theorized. In the words of Marianne Hirsch, "[r]eference, for Barthes, is not content but presence" (Hirsch 6). As a matter of fact, in "an interview with the French journal *Le Photographe*, a month after the publication of the book [*Camera Lucida*], Barthes embarrassingly appears to have been trapped by his topic" (Chaudier 209). Chaudier goes on to quote Barthes saying that "photography cannot be the pure and simple transcription of the object," reminding us that in *Camera Lucida*, the latter defined himself as a "realist" who "does not consider a photograph as a copy of the real—but as an emanation of the *past real*; something *magical*, not an art."<sup>2</sup>

When working on autobiographical hybridity, images produced by photography have to be considered almost as a separate case. Indeed, photography's perceived greater similitude, or likeness to reality undoubtedly stems from its mechanical aspect: a camera is objective, a pen is subjective as the former is literal (even though the camera is operated by a

<sup>2</sup>"Dans un entretien accordé à la revue *Le Photographe*, un mois après la parution de son livre [*La Chambre claire*], Barthes donne la pénible impression d'avoir été piégé par son objet. 'En résumé', affirme-t-il, 'la photo ne peut pas être la transcription pure et simple de l'objet'; cela va sans dire; mais 'd'autre part, elle ne peut pas être un art puisqu'elle copie mécaniquement' (OC, III, 1237). [...] 'Les réalistes, dont je suis [...] ne prennent pas du tout la photo pour une 'copie' du réel—mais pour une émanation du réel passé; une magie, non un art' (CC 138)" (Chaudier 209).



person) whereas the latter is metonymic (the substitution of an attribute, the pen, for the author). In other words, the machine does not cheat. Photography's indexical nature certainly is intrinsically linked to its mechanical process as it is *the physicality of the machine that allows to record the index in the first place*. And this indexicality is often opposed to other arts seeking verisimilitude such as writing and, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, painting. Artists who have actually practiced both arts confirm this hierarchy even though this greater potential to automatically reproduce reality is not always seen as an advantage. For instance, Man Ray, wrote that “[w]hereas photography was simply a matter of calculation, obtaining what had been figured out beforehand, painting was an adventure in which some unknown force might suddenly change the whole aspect of things. The result could be as much a surprise to myself as to a spectator” (384). But photography's greater asset, at least in the first stages of its development, precisely was this “matter of calculation” which could lead to a “faithful image” without the artist's imagination interfering with the process, without Man Ray's much vaunted “surprise.” Of course, as photography matured, what pictures were really faithful to, or how they were faithful, became an issue, mostly still unresolved, or at least still debated nowadays. Nevertheless, its mechanical nature and indexical potential remain its most fundamental feature, “[p]hotographs, in short, differ from other images on the basis of their photochemical process, mechanical production, and indexical connection to reality” (Lehtimäki 188).

Hybridity may also be seen to operate beyond this semantic and cultural balance of power and to aim at an *additional meaning* created thanks to intermediality at a level where, despite their intrinsic cognitive features and their differences, text and images are able to produce content that they would not have been able to produce had they been kept separate. In a way, it all revolves around how a book balances text and images, how it “monitors” intermediality. But this monitoring depends on what images can do in this particular context, on their function and referential potential. The role of non-photographic images in hybrid memoirs is more complex as paintings, for instance, do not have this ability to authenticate and similarly to words do not carry their referent with them to allude to Barthes's famous sentence once again. However, in a post-Photoshop age, the way photographs have the ability to tamper with or even falsify their referent can be seen as highly problematic in an autobiographical context. The same can be said of graphic memoirs, a booming field, as drawings are

also very low on the “authentication scale.” Nevertheless, narratologist Robyn Warhol made the following remark regarding them: “The juxtaposition of cartooning with verbal memoir offers methods of representing subjectivity that are unprecedented in traditional autobiography. Indeed, as Versaci asserts ‘while many prose memoirists address the complex nature of identity and the self, comic book memoirists are able to represent such complexity in ways that cannot be captured in words alone’” (8). But is this “subjectivity” represented separately or jointly? And in the latter case, how? Also not as authenticating as photographs, paintings remain nevertheless a potential narrative resource for any autobiographer. In *The Privileged Eye: Essays on Photography*, Max Kozloff reminds us that “a main distinction between a painting and a photograph is that the painting alludes to its content, whereas the photograph summons it, from wherever and whenever, to us” (236). It might only be “alluding to a content,” but a painting in a memoir simply is another form of hybridity and a way for an author to diversify the work’s content. Stanley Cavell argues that “a painting *is* a world” and that “a photograph is *of* the world” (23–4) but a painting in many ways continues to allude to *the* world, and more precisely to the autobiographer’s world.

