Life Writing, Life Sciences and Narrative Medicine in Siri Hustvedt:

The Shaking Woman, *The Sorrows of an American*, *The Blazing World*

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In memory of my father.

Abbreviations

SW	*The Shaking Woman*
SoA	*The Sorrows of an American*
BW	*The Blazing World*
MoF	*Memories of the Future*

Preface

My purpose is to read Siri Hustvedt's writing from the methodological perspectives of life sciences, life writing and narrative medicine. The concatenation of the three terms opens a resourceful field of study and guides my interpretation of Siri Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman*, *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World*. I focus on character development and relationships in my interpretation of Hustvedt's writing. Trying to understand how the Hustvedt makes use of narrative formats and art, I explore her characters' past experience, present living situation and future actions in contemporary America.

I started doing research for this dissertation in 2016, traveling between Mainz and Berlin, after writing a thesis about Jonathan Franzen's method of characterization. Franzen writes about contemporary American characters and family history in several narratives. My interest in the return of literary characters in contemporary American writing increased, as I was fascinated by Franzen's depiction of emotional and intellectual entanglements. I read about unconscious motives, existential fears and new stances about the confrontational reality these characters faced. Even though characters had a comeback after postmodernism and returned in new forms in Franzen's writing, the ending of his novels left behind unanswered questions. One was whether Franzen's characters who could not liberate themselves from constraining living conditions may otherwise change their own destiny or perhaps live a more fulfilling life. I continued reading contemporary American novels with a focus on characters who experience great obstacles, searching for solutions to challenges.

In summer 2016, I was further inspired by Prof. Dr. Hornung's advice to read and study the novels and essays of Siri Hustvedt. At the time, I was fully invested in the development of contemporary American literature and theory. The interest was academic but autobiographical, too. While studying Siri Hustvedt's writing, I realized that my research and findings were connected to my own life experiences. The novels came to life in my imagination, my perceptions and experiences changed in response to reading sessions. Wanting to know more about the internal changes of Hustvedt's characters, I kept ideas and experiences at the center of my research.

Siri Hustvedt devotes large parts of her writing and essays to art, artists and discussions of their lives and work. While reading her novels, I was reminded of Berlin's creative atmosphere. By visiting immersive art installations in old buildings and rooms it was easier for me to imagine Hustvedt's literary world and represented

artworks. Living off the beaten track, I was able to meet curious and unconventional people. These acquaintances increased my tolerance and understanding for unlikely characters who struggle with their pasts or who have different backgrounds than me. Moving to another city, I took inspiration in the Frankfurt art scene, which I regularly visited with friends. Thanks to art museums, I learned to communicate about art works better, and to look at them from a different perspective. I got advice on how to look closer at shapes, forms and fabrics in paintings, their placement, and the order in which they appear in the exhibition. Through gained experience, I improved my understanding of the visual arts and my interpretation of Siri Hustvedt's narratives.

I took further inspiration in the work of several women who study, treat and research the unconscious mind. My study and praxis of working with the unconscious complemented other readings of psychoanalysis and neuropsychoanalysis. I familiarized myself with practices influenced by Freud's theory. The people I met built their theories and praxis on the idea that not only the Id but vast parts of the I are unconscious. Current neuropsychoanalytic research proves this and it has strong implications for the study of deeper strata of the mind in literature. This means that if literature studies the unconscious mind of writers and characters, what they uncover in narratives are deeper layers of the I and not only instincts and drives. They do not just discover alien and tabooed wishes – they also have the chance to discover who they are. The idea led me to literature as a tool to discover and research identity. Connecting my idea to my research, I researched how literature can reach unconscious mental contents for self-understanding of the writers', characters' and readers' lives.

In 2016/17, I had the chance to do research and teach at the University of Mississippi and I am grateful for the insights into American life I gained during my stay. I had the chance to read theory and get acquainted with the intellectual background of Hustvedt's novels. There were great benefits from teaching American literature, too. I was able to better understand Hustvedt's place in American literary culture through discussing previous literary epochs and important genres again in great depth. I also read about visual art and artists, further supporting my understanding that the various art and artists in Hustvedt's writing narratives help portray the intricacies of life in narratives.

I am grateful for Prof. Dr. Hornung's support during the process of this dissertation. I appreciated our conversations and the freedom he granted me in pursuing my research interests and putting my ideas into writing. I thank him for his reliable and trusted advice. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Banerjee and the members of the DFG-Research Training Group "Life Sciences – Life Writing" for inspiring suggestions and conversations. I profited from communication with the members of the Obama Institute and its lectureship program. As a frequent visitor of the library at the University of Mainz, I cherish their friendly help and the extensive research department. For giving me first insights into post-postmodern literature at the beginning of my project, I am indebted to the scholarly and financial support of the Department of English at the University of Mississippi and the university library of FU Berlin. I also thank Anne Wera Weber for her support and inspiration.

My family and friends have always supported me through the years of research and writing my thesis. They have tolerated times in which I was greatly invested in reading books, essays and papers while showing interest in my process. I am thankful for Adrienne Violand's redaction. The improvements in the communication about Hustvedt's work made the writing accessible for people outside the field. I would also like to thank my family for their understanding, long conversations about art, and support through my challenges in writing: Cornelia Nesselrath-Halbach, Dr. Ursula and Dr. Hans-Werner Köhler.

1. Introduction: Siri Hustvedt and Contemporary American Literature

In the 21st century, writing flourishes in spite of the skeptical questions of literary postmodernism about the alleged future of literary writing and the future of the author. I think there is hope that writing and reading literature persists in the digital age and continues to inspire the lives of people from all walks of life. The interpretation and analysis of contemporary literature supports the understanding of current living conditions, how they will evolve or decline, and what options there are to the progress and renewal of living and thinking. One of the reasons is that in cooperation with other arts and philosophy, literature can pursue questions of human existence with life-like persistence and precision. In that manner, contemporary writers and scholars present memories of their characters' complicated family life from different angles to understand the challenges of their life and reveal solutions to severe problems. Their characters' personal and emotional responses to life, their informal reactions and interactions make the endeavor possible and liberate their personal development from systemic patterns and traditional expectations. Their step away from postmodern assumptions is a surprising and mesmerizing moment of remembering and perceiving anew what is in and around us and thus gaining a different insight into reality.

In Siri Hustvedt's novels, characters face the existential challenges of their life in recourse to art and philosophy. Her writing is in touch with people, and I think that the readers' minds, their memories and perception respond to her attempts of pursuing existential questions effectively. The characters live and act out their artistic and intellectual interests enthusiastically and freely and open their views towards new possibilities in life. Their minds are invested with thoughts about their past, but they only access its resources by living with art. In *Memories of the Future*, for example, Hustvedt's narrator remembers her youth and attempts to come to terms with experiences of the past that still haunt her in the present. Yet, her narrator S.H. observes: "Those authors who claim perfect recall of their hash browns decades later are not to be trusted" (3). This is not an invitation to reintroduce the idea of postmodern arbitrariness into the study of her novels. S.H. rather emphasizes the flexibility of what she remembers, she keeps track of how she can newly organize mental contents and find answers to the needs of the day by working with autobiographical memories.

1.1. Life and Inspirations

In Siri Hustvedt's recent novel *Memories of the Future*, the narrator muses: "Temporal coexistence is true of every single book. . . . And in this particular book, the book you are reading now, the young person and the old person live side by side in the precarious truths of memory" (Hustvedt 2019: 30). The complex relation of time and memory does not seem to engage the mind of a culture presumably thought to be invested in technological and economic progress, and yet, new literary ideas, autobiographical designs and novelistic forms about the formation of memories come to our attention – and their success raises doubt about the stated prejudice. The narrator of Hustvedt's latest book is not the only voice emerging to pronounce and laboriously work through the complexities of living in time, of being guided by memories of an almost forgotten past. An older self trying to find answers to questions of life's barriers and obstacles by asking the young self to reveal the truths of early experiences is a recurrent motif in contemporary writing. Other literary voices accompany that of Hustvedt's, which permit the researcher of contemporary motifs of writing about life experiences to revive literary scholarship.

My focus on the autobiographical motif in Siri Hustvedt's writing resonates well with the interrelation of her life experiences and her novels' setting, her research questions and her family history: Hustvedt's own view of her younger self is that of a New Yorker looking at a girl born and raised in a picturesque North American Midwest. Siri Hustvedt, born in 1955, grew up in Northfield, Minnesota, and spent her childhood and youth in this North American small town. In 1978, Hustvedt decided to move to New York City, where she met her husband Paul Auster, with whom she has one daughter, Sophie Auster. Hustvedt and Auster share their dedication to writing fiction and their daughter developed an early artistic interest in music. The choice of location in her novels is of particular significance as the vibrant urban setting contrasts greatly with the rural upbringing. The cultural and artistic wealth of New York opens the readers' mind to an unusual range of perception and possibilities to invent new narrative strategies; the city, as the center of Hustvedt's settings, is so profound that it seems as if the author's cultural environment is removed from any other American urban center – and it is no surprise that her literary inventions are just as unique.

The author's family roots are in Norway, more precisely, in and around the Norwegian city of Bergen, a region that is fascinating thanks to its rugged seashore and lush colors. The essay collection *A Plea for Eros* (2006) captures her striking interest

in and research of the family history of her European ancestors (cf. 15-16). In America, her parents could offer her and her three sisters a family life which was characteristic for Norwegian immigrants at the time, not least because her father taught Norwegian literature at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. Hustvedt's father wrote his dissertation in a comparative field of study by writing a biography of Rasmus Björn Anderson (cf. Hustvedt 31). The genre and thematic focus were, therefore, a part of her cultural upbringing from early on. The search for identity along literary paths, in combination with profound insights into the family history, repeatedly remind the reader of Hustvedt's literary background and milieu.

Siri Hustvedt wrote her dissertation on Charles Dickens at Columbia University and, as a student, she already put effort into the investigation of cases of disturbed self-perception, self-construction and problems of the body image as much as they are reflected in Dickens' novels and find expression in his literary mode of writing (2006: 153-193). It is a fact that her early research questions still find resonance in the study of her characters' or her own neurological and psychiatric sensibilities, which she has experienced and sometimes even suffered from and which make themselves known as migraines, hallucinations and a variability of her moods. It is noteworthy that the persistence of her interest in and curiosity to learn from these facets of the inner world are pivotal to the success of her literary explorations (2006: 195-228). Inner experiences and significant autobiographical elements – especially those affecting her family life – her Euro-American roots and the extraordinary intellectual resources and inspirations are the driving forces that bestow her novels and essays with a remarkable vivacity and plasticity. The current public discussion of this range of topics are the reason why her writing is of interest to a wide readership. The combination of fictional, autobiographical and critical prose in which she presents her visionary and interdisciplinary ideas on the progress of the art of fiction and literary criticism is an example of the present and future of writers and scholars.

Siri Hustvedt, whose publications have increased after the turn of the millennium, is, without doubt, one of the most influential contemporary American writers. Along with her novels, she has published several volumes of essays which contribute to her redefinition of the interdisciplinary field of study to whose academic and literary implementation she has dedicated her professional life. It comes to life in her literary worlds through the characters' vigorous interactions, their bustling mentalities, and these enactments again support and connect her scientific,

psychoanalytic and philosophical thought. She explains: “My thoughts about what it means to be a human have been changed, expanded and reconfigured by my adventures in art theory, neuroscience, and psychoanalysis” (2012: 18). In recourse to the motif that guides my research project, the initial question of handling life’s hurdles through a look backwards in time is thus a look of a learned scholar who absorbs interdisciplinary lenses into the view upon a young self. This interdisciplinary autobiographical perspective is goal-oriented and culminates in a medical search for early causes of emotional and relational disruptions that will hit the mind much later – in the narrative study of memories, the author therefore combines the role of doctor and patient. Siri Hustvedt’s medical focus and existential concern about what it means to be human is carried out in her three life writings which are at the center of my argument – the autobiography *The Shaking Woman* and the autofictional novels *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World*. In these books, Hustvedt is an advocate of interdisciplinary research about the turbulent emotional dynamics and relational mechanisms at work in fiction and autobiographies. Healing such disturbances coincides with a possible answer to the existential inquiry posed in the quote of the preceding paragraph – above all, the capacity to remember and to work with memory is central in her literary and scholarly research about what it means to be human.

In this dissertation I read Siri Hustvedt’s three books to examine how human emotion and relations of the past are structures kept in memories that serve as templates for life. I argue that Hustvedt’s literary work with these autobiographical memory templates has a mental healing effect because it transforms challenging emotional and relational patterns of memories and perceptual attitudes. Hustvedt herself and her characters aim to improve their mental health through narrative strategies and linguistically represented visual art which appeal to and work with autobiographical memories of the writer, the characters and, as we will see, the reader. At the same time, I will show that especially the fictionalization of the narrative sequences allows the writer to make changes to those memory structures because autofiction draws on imagery stored in memories, too. In this dissertation, I thus propose that Hustvedt’s narrative strategies represented in the autobiography *The Shaking Woman* and the two autofictional novels *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World* are therapeutically effective and ease mental problems because the narrators and characters specifically work through autobiographical memories in fiction and non-fiction.

To introduce the argument and research, in chapter 1, I begin stating that contemporary post-postmodern writing, like Hustvedt's life writing, deviates from postmodern writing as the narrative pertains to an autobiographical understanding of how the act of remembering family and personal history leads the way out of postmodern systems of thought and towards a re-understanding of the reality of human existence. In section 1.2, I consider that the postmodern writer Jay McInerny and the post-postmodern writers David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen reintroduce the closer observation of their character's lives in their writing. Although these three authors use forms of memories in their works, it is Siri Hustvedt who brings literary work with memories to full effect because she exposes herself and her characters to the linguistic and existential reality of her and their memories across vaster stretches of life stories and storylines. For that reason, Hustvedt accomplishes the achievement of new narrative strategies which set her apart from other writers of her time. I think that her inventiveness in giving new directions to women's lives in New York is her secret to success. Hustvedt unveils detrimental structures more relentlessly than Wallace, Franzen and McInerny. With reference to the dramatic events of 9/11, I outline in section 1.3 that the return of the linguistic reflection of reality in writing is significant as literature relating to the world is particularly successful in working with problematic memories of traumatic or troubling experiences. In section 1.4, I sketch that apart from the linguistic representation of reality and memories the reality of human existence returns in her novels and her autobiography. The texts confront the effect of severe loss of relatives and, as those significant others are not around to share conversations anymore, death intensifies the need to understand the writer's or characters' lives through an inspection of memories involving the lost other. Death intensifies the necessity of working with memories of the deceased. In Hustvedt's writing, death invokes more intense research of how the remembered power relationship to that person, for the most part the protagonists' father and husbands, affect the possibilities of managing life prospects.

In chapter 2, I frame my literary approach by drawing on the three concepts of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine. The concatenation of terms is the methodological and conceptual backbone of my analysis. I focus on one or two terms in each chapter. That decision depends on the extent to which the terms allow me to disclose, explain and interpret character or a narrator's experiences. The genre of life writing encompasses the field of autobiographical writing and writing with an

autobiographical subtext. In Hustvedt's case, it often provides patient information that is important to fathom and approach a sick person's illness from a literary perspective. In section 2.1, I continue my argument contrasting post-postmodern writing and Hustvedt's use of life writing. While the post-postmodern precursors present strategies necessary to heal the mind, Hustvedt's life writing and her characters' practice of narrative medicine proves to be particularly effective in a therapeutic way. Closely related to autobiographical writing, the comprehensive genre of life writing brings about a healing effect in the process of relating memories in a moment of crisis. It sheds light on psychological modes of writing about life experiences and the gradually developing interest in making changes to the psychology of the writer, reader and protagonists. Life writing encompasses writing with a dominant autobiographical or biographical motif, yet, this definition also extends to autofiction which explicitly expresses and works through emotion of autobiographical memory. On the one hand, Hustvedt's two novels *The Blazing Word* and *The Sorrows of an American* work with the characters' memories, and on the other hand, the author invests her own emotion in the creation of the plot. In this manner, I consider Hustvedt's autobiography and two novels as instances of life writing. The chapter points to the conventional claim that the genre interacts with the progress of literature at large and influences all forms of literary representations. In that context, the chapter takes up the idea that fact and fiction may merge in life writing without questioning the genre's interest in depicting life. Instead, it encourages a liberal way of restructuring memories for therapeutic purposes, which will lend itself to the analytic practice of narrative medicine.

In section 2.2, I further aim to suggest the medical effect of Hustvedt's autobiographical writing strategy in *The Shaking Woman* with the help of the neuroscientific/neuro-psychoanalytic research of Rawn Joseph, António Damásio and Mark Solms. I recognize that life writing specifically accesses problematic and repressed memory. Neuroscience describes this process by pointing to the reconnection of disengaged neuronal paths to the memory coding hippocampus. These neuroscientific insights establish a dialog with research of the humanities on the prospect of transforming memories in writing. It then offers a new reading of Siri Hustvedt's texts as her narrative work with memories potentially involves particular neural pathways and helps showing why life writing can have an effect on the organization of memories. The dialog with neuroscientific research provides a new perspective on and a new reading of Hustvedt's psychiatric and psychological

symptoms: the section approaches, for example, why Hustvedt's voice is particularly rational in *The Shaking Woman* and can, at first, not access information relevant to explain her body's unusual behavior.

In section 2.3, I further discuss the term narrative medicine, which goes back to Columbia University researchers Rita Charon and Maura Spiegel and links literary insights with the natural sciences. The term generally refers to the meaningful interaction of literature and the arts with the medical practice of doctors and patients. In this regard, I concur with Charon and Spiegel's assumptions that autobiographically healing the mind turns the writer into a doctor and patient in the service of narrative medicine. It might cause the fictional or non-fictional writer to change her own memory template along the way. As a result, the writer and reader develop their narrative medical competence. The term of narrative medicine was introduced by the American literary and medical doctor Rita Charon in 2001 to employ the effects of literature and the arts in the treatment of patients. It helps to retrieve and change memories that cause psychiatric and psychological problems in *The Shaking Woman.* It also supports the patients' healing process by incorporating a dialogical structure between doctor and patient into the otherwise monological thought structures of autobiographical writings in *The Sorrows of an American.* Furthermore, it supports the idea that under certain conditions, the narrative representation of visual art in autobiographical writing is a remedy for medical stressors and methodologically speaking, part of the field of narrative medicine. I would like to argue that readers and writers of autobiographical narratives which deal with experiences in the medical system can contribute to developing their narrative competence as patients. I want to show that Hustvedt's autobiography and her autofictional two novels encourage narrative competence on behalf of everyone involved. In that manner, *The Shaking Woman* combines a medical discourse and autobiographical writing and *The Sorrows of an American* shows that the characters' progress and development depend on their medical narrative competence. In *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World*, Hustvedt's characters engage with practices of narrative medicine and change their own life through various creative activities on the level of the plot. They try to heal their mind through art, and the plots they create within the literary world support their healing process.

To provide an additional theoretical backdrop and to extend the circumference of the methodology of narrative medicine and the genre life writing, I offer a life science framework to contemplate the possibilities of literary work with memories. My life

science approaches Hustvedt's return to a thorough temporal experience of the characters and causal understanding of how old memories affect new experiences. My life science perspective enters into a dialog with the idea that the literary revision of memory templates raises unconscious memories to consciousness and thereby improves the chances of generating better life patterns. From this study of memory, I derive the term memory template to conceptualize how past experience translates into new experience and that literature can change this translation process precisely. My reading of Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman* and *The Blazing World* will examine how that translation process takes place which includes the difficult task of finding the crucial childhood memory which correlates emotionally with a present emotional state. Only then can the emotional crisis, whose cause is found, be overcome. The theoretical outline and interpretation will therefore always return to such memory templates to understand the structure of the plotline.

The genre, theory and method then provide the framework for the interpretation of *The Shaking Woman*, *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World*. In chapter 3, I analyze the autobiography *The Shaking Woman* and I suggest that from a literary perspective, Hustvedt's shaking goes back to a childhood memory in Norway. Her writing process can only bring this key memory template to consciousness as the book's narrative strategies appeal to internal memory processing. Such literary techniques are at the core of my study of Hustvedt's writing despite her strong scientific position: I posit that Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman* studies and elicits an exact retrieval of a memory template and attached emotional expressions in the mind. It is my purpose in this dissertation to establish a dialog between suitable scientific frameworks and case-specific autobiographical experience to generate a feasible interpretation of memory processing. In so doing I develop a neuroscientific perspective on unconscious memories and possibilities to access them. Assuming that perspective, I research the disconnection of her right and left-brain hippocampi that parallels the literary interpretation of a key situation in her personal history. From a literary perspective, I shed light on how a situational imprint of an old memory provokes Hustvedt's later disparity of body and mind. I am interested in how autobiographical writing can get access to old forgotten memories.

Hustvedt describes the way she handles autobiographical truth in fiction persuasively: "As a patient does in analysis, the writer searches for words that will have a true meaning, not ultimately true, but emotionally true" (2012: 159). The author

validates her own thesis by means of her emotional response to and her poignant expression in her writing, and the reader can authenticate the ideas upon reading Hustvedt's novels in depth and reflecting on the immediate emotional response. This notion of truth is especially promising to the therapeutic path which I plan to pursue in my study of *The Sorrows of an American* (chapter 4). Yet, given the prevailing objective standards of verification and of finding proof, the acceptance of a subjective manner and method, the burden of evidence for emotional truths may be problematic unless we deem the assumption appropriate that frequently, emotion and social structures coincide. In the interpretation of *The Sorrows of an American*, whose protagonist is a psychoanalyst, I study four characters going through crises. I research which character works with his or her own emotional memories to find a way out of the crisis successfully. I argue that more than any other, the female protagonist's causal connection of past and present emotion, her recognition of the necessary unity of neuroscience and the humanities in explaining affective memories, and her capacity to mourn her husband make room for beneficial life patterns.

In the last chapter, I explore how *The Blazing World*'s protagonist Harriet 'Harry' Burden discovers her own life patterns retrospectively by understanding how memories of interactions with her dead father obstruct her life as a woman artist. The chapter is more extensive than the previous two. On the one hand, Burden traces back formative memories of her father which still influence her life tremendously. On the other hand, she creates complex art installations whose visual construction reveal and change the disadvantageous perception of women. As I want to demonstrate the power of Burden's art installations and analyze them in depth, this chapter is longer than the other two. I argue that Burden creates artworks appealing to perceptual patterns in order to negotiate the proliferation of uneven power relations which are often the cause for her own disconcerting life experiences as a women artist. I will shed light on the way the installations appeal to the perception and attitude towards women, people of color or non-binary persons to initiate changes to the perceptual attitudes towards them. The novel thereby averts proliferation of destructive relational patterns. Further, I will point out that some memory templates of Burden's childhood and youth still obstruct her goals as an adult artist because they still linger in the unconscious despite the fact that she has worked with her perceptual apparatus. In Burden's case, these blocking memory templates are caused by gender-related power structures and thus reinforce the necessity of negotiating their proliferation. To work through such memories, she is in dear need

of innovative writing strategies. As the novel expresses this necessity, it is a primary example of literary work with memories.

Hustvedt's encompassing knowledge and precise inquiry into the American mind drives my line of argumentation and it encourages a historically coherent and authentic literary understanding of today's state of affairs and lines of power which constitute American and European societies. Her personal interest, which revolves around the changed and conflict-laden position of women in society and in the family, consolidate her view and research in *The Blazing World* to such an extent that the inferences I can draw from her writing are credible to a degree that her claim to truth makes sense. This statement is essential with respect to two decisive points of contention: on the one hand, the novel offers a way out of the uneven perceptual and intellectual relations to women and, on the other hand, it yields a fictional remedy to unsound repetitive patterns of life. On the level of the autofictional plot the narrator and character manages and schemes her own plotline. The idea of a character being in charge of her own plotline in her fictional world, the fact that the character manipulates her memories and through that activity assumes power over her own life is evidence of the idea that life writing, as Hornung suggests, sets the pace for contemporary writing (Hornung 1989). As the term is an essential pillar of my arguments, I will explicate it in context of two neighboring terms life sciences and narrative medicine in the remaining part of the chapter after briefly introducing the three selected texts.

The Sorrows of an American was published 2008. It is set in rural Minnesota and is very much like the region Siri Hustvedt grew up in. It tells the story of Erik and Inga, who have lost their father. Erik is Hustvedt's imaginary brother – a perspective she explores after she lost and mourns her own father. Finding a note in his former office, Erik and Inga get involved in a family mystery their father was involved in. At that time, Inga still struggles with her position as a widow and her daughter mourns her father. Her brother Erik is a psychoanalyst and tries hard to help himself and his patients to overcome personal problems and crises. He tries to get over his divorce by making a pass at his new tenant Miranda, who has a daughter and is separated from her daughter's father Lane. Erik gets involved in her family affairs which make his life even more complicated. All characters use different forms of self-expression to articulate inner struggles and autobiographical memories.

The Shaking Woman was published in 2010. It is an interdisciplinary autobiography in which the author researches a shaking fit that first occurred at her father's eulogy. From them on, she repeatedly shakes when she gives speeches in public. Hustvedt recalls family events, her father's death and other personal memories to contextualize the shaking fit. As well, she includes references to psychiatry, neuroscience and psychoanalysis to better understand her illness. Merging neuroscience and the humanities is the great achievement of her autobiography and implies the significance of both for understanding autobiographical development in life writing. Finally, Hustvedt learns to accept her shaking fit instead of fighting it.

The Blazing World was published in 2014. It is a narratively complex novel which tells the story of the artist Harriet Burden but is comprised of a text collection of the fictional editor Hess. In the novel, Burden mourns her husband and struggles with her relationship to her dead father. However, she rediscovers her creativity as an artist at that point in time. Harriet Burden lives in a vibrant artistic community and enjoys supportive relationships to her two children. She makes elaborate sculptures, installations and films with male artists. She aims to show that critics' and public evaluations and estimation of art depends on whether the assumed artist is male or female. The collaborators and Burden get entangled in bizarre power games, which influence the interpretation of artworks they create together. The ambiguity of her spectacle makes her aim – the recognition of women artists in public – a controversially discussed affair.

1.2. Concept and methodology

In this dissertation I employ and relate the three terms life writing, life sciences, and narrative medicine to start the discussion of Siri Hustvedt's characters and narrators, to better understand their obstacles and chances of personal growth in their life-world. Research in this field of study is done at the University of Mainz in cooperation with Columbia University in New York. In Mainz, a DFG research training group is working on "establishing mutually shared methodological pathways to topics in life sciences and life writing related to boundary experiences of human life" (GRK 2021). The group, led by Mita Banerjee and Norbert W. Paul, aims to develop "an approach for establishing common methodological perspectives on man in his life-world" (GRK 2021). The set-out goal puts emphasis on the methodology of conducted research. In line with the prominence of methodology, I decided to make my use of terminology

transparent because I derive my method of interpreting and discussing Hustvedt's writing from the terminological dynamics in the field. I further discuss secondary literature in depth in the chapter on "Life sciences, life writing/narrative medicine."

In this section, I develop the general concept of my dissertation by analyzing the layers of meaning of single terms and by understanding their relationship. The concatenation of terms is a new approach to analyzing Hustvedt's writing, and it provides the conceptual framework for my interpretation of Siri Hustvedt's autobiography and two autofictional novels. I want to show that the terms constitute three crucial areas of my approach to three works. Life writing is the genre of the texts and it comprises autobiographical and biographical forms of representation. Life sciences provide the scientific knowledge and explanatory background to understanding the mental processes life writing initiates and guides. In addition, narrative medicine belongs to the critical practice of both. Combining medical and literary knowledge involves readers and writers in an interdisciplinary understanding of character and patient stories. My research shows that narrative medicine offers possibilities of improving the mental states of those engaging in its practice by deliberately working with autobiographical memory and changing social perception. Siri Hustvedt and her characters employ different forms of autobiographical and biographical representation such as diaries, films, photography, art, documentaries and installations. In this dissertation I argue that by working through crucial memories of their life creatively, Hustvedt and her characters exploit explanatory resources of life sciences and chances of recovery of narrative medicine. I want to show that Hustvedt's and her characters' creative work practically connects the three terms life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine. In this manner Hustvedt and her characters change life patterns, improve prospects of life and prevent the repetition of undesirable experiences.

In this section, I first develop the term and genre of life writing. New narrative strategies of the genre allow the writer and characters to engage powerfully with their personal history. I continue discussing life sciences to provide the explanatory background for healing mental and neural processes in life writing. Then, I show that narrative medicine is the narrators' and characters' critical practice of both. Finally, I argue that the three terms converge in understanding the logic of the plot and the narrators' and characters' attempt of self-directing the ongoing plot in autobiographies and autofiction indirectly by working with memory. I will analyze *The Shaking Woman*, *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World* in light of the three terms. The

three texts show forms of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine. The significance of each term varies in each interpretation and culminate in self-directed creative development of the author and characters. The activity is not purely intuitive but a knowledgeable process of authors and characters writing and giving direction to their life story. My argument shows that the concatenation of three terms explains and reveals the autonomy of writers and characters. Within the literary world, they are empowered to direct life by working with memories and perception in art, diaries, installations, films, documentaries, photography, and psychoanalysis. The activity permits artistic creativity in a third space for unabashed self-reflection and encouraging personal development.

The two novels and autobiography are of importance for Siri Hustvedt's career and significant for contemporary American literature. She gained widespread public and academic recognition and consolidated her reputation in the United States and in Europe. Siri Hustvedt's three texts are conceptually part of the genre of life writing. This means that the genre of life writing is the overall and underlying form of Siri Hustvedt's three texts. The conceptualization entails that her authentic autobiography and two novels either emerge from her own life story or are considered novels with a strong fictional or non-fictional autobiographical motif. Accordingly, her writing is either autobiographical or has an autobiographical motif. I can conclude that examining the autobiographical dynamics at work in Hustvedt's writing is a promising research interest. In my literary analysis, I research my encounter with Hustvedt's characters and narrators who come from various walks of life. I explore their different background carefully so that the expectation of literary conventions recedes into the background, and I can prioritize new techniques of the genre of life writing in my research. In life narratives the characters appear as what they are: ageing and fragile, sensitive and deeply creative, intellectually smart and ambitious. The genre gives these characters the flexibility and plasticity they require to come into being. Therefore, I am able to discover various literary modes of the human condition in the contemporary life world.

As stated, I believe Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman,* and two novels *The Blazing World* and *The Sorrows of an American* belong to the genre of life writing because they either articulate an autobiographical subtext or an authentic autobiography about narrators and characters who try to overcome power imbalances and upsetting formative experiences. Thus, I aim to shed light on three key aspects of the taxonomy of the literary genre in this section. The contemporary American life world puts people into

distinctly different living situations. Consequently, the genre of life writing takes up a range of experiences in literary writing. In order to give voice to narrators and characters from different backgrounds, the genre of life writing has brought forth a broad scope of represented positions, voices and subjectivity, and formats. I believe the representation of plural positions, voices and formats discontinue the conventions of postmodern writing and are only possible because the genre of life writing has been developing sophisticated narrative strategies since the 1980s (see chapter 1.2 and 1.3 for further information).

In contemporary Anglo-American literature, minorities, people suffering from mental or physical illnesses, and aging people represent their position, point of view and cultural environment in autobiographical narratives as well as in narratives with autobiographic subtext (Hornung 2015, Banerjee 2018). In my dissertation, I therefore discuss the three texts and how they represent life from a variety of social positions in the context of Siri Hustvedt's and her characters' life. Their representation corresponds to the plurality of the democratic American system and life world. Flourishing patient stories, fictional and nonfictional accounts of aging people, minority stories, stories about illness or mental challenges are particularly frequent in contemporary life writing. The representation of these positions is familiar to readers of Siri Hustvedt's writing. Her stories are not factual and rational accounts of their lives but focus on the writer's subjective vantage point, feelings, perceptions, and thoughts attached to being in a marginal position. Her characters and narrators often experience their positions as problematic because there are underlying power imbalances. Hustvedt develops her own and many of her characters' positions by shedding light on the circumstance of their upbringing and family relations. She often focuses on the position of women and includes male narrators and characters who are closely related to women characters. They bring along topics that are emblematic for the genre of life writing, among them the recognition and position of women in art, the position of men and women as they age, their experience as patients, and their publicity as rare intellectuals and artists. People of color appear as characters in her novels, too, and express their points of view primarily through art. As well, she portrays professions such as psychoanalysts or art collectors that provide resourceful perspectives on contemporary culture and life in America.

Life writing gives voice to previously unnarrated or unheard stories, believing that they make a huge contribution to the understanding of contemporary American life.

