BODY, SUBJECT, TEXT: (POST)HUMANISMS AND GENDERS IN FOUR HUNGARIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes the intricate web of connections between the body, the text, and the construction of subjectivity in four 20th- and 21st-century autobiographical texts, namely, Magda Szabó's *Für Elise* (2002), Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War: Hungary 1944-1945* (1991), Tibor Noé Kiss's *Incognito* (2010), and Laura Spiegelmann's *Precious Little* (2008). In modern literate cultures, autobiography as a narrative form has been inextricably linked to the construction of the human subject, and as such, feminist literary history and criticism has also studied various types and manifestations of life writing to examine ways in which the construction of gendered subjectivities is entangled with the (re)constitution of the category of the human. With posthumanist and new materialist accents in theories of subjectivity, there is a growing need and motivation to reexamine the gendered subject of autobiography in order to map the strategies and limits that specify the construction of the category of the human in life narrative, and the ways in which gender as a critical category and a means of identity-construction is invested in the materialization of bodies in terms of these strategies and limits. Autobiography may denote a widely defined framework accommodating variously designed life-writing genres, which have been testing their definitional limits since the beginning of autobiography's history (Gilmore, *Limits* 2) in order to try to create a narrative channel for the articulation of their narrators' subjective life experiences. This articulation brings up a number of issues concerning the representational function of language, and the representability of historical and embodied experience.

In the discussion of the autobiographical works selected for this study, I look at these issues as they specifically manifest in the texts, as well as the strategies employed by the authors and their narrators to grapple with the controversies deriving from the autobiographical situation of trying to talk about various senses of "being in the world."

While Szabó uses a fictional doppelgänger to make a parallel-dichotomous construction in which her autobiographical self is developed as a unique but related individual, Polcz's intent to tell "how things were" is predominantly motivated by a confessional-testimonial ethos, which, however, may be constituted very differently according to which level of interpretation the text is read on. T. N. Kiss's confession, the thematic organizing principle of which is how to come to terms with a transgendered identity in a particular social-cultural context, suggests that gender is implicated in the human in a variety of ways where both biological and social constructions are bound to be simulatory. Finally, the text (pseudo-)authored and narrated by Laura Spiegelmann constitutes a multilayered drag performance, which, by constantly exposing its own "artificiality," subverts ideas about the "naturalness" of gender, the construction of autobiographical subjectivity, and their relation to each other. I conclude that autobiography as a specific historical and cultural frame of interpretation and interpellation is also a site where the human as a category is constructed with reference to both the biological and the discursive, in both of which gender as "a term of intelligibility" is deeply implicated.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

As the sole author of this dissertation, I hereby certify that no part of the present study has been accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my dissertation does not violate any copyright, and that it contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Budapest, 27 January 2015

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Márta Kőrösi

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INTRODUCTION

In "Autobiography and the Feminist Subject" (2006) Linda Anderson points out that "[f]eminism has had an almost symbiotic relationship with autobiography, which has often acted as the shadow and locus for its evolving debates about the subject." She instantly adds that autobiography has not been "passive" in the face of these debates but "has had questions of its own to ask of feminism, often to do with specificity and the need to find room, inside or outside theory, for difference and the disconcerting diversity of texts and writing subjects" ("Feminist Subject" 119). A relatively recent direction where debates about the subject have been going is critical posthumanism (in close cooperation with new materialism), which interrogates the philosophical-social-cultural category of the subject at its very core, its humanness and humanity. Posthumanist critique is striving to move beyond the humanist foundations of the integrated and self-same subject by understanding the human "as a shifting mode of being," since the human has always been defined by way of "a multiplicity of encounters in and through proximity to what it is not" (Whitlock vii-viii).

Obviously, these posthumanist inquiries have not left the field of autobiographical studies untouched either. In Gillian Whitlock's words, since "[t]he life of the autobiographical 'self' is profoundly invested in the human," the limits of autobiography are also marked by the human's "non-, in-, and sub-human other: the monstrous, the animal, the dead, the irrational, the primitive, the mechanical" (vi). As such, autobiography also remains a field of investigation where questions about the gendered subject may (re)emerge and be (re)examined from a posthumanist perspective, in consideration of where the limits of both the human and the autobiographical subject-in-language may be, and how gender as both a critical category and a complex arena of identity-construction may be reconstituted in terms of these limits.

In this study, I am embedding the analysis of four 20th- and 21st-century Hungarian autobiographical texts in this multilayered framework of inquiry, and my focus of interest in the examination of these texts is how they posit the body in relation to, as well as in contrast with, the autobiographical subject, and how gender becomes part of this narrative construction. I regard the four works chosen for this study equally as autobiographies, although they are dissimilar in terms of structuring, thematic concerns, narrative voice and authority, as well as their position in their authors' oeuvres, the Hungarian autobiographical canon, and their wider cultural-historical-social context. Thus, they can be categorized into different subgenres of autobiography: Magda Szabó's *Für Elise* (2002) may be specified as an autobiographical novel; Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War: Hungary 1944-1945* [*Asszony a fronton*] (1991) is a war memoir as well as a testimony; Tibor Noé Kiss regards his/her book *Incognito* [*Inkognitó*] (2010) as a confession; while Laura Spiegelmann's *Precious Little* [*Édeskevés*] (2008) is a pseudo-autobiography originally published as a blog. Nevertheless, in the course of my studying autobiographical narratives to choose for the purposes of this dissertation, I finally decided to select these four works because they all emerged as texts that problematize, in one way or another, the concept of truthfulness and verisimilitude, which still strongly inform the reading of autobiographies, and, more importantly, they all offer an opportunity to examine the relationship between the narrative construction of autobiographical subjectivity, the body, and gender.[1]

These orientations mark one of the major theoretical concerns for the present dissertation, namely, the understanding of representing embodied human experience in autobiographical writing in light of both readerly expectations and theoretical debates about subjectivity-

[1] I seriously considered including two more works in the selection, namely, Zoltán Zemlényi's *Whoopsidaisyme: Mind Cleaning* [*Hoppárézimi: Agytakarítás*] (1987), and Zsuzsa Rakovszky's *VS* (2011), but Zemlényi's diary (which would provide excellent material for an autobiographical study focusing on the narrative construction of disability) did not easily fit into the gender framework of the dissertation, while Rakovszky's text would not have really conformed to the autobiographical orientation of my study, since its inclusion would have stretched the limits of the genre so much that it would have virtually covered every piece of fiction working with a first-person narrator. Besides, I had to discard these two novels for practical reasons as well, being limited both on time and space.

construction and narrative analysis. Readers may traditionally expect an autobiographical text to give the "true" account of a life, the protagonist of which is posited as a singular, anthropomorphic individual, since the teleological orientation of the autobiographical narrative is often a more or less coherent subject "who is capable of remembering, interpreting and identifying with his or her life story" (Herbrechter 331). Stefan Herbrechter also emphasizes that autobiographical narrative 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" (331). However, the idea of the coherent, self-same subject has been problematized in a number of theoretical trends and fields, and in a variety of ways (Gunn 28), for example, in poststructuralist critical theories of language and such social categories as gender, race and class, Foucauldian discourse theory, cultural studies, and more recently, new materialism, posthumanism, postclassical narratology, and so on, which would all question not only the possibility of transparent representation in language but also the idea that any kind of stable identity can be conferred upon an individual. Also, the notion that autobiography is inevitably tied to the concept of the human raises the question whether, and to what extent, this narrative genre (and narrative in general) is possibly conceived within the limits set by the category of the human and other concepts that may be related to it, such as agency, free will, rationality and causality.

Thus, my analysis of the four autobiographical texts selected for this study entails a dual theoretical interest. First, the literary approach warrants the examination of how the autobiographical subject comes about narratively, within the structure and rhetoric of the text, and how the conventions and frameworks of written autobiographies formulate and circumscribe possibilities of subjectivity-construction, as well as the reading of life stories within specific historical and cultural contexts. Second, the posthumanist orientation brings the body and its relationship with the text into the social constructivist framework of narrative

analysis, thereby complicating the understanding of how the (gendered) subject is made accessible through a text. There is an "empirical" understanding of the living body as "relentlessly" material and historical, and as such, preceding and resisting its own appropriation in language and discursive systems in general (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 67), while at the same time "the multiple, competing constructions of the body [...] show the impossibility of knowledge of the body unmediated by discourse" (Hyde 6). Thus, there is an underlying paradox in the linguistic-discursive materialization of bodies, as language (or more generally, systems of signification) must be employed in all processes of talking about, defining, delineating, categorizing, in short, making sense of and knowing bodies, while bodies themselves are seen as separate biotic entities. So if language is "marked by what it cannot contain" (DeShong 268), that is, if there is no way to linguistically represent the body "as it is," then the textual re/presentation of bodies must always resort to figuration, as much as the narration of embodied, "real" lives must always entail fictionality, which both give way to a proliferation of meaning. In the following chapters I hope to show in more detail how the figuration and fictionality of bodies may operate in autobiographical narratives.

One of the most interesting and important categories that feature in the narrativity of autobiographical subjects and bodies is gender, which is also implicated in the constitution and articulation of the human as a concept underlying all autobiographical acts. It may be argued that the binary construction of gender has a constitutive role in the consolidation of the category of the human, since the stable, unanimously bipolar representation and articulation of gender helps retain the stability of the human (DeShong 265). But if a body avoids or confuses bipolar gendered definitions (such as in T. N. Kiss's *Incognito*), it threatens the stable articulation of the human. Also, in order for the category of the human to remain consolidated, bodies that are not constructed according to gender norms may be relegated to a less-than-human status. Since gender as a social category is also at the core of patriarchal

hierarchies, gendered bodies may be discarded as inferior and subhuman in a variety of social and historical contexts where patriarchal power dynamics are at play (as is represented, for example, in Polcz's *One Woman in the War*). Therefore, the examination of gender and the body in autobiographical texts may not only interrogate the genre's self-proclaimed humanist ethos concerning (gendered) subjectivity (for example, through the reading of a text that inverts the Bildungsromanesque model of female development, or by way of analyzing a textual gender performance), but may also redefine the limits of the human and reconceptualize such adjacent notions as subjectivity, agency, freedom, power, oppression, and subversion.

The texts analyzed in this study, which present human subjects in a variety of life situations and historical contingencies, also support the idea that "the category of the 'human' has never been stable or consensual" (Fudge et al. 1), as its definition changes according to context and point of view (5). Therefore, "[t]he posthuman does not necessitate the obsolescence of the human" (Halberstam and Livingston 10), since, as Neil Badmington points out, on the basis of Jacques Derrida, it is impossible to break from "the legacy of humanism" (9). While Badmington stresses the Derridean tenet that any transgressive gesture towards the human must be articulated in the language of the human, thereby full transgression is impossible (9), Diana Coole and Samantha Frost foreground this paradox in the new materialist terms of "thinking about matter" (1). They claim that as soon as we start to conceptualize matter, "we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within the space that opens up, a host of immaterial things seems to emerge: language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul; also imagination, emotions, values, meaning, and so on" (1-2). Thus, the differential operation of language and physical materiality creates a fundamentally paradoxical starting point for any linguistic reflection on materiality, be it autobiographical or academic/theoretical.

This fundamental paradox is what motivates the plot of the four narratives selected for analysis here, as well. As such, one of the common underlying themes in the books is the alienness or animosity of the body in face of the speaking subject, which is strongly linked to both the dualist conceptualization of the body and mind, and the posthumanist notion of the textual "untranslatability" of the body and its lived experience. The linguistic construction (or textualization) of subjectivity is still an urgent need in our posthumanist times (and with the internet and social media the fulfillment of this need has developed into an everyday habit for a huge number of people), while at the same time the ever-complicating materiality of bodies must be reckoned with both in critical theory in general, and in feminist and gender studies in particular. This calls for a more comprehensive conception of subjectivity where social or discursive construction is not a sole depository of the concept of the subject but more of an attempt to come to communicative terms with embodied experience with all its uniqueness and physicality in a complex environment. In Coole and Frost's words, "society is simultaneously materially real and socially constructed" (27), and this new materialist accent on the interconnection between material and immaterial aspects must inform feminist literary analysis, as well.

The narrative tensions that keep in motion the four life stories I present here also testify that "our material lives are always culturally mediated, but they are not only cultural" (Coole and Frost 27). In grappling with this basic proposition in autobiographical form, a variety of issues and themes must be dealt with in the narrative. In the first chapter of the present study, I outline a number of these issues and themes that come up in the books, providing a theoretical background and framework for the textual analyses. The second chapter features the discussion of Magda Szabó's *Für Elise* and Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War*, two books that present their recollections of events equally embedded in their respective historical contexts, yet very different in their themes, intent, and foci. In the analysis of Szabó's

autobiographical novel, I examine how the narrator presents her Calvinist background as a disciplinary and educational institution, partly *vis-à-vis* (silenced) discourses of sexuality and gender, in order to carve out a satisfactory human(ist) subjectivity for herself. What is noteworthy in this narratorial effort is that Szabó's autobiographical subject has a female double in the novel (her semi-fictional step-sister), whose character raises questions not only about cultural differences in terms of gender, but also about the (im)possibility to contain a unified subject in autobiography, since Magdolna's figure is always presented with reference to Cili's, and the two figures sometimes collide in identification. The application of Bruce Clarke's posthumanist model of narrative distinctions in the analysis of Szabó's text shows that the construction of gender as a system of differences is always relational and, alongside with the category of the human, may indeed change according to context and viewpoint. The fact that *Für Elise* is a semi-fictional autobiography also raises the issue of authenticity and fictionality in life writing, which relates to the redefinition of the ethos of truthfulness in autobiographical confessions, and points towards the need for a more comprehensive view about the examination of authorial lives in and through their broader autobiographical space.

In the discussion of Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War*, I foreground two major topics related to autobiography and gender: the ethics of vulnerability as conceptualized by Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), and the ideology of healing related to trauma, which is both a material and a linguistic/textual issue. Butler's ethical model is based on the realization that the subject is ultimately unknowable and unnarratable, so the act of giving an account of his/her physical existence ("life and deeds") is not so much an epistemological as an ethical and communicative act. The vulnerability in one's unknowability (both for oneself and the others) derives from the fact that in order for one to establish some kind of social intelligibility, one has to relinquish one's own "self" by constructing it in language, which results in a permanent state of "non-self-sameness." I find that this idea fits critical

posthumanist trends in that it lays the focus on becoming, rather than being, which not only gives an underlying critique of the humanist teleology of autobiography but also provides a model for the discursive construction of gender as an ongoing negotiation with possibilities and constraints. Also, a positive ethics is derived from the limits of knowability, so accountability is not foreclosed on grounds of the "death of the Subject." In my view, Polcz's autobiographical book, which was the first to talk about the extensive abuse and rape a large number of women in Hungary had to suffer during the Second World War, derives its ethics from such vulnerability, which is complicated by the narrator's attempt to talk about war trauma. This latter aspect of the book provides an opportunity to discuss the narration of trauma in posthumanist terms, on grounds of the differential operation of the traumatizing and traumatized physicality of bodies in the material world (whose events cannot be separated from their historically specific but contingent context of existence), and its textual rendering in the system of communication. Similarly to the construction of subjectivity in terms of Butler's ethics of vulnerability, the textualization of trauma also entails relinquishing the traumatic event and providing it with a form open to discursive interpretation. Polcz's book is such an act of relinquishing her war wounds, all the more important (besides its historical significance as a female account of war crimes in Hungary) because it takes the burden of vulnerability inherent in (mis)interpretation, rather than seeking justice for them. In this respect, it is also a perfect example for autobiography as an ethical act, which relates to Elizabeth Grosz's (2010) posthumanist reconceptualization of freedom in action rather than recognition.

I dedicate the third chapter of the dissertation to the analysis of Tibor Noé Kiss's *Incognito* and Laura Spiegelmann's *Precious Little*. In a way, both novels can be considered works of cross-gendering, since T. N. Kiss's autobiographical subject is a transgender person whose book is a literary coming out, a confession centering around the internal and external

conflicts his/her cross-dressing habits and identity issues induce, while *Precious Little* is a pseudo-autobiography of a female character written by a male author, Lóránt Kabai, so the book itself becomes a textual drag. In both pieces, therefore, gender can be approached as a performative act, which also points towards its interpretation as hyperreality, a system of simulation without an "original." In the analysis of *Incognito*, I pay attention to the various narrative layers on which the simulation of gender occurs in the storyworld, while in *Precious Little* the gender simulacra primarily serve to construct a female author function for critical purposes, which at the same time undermines the idea of authenticity deriving from gendered authorship in a double ironic twist.

When examining and conceptualizing gender in terms of simulation in these two works, I pay attention to its systemic operation in constructing intelligibly gendered human subjects, which is an integral part of these autobiographies. I discuss, for example, whether and to what extent T. N. Kiss's gender fashioning may be considered transgressive, as his/her narrator seeks "to participate fully in a set of power relations from which [his/her] disjunction is also [his/her] enabling condition" (Halberstam and Livingston 9-10). The focus on intelligibility, rather than subversion, in the gendering act reveals the possibility for a posthumanist reconceptualization of power, freedom, and agency as an active "dialogue with power," whereby recognition entails carving out a living space in society instead of rejecting it. In this process, material gender-transformation (and the transformation of the gendering of material) has a vital part in the autobiographical subject's narrative: with the posthuman focus on becoming, rather than being, the possibility to change the gender of the physical body at will by way of effecting simulation is more important than the "stabilization" or "correction" of gender in any finite way (for example, through sexual reassignment surgery). The body is posited as having an active part in this elusive transformation, contributing to the construction of (the gendering of) the subject with its non-human agency.

One of the major issues I deal with in the analysis of *Precious Little* is also simulation, but in the case of Spiegelmann's work, simulation occurs on a different (and arguably larger) scale, since it not only constitutes a drag performance on the extradiegetic level of the narrative (i.e. the level of narration superior to the storyworld) but also permeates the paratextual universe of the book, becoming the controlling feature in its interpretation. Thus, *Precious Little* offers a complex prosopopeia: a textual act of giving a face (mask) to a certain set of gendered experiences, which create the effect of a female autobiographical subject. Reading the novel as a system of interpretive simulation enables the reader to move beyond questions of autobiographical truthfulness and focus on the general simulatory or performative character of gender, as well as the means by which bodies become represented, materialized and humanized in texts by way of becoming gendered or otherwise labelled.

Two of these other labels, which play an integral part in the narrative of *Precious Little*, are physical health and sexuality, providing two features that mark and define the living body in gendered terms. In posthumanist autobiographical analysis, both of these categories have been foregrounded in efforts to expand the limits to the category of the human and its related concepts. Firstly, pain, illness and disability, which have functioned in humanist conceptual frameworks as dialectic oppositions to health, fitness and ability, now serve to open up ways to extend the concept of agency to include non-human actants, which leave the autobiographical subject with "agency without mastery" (Gilmore, "Agency" 83). The female body is still very often posited in terms of "ailment discourses," which may perpetuate certain gendered stereotypes about women's limitations to participation in a number of (mostly public) spheres of life, thereby constituting them as having limited or no agency, and thus assigning to them a less-than-human status. Conversely, a posthumanist reconceptualization of the "dis/abled" human body (DeShong 265) in autobiography helps to locate "the self/life/writing weave of self-representation in relations of dependence and interdependence

across living and non-living matter" (Gilmore, "Agency" 83). This redefines subjectivity through the subject's "transversal connections" (Braidotti 95) with an array of "actants" constituting both its body and its environment. Secondly, sexuality also has a vital role in the materialization and gendering of bodies, as well as in their (de)humanization, very often in a paradoxical way, entailing both the rational deployment of sexuality in biopower to humanize subjects (as well as to subjectivize humans),[2] and its association with "instinctual" or "bestial" behavior, when the human is to be dehumanized. In Laura Spiegelmann's book, sexuality also has various functions both in the storyworld and the narrative-rhetoric construction of the text. Within the storyworld, it is a major tool in the construction of Laura's pseudo-autobiographical character as a heavily gendered and (almost allegorically) sexualized female person, whose motivations mainly stem from her embodiment. In terms of rhetoric, the pornographic language of the novel aligns it with a number of contemporary Hungarian texts (for example, Péter Nádas's *Parallel Stories* [2005]) which center around the sensual body (Darabos, "A néma test diskurzusa" 442). Thus, while sexual activities constitute a considerable portion of action in the storyworld of *Precious Little*, and contribute to Laura's self-knowledge and her construction as a character (as a narrated "I"), the rhetorical aspect of sexuality inherent in the language of pornography helps to place and interpret the book in a wider literary context.

What I conclude from the analysis of the four texts is that although the confessional ambition of autobiographies surfaces as an organizing principle in all the four texts, the limits to the subject's knowability and an underlying skepticism in its "confessability" undermine the relevance of truthfulness as an interpretive category in the reading of autobiographical texts. The "authenticity" of gender also becomes important only to the extent that it helps the subject to pass in a given social context, which helps him or her occupy a space of living and

[2] Michel Foucault gives an extensive analysis of the deployment of sexuality for a variety of biopolitical purposes in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1976; 1978 in English).

a subject-position in a life story. While Butler points out the impossibility to maintain a coherent self-identity (*Giving an Account* 42), and makes a categorical difference between contradictory accounts of oneself and lies, Paula Rabinowitz suggests that "a posthuman feminism develops from the evasion of truth – from fantasy, exaggeration and lies" (98). Thus, in a narratological-posthumanist-feminist theoretical context, fictionality, simulation and performativity become constitutive aspects of narrativity (Fludernik 59), with a reconfigured reference to originality. This also entails that autobiographical self-reflection can no longer function according to normative expectations when subjects are in a perpetual state of becoming and transformation.

These shifting narrative modes and accents reshape the role of autobiography in the construction of subjectivity and the delineation of the human as well, but it is also important to realize that the communicative operation of autobiographies is only part of the grand picture of the (post)human condition, which is still fraught with "power differentials [...] enacted and operationalized through the axes of sexualization/racialization/naturalization" (Braidotti 87-8). As Coole and Frost emphasize, "it is ideological naïveté to believe that significant social change can be engendered solely by reconstructing subjectivities, discourses, ethics, and identities" (25). Although texts have had an immense role in literate cultures in the configuration and self-understanding of human beings, they cannot, in and of themselves, substantially alter material conditions. What texts do instead is that they conceptualize bodies in social terms, which has an effect on their culturally intelligible materialization. Textual operation is thus part of what Karen Barad refers to as material-discursive "intra-action" (815), or what Rosi Braidotti calls the "nature-culture continuum" (82). There is a back-and-forth play between physical matter and linguistic form, a significant aspect of which is the thematization of gender with reference to the materiality of bodies, as well as the thematization of bodies with reference to gender. Thus, gender as such is not

material in the same way that the body is, but, as Butler (1993) also underlines, it has an immense role in the conceptualization of matter. The autobiographies studied here provide instances of such thematizations, which do not leave their own working categories of the humanist legacy unscathed either.

1 UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN BODIES, SUBJECTS, AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Applying Louis Althusser's ideas about the subject's interpellation to the conceptualization of literature, reading, and literary interpretation, Catherine Belsey writes in *Critical Practice* that literary genres and paradigms interpellate the readers by offering them "the place from which the text is most 'obviously' intelligible, the position of the *subject in (and of) ideology*" (47). While Belsey posits the subject in critical practice as an unavoidable political concept, since it is "[t]he destination of all ideology" (49), James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium call it a "going concern" of modern life no one can do without. They suggest that "a multitude of institutions" and "a thousand social spaces" incite individuals every day "to speak their subjectivities," as they "play out their respective roles" within these institutions and social spaces (95). Jean-François Lyotard also emphasizes the communicative aspect of self-construction, in the process of which the language games we employ to present ourselves as subjects in various situations are played out with a degree of tolerance from the system (15).

The omnipresence of subjectivity-construction thus entails "modes of production" (Belsey 47) specific to different institutions, which people learn to employ in order to appear in the world as intelligible individuals. In this dissertation I would like to study such modes of producing the subject in four autobiographical texts. I consider autobiography as an institutional site in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (108-9) and Elizabeth Bruss's (5) philosophical sense of institution,[3] where various subjectivities are constituted communicatively – in

[3] As Merleau-Ponty explains, "what we understand by the concept of institution are those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or a history – or again those events which sediment in me a meaning, not just as survivals or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future" (108-9). Bruss applies Merleau-Ponty's definition to autobiography, arguing that "to become a genre, a literary act must also be recognizable, the roles and purposes composing it must be relatively stable within a particular community of readers and writers" (5). Thus, the process in which such phenomena as, for example, genres become consolidated and recognizable is what is to be understood as institutionalization. Bruss also points out the

narrative – within certain limits imposed by the genre, but also with some tolerance for divergence from its "regulatory mechanisms" (Lyotard 15). In order to better understand the nature of the autobiographical institution – especially as it has been conceptualized with respect to the gendered aspects of body, subject, and text –, I find it necessary to dedicate this first chapter to a brief historical overview of feminist autobiographical criticism and theory, the discussion of some narratological concerns, and the presentation of recent (post)humanist interrogations about life writing. I will start with giving a short outline of some milestones on the theoretical road that led to the emergence of feminist autobiographical criticism and theory in the 1970s and 1980s, and will present how it arrived from the location of essentializing notions of "femininity" and "female experience," foregrounded by the early feminist theorists of literature and life writing, to the examination of historical, geographical, social, cultural, and narrative specificities that determine the options and modes of constructing (gendered) subjectivities in autobiography. Secondly, I would like to dwell more specifically on the narrativity of autobiography, since what I am about to perform in this dissertation is the analysis of four autobiographies *as narrative texts*. Finally, I will extend the discussion of these narratological concerns towards the ethico-political relevance of writing autobiographies, with a focus on the relationship between body, gender, and text, as well as the body's role in the historical development of narrative. I will contextualize these discussions in a poststructuralist and posthumanist theoretical framework, attempting to show how a posthumanist angle in the study of life writing may rejuvenate feminist autobiographical and literary studies by reconceptualizing such basic critical notions as the

connection between autobiography and individual identity, and the role of the latter in the institutionalization of the former: "A literary institution must reflect and give focus to some consistent need and sense of possibility in the community it serves, but at the same time, a genre helps to define what is possible and to specify the appropriate means for meeting an expressive need. We can speculate on what cultural conditions promote an emphasis upon individual identity, but conceptions of individual identity are articulated, extended, and developed through an institution like autobiography" (5). A number of theoreticians of autobiography, for example George Gusdorf (28-48) or Sidonie Smith (*Poetics* 20-6), have traced (naturally through the lens carved by their critical orientation) the cultural conditions promoting "an ideology of individualism" (Smith 20) in modern liberal societies. As a result, there may be different variations to the story of autobiography's institutionalization, but it is now commonly examined in the context of the development of modern subjectivity.

human subject, agency, and self-representation, which have been central issues in the (feminist) study of autobiography.

1.1 THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

While, as Anderson claims, autobiography has been recognized as a distinct literary genre since the late 18th century (*Autobiography* 1), its theory and criticism became a more or less well-defined disciplinary field only in the second half of the 20th century. James Olney, the editor of one of the first collections of theoretical and critical essays in the field, marks Georges Gusdorf's article "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," originally published in French in 1956, as the beginning of "a theoretical and critical literature about autobiography" (7), since "all the questions and concerns – philosophical, psychological, literary, and more generally humanistic – that have preoccupied students of autobiography from 1956 to 1978 were first fully and clearly laid out and given comprehensive [...] consideration" in Gusdorf's essay (9). Olney translated this seminal essay for his 1980 edition *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, opening the way for the systematic study of autobiographies in the English language.

As both Olney and Sidonie Smith suggest, this academic preoccupation with autobiography as a separate field of study emerged from a shift of attention from the *bios* to the *autos* of autobiography (Olney 19; Smith, *Poetics* 4), a renewed focus from the life to the self of the autobiographer, considering the ways in which "the act of autobiography is at once a discovery, a creation, and an imitation of the self" (Olney 19). Smith points out that this shift in focus also opens up the reading of autobiographical texts for literary interpretation: "once the autobiographical act is conceived as creative or interpretative, autobiography can be read as one generic possibility among many within the institution of literature, with the result

that critics and theorists do with it what they have done with other genres" (*Poetics* 5). Autobiographical texts thus became literary texts, gaining a "legitimate" status for narrative interpretation.

The focus on the *autos*, rather than the *bios*, in autobiographical study, however, does not automatically mean a questioning of the referentiality of language, or the interrogation of the stable identity constructed in text. Nor does it entail a necessary break with the humanist and universalist notion of Man as the stable individual of history driven by a curiosity about himself, and "the wonder that he feels before the mystery of his own destiny," which has been the concern of autobiography since the "Copernican Revolution" (Gusdorf 31). For Gusdorf, "the specific intention of autobiography and its anthropological prerogative as a literary genre" is still to serve a totalizing and teleological purpose by becoming a "means to self knowledge thanks to the fact that it recomposes and interprets a life in its totality" (38). Even Philippe Lejeune's idea of the autobiographical pact, which shifts the analytical focus from the authorial intention of self-exploration to generic and formalist conventions and readerly expectations, presupposes a stability of identity achieved by linguistic means, since it bases autobiographical reading on "a contract of identity" between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist, where this identity is established by the proper name and other textual markers such as the title (14, 19). If and when this structuring of the author, the narrating subject, and the narrated object into one identity is done in an orderly fashion, dictated by the laws of the genre, the narrative creates the effect of autobiographical subject as a unified individual.

It took another generation of critics, the structuralists and poststructuralists, "[to challenge] the notion of referentiality and [to undermine] comfortable assumptions about an informing 'I'" (Smith, *Poetics* 5). Structuralism, inaugurated by Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas on how meaning is created in linguistic systems, can be associated with what Richard Rorty calls "the linguistic turn" in his introduction to the 1967 collection of articles on

linguistic philosophy. Rorty defines linguistic philosophy as "the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use" (3). Within the context of the linguistic turn, and partly as a continuation of, partly as a reaction to, structuralism, a number of western philosophers contributed to the development of poststructuralism after the Second World War, forwarding a general distrust towards the stability of meaning and structures. Poststructuralist theorists, most notably Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis (reconstituting Sigmund Freud's notion of the unconscious in language), and Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man in deconstructionist philosophy, thus also questioned the notion of stable identity, and "posited instead a divided subject, debarred from self-knowledge by the unconscious or by language" (Anderson, *Autobiography* 17). The linguistic turn and poststructuralism have had an immense impact on the development of literary theory in general, and autobiographical theory in particular, in both of which feminist critics have also taken their fair share.

Apart from poststructuralism, a growing attention to the political, ideological, social, historical, economic, and cultural aspects of material life led to the emergence and development of cultural studies in the second half of the 20th century, which recontextualized works of art as cultural products in their specific temporal and geographical location. The examination of cultural products and their semiotic functioning in society draws on a variety of fields of study that have been reconfiguring such categories of difference as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, nation, colonialism, imperialism, etc. as critical concepts of inquiry. In the framework of this "cultural turn," autobiographies are also often taken to be the subject of analysis as cultural products engendered in specific contexts and institutions.

A focus on the institutional and historical functioning of language informs the theoretical system of Michel Foucault, as well, whose idea of knowledge and power as discursive

formations has made a great influence on 20th-century and contemporary theorization. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson point out that discourses in the Foucauldian sense "function as so many 'technologies of self' through which the subject materializes" (Introduction 22). In order to be able to understand these technologies, "the theorist must attend to several aspects of historical practice: the historical specificity of discourses, historically situated ways of knowing and figuring the world, historically specific regimes of truth" (22). Foucault has prompted many a theorist to reconceptualize a variety of critical terms in currency (including "history" itself) by historicizing them, and to examine cultural, social, or literary paradigms and genres (such as autobiography or the novel) as specific institutions with historically defined discursive regimes, in which subjects are constructed on a daily basis.

Thus, the theoretical impetus fed by the linguistic and cultural turn, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and deconstruction, as well as Foucault's concept of history and discourse has had an immense effect on the development of autobiographical criticism and the reconfiguration of how the autobiographical subject is constructed in text. But it is also important to note that feminist literary criticism and theory, which started to bloom in the 1970s under the aegis of second-wave feminism (Eagleton 1; Plain 6), has also largely contributed to the formation of new ideas and theoretical insights about autobiographical subjectivity, especially as concerns the role of gender as a social and ideological category in this construction.

A relatively large segment of feminist autobiographical criticism in the 1980s, very similarly to the feminist literary criticism of the time, was constituted of a "quarrel" with a canon historically constructed within the framework set up by "androcentric models of selfhood and literature" (Smith, *Poetics* 16-7). With a focus on women's autobiography as a newly established subject of critical interrogation, feminist literary critics attempted "to deconstruct the patriarchal hegemony of literary history, poetics, and aesthetics, and to

reconstruct histories, criticism, and theories from a different perspective" (17).[4] One of the first significant books in this first stage of feminist autobiographical criticism (Smith and Watson, Introduction 8) was *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980), edited by Estelle C. Jelinek. In her introduction to the anthology, Jelinek provided a model of female autobiography by categorically differentiating it from male autobiography on the basis of content, orientation, and structure. While men's autobiographies "idealize their lives or cast them into heroic molds to project their universal import," women write autobiographical texts in order to seek "explanation and understanding" for their lives (14-5). As opposed to men's autobiographies, which are structured in linearity, women's self-life-narratives are characterized by "a pattern of diffusion and diversity" (9).

While *Women's Autobiography* was a significant pioneering effort in bringing women's autobiographical texts to the fore of critical attention, Jelinek has been criticized for essentializing gender differences in autobiographical writing by mimetically contrasting men's and women's autobiographies on grounds of an uncontested notion of experience and without questioning the transparency of language in autobiographical representation (Smith and Watson, Introduction 9). Jelinek"s "experiential model" of autobiography, as Smith and Watson refer to it, "[opposes] all women to all men and [sets] up a structure of resistance and self-authorization through collective critique and political action based on assumed universal subordination" (10). There is a too easy "slippage from 'text' to 'life'" in this approach, since autobiographical texts are posited as transparently referring to life and self (Anderson,

[4] This is virtually the agenda of gynocriticism, the first prominent trend in feminist literary criticism emerging in the 1970s and dominating the scene mainly in the 1980s, with Elaine Showalter as one of its most prominent figures and inventor of the term "gynocritics." In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981), Showalter defines gynocriticism as a feminist literary critical trend aimed at constituting women "as a distinct literary group" (185) and defining "the unique difference of women's writing" (186), since the underlying premise of gynocriticism is that women's writing is not only different from men's but is also (either overtly or covertly) oppositional to it. Outlining the critical trend itself, Showalter identifies "four models of difference" by which feminist critics define women's literature: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural. Each of these four models "is an effort to define and differentiate the qualities of the woman writer and the woman's text" (186-7). Gynocriticism has been criticized for its gender essentialism and (partial) blindness to other categories of identity and difference, for example, by Susan Stanford Friedman in "'Beyond' Gynocriticism and Gynesis: The Geographics of Identity and the Future of Feminist Criticism" (1996).

Autobiography 86). As Anderson claims, "[t]he notion of a pre-existing self underlying the text and accessed by it bypasses the problem of who the subject is and how she is constituted" (86-7).

With the proliferation of feminist critical texts on autobiography in the 1980s and the subsequent decades, the experiential understanding of women's autobiography was thus contested on grounds of changing notions of the human subject. As an important aspect to this contestation, experience, a key ingredient in the acquisition of knowledge about the world and the self in rationalist philosophy, and as such, a vital element in autobiography that invests the text with "truth value," was denaturalized as "already an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 31). Joan W. Scott, following Teresa de Lauretis, emphasizes both the discursive nature of experience and the need to explain its social production in order to "historicize the identities it produces" (26). She also stresses that experience cannot be separated from language, since while experience is "a subject's history, [l]anguage is the site of history's enactment" (34). So what would be considered as "personal experience" is never fully one's own, since "the social and the personal are imbricated in one another" (35). This means that the "meanings of the categories of identity change and with them possibilities for thinking the self" change, too (35).

Experience thus becomes a key concept in autobiographical theory, since it constitutes a terrain on which tensions concerning the relation between "life" and "text" are played out. In traditional conceptualizations of autobiography, lived experience is considered as the primary source of the narrative, justifying the autobiographical act. Also, in various trends of second-wave feminism, women's experience has constituted the ground on which they have been defined as a social group in opposition to men (hence the role of experience in both constructing and claiming gender difference). Yet, experience is now generally posited as a

culturally and historically specific interpretation of past events. Smith and Watson also emphasize, in accordance with current ideas on the discursivity of experience and subjectivity, that autobiographical subjects "do not predate experience" (*Reading* 31), just like they do not come before the text. As experience is deemed discursive in the Foucauldian sense, that is, it is "embedded in the languages of everyday life and the knowledge produced at everyday sites," subjects "know themselves" in discourse (32). Various culturally and historically specific "domains of discourse" serve as "registers for what counts as experience and who counts as an experiencing subject" (32).

The understanding of experience as discursive thus suggests that what counts as experience is what gets narrated, and who counts as an experiencing subject is one who gets to narrate his/her experience (i.e. experience is constructed both by the act and the product of narration). Apart from generating a whole range of issues in connection with social power dynamics, the discursivity of experience brings up the question of how to conceptualize "human experiences outside discursive frames – feelings of the body, feelings of spirituality, powerful sensory memories of events and images" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 32). The theorization of trauma and its narrative rendering, for example, often revolves around this question, since trauma is generally believed to be "unspeakable" and at the same time in need of verbalization and interpretation (Anderson, *Autobiography* 127-9; Caruth 7-9; Cosslett et al. 9; Felman and Laub xix; Gilmore, *Limits* 46). That is, since the referentiality of language has been theoretically and conceptually undermined, there is a conceptual separation between the materiality of experience and its textual rendering. If "female experience" as such cannot be rendered unproblematically in text, it cannot be held as a firm and authentic basis for the identity category of "woman" in women's autobiography, nor can it automatically justify the validity of women's testimonies to gendered experiences (traumatic or otherwise) as a way to "speak truth to power." Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War*, one of the four books dealt

with in this study, also provides an opportunity to discuss experience and its narrativization in terms of the productive paradox between the unspeakability of trauma and the imperative of telling, as well as the rhetoricity of testimony as an autobiographical act.

Growing out of the experiential phase in the late eighties, feminist autobiographical theories started to center around "women's textuality and the history of women's cultural production rather than simply a gendered identity" (Smith and Watson, Introduction 12). In accordance with Foucauldian discursivity, feminist theoreticians of autobiography put more and more emphasis on the historical and cultural contexts defining the textual practices employed in women's autobiographies. As Leah D. Hewitt asserts in *Autobiographical Tightropes* (1990), "the cultural discourses shaping men's and women's gendered social roles [within the modern public and private spheres] have certainly inflected their writings, as well as the ways they are read" (3). Several examiners of women's autobiography identify writing strategies that involve "contradictions and tensions" (Hewitt 8), stemming not only from the formal constraints of the autobiographical genre but also from the ideology of the "conscious, coherent, individual [male] subject," on the one hand, and the "radical alterations in our understanding of [this] subject in language," on the other (3).

Smith was among the first scholars to examine the "contradictions and tensions" apparent in women's autobiographical writing. She claims that women's autobiography constitutes a site of negotiation, "a complex, ultimately precarious capitulation, open to subversive elements both without and within the text" (*Poetics* 53), since an autobiography written by a woman may be an act of self-conscious confrontation with modes of self-life-writing "inherited from the patriarchs" (57). As Regenia Gagnier argues, on the basis of studying a wide range of autobiographies from Victorian Britain, this "patriarchal inheritance" posits a historically, culturally and socially specific, nevertheless dominant, human ideal that she calls the "literary subject." The literary subject is constituted of "a mixture of introspective self-

consciousness, middle-class familialism and genderization, and liberal autonomy" (28). As Gagnier claims, "[t]he modern literary subject assumed individual creativity, autonomy, and freedom to create value by satiating its subjective desires as a right; it considered self-reflection as problem-solving, and thus valued reading and writing; and it developed in a progressive narrative of self in gendered familial relations and increasing material well-being" (28). She also notes the institutionalization of this ideal subject within the Victorian academy as a process leading to the marginalization and exclusion of alternative subjectivities not conforming to the norms associated with the modern literary subject:

> Subjects who did not assume creativity, autonomy, and freedom; who expressed no self-consciousness; who did not express themselves in individuated voices with subjective desires; who were regardless of family relations; and who narrated no development or progress or plot never appeared in literature courses. In short, what appeared was private individuals and families in pursuit of private gain for whom society was generally an obstacle to be surmounted. The dominant political ideology in the West for the past four centuries has held that the especially valuable thing about human beings is their mental capacity and that this capacity is a property of individuals rather than groups; that rational behavior is commensurate with the maximization of individual utility; and that essential human characteristics are properties of individuals independent of their material conditions and social environment. It is therefore hardly surprising that what has been saved from everyday language as Literature also participated in this ideology. (28)

However, as Garnier's autobiographical analyses show, "the organic, self-regarding, typically male and middle-class self of literary autobiography was always only one 'self' among others, even before it was dispersed under the conditions of postmodernism" (40). Moreover, the analysis of a wide range of autobiographies such as Gagnier's also foregrounds two important theoretical concepts "for understanding the complexity of autobiographical subjectivity in life writing," namely, relationality and positionality (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 214). While positionality "designates how speaking subjects take up, inhabit, and speak through certain discourses of identity that are culturally salient and available to them at a particular historical moment," relationality has been introduced as a concept to contradict, or form an alternative to, the ideal of the disengaged, autonomous liberal individual (Eakin 43-98; Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves" 72-5; Smith and Watson, *Reading* 215-6).

For example, according to Gagnier's study, the autobiographies of working people and pregnant working women do not expose a unique or autonomous "mind" or personality, but rather the subject's "profound dependence upon intersubjectively shared meanings and its vulnerability to the deprivations of the body" (29), which not only places autobiographical occurrences in a historical and social context but also connects it with the role of embodiment as a material condition in the construction of autobiographical subjectivity.

Positionality is also related to the negotiation of multiple and contradictory subject positions Smith (*Poetics*) as well as Gilmore (*Autobiographics*) identify in autobiographical writing. For example, Magda Szabó's *Für Elise*, the first autobiography chosen for analysis in this study, exposes what Smith calls "a doubled identification with paternal and maternal narratives," which "affects the structure, the rhetorical strategies, and the thematic preoccupations of the text" (*Poetics* 42). In my analysis, I designate Szabó's text as a "relational Künstlerroman" because even though it embraces the protestant liberal humanist ideal of individual intellectual subjecthood that may be deemed "paternal" or "masculine," the mother's story weighs just as heavily in the autobiographical project as the father's (who is not a typically assertive male figure in the family anyway). Moreover, the construction of Szabó's narrative rests upon a semi-fictional female figure that functions as a doppelgänger organically weaved into the character of both the narrated and the narrating "I"s, so Szabó's autobiography also deploys a relational matrix in the construction of autobiographical subjectivity.

Polcz's *One Woman in the War*, especially concerning its ethics of vulnerability (Butler, *Giving an Account*), stresses the relational aspect of autobiography both in the constitution of the female subject as a wife ("*asszony*" as "*married woman*" in the book's original Hungarian title) and in the testimonial scenario constructed for the narration of war trauma. Testimony, which often involves the telling of trauma, incorporates a markedly relational

autobiographical act, since, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub point out, "[t]he emergence of the narrative which is being listened to – and heard – is [...] the process and the place where the cognizance, the "knowing" of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (57).

Thus, the testimony belongs to the listener as much as to the testifier, and both the testimonial act and the participants in this communicative exchange are constitutive of testimony. As such, testimony is also constructed in an illocutionary context, by virtue of utterance, hence the connection between relationality and the constitutive power of language, a recurrent theme in the theory and criticism of autobiography since the linguistic turn. One of the first theoreticians to apply speech act theory to autobiography was Bruss, who conceptualized autobiography as "an act rather than a form" (19). Her book *Autobiographical Acts: The changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (1976) provides a detailed analysis of various linguistic choices in terms of, for example, pronouns, voices, persons, temporal markers, tense, aspect, or modality, made by autobiographers to create a narrative of themselves. These linguistic or rhetorical choices all construct the speaker's relation to what s6he is narrating as his/her life story. As Bruss asserts, "[l]anguage itself is positional, a vivid reflector and also a shaper of pragmatic situations. In every language there are elements that respond to features in the context in which they are used" (19).

Bruss's linguistic approach to autobiography, motivated by J. L Austin's, Peter Strawson's, and John Searle's philosophy of language, may be regarded to have anticipated "a dominant trend of the 1990s toward theorizing autobiographical performativity" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 206). Understanding autobiography as a speech act transcends the referential conceptualization of autobiographical texts and opens up the way for the definition

of autobiographical occasions "as dynamic sites for the performance of identities that become constitutive of subjectivity" (214). The most important feminist theoretician associated with the evolution of performativity is Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) introduced the conceptualization of gender not as a preexisting and stable identity category in need of representation (according to a liberal human rights framework, for example) but as an *effect* of repetitive-performative acts. Butler's subsequent book, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) clarifies and extends the application of gender performativity by discussing it in terms of the materiality of the body, sex, and sexuality as constrained and regulated by heterosexual normativity. This constraining and regulation is what Butler calls "materialization," the process that "stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (9).

Both the notion of autobiographical speech acts and gender performativity have had an immense impact on the feminist theorization of autobiography, as critics have found a vocabulary in them to describe "the complexities of how regulatory discourses of identity are related to material bodies, as well as autobiographical agency" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 214). Gagnier, for example, focuses on "the pragmatics of self-representation" in her study of Victorian autobiography as far as she examines the purpose and effect of autobiographical statements in the life and circumstances of both their authors and readers, rather than the "truth content" of texts (4). Taking into account both the textual and paratextual space of autobiographies, such an approach may reveal, as in the case of Szabó's or Spiegelmann's text studied in this dissertation, how autobiography functions as an institution operating with multiple actors, who all make sense of autobiographical subjectivities within a complex matrix of "historical ideologies of selfhood" and processes of storytelling (Smith *Poetics* 45).

The understanding of autobiography as a speech act and a performative occasion informs Felman's theorization of the genre, too, in which she connects autobiographical utterances

with feminist politics. She emphasizes that the pronoun "we" she uses in her theoretical discourse "is a rhetorical structure of address, not a claim for epistemological authority," and her utterance "is meant as a *speech act*, not as a constative *representation*; it is a cognitive suggestion, an intuition, but its rhetorical force is primarily performative" (14). Smith also asserts that whatever the occasion or the audience, "the autobiographical speaker becomes a performative subject," since "[t]here is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating" ("Performativity" 108). The political significance of such performances of identity lie in the autobiographical subject's "tactical dis/identifications," whereas s/he "adjusts, redeploys, resists, transforms discourses of autobiographical identity" (111), constituting resistance to ideological constraints and social normativity, and undermining "the foundational myth of autobiographical storytelling as self-expressive of an autonomous individualism" (114). In Chapter 3 of the present dissertation, I deploy the conceptualization of gender as performative in the examination of T. N. Kiss's *Incognito* and Spiegelmann's *Precious Little*, as both texts employ a technology of autobiographical subjectivity that calls attention to its own constructedness. In the reading of these texts, I combine the idea of performativity with simulation as conceptualized by Jean Baudrillard, since both notions explore the constitutive nature of social categories and cultural phenomena. While *Incognito* thematizes gender performance as indeed a citational process (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 45) that operates on more than one level of simulation, *Precious Little* presents a gender-bending author that questions the relevance of identifying the autobiographer with a "real," historical being whose preexisting pool of "genuine" experiences is posited as the source of validity and authenticity for the life narrative.