Thus, in any hybrid context, it is seminal to understand what a specific medium allows you to say, what its specific range of expression is, and also to figure out its narrative limits. Raphaël Baroni writes that “[i]nstead of arguing that some media are more fictional than others, it would be more theoretically sound to single out which aspects of a reality are more suitable for a rendering by a specific medium, and what formal possibilities exist when dealing with the illocutionary constraints engaged by serious representations” (Baroni 102). It is my contention that some media are more referential than others, which does not entail *at all* that some media are more fictional than others. It is necessary to realize that “the inclusion of content in a medium is never done in a neutral way. A media does not accept content independently of the properties of its material basis, which in turn has a significant influence on the mediated content. Like it or not, a written autobiography cannot be identical to an oral, filmed, drawn, etc. autobiography” (Baetens qtd. in Baroni 102). Baroni develops the idea of each medium’s specific mode of representation further:

Yet, a “media-conscious narratology” can help us realize that each medium will capture different aspects of the mediated truth, and will handle specifically the illocutionary constraints of nonfictional representation. Some

mediums, like photographs or first-hand audio-visual recordings, may give the (dangerous) illusion that the facts can be apprehended objectively. When, however, the representation aims to capture the transparent density of the experience of an individual, graphic and verbal narratives can provide a form of close distanciation needed in nonfictional immersion. (109)

This “illusion” is “dangerous” probably because it is both overwhelming and, as we have just seen, based on a unique connection to “raw materials.” For this reason, photography remains a privileged means of capturing reality and the past, and thus perfectly suited to the concept of autobiography. Baroni usefully reminds us that “Philippe Marion (1997) coined the expression “mediageny” to designate narrative contents having a particular affinity with a specific medium, such as the western with cinema, or talking animals and superheroes with comics” (103). Based on the arguments presented above, it can be argued that photography’s mediageny is “reality-oriented,” that reality is particularly *photogenic*: this privileged link with the past turns photography into a perfect tool for autobiography. And yet, integrating photography within an autobiographical context is not as simple as it seems, as its referential potential needs to be *harnessed* if such a thing is possible, and, more importantly, so does the way it interacts with words and the text’s own complicated referential dynamic. Gilles Mora asks this key question: “Does showing oneself allow to tell oneself?”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, textual autobiography has always focused on, at first, the factual and then the psychological dimension of self-narration. Showing oneself implies a different discourse and reception from narrating oneself. But early integration of photography in life writing abstained from looking into these major differences as, quite understandably, autobiography was under the spell of “the camera’s unbelievable recording capacity.”<sup>4</sup> Logically, it is “first and foremost the photographic self-portrait which, on the model of painting, inaugurated this analogue exploration of the self.”<sup>5</sup> And even today, hybrid autobiographies include a considerable amount of portraits and self-portraits of the autobiographer at several stages of life. Thus, photography, at least in this context, is still tethered to its faculty to represent a person. But many memoirs, while resorting to the occasional (self-)portrait, put the emphasis not on *seeing the author* but on what *she*

<sup>3</sup> “Se montrer permet-il de se dire?” (Mora 107).

<sup>4</sup> “La capacité d’enregistrement inouïe que donne l’appareil photographique” (Mora 107).

<sup>5</sup> “C’est d’abord—et surtout—l’autoportrait photographique qui, sur le modèle pictural, inaugure cette exploration argentique du moi” (Mora 107).

ees. *Showing* and *seeing* certainly bring additional and, as we will see throughout this book, precious resources to any autobiographical venture, but they also *disseminate* information sometimes entropically.

