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## Becoming: An Introduction

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When asked by Sinda Gregory why he introduced the possibility of reading “City of Glass” as a disguised autobiography, Paul Auster answered:

I think it stemmed from a desire to implicate myself in the machinery of the book. I don’t mean my autobiographical self, I mean my author self, *that mysterious other* who lives inside me and puts my name on the covers of books. [...] The self that exists in the world – the self whose name appears on the covers of books – is finally not the same self who writes the book. (My emphasis, *Hunger* 308)

In my book, I will develop a concept of *performative authorship* by revealing and examining different strategies of *becoming an author* in order to understand the author figure whom Auster described as “that mysterious other.” My aim is to show authors as performative self-constructions in perpetual becomings.<sup>1</sup> Authors have not only created works of art, but in the conscious and unconscious creation process, they have simulataneously created their own *author personae*. In the aftermath of postmodernism, this second creation process, formerly detectable on a meta level, has noticeably moved to the forefront. More than ever, the formation of authorial identity has been made visible by authors, who often make it the theme of their artworks. Thereby, authorial identity, like any identity, is not a fixed entity but finds itself in a state of constant flux. Authorial identity is made up of and influenced by different players and factors: readers, critics, and journalists, home stories, art prices, and literature rankings. It may change and develop with any new work but also underlies the constraints and challenges that authors have to face in their “real” lives. Authorial identity is thus a perpetual construction. I argue that cultural analysis should increasingly take into account the active performances of authors in the creation of their author personae.

Certainly, the idea of an author persona, as an image of the author, is not new, if we consider, for example, Wayne C. Booth’s concept of the *implied author*. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Booth described how the image of an author, which is neither the narrator nor the real person writing, is conveyed in the text. According to

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1 By *author* I mean all creators of aesthetic objects whether visual or textual.

Booth, readers draw this author image mainly from information authors convey in their texts. However, Booth's *implied author*, as an image readers draw from the artwork, appears to be a quite passive and random description of how author personae come into being.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, I will describe the creation of an author persona as a performative act that is bidirectional. On the basis of Wolfgang Iser's performative approach to aesthetic experience, I argue that authors have become more and more active in this act of imagination and authorial self-invention. In order to become an author, authors have thus staged themselves as authors. In *Prospecting* (1989), Iser described this staging process for the part of the reader, who actively uses role play to engage in an imaginary transfer while reading, as Iser explained: "For the duration of the performance we are both ourselves and someone else. Staging oneself as someone else is a source of aesthetic pleasure; it is also the means whereby representation is transferred from text to reader" (*Prospecting* 244). I believe that staged performances are a pleasure for readers and authors alike. Thus, I argue that we should no longer speak of passive implied authors, but rather of very "explicit authors" who actively engage and invest in the construction of their authorial identities. I would like to establish the term *performative author* for this phenomenon following in the trajectory of performance theory initiated by John L. Austin's speech act theory. This performative author is an active and acting subject. I argue that in contemporary art and literature authors have increasingly contributed to the images that their audiences draw of them. Through different performative strategies they have thereby shaped their authorial identities and have made visible universal strategies of identity formation.

My book offers a critical and comparative analysis of performative authorship in the artworks of Paul Auster (born 1947 in Newark, N.J.), Candice Breitz (born 1972 in Johannesburg, South Africa), Sophie Calle (born 1953 in Paris, France) and Jonathan Safran Foer (born 1977 in Washington, D.C.). Auster/Calle and Breitz/Foer each form a generational pair of opposites that lend themselves to a discussion of postmodern and post-postmodern artistic strategies of performative authorship. Auster and Calle have long taken up the challenge that postmodernism placed on

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2 Cf. Ingo Berensmeyer et al. in their introduction to "Authorship as Cultural Performance:" "Authorship studies, [...], needs to be distinguished from traditional approaches of biographical studies, literary sociology or psychoanalysis, i.e. from reading works of individual authors in order to find meanings in literary texts that can be related to information about the author's life; or from the 'implied author' debate, a narratological category introduced by Wayne C. Booth on the level between the empirical author and the narrator of a narrative text – a category that many narratologists, applying Occam's razor, find they can easily do without" ("Authorship" 8).

their professions. In their works, they have struggled with different authorship concepts in all possible extremes. On the one hand, they have openly integrated the voices of others in their texts,<sup>3</sup> thus revealing their references and acknowledging their sources. Auster, for example, in his novel *Leviathan* (1992) invented the character of Maria, who is based on the real artist, Calle. This short factual/fictional episode in Auster's book marks the beginning of the Calle-Auster collaboration that later led to their mutual publication, *Double Game* (1999). On the other hand, Auster and Calle have made public their most "personal" stories, using "autobiographical" writings to approach their author selves. In "The Book of Memory" (1980/81), Auster created the autobiographical character "A." to find "this 'no one' [who] has really written the words you're reading," as Auster described his fascination with his own author persona (my emphasis, *Hunger* 308). Similarly, in her *True Stories* (1988-2003), Calle revealed intimate anecdotes to create an *individual mythology* that embeds her author persona in a cohesive network of self-referentiality. In many of their works, Calle and Auster explicitly performed their authorship to become the authors they desired to be. It is thus meaningful to compare Calle's and Auster's work in regard to the notion of performative authorship and, furthermore, to analyze their aspiration to comprehend this "no one" that is the author self. Their methods may differ, as one is a writer, the other a conceptual artist, yet, their impulses are similar.

It is, therefore, all the more instructive to compare the works of these two postmodern authors with the work of their contemporary colleagues, that means authors belonging to a younger generation who are developing new concepts of authorship. The South African artist Candice Breitz and the American writer Jonathan Safran Foer form a productive counterpart to Calle and Auster. The idea of authorship has a different significance and another impact for these younger authors. In direct comparison with Calle's and Auster's works, the younger authors reveal new tendencies and developments in contemporary art and American literature after the postmodern experiment. Countless other authors and artists could have served as examples, from Philip Roth to Marina Abramović, Siri Hustvedt to Joseph Beuys, and David Shields to Pipilotti Rist. While I intersperse key examples from other authors, I mainly concentrate on Foer, Calle, Breitz, and Auster. Each author has significantly challenged the effectiveness of traditional authorship by experimenting with its different forms. Playfully, Auster, Foer, Breitz, and Calle have integrated diverse voices into their works, thus disclosing the process of collective authorship. Their artworks often blur the boundaries between autobiography and fiction; all have integrated themselves as author figures in their works. In this respect, all four authors have done what Roland Barthes formulated in his text *S/Z* (1975):

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3 By *text* I mean all aesthetic objects whether visual or textual.

The author himself [...] can or could someday become a text like any other: [...]; he has only to see himself as being on paper and his life as a bio-graphy (in the etymological sense of the word), a writing without referent, substance of a connection and not a filiation: the critical undertaking [...] will then consist in returning the documentary figure of the author into a novelistic, irretrievable, irresponsible figure, caught up in the plural of its own text. (S/Z 211-212)

Breitz, Auster, Calle, and Foer have experimented with the inclusion of their author selves in their texts. Their methods and results differ from each other, yet their considerations and intentions reveal similar origins from which general conclusions about performative authorship can be drawn.

In this book, I will develop three main strategies of performative authorship that I define as *positioning*, *staging*, and *playing*. The main chapters are arranged and named accordingly. I concentrate on these three main routes through which I detect and demonstrate key aspects of what I term *performative authorship*. I argue that performative authorship takes shape within this theoretical framework. Through different performative practices that follow my conceptual trajectory, authorial becoming is rendered possible and, furthermore, becomes visible. My approach explores different authorial practices in order to show how, why, and with what means authors perform authorial self-invention. In the following pages, I will give an overview of the book's chapters to set forth my main thesis of perpetually performed authorship and to present my theoretical framework.

My general introduction, entitled "Becoming: An Introduction," is divided into four subsections: In the first, "Who Is This Mysterious Other?," I will give a concise historical overview of the field and the development of the authorship debate in the post- and post-postmodern age. This subchapter will also introduce Barthes, by reading "The Death of the Author" (1967) as a performative manifesto. Inspired by Séan Burke's revisitation of *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (1992), Barthes's lifelong passion with and commitment to authorship questions from *Mythologies* (1957) to *Camera Lucida* (1980) constitutes a parallel narrative that underlies my discussion of performative authorship. Second, in "Becoming an Author," based on Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's concept of *becoming*, I will explain my terminology of *becoming an author* to, then, illustrate the idea of *becoming* by examining Breitz's work of the same title. In "Authorial Representation as a Performative Act," the third part, I will transfer Iser's notion of *representation as a performative act* from the reader to the author perspective by expanding his argument to authorial representation. At this point, I will also introduce Austin's performative speech act theory as well as Gérard Genette's understanding of *paratext*, which are so crucial for processes of authorial

self-invention. The last part of my introductory chapter, “Performative Authorship,” will then deal with the framework questions of the aesthetic function of performative authorship and the cultural meaning and significance of this phenomenon. Supported by Mark McGurl’s notion of the *Program Era* (2009), Martin Klepper’s concept of a *reconstructive postmodernism* (Pynchon, Auster, DeLillo, 1996), and Erika Fischer-Lichte’s definition of the *performative turn* (*The Transformative Power of Performance*, 2004), I will situate Foer’s, Breitz’s, Calle’s, and Auster’s authorial performances in the larger framework of reflexive postmodernism and post-postmodernism.

My first main chapter, “Positioning,” consists of two subsections, “Auto/Biography” and “Self/Portrait.” By *positioning* I mean the deliberate genealogical approach to locate oneself and one’s work within the larger field of cultural production. Here, I concentrate on two main aspects of intentional positioning: auto/biography and self/portrait, treating both text forms as homologous techniques of performative authorship. In “Auto/Biography,” I will read Auster’s “autobiographies” as texts of authorial self-invention. For my discussion, I critically question Philippe Lejeune’s notion of the *autobiographical pact* and draw on Pierre Bourdieu’s *field of cultural production*. In “Self/Portrait,” I will discuss three very different texts by Breitz, Calle, and Foer, as portraits of their author selves, readings that rely on Deleuze’s concept of *difference and repetition*, a comparison to Barthes’s auto/biographies, and an engagement with Michel de Montaigne’s essays. For this reason, I will enlarge my theoretical framework to include art and visual scholars, such as Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, and Susan Sontag, as well as interdisciplinary researchers of autobiographical texts and images, such as Paul John Eakin and Timothy Dow Adams. In this chapter, thus, I will show how authors develop their authorial selves in and through auto/biographical self/portraits. Yet I do not read these texts as conventional autobiographies, in the sense of “self-life-writing,” but rather as a productive means to invent authorial selves. These texts, I argue, are not about a “real” author person, but rather an author *persona*, who is to be invented, positioned, and staged incessantly in the creative process.

These position-takings are then brought onto stage in my second main chapter, “Staging,” which discloses further authorial strategies of self-invention and comprises three subsections, “Stage Names,” “Staging Oneself,” and “Individual Mythologies.” By *staging* I mean the conscious act of staging one’s author self in the text and in the world-beyond-the-text. The theoretical premise of this chapter will rely on Iser’s notion of *staging* as an anthropological category, or, as Iser wrote, as “the indefatigable attempt to confront ourselves with ourselves, which can be done only by playing ourselves” (*Fictive* 303). In “Stage Names,” I will show how Foer by assuming his grandfather’s name *Safran*, created his author name as a meaningful identity feature. Austin’s performative speech act of *naming* will be at the center of

this subchapter. In “Staging Oneself,” I will subsequently scrutinize the performative practice of staging oneself as a character to create different versions of one’s authorial self. Using Foer, Auster, and Calle as examples I argue that the act of staging oneself as an author is a powerful performative means of self-invention. Lastly, in “Individual Mythologies,” I will explain how authors fabricate an all-embracing network of personal myths to embed their author personae within their individual mythologies. For this subchapter, I borrowed Harald Szeemann’s neologism *individual mythologies* to pinpoint the unique yet equally universal superstructures that Calle and Auster construct in their *true stories* to link and frame their author personae and their works. In their universal expression, these individual mythologies embody, at the same time, a gateway to the *other*, which will be the subject of my following chapter.

My third main chapter is called “Playing,” and is divided into two subsections, “Playing Authorial Games” and “Authors in Collaboration.” By *playing*, I introduce the fundamental quality of all artistic expression and reception, namely the aesthetic pleasure of playfully engaging with words, images, and ideas. This chapter will bring together under the umbrella of *play*, Deleuze’s concept of *difference* and *repetition*, Iser’s notion of *play* as an anthropological category, as well as Bourdieu’s insights of the *field of cultural production*. I will enlarge my discussion of performative authorship to the workings of appropriation and collaboration between and among the authors discussed, thereby developing and extending the notion of the *play of the text* to the *pleasurable play of the author*. I will thus tackle the fundamental question as to why authors play the game of authorial becoming. In “Playing Authorial Games,” I will analyze *imaginary* authorial games that reach out to the “other” via appropriation, such as Foer’s inaugural anthology of new texts inspired by Joseph Cornell’s boxes or Breitz’s interplay between stars and fans. In “Authors in Collaboration,” I will subsequently show *real* forms of collaborative authorship that display direct exchange and inspiration among multiple authors, such as Auster’s and Sam Messer’s artists’ book *The Story of My Typewriter*, Calle’s and Auster’s team play *Double Game*, as well as Foer’s “corporeal” confrontation with the work of Bruno Schulz in *Tree of Codes*.