According to Mita Banerjee, life writing is "immensely productive especially for the reconstruction of the subjectivity and the agency of marginalized communities and individuals" (Banerjee 2019: 336). This dissertation sheds light on the recreation of subjectivity of these groups through authentic or fictional autobiographical texts. Representing and articulating individual experiences that constitute many of today's life experiences is helpful, but they would not get public attention if it were not for new ways of self-representation. The reconstruction of subjectivity includes people suffering from permanent or temporary psychological problems, those who have experienced oppression, separation, loss, or trauma, as well as creative minds, intellectuals, and artists who may not fit the status quo. Here, I aim to show that Siri Hustvedt reconstructs their subjectivity and creates their plural and multipolar voices in her writing. Life writing gives these characters a dialogical third space to recreate subjectivity. For example, characters in *The Blazing World* use narrative strategies to search for autobiographical memory traces, recreating parts of themselves they have been oblivious to for decades and developing their distinctive voices. That is why Hustvedt's novels are replete with characters who develop techniques to uncover dormant memory. They openly suffer from emotional challenges and try to tackle them in art or via a psychoanalyst, negotiating intrasubjective conflicts in conversations and through creation.

Life writing appears in the shape and form of novels, autobiographies, movies, documentaries, short stories, dream analyses, biographies, poems, diaries, articles, conversations, drawing and paintings, online chats, profiles or instant messengers (Hornung 2015). It also includes discourses of other fields of research and the sciences. What media and formats share are autobiographical or biographical subtexts and a portrayal of crucial life experiences, social perception, formative and constituting relationships and memories. Due to the variety of media and formats, the genre of life writing is more flexible, accessible and versatile than traditional literature. It is able to represent a greater variety of authentic and autofictional voices. The advantage is that an "individual's life can be 'reconstructed' through various sources" (Banerjee: 2019: 336), giving minorities and people in unordinary situations the power of self-representation. Therefore, I devote adequate space of the dissertation to the interpretation of autobiographical art works and productions. With these, complex beliefs of characters that would remain hidden, voices that would remain quiet can now be heard and analyzed in Siri Hustvedt's life writing.

In Hustvedt's writing, characters from various positions regularly create and present art, write diary entries, take photos, paint their past, present and future lives. Their various productions are narratively represented and make up a large part of the textual shape and structure. They offer abundant and resourceful attempts of understanding their autobiographies and autobiographical dynamics. In this dissertation, I analyze media and formats that characters and narrators use to represent and develop their lives. In my interpretation of fictional and non-fictional personal histories, I reconstruct their life and subjectivity from a variety of sources such as medical diagnoses, poems and dream narratives. I argue that their shortcomings in self-construction in everyday life find remedy in the multiplicity of representational formats. Characters who have problems to express personal challenges use art to represent their inner life. They reveal emotional experiences that have shattered their sense of self in the past using different art formats. They select the representational mode according to their artistic talents and the issue they deal with. The most striking difference is whether they represent personal problems in a narrative such as a diary entry, film or photo story, or whether spatial representation takes precedence over temporal representation in a drawing, painting, sculpture or photo.

Generic ways of remembering, understanding each other, and thinking about the characters' lives are modified by these new autobiographical narrative techniques and vantage points. This is necessary because unconventional characters and characters from minorities require different narrative strategies to make express views and perspectives. I believe that these ways of developing characters and narrators, besides the traditional structures, help convey deeper layers of personality and memory. The characters' repressed memories and unconventional perceptions of each other can become visible to the writer, reader, and themselves. The media and formats make subliminal actions and states of mind explicable. Represented creative activities allow the reader to learn more about the psychology of Hustvedt's characters. The characters can reconstruct their identity, perceptions, and memories through filming, painting, writing or taking photos. Their projects add complexity to the study of memories and the characters' perception. They access and represent memories by making use of a variety of art forms. Consequently, they can capture autobiographic information they would not have been able to access and represent before.

In each interpretation of Hustvedt's three texts, I take time to include excerpts of the characters' and narrators' productions in order to work with their unconscious

motifs, memories and emotions. In the service of life writing, the formats and media of Hustvedt's characters portray subliminal contents that were otherwise neglected. This strategy allows them to use innovative ways of confessing their inner life that are not possible in traditional writing. In addition, they use films or plays because they can guide perceptions and evoke memories. For example, in spontaneous play, characters or narrators enact social roles that were unconscious up until the day of enacting them. Without the possibility to represent unconscious mental contents as autobiographical evidence in literature, the reader would never know that these hidden patterns of behavior linger in the narrator's or characters' unconscious and guide plotlines. I think that Hustvedt's life writing is consequently a new and dense form of literary communication that represents different artforms to communicate about unconscious memories, emotions and perceptions.

Siri Hustvedt's novels employ strategies of making changes to a character's unfolding plotline. In my analysis, I will frequently develop my scholarly discourse by discussing characters who try to actively engage with their life story and change it for the better. That is relevant to characters whose social position has put them in challenging situations worthy of improvement or those who struggle with challenging emotions. Among them are characters who are not recognized for what they do, who suffer from trauma or detrimental memories, or who live in unhealthy relationships. I think that the characters' intervention and planning of the plot is an innovative feature of fictional life writing, or fiction based on autobiographical experiences. Therefore, I often raise awareness to how characters and narrators augment the reality of their lived experience. To accomplish that goal, narrators and characters work with memory techniques, changing perceptual routines and their forms of relationships using new literary formats and media.

Life writing generally emphasizes birth and death in its narratives because the experience of loss evokes the necessity of newly reconstructing subjectivity and directing life into a new direction. Life writing can start narrating early childhood and narrate up to the point the person sits down and writes her story. The writer seems to struggle with and fight death. She expresses her resistance to death in the act of writing and seems to dissimulate the fact that she is dying eventually. In *The Blazing World*, biographical views on the protagonist add perspectives on the fictional level after the character cannot continue recounting her story herself because she died. Hustvedt's narratives portray characters while they are growing up and there are a number of deaths

in her life writing, too. Death appears in different shapes and forms, and the use of new formats encourages contemporary views upon the experience of death. In *The Blazing World* and *The Sorrows of an American*, for example, characters have died or die at different stages in their lives in the course of the novel. The cumulative effect of the characters' stories demonstrates that the existential experience of moving from birth to death is crucial to understanding the three texts. Each stage of life creates other voices and Hustvedt eagerly recreates and appreciates experiences at different points in life. Children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged men and women, aging people and dying people share their impulses and movements with the reader. Indeed, their age and corporeal reality heavily influences their awareness of their life world. Moving from life to death gives them a natural and biological direction even though the characters' and narrators' work with memories allows them to move back and forth in time freely. Consequently, younger characters face the difficulties of becoming members of society, and older characters must confront their physical limitations. It is not surprising that a recurring related theme is the experience of loss – either of one's youth or of a loved one. All three texts reconstruct subjectivity of people who have lost a significant other, loss that forced them to transform routines and support networks they have grown accustomed to. Mourning often finds expression in artworks, diary entries and poems. Mourning is one of the crucial moments in which the use of other media, formats and genre supports the characters' emotional stability.

As the representation of plural positions, voices, and formats converge in life writing, the genre of life writing can negotiate and reconcile conflicting character roles. It is sensitive to the roles that shape a person's life, and often deals with the conflicts and challenges each role entails. Life writing offers solutions by negotiating oppositional roles and aversive perceptions in different media, art forms and formats. For example, characters from different positions such as men and woman, or wife and husband, make use of art forms like plays to assume roles of their antagonists. Rendering mutual understanding and negotiating their expectations fosters possible communication. For example, in *The Sorrows of an American*, one of the protagonists reconciles her family life after watching and interpreting a film conducted by her husband. Another example, in *The Blazing World*, the characters create art installations that appease social perception.

The stated variety of positions, voices and formats also helps to blend discourses in life writing that have grown apart for the sake of gaining knowledge. For example, in

The Shaking Woman, scholarly and scientific discourses converge successfully. That is possible because Siri Hustvedt makes use of her knowledge in neuroscience and the humanities to write an interdisciplinary autobiography about a psychiatric disorder. Her autobiography includes her diagnoses, disease profiles, autobiographical memories, other patients' case stories, and scientific information and findings. She also writes about herself as a psychiatric patient, as a teacher to patients in psychiatry, as a writer and artist, and as a daughter to her deceased father. Converging these roles and discourses, she empowers herself and makes her problem diagnostically explicable. Such stories of empowerment are frequent in life writing because the freedom of assuming different roles liberates narrators from the limited perspective of their previous ones and gives them more access to autobiographical self-knowledge.

The life writing and life sciences research group in Mainz posits that their aim is to establish "new approaches to explaining and understanding human life and life narratives in social and cultural studies" (GRK 2018). Writers can accomplish that goal by blending both discourses (see chapter 3) or scholars can make use of life sciences to explain experiences depicted in life narratives in recourse to life sciences. Research in the life sciences complements this analysis because it gives me the possibility to shed new light on literary experience that would have remained opaque without neuroscientific findings. In order to bring research of scholars and scientists together, the field has developed basic conceptualizations and models which are applicable to and accepted in both research areas. In this introductory chapter, my methodological goals in the life sciences are in reference to the conceptualization of the interdisciplinary field. I present and discuss research findings and the terminology necessary for my research project in chapter 2.

The possibility of drawing on scientific knowledge to clarify activity of the genre of life writing shows that empirical data can be narrated so that character development, especially the development characters have initiated themselves on the level of the plot, makes better sense to scholars (cf. GRK 2019). This does not come as a surprise because I believe that the sciences do not produce self-explanatory data which contain inherent truth. Narratives which generate meaning are therefore ubiquitous in the sciences too, since scientific data must always be explained through scientific assumptions, theories and conventions (cf. GRK 2019). From that vantage point, it is also possible to develop explanatory models which can connect to the study of novels and autobiographies. Vice

versa, the life sciences encourage the view that neuroscientific models and explications map neural activity in brain regions and along neural routes that correlate with mental processes. That's why I think that it is possible to analyze Hustvedt's writing from both angles.

Consequently, it is possible to actively engage brain studies in a dialog with life writing. The life sciences support the argument that neural areas and pathways are activated if literary engagement with the brain and mind is successful. My research is therefore consistent with the premise that "life sciences… on the one hand and the humanities… on the other hand approach the same subject of man in his life-world from different angles" (GRK 2019). A conscious decision of writers and scholars who are active in the field is recognizing that both share their research and promote different perspectives. Yet, the collaboration requires open-mindedness from scientists and acceptance of the way scholars integrate neuroscience on writerly productions.

In Hustvedt's writing the first- and third-person perspective intersect. That is how she creates new literary spaces that encompass autofiction, essays, her autobiography and conversations with scientists and scholars. She may also establish a better rapport to the reader, the second person, who is implied in the first. Siri Hustvedt has absorbed neuroscientific papers for decades and she has frequently talked to leading neuroscientists like António Damásio to include scientific perspectives. She has been deeply involved in the relationship of the mind and brain for decades. Specifically, neuropsychoanalysis, which combines neuroscience and psychoanalysis, provides explanatory models and discourses to the analysis of Siri Hustvedt's writing. The reason is that every mental process has a neural correlate – in neuropsychoanalysis psychoanalysts and neuroscientists therefore study the same subject from different angles (Solms 2011). Whereas scholars and psychoanalysts focus on first-person thought and emotional processes, scientists look at the correlative phenomenon in the brain from the third-person perspective. In the interdisciplinary field, first-person narratives such as life narratives in the form of essays, novels and autobiographies are seen as being credible sources of neuropsychoanalytic research.

I infer that Hustvedt has taken part in the effort of bridging the disciplinary divide in perspectives by applying scientifically grounded explanatory models to relate to mental processes in her essays and other writings (Hustvedt 2010, 2012, 2014). Hustvedt's resulting affiliation to neuropsychoanalysis is strikingly close. She publishes interdisciplinary essays in the field of neuropsychoanalysis, and she has done extensive

and critical reading in the fields appertaining to it. Her interdisciplinary approach has paved the way for projects like this, combining research of the mind and brain. The debate about the coincidence of the mind and brain in human life is at the core of Siri Hustvedt's writing. This gives me the opportunity to establish the first-person scholarly study of the mind next to the third-person scientific research of the brain in the interpretation of her texts. Through reading her novels and autobiography, I emphasize the intersection of first- and second-person perspectives in the inner narrative experience.

Hustvedt's writing resonates well with explanatory discourses of the life sciences for the reasons I outlined above. In my interpretation of her writing, I combine life sciences and life writing to create a more complete view of her autobiography and two novels. This life sciences part of my dissertation encompasses the milestones that approach fictional or authentic autobiographical development in life writing from a scientific perspective. On that account, my thesis develops an initial recourse to neuroscience. My research focuses on memory and emotional processing in the brain, the neuroscience of writing and reading, and a neuropsychoanalytic understanding of repressed mental contents. I am interested in scientific explanatory models which map embodied activities of reading and writing. I also show how neuroscientists relate to unconscious processes in the brain in neuropsychoanalytic literature. As a scholar in the field of life writing, I assume that reading and writing strategies have the capacity to bring unconscious mental contents like memories and emotion to consciousness. The different media and formats used in life writing make access to unconscious contents in the brain possible and have a positive effect on the characters' mental health. In my dissertation, I frequently refer to text passages in which characters deal with unconscious autobiographical emotion and memory that appear to consciousness after writing about crucial life events.

In conclusion, neuropsychoanalysis is the explanatory framework that offers a new reading of Hustvedt and her characters' laborious work with autobiographical memories using life writing strategies and formats. From a literary perspective, inner work in the autobiography and novels describes how characters and narrators become aware of unconscious memories and emotions. They make unconscious memory accessible through art forms and storytelling. From a scientific perspective, neuropsychoanalysis is theoretically significant for the genre of life writing because it provides additional explanatory models, concepts and scientific evidence for psychic narrative processes.

Both views are fundamental for my understanding of Siri Hustvedt's autobiography and two novels because it is at the core of the characters' and narrators' active engagement with their story and future. In my dissertation I apply my conceptual framework to the analysis of Hustvedt's psychosomatic episodes in *The Shaking Woman* in chapter 3. It serves as background knowledge on autobiographical memory and follows my thought process in the chapter on *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World.*, in as much as they focus on autobiographical memory processing.

In life writing, patient stories sometimes constitute entire pieces of writing, in other instances they are included in the ongoing plot or story line. The patient role is significant for a character or narrator because it suggests that regular goals and events in life may not be accomplished due to illness. Yet, illness may create valuable self-reflection and a better understanding of life. In cases of illness, scientific information helps scholars understand the patient's life story substantially better, and it should be part of research on the development of character and narrator. For example, in scientific findings from *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt emphasizes her experience as a psychiatric patient. I specifically draw on neuropsychoanalysis to learn more about the psychiatric and psychological affliction Hustvedt discusses. The medical problem only becomes explicable if I combine scientific and scholarly discourses. It is based on close examination of how negative childhood memory was saved in her brain. This autobiographical memory formation proves that life sciences and life writing can even do more than provide different angles on one research topic. On the one hand, scientists can research memory coding in the brain, and on the other hand, scholars can study the contents of memories from the first-person perspective in life narratives, understanding how a person can actively engage with unconscious memory and modify its coding. New possibilities emerge from blending resources since academic exchange between both fields complements research findings.

I have already stated that patient narratives are a source of knowledge for scholars and medical practitioners, improving collaborative healthcare and negotiations on medical practice and patient care (Verghese). Studying, writing, and talking about patient stories is part of the practice of narrative medicine. Exemplary literary accounts of patients acknowledge the reciprocity and interdependence of medical diagnosis/treatment and the patient's ongoing life story. This idea builds on the belief that practitioners can improve patient-centered care if they listen and understand what

patients say about their illness in life contexts. Patient narratives can help professionals understand the patients' role and perspective and merge conflicting views in the medical system to improve the efficacy of medical care.

Narrative medicine is the critical practice of life sciences and life writing. Narrative medicine covers the whole process of dealing with illnesses between patient and doctor. In some instances, it also deals with cases of fatal diseases or diseases with a severe progression. Today, many people die as patients in intensive care for a medical reason. In the contemporary life-world, death is discussed in a religious or cultural discourse, but it actually takes place in the healthcare system and is talked about using its jargon. Despite that, the autobiographical consequences for the sick person and her relatives are often not dealt with. Although people today mostly begin and end their life in the medical system, and the polarities of life and death are present, there is hardly a reaction to death and loss in healthcare. Where birth is celebrated, death is neglected and pushed to the margins of conscious awareness. It is not accounted for, even though grieving immediately reminds us of the experience of death or being diagnosed with fatal disease. At the intersection of life sciences and life writing, the practice of narrative medicine can re-cultivate stories of dying and experiences of loss, and it makes the representation of these experiences possible. That is the reason why death is one of the most striking and challenging topics in life writing. It is also why narrative medicine, as a practical measure, can help fill the void the medical system has left open. At the intersection of life sciences and life writing, the practice of narrative medicine re-cultivates, represents and reconstructs stories of dying people and those who have experienced loss. It can help fill the void the medical system has left open.

According to Rita Charon and Maura Spiegel, who promote the practice of narrative medicine at Columbia University, narrative medicine circles around the conversation between doctor and patient. This conversation is of particular importance when people are diagnosed with fatal disease or die from fatal diseases. In Hustvedt's writing, there are several instances in which these conversations are not reported to have taken place satisfyingly, and life writing takes the place of it. In this case, the health crisis pushes the goal of life writing into practice, i.e., stabilizing a life self-representation of a character or narrator by narrating moments of health crisis. In Siri Hustvedt's writing, one aspect of narrative medicine is the practice of discussing and narrating about serious illness in addition to actively taking part in the medical system.

Topics that cannot be dealt with at length on clinical wards or in the doctor's office find representation in her two novels and autobiography.

I discuss cases of death and loss in my dissertation and I promote this special focus in narrative medicine. Death intensifies existing problems and people in mourning being to the voices not heard and expressed comprehensively in the mainstream. It implies the practice of narrative medicine outside the medical system. Narrative medicine connects life writing to life sciences where the two areas would normally part – once a person is dead and has undergone the process of post-mortem obduction, life sciences would lose interest in a case. Yet, the practice of narrative medicine can continue working with the narrated memories of the dead and their relatives' experiences to make sense of the person's life and illness. For a healthy process of grieving, healing and preventing illness in relatives who are still alive is necessary. As well, relatives must learn to redirect life after loss. Therefore, I choose to analyze the ways characters narrate and react to loss and death through various art forms and other cultural activities. I will point out that the process of grieving can only be initiated if it is situated in conversations, writing or in poetry. In the dissertation, I intend to show that characters who actively deal with their grief, can better relate to the dead and make space for new relationships.

Narrative medicine provides specifically perceptive and generous contexts for psychosomatic and mental disorders. In Hustvedt's writing these problems intensify enormously after someone has lost a loved one. Such disorders are then mostly treated in psychiatry, yet, literary understanding of mental disorders helps make sense of the pain from an autobiographic perspective. The perspective is indispensable if negative memories are at the root of a mental disorder and emotional instability. Specifically, childhood experiences can provide crucial information about the origin of a disorder. Approaching mental disorders from the perspective of formative memories may be a crucial step for improvement. Social stigmatization declines when mental disorders are explained. Once a person's emotional or behavioral reactions become allegeable, the person's mad behavior makes sense. In my interpretation of Siri Hustvedt's writing, the character's mental disorders and emotional instabilities are analyzed from an autobiographical perspective, expanding knowledge on their causes.

My thesis approaches characters who find ways of putting life writing and narrative medicine into practice, adjusting to their future living situation after the experience of loss. On the level of the plot, the characters engage in narrative medicine as if they take

part in a narrative medicine workshop. In so doing, they create a third artistic space in which they become artists for therapeutic purposes. It is my observation that character behavior often deliberately intends to put autobiographical work into practice. Invigorating ties of personal history empowers characters to plot their future life, assuming the roles of active agents in their own life story. Of striking importance in Siri Hustvedt's novels is the idea that on an intratextual level, characters plot their own life by altering subliminal ways in which memories unconsciously direct their lives. In *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World*, I analyze how characters successfully inspire themselves to achieve that objective. The positive effect of narrative practice allows me to categorize it under the heading of narrative medicine.

The practice of narrative medicine and the genre of life writing encompass the same literary field, for instance writing which invokes memory of people suffering from illness or mental challenges for the sake of improving their lives. Once the life sciences add scientific points of view, too, it is possible to look at the subject of men and women in their literary world from different angles. The three areas of research create new space and fertile ground for the study of Siri Hustvedt's writing. In the autobiography *The Shaking Woman* Hustvedt authentically recalls and discusses her own female patient perspective she had to assume while investigating a repetitive and shaking fit that occurred when she gave speeches two years after her father's death. The experience of being a patient has a tremendous influence on the autobiographical understanding of her life. She learns to understand possible reasons for becoming a psychiatric patient by analyzing autobiographical memories. Expressing the perspective of being a patient also gives her a voice in medical settings, making her perspective explicable to medical professionals. Her perspective fosters empathy as a patient and advocates for better medical treatment of her mental condition.

Furthermore, identity formation and reconstruction, which often takes an exploratory shape in life writing, are closely connected to being able to communicate with the patient self. It is the genre's evidence that pushing less represented perspectives to the center of attention is an advisable process of entitlement for the patient. Despite this, her informed patient view is also a source of knowledge for scholars and medical practitioners. The effect on the readers promises knowledge gain, too. The study of life writing improves collaborative healthcare and the negotiation of patients and practitioners' outlook on medical practice (Verghese "Why narrative medicine?"). Life

writing is then connected to the practice of narrative medicine (see below) and reveals the genre's capacity in giving voice to patients.

Life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine are no mere distinct theoretical terms. They converge in novels and autobiographies expressed from first, second or third-person perspectives. The concatenation of three terms makes character development explicable. In fictional worlds self-direction of characters and narrators is possible in third space artistic projects. These narratives are situated, and they articulate the human experience of living in this world. Character analysis is at the core of my understanding of Hustvedt's novels because the concepts are applicable to, and intersect in the experience of characters. The three terms effectively foster an understanding of the characters and their relationships. Life sciences provide explanatory models to approach emotional experiences and mental health issues from the perspective of neuroscience and neuropsychoanalysis. Life writing provides the articulatory freedom to express diverse perspectives in different formats and media. Narrative medicine attributes new meaning to the doctor-patient relationship. It also establishes the characters' and narrators' ubiquitous practice of narrative medicine on the level of the plot as it can improve mental health crucially. Together, they allow me to approach the critical question why some characters go through life crises successfully and others are less successful.

The three terms converge in my analysis and make character development explicable. Life writing comprises specific ways of self-representation in challenging situations. Further, there is a psychiatric and/or psychoanalytic approach towards mental problems characters and the author experience after they have lost a loved one. I will analyze how forms of self-representation are used by the author in her autobiography and by characters in the two novels to improve their mental state. I suggest that in the literary world, characters engage with vital memories and change the structures they live in. Using forms of self-representation of the genre of life writing can thus have a healing effect. That way some learn to direct their own life effectively and all characters reveal subliminal layers of mind in fiction. Therefore, my literary reading is complementary to neuropsychoanalytic perspectives. Whether the author and characters successfully scheme their own life on the level of the plot depends on the interplay of activities attached to each term, i.e., the selected form of self-presentation, knowing how the mind and brain save and process autobiographical memory and the practice of working through memory. In such cases, my life science perspective on

memory processing adds to the possibility of appreciating the healing practice of narrative medicine in life writing. Therefore, the concatenation of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine is crucial to interpret character development and their ability to direct their life in this dissertation.

Approaching autobiographical memory is crucial for life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine. In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt finds a key memory that helps analyzing her shaking fit. In the two novels *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World* characters represent memories through forms of self-representation. Additionally, art installations appeal to the readers' perceptual conventions in *The Blazing World*. Hustvedt's father's memoir is included in *The Sorrows of an American*. She thus mixes fictional and nonfictional autobiographical perspectives. In *Memories of the Future* Hustvedt mixes fact and fiction to fully exploit the possibilities of self-directing life. In these novels, various autobiographical perspectives and strategies express and deal with the characters' problems. Therefore, I argue that these novels are examples of autofiction. First, autobiographical self-representation plays an important role in researching problems characters confront. Second, autofiction may cross borders of fact and fiction if the writer wants to playfully change authentic memories. In these cases, mixing authentic and fictional memories is desirable. Autofiction emerges from the interplay between authentic and fictional autobiography. Third, autofiction can establish an effective interaction and response between reader and text – the text initiates change in the reader.

Life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine are applicable to Hustvedt's writing to different degrees, even though all three terms are significant for the analysis of each piece of writing. The terms converge in my analyses because each provides a perspective on character activities. On the one hand, life writing and narrative medicine elucidate how and why autobiographical and autofictional writing strategies can access and change unconscious memory in the mind. On the other hand, the life sciences memory processing in unconscious brain regions, coding and recoding of autobiographical memory in the brain. I present research supporting this argument in my analysis of *The Shaking Woman*. My interpretation of *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World* provides evidence for the argument that different media and formats of the genre of life writing make the invention of such new narrative strategies possible. The practice of both in narrative medicine has a healing effect because characters can reveal and change detrimental repetitive patterns in their lives that are

coded in the brain in previously unconscious memories and perception. I explicate change of repetitive patterns in my analysis of *The Sorrows of an American* and the transformation of perceptual patterns and mingling of voices in my last chapter on *The Blazing World*. If all threads converge, characters can plot their life by working with memories and perception, and confront life crises caused by family or social power structures effectively. I outline that final observation in my conclusion on *Memories of the Future*.

Terminological emphasis is based on the extent to which the terms allow me to better understand the protagonists or narrators in the given novel or autobiography. *The Shaking Woman* is indebted to a life sciences discourse. The autobiography integrates scientific views more openly than other novels by Hustvedt because of the dedicated focus on description of the illness. Narrative medicine directs my view of *The Shaking Woman* and *The Sorrows of an American* because the former is a patient story, and the latter is written from the perspective of a psychoanalyst. The relationship between doctors and patients is crucial for the interpretation of personal development. Consequently, my study of *The Sorrows of an American* accentuates narrative medicine. The narrator considers the relationship to patients as being vital for his social identity. However, other characters in the novel try hard to overcome life crises themselves. That is why I study them with a focus on life writing strategies and their practice of narrative medicine. First and foremost, the characters are artists who creatively express and cope with their shattered subjectivity through art. Characters practicing narrative medicine are essential to *The Blazing World*, too. I also focus on life writing in my study of the novel. *The Blazing World* seems to be unparalleled in the complexity the genre can generate. The characters create dynamic and pervasive third spaces and intratextual fields on the level of the plot. Predominantly, the novel is about artists who reconstruct, create and change subjectivity, and the negotiate social positions and perception in art. Therefore, life writing and narrative medicine are of great significance to my interpretation of the characters in *The Blazing World*.

Life writing connects to the post-postmodern era in its focus on characters, their search for meaning, relationships, and the past. Prominent American post-postmodern writers are Jeffrey Eugenides, Dave Eggers, Cynthia Ozick, Jay McInerny, David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Jonathan Safran Foer or Nicole Krauss. Siri Hustvedt should be included in the list of post-postmodern writers because they all challenge postmodern literary conventions, shaping literary writing since the late 20th century.

Hustvedt's writing is very much situated in rich literary culture. A study of selected contemporary writers helps appreciate the literary movement in which her writing takes place. The following section discusses David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, and Jay McInerny as authors who have advanced American techniques of writing fiction with regard to character development from the perspective of personal histories. I show that their successful literary work on memory parallels to similar initiatives in Hustvedt's work. Nonetheless I think memory processing is further explored and developed in her texts. I want to demonstrate that Hustvedt accomplishes a new level of literary self-engagement that distinguishes her from contemporaries. My reading will show that she takes decisive steps towards more self-determination and self-recognition of marginalized characters and narrators.

1.3. 9/11 and the Return of Reality

In the 20th century, postmodern approaches to language and reality have often questioned the possibility to relate to reality accurately and to represent remembered experiences in language. Theoretically speaking the return of reality in literary discourses may cause doubts in writers and readers, who have been trained to be suspicious of the written words for decades. What the mind brought forth in language was not considered an actual reflection of the happenings in the world. Instead, language was thought to be a self-reproducing system that generated meaning not in relation to reality but on its own terms. Language was supposed to dominate our grasp on reality to such an extent that reality outside language is not even accessible to us (cf. Grabes 5). Pushing postmodern thinking further, for writers like John Barth, language increasingly turned into a closed system which is caught up in language games, and only able to reflect on itself rather than on external reality (cf. Boswell 26-7). Elsewhere, readers of Jacques Derrida assumed that, within the chains of signifiers that make up language, it is mainly the *différance* between and amongst the signifiers which contributes to their meaning (cf. Klages 74). Taken further, such readings indicate that language is disengaged from what it is supposed to represent. Derrida, and those voices indebted to him, were prominent for questioning the supposedly self-evident use of language and the generation of meaning via language. Challenging the ontological and epistemological possibility of accurate linguistic representation of the world theoretically had lasting effects on Euro-American literature. Consequently, scholars

called the representational and communicative aspects of language, which were hitherto thought to be a vital part of its use, into question.

Postmodern theory sometimes considers the relationship between the signifier (signs on a page) and signified (real object) as being deferred (cf. Derrida 1982). Taken further, postmodernists consider it random with no claim to truthful reference to external events because language was thought to reproduce itself in a self-referential system. That is why the discourse was believed to produce the objects it talked about rather than talking about things outside itself. However, Americans realized that the perception of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 were just as real as its linguistic and visual representation on the news and in books. The literary discourse took a new direction – that the planes crashed into the Twin Towers and people died, and the fact that numerous survivors were severely traumatized had to be taken seriously in the literary discourse. I think that today, literary language in life writing helps fleshing out characters who process traumatic or challenging memories and get in touch with their life again. In some contemporary novels, there is the possibility to communicate about the tragic attack and the memories it left behind in those who were immediately affected. The narrative is not considered to be a linguistic construction, instead, language helps characters and writers to live through and with the memories 9/11 left behind. With the reality of the plane crashes, the postmodern notion of reality and the scholarly debate about it changed too.

In contrast to simulated crises and moments of danger in some of late 20th century writing, as for example narrated in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*, 9/11 and the crises it invoked are real again. DeLillo explains himself in the essay "In the Ruins of the Future" (2001). He admits that 11 years prior to 9/11, Americans "had trouble separating the war from coverage of the war" (2001). Yet, on homeland the "raw event was one thing, the coverage another". There was no confusion for Americans because their life world was under attack and the feeling of security vanished. In 9/11 novels, characters experiencing the attacks do not live in a simulation or distorted reality; on the contrary, the catastrophe challenges literary characters seriously. Characters affected by 9/11 must face the immense effects of personal and political crises directly and must find ways to put their emotional memories and experiences into context. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) thematizes the way the boy Oskar Schell learns to mourn his father after he died in the terrorist attacks. No matter how postmodern the novel's style seems, neither the reality of the crash, his loss

and the psychological effects nor the linguistic representation and memory of it are called into question. Instead, the character's tremendously shaken world becomes true on the page. This is true for Hustvedt's characters, too. Analyzing how they process traumatic memory of 9/11 is crucial for developing my thesis. It reveals that in Hustvedt's writing characters learn to express their memories in language and art again to improve their mental health. *The Sorrows of an American*, for example, character Sonia goes through a complex process of dealing with the sudden loss of her sense of security in the aftermath of 9/11, and *The Blazing World* takes up extensive media coverage of that day by means of the protagonist's famous final art installation. These characters learn to make sense of their experience in art or in dialogs. Their language and art do not replace their world but "take[s] place 'in' that world" and, I think, rebuild the world which fell to pieces (Boswell 30). More so, the writerly intention of working through perception and memories of 9/11 is only promising if the characters can think through what has actually happened. The linguistic intensity that fathoms and transforms their upsetting emotional responses immerses them in their life situation again and reduces feelings of alienation.

In the case of September 11, the postmodern conception of language fails incontrovertibly: the reality of the event is, of course, perceivable and graspable in itself; its linguistic and visual representation is not a consortium of signs without a sound referent in reality and history. The contemporary debate about 9/11 and its representation in writing is not a demonstration of a self-referencing system but refers to an actual event and those who witnessed it. More so, its written or visual representation in art supports the actual process of understanding its psychological effects on individuals and families. I argue that the traumatic experience re-established the necessity and belief in language as a tool to establish relations to reality in order to come to terms with the challenging event. I thus propose that 9/11 marks a crucial point in time when American scholars and writers had to acknowledge the possibility to pertain to reality immediately. They reestablished the relation to the world of literary language to find ways to work through the traumatic effects of the terror attacks.

Moreover, dissatisfaction with late postmodernist strategies arose concerning overbearing irony and cynicism, the rejection of personalities and relationships and the representation of subjectivity (cf. Burn 2008 a: 23, cf. Burn 2008b: 220). A cynic and ironic literary voice is not able to afford the relation to the reader necessary to comprehend the tragedy empathetically. Accordingly, the objective of re-implementing

language as a credible and reliable communicational tool between speakers is often a concern of writing about 9/11.

