Autofiction and Photography: “The Split of the Mirror”

Laura Marcus

A starting point when we trace the long history of the connection between life writing and the visual image is the relationship between the visual and the literary self-portrait, and this now includes the literary genre which has recently come to be called autofiction. A significant number of autofictional texts make substantial use of photography, and the interchange between image and text, the visual and the verbal, photography and narrative, creates and crosses a borderline which has a charged relationship to autofiction’s own hybridity. The referential dimensions of the photograph—its testimony to, in Roland Barthes’s terms, what has been—frequently become, in the autofictional work, less certain: subject to manipulation, technical or interpretative. In some instances, as in Annie Ernaux’s *Les Années* (2008; translated as *The Years* [2017]), which is discussed more fully below, descriptions of photographs shape the chronology of the narrative but the actual visual image is never shown. Hervé Guibert’s *L’Image fantôme* (*Ghost Image*)—a collection of fragments of memory, mediations, and prose poems—is a text

Laura Marcus sadly passed away prior to the publication of *The Autofictional*. We were privileged to have the opportunity to work with Laura, whose leading expertise and great generosity of spirit have enhanced the writing of this volume.

about photography which also includes no photographic images; writing of his decision not to include “favourite photographs” in the text, he notes that his story “is really becoming a negative of photography. It speaks of photography in negative terms, it speaks only of ghost images, images that have not yet issued, or rather of latent images, images that are so intimate that they become invisible” ([1981] 1996, 113–114).¹

From classical antiquity onward, with the philosopher Plotinus’s essay on self-portraiture, the suggestion has been that the visual artist, like the literary autobiographer, turns inward to find his or her self-image, rather than merely representing the mirrored self. “Withdraw into yourself and look,” Plotinus writes ([250] n.d.: 1.6.9). For the artist and art critic Julian Bell: “Self-portraiture is a singular, in-turned art. Something eerie lurks in its fingering of the edge between seer and seen” (2000, 5). Images of seeing and mirroring are central to autobiographical writing, while numerous autobiographers have used the language of the artist in describing their acts of autobiography. Life writing (biography and autobiography) has, throughout its history, been defined in visual terms: portrait, picture, sketch, impression. The term “self-portraiture” arises at around the same time (the beginning of the nineteenth century) as “autobiography.” Before this, the term used for what we now call the self-portrait—“a likeness of the artist by his own hand”—paralleled that of autobiography as “the life of a man told by himself.” We have seen in Ben Grant’s and Karen Ferreira-Meyers and Bontle Tau’s chapters in this volume that self-portraiture in both literature and in the visual arts can be reimagined through autofictional modes and vice versa. This chapter turns to a specific mode of “capturing” or “picturing” the self in life writing, the photograph, and considers its role within autobiographical and autofictional modes of self-representation.

SELF-REPRESENTATION AND THE ADVENT OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE

With the advent of photography in the early nineteenth century (Niépce in 1825), a new and heightened relationship between text and visual image emerged. In conceptual terms, as Douwe Draaisma has noted, “photographic metaphors of all kinds appeared in papers on the visual memory, gradually changing the human brain into a light-sensitive plate, the memory into an album full of silent snapshots, consciousness into a gallery, its

walls covered with long rows of daguerrotypes and talbottypes [...]. Until the invention of cinematography, in 1895, photography was the dominant metaphor in the para-optics [Gilbert Ryle] of the mind" (2000, 104). The relationship between photography and memory was, however, contested, while in more specifically literary contexts it was by no means without anxiety. A repeated theme was that photography, with its inability to select from the details that come into view, was having a negative effect on literary and artistic representation, pushing toward both an "inartistic" and an unselective realism or naturalism. We also see an increasing concern, particularly relevant to autobiographical contexts, about the ways in which photography might be replacing memory: what we think we recall may not in fact be a "memory image" but a "photographic image."