My conclusion will summarize my findings and present generational differences between Auster/Calle and Breitz/Foer, respectively, to show how performative strategies of authorial becoming have altered over time.

Let me prelude with a placement of my theoretical framework. Certainly, to bring together Gilles Deleuze, Wolfgang Iser, and Roland Barthes is a daring, if not bold, venture for these three theorists come from different schools of philosophical thought and mostly pursue different lines of arguments. Yet despite their many differences, I see corresponding aspects in their work in regard to questions of performative

authorship. By this challenging selection of scholarly voices, I therefore hope to achieve a prolific and inspirational exchange to gain new insights in the practices of authorial performances. However, this unusual confrontation certainly has its limits. Barthes and Deleuze did not have a pronounced dialogue despite their close sphere of action in the academic milieu of French Poststructuralism. Their cross references are rare and rather sketchy. Iser, founder of the German Constance School of reception aesthetics, also responded very seldom to Barthes's texts directly,<sup>4</sup> and, as far as I am aware of, not a single time to the writings of Deleuze. Yet my intention is not to smooth out the contrasts between these three different thinkers, but to bring together selective and particular concepts in support of my own argument of performative authorship.

Simon Schleusener discussed the "possible uses of Gilles Deleuze in the field of American Studies" in his essay "Deleuze und die American Studies" (2004), concluding that scholars in this field should "make use" of Deleuze's *tool box* "despite existing differences – just as Deleuze has made use of American Literature for the sake of his own philosophy" ("Deleuze" 219).<sup>5</sup> Thus, I will borrow from Deleuze's *tool box* the idea of *becoming* as a continuously mobile state of being to show how authors are perpetually becoming authors in and through their authorial performances. For Deleuze, identity formation is constituted as a constant becoming, driven by the force of difference in repetition. This, I believe, is equally valid for authorial identity formation. Deleuze's notion of *difference and repetition*, another one of his *tools* I will make use of, also plays an important role in regard to the arts, because for him "art does not imitate, above all because it repeats; it repeats all the repetitions, by virtue of an internal power," as he wrote (*Difference* 365). In addition, Schleusener explained Deleuze's approach to literature not as a question of ideology, origin, or 'essence' of a literary work, but as a question of its *use* (cf. "Deleuze" 224), or, to put it in Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's own words in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980): "[L]anguage is the transmission of the word as order-word, not the communication of a sign as information. Language is a map, not a tracing" (*Thousand* 85). Not the *meaning* of this map is thus of importance to Deleuze but to put it to *use*.

At this particular point, I see an analogy to Iser. Deleuze's understanding of language in general and literature in particular shares common ground to Iser, who

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4 Most evidently, Iser was able to relate to Barthes's notion of the *pleasure of the text* that Iser took as a source for his conception of literature as play. See, for example, pp. 278-280 in *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1991), where Iser extensively quoted from Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975).

5 Also see Schleusener, *Kulturelle Komplexität: Gilles Deleuze und die Kulturtheorie der American Studies*. Bielefeld: transcript (2015).

argued already in 1975 that “the time has surely come to cut the thread [of fiction as an antonym of reality] altogether and replace ontological arguments with functional, for what is important to readers, critics, and authors alike is what literature *does* and not what it *means*” (“Reality of Fiction” 7). To ask for the *uses* and *deeds* of artworks instead of their *meanings* is a clear expression of the *performative turn* of the early 1960s that Erika Fischer-Lichte well described in a nutshell in *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2004): “The dissolution of boundaries in the arts, repeatedly proclaimed and observed by artists, art critics, scholars of art, and philosophers, can be defined as a performative turn. Be it art, music, literature, or theatre, the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance” (*Transformative* 22). Like Deleuze<sup>6</sup> and Iser, Fischer-Lichte thereby likewise relied on Austin’s speech act theory that describes linguistic utterances not only as statements but also as performed actions. However, whereas Austin solely applied the word “performative” to speech acts, Deleuze, Iser, and Fischer-Lichte appropriated the term for literature and the arts in general (cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative* 24-25). As a result, Iser developed his concept of *representation as a performative act* that seeks to release literature from the traditional bonds of mimesis. Iser’s idea of representation as performance operates as an oscillation between difference and semblance and is performed by the recipients in the form of role play. In consequence, for Iser and Deleuze alike, *difference in repetition* is the driving force of any artistic expression. Furthermore, Iser’s idea of representation not as mimesis but as performative acts, in turn, corresponds well with Barthes’s objection to “the reduction of language to any representational aesthetics,” as Burke formulated (*Death* 40). Burke further argued that

[t]his is the message – indeed the ‘single message’ – of ‘The Death of the Author’. To wit, that the abolition of the author is the necessary and sufficient step to bring about the end of a representational view of language, for it is only through the function of the author as the possessor of meaning that textual language is made obeisant to an extratextual reality. (*Death* 41)

Thus, without generally lumping together Deleuze’s, Iser’s, and Barthes’s different ways of thinking, I nevertheless intend to show certain thematic overlaps in terms of specific key ideas and tools, such as *becoming*, *difference and repetition*, and conceptualizing representation not as mimesis but as performative acts. I thereby hope to overcome a few obstructive stereotypes and to establish some unfamiliar yet yielding relations.

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6 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 85-86.

The attempt to discard some reflexive prejudices is especially strong in the case of Barthes's work. With the help of Burke, I seek to show that to read Barthes only from his structuralist and post-structuralist pigeonhole misses out on the refreshing complexity, and sometimes vexing inconsistency, of his expressions regarding the role(s) of the author. Thus, I will pursue a reading of his work which clearly exceeds the catch phrase of the *death of the author* that appears to be permanently attached to Barthes.<sup>7</sup> Instead, I will follow Susan Sontag's invitation to see beyond Barthes's "contributions to the would-be science of signs and structures," to discover the "literary one: the writer organizing, under a series of doctrinal auspices, the theory of his own mind" (*Barthes* viii). Correspondingly, Burke called Barthes's manner "a poet's conception." Sontag continued her argument for a revisitation of Barthes in her introduction to *A Barthes Reader* (1982): "[W]hen the current enclosure of reputation by labels of semiology and structuralism crumbles, as it must, Barthes will appear, I think, as a rather traditional *promeneur solitaire*, and a greater writer than even his more fervent admirers now claim" (*Barthes* viii). Not a *fervent admirer* of Barthes myself, I would, at any rate, like to complicate the debate on his argument(s) about authorship by showing a wider spectrum of his thoughts.

Burke argued that, prior to "The Death of the Author," which I will read as a performative manifesto below, Barthes approached the problem of authorship in *On Racine* (1963) and *Criticism and Truth* (1966), focusing in the former "on the nature of the text in and for itself," while arguing in the latter that "a science of discourse could only be established if literary analysis took language rather than authors as the starting-point of its enquiry" (*Death* 19). "The Death of the Author," then, formed a first "theoretical outline" of Barthes's project to replace the authorial perspective "by that of the reader as producer of the text" in his subsequent publication *S/Z* (1970), as Burke further explained:

Commentators of Barthes's career are united in seeing a decisive change in direction as occurring in the late 1960s, and are all but united in seeing that change as occurring decisively in *S/Z*. This text also constitutes a certain crossroads for Barthes in terms of his attitude to authorship in that it at once puts into practice the principles of 'The Death of the Author', and at the same time willingly relinquishes some of the ground that the essay hoped to gain. (*Death* 27)

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7 In his lecture session of January 19, 1980 with the title "Return of the Author" Barthes said: "I don't like it when people shut me up, so to speak, in the first kind of immortality – the immortality of *always being in the same place* –, however immortal that immortality may be! [...] I change places, I want to be reborn; I'm not where you expect me to be" (*Preparation* 215).

In *S/Z*, Barthes made some of the ground for the return of the author, at least to his own text: “The Author himself [...] can or could some day become a text like any other: [...] he has only to see himself as a being on paper and his life as a *bio-graphy* [...] a novelistic, irretrievable, irresponsible figure, caught up in the plural of its own text” (*S/Z* 211-212). At this point of the argument, Burke attested a “twisted dialectic” or even “no dialectic at all,” as Barthes clearly contradicted himself by articulating the paradox, as Burke formulated, that “[t]wo balls must be constantly kept up in the air: the author will return, but the death of the author must stand” (*Death* 28, 29). Sontag described this kind of *non-dialectic* approach as Barthes’s “aphorist’s ability to conjure up a vivacious duality,” and continued to argue that “Barthes’s writing is seeded with such ostensibly paradoxical, epigrammatic formulas” (*Barthes* xii). Yet as Burke explained Barthes’s ingenious mind-twisting maneuver, the “authorial return does not impinge upon the idea of the birth of the reader,” but rather, “the author will reappear as a desire of the reader’s, a spectre spirited back into existence by the critic himself” (*Death* 28). Hence, the author does return to the text, yet as an ephemeral, fragmentary figure and “on condition,” as Burke wrote “that his life is discontinuous, fictive; that he ‘puts the work into the life’” (*Death* 29). This “chiasmic movement from life-into-work to work-into-life is addressed to the question of priority” for Barthes, as Burke insisted (*Death* 30).<sup>8</sup>

One year later, in 1971, Barthes published *Sade Fourier Loyola*, which introduced his idea of ‘founders of language’ to the authorship debate. Here, Barthes described the thinkers Marquis de Sade, Charles Fourier, and Ignatius of Loyola as initiators or inventors of language or discourse,<sup>9</sup> which clearly constitutes a contradiction to his previous work, as Burke explicated:

The conviction that language, any language, however idiosyncratic it might appear in particular hands, invariably precedes and indeed determines the subjects of its writing is a constant premise of Barthes’s work during the 1960s, [...]. But with the concept of the ‘founder of language’ he would seem to entirely subvert his thesis. (*Death* 32)

Burke then argued that Barthes’s “idea of the logothete also necessitates the renewal of the concept of the oeuvre,” which, in turn, means to put “faith in the author or in

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8 Barthes in his lecture session of January 19, 1980: “The innovation of the *Life / Work* relationship, the positioning of the life as work is now slowly emerging as a veritable historical shift in values, in literary prejudices” (*Preparation* 210).

9 The question in how far Barthes’s ‘founders of language’ were inspired but are also different from Michel Foucault’s ‘initiators of discursive practices’ (as formulated in his 1969 “What Is an Author?”) is certainly interesting, but exceeds the scope and goal of my book.

his signature at least,” because in “absolutely minimalist terms, the author is that principle which unites the objects, [...], that gather under his proper name” (*Death* 33, 34). Via the ‘founders of language,’ Barthes reintroduced the concept of “the oeuvre as an ever-present inter text” as well as the author’s proper name as an umbrella term subsuming the work, as Burke explained (*Death* 34-35). Hence, along with oeuvre and proper name, an author persona is reestablished. At the latest in *Sade Fourier Loyola*, the author’s biography and corpus have therefore returned when “Barthes adds the author’s life to the oeuvre in the ‘Lives’ section just as elsewhere he joins corpus to corpus by reading the body writing to the body of writing,” as Burke stated (*Death* 35). Barthes, in his own words, explained this paradoxical interchange and convertibility between author and text, life and literature as follows: “The author who leaves his text and comes into our life has no unity; he is a mere plural of ‘charms’, the site of a few tenuous details, [...] he is not a (civil, moral) person, he is a body” (Barthes in: Burke, *Death* 28-29). These different bodies, the body of the text and the body of the author,<sup>10</sup> have to be constantly negotiated, which Barthes aimed for in his subsequent “autobiographical” writings as Burke summarized:

Following upon *S/Z*, which sought to work through and beyond structuralist categories, *Sade Fourier Loyola* makes the decisive break with the scientism Barthes practised in the 1960s, and along with *The Pleasure of the Text* makes a theoretical clearing for *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, *A Lover’s Discourse* and *Camera Lucida*. A reworked conception of the author is the first move in this direction. To reintroduce the author and the author’s life is to create a thaw in the cold dream of structuralist objectivity. (*Death* 38)

In pursuing my own argument of performative authorship, I am interested in what is hidden beneath the ice once Barthes’s (post-)structuralism begins to melt and crumble with his contradictory arguments on the simultaneous death and return of the author. In his lecture session of January 19, 1980, with the title “Return of the Author,” Barthes quoted from a text by Jean Bellemin-Noël to then show a possible return path for the author:

“Everything <in his book> comes out of a lack of curiosity with regard to authors. For me, this is of the order of fact, I am not touched, drawn to, even less I am mobilized by the lives or the

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10 Cf. Burke: “[T]he ideas of writing the body, and the body writing, dominate the discourse. However, somewhat typically, Barthes refuses to clarify either what is meant or what is at issue here. [...] Once again ‘body’ arises via an ‘ellipsis which is not supported’: once again Barthes cunningly tempts us to ask what the ‘body’ means or what it does in his discourse” (*Death* 56, 57).

personalities of writers ...”; a good quote (even if today I take the completely opposite view) because it uses the right expression: lack of curiosity with regard to the author → Death, Lack of Curiosity → Return of Curiosity, return of the author. (*Preparation* 208)

In this quote, Barthes advanced the view that the return of the author is not only a possibility but that, indeed, “in the history of French literature, there have been several ‘returns of the author’ of varying types and of varying values” (*Preparations* 207).