Performativity also becomes relevant from the point of view of ethics, for example, with respect to how memory functions in a testimonial framework. If memory is constituted as a rhetorical/performative device which involves a (re)interpretation and (re)construction of the

fragmentary recollections of past events into a coherent, meaningful narrative (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 22), it has an ethical bearing as a device used in the construction of "truth" in historically and culturally specific contexts and scripts that, as Felman and Laub argue, involve the intersubjective exchange of life narratives (57-8). The institutional context of testimony thus warrants the performance of truth, which also entails a "politics of remembering" inasmuch as it involves "struggles over who is authorized to remember and what they are authorized to remember, struggles over what is forgotten, both personally and collectively" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 24). Among the texts analyzed in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, Polcz's *One Woman in the War* is the one that presents a most obvious opportunity to examine such struggles over the meaning an significance of testimonial memories in various public and private spheres of social existence.

The development of feminist autobiographical criticism briefly outlined above shows that autobiography has become and remains to be a strategic terrain for feminist critics, not only because it offers a way to intervene into patriarchal structures of discourse by way of destabilizing the androcentric models and ethos of self-life-writing that purports the liberal humanist (male) individual, but also because it has been a site of contestation as regards gendered subjectivity (and as I hope to have shown, these two considerations are strongly interrelated). With the proliferation of identity categories and subject-positions from which to speak, and especially with the poststructuralist undermining of the exclusive relevance and stability of any one position, feminist autobiographical scholars repeatedly seek for "a feminist politics without a stable female subject to refer to" (Anderson, "Feminist Subject" 120). Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenk, for example, claim in their introduction to the anthology *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (1988) that the critical and political stance of their edition is "to maintain female specificity and articulate female subjectivity without either falling back into the essentialism that has plagued both American feminist

criticism and *écriture feminine* in France or retreating into a pure textuality that consigns woman – in a new mode to be sure – to an unrecoverable absence" (14). Similarly, Nóra Séllei asks if there is a theoretical-critical position which retains a focus on gender without becoming essentialist, which foregrounds the female autobiographical subject without recourse to the empirical identity between the author, the narrator, and the narrated "I," which takes into consideration the textuality of the autobiography but does not interpret the autobiographical subject as a purely textual sign, and which retains the autobiographical specificity of the text (39). Séllei asserts that in the process of searching for such a position, the categories of "woman" and "female experience" are reconceptualized, since "'female autobiography' can be considered as a space in which the 'female' subject is writing and is written" in a discursively shaped literary institution (43).

The focus on the gendered aspect of the subject's writing and being written is what makes, in Linda Hutcheon's view, feminist literary criticism affiliated, but at the same time dissociated, with postmodernism, which is characterized by an incredulity towards "master narratives," and parody as a strategic discursive structure "both to inscribe and to subvert" its target (262-3). Hutcheon refutes this "complicitous critique" of the "humanist 'universal' called 'Man'" (263, 265), and claims that the "cultural enterprises" of feminism and postmodernism cannot be conflated on such grounds, since feminism is a politics, while postmodernism is not, and feminism remains focused on its own metanarrative of contesting patriarchy and trying to effect social change (266). However, as Smith shows all the way through her *Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, the "double-voicedness" characteristic of autobiographies written by women and other writers of unprivileged status constitutes a negotiation between readerly expectations and authorial maneuvers (50), which may result in a complicitous critique of hegemonic power structures, and ideas of selfhood and self-representation, as these authors engage in various autobiographical acts of self-assertion and

justification. As Smith explains, in the "double-voiced structuring of content and rhetoric," contrasting voices "vie with one another, displace one another, subvert one another in the constant play of uneasy appropriation or reconciliation and daring rejection" (51), as can be seen, for example, in Szabó's text. If by definition postmodernity is characterized by such critical negotiation within an institution such as the autobiographical, these polyphonic texts might as well be considered postmodern or at least fluctuating between the modernist ideology of the stable, autonomous individual and the postmodernist idea of subjectivity as a constant linguistic or discursive play, performance, or process.

The issue of autobiographical negotiation between positions and ideologies of discourse naturally point to the notion of agency, which has also been reconceptualized in feminist autobiographical criticism. The rationalist understanding of human agency as the manifestation of individual free will (aptly described by Gagnier in relation to the literary subject) has been undermined from various angles and positions, and autobiographical texts have provided a number of alternatives to the autonomous masculine subject of heroic self-fulfillment within the public sphere (Evans, *Missing Persons* 46-50). Examining Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography, Mary Evans refutes de Beauvoir's incorporation of the masculine ideal that takes life as a heroic project (*Missing Persons* 46, 50-1), since it consolidates the aggressive and assertive individualism of masculine agency. Jessica Benjamin, however, warns against such easy association between gender and active agency, since "a one-sided revaluing of woman's position" might render freedom and desire an "unchallenged male domain, leaving us to be righteous and deeroticized, intimate, caring, and self-sacrificing," therefore, lacking agency (85).

These positions concerning women's agency exemplify the contradictory relationship of the liberal humanist notion of agency and free will with the body, since the latter has been conceptualized as both the precondition of, and the hindrance to, self-realization, which can

also be posited as a modern humanist ideal set in the framework of the mind/body split. In the article just quoted above, Benjamin locates women's agency and autonomy in their body as a repository to their right to sexuality and desire (85). As Smith's analysis of four life scripts (that of the nun, the queen, the wife, and the witch) at women's disposal in the late medieval and Renaissance periods shows, women have simultaneously been associated with corporeality, and denied control over their bodies for centuries (*Poetics* 27-39). As such, considerable efforts have been made in feminist movements all around the world to re/claim women's corporeal rights and control for themselves, as a constitutive part of their agency and free will. Countless autobiographies thematize female subjectivity in relation to, or *vis-à-vis*, the body, often in terms of "embodied" or "somatic" experience. Paul John Eakin points out how the "possession of a body image [...] anchors and sustains our sense of identity" (11), while Grosz claims that "all the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using the subject's corporeality as a framework as it would be using consciousness or the unconscious" (*Volatile Bodies* vii). Similarly, Smith and Watson emphasize the mutual implication of bodies and autobiographical texts, explaining that while "the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied," life narrative is "a site of embodied knowledge (a textual surface on which a person's experience is inscribed) because autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects" (*Reading* 49). Since "[c]ultural discourses determine which aspects of bodies become meaningful" (50), autobiography is also a site where the tematization of the body "can be deployed in struggles around the politics of sexuality" (53). In my reading, this Butlerian "materialization" is what becomes one of the primary concerns in the four autobiographical texts studied in this dissertation.

The body thus remains a topic of vested interest in feminist theory, since it draws attention to the multiple relations between the material and the discursive. While the critic

may uncover how the socially and historically contextualized subject is constituted in text, it is also important to remember that "art forms cannot change unless social practices do" (Hutcheon 263). Autobiography constitutes a field in which such changes in social practices can be tracked down by attending to the historical variations of the genre, the notions and constructions of the human subject speaking (or spoken for) in autobiographical texts, and the textual-narrative strategies applied in these constructions. A recent development in (feminist) autobiographical studies is a renewed attention to the material, embodied aspects of subjectivity, which is now reconceptualized in terms of the posthuman. In the third part of this chapter, I will overview how posthumanist autobiographical criticism and theory may complicate the body's role in the material-discursive constitution of subjectivity, agency, gender, and autobiographical ethics. But before that, let me focus on aspects of autobiography as a narrative and rhetorical practice, that is, as a site where certain narratological concerns inevitably arise. Thus, in the following subchapter I am going to discuss some concepts of narratology which prove useful in the examination of textual-narrative strategies employed in the writing of gendered autobiographical subjectivity.

1.2 THE NARRATIVITY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY: CONCEPTS AND CONCERNS

Although autobiographical texts have been the subject of narratological analysis for a while, this was not always the case. The attention on autobiographies for narratological analysis emerged, first of all, with the development of narratology itself from a "classical" to a "postclassical" phase, and secondly, with the so-called narrative turn, which entailed a growing awareness of the central role of narrative in social life and many areas of culture, as well as the realization of the usefulness of conceiving life as "an enacted narrative" (Alber and Fludernik 1-3; Czarniawska 1; Löschnigg 255-6). Martin Löschnigg points out that with

the emergence of constructivist (narrativist) theories of autobiography in the late 1980s, emphasis was put on "the role of narrative in the formation and maintenance of a sense of identity," which foregrounded, on the one hand, "the creative (as opposed to the mimetic) function of autobiography with regard to individual identity," while, on the other hand, it revived "the concept of autobiographical reference" (255). As will hopefully be seen from the rest of this chapter and the subsequent analyses, the issue of rendering lived experience in autobiographical narrative is often understood and problematized within the framework informed by the duality Löschnigg sets above, that is, the tensions inherent in coexisting ideas about the linguistic-discursive constructedness of subjectivity, the inadequacy of language to render lived experience, and the enduring need to narrate lives in a variety of social contexts and forms.

These tensions lead to the formulation of various conceptualizations of language, narrative, lived experience, and their relationship to the body and gender. I am about to outline some of the ideas underlying these conceptualizations in the following two subchapters. In the present section I hope to shed some light on the epistemological need of narrative, its role in the construction of subjectivity, and such related issues as closure and causality, which inform the understanding of narrative structuring and emplotment (i.e. making sense of events by way of ordering them into a plot), as well as fragmentation (in terms of the subject, language, and narrative structure). I will dwell on self-observation as a fundamental autobiographical act, the concept of transformation as related to the narrative subject and structure, the idea of retrospectively making sense of life events by giving them a narrative design, and the understanding of agency in narrative construction. I will also discuss, to some extent, such narratological and rhetorical issues as diegetic levels, their relationship to the narrated and narrating "I"s, focalization, as well as the role of fictionalization and irony in autobiographical narration. I will arrange this discussion within a

postclassical narratological framework, outlining some cognitive and posthumanist approaches that extend and/or rework some of the concepts and issues listed above (for example, Löschnigg's cognitive understanding of autobiography that emphasizes the continuity between experience and narrative in terms of the subject, or Bruce Clarke's posthumanist reworking of Mieke Bal's tripartite structure of text-story-fabula). In the last part of this chapter, I will extend the theoretical discussion of narrative towards the ethico-political relevance of rendering lived experience, focusing on the relationship between narrative, the body, and gender, predominantly within a posthumanist framework.

1.2.1 Concepts used in the understanding of narrative, and their relationship to the human subject and agency

After the narrative turn, narratives are assigned epistemological significance in that they are considered to constitute a "mode of knowing" by virtue of exposing an organization of experience according to a scheme that assumes "the intentionality of human action" (Czarniawska 7). Emplotment, the basic tool of organizing events "into one meaningful whole" (7) thus entails not only the idea that narratives are inherently structured but also that they are structured according to criteria that result in a story which "makes sense." Simple and obvious as this claim may sound, there are various, intricately linked structural and cognitive aspects that define the requirements of "making sense" in terms of narrative. One of these is the concept of closure, the need for which derives, according to Noël Carroll, from the readers' "desire to know" the answers to a set of questions the text elicits. These questions are "planted by the author in a way that makes them practically unavoidable for the intended audience" (4). Carroll refers to those narratives that sustain closure by forming "a network of questions and answers" as "erotetic narratives" (5). Questions arise "in virtue of certain

background beliefs and presuppositions" we already hold about the world, as part of "a *natural thought process*" (8). We use these questions evoked by the narrative "to organize and to keep track of the representations of the events and states of affairs that the story presents to us" (8). Thus, question formation by virtue of a narrative and the reading process of narratives in general entail both a structuring and an epistemological activity, which are interconnected: the desire to know the answers to the questions specific to the particular story move the plot forward and motivate reading, but the questions themselves presuppose our preliminary knowledge about how things are. These two aspects also limit the "natural thought process" in a more or less predictable way: "[t]he questions map a circumscribed space of possibilities; the answers plot, so to speak, a line through that space which connects the specific options that obtain" (8). So even in the most "fictional" stories, there are only a certain number of questions and answers that arise, which at the same time limit the interpretation of the text. In my view, this also works for closure: if there was no limit to the questions that may arise, closure was virtually impossible, which, according to Carroll, would lead to "intellectual discomfort" triggered by a feeling that the story has remained incomplete (6).

Carroll builds the thought process of reading narratives, as well as the definition of narrative as such, on the concept of *narrative connection*, which is made up of several aspects I have no space or plan to discuss in detail here. What I would like to follow up on, however, is his emphasis on the role of causality in establishing narrative connections in a story, since the citation of causal linkages "has the capacity to raise the kinds of questions with respect to the narrative that prepare the way for closure" (13). It is important to note that Carroll treats *narrative closure* as a special kind of closure that comes about narratively, that is, by way of narratively answering those questions that are evoked by the narrative itself (13). This does not mean that all narratives have closure: the presence of narrative connections, for example in a diary, do not necessarily entail that the diary has closure, especially if the person who

keeps it is run over by a truck and dies immediately on an ominous day (14). Rather, Carroll's emphasis on narrative connections is a way to explain what qualifies as narrative, and why and how raising questions and answering them is a salient aspect of both narrative connections and the reading process in general.

Forming a critique of Carroll's theory of narrative connections, Susan L. Feagin claims that the citation of causal linkages (that is, their evidence or manifestation in the story) is an illustration but not a necessary condition of narrative connections (18). She accepts Carroll's point that causal connections imply temporal relationships among events, as well as "patterns of significance in relation to the action of the narrative" (18), but she emphasizes that they are also "integrated into larger (not necessarily consistent) frameworks of human designs and plans" (18). Feagin's take on Carroll's theory of narrative connections and closure is important for the framework of my dissertation partly because she points out that "relating *insufficient* causes explains (some of) the power of a work to generate feelings or emotions," for example, curiosity, and other emotions of uncertainty, such as hope and fear (19, emphasis added), thereby she underlines the importance of affect in the reading, enjoyment and understanding of narratives, as well as its effect on narrative closure. But more importantly, she formulates her critique on Carroll's views about causal linkages and their relation to temporality within a broader humanist framework, with which she can also elucidate the vital role of narratives in subjectivity-formation, the import of agency, and the fact that the questions elicited and answered (or left open) in a narrative are limited by readers' ideas about "how things are" in the world.

Extending Carroll's take on causal linkages in narratives by connecting it to Gregory Currie and John Jureidini's ideas about agency, Feagin writes that "our tendency to exaggerate the degree of agency in the world is 'essentially narrative in form,' which is apt 'to represent and express mind'" (20). The definition of human agency in her framework is thus

based on human beings' capacity for the temporal structuring of events by presupposing causal linkages between them: "[i]n so far as narratives recount the actions and passions of creatures having minds of the sort we attribute to human beings, they implicate a causal nexus of a particular type of complexity, what Michael Bratman calls "temporal cross-reference," which affects the nature of the questions narratives raise and the type and degree of closure that is possible" (20). Focusing on the temporal aspect of this "narrative agency," Feagin writes that for a more comprehensive understanding of narrative connections, the concept of the human must be seen as a "temporally extended being," that is, a being that "make[s] *plans* for the future and adopt[s] *policies* to carry out those plans, often in light of one's memories of past failures or short-sighted values, or in light of new facts about oneself and the world" (21).

The relationship between narrative and the human is similarly construed by Monika Fludernik, in whose cognitive model of narrative "the existence of a human character in and of itself will produce a minimal level of narrativity" (6). Fludernik foregrounds experientiality in her model as a precondition of narrativity, which entails a "filtering through consciousness" of actions, intentions and feelings that "are all part of the human experience which is reported and, at the same time, evaluated in narratives." Thus, experientiality implies that "narrative is a subjective representation through the medium of consciousness" (109). Temporality is part of experientiality since it is needed for the "reporting and evaluation," that is, retrospective reflection exercised in narrative. In Feagin's definition, reflection is "a state when it not merely monitors one's other states, attitudes, and behavior, but when it plays a role in organizing and coordinating one's future actions in light of the relevant mental states and attitudes." This organization and coordination constitute a larger design in which one's intentions are embedded, and to which one's "intentional acts" refer to (21). Similarly, Löschnigg also emphasizes the reflexive evaluation in "[t]he rendering of past events," which

"includes a consciousness, in the present, of their eventual outcome." Telling narratives thus constitutes a way of reconciling "emergent with prior knowledge," which is particularly relevant for autobiographical narration, "since retrospection always includes a consciousness of what was not known at the time of the events referred to." Therefore, for Löschnigg, autobiographical narrative also "provides the organizational strategies which ensure that [chronological] complexity can be dealt with by writers and readers" by way of establishing spatiotemporal links in the story (264-5). Such "connections and continuities" have a crucial role in the constitution of "the identity of the agent over time" (Feagin 21), so they are of paramount importance in the understanding of how autobiographical narratives construct subjectivity.

The narratological approaches I outlined above – which take narrative connections, temporal causality, and/or experientiality as prerequisites of narrativity – seem to construct a specifically human(ist) concept of consciousness on the basis of what they define as principles of narrativity, and conversely, narrativity is seen as a phenomenon characteristically related to the human. As Feagin herself points out, "narratives and narrative understanding depend on mental powers that [...] we take for granted as central to being human in some normative sense, i.e., as being able to exercise our distinctive mental powers" (21-22). Thus, when the category of narrative is restricted to "stories involving [human] agency," or at least such stories are taken to be "the most important class of narratives" (Feagin 24-25), or when "what makes a narrative a narrative is the requirement of having a human or human-like (anthropomorphic) protagonist at the centre" (Fludernik 6), definitions of both narrative and the human are arrived at by way of a circular logic: *1)* the category of narrative is first defined with reference to narrative connections made psychologically (in the human consciousness); *2)* then psychological connections are attributed to "mental powers [...] central to being human in some normative sense"; *3)* then these mental powers are linked

(equalled) with agency; and *4)* finally, the category of narrative is restricted to stories involving human agency exactly *because* only human agents can make sense of psychological connections within a temporal framework as constitutive of "a larger plan or policy" (Feagin 21), which is seen to have a definitive role in the construction of their sense of subjectivity.

This conceptualization of narrativity in relation to the human seems to imply a humanist understanding of agency "as the ability to cause change or act by making *choices*" (Gunn 28). This concept of agency presupposes an autonomous subject with free will, and is associated with "self-transparency, self-knowledge, and rational choice making" (28). However, the ideology of the transparent, stable and rational human subject as "the seat of agency" (28) has been challenged both by autobiography and critical theory, which has also had its effect on the conceptualization of narrative. Notably, what may now be considered to come under the rubric of posthumanist thinking "would not deny that human agency consists of choices; [it] would question, however, the extent to which such choices were conscious or reasoned, arguing that they are constrained by larger forces such as language, ideology, social norms, the threat of imminent death, and so on" (Gunn 28-29). As Joshua Gunn points out, in the posthumanist understanding of agency, the term is extended to denote "the capacity to act," and the agent "can be anything that causes change or action" (29). In this framework, "the human being is only one of many types of beings in the universe and, as such, has no special status or value (other than, of course, what human beings assign to themselves)" (28). As, for example, some recent analyses of illness narratives would argue, a number of autobiographical texts on illness posit an alternative understanding of agency in which the idea of the masterful narrator is relinquished in parallel with narrative order that would derive from temporality and causality, giving way to the thematization of "chaos," both structurally and in terms of the body, and thereby lending coherence to what would normally be

conceived as narrative disorder or fragmentation (Rimmon-Kenan, "What Can Narrative Theory Learn" 242-4).

The posthumanist concept of the human and agency entails the opposition of "the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself" (Wolfe xv). Thus, as Carry Wolfe emphasizes in *What Is Posthumanism?* (2010), posthumanism "isn't posthuman at all" in that it does not focus on some technologically motivated ideal about the transcendence of the limits imposed on humans by their current physical and mental capacities, in short, by their embodiment and finitude.[5] Rather, posthumanism refers to "a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms [...], a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon" (xv-xvi). In short, posthumanism projects a different kind of transcendence: that of the "human" as understood in the liberal humanist tradition.

As I have shown, ideas about what constitutes the human and agency inform how narrative is conceptualized, and since language is one of the most predominant media of narrative construction, theories of language become relevant to how narrative is related to ideologies of the human. In Wolfe's posthumanist framework, which is based on the innovative juxtaposition of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory and Derridean deconstruction, language is seen as a system functioning separately from human beings, according to the logic of autopoiesis (=self-[re]creation), which Luhmann takes from biology and applies to describe how systems create, function and maintain themselves, and how they interact with their environment. As Wolfe describes,

[5] This post-embodiment ideal is what is referred to as "transhumanism" in the critical literature (Bostrom, 2005; Wolfe, 2010).

> Luhmann appropriates the concept [of autopoiesis] from the work in biology of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela to make sense of the seemingly paradoxical fact that systems are both open *and* closed; to exist and reproduce themselves, they must maintain their boundaries and integrity through a process of self-referential closure; and it is only on the basis of this closure that they can then engage in "structural coupling" with their environment. Like neurophysiological autopoietic systems, their fundamental logic is "recursive"; they use their own outputs as inputs in an ongoing process of "self-making" or "self-production," and they constantly (re)produce the elements that in turn produce *them*. (111)

Self-referential closure thus entails the maintenance of boundaries and integrity on the basis of which systems can then engage in "structural coupling" with their environment in a recursive logic of self-making, whereby they use their own outputs as inputs in an ongoing process of constant self-(re)production. In these terms, language is not a place where self-consciousness, awareness, and mind reside; as Wolfe emphasizes, such a claim would be self-refuting, since "as Luhmann would put it, only *language* takes place in language – which is to say, in a domain *external* to the 'self' or 'self-consciousness'" (37). Within the logic of Luhmann's systems theory, the communicative system is constituted as the individual's outside, its *environment*, from which the individual as an autopoietic system is closed off (Luhmann 37-39). It is only this separation, this closedness, the individual's being non-identical with the system of communication and with its environment in general, which makes it possible for the individual to be able to actually use the outside system as a resource, in order to communicate with others (who also constitute its environment). As Wolfe emphasizes, "the very thing that separates us from the world connects us to the world, and self-referential, autopoietic closure, far from indicating a kind of solipsistic neo-Kantian idealism, actually is generative of openness to the environment" (xxi).

Understanding the narrative construction of subjectivity in Wolfe's posthumanist framework presupposes a theory of language that sees language as part of the individual's environment, not as one's "own" that can "express" or "represent" one's "inner thoughts." Language as a differential system functions as a prosthesis in posthumanist thought:

> [T]hat first and most fundamental prosthesis of all, language itself [...] cannot be said to "re-present" "our" thinking for at least two reasons. First, as Niklas Luhmann has put it [...] language, like all forms of communication, "operates with an unspecific reference to the participating state of mind; it is especially unspecific as to perception. It cannot copy states of mind, cannot imitate them, cannot represent them." Second, there can be no "re-presentation" of "our" thinking in language because the meaning of an utterance is always subject to differential interpretation, an interpretation that itself takes place within multiply embedded protocols, traditions, conventions, and so on. (If this weren't the case, then it would be a private language, and we couldn't use it to communicate "our" thinking at all.) (Wolfe 35)

In posthumanist thought, then, language is a kind of "common denominator" – an external system accessible to a particular linguistic community – used for the communication of subjectivities constructed performatively (in speech acts). The linguistic system operates independently of the individual, and, as Butler suggests, the norms it perpetuates are also indifferent to particular subjects in history (*Giving an Account* 32). A recurrent theme in a number of autobiographies, such as the ones analyzed in this study, is the problematization of rendering individual embodied experience in a "common" language indifferent to the uniqueness of a particular human being. In this respect, the posthumanist notion of language as a separate system can be applied in the reading of these texts. While fundamentally humanist, anthropomorphic models of narrative (such as the cognitive approaches outlined above) render communication continuous with human consciousness, posthumanist models (such as Wolfe's) would rather focus on emplotment as a manifestation of the inherent operational logic of narratives, emphasizing "the narrative's *indifference to extralinguistic reality*" (Czarniawska 8). Conceptualizations of language are also related to fictionality, that is, the issue of differentiating between fact and fiction, which is still a pertinent question in the reading of autobiographies. In what follows, I will discuss the issue of fictionality along with a number of other narratological concepts and questions, as they are reworked from a posthumanist point of view.

1.2.2 Narrative in posthumanist theory

According to the posthumanist understanding of agency outlined above, a narrative itself may also function as an agent, operating according to a complex logic that is distinct from, but *communicatively* connected to, the lives which it relates. Its interpretation, together with the understanding of the elements it is constructed from, also depends on the communicative system within which it is embedded. As Clarke defines in *Posthuman Metamorphosis* (2008),

> [n]arrative is a primary formal and thematic program running on the complex infrastructures of social and psychic systems. The medium of narrative in society is the network of metabiotic meaning systems and their media environments. The maintenance-in-being of narratives in any textual medium has to be continuously reconstructed within social systems that can use them as elements of communicative exchange. Over time these contingencies ensure the continuous transformation of narratives and, from fictions of metamorphosis to histories of social evolution, the continuous recreation of narratives of transformation. (13)

Thus, in Clarke's posthumanist narratology, writing and narrative are technological systems which have a mediating function "connecting psychic and social systems" (19). He emphasizes the distinction of narrative as a system from its environment, but at the same time stresses both the system's dependence on, and interaction with, its environment (as no message is metasystemic) and its "constant reshuffling necessary to systemic self-reproduction," which "ensures the emergence of difference over time: system evolution" (15).

Autobiographical narratives may also be given a new layer of meaning if read through a posthumanist narratological lens carved out by Clarke's understanding of narrative as a system. Clarke's idea of narrative puts the emphasis on contingent transformation, rather than stasis or evolution into a final, complete and stable entity, which could be associated, for example, with the teleological outcome of a story of development or a trauma narrative, which is meant to put the self "back together" after traumatizing events. In the works I am analyzing here, the desire for closure in the form of providing answers to certain questions or

coming up with a stable construction of the self is at times in sharp contrast with the inability to reach stasis at any given moment, as a result of the text's not being able to capture or freeze the life of the body in its dynamism, or, even more generally, to halt the constantly transforming environment that has a very specific physical effect on the subject.

Bracketing, for the time being, the very real problems stemming from the vulnerability of the body to its environment, which all of the books I am analyzing in this work try to deal with in one way or another, I now return to an underlying motivator and narrative device of autobiographical writing: self-observation. As I have pointed out before, cognitive narratology emphasizes the psychological aspect of self-observation, as it is intertwined with identity-construction through narrative temporality and causality, which induce a retrospective narrative design. Löschnigg, for example, insists that "if one conceives of autobiography as a psychological activity which creates, rather than merely depicts, identity, retrospection and the double aspect of the self involve the construction not only of the experiencing, but also of the narrating self" (257). So whereas the idea of narrative construction underlies Löschnigg's cognitive narratology, the reason for his emphasis on the dual constructedness of the narrating and experiencing self is to discard the dichotomy between the narrating and the narrated "I"s, since although it may be helpful in the structural analysis of literary narratives, it "detracts from the continuity of (remembered) experience as emphasized by narrative psychology and recent theories of life-writing" (257).

Julie Hawk argues for the ontological and epistemological impulse of narratives as two interplaying aspects always present in the narrative construction of subjectivity from a posthumanist standpoint. She also grounds her argument by pointing out the ontological and epistemological role of narratives in identity-construction: the ontological impulse of narrative is the process in which stories "help make up who we are" (6), but at the same time each story has an epistemological impulse insomuch as it helps make sense of the world by

providing larger cultural narratives into the system of which one can incorporate one's own "small story" (6, 12). But while in cognitive narratology, the continuity of experience between the event and its narration is emphasized, in Hawk's model of narrative subjectivity-construction, "these two trajectories work together in a sort of feedback loop" (7), a dynamic of recursivity in which second order observation takes place (15). In the course of second order observation, which refers to the subject observing itself observing (itself), "the observer ontology feeds into and is in turn fed by the epistemology that results from second order observation" (15). Second order observation requires that the self-observing subject be split into subject and object, observer and observed, which together become "cocreating products of self-referential processes" (Clarke 6). Thus, the construction of the split is a necessary condition for narrative self-observation to take place.

However, the position of the observer observing itself is not an external one: the observer "is always caught up in the system being observed" (Hawk 17). Moreover, as Nina Ort emphasizes, one's self-observing position is created retrospectively. She insists that there is no objective point of observation (41), as the "metaposition" of observation is but a fictitious construct: "we operate *as if* [...] we could observe from an external position, but only retrospectively will we be able to observe what we have done" (42). The same idea of retrospective construction in narrative is presented by Adriana Cavarero in her introduction to *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (1997). Recalling a story by Karen Blixen about a man whose footsteps, in an attempt to plug a leak in a dike one night, eventually came to form a stork, Cavarero also points out that the design for a story of one's life makes sense only in retrospect, after that life has been lived. The design "is not one that guides the course of a life from the beginning. Rather the design is what that life, without ever being able to predict or even imagine it, leaves behind" (1). The systemic distinction between life and story is therefore also supported by Cavarero's insistence that "the story comes after the event and

the actions from which it results" (2). Cavarero also points out the impossibility of true metapositions in self-observation: "the one who walks on the ground cannot see the figure that his/her footsteps leave behind, and so he/she needs *another* perspective" (3). In autobiography, this other perspective, taken by the (self-)narrator, is the fictitious metaposition, which is required in order for the narrative to have meaning and significance.

According to the systemic interrelationship between subjectivities and communicative systems, more specifically, such narrative "subsystems" as, for example, the confession, the Bildungsroman, or the psychoanalytical case study, the desire for the meaning and significance of one's story is fed by, and feeds back into, the communicative system. Thus, narrative subjectivity forms a feedback loop with the narrative genres that construct it. The much-desired "unifying meaning of the story" (Cavarero 2), some kind of closure, is never achieved, since observation, as Hawk emphasizes, "creates change in a system, for the marking of a difference inscribes that difference into the system" (17). In Hawk's words, "[s]elf-aware observation creates still more change, for that repetition with a difference (awareness) creates a revised copy so to speak, of the observer observing" (17-18). The subject is therefore never identical with its narrative construction: by observing himself or herself within the context of a certain framework, s/he effects changes in that very framework, so by the time s/he would come to "measuring up" against the standards of the context, the rules no longer apply. In the books I am discussing here, two of the most traumatic and strongly linked contexts of such non-identity for the subject are the self's sense of separation from the body, and gender identity. I will discuss these contexts in more detail in the following chapters.

Notwithstanding the impossibility of the subject's self-identity in the narrative construction of subjectivity, there is yet another crucial motivating factor that moves the narrative forward. In Ort's attempt at juxtaposing systems theory with Lacanian

psychoanalysis, the fantasy of origins and the imaginary "lost object" gains importance. Finding lost objects in one's story is not only very similar in intent to desiring to "leave behind a figure" (Cavarero 2), but it also calls for a dynamic of retrospection, whereby "the effects guarantee their origin" (Ort 37). As Ort puts it, the history of the subject has "a hole at its origin" (37):

> If it was possible to retrace the steps taken by the subject in the course of its history to their origin, there would be and would always have been nothing. This "origin" is a purely logical construct that gains consistency retroactively by means of the effects it has in the realm of the symbolic and of the imaginary. And, vice versa, any observation implies a (phantasmatic) structure of expectation: Wherever something new is discovered, there will be the absolute certainty that it has always been there. [...] The subject constructs itself retroactively by conferring symbolic status on its past, raising it to the level of the "will have been." (37)

Thus, much in the same way as the human(ist) notion of narrative attributes significance to the design of a life story in retrospect, it retroactively creates "lost objects" in place of origins, which are narratively present "by virtue of their absence" (Hawk 20). The subject's origin of gender identity, for example, may be constructed in such a retrospective fashion, as can be seen in some of the books analyzed in this dissertation.

The retrospective logic of narrative construction is therefore linked to the necessity for closure in erotetic narratives, which is motivated by Carroll's narrative connections discussed previously. This way, narrative connections can be seen not only as structural elements in a story but also as part of a larger complex of systemic design, where the fantasies of lost objects and the desire to leave behind a discernible design of significance in the form of one's story become important motivators for constructing life narratives. But while cognitive narratology suggests the centrality of the human agent in this construction, an agent that can make rational "plans" and "policies" on the basis of previous experience, posthumanist approaches to narrativity emphasize the indifference to the historical individual of both the social and the communicative contexts in which the construction of subjectivity takes place,

and foreground the agential force of these systems in the shaping of individual lives and identities.

1.2.3 Clarke's posthumanist narratological model and some related concepts

Postclassical approaches to narratology have also been rethinking a number of technical concepts that have been in circulation since the development of classical narratology and are commonly used for the structural analysis of specific texts. In the present section, I will overview some of these concepts by way of presenting Bruce Clarke's posthumanist take on Mieke Bal's tripartite division between text, story and fabula. Clarke applies Luhmann's theory of autonomous systems and their environments to these three dimensions of narrative and thus creates a model in which text, story and fabula correspond to Luhmann's social and psychological systems, and the environment (Clarke 31). This helps him conceptualize narrative as systemically operating on three different levels.

In Bal's definition, text, story and fabula are understood as follows:

> *A narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. *A story* is the content of that text, and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and 'colouring' of a fabula; the fabula is presented in a certain manner. *A fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. (6)

In Bal's theoretical distinction between the three dimensions of a literary work, therefore, the text represents the narrative manifestation of a story, which may imply several different kinds of media for the same story (for example, the film adaptation of a novel involves two different texts of the same story). From the point of view of the fabula, the story is the "treatment" of the logical and chronological series of events that are the fabula: the way the events of the fabula are presented in a certain order, not the least for the "manipulation" of the

reader (Bal 76). For the sake of avoiding confusion, it may be useful to note that classical narratology refers to Bal's concept of "fabula" (the logical and chronological series of events) as "story," and usually contrasts it with "text," that is, the spoken or written manifestation of the story, or, put more simply, "what we read" (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* 3-4).

Bal explains that "[o]nly the text layer, embodied in the sign system of language, visual images, or any other, is more or less directly accessible" (8). In Clarke's systems theoretical terms it means that "narratives go nowhere and do nothing until they enter and circulate as communicative proposals within social systems" (23). Thus, "communicative proposals" in this framework refer to the linguistic texts themselves as understood in Bal's system, which are functionally separated from their environment.

Another key concept that Bal develops on the basis of Gerard Genette's ideas is focalization, which is "the relation between the 'vision' and that which is 'seen,' perceived" (145-46). Bal is quick to dissociate focalization from the more widespread narratological terms of "point of view" or "narrative perspective," which remain unclear on the distinction between "those who see and those who speak" (146), that is, between, "on the one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented, and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision" (146). Bal emphasizes that these two instances of agency often fall apart: "it is possible, both in fiction and in reality, for one person to express the vision of another" (146). When this happens, a narrator conveys the vision of the focalizer, through whose eyes certain things or events in the storyworld are seen.

With focalization and narration thus distinguished, the two can be analytically associated with two of the three respective narrative dimensions in Bal's system: narration belongs to the text, since, as Rimmon-Kenan asserts, it implies someone who speaks or writes it (*Narrative Fiction* 3), while focalization is a function of the story, as it is "presented in the text through the mediation of some 'prism', 'perspective', 'angle of vision', verbalized by the narrator

though not necessarily his" (71). It is important to stress that besides the more traditional concept of "point of view," which is strongly associated with vision, focalization also implies "cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation" (71), which helps to relate narrative texts to the psychological and social context. The distinction between narration and text enables Clarke to set up a correspondence between Bal's theory of narrative layers and Luhmann's theory of autonomous systems and their environments.

Bal's concept of focalization quoted above also refers to the distinction between the object to be seen and the subject to see, which links it to the function of observation, a key aspect in systems theory, as I have previously pointed out. As Clarke asserts, neocybernetics "makes an important intrasystemic distinction between the functions of *operation* and *observation*: systems must operate to function at all, but those operations are steered to a greater or lesser extent by the particular operation of observation" (31). In terms of narrative, "[t]he production of the text through its narrating instance corresponds to the self-productive operation of autopoietic systems generally (social systems in particular), as focalization corresponds to the specific operation of perception (in psychic systems in particular)" (31). Clarke's posthumanist narratology is thus summarized in the following chart (31):

Bal's theory of narrative layers	text: narration	story: focalization	fabula: events, objects, actors, locations, things
narrative processes viewed intra-systematically	narrative operation	narrative observation	(the storyworld)
Luhmann's theory of autonomous systems and their environments	the social system: communication	the psychic system: consciousness – perception, affect, thought	the environment at large
Bal's idiomatic restatement:	"A says...	"that B sees...	"what C is doing"

In Clarke's system, therefore, the separation of narrative presentation (operation) from narrative perception (observation) "conforms to the autonomous operations of social and psychic systems respectively, and the corollary distinction between communication and perception as incommensurable products of discrete system functions" (30). This does not

mean, however, that these two systems are not linked; social and psychic systems *interpenetrate* inasmuch as "they are tightly coupled and indeed coevolved metabiotic phenomena" (30). Thus, as Clarke writes, "narratives connect to worldly systems not in their putative representational verisimilitude [...] but in the ways that, at their deepest levels of abstraction, they allow the construction of functional homologies to real processes of life, mind, and society" (35).

Clarke's discarding the "putative representational verisimilitude" of narratives brings up the issue of fictionality, which has been a topical concern of autobiographical analysis. In accordance with her notion of experientiality as the essence of narrative by which anthropocentric experience is communicated, Fludernik emphasizes that "in so far as narrative depicts psychological states, it is fictional since such states cannot be rendered except by using the techniques of fiction" (59). Therefore, even though Fludernik's cognitive account of narrative holds human psychology as "fundamental to narrativity," asserting that "experientiality and consciousness are conditional upon each other" (59), and thus it significantly diverges from posthumanist narratologies based on systems theory, it shows that in postclassical narratology the issue of the division between fact and fiction is sidelined, and an emphasis is put on the necessary fictionality of all narratives, autobiographical stories included. Löschnigg also shares this view, stating that the "relaxation of the borders between truth and fiction is due not so much to the undermining of 'facticity' in life-writing caused by the general post-structuralist mistrust of 'truth' and 'authenticity'" but rather to "an emphasis on narrativity as a vital factor in the construction of identity, i.e. a view that autobiography, in narrative terms, stages the drama of creating the autobiographer's identity" (256). Since this act of identity-construction is not so much "an attempt by a detached subject to interpret itself as object," but rather "a re-living of experience," which is "shaped by present motivations, desires and anxieties" (259), autobiographical acts are best to be approached from a pragmatic

angle, that is, in consideration of their role in communication (Löschnigg 267, Czarniawska 11-3).

This pragmatist notion of (autobiographical) narrative rhymes with Clarke's conceptualization of narratives as communicative proposals that are meant to circulate within social systems (47). Czarniawska also emphasizes that "the attractiveness of a narrative is situationally negotiated – or rather, arrived at, since contingency plays as much a part in the process as esthetics or politics" (8). In this respect, the cognitive and posthumanist approaches to narratives show a similar stance with regard to the inherent fictionality of narratives, which they extend to autobiographies, as well, and they project a kind of narrative rationality (as opposed to formal rationality), which is context-bound, since it is "valid only for a given time and place" (Czarniawska 12).

Besides focalization, narrative levels also constitute an important aspect of narrative analysis, since they shape "the reader's understanding of and attitude to the story" by way of positioning and characterizing the narrator (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* 94). Narratologists have worked with Genette's diegetic levels in order to examine how texts construct narratorial participation, degree of perceptibility, and reliability, which all shape the interpretive process. In the framework of narrative diegesis, narrators are typically identified along two axes. One axis represents the degree of the narrator's cognitive and/or positional "superiority" or "authority" with respect to the story s/he narrates, with an extradiegetic narrator being "'above' or superior to the story," while an intradiegetic narrator being subordinate to it. An omniscient narrator, for example, is superior to the story s/he narrates, so s/he could be considered an extradiegetic narrator. The other axis along which narrators may be differentiated is that of their participation in the story: if the narrator is not a character in the story s/he narrates, s/he is a heterodiegetic narrator, while a character-narrator is a homodiegetic narrator. Both extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrators can be either

heterodiegetic or homodiegetic, that is, they may or may not take part in the story they narrate (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* 94-6).[6]

The issue of diegetic levels is important from the point of view of autobiographical analysis for a number of reasons. First of all, as Löschnigg points out, in the case of factual autobiography, homodiegesis – that is, the "rootedness" of the narrative voice in the storyworld – rests on "actual embodiment," which distinguishes it from other fictional forms of writing, and provides a source of authenticity for the text (257, 266). Nevertheless, the fact that the concept of homodiegesis is now applied to autobiographical (and not only fictional) analysis shows that narratology has moved from a classical to a postclassical phase (257). Thus, narrative levels are now considered an aspect of fictionality, which, as I have discussed, is seen as a governing principle in all narratives.

Secondly, the construction of the narrated and the narrating "I"s rests on a specific retrospective narrative design of self-reflection in the relatively typical case when the narrator looks on his/her "former self" from the vantage point of temporal (and often spatial) distance, with a "wiser" outlook on both the world and his/her narrated self. Such a narrative design is attributed, for example, to the Bildungsroman, which Smith and Watson call "the pseudo-autobiography of a fictional character" (*Reading* 119). Conversion narratives or stories of recovery may also have a similar diegetic structure, the narrator of which can be identified as extradiegetic-homodiegetic, since s/he is epistemologically superior to the events narrated (and his/her former self) but at the same time is part of the storyworld.

Löschnigg talks about the relationship between diegetic structures and ideas about identity and subjectivity as constructed in narrative. While "much nineteenth-century autobiography is modeled [...] on the underlying belief that individual identity can be grasped in terms of organic development, [...] narratives of estrangement and fragmentation seem to

[6] There are other distinctions besides these four in the constitution of narrative levels; however, for the purposes of this dissertation, these most important terms will suffice.

have become the dominant pattern in contemporary autobiography" (265). In the former design, an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator would often be the norm, while in the second one the degree of the narrator's superiority to the narrated world may vary, or s/he might not even have any epistemological authority over the story. The reduction of the narrator's superiority to the storyworld and the narratee is often achieved by the rhetorical means of irony. Sylvia Plath's auto/fictional story *The Bell Jar* (1963) may be a case in point, which, as Mary Evans suggests, operates with irony and humour by way of constructing a narrator characterized by apparent simplicity and *faux-naïvete*. Evans considers this strategy "a voice of resistance, of resistance to the organising and authoritarian limitations of conventional autobiography that at the same time proposes a realisation of the limits of the self" ("Extending Autobiography" 76). She also claims that "*The Bell Jar*, in its many fictional selves, avoids the controlling form of the conventional autobiographical self, yet suggests to its readers that the self is only possible through contradiction and ambiguity" (76). Among the autobiographies analyzed in the present study, Szabó's *Für Elise* and Polcz's *One Woman in the War* tend towards the construction of a heterodiegetic narrator equipped with retrospection and (some) epistemological superiority, while T. N. Kiss's *Incognito* discards most of the authority of the narrator and constructs a future-oriented autobiographical subject that is always yet to come. The fourth novel, Spiegelmann's *Precious Little* employs a narrative strategy and tone of irony similar to that of *The Bell Jar*, where this parallel is strengthened by the repeated intertextual reference in *Precious Little* to the narrator as "a passionate, fragmentary girl," an expression borrowed from Plath (*Journals* 163).

Regardless of whether or not the narrative designs outlined above may be attributed to different eras of the past centuries as dominant tendencies or life-writing paradigms (this issue should be examined in a diachronic analysis, which is not the purpose of the present dissertation), it is interesting to note that in Löschnigg's observation, narratives of

estrangement and fragmentation are posited as a "pattern" of autobiography, which suggests (even if inadvertently) that inasmuch as a coherent narrative pattern can manifest a "coherent" self, a fragmented narrative pattern can construct a "fragmented" subject. Thus, both coherence and fragmentation come to be conceptualized as functions of narrative analysis which are constitutive of the structuring and genre of life-writing, rather than projecting an attribute of the self preceding the narrative. Consequently, it is not primarily the estranged and fragmented subject whose sense of self is represented in a narrative of estrangement and fragmentation, but the narrative constructs the subject *as* estranged and fragmented. This understanding of narrative construction fits well the posthumanist narratological idea of operational differentiation between the narrative as a "communicative proposal" in Clarke's sense, and the physical environment in which historical subjects exist, while at the same time it posits the idea of constructing subjects in terms of coherence or fragmentation as a function applicable to the system of communication.

In Clarke's posthumanist framework, texts and stories – just like the communicative system in general – are thus characterized by "operational closure," which means that "they do not operate beyond their own boundaries [and they] construct their own meanings out of their own internal elements" (34). This also implies, according to systems theory, that they "must reduce [their] complexity relative to that of [their] environment" (34). This general idea of reduced complexity can also be applied to interpretation: a system's "internal construction (cognition) of its environment will inevitably be incomplete" (34), thus, interpretation, which depends on the narrative tools employed in the construction of text and story, will also be partial and subjective.

This "enforced selectivity" of narratives and narrative interpretation, which is, in fact, a condition of their "survival" and operation as communicative proposals, can also be considered in ethical and political terms when it comes to the understanding of the

relationship between historical lives and narratives. For one, the body becomes an intricate aspect of life narratives not only because it is always implicated in an individual's life and defines conceptions about discursive structures (narratives included), but also because it is specifically related to the construction of gender, which, as an analytical category, informs feminist readings of autobiographical texts. Thus, in what follows I will first extend the discussion of understanding narratives in the direction of corporeal narratology, which emphasizes the role of the body in the development of narrative and narratological concepts. I will then deal with some aspects of narrative in terms of incompleteness/selectivity by way of recalling Butler's ideas about the limits of knowability and examining how these limits are (ethically) relevant to "accounts of oneself." I will also discuss the concept of voice with respect to the ethics and politics of recognition in text, and will finally give an account of how gender can be understood in a posthumanist framework and applied in narrative analysis.

1.3 THE ETHICO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NARRATING EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

In the previous sections I have mostly discussed the systemic relationship between subjectivity, agency, and narrative, but there has not been much discussion on various notions related to the physical body as such, even though these notions have been forming not only the conceptualization of the human subject but also the understanding of narrative, as Daniel Punday discusses in detail in *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (2003). While this dissertation provides no space or opportunity to overview the vast literature that has been produced on how conceptualizations of the body, the human, and gender have historically developed and intertwined, let me briefly outline Foucault's concept of biopower here, since it gives a relevant (albeit limited) framework for the understanding of (autobiographical) narrative as a discursive regime in which gender is construed and

interrogated by way of what Butler refers to as the discursive materialization of bodies (*Bodies That Matter* 9).