The use of photography in biography—and the perception of the relationship between the two modes of representation—has been linked to the Romantic cult of the author, which developed from the nineteenth century onward, and to the rise of celebrity culture in the same period. The habitual presence of photographs in autobiographies seems to have come rather later—perhaps in the early decades of the twentieth century—when autobiographical texts, like biographies, began to incorporate a sequence of photographic images, providing visual representations of the writing "I" and a visual narrative of the life being recorded. A photographic series depicting the author from early to later life represents the evolving, changing, aging body and the different life-stages of the authorial self, as a counterpart to the chronological narratives of many autobiographical texts. There are, of course, differences: photography provides a record of the self at a particular moment, or moments, in time, by contrast with the retrospective narrative mode of most autobiographical texts. Autobiography and photography are perceived to share, however, a "referential" quality, a "truth to life," which is perceived to differ from that of fiction or painting.

The emergence of photography as a technology followed closely upon the "naming" of autobiography as a genre distinct from biography. Photography also came to be used as a way of documenting identity. As the listing of the autobiographer's name as the author of the book was taken (as theorized by Philippe Lejeune [1975]) to secure the identity of the writer and the subject, so the conjuncture of a photograph and an officially registered name was taken as a proof of identity. Photographic identity documents were issued to exhibitors and employees at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, though passports and other

identity documents with photographs did not come into general use until around the First World War. The possibility of “seeing yourself as others see you” in the early decades of the photographic medium (the claim that would later be made for film in its first years) almost certainly played its part in shaping literary self-representations. On one hand, photography could be said to have produced a new form of self-consciousness and hence a sharper divide between biography and autobiography: the representation of the self is perceived to differ radically from the depiction of another. On the other, it may in fact have blurred this divide, precisely because the self in the photograph is seen as another, as if from the outside.²

If photography—or its metaphors—has raised particular questions about identity, it has also become inseparable from questions of memory. Photographs may bring back the past or they may stand in for, and hence replace, memory images. Is it events, places, and people that we recall, or photographs of them, in addition to the stories we are told about the past and which we adopt as our own memories? As Freud wrote: “Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused” ([1899] 1953, 322). Public figures aside, childhood is likely to have been the period when an individual is most fully photographed. The adult autobiographer’s relationship to these images of a childhood self may reinforce the sense of childhood as a lost world, distinct and separate from everything that came after it. There would seem to be significant connections not only between photography and autobiography in general but also between the advent of photography and the autobiography of childhood, which intensified throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. The relationship between the photographic image and the memory image was explored in depth by the German critical theorist Siegfried Kracauer. In a 1927 essay, “Photography,” Kracauer argued that “memory images are at odds with photographic representation” because photography “grasps what is given as a spatial or temporal continuum,” while “memory’s records are full of gaps.” “An individual,” he writes, “retains memories because they are personally significant,” though there is a “truth” to the authentic memory image which transcends individual circumstance. “In a photograph,” by contrast, “a person’s history is buried as if under a layer of snow” ([1927] 1995, 50–51).

Russian Album, the Canadian writer and politician Michael Ignatieff’s account of his grandparents’ lives (split between pre-revolutionary Russia

and post-revolutionary exile) opens with a meditation on photography, memory, identity, and history. "Photographs," he writes, "are the freeze frames that remind us how discontinuous our lives actually are." By contrast, it is in "a tight weave of forgetting and selective remembering that a continual self is knitted together." Photographs are not adequate, he suggests, to a living history: "photographs only document the distance that time has travelled; they cannot bind past and present together with meaning" ([1987] 1997, 5). Ignatieff takes up some of the arguments of early twentieth-century theorists of photography: "Photography stops time and serves it back to us in disjunctive fragments. Memory integrates the visual within a weave of myth [...]. Memory heals the scars of time. Photography documents the wounds" (6–7). These are assertions with which we might wish to argue, but they indicate the extent to which photographs have become bound up with trauma theory as wound theory.

CHANGING REFLECTIONS: PHOTOGRAPHY IN TRANSSEXUAL LIFE WRITING

Writing about photography is frequently tinged by the melancholic and the elegiac. As Susan Sontag writes, in *On Photography*: "All photographs are *memento mori* [...]. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (1997, 15). For Roland Barthes, the tense of the photograph is "that-has-been": "it has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred" (1980, 120–121). The suggestion I would now like to explore is that the relationship between life writing and photography, and the incidence of photographs (actual or described) in life-writing texts, are at their most prominent in works which possess a particular generic hybridity, autofiction paramount among them, or represent identity itself in hybrid terms. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* ([1928] 1993) is an early twentieth-century example of this relationship: both and neither biography and fiction, the photographs use the construction of simile ("like a"/"as a") which is also the central trope of the text as a whole. Thus, the photographs and their captions point to Orlando "as a boy"; Orlando "as Ambassador"; instead of anchoring identity in biographical and historical reality, the photographs (and painted portraits) point to its theatricality. Images of veiling and unveiling in the text become metaphors for its "strangest transformation"—Orlando's change from a man to a

woman—but the work is in its entirety built around oscillations and vacillations, as in the identity shifts in autofiction.

Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), in which self and other, biography and autobiography, swap places, with Stein ventriloquizing her own autobiography as if it were her partner Toklas's "biography" of her life, contains photographs (usually not included in later editions), as does Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography* which includes photographs of herself and Alice taken by Carl Van Vechten. It returns repeatedly to questions of picturing, portraiture, and "likeness" or "resemblance" and to the relationship between the visual and verbal "portrait."

Orlando's "strangest transformation"—from man into woman—has been taken up as an early indication of interest in transsexualism as sex change. Jumping forward by some four decades, we find the narrative of the travel writer, Jan Morris, who, born as James Morris, undertook sex-change surgery in his/her 40s. At the start of her memoir *Conundrum*, Morris (as Jan Morris) writes: "I was three or perhaps four years old when I realized that I had been born into the wrong body, and should really be a girl. I remember the moment well [of sitting under his mother's piano as she played Sibelius] and it is the earliest memory of my life" (2002, 1). Morris's account of the surgery undergone in Casablanca comes toward the end of the memoir, and she uses both the terms of "transformation"—"man into woman"—that we find in *Orlando*, as well as a mirror-scene—"the split of the mirror" (Prosser 1998, 50–55)—which is the nodal point of the text, as it is in a striking number of transsexual autobiographies published over the last few decades.

In *Orlando*, we hear that, subsequent to the mysterious process by which Orlando has "become a woman"—"Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath"—the text's only "sign of discomposure" is that it, after this point, shifts the pronoun from "he" and "his" to "she" and "her" ([1928] 1993, 98). Jan Morris writes, of the hours immediately preceding surgery: "I got out of bed rather shakily, for the drug was beginning to work, and went to say goodbye to myself in the mirror. We would never meet again, and I wanted to give that other self a long last look in the eye, and a wink for luck" (2002, 122). Considering her choice, Morris writes: "Thirty-five years as a male, I thought, ten in between, and the rest of my life as me. I liked the shape of it" (128). The "shape" here is both the life-course and its narrative construction: Morris recalls the surgeon in Casablanca, after the operation, admiring his own

handiwork—"Très, très bons, you would nevaïr get surgery like that in England—you see, now you will be able to *write!*" (124).

There is, as critics have noted, an intimate relationship between autobiography and transsexualism. Jay Prosser has argued that "whether s/he publishes an autobiography or not [...] every transsexual, as transsexual, as a transsexual, is originally an autobiographer" (1998, 116). By this, Prosser (himself a female to male transsexual) is pointing to the requirement that, in order to be permitted treatment and surgery, the transsexual person produce an "autobiography" for the clinician, a narrative account of (gender) identity and identifications: "Narrative composes the self." In this sense, "the conventions of transsexuality are thoroughly entangled with those of autobiography, this body thoroughly enabled by narrative" (116). Autobiographies and memoirs of sex-change acts, as Patricia Gherovici has argued, are testimonies to stories of transformation: "Writing a sex-change memoir does not just aim at passing from one side to the other; it has the function of tying together body and text [...] the writing of the memoir can bring the author home to the body transformed" (2010, 262). This might also serve as one explanation for the striking incidence of photographs in transsexual autobiography. These photographs serve, however, complex functions. They exist not only on the axes of continuity and change (which is perhaps true of all photographs in autobiography) but also, as Prosser suggests, "on a tension between revealing and concealing transsexuality. Their primary function is to expose the transsexual body: yet how to achieve this when transsexuality on the body is that which by definition is to be concealed" (1998, 209). Narrative and image work both together and apart in this interplay between revelation and concealment.

