

Roger Célestin & Eliane DalMolin  
University of Connecticut, Storrs

Réda Bensmaïa  
Brown University

Yves Bonnefoy  
Collège de France

Denise Brahim  
Université de Paris VII

Mary Ann Caws  
Graduate Center, New York

Ross Chambers  
University of Michigan

Tom Conley  
Harvard University

Vincent Crapanzano  
Graduate Center, New York, CUNY

Joan Dayan  
University of Arizona

Isabelle de Courtivron  
MIT

Jill Forbes  
University of Bristol

Serge Gavronsky  
Barnard College

Wlad Godzich  
Université de Genève

Leah Hewitt  
Amherst College

Denis Hollier  
New York University

Biodun Iginla  
Writer and Media Consultant

## Editors

## Editorial Board

Jane Kramer  
The New Yorker

Lawrence D. Kritzman  
Dartmouth College

Catherine Liu  
University of Minnesota

Abdelwahab Meddeb  
Novelist and Critic

Timothy Murray  
Cornell University

Panivong Norindr  
University of Wisconsin

Jean-Yves Pouilloux  
Université de Pau

John Rajchman  
Collège International de Philosophie

Mireille Rosello  
University of Nottingham

Kristin Ross  
New York University

Michèle Sarde  
Georgetown University

Aminata Sow Fall  
Writer, Dakar, Senegal

Susan Rubin Suleiman  
Harvard University

Steven Ungar  
University of Iowa

VOLUME 1  
NUMBER 2  
FALL 1997

AUTOBIOGRAPHY ISSUE

# sites

the journal of 20th-century/  
contemporary french studies  
revue d'études françaises

GIB

GORDON AND BREACH

# sites

VOLUME 1 • NUMBER 2

FALL 1997

AUTOBIOGRAPHY ISSUE

the journal of 20th-century/  
contemporary french studies  
revue d'études françaises

## Table of Contents

- 383 **Editors' Introduction**
- 387 **A Collection of Self-Portraits** by Jean-Bernard Souderes  
Text by Ernst Benz and Jean-Bernard Souderes.
- 397 **An Interview** with Serge Doubrovsky  
Autofiction and Beyond
- 407 Serge Doubrovsky  
*Le Livre brisé* and *Autobiographiques* (Excerpts)

## SITES On Autobiography

- 415 Annie Jouan-Westlund  
*Serge Doubrovsky's autofiction: "De l'autobiographie considérée  
comme une taumachie"/Autobiography as Bullfighting*
- 433 Anne Mairesse  
*Nouveau lyrisme et autobiographie*
- 451 Ritt Deitz  
*Renoir écologiste?*
- 461 Michel Sirvent  
*An Auto-bi-graphy: W ou le souvenir d'enfance  
or the Space of the Double Cover*
- 481 Martine Delvaux  
*En marge des marges: Jacques Derrida auto/bio/graphie*
- 497 Jarod Hayes  
*Rachid O and the Return of the Homopast: The Autobiographical  
as Allegory in Childhood Narratives by Maghrebien Men*
- 527 Claire Marrone  
*Pretense and Possibility: The Tomorrows  
of Charles, Lula, and Mariè Cardinal*
- 543 **An Interview** with Maryse Condé  
Is "I" still another?

## SITES *In* Autobiography

- 551 Serge Gavronsky  
*(Ma) poétique contemporaine ou vers une rhétorique somatique*
- 561 Biodun Iginla  
*Deleuze and Lacan: Close Encounters*
- 577 Dominique Veillon  
*A Propos des mémoires de Jean-Pierre Lévy*  
*Paroles sur le vif: Extraits d'entretien avec Jean-Pierre Lévy*
- 589 Mary Ann Caws  
*Provence as a Personal Poetry*
- 599 Christine Fiszer  
*Autobiographie*
- 601 **Questionnaire**  
*The subject of Autobiography in today's genres and discourse*  
Robert Albouker, Fakhreddine Berrada,  
Mary Ann Caws, Ross Chambers, Tom Conley,  
Alice Kaplan, Vivian Kogan, Philippe Lejeune