The autobiographical subject may be ideologically linked to the body by Foucault's conceptualization of biopower, that is, "numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (*History of Sexuality* 139-40). Foucault emphasizes the importance of biopower in the development of modern western societies: "the entry of life into history, that is, the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques" (141-2) carved out a track of development in which "Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, *probabilities in life*, an individual and collective welfare, *forces that could be modified*, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner" (142, emphasis added). In comparison to previous notions about a human being's fate and course of life on earth, which were believed to be determined by God and his earthly representative, the sovereign, it now became possible to conceive a life trajectory that is forward-oriented, in which there is a chance for modification and progress, and which is actually and primarily concerned with a better life here on earth, and not with the fear of death and damnation in the afterlife. Consequently, "[p]ower would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body" (142-3).

As part of the emergence and development of biopower, confession "as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" about individuals and their bodies has also gained a somewhat modified role in modernity (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 58) and its autobiographical texts. Although torture has accompanied confession since the Middle Ages

(59), in modern western societies (since physical torture has become a largely unacceptable form of wringing out truth from people) the psychological power of confession came to be associated with its putative connection to truth and freedom (60). As Foucault explains,

> [t]he obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom... (60)

Thus, there is a "formidable injunction" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 60) to confess ourselves in a variety of forms and through a number of different media. Autobiography thus provides a channel for the confessing individual to unburden his/her soul and speak the truth, and gain some kind of absolution from the audience's acknowledgement of his/her story, as well as a reassurance of the confession's therapeutic effect. For example, Janice Peck writes about "the therapeutic framing of autobiography in TV talk shows," emphasizing the importance of this autobiographical form as a means of biopower. In her interpretation, television talk shows "appear to let people speak for themselves and tell their own stories," but these stories, by virtue of being told in this particular medium, become "located within institutional, political-economic, and sociohistorical structures that determine what can be spoken, by whom, and to what ends" (134). These structural constraints "frame the lives narrated within them" (134), and thus form subjectivities that are captured within the medium.

Notwithstanding the constraining role of different contexts and venues of confession, two important aspects of "giving an account of oneself" must be noted here. First of all, the act of publicizing one's story with the purpose of "revealing the truth" about some personal or political aspect of one's existence in order to "unburden the soul" is supposed to contribute to one's self-development by way of giving an ethical weight to the act of revelation. Secondly, confession or self-revelation can be seen both as a normative as well as a transgressive aspect

of autobiography, depending on the social position of both the autobiographical narrator and the narrated "I," which may determine the degree to which the trajectory of individual development is accepted, refused, or modified in the autobiographical act. That is, a discursive approach to biopower, as well as autobiography as one of its significant institutional practices, also entails a belief in the possibility of change and resistance to constraining norms, while at the same time it acknowledges the persistence and power of such practices in social incorporation. The autobiographies I analyze in this dissertation also employ different kinds of narrative strategies to formulate an attitude toward social constraints and incorporation, by way of either constructing an arguably "happy" ending to their *Bildung*, or positing it as an unattainable aspiration, or maybe even rejecting or transgressing it as an unfeasible trajectory for the construction of their own selves, suggesting, like Plath's narrator, the inevitability of contradiction and ambiguity in modern subjectivity.

One of the most important aspects that induce such contradictions and ambiguities is the relationship between the body and subjectivity, which is often constructed as an agent separate from the autobiographical subject, who, exactly because his/her body is posited as independent of his/her "free will," loses narrative authority. Thus, such a narrativization of the body as a separate system is paradoxical, since it is "out of sync" with the text, both in terms of the narrative structure the conscious subject is supposed to shape, and the language he or she is supposed to speak. Therefore, by making apparent how the body turns into a textual paradox by not being able to speak and be contained in terms of narrative, the texts, which strive for closure and structure, themselves become the vehicle for critiquing the liberal humanist subject as "an autonomous, self-transparent, fully conscious agent who acts rationally by making choices" (Gunn 28). One of the most important aspects in the paradoxical discursivity of the body is gender, that is, the construction of gender in autobiographical text. In the texts I am analyzing in this study, gender keeps recurring to

trouble the construction of autobiographical subjectivity either as a category of difference that recourses to inequality, despite the autobiographical subject's efforts to eradicate or at least downplay its social effects (as in Szabó or Polcz), or, on the contrary, as a category that subverts its own binarism and refuses to become a depository of stable identity (as in, for example, T. N. Kiss). In what follows, I will overview how such complex critique may be conceptualized in theory by various approaches to the relationship between the body, the subject, gender, and narrative. I will start with an overview of corporeal narratology, and proceed with the discussion of some ethical and political implications of autobiography, the limits to accounts of oneself and the subject's knowability discursively, conceptualizations of voice in ethico-political terms, and finally the discursive construction of gender and gendered bodies.

1.3.1 Punday's corporeal narratology

Corporeal narratology, which Punday elaborates in *Narrative Bodies*, is founded on the claim that the human body has historically played a crucial role in the conception of modern narrative. Both triggering, and triggered by, the emergence of Foucauldian biopower, ideas about the body started to significantly alter in the early modern period, when "scientists began to speak about the body as a space to be explored, equating it with the dark 'interior of the continent of the newly "found" americas'" (Punday 39). Punday asserts that the "[m]odern scientific study of the body, then, marks a fundamental transition in the way that the body is made meaningful, and especially implies that we must give up the symbolic qualities [earlier] attributed to the surface of the human form" (39). In the historical evolution of concepts about the human body, a transition started in the early modern period "from a cosmological to a genetic [scientific] understanding of the 'starting point' for human identity" (39). This

genetic/scientific understanding of the starting of human life and identity is based on chance: Punday calls it "accidental" and sees it in opposition to previous cosmological understandings of human genesis and existence, where certain "godheads" were supposed to know what the purpose of an individual was, and this purpose was rarely to be questioned.

The idea that the fate of a human being's body and life is no longer predetermined by God but may be altered by will, talent and chance made the plot of the narrative future-oriented. Thus, parallel with the development of biopower, changing conceptions of the body also played an important role in the evolution of the notion that a character in a novel has various possibilities outside God's will that may or may not be realized, and, more importantly, that s/he can make choices to further the plot. Punday quotes one such plot, the Darwinian narrative, as a primary example, where there is a "balance between a search for [scientific or secular] origins and the unlimited futurity of accidental starting points" (40). This balance is, most of all, dynamic: it is what moves any plot forward. There is no need any more to return to God as a source of authority because a natural order prevails (41). As Punday stresses, this transformation marks a shift "from belief in inherent, divinely inspired forms that manifest themselves over time – both in everyday life and in narrative" (41). Even more specifically, "these changes produce a new way of thinking about character identity as the basis for narrative. No longer are characters subordinated to some larger form; instead, they are the basic metaphysical building blocks of whatever story, whatever 'world,' is described" (41). Hence the dominance of the two motivating factors of a modern life story I have described above, origins and final designs, which circumscribe the story of an individual, the significance of whose life is then constructed by the narrative itself.

It is not only the concept of character that significantly changes in the modern novel. With the evolution of humanist notions and genres of developmental fiction, hermeneutics also "undergoes a fundamental transformation as we move into the modern period and accept

possible-world thinking about narrative" (Punday 45).[7] The scientific and analytical approach to the body results in the separation of world, text, and self (45). As such, the understanding of narrative starts to center around "the hermeneutics of the text" and the alternative narrative world it constructs. I think this hermeneutic turn is one of the most important triggers in the development of dualistic thinking, which entails a conceptual split between observer and observed, and hierarchies between body and text, body and self (mind), and self and text.

In these conceptual and functional differentiations, on which modern narratology is largely based, the body is most often posited as an entity prior to language, and as such, as *pre-narrative*. Punday compares Hayden White's idea of the brute and chaotic forces of existence that resist narrative structuring,[8] Anthony Paul Kerby's concept of the body as "the 'permanent locus' from which narrative springs,"[9] and Peter Brooks's Freudian theory of narrative plot,[10] in which the body functions, paradoxically, as both striving for ultimate narrative closure (death), and at the same time exerting desires that delay the progress toward the end point of narrative (87-89). As Punday concludes, what brings together these theories about narrative is the body, which, in one way or another, becomes "unruly," hence resists emplotting (89), that is, narrative structuring and progress, and thereby hinders development towards a teleological end-point.

Dualistic thinking thus creates its own paradox in narrative theory, when the physical body is put in the realm of the real as something "pre-narrative," while at the same time it is posited as *resisting* textuality, as if it was some lower-order residue to be *incorporated* in the Symbolic, however futile this incorporative attempt may be. In this respect, Lacan's three psychoanalytic realms of the Real, the Imaginary (both "pre-linguistic") and the Symbolic

[7] For an exposition of possible-world theory in narrative, see, for example, Lubomír Doležel (1998, 2010), Thomas L. Martin (2004), Ruth Ronen (1994), and Marie-Laure Ryan (1991).
[8] White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.
[9] Kerby, Anthony Paul. *Narrative and the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.
[10] Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992.

(linguistic) leave some theoretical dissatisfaction with respect to the relationship between body and text, just like the modernist theories of narrative Punday reviews. Judith Butler's theory of the construction of the material (the body) in the discursive, which can be aligned with posthumanist systems theory, is also informed by the paradox inherent in the conceptualization of the relationship between the body and its discursive construction. For example, in *Bodies That Matter*, she refers to the construction of the body as an "absence or loss" which cannot be "captured" by language, yet which keeps "troubling" the discursive:

> The linguistic categories that are understood to "denote" the materiality of the body are themselves troubled by a referent that is never fully or permanently resolved or contained by any given signified. Indeed, that referent persists only as a kind of absence or loss, that which language does not capture, but, instead, that which impels language repeatedly to attempt that capture, that circumscription – and to fail. (67)

Thus, if the body is conceptualized both outside the frame of discourse as "pre-discursive" and at the same time in terms of the discursive – either in a hierarchical relationship with the mind, as in, for example, rationalist philosophy or traditional narratology, or as *discursivized*, "written by" discourse,[11] as in poststructuralist theories –, paradoxes will be maintained. The conceptualization of the body in terms of posthumanist theory – rather than in terms of discourse – as a separately functioning system that is not in a hierarchical relationship with communication may provide a tool for understanding the body in life narratives such as the ones analyzed in the subsequent chapters. On the one hand, the narratives I examine in this study can be read as texts where the "unruly" body keeps surfacing to disturb the expectations of reading audiences indoctrinated by the narrative frameworks of modern humanism. On the other hand, the body's "haunting" the text can be read more productively in the framework of Clarke's posthumanist narratology where distinct

[11] Punday asserts, for example, that "the unruly body is not a natural thing – something that inherently resists meaning or social use by virtue of its materiality – but rather a discursive object very much constructed to make sense in the light of the general body to which it is contrasted" (100). For Punday's discussion of the concept of "general body," see Chapter 2, "Sorted and General Character Bodies" in *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (2003).

but interdependent autopoietic systems – the biotic system of the body-brain, the mind as a psychic system, and communication as a social system – are cocreated and cocreate meaning at the same time. In what follows I will give an overview of the narratological application of the functional differentiation of these systems.

1.3.2 Limits to the subject's knowability and their relevance to ethics and politics

With systems theory complicating the framework of this dissertation, the concept of "closure" – whether systemic in general or narrative in particular – has now come to refer to several things. We can talk about the closure of a biotic system – the body of a living individual, for example – in terms of its termination (death), which also brings about a narrative closure to the individual's life story. In systems theoretical terms, closure may refer to the operational closure of any system with respect to its environment, which I have previously discussed. Finally, I have referred to narrative closure in at least two ways (which may nevertheless be related): *a)* narrative closure as the satisfactory conclusion of an erotetic narrative; and *b)* the operational closure of a narrative text as a communicative system.

I have also dealt with the body as an entity postulated to "resist" narrative closure in a number of modern theories of narrative Punday discusses. The idea of the body resisting emplotment, constructed as "prior to" language, appears in Lacan's theory of subjectivity-formation, too, as both Butler and Punday point out. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler takes issue with the Lacanian order in terms of its notion of fragmentation that Lacan links to the Imaginary. According to Lacan, when the mirror phase arrives, the infant comes to experience her "Ideal-I" as an image of wholeness in the mirror for the first time. The mirror phase is thus "a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the

succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality" (289). Lacan thus imagines the mirror phase as a formative process where the infant's previous sense of fragmentedness and motor incapacity gradually gives way to a fantasy of wholeness. Butler, however, asks how the infant's body comes to be experienced "in pieces and parts" prior to the image of wholeness (81). She points out that "[t]o have a sense of a piece or a part is to have in advance a sense for the whole to which they belong" (81-82). Butler claims that in spite of Lacan's attempt at describing a process of the origin of wholeness, "the very description of a body before the mirror as being in parts or pieces takes as its own precondition an *already* established sense of a whole or integral morphology" (82). As such, Lacan's structure of subjectivity also works according to the recursive logic of self-referential systems previously discussed.

Punday shares Butler's concern with this Lacanian retrospective logic: "fragmentation is constructed after the fact [the realization of the "Ideal-I"] precisely as the opposite of the coherence that is found in the mirror stage, and later, in the subject's articulation into language" (93). Thus, the construction of bodily materiality as fragmented in the pre-linguistic phase is effected *discursively* in order for the subject to come up as whole and coherent. This retrospective construction of bodily fragmentation versus later coherence is politically invested: while the body in its fragmented state is without power, coherence induces dominance (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 82). Therefore, the construction of the body as both pre-narrative and fragmented (similarly to the construction of the fragmented subject, as I have suggested before) is a narrative act, the imposition of a discursive notion on the body/real from its environment, and as such, it is meaningless within the operation of the system of the body/real itself, since bodily coherence, or the lack thereof, cannot be made operational sense in narrative terms within a biotic system.

The imposition of the discursive notion of fragmentation and incoherence on a system that functions non-discursively can be seen in parallel with what Butler calls "ethical violence" in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. In this book Butler discusses the impossibility of complete coherence and self-identity in one's (narrative) account of oneself, and proposes an alternative ethics "spawned by a certain willingness to acknowledge the limits of acknowledgement itself" (42). Ethical violence, in Butler's terms, "demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same" (42). This maintenance of self-identity is supposed to saturate one's discursive accounts of oneself, regardless of the context of the narrative, so Butler draws an analogy between ethical violence, and narrative coherence and closure. In her terms, the coherence and closure of the subject's account of itself (self-identity) also entails dominance over the construction of meaning and subjectivity in a text. Butler deems this politically invested construction of narrative coherence and closure "suspect" in that it forecloses upon the ethical resource of accepting "the limits of knowability in oneself and others" (63). So when we expect the autobiographer to come up with a coherent story about herself, "we may be preferring the seamlessness of the story to something we might tentatively call the truth of the person, a truth that [...] might well become more clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness – in enigmatic articulations that cannot easily be translated into narrative form" (64).

Butler's description above of the difference between "life" and "narrative" – between two different functional systems in systems theoretical terms – is a bit fuzzy in that although it makes the difference clear, it seems to set up an (albeit "tentative") hierarchy between the "truth" of a person, which is characterized by "interruption," and the narrative, which is coherent but suspect. In Butler's understanding, giving an account of oneself entails a narrative that conforms to the rules and requirements of an (autobiographical) genre, so a

certain imposition of expectations occurs: violence is exerted upon the narrator, the one giving an account of oneself (64). This abstract violence involves the "straightening up" of the more or less incoherent, scattered tidbits (experiences) of one's life, which are probably not even recalled in a linear fashion, into a coherent narrative that is intelligible to the addressee. As Smith and Watson also emphasize, we learn early on in the course of our socialization what are the legitimate forms in which bodies and lives are constructed meaningfully in stories (*Reading* 22). We primarily call this structure of sense-making "narrative," which, as I have previously discussed, functions according to certain rules and shows a set of narratological features.

This line of argument is hard to dispute. But what if the process of "translating" incoherent, scattered and unstructured lives-as-they-are into structured texts is what should be seen as "suspect" instead of narrative coherence in and of itself? For me the hierarchy between the incoherence, unstructuredness and pre-narrativity of life and the suspect coherence and structuredness of narrative only serves the naming of the "fragmentation" and "incoherence" of bodies and reality as opposed to narrativity from within the realm of the narrative. Thus, the conceptualization of (narrative) coherence versus (pre-narrative or non-narrative) incoherence has judgement value only within the system of narrative, since, at least in systems theoretical terms, the differentiation between "life" or "the real" and the text is operational, and as such, the logics according to which both function are non-analogous. Butler herself puts the difference more radically – and less fuzzily – elsewhere in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, and also in *Bodies That Matter*, when she appropriates how the social system and the individual may function regardless of, but still in contact (and certainly not in hierarchy) with, each other (so in this respect, she gives a "methodology" for Luhmannian systems theory, as it were):

> The norms by which I seek to make myself recognizable are not precisely mine. They are not born with me; the temporality of their emergence does not coincide with the temporality of my own life. So in living my life as a recognizable being, I live a vector of temporalities, one of which has my death as its terminus, but another of which consists of the social temporality of norms by which my recognizability is established. These norms are, as it were, indifferent to me, my life, and my death. (*Giving an Account* 26)

> The linguistic categories that are understood to "denote" the materiality of the body are themselves troubled by a referent that is never fully or permanently resolved or contained by any given signified. Indeed that referent persists only as a kind of absence or loss, that which language does not capture, but, instead, that which impels language repeatedly to attempt that capture, that circumscription – and to fail. (*Bodies That Matter* 67)

While in the first quote above Butler describes the social/communicative system as one with a "temporality of norms" indifferent to the individual, in the second section she stresses the inability of language (as part of the social/communicative system) to "capture" the materiality of the body. Therefore, both in *Bodies That Matter* and *Giving an Account*, Butler gives a description of both the operational closure of the body *vis-à-vis* its environment, which is constituted partly by the communicative system, and the closure of language as to the satisfactory interpellation of the (materiality of the) body within the communicative system. What thus Butler calls the "failure" of language to repeatedly capture the body linguistically is what constitutes, in systems theoretical terms, a condition of survival for a system by way of functional differentiation, operational closure, and the system's simplicity relative to its environment.

Since discursive subjectivity is thus constructed within a communicative system that remains different from, and indifferent to, the individual, "I am, as it were, always other to myself, and there is no final moment in which my return to myself takes place" (Butler, *Giving an Account* 27). In Butler's terms, this otherness to oneself – as a systemic condition for the functioning of discourse – is a prerequisite for recognition. But, given that "self-identity" in this systemic logic is impossible, recognition is always partial, and the subject is dispossessed by the language by which this recognition is initiated: "the moment I realize that the terms by which I confer recognition are not mine alone, that I did not single-handedly

devise or craft them, I am, as it were, dispossessed by the language that I offer" (26). This is also the point where Butler's ethics of giving an account becomes focused on transformation, and is thus connected to the emphasis of posthumanist theory on the process of change instead of stasis and a teleological outcome. As Butler states, "I am invariably transformed by the encounters I undergo; recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was" (27-28). This also underlines the importance of mediation in recognition: "one finds that the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself, exterior to oneself, by virtue of a convention or a norm that one did not make, in which one cannot discern oneself as an author or an agent of one's own making" (28). This is what Clarke calls "systemic situatedness" (2), which also refers to the notion that although biotic and metabiotic systems are distinct, the individual has no "spiritual autonomy" from such constructive material contexts as media (3).

1.3.3 The metonymic and metaphoric conceptualization of voice in narrative, and its political and ethical implications

One of the most important concepts in mediation that have saturated both narrative and political theory since the advent of modernity is voice. Given the functional differentiation between the body as a biotic system and discursive subjectivity as constructed by the metabiotic communicative system, the concept of voice may become paradoxical as it travels from one scope of use to another, turning from a biotic entity into a metabiotic one and back, or existing in both realms at the same time. Peter Elbow, for example, distinguishes between "the literal, physical voice" (which I refer to as biotic) and five other concepts of voice in writing, namely, audible voice (the sounds in a text), dramatic voice (the character or implied author in a text), recognizable or distinctive voice, voice with authority, and resonant voice or

presence (1). According to Elbow, one reason for the diverse yet pervasive presence of voice in various kinds of discourse is that because voice is produced by the body in its literal (biotic) sense, "[t]o talk about voice in writing is to import connotations of the body into the discussion – and by implication, to be interested in the role of the body in writing" (2). But even in its biotic sense, voice is "produced out of *breath*: something that is not the body and which is shared or common to us all – but which always issues from inside us and is a sign of life" (3). This fact may even stand as a metaphor for the travelling of voice from being a metonymy of presence – that is, standing in for the living body of a person by a synecdochic relation, since "[p]eople commonly identify someone's voice with *who* he or she is" (3) – to a multilayered critical metaphor of and in writing, which implicates a matrix of ideology and politics, something that subjects share, just like the air they breathe.

Working with Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyvocality in *The Politics of Voice: Liberalism and Social Criticism from Franklin to Kingston,* Malini Johar Schueller discusses the ideology of voice in a number of "personal-political" narratives of liberal or "reluctantly liberal" American writers. For Schueller voice refers to "an ideological speaking presence in the text" (9), which gives way to the multivocality of even the simplest utterance. She emphasizes that "at no point [...] is it possible to identify all the voices in a text or an utterance so that it has a definite social or ideological referent" (9-10). This also destabilizes ideological concepts such as liberalism, nationality, race or gender, which "exist in a state of struggle and tension" (12), for example, in Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiographical novel, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975).

Smith and Watson also underline the multiple relations of voice to distinct systems by connecting voice to different constructions of the "I": "voice arises at the conjunction of narrating, narrated, and ideological 'I's," which are all distinct from "the spoken voice of the historical 'I'" (*Reading* 79). They point out that autobiographical writing is often read as

monovocal because the readers assume the exclusive authority of the voice of the narrating "I," even though it is more often the case that a range of "interior" and "exterior" voices conjoin in the text to construct a Bakhtinian dialogism "through which heterogeneous discourses of identity are dispersed" (81). Although in Bakhtin's understanding language is considered as "the medium of consciousness" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 81), while in Luhmannian posthumanism consciousness and language are two differentially operating systems ("only language takes place in language"), in both theories the conjunction of dialogic voices in autobiographical texts may be equally understood to be "inflected by such ideological formations as national and/or regional identity, gender, ethnic origin, class, and age" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 81). Therefore, the subject that is constructed discursively is "in dialogue with complex otherness" (81).

When discussing voice, James Phelan also uses Bakhtinian dialogism to develop a structure of distances established by narrative voices, which may generate ethical and ideological implications as well. Phelan identifies "pairs of narrative agents [...] between whom the question of distance matters," and between whom different kinds of distance may be established (140). Accordingly, we can talk about various kinds and degrees of distance between actual and implied authors, implied authors and narrators, implied authors and characters, narrators and characters, and "all of these agents and audiences" (140). Likewise, Phelan examines spatial, temporal, intellectual, emotional, physical, psychological, ideological, and ethical kinds of distance between the different pairs of narrative agents, which are made salient in the narrative to varying degrees (140). The identification of distances is important because it defines from whose perspective we are making ideological or ethical judgments (140), which is connected to the question of narrative authority (and hence diegetic levels), since, as Phelan stresses, "[a]uthority arises out of both the rhetorical and social properties of the specific deployments of [narrative] voices" (142-3). For example,

if a narrative voice is unreliable, it can establish different kinds of ethical distance or bonding between text and reader. As Phelan writes, estranging unreliability "increases one or more kinds of distance," while bonding unreliability decreases them (146). Thus, as Phelan concludes,

> ethical dimension arises from the dynamic interaction among four ethical positions: that of the characters (the ethics of the told); that of the narrator in relation to the characters and to the narratee (part 1 of the ethics of the telling); that of the implied author in relation to the narrator, the characters, and the authorial audience (part 2 of the ethics of the telling); and that of the actual audience in relation to the values operating in the first three positions. (146-7)

This dynamic interaction among the ethical and/or ideological positions established via pairs of narrative agents and their various kinds of distances may serve as a model in the interpretation of ways of interaction between different systems that Clarke's posthumanist narratology identifies. It is particularly interesting to examine how autobiographical texts work with the rhetoric of distancing and/or bonding between their different "I"s and their implied audiences, as well as how these "I"s deal with the physicality of existence in a narrative system, in order to establish (or even avoid) an ethical or ideological standpoint. In the upcoming analytical chapters I will attend to the examination of these narrative dynamics.

The examination of Bakhtinian multivocality with the help of Phelan's model above might also point towards an ethics of ambivalence, when, in Smith and Watson's terms, "a compelling, unique textual voice emerges in the act of articulating a personally or politically unspeakable event" (*Reading* 83). It is a challenge to deal with this paradox of articulating something unspeakable, since, in a way that systems theory also suggests, each event is "unspeakable" in that the speaking of an event is systemically separate from the event spoken. The "compelling, unique textual voice," which emerges from a representational impossibility, thus (re)constructs events in the narrative context by "unspeaking" them, which is key to understanding the significance of life narrative in a posthumanist context. This constructive

unspeaking foregrounds not only the multivocality of life narrative but also the ethics inherent in ambivalence, suggesting a different kind of authority to narrators of "multifarious and ambivalent" voices, who struggle with the articulation of extreme experience (84).

Elbow also discusses the authority of voice in the context of multivocality, and suggests that in any kind of text "one of the best ways to find authority or achieve assertiveness of voice is to role-play and write in the voice of some 'invented character' who is strikingly different from ourselves" (10-11). This invented character may not even have a voice of authority; for example, many of Jonathan Swift's personae are ironically self-effacing and nonjudgmental (11), and Spiegelmann's *Precious Little* also constructs a narrator whose authority over her own story is questionable. Elbow's ideas about voice are interesting because, on the one hand, some of his concepts rest on humanist assumptions about voice and authority;[12] on the other hand, much of what he says about "distinctive and recognizable" voices stands in line with Butler's ideas about recognition as a process of othering. He writes that "[i]f I have a 'distinctive and recognizable voice,' that voice doesn't necessarily *resemble* me or feel to me like 'mine' or imply that there is a 'real me.' Recognizable or distinctive voice is not about 'real identity'" (10). In Elbow's words, recognition is connected to style, "a habitual way of doing" things (9), rather than identity, which is a territory of distinction in the social system. The systemic conditions of recognition (the fact that I am able to recognize "your" voice) imply that there is something about "your" voice that is not yours, and yours alone, otherwise I would not be able to recognize it as intelligible. Voice as a recognizable feature is thus outside you as an individual: at the same time that you become recognizable "as a voice" (of authority), you relinquish your singularity as an individual, so "you" and your authority are in fact outside yourself.

[12] For example, he writes about the importance of teaching students "to develop some authority of voice," and leads his discussion to Virginia Woolf's "struggle to take on authority," who suggests that "if we don't write with authority, with a mind of our own that is willing to offend, what we produce scarcely counts as real writing" (11).

This posthumanist understanding of voice complicates feminist politics as well, in which struggles for equality, authority and agency have been linked to the question of voice, very often on liberal humanist grounds. Voice in its political meaning is metaphorical, the intelligibility of which must presuppose a common ground, despite claims for individuality. But the commonness of this ground may be assumed only by abandoning the idea of distinctive voices the source of which is the individual, and relegating political voice to the realm of the social system. This is how voice becomes its own common ground, on which collective ethical and/or political claims are made.

According to Cavarero, autobiographical narrative is not the space where such common grounds may be established. She criticizes the privileging of collective, plural pronouns in "schools of thought to which individualism is opposed" (90), and proposes instead "an altruistic ethics of relation" (92). This ethics centres around the singular "you" that is "truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction" (92). In Cavarero's framework, "your story is never my story," so recognizing myself in your narrative is impossible:

> No matter how much the larger traits of our life-stories are similar, I still do not recognize myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we*. I do not dissolve both into a common identity, nor do I digest your tale in order to construct the meaning of mine. I recognize, on the contrary, that your uniqueness is exposed to my gaze and consists in an unrepeatable story whose tale you desire. This recognition, therefore, has no form that could be defined dialectically; that is, it does not *overcome* or *save* finitude through the circular movement of a higher synthesis. The necessary other is indeed here a finitude that remains irremediably an other in all the fragile and unjudgeable insubstitutability of her existing. Put simply, the necessary other corresponds first of all with the *you* whose language is spoken by the shared narrative scene. (92)

Cavarero's concept of a "shared narrative scene," as well as her insistence on irremediable otherness and insubstitutability recall how systems function in systems theory by operational differentiation. In Cavarero's ethics, relationality between the one who addresses the other by way of narrative reflects the idea of a system's operational closure with regard to its environment in that the purpose of address is not identification but *differentiation by and for interaction*, an operational necessity that also establishes the uniqueness of an individual

system. However, as Butler points out, "[n]o account [of oneself] takes place outside the structure of address" (*Giving an Account* 36), and the singularity of one's story will be challenged by the set of norms that make one's story intelligible and the one recognizable in the first place (37). Thus, I think Butler's focus on the exteriority of the context of address (and the voice an address presupposes) with regard to the individual appropriates more closely how the individual as a system may become different(iated) from the social system in the course of interactions made on a "common ground" of norms, in which process interactions may become political exactly because they are neither personal nor (purely) biotic.

As this short overview of voice as a narrative, ethical, political and ideological concept suggests, voice, travelling from one system to another, may also be a representative concept that shows how such functionally distinct systems as the body and the narrative interact with each other. In the following subchapter, I will discuss, again on the basis of Butler, the concept of gender in similar terms, as a discursive and narrative construct which is in a complex and dynamic interaction with the materiality of the body.

1.3.4 Understanding the construction of gendered bodies

Extensive theorizations of gender and the sex/gender distinction show that gender as a critical or analytical concept cuts through various spheres of existence differentiated by not only systems theory but a range of other theories of society and subjectivity. Although widely taken as a "social construct," gender is also linked to biology, materiality and corporeality in *some* way, which makes it an extremely debated term, mostly because in a culture of representations it is hard to find a bridge between "things" and "words" that does not collapse at some point. Thus, what gender scholars and activists alike seem to have some agreement on

is the constructedness of gender; however, their ideas may stand far apart as to how the construction of gender takes place in everyday life and social practices (such as creating autobiographical narratives), and how it relates to the body.

A significant development in the analysis of autobiographical writing has been the inclusion of gender as one of the categories formulating individual experience. However, if gender as a critical and ideological term is seen not as an essential, biologically determined and stable category of difference but as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 2), then gender also becomes imposed on the body from without, from the reiterative practice of gender, which may also be seen as an autopoietic system in Luhmann's sense. Thus, gender in this understanding has no "real core" within the body, or rather, its reality consists in its performativity and discursivity. The individual becomes gendered only by means of performativity in a discursive field, that is, it is *designated as gendered* within discourse. Sexual acts, for example, would not be gendered in and by themselves; they only become *gendered practices* when rendered discursively.

John MacInnes comes to a very similar conclusion about gender by making a conceptual distinction between sexual genesis and sexual difference. Although he does not use the idea of autopoiesis to support his theory, he maintains that the systematic oppression of one biological sex by the other in modernity came to be based on "imagining gender as something that was social, but which corresponded to natural categories" (16-17). In MacInnes's understanding, the modern "introduction" of gender as a social-but-not-quite category of oppression

> depended upon a systematic confusion of sexual *difference* with sexual *genesis*, such that what are in reality issues of the natural generation of individuals (about the relationship between parents and infants) have been displaced onto issues of social differences between sexes (about the social production of 'masculine' and 'feminine' from male and female). We have come to systematically confuse what results from us all being born *of* a man *and* a woman with what results from us all being

> born *as* a man *or* a woman, so that the natural limits to our social identities come to appear to be the fact that we are all born of one sex or another, rather than being set by the inexorable fact that we are the products of biological sexual reproduction. (17)

This confusion between sexual difference and sexual genesis, in MacInnes's view, is therefore not "an historical error" but a necessary consequence of "the legacy of patriarchy and the ideological and material forces of universalism" (17). By universalism he means the "formal commitment" to the idea that "as members of a species, human beings shared some essential properties and by virtue of that, [are] in some sense formally equal one with another" (3). This leads MacInnes to conclude that gender is "an ideology people use in modern societies to imagine the existence of differences between men and women on the basis of their sex where in fact there are none, and whose existence they at other times deny" (1-2).

Butler's discussion of the issue of constructivity in *Bodies That Matter* also interrogates simplifying correspondances between sex and gender. She stresses that it is not enough to accept that gender, this multifaceted apparatus of difference-making between male/masculine and female/feminine bodies and/or subjects, is "constructed through relations of power and, specifically, normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings" (x). If gender is an effect of normative regulative practices, and not of choice, we also have to examine and understand "the ritualized repetition by which such norms produce and stabilize not only the effects of gender but the materiality of sex" (x), which in turn leads her to questions concerning "the meaning of construction itself" (xi).

Butler thus brings (the) materiality (of sex) in the picture, which makes her problematize the relationship between the body and (gendered) subjectivity at the very core of construction itself. Her idea that both sex and gender (two items on the respective sides of a traditional biologist vs. social constructionist divide) are simultaneously constructed as "regulatory ideals," whereby sex is "forcibly materialized through time" (1) in a retrospective manner, also underlines the practice of sexing and gendering as a process, rather than either sex or

gender as a product. Therefore, Butler's understanding of performativity entails a quasi-referential process whereby a discursive practice "enacts or produces that which it names [that is, which it refers to]" (13).

When conceptualizing the relationship between body and narrative, Punday also brings up the question of referentiality, claiming that even after the linguistic turn, the body remains "a site where the power and problems of reference play themselves out," with critical writing using the body "as a way to balance suspicion toward representation with a recognition that such representation plays a profound and productive role within culture" (1-2). In a way, Butler's idea of performativity also struggles with the relationship between body and representation, since in her work the body also emerges "as a site where the power and problems of reference play themselves out" (recall the "absent referent" that the body is in *Bodies That Matter*, 67). If sex is "not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is," but "one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (*Bodies That Matter* 2), then the performative construction of sex and gender, and thereby the viability of sexed and gendered bodies, or more generally, the intelligible performative construction of matter, has a political stake in which the question of representation remains central. Butler's understanding of sex may thus stand in parallel with Punday's general observation about the "profound and productive role" of representation within culture, which, for him, is always linked to the understanding of the body as a site of (problematizing) referentiality. As Punday emphasizes, both narrative aspects and elements, as well as the way we understand the reading process, are "historically conditioned by, among other things, a conception of the human body" (ix). And this human body, in Butler's understanding, is "always already" sexed and gendered.

So even within a poststructuralist framework marked by Butler, the reading of autobiographical writings with the intent to examine how the text constructs sexed and

gendered bodies entails a question about "representing" lived experience (or what is referred to as "life" or "reality"), so the analysis of construction will eventually deal with the semiotic aspects of the text. However, as both Julie MacKenzie and Karen Barad claim, the performative understanding of how sexed and gendered bodies are constructed in their materiality should not stop at the issue of the semiotic side of performative constructions. In MacKenzie's point of view, for Butler "matter subsists as that which exceeds representation," and as a result, "the ontological, the in-itself of matter" falls out of the scope of analytical and political attention. Although Butler "emphasizes the political significance of an 'outside'," which is the product of symbolic reiteration (a method of "contingent cultural and historical relations"), and as such, "both constituted by, and constitutive of, the boundaries of symbolic intelligibility," her insistence on "the ontological as a lack or absence [as the outside of the symbolic]" results in the evacuation of materiality from the political. On the contrary, MacKenzie claims that we must acknowledge "that matter itself is variable, and that political futurity, far from being based upon the inevitable absence of the ontological from signification, is an eminently material transformation."

Barad picks up the line where MacKenzie drops it, and works out a comprehensive "onto-epistemology" for the "elevation" of matter to a political, and even agential, status. She acknowledges Butler's importance in "recognizing matter in its historicity" and discursivity, and in directly challenging "representationalism's construal of matter as a passive blank site awaiting the active inscription of culture" (821). She nevertheless suggests that Butler goes only halfway as she "ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices rather than as an active agent participating in the very process of materialization" (821). On the basis of Niels Bohr's quantum philosophy-physics, which "poses a radical challenge not only to Newtonian physics but also to Cartesian epistemology and its representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers, and things" (813), Barad presents a comprehensive

understanding of discursive practices and material phenomena in their "productive entanglement." In what she calls "agential realism" (which is at the same time a "relational ontology"), she gives a "posthumanist performative account of the production of material bodies" (814). For this she claims, on the basis of Bohr, that *phenomena* (rather than "independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties") are the basic epistemological units, which do not mark what we traditionally understand by "observer" and "observed" or "subject" and "object," but are "*the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting 'components'*" (815). That is, phenomena are not "things" but "ontologically primitive relations" without preexisting *relata* and qualities, the boundaries and properties of whose components are determined through specific "agential intra-actions" (815).[13] Thus, Barad posits relations, rather than their pre-existent relata, as primary, and it is by virtue of, and within, specific relations (occurrences of intra-actions) that subjects and objects are locally and temporarily "cut" (as opposed to the Cartesian belief in "cuts" of subjects and objects that pre-exist relations). This also reworks the traditional notion of causality, since "the agential cut enacts a local causal structure among 'components' of a phenomenon" in the marking of the effect by the cause (815).

The way Barad conceptualizes the construction of causes and effects, subjects and objects, or observers and observed – what she refers to as "agential cut" – recalls Luhmann's theorizing the self-observation of any system with respect to its environment. First of all, Luhmann, just like Barad, emphasizes that no element has "unilateral control" over another one, since "no part of the system can control others without itself being subject to control" (36). Luhmann's concept of system can be seen as a phenomenon in Barad's sense, in which distinctions are made in the course of self-referential constitutive operation (autopoiesis), which is necessary for the system to reproduce itself. More importantly, when it comes to

[13] Barad uses "intra-action" to emphasize its difference from "interaction," which "presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata" (815).

what Luhmann refers to as "meaning systems" (that is, psychic and social systems), he emphasizes that "structures and processes that employ meaning can include system boundaries and environments, which *take on meaning within the processes of a self-referential system (not in themselves!),* so that such systems can operate internally with the difference between system and environment" (37, emphasis added). The emphasis on meaning-production (semiosis) within the process of self-reference links Luhmann's account of how communication functions to that of Barad, who constitutes discursive practices and material phenomena as mutually implicated or entailed in the dynamics of intra-activity, so neither is in a relationship of externality to the other, but "nor are they reducible to one another," and "[n]either can be explained in terms of the other" (822). In Luhmann's terms "[m]eaning systems are completely closed to the extent that only meaning can refer to meaning and that only meaning can change meaning" (37), but as meaning-making is a self-referential operational process, no system can make meaning alone, as "connecting operations" are needed to "reproduce meaning through internal and external references" (37).

Thus, in a way, both Luhmann's systems theory and Barad's agential realism are useful in constituting gender as either a system of meaning in the Luhmannian sense, or a Baradian apparatus with "*specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted*" (816). While a Luhmannian concept of gender would postulate it as an operationally closed system in contact with its environment (so in this respect, Luhmann's gender is more akin to Butler's version of gender performativity, in which the body "as such" is a missing referent, as it can never be "captured"), Barad's gender apparatus is an open-ended practice, whose lack of "outside" boundary "represents the impossibility of closure – the ongoing intra-activity in the iterative reconfiguring of the apparatus of bodily production" (816).

What must also be emphasized in a Baradian gender apparatus is that since its individual agents do not precede the apparatus as a phenomenon, its "semantic contentfulness" is not achieved through their thoughts "but rather through particular discursive practices" (818). Barad stresses that discourse is not simply "a synonym for language" used willfully by individuals; it is "not what is said" but "that which constrains and enables what can be said" (819). According to the logic of agential intra-action, "statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities," which, in a Foucauldian sense, are "actual historically situated social conditions" (819) that determine which bodies and subjects may emerge as intelligible, and which ones may become "unthinkable, abject, unlivable" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xi). As "mattering" takes place in the course of agential intra-action, matter is "not simply a 'kind of citationality'," as Butler states, but "[t]he dynamics of intra-activity entails matter as an *active* 'agent' in its ongoing materialization" (Barad 822). In short, "materiality is discursive (i.e., material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production: matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries), just as discursive practices are always already material" (822). Thus, in comparison with Luhmann's systems theory, where systems (of gender, communication, discourse, or biotic systems) function by way of self-observational closure from their environment, in the course of which, however, they must be in constant interaction with their environment in order to be able to effect differentiation from it at all, Barad's agential realism is predicated upon a dynamic intra-action between the material and the discursive, whereby they are mutually entailed and their boundaries are defined in this entailment.

What I find important to emphasize in this framework is that the "mattering" of the human body cannot be separated either from its gendering or its humanization. That is, the materialization of the body is effected by way of its gendering, and its humanization comes about simultaneously with, and by virtue of, its material-discursive gendering. Gender(ing) is

thus as much a corporeal performative production as it is a discursive practice. This is how the body functions also in the formation of autobiographical narrative practice, where the body is an active agent in its ongoing materialization by the narrative via functional differentiations between body and text. In turn, autobiography as a material-discursive practice contributes to the demarcation of the body's boundaries and properties, which construct it as an intelligibly gendered and humanized "object." In the following analytical chapters of the dissertation, I will examine how the gendering/humanizing of the body as a differentially operating system functions or fails to function, or how it is "written over" or out of the text in order for the subject to emerge as "a gendered human being," in four 20th-century and contemporary Hungarian autobiographical works that present various "contingent cultural and historical relations" and circumstances.

2 FEMINA HISTORICA: MAGDA SZABÓ'S *FÜR ELISE* AND ALAINE POLCZ'S *ONE WOMAN IN THE WAR*

In this chapter I am going to analyze two autobiographical books by women writers, Magda Szabó's *Für Elise* (2002) and Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War* (1991), which are both strongly embedded in a historical context marked by the world wars, but in constitutively different ways, which results in very dissimilar autobiographical contents, narratives, and strategies of subjectivity. Both novels are retrospective renderings of events occurring in or as a result of war proceedings, and as such, both are in "an ongoing and often contentious engagement with humanistic discourses of identity and truth" (Gilmore, "Agency" 83). In other words, they are in search of an answer to the question of "what it means to be human" – a question "fundamental to autobiographical narrative, and embedded in the history of autobiography in western modernity" (Whitlock v). But while Szabó's "relational Künstlerroman" uses a more comprehensive historical and social context as a backdrop for the construction of her subjectivity as an author, in Polcz's book the horrors of the war themselves become the subject matter of the autobiography, rendering a contingent, almost incidental, and in any case overtly unstable subject as a "by-product." The narrators' dissimilar strategies of subjectivity-construction and attitudes to their autobiographical project give different weight to such vital elements in the narrative as embodiment, gender, and relationality. This also results in varying interpretations concerning the subject's historical contextuality and individuality.

2.1 MAGDA SZABÓ'S *FÜR ELISE*: PARALLEL-DICHOTOMOUS CONSTRUCTIONS

> "I just can't ignore the fact that Aunt Magdi has deceived me. Because this novel is fiction, though I thought everything that's written in it had actually happened."
> – *Tilla, online commenter*

> "I don't believe a single word in this novel."
> – *Noémi Kiss* ("Szabó Magda" 9)

The quotes above focus on a highly contested aspect of both Magda Szabó's autobiographical novel, *Für Elise*, and autobiography in general: namely, the "authenticity" or "truth value" of an autobiographical piece. When it was published, *Für Elise* was meant to be the first part of a two-volume autobiography in which the author, in her ninth decade of life, promises to "break the seal of silence" because she is old enough now to "confront with the passage of time" and tell the truth about her family and life (Szabó, *Für Elise*, book jacket).[14] She is all alone now, as all her family members and friends are dead, so she is "the only witness to herself" and to the people, institutions, places and events she is going to write about, whom and which she is going to compromise no more by telling the truth about them. The book jacket text to the 2010 edition of the novel thus enumerates many elements that are traditionally believed to motivate an autobiographical text: facing the passage of time, giving a "witness account" of what happened before it is too late, confessing truths so far hidden, and tricking mortality by memorializing it all. These are the readers' expectations as well, and when the autobiography proves to be "fiction," some of them might feel deceived or are quick to assert they are not gullible enough to believe a single word in the book (even though the title page inside gives the work the generic denomination "novel," so this "deceit" should not really come as a surprise).

[14] With the exception of Polcz's *One Woman in the War*, and Ferenc Kölcsey's "Hymn," all the English citations from the Hungarian originals (including primary and secondary sources) are my translations.

2.1.1 Szabó Magda's autobiographical space and textual construction

Noémi Kiss – similarly to a number of readers commenting on *Für Elise* online[15] – connects autobiographical authenticity with authority, which she claims is a central issue in feminist literary criticism, suggesting that if a woman's novel proves to be "inauthentic," it looks bad on the feminist critical side: "with *Für Elise*, Magda Szabó would weaken her position in the debate [about the issue of authority in feminist criticism]" ("Cili én vagyok" 9). Although N. Kiss does not elaborate on the question of authority in feminist writing and literary criticism, her comments on *Für Elise* show how strongly such claims as truthfulness, authenticity and authority still define the reading of autobiographies even at the beginning of the 21st century, and even in circles of literary and feminist studies. These readerly expectations all come down to a notion of coherence in the autobiographical subject, the requirements of which *Für Elise* does not seem to comply with. Magda Szabó's autobiographical space, which, thanks to her huge oeuvre, extends across a large number of novels and short stories, numerous interviews, letters, media appearances and even poems and essays, is particularly characterized by incoherence. As N. Kiss puts it, "*Für Elise* plays a game with the earlier life of the 'author,' since the narrated subject, young Magdolna gives away details about herself in the story that she has not only remained silent about before but has also forgotten to mention even in her earlier authorial/narratorial confessions" (9). Given that *Für Elise* is read autobiographically, the author "modifies, or even overwrites, herself" in it (9), because whatever is written in the novel does not match earlier data about the author's life and family. In N. Kiss's view, this leads to the undermining of Szabó's authority as the writer of her own autobiography, as a

[15] It is worth quoting Rita Lehóczky's comment on Libri's *Für Elise* site as an example: "[*Für Elise*] was a wonderful story, I could hardly put it down. One thing, however, disappointed me: wherever I was expecting different characters and styles, it was always Magda Szabó speaking instead. When her mother, her father, Cili, or even Anna András or Ádám Textor speaks, it is never the particular character whose voice you hear but the author's. So I have some doubt concerning the extent to which this work can be read as authentic. Though the opening page clearly states: NOVEL..."

result of which she turns into a fictional character, and the story of her life becomes a fictional biography (9).

Smith and Watson point out that while autobiography and fiction are normally "distinguished by their relationship to and claims about a referential world" (*Reading* 10), the boundary between these two modes of writing has become exceedingly hard to fix (13). It is not only that "contemporary writers deliberately blur the boundary between life writing and the kind of stories told in the first-person novel," but the twentieth century also saw the collapse of the traditional teleology of the Bildungsroman, which has largely contributed to the historical and formal development of autobiography (10). Thus, autobiographical writing, as I have discussed in Chapter 1, is a textual practice which, in a traditional, normative sense, is constructed with regard to referentiality, which routinely puts it into a dichotomy with one of its "oppositional" modes of narrative, namely, fiction, but at the same time it is characterized by its own inherent fictionality, which has a constitutive role in constructing lives in narrative (Fludernik 59; Löschnigg 256). Given the shifting boundaries and paradoxes in the delineation of autobiography, what its differentiation from fiction eventually comes down to is the autobiographical pact, with the recognition of which, as Smith and Watson assert, "we read differently and assess the narrative as making truth claims of a sort that are suspended in fictional forms such as the novel" (*Reading* 11). In this respect, the autobiographical pact is seen pragmatically, in terms of the role the autobiographical narrative serves as a "communicative proposal" (Clarke 23) within a given social context.