> …on the morning of September 11, 2001, Inga and Sonia had found themselves running north with hundreds of people of other people, as they fled Stuyvesant High School, where Sonia was a student. They were just blocks away from the burning towers, and it was only later that I discovered what Sonia had seen from her schoolroom window. From my house in Brooklyn that morning, I saw only smoke. (Hustvedt 2008: 4)

In *The Sorrows of an American*, the narrator's niece Sonia had seen people jumping from the towers. The serious tone and simple words, gaps her account of the day does not try to fill, convey speechlessness. And yet, that fact that the narrator tries hard to find words and to fill the void shows that his grip on language gives him the possibility of approaching her crisis through words. A serious tone and coping with the gravity of the situation through a sympathetic voice is one of the narrator's achievements. The narrator later discovers what Sonia had seen that day and feels empathy for what Sonia has to process inside. His compassion for his niece is subtle, yet, the words "I only discovered what Sonia had seen" (4) undeniably express that he shares some of her pain. The narrative's serious and skillful use of language is therefore an expression of sympathy for his niece's suffering and point of view. It takes Sonia two years to talk about her memories of that day. Since September 11, Sonia depended on finding words that express her point of view and the reality of the event in order to find her way back into life.

After 9/11, writers and characters had to learn to write and talk about their memories of the event and they make use of new narrative strategies to do so. Instead of continuing a system of thought, they were asked to find ways of putting memories into words to rebuild the shattered world they inhabit. Siri Hustvedt clearly assumes the position that language can refer to 9/11 and it is possible to integrate the reality of the event into the literary discourse. Overcoming the crises 9/11 yields, fully reengages her characters with their life and initiates an artistic or narrative work with disturbing memories. That is why I take up the topic of death, loss and mourning again in chapter 1.1.5. Rather than being caught in a postmodern system of thought that questions the character's creativity, section 1.1.4 aims to show that their hope in personal development helps Hustvedt's characters to think of new ways of expressing and overcoming their burdensome misery after 9/11.

In the section 1.1.4, I want to further trace the transition from postmodern literature to post-postmodern writing, which was ended by 9/11. With 9/11, the postmodern thought that language cannot map the world and human experience does

no longer prevail. Ending the denial of the referential quality of language, post-postmodern writing gained importance. Several American writers, amongst them Siri Hustvedt, have reimplemented the representational function of language in their post-postmodern writing before and after 9/11. I thus want to expound how that shift away from postmodern literary convention took place. I discuss David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen and Jay McInerny to situate Hustvedt amongst the contemporary writers of an era that embrace representative functions of language. Analyzing texts of these writers who practice a post-postmodern form help me depicting the progress of literature from the postmodern to the post-postmodern period. I will then show that their successful reestablishment of representing experiences in language parallels similar initiatives in Hustvedt's writing and is even taken further in her texts.

1.4. Postmodernism and Post-Postmodernism

In this dissertation I analyze Siri Hustvedt's writing as a genre of life writing, the explanatory model of life sciences and the practice of narrative medicine. According to my understanding of life writing, the genre, whose authors particularly write assuming minority or marginal positions and reconstruct their subjectivity, emerges in close proximity to postmodern and post-postmodern writing. In this sense, Hustvedt's writing is thematically strongly connected to the problems postmodern writing poses and post-postmodern writers try to confront. While the former deconstructs narrative conventions like characters and plot, the latter make an effort to reintroduce characters from different walks of life with their biographical background. But other than post-postmodern literature, which does not move beyond the narrative portrayal of such characters, I believe that life writing, narrative medicine and life sciences connect and generate writing strategies that can improve the relational and emotional problems the characters experience in their life.

The American authors Jay McInerney, Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace are, like Siri Hustvedt, eager to think beyond postmodernist uses of literary language. I chose the three authors to show the transition from postmodern to post-postmodern writing because their writing gets to the heart of literary changes in the post-postmodern era. On the one hand, they focus on how the new approach to language affects character portrayal, character experience and the relationship of the individual to reality. On the other hand, the analysis of selected works is a way to place Siri Hustvedt in the post-postmodern period and contextualize her new writing strategies

amongst writers with similar intentions. In my opinion these three authors bridge the divide between postmodern deconstruction of literary conventions and the contemporary need to reinvent them by carefully developing their characters against the background of their fictional family relations. To reach this goal, these three authors draw on psychoanalysis and existentialism. They consider existentialist relations to reality and psychoanalysis to bring their characters' family history – as it is represented in the narrative – into shape, such that it explains the situation they confront when the narrative takes place.

The three writers began to publish works focusing on character development in the 1980s and invoked the crucial transition from one literary era to the next till the 1990s. Wallace and Franzen are no longer considered to be part of literary postmodernism, and instead, scholars agree that their writing is post-postmodern as regards their intention for dialogic narrative strategies, autobiographical character representation and their research of the existential question of what it means to be human. Like Hustvedt's novels, their writing reintroduces full-fletched character personalities and relationships in family settings, the representation of their inner world and biographical background is metonymic with the plot's progress. Existential questions about ways to experience loss, separation and meaning in life are a significant part of the intellectual world the authors envision. In so doing, they create fictional worlds in which the search for meaningful paths of life is thinkable. At the same time, I think that these writers have thought ahead incentives of changing the inherited patterns of life which Siri Hustvedt brings to full effect in her writing:

With the examples of Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights Big City* (1987) and Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (2010), I show that the two writers are aware of an autobiographical perspective on character development and relationships to negotiate the possibility of overcoming personal crisis. McInerney is a very late postmodern writer who, by developing a character who reorganizes his life through the remembrance of his mother's death, already introduces possible post-postmodern strategies towards the end of the novel. Franzen, a post-postmodern writer, brings fictional personal histories into view right from the start of his novel. Included fictional autobiographical chapters help reinvent plausible character traits and encourage the reader to make sense of the character's experiences. That way the narrative generates and reconstructs meaning. Yet, the plots' resolutions are not sufficiently developed – the narratives do not invent narrative strategies, such as those presented in Hustvedt's

The Blazing World, to effectively work through their personal conflicts and trauma from an autobiographical perspective. The interpretation of *Bright Lights, Big City* will carve out that recalling the mentioned repressed and painful life event and the psychoanalytic understanding of this memory has a particularly healing effect upon the protagonist's life. It helps him overcome the life crisis his mother's death provoked. Therefore, I regard it as an early move towards life writing. However, the change of mind is the end rather than the beginning of this novel whereas Hustvedt's novels *begin* in the moment of remembrance and make room for the emergence of the genre of life writing and the practice of narrative medicine.

Jonathan Franzen makes us aware that an existentialist commitment to literary theory, the psychoanalyst view upon characters and his reference to the medical effect writing exerts, are informative. Theoretically, he does not disconnect his thought from the commercial development of his time for the sake of autobiographical autonomy of characters, it is thus post-postmodern. Wallace also writes in the midst of post-postmodernism. I outline the post-postmodern critical portrayal of that system of thought with the example of David Foster Wallace's "What is Water?" (2005). David Foster Wallace's portrayal of an isolated post-postmodern self, which is caught up in a consumerist world, emphasizes the need to look into a theoretical and scientific perspective on human being's biographical self-understanding to overcome post-postmodern alienation from one's life and from others. Yet, I conclude that Wallace's thoughts do not put the desired adjustments into practice. Rather, Siri Hustvedt accomplishes that goal in her writing.

In contrast to Franzen's and Wallace's early work, McInerney became a literary star with the publication of his first novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984). In the novel, the narrator, who works for a New York magazine as a fact checker, tries hard to forget his mother's death and his wife's disappearance by partying at night. In the course of the novel, the narrator dances wildly, suffers from a drug addiction and his performance at work deteriorates due to his exhausting lifestyle. His life only changes upon meeting his brother again after a long time and remembering their mother's death, a severe loss he tried hard to forget. Throughout the novel, the narrator slowly understands that he ran away from the pain the loss has left behind and that he has to confront it in order to take control of his future. He realizes that his marriage, the parties and taking on the job as a fact checker were means to forget his mother's absence. He eventually gives up his

profession and lifestyle when his brother visits him. Thereby, he initiates a series of events and situations which remind him of the personal history he tried to run away from.

Looking at the larger picture, the novel encourages the close study of how America is attuned to the requirements the ongoing commercialization of life imposes upon the individual and the kind of lifestyle late-capitalist press propagates, namely a life without a concern for a character's past and future web of relationships. I support the view that the novel's outstanding turning point is also the turning point from postmodernism to a coherent philosophical and psychoanalytic understanding of character development and family history as regards the effect of formative memories on life. McInerney's turning point is likewise the turning point from a perspective focusing on disconnected and meaningless facts to an autobiographical perspective onto personal relations which shape and shaped the narrator's life. Because *Bright Lights Big City* carries in itself the germ for healing the mind through a literary appeal to noteworthy memories, I focus on this literary contribution.

To start and develop the plot, McInerney heavily drew on a serious crisis in his own life: Before starting to write the novel, the author's mother died of cancer, his wife, who was a model, left him, and he lost his job as a journalist for the magazine *The New Yorker* (cf. Thind 2020). I suggest that the author then begins a remarkable line of thought which, like Hustvedt, confronts the reality of loss and death as a door opener to an autobiographical self-understanding and retrospective healing process. Yet, in an interview for the magazine *Squaremile*, McInerney says that apart from the three autobiographical facts, the narrative is to a large part fictional. He thinks that writing the novel was of therapeutical value as it helped him through and out of "the worst time of his life" (cf. Thind 2020). It portrays the author's and protagonist's affirmative change of mind in times of crisis and is thus akin to the approach of life writing. Making use of the mentioned autobiographical experiences and developing them in a fictional narrative is methodologically common in life writing and grants the writer a greater freedom in finding solutions to the limitations they experience in their life and prevent them from getting better.

The novel's famous beginning is autobiographical, too, as the author and narrator share the initial experience of being utterly alienated from themselves in a hip urban setting. *Bright Lights, Big City* is set in New York in the 1980s; as if it is a short story, the novel begins *in medias res* with the sentence: "You are not the kind of guy

who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning" and presents a narrator without a past in a postmodern life world (McInerny 1). His voice emerges out of nowhere, as if his personal history is of no effect in his current situation. Defining his kind in relation to the habit of partying and taking drugs excessively in the second-person, the narrator speaks as much to the reader as to himself. The second-person narrator, a Yuppie, is detached from himself but, at the same time, addresses the reader more forcefully. Since the pronoun 'you' suggests a commonality between the literary voice and the reader's lifestyle, it cogently places the reader right into the novel's scenery and plotline. As a result, the narrator voice absorbs the reader into his pepped up chain of signifiers and draws her into the narrator's skeptical discussions of the latest journalistic constructions of public opinion in particular, his problems with the work-place in general and his inability to form meaningful relationships beyond. In the beginning, *Bright Lights, Big City* openly reads from the narrator's postmodern urban mind, a journalist's mind, and its sedative lures convincingly entrap the bundled subject in its hallucinatory monetary promise of infinite jest. The narrator's few lonesome liaisons succumb to mere clusters of interaction. The reader races through his cocaine infused stream-of-consciousness – a drug known to exaggerate egoistic tendencies – and learns about his thoughts and perceptions in the second person. The narrator's stream-of-consciousness is saturated with commercial labels which signify the peak of capitalist consumerism. The message is that the propagation of the postmodern journalistic system of thought, its matters of fact, are adjusted to the opinions the journalist must generate in the readership. The reporter's chain-of-signifiers, which result from thoughts kicked off by probabilistic research methods, formal calculations and sensationalism, do not encourage the latent idea to pertain to reality.

A recent marital crisis colors the young man's mood. I consider that not thinking about its personal causes is his aim, he intends to distract himself from the pain of his family life and lusts for ecstasy and elation inside and outside the club, his desire drives him from one flirt to the next and, when a party is about to end, he eagerly searches an "eligible candidate …this late in the game" (6). The narrator enjoys his amnesia and while as reader I accompany his Yuppie lifestyle, I run with him through non-causal lists[1] of folders and files, lists of priorities, lists of errors, standardized lists, Ivy League

[1] Lists indicate a rational approach to gather and order matters of facts about the social system. Usually, the creative mind associatively groups representations, such as ideas, memories, emotions, impressions and other mental contents, and relates the grouped mental things as if they are a mobilé. Regroupings of the things or changes in one thing moves and changes the whole.

reading list A, matters-of-fact, rational thoughts, various perspectives, more facts, Ivy League reading list B – facts that are unrelated and removed from personal connotations.

The narrator's mind is caught up in this system of thought and he compares his impersonal limbic reactions to 'resembling' childhood memories: writing and working for the magazine and interacting with his colleagues in the office carries his mind back to emotions which lavishly flooded his young body while undergoing the American educational system. Hereafter, I am confined to this train of thought and only notice slight disruptions whenever I stumble over reminders of his past, amongst them death, leukemia, a brother, mothers, France, friends who support your decisions and with whom you can talk because they share your values (cf. 32) or the reminder that the silence around you signifies a loss, a voice and mind who has disappeared from your life (cf. 39). Finally, his general perseverance that the psychoanalytic session is not about children overhearing the parents having sex but the bullies on the schoolyards stands out (cf. 47). It alludes to the fact that functionally speaking, experiencing early schoolyard bullying and later power struggles at his work place have taken the place of finding solutions to conflicts in his family; his memories of relations and situations at home have withered away and effortless conditioning substituted their formative power.

"Les jeux sont faits" **(**69) – the loveless marriage, his wife's eventual emigration to France and his waiting for a phone call from Paris closes the pseudo-epistemological postmodern discussion of matters-of-fact. The pressing need to solve his domestic problems, to direct his life meaningfully, puts an end to the ahistorical presentation of the system the narrator generates in his mind. I think that the actual question is about finding the cause for his current loss of personality, and the questions itself indicates the move away from postmodern writing and towards researching life events that have been the reason for his chosen amnesia. So far, the narrator is not able to understand the causal dynamics at work in his life. Causality does not exist in the novel until the narrator is willing to think about the relationships which shaped his life. To the point when the narrator remembers his past, he observes effects and symptoms of past occurrences he is not willing to raise to consciousness. The man becomes aware of the reason of his present situation in the moment of remembering alone. The narrator's loved one is in France and no letter or call gives him the assurance that he is still in his former lover's mind. At first, the narrator cannot find the actual reason why his wife has left him and prefers to live in France. His present perception tells him that she left

him, her absence from his life is a fact not in-itself but in relation to him. Although there *could* be a bond of union between wife and husband, notwithstanding, the narrator's relationship to the woman ended and there is nothing that binds them together. I argue that she has removed herself from his life because the narrator represses memories of his dying mother. The unresolved conflict with and his inability to mourn his mother prevents a stable relationship to any woman. I think that this inference is the reason for the narrator's loneliness, and it emerges through understanding the relation between his present circumstances and his past.

The narrator meets Vicky, a woman out of flesh and blood, and she initiates a first lively glimpse into her own memorable childhood. Keeping this glimpse in mind, the upcoming fact that the narrator is at that point "no longer associated with the famous magazine" and starts a drug-binge to forget the disappointment is less daunting (107). Here, the narrator does not report or run through facts, he narrates Vicky's domestic situation in detail:

> As you resume your walk she describes the house in which she grew up. A rambling Tudor affair on the shore in Marblehead, which started out early in the century as a summer house and, despite the formal dining room, never quite lost its wet towel ambience. There were empty rooms to play in, and a closet alcove under the stairs which no one could enter without her permission. Pets galore. A gazebo where the four girls had tealess tea parties presided over by Vicky's eldest sister. Their father kept chicken in the boathouse and spent years trying to bring a vegetable patch to life. Every morning he woke up at five and went for a swim. Mother stayed in bed till her daughters and the pets gathered in her room. (McInerny 94)

Vicky takes time to tell her new acquaintance about her childhood home as she remembers it. She recalls the house in her memory and mentally walks through the rooms, and thereby, she talks about the architecture of her mind. She mentions each person's habitual activities in the house and recreates the familiar atmosphere in the conversation. Despite the adequate dining room, the four girls had access to rooms to play in freely, to indulge themselves in childish and leisurely dreams. The kind relationship between the parents and children proves to establish a happy domestic life. Mother and father shared family rituals with their children in the house, and over the years, her father brought the garden to life – keeping up her childhood memories, Vicky is endowed with a self that can relate to another person. Listening to her stories helps the narrator understand what is missing in his party life. Becoming aware of his exhilarating boosts and indescribably grim coming downs, the narrator captures the end of his excesses and the dawning confession – the party has ended.

I argue that the novel's turning point designates a shift away from the self-referential system the media system constructs. That linguistic system is the reason for

the narrator's initial epistemological and empirical uncertainty about the facts he gathers for his job and in his daily life. Caught up in this misleading web of signifiers, the narrator is lucky enough to rediscover the importance of ontology and the associative relation of ideas in his life. It is return of the protagonist's brother, who visits the narrator after he has spent months in urban anonymity, which finally reminds the narrator of his repressed family relations by asking him whether he would have married Amanda if their mother were still alive (McInerny 161). Consequently, the relation of ideas about his mother that he keeps in the unconscious return to consciousness – related memories (ideas) of his mother reappear to his mind by association. The memories initiate his reintegration into his family network, reinforce the alienation from the previous journalistic hunt for hard facts and free him from his addictive cravings. I believe that next to the reintroduction of cause and effect in life, the turning point – the returning memory of the dead mother – confronts the narrator with death as a factual reality of his life, which is, to borrow Hornung's word choice in "Postmodernism – post mortem. Death and the death of the novel" (1992), "itself the ineluctable reality", a reality whose consideration moves fiction out of postmodern conventions (Hornung 1992: 108). In choosing death as the actual fact of life marking the beginning of an existentialist mode of writing fiction, writing engages in thinking beyond the postmodern production of thought. In *Bright Lights Big City*, this is exactly what happens: The narrator becomes existentially aware of his life and the reality of experiencing loss and pain upon remembering it, the reality of the absent mother puts an end to his non-biographic postmodern mind set. The returning memory of his mother makes a difference and connects him to the real world again. The memory resurfaces his character and calls attention to his own existence in relation to his mother, as it replaces the self-referencing journalistic world by the reality of his mind.

Causally understanding the narrator's relationship to his mother, i.e., the relation of his memories of the loved one and the effect they have on his present life, guides the attention to what is in between the repressed memory of the painful situation of loss (the cause) and the present desolate emotional state and circumstances (the effect): The reason for his failed marriage is, on the one hand, the unconscious oedipal conflict with his mother and, on the other hand, the repressed fact that his mother's absence points to the tremendous loss the narrator had to live through. The void forces the narrator to regard his mother's death as an ineluctable fact in his life and mourning her necessarily involves a reconsideration of how his memories of his mother affect his present life.

The narrator's brother initiates the narrator's process of remembering: Due to the brother's question about the reason for the narrator's marriage, the narrator remembers his mother's demise by association. The appearance of related memories about his mother continues even after the immediate question. Upon remembering an imagery of the mother at the time of his birth and her death, he also recalls a conversation with his mother at the end of her life. When this particular dialog reverberates in his mind, their rapport comes into focus. Their resurfacing relation, in the broader sense that the attitude towards the dead mother can change in terms of the ideas, memories and thoughts the protagonist associates with her, initiates a transformation of his relationship to the deceased and the relationships he presently lives in. The brother's initial dialogical appeal to his autobiographic memory is therefore successful and starts a slow healing process.

After the brother's well-intended question his memories indeed come back to his mind in accordance to the intention of understanding and answering his brother's question (cf. McInerny 161). The memories do not return arbitrarily, yet, they do not appear in a mechanical or probable order, too; his mind associatively connects and orders his memories in a way that makes a proper answer to the brother's question possible. As said, the narrator had forgotten and repressed whatever he associates with his mother's painful death – I think that his brother's visitation, his physical appearance and questioning naturally introduces repressed memories to the narrator's mind. The process of remembering is dialogical because only dialogical communication can overcome repression of painful memories: The narrator immediately recalls conversations with and about the relationship to his mother, but soon after he also remembers her suffering and eventual death.

The dialog with his brother initiates an association of ideas, in this case, the association of memories, and it links them with respect to the underlying causality. It turns out that the object-relationship between the narrator and his mother is strong, too, and the causally connected mental contents, which pertain to their relationship, return in a quick and easy succession. Solving his inner conflict regarding his mother is, in fact, uncomplicated. The mother to whom he related as if she were merely an inner object comes into focus as a subject.

> You always thought your mother was the last Puritan.
> "Have you slept with a lot of girls?"
> "Mom, really," you said.
> "Come on. What's to hide? I wish I'd known a long time ago that I was going to die. We could've gotten to know each other a lot better. There's much we don't know."

> "Okay, there have been some girls."
> "Really?" She lifted her head up from the pillow.
> "Mother, I'm not going into details.."
> "Why not?"
> "It's, well, embarrassing."
> "I wish people wouldn't waste their time being embarrassed. I wish I hadn't. So tell me what it's like." (McInerney 165)

In the remembered conversation, mother and son discuss his sexual interests. She directs his attention towards the unresolved oedipal complex, which blocks the possibility to attract and find a woman who shows serious interest in him and is even willing to make sacrifices for the relationship. That way, he understands the reason why he married a woman who only showed superficial interest in him and would not prioritize the relationship. It inspires an easy transition in his life in the sense that the content of the memory, which returns in line with his brother's initial question, reconfigures his intellectual world. His mind does not produce journalistic chains of signifiers anymore but autobiographically related ideas and memories – an observation that also indicates the end of his job as a fact checker. He eventually understands the unfortunate causality at work: the conflict with his mother blocks the expression of his grief, his marriage fails because the repressed object-relation to his mother, his utterly irrational desire obstructs a kind attitude to any other woman.

At that time, the narrator revisits the last dialog with his mother. He remembers the personal conversation about the reminiscence of his mother's birth pain, her screams and wreath about the birth pain, her son's first breath and his reluctance to be born into this world. He remembers what both remember about the event. The attitude towards his mother changes retrospectively and conflictive object-relations do not obstruct the narrator's love to the deceased, to himself and new partners any longer. I accentuate that this reading propagates a psychoanalytic understanding of intergenerational family relationships and signifies the turn from a focus on matter-of-fact, such as the facts the narrator collects and lists as a fact checker and journalist, to the autobiographically structured relations of memories and ideas. It is thus that before the late turning point, the novel is utterly postmodern, whereas the very last part emphasizes the protagonist's autobiographical background and turns towards a post-postmodern novel.

Bright Lights Big City accompanies the protagonist's process of remembering again what he has tried to forget about his past, thus invoking a promising healing process in his life. The narrator becomes aware of the fact that suppressing his painful memories had detrimental effects on his life. "I tried to block her [his mother] out of

my mind. But I think I owe her to remember" (McInerney178). He has to consciously remember her in order to start over again and slowly learn how to live life without her (cf. 182). The novels ends putting this hope of ending his crisis into words. On the last page, the narrator takes off the sunglasses which have shielded his over-sensitive eyes from the rays of the sun after an intoxicating night in the club. After accepting his mother's death as a fact of his life, and after healing his mind from the oedipal conflict by remembering alone, the narrator leaves Plato's allegorical cave and is able to look beyond the illusion of reality, the social constructions and systems of thought he invoked as a journalist and deemed to be true. The question whether "it is possible to change in this life" like "Plato's pilgrims climbing out of the cave, from the shadow world of appearances toward things as they really are" is answered with hope (McInerny 92). The novel is remarkably successful, yet, it does not show how the narrator actually transforms his life style. I conclude that in terms of literary style, this short novel ends where Hustvedt's later novels are about to begin: The character's memories of loss and death and the psychoanalytically understood entanglements with the deceased are the incentive that drives the narrative of *The Sorrows of an American*, *The Shaking Woman* and *The Blazing World* from the first page onwards.

In her essays and novels, Siri Hustvedt reconsiders American literary conventions in order to find her way out of the postmodern belief system. Other writers have also been aware that the postmodern system of thought confronts them with problems that obstruct developing new narrative strategies through an autobiographical understanding of a person's life. Wallace is aware that – just as McInerny's narrator exemplifies – postmodern conceptions of reality do not support a mind that remembers well; the drawback is, however, that Wallace does not research the possibilities to exit it through autobiographical work with memories. Nevertheless, his points of criticism are of concern to my view upon contemporary literature: I argue that in the analysis of one of his speeches, the novelist and essayist David Foster Wallace successfully points to the most severe issues of postmodern writing, liberates himself from it and helps establish the deviant post-postmodern systems of thought. Because Wallace frames post-postmodern thinking by pointing out its major points of contention, I turn attention to his thoughts before discussing Franzen.

Wallace's first novel *The Broom in the System* (1987) offers a productive philosophical reading, primarily on the topic of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical*

Investigations, published in 1953, and *Infinite Jest* (2006), like Franzen's *Freedom,* takes additional recourse to philosophical existentialism (Dulk 2016). Both works are post-postmodern and critical about postmodern mentality. Wallace's speech "This is Water", held in 2005, is particularly explicit about his critique of the contemporary system of thought: two young fish meet an older fish, and the older asks the two younger fish: "'Morning, boys, how's the water?' The young fish swim on for a bit, eventually one of them looks over at the other and asks: "What the hell is water?'" (Wallace: Commencement 2005). Wallace rightly assumes that children and teenagers who were born and raised in the midst of shallow monetary values are unlikely to metonymically perceive the matching capitalist system as such. Wallace insinuates that the simple question has additional implications. In his speech, he advances that today's automatic capitalist productions of thought have nothing to do with liberal arts' automatic writing experiments of the 1960s and 1970s: the former are delusional and without informative value about our world. He criticizes that unrelated self-perception leads the ego to the hallucination that it is on Center Stage in this universe, its "*absolute* center" (Commencement 2005). He further infers that overly intellectual college education gets easily lost in rational argumentation and might produce an endless interior monolog that does not relate to the world or takes part in conversations. The hypnotized and servile ego automatically learns to construct meaning from list-like chains of signifiers and forgets to consider the signified life experience. From Wallace's perspective, the educated American comes to the verge of lunacy and death by boredom, dismal thought and frustrations of the body.

Wallace is the hallmark of post-postmodern writing as he points to the issues of his time precisely and communicates a better way of living, yet, he does not show a way out of the system he criticizes. Although Wallace does not want students to think that their inner experience is a reproduction of social conventions, he only vaguely speaks about the deadening effects of the disappointing reality the students must bear as adults. His philosophical advice to live as if there is infinity and unity in the universe, that the students should decide on what to worship and how to live, how to think and what to sacrifice, and that these students can be aware of their relation to the world although they are, from then on, shamelessly exposed to Walmart's inflationary designs and the future work-place's demand to function in the system, is his desperate attempt to turn towards an existentialist world view. Wallace tragically prognosticates that it is "unimaginatively hard" to exert the necessary will power and imagination to stay alive,

day in and day out, in this kind of situation (Commencement 2004). Wallace, who commits suicide in 2008, leaves his readers puzzled about ways to think about life and enact an existentialist point of view in their lives in the United States. Although the writer's essay genuinely declares monologism, rationalism, egotism, alienation and consumerism the key problems of his time, Wallace has not solved his feelings of alienation, he does not map out how to avoid the commercialization of life through a turn to the existentialist world view he outlines correctly. I believe that the issues raised can improve through autobiographical research. Because working with unconscious memories is dialogical, it abolishes monologism, because it brings emotional and relational dynamics to consciousness it counters rationalism, and alienation declines the moment a person sees memories reflected in current perceptions of ongoing life situations. In the course of this dissertation, I argue that the problems and symptoms Wallace speaks about find remedy through Hustvedt's narrative work with memories.

Like Wallace and McInerny, Jonathan Franzen's turns his back on postmodern strategies by returning to existential questions in his acclaimed novel *The Corrections* (2001), his essay "Why Bother?", published in 1996, and his most famous novel *Freedom* (2010). In "Why Bother?", Franzen's contemporary answers to the existential questions Sartre poses in *What is literature?*, published in 1947, are meant to encompass post-postmodern arguments and problems such as the balkanization of post-postmodern theory[2] and he investigates post-postmodern lives against the background of an existentialist framework. The essay, which is theoretically concomitant to *Freedom*, reveals postmodernism's failure to solve the issues it raises but I think that *Freedom*, a novel of ideas aspiring to enact Freud's and Sartre's world of thought, has still no complete answer to the mainly relational and emotional problems his characters face. Although Franzen portrays which early life experiences lead to the characters' later mental problems or problems in life successfully and therefore takes part in the reintroduction of characters in American literature, he does not investigate feasible narrative solutions to the problem's causes.

His characters are entangled in the mistakes and repetitions of the past without the knowledge of how to correct them in writing. *Freedom* is a novel that studies the post-postmodern living conditions, but it does not encourage a thorough view upon his

[2] The problematic fragmentation of theory according to assumed social groups.

characters' memories, allowing them to work through difficult life events in order to dig out unconscious emotional blockages. In *Freedom*, Franzen resituates the protagonists and couple Patty and Walter with existentialist and psychoanalytic expertise in a family constellation and stages their personal crises and eventual separation deftly. Yet, I think that the male and female position is not elaborated in an empowering manner. The problems between husband and wife remain obscure, the two characters think and act crudely on grounds of their unresolved inner conflicts. And even though Patty writes a fictional autobiographical text to capture her precarious mental state, she is unable to work through her emotion. The problem is that there are no narrative strategies which research precisely which unconscious memories cause her present precarious mental states. Such an approach would entail the structural representation of Patty's and Walter's key life events which are the cause for their later relational conflicts such as Patty's disappointing conversation with her father after she has been sexually harassed. It would also require a possibility to come to terms with her father's ignorance of the harassment by re-writing what had happened.

The obscurity of cause and effect between present situations and those of the characters' past are symptomatic for Franzen's post-postmodern novels. In contrast, life writing as it attempts to overcome crisis depends on a very clear connection between the causal relations of troubling past and present situations in a character's life. The genre of life writing enjoys the advantage of gaining some independence from literary eras. Era-specific writing like post-postmodern writing mirrors how technological and economic progress is reflected in a person's course of life to the degree that we arrive at a description how a society undergoes further modernization. Seeing the facets of modernization reflected in fictional or non-fictional autobiographies quickly raises the awareness of how the lived experience of the individual, her ability to experience the basic ideas of human existence and identity, is put at risk and fosters alienation. Whereas post-postmodernism still reacts to the changes that come along with technological change and economic progress, life writing develops its narrative techniques by working with autobiographical reflection.

In life writing, the stress is no longer on economic structures but on a study of the path dependency and laws of family history, and life writing is no expression of the common systems of thought. It is more optimistic about overcoming life crisis in writing by engaging with personal memories and their inherited fabric in an individual as they stretch over generations. Hustvedt consistently represents the female perspective in that

context. Establishing female voices proves to be significant to better exhaust the possibilities of working with personal memories. Therefore, I consider Siri Hustvedt a writer who writes in the post-postmodern era but goes beyond post-postmodernism by developing narrative techniques which allow for an improvement of narrators' or characters' life situations. For example, in *The Shaking Woman*, *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World*, Hustvedt employs narrative strategies which help the character bring memories of harmful feeling states to consciousness for therapeutic purposes. Such literary work with autobiographical memory is only possible if literary language ceases to primarily contemplate economic changes in an individual's life but reflects the person's ability to work through memories through literary. I thus want to show that language can creatively represent what a narrator or character perceives and remembers. In case of distressing or traumatizing memory, literature must be able to reflect the incident in writing and work with the memory imprint it left behind.

In life writing, characters must rearrange their relationships and roles, and they must process autobiographical memory related to loss. When a character loses a loved one, a deliberate work with key autobiographical memories is necessary to deal with the complicated life situation. Because of the significance of death and loss in the genre of life writing, I discuss the experience of death and mourning in Siri Hustvedt's writing in the next section.

1.5. Focus on Family Relations – The Experience of Death

The three books I chose to interpret in the course of this dissertation begin with the experience of losing a close relative. *The Shaking Woman* begins narrating "When my father died, I was home in Brooklyn…" (1) and *The Sorrows of an American* starts recounting "I've come to understand that it was a time not of what was there but what wasn't" (1). Death is indeed a literary motif and the starting point of the story lines because being confronted with their own death or the death of a loved one, the characters' lives are bound to be subject to fundamental changes. The crisis demands vital character development and gives me the chance of researching how the non-fictional and autofictional writers and artists work with memories of the deceased to improve and direct their future living conditions. The literary motif is therefore crucial for developing my thesis. Often, the characters move on slowly by processing their relationship to the dead to make a new scope of action in life possible. I want to show that along the way, they project thus far unconscious feeling states associated with the

dead person on other people, confront these emotions or striking bodily experiences, and must learn to mitigate and transform their effects.