The relationship between absence and presence is also fundamental to the photographic, as to the cinematic, medium. From the early days of film, commentators pointed to the ways in which it produced "the presence of an absence"—the illusion of an embodied and substantial reality. For the writer John Berger, photography "finds its proper meaning" between "the poles of absence and presence" (2013, 19–20). The elegiac and melancholic nature of much photography theory of the last decades—as in writings by Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and many others—continues the parsing of the medium in the mode of loss. In every photograph, Barthes writes, there is "the return of the dead" (1980, 23). He wrote these words in his book on photography, *La Chambre claire* (translated as *Camera Lucida*), which is also a work of mourning: in particular, for his

deceased mother, a photograph which he talks about but does not reproduce for the reader: he says of this “Winter Garden Photograph” that “[i]t exists only for me” (1980, 115).

The use of photography—or the metaphor of photography—to represent ontological and emotional presence and absence recurs in many autobiographical writings. In *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), written in the week after his father’s death, Paul Auster gives an account of emptying out his deceased father’s house, the family home before his parents’ divorce. He finds an expensively bound photograph album, with the lettering “This is Our Life: The Austers.” It was “totally blank inside” (14). In the memoir, Auster describes a number of family photographs, but includes only two as actual images. It has, as its front cover, a trick “multiplicity photograph” of his evasive and emotionally absent father, whose multiplied image seems to embody the disappearing act which was his life: “It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man” (33). Autofiction might be said to operate with similar transformations. The silence surrounding a scandal in the family appears in visual form through a torn and patched-together photograph, from which the figure of his grandfather (the subsequent perpetrator of a violent crime) has been cut out, so that only his fingertips remain (36). The torn photograph becomes an image not only of family secrets but also of the “wound” Auster experiences in relation to his father’s death—and his life.

The American author and journalist Susan Faludi’s memoir *In the Darkroom* (2016) is an account of her journey to visit her estranged father who, after returning to his native Hungary has had, in his 70s, a sex-change operation—Steven (his adopted American name) is now Stefánie. The photograph in transsexual autobiographies, as I have suggested, exists in a complex negotiation with old and new identities. In Faludi’s text, there is a different take on the medium and its metaphors. At the start of the book, in which she includes no actual photographs, she uses her father’s professional work as a “trick photographer” (before the age of digital photography)—“dodging” (making dark areas look light), “masking” (concealing unwanted parts of the picture), and making a perfect copy from a print—as a metaphor for the secrets, evasions, and assumed identities by and through which he lived. “He made the story come out the way he wanted it to” (34). As she travels further back in search of her father’s and his family’s past—during the war years in particular—photographs take on more fully evidentiary status, which they share with the investigative journalism which is Faludi’s professional practice (and which

is set up in the book's early pages in contrast to photography's manipulations of reality). At the very end of the book, Faludi writes of the immediate aftermath of her father's death: "I studied my father's face, averted as it had so often been in life. All the years she was alive, she'd sought to settle the question of who she was. Jew or Christian? Hungarian or American? Woman or man? So many oppositions. But as I gazed upon her still body, I thought: there is in the universe only one true divide, one real binary, life and death. Either you are living or you are not. Everything else is molten, malleable" (417).

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE AUTOFICTIONAL IN ANNIE ERNAUX'S OEUVRE

A different take on photography and/as absence structures the autofictional work of Annie Ernaux, in particular, two companion works from the early 2000s—*Les Années* (2008) and, co-written with Marc Marie, *L'Usage de la photo* (The Uses of Photography) (2005a). In *Les Années*, which is written as a form of "collective autobiography," charting the passing of historical as well as personal time, Ernaux opens each new section with a lengthy and detailed description of a photograph of a woman at different stages of her life. The text opens, however, with a sequence of free-floating "images"—those of memory rather than photography—alerting us to the (complex, irresolvable) question of the relationship between the "memory image" and the "photographic image." "Our memory is outside us, in a rainy breath of time" (2017, 12/2008, 17) reads one fragment, but another refers to "[a]n intimate memory, impossible to share" (2017, 15/2008, 19). After this initial sequence of memory images, the narrative "proper" opens with a description of a photograph, beginning a sequence of verbal descriptions of photographs of a child, girl, and then woman whose descriptions punctuate the text. We infer that these are photographs of Ernaux, but she writes of the images as radically other to herself, and as speaking only of the time and place in which they were taken. When describing the images, Ernaux tends to point to discontinuities rather than to continuities. She writes of a school photograph "[i]t is difficult to see in her the girl with the provocative pose from the previous photo, taken scarcely two years earlier." (2017, 73–74/2008, 76) The external quality of the photograph to the photographed subject is "mirrored" (Ernaux's term) in the use of the pronoun "she" (and not "I") throughout the text.