I argue that when Magda Szabó inaugurates her autobiography as her definitive life-writing in which she "removes the veil" from the past, and then she "overwrites" herself, she plays with the autobiographical pact in the full awareness of the pact's institutional nature and significance.[16] For the central concern of Szabó's autobiographical book is not the

[16] In this respect, I disagree with Paul de Man's calling the operation of Lejeune's autobiographical pact "transcendental"; in fact, the way de Man describes how "the reader [of autobiography] becomes the judge, the

problematization of the relationship between truth and fiction – she reflects on it elsewhere, for example, in a short story entitled "Teréz esztendeje" ["The Year of Teréz"], and also in a number of interviews. For her the autobiographical act means the *textual/rhetorical* and *performative/theatrical* (re)creation of memories in order to send a message to the reader: "[L]et me offer the record of my years so far undisclosed to the Unknown Reader, and let her hear her own private message from Elise's textless tune" (*Für Elise*, book jacket). This private message stresses the importance of remembrance attached to the awareness of the inevitability of death. The main character, Cili, constructed by Magda Szabó as her "real" stepsister in *Für Elise*, interprets Elise's message in this light: for Cili the unwritten text of Beethoven's tune says "Think of me when I am gone, again and again" (174-5). The book jacket of *Für Elise* asks the Unknown Reader the same "because some day she will also be a memory." As it is not clear whether "she" in this sentence refers to Magda Szabó or the Unknown Reader, it can be read as a rhetorical way to put both author and reader on the same textual level by way of referring to the unavoidable physical death of both and the fact that their memory may survive only textually.

In Szabó's autobiographical space the importance of such remembrance always derives from historical contextuality. For her, Beethoven's tune talks about the imperative of telling:

> "What will you answer when the Age asks the question? Will you stay silent? Or will you talk?" I chose to talk: a whole oeuvre justifies my answer. The two novels[17] relate how the world and my life went between 1917 and 1939; the period between Trianon and the Second World War already senses the arrival of the monsters who are going to trample on both individual and humanity, leaving heavy footprints that are visible up to this day. (*Für Elise*, book jacket)

policing power in charge of verifying the *authenticity* of the signature and the consistency of the signer's behavior, the extent to which he respects or fails to honor the contractual agreement he has signed" (923) suggests an elaborate institution in which autobiographical authenticity is determined in material-discursive processes including not only the author function as understood by Foucault ("What Is an Author?" 119) but also a variety of readers (individuals, publishers, editors, scholars, media etc.), whose judgment-passing actions involve both tropological and non-tropological systems. See a subsequent section of this dissertation for a debate of de Man's assertion that a "tropological structure [...] underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of self" (922).

[17] The text refers to *Für Elise* and its intended second volume together, but the second part was never written because Szabó died before she could finish it.

Therefore, Szabó's autobiographical texts, similarly to all of her writing, are ethical acts in which what are known as facts are subordinated to the construction of morality. As Smith and Watson write, "[t]o reduce autobiographical narration to facticity is to strip it of the densities of rhetorical, literary, ethical, political, and cultural dimensions" (*Reading* 13). Discussing the ethical aspects of autobiographical writing, Zoltán Z. Varga explains why both autobiographers and scholars of autobiography may insist on interpreting autobiographical writing as action. On the basis of Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani's understanding of life writing as juridical and moral practice, Z. Varga suggests that the narrative construction of subjectivity in life writing duplicates the self by creating a dialogue in which the self under judgment can account for her own actions in front of her judging self and her audience. This way writing itself becomes a performative act of taking responsibility (256). As Szabó also says in an interview, for her writing is intended to be action: the act of telling about life "as it is" (Gách 36). In the narrative construction of "life as it is," however, it becomes impossible to reconstruct "life as it was." Interestingly then, the juridical and moral aspect of narrative reconstruction in Szabó's case forecloses the possibility of creating verisimilar life stories in a factual sense. Szabó's metaphors in "The Year of Teréz" also strongly suggest that the juridical nature of telling "true stories" turns them into "almost true ones" as a result of narrative reconstruction: "what is more or less [than the truth] in the story depended on the characters in it, who can neither accuse me nor defend themselves any more; they left me to be not only the court registrar but also their witness, prosecutor and defender" (169). Here, as in *Für Elise* as well, the juridical act is connected to death: the narrator undertakes the multiple tasks of reconstructing and judging in the place of those who cannot account for themselves because they are dead. This juridical act, therefore, becomes manifest in a narrative act of substitution, which is an underlying strategy in *Für Elise*, too, as Cili's

character is constructed in parallel with the author-narrator's autobiographical subjectivity in order for the subject under judgement to have a doppelgänger who can take the role of judge.

Before going into detail how this parallel narrative construction works in *Für Elise,* I would like to discuss another important contextual aspect of Szabó's life writing. The moral responsibility of *Für Elise*, similarly to basically all of Szabó's texts, is strongly embedded in her personalized Calvinism, which extends the discursive matrix of the novel towards religion in general, and confession in particular. Szabó's Calvinist identity was primarily moulded by her father, Elek Szabó, whose father, János Ágyai Szabó, had been a "legendary" dean of the Békés-Bánát diocese in former Hungary (Szabó, *The Moment* 5). Also, Magda Szabó was born in Debrecen, Hungary, the city which goes by the moniker "Calvinist Rome," since it had become a centre for the Protestant faith by the second half of the 16th century. In her works Magda Szabó draws on a large pool of experiences of her multi-faceted religious education provided by her parents (her mother was an unconventional Catholic) and the schools she attended, most notably Gedeon Dóczi Grammar School in Debrecen, which she refers to as the "lady factory" (*Für Elise* 141, 162). Marianna Ács gives a comprehensive analysis of how Szabó represents Calvinist women's education in her autobiographical space: she describes how this "contextual field" provides a space of interaction between Szabó's individual creativity and Protestant belief (52-3).

While Ács discusses Szabó's Calvinist background basically for the sake of emphasizing the importance of religious faith and its role in the foundation of (her) humanist morality, I would rather like to focus on the institutional operation of Calvinism, which is also apparent in *Für Elise* (and other works by Szabó, for example, her popular novel *Abigail* [1970], which also heavily draws on her educational experience in Debrecen, as she emphasizes it in *Für Elise*, too). The ideal Calvinist subject is, in fact, a necessity, an inevitability that results from the Fall: the individual stands alone in front of God, without any intermediary, so it is his

personal choice to accept or refuse God's grace, and the drama of his conversion is his own personal drama (Ács 53). János L. Győri calls this human status the individual's "coming of age" (quoted in Ács 53), which recalls a vital concern of the Enlightenment, playing a particular role in the construction of the independent male subject. The ideal Calvinist-humanist subject is thus characterized by "the full awareness of his own maturity, a strong sense of criticism, rigorous work ethic and a sense of mission, almost verging on obsession" (Győri, quoted in Ács 53). In the contextual field of Calvinism, the construction of the subject by means of disciplinary practices is a lifelong project, and the subject's autobiographical space is subordinated to this project, while at the same time it is one of the most important arenas of subjectivity-construction, provided with its own "subdisciplinarity."

The development of the female Calvinist subject, such as Szabó's, however, is more paradoxical than the trajectory above would suggest, given that "[a]s a result of [a] divinely constituted hierarchy, Adam embodies qualities associated with the essence of human-beingness," while Eve remains eternally subordinated to him: "intellectually and morally, she remains a misbegotten man, denied the possibility of achieving full intellectual, ethical, and moral stature," silenced both socially and literally (Smith, *Poetics* 27-8). Suggestive of this ideological paradox, the gendered differentials of the development of the Calvinist subject appear in *Für Elise* in a contradictory way, since sometimes they are problematized and contextualized overtly (as will be seen in the subsequent sections of this chapter, especially with regard to the Calvinist education of girls), but sometimes they are downplayed, as if the narrator did not want to acknowledge them. For example, the following quote emphasizes not only the educational foundation of the project of constructing the Calvinist subject but also its historical-political embeddedness, and its moral validity in the long run, while it does not specifically deal with how the gender of the subject determines and delineates this construction:

> Ours was a school of high standards, under constant supervision; there were no perspectives for stuttering, stammering, undisciplined or ungifted students among these puritan walls. Hungarian Calvinist girls were prepared here, some of them for ordinary lives, and some of them for exceptional ones, were it in God's will to give them bright careers. Dóczi was a demanding educational institution, which was to be thanked for its standards of perfection by its graduates especially after the Second World War that we had lost, because even though their unusual eruditeness, disciplined behaviour, working capacity and unshakable faith in God caused them to be removed from their current jobs in the Rákosi-era, they were splendidly rehabilitated in 1956, as Dóczi graduates had been brought up within strict parameters, so they would take up physical jobs without a word of complaint rather than become traitors to their own conviction or the interests of their nation, and then it was eventually proved again, when they started their lives over, that there was a reason to their having been equipped with almost monastic rigour and resignation, since their uncompromising personalities, coupled with exceptional expertise and a strong faith in God, were awarded with outstanding positions of leadership in the new world. (*Für Elise* 87)

Szabó's whole autobiographical space, as *Für Elise* also testifies, is founded on the humanist ideal exemplified above, the vital importance of which she establishes in each of her works in one way or another. At the same time, however, she provides an extended critique of the institutional technologies which construct her as a Calvinist subject and turn her into a "proper citizen" [*"korrekt állampolgár"*], who "knows and abides by the laws of her nation, puts the country's flag on display on national holidays, but doesn't start crying when she hears the national anthem and begs that God should bless our people already because we have indeed suffered so much" (*Für Elise* 134).[18] The fact that the coherence of Szabó's autobiographical space is shattered by this ironic commentary is partly due to the fact that the contextual field that motivates its construction generates ideological, affective and sexual contradictions, which appear at the level of narrative. But this incoherence is inevitable in light of the fact that many of the institutional conflicts encountered by the narrated "I," young

[18] Here Szabó ironically paraphrases the Hungarian national anthem, the first verse of which goes as follows:

O Lord, bless the nation of Hungary
With your grace and bounty
Extend over it your guarding arm
During strife with its enemies
Long torn by ill fate
Bring upon it a time of relief
This nation has suffered for all sins
Of the past and of the future!

(Kölcsey, trans. Korossy)

Magdolna, serve to contribute to the evolution of her Künstlerroman: she constantly finds herself in opposition to all kinds of teachers who either represent the constraining regulations of the institution or misunderstand her intentions and her imaginative "generosity" with scriptural narratives. For example, she is expelled from the religious preschool because she rewrites the Christian catechism to her own liking. When, for example, the preschool teachers – the "perfumed ladies" – visit the family, they ask the parents to remove their child from preschool because "[her] vocabulary and knowledge brought from home is inconveniently wide, so its narrowing is inevitably due, and the curtailing of this odd and unpleasant proliferation is a more befitting task for an ordained minister than for them" (92-3). In this case, as in many others, the narrated "I" finds herself in an interpretive-authorial conflict, the autobiographical narration of which draws attention to the textual nature of subjectivity in autobiography, which opens it up for interpretation.

One of the constitutive aspects of Szabó's autobiographical space and her narrated and narrating subjectivities in *Für Elise* is literacy and textuality: her father starts to teach her Latin when she is three years old; both of her parents tell her bedtime stories in which her mother constructs tales from her imagination, and her father tells his daughter about classic myths and legends of old times. She considers these stories as her most important family heritage, in which her parents live on: "My mother told me stories until she died; no greater heritage than a gift for storytelling could have been given by a mother to her child that I inherited from her" (13). This strong emphasis on textuality is connected to the family's religious faith and traditions, too, as Ács points out, who also talks about the heavy influence that one of the five main principles of the Reformation – *Sola Scriptura*, "by Scripture alone" – had on the life of Szabó's family (56). *Sola Scriptura* refers to the doctrine that salvation and holiness derive only from the word of the Bible and not from religious theses and practices ordered by church authorities, which not only entails the everyday practice of

reading the Bible and the imperative of knowing it well but also foregrounds the individuality of religious practice.

Szabó's oeuvre testifies to an autobiographical subject who has a peculiar relationship with *Sola Scriptura*. On the one hand, she conforms to the doctrine as far as she attributes centrality to the text of the Bible in her Calvinist development; on the other hand, Magdolna's scriptural reinterpretations related in *Für Elise* may give another angle to the whole idea of assigning cardinal importance to the Bible and other texts in her construction of subjectivity as an author. While the child Magdolna creates a textual universe for herself as a result of intertextual interpretations (the stories of the Bible included), Szabó's texts may also be seen as "interpreting themselves" inasmuch as their "truth" is not to be sought "out there" – that is, in the facts of the author's life, or in a philological cross-checking of these same "facts" in the various works of the oeuvre. Each text, however intertextually rich, constructs its own world and presents a different realization of the same fabula, and its characters and events should remain valid and serve their moral purpose within their own textual world. This understanding of a(n autobiographical) text suggests a Luhmannian notion of texts as closed systems, as particular communicative proposals, and at the same time it recalls the idea that the linguistic-narrative formulation of a text is the only source for both the concentration and the slippage of meaning. Semiotic structures operate in a closed system in that their elements do not refer to something "real" outside the text but to one another, and this is how meaning is formed by "endless semiosis" (Mekis 269). For example, in Derrida's understanding of semiosis as *différance*, signs refer to other signs that refer to other signs *ad infinitum*, which also results in the text's inability to fix meaning or stop it from proliferating, so meaning is always deferred.[19]

[19] "[T]he signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general. [...] It

Interpreting autobiography on similar deconstructionist grounds as "defacement," Paul de Man insists that autobiography is a figure of reading in which the autobiographical moment "happens as an alignment between the two subjects[20] involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution" (921). This "mutual reflexive substitution" is what de Man refers to as the "specular moment," which is not contractual, nor is it juridical or "a situation or event that can be located in a history" but "the manifestation, on the level of the referent, of a *linguistic structure*" (922). In the specular structure of autobiography, "the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding" (921), but this understanding is not "reliable self-knowledge" because, due to the fact that a tropological structure "underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of the self" (922), and because tropological structures operate by endless semiosis, autobiography for de Man "demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization [...] of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions" (922).

Thus, on the basis of the same principles – basically that linguistic-tropological systems operate in and of themselves – systems theory and deconstruction arrive at seemingly diverging conclusions. However, de Man's idea that tropological structures underlie all cognitions (including knowledge of the self) is highly debated in a posthumanist context, since other forms of (non-discursive or non-linguistic) self-knowledge are possible, too. Nevertheless, the investment of autobiography (similarly to other communicative systems and apparatuses) in the tropological *mode* of cognition (as one in the array of several cognitive modes) remains a "going concern" in textual analyses, exactly because "just as

is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called "present" element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not" (Derrida, "Différance" 11, 13). Derrida calls the constant movement of signifiers' (traces') referring back and forth to each other (in the past and future) "temporization," and the interval that separates the traces from one another "spacing" (13).

[20] I.e. the narrated and narrating subjects, or "a historical self and a textual spectacle" (Ng 11).

autobiographies, by their thematic insistence on the subject, on the proper name, on memory, on birth, eros, and death, and on the doubleness of specularity, openly declare their cognitive and tropological constitution, they are equally eager to escape from the coercions of this system" (de Man 922). I think the oscillation between "autobiographical eagerness" to tell the past "as it was" and the realization that the medium and genre chosen for this purpose make this endeavour fundamentally impossible is exactly what gives dynamics to the texts: in de Man's reading it is a struggle for closure that can never be attained, but in posthumanist systems theoretical interpretations, it is continuous "intra-action" between the inevitable tropological structures of texts and the various kinds of worlds and subjectivities they are meant to (re)construct. In a posthumanist reading of textuality, openness from closure derives from this (re)constructive intra-action, in which narrative operation and observation take place (on the level of narration and focalization, respectively), continuously reformulating both the observed and observing subjects and the textual system itself.

2.1.2 The deployment of Calvinism and gender in the parallel-dichotomous construction of subjectivity in *Für Elise*

Szabó's oeuvre is a perfect example for the idea that observation creates change in the system by creating a "revised copy" of the observer observing, which indicates the dynamic nature of her autobiographical space. In an interview made by Judit Aczél in 2002, Szabó reflects on the genesis of *Für Elise*, as well as comments on the divergence between her works *The Ancient Well* [*Ókút*] and *Honey Macaroon for Cerberus* [*Mézescsók Cerberusnak*] as far as the "facts" of her life are concerned:

> [In *The Ancient Well*] a newly wed wife, deeply in love with her husband, told him the story of her early life, since he demanded that she also share her childhood, family and past with him; but when he was listening to the memoir, he heard the voice of a wife in her twenties, not the records of an eighty-

> year-old woman approaching the end of her life. I came to see what had been hidden from me as a child and young girl; I also solved some of the mysteries; and finally, I felt that it was time to uncover the truth that I now conceive. (Szabó, quoted in Nagy 914)

In *Für Elise*, Szabó goes as far in the creation of a revised copy of her self as constructing a sister, who becomes the second autobiographical subject in the book. The dynamics of self-observation is founded on this duplication of subjects: while the 85-year-old Szabó is observing and narrating her childhood self, Magdolna, she is at the same time writing a parallel biography about Cili, her stepsister (the subtitle of the first volume of the two-part autobiography is *Cili*). But Cili also becomes the observer of Magdolna, so her role in the narrative is vital: she provides a constant reflection of Magdolna's subjectivity, and there is also a constant reflection of Cili in Magdolna.

This duplication of auto/biographical subjects is constructed along two important and intersecting lines, Calvinist morality and gender, which are both linked to the body in intricate ways. First of all, it is important to note, as Mary Evans claims, that Protestant cultures have had "a closer affinity with the auto/biographical form," since it "places a heavier burden of responsibility on the individual" (*Missing Persons* 13). Evans explains this "closer affinity" on the basis of Max Weber's ideas about Protestant ethics, in which God demands of his believers "not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system" (Weber, quoted in Evans 13). Moreover, the lifelong project of the Calvinist subject, which, as I have pointed out, is a constant underlying theme in Szabó's oeuvre, is connected to autobiographical writing in terms of confession, as well, since

> [i]n the spiritual loneliness of Protestantism (and Calvinism in particular), individuals are removed from the possibility of confession, and explicit forgiveness. There is, in Calvinism, a constant individual gamble on the existence of salvation. None of the mediations of Catholicism (confession, prayers to the saints, the alternative presence to the patriarchal God in the person Virgin Mary) are there for Protestants. In no immediate sense does this order of the religious world account for the emergence of auto/biography, the connection is not as explicit or as direct. But what this model of the symbolic order does create is a need for confession in other forms than those of the expressly religious, as well as a need for personal legitimation and the demonstration of life lived, not as a series of events, but as a project directed towards the possibility of salvation. (Evans, *Missing Persons* 13-4)

The migration of the compulsion of confession from religious practices to autobiographical writing is thus part of the historical evolution of the disciplinary institution that Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality*. The institution of confession, which "has served to discipline subjects by managing illegitimate desire and producing knowledge about sexuality" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 265), works in *Für Elise* through the duplication of auto/biographical subjects by making Cili serve as Magdolna's confessor. Cili, who is a "wounded bird," a mysterious orphan of Trianon, makes Magdolna exercise self-examination and self-control right from the moment she arrives in the Szabó household. When five-year-old Magdolna first meets Cili and learns that she is going to be her stepsister, she refuses her by screaming at her. As a reaction to this, Cili slowly undresses and offers her orphan clothes to Magdolna, attempting to leave the family house naked, acknowledging that since she has lost everything, she cannot claim anything as her own, much less disrupt the triadic unity between Magdolna and her parents (Szabó, *Für Elise* 43-7). This is the moment when Magdolna's ice breaks, and she realizes that Cili is going to play a vital role in her life, that she will be "one of the four pillars" of her life: "if she had not been there, I would never have survived what I was destined to survive" (47-8). Cili is always the only one privy to Magdolna's real thoughts and feelings (113); she warns her whenever Magdolna is about to do something disrespectful or stupid; and she provides her with a moral standard to act by: "without Cili I either jump way over something I am supposed to just step over, or I ignore the sign that shows the right direction and fall into the abyss" (365).

The duplication of auto/biographical subjects thus constructs Cili as Magdolna's "better half," but the underlying technique of this construction is not of similarity (or improvement) but complementarity. Leslie A. Baxter, who has developed a theory for relational dialectics by applying Bakhtin's dialogism and related concepts of social life as "a process of contradictory

discourses" (Baxter 182), claims that "a relating self is not a preformed, autonomous entity; instead, self becomes in and through interaction with the partner" (187). Much like Barad, Baxter also stresses that there are no preformed selves prior to a relationship, but the relating parties' selves are co-constructed through relating, and "[t]he complex interplay of similarity and difference plays an important role in this construction work" (187). On the basis of Bakhtin, Baxter foregrounds the importance of so-called "aesthetic moments" in the process of the co-construction of selves by way of interaction/communication, which "create momentary consummation, completion, or wholeness in what is otherwise a fragmented life experience" (186). In these fleeting moments "the difference of opposition interpenetrates in ways that create a sense of coherence" (187). Magdolna's bursting out in tears and accepting Cili as a sister is one of such aesthetic moments, even more so since it is a *narrative* moment that serves as the foundation for constructing Cili as Magdolna's autobiographical doppelgänger. Thus, Magdolna's confessor and double also becomes a complex and ongoing metaphor for her lifelong project of subject-construction in moral terms:

> How could I have known [at the beginning] that I am Cili, my multiple selves, that I would try to construct her again and again in my works; she would become Blanka from *Katalin Street*, Caieta in *The Moment*, Abigail, too, the character who always helps, she would be the secret admirer of King Béla with the silence and secret love of Filerimé, the only person whom I would never treat gently because she demanded that I do not treat her gently, lest she should lose the thread of my fate. On the shaking ground of history I kept trying to deceive the pillars of my life: I pretended it wasn't at all dangerous to be a persecuted class enemy under Rákosi's regime, it was just a temporary nuisance that could be avoided; but I could never fool Cili, she always laid claim to the burdens of my life; what she wanted to share with me was never the success but only the failure. [...] I was Cili, and Cili was me; we were each other's missing parts, the two of us together made a real whole. (Szabó, *Für Elise* 48-9)

Thus, in a way, Magda Szabó's compulsion for confession manifests through her construction of Cili as part of her subjectivity. It is particularly interesting in this light how the complementary – and at times oppositional – construction of these parallel subjectivities works along gendered lines, or more precisely, how Szabó deploys gender in this construction. What is striking throughout the whole book is how Magdolna differs from Cili

in terms of gendered "markers": while Cili is a conventional girl, someone who plays with dolls and would be preferred as a child by anyone, Magdolna is "as irregular as irregularity itself" (11). These gendered markers mostly appear in the form of institutionalized differences: one of the most significant foundations for Magdolna's irregularity is her "dangerous" home schooling from early on. Her father starts to teach her Latin when she is barely three years old, which scandalizes her uncle upon his visit not because she is young but because she is a girl: "My uncle would not regain his composure: he sat down and turned to his brother, started to scold him again, explaining to him that it was an unholy act to start teaching me Latin, because who would ever want to marry a pagan witch that shouts in an ancient language and speaks in alliterations instead of properly greeting the guest?" (19). What Magdolna realizes – and is also offended by – in this reproach is how strongly two institutions, education and marriage, are intertwined by gender, rendering certain fields of knowledge unavailable to girls because they might jeopardize their chances for "proper" happiness in marriage. The conflicts that Magdolna has to face because of her "ungenderlike" education, knowledge and behaviour are referred to in the book with a recurrent metaphor of life: as the rocks of conflict hit the surface of water, they cause interference that lasts through a lifetime, troubling the surface by creating more and more concentric circles, and the water smooths out only when she dies (91-2, 111, 205).

Für Elise (similarly to *Abigail*) also gives an extensive account of how the construction of the ideal Calvinist subject is connected to gendered biopolitics at the lady factory: while the education obtained there prepares the students to bear even the harshest historical conditions and provides them with a firm moral ground, it comes with the price of curtailing individuality, imagination and sensuality by setting strict rules of dressing and conduct, and keeping the students under constant surveillance in the name of God and the Calvinist church (133-4). Also, the formation of Calvinist subjects at school is embedded in a historical context

saturated by the national hope to regain Hungary's territories lost at Trianon, which provides another way to mark and define the Calvinist subject by gender. While the open discussion of sexuality is forbidden, the "patriotic education" of the students in the girlscout movement, the hidden agenda of which is to prepare the youth for the fight for national reparation, occurs along gendered lines:

> [U]nfortunately, although our uniform in the girlscout movement was meticulously detailed, we were never told what the whole movement was about, why we had to go on excursions so often, embroider heavy textiles, sing folk songs, play number wars, and support a poor family once a week, always after the Sunday church service, by giving them food we ourselves had prepared, after whose simple but tasteless meal we even did the dishes and cleaned the kitchen, and by the time we finished, Sunday was already over. I disliked all of the activities in the girlscout movement, being the clumsy "helper" around the household of some Poppy family... (203)

What is more, the marching song of the girlscouts, unlike that of the boys, is unacceptable for Magdolna, a burgeoning writer, because it is so badly written. When Magdolna decides to reveal her opinion about the meaninglessness of both the movement and its song, and expresses her wish to quit, she inadvertently induces the hatred of her girlscout superior (and maths and physics teacher), Ms. Fejér, who starts to mentally torture her in class. Magdolna realizes the true political objective of the movement only when Cili gives an explanation: young girls and boys are expected to receive patriotic "training" in order to be prepared for the country's revision and the undoing of the tragedy caused by the Trianon treaty (215). After this "interference," Magdolna is not only deemed genderless[21] but also unpatriotic, which causes a lot of difficulty for her – setting the narrative development of her Künstlerroman in motion.

Interestingly enough, while Szabó gives extensive details about the disciplinarity of institutional education that curtails the body's activities (by, for example, introducing uniforms, and forbidding not only jewelry and fancy clothes but also contact with boys other

[21] "While Cili was a natural born housewife, [...] I was considered a wonder creature without gender, who should never have been born" (*Für Elise* 69).

than family), and puts it under constant surveillance[22] in order to check whether the students abide by the "tons of new rules" listed in a little printed book (*Für Elise* 133), the body itself remains underthematized in the book. That is, Magdolna's problems and conflicts presented in *Für Elise,* as I have pointed out before, are not physical but primarily cognitive-ideological. For example, when she reaches puberty, what causes trouble for her are not the physical changes in her body and the need to come to terms with these changes, but the difficulty in obtaining reliable knowledge about them. Magdolna, the "frigidity" of whose mother is "revealed" by Magda Szabó in *Für Elise*, cannot turn to Lenke Jablonczay for answers, which adds to the family's unconventional division of labour concerning gendered tasks, since the girl has to turn to her father for the much needed information about the sexuality of the body:

> Bashfully, we just tried to figure out the secrets of adult life, [...] being reluctant to talk about these things even to our friends. [...] Due to the frigid silence of Lenke Jablonczay's womanly body, Cili and I lived through our teenage years speculating about the suspicions we had about male-female relationships, or trying to gather information from bad novels. We practically knew nothing about anything then, even though our biology reminded us each month that we were not kids any more. At times like these, other girls have their mothers to enlighten them; we didn't dare to bother Lenke Jablonczay, since as soon as we shyly approached her and tried to find out whether the unexpected symptom, which never occurred simultaneously for me and Cili, was a sign that we were sick, she would give us protective devices she herself made, and simply said this thing was not something to ponder about, as it was as natural as losing our baby teeth and having adult ones now, the body is changing. No other reasons were given, Lenke Jablonczay closed the subject immediately. [...] Again, the only person I could turn to in my trouble was my father; with difficulty, I told him what was confounding me, what I didn't understand, and his answer to my coy and awkwardly phrased question about the activities of a man and a woman before the birth of a baby was the simplest one ever received (164-8).

The passage above about Magdolna's sexual enlightenment refers back to the "originary moment" of the autobiography: the book starts with one of Szabó's moments of revealing family secrets that she promises in the paratext on the book jacket. On the first few pages of *Für Elise* she talks about her parents' marriage, which was satisfying as a friendship, but unhappy as a sexual partnership. The mother refused to sleep with her husband after

[22] "[O]ur each and every move was constantly surveyed by invisible eyes, who reported everything they observed to someone; and whatever roughness they found on us they would polish it down to the bone" (*Für Elise* 145).

Magdolna was born, which resulted in the father's seeking sexual gratification elsewhere. Magdolna learns about this fact only retrospectively, when she finds her father's poems after his death; and when the secret is revealed to her and her mother (or rather, when they find proof for their suspicions in the poems), Magdolna is surprised to see that her mother is not jealous or mad about the affair but understands and forgives her husband for his behaviour. In this moment, the mother gently forces her daughter to close her eyes and withdraw from reading the poems. This scene, in which a secret is revealed and then immediately covered again, gives an example for the narrative technique of foreshadowing that Szabó uses in the whole book, and at the same time it provides the framework for the treatment of sexuality, the underlying attitude of which is "tactful silence":

> I remained a child in my parents' relationship, no matter how old I was; my father was never a man for me, only a dad, and my mother never a wife but a woman who gave birth to me, and the image of the two copulating bodies that had once conceived me, even if it occasionally emerged in my adolescent mind, was immediately shunned in disgust, as I was offended even by the thought. I now understand that the model of their conduct and their tactful silence forged my personality just as much as the genetic formula I inherited from them. (*Für Elise* 8)

Perhaps this model of silence and demeanour operating in *Für Elise* is the reason why the mother's sexuality is dealt with so abruptly; moreover, it is staged in the ironic context of "the film version of a new type of family saga" (51), in which the father appears as "a sacredly benevolent, extremely erudite softie, a walking encyclopaedia, whose initial career choice was a mistake, and so was his marriage," and the mother is presented as "a frigid mermaid, who never recovered from her childhood traumas, but who will never grow legs in the majestic moment of marriage, and there's only one person in this whole wide world she loves, and that's her child" (52). Focusing on the alleged frigidity of the mother would seem an unfair treatment of her sexuality on Szabó's part, was it not for another piece in her autobiographical space, *Régimódi történet* [*An Old-fashioned Story*] (1977), in which the mother's biography is more detailed, and her sexuality is explained in different terms: it is suggested that she might

have been a lesbian or perhaps bisexual (there was a man whom she loved dearly but could never marry, and after that she only sought freedom in marriage, not love). But in *Für Elise*, the book of tactful revelations, Lenke Jablonczay is "as perfect as a diamond can be," whose "passion for the home country, universal morality and secular integrity has nothing to do with the body" (52).

Thus, in *Für Elise*, the secrets of bodies are not revealed, at least not fully. This non-exposure or limited discussion of bodies can be interpreted in terms of two of Baxter's main recurring "families of contradictions" in the dialogics of relating, that is, in terms of the dialectics of integration–separation and expression–nonexpression (185). According to Baxter, these families of contradictions "have multiple strands of meaning that are constituted differently depending on the particular kind of relating under study" (185), and the particular kind of context the relating is formed. In Szabó's *Für Elise*, the underthematization, nonrevelation or nonexpression of bodies seems to stand in line with the rigidity and surveillance of the book's moral and religious context of Calvinism. On the one hand, this context gains prominence in the autobiography as the institution against which the individual Künstler has to fight her intellectual-ideological battles; on the other hand, if seen retrospectively from the focus of the narrating "I," it provides the narrated "I" with a long-lasting shield to fend off attacks coming from other kinds of intellectual-ideological contexts.

2.1.3 Shifting focalization and multivocality as tools of dialogicity in *Für Elise*

The conflicts manifest in the relational dialogics of the novel, contextualized in terms of either the contradictory functions of Calvinist disciplinarity or gender(ed) relations, can also be interpreted with respect to narrative technique and autobiographical space. Here I will first examine how focalization and voice are used in *Für Elise* to construct a gap between the

childhood narrated self and the narrating self of the present, who is supposed to look back at the childhood self from a temporally and spatially distanced perspective. Before getting to the analysis of some relevant parts from the novel, however, I would like to discuss focalization in more general terms in order to further clarify and expand the narratological horizon I have introduced in Chapter 1.

When the narrator is the focalizer of a scene in a narrative (so narrator and focalizer are identical), it is generally referred to as external focalization, while internal focalization entails that one of the characters is the focalizer of a scene. This, as Göran Nieragden points out, causes a great deal of confusion, since the focalizer-narrator, if also a character, is "an internal textual element" (690) – meaning that s/he also functions on the diegetic level, that is, s/he is internal to the storyworld. Thus, Nieragden complicates the terms of external and internal focalization with Genette's distinction between homodiegetic ("eyewitness," or "within-the-storyworld") and heterodiegetic ("outside-of-the-storyworld") types of narration. He states that the narrator can be a character in the storyworld *and* a focalizer at the same time only in homodiegetic texts ("eyewitness" accounts), claiming that if such identities were possible in heterodiegetic texts, "a rupture in narrative communication would be the consequence," since the characters "would then be in a position to perceive the narrator of their own 'lives' and to reflect on the act of narrating by which they themselves are 'brought into being' in the first place" (690-1). Thus, Nieragden concludes, "[e]xternal focalization is always heterodiegetic" (691), which means that – contrary to the general lack of attention on focalization in the distinction between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration – in external focalization the narrator is never a character in the storyworld. In Nieragden's words, "personal identity of *character-focalizer* and *narrator-focalizer* is impossible in the case of a heterodiegetic narrative situation" (691).

This has special relevance to autobiographical texts because of the supposed (quasi or metaphysical) identity between the agent or character on the diegetic level (narrated subject), the focalizer, and the narrator of the autobiography. In Nieragden's narratological terms, an autobiographical text can only be homodiegetic, since only in homodiegesis can the narrator be identical with the focalizer *and* the character of the text. I, however, argue that accepting the identity and constancy of these narrative positions or roles throughout an autobiographical work would be tantamount to reverting to the metaphysical ideal of the unified autobiographical subject and foreclosing the possibility of its dialogicity (a kind of narrative "non-self-sameness"). *Für Elise* is a very good example for such dialogicity with its relatively wide gap between the narrated and narrating autobiographical subjects, which are constructed in a dynamic intra-action of dissimilarity.

I would like to emphasize here the virtuality of this gap between narrated and narrating selves, since, as I have already pointed out with reference to Löschnigg, both are constructed textually, in the moment of writing and reading, within the closed circuit of written signification, in which "the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 250). Having a look at how focalization shifts from one narrative self to the other and back not only shows how a gap between narrated and narrating autobiographical selves is constructed in order to make visible (or more precisely, readable) such ideological-cognitive conflicts as the ones Magdolna experiences in *Für Elise*, but also reveals the textual/linguistic nature of such selves and, more importantly, the fact that they are created *by way of* narratively constructing a gap between them (with a Butlerian analogy, the text creates the difference that it names). Thus, it is never the "experience" that finds its way to the narrative but a retrospective interpretation of (some kind of) experience: what is at the reader's disposal is the interpretive trace of experience, which is made readable by the employment of textual tools. In short, and in a somewhat Derridean vein, narratological tools

such as the construction of narrated and narrating selves by way of, for example, shifting focalization or multivocality (tools of dialogicity), are textual difference-making devices.

A nice example for shifting focalization in *Für Elise* is in the book's third chapter, "Sur le pont d'Avignon," which contains the follow-up to the moment Cili arrives in the Szabó family. The irony that is present in Szabó's whole book, and which derives from the novel's multivocality of autobiographical selves as well as the shifts in focalization, is perhaps the most caustic in this part. While the adult narrative voice opens the chapter with a description of cheap market paintings depicting a blond and a brown girl in a loving hug, and likens her childhood self and Cili to these stereotypical prefabricated images, it turns out in retrospect that both girls felt in the awkward moment of their first meeting that "what [was] happening [was] unacceptable" for young Magdolna, while it was taken by Cili as just another burden to bear (50). This scene of "late revelation," just like the whole chapter, juxtaposes the vision of various focalizers: that of the child Magdolna, the adult narrator, and Cili (the narrator's autobiographical doppelgänger), as well as an imagined audience, so scenes like this multiply the autobiographical self with the help of "temporalizing" and "spacing" perspective.

A page later, in the first sentence of the paragraph that contains one of the most sarcastic scenes of the book, Cili becomes the focalizer (but not the narrator) for a moment: it is her "alien eyes" through which the readers are first presented with the Szabó family in this passage. "The man in whose arms she had travelled here didn't look like a bad person, the lady was also kind to her, so Cili accepted the rearranged scene on the brand new stage, and played along with the family she'd never seen" (*Für Elise* 51). In the next sentence, however, this mis-en-scène is already presented through the "eye" of a camera: with a reference to Visconti, the text switches from theatre to cinema, to the scene of the "new type of family saga" I have discussed before. This shift in focus serves the purpose of distancing the family and the narrated subject(s) in it from the narrator (and thereby the reader), since the focalizer

is now the movie audience who "may not even see that in this modern image that inaugurates the new millenium, each member of the holy family is a little bit cross-eyed, even the donkey of Bethlehem" (52). This sarcastic depiction not only overwrites the cheap sentimentality of the little girl scene in the paintings but also undermines the idea of the family as unanimously "holy." The irony of this alternative presentation of the family gains additional emphasis with respect to the Calvinist context, where family morale is a vital part of the overall project of the integrated religious subject. The sarcasm in the scene above is in stark contrast with the neutral tone the narrator uses when telling other stories, for example, that of Mr. Ágoston, one of Magdolna's teachers, whom she is in love with, but who starts an affair with another student. When the forbidden relationship is disclosed, the teacher is expelled from the school and cast out from the profession, and he eventually commits suicide. Such variations in voice in the handling of different aspects of the same general moral content also add to the construction of the novel's dialogicity.

In general, the critique of the Calvinist context, especially the disciplinarity and oppression of its educational system, can be more fully interpreted in light of the dialogicity created by the juxtaposition of the child Magdolna's vision and that of the narrator. This dual perspective, supplemented by the other characters' various points of view (most notably, the parents' and Cili's), provides space for overwriting and reinterpretation: the adult narrator relates the conflicts of the child from a temporally and spatially distanced (differed and deferred) perspective, which keeps the disidentification of the narrated and narrating autobiographical subjects in place. The lack of knowledge about the body, which the child Magdolna attributes to the figure of her mother, can also be interpreted with respect to the adult Szabó's knowledge of sexuality and matrimony. A more comprehensive view of this knowledge is revealed in the other works of the author's oeuvre, which justifies the (re)reading of *Für Elise* within the context of Szabó's extended autobiographical space, where

each work, itself a closed narrative system, is in productive textual intra-action with all the others.

2.1.4 Missing gender in *Für Elise*

Focalization and multivocality, as well as the duplication of the narrated autobiographical subject with the involvement of Cili as a supplement-character, are basic and intertwined textual tools of subjectivity-construction, which multiply the autobiographical "I" even in such a "traditionally read" novel as *Für Elise*, so the book undermines the notion of the self-identical subject as a teleological outcome of autobiography even without overtly questioning its validity or providing more direct or alternative social-cultural critique. Indeed, some of the reviewers of *Für Elise* claim that it does not provide "real," more critical self-reflection, so it misses out on the opportunity of thematizing or problematizing gender(ed) identity and sexuality, especially with regard to their relevance to the autobiographical subject's relationship with her parents. Noémi Kiss, for example, wonders why Magdolna/Magda does not provide a psychoanalytic self-interpretation concerning her relationship with her father; in fact, N. Kiss reads the narrator's sentence about her father ("my father was never a man for me, only a dad") as the manifestation of her Electra-complex, where saying "no" is virtually a symptom indicating a desire to say "yes" ("Cili én vagyok" 102).

N. Kiss regards this denial and lack of enunciation as a more general problematic of autobiography, and also as a major undercurrent of *Für Elise*: "the possibility of verbalizing the unspeakable, making visible the invisible trope of the traumatic, is the central question and theme of this novel for me" ("Cili én vagyok" 100). Although N. Kiss states that the attempt to speak the unspeakable is doomed to failure because of its impossibility, she still argues that the "silence" of *Für Elise* about such highly loaded issues as "the female body

woven through with taboos," the mother's "frigidity" and unhappiness in marriage, or abusive disciplinarity in educational institutions is attributable to Szabó's traditional (i.e. "old-fashioned") textual space, in which the "I" cannot be placed "outside of itself" – that is, the autobiographical subject cannot reflect upon itself from a self-critical position (101). What is more, N. Kiss adds, the confessions of the "I" cannot enable her to escape "the psychological trap of the Oedipal triangle" (101). The inevitable outcome of these failures is an unreflected, traditional autobiography in which the "I" cannot uncover the "real" secrets of the unconscious (102). Since the narrator foregrounds the intellect of her narrated subject at the expense of her sexuality, the book follows a patriarchal tradition of autobiography, in which a female author is associated with intellect rather than sexuality. Apart from Noémi Kiss, Boglárka Nagy also considers Szabó's autobiographical subject "masculine" because she puts her strength, genius and intellect in the limelight, casting a shadow over the other characters of the narrative who may represent alternative voices (911).

Although both N. Kiss's and Nagy's review of *Für Elise* find "feminist worth" in the book, both N. Kiss's unreflected assessment of the usefulness of a psychoanalytic framework in feminist literary analysis, and the attribution of intellect to masculinity and sexuality to femininity, are highly problematic. Grosz, setting up a "Deleuzian framework" in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), points out that psychoanalysis tends to reduce "current adult factors to infantile precedents" and express a "need to endlessly read symptomatically, *to read events and impulses as being about something else*" (181, emphasis added). N. Kiss's reading of *Für Elise* is very much dependent on this need, the inclination to try to find a "secondary history" below the "primary text," an unseen layer of meaning under the surface, which, although unspeakable, could nevertheless be teased out from the text, were it not for Szabó's "old-fashioned" narrative technique that prevents the subject from reading herself from an exterior critical position (as opposed to, I presume, a "more postmodern"

technique, which makes the subject's non-self-sameness "readable"). My issue with this view does not so much concern the specific evaluation of Szabó's "outdated" text as the philosophy of language behind it, which presupposes, firstly, that there is a "real" and knowable meaning under the surface of language, and secondly, that narrative is necessarily symptomatic, and as such, traumatic. In my interpretive framework, both the systems theoretical understanding of language and communication, which treats (physical or material) experience and linguistic "communicative proposals" (and not representations!) on different planes, as well as the Derridean idea of the operation of language along the dynamics of différance rather than representation (a productive methodology of surface operations, as it were) refute this idea(l). Expecting the narrative subject to "step outside" and take a critical position (where?) is impossible both in a performative (Butlerian) and a systems theoretical framework of language, where the subjects narrating and narrated are the effects of the text, therefore, there are no external positions to take (so the position of the "unconscious," however construed theoretically, is not an external, a "true" or "real" position either).

Even more problematic is N. Kiss's and Nagy's feminist evaluation of Szabó's autobiographical subject as "masculine" and her discourse as "patriarchal" on grounds of the binary of intellect/sexuality, since it leaves both terms unquestioned, while it attributes them to masculinity and femininity, as well as language and the body, respectively. This (un)critical move not only disregards the long-term problematic of the discursive treatment and construction of sexuality (as, for example, seen in Butler and her critics discussed in Chapter 1) but also the dynamic intra-action between the sexuality/sexualization of the body, the sexuality/sexualization of the intellect, and both the sexuality and the intellect of the text. Szabó's *Für Elise*, similarly to her other works, thematizes these material-discursive relations, for example, in the connection between love and intellect in marriage. One of Szabó's most important narrative techniques is to put Magdolna into theatrical or imaginary roles (a notable

alter ego for Magdolna is called Mabel Shanlett) or to present her as various characters from other novels (for example, Scarlett from *Gone with the Wind*), who are all "victorious" in love and marriage. Cili's unfulfilled love to a young man, Ádám Textor, while staged in terms of a tragedy, is deemed "too real" by the mother, and therefore, not to be envied by Magdolna (*Für Elise* 336). There are several conflicts in Magdolna's life deriving from the confusion of "theatre" and "reality," for example, in an episode where Magdolna flirts with Ludwigh, an external member on her graduation exam board, acting and speaking as if their interaction was a scene from a grand operetta (375-8).

What is most noteworthy in these role plays is that the roles are not necessarily acted out according to gender norms: as her mother states, Magdolna always plays the star, since everything is theatre for her, where she is the leading playboy and Cili is the prima donna (*Für Elise* 26). Thus, gender performance does not only appear on the extradiegetic level but also on the diegetic level. Júlia Vallasek suggests that the construction of Magdolna and Cili as parallel characters is organized along binary oppositions, where "Cili is beautiful and Dódi is smart," and where it is mostly Magdolna who takes the active role of leader and caretaker, while Cili is the passive counterpart, who "instantly annuls hopes and wishes as soon as an obstacle comes up" (Szabó, *Für Elise*, quoted in Vallasek). At the same time, Cili is her sister's "living conscience," who warns, advises and worries about her. As Vallasek points out, this division of characteristics and roles exemplifies a classical male-female relationship. This is probably why N. Kiss and Nagy also consider Magdolna's and the narrator's characters "masculine" and "patriarchal."