Several options of semantic contributions between text and images are available. One can favour one medium over the other and thus subordinate one to the other, but one can also accept that both media *work together* at producing something different, a result none of the two media could have achieved on its own. Visual arts' contribution to autobiography should be regarded thus: yes, they can definitely bring something essentially referential or even a form of immediacy to autobiography for all the reasons expounded above and many others, but the referentiality or the immediacy that they bring is not the same as a text's: both media can obviously refer to the same moment or episode of a person's life and yet produce different semantic perspectives on it, hence the interest of bringing them together, *to enhance the autobiographical experience*.

In 1999, Jay David Bolter and David Grusin, introduced the concept of "remediation" in their now classic *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. They used this neologism as a way of referring to the way new media refashion and repurpose visual content imported from more traditional media, such as photography, painting, film or television (knowing that these traditional media had already done their fair share of refashioning and repurposing, borrowing from each other). As for the very nature of a medium, Bolter and Grusin offered the following definition: "What is a medium? We offer this simple definition: a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real. A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media" (Bolter and Grusin 65). If one medium cannot operate in isolation, needless to say that when two media come into contact, these "relationships of respect and rivalry" trigger off new tensions but also a new realm of possibilities.

Finally, beyond the intermedial question, another seminal issue addressed in this book is the current state of autobiography, autobiography at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a different type from previous centuries, one more informed of the unreliability of our memory and of the limits of referential writing and yet more than ever aware of its own importance; one also that has often outgrown its usual vessel, the text—even though the latter remains its most prestigious one in terms of

official recognition—and has branched out into social and often more visual media (just one example among so many: the renowned American photographer Stephen Shore’s Instagram account on which for several months he posted one picture every day, accompanied by a very short caption). The aim of this book is to explore the point at which an image, *any* image, whether fixed or moving (in vlogs, for instance), enters the autobiographical act and confronts the verbal form. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson devote a whole chapter to “the visual-verbal-virtual contexts of life narrative” which have multiplied through, for example, performance and visual arts, autobiographical films and videos, and variously curated online lives. Finally, the figure of the author, of the autobiographer is also referential: the author thinks, the author writes in a particular place, at a particular moment. Text and images simply offer two forms of referentiality: one that is *visible* and one that is *implied* by the text, the traces of this internal referentiality. The attraction of hybridity in autobiography emanates from the absence of the body in autobiography until photography became widely accessible. Suddenly, but slowly at first, embedding actual images of the empirical author “assert[ed] the presence of a living body through the power of photographic referentiality” (Haverty Rugg 19). It is actually not only the body but the environment of the body that threaded its way into the text, but “the inclusion of photographs” leading to “a revitalization of the corpse of the author, a re-membering of the autobiographical self” (Haverty Rugg 21) was certainly its most striking feature. Of course, this “re-membering” raises questions such as “How is the person narrating the autobiography related to the person described there?” (Haverty Rugg 38) but it also answers the question of the *presence* to some extent. There are obvious *issues of connection* between textual and visual I, and all contributions in this book address these issues from different angles, sometimes different periods and obviously through different forms of hybridity.

Being in pictures, being in words, being in both. At the very core of this collection is Joanne Leonard’s fascinating interview with Griselda Pollock, based upon her beautiful 2008 memoir *Being in Pictures: An Intimate Photo Memoir*, in which, Leonard, a renowned photographer, does not content herself with presenting her life through her own visual art but also in a typical hybrid manner resorts to words. Like many other artists whose works will be studied in the following pages, she “participates in the category of life-writing through its formally composed juxtaposition of text