Taking up the motif again, the first pages of *The Blazing World* refer to the by then dead protagonist Harriet Burden in the fictional introduction and take up her husband's prior death in the first chapter (cf. 1, cf. 13). The plot then aims to comprehend the dead people's lives and makes sense of the secrets, unanswered questions and unresolved memories they left behind. It is important that work with memories of the deceased is supposed to give the life of the mourner a favorable direction and helps them tackle their life crises. I argue that doing so has a healing effect on those involved and finally allows them to go on with their life as well as they can. In Hustvedt's writing, men die earlier than women and it is not surprising that the reader mostly accompanies daughters, mothers and widows through the difficult process of mourning the companion and rearranging their lives in the course of remembering what has been lost. This motif reoccurs in various shapes and forms, and as a reader I feel their urgency of being able to overcome crises.

Mourning primarily entails working with memories, as in memories alone the dead person exists. *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Shaking Woman* were both written in immediate response to the death of the author's father. Yet, whereas the former talks about the time of mourning and experiencing loss fictionally, the latter primarily contextualizes the neurologically interesting and troubling shaking fit, which complicated the author's life two years after her father had died. It is, in part, caused by a conflict that has to do with a family experience. The novel integrates the father's actual memoir into the plotline whereas Hustvedt's autobiography is an epistemological discourse whose key passages refer to domestic situations that shape the author's life. The father's death and the shaking fit are processed in the course of the novel and autobiography so as to carry the mind through the emotionally challenging time of grief and to find a way to change the mind such that the shaking subsides respectively.

As I begin my interpretation of the three selected books with Hustvedt's autobiography, I work against the chronology of their publication: The publication of *The Sorrows of an American* precedes the publication of Hustvedt's autobiography *The Shaking Woman* by two years. The autobiographical motif is significant for the autofictional novel, too: Other than the novel, whose plotline is supplemented by a memoir Hustvedt's father has written at the end of his life, the writing of *The Shaking Woman* draws on the author's own memories and reminiscences. Although the death of

her father is not the dominant theme in this book, the loss strongly encourages writing about her memories of family relations, relations which cause her shaking fit. In the book, Hustvedt investigates her irrational and vehement shaking fit. The invocation and movement of autobiographical images and objects she remembers parallels an interdisciplinary analysis of Hustvedt's shaking fit and frames her interdisciplinary approach to handling the shaking fit, too. And yet, I think that it is the art of autobiographically remembering within the broader context of loss and mourning which allows for a proper scholarly diagnosis.

Thinking about the death of a father continues in the interpretation of *The Sorrows of an American*. The siblings Inga and Erik read and work through paternal memories, the process of mourning the deceased gains vivacity as the younger generation responds emotionally to the old man's memoir, to the mental remains of the person who has disappeared from their lives. Furthermore, the novel repeatedly focuses on other characters in mourning, characters who suffer from a tremendous loss and who try to find a way back into their lives. *The Sorrows of an American* portrays these characters as they are in rapport with the psychoanalyst Erik. Insights into his psychoanalytic practice as well as his personal struggles admit of a dialogical access to his own unconscious memories. His therapeutic conversations reveal the dialogic organization of his relationships, which are in an uproar after his father's funeral. Loss is likewise reflected in the protagonist's family situation, and after his father's death, Erik is thus stuck in a state of painful loneliness and boredom. Erik is a very concerned and interested psychoanalyst, yet, he has troubles to relate to his patients effectively and to connect with the people in his life joyfully anymore. He consorts with maltreated characters whose conspicuous agitation is either caused or revealed by emotionally upsetting circumstances. A closer look at the way Erik relates to his patients and family members in times of grief is worthwhile because the way he engages with others, his failures of communicating smoothly, informs us about the ways he fails to transform his feelings of grief.

I conclude with an unusual narrative twist. In my last example, a character mourning her dead husband is just as well liberated from his omnipresent success and forced to research the cause of his predominance in their marriage. *The Blazing World* is set into motion after the protagonist Harriet Burden loses her father and her husband. Burden mourns and grieves, but what surfaces is not only sadness for lost loved ones but rage and frustration in sight of the injustices she has experienced in these two

unequal relationships. It is interesting that Burden's close research of this aspect of her inner reality is connected to the existential experience of death in her life. I think that it implies that yet again, mourning opens doors to research of autobiographically significant emotions and memories. Such research tries to understand the emotional relationship to the deceased from a scholarly and scientific perspective through a study of how it is represented in the memories of the deceased that gain new significance after the person died. The novel unveils the systematically organized exercise of male power Burden has first experienced in her family and left an imprint on her memories.

Burden takes the chance and studies what has happened in her personal life on a social scale. In contrast to the previously introduced books, *The Blazing World* is thus, primarily, a novel which researches collective patterns of perceiving social situations and interactions, which are personally reflected in her memories of her relationship to her father. Perceptions in the public sphere correlate with attitudes she has experienced in the domestic sphere. Burden argues that inauspicious perception causes an adverse representation of and attitude towards the other. It provokes off-putting thoughts and opinions about women, old people or people of color whose automatic instantiation is due to learned unconscious structures and rests on inflexible patterns of socialization. The systematically generated expectations predetermine and obstruct her development and success as an artist. Because Burden successfully guides the reader into and out of these confining expectations and yet remains true to the aesthetic ingenuity a reader hopes to experience, the novel is a very rare literary masterpiece: *The Blazing World* offers a patent solution to unconsciously active conceptual perception and in that way, the novel's political format is emphatic about its immediate relation to our social reality. Unfortunately, Burden's research begins with the death of her husband and ends with her own.

The experience of trauma and death in Hustvedt's writing resurfaces the need to reflect the reality of these experiences in literature. It spurs the need and research of her strategies to embed the respective memories of these events in her books, and most of all, of finding ways to continue the plot despite the effect the unsettling memories have on the psychological state of the person suffering from trauma and loss. Hustvedt's writing is not the only instance of this effort and is rather emblematic for the emergence of the genre of life writing. On the one hand, it heralds a new attitude towards questions of human existence that result from our capacity to remember, and on the other hand, it is a movement which must defend its goals against those pursuing opposing commercial

interests. The genre encompasses literature whose work with memories takes more liberal forms and shapes but aims to answer the need to reconsider the determinate effect of memories on life prospects. Living according to this insight and correcting memories to improve life prospects is not an easy endeavor. In the next chapter, I discuss the development of the genre of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine to provide a theoretical and methodological background for the analysis of fictional and non-fictional autobiographical memories and experiences in Hustvedt's writing.

2. Life Writing and Life Sciences/Narrative Medicine

Today's liberal societies grant writers the possibility to give credit to new sophisticated discourses that engage in resourceful interdisciplinary dialogs. Today the humanities and sciences find common ground and writers like Siri Hustvedt contributed to and benefitted from the exchange of knowledge between the two realms of research and writing. That is possible because previous thinkers have dismantled an overarching master narrative, whose basic ideas and terms everyone had accepted and progressed. The plurality of voices Hustvedt develops in her essays, in *The Blazing World* and in *The Shaking Woman* are the result of her encompassing and impressive interdisciplinary work. Her writing cultivates voices with different points of view and various ways of understanding the world. The resulting approaches to the world are sometimes polarized but not scattered, sometimes they may even correlate. There is common scientific background knowledge, a medical perspective is present in her works and ensures coherence. In this way, complex semantic levels can emerge from the lively and often oppositional interaction of her characters.

I think that Hustvedt's related plurality of interdisciplinary voices counters the fragmentation of thought because it brings different literary and theoretical perspectives together without eliminating diversity. The integration of the disciplines is, in that regard, an important step towards progressing the emerging literary discourse of our time. I think that a closer look at life sciences and narrative medicine improve the understanding of characters in contemporary life writing because it shows how their use of language and work with memories helps them consciously direct their own development on the level of the plot. That is significant because the books I read are relevant to understand particular paths of life, too. Given that aim, the life sciences contribute scientific knowledge and points of view to the study of literary, whereas narrative medicine combines life writing and life sciences: It makes sure that the motif of healing is in the forefront of my research interest. The concatenation of life sciences, life writing, and narrative medicine contributes an eclectic interdisciplinary voice to the understanding of the contemporary literary discourse, and it integrates scientific and scholarly approaches aiming to appreciate human life through autobiographical writing.

2.1. Life Writing

Guiding thoughts and narratives of our time revolve around the perennial question of what it means to be human. David Foster Wallace posed the question in the 1990s, and the question is still relevant today (Wallace: 1993). Although people today are, as Hustvedt says, "drowning in answers" to that question, I think that an interdisciplinary approach to it supports eclectic literary inquiries which want to find supportive answers (2012: ix). Hustvedt's autobiography and novels with an autobiographical motif add a significant intellectual and creative aspect to the field of research I have roughly outlined above. Precisely, I think that research of how narratives organize and present memories, how a person can make use of conscious and unconscious mental processes through writing, contributes significant answers to the question of what it means to be human. Working with memories while we read, write and talk, is of existential importance in moments of crisis, and life writing can thrive in the exact moment a writer and reader start to work with them and experience new spectra of human life.

In the process of reflecting on life writing, joining the dots of previous and contemporary answers leads me to an understanding of autobiographical memories and the perceptions they stem from, because the fact that every person lives in and enacts early memories is true for everyone. I think that particular approaches to memories and perceptions are fundamental characteristics of a culture. I think that developing approaches to change life patterns is an endeavor to which many disciplines and the arts may contribute. Yet, I think that life writing is particularly resourceful because it can present life stories over longer stretches of time and make the crucial situations available to the reader's eye. Life writing becomes prominent because it captures experiences many people share in one or in overlapping cultural environments. Demonstrating how a person can change underlying and unwanted master narratives deliberately on account of working with memories is therefore just as relevant to many readers, too.

Today's advantage is that the contemporary canon of values accepts liberal ways of living life, even if it may be fragile in some settings. Whereas literature of previous centuries may have dealt with the limitations of coercive situations, the liberal mind-set that is common in many urban centers and some regions makes such plotlines and storylines possible in the first place. The autonomous way Hustvedt's female characters learn to modify their life, the way they can think anew about their relationships is surely a product of a generation who has fought for equality and liberal lifestyles over decades. To carve out the emergence of life writing and relate it to the cultural progress it was

dependent on, I want to write about the evolution of the genre and focus on its approach to memories in the coming section.

2.1.1. Prominence of Genre: Memoir Boom

The following section builds upon research of the evolution of American autobiographies and then focuses on contemporary research critics have advanced since the 1980s and early 1990s. In this manner, they researched the rise of the comprehensive genre of life writing, which also affected our renewed concern for the humanities. Up till now, critics concerned with autobiography as an important mode of writing and contribute literary theory on the narrative invocation of memories. This focus will be of key importance to establish life writing as an enabling genre. Life writing is thereby understood as writing which chooses an autobiographic or biographic point of view or motif in authentic writing or autofiction. The forms of writing and representation include different media and perspectives in life which do not follow a coherent chronological representation of sequential life events (cf. Hornung 2015: 38). This greater narrative flexibility of the genre answers the need to choose and work with the most poignant memories as to overcome relational or emotional crises.

Understanding the development of the genre contributes greatly to the development of my thesis as it contextualizes the three books which are subject of my analysis. Studying the genre of life writing provides the possibility to research how the life of narrators and characters, for example in Hustvedt's writing, are guided by crucial memory and perceptual patterns. Furthermore, it supports my argument by explaining why the narrator's and character's mental processes, which involve their personal memories, social perception and their private and work relationships, dominate contemporary writing and research in the field. To argue that contemporary writing significantly changes the conventions of writing about life, I draw on the historical development of writing autobiographies. Hornung points to the prevalent American historical periods, which I can, in the next step, further divide into literary eras.

> Paralleling the double experiential and analytical nature of the autobiographical structure, two historical periods can be distinguished. The first period spans the time from the settlement to the political constitution of the American nation. The second period is that of modernism, which begins shortly after the Civil War and reaches well into the 20th century. Two concepts of reality conform with these two periods, that of a guaranteed reality and that of an intrinsically consistent reality. The reality which was formerly guaranteed by the belief in God and/or the American nation gives way to metaphysical doubts and allows or forces the individual to construct his reality according to a pattern of consistency. Thus the earlier ontological function of the autobiographical in the national constitution phase changes into the existential one in modernism. (1989: 202)

Hornung makes us aware that autobiographies written in Early America differ with regards to their experiential and intellectual qualities from those drafted after the American Constitution due to major political and structural changes. The existential inquiries of modernist thinkers have replaced ontological approaches to the meaning and goal of pious ways of living. It is the aim of this study to assert Hornung's anticipation of the dawn of a third historical period. Life writing, which often begins its narrative in the moment of crisis, establishes a means to overcome it. In terms of narrative strategies, new themes and methods, it enriches literature at large. Hornung states that "autobiography will come to the aid" of literature. It progresses the increasing psychologically oriented narrative study of memories to finally reconfigure them in ways that negotiate former conflicts of interests (1989: 222). The underlying argument is that autobiographical strategies as they connect "life and writing", precisely the current "existence in time" as an actual or fictional writer who recalls former "actual experiences in the act of writing", indulge in and experiment with modes that exploit with the possibilities to creatively recombine psychic contents (Hornung 1985: 72). That way the genre of life writing expands its scope of autobiographical action.

In this chapter I argue that American autobiographical writing and biographical understanding have initially been an instrument to depict a political or spiritual path in a new society and have then moved inwards towards the description of the psychological growth in life. The emerging genre of life writing now points to the need to represent and influence inner life to manage the years ahead – life writing is a method of capturing what happened and a strategy to direct what will happen. In that sense, this chapter ponders on the possibilities to give voice to the inner reality as it progresses in life writing. For example, in *The Sorrows of an American*, Erik's father's felling of trees is no longer a biographical process of great mastery over nature and contribution to commercial progress, but an almost compulsory abreaction of emotion he cannot tolerate. And at a point in time when not every man can fell trees to manage emotion, the person must find new ways to cope with it. The historical view will show that this has to do with environmental factors – glorious adventures in a mapped out country are hardly possible, and the writer settles constraints of living not by trying to go to places unknown but by working with constraining issues she keeps in her mind.

In the colonial period immigrants wrote various texts with autobiographical information – among them diaries and letters – in context of the westward expansion of

European setters. The textualization of the conquest parallels their religious forthcoming, striving and attempt to confer with God (Imbarrato 2008). In Early America, autobiographies represented important stages of personal development and events, a career or religious path in life. Alike, autobiographies would often contain emphasis on political and historical issues and topics, next to questions of spiritual growth. Whenever the writer elucidated family welfare, himself within the emerging American culture, or himself in relation to religious authorities and powers, the writer involuntarily captured the state of evolution of that respective period of the early American culture (cf. Imbarrato: 395-8). Broadly speaking, psychological connections and an analysis of the modes of inner action did not excite the writers' curiosity. These facets of interior human reality went more or less unnoticed until the end of the 19th century, when realism, notably Henry James, became more and more indebted to what we call today psychological realism. The turn inwards, to the inner private life was only possible after efforts to build the nation, and once the countrymen familiarized and accustomed themselves to the evolving society – efforts Susan Clair Imbarrato subsumes under the terms "migration, settlement, rebellion and nation building" (cf. 413). As soon as the country was leveled and adjusted, they could implement a lifestyle allowing for or forcing upon them time for self-reflection and pave the way for self-expression common in life writing.

Once American autobiographers set forth on a journey into subjectivity of the world of their memories, they were able to correspond about the "frame of mind of a whole generation", a mentality which indispensably presupposes a shared upbringing and experience, and therefore a certain state of social and national modernization (Hornung 1992: 405). Simultaneously, technological revolutions asked artists to compete with new methods of representing social realities. Inventions like photography and later, film, would question the hitherto known representative aspirations of art and inspired artists to improve the depiction of the deeper realms of the human mind instead. When modernist autobiographers increasingly described their private thoughts, individual mental activities and psychologically important events, the field opened to the invention of new writing strategies. The role of the writer was now more closely aligned to those of the artist rather than the historian. When they mastered their memories on paper, just as life writers like Siri Hustvedt do today, the artist made allowance for exercising their creativity rather than adhering to a historical mode of writing autobiographies. The rise of psychology and psychoanalysis, lending its support

to philosophy's inquiry of the mind, further encouraged the fascination with our interior realms and signified the interest in understanding mental, emotive and behavioral crises in light of unconscious drives and desires. The path the genre took is still reflected in Hustvedt's psychologically versatile narratives and characters.

The industrial and technological business world dominated the 20th century and marginalized the art of writing in general (cf. 1989: 211). Nevertheless, in the 1950s and 1960s, an anti-bourgois sentiment had an immense influence on the mainstream and only in the 1980s did Yuppies celebrate a life-style that was closely tied to the interests of the market-economy and world of finance. The created capitalist society became a closed system in which entropy was increasing and the conducted processes were irreversible. The artistic and cultural world, with its potentially free flow of energy and reversibility, has been marginalized and only survived in specialized groups. The discrepancies between the advocates for business interests and those proclaiming an aestheticized life grew as the cultural achievements of the art world were more and more absorbed and coopted by business and the commercialization of every single aspect of life could not be prevented (cf. Hornung 1992: 411). The capitalist usurpation of the art world, a course of action straightforwardly addressed in *The Blazing World*, lays bare the disharmony within upper class in America. The creative heads felt overpowered, their life-style was in danger and at odds with the incentives of the market-economy. "The former global concept of culture had been reduced to a practice of art" (Hornung 1989: 204) and in postmodernism, even those fringes were under attack.

Despite the incredulity on behalf of many scholars and writers, in high postmodernism of the 1960s and 1970s, autobiographies written along postmodern conventions coincide with autobiographical texts complying with the standards of the genre, which deviate from those of the era (cf. Hornung 1997: 221). And as early as the 1980s to the early 1990s, a number of authors reconnected with ideas and theory advocating alternatives to the conventions and norms suggested and distributed via mass media. The autobiographical motifs, in general, elicit a historical perspective which closely entangles the conditions of family history and the personalities it brought forth. Today the genre of life writing seeks to overcome outdated narrative traditions – not to replace them by strategies resembling processes advanced in capitalist environments but to progress cultural techniques for the sake of living and life processes. Whereas postmodern autobiographies evoke the problem of self-representation in language and deconstruct the authorial voice, plotline and character

development, in the genre of life writing fictional and non-fictional writers try to extract truthful connections and emotion from the study of autobiographical memories. In life writing the close analysis of memories and experiences is of primary importance and even though memories are not always believable their emotional value is. The confidence that the author represents her memories, emotion and relational structure as truthful as possible, while accepting the undeniable dimming of past events, offers the reader and critic the possibility to analyze social forces and patterns which govern the life of the person. The events and strands of her life are, in that case, not random but give voice to powers at work in that particular life.

Due to the liberal culture writers enjoy in the US, authors are less embedded in guiding tradition and convention, the writer can decide for herself how to connect life events to form a meaningful plot (cf. Hornung 1992: 405). I assume that narrative connections, creating a chronology of one's life, are an act of artistic intention and invention, a way to re-enact and aestheticize life retrospectively, a way to entangle events and plotlines meaningfully – in life writing this process often begins in the middle of life when the narrator experiences crises (cf. 1997: 225). Burden's fictional diary entries, for example, sincerely configure what was only prefigured in the experienced situations according to the standards and liberty of the genre of life writing. Her process of writing allows for necessary active engagement with her life and defies alienation. Following this line of thought, thinking and writing about life is one of the possible and necessary cultural techniques to deepen, reengage with and redirect one's life. Without such advances and mental work, life cannot fully unfold itself in the past and future. Life writing is, at that time, not comparable to what has happened in the daily situation but includes the process of reworking and transforming memories. Hornung further specifies the mediation and discrepancy between real life and the narrative, more precisely the imitation of lived situations in a literary text (1989: 199). Life writing fashions a well-elaborated plot whose temporal, spatial and causal nexus becomes evident retrospectively.

Accordingly, the conscious play with autobiographical memories helps researching and shaping new life structures in life writing. This is necessary when a character experiences crises and must reconsider life goals in the in the middle years of life. The play of consciousness, the representation of the stages of life and the field we inhabit in each phase of our life, form a dramatic dynamic pattern which an author can act out and then grasp in a text. Taking up Paul Ricoeur, Hornung accentuates that the

initial situation, which the author plans to represent in writing, is full of gaps, and the "inevitable gaps in the configuration of the plot", more precisely the invisible forces and powers at work in any prefigured situation, slip our attention and ordinary perceptual faculties (1992: 405). The author is thus asked to fill the gaps and convert the incomplete reports into a full-fledged narrative which discloses what was hidden. Filling the gaps is not an invention but a move towards a deeper view into reality. I reiterate that almost each dramatic act and impulse set on a life stage, i.e., in a prefigured situation, which the writer then configures in a written narrative, will motivate reconfiguration[3]. In Hustvedt's writing she or her fictional life writers will carry the experiential pattern, which she has reorganized in writing, back into her life: once narrators have become aware of the remembered power relation to their father in autobiographical writing, they will enact the template differently in their life afterwards. Burden, for example, finds a partner who is not a competitor but a companion. The plot, in this act of reconfiguration, inspires and regulates life processes of the author and, I want to add, possibly of readers of that sequence of events. Hornung asserts that this translation of life's drama into literary texts and the performance of narrative in life require a theory of life writing (cf. 1989: 201).

I infer that action can be "dramatized in the mind" without standing on stage (1989: 209). Unconscious memories of structures and emotion can then engage consciousness. These acts of literary dramatization, like the fictional dramatization of mourning in *The Sorrows of an American*, are sometimes more forceful in fiction than in autobiography. Fiction allows for authorial experimentation with character constellations and events, so that the underlying emotion creates the plot necessary to express itself. If reading a literary text activates emotion which play a significant role in life or have played a role in a person's past, this fictional text can express autobiographical truth on an emotional level. The text does not represent the *interactions* the author has lived through but an *emotion* the author has experienced. In the following chapter the research question of transgressing the borderlines between autobiographical or biographical portrayal and fiction examines the possibilities to bargain the flexibility of fiction in a historical person's autobiographic development: Life writing permits a free exploration of emotional truth to encourage working through

[3] Hornung also connected Ricoeur's terms prefiguration, configuration and refiguration with the historical periods of puritanism, modernism and postmodernism. The forms therefore mirror the stages of developing acculturated narratives and configuring them over time (1992).

memory and therefore includes autofictional accounts with an autobiographical subtext or motif. Escapist tendencies, however, try to invent plotlines to circumvent the appearance of difficult memories and emotion to consciousness and thus prevent an affirmative character development – they are not part of my study.

Life writing invents new paths of life in moments of crises by working through life experiences of the past and rearranging them. In the next section, I discuss the necessity of transgression in life writing in that context. I will show that making changes to established life patterns possibly requires the courage to transgress expected formalities of literary writing, such as mixing fact and fiction without a loss of credibility. For example, Hustvedt's autofiction does not comply with formalities such as keeping fact and fiction apart in order to make new plot lines possible. Additionally, characters and narrators suffering from mental disorders make readers of life writing aware of the fact that transgressing the limits of sanity can evoke creativity and question the paradigm of rationality in modern society. As well, the next section analyzes how explicitly recounting the story of patients suffering from mental disorders transgresses the idea of normalcy and opens a discourse to find proper remedy.

2.1.2. Trangression and Illness Narrative

In the absence of hope and the absolute, a god who inhabits a person's conscience and daily inner monologs has died and with it the fear of being punished for wrongdoings. Nietzsche famously announced God's death in *The Gay Science*, and with God, truth and the demand for the obedience to his law has subsided (cf. Nietzsche: § 125, cf. Hornung 1994: 230). Further accelerated by modernism, there is a general disobedience to and transgression of old conventions and order in any area of life, society, system or sub-system. For example, people and corporations love sexual transgression as a means of liberation, entertainment and sales drivers. In the late 20th century, transgressions may have been taken to extremes, so that the dissolution of limits and borderlines renders more transgressions impossible. In that context, I will not be able to encompass Michel Foucault's famous "A Preface to Transgression" (1977) in depth and can only carve out ideas as far as they help us elaborate on the ongoing argument. Foucault bespeaks sexuality and the death of God, consciousness in relation to unconsciousness and the profanation of the sacred. These elements of thought are interrelated in the sense that they give each other a push. Whether the norms and limits of sexuality are in fact transgressed or whether the respective discourses have only built up and proliferated is

a question I cannot address in due form. What I can say is that there is, at the very least, a correspondence between an intensifying prudishness and the need to overcome it impulsively (cf. 32). In Hustvedt's writing characters and narrators transgress social norms that are mostly more subtle and do not meet the eye at first sight. In any case, the reexamination of social and personal boundaries are a factor that drives the plotline.

Foucault embeds the thought into the psychoanalytically informed mind set of his time but concludes that Freud's attempt to bridge prudery and excess through an analysis of human drives has not been able to address the core of the problem: "We have not in the very least liberated sexuality, though we have, to be exact, carried it to its limits: the limit of consciousness, because it ultimately dictates the only possible reading of our unconsciousness…" (30). Crossing the borders of our conscious knowledge and diving into the vast and deep unconscious deliberately has, in his eyes, promoted a narrowing of views rather than enriched the interpretational tools. Instead of releasing new argumentative forces, unconscious drives force consciousness to submissively obey its direction and guidance. From his perspective, Freud's transgressive activity has only succeeded in introducing further restrictions to mental operations.

Simultaneously, the profanation of the sacred attracts attention, is the answer to the loss of religious fervency, and bluntly contrasts the intention I associate with transgression (cf. 30). Transgressions into a realm whose integral components have undergone a process of profanation are border-crossing advances without the desired effect of enhancing or alternating the ordinary realm of experience. One may wonder if there are more transgressions possible and how to discover what has not been desecrated because each transgression opens a profane field which does not entail a qualitative change of our understanding, practice or emotional state. This comes down to a transgression without effect. One way or the other, only well thought out digressions will suffice the purpose of discovering new facts of life in the future.

Opening new narrative possibilities liberates the excitation of feeling. Liberated emotion invigorates the dampened passions. Life writing's transgression of the common literary discourses and expectation do not imply the opposition of taboos but the digression of literary expectations. In this sub-chapter I argue that the transgression of the autobiographical and biographic ideal and expectation of representing life as truthful as possible towards an inclusion of fictional elements in autofiction is at the core of improving the work with autobiographical memory and emotion. As well, autofictional

novels can indeed be as true to life as autobiographies, if not representatively but rather emotionally (cf. Hustvedt 2012: 176-7). The idea of truth in life writing is less rigid and transgresses the fields of each text type. In the essay "The Real Story", Hustvedt expounds that writing fiction, she is directed "by the creation of a story that resonates … emotionally, rather than literally, true" (cf. 177). This is significant as she criticizes that autobiography is "valued more highly than fiction in the contemporary American market place" (cf. 99) because they have the approving "stamp of reality" and truth (cf. 98). The writer bends and goes beyond limiting norms and categories of truths and reality in fiction and non-fiction. In *The Sorrows of an American*, for instance, Hustvedt includes her father's actual memoir into a fictional narrative that is carried forward by her own process of mourning her father. The formal transgression of mixing fiction and non-fiction in a novel thus helps her work through the memories of her father's life and yet, Hustvedt does not entirely mingle both. It may even be possible that the fictional daughter and son to the man who write the memoir are at times emotionally as true as the actual daughter, Siri Hustvedt. Further, fiction provides the grounds on which Hustvedt can liberally act according to her emotional needs after the death, needs that may not be granted in the more constricted reality of authentic life.

The genre of life writing does not obey the conventions traditional forms of writing profess. First of all, it transgresses rigid rules and includes fictional elements into the study of authentic life to accentuate autobiographical memory and better express emotion. As well, fiction can then indeed be at the service of truth and convey emotional autobiographical subtexts that would remain opaque in an authentic autobiography. The conventional idea of what is and what is not true is therefore transgressed. Second, the writers study characters who transgress traditional lines of power such that women assume the role of a male family member after his death and represent the resulting experiences in writing. *The Shaking Woman* and *The Blazing World* are, for example, studies of women in mourning, women transgressing behavioral rules therewith and narrators who transgress regular medical diagnoses of women by explaining the symptoms in relation to formative memories. Third, in life writing writers portray characters going through mental states which transgress ordinary fields of experience and try to approach these peculiarities autobiographically. The type of transgression life writing aims to support is therefore creative in the sense that it engenders new forms of experience and discoveries about the intersection of writing and life experience such as memories. For example, character Erik's transgressions into

other characters' fields of living is – on the one hand – revelatory as we get to know the characters through his transgressions into their lives. On the other hand, they shed light on his own issues of not recognizing other people's boundaries and getting involved in their issues rather than solving his own. Its revelatory power is exerted once literary "transgressive acts bring to light new forms of existence and reveal human limits and limitation" (cf. Hornung 1994: 231, 1992: 401). Transgressive energy is then able to uncover hidden structures. (cf. 1994a: 233).

The rejection of long established traditional conventions in fiction and autobiography opens the field to discoveries, and in the study of writing literature it offers opportunities to new theoretical frameworks. The aim is to develop writing techniques which "reach beyond literary artifice" and which the author and writer "realize[d] in the performance of life" (1992: 401). Once art proliferates in life, the emerging literary culture creates new fields of experience whose forceful dynamics are able to progress and heal social structures in decay (cf. 1992: 402, cf. 407). This means that just as fiction can find its place in autobiographical representation, fiction can become a part of and seep into life itself. I think that in so doing, it counters the profanation of life and infuses it with meaning. Mingling art with life is a complex process. There is an obvious gap between the process of writing and the possibility of granting literary experiences executive power in our daily life. Yet, the interaction between a text and life is possible, forceful and mysterious.

Formal transgressions between fact and fiction and combination of fact and fiction, which has been a defining mark for autobiography from early on, may lead to unreasonable experiences or thoughts. It touches upon what we can denote as mad, although transgression of truth in life writing actually reveals emotional truth. The protagonist of *The Sorrows of an American*, whom Hustvedt imagined as her imaginary brother, experiences extreme bouts of rage, and reveals outright aggression. A discouraging approach to madness would prevent the autobiographical understanding of instances of mental uproar and obstruct an appreciation of fertile facets of male madness as a result of transgressions of behavioral norms. The total marginalization and repression of madness and the mad confines the symptoms to a discourse that hinders an appreciation of thought-provoking aspects of madness in art.

Further, transgression and madness begin with a brief literary commentary and lead me back to foundational research: A woman suffering from dementia lends us the

impulse to question conventional belief systems. Hornung analyzes the case of dementia, in which the patient calls her doctor's diagnosis into question and explains the disease by means of her person's biography. The protagonist rejects the objective stance towards her sickness and notices that she suffers from sickening memory (cf. 2009: 539). Just as Siri Hustvedt's experience of shaking in *The Shaking Woman*, her sickness has a meaningful correlation with her life story and can be understood as such in terms of a narrative. The diagnosis doctors use to define the disorder she suffers from does not do justice to the complex autobiographical reason for her illness, and what is more, the demands of rational understanding prevent a proper treatment through creative work with the maddening memory.

I associate productive literary madness with the state of mind leading to and following the transgression of clear demarcations between life and its literary representation. Autobiography is not remote from life but takes place and interacts with life. The meaningful connections that explain mental illness can be discovered in an autobiographical text, and raising them to awareness changes the way the narrator lives her life. If that idea is then extended to imagining fiction or including fictional elements in the autobiography, the transgression of the borderline between fact and fiction is an instance of productive life writing. Yet, once literary madness leads to a denial of an unwanted reality, it exerts a destructive influence on the madly fantasizing person. Similarly, rewriting an autobiographical plotline according to one's wishes, embellishing a narrative can be read as a sign of irrational strategies that cause a misapprehension of fact and fiction in life. Nevertheless, this play with fact and fiction will prove to be particularly promising in regards to healing dreadful reminiscences. The formal and content-wise transgression is therefore a liberal way of negotiating narrative truth.

Hustvedt has mixed fiction and non-fiction in her autofictional novel *The Sorrows of an American* to develop plotlines about mourning to allow a mourning process, and not to imagine a scenario in which the narrative escapes from and avoids the pain of loss. I finally state that here, grief and the confrontation of death is the aim of transgressing fact and fiction, not escaping thinking about the absence it creates. Approaching memories and emotion of loss thus serves the objective of narrative medicine by bringing relief to the symptoms these memories inflict upon the subject. In *The Shaking Woman* and *The Blazing World*, women supposedly mad actually transgress boundaries of power relationships and therefore experience intense emotions.

They research why trying to assume a role in society that was destined for their, by then, dead husband or father is so difficult and may even fail. They overcome inner inhibitions only by identifying and working with formative memories. I thus conclude with the remark that I aim to advance the study of how the two autofictional novels and the autobiography work with memories to improve the process of healing the writer's or character's mind. I choose a scientific perspective to prove that a narrative can access conscious or unconscious memories precisely. I examine how such memories can, given that troubling memories cause problematic life experiences, change for the better through narrative work with autobiographical memories. The narrative experience of working with memories is then again translated into embellished lives experience in the world.