## Fiction and Poetry

- 609 Catherine Cusset  
*A vous, with an introduction by the author: "Could Someone Please  
Whip Me, or How I Wrote A vous, an Autobiographical Novel"*
- 623 Lionel Ray  
*"Autobiographie"*
- 625 Marie-Claire Bancquart  
*"Curriculum Vitae"*

**Contributors**  
**Notes for Contributors**

# AN Auto-bio-graphy: W ou le souvenir d'en- fance or the space of the double cover

Michel Sirvent

---

1 Although some critics tend to retrospectively exaggerate his success, which was indeed true for *Les Choses* (1965) which obtained le Prix Renaudot, let us remember that Perec's work was not fully recognized until the beginning of the 80's. For example, it should be pointed out that Perec is excluded from *A New History of French Literature* (1989). In 1978, when *Life a User's Manual* obtained the Prix Médicis, not without difficulty, Perec was still relatively unknown outside the literary world. *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* did not sell more than 3500 copies.  
2 See Bellos (508-9) for the relation between the specific constraints that organize *La Vie mode d'emploi* and Nabokov's novel. *W* seems to correspond to the same principle as

[...chaque personne] elle n'est pas sûre d'être positivement quelqu'un; elle se déguise et se nie plus facilement qu'elle ne s'affirme. Tirant de sa propre inconsistance quelques ressources et beaucoup de vanité, elle met dans les fictions son activité favorite. Elle vit de romans, elle épouse sérieusement mille personnages. Son héros n'est jamais soi-même ... (Valéry 1227)

## BIO/GRAPHY

Each time we try to reconstruct a writer's life through his work<sup>1</sup>—and we know that this scenario is staged in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*—we cross, all too easily, the threshold that separates real life from writing.<sup>2</sup> We suppose that writing derives from life according to a simple cause and effect relation and we forget “the influence of the book on the person writing, during the writing itself” (Gide). The main function of the bio/graphic discourse is to neutralize the tendency of bringing writing back to existence.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to what the prefix “auto” in “autobiography” implies, the threshold between writing and existence cannot be crossed under the regime of identity, reflection or simple causality. Between two irreducible universes lies Perec's duelist practice. It is precisely such duality that divides the text of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. The bi-textuality clearly announced on the book's back cover hardly allows us to deduce that the work constitutes a unity or an autobiographic totality: “one of these texts is entirely imaginary [...]. The other text is an autobiography [...].”

the one expressed in *Sebastian Knight* about The Doubtful

Asphodel: "It is not the parts that matter, it is their combinations" (176).

3 According to Nietzsche, "there is no more dangerous error than confounding consequence with cause: I call it the intrinsic depravity of reason" (132). At one end, the cause: the author's life. On the other end, the works as an effect, a mere consequence: "We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences" (de Man 69). Many a critical discourse still hinges upon this simplistic pattern (see Beaumartin, "L'homme et l'œuvre"). This paralogical one-way relation between a writer and his/her work should be seen in a more dialectical way. The autobiographical writing (écriture) can also "produce and determine the life and [...] whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium" (69).

4 This said, in spite of its conclusion quoted above, Magné's study is still subjected to a biographical orientation. The emphasis on formal arrangements is finally justified because they turn to be founded on existential grounds.