and image.” However, Pollock goes further than the concept of hybridity and states that by “combining text and image, two language or representational systems,” Leonard’s work is “not so much hybrid, an impure confusion of cultural modes, but interanimation.” The first section of this book will focus on the “interanimation” between words and photographs as photography, as developed above, has definitely proven to be a major contribution to life writing, even though one whose very nature is still being assessed today. In all cases, this contribution is extremely varied. For instance, similarly to Joanne Leonard, other photographers have decided to get out of their artistic comfort zone and use two media instead of one. Anne Green Munk explores how Sally Mann deals with her own hybridity in her memoir *Hold Still* and her 1992 photo-book *Immediate Family*. Two very different works, at least formats, two distinct hybrid strategies as at first sight, the former is more textual and the latter, for obvious reasons, visual. And yet, “While it is evident that text plays a key role in *Hold Still*, it has only rarely been noticed that *Immediate Family* has quite a lot of text in it, even though it has the format of a traditional art book.” What’s more, there is even a degree of intertextuality and interpictoriality between both works as *Hold Still* includes photographs drawn from *Immediate Family* which also contains an essay explaining to readers why Mann photographed her children in such an unusual manner, arguments also presented in *Hold Still*’s chapters 7 and 8. But what is particularly interesting in Anne Green Munk’s chapter, and to various extents, it echoes many other chapters collected here, is the way visuality and textuality can outgrow their original function. For instance, it can be argued that “Mann has infused her photography with her knowledge of literature; an inspiration that becomes obvious when reading *Hold Still*” and for this specific reason—her literary approach to photography and her romantic or transcendentalist influences which create a constant link between her life and her art—“photographs can thus be seen as part of Mann’s general life writing practice.”

Sally Mann’s background and life approach are not very different from Patti Smith’s, an artist who for most of her life, as mentioned by Silvia Hernández Hellín, “has been known, first and foremost, as a singer-songwriter, musician and performer” and who “thinks of herself as a writer first,” but who can also be considered as a photographer as this art has played a fundamental part in her artistic evolution, both as an amateur and practitioner. Silvia Hernández Hellín regards Smith’s recent autobiographical trilogy—*Just Kids* (2010), *M Train* (2015) and *Year of the*

*Monkey* (2019)—as “a major oeuvre.” Even though each book encompasses a different period, there is a certain aesthetic homogeneity to the whole project, and “[o]ne of these common threads is photography, a running theme in Smith’s life and work.” Similarly to a lot of hybrid autobiographical works including photographs, “photography [...] performs an illustrative role, with pictures complementing the narrative” in Smith’s autobiographical narratives. Whether in Leonard’s, Mann’s or Smith’s memoirs, photography has a powerful artistic dimension and yet, almost paradoxically, never strays very far from this illustrative, even authenticating function.

This very specific function of photography, and more widely of any type of visual content in the bimedia dialogue implemented by autobiographical text-image hybridity runs like a red thread throughout this book. It is a “common thread” while at the same time showing that the pragmatics of context often overrides overarching functions. An illustrative or authenticating role indeed, but from one memoir to another, from one work to another, what images are supposed to illustrate or even validate varies greatly, and consequently so does the process. This is definitely one of the most striking features of this collection and hopefully the reason why it will be a major contribution to life writing studies. For instance, in a drastically different context, more precisely underwater memoir illustrations in “diver memoirs,” Clare Brant studies how “[i]mages help construct, relay and mediate new relationships between humans and the ocean” and how “they also create new tensions in verbal description.” She reminds us that a majority of underwater memoirs had a commercial purpose, with a readership composed of divers as well as nondivers, “and published to raise funds for the authors’ next underwater endeavours.” Underlying the determining anchoring function of captions in many hybrid forms, and focusing to a large extent on Cousteau’s *The Silent World*, she brings to light the way diver memoirs can tip the bimedia balance in an unusual way. Indeed, as they often present readers/viewers with “places appearing photographically for the first time, both *in situ* for the autobiographical diver-writer and for readers in relation to the biography of the sea,” in other words unknown places, the illustrative function seems to be reversed, the text, captions included, being used in aid to the pictures and not the, most common, other way round: “So the usual luggage of the past for photography is repacked into a carry-on of multimediality.”

Marie-Agnès Gay further demonstrates that photography's seemingly straightforward illustrative function is a complex and very unstable process, especially in a postmodern context.

In Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's short autobiographical "photo-essay" (included in the posthumous volume *Exilée—Temps Morts—Selected Pieces*), here again the hybrid balance is tipped differently, with "black and white photographs and film stills—which are never used in a transparent complementary 'relational' interface with the text." In her way of combining text and images in "a very large and equally hybrid body of work" ("experimental poetry, multi-media performances, mail art...") but most specifically in the handmade artist book that is part of her autobiographical work in which she "alternates ten short poetic texts with ten photographs each time set side by side," Cha often draws the reader/viewer out of her comfort zone and undermines the usual hierarchy between words and images. She similarly calls into questions photography's illustrative function, and even more its so-called indisputable referential function, evoked in the first part of this introduction. Marie-Agnès Gay sees in Cha's strategy an "act of resistance" relying on the principle that "no system of re-presentation will ever be able to really make its referent present, let alone a human subject." Here, photography is paradoxically not used to rebuild the past but to deconstruct it, and throughout the first part of this book, we will see that photography's referential function and its authenticating contribution to the text is often far from unequivocal, creating tensions within these hybrid works which energize the reader's experience. We find similar tensions in Helena Janeczek's *La ragazza con la Leica*, an "unidentified narrative object, sliding alongside a continuum moving from fact to fiction, from truth to untruth, which crosses both images and words" about Gerda Taro (1910–1937), a young German Jewish female photographer and pioneering photojournalist who died in action during the Spanish Civil War. Veronica Frigeni decided to focus on a biographical hybrid work (belonging to the tradition of "so-called non-fiction novels") but we find similar problematics as the ones expounded above, on account of "the insertion of actual photographs, and the fact that the narrative expands beyond the book, as a portfolio of materials about Taro is available on Janeczek's website, elicit a reflection on the work's phototextual and transmedial rhetoric." It is particularly interesting to see how Janeczek's work regarded by Veronica Frigeni as an instance of postmemorial phototextuality is both an echo and a counterpoint to the memoirs



previously mentioned which, despite their own internal contradictions and complicated hybridity, still attempt to fulfil a memorial function.

Laure de Nervaux-Gavoty extends Veronica Frigeni's reflection with her own take on postmemory in a (very autobiographical) biographical context by focusing on the essential but not unequivocal function filled by photographs in Michael Ignatieff's *The Russian Album*. These photographs are essentially family pictures aimed at reconstructing the lives of his grandparents. Ignatieff's taps into their own memoirs and photo albums to explore their past. Echoing all the other chapters, Laure de Nervaux-Gavoty ponders the question of the integration of these pictures into the body of the text. As it is the case throughout this book in all the other autobiographical or biographic works brought to the fore, this integration is always deeply personal: "The Russian Album's approach to these questions reflects the narrator's conflicted approach to his roots." This is especially the case when particular photographs are not commented upon by words despite the text's proximity, and in this case "in which images weave a silent narrative, absences are also fraught with meaning." Photographs not accompanied by words seem to underscore important referential limits of their own medium, despite its obvious bond with the real and, to some extent, both the scope and limits of text/image hybridity. In the final analysis, a "tension between text and image, voice and photography, runs throughout the text, reflecting the narrator's conflicted relationship to his past." Laure de Nervaux-Gavoty aptly shows how Ignatieff's version of postmemory is symptomatic of contemporary autobiographers and biographers' approaches to memory, the will to "identify oneself as part of a lineage" while asserting one's own individuality even when the narrative is not exactly about oneself, and she underlines the ambiguous role photographs often play in these projects.

By focusing on Teju Cole's pandemic visual diary Julia Watson, one of the leading international figures in the field of life writing, seems to sum up all these contradictory forms of bimedia integration in which photography always seems to play the disruptive or at least unexpected role, while occasionally doing exactly what it is supposed to do, that is, supplementing words: "Despite the insistence of life narrative theorists that photographs, as indexical artifacts, narrate differently and at times even in opposition to the texts in which they appear, we tend to think of photographs as supplements to memoirs, as familiar examples—from Patti Smith in *Just Kids* and Keith Richards in *Life*—suggest." Her chapter can be seen as a perfect conclusion to the first part. Cole, Nigerian-American writer