2.2. Life Sciences: Neuroscience of Writing

In this section, I first focus on the study of memory from a neuroscientific perspective. I want to make it available for a new reading of life patterns in Hustvedt's autobiography and autofictional novels – *The Shaking Woman*, *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World* take advantage of the narrative relations of time and memory, and work with them effectively. Hornung phrases the possible exchange between life sciences and life writing as a "cooperation … to reveal new insights gained from the cross-disciplinary research of the transference of explanatory scientific models into narrative patterns for the depiction of life" (2015: 41). This aim proceeds on the assumption that it is possible to add a scientific perspective to the subject of life writing to improve the interpretation of the autobiography and two novels. In so doing, my neuroscientific and literary perspectives approach the organization, reorganization and access to memories from two angles and disclose how the brain and mind cope with unconscious memories. Accordingly, I support Hornung's suggestion of transferring scientific models to narrative patterns. The emergent dialog between the humanities and life sciences indicates the former's departure from postmodern literary structures. I want to engage with that interdisciplinary dialog by relating neuroscientific/neuropsychoanalytic findings to a new reading of Siri Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman*. The possibility revolves around the idea that repressed memories can be raised to consciousness through writing to resituate them in time for the sake of changing the life patterns they determine. I argue that reading Hustvedt's writing in close proximity to

neuroscience/neuropsychoanalysis sheds new light on her shaking fits. The interdisciplinary methodology then opens her writing to the study of narrative medicine.

I begin saying that from the perspective of neuroscience, inner impressions are liberally mingled right brain memories. Neuroscientists assume that memories are coded and recoded in the left and right hippocampi when a person retrieves them or brings them to consciousness. That imaginative process involves activity of the angular gyrus (Joseph 1992). My research in neuropsychoanalysis suggests that associative work of the angular gyrus facilitates the associative and imaginative access to unconscious memories which are not accessible through rational thought processes. I think that this can be seen in line with a reading of *The Shaking Woman*. From a literary perspective it is possible to create a vivid and colorful experience when the writer and her readers get immersed in that engaging book. If I relate the stated basic neuroscientific processes to the analysis of Hustvedt's writing, writing and reading are actions that may reorganize even long forgotten memories beneficially. I derive that particular life writing strategies and narrative patterns may reactivate mental connections and improve access to unconscious and repressed memories from that dialog between the neuroscientific process and my literary reading of *The Shaking Woman*. That way, memories the author could not represent in writing before become available to autobiographical representation and reorganization. In this section I want to show that in the autobiography this observation is relevant to researching how the author brings the memory of a visit in Norway, whose pattern is important to contextualize her shaking fit, to consciousness.

Approaching the linguistic intersection of the mind and brain

I think that a dialog between a neuroscientific/neuropsychoanalytic perspective on memory processes and a critical reading of *The Shaking Woman* offers a new interpretation of the text. In the autobiography, the writer successfully moves back in time towards one very specific childhood memory and contributes greatly to the literary understanding of the retrieval of memory. I draw on Rawn Joseph's *The Right Brain and the Unconscious: Discovering the Stranger within* (1992) to develop the neuropsychoanalytic perspective. It is a key source for the neuropsychoanalytic/neuroscientific understanding of the brain in life sciences and helps approach the modification of neuronal pathways of the brain and access to memories coded in the hippocampus. An exchange of information between the

scientific and scholarly perspectives may suggest that Hustvedt's writing techniques engage her brain's linguistic areas and access a particular memory whose content is crucial to understand the crisis the author experiences. Based on life sciences research, I think that the process involves the angular gyrus which creates and connects imagery by mingling memories which the hippocampus has coded before. Thereby, the stream of imaginative imagery generates subjective time, which a writer represents abstractly in language due to its informational exchange with Broca's and Wernicke's area. It is therefore significant for writing and reading life writing because it correlates texts and memories creatively, and reorganizes memories as the narrative demands. The neuronal assemblies in question are Wernicke's area[4], Broca's area[5], the arcuate fasciculus and the angular gyrus (cf. Joseph 30-32).

Neuroscientific literature supports the view that the angular gyrus plays an important role in the process of reading and writing a novel. It correlates a novel's grammatically correct words and sentences to inner sensations and impressions taken from memories, it links to various other brain regions and translates words into multimodal (i.e. vision, sound, touch, smell and taste) inner impressions by association. Apart from providing imagery for words, the angular gyrus is in reverse also able to group remembered sense impressions and perceptions such that it is possible to assign a name to it. The angular gyrus, as it connects to various other brain regions, can even draw on remote memories and unite its sensations to form and shape new imagery. It combines and links one inner picture to the next, so that Wernecke's area[6] can then find proper linguistic representation for the inner images. Once the imagination or memory and its linguistic representation are congruent, the linguistic information is transferred to Broca's area via the connecting nerve fibers 'arcuate fasciculus' and the person can express her memories or imaginations in writing (cf. Joseph 32-33).

[4] Wernicke's area is located in the left temporal side of the brain. It is receptive and relevant for understanding spoken and written language and thus also life writing. Wernicke's area discerns temporal sequences and units of incoming speech sounds and letters; at that moment, it transfers the properly distinguished information or units of information (the impulses expressed as written or spoken words, clauses and sentences) to the angular gyrus via the arcuate fasciculus – and the arcuate fasciculus, which transfers information between Wernicke's area and Broca's area, is accordingly well connected to the angular gyrus (cf. Joseph 30-32).

[5] Broca's area is located in the left frontal side of the brain and significant for our ability to express memories when one engages with others verbally and feel the need to share our experiences with them (cf. Joseph 30-33).

[6] Wernicke's area then finds the correct linguistic representation for each multifaceted image the angular gyrus has brought forth. Wernicke's area provides the temporal, sequential and grammatical structures and permits the abstract linguistic representation of the pre-linguistic thought and memories. In action, Wernicke's area organizes the suitable temporal, sequential and grammatical order of an imagined answer to a question in a conversation or it organizes what a person plans to say in writing (cf. Joseph 30-33).

The portrayal of the reading and writing process from the life sciences perspective provides a first access to the possible intersection of neuroscience and the study of writing and reading: due to the informational exchange between Wernicke's area and the angular gyrus, writing is translated into multimodal imagery, and conversely, a multimodal image is represented in writing thanks to the informational exchange between Wernicke's area and the angular gyrus. Joseph writes: "It is in this manner that when we read the word "chair" I am able to visualize what it would look like, what the word sounds like, what it might feel to sit in one…" (32). This example recalls Saussure's concept of the sign. It is in this manner that a person can call forth an image or association and then organize the inherent relational aspect of the idea or association grammatically, too (cf. 33). In terms of linguistic expressions and impressions, the angular gyrus is therefore a key neuronal assemblage. Because it creates imagery associatively, brings forth one image after the next by association and sends it to the other speech processing areas to permit the expression, a person creates verbal chains of associations and give a verbal response in a conversation by association. And a person can understand another's associations creatively because the angular gyrus connects multimodal imagery liberally: it sits at the border between abstract and imaginative thinking and knowledge. Because the angular gyrus relates multimodal impressions to letters, words, clauses and sentences, language can represent every other sense impression.

If I apply that neuroscientific line of thought to my reading of *The Shaking Woman*, I may offer a new interdisciplinary approach to the autobiographical text. The *narrative* chain of associations of memories in a book like *The Shaking Woman* revokes inner impressions because the angular gyrus translates associations of narrative linguistic thoughts, such as phrases, clauses and sentences, into associations of tactile, visual and auditory sensation. Without its creative mingling of sense information kept in memories, the autobiography would not invoke inner impressions nor would the author transmit her inner life to others in writing: such narratives create inner experience precisely, yet, they grant a creative reorganization and handling of memory. Returning to the writer's perspective, the associative connection of memories allows for a subsequent retrieval of memories. Moving from one association to the next, the writer can slowly access memories one after the other and finally arrive at memories that would otherwise not be open for conscious processing. In *The Shaking Woman*, the

search for the cause of the shaking fit does not immediately and rationally lead the writer to the key memory but testifies a slow and associative move backwards in time.

Perspectives on the right and left brain disconnection

Neuropsychoanalysis describes the disconnection of the left and right hemisphere in detail because it makes access to right brain memory difficult (Joseph 1992). I think that Joseph's findings encourage the view that the rational left hemisphere of the brain, the side of the brain he calls 'left brain', dominates *conscious* brain activity in modern individuals and it is the seat of our linguistic faculties necessary to verbalize memories and emotion in writing. The left brain produces conscious thought in a disconnected brain. In her autobiography, Siri Hustvedt elaborates on the problem of accessing memory, too, stating that her brain does not share information liberally in context of her shaking fit (cf. 54-5). She writes: "When the right hemisphere takes in a picture and the information isn't sent to the left, the verbal neocortex will do its best to explain what's going on" (54). It can only rationalize. During her fits her inner voice tries to make sense of it rationally but her voice does not get the right brain information necessary to fully explain the reason for the fit. That is why she tries to understand herself by doing research on her illness (cf. 6). In *The Shaking Woman*, Siri Hustvedt studies the life sciences at the intersection of the right and left brain to research the shaking fit she experienced ever since she gave a speech at her father's funeral. Establishing an exchange between Joseph's research and the autobiography, I suggest that Hustvedt can initially not consciously access information relating to her fits in writing because there is a neuronal disconnection in her right and left side of the brain. Hustvedt's comment at the very beginning of *The Shaking Woman* about being split speaks in favor of my reading that the conscious 'I' cannot access information about the cause of the fit.

Neuroscientific models of neuronal activity enter into a dialog with my analysis of Hustvedt's autobiography. From a literary perspective, Hustvedt's initial inability to put the information explaining the fit into writing is caused by a repressed memory. From a neuroscientific perspective, there is a disconnection between the hemispheres because the right hemisphere contains distressing information. To this effect, Hustvedt observes that her linguistic 'I' is unaffected during the shaking fits whereas her body is out of the 'I's control. That's why the 'I' does not know the reason for the shaking fit. Consequently, she goes in search of the right brain "hidden recesses" of her memories, a recess that she is "reluctant to penetrate", guessing that these parts of her personality

cause the violent fits (19). Hustvedt confirms that the shaking woman and the narrating woman, who is untouched by the fits, are initially not the same. She relates to neuroscience and states that from that angle the rationally narrating 'I' is located in the linguistic left half of the brain while the right brain half gives rise to the irrationally behaving shaking woman (cf. 52, cf. 54). This means that speaking from a neuroscientific position the right and left half of the brain are disconnected (cf. 40).

Yet, the literary perspective reveals that she can finally reach the crucial memory through a particular writing strategy. I think that Siri Hustvedt's associative autobiographical writing strategy contributed to reestablishing mental connectivity to access the crucial memory that causes the shaking. Interestingly, a neuroscientific angle on the subject confirms the view that it is possible to reconnect the left and right brain (cf. SW 65). Consequently, the literary evidence and neuroscientific view complement each other. In that dialog between the neuroscientific and literary perspective, the study of new writing techniques emerges: life writing *connects* left brain linguistically and the visually working faculties of the brain in order to translate visual into verbal and verbal into visual information by means of the angular gyrus. The imagery the angular gyrus creates are at the heart of understanding how the language processing areas of the brain can invoke creative visual imagery as it is present to the mind. This visual information draws on right brain memory. Then, I suggest that life writing is a holistic embodied act which potentially *integrates* the right and left brain. It engages the writer's right brain memory, emotional information and the right parietal lobe, which represents the writing body and the sound-processing areas of the right brain during the writing process. And finally, I think that writing about memories can *alter* the neuronal connectivity of the right and left half of the disconnected brain Hustvedt refers to.

In that sense neuroscience offers a possible new reading of *The Shaking Woman*: The writer activates particular connections of the right and left brain, the conscious left brain 'I' and the unconscious right brain 'shaking woman' can exchange information and understand each other better. Once her narrating 'I' gets access to unconscious emotion and memories of the right hemisphere, which explain the shaking, they become conscious. She can represent them in writing and the symptoms they cause may even decrease (Hustvedt 2010: 59). From the dialog between neuroscience and my reading of the autobiography I infer that life writing is particularly effective to overcome the disconnection through the retrieval of the unconscious memory and emotion, which causes the fit.

Approach to the retrieval of unconscious memories and the reconnection of the brain

Considering the complexity of the neural pathways in the brain, it is evident that the cooperation between the hemispheres is vulnerable to a disconnection. Important terms and ideas in neuropsychoanalytic research are

1) the split brain: the term designates a disconnection between the right and left hemisphere and the inhibition of the former; the brain is split because of one-sided education, trauma, emotional injuries and repression on grounds of taboos and social conventions (cf. Joseph 101)

2) conflicts between the two brain halves: an inner conflict causes and signals the disconnection of the left and right hemisphere; in that case, the right and left brain do not share the same information, they interpret incoming information differently and respond to it by giving conflicting impulses; if the left brain dominates in the split brain, it instructs rational action the right brain does not support and if the right brain acts on impulse, the left brain regrets the action (cf. 63)

3) unconscious memories, emotions and wishes: inner conflicts often result from right brain desires and troubles the rational left brain does not accept or know about. Confronting a problem, one cannot decide how to solve it because each hemisphere provides a different interpretation of and informational background to the issue. In a given situation one acts on impulse (right brain) or rationalizes about it (left brain).

I would now like to further apply these terms to my reading of *The Shaking Woman*. In her autobiography, Siri Hustvedt discusses problems of the organization of the brain next to the observation of her first-person mental state. I infer from the terminology that she has the impression of being split because her narrating 'I' cannot draw on right brain memories to understand the body's fit. The intentions of conscious left brain and unconscious right brain are at odds – it seems as if her left brain wants to give a speech whereas the right brain intervenes by causing a shaking fit. Neuropsychoanalysis approaches the phenomenon of being split, too. Neuropsychoanalysts like Jospeh add that if the right brain contains unsettling emotion and memories of the past, the left brain cannot get access to their contents. They stay unconscious because they are emotionally challenging.

Neuropsychoanalysis states that if someone acts on impulse, unconscious memories and emotions direct behavior, and the left brain will later produce adversary thought about the reckless action. If someone rationalizes, the right brain's irrational will and its unconscious needs are not satisfied and must compensate the ignorance of its wants (cf. 57-67). That person is at odds with herself. Unconscious mental contents are not within reach especially if they are disconcerting – they are kept in the right hemisphere as long as the informational flow towards the conscious left side across the corpus callosum is blocked. That is the reason why conscious left brain thinking or rational speech often denies unpleasant right brain emotion or memories.

Hustvedt's experience can be seen in line with the stated neuropsychoanalytic inner dynamic and conflict. Neuropsychoanalytic research findings offer the reading that her rational self can only guess the right brain's pains and desires which cause the shaking. The left brain then finds rational explanations and excuses for an emotional-behavioral problem eagerly. It neglects the emotional and structural causes which are kept in the interactional patterns of right brain memories and are coded in the right hippocampus. What Hustvedt consciously and rationally thinks about a problem (left brain cognition) is not congruent with what actually lingers in the unconscious right brain. The repression of these mental contents is the reason why the right brain, which is well connected to the body, is tense. If Hustvedt experiences an inner conflict between the rational goals of the left hemisphere and emotional needs of the right hemisphere, she could – scientifically speaking – establish a better horizontal connection between the left and right brain via the corpus callosum and the anterior commissure in therapy or in art and writing. That way, she can access repressed mental contents and change its emotional and structural values for the better. In that moment, the left brain stops rationalization and understands the reasons for emotional troubles of the right brain.

Joseph's research findings say that the disconnection of the right and left hemisphere is strong if it has coded a traumatic or challenging memory and must avoid its appearance and linguistic representation to consciousness. According to Joseph, the corpus callosum deters the informational exchange about the distressing incident. That is why there is a distressing and shameful childhood memory which is not available to conscious left brain thinking. If such memory appears to consciousness without preparation, the individual would run into danger of being overwhelmed by its contents. Neuropsychoanalysis confirms that this is why the right hippocampus codes traumatic or distressing memory but its informational content does not travel to the conscious left

side via the corpus callosum. Trauma or disconcerting memory causes a disconnection between both hemispheres, yet, although the id is unconscious, it is active emotionally. It has a tremendous unconscious influence on behavioral and mental habits, too. The right brain can then cause sudden and uncontrolled outbreaks, impulses, addictions and behavioral abnormalities. The left brain tries to give rational explanations for the irrational behavior but it can merely guess why the right brain is not under control (cf. Joseph 61-3, cf. 66). The right brain must carry the weight of emotional injury such that the person feels terribly uncomfortable unless she finds an outlet. Other than an overly rational person who tries to conceal her inner conflict, the traumatized or distressed person is possibly hysteric.

The flow of information across the corpus callosum, the nerve cord connecting both hemispheres, depends on the manifold and rich composition of its nerve fibers. In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt resumes:

> Human beings are binary creatures: two arms, two legs, two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and two hemispheres of the brain that look alike, although the two sides are said to be dominant for different functions. They communicate with each other through the neural fibers that attach the two halves, the corpus callosum. (SW 51)

I said that the frontal lobe can inhibit the transfer of information from the right brain to the left brain across the corpus callosum (cf. Joseph 66). If there is only limited exchange, a person can consciously access verbal and factual memories which capture a past situation but she cannot provide the full scope of sensory and emotional traces that accompanied the original experience. The right brain cannot share information, such as unsettling emotional meaning, with the dominant and conscious left hemisphere because the left frontal lobe does not facilitate the transmission. Under such circumstances, a person can grasp why a past situation makes factual sense but each time the facts are not congruent with the emotional and sensori perceptions, that person is forced to rationalize about it. A person would, for example, trust his partner that she has been at a conference because the rational facts make sense. He trusts her because he is not in touch with the right hemisphere's intuition which tells him intuitively that she has indeed been out with someone else. The brain is split and conscious thinking cannot take the partner's telling body language, her tone of voice and facial expression into consideration. Recalling that situation from hindsight, he remembers what the partner said but cannot grasp the connotation and feelings states to support his critical position sensibly. He is allowed to remember the situational parts coded in the left hippocampus but the manifold sensations of the right hemisphere remain obscure and

opaque. If the brain is not split, he immediately knows about any fraud and trickery, he can consciously recall the exposing details, express them verbally and make his position known.

Neuroscientists want to find out more about the effect of the corpus callosum on our ability to act and they consider specific cases to progress their scientific research: brain surgeons cut the corpus callosum of patients suffering from epilepsy to heal their psychiatric condition. After the surgery, split brain patients go through a series of experiments in a laboratory so as to show which brain functions are now impaired. The patient can, from then on, only control her left hand with her right brain and the right hand with her left brain; sadly, the informational flow between the right hand and the right brain has stopped. Any split brain patient, whether she has undergone surgery or whether her disconnection is the consequence of inhibition or repression, can only grasp half of what she perceives and remembers: the understanding is impaired because she cannot make use of right brain information (cf. Joseph 100-1). She cannot talk about the impressions or memories kept in the right hemisphere because it does not send knowledge to the speech processing areas in the left hemisphere anymore (cf. Joseph 60-63, 82). Discussing the severe case of a young split brain patient in *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt comes to the conclusion that the patient could, from then on, only remember by taking notes. The moment the boy makes use of his writing hand in this manner, memories appear on paper which he could not remember verbally although the corpus callosum does not transfer any memories (cf. SW 65). How is he able to remember? Which neuronal pathway transmits information between the left and right brain when the boy takes a pen into his hand?

Connecting life sciences and life writing, Hustvedt explains that writing the words 'I remember' gives access to autobiographical reminiscences even if the corpus callosum is disconnected or split. The precise word choice inspires the associative retrieval of memories easily and immediately (cf. 63). *Writing* the two words gives the impulse to retain autobiographical information from the first-person perspective and the verb 'remember' predetermines the brain and mind's precise activity. I infer that the split brain limits access to the right hippocampus in verbal interactions. Despite this problem, the writing route is robust enough to prompt autobiographical views into the past because the writing hand supports the activity. I think that the angular gyrus is able to draw sense information from memories coded in the right hippocampus and makes them available to written expression even if the corpus callosum is not working

properly. When the writer takes a pen into her hand, she activates the motor area in the brain responsible for the movement of the hand which is connected to Broca's area and Wernicke's area, and the angular gyrus via the arcuate fasciculus. If the hand writes 'I remember', motor areas of the brain are active and incite language processing areas. These areas receive and understand the motor-linguistic impulse of the hand and the argular gyrus summons impressions in response to the precise linguistic impulse. In the common field of life sciences, life writing and narrative medicine, I suggest that a person can get better by establishing a connection between the right and left hemisphere through autobiographical writing strategies which activate personal memories by means of the writing hand.

If a particular memory is unconscious in the sense that it is stored in the right brain and if it is not up for retrieval, a writer can access this memory indirectly. To give the impulse to remember this repressed situation along the writing route, she first conjectures the thematic context of that memory. Then she begins to write about (left brain) a situation she can remember well (right brain) within the same thematic context. The description of that conscious situation associatively leads to another situation which is causally related to it by association because she retrieves the memories by means of the angular gyrus. If she continues the chain of association, the situative causality at work in her life will lead her to the unconscious memory which is of key significance in terms of the chosen theme.

This previous neuroscientific explication allows for a new interpretation of Hustvedt's inner experience because it establishes a dialog between a neuropsychoanalytic and my literary reading of Hustvedt's shaking fit. In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt's shaking at her father's memorial is *somehow* causally related to his death two years earlier. She does not consciously understand why she feels so bad when she gives talks and her rational narrating self is at a loss about the pain. It is possible that it provides a rational argument which does not grasp to the actual problem and simulates self-understanding (cf. 66). Hustvedt begins her autobiography and writing process by describing the situation at the end of her father's life, recalls his funeral and that way, and she sets a causal associative chain in motion which carries her back to the situation which is at the root of her problem – it is the silent reprimand she has experienced in a domestic situation in Norway (cf. SW 79). The nonverbal scolding at home later functions as an unconscious barrier and is the silent cause of her shaking in public. In Norway, the appalling social structure is transmitted in the domestic situation

at a particular point in her personal development and much later, it obstructs her from giving certain public speeches in Europe and the United States. Because she suffers from the first shaking fit sometime after her father's funeral, the structure *could* have kept her from taking her father's position as the head and spokesman of the family after his death. Yet, because the autobiographical writing strategy has resurfaced this incident and put it into a causal relation to her shaking and her father's death, she can counter its inhibiting effect: Hustvedt can recode the remembered interactional pattern (the social structure) in writing and change it beneficially. Soon after she has rewritten the scene such that she is not scolded and she has committed the modified scene to memory, she is released from social inhibition.

In *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* António Damásio points out that human beings remember the multimodal impressions of a given situation. The hippocampus codes notable emotional and sensorimotor impressions including sounds, muscular activities, touch and smell; they become memories through the coding process. The hippocampus can code memories in the sense that it codes our interactions with others, too. Through its direct connection to the limbic cores, it can later recreate feelings and emotions a person has had in that interactive situation (social structure). This can be seen in line with the experience Hustvedt had – and eventually remembers – when she was scolded for stepping forward and expressing emotion. Whereas the autobiography invokes the scene from her first-person perspective, neuroscience looks at the phenomenon from a different angle and elucidates the brain processes involved in bringing an unconscious memory to consciousness. From this scientific perspective, the coded situational elements shape the memory roughly: the memory contains perceptual and sensual information and her behavior in response to the domestic scene (cf. 132). In order to recall a situation properly and become aware of it, she must engage the right and left hemisphere synchronically because both hemispheres represent aspects of memory selectively. Factual information about one situation is represented in the left hemisphere. Emotion, tactile sensation, a melody or face, the situative feeling and mood is coded in the right half of the brain (cf. Joseph 61). The horizontal informational exchange is thus necessary because each side registers and codes different aspects of this situation: the right hippocampus codes visual, emotional, tactile and nonverbal memories whereas the left hippocampus codes verbal expressions roughly and temporal-sequential courses of action logically and precisely (cf. Joseph 106, cf.

113). The example shows that explanatory models of the life sciences complete life writing strategies and the practice of narrative medicine. Memory processes are improved and chances of healing increase.

Access to non-situative memory patterns

In Mark Solm's and Oliver Turnbull's book *The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience*, first published in 2002, the scientists introduce terms derived from the study of the mind and carry them into a debate which merges neuroscientific and psychoanalytic insights. Precisely, Solm and Turnbull's argument revolves around the assumption that unconscious cortical memory patterns a person has internalized as child are structurally active but not conscious (cf. Solms, Turnbull 161-169). Such unconscious memories can determine unwanted mental, behavioral and emotional patterns such that they govern and restrain the becoming of mind and active participation and success in society. I aim to show that autofictional writing in the field of life writing is particularly powerful in overcoming the inhibition of such memory. To do so, I relate the perspective of the two neuroscientists, whom I am about to present in greater detail, to a short comment of Siri Hustvedt that appears in an essay collection. From that context I draw the conclusion that autofiction is a powerful means to draw on emotional memories and the connected feeling states. Whereas the previous section explained access of autobiographical writing to unconscious memories, in this section I intend to show why autofiction may convey purely *emotional* autobiographical truths. In so doing my research provides a new perspective on the autobiographical subtext of fictional life writing.

The fact that Turnbull and Solms accept psychoanalytic terminology opens their argument to explanations which reflect on brain activity and disconnections in line with a person's inner life and experiences. The neuroscientists discuss the vertical disconnection between the frontal cortex and the limbic system whereas Joseph prefers to consider the horizontal disconnection of information coded in the right and left hippocampus. The former state that remembered conventions imprinted on the left frontal lobe inhibits the corpus callosum such that no information is transmitted in a downward direction to the hippocampus, the limbic system and the brain stem (body).

There are numerous access areas to different kinds of memories spread across the brain (cf. Solms, Turnbull 163). The unconscious memories Solms and Turnbull look at are not stored and activated individually, on the contrary, the cortical patterns

of the frontal lobe represent *the sum of* early experiences and perceptual patterns, life in the domestic, institutional and public settings abstractly (cf. 176). A person lives through the social patterns which are represented in the frontal lobe as adult whenever they are activated through the frontal lobe's connection to the brain stem[7] and the body via the hippocampus. Entering a social context invokes a state of the body and conduct which generally complies with the bodily state and conduct someone had and enacted when she lived in a similar setting as child. The body state activates a certain frontal lobe representation of that cultural space via the brain stem and the hippocampus. This means that bodily states, movements of and impressions upon the body activate remembered frontal lobe patterns whenever that person enters a domestic, institutional or public setting which is like a setting she has lived in as child. In such instances, the bodily state activates the resembling cortical imprint and she thinks and behave according to the standards and conventions she has learned to obey in the past in the resembling social setting (cf. 176-7). Each setting causes a particular state of the body and, in reverse, each bodily state triggers the activation of the social patterns the frontal lobe represents.

I said that abstract episodic memory, that is the representation of the social patterns and rules which underlie the sum of particular interactions, is represented in the cortical brain regions, the frontal lobe. The emotional states of the body activate such general episodic memory of the frontal lobe thanks to the connection to the diencephalon and the ventromedial frontal cortex. The representation of social rules and conventions in the frontal lobe can systematize thought and patterns of behavior and produce bleak inner states. Solms and Turnbull describe the former frontal lobe organization as a frontal system whose "functions serve to program, govern and control activities" (190, my translation).

In compliance with Freud's reality principle, this systemic imprint is goal oriented and appears as a power enforcing realistic, orderly, chronological and linear sequential behavior (cf. 188). Solms and Turnbull articulate that the frontal cortex often

[7] The frontal lobe can represent procedural (habitual) and semantic experiences and traces abstractly; again, it does not store concrete experiences, instead the brain abstracts from its sum. Such semantic memories give rise to beliefs, facts or can take the shape of rules. Procedural memory is the memory of bodily activities we have learned such as writing or playing the piano; regions important to procedural learning are the premotor cortex, the inferior parietal cortex, basal ganglia and the cerebellum. If experiences are represented procedurally and semantically, they are not conscious and they connect to the brain stem and – from the brain stem to the body – via the hippocampus (cf. Solms, Turnbull 170, cf. 172).

deters the appearance of fantasies and vivid memories, which are stored in the hippocampi, to consciousness. The frontal cortex can also distort, repress and inhibit sensual and lively information coded in the hippocampi. The frontal lobe exerts selective oppression in terms of the retrieval of those memories because these memories and its interpretation must meet the requirements of rational thinking and conventional behavior. When a person dreams, she can retrieve and combine memories even though the dream experience does not agree with the conventions promoting systematic approaches to reality because the respective cortical regions are inactive. It is easier to be unconventional at night due to the deactivation of the diencephalon and the ventromedial frontal cortex which act as the censor and ensure that a person acts rationally in accordance to the reality principle. In dreams, the brain combines unconscious memory liberally such that they take the shape of unconventional conduct and help expressing absurd fantasies, immodest wishes and irrational desires (cf. 188).

Siri Hustvedt claims that "making fiction is something like dreaming while awake" (2012: 218). Therefore, I argue that the writer enjoys dreamlike liberty in the process of writing fiction. I think that her claim can be seen in line with previous research findings. From that point of view, she can create plotlines without an active mental censor – the frontal lobe is less inhibited when she writes fiction and she has better access to early emotional memory patterns. It is then part of her autobiographical subtext for fiction. In writing fiction, Hustvedt can be unconventional because frontal lobe inhibition does not constrain her to internalized social behavioral patterns.

> Vague or vivid memories are reconfigured as the artist plays. Imaginary companions appear from unknown regions to keep one company. Like every child, I know that the worlds of my novels are "pretend." My reality principle is intact, but every fiction I write must be emotionally true to sustain its making, to keep my play in motion. The choices are never, never arbitrary, because beneath the words I write, I feel the old music, tuneful and dissonant, … that direct my the story I am telling… . (2012: 218)

In the text passage, Hustvedt states that while writing fiction, she partly draws on early nonverbal memory, which is "the intersubjective music of early life, the preverbal melodies of the first human interactions" (2012: 187). Her creativity reigns more freely if the inhibiting force of the frontal lobe is not active and she can play with emotional values saved at that time. The interpretation of her statement suggests why writing fiction can express truths authentic autobiographical writing cannot put into words. It also explains scientifically why the creation of imaginary worlds is of significance in researching life experiences in life writing. Fortunately, autofiction can effectively circumvent the censor because it accesses memories by making use of the speech

processing areas and the angular gyrus in particular; the writer can freely create characters who live through socially unacceptable experiences and express such emotions in life writing.

Joseph also notes that experiences of very early childhood are not represented in language and do not relate to any linguistic impulse. They are not even within reach of the right brain's emotional awareness because the limbic system codes these emotional memories (cf. 136). Although these experiences are stored in the right limbic system, neither the right brain nor the left brain angular gyrus can access these emotional memories. This means that one cannot write about these early inner experiences directly. Are these memories completely out of reach? The left hippocampus can in fact *indirectly* push these traces into consciousness by means of the subcortical connection of the left and right limbic system: if the left hippocampus is verbally triggered, the trigger can provoke a reaction in the left limbic system, and the left limbic system then activates the right limbic system pointedly. That way, the right limbic system can again incite the right hippocampus (cf. 269, cf. 57).

The subcortical route is significant because the mind and brain can only work as a whole, if the lower pathways are in use as well as the upper routes. One possibility to activate these very early non-linguistic memories, which are not even part of unconscious right brain awareness, is to describe a present verbal situation which is causally related to an unconscious subcortical memory of our early childhood. I would now like to apply this scientific model to my reading of *Bright Lights, Big City*. Jay McInerny's narrator, has, for example, been reminded of the causal relation between his troubled marriage and the oedipal conflict. The present marital problem corresponds emotionally, not rationally, to the unresolved inner conflict and the inability to mourn his mother's death; the emotion repeats itself in the coming divorce but not in the relational pattern. Thus speaking, the brother's correct connection of the conflict with his mother and the inability to mourn with the urge to marry triggers the activation of the repressed verbal memories coded in the left hippocampus by association. My research suggests that the associative push recreates the feelings he lived through when he was very young through its connection to the left limbic system. From then onwards, the early memory activates his repressed desire and attachment to the mother coded in the right hemisphere along the prelinguistic subcortical route. He finally subtly re-experiences the subcortically coded very early embodied unity with his mother and the

reluctance to give it up and be born into the world. He can then mourn and adjust his life to the utterly new circumstances.

Authentic and autofictional life writing is particularly interesting for narrative medicine because it allows for effective work with memories. Apart, the life sciences support the approach by explaining why it is possible. As I have shown in the previous section, writing can have an immediate effect on the access and organization of memories in the brain and it can, by invoking forgotten memories, open the brain to new ways of living. The practice of reintroducing a spatial-temporal pattern into memories, which exist outside these frames, for therapeutic purposes in literature does not need to conform to the autobiographical convention of recounting life exactly. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the mode of writing fiction empower the author to therapeutically treat herself and is methodologically attributable to narrative medicine.