It would be questionable, however, to regard such role plays as a "classical" enactment of gender roles, since it would amount to a paradoxical identification of gender with biological sex (along a stereotypified gender binary, which is problematic in and of itself), and, consequently, to an exclusion of the possibility and examination of gender either as

performance or as narrative construction. If gender performativity is examined in *Für Elise* as part of the written narrative, it can be interpreted as a "double performance" as such, being performative not only on the diegetic level but also on the level of narration. The narrator's account of her success later in life – which is charged with patriarchy – is made visible with the same narrative techniques of shifting focalization and voice as the ones used for the construction of autobiographical subjectivity; that is, it is part of the narrative construction. Thus, it makes sense only from the temporal and spatial distance the narrative creates, and within the context of Szabó's whole autobiographical space: the child Magdolna's jealousy and ignorance (both in terms of lack of knowledge and ignorance of others) are forgivable and justifiable only from the adult narrator's focal point, from the point of view of her subsequent success. But this "technical" distance is strongly linked to Szabó's self-irony, which instantly undermines the "patriarchal glory" the book is charged with. A good example for this is the scene where Magdolna, now a successful writer and honorary citizen, returns to Debrecen and meets the staff of her secondary school, but she completely ignores Ms. Fejér, the teacher who tortured her (*Für Elise* 213-4). This event is also presented as a theatrical scene, for the occasion of which the adult Magdolna "has made herself up" (214), but since the narrator involves not only an ironic focus on her (yet another) autobiographical self but also some other voices in the recollection of this experience (her other teachers express their disapproval when they see how she treats Ms. Fejér), the dialogicity achieved with the help of these narrative tools undermines the unanimous glory of the event:

> Monsieur [the French teacher] heard what we were talking about. He remained silent for a moment, then he said to me very softly: "You've become a happy wife, haven't you? Those who hindered you in your career can't stop you any more. How much longer do you want to keep your grudge, ma chère? Poor Margit has long died of her own self. You should have made peace now, lest it should be too late five years later." I turned away from François to Kibédy; as far as my role was concerned, I've played it perfectly, carefully working out each detail, I was wearing inch-long fake eyelashes and golden buskins from Rome. At the next meeting my theatre mask was already useless: I had no one to ignore, Fejér had died by then. Whenever I cross the border still marked by Trianon, I recall that she would've been able to kill for this piece of land, and I realize, in fright, that my wrath has fallen off my shoulders, just like a heavy sack. (214)

The spatial and temporal shifts in perspective and voice, which the narrative also uses for the creation of historical dialogicity, thus serve as interpretive tools in *Für Elise*: they keep the meaning of such notions as success and failure in motion, while they problematize their gendered character. What Vallasek considers as binary oppositions used for the construction of a male-female relationship between Cili and Dódi are not obvious either: it is true that Magdolna has the initiative most of the time, and Cili "follows her lead," but at the same time Cili excels in mathematics and everything related to numbers, an area typically associated with men, while Magdolna is a person of the humanities (147). This is but one aspect that troubles the gendered construction of the doppelgängers; what is more important, however, is that gendered construction itself, especially within the closed system of a written narrative, cannot be postulated in terms of two diametrically opposed sets of characteristics: this notion would be alien to both Butler's idea of gender performance, in which the characteristics themselves are generated in and by way of their own "action" (which makes them productive elements of their own construction), and systems theory, under the terms of which both genders can be imagined as marked entities of and within the same system, so the assumption of one gender (the masculine) as being unmarked (outside the terms of marking) while the other (the feminine) being marked (inside the terms of marking) does not make sense. In this framework, being gendered equals being marked in one way or another, which notion is especially applicable in the analysis of written texts: in a systems theoretical context, any communicative proposal (and as such, any literary text) is the generation of "marked spaces." On the basis of Luhmann's and George Spencer-Brown's ideas about the operation of systems, Cary Wolfe suggests that although differences remain central to the operation of systems, what makes self-referential systems paradoxical is "the unity of the difference between the two sides of the distinction that anchors the system's code" (15). Wolfe brings

the legal system as an example: "the first-order distinction between legal and illegal in the legal system is itself a product of the code's own self-reference – that is to say, the problem is that *both* sides of the distinction are instantiated by *one* side of the distinction (namely, the legal: hence the tautology 'legal is legal'[23])" (15). This means that on the level of self-referential observation, whatever that is defined with regard to the system as its opposition is made sense as such only in terms of the system, that is, only from within. The "tautological unity of this distinction," Wolfe continues, "may be disclosed only by a second-order observer, operating within another system and another code, which must remain blind to its paradoxical distinction if it is to use that distinction to process events for the system's autopoiesis, and so on and so forth" (15). The "formal notation of this dynamic" is processed by Clarke in *Posthuman Metamorphosis* and is quoted by Wolfe to show how distinctions come about by way of systemic observations. According to Clarke, "[t]he marking of a distinction produces the following elements, collectively referred to as 'the form'":

- the indication, the marked state: "the inside the distinction"
- the indication's exterior, the unmarked state: "the outside of the distinction"
- the distinction itself as the unity of marked and unmarked states
- a second distinction between marked and unmarked spaces (66-7).

Clarke also provides a figure to present "the form" of all kinds of distinctions (67). Figure 3 below, which is Clarke's visual translation of distinctions, shows how marked and unmarked states are bound together by the distinction itself (that is, by separating the inside of the distinction from its outside), as well as how marked and unmarked spaces relate to each other by setting up a marked space within which the distinction operates.

[23] Just like "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" for Gertrude Stein in "Sacred Emily."

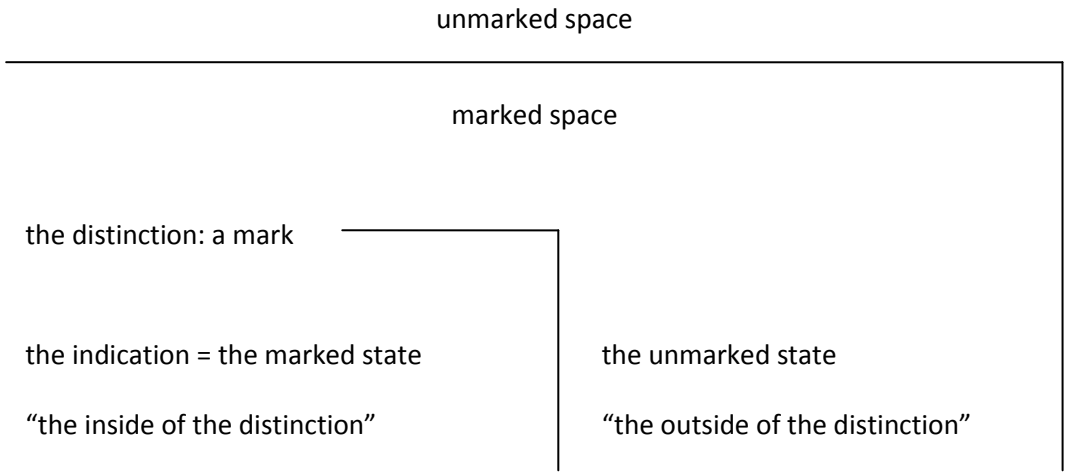

Figure 3: The Form

This scheme can be adapted to give an account of all kinds of binary codes, as it gives a general pattern of how systems operate in their self-definition by setting up binary distinctions "from within" and then applying their self-generated distinctions to define and describe their environment. Drucilla Cornell has already pointed out how gender can be seen as such a system, which "operates to limit the possibility of the representability of woman and, as a result, the status that can be given to 'woman' as an observer" (187). Here "'woman' as an observer" is meant to refer to 'woman' as a second-order (critical) observer of her own gendering within the system of patriarchy (and the binary code of masculine/feminine) but in "the outside of the distinction." The fundamental binary of gender as masculine/feminine may be initially arranged in Clarke's form in the manner indicated in Figure 4: the feminine side takes the marked state, marked both by the distinction itself and the masculine side, on which the position of "markers" (observers) can be taken. Cornell argues that for a critical feminist analysis of gender, it is indispensable for 'woman' to be able to take the position of observer, "to have 'appear' on the stage of history" in order to "mark out the reality of gender as a

system from other possibilities of the meaning and representability of her own sexual difference" (188).

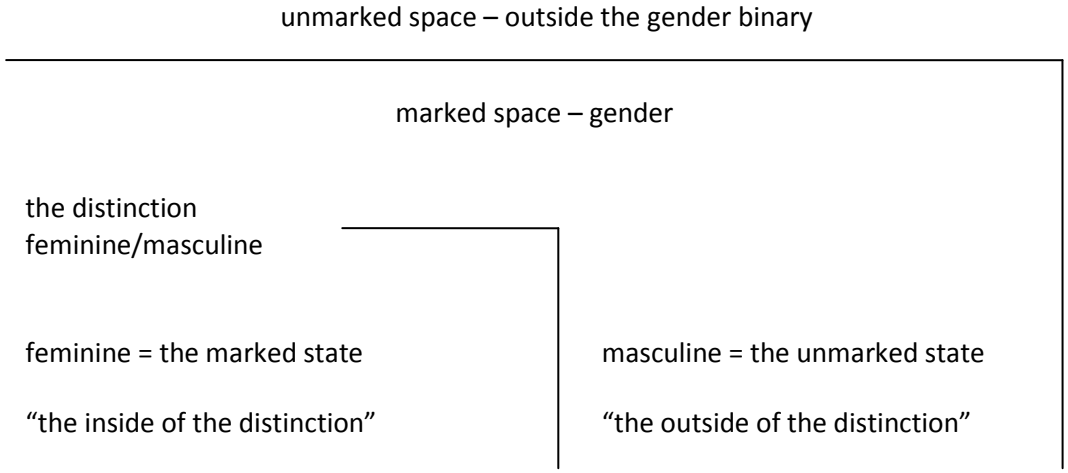

Figure 4: The form of gender

In the case of *Für Elise*, Clarke's form can be applied in two ways: to mark the distinction between Cili and Magdolna in terms of the gender binary, and to model text and context in the specific case of autobiography. In the case of the latter (see: Figure 5), the autobiographical text takes the marked space, and the context the unmarked space ("unmarked" only with regard to the text, not to itself). The autobiographical subject is constructed within this marked space along the distinction set up by the narrative act: the narrated (observed) "I" (along with her doppelgänger) remains within "the inside of the distinction," separated from the narrating (observing) "I" by virtue of the mark that the narration "carves out." While the negotiation between the marked and unmarked states of the autobiographical subject occurs with the help of narrative tools (such as focalization and voice), in which, however, the narrated "I" cannot take the position of second-order observer, the distinction itself, as I have

pointed out above, operates only within the marked space of the text, and for an "external" observer both (or all) "I's" are textual effects, equally narrated as such.

With the involvement of the gender binary in this scheme, the dynamics along the two sides of the distinction become complicated. Both Cili and Magdolna are within the marked space of gender, but if Magdolna is given the unmarked (masculine) position with regard to Cili (as some reviewers of *Für Elise* would suggest so), she would fall into the position of the narrating "I," which is not the case. In order to be able to indicate Magdolna's position within this scheme, a second distinction must be set up within the marked space of the text (as seen in Figure 6), which results in the disturbance of the binary structure.

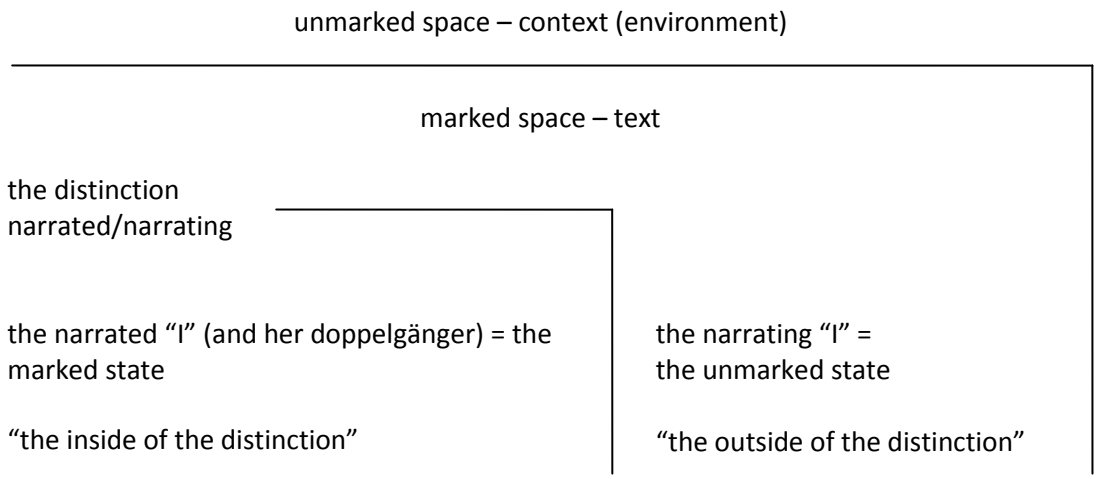

Figure 5: The form of autobiographical subject

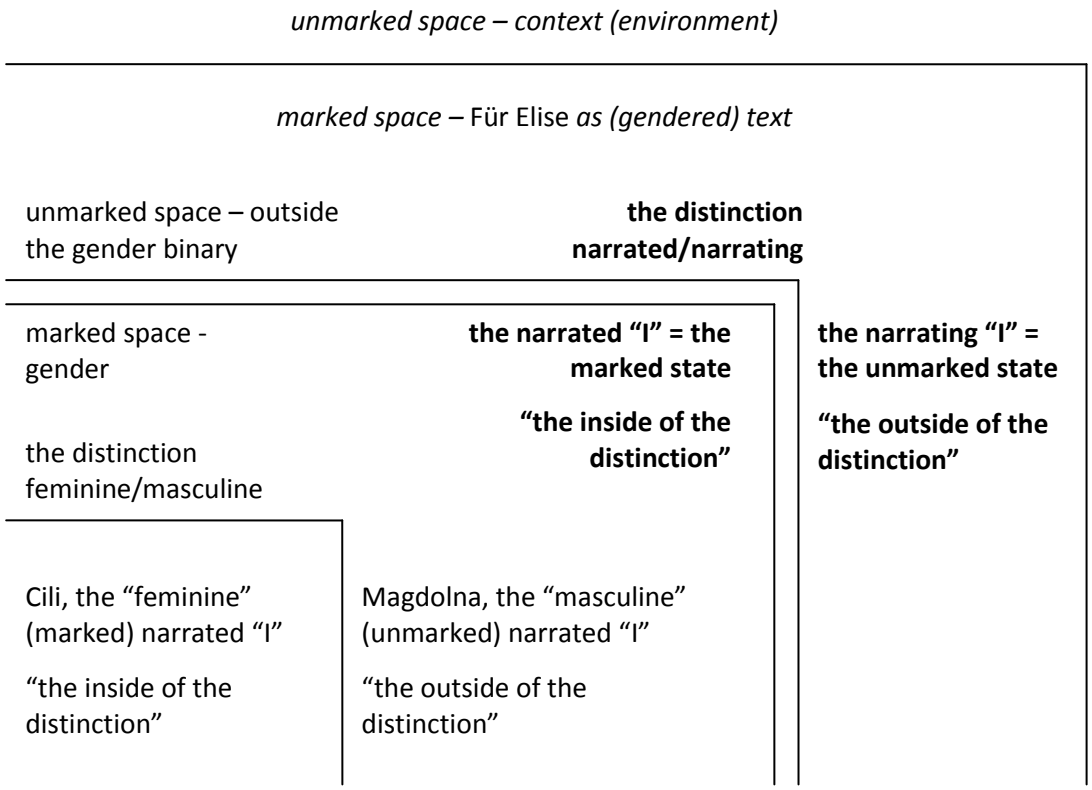

Figure 6: A possible gendered structure of the autobiographical subject(s) in *Für Elise*

In Figure 6, which is but a possible arrangement for a segment of the gender dynamics in which *Für Elise* can be analyzed, the double lines indicate the distinction between the unmarked and marked spaces of gender, as well as the narrated (marked) and narrating (unmarked) states within the marked space of the narrative itself. The figure shows that Magdolna's (supposedly "masculine") character is both marked and unmarked at the same time, which suggests a paradoxical position, since her marked or unmarked state can be seen as such only with respect to the particular distinction according to which it is observed. If the idea of gender (at least in text) as discursively constructed is accepted, it suggests that the narrated subject will always be in a marked state in one way or another, regardless of its position with respect to the gender binary. So while Magdolna is the "unmarked" character in the text, according to systemic logic, her "unmarked" (either ungendered or masculine) status makes sense only in relation to Cili's marked state, the "inside of the distinction." It is

inevitable, then, that the two characters together should constitute the marked space of gender. Given that both of them are girls, the novel's gender marking shakes the normative association of masculine/feminine with male/female.

Moreover, as Clarke states, "[a] single act of distinction always already produces another distinction from which an infinite series of distinctions can ramify – and conversely, a complex of systemic distinctions can often be collapsed back into (the multiplicity of) a single observation" (67). That is, another gender distinction may be superimposed above the distinction of text/context in Figure 6, which would result in the narrating "I" falling into a marked position with respect to a social category, regardless of her unmarked position in the marked space of the narrative. With the generation of "an infinite series of distinctions" – in which gendered distinctions may appear on various levels – a constant flux of signification can be achieved, which may result in the slippage of meaning, as will also be seen in the subsequent analyses of the dissertation.

2.1.5 Conclusion: Missing the body in *Für Elise* once again

My purpose with the analysis of Szabó's *Für Elise* has partly been to show that even in the case of a writer whose prose is critically regarded as "traditional" (i.e. "nicely outdated") in comparison with a "new generation" of postmodern writers in a particular (national) literary context, the ideology of "how things were" provides the pretext for the fictionalization of life, and the construction of "real-life" characters as part of an author's autobiographical space is not a phenomenon of "truth" but is based on narrative options and choices. I regard the utilization of such discursive-constructive options and choices posthumanist (rather than necessarily postmodern), since such an understanding of fictionality sheds light on the

systemic operation of both gender and narrative, for example, in the dynamics of linguistic negotiation with(in) such discursive systems as gender or religious morality.

I have pointed out that gendered "truths" within the discursive context of Calvinist morality render the body underthematized in *Für Elise*. Szabó's themes and conflicts remain textual and ideological in this book, and sexuality, also as a result of the constraints imposed by the puritan religious context, remains largely unnamable. For example, the linguistic signifiers shift their (gendered) meaning in this context: instead of the word "lecherous" [*parázna*], the physical education instructor uses the word "wasteful" [*pazarló*] to refer to the students, which confuses even the parents (150). In a superficial reading, which presupposes the fixability of textual meaning, such unnaming may seem "old-fashioned." But interpreted within the context of the imperative of talking and writing about sexuality in order to "speak the truth" about the body (as Foucault discusses it in *The History of Sexuality*), writing about, rather than keeping silent, about bodies (a possibility presupposed, for example, in psychoanalysis, as well) is also a constraint, but of a different kind. Such a textualized life as the one Szabó constructs in her autobiographical space may seem to foreclose the (overt) discussion of sexuality, but the reason for this foreclosure may only partly be attributed to the "prudishness" of the literate society she is brought up in. It is also possible that this interpretive context does not make sexuality a namable concern because it is indeed unnamable – in the systemic terms of the body. There is no story of the body (of bodies) in *Für Elise* except in the tragedy of dead or missing bodies, for example, the body of Cili, who is a "missing" body from the start, provided her historical counterpart has never existed (even her parents are obliterated from the face of the earth). She is an autobiographical construct whose antithesis is not the historical bodies residing in the "environment" of the text but forgetfulness, so her thesis is narrative remembrance, which implies a different (textual) system operating on the basis of signification and, consequently, slippage.

In any case, the Calvinist ideal, which constrains as well as generates the differential understanding of textual signifiers, is constructed by Szabó as a source of empowerment, too. Her parents brought her up to be a successful woman, and her success both derives from, and is narrated in, an extensive, richly *textured* autobiographical space. The textuality of such a space, which literate cultures born into a narrative tradition of humanism are familiar with, is both a systemic constraint and a possibility for moral and ethical action and intervention by way of resignification – in case physical action becomes impossible or is not an option. In the following part I will read Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War* as such an act of intervention, but one which is contextualized very differently from *Für Elise*.

2.2 Telling, Forgetting, and Forgiving: Alaine Polcz's *One Woman in the War* and the Ethical Project of Autobiography[24]

> "We women must find the way to really be women and creators at once.
> Of course, you can't ride two horses at the same time.
> But we'll eventually design that saddle and train those horses to bear it somehow."
> – *Alaine Polcz (Burger)*

Alaine Polcz's manifesto quoted above, similarly to her autobiographical novel *One Woman in the War: Hungary 1944-1945*, focuses on the duality of a woman's existence as Polcz sees it: she is not simply a creator (a psychologist-turned-writer in her case) but a woman *and* a creator at the same time. For her, these roles or identities are often incompatible, due to the complex double standards and impositions the various social relations and "bonds of love and duty" put on women. *One Woman in the War* is a text of conflicting expectations and motivations in more than one sense. As concerns the actual creation of the piece, the fact that

[24] This subchapter of the dissertation is an extended version of an earlier conference paper of mine entitled "The Subject's Imperative of Telling and Forgiving: Alaine Polcz's Autobiographical Novel *One Woman in the War*" (Kőrösi 2012b).

it was dictated into a tape recorder in the early hours, before Polcz left for her professional work (Tezla 11), already shows the difficulties a woman may have to face when trying to balance writing and doing her "ordinary job" (i.e. basically anything else).[25] Thematically, the text addresses, among other important issues, the incompatible expectations men (for example, husbands) put on women in a patriarchal society, so the riding of two (or more) idiomatic horses at the same time becomes an everyday reality not only for Polcz but for a large number of women even today, so much so that it is accepted as a natural condition of women's life in modern societies. The power of *One Woman in the War*, in my opinion, partly derives from its providing an account of this female condition embedded in a narrative that is contextualized and defined by living on the frontline at the end of the Second World War, a historical situation far from the everyday and ordinary (at least from the vantage point of peaceful times). As such, the text not only gives a wife's perspective on married life but also serves as a historical document of war trauma, while it extends the limits of autobiography by way of reusing it for therapeutic purposes. In the following analysis, I will examine all of these thematic and contextual aspects of the book with a feminist theoretical focus on the (post)humanist ethics of vulnerability and a different kind of female agency formulated thereby, which are constitutive of a sense of embodied subjectivity that may both diverge from the stable subject of classical autobiography and extend the poststructuralist idea of the subject as predominantly discursive.

[25] It is also symptomatic that Polcz's second husband, Miklós Mészöly, was a professional writer, while Polcz was primarily a psychologist who started to publish non-work-related texts with *One Woman in the War* at the age of 69. Yet even though her psychological and thanatological work comprises most of her written output, she became popular with *One Woman in the War*, which won the Hungarian "Book of the Year" award in 1991.

2.2.1 Confession, testimony, and monolithic meanings

The primary concern of Polcz's autobiography is not the construction of a stable autobiographical subject, but confession and testimony. In this respect, the text's motto serves as a thematic guide to the reader: "War is not easy. Neither is marriage. Still, I will try to tell you how things were, because I must tell you some time" (v). Serving as a vital paratext to the parallel exposition of war, marriage, and the imperative of telling, the motto already creates a rhetorical situation in which the narrative persona constructs the "you" of "an adequate witness to engage in therapeutic listening" (Gilmore, "Agency" 85) well before the main text starts.[26] Apart from serving as an important tool in the fulfillment of the text's confessional and testimonial agenda, shifting focus from the "I" to the "you" also points towards an ethos different from the self-centeredness of traditional autobiography that constructs the textual representation of a "great person(a)" (for example, *Für Elise* may be a more traditional autobiography in this respect). This rhetorical move can be linked to Cavarero's "morality of pronouns," which she details as follows in *Relating Narratives*:

> the *you* [*tu*] is a term that is not at home in modern and contemporary developments of ethics and politics. The 'you' is ignored by the individualistic doctrines, which are too preoccupied with praising the rights of the *I*, and the 'you' is masked by a Kantian form of ethics that is only capable of staging an *I* that addresses itself as a familiar 'you' [...]. Neither does the 'you' find a home in the schools of thought to which individualism is opposed – these schools reveal themselves for the most part to be affected by a moralistic vice, which, in order to avoid falling into the decadence of the *I*, avoids the contiguity of the you, and privileges collective, plural pronouns. Indeed, many 'revolutionary' movements (which range from traditional communism to the feminism of sisterhood) seem to share a curious linguistic code based on the intrinsic morality of pronouns. The *we* is always positive, the *plural you* [*voi*] is a possible ally, the *they* has the face of an antagonist, the *I* is unseemly, and the *you* [*tu*] is, of course, superfluous. (90-1)

I find it a significant aspect of *One Woman in the War* that the text addresses the singular "you" as an "adequate witness," since the space it constructs for Polcz's personally and

[26] It is also worth noting that this "you" is the familiar version of the Hungarian "you" ("*te*"), and not the formal one ("*ön*"), which increases the intimacy of the narrative situation, differentiating it from a more formal confessional setup between, for example, a priest and a confessor in church.

historically imperative confession and testimony provides an alternative ethico-political modality for evaluating and coming to terms with trauma. Rather than proclaiming a collective sense of historical loss (as evidenced, for example, in some rhetoric of Trianon as a "national tragedy"[27]) that disregards the fact that historical events affect individuals differently according to their multiply defined social, cultural, economic and geographic situations, *One Woman in the War* mediates the story of indeed one woman and gives an account of how she was affected by particular historical events in a certain geographical and temporal location, without wishing to elevate her autobiography on a more general level in order to "speak for the masses." There are several places in the text where this sense of "uniqueness of experience" is suggested by way of silence or a lack of comprehension, indicating a glaring difference between the understanding of characters that have been ultimately affected by a particular situation or experience and that of characters that have not. I would like to quote two of these examples here to point out both their similarities and differences with respect to experiencing unique situations and the source of human particularities. Quite early in the book Polcz recounts instances of Jewish deportation from Budapest and other war events in 1944, which she witnessed during their honeymoon and early married life with her first husband, János, and their travel back home to Transylvania in fright lest they should find their family and acquaintances killed by bombs (18-26).[28] After this series of juxtapositions between war events and snippets from her married life, the narrator reminds the implied audience that "theater of war or not, life bubbled merrily. Theaters and movie houses were packed; it was impossible to find an empty table in

[27] The "Statue of Hungarian Pain" in Debrecen, Hungary, originally erected in 1933, removed in 1949, and re-erected in 2000, is a very telling example for the representation of the collective national loss at Trianon, all the more so because the statue features the mutilated body of a woman who, as the engraving on the pedestal reads, "represents Hungary's pain as she is crying over the fate of her children abducted by the Treaty of Trianon." The history of this statue is overviewed in Róbert Kerepeszki's paper "Trianon's *Lieu de Mémoire* in Debrecen: The 'Statue of Hungarian Pain'" (2010).

[28] In the case of *One Woman in the War*, the page numbers in parentheses refer to the 2002 English edition of the book.

restaurants; outings and the entertainment of guests at home followed one another in quick succession" (26). The other example is also related to the narrator's reunion with her family, but the situation is substantially different: having been trapped in the frontline in Csákvár, where she had to witness and suffer all the horrors of the war including hunger, dirt, lice, brutality, rape, and the constant fear of death, she returns to Budapest where her family is known to be staying. A number of material, as well as emotional and discursive aspects in the recollection of this reunion create the effect of a cognitive-affective gap between the narrator and her surroundings, especially the people she is now reunited with:

> There were no panes in the windows; their frames were pasted over with paper, instead. But I remember I was astonished and surprised to see the table spread with a white tablecloth. We had dinner, a real dinner.
>
> We sat down and ate. I was full of lice and filthy; I had only washed my hands; nothing else entered my mind in the commotion present in the apartment.
>
> Naturally, my mother wept and was happy and hugged me. I looked at her and was happy for her. I was happy they all were alive, though not very much so.
>
> I myself wasn't very happy about anything and didn't much believe in anything. I was already carrying the sickness that would prevent me from ever giving birth to children, and I didn't know whether I had syphilis or not. I suspected that I could infect somebody badly, and I did not want to infect anyone.
>
> We were seated at the table; I did not even take out the little piece of sausage I had kept hidden to this point. It seemed ridiculous on this occasion. We were having tongue in tomato sauce. I looked at it, marveling; I ate it silently.
>
> They told me the Russians had raped women. "Where you were, too?" asked my mother. "Yes," I replied, "where I was, too." "But they didn't take you away, did they?" she asked. "Yes, everyone," I replied, and I kept on eating. My mother gave me a little look and said in amazement, "But why did you let them?" "Because they hit me," I replied and I kept on eating. I did not consider the entire matter to be either important or interesting.
>
> Someone asked airily and drolly, "Many times?" "I lost count," I said, and I kept on eating. "Just think, we had lice in the cellar," my mother said. "We did, too," I said. "But surely you didn't get infested." "I did indeed!" "With head lice?" my mother asked. "Every kind," I said, and I kept on eating. Then we talked about other things.
>
> My mother called me aside after dinner and said, "My dear girl, don't tell such nasty stories, people might believe them!"
>
> I looked at her. "Mother, it is the truth." She began crying and put her arms around me. Then I said, "Mother, I said they took everyone away, they raped every woman! You said they took away women here, too."
>
> "Yes, but only those who were whores. You are not one," my mother said. Then she threw herself on me and begged, "My dear, tell me it is not true!" "All right," I said, "it is not true. They took me away just to nurse the sick." (120-1)

While the first example calls the readers' attention to the fact that historical events such as wars affect people differently by confirming that family and cultural life did not stop in the

middle of building ghettos and dropping bombs, the second scene works with more material details and on a much more personal level. Thus, although both excerpts above show how different people's reactions to the same situations may be depending on the extent to which they are personally affected, the narrator's ignorance and naivety informs the first passage, while in the second scene the physical violence, deprivation, and humiliation she has had to endure fundamentally change her affective-epistemological position with respect to the people in her circle, especially her mother. This latter episode, in which the body's experiences result in the subject's differential positioning *vis-à-vis* her others (her audience), supports Cavarero's point that "reciprocal identification," a vital element in what she calls the "empathetic theory" of modern life narrative (either in literature or, for example, in a social context of consciousness-raising), is not really possible. According to Cavarero's narrative ethics, as I have outlined in Chapter 1, there are no common identities into which the "I" can dissolve, since each person's life stories are different. Her altruistic ethics of relation "does not support empathy, identification, or confusions" but "desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction" (91-2). In this respect, a number of places in Polcz's book, such as the one quoted above, refute the ideology ingrained in the theory of empathetic reading, and express an altruistic ethics of relation by way of stressing "the irremediable uniqueness of the other" (Cavarero 91).

I find Cavarero's discussion of the morality of pronouns and narrative ethics relevant for yet another important reason, which also relates to narrative gender construction and women's autobiographical writing. She points out that "beginning with the eighteenth century, the sense of the 'self' is articulated above all through the use of a history of suffering and tribulation told by another – most of all by someone who belongs to the ranks of the oppressed" (91). This tradition, which Cavarero links to the development of the theory of

empathetic reading, also recalls hagiography,[29] a term Louise O. Vasvári uses in her discussion of *One Woman in the War* to point out that Polcz's autobiography does not display feminist strength, since it is confined to speaking about the pain and humiliation of the body in marriage and war "in the inherited language of female victimhood and not of agency," so, ultimately, "the description only of the endless pain inflicted on that body places the work squarely in the tradition of a spiritual autobiography, even of hagiography, rather than as an example of feminist life writing" (82). The concept of agency Vasvári misses from Polcz's book, however, is deeply embedded in the humanist ideology of the active subject, which is interrogated by *One Woman in the War* exactly by its focus on how both historically contingent occurrences and social categories may limit one's possibilities for oppositional action. The exposition of this focus reinterprets the very notion of "oppositional action" in that it points out how actions for sheer survival may themselves constitute opposition in situations of peril. Moreover, as I have mentioned in Chapter 1, discussions on posthumanist life writing, especially those dealing with pain and illness narratives (for example, Leigh Gilmore's essay, which I will return to in the subsequent analyses in Chapter 3) suggest that alternative conceptions of agency are constructed as a result of the necessity to take into account non-human entities (for example, physical symptoms, natural disasters, or non-human organisms) in the construction of subjectivity. Thus, I alternatively locate the agency of Polcz's narrator in the act of telling her story to the audience of late-20th-century Hungary, where, as Albert Tezla writes, the past horrors of the Second World War "had lingered on in the farthest reaches of the national memory as rumor and suspicion about the violent acts committed against women during a time of chaos, havoc, and savagery" (1). Polcz effectively broke the silence surrounding these events during the state socialist era with the publication of

[29] Hagiography refers to the books and writings on, as well as the study of, the lives of saints (*Webster's New World Dictionary* 606).

her book two years after the regime change in 1989, so writing in her case is indeed an ethical and historical act.

The gendered and sexualized aspect of much of the violence Polcz chronicles is painfully obvious, as the second excerpt above also shows. But it is not only the serial rapes committed by the Russian soldiers that construct violence as gendered in the autobiography: sexual abuses start early in the narrator's marriage, so the soldiers' actions seem to be an almost "natural" continuation of the husband's misogyny and sexism, which manifests in his verbal abuses, infidelity, and incapacity to love and respect his wife. She also contracts a venereal disease from him early on as a result of his womanizing habits, so the infections she catches from the soldiers in the course of the rapes form a direct line of sexual pathology which starts with the husband's STD, and develops into a gynecological illness that proves nearly lethal and results in her infertility. As such, marital sexuality also becomes a means of submission, and in a way it foreshadows the dehumanizing aspects of the rape committed by the Soviet soldiers.

It is not only these overtly sexual(ized) occurrences, however, that construct the gendered thematics of Polcz's text. The previous excerpt from the book also testifies to the widespread ignorance and sexism that surface in rape discourses even today, manifesting in such commonly held beliefs as anyone who is raped "asks for it" in one way or another, or if there is no physical violence involved, it does not count as rape, or soldiers in war only take women who are "whores by profession." While the mother's words communicate such beliefs in a blatant manner, the narrator also calls herself a whore in another episode, when, still in Csákvár, she comes into the focus of one of the Russian commanding officers, who wants to have sex with her in exchange for meat:

> He received me gently. I was served a good dinner. I waited for what was to follow. If I stay with him for the night, he said, he will give me half a pig. Good Lord! half a pig!

> I went to bed with him without hesitation. [...] He was very gentle and pleasant; this affected me more painfully than being raped without any bargaining. Nevertheless, I tried to "behave." I wanted to leave early in the morning. I asked him to let me go. I was walking in the corridor. The woman cook, who was also the cook at the hospital, was coming toward me; she was cooking here now. She looked at me, the hospital's "little darling." I had gone to bed, even though they did not beat me, did not strike me; it showed in her eyes what she was thinking, "You are a whore."
>
> Actually, I was a whore in the strictest sense of the word. A whore is someone who goes to bed for money or some other kind of benefit. A whore is someone who deliberately acquires something with her body.
>
> Of course, this never entered my mind there. I did not think of anything. I did no thinking. Only some great bitterness abided within me. I felt it was unbearable, and not just this, but everything, the totality. What a gray morning! What is a gray morning? The nadir of human humiliation. I did not receive the half of a pig. I felt relieved. (Polcz 107-8)

This part constitutes one of the moments in the text where the narrator is openly self-reflexive, and where the temporal gap between experience and narration becomes explicit. It also exposes the fact that the act of autobiographical narration entails retrospective interpretation, which may "rewrite" the diegetic level, as well, just like in this episode. That is, the cook's reflection on Polcz's behavior – "You are a whore" – must be a retrospective insertion, since if Polcz "did no thinking" in those days, it is most likely she may not have been able to read the cook's expression as a sign of condemning her for sleeping with the commanding officer. Thus, both the cook's and the narrator's opinion regarding the narrated self's act as prostitution is constructed by the self-reflexive act of autobiographical narration. However, the main purpose of this dual focalization is to juxtapose two opinions, one informed by stereotypical ideas about women's roles and sexuality discussed above, and one constructed by the embodied experience of such "war prostitution." Therefore, both a retrospective self-evaluation and a social critique emerge from the presentation of this dual interpretation, justifying Cavarero's idea outlined in Chapter 1 that one's life gains shape and meaning only after being narrated from a rhetorical metaposition. As "the story comes after the event and the actions from which it results" (2), autobiographical narration also entails reinterpretation by way of reiteration, just like in the episode above, which reconceptualizes prostitution in a war context. In my opinion, such reconceptualization may also fall into the category of "feminist writing," if such categorization is indeed imperative for feminist

criticism, since a gender critical meaning may be teased out from the various layers and themes of a text, and is not necessarily or exclusively related to the humanist ideal of the active agent (or the humanist notion of the autobiographical writer as a self-same subject whose narrating and narrated selves exist in perfect and stable unison). As such, "hagiographic" writing may also carry critical potential, even if not consonant with some theoretical expectations about female agency constructed in writing.

Unlike Vasvári, some critics who have written on *One Woman in the War* find Polcz's "enumeration of suffering" one of the strongest aspects of the text. According to Sándor Radnóti, for example, the impassive tone in which the horrors of the war are detailed in Polcz's book as natural occurrences of everyday, ordinary life (the emphasis here being on "order" in "ordinary") creates the book's aesthetic effect, which contributes to its authenticity (1371). While autobiographical authenticity is also a rhetorical effect, since the experience, the affective response to it, and their narration are not only temporally and spatially distanced from one another but also operate on different levels of existence, and according to different systemic logics (as I have discussed in Chapter 1), *One Woman in the War* is indeed premised on the reinterpretation of ordinariness and naturalness in times of war, as well as the paradoxical relationship between the unique and the collective. The previous excerpt from the book provides an example of how "prostitution" and "rape" are reconfigured and reinterpreted by becoming ordinary practices, happening not just once but repeatedly, almost on a daily basis (Radnóti 1371). Similarly, other aspects of material life, which are deemed extreme in times of peace, become part of everyday life for those trapped in the frontline:

> At first we spoke about our mouths being smelly because we could not brush our teeth. Then, after a time, such a notion never occurred to us; we were not even aware of it, not even of the lack of washing up. With eighty of us in the cellar, there was not even enough water for us to drink, and, after a couple of days, our demand for water to wash up also ceased. (Polcz 100)

The example above, as well as many occurrences in the autobiographical story (such as the serial rapes) become, to a certain extent, general experiences shared by many individuals, which posits these individuals as a historically contingent collective (such as those eighty people in the cellar). Yet the autobiographical story itself, as I have pointed out before, becomes Polcz's individual narrative, not only because the events affected her material, historical being in a unique way shared by no one else, but also because the trauma narrative she constructs from these experiences is her interpretation of these events, and although it is open to reinterpretations, the social and family network (Séllei 57) that texture her story, as well as the intersections generated by cultural, temporal, and geographical locations, contextualize her experiences in a particular way. Thus, there is an oscillation between the particular and the general in the understanding of her life narrative, which generates an altruistic sense of relation, rather than identificatory reading, as the basis for narrative ethics and politics.

This oscillation between the particular and the general might be one of the reasons why the critical views on Polcz's book are so varied, as it is related to the generic definition of *One Woman in the War* under the umbrella term of life writing. Given that it has been identified as an *autobiography*, as well as a *testimony* and a *confession* (Balassa and Varga 859-60) in the framework of a war memoir, there are contradictory expectations put on the text by institutional literary criticism, which is informed by various, often contrasting theories, and by the more general readership with regard to genre. These multiple roles of *One Woman in the War* that readers attribute to it – and that the text assigns to itself in its motto – impose a double standard on the book concerning its construction of autobiographical subjectivity and its national value as a historical document. According to the traditional ethos of modern autobiography, the text should focus on the narrated "I," who virtually emerges from her surroundings (Séllei 57) as a narratively constructed, coherent subject of disembodiment. As I

have pointed out, when, for example, Vasvári claims that the book cannot be put in line with feminist autobiographies because its narrator "lacks agency" (82), or when Edit Gilbert writes that Polcz's narrator does not reach self-understanding because she is not able to face her own role in her fate – largely due to her inability to see the "nature" of her own submissive behaviour that contributes to her "demise" (77) –, they not only get dangerously close to blaming the victim but also call upon the narrator to account for a certain type of active agency that an autobiographical piece is supposed to come up with as a conclusion.

As has been previously suggested, however, the primary concern of Polcz's autobiography is not the construction of a stable autobiographical subject whose actions assert active agency in the humanist sense, but confession and testimony. This dominant aspect of the text notwithstanding, the confessional and testimonial agenda comes with its own problematics, too, especially because of the book's thematization of war rape from a temporal distance of several decades, in the period of which, as Andrea Pető reminds us, both the language of talking about rape and the emphases of Hungarian historiography have changed. According to Pető,

> In Hungary, the rapes committed by the soldiers of the Red Army represent a special case of social memory: of different levels of forgetting on the individual and social plane. On the one hand, everybody "privately" knew that rapes had been committed by the Soviet soldiers. Private stories circulated that pointed a finger at the behavior of the Soviet soldiers and justified strong anti-Soviet sentiment. However, on the other hand, this historical fact became part of canonized Hungarian historical knowledge only after 1989, once communism had collapsed. [...] I argue that the silence surrounding the massive number of rapes by Soviet soldiers is not a case of amnesia but rather a "conspiracy of silence." (130-1)

This "conspiracy of silence," as Pető argues, and as is evidenced in the reunion episode discussed above, is heavily gendered, especially because of the shame and sense of guilt associated with the predominantly sexual and sexist nature of the abuse, and because of the political-military context that emerged after the war. Both aspects historically fit patriarchal contexts of power, but while the sexual aspect of rape silences women primarily on the

"individual plane," the political-military side of the issue induces a collective silence by treating female rape victims as a monolithic "problem group," regardless of their particular biological, social, and cultural differences, and their psychological and affective responses to abuse. Pető explains that after the war, rape was considered "a public-health issue": it was dealt with "not as a moral but as a medical matter, which was controlled and institutionalized" (137). While both private and public voices took part in the conspiracy of silence about the abuse during the state socialist era, after 1989 "the uncertain, wild numbers" of women sexually abused by Soviet soldiers started to circulate publicly, which "allowed Hungary to redefine its national identity after the war, creating the myth that Hungary suffered at the hands of not only Nazi Germany but also the Red Army" (133). Both the earlier medicalization of war rape, and the larger (and still ongoing) post-socialist agenda of constructing Hungary's victim role in the Second World War (parallel with the debunking of the myth of the Russian soldiers as heroes of liberation) resulted in depersonalized narratives of rape: if the stories "became a part of the public memory, it was by constructing a single, unified group of victims from the women" (130).

Since *One Woman in the War* was the first widely available text by a woman to give a public account of the atrocities committed by the Soviet troops in Hungary against Hungarian civilians during the Second World War, the historical stakes attached to Polcz's testimony in the construction of Hungary's newly found victim role have obviously been high, which is somewhat reflected in the text's reception, as well. Péter Balassa and Márton Varga, for example, emphasize that the time of the book's publication in 1991 was almost "biblical," since it corresponded to the Soviet troops' leaving Hungary at the time of the disintegration of the state socialist regime (861). As such, the book offers an analogy between the oppression (abuse) and liberation of the individual female body and Hungary's geographical and political body, which also historically links the nation's losses at the Treaty of Trianon with the

Second World War, so the interpretations of Hungary's position and role in the two wars strengthen each other in the construction of the victim role (so much so that the two wars somehow collide and start to behave like one giant trauma of immense loss in the public imagination).

On the basis of this analogy, *One Woman in the War* could easily be (and is indeed) read as the narrative of the trauma of the body's violation and attempts at healing, in which the individual body of the autobiographical subject is elevated to an allegorical level. On this interpretive plane, Polcz's book can be seen as what Szabolcs Virágh calls the "social-collective" way of sharing traumatic events in a narrative form, which is traditionally regarded by psychoanalysis as an adequate channel for dealing with events that have traumatized the subject (169-170). The confessional-testimonial function of the novel is thus fulfilled on a social-collective level by Polcz's act of breaking the silence that surrounds war rape (both in the literal and metaphorical sense of the word), and in this respect her narrative is heavily gendered in that it could not be told by a man in the same way. Hence the emphasis on the "woman" in the title, which actually refers to a "married woman" in the original Hungarian language, putting even more emphasis on gender relations defined by social institutions, as Vasvári also points out (76-7).

This kind of elevation that turns Polcz's story into a tale of national suffering is in line with the kind of reading that the empathetic theory of narrative entails, in which the audience – in the case of such national(ized) trauma, a whole nation – is constituted by the "metabolization" of the story of suffering and misery told by an other (Cavarero 91). This has ethical implications, since

> [i]n the exchange of auto/biographical tales, the recognition of the uniqueness of the other and her desire for narration is, within the narrative scene, often mixed with the tendency to recognize the meaning [*senso*] of one's own self within the other's story, especially if that story speaks of suffering and misery. The comfort of similarity wins out over the relational status of distinction. The effect – or, perhaps, the empathetic motive for reciprocal narration – thus risks frustrating that reciprocal

> appearance [*comparire*] of *uniqueness* that qualifies the dynamic of recognition as an ethic. To recognize oneself *in* the other is indeed quite different from recognizing the irremediable uniqueness of the other. (91)

If Polcz's suffering is interpreted on an allegorical level, as the story of a victimized nation, it risks losing the *literal* meaning and weight of rape as an ultimately material form of gendered oppression. As Balassa and Varga assert, the strength of *One Woman in the War* comes from its intimately sharing, as if in a close-up, all aspects of the horrors that affect the body (860). In fact, the horror itself lies in the inescapably material nature of physical abuse, in the fact that it affects the body's functioning down to its elemental level. The allegorical, vicarious reading of such stories as Polcz's ignores the significance of the narrated subject's attempts at coming to terms with individual trauma, and thereby downplays or silences the gendered coding of both event and interpretation, which comprises a territory of intersections between the personal and the public. Such "catastrophic event[s] [...] can add conflicting meanings to one's former sense of what constitutes normal social relationships and the moral order in which such relationships are supposed to reside" (Vasvári 75), so allegorizing narratives of personal experience may compromise narrative attempts at reconfiguring identities and terms of interpretation by way of solidifying and hegemonizing meaning.

In a way, this kind of "hijacking" of life stories such as *One Woman in the War* is also a form of silencing, a kind of discursive oppression, which may counteract the personal or critical motivations behind autobiographical narrative. Such motivations can include, for example, what I termed the "imperative of telling," which is also expressed by Polcz's motto: "I will try to tell you how things were, because I must tell you some time." The imperative of telling may entail a desire to make some kind of retrospective sense of what happened and thus gain some mastery over one's story by giving structure to something that is unstructured and contingent. However, this mastery, and similarly, the sense of its loss in chaos and fragmentation, are but textual effects of rhetoric and narrative structure. In the following

section of the analysis, I will look at the ways in which various textual effects such as lapses in memory or epistemological naivety operate in *One Woman in the War*, and how they comprise a Butlerian ethics of vulnerability, which can be linked to Cavarero's altruistic ethics of relation.

2.2.2 Non-remembering as a strategy of ethics

The kind of testimonial ethos under which autobiographical texts are used for political purposes is premised on "notions of presence, truth, and origins," which are "fundamental to the idea that testimony enables a speaking of truth to power, a remembrance of the dead, and a claim to the status of the human and the rights that fall from that" (Whitlock vi). In the previous section I have discussed how the "speaking of truth to power" subverted the communist ideology and image of the Soviet liberator after 1989 by creating a monolithic group of sexually abused women, whose bodies – as if constituting a body politic – were elevated to an allegorical level to represent the humiliated and raped "body" of Hungary, and how Polcz's text might be (or have been) enlisted in this process to support this allegorical formation. This kind of truth-construction is thus an example of how bodies are materialized in homogenizing discourses in order to create and consolidate virtual identities – in this case the virtual identity of Hungary as a country and nation victimized by warring powers.

What is peculiar in this process with regard to *One Woman in the War* is that Polcz's narrator, despite her desire to tell "how things were," and the impassionate, detailed naturalism of some of her descriptions, cannot or does not even want to remember many of the events correctly (Radnóti 1371). This may partly be because almost fifty years passed between the war and the publication of *One Woman in the War*, during which decades the failure of memory was supported by a "conspiracy of silence." But I think that Polcz's

"inability to remember" is predominantly a way of interpreting the events without overtly reflecting on them. In this respect, *One Woman in the War* is not a particularly self-reflexive text, but one in which the account of the events itself, and the silences about certain issues, are what open up the work for interpretation. As such, I find evaluations about the "authenticity" of the work misguided in the case of Polcz's text, as well, since both the narrative act of remembering and of forgetting constitute the performativity inherent in writing. A noteworthy example may be quoted here, a 2009 event in the literary discussion series called *Pink Glasses* [*Rózsaszín Szemüveg*], in which Alaine Polcz's oeuvre was (supposed to be) discussed. As László Klein's review of the discussion shows, the participants (Noémi Kiss, Anna Menyhért, and Endre Kukorelly) unanimously found Polcz's writing garrulous but superficial, and Kukorelly, a contemporary novelist, who was a neighbour of the Polcz-Mészöly couple for sixteen years, deemed both Polcz and her texts "unstructured," "deceitful and false," and "pseudo-naive."