and photographer, spent several weeks taking daily photographs of the objects that lay on his kitchen counter and posting them on his Instagram account to later publish a book, *Golden Apple of the Sun*, containing thirty-five of these photos which represent kitchen foods and objects, “as well as several photo-reproductions of still-life paintings and three snapshots by Cole—a repertoire of photographic modes.” The text is not very easy to apprehend, and this is an understatement, being composed of “twenty-eight nearly unreadable handwritten pages of a Cambridge cookbook from 1780” and textual fragments of a non-paragraphed, undated essay. Both media depict very mundane elements, mostly focusing on the kitchen as a metonymical centre of our daily lives (but with the US 2020 election as a background) but the way Cole interweaves text and images is particularly complex as his “enchained text” links his own narrative “of hunger and melancholy to both the Vanitas tradition in painting and photography and to historical practices of enslavement and appropriation.” To make sense of this hybrid apparatus and of how it indirectly uses the political background of the election, Julia Watson resorts to her own experience of the same period which then overlaps with the author’s autobiography: “As you see, in order to engage the photo-autobiographics of *Golden Apple of the Sun* I have had to not only locate Teju Cole’s narrating I and the various “you’s” he addresses in it, but to put myself in the picture.” Once again, this chapter is a fitting conclusion to the first part as it underscores photography’s not so congruent link with reality and autobiography.

The second part of this book, entitled “The Materialities of Hybridity: Artists, Autobiographies, Textualities, Images and Graphic Narratives,” embraces a broader spectrum of autobiographical works and above all of types of hybridity, comprising drawings, paintings and comics, for instance, while focusing on the same aforementioned problematics. Teresa Bruś’s chapter certainly is an apt introduction to the second part as she demonstrates how various photographic materialities and archives become part of very unstable and liminal autobiographical projects, accompanied by various amounts of texts, or underlying comments. She takes several examples, such as the visual artist Joachim Schmid, whose work, *Other People’s Photographs*, “takes the form of a set of 96 self-published books, each of which contains 32 photographs found on the Internet and classified according to specific, arbitrary criteria like Self, Anti-Self, or Writing.” Similarly to Laure de Nervaux-Gavoty and Veronica Frigeni’s contributions, Teresa Bruś analyses through various highly original artistic concepts how the biographical can become autobiographical, but also how

hybridity can stem from more unexpected and less stable artistic environments than the ones presented in the first part of this book. For instance, “Schmid, the photographer without the camera, tells his life story in terms of one obsessive activity: a search for discarded analogue photographs and, more recently, for digital images in the global photo-sharing sites.” What is fascinating with all the diverse photographic and hybrid materialities considered by Teresa Bruś is that they often take us to the limits of the autobiographical project and yet allow us to remain within the vast perimeter of life writing, demonstrating both the broad scope of this book and yet a common focus on the “complex ways we tell our lives with and around the new volatile photographic images” and “other materials and technologies.”

Even though non-photographic visual content is lower on the referential scale, it does not mean that its own link with the real is not radically different from the text’s and still a valuable addition to any autobiographical venture. Furthermore, beyond its theoretical scope, the exploration of text/image hybridity, this collection is also an opportunity to discover less known and highly original autobiographical ventures. For instance, Keith Vaughan (1912–77) “a painter who fell somewhat unfortunately between two generations of celebrated British artists” produced a journal consisting of 61 volumes written over almost four decades. Alex Belsey points out that Vaughan’s position on the London art scene of the middle of the twentieth century was a complicated one: “A homosexual man, a pacifist and a conscientious objector,” he often felt misrepresented. This led him to edit and publish in 1966 his *Journal & Drawings*, a form of “corrective.” His own approach to hybridity was to create a “conglomeration of words and images’ (*J&D* 8)”: “The book contains over 200 pages of journal entries sequenced chronologically and grouped into seven parts, accompanied by compositions of assorted drawings and several large reproductions of monochrome photographs.” Once more, images’ illustrative function is problematic. Alex Belsey describes how Vaughan made a very different use of drawings and photographs in his *Journal & Drawings*. The drawings were aimed at illustrating not his life but his work, to depict his creative process and also bolster his credibility on the art scene. On the other hand, the photographs were made to “present a facsimile of sensory data that neither medium of journal nor drawing could achieve.” The photographs chosen by Vaughan convey beautiful representations of places or people, but in a very staged and artificial way.