Ernaux writes, “The distance that separates past from present can be measured, perhaps, by the light that spills across the ground between shadows, slips over faces, outlines the folds of a dress—by the twilight clarity of a black-and-white photo, no matter what time it is taken” (2017, 64/2008, 65). For the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk, the black-and-white image is the medium of memory and of nostalgia. This does not appear to be Ernaux’s message, though she does suggest that the light and shadow of the black-and-white photograph trace the lineaments of an irrecoverable past. Later, she writes of her aspiration for the book she had hoped to write (the imagined, idealized version of the one we are reading), that it should leave the impression of “an image of light and shadow streaming over faces. But she hasn’t yet discovered how to do this” (2017, 170/2008, 179). This ideal work (and Ernaux instances Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*] and Vassily Grossman’s *Life and Fate* as exemplars) is, then, envisaged in relation to a photograph or, at least, to a visual image in which individuals (“faces”) are contoured by the processes of time itself.

Does Ernaux’s decision to withhold the actual photographs she describes—there are no visual images in *Les Années*—indicate “an ethics of photographic abstention” (to borrow François Brunet’s phrase) in the face of the contemporary image saturation of culture? We could discuss the motives underlying, and the effects of, the “pursuit of photographic absence” in a text so bound up with photographic imaging, and think about it alongside Ernaux’s *L’Usage de la photo*, in which the text is structured around a series of actual photographs, but ones in which no human subject is depicted. The photographs depict the clothes, scattered on the floor, which she and her partner, Marc Marie, had removed before making love. This gave them the idea of producing a series of photos from 2003 to 2004, which they subsequently (and separately) began to write about. They agreed not to move the clothes before photographing them, nor to change the texts (2005a, 10). As she said in an interview, “The rule of the game was to stick to the truth with both the photos and the writing” (2005b, n.p.).

Ernaux declares: “I don’t expect life to bring me *subjects* for but *unknown organisations* of writing” (2005a, 56; original emphasis).³ Previously, photos had been objects of discussion in her writing; now, she says, they are the starting point. She aims to describe the photos from both a past and a present angle, focusing not on context but on the objects and their placing. “It’s my imagination which deciphers the photo, not my

memory" (24), Ernaux asserts. It is only a little later that the memories return, "in a sort of deferred remembering." This is one of the differences between her commentaries on the photos and those by her partner, Marc Marie, who tends to describe the immediate contexts of the images. The theme of absence and presence is constantly addressed by Ernaux: "For an outsider, they are only traces, whereas we see precisely what is *not* represented: what happened before, during and just afterwards" (2005a, 95). This model of the trace—which in other contexts might be linked to the anticipation of a future absence (the end of the affair, the end of life)—is a dominant trope in much writing about photography, and in contemporary photo-texts.

Ernaux has resisted the label of "autofiction," in part because she believes it to be a way of ghettoizing women writers (to whom the category, with its implication of narcissism, is, she states, more often applied than it is to men). She has written of her work that the facts are true, and that the events she describes actually happened, but that the result is a "fiction." Autofiction includes two contracts, Ernaux writes, "which I think are opposed: to tell the truth and to invent. I am the character in a history but that history is structured [*arrangé*]." She prefers the term "autosociobiographer" (see Snauwaert 2012). Nonetheless, Ernaux concedes that autofiction arouses passions "because it obliges readers to examine themselves, to say 'me too' or 'not me'" (*Le Monde*, February 3, 2011).

Despite Ernaux's reservations, her work lies, for many commentators on her work, in the category of the "autofictional," in which we find a significant number of texts which use photography (or the motif of photography) in their play with the porous boundary between autobiography and fiction. The French writer Hervé Guibert is another significant example here—and also one in which there is a particularly marked play with absence—as is the artist and writer Sophie Calle, who has worked with both photography and film to record the narrative events, encounters, and pursuits which she has constructed and staged in various cities: she has been described as a "first-person artist." There would thus, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, seem to be a significant link between the crossings of photography/narrative and those of the autofictional mode and these seem to be more prominent in French than in British literature, perhaps following the example of Barthes's *La Chambre claire*.