The issue of authenticity and falsehood in life narrative, also discussed previously, may be related to feminism, which, in Rabinowitz's words, "required sincerity for women to claim their experiences as authentically human" (98) in the revelation of personal secrets and traumas yet untold. But Rabinowitz argues that the generation of feminist counter-power narratives "has engendered radical skepticism; once the lid was blown off and culture revealed to be hopelessly male-dominated, who could take anything seriously? Even women's authentic voices" (99). Rabinowitz asserts that in the process of speaking truth to power, women "called into question both truth and power. But the joke was on those sincere believers, acting like naive ethnographers in the field soaking up authentic culture, who found women's voices pure" (99). Pető's analysis of rape stories from Vienna and Budapest also asserts that women's stories, which provide an alternative history to hegemonic formulations

that legitimate power, also employ rhetorical and structural techniques and omissions in order to fit into their narrators' larger ideological framework (137-8).

This is a necessary paradox in the narration of trauma, which, rather than serving as an unproblematic tool for the narrator to "face reality and form her independent identity" (Pócsik 62), comes as a socially constructed communicative intrusion, in the form of narrative structuring, into the operation of the physical or psychological dimensions of the individual. Reluctance to speak after traumatic events, the "unspeakability" of what has been experienced, may result from the violence of this intrusion, which also entails a set of ordering principles that are not the individual's own. The autobiographical form, "a Western mode of self-production" (Gilmore, *Limits* 2), brings with itself such a set of ordering principles. These principles, however, are not as uniform as they seem: as Gilmore writes, the autobiographical tradition "was never as coherent as it could be made to appear, its canonical texts formally unstable and decidedly multivoiced, and its variety as much a critique, parody, or mimicry of the Western self as evidence of it" (2). In a similar vein, texts about personal trauma also interrogate the tenets and limits of autobiographical writing, including its claims to truth, as they "confront how the limits of autobiography, multiple and sprawling as they are, might conspire to prevent some self-representational stories from being told at all if they were subjected to a literal truth test or evaluated by certain objective measures" (14).

If judged by the "objective measures" of veracity, as well as from the vantage point of the traditional autobiographical ethos of self-production, *One Woman in the War* may also be seen as a "limit-case" of autobiography in Gilmore's terms. This possible identification of the text as stretching the limits of autobiography in the process of trying to deal with "how things were" comes down to a set of rhetorical-structural features that reviewers routinely identify in the book: its "lapses in memory," that is, its omissions, which may give the effect of superficiality to the text; its epistemological naivety, which may be interpreted as a lack of

self-reflexivity; and its naturalist, indifferent, and non-commentary mode of storytelling, which focuses on the physical details of the war events and local surroundings. The operation of these elements is interrelated, that is, omitting certain events or explanations, or leaving them unreflected may sometimes create the effect of naivety, or the impassionate tone of storytelling, and the focus on physical details, rather than the exposition of retrospective evaluations, in connection with a given situation may give the impression that the book is lacking substantial self-reflection. In what follows I will have a closer look at these strategies of narrative (non-)remembering, and discuss how they construct a possible ethics of life writing.

Among others, Edit Zsadányi also points out the similarity between Polcz's *One Woman in the War* and Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness* [*Sorstalanság*] (1975) with respect to the dispassionate mode of storytelling, in which the narrators function "only" as chroniclers when they register the events happening to them (more precisely, to their body) and in their immediate surroundings (380). According to Zsadányi, in this mode of "body-talk" the narrator "does not look beyond the description of the functions of his and other peoples' bodies, and as such, he discards [...] the metaphor as the traditional modality of modernist fiction" (374). I maintain that this "non-metaphoric" description of events that features both *One Woman in the War* and *Fatelessness* is just as performative as what Zsadányi calls "the traditional modality of modernist fiction," since both kinds of narrative are conscious methods of storytelling in which a selection of linguistic tools and strategies at the narrator's disposal are employed in an autobiographical act. In the narrative rendition of trauma, Zsadányi argues, the actual wounds, the bodily experiences are ultimately inaccessible by linguistic means (382). Gilmore also points out that testimony tests "the limits of representativeness" (*Limits* 5), since, in Butler's terms, the personal story must be relinquished in order to become a communicative event to which the audience can relate:

> Trauma, from the Greek meaning "wound," refers to the self-altering, even self-shattering experience of violence, injury, and harm. Crucial to the experience of trauma are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. Indeed, the relation between trauma and representation, and especially language, is at the center of claims about trauma as a category. Something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet, at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma. [...] This apparent contradiction in trauma studies represents a constitutive ambivalence. For the survivor of trauma such an ambivalence can amount to an impossible injunction to tell what cannot, in this view, be spoken. (Gilmore, *Limits* 6-7)

Polcz is well aware of this inaccessibility of trauma through language when her narrator expresses the failure of both memory and words. As early as in the first chapter, she sets her mode of "remembering," when she mingles her memories with her failure to remember the events correctly after her wedding ceremony:

> Our new apartment, on the mezzanine of a villa, faced my parents' one-family dwelling and garden. We simply walked across the narrow, cobblestone street that ran into the hills. Maybe I would have liked [my husband] to carry me over in his arms. Or did he, only I no longer remember? How did we enter? What did he say? Did he undress me or did I undress myself? *I can't conjure up anything.* I simply don't have any recollection of that first night. (16-7, emphasis added)

Similarly, her memory also fails when she tries to relate the events on the front:

> As for what happened to Mami and the other women during this time? This episode took place at the beginning. Mina had long hair; a soldier wound it around his hand and dragged her that way. Mina howled and shouted my name. I went to her. "Help me!" she begged. I said to her softly, "Just go." She did; that is, they carried her away.
>
> Did this occur before they took me away, or on only one night or evening, or did it happen again or for the first time then? (91)

These lapses of memory are proof that an individual's life narrative cannot be written, only *re*written (or more precisely, constructed), so from the point of view of referentiality it is unproductive to set up a dichotomy between a metaphoric modality of modernist fiction, and a non-metaphoric modality of autobiography (in which the untenable distinction between fiction and life writing is also inherent). Seen in systems theoretical terms, each act of

signification must be metaphorical, since it involves the carrying of meaning in the absence of the material itself. In this respect, the discursive construction of gender and sexuality is fundamentally metaphorical, too, and to the extent that elusive physical experiences are identified according to dualistic categories, the gendering of experience in discursive terms is also traumatic, since it entails a violent intrusion into a non-coherent sphere to order it into an accessible narrative.

As the epistemological naivety mentioned above often appears in Polcz's book in episodes related to sexuality and married life, the construction of the naive autobiographical subject may be interpreted as a protective tool against the violent intrusion of narrative in a testimonial-confessional context, as well as a covert commentary on gender relations. The following example would constitute such an instance: having learned at the gynecologist that she has contracted gonorrhea from her husband, she "believes" he may have become distanced from her because of her infection or her clumsiness. But at the same time, the passage reinforces, in an indirect way, the construction of the husband's unloving, sexist and oppressive character:

> At Mindszentpuszta, they made beds on the floor of the forester's lodge toward dawn. János and I lay together, sharing a mattress. He didn't speak to me. Everyone said good night, but he didn't. He did not embrace me, did not even touch me. He pulled away and turned his back to me. I thought he must be angry about something. But what? Because I'd been so clumsy with the horses? Because of the "infection"? Did he hate me because I had venereal disease? I could think of no other reason. After all – though I will not dwell on it here – I surrounded him with love, attention, and tenderness. I also tried to figure out what he was thinking. He hadn't talked with me for weeks by then. (61)

Although Vasvári uses this passage to argue that Polcz's "one-sided masochistic infatuation with her husband is never described with any sort of irony but rather as some sort of saintly *calvaire*" (78), I do find an indirect self-reflexive irony in the ultimately wide-eyed questions inquiring about the reasons for the husband's coldness. What Vasvári terms as

"one-sided masochistic infatuation" itself appears as an ironic (albeit very sad) construction that serves as a commentary on traditional gender relations in marriage.

By way of the same passage, Vasvári expresses her disappointment at the incoherence of the text concerning the reason for the marriage between Alaine and János, "given that she recounts that she did not want to marry and even daringly proposed to her future husband that she would be his mistress instead and attend university" (78). Vasvári attributes this and other omissions or fuzzy places in the text to "a pervasive conflict on the author's part between an overwhelming compulsion to address and equally strong internal resistance against self-disclosure, with, however, the latter winning out overwhelmingly" (79), and concludes that this resistance to tell the "truth" makes *One Woman in the War* a weak effort at feminist autobiography because it reinforces constructions of female victimhood (82). However, as previously argued on the basis of Gilmore, truth claims on testimonies and confessions such as Polcz's must be carefully weighed not only with respect to autobiography's limits at narrative/linguistic representation but also in consideration of the wide range of settings in which specific formulations of trauma emerge. As an ice-breaking narrative of abuse, Polcz's testimony has contributed as a seminal item to the construction of a viable national identity in and for Hungary, and as such, its "authenticity" is politically legitimated. But if read from a feminist point of view that takes the ultimate uniqueness of the individual autobiographical subject into account, both in her historical materiality and discursive construction, the focus of attention must shift from concerns of authenticity to an alternative notion of truthfulness not defined on a juridical basis.

István Örkény, in his autobiography on time spent as a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union, puts this problematic succinctly: "Nothing falsifies truth so much as facts" (13). Approaching the writing of trauma in testimony from the same angle, Gilmore writes that "when the issue is narrowed to the legalistic question, 'Did she lie?,' almost none of the

complexity of representing the self in the context of representing trauma can be retained without seeming to sink into massive ethical relativism and equivocation." Conversely, she emphasizes that testimony entails not only the interrogation of the truth/lie dichotomy but also the limit of representativeness in a testimonial context, "with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the peculiar way it operates both to expand and to constrict testimonial speech, and the way it makes it hard to clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously 'my' experience when 'our' experience is also at stake" (*Limits* 5). In my opinion, this is the interpretive focus with which the truthfulness of *One Woman in the War* is worth approaching.

As Polcz emphasizes in the motto, she *must* tell us her story "some time," a time which historically and/or personally seems appropriate. Although her whole text is an apparent antithesis to her motto, since she is unable to tell "how things were," the need to speak is still imperative. If it is neither the factual truth nor the integrity and stability of the autobiographical subject that is at stake in the narrative construction, *what* is it then that gets told? If memory fails – either because it is in the systemic nature of memory to fail to be "authentic" to life events, or as a result of the narrator's conscious effort to avoid talking about certain things –, so if autobiography simulates "real persons through the combined techniques of the documentary and the imagined" (Gilmore, *Limits* 12), the significance of narration must lie elsewhere.

For me, Polcz's insistence on *not-remembering* – which becomes one of the key elements in the book's narrative strategy – is strongly linked to an ethical concern of testimony, which subverts hegemonic intentions with respect to the meaning and historical significance of the text. Not putting the blame on the perpetrators for doing what they have done, in spite of the horrors that the narrator and other victims had to endure, shifts the emphasis from the collective to the individual level on which the significance of the autobiography may be

located. In this respect, it is interesting to see that while the war rapists are given absolution for what they did, the husband is not, or at least not in the same way as the Soviets, in spite of the fact that the 19-year-old Polcz, who married János during the war, was so much in love with her husband that at times she felt she would die without him. This might indeed sound sentimental and masochistic in a normal, peaceful context, but the narrator also recalls a number of war situations in which her life was literally at stake, and János's presence provided her with, if not spiritual, but at least physical support. This also suggests affective ambivalence towards the husband, which undermines the idea that *One Woman in the War* might be categorized a narrative of hagiography; yet the book's conclusion does not acquit the husband from his "charges." The following two quotations exemplify this difference between the narrator's attitude towards the soldiers and her husband:

> I had seen those posters in Budapest showing a Soviet soldier ripping a crucifix from a woman's neck. I heard they ravished women. I also read leaflets reporting the Russians did this and that. I didn't believe any of it; it was all German propaganda, I thought. I found it unimaginable that they would knock women down, that they would break their backs, and commit other horrors. Then I learned how their backs were broken. Very simply, *unintentionally*. (77, emphasis added)

> When [my husband] died, his family and Mamika surrounded me as if I were still his wife. Then I learned he had written his last poem to me. *But late, in vain. He had ceased to exist within me; he had sunk so deep that his death did not change this situation.* I did not understand what became of our great love.
> Twenty years later, I dreamt he was coming and wanted to take me with him. I protested [...] I could not go and did not want to. [...] We finally scuffled. Then at this moment something within me split apart – as when the ice cracks and water breaks free. (150, emphasis added)

In Polcz's book, therefore, not-remembering "how things were" does not mean accidental forgetting, but an attempt at not keeping the traumatic wound open: it is an act of forgiving, which is necessary for Polcz's narrator (just like for Gyuri Köves in *Fatelessness*) to be able to move on and live her life. In my opinion, this central aspect of *One Woman in the War* actualizes Butler's ethics of vulnerability discussed previously. This kind of alternative ethics, in which vulnerability is understood both in a physical and a psychological sense, derives

from the responsibility inherent in one's being vulnerable to the address and actions of the Other: in Butler's words, "my very formation implicates the Other in me" (84). As a result, no one's story is full in and of itself: everyone is ultimately unknowable, since everyone is inevitably implicated in others' stories. This, however, does not lead to a freedom from responsibility; on the contrary: "to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding and to establish this limit not only as a condition for the subject, but as the predicament of the human community itself" (83).

I find that Polcz's book is in line with this ethics in that it exposes the narrator's vulnerability to the world both at the basic level of the body and at the level of interpretation as concerns her trauma narrative. Telling her rape story necessitates the relinquishing of it for the sake of public circulation, which also entails giving up on the mastery over its meaning. This carves out an alternative conceptualization of narrative agency, too, which cannot be defined solely in textual terms but must be seen within a larger social-political-historical context in which an author's autobiographical space is formulated. As in Szabó's case, Polcz's autobiographical space is also made up of a relatively large oeuvre, comprising of a variety of texts using "techniques of the documentary and the imagined." Her subjective truth, as well as the truth of her subjectivity, is constructed both in her texts and in the liminal spaces of silence and omissions in between.

2.2.3 Conclusion: Forgiveness as a source of agency, and the narrative construction of humanity

What Gilbert and Vasvári condemn as lack of agency in *One Woman in the War* is, therefore, the acknowledgement of not only the limits of knowability as far as the subject and her story go, but also the need to forgive. Forgiveness, however, is effective only in and as a speech act,

in a discourse that enables the individual and/or the community to see the mutual implication of the victims and the perpetrators in each other's stories. I think that, similarly to Kertész's novel (Zsadányi 373), *One Woman in the War* offers such an autobiographical discourse which does not seek a causal and teleological meaning in what happened but gives a narrative space for asking questions which may never be answered.

In terms of the epistemology of life writing, such a forgiving intent does not have much to do with juridical truth; in fact, the two would tendentiously exclude each other, since a juridical context implies a search for "the" definitive truth in order to instigate punishment for the sake of reinforcing institutional discipline and justice. As has been argued, in the process of justice-making, be it either symbolic (as in "respect and justice for the Hungarian nation") or more literal (as in punishment for the perpetrators), both the individual female body and the unique story of the female subject are allegorized, which downplays the significance of patriarchal gendered structures and power dynamics in sexual abuses such as war rape, a hierarchical gendered and sexualized context in which individuals must materially exist. A narrative of trauma such as Polcz's may have the potential to resist such monopolization of meaning by way of speaking truth to power in the form of constructing forgiveness and renouncing judgement in an autobiographical framework. In *One Woman in the War*, however, granting forgiveness to men for their abuse is not unanimous: while the humanity of the Russian soldiers shines through their atrocities, as they "hit [...] with one hand" and "pet [...] with the other" (105), there is no absolution for the husband, even less so since his crimes are committed regardless of the war.

In this respect, Polcz's text constructs humanity in its various facets on the basis of physical and emotional experiences of abuse in a war context. Absolution is not granted to the husband because of his inability to love and respect his wife; in fact, his "most compassionate act" during the seven years of their marriage is to grab her wife's wrist, push her into a room,

and lock the door on her in an episode of Jewish deportation, lest the Germans should punish her for the protection of the Jewish residents in their house (21). His character stands out as an epitome of inhumanity, similarly to the Germans soldiers', who are always much more frightening than the Soviets because of their rationalized and predictable routines in warfare, while with the Russians, "you could never know anything, never figure out anything" (103). Humanizing the Soviet perpetrators of war rape, while dehumanizing the Hungarian husband, a companion made legal and legitimate by the social institution of heterosexual marriage, subverts the nationalist discourse that calls for historical retribution for war atrocities and losses Hungary had to suffer from the hand of "her foreign enemies." Thus, while Polcz reconstructs (and to a certain extent reinforces) the category of the human in a highly gendered context in order to offer her personal history and implicit judgement on private and public gender structures and relations of power, her ethics of vulnerability may point toward an alternative posthumanist understanding of what it means to be (and remain) human in a traumatic context.

3 FEMINA FABRICATA: TIBOR NOÉ KISS'S *INCOGNITO* AND LAURA SPIEGELMANN'S *PRECIOUS LITTLE*

In all the four books dealt with in this study, one of the central issues of the autobiographical narrative is the difficulty of enunciation. That is, in all the four works the narrators struggle with their own experiences as they try to textualize them, and they thematize, to a smaller or larger degree, the impossibility of telling things "as they were" (or "as they might have been" in the case of *Precious Little*). I have discussed, in terms of systems theory and deconstruction, why this impossibility arises in the first place, and I have also provided, through examples of textual constructions of gendered experience, an understanding of both gender and experience as a discursive-narrative approximation of something that eventually evolves as gendered experience in the course of reading. Thus, neither gender nor experience is simply constructed in narrative as a static or stable set of linguistic effects but they start to operate as textual subsystems which *create effects* (for example, gendered characters or a sense of healing from trauma). Since their operating mechanism is based on what Derrida calls iterability – the function of signs to be recalled (iterated) in different contexts –, they become shifting constructs that may elicit differential interpretations. In the case of gender, as Cornell maintains, iterability induces transformative potential in the binary code, since as the system repeats the code over and over again, it not only changes the meaning of the code but at the same time it transforms itself (195). In Cornell's opinion, "this process itself has an ethical aspiration" in that it may create "a new choreography of sexual difference in which our singularity, not our gender, would be loved by the Other" (195). This dynamic instability of signifying systems, however, does not exclude readability; on the contrary, it is the constitutive prerequisite of it.

This iterability is the basis for Butler's system of gender as performativity, too, the operation of which is the central theme in Tibor Noé Kiss's autofictional *Incognito* (2010), while Laura Spiegelmann's storytelling in *Precious Little* (2008) is founded on the premise of narrative as (gendered) performance. Both books may be regarded as transgendered, since a significant portion of *Incognito* deals with the acts of turning a male body into a female one, while *Precious Little* is written by a male author masquerading as a female autobiographer. However, the significance of trans- or cross-gendering lies in different aspects in the two books. In *Incognito*, the emphasis is put on the difficulty of the construction of gender itself against an odd physical-historical given, that is, the body, so gender transformation becomes a theme. In *Precious Little*, similarly to the other two books discussed in the previous chapter, the narrative conflicts do not derive mainly from a sense of instability concerning gender identity but from the difficulty or inability of the narrator to come to terms with the differential operations of (gendered) experience and its textual rendering. *Precious Little* is thus primarily concerned with constructing femininity as a narrator and author function: it is a pseudo-autobiography aspiring to pass as the story of its female author's experiences, and as such it presents a parodistic-ironic *Spiegel* [mirror] to *Mann* [Man], as well as to autobiography as a definitive and "authentic" form of subjectivity-construction. So in this sense, cross-gendering in *Precious Little* becomes a narrative strategy, not a diegetic theme, unlike in *Incognito*, which presents a double project: primarily, a gender transformation, and secondarily, the presentation of this gender transformation in a textual form. Thus, in *Incognito*, the problem deriving from the textual rendering of physical-historical experience becomes secondary to the performative construction of gender itself, although, as I will show later, this "primary" project may also be secondary to other agendas, which are not readily revealed by the text (so the primacy of gender transformation may in fact be yet another performative ruse). The multiplicity of such constructive projects results in a peculiar

methodology of generating several layers of simulacra in the texts, as the performative operation of gender is to be made readable on the textual level. In what follows I will examine in detail how these layers of simulacra function in the books, while I will also propose a hyperreal understanding of gender on the basis of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and Butler's ideas on performativity. I understand that both texts, but especially T. N. Kiss's confession, may be approached from an expressly queer and/or transgender analytical angle; however, the framework of this dissertation is primarily narratological, and as such, in the interpretations that follow I focus on the narrative and rhetorical strategies and structures that construct the autobiographical subject with respect to, as well as *vis-à-vis*, the gendered body on various levels of the text.

3.1 TIBOR NOÉ KISS'S *INCOGNITO*: THE NARRATIVIZATION OF (TRANS)GENDERED METAMORPHOLOGY

In systems theoretical explanations of the world and our experiences in it – similarly to Lacan's tripartite framework of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real – discourse (or Luhmann's preferred notion, communication) is posited as a system operating separately both from the reality of the physical world and human consciousness. This does not mean, of course, that there is no interaction between these systems – for Luhmann, they are just not "translatable" into each others' operational logic. Butler, unlike Luhmann, does not shun (the) materiality (of the body) as external to the communicative/discursive, but she mainly deals with the materializing effects of discourse on the body, so for the most part she also remains on the "discursive side" of the mind/body problem,[30] focusing on discourse as a set of "complex and convergent chains in which 'effects' are vectors of power" (*Bodies That Matter*

[30] "To return to matter [in feminist theory] requires that we return to matter as a *sign* which in its redoublings and contradictions enacts an inchoate drama of sexual difference" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 49).

187). For Butler, thus, matter "makes sense" for us by being materialized, that is, circumscribed by discourse: bodies become gendered by being made "readable," by being "elevated" to the level of intelligibility. This process of materialization, while it demarcates "the domain of intelligibility" (187), at the same time excludes that which is unintelligible in its terms as non-human and inferior (*Bodies That Matter* xi, 8; *Undoing Gender* 12).

But what happens when, as Jean Baudrillard puts it, the map precedes the territory, that is, there is a "generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (1) – when there is no material to be materialized? Baudrillard's hyperreality, as Karen Sichler writes, "reconfigures the post-modern condition and consciousness by removing the need for a referent or an original to exist prior to its copy in the corporeal world" (48). If read in Baudrillard's terms, gender as a bipolar system of simulacra is constructed in the hyperreal (the virtual), which is defined "by a liquidation of all referentials" (Baudrillard 2). But even if gender, as a simulated hyperreality, "lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra" (2), is it possible for it to undermine its own heteronormative binary logic? This is my specific question when analyzing T. N. Kiss's *Incognito,* which has been read as a text where the binary opposition of gender is subverted (B. Kiss). I argue that the subversion of the gender binary is not such an easy matter in *Incognito,* since the primary conflict of the book lies in the fact that although gender may be constituted in hyperreal terms as a system of simulacra, it cannot lend itself arbitrarily to "all combinatory algebra," because constraints of intelligibility uphold "vectors of power," and becoming materially unintelligible (or rather, not becoming materially intelligible) exposes the autobiographical subject to danger. As Butler suggests, what is constructed should not be refuted as "having an artificial and dispensable character," since even such hyperreal constructions are necessary for us to "be able to think, to live, to make sense at all" (*Bodies That Matter* xi). Žižek also stresses that "[i]f you take away from our reality the symbolic fictions that regulate it, you

lose reality itself," so we must be able to perceive "not the reality behind the illusion but the reality in illusion itself" (*The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*) – in this case, the reality in the illusion of gender.

T. N. Kiss's narrator, Tibor/Noémi feels compelled to transgender him/herself in order to retain the livability of his/her human life, but the same gendering act that is meant to make his/her body "real" and readable as a female one renders him/her "inhuman" (unintelligible, therefore "unreal") exactly because his/her gender performance is at odds with his/her male body. In a way, then, Tibor/Noémi's difficult task is to figure out how to handle the double materialization of his/her body: a biologically male body materialized as female puts his/her "two bodies" in conflict because in order for him/her to be intelligible, s/he has to resort to a binary gender system of two mutually exclusive extremes. An important question the book poses is whether this constraint still leaves a possibility for a subversive, or at least a livable, "methodology" of gender and subjectivity.

3.1.1 Looking for the autobiographical in *Incognito*

I have previously termed *Incognito* autofiction, with which I referred to the fact that although it may be read as a Bildungsroman of transgendering, it has autobiographical "referential value": as the author claims in an interview conducted by Dóra Szekeres, the book is more of a confession than a novel, and as such, it would have been impossible to write under a pseudonym. Thus, it may be a worthwhile experiment to try to locate places in the text where it attempts to construct itself in terms of genre, that is, where it seems to deploy typical elements or "tokens" of autobiographical narrative.

As I have previously pointed out, one of such elements is the point of origin, a "privileged" place in the text, which may be, for example, the recollection of a significant

memory of childhood happiness or contentment (a source of *Expecto Patronum*), or the narrativization of a traumatic event, a past cause for present troubles. Either way, the inclusion of an originary moment may be evaluated within the framework of the teleology attributed to life writing, the structure of which rests on the logic of causality and the need for closure, as discussed in detail in Chapter 1. Conversely, if originary moments "do not work" in the text, it suggests a possible disruption in the autobiographical teleology of causality and closure. T. N. Kiss's *Incognito* is filled with moments that may be read in terms of seeking origin: in fact, the parallel time structure of the book – which moves between the (post)socialist past of Tibor's family in the 1980s and 1990s, and the present of the narrative, a day in 2004, precisely 2 October 2004, a Saturday – warrants the reader's search for causal links between past and present. And explanations may abound, since the past events, which are rather randomly presented on the historical plateau of the narrative, offer potential causes and explanations for the narrator's present crisis of gendered subjectivity. Tibor's family is far from ideal: his father is an alcoholic and a brute, who beats his wife (*Incognito* 20) and destroys the apartment and the elevator in the condominium where the family live, having embezzled some money from the condo budget (28-31, 35), while his mother suffers a series of nervous breakdowns and gets hospitalized in a psychiatric department (37-8), and at a point she leaves her husband and contemplates suicide (18-20). Tibor's grandmother is described as a breeder of Chow Chows who hates animals (37). Each of the horrible events included in the narrative to construct the dysfunctionality of Tibor's family may be picked to stand in for the originary moment, or, rather, the series of these events together may constitute a major cause for Tibor's problems. However, as György Kálmán C. also points out, "the text plays a trick on us," since although the inclusion of events from the family's troubled history does strengthen the autobiographical-confessional aspect of the narrative, it does not offer a fully convincing explanation for Tibor/Noémi's "gender trouble" (1139). Thus, the family history

becomes dissociated from Tibor/Noémi's present troubles with his/her gendered subjectivity; narrativizing the past recollections may have a therapeutic effect, but they do not offer an easy solution to the construction and acceptance of transgendered subjectivity, which is the narrator's substantial "going concern" in the book's present tense.

Tibor's dissociation with the family, more emphatically, with his father, is apparent on the narrative level, too, particularly in two aspects. As a pre-teen boy, Tibor is an ardent football fan and promising player; his sports activities strongly link him with his father, who supports his son's aspirations to become world champion and attends all of his matches up to the point when troubles in the family start to escalate (*Incognito* 13-4). Parallel with the father's losing interest in his son's football career in the early 1990s, Tibor grows disgusted with the whole sports scene:

> *How was the training?*, my father asked, leaning against the kitchen cupboard. *You've always been a spring kid*, he went on, but in those days he would no longer come to any of my Saturday games, neither in the spring nor in the fall. But I also stopped attending my own games, I didn't even go back to the changing room to pick up my tracksuit and football shoes. I never again took the tram to Népliget, and nobody from there ever contacted me either. (41-2)

Tibor's first "coming-out" to his father is also related to football: at last, he musters the courage to tell his father that he has stopped attending the football sessions for good:

> A deep breath. *I gave up football, I haven't been to a training or a game for two weeks*, more precisely, five weeks. The water for the peas kept boiling. Flowered tiles above the gas stove, drops of fume on the leaves, plates on the kitchen cupboard, glasses and mugs, wine bottles near the stove, a corkscrew on the small folding table, a napkin holder, a lighter, an ashtray, a red indicator light on the boiler, a mirror on the boiler, smears on the mirror. *What were you thinking, son.* My father was chewing his mouth from the inside, my legs were shaking. *What the fuck were you thinking.* He wasn't shouting, his tone was neither interrogative nor imperative. The water for the peas kept boiling. [...] I never thought about how I would answer this question, I just wanted to put an end to the lie. (48-9)

As a basic storytelling method, the narrator juxtaposes conversations with descriptions of physical details in the storyworld. In fact, there are no "proper" dialogues in the scenes: the few lines that are uttered by the characters are typed in Italics, as the example above shows,

and these lines interrupt the minute descriptions of the physical world, as if whatever is said is an intrusion into material reality. This is a strategy to cover up the fact that both conversations and physical objects/people are constructed textually: they become verbal simulacra that approximate the experiential reality of a coming-out such as the one above, in which material and discursive elements are part of the same matrix of the textual performativity of rendering lived experience narratively, which has relevance in and to the present time of the reading. The fact that the employment of such editorial juxtaposition is indeed possible shows the simulative nature of textual "representations," that is, that they obey the same systemic rules of language. Since Tibor's transgender coming-out as Noémi to his/her father never becomes part of the story, the football coming-out may as well stand as a diegetic substitute for his/her "big" coming-out in the form of *Incognito*. Tibor/Noémi's "real" coming-out (to the father, as well as to a wider reading public)[31] is thus performed on a different level of reality, in the book's paratextual universe.

Tibor's other act of dissociation from the family is a highly symbolic event: having been tormented by the family troubles and the violence of his father, he chooses to have his surname officially changed. However, the account of this event is multiply distanced from the reader, since Tibor presents it by juxtaposing his narratorial reflections on the letter in which he informs his father about his decision, with the description of his father reading it, as well as both his mother and his narrated self witnessing the reading:

> As written in the letter of 18 November 1993, *I don't want to bear this family name any more.* Raging emotions in left-aligned lines, ink stains of despair, words piercing through the 70g sheet, *fear, fallen apart, lying, unbearable*. The heavy curves of the last letters in the words, characters running into one another, loops too big or too small. My father was reading with a blank face. He was wearing a white undershirt and briefs, just like when my form master visited. He despised *those teaching parasites*. [...] *I'm going to apply for a new family name at the mayor's office*. Having finished reading, my father

[31] T. N. Kiss speaks about coming out to his father in the Szekeres-interview: "I told my father everything before the book was published. I visited him in the country, and we had a conversation during our walk between two farms. He read the manuscript that night, and although he still doesn't understand me, he didn't cast me out. Well, he wasn't happy to hear that I'd attend the book launch in women's clothes. He said I shouldn't expect him to come forward and congratulate me. But he eventually did."

> folded the paper, then stood up and put it in the wardrobe, slipping it under his sweaters. I kept shifting from foot to foot. My father sat back in his armchair and turned up the volume on the TV, my mother kept staring at her hands clasped in front of her. Cigarette burns on the rug, a coffee stain on the blanket, moisture on the wall under the window, crumbling plaster. (59)

What is most striking in the passage above is the narrator's emphasis on the physical details of not only the scene but the handwriting itself, as if what the letter says is less important than how it is written. A widescale reflection on this scene (both the letter and the act of reading it) is achieved through employing multiple focalizers. The primary focalizer is the narrator, whose temporal distance from the scene is stressed by quoting the exact date of the letter, which is also a means to authenticate the scene in terms of life writing with the inclusion of a historical, "original" document. However, there are more points of view included in this short scene: the emotional state of the narrated "I" is also expressed in his "shifting from foot to foot" as he is watching his father reading his letter, while the reader has a glimpse of the scene both from the mother's point of view as she is shown staring in front of herself, hands clasped, and the father's, whose face remains blank while he is reading the letter addressed to him. Thus, this is a scene of multiple viewers, each reflecting differently on the symbolic act of the son's denying his father('s name).

This act of denial makes an obvious call for a psychoanalytic interpretation which may provide a hasty explanation for the narrator's transgender issues as originating from an Oedipus complex. However, the method of narrativizing this scene initiates its own deconstruction, in a way not dissimilar to how Cornell, on the basis of Derrida, imagines the deconstruction of the binary code of gender, by giving a critique of the transcendental "law of the father" as conceptualized by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. By way of following Lacan's conception of woman as the castrated Other, Cornell shows "how sexual difference and gender is understood as a semantic code that consolidates its meaning so that we inevitably 'see' a world in which there are two sexes and only two sexes" (188). However, if gender is seen as a system, it can be shown that "the meaning of the father [that governs] over

the actual family setting" operates by appropriating its subjects through a binary code which is already in place before the emergence of these subjects as gendered ones. As such, the objectification (or rather, abjection) of 'woman' "is the result of this already-in-place system which functions through and is enforced by patrilineal lineage as a system of stratified differentiation" (191-2).

After defining gender hierarchy "as a self-referential system that codifies its semantic code through the meaning given to the Oedipus complex in patrilineal lineage" (192), Cornell turns to Derrida to demonstrate that "the establishment of the phallus as a transcendental signifier is based only on a *reading* of the mother's desire [for the father] and [...] what is read can always be reread" (194). Rereading gender(ed) signifiers entails iterability, that is, "the slippage of language" which "breaks up the coherence of gender identity" defined along binary codes (195). Cornell asserts that "[w]hat allows language to be repeatable is that it can be repeated in different contexts," but as a result of the lack of an overarching context (an overarching system which defines the meaning of all other contexts), "what is repeated does not yield an identical meaning" (195). Cornell's systems theoretical rendering of gender thus leads to an already familiar conclusion about the necessary and inevitable transformation of systems: "as a system seeks to perpetuate itself it would always be doing so by responding to its irritations or symptoms and, thus, would repeat itself in a slightly different context. This, in turn, means that as it repeats itself, the system also transforms itself" (195). Therefore, within the system of gender hierarchy as well, "the repetition compulsion of imposed gender identity can never completely foreclose transformative possibility" (195). This transformative power does not only mean a shift in "the meanings of male and female within the binary code" but also "the effective undermining of the code itself" (195). As such, the binary code and the "law of the father," a stable signifier in readings emphasizing the role of the Oedipus complex in gender development, are shaken on the same grounds, by resignification.

The scene where Tibor gives the letter to his father can be (re)read in terms of such resignification: while the denial of the family name is clearly an Oedipal moment, the method of focalization used in this passage gives it an ironic twist that undermines the seriousness of the psychoanalytic reading. By temporally distancing him/herself from the scene, and at the same time quoting his/her own letter as if s/he was looking at it through a magnifying glass, the narrator not only creates a time-gap between the denial and the act of narrating it but also subverts the validity and importance of its interpretation in the context of the Oedipal triangle and patrilineal lineage. Emphasizing the physical appearance of such individual expressions as "fear," "fallen apart," "lying," and "unbearable," and thus recontextualizing them by cutting them from their original context in the letter and pasting them into a passage of self-characterization (as if putting together a ransom note for his/her own kidnapping by recycling words cut out from a newspaper), T. N. Kiss's narrator turns them into signifiers of self-ridicule, mocking the grandeur of his/her past suffering. Focusing on the "surface" of the paper, as it were, also subverts the dichotomy between depth (the subconscious) as the realm where the "hidden truth" of meaning resides, and surface (the conscious), which is but all appearances. The description of the father is similarly structured: instead of providing an authoritative father figure whose name is to be respected and preserved – and whose patrilineal lineage would thus gain weight exactly by being broken with the act of denial – the narrator describes him in his underwear and signals his shallowness by quoting his equaling teachers with parasites.

What is also very important in connection with naming is that it becomes a matter of choice in the book on a more general level, as part of the process of gender construction. When Tibor decides to take on cross-dressing as more permanent *life praxis*, he needs a female name for his feminine identity, the selection of which reminds the reader of how a name is picked for a newborn child:

> Kinga drew the coil-bound desk calendar closer to herself, *we should find you a female name*. She turned back to the first page of the calendar. I didn't like Gyöngyvér,[32] I didn't want a name that meant "pearl blood." I didn't want to be as tough as an Ingrid. Aurelias wear horrible jewels. Juliana, Susanna, Edina, Luisa, Henriette, Karina, Dawn,[33] I didn't want any of these names. I didn't feel I had anything to do with any of them. We arrived at the end of April, Noémi didn't sound off. We tasted it again and again. I moved closer to Kinga, I could smell the baby shampoo. Our thighs stuck together, the empty coffee cups started to wobble and then resumed their composure on the desk. *Noémi*, Kinga said. (*Incognito* 88)

Moreover, the significant last line of Tibor's letter to his father – "*I'm going to apply for a new name*" – is repeated towards the end of the book, so it is resignified yet again to stand as a metaphor for the need to constantly apply for new identities, as if the existing ones could not approximate one's "true" identity, since true identity as such is nothing more or less than a series of continuous appropriations, instances of naming that are valid only temporarily, in certain situations but not in others. By this point in the text the narrator does not want to be asked about his/her name any more: "I'm not identifiable with my name. Noémi, Tibor, the words get stuck in my throat [...] I can't utter my name. Each name is invalid. Noémi, Tibor, fain it! I'm going to apply for a new name" (*Incognito* 164). Thus, resignification in the construction of identity is both inevitable and a never-ending project, since it is never completed.

Besides (re)naming, there are other examples of resignification in *Incognito* that support the deconstructive interpretation of discourse and language in the constitution of meaning. Football is one element in the book that gains several layers of meaning depending on the context. I have already referred to football in connection with Tibor's substitute coming-out to his father: his getting sickened by and eventually giving up playing football might thus be seen as a break with traditional masculinity by way of refusing to take part in a sport that is widely regarded as an emphatically masculine activity, a general epitome of male virility and

[32] "Gyöngyvér" means "pearlblood" in a verbatim translation, although "blood" in the name refers to "kin" ("blood sister"), as the narrator also notes.

[33] *Hajnalka* in Hungarian.

power (even in comparison with other sports that may require more stamina and strength), and a peculiar "playing field" for extensive sexism.[34] But football has a strong presence in the whole book not just as the antithesis of the narrator's transgendered subjectivity under construction but as a thematic-narrative link that connects the two temporal planes of the book. The present of the narrative, the story of an "ordinary" day in Tibor/Noémi's life, that of 2 October 2004, is marked by a football game between West Bromwich and Bolton Wanderers, which Tibor is watching while he is cleaning his apartment. As a counterpoint to this "present tense" of the narrative, Tibor recalls 5 July 1982, the first "memorable day" of his life – an archetypal token of autobiographical writing –, which is also related to a football game, a World Championship match between Italy and Brazil. Six-year-old Tibor is rooting for Italy because his favourite colour is blue, and the Italian team is wearing this colour: "Everybody in the family was a supporter of Brazil, they despised the Italians, so they also despised me" (*Incognito* 7). While Nóra Neichl considers this passage an important trope in the narrative because it signifies the first instance that Tibor is "marginalized" in the family (98), it is peculiar that his initial separation from the family is the result of colour preference. Thus, the colour blue, originally standing as the symbol of a nation via its football team, is resignified to become the motif of Tibor's alienation from his family.

The narrator's supporting the Italians from an early childhood gains yet another layer of meaning when he adds that it was only his grandfather who came to his defence in his football team preference. The grandfather understands Tibor's predilection in football, since he "supported the Soviet Union all through his life, even in 1992, against the Federal Republic of Germany, during the game between the Russian Commonwealth and Germany in Norrköping" (*Incognito* 7). This additional piece of information about the grandfather's character shows how national identities and affiliations are also constructed on the basis of

[34] Miklós Hadas gives a detailed analysis of the role of football in the development of modern masculinity in his book *A modern férfi születése* [*The Birth of the Modern Man*] (2003).

simulacra, for example, in terms of sports teams and their colours. But the irony of this passage can be fully appreciated only in the context of European history, since in 1992 neither the USSR nor the FRG exist any more. The historical volatility of political structures, countries included, thus also points towards the simulatory nature of national identities and related political affiliations, which may become as delusional as in the case of the grandfather,[35] in whose mind the map does indeed precede (and survive) the territory.

These instances of resignification in the narrative make sense in the framework of Tibor/Noémi's repeated attempts to construct his/her identity within a binary gender structure, and the narrator's endeavours to present these attempts in a textual form. In the next part of the analysis I will discuss resignification in terms of Tibor/Noémi's *Bildung*, focusing on how the text constructs the effect of the disintegration and instability of the narrated subject on the playing field of gender.

3.1.2 Constructing disintegration in the face of constancy

One of the central tropes in *Incognito* is contained in the very first sentence of the text: "I'm stepping over the threshold" (5), and this figure is repeated at least six more times in the novel (81, 109, 120, 135, 142, 153) in slightly different contexts. In fact, Tibor/Noémi's whole *Bildung* in *Incognito* could be strung on the thread of crossing thresholds, especially because this act can be interpreted in several ways, and on various layers of meaning explored in the text. It is significant that crossing a threshold is first of all a physical act – Tibor does have to cross the threshold as Noémi several times in the novel, which is a difficult bodily act for him/her, since s/he has to get used to crossing thresholds, walking down stairs and through doors, and other architectural structures of passage in female clothes, *as a woman*. This

[35] "My grandfather whispered to me during the morning coffee that Stalin will soon fix everything" (*Incognito* 8).

physicality of crossing is a site for material-discursive intra-action in the novel, since in the course of the body's movement from one side of the threshold to the other, a liminal trans-space is constructed, which stands in-between the male and female poles of gender. Crossing this liminal space is thus an obligation for Tibor/Noémi in order for him/her to become intelligible in terms of gender, and this intelligibility is by no means a simple linguistic (narrative) matter but has a strongly material stake in his/her everyday life: "I step over the threshold. The stockings are thin, my knees are trembling with cold" (120). In such instances, Tibor/Noémi's alertness and vulnerability are heightened by the other people's reactions to his/her physical presence: "The hatred in the eyes of the security guard. Tripping on a stair, stepping over a threshold" (135).

Tibor/Noémi thus seems to be constantly moving, continuously stepping over thresholds and walking through doors throughout the novel. The endless repetition of this act of crossing suggests that although crossing is inevitable, it is never done with once and for all: it is not enough to cross the threshold for the first time, but once it is stepped over it must be crossed again and again. In this sense, Tibor/Noémi's series of crossings constitutes his/her reiterative gender performance that lasts for a lifetime. Seen in terms of autobiographical writing, the repetition of crossing, or rather, the narrative's focus on crossing as a process (and not as something that has been completed) undermines the possibility for closure: the *Bildung* is not only unfinished but the novel, just like Harry Potter's Golden Snitch at the end of *The Deathly Hallows*, "opens at the close": having narrated the story of Tibor/Noémi's coming-out, the narrator realizes that s/he still cannot introduce him/herself, even though s/he longs to do so, so s/he finishes the book with the sentence "Where shall I start" (166). The construction of gender, especially in such a complicated case as Tibor/Noémi's, must be recreated over and over again, since gender itself "is an originating activity incessantly taking place" (Butler, "Variations" 131). Similarly, the origin of Tibor/Noémi's gender trouble cannot be located

temporally either – even though the first "memorable day" in his life as a boy is recalled, there is nothing that would warrant his/her transgendered identity in the episode of choosing the Italians as his favourite team because they wear blue shirts. As Butler also asserts, "[t]he origin of gender is not temporally discrete precisely because gender is not suddenly originated at some point in time after which it is fixed in form" ("Variations" 131). Having perused about one-third of the story, the reader also learns that Tibor had the habit of wearing his mother's clothes as a child – "At the age of six I tried on my mother's underwear in the small room [...] At the age of twelve I still hated myself in my mother's clothes" (*Incognito* 63) – but this cross-dressing habit, which may rightfully draw the reader's attention as a significant element in Tibor's childhood, does not receive a central place in the narrative, and it is certainly not related to the Italian national football team in any direct way. Kálmán C. also points out that as we get along with the story, it becomes confusing in terms of history: the reader grows unsure as to when the events take place, whether we are on the present or past plane of the narrative (1140). This confused temporality also suggests a disruption of linearity regarding both narrative and gender construction: as much as the text is unable to verbally locate its "central problem," Tibor/Noémi cannot identify and introduce him/herself in terms of gender once and for all.