2.3. Narrative Medicine: The Columbia Program and Siri Hustvedt's Role

The term 'narrative medicine' goes back to Rita Charon and Maura Spiegel. They explicate their basic framework in *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine* together with colleagues (2017). Charon and Spiegel promote narrative medicine at Columbia University. Spiegel and Charon, who also practices the medical profession and treats patients, do primary research on narrative medicine and work with texts in workshops and in criticism. They also collaborate with the "Life sciences – life writing" research group of Mita Banejee and Norbert Paul at Mainz University. The term of narrative medicine is taken up by Mita Banerjee and reappears in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity*. It has accordingly entered the transnational interpretation of literature and film in general and Siri Hustvedt's writing in particular. Methodologically, this dissertation is closely related to Banerjee's and Charon and Spiegel's approach, which uses fictional, filmic or artistic examples for discussions between doctors and patients in workshops. My approach to narrative medicine is, therefore, associated with their practice of narrative medicine used for analyses. It also draws on the collection of articles published in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity,* in which narrative medicine is a topic and amongst whose contributors I find Charon's name. Narrative medicine is a pioneering step that accommodates the perspective of persons who suffer from illness or mental disorder, as researched in Banerjee's *Medical Humanities: Life writing, Narrative Medicine and Autobiography* (2018). It makes room to hear patient's voices

and is an astonishing chance to continue the collaboration between narrative medicine and research on Hustvedt's writing. Hustvedt makes herself known as patient who aspires to increase her level of self-understanding through narratives in cooperation with the doctors she consults.

I argue that the practice of narrative medicine engages creatively with the role of doctors and patients. Narrative medicine is, in this regard, first and foremost a practical approach to a better communication between doctors and patients in a clinical and literary setting. As well, the literary practice of narrative medicine allows for work with autobiographical memories. The literary approach to narrative medicine requires a thorough inclusion of theory to understand and provide evidence for the argument that life writing and narrative medicine can have lasting effects on life patterns by accessing memories. If scholars combine the aims of the genre of life writing and the theoretical move towards life sciences, narrative medicine almost automatically appears on the horizon of practical approaches: The previous argument of studying the way autobiographical narratives relate to unconscious memories positively leads to the assumption that autobiographic narrative strategies work with memories to improve life experiences. Narrative medicine practically denotes the strategies life writing develops. Life sciences then offers scientific explanatory models for the practicability of these strategies by explaining scientifically how a person can raise unconscious memories to awareness and remove mental blockages stored in memories. Life sciences therefore provides theoretical explanation and proof of the effectiveness of this narrative strategy. The extensive approach is appropriate as the humanities are asked to connect and open their research to science and medicine, and it takes up Christine Marks' suggestion that the study of the brain should inform literary studies in the future (cf. 189). As Marks ends her dissertation *Identity Formation at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century: Intersubjectivity, Art, and Medicine in Siri Hustvedt's Works* with this persuasive request, this dissertation has taken up her claim.

Narrative medicine, as the Columbia program promotes, initiates the interdisciplinary advance into patient stories to inform doctors and caregivers about symptoms, causes and possible treatments of the patient's illness technical diagnostic tools and schematic frameworks do not make known. Hustvedt includes patient perspectives in *The Shaking Woman, The Blazing World* and *The Sorrows of an American,* however, her research objectives somewhat differ from those of the Columbia program in terms of the patient relationships she primarily writes about:

Hustvedt exemplifies the possibilities of merging patient and doctor experiences through autobiographical writing and processes of self-reflection. As well, her characters engage in practices of narrative medicine as artists in highly inventive intellectual context. These patient voices, in *The Shaking Woman* and *The Blazing World*, emerge from medical and psychoanalytic treatment or characters approaching death. *The Shaking Woman*, for instance, establishes a dialog between her patient experiences in relation to the medical system but also empowers her to study her shaking fit apart from the healthcare system, such that she studies her life, her memories, relations and emotion active in her field, to discover which power structure trigger her shaking fit. Alike, character Harriet Burden is a patient in relation to her doctors and her psychoanalyst but her voice as a patient emerges from her own medical study of autobiographical writing, too. The patient is defined not only in relation to medical caretakers but the patient's role emerges from her own writing, too.

Siri Hustvedt's role in narrative medicine is to open narrative medicine's method of working with patient voices to the particular needs and life stories of women-patients. In this dissertation, narrative medicine primarily centers on women's life stories because Hustvedt's novels circle around the medical experiences of women and girls. I argue that in *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt informs the reader that her role in narrative medicine derives from her work in psychiatry, her own experiences as a psychiatric patient and as a patient in psychoanalysis. She often researches the life experiences and memories of women patients. This adds the dimension of analyzing power structures to the study of narrative medicine, claiming that understanding female patient narratives involve understanding the power structures the patients' lives in. Analyzing Hustvedt's female characters in reference to their psychological problems is also a question of power structures. Anticipating and affording relief to their psychological and physiological states of inner tension, pain and worries is significant if I keep in mind that women are especially prone to be victims of violence and disadvantageous power structures. They expose them to complicated situations and often hinder their emotional well-being and stability. Life writing has social implications about the roles of gender because it researches how female characters learn to act these roles from their parents at a very early age. For example, reading about the case narratives presented in *The Shaking Woman*, the fact that women and children are especially vulnerable to emotional or sexual violence becomes explicit in the case narratives Hustvedt mentions. The narrative outlines that women must often bear the burden of living with the

consequences of such assaults alone. In *The Sorrows of an American*, Inga struggles and finds her way out of almost nasty entanglements her husband has left behind after he died. And similarly, in *The Blazing World*, the protagonist Burden researches her own imbalanced power relations to men after her husband dies.

I argue that women store inhibiting templates or templates for discriminatory gender relationships in their memories, they manifest in patient narratives and cause fear, dread and frustration. Researching how the practice of narrative medicine develops strategies to work with these emotions is at the heart of the interpretative chapters. The practice improves the situation of the female characters as patients. Power structures causing Hustvedt's shaking fits are important to the following study of *The Shaking Woman*. The study of *The Sorrows of an American* explores the possibilities and failures to ease the characters' suffering through the art of conversing, film, photography, poems and family constellations. In the novel, characters engage in the practice of narrative medicine as artists, patients and clients. I argue that comparatively speaking, Inga's strategy of actively rearranging her relationships is the most forceful way to overcome her mentally dreadful situation. *The Blazing World* tells the story of how the artist Harriet Burden fights for her wish to be recognized for her artistic achievements in public. Feeling utterly frustrated, she argues that the public does not recognize her art because they perceive the art of women more critically than the art of men. For Burden help comes too late – she eventually dies from cancer but leaves behind striking artworks manifesting her life and struggles. Yet, her children profit from the path she has paved for them.

Hustvedt's approach of working with autobiographical memories is a challenging project because it entails a rigorous self-confrontation to overcome and end crisis in life. The literary work with memories is encouraging because it opens up new structures when the old ones crumble and fall. The specific combination of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine results from the idea of working with problematic memories for therapeutic purposes. The goal is certainly therapeutical, and I think that narrative medicine is therefore at the heart of the coming interpretation: the writer, who is a patient, successfully imagines a life writing narrative capable of changing the writer's mental connectivity and organization of memories. A new way of scientifically approaching what happens in the brain during these writing processes arises in the context of the life sciences, too. I state that the starting point for life sciences in this frame is developing a feasible perspective on the deliberate retrieval of unconscious

memories and memory templates. It explains why and how particular life writing strategies can access problematic memories and raise them to awareness and how a writer can recode them through specific writing strategies. Life sciences generate a new view on unconscious memory templates which are discussed, for example in *The Shaking Woman*, throughout the narrative. Narrative medicine then results from the process of firmly writing about autobiographically relevant memories because it immediately turns the writer, in this case Hustvedt, into a doctor who treats her own memories. I suggest that the genre of life writing benefits from the perspective narrative medicine implies: the first-person narrator's scientifically informed view upon critical moments in her biography extends the strategical possibilities of the genre. Additionally, the three different concepts and frameworks reinforce each other. A new form of writing and processing literature emerges, namely storylines and plotlines which bring unconscious memories to awareness and sets them in an explanatory relation to current life experiences.

I argue that the practice of narrative medicine can actively transform memory patterns of the characters and writers. I suggest that Hustvedt's two novels and autobiography can transform memory patterns. Beyond the new mode of literature, these narratives finally change the modes of life, too, because altered memory patterns imply a change of structures in life including private and work relationships. I consider the combination of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine as specifically effective to reach this aim because life writing sets out the topic and aim, namely overcoming crisis which is caused by repetitive early life experiences. Consequently, I hope that the threefold approach comes to the aid of literature, but, and that is crucial and central, to the aid of life, too. Life sciences contribute and permit an understanding of the underlying neurological processes this strategy benefits from while narrative medicine is the writers' and characters' practice of treating herself effectively. In practice, I think that life writing provides a template to re-organize memories so that patterns, which a person is about to project into the future, change. Mental contents like memories emerge from material experience but then exist, depending on the terminological choice, outside time or in an ongoing present in the unconscious. The problem is usually that these unconscious memories regulate a person's life as they serve as templates to structure the future. Without the possibility to change in time, these memories are in a changeless 'present' and these templates cannot transform. But if life writing draws upon memory templates and raises them to awareness, chances are

high that the templates can undergo change. As memories are not material and thus not in time and space unless they become conscious again, they can undergo modification easily by including them in a plotline.

For example, I consider it evident that *The Blazing World*'s protagonist Harriet Burden, a woman of letters and an artist in her own right, contributes her own attitude towards memories by retention, projection and anticipation to articulate the way memories are kept in the mind and serve as models for future growth (cf. 219). She retains her early memories in her mind, she projects them into the future and therefore re-experiences the emotions and relationships she experienced as a girl. She knows that she anticipates the future on grounds of her memories. It is her own expectation which guides her into a certain direction. Thus, Burden tries to consciously remember the forgotten memory templates which govern her expectations about the future in order to become aware of unconscious memories which determine her underlying expectations of the future.

Life as narrated in life writing unfolds in accordance to reoccurring emotion. Although the narration is not necessarily represented chronologically, the characters think about their early and later life events as being emotionally related. The characters' life experiences are emotionally connected. They remember autobiographical memories of emotional situations, memories whose integration into the plotline substantially guides its development. In *The Blazing World*, Burden lives through the past in the present whenever she writes about it; the present is, in these moments, not at the heart of the narration but replaced by reminiscences of the past and its emotional causal connections to the present situation. And more generally, I argue that understanding the emotional causality at work in life writing empowers her to intentionally improve their life pattern in a moment of crisis by working with memory templates. She is fully engaged in the practice of narrative medicine, and even if she does not cure herself in time, she diagnoses her condition properly. For example, upsetting emotion and relationships reappear in different shapes in Burden's adult life but they all go back to initially upsetting experiences she lived through when she was young. Burden herself can therefore understand how her early experiences are emotionally connected to her present situation. Eventually, she even makes use of this knowledge, actively modifies her narrative and thinks about ways of plotting the final years of her life.

Early emotional memories cause the very same emotional experiences in later life. Problematically, these memories are often not up for conscious retrieval. They

remain unchanged in the unconscious unless the writer practices narrative medicine by placing them amidst the temporal and spatial frame of a narrative. I advocate that Hustvedt or her characters, who want to recall an experience that is responsible and the reason for an unpleasant emotion in the present, must develop a particular writing strategy to raise it to consciousness, too. These writing strategies put life writing and life sciences into practice and realize the goal of narrative medicine. I think that it is important to note that my approach, which combines life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine hopes to contribute to the final medical goal of healing the patient. I think that in so doing, fact and fiction do not grow hazy randomly, that reality and fiction mingle in order to question the possibility of facts in life. Fact and fiction solely merge because in the next step, narrative medicine's method of turning a writer into a doctor and patient at once *only* exploits its full potential if the narrative raises the memory templates to conscious awareness *and* changes the information the template contains. I believe that a narrative can only fully transform autobiographical information if the writer changes the facts memory contains. The narrative does not lie but the writer may invent a better ending for herself.

Imagine, for instance, a writer like Hustvedt has lived through a disconcerting experience when she was young. Assuming that she cannot consciously remember this experience, the memory serves as a template for later disconcerting experiences in her life. She can then go in search of the causing experiences and raise it to awareness in order to prevent its projection into the future. At that point, the writer has still not put the possibilities of narrative medicine into full effect. I strongly advice the view that what she can do as well is to entirely re-write the original experience such that the harmful interaction the memory contains becomes a beneficial experience. The projection of this rewritten memory into the future can then make life better. The projection is due to the idea that a person repeats life experiences of the past that she stores in her memories. The writer should therefore embellish memories with unfortunate content so that the repetition of the past develops positively in the future. Therefore, the writer must merge fact and fiction for therapeutic purposes. Whether or not an autobiographically motivated writing is always realistic is thus not always at the center of the attention. On the contrary, specifically blending fact and fiction in crucial memory patterns adds to the aim of narrative medicine. *Memories of the Future* is an example where this idea has come to full effect and fully accomplishes the practice of narrative medicine.

In the following chapter I start analyzing Hustvedt's writing and concentrate on *The Shaking Woman*. I analyze the autobiography in line with my understanding of the genre of life writing and focus on the examination of autobiographical memories. I will also highlight Hustvedt's experience of being a patient who has problems to be diagnosed accurately. In the absence of a final diagnosis, her autobiography uncovers the reason for her illness and neuropsychoanalysis provides the scientific model for understanding her suffering. Therefore, I analyze *The Shaking Woman* at the intersection of life writing and life sciences and hope that the approach sheds light on the rare illness that had made life difficult for Hustvedt prior to and at the time of writing the text.

3. *The Shaking Woman*

In the autobiography *The Shaking Woman* Hustvedt authentically recalls and discusses her own female patient perspective she had to assume while investigating a repetitive and unsettling shaking fit that occurred when she gave speeches of which some relate to her dead father. In the order of the text, she experiences the first fit while giving a speech at her father's memorial and it initiates a journey into her family history, medical history of similar somatic symptoms and contemporary neuroscientific explanations for her condition. The experience of developing a psychosomatic symptom and researching it has a tremendous influence on the autobiographical understanding of her life. On the one hand, she learns to understand the reasons for developing a psychosomatic symptom by analyzing autobiographical memories. On the other hand, narrating the perspective of being a patient gives her a voice in medical settings, empowers her and makes her perspective explicable to medical professionals.

Furthermore, identity formation, which often takes shape and is explored in life writing, is closely connected to her approach towards finding the cause of her discomfort. It is evidence for the suggestion of the genre of life writing that pushing less represented perspectives such as her patient view to the center of attention is an advisable process of entitlement. Yet, her informed view is also a source of knowledge for scholars and medical practitioners for whom the study of such life writing improves collaborative healthcare and the negotiation of patients and practitioners' points of view on medical practice. Life writing is then connected to the practice of narrative medicine and reveals the genre's capacity in giving voice to patients.

In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt's shaking fits and fear of shaking in public act as a barrier to her open speech in public, but it is also a motivator to write an autobiography about its cause: She decides to research the phenomenon in writing. Along the writing process, she figures out that her pathological fits go back to an initial early experience, which later social gatherings trigger. Then, it causes a restless bodily and mental state. Hustvedt is afraid of not functioning well in public, and it makes sense that medical treatment is mentioned particularly often in the first part of her autobiography. Hustvedt can, in fact, diminish the bodily attacks with medication, but *understanding* the cause is an autobiographical procedure. Precisely, it carries me far into the realm of life writing. In so doing, I can point out the scientific and scholarly perspectives on the causes and effects of her illness in my analysis of *The Shaking Woman*.

As a result, in *The Shaking Woman* life sciences and life writing complement each other and create a new field of research. Life sciences has provided the explanatory framework to explain the narrative strategies at work in the autobiography. The coming section thus aims to understand Hustvedt's life with regard to a particular formative memory. I explain that Hustvedt can access those parts of her brain which contain information about the cause of her feared attacks by writing about it. Conscious access to such areas of the mind is blocked, yet, narrating her life helps her remember the most relevant experiences. The autobiographical motif brings the writing process on track. That is why the problem functions as a motivator for a diligent new writing project, too. Precisely, it is the starting point of a brilliant autobiography which brings together discourses of various disciplines to make sense of the mysterious fits.

The Shaking Woman is widely discussed in academia. Hustvedt's autobiography was the topic of numerous perceptive papers in the last decade. To introduce the topic, I first present previous critical responses to the autobiography because my own research is thematically related. Scholars argue that in *The Shaking Woman,* Hustvedt establishes discursive identity formation. The scholarly readings of her autobiography analyze Hustvedt's relational identity formation and her successful attempt of establishing a rapport to the sick parts of herself. Hustvedt's piece of writing has been recognized for being an interdisciplinary discourse that is a dynamic investigation of episodes in her life which are somehow connected to her shaking fit. I also include Hustvedt's own essayistic remarks on understanding herself in writing to render her identity formation intelligible. Introducing the state of research will show that research of the autobiography has raised an impressively comprehensive discussion. It studies the tremendous influence of the doctor-patient relationship in the writer's life. Yet, previous research still remains vague with regards to the reasons for Hustvedt's shaking fits and that Hustvedt subsequently learns to practice narrative medicine. After presenting the critics' response to Hustvedt's writing, I therefore continue with my own reading of her autobiography. It provides scientific models to elucidate narrative activities in the text and make Hustvedt's fits explicable. I will analyze the autobiography focusing on how Hustvedt's autobiographical work with memories accomplishes the aim of understanding the shaking woman.

3.1. The essayistic and critical response to the identity of *The Shaking Woman*

In Christine Mark's thesis *"I am because you are": Relationality in the Works of Siri Hustvedt* (2014), the scholar points out that in Hustvedt's writing, identity is "relational, focusing on the interdependencies that shape identity and the physical connectedness between self and world" (3). In *The Shaking Woman*, relational identity formation is again at the bottom of her narrative which studies an explicable shaking fit for which other people act as triggers. Right from the beginning, the shaking fits are a public phenomenon, too. They establish an unconventional and new interaction between the writer and her audience, in the sense that feeling states and thoughts emerge that both sides have not known before.

> She, Siri Hustvedt, the talker, feels like her usual self, and yet her body stops being a loyal part of her. This is conceivable to others more than herself: they want to rush to help her, to hold her, to make the seizures stop, while Siri Hustvedt herself is disturbed, but unaffected in her self-perception. (Gelhaus 238)

Whereas the shaking body is initially an unasked-for and bizarre manifestation of a rebellious part of the writer, critics argue that in the course of the autobiography, Hustvedt identifies with the shaking woman by establishing an intricate relationship to her (Hustvedt 2010: 199). Taking that opportunity, she becomes a difficult negotiator. In the process, critics believe that Hustvedt's effort of communicating with and about her in interdisciplinary discourses is particularly beneficial to her goal of learning to identify with that part of herself. In the following, I want to show how her process of relational identity formation is vital for her successful narrative work with autobiographical memories. I think that at its core scholars agree that the writer learns to identify with her by realizing that the body memories which cause the shaking are ultimately her own, too. The process of identification takes place in the medical system, too, and is therefore closely entangled with diagnosis and treatment.

Apart from writing about her, Hustvedt researches, approaches and diagnoses her shaking fit in medical and therapeutic settings. Critics point out that Hustvedt's acceptance of and identification with the shaking woman appears at the end of a process of interdisciplinary understanding she has developed in collaboration and conversations with doctors, scientists and therapists (Hornung 2016). Gelhaus remarks pointedly: "If Siri Hustvedt wants to learn more about the shaking woman, it is perhaps wise that she tries to scrutinize *other's* ideas, namely medical theories and case reports about a state like hers" (Gelhaus 245). The scholar emphasizes that getting a feeling for the shaking woman, intellectually addressing her and receiving an answer is an endeavor that

requires the cooperation of medical and scientific personnel. Her attempt of diagnosing and explaining her fits is a process of continuous negotiation with experts in science and medicine because they help her in understanding her presence from new perspectives. Hustvedt decides to examine the meaning of her painful fits with the specialists, and the more she pursues the goal, the more she becomes a specialist herself.

In the introduction to the first essay collection about Hustvedt's oeuvre *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedts Works*, the editors Johanna Hartmann, Christine Marks and Hubert Zapf remark that in *The Shaking Woman* "the role of writer and scholar can in fact not be clearly separated in her work, since she includes a wide range of scientific material from various disciplines in her narratives…" (2). What power lies in the appropriation of knowledge of neighboring disciplines becomes more visible upon the comparison of Hustvedt's disciplinary and interdisciplinary voices. For instance, Iris Vegan is the protagonist of the early novel *The Blindfold* and certainly has no active voice in the hospital. Being one of Hustvedt's early characters hospitalized for psychiatric reasons and based on Hustvedt's own experience in the medical system, she still feels desperately lost on the psychiatric ward (cf. Hustvedt 2012: 182). Hustvedt's own later voice is confident and on equal footing with her doctors, other than this early patient-character, whom critics analyze as initially being a disempowered patient without a voice, control and status in the medical system. The shift indicates that adopting an interdisciplinary voice was her way of accomplishing a power shift and reconciliation in the previously precarious doctor-patient relationship. The power struggle character Vegan experiences is replaced by a conversation about symptoms and treatment in Hustvedt's later years. It is now an interdisciplinary narrative that does pay attention to the story the patient has to tell and therefore realizes the goal of narrative medicine (cf. 200).

By talking about her symptoms to people in various fields, Hustvedt intends to find out more about the meaning of her illness rather than categorizing her condition neatly. "With ambiguity being the "overriding principle" which governs Hustvedt's account of the shaking woman" it does not come as a surprise that Hustvedt's doctors never finds a definite diagnostic tool to categorize her fit (Hornung 2016: 67). Instead, Hustvedt learns that the shaking woman is a repetitive activity or reaction which appears in slightly different shapes and forms throughout her life. It is not a label; it is a part of herself which wants to be seen, understood and become a point of reference over time.

> Embracing ambiguity can mean to open up possibilities, to become more positive about one's own inner fears and contradictions. These may indeed cause crises of different kinds, but these crises, as we have learned, can also be a chance for a change. (Bein 235)

The crisis of another kind may be associated with a lack of fixed identity which confronts the writer with an unstable conception of herself, a self that is in fluctuation and depends on an ongoing process of narrative self-enquiry. Interestingly, her process of researching and negotiating a proper diagnosis is successful in the sense that her autobiography is accepted and acclaimed without providing the possibility of a neat categorial review. Critics and scholars welcome the ambiguity of her condition and regard it as an excellent source of knowledge in the field of life writing and narrative medicine (Hornung 2016).

Approaching the shaking woman, Hustvedt does not only turn towards her symptoms but pays attention to the broader context in which these symptoms occur. In that regard, Hornung researches the autobiographical recollections she associates with the seizure-like fits. The study of symptoms and autobiographically salient memories strongly overlap and again justify the interdisciplinary approach to their examination.

> What had been a professional interest behind her fictions, which also appear as fictional examinations of neuropsychoanalytic conditions and forms of behavior… now turns into a major project of research in fictional and autobiographical recollections. Connecting the episodes of her nervous history from childhood to the event in Paris in 1982, which happens to be her honeymoon trip after marrying Paul Auster (Hustvedt 2012c:25), and to the death of her father constitutes the basis of a narrative investigation via traces of memory, a form of relational life writing between her father and herself. (Hornung 2016: 69)

It is the autobiographical text which gives crucial information about her adversity because the recollections of her life story reveal important contextual information about the situations in which her shaking occurs. Hornung uses the term relational life writing, a field Marks has studied and developed in her thesis, to convey the idea that the shaking fits are relational phenomena as they occur in social settings. Further, scholars emphasize that doing justice to the principle of ambiguity in the autobiography defies reductionism and ensures that the field of research is not prematurely diminished in size. The idea helps in doing justice to the vast reading and unconventional perspectives Hustvedt assumes in her writing (cf. Hartmann, Marks, Zapf). Hustvedt learns to see her symptoms reflected in various examinations, professional opinions and her own progressing narrative. In relation to and interaction with different diagnostic and treatment approaches, she slowly gets to know the shaking woman and converses with and about her from these perspectives. This means that the symptoms and diagnoses of

her illness is a genuinely cultural phenomenon and that learning to identify with the shaking woman is a process of conflictive and reconciliatory acculturation, too.

As a matter of fact, the shaking woman has significantly inspired and driven Hustvedt's art and research. Taking the shaking woman seriously and appreciating her presence has, despite the pain, contributed to her increasing literary mastery and strong position in the literature scene. Hilary Mantel observes in *The Guardian*: "She is not a romantic. Illness does not necessarily produce insight. Mostly it does not. It must be endured, accommodated" (Mantel 2010). Critics agree that the reader witnesses her laborious process of establishing a rapport to parts of her that are ill. As she enters an arduous "form of inner dialogue with herself", helping her to circle the connotations and significance of her unruly shaking body, she feels encouraged by an ever more intricate understanding of the shaking woman (Hornung 2019: 70).

Critics agree that Hustvedt's approach to the shaking woman is not only medical and autobiographical, both perspectives are informed by neuropsychoanalysis and its therapeutic goal. Hornung points out that "she explores her own brain/mind/body experiences in the context of neuroscience and the emerging field of neuropsychoanalysis," which combines psychoanalysis and scientific findings in the field of neurology (2019). Hustvedt recognizes the power of the often alien unconscious. Considering the fact that to some degree, we are and we stay "strangers to ourselves" requires the acceptance that the conscious I is not necessarily in control of its own doings (Hornung 2016: 77). Hustvedt experiences that lack of control when shaking fits upset her while giving talks in public. In these situations, hidden motives can be powerful enough to disarm her conscious will-power and take over what she does. She makes use of her narrative to reach deeper layers of autobiographical memories and sensations. Hornung points to Hustvedt's resulting dialog with the shaking woman as her way of coming to terms with the unknown parts of herself.

She notices that the conscious I can do little for her fits if the I does not try to get to know hidden recesses of herself to learn more about the unconscious motives of the shaking woman. At the same time, the autobiography defies a clear demarcation

between the unconscious Id and the conscious I[8]. To assume that the shaking woman is the Id, whereas the I is the Ego who writes the autobiography, is not feasible. Instead, the autobiography reveals that parts of the I are unconscious, too, and become visible in writing in the form of hitherto unknown thoughts and memories. Consequently, the shaking woman is not just the rebellious body, the uncivilized Id, and its unnerving drives – she is part of the unconscious I. As a result, the boundaries between the shaking woman and Hustvedt's conscious self blur. Katja Sarkowski notices that as the reader moves towards the end of the autobiography, Hustvedt's understanding of "'herself' and understanding 'her illness' becomes one and the same" (363). Acknowledging this fact contributes to Hustvedt's idea of accepting the shaking woman as part of the I and "…clearly signals an identification with and acceptance of a particular body state initially experienced as alien" (363). Writing the text reconciles the alleged disparity between body and mind, conscious and unconscious forces.

In her essay collection *Living, Thinking, Looking,* Hustvedt further elaborates on the psychoanalytic view that unconscious motives and reactions as the shaking woman are strange to the conscious I, even though they originate in the same being (cf. 2012: 37). She says that a large number of memories, ideas and thoughts are not present to consciousness, but they may influence consciousness and behavior remarkably (cf. 37). They are the reason why acquainting herself with the stranger within is a story of discovery as well. In *The Shaking Woman,* she thus searches for those strange mental contents that "split off from consciousness, travel elsewhere, and appear as hysterical symptoms" – the shaking fits (2012: 37). She tries to reach her unconscious memories and feelings through an interdisciplinary autobiographical narrative and discourse to get to know those unknown parts of herself, transpose and integrate them in an ongoing stream of narration. That way, strange contents can become part of her own story. I think that her autobiography reveals the power of writing in making such creative discoveries systematically and therefore supplements other therapeutic strategies such as talking.

In the essay "The Real Story" (2012) Hustvedt says that a writer of a memoir narrates her memories truthfully. That idea holds true for *The Shaking Woman*, too,

[8] Jaak Panksepp and Mark Solm's neuropsychoanalytic research shows that parts of the I are unconscious whereas past of the Id may be conscious (2012). Viktor Frankl proposes a similar view (Frankl 2021). That helps explaining why the writing self can bring unconscious contents of the I to consciousness – it can express what is otherwise unconscious very well. I assume that towards the end of the autobiography, the shaking woman, whose inner life was unconscious, has become part of the I and some of her contents were raised to consciousness.

even if she wants her readers to consider that memories are not fixed, many are unconscious, fragmentary, embellished or reconfigured (cf. 94). Hustvedt imagines as much as she remembers of the past in writing her autobiography. Similarly, Hornung cites Damasio claiming that the biographical self we see depicted in the memoir *emerges* from the "architecture of the brain whose features are multiply enhanced by the power of the imagination" (76). The writer remembers, discovers and creates herself on the page at the same time. It is that flexibility and mutability that allows Hustvedt to work with the shaking woman and find common ground.

In the essay "The Writing Self and the Psychiatric Patient" (96), which appears in the essay collection *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Woman* (2016), Hustvedt writes about the role writing plays in today's psychiatric practice. She is inspired by teaching patients at the Payne Whitney Clinic in New York City and reports teaching the class while writing her autobiography. In her writing class, patients' mental contents and memories became manifest on paper and they felt more alive afterwards. She notices that the students felt better after class than before, but at first it is not entirely clear whether this is due to a therapeutic effect of writing or rather because the patients diverted themselves creatively. However, her "interest and concentration were vital to the therapeutic effects in the room, whether one understands them as a form of placebo or transference or dialogical healing in the realm Martin Buber called "the between'" (Hustvedt 2016: 108). In teaching writing, she practices narrative medicine and enables her students to express previously unpleasant memories and feelings and it may relieve them from tensions that have been built up by repressing them (cf. 106). I think that her own autobiographical writing about emotionally charged memories has been beneficial to her mental state, too, and is the reason why she feels more at ease at the end of her autobiography.

The Shaking Woman is inspired by case studies. Hustvedt has a clear view on the use of case studies which are common in psychoanalysis and argues in their favor in her essay collection (cf. 2016: 97). The case narrative can indeed give information about the cause of mental problems as it gives a systematic and coherent overview over a patient's network of relationships, memories and possible trauma. Despite Freud's doubt about the conceptual conclusiveness and validity of words, which supposedly lack the rigidity and seriousness of scientific methods, writing has played an important role in psychoanalysis (cf. 2016: 98-99). Hustvedt considers the question whether "writing narratives, diary entries, poems, or other forms of scribbling might be part of

the science of the mind" (2016: 98). Certainly, the intersection of both opens the interdisciplinary discourse that approaches rare manifestations like Hustvedt's shaking. It can elucidate the appearance of mental contents in a patient's mind and study the content, such as memories and perceptions, as well. In this way, writing can be part of neuropsychoanalysis and bridge the divide between textual and scientific fact as neuropsychoanalysis expands its possible scope of therapeutic action. Scientific fact alone cannot put a patient's suffering into perspective. The shaking woman may be treated with helpful medication and looked at on a screen, yet, the contextual reasons for the fits and first-person experiences do not appear in scientific diagnoses alone. Hustvedt observes:

> Brain scans of patients before and after writing assignments would tell us something about what parts of the brain are activated but would tell us nothing about the person's subjective experience while writing, nor would they explain in any subtle way how to make a writing class better or which of the areas or connective zones are crucial to beneficial effects. (2016: 100)

If the self has been harmed, its case cannot be reduced to its biology. Yet, both views supplement each other auspiciously. I think that is true for her as well as her class of patients even though her own suffering is not as severe as theirs. What the writing self can do is to learn to articulate "somatized, motor-sensory, and sometimes visual memories" in language (2012: 212). With that intention in mind, she poses the "question of the metaphorical function of illness for self-construction" and its acceptance in medical settings (Sarkowski 359). Hustvedt indeed circles and accesses what she has not been able to say coherently before. She is only then able to identify and speak to the shaking woman.

I believe that another crucial turning point in being able to converse and identify with the shaking woman took place before writing her autobiography. It happened when Hustvedt was imaginatively switching roles with doctors in preparation for the novel *The Sorrows of an American*. Although she is not a psychoanalyst, she assumed the role of a psychoanalyst in her mind. In the essay "The Analyst in Fiction", she reports to have transformed her "experience, changed sex, wrote in a different voice, found a doctor self and several patient selves" (2012: 163). Knowing the other perspective and expectations in the patient-doctor relationship allows her to overcome feelings of powerlessness in the medical system. She is better able to anticipate expectations and negotiate opposing views, search for competent practitioners and doctors she can approve of; she is willing to meet their expectations and confident enough to express her own expectations. The doctor-patient relationship functions better when she starts

writing the autobiography. At that early stage the autobiography has thus already been prone to become a story of discovery and considerable success. This also means that the doctor-patient relationship is crucial for her life story. In the following sections, I want to have a close look at the autobiography, read it closely and explain the shaking fit by analyzing the memories that come to consciousness in the course of her writing process. I want to show that the autobiographical perspective and scholarly analysis contributes essential information and point of views to the examination of illness.