5 The back jacket copy is placed as a preamble in the English edition.

6 On "the language of space," see Foucault,

Unless we wish to infinitely reduce it, this heterogeneous work is not an "autobiography in two texts," nor an "autobiographical assembly" (Burgelin 138-9), nor a "psychoanalytical autobiography" (Lejeune 65), nor a simple "autobiographic puzzle." Even if we must fully recognize the textual status of the autobiographical chapters (recognize their "poetic" function), we cannot on the other hand excessively privilege "the autobiographical constituent by assigning to it the status of the source-text, the origin-text which would furnish the key to all the others" (Magné, "Textualisation" 183-4; Ribière 25-37). There is certainly an "exorbitant privilege that some people accord a bit too quickly to biography" (Magné 184).<sup>4</sup> This privilege affects our reading of *W*, but also all of Perec's work. The autobiographical part supplies a sort of interpretative opening or closure. We should take up this conclusion according to which the situation of *W* (in the overall context of Perec's production) resembles "the image of ties woven between autobiography and fiction in *W* itself." Actually, the back cover immediately engages us with several alternating texts *inextricably bound up with each other [...]*" (my emphasis). This is not only because Perec's textual space notoriously combines a range of intertexts from *Les Choses* to "*53 jours*" (Mouillaud-Fraisse, "Angus" 85-93, "le récit" 235-243, Bouchot 235-243). But it is also because what is at stake in the alternation between fiction and truth is the readerly effect of *composition*. For *W*'s signification lies at their intersection, to express the "unsaid:" such a composition "could make apparent what is never quite said in one, never quite said in the other, but said only in their fragile overlapping."<sup>5</sup>

In many studies on autobiography we observe this omission: the "narrating force" is rarely considered, that is, how the representation is determined by the narration. But written representation may only come about thanks to an ensemble of parameters, the least of which is none other than the *scriptographic space*.<sup>6</sup> There are few books that illustrate better than *W* the principle according to which representational effects are shaped in one way or another by the very space in which the work "occurs," where the text "takes place." Far from simply undergoing such conditions "passively," the strategy in *W* takes them into account. In the following pages we will emphasize this aspect of the work, this organized space upon which the conflict of representations is undertaken. The fact that the writer explores or exploits this dimension of the scrip-

Genette (*Figures II*), and my "Représentation de l'espace."

7 In Roubaud's afterword to the German edition we note though the same biographical bend: "«53 jours», in its evocations of the war years, treason in the Resistance, and the Vercors tragedy, contains new biographical "keys" to Georges Perec, and constitutes a further stage of his "recollection" of a last past or another "anamnesis" of which *W* or *The Memory of Childhood* and *Je me souviens* are two other poles" (my emphasis)

8 Yet Lejeune distinguishes "the coexistence, the constant association of two axes in Perec's writing, one existential, the other formal"

(*Mémoire* 11)

9 "I reckon, in fact, that I was born left-handed; at school I was forced to write with my right hand. This has resulted, in my case, not in a stammer (as apparently it often does) but in a slight lean of the head to the left [...] and above all in a more or less chronic and still undiminished inability to tell not just left from right [...], but also the acute from the grave accent, concave from convex, the "larger than" sign (>) from the "smaller than" sign (<) and in general all terms that more or less approximately imply any kind of laterality and/or dichotomy [...]" (*W* 135, my emphasis)

10 "That mindless mist where shadows swirl, how could I pierce it?" (first part)/"This mindless mist where

tual medium may be confirmed in the solution to the structural enigma posed by "53 jours" which has been most convincingly resolved by Jacques Roubaud: "Its fundamental constraint is less a formal than a compositional one: 'It neither resembles the single constraint of *La Disparition* nor the multiple rules of *Life A User's Manual*'" (qtd. in Bellos 704, my emphasis).<sup>7</sup> We therefore rediscover the concern of ancient rhetoric, the *Dispositio*: "We will define the *dispositio* as the arrangement (whether in the active and operational sense or in a passive, reified, sense) of the main parts of discourse. The best translation is perhaps *composition* [...]" (Barthes, *Aventure* 148). We will keep this term in mind while specifying that it covers the arrangement of sequences, parts, sections, chapters, etc. For if the *disposition* were worked enough to become a *configuration* (a *dispositif*), it would then function to reveal the incompatibility of the genres and registers here at issue: the conflict of languages that is staged. The *alterity* of composition in *W* deserves our attention since it seeks to respect the heterogeneity of registers while, at the same time, reveal their irreducibility.