Nevertheless, my revisitation of Barthes’s changing notion(s) of authorship will not constitute the main theoretical premise of my argument. Rather, the meta-narrative of the Barthesian trajectory will unfold parallel to my readings of the works of Auster, Breitz, Calle, and Foer. At times, my intention is to show striking thematic and methodological reverberations between Barthes and, especially, Calle and Auster. Sontag described Barthes’s writing sensibility as “a dramatic act, subject to dramatic elaboration. [...] Under the meta-category of performance, not only the line between autobiography and fiction muted, but that between essay and fiction as well” (*Barthes* xv).<sup>11</sup> In this regard, I value Barthes’s model role as a hybrid author-thinker who performed his theoretical concepts of authorship *in situ*. As Sontag wrote: “Barthes’s writing, with its prodigious variety of subjects, has finally one great subject: writing itself” (*Barthes* vii). This, I believe, is equally true of Auster’s writing and also corresponds well to Calle’s lifetime project of authorial self-invention. Both authors have been interested in the processes of text formation and, respectively, of *becoming authors*. They have approached their author personae via the anecdote, oftentimes in the form of individual mythologies – as did Barthes, for example, in *Camera Lucida*. Their subjective practice of text production has a playful note, which demonstrates *the pleasure of the text* from the authorial perspective. Thus, I see a strong affinity between Barthes’s, Auster’s, and Calle’s understanding of authorship that will echo in my readings of the works of the latter two.

Despite all reverberations between these authors, my theoretical framework will rely, most importantly, on Iser’s notion of *representation as a performative act*. Iser’s anthropological approach to literature and his work in reader-response theory might appear as a curious choice to start discussing performative authorship. Yet I chose this trajectory, because I see a resilient bridge between Barthes’s “birth of the reader” and Iser’s “reader-response theory,” the former of which made possible to think from the reader perspective and the latter of which provided a viable path to describe this perspective. Barthes strengthened the focus on the text and, simultaneously,

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11 Sontag described Barthes as “the latest major participant in the great national literary project, inaugurated by Montaigne: the self as vocation, life as reading of the self” (*Barthes* xxxiii).

established the sovereignty of the reader. Iser, on the other hand, methodically installed the reader as the performing agent in the production of texts. Yet where Barthes remained vague, Iser was specific; where Barthes appears chaotic and ambiguous, Iser seems systematic and clear. I was drawn to this confusing dichotomy in order to describe the complex rebirth of the author via the birth of the reader. The outcome of this unusual juxtaposition of thinkers is my very own concept of performative authorship.

Thereby, I do not, at any time, intend to neglect or diminish the achievements in regard to the reader's agency by strengthening the agency of the author in my argument for performative authorship. Rather, I see these two practices as equally valuable twins that closely belong to each other and only together arrive at the production of the text. Or, as Barthes wrote in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), "[o]n the stage of the text, no footlights: there is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader); there is not a subject and an object" (*Pleasure* 16). In consequence, the *detour* via the reader-response theory is necessary to avoid stepping into any revisionist trap of an author's resurrection at the expense of an anew neglect of the reader.

Let me begin by restating Auster's urgent question of principle: "Who is this mysterious other to whom we refer to as *author*?"

## WHO IS THIS MYSTERIOUS OTHER?

The author is dead. Long live the author. More than forty years have passed since Roland Barthes "overthrew" the author and "crowned" the reader. Only dead authors are good authors. Since then many authors have seemingly internalized this credo. But what to do with this "person" who writes onto paper (or types on laptops) the words that create a text? How do we comprehend this "no one" who produces the text, this "tissue of quotations" (Barthes in: Burke, *Authorship* 128),<sup>12</sup> as Barthes referred to it in his influential essay? With his controversial text, Barthes not only challenged literary theory but also the ways authors thought and continue to think about themselves. In a single blow, the sacrosanct authority of the author was called into question, leaving writers with a blankness, equal to the empty page in front of them. Literary criticism, on the other hand, has increasingly struggled with authorship questions after Barthes's attack on the traditional notion of the author. Who actually creates (a) text? Who is this person who puts her name on the book's

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12 All quotes from Barthes's "The Death of the Author" are taken from Seán Burke's publication *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern* (1995).

cover? Are authors fiction themselves? Literary theory has since tried to find answers to these vexing questions.

As early as the 1940s, American New Criticism scholars such as W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley labeled traditional understandings of author concepts as “intentional fallacy,” declaring the author’s intention as meaningless in the assessment of a work of (literary) art. At the beginning of the 1960s, Wayne C. Booth tried to introduce his “implied author,” the notion of an author’s second self, as an intermediate figure to describe the author’s image in his text. Then, in 1967, Barthes radicalized earlier deconstructions of traditional author concepts and was followed shortly after by his fellow countryman, Michel Foucault, who, in his own iconic essay, also bid farewell to classical notions of *the author*. Foucault tried to answer the question of his essay’s title, “What Is an Author?,” with the notion of the *author-function*. The author, as a substitute of the subject, ought “to be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse,” Foucault argued (“Author?” 138). Literary critics have since been struggling with authorship concepts. These include Gérard Genette, who, among other things, heavily criticized Booth’s “implied author,” Nancy K. Miller and Cheryl Lawson Walker, who analyzed the special situation of female writers, and their compatriots Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi, who argued for new possibilities of collective authorship in digital media that is changing the notion of authorship yet again. By the 1980s, critical discourse had finally overcome grief with Eugene Simion’s *The Return of the Author* (1981) and Seán Burke’s *The Death and Return of the Author* (1992). In Germany, Heinrich Bosse described *authorship as work authority* to analyze questions of authorship and copyright (*Autorschaft ist Werkherrschaft* 1981), while his colleagues around Fotis Jannidis likewise celebrated the *return of the author* (*Die Rückkehr des Autors* 1999).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the applied arts have equally discovered the *author* as a worthwhile topic for critical discourse. The Swiss art historians Hans Peter Schwarz, Corina Caduff, and Tan Wälchli worked on questions of authorship in the applied arts (*Autorschaft in den Künsten* 2007), as did Beatrice von Bismarck in her publication on the *appearance as artist* (*Auftritt als Künstler* 2010). From 2009 to 2014, the research group “Authorship as Performance” around Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor at Ghent University in Belgium “aimed to re-examine material conditions and historical views of literary authorship as cultural performance in the light of recent developments in the theory [...] of authorship, authority and agency.”<sup>13</sup> This research group has developed performative models of authorship by including in their analyses questions of material dimensions, theories of performances and performativity, gender, professionalization of writing, processes

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13 See *Research on Authorship as Performance*: <http://www.rap.ugent.be/>.

of canon-formation, cultural networks, and self-fashioning, thereby following the *performative turn* in cultural analysis. In her very original book *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (2010), Marjorie Perloff argued for a ‘poetic turn’ and called for a conceptual understanding of poets and their work and Benjamin Widiss proclaimed *The Persistence of the Author in Twentieth Century American Literature*, as the subtitle of his publication *Obscure Invitations* (2011) reads. However dynamic this ongoing transatlantic academic debate is, I argue that it was especially Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” that – paradoxically – marked a great opportunity for authors. After dismantling the author’s single authority on a text, Barthes’s essay gave many authors space for previously unthinkable experiments. Genre definitions were thus blurred, different voices were integrated into one text, and fact and fiction were no longer presented as opposites. Parallel to the academic discourse, authors have taken up the challenge to revive ideas from Barthes and present them in new forms. The challenge was and still is to accept that texts are not only the outcome of one author’s voice but also the product of many voices. There is no such thing as one single authority on a text. Instead, there are rather innumerable voices that are clustered in the author’s mind, like an *archive of ideas*. Authors, consciously or unconsciously, draw from this imaginary archive anecdotes, images, and concepts for their stories. Fragmentary components from various stories are thus collected. Authors then combine these with other fragments, process them, transform them, and eventually mold their own stories from them. For the most part, this has been an unconscious process or, at least, one that has not been openly revealed to readers. However, since withdrawing from their prominent positions as sole authorities on their texts, many authors have acknowledged that texts are, ultimately, the outcome of collective efforts. These authors are increasingly willing to share their sources with their readers.

Without a doubt, authors are inspired by “real” events that happen around them. Sometimes fictional stories cross over into “real” life. Burke formulated this idea by positing that “[w]ork and life commute through a channel which can be traversed in both directions and not as has been traditionally supposed, only in the direction, author-to-text” (*Death* 31). To read authorship as a performative act of self-invention is one way of acknowledging and celebrating this multi-directional passage from author to text to reader and vice versa. What this amounts to is that authors do not simply create stories out of nothing. Therefore, the metaphor of the white page, commonly used to illustrate the creative process of writing, is actually a symbol of a traditional understanding of authorship that continues to regard the author as the single authority on a text. However, the empty page is not simply white and void but, rather, wildly colorful and crowded with all the pre-existing stories. Authors have to create their own stories in the context of this stew of stories, texts, and words. Barthes’s essay marked a watershed moment in freeing authors from their duty to be

the single authorities on their texts. His ideas gave them the opportunity to more openly reveal their sources and consciously play with them. Beyond that, this new liberty offered authors a way to integrate themselves as authors into their texts. This way, their voices became one of the many elements woven into the fabric of their texts. Unusual genre mixes have evolved from this new kind of aesthetic expression that finds itself in the “no one’s” land between fact and fiction, which has become an experimental ground for literary and visual artists alike. It is therefore worthwhile to revisit Barthes’s text and read it in terms of performative authorship.

As we have seen, even though Barthes’s 1967 essay “The Death of the Author” was certainly not the first attempt to dismantle the “Author-God” from her throne, Barthes’s text is by far the most radical approach in this tradition. To begin with, Barthes, with both ignorance and arrogance, neglected and minimized earlier undertakings to diminish the significance of the author figure in the creation of a text. He failed to mention, for example, the Russian Formalists or the Prague Structuralists, hence omitting a whole succession of earlier critical authorship theories. Further, Barthes belittled the approach of New Criticism scholars who focused on texts rather than authors. Literary criticism, such as close reading, Barthes claimed, “has often done no more than to consolidate” the authority of the author (*Authorship* 126). Burke explained Barthes’s approach as follows:

The large body of critics who work with a more modest conception of authorship are not considered, nor the ameliorative influence such critics bring to bear upon the role of the author in literary studies. All author-positions are subsumed under an essentially nineteenth-century theocentrism, a tactic which naturally lends to the death of the author a greater urgency, a more direful necessity. (*Death* 25)

Literary critics prior to Barthes do not fare well in his essay, in which he stated that “there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author” (*Authorship* 129). Since Barthes was certainly aware of his important predecessors in the field of literary criticism, there must be another reason for his drastic neglect and denunciation of them.

Before trying to explain this highly conspicuous oversight, let me add that Barthes did name a few legitimate forerunners of his cause. Yet, he found visionaries in fields other than literary criticism: Literary writers, visual artists, and linguists of different times and schools had been among the first, he claimed, to focus on language rather than on individual authors. Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Valéry, and Marcel Proust suppressed and called into question the grand authority of the author, to replace the latter with language itself. The Surrealists introduced the notions of automatic and collective writing, which put strong emphasis on the writing process of a text, not on

its creator. And, finally, it took linguists to deconstruct the figure of the author by providing analytical tools to show that in language there are subjects and not persons. To give just one example, the *intertextuality* that Barthes stressed and described as “collages of quotations” is clearly a distinct structuralist concept developed by scholars like Julia Kristeva and Barthes himself. The above-mentioned groups and individuals are somewhat legitimate predecessors for Barthes, who urgently needed forerunners to anticipate his own thoughts. This is not because he had to establish a genealogy or is deficient of academic or literary recourse. Barthes’s need for forebears becomes apparent when we look closely at his text. Barthes was obliged to position his essay within the very kind of network of intertextuality that he demanded and postulated so strongly in his own writing. He could not simply claim originality in his approach, because, according to him, there was no longer any original, only “a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (*Authorship* 128). Therefore, Barthes had to perform what he postulated. Despite all novel radicalism, Barthes needed to present his readers a view of the “multidimensional space” that his text opened up. To intertextually contextualize his text ultimately equaled to remain truthful to his project. For this, Barthes needed to present his readers at least a glimpse of the genealogy (that is the poets, artists, and linguists) in which his text was embedded. This is one of the many ways that “The Death of the Author” is highly performative.