3.2. Working with emotion and memory in life writing

In *The Shaking Woman* Hustvedt suffers from a shaking fit that mostly occurs when she gives speeches in public. I argue that from a literary perspective, the shaking is related to a particular memory template. However, what is my first concern is not the memory itself, but its bodily effects in the life of the author and the way it determines her own life narrative. Hustvedt begins to be afraid of the shaking fits when she gives speeches after it occurs uncontrollably and regularly. Hustvedt personifies the irrational part inside her which causes the fit and reports:

> What has seemed a bizarre occurrence with no conscious identifiable emotion connected to it began to look more and more like an extreme form of stage fright—entirely irrational but exclusively connected to moments when I was exposed to public scrutiny. Everything associated with performance made me anxious and distressed. Any moment, the unruly saboteur inside me might appear and disrupt the proceedings. It was then that I discovered the beta-blocker Inderal. (SW 39)

The maddening saboteur is the cause of Hustvedt's anxiety and fear, yet, fear and anxiety are not the reason for her shaking. I think that this is an important observation because it says that for Hustvedt fear and anxiety become dominant factors in her life and in combination with the fit itself, it almost governs her autobiography. The situations and emotions, her search of a potent solution organizes and drives her life. What can turn this imbalance of power around is solely her search for the cause. And in that sense, the autobiography is an instance of life writing in which Hustvedt, the writer of the text, re-assumes power over the plotline by setting out the goal of researching the shaking fit despite the anxiety and fear it causes.

My research suggests that the crisis itself is caused by the shaking fit but improving the conditions is mostly psychological. The crisis itself is, of course, serious. Hustvedt is in a predicament because giving speeches that are related to the memory of her father causes an enormous amount of stress whereas a very early retirement from public life is obviously not an option as well. Yet, considering that she reports taking

the drug Inderal as a preparation for public speech is a clear sign of the gravity of the problem. I deem possible that her ease in giving speeches in public is at risk. Her difficulty signifies that her success is at stake, meaning that finding a solution to her emotional problem is urgent and pressing. In this sense, the autobiography is meant to solve her problem: Hustvedt practices narrative medicine by putting life sciences and life writing into a dialogical practice and along the way, discovers new writing strategies. In this case, I can take Hornung's earlier comment even further and state that the autobiography comes to the aid of the writer, too.

Although in post-postmodern literature, scholars observe the return of the fictional or non-fictional author, the writer's or character's strength to assume power over her plotline is particularly significant in life writing. The literary search of the memory template that silently and invisibly governs life is Hustvedt's first decisive step to plot the narrative. Just as the narrator S.H. says in *Memories of the Future,* a desire for mastery is the primary incentive to assume power over the direction of the autobiography she writes. Hustvedt clearly expresses the goal of self-directing life which is prevalent in the field of life sciences, life writing and narrative medicine. Hustvedt embeds her scrutiny of the shaking fit in a scientific and psychiatric discourse. Yet, the stated discourse about her psychiatric and psychological problem does not form the autobiography nor is the text the result of a self-reproducing linguistic system. Hustvedt's voice and personal intention drive her account. Therefore, I argue that the narrative strategies have very clearly departed from postmodern and post-postmodern conventions. Just as well, the outspoken intention of understanding her symptoms goes beyond the vague descriptions of symptoms that appear in some other writing. Instead, Hustvedt outspokenly formulates her definite goal of understanding the shaking fit and with it the emotional reaction to it. This instance of life writing involves a precise research objective, whose answer is needed to overcome crisis. Explicit or implicit research is likewise an important incentive of the novel *The Blazing World* and, I suggest, a frequent element of life writing.

> What began with a curiosity about the mysteries of my own nervous system had developed into an overriding passion. Intellectual curiosity about one's own illness is certainly born of a desire for mastery. If I couldn't cure myself, perhaps I could at least begin to understand myself. (SW 6)

Hustvedt, who is clearly experiencing a moment of crisis at the outset of writing the autobiography, combines her searching look into the past with a scientific discourse helping her understand the neurological background to and the symptoms of the shaking

woman. She assumes the role of a patient and doctor. Although I do not intend to say that the role of the doctor implies that she successfully cures herself, it means that she learns to understand her problem in depth. This process of understanding the background of the problem answers the question 'why', i.e., the meaning of the fit. In practicing narrative medicine in the field of life writing, she assumes self-responsibility therewith, generates acceptance of the problem she is facing including the constant confrontation of fear and anxiety. Doing biofeedback exercises, Hustvedt arrives at the conclusion that she must finally "integrate the shaking woman" (SW 174). The narrative steps show that she stops fighting herself after understanding the conflict she incorporates and which I will outline in the next section. If Hustvedt stops fighting her fits, if she lets them happen, the emotional intensity decreases. The crisis ends when she accepts that she shakes at times when she gives speeches and that this will happen on future occasions, too. Anxiety and fear drop the moment she stops responding emotionally to her body's reaction. Hustvedt finally tolerates her shaking and regains a serene ease which tells the reader that she is in full command of the plot of her life. In the autobiography's last sentence "I am the shaking woman" Hustvedt's rational 'I' finally embraces her shaking body and she may dissolve the discrepancy to unite both sides.

3.3. The Experience and Examination of Shaking

Hustvedt emphasizes her literary work with emotion, her life experiences and interdisciplinary research findings primarily direct the emotional courses of action her writing represents. She guides the reader through selected parts of the enormous mental labyrinth made from the connection of autobiographical memories and intellectual ideas she created during a lifetime of reading. The author successfully guides the reader through the sense experiences of her life in the order the autobiography requires. Channeling the represented autobiographical contents according to the aim of researching a shaking fit, she successfully leads us towards the key memory which is at the root of her shaking fit. She allows her readers to share in the ensuing perceptions and reflections that – owing her serious and likewise humorous studies of leading disciplines – unfold in vivid narrative imagery. Setting an interesting frame, Hustvedt exemplifies that the natural sciences and other disciplines can inform her art, but that literary productions can invoke distinctly unified accesses to the world of intellect and experience which develop into multifaceted empowerment and liberation.

Hustvedt's *History of Her Nerves* begins with an emotionally strong recollection of her father's death. Instead of providing factual historical accounts regarding the life, she continues by strongly relating to her close family relationships: "I can … clearly see the room where he lived at the end of his life. My three sisters and I had hung pictures on the wall and bought a pale green bedspread to make the room less stark. There was a vase of flowers in the windowsill" (SW 1). The autobiography's intense opening leads us to an account of how her American family of Norwegian descent gathers to accompany her father during his final days. The women provide not only the necessary facilities but care for him personally and soften his pain by their loving presence. His death marks a point in her life when an odd progression begins: initiated by writing her father's eulogy, she will take up his voice more frequently and integrate it into her own. Despite her own will and expectation to follow in her father's footsteps and to – eventually – lead the way, she suffers from occasional fits once she speaks in public or shows herself off in the years to come. During these violent shakings, her arms and legs take a bluish color and her body shakes as if a seizure seems to go right through her. Her voice is not affected and she has no problem to speak while her body rebels against her public performance. Yet, mourning and her ways of expressing her father's thoughts are in her control: neither mourning nor sadness are the reason for her shaking fit. In writing about characters in mourning in the novel *The Sorrows of an American*, Hustvedt mourns her father's death and, including a memoir he has written at the end of his life, she mixes his and her voice, appropriates his sentences and makes them her own. Hustvedt always has a voice and her voice is always her own; rather, her body seems to not to be her own during the fits.

Hustvedt searches for the reason of her fit and the triggers causing her bodily reaction. She engages in an interdisciplinary discourse, including neuroscience, psychiatry and historical excursions, but never forgets that her primary concern is not only intellectual but also emotional. As said above, the shaking fits are reactions of her body leaving her with the nauseating fear of shaking during speeches she holds in public. I argue that through a cascade of associations set off in the course of the autobiography, Hustvedt finally remembers the life event causing her shaking. This experience sanctioned her emotional reaction as an active agent in a family situation and, as it is kept in her memory, it implements a power structure forbidding her showing deeper emotion in public. This memory serves as template for later life experiences, unless Hustvedt remembers it consciously, its pattern mingles with current perceptions

and translates into new experiences of being sanctioned for displaying emotion as an active agent in society.

Hustvedt visits her family in Norway and the key scene takes place in her aunt's house in Bergen, Norway, when she is four years old; she recalls:

> I was sitting in a chair across from my twelve-year-old cousin, Vibeke, whom I loved and admired, when suddenly, for reasons I didn't understand, she began to cry. ***I remember*** **pushing** myself **off** the chair. My **legs** didn't reach the floor, so I had to slip to the ground. I **walked** over to my cousin and **patted** her back in an effort to comfort her. The grown-ups began to laugh, and I was **seized** by burning **humiliation**." (SW 102) She further remarks: "The mistake I made was not about my emotion but about *where* I had been when my pride was wounded. (102)

I think that this scene summons much of the idea that helps us understanding Hustvedt's shaking. Her fits can originate in limbs and the brain and that her symptoms recount the original root of her problem. It starts when she wants to console her cousin. To do so, she pushes her body up, lets her feet to the ground so that she reaches her cousin and starts to pat her. She does not talk but walks and consoles with her arms: hence, her limbs are involved in this familiar interaction. However, the adults present in the room do not approve of her way of relating to her cousin and sanction the girls' open display of emotion by laughter. Hustvedt feels ashamed of herself, an emotional reaction that creates a severe seizure that is produced by her brain. Thus, the effects of humiliation do not embrace her whole self but rather the body parts that are involved in her previous non-verbal communication. I suggest the reading that her actively and emotionally performing body, her body courageously trying to console the cousin, the body taking pride in helping her cousin, is sanctioned for this confident action, as through her behavior, she crosses a line of power. After her father's death, Hustvedt re-experiences this early scene because the moment she proudly speaks about emotionally deep insights in public or she shows herself off, the body parts which were seized by burning humiliation in Norway, will react against her attempt to address her inner life in public. Hustvedt narrates that even during a hiking trip, when she is "proud of her strength (showing off, if it must be told,…)" (SW 152), her body goes through a series of convulsions.

Hustvedt slides into this harmful situation in Norway because she is unaware that her behavior crosses her Norwegian family's expectations of limited emotional self-presentation that does not exist in American family. Importantly, I suppose that her family members did not explicitly intend to harm her but reacted in accordance with their own implicit cultural habits. Despite the relatives' good or bad intentions, she now embodies the conflict and, whenever it blazes up, she is forced to fight the battle.

Hustvedt *shares* this conflict *with* her father and *battles* it *with* words. She shows a specific reaction to opposing values that originates in her personal history and a situational imprint that took place in a very early period of her life. Her inherent ambivalence that, among others, spans between attachment and critique of the values in question defies simplified categories, forces readers to think in complex frames and frees their mind from beaten paths.

Hustvedt frequently refers to her Norwegian roots in order to understand her own expression of feelings – she expounds humorously: "My roots are in Scandinavia, where stoicism is highly valued" (SW 17). For further explanation, she further refers to the Norwegian ritual to swim in ice water throughout the year and applies it to William James' notion of the self:

> In *The Principles of Psychology*, Henry James's older brother, William, develops a broad notion of self or selves that begins with the **body** of a person, a material self, a ***Me***, which then moves outward to include a wider self—the ***Mine***, which embraces a **man's** clothes, his family, his home and property, his successes and failures. Notably, James acknowledges that parts of our bodies are more intimate than others, that a lot of **self-feeling**—or what he calls "the **Self of Selves**"—happens "**between the head and the throat**," or from neck up, not the neck down. … It might be because the outline of my self is subject to some blur that I lean in the sympathetic direction, that I like the idea that we both take in the world and move outward toward it, and that movement is part of a feeling of my *self* that includes others. I am not always locked away in the cell of my private, hidden thoughts, and even when I am, large parts of my world are closed in with me—chattering multitudes." (SW 194-5, my emphasis)

I cannot fully disentangle these processes but I can still develop a broad understanding. Hustvedt is aware that during the fits, she never loses the self-feeling that she associates with the region between head and throat, her voice. Norwegians tend to retrench their selves into these parts, the 'me', a part that in Hustvedt's case causes enormous migraines (SW 174). Americans may move more openly outward, they display their 'mine', the part that shakes, although they might not be so eager to include aspects of 'me' in the expression of 'mine'. As well, Willliam James distinguishes between the "I" and the "me" as a subjective and objective part of the self. Hustvedt moves between these notions of self and, additionally, appeals to the interesting pattern that especially men are in the position to present the 'mine'. This movement and display of herself when she gives speeches and verbalizes 'mine' and 'me' crosses taboos of speaking about topics people conventionally do not speak about.

Even if she temporarily develops her thoughts in a remote state of mind, she implies that due to the dynamic of moving inward and outward, even the part she calls 'me' will have touched upon and be altered by others.

> A young, gifted Mexican novelist, M., told me that while writing his first novel, he understood that he was making a house, room by room, and when he finished, the house had been built. For

> him, the act of writing had precise visual coordinates. "I had the **idea**," he wrote to me in an *e*-mail, "that this novel is like a white house, a funny one. In the center of the second house there is a garden, and in the garden there are brave dogs and a gardener who waits for the reader to arrive so he can tell him a story." M. likes to get other novelists to draw a diagram or map of their novels… . When he asked me to do it for one of **mine**, I hesitated, but then the visual form arrived in my mind and I drew it quickly. (SW 112, my emphasis)

In the paragraph, Hustvedt casually mentions that her novel is part of 'mine'. As this wider self is not to be displayed or showed off in Norway, and she internalized this expectation in her childhood, she struggles against this inhibiting force whenever she openly reads from the novel that includes her father's voice and her emotional relation to him. Hustvedt decides to articulate her inner self publicly and does not retrench her outer self at the same time: the shaking is hence the result of this complex inner struggle for freedom of speech.

Her reaction to and the expression of this effort repeats the formative early childhood experience, and it has an entirely different meaning than her frequent migraines and auras or her occasional hallucinations. Hustvedt writes that the experience of her shaking is a "repeated event that, over time, gained multiple meanings", saying that the discursive perspectives upon the shaking as well as the situations and triggers of the shaking are multiple (182). After investigating the different situational triggers, I think that the emotional content, putting her intelligence on show, even mildly showing off can prompt a shaking fit (cf. 30-40). The meaning of her shaking and the reason for it is still ambiguous. The Norwegian taboo of competitiveness is relevant in the same way as the ownership of her body, whereas controlling her body as a woman in public, is a topic that more strongly resonates with Anglo-American concerns (cf. 40). Importantly, Hustvedt learns to own herself through life writing and the background knowledge I would denote as life sciences because it supports her in developing self-understanding which brings together how disquieting memories affect her nervous system and cause psychosomatic issues. Being able to explore her fit gives endows it with meaning and empowers her to relate to the sick part of herself. It thus becomes part of herself again. In chapter "Doctor and Patient" I investigate my idea that her self-empowerment suggests a proper narrative approach. Second, I may expound on the idea that the possibility of this narrative approach verifies that, in this case, the scholarly approach to neurological and mental illness from the first-person perspective and the scientific third-person research of such illnesses is put on equal footing once life sciences and the humanities engage in a dialog made possible by shared terminology.

3.4. Doctor and Patient

In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt is the doctor who writes about herself, the patient. In the following analysis, I show that from the autobiographical relation between her narrating self and the self about whom she writes I can derive a narrative approach that sheds new light on her condition. I argue that merging roles of doctor and patient promotes a complete portrayal of the personal medical history that relates to her shaking and promotes a new perspective on the fits. Hustvedt cites Freud who is forced to acknowledge that the medical case histories he reads resemble short stories, and these stories provide crucial information to approach an illness. He reasons that case histories consent to the diagnostic representation of mental processes (cf. 21). Her own case history is interdisciplinary and can express "the nature of the subject", i.e., including the doctor's perspective it reflects the medical discourse surrounding her shaking fits in general and, as a patient, the case narrative represents the particular perceptions via her five senses and experiences (cf. SW 21, Einstein 1936: 354). This parallel narrated reality and medical reality of her illness promotes her interdisciplinary self-understanding which joins both perspectives.

Hustvedt mentions that with the foundation of medicine as a separate discipline, multifaceted approach to illness was reduced to subordinating symptoms to a defining name (cf. SW 7, Grammaticos, Diamantis 2-4). Although this order can serve our understanding of disorders and illnesses, it should not be considered a given and our understanding must occasionally move beyond narrow systematizations. The combination of her "[A]awareness and speech" are the leading functions that will eventually allow a broader narrative approach to the symptoms she describes in her autobiography (SW 8). Her non-linguistic awareness is a significant investigative tool as her problem lies "beneath or at the side of language" (20): her aware self-perception and perception re-informs the linguistic 'I' in writing about the complex relations between her life experiences and her fit. Through self-interpretation, Hustvedt can slowly see herself in light of the medical discourse she researches and employs in the autobiography. However, I argue that in Hustvedt's autobiography, it is possible to apply the interdisciplinary terminology with greater liberty to express what lies in between the diagnostic concept her doctors use and the life of a healthy person.

The resulting summary of my literary approach suggests that although Hustvedt's disorder mirrors aspects of an epileptic fit, she never loses sight of her self and speaks right through her shaking confidently. From what she says I assume that her

fit may be hysterical in nature and roots either in "the uterus or the brain or a limb" (SW 11). Hysteria is commonly known as conversion disorder and describes a state in which psychical excitement is transformed into somatic symptoms. In line with that thought I can imagine that Hustvedt's hysteria possibly originates in a bodily transgression, which transforms into psychological distress that again finds bodily expressions to point to the initial cause (cf. 47). Her hysteria describes states in which the ownership of the self is disrupted. This is in turn related to signs of dissociation disorder, in her case an alienation from her body, which touches upon conflicting ideas that make up her personality (cf. 12). From a scholarly perspective, the disorder is caused by the repression of parts of her individual's subjectivity: a part of Hustvedt's self is unguided because it was suggested that she is not supposed to handle 'it' as she likes. Although her symptoms continuously repeat what happened to her at an early age, she is not inconsolably traumatized: Hustvedt, whose life is not at all a "catalog of miseries", does not lose the capacity for speech and perceives the moments of shaking in a timely order (34-5). However, Hustvedt's voice is almost indifferent to what her body fights against and she speaks in a rather unconcerned manner (cf. 25). And although Hustvedt expresses and processes grief for her father's death by writing a novel that incorporates his writings, grief is not the immediate cause of her shaking.

I further argue that from a perspective of life sciences, Hustvedt's left language-processing hippocampus is unaffected because the formative situation unfolded without any linguistic expression or impression. Instead, the left speaking 'I' (left frontal lobe) thinks on its own. Because the right side is in touch with the body, the body reacts to the blockage from the neck down. In a dialog between Hustvedt's autobiography and the life sciences, it is possible to assume that the blockage is coded in the right hippocampus: the body reacts against the right brain structure. From a literary perspective, she practice narrative medicine by altering the code through writing. She can concentrate on the initial situation and describe it while focusing on the past self imaginatively. She can then recall the remembered pattern of interaction with the other family members, which are in retrospect present as inner objects. By focusing on the remembered emotionally and visually powerful situation in Norway (right brain) and simultaneously reflecting on the past situation (left brain), she can let the situational elements and inner objects move narratively, the left and right side reconnect. The memory template, that is the memory imprint of the past interaction with her relatives

in Norway and the attached emotion of shame, which she has kept in her unconscious mind ever since, loses its force of reproducing itself in Hustvedt's life.

From a literary point-of-view, the forgotten memory template has been retrieved by the autobiographical writing strategy Hustvedt employs. That way, she has successfully established herself as a patient-writer who empowers herself to change the structures she lives in. First of all, the autobiography raises a problematic unconscious memory to consciousness in order to stop its repetition in the present and projection into the future. Second, she has written an autobiography that enables an attempt of serious self-understanding through the scrutiny of her life memories and reflections. Third, looked upon through the lenses of life sciences as employed here and chapter 2.2, the approach to her fits and the efficacy of the writing process are eligible. The combination of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine leads to a successful transformation of her view upon and attitude towards her ailment. The emergent threefold approach assigns value to the inventive and creative power writing can bring into being. Most of all, with respect to the emotional outset of the chapter, it releases the nebulous effect of Hustvedt's fear of her unreasonable rejoinders and reestablishes a clarity about her own bodily reactions.

3.5. Life Writing and Narrative Medicine

What sets psychiatric illness – an illness that we trace back to the nervous system and that is reflected in a patient's psychological makeup – apart from other health issues? In *The Shaking Woman* (2010), Siri Hustvedt suggests that the manner in which we speak about disorders of the mind in life writing exposes its condition: One says "I'm bipolar" because the disorder is part of oneself whereas cancer is not identified with the 'I'" (2010: 7). Hustvedt's internal polarity is an expression of herself. Or, rather, are we talking about an arbitrary language game[9], a mere grammatical distinction that has no deeper meaning beyond convention (cf. Hume 1896: 262)? It is possible to argue that language coincides with existence or thought at the precise time when the memory of the linguistic turn fades away, when neuroscientific concepts and public discourse occupy the interpretative sovereignty on any topic that emanates from our nervous system? In framing an answer, I argue that "I'm bipolar" is not only an actual

[9] There is no need to dismiss language games. Freud's analysis of jokes points out that the production of *German* jokes rests on structural games that are comparable to and follow the rules of *English* linguistic creativity, i.e. word formation and transformative syntax (Freud 1977). Jokes are grammatical twists that simultaneously provoke a dialogical play with meaning.

articulation of a misbalanced being, but a starting point to investigate and alter disordered states of mind with the help of narrative strategies.

In the following quote Hustvedt points to the linguistic difference between *to be ill* or *to have an illness*. The former is used for psychiatric and psychological inflictions whereas the latter formulation frames bodily diseases. It is of explanatory significance in that, although both could be seen as the same, the former expresses a disorder of the mind or the ego and the latter describes an illness of the body. These differentiations are not just grammatical but speak to the nature of the disorder to the point where we can talk about symptomatic and diagnostic accuracy.

> Every sickness has an alien quality, a feeling of invasion and loss of control that is evident in the language we use about it. No one says, "I am cancer" or even "I am cancerous," despite the fact that there is no intruding virus or bacteria; it's the body's own cells that have run amok. **One *has* cancer**[emphasis added]**.**Neurological and psychiatric illnesses are different… the patients often say, **"Well you see, I'*m* bipolar"** [emphasis added]or "I'm schizophrenic." The illness and the self are fully identified in these sentences. (SW: 6-7, my emphasis)

The ego rightly assumes that it – rather than the body – coincides with the illness and reflects its disturbed self-awareness in and through language. More precisely, the question of narrative identity echoes in the ego's linguistic account of its *malaise* since "… illness and the self are fully identified" in one sentence (Hustvedt 2010: 7). For this reason, I consider Hustvedt's autobiography as a device to understand the depth of her wounded self. The practice of narrative medicine adjusts the destabilized identity, thus paving the way for new layers of understanding the problem. If one thinks about it in these terms, *only then* will a writer remedy the ego's malady of being internally split (Hustvedt 2014). Her storytelling provides insights into and transformation of such "relationality…and complex occurrence of human interaction" beyond the ego (Charon 2017: 15). This reading opens up to Siri Hustvedt's insistence that we find the origin and cure of mental disorder in the energetic and dialogical relation between the sick person and medical discourse.

In life writing, words struggle for unity and distinction. Hustvedt's distinction between 'to be ill' and 'to have an illness[10]' presumes a difference between body and ego, leaving us the following ambiguous question: acknowledging that the 'I' is embodied and accepting that the 'I' necessarily resides within a body, how can we keep the distinction between body and 'I' alive? How does the ambiguous embodiment of

[10] The question relates to Erich Fromm's *Haben oder Sein*, first published in 1976. Changes in the character are, following his argument, necessary to overcome suffering; Fromm specifically recommends that changes of character are closely tied to the alteration of the condition of human existence (cf. 204).

the ‘I’ influence the treatment of psychological disorders which tend to manifest themselves physically? In *The Shaking Woman*, Hustvedt performs an in-depth study of how her reasonable ‘I’ struggles with an irrationally shaking body. Initially being emotionally untouched by what is going on in the extremities, her ego is eventually almost, to put it in Emily Dickinson’s words, “afraid to own a body” (Dickenson 472). I explicated above that Hustvedt attempts to compromise her reasonable ‘I’ with the irrational body. Her distinctive narrative structure is able to reintegrate the basic mind-body dichotomy in a unity with distinctions: mind and ego reside in a body, are embodied and *of* the body but are not *identical* with the body.

I think that momentary challenges for the proliferation of narrative medicine and life writing are prevailing models that privilege concept over gestalt in perception and liken language and life to self-referent games rather than transformative play. Metaphors that equal humans to machines further establish the basic expectation that we can diagnose illness of body and mind through advanced medical technologies. These systems of thought may fail to notice the potential for making sense of illness through authentic cultural and artistic productivity such as life writing. A critical recourse to continental philosophy can contribute to a change of these metaphors in thought-production (Nietzsche 2015). Recognizing a person’s ill body and psyche as fundamentally human rather than machine-like and fully recordable by medical technology or statistical evaluation is the starting point for the introduction of life writing into medical practices (cf. Verghese 1994, 1999, 2009). In contrast to common practice, I argue that Hustvedt’s cases explicate that especially in cases of mental strains, medical practice can widen its scope and deepen its complexity by acknowledging the patient’s autobiographical perspective on the healing process. It is not considered a routine or scheme but a path in her life that can be expressed and guided by life writing. Following this line of thought, I take care to not develop a rigid system of thoughts; however, I still need to go far beyond the vague *cliché* that writing and reading, one way or the other, makes us feel better.

Yet, art forms including poetry, visual art and drama are the creative driving force behind the healing function of Hustvedt’s narrative. Her specific imagery leads the way out of hardened concepts, reductive metaphors and its accompanied automatized perceptions. These narrow thought processes would normally delimit an understanding of her illness. Instead, *The Shaking Woman* liberally “abstracts visual memory and, in time, often replaces it by creating a fixed narrative that can be repeated

again and again" (SW 102). The reader transforms the fixed abstract signs again into different images, scenes and colors, accompanied by different sounds and voices in the head: "… reading is a form of ordinary synesthesia. We turn abstract signs into visual scenes" (SW 112). In that manner, the reader experiences literarily invoked imaginations, subjective time and a succession of inner perception, from which she may deduce liberal medical concepts and diagnostic metaphors. The imagery, sounds and abstractions the autobiography instructs not only contribute to a change in metaphors and rigid systems of thought, included in life writing, they reach unconscious meaning on a therapeutic level that is otherwise not accessible.

I consider the idea that life writing supports the progress of literature and I may extend the thought saying that life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine combined may help restructure and liberate writing techniques in times of crisis. In Hustvedt's autobiography, the reader certainly accompanies the narrator on her path through crises and, as the written text is a believable account, the end of crisis in the autobiography overlaps with the end of crisis in Hustvedt's life. As I am approaching the interpretation of two novels, it makes sense to think about ways the genre of life writing proliferates new narrative techniques to reorder life in Hustvedt's autofiction, too. As I dwell on the thought, I already anticipate the analysis of *The Sorrows of an American*, which indeed merges an actual memoir and fiction, of whom the former directly relates to and is taken from the writer's life.

To take one step at a time, I want to highlight a passage which appears at the beginning of *The Shaking Woman*, which forwards an insight into the background of *The Sorrows of an American*. Hustvedt had written the novel even before she wrote her autobiography to process the loss of her father. She remembers:

> But my investigations [about her migraines] intensified when I decided to write a novel in which I would have to impersonate a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, a man I came to think of as my imaginary brother, Erik Davidsen. Brought up in Minnesota by parents very much like mine…. (SW 5)

Hustvedt writes this novel in times of mourning but what the reader stumbles upon are characters suffering from dread, too. In contrast, the prevalent emotion in the autobiography she writes after her father's death is fear and anxiety. Both texts confront the writer with challenging emotions which are not immediately related to the topic the books mention explicitly but result from the relation to her father to some degree. On top of this, she must find ways of implementing new structures in her life because the

old ones break down or change due to her loss and the changed position in society. Therefore, I consider that in Hustvedt's case, in life writing she searches for ways to build up new relations in the field the writer lives in after death has disrupted the old ways of living. A crisis which implies a breakdown of structures the writer has made use of to that point in life calls for the implementation of new structures which, however, connect to the past. Hustvedt's choice of creatively narrating her personal and her family history in *The Sorrows of an American* is therefore auspicious.

Hustvedt's practice of narrative medicine in the field of life writing is significant because if she did not take action and decisions, and if she had no power to implement new ways of living, decline would be possible. In the case of *The Shaking Woman*, her ability to express herself is under attack by her own body. Hence her crisis is severe and requires a thorough reflection of the past to imagine possible routes of the future. That is the aim of working with memories in literature and by installing new structures in writing to support the writer's life, life writing changes literary structures and theory, too. Literature is, in that sense, not just an art that happens when all needs are satisfied and leisure makes room for thought and creativity. I rather think that Hustvedt's writing shows that literature can be an essential part of living, of inventing new ways of living over time and of managing crisis well. Because Hustvedt confronts the fear of almost standing at the abyss, she learns to bridge it with words. In her writing she takes up memory templates and its structures, she writes about and rewrites them in order to transform old structures, so that new ways of living emerge from what is available at that point in her life.

As working with memories freely in order to create new structures and relations is best possible when autobiography and fiction merge, when fact and fiction mingle without giving up fixpoints in life, fiction is particularly powerful to communicate in crisis. Although life writing does not transgress facts to the degree that the narrative disregards disconcerting feelings, fiction is a credible tool to work with memories to explore the inner scope of pain and action. The following two interpretative chapters highlight that Hustvedt confronts challenging emotion in her novels and works with fiction to research the possibilities to express them.

4. *The Sorrows of an American*

Readers of Hustvedt's novels know that life crises are a prominent thematic focus in her novels. They are present in her writing, and are particularly striking in *The Sorrows of an American*. In the novel, several characters confront painful personal and professional crises and find different ways of dealing with their challenging life situations. While the protagonist and psychoanalyst Erik feels bitter loneliness after his divorce, his sister and niece mourn their father and husband. The characters are in agony and take measures to improve their lives. The solutions to their individual problems depend on the causes, and I think that approaching both is a literary activity. The characters choose different ways of studying and working with their life story and painful memory templates. In this chapter I want to discuss their approaches to their problems as aspects of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine. I argue that the characters use different artistic and conversational strategies to mitigate or solve their problems. By analyzing them I can understand their reasons for suffering, find out whether the strategy was of help, or understand why some failed.

Analyzing the characters' approaches to life crises in *The Sorrows of an American* shows that life writing can add literary perspectives to medical views and their ways of examining, identifying, and treating mental problems to improve medical care in a dialogical manner. The interpretation of the novel is therefore guided by the method of studying writerly and artistic work with memory templates that narrative medicine employs. I want to pursue the idea that retrieving and working with memory templates helps Erik's sister Inga tackle her life crisis because it empowers her to plot her own life according to her needs. Inga is not a victim of circumstance and her past. On the level of the plot, she intentionally works with autobiographical memory to widen her possibilities and scope of resources. I think that it supports understanding character development from an innovative perspective and promotes research of plot development in the genre of life writing. Also, Inga's practice of working with her own life story in order to make it more enjoyable in the future is an example of practicing narrative medicine within fictional worlds.

Apart from working with memory templates, the novel implements other narrative possibilities in the genre of life writing. In *The Sorrows of an American*, Hustvedt has included parts of her father's actual memoir. She merges autofictional and autobiographical texts in life writing, allowing fiction to seep into reality, a technique that is prevalent in life writing. It challenges all too narrow views on current ideas of

what is real. It shows that autofiction can put autobiographies into perspective, enrich its interpretation and blend literary voices resourcefully. The characters' use of different formats, art forms and communicative settings to deal with their own conscious and subliminal autobiographical memories is also a characteristic of the genre of life writing. These character activities are at the heart of my interpretation of the novel because they are successful examples of concatenation of the areas of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine. Therefore, I briefly outline their use of different art forms, media and communication channels which are at the service of life writing and the inner debate of each character.

The Sorrows of an American is narrated by the psychoanalyst Erik, who frequently recounts sessions with his patients. Since American psychology is dominated by behavioral psychologists, the position of the psychoanalyst is a valuable contribution to the understanding of contemporary patient care and the role of therapists. The fictional text is a rich source for the study of narrative medicine, allowing great freedom in the portrayal and exploration of patient-therapist relationships. In Erik's case, it influences his patients' and his own life. His sessions inform the reader about his own mental state as well as his patients'. Although his sister Inga only appears as a character and never as a narrator, she assumes power over the plotline by summoning meetings and involving different characters in significant social gatherings.