## AN AUTO-BI-GRAPHY

If we consider most studies a double danger seems to prey upon our reading of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. On the one hand, the danger of reduction through synecdoche: one subsumes the ensemble under the aegis of one of its parts, the autobiography.<sup>8</sup> On the other, through a sort of metonymical sliding, an omission takes place: autobiography is covered up by autobiography or, in other words, the graphic dimension is masked. Yet, since it is basically a twofold book, it can be characterized as an auto-bi-graphy: this is directly apparent in its dual title (from the graphic and the phonic perspective).<sup>9</sup> Less than the story of a double personality in search of himself or his shadow, it's more a question of a text literally cut in two. Two "texts," two typographic characters (Italics for fiction, Roman for autobiography), two parts (separated by a white page where there are suspension points between parenthesis), two varying epigraphs (from Raymond Queneau's *Chêne et chien*),<sup>10</sup> two narrators (Gaspard Winckler/G. Perec). On both sides of a double place («Vilin »/«Villard ») that shares a "double life" (fiction/ "reality"), two temporal categories may be designated (memories/ the future) which are reduced to the same end: "That mindless mist where shadows swirl" as

shadows swirl, is this then, my future?" (second part)

11 Which ties up with the four major orientations that characterize Perec's work: "sociological," "autobiographical," "playful" (*ludique*) and "fabulous" (*romanesque*): "[...] the books that I have written are grounded in four different fields, four different modes of interrogation that all pose the same question," "Notes sur ce que je cherche" (*Penser/Classer* 10)

12 In his analysis of Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*, Perec establishes a connection between "violence" and "capitalism" (Bellos 494)

13 This wordplay (*jeu*) is obvious since the third-person pronoun replaces the first-person singular in the second half of the book in italics as the third-person is replaced by the new subject—the Island—as the structure of its first sentence clearly demonstrates (65, ch. XIII)

14 "Désormais, les souvenirs existent, fugaces ou tenaces, futiles ou pesants, mais rien ne les rassemble", "From this point on, there are memories—fleeting, persistent, trivial, burdensome—but there is nothing that binds them together" (68, ch. XIII)

well as two genres (autobiography/ the science-fiction of the city of *W*).

Meanwhile the auto-*bi*-graphy is still a mask. *W* is not a double text but a book that unfolds by constantly splitting up. Beneath its apparent dichotomy the narrative is crafted by the auto-division of the "subject," in the double sense of discursive subject and object of discourse (subject of enunciation and enunciated subject). This dynamic process seems to imply that unity (selves, genres, types of discourse, sections, etc.) is always already dual. Since we have two alternating texts and two clearly separated main parts, the fictional as well as the autobiographical series can be subdivided, thus giving way to a "quadripartition."<sup>11</sup> Thus fiction begins as an adventure narrative, a travel story, an investigation. It is the story of an imposture. The impostor-deserter-narrator, Gaspard Winckler, meets a mysterious emissary, Otto Apfelstahl, who discovers his false identity and entrusts him with a lifesaving mission. He must find a child (his homonym) who disappeared with his mother Cecilia in a shipwreck off la Terre de Feu, the island of *W*. In the second part (still in italics), this story is brusquely interrupted giving way to a second entirely different story. The transition is motivated by a spatial and geographic tie: a sort of mysterious island, the island of *W*. The adventure narrative now becomes description and then socio-political satire. It's almost an Orwellian science fiction story. The account of a super organized city based on an inhuman Olympic ideal is given in a quasi ethnological mode.<sup>12</sup> The narrative becomes an allegory of totalitarian regimes, a denunciation of scientific tailspin through a sports metaphor. The technocratic ideal exemplified through an Olympics parody contains the germ of what then emerges as Concentration Camp horror. Between the first and the second fictions there is a double disappearance: that of the Winckler child but also of the narrator. The initial *je* is replaced by *on* or, rather, an impersonal *il* : "*Il y aurait, là-bas, à l'autre bout du monde, une île*", 'Far away, at the other end of the earth, there is an island told of. Its name is *W*.'<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in the second part the autobiographical series divides itself in two. The break in the story is based on a spatial element: Paris/ Villard-de-Lans.<sup>14</sup> There are "two disjointed childhoods" caused by "the separation from the mother." Here the mother disappears leaving a hole in his existence. But there is also a complete ellipsis on the trip of the child, Perec, between the two geographical places.