Yet s/he must, since in order for him/her to remain or become (again) a social being, who is discursively intelligible both for him/herself and the others, s/he must be "presentable" (in more than one sense of the word). The trope of crossing the threshold signifies passing in this context: Tibor's desire (in most of his cross-dressing moments at least) is to pass as Noémi. Paradoxically then, in Tibor/Noémi's case, recognition entails non-recognition: "The elevator bumps heavily and starts to fall. [...] I do hope I won't have to face anybody. I do hope no one will identify me, I'm falling, I'm praying" (*Incognito* 78). The need for identifying Tibor's body as Noémi's, and the fear of the reverse (identifying Noémi's body as Tibor's) is thus

another field of material-discursive intra-action, where disidentification with a "start-out" masculine identity is the desired effect. Tibor himself wishes to disidentify Tibor as Noémi: "I try to look at myself as a woman, I try to look as a woman" ["*Megpróbálok nőként nézni magamra, megpróbálok nőként nézni*"] (78). In this sentence there is a play with the duplication of Tibor/Noémi as subject and object, recalling a special "specular moment" (de Man 921) in which the subject (observer and observed "trapped" in the same body) must misrecognize himself as a woman. Such moments of self-observation are not peculiar to transgendered persons; however, in their case the specular moment is intensified in terms of gender, since passing in the social scene becomes a matter of life (and death, in extreme cases, as can be seen in the movie *Boys Don't Cry* [1999], for example). When Tibor successfully passes as Noémi for the first time, his/her gender performance becomes liberating:

> Tin and concrete everywhere. A market on one side, blocks of flats on the other. Somebody whistled after us from the fish-smelling alleys, a middle-aged man stopped and gave way to us at the entrance of the fast food restaurant. *I calmed down.* Kinga ordered the cheeseburger, the fries and the Coke, I would've ruined everything with my voice. I was just smiling silently. I stood, sat down, walked like a marionette, Kinga was the stringmaster all through the way, *draw in your stomach, walk straight, close your knees, don't take such big strides*. We sat down at a remote table, near the window. I started to get used to others seeing a woman in me. I started to behave like I saw women behave and like women are expected to behave. I fixed the wig as if combing my hair with my hand, the plastic stroke my fingers. I pretended to be a woman, and the act more and more liberated me. (*Incognito* 85)

Other times, when passing is not successful, the effect of recognizing Tibor in Noémi is devastating both for him/her and his/her audience: "The woman would rather cover the little girl's eyes. The smile disappeared from her face, I felt her stomach go into a cramp. I realized that the sheer existence of Noémi upset people" (*Incognito* 92). Passing is always effected in the context of looking: "The headwaiter is leaning against the bar, staring, I notice him, he looks away. He looks away, everybody looks away, all who have been staring, it makes me furious" (95). However, looking always entails interpretation, too, as it is not the sight itself that disturbs people but the fact that the performance of gender is overt: it is made obvious through the perceived discrepancy between a body that is sexed as male and a person who is

dressed as female. What is most disturbing for the audience is the denaturalization of gender in a regime where the sexual morphology of the body must be gendered according to a set of norms that define that body's definition and intelligibility in society. The transformation that Tibor/Noémi wishes for – and with which s/he makes the liminal space visible – is upsetting for the audience because of its denaturalizing effects, but *Incognito* suggests that the real problem for the narrator is that s/he cannot find the right context for his/her metamorphosis within a bipolar gender structure. So in this book transformation itself becomes an issue on a more general level that goes beyond cross-dressing. In a utopian context, where the sexual morphology of the body would be dissociated from gender identity and sexuality, and where the structure would not have such a notoriously fixed bipolarity, Tibor/Noémi would not have a problem with his/her gender: even after Noémi is born, Tibor/Noémi still loves women and is repulsed by sexual activity with men who want to seek him/her out because s/he is transgendered (109-10). But in a system where bipolar gender is read back onto the body and its morphology, and thus sexual genesis is confused with sexual difference on a social level (MacInnes 17), Tibor/Noémi's transformation is a threat to the stability of the system. Also, Tibor's existence as Noémi is more of a pressure on masculinity than on femininity: while most women in the novel do not feel threatened by Noémi's presence (one of them even remarks that she has reconsidered her femininity since she met Noémi [116]), men refuse Noémi on homophobic grounds (99-100), even though Tibor/Noémi's sexuality remains intact. Nevertheless, the gender transformation still causes trouble in his/her sexual life, when Kinga, who starts to date Tibor, breaks up with Noémi because she cannot see Tibor in Noémi any more: "*I've regarded you as a woman for too long now; I don't see the man in you any longer*" (114).

So it would be easy to conclude that it is transformation at will that becomes Tibor/Noémi's ultimate desire, especially after reading passages such as this: "I'd like to have

a magic wand so that I could turn my gender whenever I want to. Once I'd exist in a female body, once in a male body. Just upon the spur of the moment. But I might as well want to become a woman for good. I don't know" (*Incognito* 132). Yet, the bipolar structure of gender does not allow this desire to become some kind of "supragender" life praxis. For the most part of the narrative, there is – because within the existing structure of gender there must be – an either/or urge to change the body or the psyche (or both) into *either* male *or* female: "I wish I was different. I wish I could change, cutting out the necessary amount of desire from myself. [...] I wish I could change, I wish I could be a man. Or I wish I could be a woman" (115). There is no third option.

Therefore, it seems that Tibor/Noémi's liminal space of identifying *both* as male and female (and being able to make these two poles coexist in the trans-space) remains a utopia. As such, the fact that Tibor/Noémi must conceive his/her gender transformation not only in bipolar but in bodily terms induces a massive sense of alienation from his/her male body. As B. Kiss asserts, Tibor's male body becomes the locus of estrangement, which, in my opinion, problematizes the reading of *Incognito* as a text that automatically undermines the bipolar gender structure. For me T. N. Kiss's confession is much more about uncovering an underlying paradox about the discursive materialization of gender in narrative: while transgender, a fundamental part of the narrator's identity (together with the desire it entails), derives from the discrepancy between the sexual morphology of the male body and the feminine gender to be performed on it, the body as such is treated as an independent system (locus) completely differed from narratorial/subjective consciousness. As such, *Incognito* revolves around the issue of (gender) misrecognition in the face of the body's constancy (a closed system sexed as male): the narrated subject, who wishes for effective transformation, feels that his/her body is an enemy, cut off from him/her as a gendered subject. The extended allegory at the end of the book is a perfect example for the presentation of the tripartite

systems of body-psyche-text, which are dissociated from each other but still presuppose each other's presence: "It would be so easy if I didn't differ from my body, if my own body didn't rob me of myself. [...] I can't introduce myself, yet I would like to so much, so much. Dear Évi, dear Karola, dear audience. I can't introduce myself, yet I would like so much to tell you everything" (165-6). Introducing the subject is a communicative act (either on the diegetic or the extradiegetic level), but it cannot be effected without a body. But the body in *Incognito* is just "a puppet in clothes": Noémi's character cannot be anything else in Tibor's male body (165). Noémi as an identity is thus void of human agency, which deprives her of the possibility to become a speaking subject. Noémi does not have a voice – either in the literal sense of the word (recall the scene in the fast food restaurant, where she remains silent lest she should ruin the gender performance) or in the figurative sense, as a political-social presence, an extension of herself as the possessor of humanist subjecthood that would make her intelligible by way of enabling her to introduce herself to society.

One of the most striking features in the narrative, therefore, is the effect of the narrator's alienation from his/her body, which consists in a series of images of disintegration. The posthumanity of *Incognito* can be observed best in the construction of this pervasive effect of disintegration on the linguistic level of the book. But what is it that disintegrates? However ubiquitous the images of the body's dissolution seem, for example, in the recurrent image of Tibor/Noémi coughing up dust that suffocates him/her (162, 164, 165), the main problem for the narrator is that Tibor's body is *not malleable enough* for Noémi to take it – after all, *Incognito* is not a magic realist story of bodily transformation (unlike, for example, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*). In *Incognito* the transformation of the body is contained in figuration and does not specifically occur on the "biodiegetic" level (in the physical body of the character in the storyworld as such). Tibor clearly refuses sexual reassignment surgery: "I'm a woman, in a male body. I'd like to live on as a woman. I ask for a woman, myself. A morning when I

wake up as a woman. I want to be a woman, not a man turned into a woman by surgery" (162).[36] Attempts at the physical transformation of Tibor's body thus mainly involve cross-dressing, the creation of the effect of gender by way of such metonymical signifiers as clothing, make-up, movements and gestures, which are even referred to as "crap" at some point in the text (140). This construction of Noémi from such metonymical signifiers, which constitute visual simulacra (hence the focus on looks in moments of passing and failing to pass), is too unstable for Tibor. In one scene, for example, the narrator describes herself through the images of security cameras:

> I move from screen to screen, a woman on the security footage, in eight hundred times six hundred pixels. My face in sixty times thirty-six pixels, my ear in twelve times eight, my lips in fourteen times four, my eye in two times one pixels. My eyes are green, my lips are shining with gloss, I am a woman on the screen. […] the woman will disappear as soon as I hang it on a rack with my clothes. As it vanishes in the air, just like the scent of perfume. As I'm left alone with my body, all alone. It holds me captive. There's no place to go. Nowhere to turn back to. (124-5)

The passage above is an excellent example of how the layering of simulacra works in the text, which also shows material-perceptive-discursive intra-action in operation. The construction of Noémi's feminine gender from clothes and accessories, the material performance of gender on the diegetic level, is the first layer of simulacra. Then another, virtual-visual layer (still in the storyworld) is added to the performance when it is described through the security screens as a series of images constituted from pixels. Finally, both of these layers are presented to the readers by the extradiegetic narrator, through the figurative operation of language. These layers, with the narrator and a mechanical panoptical system (the security cameras) as double focalizers, intensify one another and thus create a general effect of simulation and disintegration, which is as pervasive as it is temporary. Choosing a

[36] The narrator of *Incognito* concludes that "[t]he surgery was cancelled for good" (130). Tibor Noé Kiss, the author reinforces in the interview conducted by Szekeres that he does not want "to do anything" with his/her body, as s/he considers the transformation of his/her body a "taboo."

technological means of focalization also dissociates the notion of narrative viewpoint/focus from the human, thereby opening up the act of narration to include non-human agents.

This gender simulacrum is put into contrast with Tibor's body and self, so much so that it seems to come to a life of its own that Tibor cannot incorporate, so he has to put an end to it. In the following passage of disillusionment, which presents Tibor's voice *and* point of view, Noémi appears as completely reduced to her constructive accessories, as a lifeless body that must still be killed in order for Tibor to stay alive:

> I have known for months that I had to kill Noémi. I could never become Noémi once and for all, so I had to kill her. I wasn't sure of anything, I just felt I could never be Noémi. I had to choose, either this or that. Tibor or Noémi. Or the constant fear of death, the numbness and the sweating.
> The woman was lying in front of me, spread out in the mud. The woman, in plastic bags and cardboard boxes. I had to kill her." (*Incognito* 151)

However, this ritualized killing of the woman by the man, the imagery of which may be familiar from television, never takes place. Tibor tries to put Noémi on fire, but she will resist, and rather than burning "well," she emits a thick smoke, so eventually Tibor stomps out the fire, and the smoke slowly clears (151). Thus, this scene suggests, again in a metaphorical chain of signification, that Noémi's presence is a necessary element in Tibor's sense of identity, bringing as much confusion as clarity into it.

As the passage above also exemplifies, what is narrated in *Incognito* is the construction of a subjectivity that is more complex than "mere" discourse: first of all, the "adventures" of a biological body, which is morphologically coded as male, are narrated in the story. Secondly, a feminine character (Noémi) is constructed by means of gender performance, with the mixture of signifiers that operate on the "surface" of the male body. Both of these "bodies" are elements of the storyworld on the diegetic level. The narrator's psychic presence, centering around his/her transgendered identity in the process of self-narration, is positioned against *both* of these duplicated bodies that are contrasted in terms of gender. As such, several

passages testify to the conceptual separation and independence of both the biological and the performative body from narratorial consciousness. "My body is a cloak *hung up on me*, I drag it around, can't tear it off, can't leave it behind. The bones, the jewels are *cracking, coughing, rattling on me*. The face powder and the nylon burn into my skin, blood red stains on my incognito" (165, emphasis added). This poetic passage uses a series of metaphors and metonymies to juxtapose the biological body and the gender simulacrum as antagonistic to the narrated "I," and at the same time confuses what is biological and manufactured in a series of "misplaced" signifiers, thereby achieving resignification by slippage. The metaphor of the body as a cloak takes a piece of clothing to stand for the biological body, while it also opens up the metonymical chain of items used in gender performance (jewels, face powder, nylon). In the second sentence of the passage, both the body and the performative items are personified to constitute a sinister presence of "partial objects" (Žižek, "Troubles with the Real")[37] that crack, cough and rattle, recalling and resignifying archetypal images of Death, reminders of the biological end of the body. Finally, in the second half of the third sentence a specific reading of the book's title is provided in a context that suggests metaphorical bleeding wounds and burns (which again recall the biological vulnerability of the body).

These images show that the narrated "I," a consciousness separate from these sinister partial objects that constitute the duplicated bodies of Tibor/Noémi, suffers from the misplacement of signifiers necessary for him/her to construct an incognito that makes him/her readable in terms of gender, but which also cause him/her pain and frustration. One of the fundamental realizations of the book is that the narrated "I" does not fit anywhere: his/her image cannot be contained in the mirror, as some part always falls out of the frame, so s/he is not recognizable even to him/herself (*Incognito* 134). An inescapable sense of alienness and

[37] As Žižek explains, in Freudian psychoanalysis a partial object is "a weird organ which is magically autonomized, surviving without a body whose organ it should have been, like a hand that wonders around alone in early Surrealist films, or like the smile in *Alice in Wonderland* that persists alone, even when the Cheshire cat's body is no longer present" ("Troubles with the Real"). Such a partial object is usually a threatening presence, since it is a symbol or metaphor for "undeadness" (*The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*).

abjection permeates the narrative: "I am a stranger on the meadow and the path. A stranger on the farm and among the blocks of flats. A stranger on the bank of the Danube and the Promenade, in the pub and on the football pitch. A stranger at home and abroad. In incognito, everywhere" (134). The narrated subject's transformation takes place by way of migration "from an alien body to an alien body" (155).

The reading of the book's title on the basis of the passages above thus suggests that it is not only Tibor's male body that functions as the locus of alienation in the novel but Noémi's constructed female body, as well. It is the body in general (in its duplicated form) that becomes a source of alienation and threat in *Incognito*, just like in Spiegelmann's *Precious Little*. As such, one of the major "sources" and manifestations of this alienation is gender, since gender as a power discourse is a never-ending process of identification continuously requiring performative self-fashioning, in which a discursively constructed system of norms outside and prior to the body is written back on the body. In a way, then, "writing back" on the body constructs it as a phenomenon in different systems. In Butler's words, "[a]s a projected phenomenon, the body is not merely the source from which projection issues, but is also always a phenomenon in the world, an estrangement from the very 'I' who claims it" (*Bodies That Matter* 17). Gender can thus be seen in *Incognito* as a system of simulation that forces the narrated subject to engage in daily identification, but which constructs his/her differentiation and différance from both of the idealized poles of a dichotomous gender structure. This, in turn, leads to his/her occasional rejection (abjection) in social terms, which shows that simulated effects can generate very real power dynamics and hierarchies. In fact, the differentiation here between "simulated" and "real" is only a rhetorical move.

In this aspect, the book shows the impossibility of the simulacrum itself, in that most of the time it cannot create the effect of the narrated subject's "naturalness" [*természetesség*] in terms of gender. In the Szekeres-interview, T. N. Kiss asserts that "self-sameness

[*önazonosság*] is the key," since "if you are at peace with yourself, nothing should seem unnatural [*természetellenes*]." The use of the expression "self-sameness" here may recall a transcendental humanist understanding of subjectivity in an individualistic framework, which, as posthumanists such as Wolfe would argue, is difficult to transcend. But if the concept of self-sameness can accommodate the acceptance of the subject's limited knowledge about, and control over, his/her own self, in a way Butler talks about it in *Giving an Account*, then self-sameness does not need to incorporate a stable gender identity (or a stable identity in general, be it constructed in autobiographical narrative or by any other means), since what constitutes an individual subject's identity is beyond the authority of that individual.

Incognito complicates this idea by radicalizing the dualism between the mind (consciousness or psyche) and the body with the introduction and "elevation" of the sinister partial objects to an agential level. T. N. Kiss and his/her narrated "I" refuse sexual reassignment surgery, on the basis of the argument that self-sameness (however paradoxical a notion) is what matters. Therefore, there is no "relapse" into a monistic[38] view of mind and body made of the same substance, and the text is very far from suggesting a utopian ideal of unity between them. I would argue, however, that the strong agential presence of the body and other partial objects, which are posited against the narrated "I" in terms of sinisterness and pain, suggests a posthumanist (non-human) notion of agency. Thus, paradoxically, although the narrated "I" as the positive presence of the book (its speaking "consciousness" in a confessional context) is dematerialized, it can be dematerialized only *vis-à-vis* the material, so it is unavoidably implicated in the material. Conversely, the material is also always implicated in what is dematerialized, by way of being named and defined via social categories, and given metaphorical agency on the rhetorical level of the text.

[38] Monism here refers to "[t]he [philosophical] doctrine that mind and matter are formed from, or reducible to, the same ultimate substance or principle of being" (*The Free Dictionary*). A detailed discussion of philosophical monism and the mind/body dualism with respect to gender can be found in Grosz's *Volatile Bodies*.

An overarching aspect of the book that sets this dynamic into motion is a system of symptoms that becomes an integral part of the narrative. Sickness and pain, which constitute the sinisterness of the body and other partial objects in *Incognito*, may also be conceptualized in terms of simulation. While Tibor/Noémi's continuous self-observation in mirrors, shopwindows, a variety of reflecting surfaces and other people's eyes verge on the paranoid, such a heightened level of self-reflexivity is a usual autobiographical "prerogative," and shows the paradox of self-observation in life writing, namely, that despite the self-reflexive imperative, there is no objective position for the narrating "I" to construct a fully separate narrated subject (Kálmán C. 1144). So what I would rather like to focus here is the construction of symptoms, which, on the whole, create the sense of a hypochondriac autobiographical character in a self-ironizing way. But this generation of symptoms also deserves more careful attention because it also shows how simulation can operate to construct real physical effects.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard writes that someone who simulates an illness produces "true" symptoms. As such, the question whether the simulator is sick or not is a misplaced one:

> Objectively one cannot treat him as being either ill or not ill. Psychology and medicine stop at this point, forestalled by the illness's henceforth undiscoverable truth. For if any symptom can be "produced," and can no longer be taken as a fact of nature, then every illness can be considered as simulatable and simulated, and medicine loses its meaning since it only knows how to treat "real" illnesses according to their objective causes. Psychosomatics evolves in a dubious manner at the borders of the principle of illness. (3)

Similarly to gender, sickness in *Incognito* also functions on a dual platform of simulation: first of all, there are simulated bodily (psychosomatic) symptoms that create very real physiological sensations in the body, such as a racing heart, pain in various parts of the body, sweating, numbness and shortness of breath. "I've had a backache for weeks. Sometimes a pain in my chest. I know this is a premonitory symptom of a heart attack. I'm prepared for the

arrival of numbness in my hand and a black-out. It may happen at any time now" (66). Although these symptoms are prevalent, as shown in the final imagery of the body as an imprisoning entity,[39] the irony in the narrator's self-description as a hypochondriac suggests an additional level of rhetorical manipulation in the description of these simulated symptoms, with which the symptoms themselves become an effect of the text, constructing a dualistic subject with ambivalent agency. On the one hand, by way of telling the story of these symptoms, the narrator becomes a speaking subject; on the other hand, this speaking subject is numbed by (the symptoms of) the body. At some point, even sound becomes a peculiar partial object, when the narrator imagines to hear piano music played within his/her body, and it feels as if the notes were originating from within him/her (162), without his/her contribution to the music.[40]

To further complicate matters, these bodily symptoms, being psychosomatic, are generated by the psyche, not by the physiology of the body, except its sexual morphology, which, however, is a different aspect altogether. Thus, there is again a material-discursive intra-action presented in the narrative: the sexual morphology of a given male body does not match the psychological-medical-social identification of the narrator's psyche as female/transgendered (categories constructed by discursive regimes, most prominently, the regime of gender and the medical/psychiatric profession). As a result of these discrepancies in identity (strengthened by other causes from the narrator's past and family background, none of which, however, may be selected as the single most significant cause, as I have previously pointed out), the psyche generates symptoms that affect the functioning of the body on the

[39] "My body shackles me, presses me, there's no escape. I keep kicking, running out of breath, gasping for air. [...] My body controls me, and yet, it lets me see and breathe" (*Incognito* 165).

[40] Žižek points out in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* that the human voice can also become a fearful partial object, when it surprisingly manifests itself as a presence on its own, a "foreign intruder": "Voice is not an organic part of a human body. It's coming from somewhere in between your body." Žižek's examples for voice as a partial object include William Friedkin's "The Exorcist" and David Lynch's "Mulholland Dr." In my reading, the above-mentioned piano scene makes *Incognito* similar to "Mulholland Dr." in this respect: in both works, there is autonomous music/singing without the presence or conscious contribution of a human being.

physiological level. And yet, the narrator presents these symptoms as manifestations of the body's suppressive hold that prevents him/her from freely becoming "who s/he wants to be." This whole dynamic intra-action between the psyche and the body is then narrated in the textual system of the book, gaining a whole new level of operation in a confession whose function is to make an attempt to "cure" the subject from his/her intricate trauma of identity in some way, and at the same time to make him/her "presentable" in communicative-social terms. Thus, the generation of psychosomatic symptoms, a "playing field" for material-discursive intra-action, connects the three systems of narration identified by Clarke and discussed in Chapter 1 in complex ways.

3.1.3 Conclusion: Becoming the partial object

As Kálmán C. suggests, the unfulfillment of the novel's autobiographical teleology of the narrator's development into a "complete" human subject is mainly due to the fact that the major problem for the narrator of *Incognito* – the lack of a sense of self-sameness s/he desires all through the book – is not narratable (1141-2). In a way, the narrator's alienation from his/her body and his/her psychosomatic symptoms do not "pass" as stories, at least not in the traditional sense of the term, which supports the systems theoretical idea that the systems of biology/environment, consciousness, and narrative operate separately as closed systems, so their entities are not transformable or transplantable into one another. This is why Kálmán C. asserts that *Incognito* is a not a novel about finding answers to the burning question of "Who am I?" (since all the answers the narrative seems to come up with ring false somehow) but about showing the impossibility and hopelessness of finding answers (1143). As such, I consider *Incognito* a consciously performative text, which equally calls attention to its own construction, the constructive-performative nature of social categories that define and

circumscribe identity, and the philosophical-ideological loadedness of the very questions that interrogate it (such as the simple "Who am I?"). The (mis)readings the text offers also appear as simulacra themselves, generated by respective, similarly loaded theories. In a humanist framework of autobiographical analysis, *Incognito* can be read as an "honest confession," but it may also be interpreted in terms of psychoanalysis (for example, as an Oedipal story), or with a focus on (trans)gender and subjectivity, and while these (mis)readings may stand as equally valid, they all seem to be partial and elusive.

On the closing pages of the novel, as part of the extended allegory about the narrated subject's alienation from his/her body, Tibor/Noémi finally realizes what Žižek concludes in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*: "the only way [...] to get rid of [an] autonomous partial object is to become this object." Tibor/Noémi's sense of alienation from his/her body can thus be ameliorated only if, as s/he writes, s/he finds his/her place in it:

> I have no other choice but to make myself comfortable in my skin. I settle next to the heart, near the lungs, where the ribs protect me. I carve out pieces of furniture from the redundant bones, a wardrobe, a desk, a bunk bed. I float on blood red blood cells, from my frontal lobe to my metatarsus. I sweep the chamber and the atrium, look my retina in the eye, set sail of my soft palate, trim the hedges of my nasal septum. I would like to observe myself, as closely as possible. (165-6)[41]

In this final imagery of the body as abode for the subject, the hierarchical relation between the mind as superior and the body as inferior is reversed, but in a peculiar way: the narrated "I" becomes a miniaturized Robinson Crusoe and sailor of the body, a self-made subject who wants to explore the body's recesses, while his/her body parts are turned from

[41] In this beautifully written passage, the metaphors show, in an ironically self-referential way, the great extent of figuration in the language of biology. Some of the metaphors are difficult to translate, and the translations are only approximations of the original imagery in Hungarian. The ingenuity of the passage lies in the use of verbs that match – in a pseudo-naive, ironizing way – the activities related to the literal meaning of the objects that are used in a figurative sense when referring to body parts. For example, the original "*egyenesre nyírom az orrsövényemet*" (translated here as "trim the hedges of my nasal septum") involves the metaphorical name of "nose hedge," which is the expression in Hungarian for "nasal septum." Moreover, the metaphors may bring in further connotations, as well, such as the sweeping of the chamber and the atrium, which recalls early state socialist times in Hungary through associations with the common expression "*kisöpri a padlást*" ("sweep the attic"), referring to the compulsory delivery of crops to the state. The chain of associations this passage brings up also shows how the slippage of meaning in language works.

sinister partial objects into everyday objects of use in a house. Again, a metaphorical chain is employed for resignification, completely transforming the humanist dichotomy of mind/body by changing proportions between them, and at the same time turning the body into a *literal* home for the subject.

This figurative conclusion to the novel delivers a somewhat positive outcome of Tibor/Noémi's confession, inasmuch as it leads him/her to indeed becoming comfortable in his/her (male) body and finding a way to introduce his/her transgendered self to society in a tolerably intelligible way. However, the novel on the whole still testifies to the constraints the bipolar gender structure exerts on bodies, in which "free floating" transgender is not yet a fully viable and livable option of difference. As long as the materialization of sexual genesis, "the assumption of a certain contoured materiality [...], a giving form to that body, a morphogenesis that takes place through a set of identificatory projections" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 17) occurs in discursive territories where the prerogative for one to gain social presence entails negative terms, abjection, and the hierarchical circumscription of what is meaningful from what is not, there will be no equality of bodies. Also, there is still a primacy of the discursive body – even in theory – over the body imagined in other forms and modes, a discursive materialization of the body that entails the "estrangement" of that which is being materialized. As such, the conceptualization of the dualism between mind and body is still too often hung up on negative terms (such as "trauma"), so it is driven by nostalgia for a primordial unity that never existed. When Butler, problematizing the materialization of the body on grounds of gender, asks whether language can "simply refer to materiality" or if it is "also the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear" (*Bodies That Matter* 30-1), the question still poses two extremes, and while the acceptance of the first option is now obsolete, an unconditional "yes" to the second one is still dubious, and calls for new

directions of analysis, a "rephilosophization" of questions of body, gender, and language – for example, in posthumanist terms.

3.2 Laura Spiegelmann's *Precious Little*: Textual Drag as Posthumanist Critique

It is hard to specify a theoretical line of argument for the analysis of Laura Spiegelmann's *Precious Little*, not only because life writing has been for a while theorized alongside the subject and subjectivity, and as such, it has accumulated a huge variety of analytical approaches, but also because the book itself addresses a lot of issues and generates a number of controversies both thematically and structurally. First of all, what was published in 2008 as the pseudo-autobiographical novella *Precious Little* had originally been written as a weblog, a hypertextual and interactive form characteristically different from the linear and static text of a novel. This alone would justify a unique approach to the text, provided I had chosen to focus on the text as a literary pseudo-selfblog. However, by the time of starting this study, the blog had been removed from the Internet, so, as a "latecomer" to the text, I myself did not have the chance to read *Precious Little* in its online form; consequently, I also missed the comments to it, which I consider to be an integral part of a blog text. Therefore, even though I fully agree with Péter György, who points out that the novel's remarkable prehistory as a blog must also be taken into account if a comprehensive critique of *Precious Little* is to be constructed in the long run (28), what follows is predominantly the analysis of the text in its hard copy form, albeit one that has retained some structural features of its original weblog format. Consequently, I will not be able to extensively dwell on issues that may derive from the digital existence of *Precious Little* but will focus on aspects that evolve from the work as a printed text.

Apart from this characteristically 21st-century genesis of the text, however, a lot of other issues of interest still remain for analysis. Nevertheless, as Zoltán Németh suggests, most critics and readers focus on one of two aspects when discussing the work: firstly, the identity of its author ("Who is Laura Spiegelmann *really*?"); and secondly, its pornographic style ("Obszcén női önéletrajz" 222-3). *Precious Little* has indeed been contextualized in terms of both of these aspects: it has been put into the line of Hungarian literary works in which there is a gender switch between author and narrator (or between real author and implied author),[42] rendering the work a pseudo-autobiographical text, and it has also been aligned with (and measured to) the trend of using pornographic language as a tool to express some kind of "truth" about the body and its sexuality.[43] Both of these issues are important in that they may open up the way for problematizing the relationship between (embodied) subjectivity, gender, and text. However, they may also circumscribe the analysis because they keep the readers within comfortable confines defined by well-rehearsed theoretical and historical traditions of literary consumption and interpretation. Recalling the discussion of *Precious Little* (the book) at an *Élet és Irodalom* roundtable event in Budapest in 2009, György points out that the "normative method of close reading" with which the discussants approached the book somehow led to its misreading. In general, by focusing on the internal structure and immanent features of the text, with expectations concerning veracity and verisimilitude, critics have partly or wholly disregarded the wider context that the text (in both its forms) called into play, including norms and preconceptions about, and connections between, (pseudo)names, genders, pornography (both as practice and as linguistic register), printed and digital forms, and the literary and critical establishment (30).

[42] See, for example, Péter L. Varga (2008) and Zoltán Németh (2009a, 2009b).

[43] Spiegelmann's text does not live up to the standards of Hungary's "great pornographic literary tradition" either for Csaba Károlyi (2008) or Imre Bartók (2009).

In my opinion, the possibility of mis/reading *Precious Little* is strongly connected to Derrida's concept of iterability mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. Iterability, as Derrida conceived it, is the function of signs to be recalled in different contexts, which also always entails a certain intention or necessity of interpretation. I have also pointed out that iterability in texts results in shifting constructs of textual subsystems that create effects, for example, of gendered or other socially-culturally coded experience, which in turn elicit differential interpretations – and this is how iterability shifts meaning *ad infinitum*, sometimes resulting in contradictory readings. As has been mentioned, Cornell underlines this functioning of signs as an important means to induce transformative potential in binary codes, for example, in the system of gender. The reason I find *Precious Little* a significant text for analysis is its conscious utilization of this transformative potential by means of a double-layered drag performance that entails the transgendering of the author function on the paratextual level, and the narrative performance of gender on the textual level. In the first part of the present subchapter, therefore, I will discuss the critical potential of this performance both in the context of the book's reception (its differential mis/readings) as well as the idea of gender performativity that tends towards posthumanist conceptualizations of gender as a system of simulation. In the second part of the subchapter, I will direct the analysis of *Precious Little* towards some current concerns in posthumanist criticism of autobiographical writing and gender, examining mainly the narrative gendering of the fallibility of the human body and embodied experience in post/humanist terms.

3.2.1 Textual drag performance inducing mis/readings

Although many of Spiegelmann's reviewers have focused on (the possibility of) the writer's[44] gender switch from male to female to the extent of the author/narrator function, drag as a critical concept does not surface in the reviews. It is partly due to the fact that the term itself is not common currency in Hungarian literary criticism, and as such, the gender change of *Precious Little* has been addressed in the more general terms of the mask, incognito, alterego, and/or pseudonym.[45] However, I find the concept of drag very useful in approaching the book both on the textual and paratextual levels, as it provides an analytical vehicle for the explication of both sexuality and gender as they operate textually. In what follows I am going to discuss how drag can be conceptualized in the context of narrative, and how it is used in *Precious Little* as a strategy to create an author and a narrator function, and to offer a critique of binaries and preconceptions at work in the narrative-discursive construction of sexuality and gender, and the literary-autobiographical establishment. Taken as a critical instrument, drag helps to understand gender in posthumanist terms, since it discloses the operation of gender as "a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 140) by blatantly exposing the links that connect masculinity and femininity to the body. At the same time, it comes forward as a parasitic act that feeds on the system it disrupts.

In an earlier research paper of mine on Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1999) I make a categorical distinction between *drag*, the performance of a gender by the body (an actor) of the opposite sex (where a related term may be cross-dressing), and *androgyny*, which mainly

[44] When I started working on *Precious Little*, the identity of the author was still unknown, and the guesswork concerning his/her identity constituted a significant portion of the book's reception. When the author, Lóránt Kabai finally revealed himself to be the writer of *Precious Little* by listing the title among his previous works on the book sleeve of his 2013 collection of poems, *Avasi keserű* [*Avas Bitter*], his acknowledging the work as his own solved the mystery, and thereby cut a major source of interest for/in its reception (although some readers do not give credit to Kabai's revelation; in a November 2013 online article, Bálint Szilágyi argues, on the basis of some of the book's intertextual references, that the real author is Attila Bartis).

[45] These concepts are prominently dealt with in Zoltán Németh (2009a), but also in Emőke Berényi (2009), Péter György (2010), Péter L. Varga (2008), Illés Molnár (2008), and Júlia Turai (2008), among others.

entails the spiritual and/or philosophical unity between the male and the female principles, so it would rather stand as the marker of a kind of "post-gender" utopia (2-4). Unlike androgyny, drag is heavily grounded in the material for its self-construction: in the case of theatrical drag, the performance needs a body in order to perform, and the body becomes an act to be performed. While the whole performance centers around gender, drag uses and abuses the pre-existing gender system to induce meaning in a deconstructive way by creating a literal and a figurative (ironic) reading of gender: it aims to pass and disrupt at the same time. It must be noted that both of these readings are equally valid: they coexist in the performance without cancelling out each other. In my opinion, this coexistence of conflicting readings is important to make drag disturbing, disruptive, and critically effective.[46]

This coexistence of conflicting readings also entails that the ironic, disruptive reading would not be possible without the literal reading (the one oriented at passing), in the creation of which the drag performance must heavily rely on the already existing system of gender in its *extensive performativity*. As Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*,

> [a]s much as [male] drag creates a unified picture of "woman" [...], it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.* Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (137-8)

According to Butler, what makes such simulation pervasive is its repetition in a social (public) context, where each repetition is "at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (*Gender Trouble* 140). A key element in the simulatory nature of such gender

[46] Ethnographic research on drag cultures, for example, by Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp (2006), or Eve Shapiro (2007), supports this claim, emphasizing that drag is more than just "playful entertainment" for its performers. As Shapiro states, oppositional drag communities "are an important venue for identity work" (268).

performance – and of all performativity, in my opinion – is the parodistic nature of "imitation without an origin" (138). As Butler stresses, what makes such parodistic imitations potentially disruptive is their method of using signifiers in different contexts – that is, their iterability. The perpetual displacement of gender signifiers in drag "constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization," depriving hegemonic culture of the possibility to maintain naturalized essences. In short, "imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original [...] imitate the myth of originality itself" (138).[47]

The performative operation of drag bears import to *Precious Little* on two levels. First of all, Lóránt Kabai's creating Laura Spiegelmann, originally as a nickname (avatar), then as a more conventional author function in printed literature, constitutes a literary drag in the paratextual universe of *Precious Little*. This literary drag, as I have pointed out, is not without precedent in Hungarian literature. József Kármán's *Fanni hagyományai* [*Fanni's Traditions*], which first appeared in periodical installments in 1794, stands as an early example for a gender-bending first-person narrative, presented via Fanny's diary and letters. As Németh remarks, similarly to *Precious Little*, Kármán's text also confused the readers of its time, since even Ferenc Toldy, a prominent 19th-century literary critic, and publisher of *Fanni* in a book format (1843), originally thought it was written by a woman of the same name, and Kármán was just the editor of the text ("Obszcén női önéletrajz" 223). Németh also wonders why it is a common notion that the use of a pseudonym warrants the authorship of a famous writer, and that a fictional game of identity (the use of a mask) should necessarily indicate gender bending (224), as many readers believed was the case with *Precious Little* even before Kabai's revealing himself to be its author.

[47] Butler also points out that in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1983) Fredric Jameson uses the term *pastiche* to denote such disruptive imitations without origins (*Gender Trouble* 138). Baudrillard retains the notion of simulacrum for a similar phenomenon: the construction of a pervasive copy without an original. As I see it, in all the three terms – performance, pastiche, and simulacrum – the ontological quality of the imitation with regard to the non-existing original is the same: the imitation creates originality by constructing and/or parodying the effect of originality, subverting thus the dichotomy between original and copy. Drag, therefore, can be seen in the context of all the three terms.

In a short paper I also examined *Precious Little* in comparison with two other Hungarian gender-bending works, Sándor Weöres's *Psyché: Egy hajdani költőnő írásai* [*Psyché: The Writings of a Poetess from the Past*] (1972), and *Csokonai Lili: Tizenhét hattyúk* [*Seventeen Swans by Lili Csokonai*], written by Péter Esterházy (1987). As I argued, the sheer fact that there is (believed to be) a gender switch between the real author and the pseudonym/narrator of the work triggers the attention of feminist critics, some of whom – trapped within the confines of referential reading, even more obviously in the case of (pseudo-)autobiographical texts – find these works lacking in authenticity as to the rendering of "female experience" ("Performing the Autobiographical" 2).[48] Of course, it is not only these feminist critics in particular that expect to gain a sense of authenticity from a literary work marked by gender, but the general reading public, as well, as I have already discussed in connection with Magda Szabó's novel *Für Elise*. But in terms of feminist literary criticism, a gynocritical attitude is betrayed by remarks that claim *Precious Little* must have been written by a man (or perhaps by a man *and* a woman) because although the author has taken great pains to "write as a woman" and to "become a woman writer" (by observing how contemporary women authors write), the text exhibits shallow drama, extensive imitation, inauthentic femininity, and ambiguous psychology (N. Kiss, "Keserű és nimfomán" 41). Apart from the fact that such shortcomings may as well be attributed to texts written by "real" women – as N. Kiss herself suggests when referring to the uneven standard of "women's booklets" that construct a female psyche based on self-reproach and a sense of inferiority (41), or as some readers characterize Polcz's writing discussed in Chapter 2 –, relating authenticity and femininity through the sex of the author is problematic both in terms of narrating (gendered) experience and gendering narrative.

[48] Such readings often result in deeming these texts not only inauthentic but also antifeminist and even misogynist. However, as Beáta Hock points out in her comparative analysis of *Psyché* and *Seventeen Swans*, these texts may provide feminist readings if approached with a focus on their fictionality and rhetoricity, more specifically, Weöres's attempt at writing an alternative literary history in which women such as Psyché are included (146), or Csokonai-Esterházy's constructing a peculiar kind of *écriture feminine* (140).

My aim here is not primarily to add to the already vast literature that problematizes gynocriticism, but to emphasize that the performative operation of drag – the literary version of which is at play in *Precious Little* and similar gender-bending texts – would not even be conceivable in gynocritical terms that imagine an unproblematic correspondence between body, sex, gender, authorship, and authenticity. These correspondences affect both the textual and paratextual levels of literature, so drag – for example, in the specific case of *Precious Little* – denaturalizes not only the relationship between (the name of) the author and such narrative elements as voice and focalization, but also the connection between the real author (his/her physical reality) and the name that appears on the cover of the book. It is important to note, as Németh does, that this name often takes up a superposition in the construction of a book's paratextual universe, controlling and defining interpretation and aesthetic judgment ("Obszcén női önéletrajz" 223) – and inducing gendered critique in a lot of cases. The name Laura Spiegelmann is thus an overtly virtual paratext,[49] a superpositioned simulatory signifier for a female writer that never existed.

The fact that even before Kabai's revelation most critics believed the real author to be male tells a lot about the gendered nature of the Hungarian literary institution. First of all, as I have mentioned before, the book was associated with the relatively long line of gender-bending/masquerading writers, among whom no female authors are usually listed. Had Laura Spiegelmann really been a woman,[50] she would not have fitted into this tradition, and the reading public would have been at a loss, bereft of an easily identifiable critical context. Secondly, the book would have had to be considered either too serious or too weightless

[49] No reader actually believed it was the author's real name, especially since *Precious Little* was put out by a major publisher not famous for dealing with "talented amateurs."

[50] Unfortunately, as I never had the chance to read Laura Spiegelmann's blog, originally titled "Manga," I also missed its comments, so now I cannot compare the guesses about Laura's online gender identity with those appearing in the book reviews. But I suspect Laura as an avatar could pass as a woman more easily than her printed counterpart, which may again be partly due to the fact that the Hungarian institution of print literature is still heavily male-dominated.

without the use of drag, especially given the often unfavorable attitude towards contemporary Hungarian women's literature.[51] With the gender-switch, however, Laura Spiegelmann's identity became the topmost concern in the reception of the book, in spite of the author's intentions (which will be discussed in more detail later). Thirdly, and most importantly, using a female pseudonym calls attention to the (empty) space that the owner of the name is supposed to take up in real life (if the autobiographical pact is to be taken seriously), and to the performance *within* the text that creates the effect of gender, which takes me to the second level of how drag operates in *Precious Little*.

As Rika Saito argues in "Writing in Female Drag" (2010), authors may employ literary drag – that is, a set of thematic, linguistic and stylistic features normatively associated with feminine or masculine writing – as a narrative strategy, regardless of their sex. Saito claims that "a woman's everyday lived behavior, mannerisms, and speech, when performed unconsciously, often do not conform to ideals of 'femininity.' Accordingly, the kind of behavior that has been categorized as 'feminine' is largely a product of an imagination and aesthetic ideal fueled by masculinist discourse" (149). Examining women's literature in the Meiji period (1868-1912), Saito calls attention to the fact that many Japanese women writers of the time employed textual female drag in order both to conform to the literary ideals of their society and to confront "the normative or socially and culturally defined writing rules of [their] day" (150). More specifically, female drag as a writing strategy included a combination of such elements as "a particular writing style [in the case of Higuchi Ichiyō, for example, the combination of classical narrative and colloquial dialogue], character setting (placing a woman in the patriarchal system), and narrative mode (first-person narration)" (152).

Given the inevitability of such female drag in the construction of a "feminine" voice and gendered experience, it is rather surprising how extensively "referential reading [still] rules"

[51] A telling example for this attitude is the following joking remark from a Spiegelmann-review: "if we were cool, professional (and, let's say, male) writers, and we witnessed the scene of women's literature with its current battles verging on the parodistic [...], we would deffo write a similar novel" (Dömötör and Puskár).

(Spiegelmann quoted in Rácz) in the reception of such books as *Precious Little*, which are very often taken at *face value* by their readers. In light of de Man's understanding of autobiography as "defacement," taking *Precious Little* (or any other gender-bending text) at face value seems ironic. In the same essay, however, de Man presents the trope of prosopopoeia – literally, "making/doing/giving a face" (personification) – as an ultimate device of autobiography, the primary mode of which, as I have discussed in Chapter 2 on the basis of de Man's essay, is tropological. Prosopopoeia in an autobiographical text is thus applied in order to construct self-knowledge by figurative means. Its use is obvious in such pseudo-autobiographical drag-texts as *Precious Little*, where it is applied twice: first Kabai takes the mask/identity of Spiegelmann, who in turn takes the mask of the narrator of her own story in order to seek out self-knowledge, which – given that *Precious Little* is indeed an autobiographical text – refers back to Kabai in a complex way. The term "face value" thus gains a new meaning in this context: every face value in such an autobiographical text as *Precious Little* is the recognition of a (tropological) mask used in the construction of autobiographical knowledge about some subject. Hence the qualitative difference between taking a text at referential face value, and tropological face value.

According to de Man, the figure of prosopopoeia constructs "the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech." By way of prosopopoeia, "one's name [...] is made as intelligible and memorable as a face" (926). Thus, giving face entails – by way of a metonymical chain of signification engrained in a humanistic paradigm I have discussed in Chapter 1 – the conferring of voice, "the power of speech," as well, which opens up *Precious Little* for political readings. Examining Hubert Fichte's writing, Robert Gillett also claims that "[t]he primary gesture of autobiographical narration [...] is the application of make-up," and since "all identity is a performance put on within certain ideological constraints,"

autobiographical drag may prove to be explicitly political (45). *Precious Little* has also been considered in this light, taken as a text that holds up a mirror to men (as manifest in the name Spiegelmann) in order to show "how sexism appears in a text" (Németh, "Szerzői név és maszk" 84). In this respect, Németh puts *Precious Little* into what he calls the third wave of postmodern Hungarian fiction, whose major strategy he identifies as *transitive*: as opposed to the first and second waves, characterized mainly by *imitation* and *simulation* respectively, *Precious Little* politically relates to the world by way of reflecting patriarchy as a dominant social structure (83). In my opinion, the way Németh defines the strategies of imitation, simulation and transition for the identification of the three different waves of postmodern Hungarian fiction entails political intent, or (retrospective) interpretation within a politically conscious critical matrix, but it can hardly be applied to the linguistic operation of the texts he chooses to support his claim with, since the authors basically employ the same tool – literary drag – for the purpose of creating their highly self-reflexive characters in an autobiographical setting. Moreover, the notion of imitation and simulation are strongly related, depending on their critical definition, as I have previously shown, and both can be used in the service of transition, that is, for the problematization of identity and power in a relevant social context.

As such, I find it more rewarding to look at the book's transition (in Németh's understanding) in terms of drag, looking at its constitutive elements similar to the ones identified above by Saito, namely, writing style, character setting, and narrative mode (e.g. first-person narration). One of the most important constitutive elements of drag in *Precious Little* is its sexuality (pornography), which has largely contributed to the book's fame (and infamy) among readers and critics. As Samantha Allen points out, cross-dressing must be interpreted not only as an identity but also as an erotic practice (52). In *Precious Little*, the eroticism of drag does not explicitly manifest in the application of clothing (as in *Incognito*) but in the narration of the protagonist's sexual activities. The extensive description of these

encounters, the style of which makes the book "pornographic" in the critical eye, posits the narrative body as an item separate and independent from the narrating subject, turning it into both a partial object in posthumanist terms (similarly to the male body in *Incognito*), as well as a key element in the book's drag performance. For example, the very first chapter ("entrée") of *Precious Little*, which arguably contains one of the most striking opening lines in contemporary Hungarian fiction, places the character in a sexualized and gendered narrative context, in the middle of exaggerated erotic-pornographic activity:

> When I come to my senses, there is a cock in my mouth, I look up at its owner, a distinctive nose, a clean shaven, strong chin, slightly thin lips, warm deep blue eyes, he's looking right into my eyes, I'm kneeling in front of the couch, he's naked, I have only my bra on, its left strap pulled off my shoulder, my breast is a little visible, blood in between my thighs, but the tampon has slipped just halfway out of me, so he didn't actually want to fuck a menstruating whore, a handsome man, no excess weight anywhere, a discreetly worked-out chest, a flat belly, his dick has just the right thickness to fit in my mouth, its length is ideal, too, not even remotely the horse fucking size preferred in porn movies, on a better day my throat could even swallow it whole, a magnificent cock, what a pity I'm about to throw up on it, he's not growling, only his nose is sweating a little [...] (7)

As this first passage of the book already shows, the pornography of *Precious Little* constitutes the book's drag both on the levels of action and style, with a number of elements constructing a gendered situation. The proverbial first line – "there is a cock in my mouth" – sets a hierarchically embodied situation, which is extended in the scene with the postures of the two bodies in the intercourse. References to female genitalia, clothing, and bleeding further specify the scene as a heterosexual one, in which the narrator refers to herself as "a menstruating whore." Putting herself into the position of focalizer below the perspective of the man on top – both physically and socially, in a heavily patriarchal sexualized context –, the narrator sets a realistic-parodistic viewpoint in which both aspects coexist as valid, much in the same way as the literal and figurative readings of drag coincide without cancelling out each other. Having to retain both meanings at the same time is indeed a difficult task for the readers, no wonder a lot of them express confusion about the text (many of them complain

about not being able to "get their head around the book," as, for example, a blogger called "ficka" writes).[52]

As we go further into the scene, the events escalate as Laura indeed vomits on the magnificent cock, for which she gets beaten up, so she scratches the man's face in return, and is finally left alone in her drunk and shattered state to fantasize about how the man is going to have sex with his wife at home and try to explain away the face scratch (9-12). The excerpt above (just like the whole first entry) also shows how pornography operates as a drag performance in the novel: the sexual and physical aggression of the scene, topped with naturalizing descriptions of such bodily occurrences as menstruation, which many readers and reviewers find disgusting and disturbing, is heightened by the language use, featuring various "dirty" words related to sexual morphology and activity. However, the words and expressions traditionally regarded as constituting pornographic and "bad" language[53] are mixed with more sophisticated phrases ("magnificent cock," and its variant, "impressive cock," are such examples of stylistic juxtaposition). A constant switching back and forth between different registers characterizes the whole book, and goes along with the structural alteration between entries that describe some (usually highly physical or sexual) action, and passages of self-reflection written in a more "elevated" language. For example, right after "entrée," we read "tango," which is a highly self-reflexive passage about love, subjectivity, writing, narrative, and language, all of this squeezed into a short entry of four pages (13-6). I will dwell more on

[52] In this respect, *Precious Little* may be paralleled with Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), which presents an extremely violent misogynistic protagonist in a first-person narrative. The novel's misreading as a text that endorses its writer's similarly violent and outrageously misogynistic world view mainly derives from ignoring what one its mottoes, an author's note from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), calls attention to: "Both the author of these Notes and the Notes themselves are, of course, fictional. Nevertheless, such persons as the composer of these Notes not only exist in our society, but indeed must exist, considering the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed" (Ellis n. pag.). The same may be applied to *Precious Little* inasmuch as its fictionality is constitutive of a text that bears relevance to a real social context.