We can now return to the question as to why Barthes was unwilling to open up the same multidimensional space of *his* text to the writings and analysis of literary criticism. Despite similar intentions, literary criticism is willfully excluded from the “tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” that constitutes his own text (*Authorship* 128). Not only was the author declared dead, so was the critic. The exclusion of related ideas from the Prague Structuralists, the Russian Formalists, or the New Criticism School, made Barthes’s claim even more radical. “The Death of the Author” is not just another academic treatise, nor is it simply a well-argued essay in which Barthes pursued a serious contribution to the debate on authorship. It is, rather, a radical polemic – a call to arms – that must be read as an avant-garde manifesto. In *The Author* (2005), Andrew Bennett explained the environment in which Barthes’s text appeared for the first time:

The essay was first published in an avant-garde, iconoclastic and formally experimental US magazine, Aspen, [...]. The issue was dedicated to Stéphane Mallarmé and included work by, amongst others, Marcel Duchamp, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Merce Cunningham, Samuel Beckett and John Cage. The collection as a whole and Barthes’s essay in particular were aimed at confronting and subverting conventional ways of thinking about, of approaching or theorizing, literature and art, particularly with respect to conventional oppositions of ‘high’ art to low cultural values. (*Author* 13-14)

The impetus and style of Barthes's manifesto explain the great appeal that his text has retained over the decades. It seems so easy and alluring to quote from his provocative text, because it expresses a strong position within the authorship debate. Many scholars simply took it for granted that "The Death of the Author" was written as a serious contribution to an academic literary discussion about the author. As Bennett explained:

Barthes's essay was often taken as the last word on the author. The essay was often conceived of in terms of a theorist reading the last rites over the corpse of the idea of the author. And such an understanding often went no further than the 'stark extremity', [...], of the essay's title. (*Author* 9-10)

Yet as Burke argued, Barthes's text must really be seen as his first radical attempt to free himself from the chains of an orthodox notion of authorship. Only a few years later, in his 1970 *S/Z*, Barthes developed the missing logical arguments that supported his call to arms against the traditional author. The polemical dimension of "The Death of the Author" offered an entrée for Barthes to radically rethink the form and meaning of author- and readership and to push a new aesthetic based on these concepts. However, before Barthes could seriously engage in an academic debate about author- and readership, which he did shortly after in *S/Z*, he needed to develop certain aesthetic views and representations of authorship. Thus, instead of offering yet another literary criticism on the role and function of the author, Barthes wrote an avant-garde manifesto that expresses and promotes strong aesthetic goals. The essay is therefore far more of an aesthetic performance than an analytical theorem. It is a performance that came out of a clearly discernable theoretical and political background. On the one hand, Barthes developed his essay on the theoretical premises of Structuralism. On the other hand, he formulated his ideas in the political climate of the "Paris May 1968" ideology.

Let me begin with the latter. Barthes was part of a generation of thinkers who challenged traditional notions of the role of the author and the meaning of authorship at a time of upheaval and radical social change. In "Paris May 1968," the anti-authorial student movement questioned established social forces of power and control in the realms of politics, education, and domestic relationships. The traditional author, long admired as the grand authority of an artwork, and representational art, long connected to notions of truth, were deconstructed. Authors were thought to have authorial control over their art, and representational art, such as realism and naturalism, were thought to express "reality." As Burke explained:

The death of the author might be said to fulfill much the same function in our day as did the death of God for late nineteenth-century thought. Both deaths attest to a departure of belief in

authority, presence, intention, omniscience and creativity. For a culture which thinks of itself to have come too late for the Gods or for their extermination, the figure of the author and the human subject are said to fill the theological void, to take up the role of ensuring meaning in the absence of metaphysical certainties. (*Death* 21)

Barthes intellectually detested any illusionary claims of individual authors to control “reality” and thus “meaning.” Representation signified the worst form of art for him, as Burke showed: “This is the message [...] of ‘The Death of the Author.’ To wit, that the abolition of the author is the necessary and sufficient step to bring about the end of a representational view of language” (*Death* 41). Only in experimental art did Barthes see a creative potential that could possibly liberate the individual from superordinate powers. Therefore, he linked creativity to experimental texts which he later termed *writerly texts*, because only these texts offered a possibility for readers to “rewrite” them. It was in *S/Z* that Barthes further developed his distinction between *writerly* and *readerly texts*. The latter are representational forms of writing, whereas the former are more open texts, enabling readers to enter into a productive endeavor with texts. As he explained in detail:

What can be written (rewritten) today: the writerly. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. [...] Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the readerly. We call any readerly text a classic text. (*S/Z* 4)

The multiplicity of references in an experimental text, in Barthes’s view, make the formation of one single meaning impossible. Readers have to work with a plentitude of simultaneous references, with, what Barthes in *S/Z* termed, “codes” within a given text to create their own meaning, which changes with each new reading of a text. In experimental texts, the full meaning potential can thus never be exhausted, as readers are always rewriting the texts. In this open and ever-repeated process, Barthes detected the only creative potential for individuals to escape superordinate powers. Reading, that is rewriting texts, was a method for Barthes that had the potential to liberate us from authoritative structures. To Burke, “the two enduring principles” of Barthes’s manifesto are “the refusal of an instrumentalist conception of language, and the promise of the ‘birth of the reader’” (*Death* 45). Yet neither writers nor readers can play outside the language game. In Barthes’s understanding of an artificial place “without history,” the reader rewrites texts in accordance with the logic of language, which leads directly to the structuralist premise on which “The Death of the Author” rests. According to Barthes, and Structuralism as a whole, language not the author or individual speaks. Language has its own logic, and writers,

as well as readers, are only “guests” within the language game. Barthes elaborated on this idea in an essay from 1971 published in his later book, *Image-Music-Text*:

It is not that the Author may not ‘come back’ in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a ‘guest’ [...] his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary); it is the work of Proust, of Genet which allows their lives to be read as text. (*Image* 161)

The language game, in which the author is only one guest among many others, has well-defined rules determined by history, culture, and, in particular, linguistics. The argument is that no matter how innovative and creative writers or readers are, they are nevertheless always subject to the power of language. There is no loophole to escape language and its dominant normative force. Even the search for meaning itself, so grave in Western thought, is dominated by language and its powerful rules. Hence, the liberating potential for readers, which Barthes identified in experimental texts, is nevertheless limited to or operates within the system of rules of the language game.

In sum, “The Death of the Author” is based on a structuralist argument and framed by the politics of Barthes’s era. The text was Barthes’s violent entrée into an entire intellectual exploration of concepts that were later fully developed in publications like *S/Z* and others. Examined in isolation of its larger context, the text reads as a polemical if not naïve essay. This is not to diminish Barthes’s accomplishments in this early text, but rather to explain why critics and scholars, even today, struggle with and dispute over this text so profoundly. To approach “The Death of the Author” in the context of Barthes’s later publications, enables us to comprehend and appreciate its significance beyond the “stark extremity” of its title. After all, Barthes’s text should not be read only as a well-argued scholarly essay that develops a position about the role of the author. Instead, it should be understood as a radical, avant-garde manifesto that persuasively pushed a new aesthetic order in relation to concepts of author- and readership. Barthes performed his own *becoming an author* in this essay by genealogically positioning and staging his author persona as the *enfant terrible* of literary criticism.<sup>14</sup> Later I will establish authorial representation as a performative act, with the help of Wolfgang Iser’s theoretical insights. But first let me define my terminology with regard to my theoretical framework of *becoming an author*.

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14 Cf. Berensmeyer et al.: “When Roland Barthes wrote ‘The Death of the Author,’ his own authorship may still have been modeled on this anti-bourgeois attitude of the avant-garde, while being related to the French new novel’s anti-humanist reaction against the traditional norms of literary realism” (“Authorship” 21).

## BECOMING AN AUTHOR

At first glance, my chapter title, *becoming an author*, might sound awkward, calling for a thorough explanation. In the following pages, I will therefore explicate how I intend to use the concept of *becoming an author*. I carefully coined the term with the intention to emphasize the process of individuals turning themselves into authors. Authors are not simply born authors. Authors are made authors and, more importantly, authors perpetually turn themselves into authors. I am interested in the continuous venture of self-invention and aim to scrutinize the transformative and performative acts of authorial becoming. My terminology *becoming* relies on Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's notion of *becoming* as an ambivalent transformation discussed primarily in their work, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Deleuze and Guattari explained *becoming* as a constant flow that must be seen in contrast to the static verb *being*.<sup>15</sup> Becoming, to them, is a movement, a transformation, or a nascent metamorphosis between different states of being: It is never completed. Rather, becoming is the constant condition of the self, of one's identity,<sup>16</sup> described by Deleuze and Guattari as "only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities" (*Thousand* 275). This crossing between, or transformation of, multiplicities can be pictured in the form of a "vital" or "life-assemblage"<sup>17</sup> that is defined by "a longitude and latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects" (*Thousand* 289). For Deleuze and Guattari, accordingly, the longitude entails the sum total of the material elements in regard to movement and rest, as well as rapid and slow speed. The latitude subsumes the sum total of the affects available to the body in question.<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari located a process of individuation on the spatiotemporal plane of consistency<sup>19</sup> and used the term *haecceity*<sup>20</sup> to delineate this mode of self-realization that observes and understands the body, thing, or subject only within and as part of its environment. They pointedly argued that "you will yield

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15 Deleuze/Guattari: "Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it is not to reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or 'producing'" (*Thousand* 263).

16 Cf. Deleuze: "[B]eing is said of becoming, identity of that which is different, the one of the multiple etc. That identity not be first, that it exist as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle *become*" (*Difference* 50).

17 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 315.

18 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 287.

19 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 294.

20 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 287-288, 290. The term *haecceity* literally translates as 'thisness' and derives from John Duns Scotus, a Scottish theologian and philosopher of the High Middle Ages.

nothing to haecceities unless you realize that that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that” (*Thousand* 289). Instead of speaking of things and subjects, and their developments and formations, they therefore began to speak of events and of becoming events.<sup>21</sup> This becoming takes place, not on a molar, but on a molecular level:

Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. (*Thousand* 300-301)

Deleuze’s and Guattari’s work is specifically significant for their discussion of the process of writing, the larger production of cultural texts, as well as for their ideas on the individuation of writers, or authors in general. They described the writing or creating of texts as a process of desire, a special form of becoming: “If the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings” they wrote (*Thousand* 265). Alongside writers and their literary works (such as Virginia Woolf, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, and D.H. Lawrence),<sup>22</sup> they discussed the music of composer John Cage,<sup>23</sup> the films of directors Daniel Mann, Jean-Luc Godard, and Alfred Hitchcock,<sup>24</sup> and the paintings of Piet Mondrian<sup>25</sup> as exemplary cases of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari argued that these authors “were able to tie their writing to real and unheard-of becomings” (*Thousand* 269). Producing cultural texts is described as a specific and unique case of becoming that discloses this desire-driven process of individuation, because “singing or composing,

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21 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 289.

22 Deleuze/Guattari: “Virginia Woolf – who made all of her life and work a passage, a becoming, all kinds of becomings between ages, sexes, elements, and kingdoms” (*Thousand* 278). Also: “*Moby-Dick* in its entirety is one of the greatest masterpieces of becoming; Captain Ahab has an irresistible becoming-whale” (268). As well as: “But the objection is raised against Lawrence: ‘Your tortoises aren’t real!’ And he answers: Possibly, but my becoming is, my becoming is real” (269-270).

23 Deleuze/Guattari: “It is undoubtedly John Cage who first and most perfectly deployed this fixed sound plane, which affirms a process against all structure and genesis, a floating time against pulsed time or tempo, experimentation against any kind of interpretation, and in which silence as sonorous rest also marks the absolute state of movement” (*Thousand* 294-295).

24 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 257, 295, 336.

25 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 336.

painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash these becomings” (*Thousand* 300). To “unleash these becomings” is to multiply and amplify the desire and render it visible for oneself and others in writing, painting, or musical composition. As their diverse examples show, it is especially with authors and in cultural texts that we can best locate the spatiotemporal plane of consistency that Deleuze and Guattari defined as “a means of transportation” in or on which “no form develops, no subject forms; affects are displaced, becomings catapult forward and combine into blocks” (*Thousand* 296). My expression *becoming an author* thus signifies the processual and continuous individuation of authors alongside the development of cultural texts. Spatiotemporal planes of consistency are not only constituted by texts but by authors as well.