15 Critics generally opt for the reverse order, i.e., the genetic order (Magné, "Les sutures" 41) according to which fiction "springs" from the retrieved drawings even though the actual order as displayed by the book makes the "apparently" autobiographic series come after the fictional episodes. Yet not only *W* is a "réinvention", 'I made up these stories' (6, ch. II) but we also know that "the childhood story borrows from the fiction and is then fictionalized by a series of elements taken from the adventure story" (Colonna 16)

16 For a first analysis of *W*'s peritext, see Colonna. For the concept of *peritext*, see Genette (*Seuils*) and Ricardou who was among the first to "textualize" the peritext in *La Prise de Constantinople* (*Nouveaux Problèmes* 279-316)

17 About the "autobiographic" genre experimented by Percec, see Beaumartin.

Autobiography 1 (part 1), before the disappearance of the mother: Vilin Street: 1936-1942. Autobiography 2 (part 2), after the mother's disappearance: Villard: 1942-1945. The interest of this quadripartite arrangement resides in the possibility of establishing all sorts of readerly correspondences between the 2 fictions and the 2 eras. For example, in the last chapter, the autobiography ends with a quotation from a book by David Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, and by recalling the regime of the dictator Pinochet. Both of these references directly echo the totalitarian allegory in the fiction. Furthermore, the name of the lost child's mother is the same as that of Percec's mother: Cecilia. Also the "I was born on Saturday, 7 March 1936, towards nine in the evening, in a maternity located at 19 Rue de l'Atlas, in the XIXth arrondissement of Paris" (chap. VI, 19) takes up "*I was born on 25 June 19.. around four o'clock, at R., a hamlet of three houses, not far from A*" (chap. I, 4). Overlapping the two series, this alternating doubling keeps referring to the other "subject"—always deferred—and divides the second autobiographical enunciator: his echo (the fiction) precedes him.<sup>15</sup>

#### DOUBLE OVERTURE

A book cover serves not only to display, but inversely to cover up the text through a series of identifying elements which reduce the volume to the coded expressions of the front cover. Very aware of what was at stake, Percec took care to integrate the *peritext* into his overall strategy.<sup>16</sup> Lejeune observes the "many drafts of the back cover, graphic attempts at configuring the cover itself (how to articulate the title and author's name with the picture of the hair salon door on Vilin Street)" (137-8). The alternative bifid title—*W* ou le souvenir d'enfance—duplicates itself according to a self-dividing mechanism. It subverts its identifying function. For the subtitle's autobiographic signal is also contradicted by the generic mention—*récit*, i.e. "narrative"—that we discover on the deceptive publicity strip printed across the cover. Similarly, the back cover text (which is taken up a second time on the dust jacket's front flap and which describes the two texts, is presented in two distinct paragraphs. Beneath, the auto-bio/bibliographic note in Italics is again subdivided: "L'auteur: / Est né [...]. / A obtenu [...]"<sup>17</sup> In the original edition the cover is not only double but it conceals the bi-textual composition of the volume's space. In fact, the peritext