Ernaux has stated in interview: "I do not really consider myself as a unique being, in the sense of absolutely singular, but [more] as a sum of experiences and also determinations which are social, historical, sexual,

linguistic, and continually in dialogue with the world (past and present). All this does, necessarily, form a unique subjectivity” (2003, 43–44). It is this focus on the collective framework for the autobiographical project—enabled, we could argue, by the photograph’s interface between private and public context and meaning—that connects her projects with the rather different explorations of photography and life writing in British contexts. There are also strong links to work in the US—including that of Marianne Hirsch (1997), as well as explorations of history, race, and ethnicity through visual anthropology and of the complex and often fraught terms of photographic ethnography.⁴

Arising out of the developments in cultural studies in Britain in the 1970s and beyond, the “democratization” of life writing (especially autobiography) was linked not only to developments in social, feminist, and oral history—“history from below,” as it came to be known—but also to interest in photography as a medium. Photography, while not entirely outside the parameters of what defines “art,” was perceived, by some academics and intellectuals on the Left, to be free of the “contamination” of the fine arts by commercial considerations (see Berger 2013). The understanding of the photograph, defined in relation to its “social function,” can be placed in parallel with the move in (what we now call) life-writing practices and studies toward the view that all human lives possess the value of their experiences and their place in, and passage through, historical circumstances. “The task of an alternative photography,” John Berger wrote in his essay “Uses of Photography” (a response to Susan Sontag’s *On Photography*), “is to incorporate photography into social and political memory, instead of using it as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of any memory” (2013, 57). This task is, he suggests, to create an adequate context for the photograph—and to replace it in “narrated time”: “Narrated time becomes historic time when it is assumed by social memory and social action” (60). For Berger, it is the “phenomenon and faculty” of memory that should shape photographic construction; memory is not linear, he argues, but radial and the printed photograph should be situated in a way that is faithful to the multiplicity of associations and contexts attached to any given memory: “The aim must be to construct a context for a photograph, to construct it with words, to construct it with other photographs, to construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images” (59).

Berger’s model of an “alternative photographic practice” was developed not only in his own writing and photographic projects but also in the

"memory-work" advocated and advanced by women theorists, artists, and writers in recent decades, in which reversals and transgressions of the traditional direction of the "look" or "gaze" were paramount. The project also became one of cutting across the divide between the "private" and the "public" photograph (see Berger 2013, 53). The British film theorist and cultural historian Annette Kuhn, in particular, has developed a method of analysis which she calls "memory-work" and which is centered on the forms of private and public memory attached to photographic images. Her book *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (1995) (which she defines not as an autobiography or confession but as a memory-text) is structured around photographs from her childhood, as well as films that have particular resonance for her. Her title refers to her belief that families are repositories of secrets: "From the involuntary amnesias of repression to the willful forgetting of matters it might be less than convenient to recall, secrets inhabit the borderlands of memory" (1995, 2). Kuhn shares the widely held view that narration and storytelling are fundamental aspects of identity-construction, but adds to this the idea that "such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account—whether forgotten or repressed—as by what is actually told." The past, she writes, "is like the scene of a crime: if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain" (1995, 4)—the words echoing those of Freud's (though without his sense of the precarity of the enterprise) when he describes "our method of concluding from faint traces, exploiting trifling signs. The same as in criminal cases, where the murderer has forgotten to relinquish his *carte de visite* and full address on the *Tatort*" [the scene of the crime] ([1921] 1993, 408–409).