In her book *The Thought of Becoming: Gilles Deleuze’s Poetics of Life* (2008), Kathrin Thiele argued that Deleuze’s thought of becoming is, above all, an ethical thinking, a “concern for the world” (*Thought* 161) that draws on philosophical inspirations from Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Thiele wrote that “while Deleuze *thinks* (conceptualizes) the world in a Spinozist way, while he *senses* (envisions) it in a Bergsonian way, it will be the task [...] to exemplify that Deleuze *acts* (intervenes) in it in a Nietzschean manner” (*Thought* 116). In her detailed analysis, Thiele traced the philosophical thoughts of Spinozist *immanence*, Bergsonian *difference*, and Nietzschean *repetition*, linking them to “Deleuze’s thought of becoming as inherently expressing an ‘attitude,’ i.e. an ethos” (*Thought* 161). Thiele defined Deleuze’s task of becoming as follows: “‘To become!’ is (=) to bring to the highest degree the (in)capacity to be affected while at the same time to intensify the force to affect” (*Thought* 192). *Becoming an author* is such an effort “to be affected while at the same time to intensify the force to affect” through one’s authorship. *Becoming an author* indeed allows for such an intensification of force, because of its acute focus on the onward constructive process of creation. Creating is becoming and vice versa. Nowhere is this immanent part of our being more visible than in the creative process of authorial self-invention itself. Authors constantly reinvent themselves in their works and beyond. *Becoming an author* thus illustrates Deleuze’s thought of becoming, which Thiele conceived of as an attitude, even an ethos. *Becoming an author* exemplifies the Deleuzian thought of becoming in the sense that authors (publicly) perform becomings, and thus disclose those mechanisms of becoming that concern us all. In his manifesto *Reality Hunger* (2010), David Shields described this indicative mode of authors as follows: “One is not important, except insofar as one’s example can serve to elucidate a more widespread human trait and make readers feel a little less lonely and freakish” (*Reality* 160).

I will now elaborate on the concept of *becoming* and of *becoming an author* with an example from Candice Breitz’s 2003 body of work entitled “Becoming,” in which the artist “becomes” different public personas in her performances. “Becoming” is a

Fig. 1: Candice Breitz, *Becoming Cameron*



Stills from *Becoming Cameron*, 2003. From the series *Becoming*, 2003. Dual-Channel Installation. Duration: 31 seconds, 22 frames.

fourteen channel video installation consisting of seven pairs of screens, each pair standing back-to-back. On one side of each screen, a short sequence of a Hollywood movie is displayed, and on its rear side, Breitz is seen re-enacting the same scene. Drawing on clichéd feminine roles from different romantic comedy films, Breitz is performing, in lip-synching pantomimes, the expressions and gestures of seven famous lead Hollywood actresses, namely Cameron Diaz, Julia Roberts, Jennifer Lopez, Meg Ryan, Neve Campbell, Reese Witherspoon, and Drew Barrymore. All other actors, more precisely the male counterparts to the women, from the original film footage are visually removed, with the exception of a few short aural sequences that show the actors in conversation with one of the actresses. Breitz's re-enactments of the short sequences are never shown directly next to their "original" versions, but always on a screen facing the other side. This makes the direct comparison of the "original" and the "copy" impossible. Likewise, on Breitz's website, viewers can either watch the "original" or the "copy" by keeping the scroll above the corresponding video, but cannot watch both performances simultaneously.<sup>26</sup> Viewers thus have to draw on their own memories for comparisons of the two performances. Using their own bodies, either viewers walk around the screens or scroll in order to bring together the two parts. Breitz herself suggested that

[i]n viewing the work, the viewer completes the loop between the original piece of footage [...] and the copied piece of footage [...], such that the 'before and after' structure breaks down,

26 See <http://www.candicebreitz.net/>. All quotes are taken from Breitz's website.

undermining the primacy of the Hollywood footage, and suggesting the deeply scripted nature of both performances. (Breitz in: Burke, "Breitz" 12)

Each set of conjoined twin screenings shares the same audio channel, so that Breitz is seen performing to the voices of the seven aforementioned actresses. The "master copies" are screened in their original colored versions, while Breitz's imitations are shown in black and white. She is shown performing in front of plain backgrounds, with different shades of light to dark grey. Props appear only when necessary, for example, when Drew Barrymore is seen speaking into a telephone receiver or when Cameron Diaz is seen waving a book entitled *True Love*. The neutrality of the settings that Breitz attempted to evoke is further emphasized through her attire: a plain white blouse and blond pixie-bob hair-do. Her outfit bespeaks a neutral, almost unisex, appearance that obliterates anything characteristic of Breitz's own personality. Her identity is thus visually reduced to a bare projection screen onto which the Hollywood performances are re-performed. Breitz mimicked each performance painstakingly and, for viewers became (and continues to become) an "exact duplicate" of the "master version." This observation is elaborated upon in my later discussion of Breitz's work.

In her series, Breitz, for example, re-enacted the famous scene from *Pretty Woman* (1990) in which Julia Roberts, as the beautiful, lascivious prostitute, Vivian Ward, leans backwards over the balcony balustrade of a luxury hotel, teasingly daring Richard Gere, alias Edward Lewis: "It's making you nervous? What if I just lean back a little bit like this? Would you – would you rescue me, if I fell? It's really high. Look – no hands, no hands." "Would you rescue me" is, of course, the crucial question that condenses the whole storyline of the romance movie. Will the wealthy yet lonely corporate raider Edward rescue the fun-loving prostitute Vivian from her precarious environment? "Would you rescue me, if I fell?" is thus a question as well as a calling, because as a prostitute, Vivian is already a *fallen woman*<sup>27</sup> and depends entirely on a man like Edward for rescue and rehabilitation. In Breitz's "Becoming Julia" (see book's cover) Vivian's role is displayed as a blatant stereotype of women's social dependency on men's goodwill, as portrayed in countless romance stories. This is best exemplified by Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind* (1936), whose social standing depends entirely on her status as a married woman or, at least as a widow. Breitz's 39-second clip from *Pretty Woman* further distills Vivian's role to that of a bold yet totally dependent woman whose only hope, through seduction, is to be rescued by a man.

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27 In the past, people described a woman as a fallen woman when she was no longer respected because she had had sex with someone that she was not married to.

The subtitle of each sequence, “Becoming Julia,” “Becoming Cameron,” and so forth, indicates that Breitz’s mimicry is not her attempt to become the characters of the different movies, for example, Vivian Ward of *Pretty Woman* or Christina Walters of *The Sweetest Thing* (2002). The focus of Breitz’s *becoming* lies in the actresses themselves, the stars who have embodied the different characters, rather than in the individual roles they have enacted. This, on the one hand, points to Breitz’s sincere interest in celebrity culture and star-fan relationships, which her later projects of 2005, such as “King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)” or “Queen (A Portrait of Madonna),” further attest. On the other hand, putting the focus on the actresses and not on their roles gives the concept of *becoming* a double twist. In Breitz’s installation, not only is Julia Roberts becoming Vivian Ward, but Breitz is becoming Julia Roberts becoming Vivian Ward, who herself transforms from a prostitute into a “socially respectable” woman. The repetitive continuum of becoming, intrinsic to our all “being,” is demonstrated and exemplified here. As such, Breitz’s “Becoming” reveals the continuous process of becoming as a never-ending desire that is the essence of our individuation. Breitz’s installation makes three possible modes of becoming-woman<sup>28</sup> visible – becoming Julia, becoming Vivian, and becoming well-respected – all of which show that (women’s) identity is forever a construction of perpetual repetitions. Yet the key aspect of becoming, in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s sense, is not imitation or transformation, but the expansion and extension of the assemblage to the next multiplicity. Their example of Hollywood actor Robert De Niro well illustrates how to understand their conception of becoming in the context of play-acting:

The actor Robert De Niro walks ‘like’ a crab in a certain film sequence; but, he says, it is not a question of his imitating a crab; it is a question of making something that has to do with the crab enter into composition with the image, with the speed of the image. (*Thousand* 303)

This is also well illustrated in Breitz’s own performances that flip from “appropriation [...] over into mimicry and then back again,” as Edgar Schmitz observed (Breitz, *Scripted* 137). Breitz connected the limitations of expressions and gestures provided by mass media to the construction of the self. Thus, Schmitz continued, “the work tests the availability/unavailability of media stereotypes to the modalities of self-invention” (Breitz, *Scripted* 137), and, I argue, reveals the limited possibilities of these stereotypes. All three women, Ward, Roberts, and Breitz, are performing stereotypical roles that are restricted to normative cultural boundaries, predetermined by mainstream Hollywood. Breitz’s work suggests that an escape from these pre-set masks, these “convenient” identities, is almost impossible, or, only

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28 Deleuze/Guattari, *Thousand* 303-304.

possible in slight deviations. Specific modes of behavior for female seduction, for example, are culturally well established and have been endlessly repeated in hegemonic narratives. Individual expressions, gestures, and speech are culturally stamped and internalized. In an interview, Breitz described that idea further: “You could say that we are to some extent condemned to living scripted lives, scripted in the sense that we must work with the language that pre-exists us and try to make it specific to our own experience” (Breitz in: Burke, “Breitz” 12).

Visually, “Becoming” has a disturbing effect that renders the notions of “original” and “copy” ad absurdum. The plain, neutral appearance of Breitz’s black-and-white re-enactments suggests “originals” as opposed to remakes. Her performances evoke black-and-white films of the classical studio era and, thus, give the impression that Breitz’s clips are, in fact, the templates from which copies are created. Aesthetically, her performances picture her as the prototype that others attempt to mimic or appropriate. Breitz’s black-and-white reenactments leave viewers questioning whether contemporary identities are shaped by everyday life, or whether our needs, fears, and desires are a reflection of the images from the entertainment industry. Breitz elaborated on this confusion: “*Becoming* was an attempt to engage what ends up being a chicken-and-egg question without necessarily answering it. Rather than attempting to weigh the authenticity of either screen life or lived life, the work suggests the conventionality of all expression and gesture” (Breitz in: Burke, “Breitz” 12). To put it bluntly, according to Breitz, there are no original identities, only endless repetitions and becomings. Or, as Deleuze formulated in *Difference and Repetition* (1968):

Returning is being, but only the being of becoming. The eternal return does not bring back ‘the same,’ but returning constitutes the only Same of that which becomes. Returning is the becoming-identical of becoming itself. Returning is thus the only identity, but identity as a secondary power: the identity of difference, the identical which belongs to the different, or turns around the different. Such an identity, produced by difference, is determined as ‘repetition.’ (*Difference* 50-51)

In repetition, difference is created. Repetition or looping is certainly a crucial feature in Breitz’s work, which makes use of the various strategies that our contemporary “remix culture” offers, from re-enactment to appropriation to other performative acts of repetition. Furthermore, I see a connection between Deleuze’s idea of repetition as difference and Wolfgang Iser’s concept of representation as recipient’s performance. For Iser, “[r]epresentation arises out of and thus entails the removal of difference, whose irremovability transforms representation into a performative act of staging something” (*Prospecting* 245). In the following chapter, I will make use of Iser’s recipient’s approach for reading authorial representation as performance.

## AUTHORIAL REPRESENTATION AS A PERFORMATIVE ACT

In this chapter, I will extend Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, which describes literary representation as a performative act of the reader to my discussion of authorship. I argue that authors equally engage in a form of role play when producing their texts, thus simultaneously creating their works and their author selves. Hence, there are (at least) two performative acts involved in the arts: the performative act of production and the performative act of reception. Iser was well aware of this multilateral process, as he explained in "The Play of the Text," part of his seminal publication *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (1989). He wrote "author, text, and reader are thought of as interconnected in a relationship that is the ongoing process of producing something that did not previously exist" (*Prospecting* 249). Earlier, in 1977, Iser described the literary work, or aesthetic object, as a result of two linked poles: "[W]e may conclude that the literary work has two poles, one the 'artistic' and the other the 'aesthetic.' The artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the actualization or the realization accomplished by the reader" ("Defense" 21-22).

However, while Iser clearly focused on the recipient's participation in the production of representation, I aim to scrutinize the author's role in this process. Differences in the performative acts of text production and text reception must be acknowledged. It is striking to note, for example, that once a work of art is produced or published, the performance of the author has largely ended,<sup>29</sup> while the performative acts of the reader have just begun and may never end. Yet a deeper analysis of the performative act of the author reveals this process to be more complex, promoting perspectives on authorship as a cultural performance. In his chapter "Representation: A Performative Act," Iser argued for a notion of representation in literary criticism not as mimesis but as performance, stressing "the qualities through which the act of representation brings about something that hitherto did not exist as a given object" (*Prospecting* 236). He delineated how representation as performance, as distinct from representation as mimesis, involves two relating acts: the act of selection and the act of combination.