18 It is also missing on the half-title page where we should expect it and this "bastard page" is also absent.

19 The juxtaposition of *W* with "DAMES" (*W/D*) confirms the possibility of turning the *W* upside down to become an *M* as in, for example, *mère* (mother) (see Bellos 553), but also points to the interrogation on "the meaning of "MD" which followed the name of Otto Apfelstahl in the letter-head." Also, the paradigm *M/D* can be illustrated by such examples: "My mother had died and I had to go and arrange the funeral at D., in Bavaria" (*W* 10-11). Apfelstahl heard Cecilia Winckler "sing the part of Desdemona at the Metropolitan shortly before the war" (43). But *M* can also be associated with the *M* of "Marine marchande" (Merchant Navy) that help the "Shipwreck Victims' Relief Society" (43-4), etc.

duplicates the text in two ways. First of all, the cover reproduces itself with a dust jacket and, second, many of its characteristics are dual. At the same time the cover conceals and manifests the configuring principle since the complete double title is seen only on the cover (not on the dust jacket).<sup>18</sup> The dust jacket shows a large *W*, yellow like the Jewish star, which occupies the center space and hangs over the name of the signatory printed in the same color without capitals. We realize that the dust jacket makes a segment pass for the whole. The first unfathomable title, reduced to an initial, already tells us that the rest must be completed. Concealed and deferred, its complement is manifested afterwards as a sub-title, thereby suggesting that every single element is potentially subject to analytical segmentation.

The dust jacket creates an effect of superimposition by combining a partial title and the inscription of the sign above the door on Vilin Street. It offers a first (double and "false") book title

## COIFFURE DAMES

### W

which anticipates the duplication of the deferred title.<sup>19</sup> Without going into great detail, we can give a quick idea of how the dust jacket is also fraught with dual elements: besides the single capital *W*, there are two colors (yellow/grey), two yellow segments (*W/* georges perec), along with the dichotomy of the three main constituents (COIFFURE/ DAMES, georges/ perec, DENOEL/ LN). In other words, the manner in which we can read this configuration, that articulates the names of the author and editor against the cover photograph, gives an idea of how we should grasp the entire infrastructure. A plurality of material (biographic, intertextual, typographic, photographic) is arranged and redistributed according to apparently contradictory principles since the book contains different organizational schemes, which range from the simple (the book/the title letter as unities) to the complex, and which are based upon a logic of deciphering and, at the same time, progressive de-composition.

These peritextual elements are performative: their expositional mode reflects and announces several of the book's formal peculiarities. We can also compare the *W* title to what Barthes says about *Sarrasine* and the enigmatic title of his own



20 To follow up on the *Sebastian Knight* connection, we could note that the unreliable first-person narrator who tries to reconstruct the "real" life of Sebastian Knight, is called "V" by his half-brother writer (71) (for Vladimir's double of course) in a parody whose subject matter is to reflect on biographical and autobiographical reliability as in chapters 6 and 7. "Remember that what you are told is really threefold: shaped by the teller, reshaped by the listener, concealed from both by the dead man of the tale" (52).

21 "l'énigme est cette carence prédicative", 'the enigma is this predicative lacuna' (194).

22 For a comparable function of the subtitle which gives a more literal answer to the symbolic or cryptic theme evoked by the title, see Genette (*Seuils* 81).

23 See Bellos (553, note 2). This movement of progressive subdivision recurs throughout the book. This is the case in chapter IV with the account of the first two memories (12-14). In chapter VIII, the typographic disposition is as follows: 2 paragraphs in Roman. The first is organized around the couple father/mother (26). The second paragraph introduces the "following two passages (that) date from more than fifteen years ago." These 2 texts are in bold and are numbered. One refers to the picture of the father; the other to