Nancy Pedri's stimulating chapter perfectly fits the logic and scope of this second part, that is to say exploring non-binary, even multifarious forms of hybridity. Her study focuses on the "use of photographic images in graphic memoir (and other life-writing graphic narrative genres)," a form of hybridity comprising different hybridities, and more particularly on "graphic illness narratives that include photographic images in their pages." Demonstrating how photography is present in many graphic memoirs, Nancy Pedri homes in on readers' response to such works as Al Davison, Brian Fies and Gusti's and clarifies for us how they generate "a narrative situation whereby readers are asked to engage with and reflect upon their presuppositions about the nature of and relationship between cartooning and photography." The nature of this relationship is complex, with historical, social and above all cultural implications. The cohabitation of these two media within the same works, especially ones tackling very sensitive issues such as the ones conjured up by Pedri, renders the hermeneutical work and the "intermedial reflections" of the reader/viewer more unusual and the hybrid text sometimes harder to naturalise. Indeed, "the inclusion of photographic images in graphic memoir asks readers to draw on their knowledge of the distinct production methods and sociocultural uses that characterize each type of image and renders them different one from the other," but on the other hand "it can also call upon readers to consider their similarities." The hermeneutical work might be harder but on the other hand, the collaboration and confrontation between these two visual artistic modes generate "new expressions and configurations of knowledge" and for this reason, are worth the cognitive effort.

Formerly a peripheral domain in the field of life writing, graphic memoirs are fast becoming one of its main domains, driven by the outstanding quality of autobiographical works such as Alison Bechdel's, for instance. H el ene Tison notes that "In the United States, since the late 1960s and the rise of independent comics, graphic narratives of the self have proliferated and become very popular; indeed, the genre is fecund enough to have been the subject of a number of essential studies of comics in recent years." When it comes to hybridity, on account of their multimedia nature and structure, comics and graphic novels or memoirs are a perfect place to start. Nathalie Saudo-Welby stresses the fact that in the case of Cece Bell's graphic memoir *El Deafo* (2014), hybridity has a special resonance when one learns that she lost hearing after meningitis when she was four. Thus, from a very young age, Bell has learned to rely more heavily than others on "on sight, whether it is signs that are read, or words, whether on the

speakers' lips or in subtitles," thus creating a work which aims at "raising the awareness of child and adult readers alike to what it means to live with a hearing impairment." Bell's graphic style hinges on an apparent contradiction between a cartooning style that is both simple but quite stylized and human figures (referring to real persons since we are in a referential environment) represented as anthropomorphized rabbits. If at first sight, one might expect these anthropomorphized rabbits' realistic deficit to be compensated by a domineering text fulfilling all the contextualizing function, it is not exactly the case since "evaluative judgments emanate from the visuals rather than from the voiceover tones down the latter's authoritativeness."

Graphic memoirs and more generally graphic narratives are hybrid by definition, their meaning-making process hinging on the articulation of the two media. Indeed, as brilliantly demonstrated by Scott McCloud, authors of a graphic memoir or novel are presented with multiple choices: "Choice of moment, choice of frame, choice of image, choice of word, choice of flow" (10); how they make these various choices work together defines their readers' experience. However, as regards graphic memoirs, the verisimilitude of the graphic style adopted by the author also plays a fundamental part in the outcome of the autobiographical endeavour. In other words, how similar are a picture of the author and her avatar? This is one of the key questions H el ene Tison tries to answer in her chapter devoted to Allie Brosh, "how we react to their [graphic memoirs' authors'] figure emotionally" and if they can be deemed worthy reflections of the empirical author, at least worthy enough to uphold the autobiographical pact. Of course, compared to a photograph, a drawing's referential potential will always be lower on the verisimilitude scale. But H el ene Tison points out that "Brosh has stated repeatedly that this creature 'is more me than I am,' that this is what she looks like on the inside." More than she is, maybe, but certainly not exactly *as* she is since her avatar can be characterized as "grotesque cuteness." And yet, this discrepancy between reality and avatar, inherent in even the most realistic graphic representation, forces authors of graphic memoirs to develop other, maybe even bolder autobiographical strategies to give readers a sense of what their lives *really* are. Eventually, "what makes Brosh's work instantly recognizable is her rather unique graphic style, and in particular the way she represents her bizarre graphic avatar" which allows her "to express and to domesticate a sense of self as monstrous and to transform her self as Other into a comic oddity."