The act of selection, Iser argued, is a form of doubling that echoes the overall "doubling structure of fictionality," which he detected in the production of literary texts (*Prospecting* 236). This process of selection is integral to fictionality, for each text forcefully advances into "extratextual fields of reference" in order to create an interpretation of the world. The act of selection is a kind of break, or disruption, which creates, what Iser called, "an eventful disorder" in the structure and semantics of these extratextual fields. In this process, structure and semantics are subjected to

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29 If we do not take into account such things as interviews, readings, signings, and so forth.

certain deformations and are restructured in the text to take on new forms. In the act of selection, each field of reference is thereby split up, because “the chosen elements can only take on their significance through the exclusion of others” (*Prospecting* 237). New meaning is thus assembled, yet this new form “includes and indeed depends on the function of that field” of reference in a kind of double helix. The act of selection, thereby, reveals the doubling structure of fictionality as a whole. Extratextual fields are activated and are, at once, reshaped in their structure and semantics, while, simultaneously, “something that hitherto did not exist as a given object” (*Prospecting* 236) is created. This new meaning, or new form, is not representation as mimesis, but representation born out of performance. Furthermore, the act of selection creates intertextuality, which renders the doubling process more complex, because it triggers an interplay between the written texts and the texts alluded to: “The one discourse becomes the theme viewed from the standpoint of the other, and vice versa,” Iser explained (*Prospecting* 237). From the interplay between these discourses emerges, what Iser called, “semantic instability,” which brings about a “dynamic oscillation” between the texts to ensure that their “old meanings now become potential sources for new ones” (*Prospecting* 237). It is here where Iser located the aesthetic dimension of a text and its potential of *plurivocity*: “The text itself,” he confirmed, “becomes a kind of junction, where other texts, norms, and values meet and work upon each other” (*Prospecting* 238).

The act of combination, the second act in Iser’s theory of representation as performance, works within the same structure as the act of selection. Yet here we are concerned with intratextual boundary crossings, such as lexical meanings and constellations of characters. “Every word,” Iser wrote, “becomes dialogic, and every semantic field is doubled by another” (*Prospecting* 238). On the lexical level, the act of combination thus facilitates manifold possibilities of associations. Through its “double-voiced discourse” it also “enables what is not said to become present” (*Prospecting* 238). What is written brings to light what is not written and, paradoxically, often results in highlighting that which is absent. The double meaning of each word or field, therefore, “opens up a multifariousness of interconnections within the text,” as Iser stated (*Prospecting* 238). The extratextual act of selection and the intratextual act of combination are the two areas from which the aesthetic quality of a text comes and where it is located. According to Iser:

The act of selection brings about a network of relationships by invoking and simultaneously deforming extratextual fields of reference, thereby giving rise to the aesthetic quality, while the act of combination – by inscribing the absent into the present – becomes the matrix of that aesthetic quality. (*Prospecting* 238)

Both acts, the act of selection and the act of combination, are the means by which representation in terms of performance – not mimesis – functions. Iser's two acts demonstrate the enactment of "the performative qualities through which the act of representation brings about something that hitherto did not exist as a given object" to, once again, use this significant quote (*Prospecting* 236). Old meanings become potential sources for new ones through the disruption of the structure and semantics of the extratextual field as well as through the duplication of the constellation and meaning of the intratextual field. Representation is, in other words, not a mimetic description or depiction of something already in existence, but is, in fact, the emergence of something new through performative acts. Literary fiction, therefore, is described by Iser as "an enabling structure generating an aesthetic potential" (*Prospecting* 241). This is where Iser's reader-response theory sets in. Readers take up the aesthetic potential and engage in an active role play while reading. Iser argued that "[r]epresentation can only unfold itself in the recipient's mind, and it is through his active imaginings alone that the intangible can become an image," (*Prospecting* 243). The reader or recipient finds herself in a similar situation to an actor "who in order to perform his role must use his thoughts, his feelings, and even his body as an analogous for representing something he is not" (*Prospecting* 244).

There is, yet again, a certain form of doubling involved. The act of representation is transferred to the side of the readers, who need to perform their respective acts of selection and acts of combination while reading the text. Reading involves the active participation of the reader's imagination to, as Iser explained, "become an image." Readers thereby make active use of intra- and extratextual fields of reference by associating and drawing on analogies and affects. Iser wrote of this reader participation in the act of representation as a performance:

It follows, then, that representation, by bridging difference and thus making the intangible conceivable, is an act of performing and not – as Western tradition has repeated time and again – an act of mimesis, since mimesis presupposes a given reality that is to be portrayed in one way or another. (*Prospecting* 243)

He further argued that for the duration of the reader's role play, or performance, we are both ourselves and someone else. Iser concluded his analysis by stressing that "staging oneself as someone else is a source of aesthetic pleasure; it is also the means whereby representation is transferred from text to reader" (*Prospecting* 244).

Can we argue, therefore, that role play and performance are also the means by which representation is transferred from author to text and to the world-beyond-the-text? How can we bring forward the argument for the transition from the reader's role play to the author's role play in the act of representation as a performative act? Role play, or performance, I argue, works for authors as well. Authors stage

themselves as authors in acts of authorial self-invention. This self-invention takes place inside and outside of the text proper, for example, in form of the appearance of an author within her own text or in form of *paratexts*. Gérard Genette, who described paratexts as *thresholds* between the inside and the outside of texts, wrote that “this fringe, in effect, always bearer of an authorial commentary either more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes, between the text and what lies outside it, a zone not just of transition, but of *transaction*” (“Paratext” 261). Clearly, Genette’s emphasis lied on the *action*, or, as I would say, on the *performance*. Authors perform representation within and beyond their texts; in other words, they extend their texts to incorporate their author persona into the interior as well as the exterior of the text proper. The paratext, thereby, is a promising place to detect authorial self-invention and self-representation, because it is especially in this gray area, or “indeterminate zone,” where authors have conventionally and most frequently been able to present and represent themselves as authors. It is in the paratext where authorial representation as performance operates most visibly. The phenomenon of the paratext thus deserves a closer examination, before we return to Iser’s concept of representation as a performative act.

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987), Genette delineated possible means and functions of paratexts. He outlined five basic characteristics of paratexts: the *spatial*, the *temporal*, the *substantial*, the *pragmatic*, and the *functional*.<sup>30</sup> Genette gave many examples to show the possible range of paratext: title and preface, interviews and private journals, advertisement, illustrations, typography and composition as well as information about the age and the sex of the author. “Every context creates a paratext,” Genette wrote and continued that “[t]hose who know it do not read in the same way as those who do not” (“Paratext” 266). Genette’s fourth paratextual characteristic, *pragmatic*, is the most interesting one for the question of representation as authorial performance in paratexts. Under the term *pragmatic status*, Genette subsumed all communicative instances or situations of paratext that include the nature of the addresser, her authority and responsibility, the addressee, and the *illocutionary force* of the message itself. Before we look at the paratextual message and its striking attribute of illocutionary force, let me begin with the addresser and addressee. Genette further differentiated the addresser with three sub-groups of the paratext: the authorial, the editorial, and the allographic paratext, which is a text written by a third person who is neither the author nor the editor. To clarify the degree of responsibility for the paratext, Genette introduced the terms *official* and *officious* to the discourse: “Any paratextual message for which the author and/or the editor assumes a responsibility which he cannot escape is *official*.” Genette’s examples of official paratexts are the title or the original preface of an anthomous

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30 Genette, “Paratext” 263.

paratext, whereas “the greater part of the authorial epitext – interviews, conversations and confidences – is *officious*,” as he wrote (“Paratext” 267). In these cases, authors can deny responsibility by contradicting their statements. Allographic paratexts, written by a third person who is neither author nor editor, fall into the category of the *officious*, and can function as the author’s mouthpiece: “It is sometimes to one’s interest that certain things ‘should be known,’ without having (publicly) said them oneself,” as Genette described (“Paratext” 268). Genette roughly defined the addressee as the “public.”

He then elaborated on what he described as the *illocutionary force* of the paratextual message. Illocutionary force, of course, is the terminology of John L. Austin, who explained in his benchmark publication *How to Do Things with Words* (1955/1962) the performative quality of an illocutionary act in its constitution as “an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something” (*How* 99-100). Genette attributed illocutionary force to the message of the paratext and thereby further stressed its performative aspect. Again, different kinds of illocutionary messages within the paratext are possible. First, there can be, what Genette called, pure *information*, that is anything like the name of the author or the date of publication. Second, there is authorial and/or editorial *intention* or *interpretation*, including genre indication such as the word “novel” on the cover or title page. Indeed, Genette elaborated, “*novel* does not mean ‘this book is a novel,’ an assertive definition which is not in control of any single person, but suggests instead to: ‘Please consider this book a novel’” (“Paratext” 268). Third, a real *decision* may be involved, such as a decision for a pseudonym or a title. Fourth, it can be a matter of what Genette termed an *undertaking*, which may include genre indications such as a contractual value of, for example, autobiography or a promise that accompanies statements like *First Volume*. Fifth, the message may have the illocutionary force of *advice* or *injunction*. Here Genette offered the very convincing example of Roland Barthes whose text *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975) starts with the handwritten epigraph: “It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel.”<sup>31</sup> Lastly, and most important for my argument, paratextual messages may imply the power of the *performative*, “that is the power to accomplish what they describe” (“Paratext” 268). For instance, this holds true for dedications, “a borderline case of paratextual efficacy, since it is sufficient to say it in order to do it” (“Paratext” 269). Furthermore, Genette also detected comparable mechanisms in the choice of a title or a pseudonym, which he described as “actions mimetic of all creative power” (“Paratext” 269). However, at the end of his introduction to the paratext, Genette restrictively added:

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31 See my chapter “Self/Portrait” for a reading of Barthes’s *R.B.*

No matter what aesthetic or ideological pretensions ('fine title,' preface-manifesto), no matter what coquetry, no matter what paradoxical inversion the author puts into it, a paratextual element is always subordinate to 'its' text, and this functionality determines the essentials of its aspect and of its existence. ("Paratext" 269)

This means, on the one hand, that the paratext, in order to function as a paratext, is always dependent on its proper text. On the other hand, the actual text also depends on its paratext, because it gives the text a frame and it functions as the threshold to the outside world, that is the world-beyond-the-text. The paratext's intermediate position enables it to operate between the interior and the exterior of the text proper. Matters of information, intention, and decision are also performed on this textual level and are indispensable to the text proper because, as Genette suggested: "[T]here does not exist, and there never has existed, a text without paratext" ("Paratext" 263). Besides the text proper, it is within the paratext that authors present and represent themselves as the authors they want to become. This self-representation is performed in diverse manners and forms, such as in the author's name, the title, the sub-title, the cover, dedications, the preface, epigraphs, illustrations, emblems, pictures, the epilogue, acknowledgements, the author's photograph, and her short biography on the spine. It is also performed in the press or peer-reviewed commentaries on the back of the book. In short, the whole physical object of the text – the book or artwork to put it bluntly – can be used as a space for authorial self-invention and self-representation.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, in whatever form or style presented, paratext is text after all. And all paratexts, as Genette explained, "share the linguistic status of the text. Most frequently, then, the paratext is itself a text; if it is not yet *the* text it is already textual," as he clarified ("Paratext" 265). The paratext is not the text proper, yet, it is neither outside the actual text nor inside the world but right in between these two permeable zones. That means that, after all, paratexts are linguistic constructions and, even more so, constructions with highly conventional and stylized formulas.

Paratexts, as we have seen with Genette, convey the illocutionary force of their message. It was Austin himself who pointed out that illocutionary acts, that is, acts with illocutionary force, are conventional acts and thus "have a certain (conventional) force" (*How* 109). Austin elaborated:

We must notice that the illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention. [...] Strictly speaking, there cannot be an illocutionary act unless the means

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32 Certainly authors cannot determine all aspects of the published text, for example the size of the book or the quality of the paper. Publishing houses, editors, and booksellers demand to keep their standards of cooperate design, especially for promotional reasons.

employed are conventional, and so the means for achieving it non-verbally must be conventional. But it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end. (*How* 105, 119)

This description is valid for the paratext as well, as Genette concluded at the end of his introduction: “[O]ne is dealing here with a discourse much more ‘constrained’ than many others, in which authors innovate less often than they imagine” (“Paratext” 270). There are distinct rules and requirements for the paratext that have been well established and that cannot be overcome easily.<sup>33</sup> Many authors, mainly due to editors’s demands, cannot be, or dare not to be, extraordinarily creative in their paratextual messages, at least when it comes to form. The imaginative authorial potential thus unfolds most strongly through the content of the paratext, through the title, pseudonym, or preface. By choosing one’s author name (either as a pseudonym or as a variation of one’s proper name), and by choosing a title and/or by composing a dedication, the author performs her representational power and generates “something that hitherto did not exist as a given object,” to return to Iser’s definition of representation (*Prospecting* 236). At the very least, already within the paratext, the author as object and the text as object, represented by its title, are created and established through performative means. This detour to Austin’s speech act theory and Genette’s definition of the paratext was necessary to tie together the open ends between authorial (self)-representation as performance and the text, that is, the complete text including all paratextual practices. Furthermore, the excursion was already a short demonstration of how representation as authorial performance may work and function, most convincingly explained through the examples of pseudonyms, titles, and dedications.