[53] I do not have the space here to specifically dwell on how and why most "bad" language denotes sexuality and gender, but it is probably related to what Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality* as the modern discursive compulsion to construct some "truth" about the body and its "evil" practices, which, according to the circular logic of this confessional obligation, must be inherently hidden.

this duality in the second part of this analysis in terms of philosophical-ideological conflict, so here I would like to focus on it with respect to the constructive aspect of language and structure. I find this narrative strategy of mixing or switching between registers (pornographic and sentimental) and themes (events and reflections) a constitutive aspect of simulation in the book, which I consider as the text's second-layer drag performance. Simulating the narration of "physical (lived) experience" becomes a predominant tool in *Precious Little* for creating the effect of gender by way of describing the main character's extensive sexual practices. With the duplication of registers and themes, the drag aspect of the book becomes heightened, which makes the text look disturbing or inconsistent. However, in my opinion, such a construction is characteristic of all narrative texts that recall or describe physical events in the storyworld, which points towards a posthumanist understanding of the systemic operation of narrative texts with respect to the lifeworld; what differentiates them from *Precious Little* is that they may "cover their tracks" as to the constructedness of narrative action, while *Precious Little* makes it visible with the application of this drag strategy.

The excerpt above shows another easily perceptible feature of Spiegelmann's text in terms of autobiographical writing, since its present tense, which makes the narrative more vibrant, visceral, and at the same time contingent, also calls attention to the fact that the autobiographical setting is a linguistic construct in which the use of tenses – at least in languages where there are indeed grammatical tenses – has an important role in the structuring of the narrative and the construction of subjects. I have discussed the future-oriented paradigm of life writing that characterizes *Incognito*, and I think the same applies to *Precious Little*, which also (partly) breaks with the retrospective orientation of traditional autobiographies that include a "wiser" and more mature narrating subject from a temporally distanced vantage point (as can be seen both in *Für Elise* and *One Woman in the War*). As opposed to this teleology, *Precious Little*, similarly to *Incognito*, offers the future possibility

(and not the present reality) of a subjectivity that is more livable than the one constructed in the text from a series of self-destructive events and a suicide attempt (which Laura refers to below as her "experiment"). At the very end of the book there is a triple specular moment that demonstrates this future-oriented dynamics, although the past is also recalled, but only in order to suggest that what once seemed to be happiness must be retrospectively revised in light of the present and the future:

> I find two photos [in a volume of poetry], I've completely forgotten I put them in here back then, I was still crying at that time, now I'm looking at both photos coldly, one of them shows me with my ex-lover, both of us smiling into the lens, all was still for the best, in the other one I'm already alone, but it's as if it wasn't me, taken about one week after my experiment, I'm looking at this ugly death mask, trying to forget that once I looked like this, a mask of white chalk, behind it the lethal, dry poison of the fucked-up angel of death, that was me back then, and I don't want to be like that any more [...] I take the two photos and go to the bathroom, stand in front of the mirror, stick the photos into two of its corners [...] I take a long look at my ex-lover's look, [compare it with] the dull, lifeless light in my eyes in the other picture, "emotional anaemia," I don't know where that's come from, the phrase has just appeared in its nakedness, in the middle my mirror image is looking back at me astonished, I'm examining the three faces, trying to find out what they might have got to do with each other [...] I'm looking at this horrible image, which I never want to be again, and it's starting to look more and more like my present self showing in the mirror, my happy self is also starting to change in the photo, moreover, even my lover's look is starting to get blank, I take off the photos, look at myself in the mirror a little more, as if I was facing myself for the first time, then go back to the room, put the two pictures back in the same place, I may even crack a little smile, I don't know, sometimes I feel I might still have some life in me. (155-7)

I will return to this scene in the second half of this analysis to look at the relationship between subjectivity and the body in a different context, so here I would just like to draw attention to the construction of an effect of fragmentation by way of multiplying the specular moment, the narrator's self-identification as well as her différance from herself with the use of layering image upon image: the "death mask of white chalk" on a photographic face, the duplication of photographic images, the multiplication of her image with the help of a mirror, the construction of her (fourth) image as the narrator-focalizer observing her own multiplied selves, and the duplication of focalization by bringing the non-human camera focus in the specular structure. As has been discussed with reference to de Man and Gillett, autobiography is by definition the application of a rhetorical mask, the dedicated act of giving a face to a

discursive subject, which may induce a sense of surprise or astonishment at the moment of mis/recognizing oneself (as can be seen in the excerpt above, too). I think that in the case of *Precious Little*, this autobiographical mis/recognition is related to the parasitic use of drag in more than one way. First, if drag sponges on gender as a normalizing system to seemingly conform to an (over)sexualized image of woman, exactly because of its overdone sexualization and pornography, it becomes a parody that criticizes and subverts women's (over)sexualization in patriarchal terms (that is, even though drag makes woman recognizable, with the same move it alienates her image, exposing its artificiality, hence drag's parasitic relation to the existing gender system). Second, the narrative imitation of confessional life-writing feeds on the genre of autobiography just the same way as its drag lives off the binary gender code, but since the text multiplies and overplays both literal and figurative self-reflection to such an extent as it ultimately makes its own subject unrecognizable (as can be seen in the passage above), the parasitic use of autobiographical narrative disrupts the genre, too, and confuses the readers and their expectations as to the reception and interpretation of the work in autobiographical terms.

Nevertheless, the importance of (life-)writing as healing practice is still retained throughout the text and in the paratext, as well. Since in the second half of the analysis I will dwell on Laura's metafictional narratorial reflections on writing as an ultimate activity in trying to retain or (re)forge her humanity *vis-à-vis* her body's destructive excesses, let me here focus on the paratextual statements of the authors with regard to their writerly intentions. Both Spiegelmann and Kabai confirm in their respective interviews (Rácz 2008; Berta 2009; and Horváth 2013) that the blog was started for therapeutic reasons, and it is primarily a story centering around questions of identity, trauma, and neurosis. Moreover, Kabai confesses that some of what he wrote under the pseudonym Laura Spiegelmann is his "own shit" (Horváth). In a way, then, Kabai-Spiegelmann's drag text speaks the "truth" about the body, the psyche

and their cultural-textual construction, which is always already gendered, but this truth is to be found in the liminal space between drag's literal and figurative meaning. Thus, the book's transitivity is achieved by literary imitation and simulation, so in this respect the novella belongs to what Németh refers to as a new literary paradigm, a "literature of reality" ("Obszcén női önéletrajz" 230), which creates the effect of reality by way of simulation, thereby reconceptualizing referentiality. In the second part of this analysis, I will discuss how this "new" referentiality can be understood in post/humanist terms by predominantly dwelling on what Kabai calls his "own shit": the trauma of the body and the soul, mental and physical illness, the underlying discrepancies in corporeality in terms of the human and the posthuman, and their relations to gender and narrative self-reflection.

3.2.2 (Un)gendering and (post)humanizing the corporeal: trauma, illness, and pain in the simulated female body

The corporeality of *Precious Little* is controversial on several levels, mainly as a result of its excessive sexuality mixed with even more excessive self-reflection, all of this contextualized in a double-layered drag performance that I have previously analyzed. Kabai chooses a female body and self to construct a narrative of passion, suffering, regret, and (possible) redemption, which obviously makes the story gender specific, but at the same time – because of Kabai's confessional-therapeutic intent – interrogates the relevance of gender in any "account of oneself." This discrepancy runs parallel with a conflict between body and mind (self) in terms of a Cartesian duality that saturates the text. Enikő Darabos claims that the book stands "breast-deep in the Christian-humanist ideology that dreads the body's baseness and evil power" over the self, and she regards the book as a consistent manifesto against the body ("Reflexív delírium" 244). While I also find the narrator's frequently expressed fear and

repulsion of her own body a strikingly overt element in the narrative, in what follows I would like to complicate Darabos's view by way of approaching the text from a posthumanist perspective, focusing on the narrative-rhetoric construction of its Cartesian duality concerning the mind/body dichotomy, the sense of trauma, and the body's illness and pain. I interpret the Cartesian duality manifest in the text as a possible part of its multilayered deconstructive-simulatory strategy in which the Christian-humanist ideology coexists with a critique on the very same ideology that upholds its autobiographical-reflexive structure. The book undermines its own self-reflexivity, partly by overdoing it, and partly by letting the body come forward and take over (and fragment) the subject. In this respect, *Precious Little*, very similarly to *Incognito*, can be read in posthumanist terms as a work that suggests a (perhaps terrifying) conclusion: subjectivity is not only constructed discursively but materially, as well, in the process of which a variety of non-human actants (including, for example, the system and discourses of gender, illness, pain, and trauma) play a significant part.

Much of Laura Spiegelmann's text is a confessional account, in loosely related, non-linear episodes (entries), of her heartbreak over a womanizer, and the ensuing suffering, suicide attempt, sexual affairs, concurrent neurosis, and illness as a result of what she refers to as her three-week-long *supermarathon* of excessive drinking and fucking more or less random men and women. Her suicide attempt is the culmination of this supermarathon, after which she ends up in the ICU of the Toxicology Clinic. Having barely survived taking a bunch of blood pressure pills and sedatives, and cutting her wrist, she learns that her corrupted immune system has not been able to withhold the attacks of *Candida albicans*, a parasite she believes to have contracted from her former lover. To get cured from the fungus infection, she needs to follow a strict dietary regime, and abstain from sex, alcohol, smoking, and other carnal means of enjoyment and self-destruction. The book ends with the specular scene quoted above, about

fourteen months after the suicidal attempt, with a broken but living Laura, who believes there may still be life in and for her.

The episodes that narrate these events are juxtaposed with sentimental passages that reflect on a variety of themes: love, hatred, jealousy, the construction and dissolution of identity, and very often "the fascism of carnal delight" (Spiegelmann 114). Similarly to T. N. Kiss's narrator, Laura also often finds that her body is her enemy. But as in T. N. Kiss's text, in Laura's narrative there is also confusion as to where the body (the "flesh") ends and where the mind begins, so it is not clear whether it is the body that is the actual enemy of the self, or it is the mind that rules over the body and causes it to be unruly, which results in all the suffering and fragmentation. For example, in the entry called "fight club," after the description of a lengthy series of sexual acts with P. H., the "increasingly apathetic, forever broke, not too popular, young alcoholic writer"[54] (17), Laura remarks that "one can't exploit the body endlessly" (23), which reverses the master/slave dichotomy with regards to the body and the mind. In the second entry ("tango"), the discrepancy between flesh and spirit is extended in an intensively self-reflexive passage, which also comments on the impossibility of (not) being self-identical, and the hopelessness of observing oneself from an external vantage point:

> [...] while I love people and at the same time I would like to be everybody, there's only one person left I can still more or less get along with, and that's my own self, but no one has ever walked in my shoes, perhaps I'm the only one who'll ever succeed in doing so, if it's possible to succeed in such a thing at all, I'm a stranger everywhere I go, and I'm actually a stranger to myself, too, my head always cuts itself loose from me, it keeps following its own head, it doesn't even ask me if what it's doing is right, so I always keep a couple of meters distance from myself and observe from there what I do, say, and feel, usually things I don't want to feel, say, or do, but I can't help it; how could I ever hide from someone who never leaves me, I'd say I'm the most similar, the closest to myself, when I drink, if I'm sharp and drink enough, I can even sleep, although nightmares keep coming, and *whatever wants to kill me has been created by my own body, my own mind*, I don't get it, don't get it [...] (14-5, emphasis added)

[54] As Bálint Szilágyi points out, "fight club" is a notable instance in *Precious Little*'s extensive intertextuality, which is a constitutive element in the simulatory-mimicry strategy of the book: the entry is a rewriting of Péter Hajnóczy's (P. H.'s) short story, "Hair."

This passage, following a general rule of the text's rhetoric, juxtaposes dichotomous values as coexistent, so in this regard, the same strategy is used in the rhetorical construction of the effect of a postmodern fragmented subject *and* the Cartesian duality between body and mind, as the one used in the book's drag performance: keeping both sides of traditionally either/or oppositions coterminous. Often these moments of oppositional coexistence are gendered and/or sexualized: for example, a recurrent pair of phrases found in the narrator's oft-quoted self-interrogation, which also contains an intertextual reference to Plath's *Journals* – "I still don't know what I am, a nymphomaniac stupid bitch *or* a passionate, fragmentary girl" (58, emphasis added) – mirrors a traditional witch/angel dichotomy in the framework of which women are judged on the basis of their sexuality. In this framework, there is either "good" or "bad" female sexuality, along which women are identified either as virgins/angels or at least decently passionate (albeit a little "fragmentary") girls, within the confines of a steady heterosexual relationship based on romantic love, or as nymphomaniac stupid bitches/witches, or any other non-human, subhuman, or "bestial" entities outside the humanistic paradigm. Darabos claims that within the text's Christian-humanistic ideology, the interrogation above rings false and proves to be a pseudo-question, since the nymphomaniac stupid bitch gains meaning and (negative) significance only *vis-à-vis* the passionate, fragmentary girl; and vice versa, the latter becomes valued only in relation to, and by way of the devaluation of, the former, whose baseness is exposed in the reflexive moments of the passionate, fragmentary girl ("Reflexív delírium" 244). As such, the deconstructive reading the book offers (perhaps inadvertently) about female sexuality subverts not only the angel/witch (virgin/whore) binary, but the definition of femininity in the Christian-humanistic ideology, as well, which is a vital element in the construction of the human and humanness itself. Hence the summary of the book's pervasive theme of oppositional coexistences in its

metaphor of the black hole: "I exist in a black hole where never and always stick together" (Spiegelmann 33).

The black hole can also be read with reference to the vagina, which is also (over)thematized in the text, adding to the constructive simulation of gender by textual drag. A notable instance for this is the entry entitled "all about my cunt," in which the ultimate female genital organ becomes the source of both suffering and delight, constructing the effect of woman defined by her carnality in some patriarchal discourses of gender. With reference to the entry in question, Darabos points out that Laura's body is further reduced to her "cunt" by way of metonymical simplification, and in order that the narrator might achieve happiness (or at least calmness), she has to defy this diabolic organ of hers: "if I didn't have a pussy, I might be happier" (Spiegelmann 68, quoted in "Reflexív delírium" 243). The logical outcome of this defiance, however, would be the renouncement of (female) identity, which is not exactly how the text reads for me. In my opinion, inasmuch as Laura defies her vagina as an ultimate signifier of her femininity (and at the same time a significant organ of her female body), she also revels in its uniqueness, so again, the transcendental fear of the body that Darabos emphasizes is counterbalanced with a focus on the corporeal as an inevitable aspect of *literal*, physical existence. In "all about my cunt," as the title of the entry suggests, Laura thematizes her female organ in a variety of contexts: she introduces the topic by expressing the necessity for her "escaping into the flesh, the fascism of carnal delight" (114); she describes a rape scene (115-6), which, parallel with the story of losing her virginity in an earlier entry called "winter time" (63-76), exposes the physical pain attached to female sexuality; she tells about a former male lover, an artist, who makes her pose for vagina photographs (116-7), as well as a female partner, who talks so beautifully about her body, describing each of its details, as "no man will ever be able to" (117-8); and finally, she concludes the entry by expressing her (narrating) self's alienation from both "fucking" (with

men) and "making love" with women, and her distance from her "most beautiful part" (119). The wide variety of connotations and contexts that the vagina elicits in this short chapter of six pages indicates both the pervasiveness of sexual and body images in the discursive construction of gender/femininity, as well as the fact that Laura's relationship to her body and genitalia are not as one-sided as Darabos might suggest. This also entails that the ideological context that Laura's body and life-story are embedded in, the Cartesian duality as well as the Christian-humanist fear of corporeality, are constantly undermined by way of being made to look untenable. In more general terms, as DeShong writes, the human, which is constantly redefined in autobiographical writing, *Precious Little* included, "is subject to a logic exceeding itself," since "the human as such is rhetorical, a rhetorical event," and, conversely, "rhetoric emerges with the human" (269). In my opinion, the major source of distress for the narrator lies in this uncontainability of rhetorically constructing the (female/feminine) human, or more specifically, the untenability of formerly stable ideologies about the relationship between body and mind, and the possibility for constructing a satisfactory human subjectivity in autobiographical writing. In the remaining part of this analysis, I will look at some more elements in the text that interrogate the possibility of stabilizing the human subject via writing, and open it up for posthumanist concerns and uncertainties.

As I have briefly mentioned, Spiegelmann/Kabai claims that *Precious Little* is predominantly about issues of identity, neurosis, and emotional and physical trauma (Rácz; Berta; and Horváth), yet the majority of reviews and readings focus on the identity of the author as a historical person, leaving out both the controversial issues of identity-construction *within* the text, as well as the discussion of illness, trauma, and pain, which are indeed central thematic-organizing principles in the narrative. In an article examining illness narratives, Gilmore identifies a trend in recent autobiographical writing about chronic pain that can be distinguished from "representatively humanistic" autobiographies, which "take as their

subject an 'I' whose agency is expressed in the mastery of life and story." As opposed to this humanistic life-writing paradigm, some autobiographical writing about chronic pain "exposes the self-sufficient and masterful 'I' as both deception and error, it restores chaos to life writing's purview, and it shifts the focus from the study of exemplary selves to an engagement with selves in conditions of alteration and relations of interdependence" ("Agency" 84). Relationality thus emerges as a prominent aspect in both the lives and narratives of people with pain, illness, and trauma, "as pain shapes the relationships we have to our bodies and with others." Since pain, illness, and trauma markedly feature in such narratives, they call for alternative representations of identity in which the subject is "interpenetrated and altered" by these non-human actants, which also results in a reconfigured notion of the self as having "dispersing agency" without mastery (84).

The thematization of pain, illness, and trauma in *Precious Little* in such posthumanist terms of identity, subjectivity, and agency largely contributes to the subversion of both the autobiographical ethos of the stable subject, and the humanist ideological framework in which the body is rendered inferior to the autobiographical mind and is simultaneously constructed rhetorically as a disruptive element that has no place in the story but still keeps coming back to disrupt it. Pain as a permanent reminder of corporeality (and also the fact that even the soul's trauma manifests in symptoms of the body) interrupts the writing process, which makes it impossible for textuality to fulfill its function in the construction and immortalization of the subject. In the entry called "relationship model," Laura describes not only a model for her relationship with her ex-lover and cause of her emotional trauma but also gives a metaphor for (her) narrative, as well: "I'm the cat, you're the ball; I show interest and try to get to know you to your tiniest details, and by the time I get to the end, it turns out that the whole ball is just a single thread, and the most interesting thing about it is just the way it's wound into a ball – but there's no cat, there's no ball, there's just this pain of genital strength" (55). In

several places of the text, the narrator expresses her sense of futility in writing as a cure for pain and trauma, since neither the act of writing nor the "end product" can overcome the dread of corporeality (and eventual annihilation): pain, the operation of which defies the logic of narrative structuring, can neither be written nor overwritten.

Laura's connection between writing and life is based on her desperately "clinging to writing," because if she can write, she may be able to live, as well. But, as she confesses, the logic of this intersystemic connection is basically faulty (58), since, firstly, one who lives does not have the time or need to write, and one who writes does not have the time (or need) to live; and secondly, narrative as part of the communicative system can never "write life" to the full because language as a common tool of communication not only entails giving up some of what is exclusively one's (as discussed with reference to Butler in Chapter 1), but is also fundamentally "marked by what it cannot contain, what is of it, yet exceeds it – the pluripotentiality of meaning, a matter of signification's ability always exceeding itself – and thereby is rendered incapable of its own capability" (DeShong 268). In Laura's words, "thinking in ideas has obviously made the situation so bad by now that [one has] no idea any more what the situation is" (16). As such, pain, illness, and trauma cannot be "authentically" represented in language either (as Polcz's war narrative also testifies to the concurrent need and impossibility of testimony). What is at the narrator's disposal is what any writing has: a tropological construction which may be reconfigured and/or recharged with meaning again and again, with each communicative act – as happens in *Precious Little* as well, by means of using socially engrained stereotypical images in a simulatory structure.

The tropological operation of language also applies to the gendering of discourses constructing (the experience of) pain, illness, and trauma. Indeed, in *Precious Little* it constitutes an important part of the textual drag performance: while Kabai's "own shit" serves the basis for some of the "shit" happening to Laura, and in this respect, the narration of such

experiences might as well be gender-neutral or masculine, a lot of instances in the text deliberately make the rendering (and "nature") of pain, illness, and trauma feminized, keeping the gendered division of suffering intact. At the same time, the narration of such experiences involves a series of non-human agents that take control over the subject and form a posthumanist cohabitation with her. Let me take *Candida albicans*, a disease whose mild form is predominantly associated with women (that is, their vagina), as a perfect example of the body's non-human cohabitant that has well-known gendered connotations: the "white-robed" fungus (its Latin name already uses a prosopopoeia to denote the disease in anthropomorphic terms) keeps the narrator "hostage" several months after *rearing its ugly head* by keeping infected the narrator's liver, stomach, lungs, and – most importantly and apparently – her genitals (40). In the entry entitled "we must cultivate our garden," she also addresses the fungus as her "most faithful companion in the best of all possible worlds" (48), paralleling the parasitic strategy of the fungus with sponging on previous literature by including a series of unmarked intertextual references (the title of the entry included) to Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), and thus drawing a satirical comparison between Gottfried Leibniz's tenet that *Candide* makes fun of (i.e. that our world is "the best of all possible worlds"), and her storyworld, which seems (at least one of) the worst of all possible worlds.

The unbearableness of this narrative world is heightened by yet another malady, mental illness, the historical-cultural associations and representations of which are also heavily gendered (as can be seen, for example, in seminal feminist work on women and madness in literature, including Showalter's *The Female Malady*, as well as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*). A frequent reader response to Laura's excessive adventures, rendered in a pornographic style, and her often neurotic reflections on her split personality has been a charge of inauthenticity, since no "normal" woman/person would be so excessively delirious *and* self-reflexive at the same time (Darabos, "Reflexív delírium" 242;

N. Kiss, "Keserű és nimfomán" 41). Notwithstanding the simple fact that traumatic events and mental episodes often do involve self-reflexive mental activities on the spot,[55] such a charge of inauthenticity disregards the fundamentally rhetorical nature of not only an autobiographical text but also the constitution and accounting of mental illness, as well, which, at least in our western literate cultures, must be narrativized in order to become both intelligible and curable (hence the confessional need and impulse transplanted into the therapeutic context). What applies to life-stories in general is also true of stories of mental breakdown and trauma in particular: the dedicated act of talking about experiences (that is, turning them into a story) distances the subject from the experiences in order for him/her to find "an adequate witness to engage in therapeutic listening" (Gilmore, "Agency" 85). In a Butlerian way, as soon as one's account becomes a story, it is relinquished as one's own, so one is dispossessed of his/her story by his/her own act of storytelling. Thus, in a posthumanist framework based on a deconstructive theory of language, expecting authenticity in traditional verisimilar terms from an account of events charged with mental illness – or any other traumatic occurrence – is controversial, to say the least. Kabai's account of himself and his neurosis in the drag performed by Laura Spiegelmann presents a different kind of authenticity, which also exposes the iterative operation of language. As he claims in an interview (Horváth), he wrote Laura's suffering and anxiety, from which she escapes into the fascism of carnal delight, the way he *recalled* them. Claiming that Laura's account is not authentic because the narrative remains self-reflexive during, for example, a sexual scene or an episode of vomiting (Spiegelmann 50-1), and as such, it is surely not a woman's text, disregards the simple fact that a woman's giving an account of her own experiences is temporally as well as systemically distanced from her historical reality and the events

[55] A good example would be Tori Amos's confessional song text for "Me and a Gun," the story of her being raped at knife-point by a patron of the bar where she had performed: "You can laugh / it's kind of funny / things you think / at times like these / like I haven't / seen Barbados / so I must / get out of this" (*Little Earthquakes*, 1991).

themselves by means of the same inevitable rhetorical and narrative techniques as a man's drag performance; otherwise no such account would be intelligible for the "therapeutic listener."

3.2.3 Conclusion: Loss of human control

The constant focus in *Precious Little* on the ultimately deconstructive nature of autobiographical construction, the dissolution of subjectivity by the discrepancy between the carnal and the spiritual, intensified by emotional trauma, pain, illness, and the body's "intense life force" (Spiegelmann 16), which become so overpowering that the mind is driven into self-annihilation, may lead to the superficial conclusion that the book is a "manifesto" of nihilism. But, as I have emphasized throughout this analysis, the text is to be read on two levels of meaning that maintain each other, resulting in a dynamics of signification where the literal reading is constantly undermined by the ironic one. In this dynamics, the ironic reading, and the critique of normalcy and hegemony it generates, would not be possible without the literal reading. So in this respect the book does indeed "reach out to the world" (Németh, "Szerzői név és maszk" 83) for the construction of meaning, while it presents a critical interpretation of how the marginalizing, homogenizing, totalizing and assimilatory tendencies of consolidated social hierarchies such as patriarchy operate to construct identities (83). As part of this strategy, ironic and stylistic exaggeration becomes a major tool in *Precious Little* to make explicit how texts represent, materialize and (de)humanize subjects through the labeling of their bodies (e.g. "stupid bitch" vs. "passionate, fragmentary girl").

In Spiegelmann's novella, such labeling occurs predominantly on two terrains, physical health and sexuality, which feature gendered imagery to dehumanize Laura's body both on the diegetic and the rhetorical level by positing it as mere flesh in opposition to the narrating

subject. Her vagina, as has previously been shown, is used in a synecdochal identification to refer to her body and its sexuality; however, her "cunt," this "most beautiful organ" (119), is just a "break of continuity," a "hiatus" and a "crack" that does not belong to her, being only a "supplement" (101). Laura's vagina thus becomes a missing signifier, as well as the ultimately gendered partial object, which, though it directly stands for bodily life and sexual drive, does not seem to belong to the subject: "what good is it to me that most of my male partners say I'm a good fuck, when it's not me who's there, only my perhaps unreasonably treasured cunt" (119). Therefore, by way of this highly sexualized and gendered synechdochal identification between body and vagina, Laura's body becomes a hiatus, a trope of nonexistence, which, paradoxically, is also an entity of endurance and stability (despite all the pain, illness, and suicidal effort) *vis-à-vis* the autobiographical subject (the "passionate girl") falling apart.

The controversy inherent in embodiment that is expressed in *Precious Little* largely derives from the fact that sexuality, which is supposed to "make us human" in discourses focusing on romantic love as a primary motivator in modern life, turns into an agent, an inhuman force that uses the body to destroy the very subject it defines as human. Laura's autobiographical events are largely constituted in her sexual encounters, and her desire and desirability are directly related to the amount of alcohol she consumes. But when she starts to unravel towards the end of her supermarathon (the sad outcome of her loss of romantic love), she turns from "girl" into "just woman," becoming less and less human as she is looking more and more repulsive (42). An underlying critique of gendered materialization can therefore be read into the text through its focus on how the humanity of a female subject is de/constructed on the basis of her "fuckability," a value-laden feature that also serves as the foundation for the virgin/whore dichotomy discussed before.

In my opinion, this material-discursive connection between a female body's "fuckability" and a female subject's humanity, a persistent method for the subjugation and dehumanization of women in patriarchal cultures, is a target of critique in *Precious Little* by way of becoming a major theme and source for the autobiographical subject's dread of her own body. So while Laura's fear of her own materiality and its excessive force is indeed embedded in a dualistic framework informed by Christian-Cartesian ideology, as Darabos suggests, *Precious Little* can also be read as the story of realizing one's loss of control on several levels, which may extend beyond the humanistic framework Darabos recognizes in the text. Throughout the work, the autobiographical subject grapples with a sense of losing control over her body, which is represented by a host of "material" entities such as compulsive sexual desire, the consumption of addictive substances, organic liquids and membranes,[56] neurosis, illness, and physical deterioration. These signifiers construct the female body as a locus of excess and uncontainability, an entity that sabotages the narrator's endeavours to construct a relatively stable autobiographical subjectivity in the text. However, it is important to note that both the sense of the body's uncontainability, and the narrating subject's desire for (discursive) stability are achieved textually, so the body's uncontrollability makes sense here only with respect to the controlling intent of the textual system (rhetoric and structure). The following ironic passage from the entry entitled "from the dark" exemplifies how the material and discursive modes of conceptualizing the body may be linked: it presents a metonymical chain of signifiers that put the literal liquidity of drinks and bodies, and the metaphorical fluidity of texts and meanings into the same frame of interpretation, thereby proving that in a narrative context all senses of instability and uncontrollability are rhetorical-structural effects:

[56] For example, blood, vaginal discharge during sex, a hymen that "weighs a ton" and has to be "washed out" of the narrator after she loses her virginity to her former P.E. teacher (76), and "poisonous cunt juice" (47) during the Candida infection.

> I'm looking at the funny colored drink, thinking it's a blasphemy to drink wine mixed with soda, even if it tastes good, *it's a blasphemy to mingle things in general*, it's immoral to mix different fluids, I'm looking at this thing called wine, adulterated with soda, and soon make the conclusion that it's a disgrace to share my body fluids with others, I shouldn't get mixed up in situations where my body fluids mix with someone else's body fluids because it's dirty and disgusting, I'm standing in a freeze, looking at the glass, my panties are wet, something's dripping from me, now I know, I'm drinking, I'm at the corner of Madách square, empty my glass with two more big gulps, and ask for another one right away. (103-4, emphasis added)

In the same way as Laura cannot control her body fluids, and purists cannot prevent the mixing of wine with soda, Kabai cannot control the interpretation of Spiegelmann's autobiography: the text behaves as an object separate from its creator, generating meaning on its own, regardless of possible authorial intentions. And in the same way as Laura's body fluids need to mix with other people's in the act of sexual intercourse, communicative acts – including texts like *Precious Little* – entail "adulteration" in interpretation because language is made liquid by its iterative potentials, and interpretations can never be identical, since new meaning is constantly generated by the different contexts in which communicative interactions occur. But these "misinterpretations" also bring the possibility of reinterpretations, which also constitute the performative power of literature. This way, literature can offer "rhetorical alternatives to speak about the body and sensual experiences," and thus form the "biopolitical discourses controlling the body" (Darabos, "A néma test diskurzusa" 442). The alternative provided by *Precious Little* – variously interpreted as it is – opens up thinking about the body into directions where humanist dualisms that guide (and circumscribe) discursive interpretations may also be interrogated with a new focus on the material and its representations.

CONCLUSION

The four autobiographical books analyzed in this dissertation show diverse ways of making sense of material experiences and human subjectivity in a narrative form, while they are all invested, to a smaller or greater degree, in the confessional and testimonial predilection of life writing. Szabó's *Für Elise* follows the path of the Künstlerroman inasmuch as it relates how a child protagonist starts to develop into a writer in the geographical and historical context of Eastern Hungary during the interwar period. While the texture of life created by such institutions as family, school, and church provides opportunities as well as erects obstacles in the career of the budding author, a series of gendered and sexualized power dynamics are revealed in a narratorial attempt to "unveil the past." Yet, this revelation of hidden secrets and occurrences, informative as it is, abides by the teleological objective of modern autobiography to construct an independent subject by retrospectively testifying to, as well as justifying, her existence in moral terms. Szabó's autobiographical novel is interesting in this respect because of the controversy surrounding the narrative creation of the artist. First, the construction of the independent subject is embedded in the story of Cili, a narrative doppelgänger, whose tale has previously been untold. Although Cili as such is a creation of fiction, her role in the novel is vital: the parallels and contrasts drawn between her and the autobiographical "I" serve the purpose of constructing subjectivities viable and unviable in particular historical and social contingencies of relation, while her character, especially positioned next to Magdolna's, shows how the construction of gender is effected performatively and institutionally (e.g. in the family and at school). The body's underthematization in the development of Magdolna's artist self conforms to a dematerialized notion of the autobiographical "I," but this spiritual subject (both in the intellectual and religious meaning of the term) is constantly reminded of

the presence of the material as its gendered and sexualized, and at times traumatic, undercurrents are revealed.

In contrast with Szabó's autobiographical orientation, Polcz's text emerges from the imperative of telling the story of survival, both in the material and spiritual sense. In *One Woman in the War*, therefore, the focus is laid on the testimonial and confessional motivation of life narration, which gains historical relevance on the national level as a "witness account." This juridical apprehension leads to the transposition of a personal story to the level of allegory, where it is utilized as evidence in the ideological and political justification of a nation's victim identity. This draws attention away from the uniqueness of the personal narrative of trauma, downplaying the gendered and sexualized aspects of violence and the power dynamics therein, both in times of war and peace.

The confessional impetus, which comes to the forefront in Polcz's story, reappears in T. N. Kiss's *Incognito*. The book, however, offers a very different thematization of gender, which becomes a source of trouble in its own right here. The text reveals the extent to which the narrati(vizati)on of gender has to resort to figurative and performative simulation if (trans)gendered passing – that is, the intelligibility of a body and a person as a socially coded being – is at stake. The confessional framework is employed in *Incognito* to show that this coding (i.e. gendering) of the body takes place both on the material and the communicative (textual) plane, and the operation of these interacting planes entails simulative construction which creates the thing it names. T. N. Kiss's autobiography, a story about the troubles inherent in negotiating identities and materialities, affirms that this negotiation is a continuous process in which the socially and culturally defined constraints and limited options for identities also constitute possibilities for self-reconfiguration, exactly because of the simulatory and volatile nature of such constructions, even if reconfiguration itself comes with a price and may prove to be an ongoing trauma that needs to be handled day by day.

In a way, *Precious Little* takes the narration of traumatic self-(re)configuration one step further when it uses a literary variety of blogging to talk about emotional loss, neurosis, and physical suffering. Being a performance of the author function, Laura Spiegelmann serves as a systemic prosopopoeia, a para/textual simulation to talk about very real fears concerning the dissolution of the subject both in the physical and mental sense. The thematization of gender and patriarchal power structures in the so-called private sphere occurs in the book predominantly through the narration of sexuality, which also gives way to the articulation of anxieties stemming from the conceptualization of mind and body in a dualistic framework, a basic principle also related to the construction of autobiographical subjectivity.

Although to varying degrees, the possibilities of self-construction in autobiographical text remains a "going concern" in all the four books discussed here. The conventions of autobiography offer an opportunity for the construction of a speaking subject, but at the same time they impose narrative constraints as to plot, structure, character, voice, and style, themselves historically developing and changing with life-writing practice. In Gilmore's terms, actual autobiographies (in the modern sense) constitute a tradition far from homogenous, exactly because their writers keep testing the limits of the genre, creating autobiographically motivated works that may not even be categorized as autobiography within more rigid definitions (*Limits* 5). The normative and juridical expectation of telling the truth in one's account of oneself is one of the most predominant elements in constituting the limits of autobiography. While vital as they may be in autobiography's testimonial function, claims for factual truth might "prevent some self-representational stories from being told at all if they were subjected to a literal truth test or evaluated by certain objective measures" (14). This is one of the reasons why writers may choose to swerve "from the center of autobiography toward its outer limits," thereby revealing "the potential for self-representational writing without the explicit presence of its most familiar requirements" (14-

5). The books discussed here also wander away from autobiography's center to its limits: Szabó's creation of a fictional doppelgänger, Polcz's omissions and non-remembering, T. N. Kiss's simulatory figuration, and Kabai's textual drag all serve as narrative strategies of self-representation that push the boundaries of the genre, and reconfigure, to varying degrees, literary techniques of subject-construction.

These autobiographically motivated stories all create the effect of a historical referent, a body and individual, whose tale is told in the life story, be it in the form of a novel, a confessional text, or a series of blog entries. The uniqueness of these stories derives from the singularity of the bodies and lives they construct, which is comprised of a series of events-turned-into-experiences, some of which qualify as "traumatic" in their irregularity and formative effect on the subject in question. As Gilmore underlines, trauma is "typically defined as the unprecedented," and as such, "its centrality in self-representation intensifies the paradox of representativeness," so much so that "the self-representation of trauma confronts itself as a theoretical impossibility" (*Limits* 8). In many instances in the four texts dealt with in the dissertation, the narrators "contend with their own impossibility" (8) in representing themselves textually, since they are assigned to "speak truth to power" in prefabricated terms of gender, while what they want to say is "unspeakable." This contention of unspeakability constitutes a fundamental issue in autobiographical writing, as it connects the material (bodily) plane of existence with the communicative (discursive/narrative) one. As a narrating subject labours at giving an account of her/his embodied experience, s/he submits to a literary form of interpellation in order to give her/his unique story to the audience. However, as I have previously discussed on the basis of both Cavarero and Butler, this kind of submission also entails the relinquishing of one's story for the sake of intelligibility, so there is always a degree of vulnerability entailed in making one's life publicly accessible. As Cavarero's translator, Paul A. Kottman explains in his introduction to *Relating Narratives*, "interpellation

names someone in a way that produces that person's 'social existence' by impacting *what* form that person's social existence will take. In fact, one of the defining features of interpellation is that it works with indifference with regard to the one *who* is named" (xix).

What is at stake here, thus, is the uniqueness of the individual with her/his particular embodied experience, or that individual's singular sense of embodiment, concerning motivations, desire, relations, and "existing in the world" as a human being. For example, Polcz's experience of mistreatment by her husband, and sexual violence and rape by the Soviet soldiers, or T. N. Kiss's transgenderedness as material(ized) life praxis, constitute unique experiences, which, however, can only be narrated in commonly accessible terms that are "lethally indifferent" (Kottman xxiii) to their individuality and personal history. Kottman emphasizes, with reference to the "tragedy of names" in *Romeo and Juliet*, that "the tragedy lies more deeply in the relation the unique 'who' maintains with this lethal indifference of the name," since "for *who* Romeo and Juliet are, as their story reveals, is bound up with the tragedy of the name" (xxiv). The autobiographical subjects in the four stories analyzed here would thus not be who they are "without this 'other' tragedy of name-calling" (xxiv), which is explicated by way of, and within the constraints of, the autobiographical form. Szabó's Magdolna as a gendered and Calvinist subject does not conform to the official expectations of her era concerning either a girl's professional and academic interests, or her religious beliefs and interpretations. Polcz's subject may (and indeed is) categorized as a "war rape victim," but her book, at least in my reading, is as much an ethical project as a written testimony to the abuses committed by the Russian soldiers. T. N. Kiss's identity issues derive from the fact that a particularly sexed body can serve as the materialized form of only its "corresponding" gender, since the sexing/gendering of bodies occurs in a mutually exclusive binary structure that does not tolerate metamorphosis (let alone metamorphosis as a *continuous* process of identity work). Laura Spiegelmann's story, including a character interpreted along the heavily

gendered lines of virgin/whore, would not be accepted by the readers as an "authentic" autobiography of its writer, Lóránt Kabai, because the two names bear opposite gender codes. Thus, by way of analyzing these four texts together in a posthumanist framework that acknowledges the limits to the subject's knowability (Butler, *Giving an Account*), I hopefully managed to uncover their critical potential as narratives that problematize the conflictual relationship between the gendered body/person and the necessity of naming it in "indifferent" terms, which entail the subjugation of the material to a symbolic power structure.

The intriguing question is why these terms, categories, labels, and names that identify the individual socially are so strongly invested in the body in Western cultures, and yet the uniqueness of the body they remain concerned with is refuted in the very same terms of interpellation and intelligibility as obscure, inferior, abject, "instinctual," or simply that which is unspeakable. Perhaps this whole ideology and politics of the body develops out of a conflictual philosophy that, for some reason, emerges from the primary need to theorize the material, and then discard it as "untheorizable," while it has long discredited the hope of finding the spiritual in the material. At the same time, the body remains an ultimate source of figuration, even though it is often conceptualized biologically, as "silent organic matter," on a "basic" level where no figuration or abstraction is thought to be possible. This conflictual omnipresence of the body in humanist politics and ideology is so natural for us that it may be observed from the perspectives of cultures or philosophies that do not have a predilection for the same kind of bio-politics. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, for example, asserts that "[i]n the West, biological explanations appear to be especially privileged over other ways of explaining differences of gender, race, or class," where difference is a synonym for "degeneration" (1). She explains that "since the body is the bedrock on which the social order is founded, the body is always *in* view and *on* view. As such, it invites a *gaze*, a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation – the most historically constant being the gendered gaze" (2). In Oyěwùmí's

view, "[t]he reason that the body has so much presence in the West is that the world is primarily perceived by sight. The differentiation of human bodies in terms of sex, skin color, and cranium size is a testament to the powers attributed to "seeing" (2). The focus on witnessing in the testimonial-juridical ethos indeed affirms the primacy of seeing: somebody who has seen something is believed to have acquired knowledge that no one else among those who have not witnessed the same event has. As such, Polcz's story of war rape is important for national political purposes not because she tells about her embodied experience, but because it functions as a witness account. In a related but different vein, T. N. Kiss's confession also talks about the central importance of seeing, as well as being seen, as the precondition of passing in the public sphere in terms of gender. Narrative itself could hardly be conceived without the textual construction of point of view and focalization, which, as I have discussed with reference to Rimmon-Kennan in Chapter 1, bear some of a text's cognitive-affective-ideological load.

The primacy of seeing in Western epistemology notwithstanding, I would argue that speaking becomes just as important as seeing in the formulation of subjectivity and politics within the humanist paradigm. Somebody who has seen must also speak in order to gain the social attention necessary for the construction of the category of witness. The term itself implies, first, to see something, and second, to give an account of what was seen in a form accessible to others. Observation, and more specifically, witnessing, are thus vital elements in the construction of autobiographical acts, providing a context in which the physical/perceptional (the event), the psychological (the mental interpretation of the event), and the communicative (the account given of the event) are in intra-action. Social inequalities arise not only because of the fundamental biological determinism of Western societies, that is, because differences and hierarchy "are enshrined on bodies; and bodies enshrine differences and hierarchy" (Oyěwùmí 7), but also because these differences and hierarchy are

reconstructed in the communicative accounts that these bodies "generate." It means that various personal accounts are given different weight and credit according to the type of body they account for, and if the constitution of agency is equally involved in the acts of experiencing/seeing, mentally processing, and telling an event, human agencies formulating thus are also hierarchically constructed.

This also entails that autobiography as a frame of interpretation and interpellation is also a site where the human as a category is constructed with reference to both the biological and the linguistic/discursive. As I have shown in the analyses of the four books chosen for this dissertation, autobiographical life writing is a place for the figurative conceptualization of the material according to preexisting terms and hierarchies. If biology is used "as an ideology for mapping the social world," the two sides of binaries that emerge in terms of the nature/culture distinction become synonyms (Oyěwùmí 12-3). In this respect, the question of how to talk about the experiences of the sexed/gendered body is already *a question of figuration* in the sense of attributing a social category to an independently functioning organic (biotic) system, since the sexing/gendering of the body is an already ongoing process of politically, ideologically and theoretically invested figuration; thus, the "gendered experiences" of the body are also constructions. Likewise, the silences around, as well as the erasures or misnomers of, certain issues concerning the body (or bodies) are themselves discursive effects that constitute an interpretation. For example, "the conspiracy of silence" surrounding war rape, as discussed with reference to Polcz's text, or the erasure of the body and sexuality from discourses constructing the Calvinist subject in *Für Elise* all give way to the body's resurfacing, like Rebecca in Daphne du Maurier's novel, to "haunt" the text.[57] As such, even though neither *Für Elise* nor *One Woman in the War* provide an overt gender critique, and they may be associated with a more traditional autobiographical teleology in which "self-

[57] I give an analysis of Rebecca's uncanny presence and role in the narrator's construction of female subjectivity in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) in the paper entitled "'Disembodied Spirits' Revisiting Manderley: The Construction of Female Subjectivity in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*."

fashioning" entails self-censorship, their silences, hiatuses, and breaks inadvertently subvert the ideology of gender-neutral and disembodied subjectivity, while at the same time they testify to the impossibility of unproblematically representing bodies and embodied experience in narrative.

Incognito and *Precious Little* differ from Szabó's and Polcz's texts in this respect, since they operate with a much more obvious strategy of gendering the narrative that equally entails theme, structure and authorship. Since the issue of fragmentation, and by way of it, a sense of loss of control and authority, become central concerns in both T. N. Kiss's and Spiegelmann's texts, they can be more easily associated with the postmodern literary paradigm, while Szabó's and Polcz's texts retain, to varying degrees, a sense of authority over the narrative (even if not over the acts and events narrated), so in this respect they may be deemed modernist. However, as I have argued in Chapter 1, such concepts as fragmentation, coherence, or authority should best be conceptualized as narrative functions constitutive of autobiographical writing, which create the effect of fragmentary, coherent, or authoritative autobiographical subjects within the operational logic of the text, so they make sense only with reference to the narrative system in which they are constructed. As such, constructing the effect of fragmentation or loss of control equally entails a degree of authority and intentionality in the systematic use of narrative strategies in the case of "narratives of estrangement and fragmentation" (Löschnigg 265), as well.

This intentionality, however, is not to be seen as the reestablishment of the independent subject of free will, since how a text is interpreted by its readers is well beyond authorial control, as the analyses of the four books also show. Moreover, as Rimmon-Kennan also suggests with regard to illness narratives, the attempt to establish narrative authority and structure may be a way to counterbalance the effect of the uncontrollability and unspeakability of lived experience (244), to regain or (re)create (some of) the control that has

either been lost or never been there in the first place, only as a fantasy of humanist agency. This also suggests a pragmatic use of autobiographical writing, in which the text is constructed according to the current needs of the autobiographer in a specific communicative situation, and is determined by motivations, needs, desires, anxieties, as well as "internalized social, ethical, and moral norms or 'frames'" relevant to the present tense of the autobiographical act (Löschnigg 262-3). The terms denoting various subgenres of autobiography – for example, confession, testimony, coming-out story – also reflect this pragmatic orientation, while the speech acts they refer to carry ethical and critical weight when actualized in a particular social and historical setting.

The need to talk about the body and its experiences is thus seen as a culture-specific obligation motivated by the confessional-testimonial ethos of modern social contexts, which comes with particular forms of articulation defined by oral, written, and visual systems of signification. Since such "autobiographical obligations" are fulfilled by way of narratives that entail fictionality and figuration, narrativity is always politically and ideologically specific and context-bound. This applies to the four works examined in this study, as well, which have not yet been given a more detailed analysis concerning gender and the body as they figure in the construction of autobiographical subjectivity, let alone a narrative reading informed by a posthumanist angle. I hope that the inclusion of a critical posthumanist approach, and its application in the feminist narrative analysis of these four texts, helped uncover how autobiographies may find a way to speak about what it means to be human, how gender is implicated in the human as a notion and ideology that fundamentally determines the understanding of autobiographical subjectivity in our times, and how "vulnerable" both the category of gender and the human are to reconfigurations within autobiography.

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