book (*S/Z*) with this indirect self-commentary: "The title provokes the question: *What is Sarrasine?* A noun? a name? a thing? a man? a woman? This question will be answered much later by the biography of the sculptor Sarrasine" (24). Likewise, we can ask, what is *W*?<sup>20</sup> While asking to be deciphered, Perec's title also gives an extra clue. The autobi(o)graphy opens itself to the hermeneutic code. If we adapt Barthes' phrase we can say "the enigma is this *grammatical lacuna*".<sup>21</sup> The subtitle ("le souvenir d'enfance"), which points to the autobiographic code, plays a complementary role since it is a possible answer to an oblique question, that of the enigma posed by the "W" fragment.<sup>22</sup> Still, if the *ou* [or] conjunction generates an answer, the question is immediately complicated through the use of the definite article ("le souvenir d'enfance"). This circular return again divides the complete title. If Marcel Benabou is able to remark that the first "fake memory" (concerning the Hebraic letter) and that of the *gold coin* (the other first *souvenir*) both play on words (it's a question of *sou-venir*, "a memory of a coin"),<sup>23</sup> then we too can guess that the toponym *Villard* contains in germ the cardinal opposition between Life and Art (*la Vie/l'Art* for "Vi/llard"). It's as though this ideological opposition—discovered through an oxymoronic hypogram—gave way to a "reader's manual" (*a mode d'emploi*) according to which Art is Life's deciphering key.<sup>24</sup>

If we adhere to Genette's distinction, we can also ask whether this fissiparous title is "rhematic" or "thematic." Does it point to the text itself as work and object or as content (*Seuils* 73-97)? Not only is the subtitle "mixed": it is thematic (what is *the* childhood memory in question?) and rhematic at the same time. But the function of the title depends on the answer to the question of the first *W* element. The title refers both to the form and content of the book. The *W* is a graphic representation of the work and seems to point less towards the supposed double text than to conform, as one element among others of the peritext, to a configuration that affects the book on all levels. Thus its formal (title/subtitle, etc.) and generic (hermeneutic/autobiographic codes) bipartitioning are once more faced with a third element, the qualification of the text as "narrative" in the singular (*récit*) which again anticipates the active dynamics of the entire volume. In this sense the title doesn't just give us information about what the writer *does* with certain biographical elements (such as a

the picture of the mother (27-33). This is followed by a series of 26 notes for "the corrections and comments which I now feel obliged to add" (26). The chapter ends with a presentation of the motivations for writing an autobiography, in which the narrator admits a "ressassement sans issue", "a reiteration of the same story, leading nowhere" (41).

24 There is less an opposition between, on one hand, "life, that is a sort of unnamable, undecipherable proliferation that overflows into all of the meanings we are incapable of grasping" and, on the other hand, "a derisory ordering which is called "user's manual" than an "opposition" ("a syntactic break") which we find again in this de-centered rupture displaying suspension points that cut *W* into two parts (Perec, "racontouze" 55). The dual title of *W* is comparable to the one of *La Vie mode d'emploi*: this at first unfamiliar juxtaposition ("the unpunctuated formula") is actually caused by a typographic *ellipsis* (see Bellos 638-9).

25 Bellos comments: "Perec's childhood autobiography, though it was not published until 1975, is less a work of early middle age than it is the final achievement of a project first planted in 1956. For Perec, from this point on, and despite his many subsequent evasions, masquerades and double covers, writing was autobiography" (Bellos 153-4). Another exam-

plificatory title) but it graphically exemplifies what happens to it as well as to the composition of the book which is subjected to the same writing constraint. The *W* design refers to certain aspects of the book's graphic and narrative composition. At the same time, as graph it points to the importance of the *scriptographic* register. Consequently, the function of such a title is less of an identifying one than an emblematic one—if we can still speak here of "function." For such a title merely precedes the ensemble of which it partakes. The *W* is the emblem of these contradictory dynamics. We seek the key to this simple letter, initial or crypt (there are numerous instances of serious and parodical deciphering in *W*, especially scenes related to the "first two memories"). It's a text that decipheres itself, that proposes reading models and which then postpones its resolution by systematically multiplying variations (as in Chapter VIII). Whatever the pretext may be for glossing, these variations do not lead to their reciprocal exclusion. What follows, even if it's the fiction, in some way bears some sort of "supplementary truth." Far from effacing each other, their accumulation throws off all symbolizing fixations and polysemic readings. This crypt opens the reading space and we know our reading can not be monologic.