Thus, in order to examine authorial performance in the production of representation, we can now return to Iser’s concept of representation as a performative act and my aim to extend his work from the side of the recipient to that of the author. To understand the transfer of representation from text to reader, we must first understand Iser’s conceptual framework as well as its meaning for and function in representation. First, there is Iser’s notion of *difference* and its significance for literary discourse. Second, there is Iser’s concept of *semblance* as the basic ingredient of representation. And lastly, there is Iser’s idea of *repetition* that introduces performative activity to the nature of representation. *Difference* and *semblance* are interdependent in Iser’s scheme, because “although difference downgrades representation to the level of semblance, it also needs this semblance in order to manifest itself” (*Prospecting* 243). Fiction in literary discourse is a staged discourse that discloses its own fictional nature and that cannot be falsified. Thereby, literary discourse encompasses two mutually exclusive realms, the text and the world-beyond-the-text, which are

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33 Does a book without title exist? How would readers *recognize* such a “title-less” book?

“bracketed together” yet “nevertheless retain their difference” (*Prospecting* 241). *Difference* to Iser is, therefore, not only the precondition for doubling, and, consequently, the “hallmark of literary fictionality” but “also the driving force behind its own removal” (*Prospecting* 241). *Difference* is always retained, otherwise “that which appears as doubled would instead merge into one” (*Prospecting* 241). Therefore, difference, as the origin of representation, “defies determination by any form of representation,” as Iser concluded (*Prospecting* 242). The second feature in the framework of representation is *semblance*, or rather aesthetic semblance, which gives rise to a representation of something “that has no given reality of its own, and is therefore only the condition for the production of an imaginary object,” as Iser explained (*Prospecting* 243). Iser thereby strongly differentiated his *aesthetic semblance* from Friedrich Schiller’s “beautiful semblance” and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s “sensuous appearance of the idea,” because aesthetic semblance “neither transcends a given reality nor mediates between idea and manifestation” (*Prospecting* 243). Rather, aesthetic semblance evokes an image of the invisible that points to something in the world-beyond-the-text, that is “reality.” Yet, at the same time, semblance denies this image “the status of a copy of reality” (*Prospecting* 243). Aesthetic semblance is, therefore, not to be confused with resemblance, because of its interdependence with difference, which is always retained. Semblance can rather be pictured as a blurred ghost version of “reality” which is, at the same time, recognizable yet alien to us and, thus, always different from what we call “reality.” *Repetition*, Iser’s third category, is necessary for the recipient to “initiate and ensure the transfer from text to reader of what is to be represented” (*Prospecting* 243). The reader must repeat the performance of representation by bringing in her own thoughts and feelings to make the invisible present. “In this respect,” Iser wrote, “the required activity of the recipient resembles that of an actor, who in order to perform his roles must use his thoughts, his feelings, and even his body as an analogous for representing something he is not,” (*Prospecting* 244). Like an actor on stage (and literary discourse is a staged discourse), recipients must get engaged and repeat the very performance out of which representation arose to enable the emergence of “what representation seeks to make present in us” (*Prospecting* 244). Readers, thereby, enact their performances in a kind of role play, imagining themselves as someone else during the performance. Iser summed up the three qualities of difference, semblance, and repetition, which amount to representation as a performative act:

The aesthetic semblance can only take on its form by way of the recipient’s ideational, performative activity, and so representation can only come to full fruition in the recipient’s imagination: it is the recipient’s performance that endows the semblance with its sense of reality. And so representation causes the recipient to repeat the very same performance out of

which it arose, and it is the repeat of this performance that initiates and ensures the transfer from text to reader of what is to be represented. (*Prospecting* 243)

Representation operates as an oscillation between difference and semblance, performed through repetition by the recipients in the form of role play. The staged discourse of “fictionalizing acts”<sup>34</sup> has to be staged over and over again by the recipients in order to unfold its representational quality and power. Iser compared the staging of fictionality to the phenomenon of dreaming, for it involves “both the structures of our everyday reality and our psychic patterning” and, thus, “produces a specifically aesthetic quality” (*Prospecting* 239). It is this aesthetic potential<sup>35</sup> that Iser defined as the fundamental element to all literary discourse: “Representation is first and foremost an act of performance, bringing forth in the mode of staging something that in itself is not given” (*Prospecting* 248). According to Iser, staging oneself as someone else is a source of aesthetic pleasure, and staging “is also the means whereby representation is transferred from text to reader,” as he concluded (*Prospecting* 244).

I am convinced that *staging* is also the means whereby representation is transferred from author to text. Already in this phase of the triangular production of representation delineated by author, text, and reader, representation can only unfold itself when authors engage in a form of role play as well. Iser already hinted at this possibility when he wrote: “[R]epresentation causes the recipient to repeat the very same performance out of which it arose” (*Prospecting* 243). So representation arises out of a performance by the author and must be re-performed, time and again, by the recipient. Just like readers, authors also have to place their “own thoughts and feelings at the disposal of what representation seeks to make present” (*Prospecting* 244). What applies for readers therefore also applies for authors:

To imagine what has been stimulated by aesthetic semblance entails placing our thoughts and feelings at the disposal of an unreality, bestowing on it a semblance of reality in proportion to a reducing of our own reality. For the duration of the performance we are both ourselves and someone else. (*Prospecting* 244)

Imagining, or creating, is a matter of staging the unseeable in order to render it visible. Authors are, for the duration of the performance of production, both

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34 Cf. Iser: “Fictionality is not to be identified with the literary text, although it is a basic constituent of it. For this reason I refrain from using the word ‘fiction’ whenever I can and speak instead of fictionalizing acts. These do not refer to an ontologically given, but to an operation, and therefore cannot be identical to what they produce” (*Prospecting* 236-237).

35 Iser has also called it “aesthetic dimension,” “aesthetic character,” or “aesthetic pleasure.”

themselves and someone else. The same mechanisms of representation as performance, and not as mimesis, are in operation during the performance of production as they are during the performance of perception. During the production stage, both the act of selection, with its double structure inroads into extratextual fields, and the act of combination, with its intratextual potential for countless associations, are at play. Authors, necessarily, draw on extratextual fields of reference for their work, while they also make use of intertextuality and are dependent on the double-voiced discourse of the intratextual interconnectedness.<sup>36</sup> These fictionalizing acts may occur randomly or are deployed consciously by authors. Most importantly, though, these acts display the performative quality of the creative process that uses the means of staging to make the absent present in representation. Authors likewise gain aesthetic pleasure through staging themselves as both themselves and someone else. Iser pursued the universal rationale behind the phenomenon of staging, which equally applies to recipients and authors:

The need for such a staging arises out of man's decentered position: we are, but do not have ourselves. Wanting to have what we are, that is, to step out of ourselves in order to grasp our own identity, would entail having final assurances as to our origins, but as these underlie what we are, we cannot 'have' them. [...] we know that we live, but we don't know what living is, and if we want to know, we have to invent what is denied us. (*Prospecting* 244)

'Wanting to know' and 'wanting to have ourselves' are strong universal urges that apply to everyone, recipients and authors alike. Authors, without question, are interested in, if not obsessed with, grasping (their own) identities. Staging themselves as authors is a pleasurable means to play with such identity questions, not only within the text proper but also on the fringes of the world-beyond-the-text. Iser explained that "knowledge of what man is can only come about in the form of play" (*Prospecting* 245), and, in literary discourse, this play is a mutual one. Representation is not an act of mimesis but, rather, an act of performance enacted by recipients in the form of role play. Representation is, likewise, not an act of authorial mimesis but an act of performance enacted by authors in the form of role play. The *mimetic* author, that is, the author who tries to "duplicate reality," is dead, according to Barthes, but the representational *performative* author, that is, the author who performs representation, is alive and well and ready to play.

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36 Iser, *Prospecting* 237-238.

## PERFORMATIVE AUTHORSHIP

Before we can address these fascinating authorial performances, several questions must be asked. What is the aesthetic function of performative authorship? What are the cultural meanings of this phenomenon? To answer these fundamental questions, it is necessary to acknowledge the diversity of motivations and manifestations of performative authorship, which I will illustrate with my four selected authors. It is my intention to show a spectrum of ways that authorship has been performed, using authors who are representative rather than exhaustive. Why Paul Auster, Sophie Calle, Candice Breitz, and Jonathan Safran Foer each chose to *perform* their respective authorships will be explored in detail throughout this book. But first I offer introductory remarks on the functions of performative authorship in their works in order to set the framework for my subsequent analyses of their individual expressions of this larger cultural phenomenon.

My approach of discussing authors from different generations, origins, and genders reveals a range of reasons for performative authorship in contemporary art and literature. Yet commonalities do exist among these authors. Collectively, Auster's debut publication *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), Foer's forthcoming book *Escape from Children's Hospital*,<sup>37</sup> Calle's early work "The Sleepers" (1979),<sup>38</sup> and one of Breitz's latest productions "Extra" (2011),<sup>39</sup> display significant shifts in the cultural field. Such tendencies are typically categorized under postmodernism

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37 "A fictionalized account of a life-changing event that happened to the author as a nine-year-old [...]. Weaving precariously between non-fiction and fiction, and existing at the intersection of different styles (suspense, memoir, imaginative storytelling), the book moves out from that moment in 1985 to the repercussions on the ever-expanding circle of those affected by it" (Foer, "Escape from Children's Hospital" (book review). *GoodReads*, <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13610162-escape-from-children-s-hospital>).

38 Cf. Calle: "I asked people to give me a few hours of their sleep. To come and sleep in my bed. To let themselves be looked at and photographed. To answer questions. To each participant I suggested an eight hour stay" (*M'as tu vue* 145).

39 Kerr Houston: "Candice Breitz's *Extra* (2011), [is] the centerpiece of a recent survey exhibition of Breitz's work— her first in her native South Africa [...] *Extra* is a video project in which the artist worked with the cast and crew of the immensely popular South African soap opera *Generations*. After the cast completed a shoot for broadcast purposes, Breitz inserted herself into the *mise en scène* [...]: sitting in the background, or lying on a table, or draped on the shoulders of an actor—and the scene was shot once more, with the actors instructed to ignore her as fully as possible. Breitz was thus an extra in a series of extra takes" ("Absent Presence" 52).

and post-postmodernism, even though “nobody likes the term” *postmodernist*, as Brian McHale stated in his 1987 book *Postmodern Fiction* (3). What seems to unite all these cultural expressions in the post-World War II period – an era that Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash called *reflexive modernity*<sup>40</sup> – is a decisive move towards self-reflexivity and self-referentiality. Mark McGurl, in his book *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (2009), used the concept of *reflexive modernity* to explain this metafictional impulse<sup>41</sup> in the arts. He summarized the idea as follows: “To be subject to reflexive modernity is to feel a ‘compulsion for the manufacture, self-design, and self-staging’ of a biography and, indeed, for the obsessive ‘reading’ of that biography even as it is being written” (*Program* 12-13). Convincingly, McGurl described *reflexive modernity* as “a hall of mirrors in which the subject engages in an endlessly entertaining but, on another level, frighteningly compulsory performance of self” (*Program* 365). Self-reflexivity, in this respect, is a double-edged phenomenon that is simultaneously self-imposed as well as inflicted upon individuals who are “condemned to individualization,” yet who are also allowed to partake in a “thrilling panoply of choices about how they will live their lives” (*Program* 12). Effective self-reflexivity thus ranges from compulsive self-monitoring to liberating self-invention. All authors, on some level, take part in these processes of self-optimization and self-discovery. But contemporary authors increasingly engage in self-reflexive and self-referential approaches in order to be seen and heard in the literary and art marketplace, for “being the dominant figure in Shakespeare’s or even Pound’s time was, by comparison to today, easy as pie,” as McGurl declared (*Program* 410). The practice of self-reflexivity in the postmodern *Program Era*, however, is not only connected to current “marketing strategies,” but is also linked to the pre-modern or what McGurl called the *Pound Era*, where it finds its origins.<sup>42</sup>

In his publication *Pynchon, Auster, DeLillo: Die amerikanische Postmoderne zwischen Spiel und Rekonstruktion* (1996), Martin Klepper argued that postmodernity broke away from the perceived backwardness of the realistic tradition

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40 See: Beck, Giddens, and Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

41 Cf. McGurl: “[I]t was of a piece with a broader postwar codification and intensification of modernist reflectivity in the form of what came to be called ‘surfiction’ or, more durably, ‘metafiction’” (*Program* 9). Also see: Patricia Waugh’s *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 1984.