For Kuhn, the "traces" (her use of the term and concept bearing interesting comparison to that of Ernaux) which are the starting point of her "memory-work" are images and the memories associated with them—both "private" (family photographs) and "public" (such as films, news photographs), though, as she notes, "private" and "public," "inner" and "outer," are porous categories. In exploring her own family photographs, she will always seek to situate them in broader cultural contexts: the cultural conventions of photographing babies and children; the commemorative occasions on which the photographs were taken (such as the Queen's coronation), which give them both private/individual and public/collective meanings. In all "memory texts," Kuhn insists, personal and collective remembering are continuous with each other (1995, 5). *Family Secrets* is a personal memoir of kinds, but it is also offered as a guide to the

“memory work” which Kuhn understands to be an important cultural and political practice. There is also a strongly psycho-therapeutic dimension to Kuhn’s account, which follows the “phototherapy” and “family album” work of artists and photographers Rosy Martin and Jo Spence: Spence is perhaps best known for her self-images during the treatment (and refusal of treatment) of the breast cancer from which she died in 1992. For Kuhn, “bringing the secrets and the shadows into the open, allows the deeper meanings of the family drama’s mythic aspects to be reflected upon, confronted, understood” (1995, 6).

When Kuhn turns to her “family album”—more particularly, photographs of herself as a child, either alone or with a parent—she opens up her family’s dynamics and, in particular, the increasingly conflictual relationship between herself and her mother. Photographs are “evidence,” she writes, in that they offer “material for interpretation—evidence in that sense [...]. Evidence [...] though, can conceal, even as it purports to reveal, what it is evidence of [...].” (1995, 11–12). Kuhn finds, in almost all the photographs she discusses in the book, evidence of her mother’s need for control (as figured, for instance, in the inscriptions she made on the back of her photographs or in her cutting down of the images), “involvement with her daughter’s appearance”—mothers finding in their girl-children an opportunity for self-love—and the increasing exclusion of her father from the family scene (though his is the eye behind the camera).

The image of the family album—the family frame—has also been central to the work of Marianne Hirsch, whose concept of “postmemory” is closely tied to the forms of remembering, forgetting, and imagining associated with post-Holocaust, exilic, and intergenerational memory. Photographs, she argues, “are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory” (1999, 10); as Michael Ignatieff has suggested, they are “often the only artefacts to survive the passage through exile, migration or the pawnshop” (1997, 2). Hirsch proposes, like Annette Kuhn, an approach to family pictures through “a multi-layered reading practice that pierces through the photograph’s flat surface” (1999, xvi).⁵ The terms echo Ernaux’s name for the overlapping of past and present, “where, it seems, she flickers in and out of all the shapes of being she has been” which she calls “the palimpsest sensation” (2017, 194/2008, 213). Hirsch’s is also a spatialized model of memory, linked to W.J.T. Mitchell’s model of “imagetext, a double-coded system of mental storage and retrieval.” Here we see the ways in which the

metaphors of mind, memory, historical process, and visual technologies continue to be rethought, now in the service of practices of historical and future-oriented interpretation and understanding.

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When John Berger wrote, in 1968, of the photograph's ability to "bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation," he was referring to a principle of selectivity: "A photograph is a result of the photographer's decision that it is worth recording that this particular event or this particular object has been seen. If everything that existed were continually being photographed, every photograph would become meaningless" (2013, 18). We are now in an age in which the concept of what is "worth recording" seems to have radically altered, as Ernaux suggests at the close of *Les Années*, when she considers digital technology—through which, in the recording of existence as we lived it, "we drained reality dry"—and the media, which took charge of "the process of memory and forgetting" (2017, 213–214/2008, 223–224). However we feel about this image-saturation in the digital age and the age of social media, there are undoubtedly interesting and important questions to ask about how it might alter and shape the modes of life writing—and of self-representation more generally, including autofiction—in the future. The broad conception of the autofictional that this volume has adopted, and the flexibility it affords to consider self-representation from multiple different angles, offers a potential avenue for such exploration.

NOTES

1. All texts cited from languages other than English are translated by me, unless indicated otherwise.
2. "For the Photograph," Roland Barthes wrote, "is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity." "Car la Photographie, c'est l'avènement de moi-même comme autre: une dissociation retorse de la conscience d'identité" (Barthes 1980, 28).
3. "Je n'attends pas de la vie qu'elle m'apporte des *sujets* mais des *organisations inconnues* d'écriture."
4. See the work of Hertha Sweet Young, most recently *Picturing Identity: Contemporary American Autobiography in Image and Text* (2018).
5. The image is from Barthes, at the end of section 10 of *La Chambre claire* (1980, 49).

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