This peritextual configuration signals three things. First it exposes the assembly of texts, the general dichotomy, its dialogism, its bi-graphic and bi-textual composition. Enigmatic, dualistic and suspensive, the title and the double cover give an explicit image of the book they conceal. Text and peritext are *isomorphic*. The second effect of this cover is to foreground a rather neglected aspect of representational writing, that is, its spatial dimension, its *scriptography*. In other words, its spatial configuration is precisely the dimension which is the object of an indeed singular attention and craftsmanship in this book. Finally, as we have seen with the title, a main function of the book is revealed : a *self-dividing* principle.

### AUTOBIOCENTRISM

Not only does the book's dichotomy shape our first reading but it also reflects the writer's double face: Oulipian/Autobiographer. But the tragi-comic figure that emerges from a particular critical heritage cannot satisfy itself with a synthesis that eradicates the conflict of languages, which is *W*'s arena. No equation is possible between the two

ple of autobiocentric criticism can be found in the chapter devoted to *Les Choses* (305, 314). 26 If "he stopped writing when he went into analysis" (Bellos 476), he stopped psycho-analysis once the work was completed (Burgelin 137). Shall we conclude that écriture plays the role of a ...cure (implying the concept of *écricure*)? As a counter-example, we read the following sentence in *La Boutique obscure*: "La Boutique obscure is a autobiographical text in a very precise sense: it tells the story of a separation. These dreams tell the story in a completely buried manner." The following sentences are significantly omitted from the English version: "On the other hand, it is a writing labor which is a bit out of place: in the same way as in *La Disparition*, there was simply something out of place (*en porte-à-faux*). In *La Boutique obscure*, there is no longer any 'dream work,' in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, there is a writing that prevents the dream to be what we call the Freudian *voix royale*" (qtd. in Bellos 505).

sides. Let's first consult the autobiographic pole which leans upon the following much quoted phrase: "Le projet d'écrire mon histoire s'est formé presque en même temps que mon projet d'écrire", 'The idea of writing the story of my past arose almost at the same time as the idea of writing' (26, ch. VIII). Lejeune places it at the heading of his essay entitled "Dire l'indicible".<sup>2</sup> He assimilates the finished work in a vaster ensemble, a "space" that includes geneses as well as multiple autobiographic projects, not all of which are completed. He even admits that:

[...] once the necessary distinction between finished work and unfinished projects has been discarded, by inflating the latter, we can but return to the *bio-graphic*: "these projects won't be considered as works but they are acts with which we must become familiar in order to understand autobiographic strategies and their evolution" (16).

He adds: "I know that my solution is reductive. I isolate the 'autobiographic' thread in such a complicated writing system, one that is so slippery" (28). And yet the finished work is assimilated with many unfinished "autobiographical projects." But there is an entire world between, on one hand, notes, fragments, first tries, paratextual versions and what is entirely different, a work which is, as Valéry would say "composed." It should be pointed out that this finished work concludes the psychoanalysis that the author had undergone until then but is also situated between two of the most completed of his enterprises, *La Disparition* et *La Vie mode d'emploi*.<sup>3</sup> Next, we include the episodes of the *avant-texte* (the various drafts) and apply them to the peculiarities of the work's form. However, it is less important to know what was written first, or to go back to drawings made when Perec was twelve, or to a first version of *W* written when he was thirteen, or even to point out that the fictional discourse which was "re-invented" came before the autobiographical discourse which was written with much difficulty. What matters is that we must draw the conclusions from the fact that a definitive choice has been made. As for Bellos' study in Chapter 52 of his biography, «*M/W*», we doubtfully reach through a film detour—Fritz Lang's, *M le Maudit*—the following conclusion: "Children, take better care of your mothers!" (555). A certain indissolu-