42 McGurl: “The rise and spread of creative writing programs over the course of the postwar period has transformed the conditions under which American literature is produced. [...] It has in other words converted the Pound Era into the Program Era.” (*Program* 281).

of American modernity by pushing self-reflexivity beyond its modernist experiments.<sup>43</sup> Klepper noted a developmental shift and an aesthetic transformation with the postmodern project in literature, from an aesthetics of *playfully dismantling* (“zerspielende Ästhetik”) in the 1960s and 1970s to one of *reconstruction* (“rekonstruktive Ästhetik”) in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>44</sup> Regarding Auster, Klepper discussed *The New York Trilogy* (1987) as an illustration of deconstruction, and *Moon Palace* (1989), *The Music of Chance* (1990), and *Leviathan* (1992) as texts revealing reconstructive impulses, such as textuality as self-constitution (cf. *Pynchon* 375). Klepper thus delineated a complex *reconstructive postmodernism*, which he defined as follows:

That way, a functional transformation in postmodern literature has taken place. The common playful dismantling of conventions and certainties through authors and readers is no longer the dominant impulse of this literature. Rather, it is about the quest for orientation on a floating surface of language and media, literature and the remains of conventions. Storytelling becomes more important again – however not as didactics or representation (mimesis), but as an attempt to find new structures or structuring possibilities through storytelling. Thereby, the significance of authors is again increased. (My translation, *Pynchon* 377)<sup>45</sup>

According to Klepper, this increased significance of storytelling, in general, and of the author figure, in particular, reopens the scope for action and offers “agency” (cf. *Pynchon* 48) in the process of authorial identity formation. Klepper identified this reinforced agency in the “intensive attempt to escape from the action paralysis of early postmodern theory formation and to reconstruct possibilities to act and

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43 Cf. Klepper: “Gegen die so empfundenen Rückständigkeit setzte die Postmoderne eine Überbietung modernistischer Selbstreflexivität” (my translation, *Pynchon* 51).

44 Klepper, *Pynchon* 48.

45 The original reads: “So hat sich in der postmodernen Literatur ein Funktionswandel vollzogen. Das gemeinsame Zerspielen von Konventionen und Gewiheiten durch AutorInnen und LeserInnen ist nicht mehr der dominante Impuls dieser Literatur. Vielmehr geht es um die Suche nach Orientierung auf einer flieenden Oberflche von Sprache und Medien, Literatur und Konventionsresten. Das Erzhlen wird wieder wichtiger – jedoch nicht als Didaktik oder Realittsdarstellung (Mimesis), sondern als Versuch durch das Erzhlen neue Strukturen oder Strukturierungsmglichkeiten zu finden. Dabei steigert sich die Bedeutung der AutorInnen wieder.”

overcome the same” (my translation, *Pynchon* 76).<sup>46</sup> This takes place, as Klepper explained, in the form of “self-reflexive imitations of literary and artistic forms” (my translation, *Pynchon* 209).<sup>47</sup>

Like McGurl, Erika Fischer-Lichte, in her study of *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2004), developed a related concept of the self-reflexive and self-referential trajectory in post- and post-postmodern art. She used the terminology of the *autopoietic* (or *autopoetic*), thereby “taking advantage of a common Greek root in autopoiesis (self-making) and poetics,” as McGurl explained (*Program* 49). Yet McGurl and Fischer-Lichte approached the autopoietic processes of both spectator and author from diverging perspectives. While Fischer-Lichte focused on the interplay between artists and their audiences, McGurl concentrated on the very act of authorship in the *Program Era*, highlighting “autopoietic agendas” such as “the portrait of the artist” or “the thematic representation of authorship” (*Program* 49). He saw “part of the value of the modern literary text” in “the act of authorship that it records, offering readers a mediated experience of expressive selfhood as such” (*Program* 19). Finally, both scholars arrived at similar observations on the performative character of the arts since the 1960s. “What has been described throughout this book,” McGurl summarized, “as ‘autopoetics’ – the routine reflexivity of literature embodied most explicitly in the literary genre of the portrait of the artist – is obviously nested in this larger reflexive-performative matrix” (*Program* 366). This new performative paradigm, illustrated by McGurl with the image of a “hall of mirrors,” was defined by Fischer-Lichte and others as the *performative turn* “which not only made each art form more performative but also led to the creation of a new genre of art, so-called action and performance art” (*Transformative* 18).

By tracing the term *performative* from its original appearance in John L. Austin’s language philosophy of the 1950s to its theoretical reconsideration in literary and cultural studies of the 1990s by figures like Judith Butler and others, Fischer-Lichte arrived at a notion of *culture as performance*, replacing its predecessor of *culture as text*, “in order to accommodate explicitly bodily acts”<sup>48</sup> (*Transformative* 26). For her

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46 The original reads: “In Austers Romanwerk schließlich läßt sich der intensive Versuch beobachten, aus der Handlungsparalyse früher postmoderner Theoriebildung auszubrechen und Möglichkeiten des Handelns und Überwindens zu rekonstruieren.”

47 The original reads: “Bei Auster wird das Erzählte in selbstreflexiven Imitationen von literarischen und künstlerischen Formen wiedergegeben.”

48 Fischer-Lichte described the human body not as “a material like any other [...] to be shaped and controlled by will,” but rather as “a living organism, constantly engaged in the process

exegesis of an *aesthetics of the performative*,<sup>49</sup> Fischer-Lichte disclosed the notion of the *autopoietic feedback loop* between author and audience. She wrote:

[T]he autopoietic feedback loop is generated and kept in motion not just through visible and audible actions and attitudes of the actors and spectators but also through the energy circulating between them. [...] perception plays a crucial role in the autopoietic processes of the feedback loop. [...] The audience's perception influences the performance from the outset and affects all participants reciprocally. (*Transformative* 59)

Fischer-Lichte thus stressed the indispensable participation of the audience in the creation of a performative artwork or, as she called it, *event*.<sup>50</sup> This applies to many of Breitz's artworks, which arise from the interplay between herself and others. Breitz even explicitly described herself as "someone who's making loops, and working in the [...] 'loop business,'"<sup>51</sup> thereby echoing Fischer-Lichte's concept of the feedback loop of autopoiesis. Fischer-Lichte described the *performative turn* as the "dissolution of boundaries in the arts," and explained that "[b]e it in art, music, literature, or theater, the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance. Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which involve not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators" (*Transformative* 22). Calle's and Auster's "Gotham Handbook" (1994) certainly counts as such an *event*, involving not only Auster's manuscript and Calle's performance of it, but also her interaction with random people on the streets of New York City (cf. my chapter "Double Game"). Physical and intellectual participation and collaboration between

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of becoming, of permanent transformation. The human body knows no state of being; it exists only in a state of becoming" (*Transformative* 92).

49 Fischer-Lichte summarized her *aesthetics of the performative* as such: "I will employ the findings produced by my analyses of mediality, materiality, and semioticity in performance as a basis to grasp the specific aestheticity of performance since the 1960s. In particular, three aspects have crystallized that directly constitute the nature of performance as event [...]. These are: first, the feedback loop's autopoiesis, [...]; second, a destabilization, even erasure, of binary oppositions; and third, situations of liminality that transform the participants of the performance" (*Transformative* 163).

50 Cf. Fischer-Lichte: "The pivotal point of these processes is no longer the work of art, detached from and independent of its creator and recipient, which arises as an object from the activities of the creator-subject and is entrusted to the perception and interpretation of the recipient-subject. Instead, we are dealing with an event, set in motion and terminated by the actions of all the subjects involved – artists and spectators" (*Transformative* 22).

51 Breitz, "I'll Be Your Mirror" s.p.

author and audience mark these kinds of performative events. Furthermore, Fischer-Lichte wrote about a “new self-understanding of the artists. No longer god-like creators of the work of art, they instead established similar conditions to laboratory researchers to which they exposed themselves and others” (*Transformative* 164). This surely applies to Calle who is well known for her staged self-experiments like “The Birthday Ceremony” (1980-1993), in which she acts out instructions or practices rituals.<sup>52</sup> Fischer-Lichte also provided a new understanding of performative authorship when she wrote: “The artists relinquish their powerful positions as the performance’s sole creators; they agree to share – to varying degrees, of course – their authorship and authority with the audience” (*Transformative* 50). This new kind of artistic self-awareness, marked by performative practices of remix and appropriation, is evident in Breitz’s works such as “Soliloquy Trilogy” (2000)<sup>53</sup> and “King” and “Queen” (2005) – a series that involved a “chorus of amateurs,” as I will show in the forthcoming chapters.

While performative art of the postwar period has introduced and advanced forms of (physical) exchange and collaboration, it has thematically displayed, as McGurl argued, “a body of work [which] is fair to describe as self-involved even when its interests are patently social and historical. Explicitly or not, every work of serious fiction in this period is, on one level, a portrait of the artist” (*Program* xi). Explaining the reasons for this phenomenon, McGurl cited the tremendous increase of creative writing graduate programs at U.S. universities, with their programmatic agendas encouraging the self-expression and self-promotion of its students, which made a profound contribution to postwar American literature.<sup>54</sup> McGurl traced the careers of

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52 Calle: “On my birthday I always worry that people will forget me. In 1980, to relieve myself of this anxiety, I decided that every year, if possible on 9 October, I would invite to dinner the exact number of people corresponding to my age, including a stranger chosen by one of my guests. I did not use the presents received on these occasions. I kept them as tokens of affection. In 1993, at the age of forty, I put an end to this ritual” (*M’as tu vue* 261).

53 Breitz: “The *Soliloquy Trilogy* crafts a series of portrait-like short films by isolating key Hollywood protagonists from the contexts of their blockbuster films. Cutting back “The Witches of Eastwick” (starring Jack Nicholson), “Basic Instinct” (starring Sharon Stone), and “Dirty Harry” (starring Clint Eastwood), to only those moments in which each of the films’ lead actors is vocally present, the *Trilogy* distill the material of iconic Hollywood performances down to a paradoxical form of portraiture” (*Scripted* 103).

54 Cf. McGurl: “By 1984 there were some 150 graduate degree programs [...], and as of 2004 there were more than 350 creative writing programs in the United States, all of them staffed by practicing writers, most of whom, are themselves holders of an advanced degree in

Raymond Carver and Joyce Carol Oates, the latter of whom started as an undergraduate at Syracuse University, “where her talent for writing was quickly perceived and nurtured by creative writing instructor Donald Dike. Thus began a lifelong affiliation with universities, first at Syracuse, later in and around Detroit, and finally at Princeton” (*Program* 299). Princeton University was also the place where Foer started his undergraduate career and where he took an introductory writing class with Oates who, for her part, encouraged him in his writing. Thus, we’ve come full circle, as Foer himself is currently a writer-in-residence in the creative writing program at New York University and exemplifies the kind of contemporary author that McGurl has described. For McGurl,

every artist on campus is half a performance artist: making his name, doing his job, owning the product of his labor of ‘self-expression,’ the artist or writer-in-residence is in a sense the purest version of the kind of worker, the white-collar professional, that so many college students are preparing to be. (*Program* 408)

Performative authorship – the subject of my investigation – proves to be a complex and multi-faceted topic. The aesthetic function of this phenomenon varies with its actors and their specific circumstances and needs. Auster, as Klepper has shown, has engaged in processes of *reconstructive postmodernism* by performing an assertive authorial agency. Calle and Breitz, according to Fischer-Lichte’s conceptualization, have both contributed to the aesthetics of the performative<sup>55</sup> by dissolving boundaries “between art and life, high culture and popular culture, and Western art and non-Western art” (*Transformative* 203-204). Foer, in McGurl’s assessment of Jewish-American authors, has performed his authorship as a “high pluralist writer” who “is additionally called upon to speak from the point of view of one or another hyphenated population, synthesizing the particularity of the ethnic – or analogously marked – voice with the elevated idiom of literary modernism” (*Program* 57). All four authors have performed their authorship within the larger framework of reflexive postmodernism and post-postmodernism. All have engaged in autopoietic processes, embracing the aesthetics of the performative. How the practice of *becoming an author* has transpired and taken shape in the works of Auster, Breitz, Calle, and Foer will be closely examined and interpreted in the following chapters.

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creative writing. [...] [David] Fenza estimates that the total contribution [...] runs to at least 200 million dollar annually” (*Program* 24).

55 Cf. Fischer-Lichte: “The aesthetics of the performative focuses on art that crosses borders” (*Transformative* 203).