The Sorrows of an American tells the life story of three other characters who are emblematic for the genre's ways of artistic self-representation in different media and social settings. The characters engage in the practice of narrative medicine. Their artistic activity or production of artworks makes creative self-reflection in the process and/or in the artwork possible. These activities induce changes in their lives, meaning that on the literary level, they assume power over the plotline. Erik's neighbors Lane and Miranda are artists that depict autobiographic information in their pieces of art. Lane is a photographer and Miranda is a painter. After the separation from his wife Miranda, he takes photos of his family. Capturing what he has recently lost is his way of coping with personal failing and multiple crises. Miranda dares to look inwards, painting inner tensions that result from figurative, autobiographical memories. Erik's deceased brother-in-law, Inga's dead husband Max, produced a film before his death. Eventually, it gave Inga closure to their marital problems as she was confronted with Max's infidelity and the consequences of his indiscretions.

The characters' life crises, resulting in destructive emotions of the past that influence present experiences, are expressed in a variety of art forms and formats. The characters engage in practices of narrative medicine and see their troubles reflected in the artworks and life processes they create. Their emotion and relationships are thus my first focus in the coming section. In *The Sorrow of an American*, Inga deals with dreadful feelings that darken her perspective on life. She is living with memories of miserable relationships and constantly reliving the state of danger that came from them. Dreadful feelings pose a threat to Inga's actions in this novel, as she turns them into tormenting experiences devoid of cheerfulness or pleasure. Inga also tries to protect herself and her daughter from aggressors. The realignment of her life is a complex process, and it only becomes visible by close examination of the narrative situations she experiences. In the next sections, I will argue that Inga successfully accomplishes narrative medicine. I approach the character, who seems to be modest and particularly sensitive, to analyze how she attempts to save her life achievements from jealous eyes of less generous aggressors.

Before my analysis, I discuss secondary literature on *The Sorrows of an American*. I again put the state of research in front because previous research deals with the novel's most prominent theme. Critics have discussed loss, absences and voids the characters have to bear. They either discuss how voids convey meaning in the novel or they approach traumatic voids carefully, defying any sense of meaning. Research implies that characters try to reestablish themselves in the family and society in a number of ways. The critics' analysis of voids immediately links to my research on creative work and family relationships. After outlining voids and absences in the characters' lives in the next section, I aim to show how they make efforts to come to terms with them through art.

4.1. Critical responses to *The Sorrows of an American*

The Sorrows of an American is a novel guided by a mystery the narrator's father has left behind. Erik and his sister try to solve the puzzle and it carries them far into their father's personal history and environment. Hustvedt recounts:

> *The Sorrows of an American* was generated by an unbidden mental image that came to me while I was daydreaming. In a room that looked very much like a tiny living room in my grandparents' farmhouse, I saw a table. On the table was an open coffin, and in the coffin lay a girl. Then, as I watched she sat up. My father as dying then, and despite the familiar setting – my father grew up in that house – and the undisguised wish to wake up the dead that must have been at the heart of the fantasy, I did not interpret it. (2012: 38)

Hustvedt's remark illustrates the autobiographical subtext of the autofictional novel. Her writing process begins with the image of the mysterious dead girl. Consequently, her own memories and imagination are closely entangled and weave the plot line around the initial mental image. The uncanny feeling the image invokes is reflected in the unfolding text. She goes in search of a plot line which seems to be hidden somewhere to make sense of the girl in the coffin. Hustvedt must discover it as much as create it. In the novel, the characters eventually solve the riddle of the dead girl that has played a role in Erik's father's life.

The girl's family must feel a terrible emptiness due to her absence. In fact, there are more voids in the novel. That's why critics frequently write about voids playing a significant role in the characters' lives. They are due to absences, strained relationships and loss. In her book "'I am because you are': Relationality in the Works of Siri Hustvedt" (2014), Christine Marks addresses the distance between Erik and Miranda, which is due to "unrequited love that invades and wounds him" (cf. 64). Erik knows that Miranda, who has a family but is his new tenant, is not meant to be in his 'territory'. Nevertheless, imagining that her place, which is a blank spot on his map, could be mapped out and occupied is intriguing. Marks observes that despite his efforts, Erik must live with the distance between them because Miranda continues to reject his advances. Sadly, Erik deals with more voids in his life. His marriage failed and he has just lost his father. He must find ways of living with absence and fill the voids they left behind (cf. Marks 66). His sister Inga bemoans the loss of her husband and father as well, and both try to get through the mourning process together. They investigate a secret in their father's life, a mystery he has taken to has grave and engages them in an exploration of his past. It is noteworthy that what he did not say in his lifetime bothers them more than what he openly said in a memoir he left behind.

After all, Marks notes that *The Sorrows of an American* "revolve[s] around loss and trauma" (143), which are painful voids the characters circle over longer periods of time. Erik is a psychoanalyst and earns his living by helping others deal with the voids in their lives, despite his own attempts to tackle the voids in his life. Erik reports feeling like an empty container to be filled with the patients' emotion and thoughts (210). As a doctor he treats patients by listening to the stories they have not yet been able to talk about before. He helps them fill explanatory gaps to make behavior and feelings explicable and raise awareness of traits they have been oblivious to. Carmen Birkle writes in "No self is an island: Doctor-Patient Relationships in Siri Hustvedt's Work" that he does so by "listening for patterns, strains of feeling, and associations" that give hints on possible reasons for their pain (Birkle 208). Erik also must fill the void between himself and the patient in therapy. The initial space between him and his patients becomes almost too intense and lively over time. It may seem as if the more he suffers from absences in his own life, the more he is "unable to keep his emotional distance" to his patients (208). The incisive absences in his own life make him vulnerable so that others encroach upon him (cf. 209). At the same time, he sometimes gets too emotionally invested in his patients and forgoes distance where it should be.

Erik treats patients who are traumatized. He is confronted with experiences without apparent meaning in his sessions. He speaks to his patients for the purpose of generating meaning where his patients do not see any. However, he also needs his patients because the job has become a part of who he is. The occupational relationship of psychoanalyst and patient is nourishing and straining at the same time. The relationship has become part of his identity and that way, his identity is closely related to his social function as a psychoanalyst. Despite the emptiness which threatens his own mental health, he has a professional identity which keeps him mentally active and alive. It gives him purpose in life even though other aspects of his social identity such as that of the husband, lover and son are shaken.

In Erik's family, people suffer from trauma, too. His niece Sonia witnessed 9/11 and is mostly silent about what she saw that day (cf. Birkle 336). The fact that she is silent about the event is challenging for the family. Sonia had seen people falling in the abyss, into a void that would put a violent end to their lives. Due to the absence of meaning of the event, she cannot put it into words. At the same time, the girl mourns her father. She is only able to break the silence in poetry and later in conversations with her mother. Her process of breaking the silence reflects Hustvedt's belief in the power of words. In

"History and Trauma in Siri Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American*" (2016), Jean-Michel Rabaté says that "Hustvedt would reject the thesis of an unspeakable trauma what would remain inaccessible to words" (cf. 339). Even if traumatic events cannot be spoken about first, the example shows that words are stronger than the silences imposed on the traumatized girl. Therefore, words significantly empower her to gain control over her life again.

Erik's rival Lane, who is the father of Miranda's daughter, takes photos of him, Miranda and Eggie. In some photos he scratches out their eyes. The empty eyes demonstrate his aggression towards his family. Miranda and Erik are repelled but they also take the bait readily. Lane gets more attention, gets involved in their life and seems to take care of Eggie again. Sadly, he proves to be incompetent: Eggie falls out of the window and into the abyss, while she is left in the hands of her inattentive father (cf. Rabaté 349). She survives heavily injured and changed for life. For now, her accident puts an end to her unburdened vitality. The reader never learns what Eggie herself feels and thinks about her accident, however, the silence makes her fate even more troubling. If there had been utterings from her side, the discomfort and unease could have been diminished. After the accident, Eggie, who has talked to Erik every so often, is no longer in Erik's sphere of influence. Consequently, Erik is flabbergasted and in pain that yet another voice he has grown accustomed to has fallen silent in his life.

> Dominated both by present concerns and the absence of what once was, *The Sorrows of an American* is, in the end, a moving meditation on how the imagination constantly works to transcend the barriers that separate the dead from the living, the past from the present, the others from the self – and how our memories inhabit the border zones in-between. (Schliephake 383)

Christopher Schliephake writes in "Embodied Memories, Embodied Meanings: Mind, Matter, and Place" (2016) that the faculties of memory and imagination can vanquish distance, void, absence and gaps in the future of a character's life. Hustvedt elaborates on the idea in her essay "The Real Story", saying that "both episodic memory and the imaginative act of projecting oneself into the future" originate in the same regions in the brain (2012: 107). I have already stated in previous chapters that memories are projected so that a person projects her past into the future. That is why psychoanalysis tries to bring problematic memories to consciousness to avoid the unintentional repetition of unfortunate experiences. In *The Sorrows of an American*, characters use memory and imagination to make sense of voids, absences, secrets and the abyss (cf. Schliephake 383). They remember the dead and missing, and by remembering, they imagine, too. Imagination gives them the possibility to fill gaps and make sense of

puzzling secrets. In *The Sorrows of an American*, the characters create artworks, rearrange their living space or engage in intense conversations to make sense of what they have lost. They imagine a better future despite the shortcomings of the past. The next sections promote the different characters' creativity by discussing ways of dealing with challenges. Inga's example shows that her work with memories and hope for a decent future can be successful. She is willing to confront her past and adjust the narrative she enacts. Although the other characters may not be as successful as she is, they create wonderful artworks which disclose significant parts of their life story and mentality. They give proof of the power of imagination to express themselves when conversation alone does not suffice anymore.

In the next section, I will discuss the characters' family relationships. Death and mourning play a significant role in their lives. The characters' narratives are closely entangled. Together, they must find a way to mourn the dead and enjoy life again. As they heavily depend on each other, I will analyze their personal entanglements in the next section.

4.2. Family Relations

I have already mentioned the autobiographical subtext of *The Sorrows of an American* in the previous section. In addition to the setting, protagonist Erik is the imaginary brother Hustvedt never had. There is a strong autobiographical source in terms of the character formation. Hustvedt places her actual father's memoir, who is also her imaginary brother's father in the novel, next to the fictional narrative. Clearly, relations and experiences kept in the memoir seep into the novel. At the same time, her strategy of altering her own story and making use of it to feed the novel is a hallmark of the way life writing merges autobiographical facts and fiction. It encourages a better expression of emotional truths Hustvedt aims to convey. Other than *The Shaking Woman* and *The Blazing World*, *The Sorrows of an American*, written before the two books, does not yet focus on how the characters' early life experiences govern their later relationships to the public. Instead, it has a close look on family relations and the emotions which come up amongst them. As this novel primarily deals with loss, grief is certainly a dominant topic amongst the characters and, somewhat surprisingly, the characters in mourning suffer from uncomfortable feeling states such as anger and predominant dread. Each character engages in an artistic activity that relates to their mental issues. In a narrative medicine process, they enter a dialog with themselves. tries to express and ease their

suffering through art. My interpretation therefore explores in how far the chosen art form helps solve problems by working with the characters' personal memories. Consequently, the characters are deeply engaged in life writing activities. I will argue that in the novel, those art forms reveal and express otherwise unconscious memories and I aim to discover which emotions attached to them are therapeutically credible. The analysis of *The Sorrows of an American* shows that evaluating how characters put life writing and life sciences into practice is a *critical* endeavor. I will show that Inga's attempt to re-arrange her life and her daughter's poetic skills are successful in that sense whereas Miranda, Lane and Erik fail to access their memories to work through their emotional insinuations. In the level of the plot, Inga is a character who builds her own plot line whereas Lane and Erik are dominated by it. I think that she is successful because she puts life writing and life sciences into practice. Next to working through memories as I have discussed in the previous chapter, I thus want to show that the novel develops a narrative strategy that puts the character into the position of actively self-directing the plot. To do so, Inga must understand and work with the forces that govern her life.

The analysis of *The Sorrows of an American* explores the characters Inga and her daughter Sonia, Inga's brother Erik, Erik's new tenant Miranda, her daughter Eglatine and the father of her child, Lane, on the topic of how each character deals with grief from a therapeutic perspective. All characters confront family crises at the beginning of the novel and everyone must decide upon ways of setting up new relationships to themselves and others to overcome it. Inga and Sonia mourn their husband and father for five years, and Inga decides to engage in family therapy to rearrange her family relationships. Erik's and Inga's father died recently and both mourn him by investigating his role in a secrecy his father was involved in before they were even born. Miranda is at odds with her unplanned role as a mother and her precarious relationship to the father of her child. Additionally, the advances of Erik into her life unsettle her, whereas Lane cannot give up his idea of having a family and does not accept the role Erik wants to play in Miranda's life. Miranda expresses her conflictive feelings artistically through pictures she draws and Lane takes photos. Eglatine plays to externalize her innermost desires. Only Erik, a psychoanalyst, is just marginally interested in an artistic or regular treatment for himself, although he was recently divorced and suffers from loneliness, and most problematically, though his unrest affects his sessions negatively.

I argue that only Inga's idea of rearranging her life in the fictional world she inhabits after her husband's death is convincing from the perspective of scholarly scrutiny whereas the other characters do not share her success. To prove my argument, I will include close readings of key passages and analysis of her character development to explain the causality of her life and why her method is efficacious. Taking that route, I aim to show and argue that Inga is triumphant because she successfully retrieves, understands and reorganizes her memories the way life sciences and narrative medicine suggests. Understanding why she ends up in dreadful situations from an autobiographical perspective is Inga's first step to healing because it is a sign of self-responsibility[11]. The other characters' forms and attempts of healing themselves are not as successful. I propose that their ideas of working with memories do not thrive as much for the reason that their art may exaggerate their problems rather than offering solutions. Their art is not transformative although it draws on autobiographical memories because it neither transforms the emotional dynamic they contain nor does it reintroduce a temporal pattern to memories to re-organize them. This means that it is possible to diagnose their mental problems through art and but they not solved, their discussion remains on a purely diagnostic level instead of involving solutions, too. Their activities exemplify that the practice of narrative medicine must be critical and regard differentiated conclusions on character development.

Inga is forced to manage her life according to her own will and sense of morality. Her husband was a writer of fiction, she continues to write theory and her daughter begins to write poems after the loss of her father. After her husband's and father's deaths, Inga "rearrange[s] her past" in family therapy and, in so doing, accepts the bitterness and welcomes the sweet moments of her life without being attached to them (267). Commenting on her strategy in this way, she puts her cards on the table and reveals that on the level of the plot, she remodels the plot herself. The motif of her action is her daughter's protection, the mother's wish is her daughter's happiness. Her will, therefore, guides each of her plot strands and her ardent wish attracts good coincidences (cf. 266). I suggest that Inga's approach to rearrange her life from a narrative perspective is particularly promising, as she confronts crucial scenes and plot lines of her past and accepts how they lead to her feelings of dread in the present. As character Burden in *The Blazing World*, Inga makes use of this knowledge in her literary reality

[11] Viktor Frankl has written about the significance of asking why psychological problems occur to support self-responsibility and resilience (2019).

to also scheme further plot strands, amongst it are two key events – a dinner to engage in a conversation about grief, and a meeting with her husband's affair and their offspring to arrive at a mutual agreement on financial disputes. On the level of the plot, she becomes the creator of the plot by working with personal memories, that is not to disengage herself reflectively but to improve her mental state through that activity. As a character in the plot she reflects her storyline and makes alterations to it. I thus argue that Inga's approach to her own storyline proves to be more successful than those of the characters who do not research their autobiographical development throughout their lifetime. In this sense, my research may suggest that any artistic representation does not necessarily improve the mental state, rather the characters must take coherent temporal development and the emotional causality of their own life events into consideration. In Hustvedt's novels, the characters who learn to successfully manage their condition become the leading figures plotting their life within the fictional framework. On that level, they create their own plotline and actively engage in life writing themselves by authoring their life as active participants of the culture and society they live in.

I think Inga's activity to plot her life after her father's and husband's deaths contains four phases of working with autobiographical memories in the context of narrative medicine. I believe that in that process, mourning and grief are significant and clear the way to solve her personal issues that she associated with that person and cause dreadful living conditions. The proceedings show that unless Inga has lived through periods of sadness, she has no power to solve the conflicts which came up when she lived with the deceased. As typical of life writing, the character finally organizes the plot for herself within that fictional world. Yet, before, the character makes use of techniques of working with memories. I analyze the most significant moments to explain why Inga successfully implements the goals of life writing, life sciences and narrative medicine. In the beginning, she understands how her memories of tormenting experiences of her childhood repeat themselves in the present regarding patterns of current emotion and relationships, and leave her with a dreadful life situation, in which she and her daughter are subject to severe aggression from a journalist. In the middle part, she mourns the deaths of her husband by working with significant memories and talking about her grief with friends. Before she approaches the end of her endeavor, she visits her father's community to find out about a secret he has kept to his death that weirdly repeats itself in her life in the shape of the secret affair her dead husband has tried to hide from her. I think that only after working through significant reminiscences,

she can finally resume control over her dead husband's legacy and her family's future at the end of the novel.

Inga's story of suffering begins as a young girl. At first, I learn that fellow students tormented Inga at school. The children are powerful enough to deny her a good position in class because her attitude, thoughts and work are different from those of her classmates. I think that pattern-wise, her antagonists' leader now re-appears in her life in the guise of a cunning journalist who threatens to attack her family in public and make her life miserable. In a conversation with Erik, she reveals:

"You know who she made me think of?"
"No."
"Carla Screttleberg."
"Your tormenter in the sixth grade."
Inga nodded. "The ache has never gone away. She got all the girls on it. No one would speak to me… ." (SoA 47)

Bullying is a recurrent theme in her childhood and youth in the same way gossip and betrayal makes her miserable as an adult. Indeed, the journalist is after the story of her husband's secret extramarital affair – she knows about seven mysterious letters Max has written to his lover and threatens to publish them. Inga is alarmed because she fears that the protective shield allowing her daughter to grow up in a peaceful environment is under attack, too. Though by now the wife to a celebrated author, the memories of her schooltime serve as memory templates for the present because she has never worked through its contents. Consequently, she confesses that pain has been present ever since. I argue that the emotionally violent relationship to childhood fiend Screttleberg, whose passive-aggressive actions against Inga tormented her, is a relational memory pattern that repeats itself later when the journalist Linda Fehlburger threatens to tap into her life and to make family secrets public that could devastate their reputation. I think that the emotional injury is the actual reason why she – although her husband Max Blaustein was a prominent figure in the literary world – is still vulnerable as an adult and subject to hostile attacks from second-rate journalists, from gossip and hostile critique common in effortless journalism. What it comes down to is that the memory template of being tormented at school returns to Inga in the guise of dread the ill-mannered journalist invokes in her life and the attached emotion dreadfully returns to her mind (cf. 47).

Inga's old plight and the emotion attached even come up again in the guise of complete plot strands – on which I will elaborate in the next passage – that are initiated by her ruthless opponents (cf. 194). The experience her memories contain imprint themselves on the present extensively in various subplots. I think that understanding the

emotional causality in her life and the driving force behind plotlines she lives in raises Inga's awareness of why she is confronted with dread when the journalist points her finger to her weak spots. Inga explains herself: "We don't experience the world. We experience our expectation of the world" (SoA 131). This means that her early life experiences, including being bullied in school, have left behind the expectation or memory template that potential competitors will go against her and that they may convince others to go against her – this is her concern in regards to Fehlburger and her threat to make Max's secret affair public. The remembered involuntary *expectation* that others will turn against her is the final reason why dreadful emotions repeat themselves in her life. In reference to Hustvedt's essay "Three emotional stories," Inga "reinvents deeply emotional material" of her childhood "into meaningful stories" (2012: 195). This means that the emotions she had as a child in school is the emotional material which she expresses in her current story line. I think that only because she now has, as the previous quote exemplified, consciously understood the undesired expectational pattern and accepts the attached emotions in her life, she can finally overcome its determinate force and step out.

This also means that life and fiction merge because by projecting memories into the future Inga actually creates and invents her own plot on that fictional level. For the purpose of illustration, I will have a closer look at the plotlines her expectation brings forth over a longer stretch of time: Inga explains that the combination of Max's failure to fully commit himself to the marriage and her personal dissatisfaction with her public role has hindered a timely intervention into the dissolution of the family structure her husband has initiated by his sexual escapade. These structural problems in her family make a timely resolution between her and Max impossible and later, they make Fehlburger's nasty intervention possible. Fehlburger can attack Inga in the first place just because their marriage has left behind unresolved issues: I suppose that this complex relational entanglement is part of Inga's reenactment of the expectation she acquired when she was bullied in school. Her mind has involuntarily invented and created this narrative experience in order to repeat the memory and the adjoining emotions. She is thus, as an adult, not a passive victim: she lives in nasty expectations the past has left behind and because it is *her* mind's expectation she sees in the drama, she identifies with it. She is less alienated, not a mere victim, she can eventually take action and change it.

The *emotional* consequence of this enacted expectation is that Inga is hurt by Max's betrayal, is just as much hurt by her unaccomplished goal of gaining recognition in the public and she must live through dread because a complete stranger attacks her. I suggest that the outlined emotional pattern her expectation has brought forth finally causes a return of negative emotion she has already experienced as a child. Being hurt as a child is at its root and feelings of dread are the consequence. However, consciously understanding the complexity of her life events and the emotional causality between her childhood wounds and her current exposure to dread empowers Inga. She can now deliberately change her implicit expectations and think about the reasons why she failed. The insight is another step towards opening her mind to imagine a better future. Only then can she transform her behavioral patterns and imagine new plot strands in her life and put them into practice.

To prevent a scandal, Inga has already taken matters into her hands and she intervenes actively. Because her problem is due to the projection of her memories and a repetition of emotion, Inga can manipulate the projection if she changes the content her memories contain. But as I said above, a new plot cannot emerge if Inga's attachment to the past prevents her from letting go the memories of old relationships. To pave the way for a renewed life she must feel grief – mourning is thus a necessary step in the process of recovery. Inga is in fact deeply in mourning, and to share and confront her experience she invites a motley group of relatives and friends to a fairly merry dinner party. Inga's mother, her daughter Sonia, her brother Erik, Miranda, Burton, Henry and Leo accept her invitation. Burton loves to look at Inga and is dedicated to her happiness and Henry is her husband's biographer. Leo Hertzberg, whose son has died when he was 11, accompanies them, too (cf. 96-7). Strikingly, her friends' lives have all been shaken by loss and all find diversion from their pain and comfort in each other's company.

The guests and residents readily engage in an academic discussion of philosophy and neuroscience of memory. I argue that surprisingly, the turning point in Inga's process of mourning is her announcement that Burton has united past and present research as well as scientific and scholarly thinking about the nature of memories. The decisive moment Inga, Burton, Sonia and Henry celebrate cheerfully is purely conversational – Inga defines it and bursts out: "You mean you're bringing together classical memory systems and neuroscience! That's wonderful!" – and the other three consent (100). This quote reinforces my project of combining the genre of life writing

and life sciences, which circles around memories and neuroscience, and which provides explanatory frameworks to explain why literary work with memories is beneficial to the individual character. It is not entirely clear where Burton has seen a connection or overlap. I suggest against the background of my previous discussion of neuroscience that Burton discovers that the classical knowledge of the associative connection of memories and the contemporary research of the association of memories in the brain, as pointed out in chapter 2.2 in reference to the associative activity of angular gyrus, describe the same phenomenon by means of different disciplinary lenses. I think that combining both frees the mind to further associations of memories and the emotions which link them to conversations in real time. Burton is then allowed to present his state of research to the group.

I think that only the connection of intellectual and scientific theory about memories, of life sciences and life writing, opens the discussion to an associative conversation about emotionally challenging personal memories. The reason for its success is the fact that both constitute one part of mental reality and it is only accessible if combined. Therefore, the combination of life writing and life sciences is essential for the successful practice of narrative medicine. Having a better grasp on the reality of memories, the deciding situation has raised the conversational content and dialogic mode above the previous level of interaction and they can attach the academic discourse to personal experience. The dinner conversation can then move on from the stated interdisciplinary understanding to a personal understanding of memories. The mixture of wishes and memories in dreams, which connect memories associatively, is crucial for analyzing their own dreams. Sonia begins the exchange of ideas saying, "I know dreams come from memories" (SoA 102). The adjoining associative verbal moves quickly lead towards the thematic focus of the occasion, the painful grief every invited person must live through. The guests take the chance of attaching their own dream figures to Inga's and Burton's expounded intellectual understanding of dreams, memories and neuroscience. I think that their stated theoretical understanding translates into correct experiential contributions on part of the guests:

> "In the dream, I said to myself, 'I've seen my father's ghost.' "
> After a pause, Leo said, "It can't be accidental that we bring back dead people we've known and loved in our dreams. Surely that's a form of wishing." (SoA 106)

The dinner conversation ends when Inga speaks about her dead husband's work with Henry. Inga's memory of Max turns everyone's attention to her and their own feelings

of grief and loss (cf. 105-6). Only Erik, whose fantasies about Miranda distract him at this decisive moment, cannot keep up with the established conversational level.

I have previously said that transgressions are a typical way of opening paths of healing in the genre of life writing. As a widow, Inga enacts a transgression which almost seems like an act of madness to the conventional mind but actually points to fashioning new paths in her life. Inga questions herself and wonders "What kind of woman sleeps with her dead husband's biographer?" (SoA 225). I would suggest that Inga takes on the necessary eccentricity, the transgression of a traditional widow's code of conduct, to promote her plan and motif further: she has invited her dead husband's biographer, Henry, whom she has been dating for a while, to her dinner party. Henry is shamelessly eager to investigate and take on Max's personal and professional life although the widow is alive, in mourning and has not even accomplished the goal of settling the husband's legacy. Inga takes the chance of interacting with this sort of 'transitional object', a man who, in order to write the biography, must internalize Max's writing, his perception and world view, adapt himself to his mind. I assume that Inga has the possibility to live half-way between her husband's life and death, she diverts herself to a certain degree and learns to let go of the deceased. As outlined in section "Madness and Illness Narratives", her transgressive energy allows her to mourn and escape from imprisoning behavioral expectation traditionally thought to be appropriate for widows of her social standing, by crossing borderlines, she can feel grief and pave the way for healing plotlines.

The complexity of the kinds of documents that are relevant for directing the plot in life writing is relevant to the success of Inga's re-arrangement, too, and emphasizes the need to include various types of text in the genre. In Inga's case, a letter and a memoir significantly direct her possibilities of mourning. Inga's father has left behind one letter, indicating a secret he shared with a woman he had known before the children were born. In the letter a woman called Lisa writes: "Dear Lars, I know you will never ever say nothing about what happened. … It can't matter now she's in heaven or to the ones on earth" (SoA 4-5). Inga and Erik are curious about the letter's content and decide to do research in their father's milieu to learn more about the secret. During their investigation they find out that the letter is about a stillborn. Yet, she, other than her brother Erik, accepts its ambiguous ending and is not eager to speculate who the dead baby's father was. Instead, I think that it is important to note that she makes reasonable use of engaging with her family's past and its transgenerational templates to understand

why secrets like the seven letters and an 'illegitimate' child may have happened to her marriage, too. There is no definite answer though and parts of her family's past remain elusive.

There is another significant written document which helps her to re-organize her memory templates: one memoir about her family's immigration, her father's struggle to survive in North America and his years as a soldier in World War II. The memoir is added to the novel's chapters and appears in chronological order next to Erik's narration. I think that the letter and the memoir open doors to the father's past and make sure that Inga can mourn her father's death appropriately. These two documents of his life are forms of life writing. They are not coincidental in the sense that the formats are random choices, the memoir and a letter are not arbitrarily put into play. I think that they are exemplary but necessary elements of plotting generational changes. Reading the memoir, past and present, Inga's father's memories and her own mesh in terms of particular life experiences, and researching her father's environment and meeting people he has known, integrates her own and her father's live stories. Inga learns about her father's hitherto unknown field of interaction and perspective. During the reading process and during research on the spot, she mingles her own and her father's memories and emotion to the degree that she gradually integrates herself into the ongoing family history and its developing plotline.

I argue that after Inga has thoroughly worked through her past, making use of different channels and methods, she can rearrange her present life, too. I think that after Inga has understood repetitive patterns in her life, made another step in grieving her husband at dinner, and reconnected herself to her father's memories by reading his memoir and researching the letter's contents, Inga is empowered and confident enough to resituate herself. She summons a meeting with the journalist, Edie Bly, her husband's biographer, her brother, her daughter and Burton, who has secretly bought the seven letters Max addressed to Edie and prevents their appearance in the public discourse, joins them later. Before Burton appears in the scene, Inga clarifies her incentive again:

> Don't you see, Edie, we have to try to come to an understanding, because my daughter and your son are sister and brother. You've sold the letters to an anonymous person who could do many things with them, and I think it would be fair … if there's something in them that might hurt Joel or Sonia someday. (SoA 286)

In the quoted passage, Inga emphasizes that the children's future is her primary motif of solving the issue. Despite the severity of the issue, humor enters the conversation soon. The shrewd journalist, who wants to publish her dead husband's love letters to

his lover, is referred to as 'Hamburger.' At the most complex occasion, namely, upon settling the issue of the inheritance and upon agreeing to be silent about Max's extramarital affair and its 'illegitimate' offspring, Inga and Sonia can laugh again. At the meeting, Inga speaks to everyone decently and with respect, the communication shows Inga confidently at ease. Burton who has helped Inga and secretly bought the seven letters Max wrote to his lover, hands them out to the rightful owner. Inga can pursue her motif – her daughter's protection from a public discrediting of her family – precisely because she has previously been so busy to clear her past from obstructions and hindrances (cf. 290). I come to the conclusion that at the end, Inga successfully plotted the final event and she deliberately ends the replication of dreadful memories. She has recovered by directing events like the dinner and final meeting to improve her proceedings, yet, she has only been able to do so and invent her own life because she has worked through and altered her memories. As a creator and author of her own life, she has implemented templates that do not repeat negative emotional reactions and are self-sustainable when they again project themselves into her future.

4.3. Life writing and Psychoanalysis

In *The Sorrows of an American*, the narrator Erik Davidsen describes the territory he ostensibly occupies and the lives of those related to him after his father passed away. As Erik is the narrator of the novel, his view guides the reader's perception of the plot. Yet, his privileged position as narrator is slightly levelled by the creative activities of the other characters. For example, Inga intervenes in the plotline, even though she does not appear as narrator. Due to Erik's interest in and description of other characters' accomplishments, the reader learns about their mental life, too. This is again emblematic for the genre of life writing and its effort to give voice to different positions and perspectives to reconstruct subjectivity of characters. It uses different media and formats to reconstruct subjectivity of various characters.

Erik, who is a psychoanalyst, is a character who mixes very critical and aggressive tunes with sensitive and elaborate thoughts. In the novel, he faces severe feelings of loneliness. Erik makes use of a notebook to report his inner life but he does not make use of writing for therapeutic purposes. In this section I argue that even though Erik tries to rebuild his life, his way of engaging with his problems is only partly successful. In comparison, his sister Inga employs more effective strategies to direct her

life. Erik does not make use of the one power he has, namely, to sort out his inner life and primarily his memories, in order to transform what he projects in the world and creates therewith. Instead, he replicates the malfunctioning structures he lives in and tries to distract himself to not feel the pain they cause. For instance, he interferes with his new tenants' private matters "dreaming of companionship, too, of dialogues and walks and dinners…" (p. 51). Erik develops romantic feelings for her and loses control over the situation when her former boyfriend gets involved too. Rather than processing his divorce and understanding why he feels unhappy, he makes his life even more complicated and confusing.

> After my father died, I began to fill another notebook, jotting down fragments of conversations that had taken place during the day, my fears about what looked like an imminent invasion of Iraq, dreams I could remember, as well as unexpected associations that arrived from the recesses of my brain. (SoA 56)

Erik is divorced, lonely and his new tenant Miranda immediately spurs his desire to get hold of her. The problem is that Erik does no research on what is the reason for his fear, irrational desire, and painful solitude. Erik will later find a more realistic dating option, yet, he still does not find answers to his problems. I argue that below Erik's desire for Miranda linger dynamics whose confrontation he does not dare to put into action and cause his final state of confusion, which proves that Erik's approach to solve inner turmoil is not successful. In this section, I provide evidence for these maladjustments in reference to the fantasy object Miranda has become. Then, I move on to Erik's conversational strategies during his psychoanalytic sessions and argue that Erik projects his own problems onto the doctor-patient relationship. Accordingly, Erik does not seem to perform well enough as a psychoanalyst. I want to show that Lane, who reminds Erik of his failures at work, triggers the underlying conflicts that cause Erik's problems at work. Finally, I explore how his awkwardly demanding way of dealing with his dead father's remote past cause states of bewilderment, leaving him in a confused state at the end of the novel.

Miranda does not answer the cravings of Erik's body and, for this reason, his lascivious motifs reappear to his mind in the shape of recurring fantasies, which are problematic because Erik's fantasy world is a form of crude escapism that does not solve the actual problem: boredom, which is an inability to create from what he has within the realms of his inner life. He treats his life without any sign of humor and abandons himself to his desire without receiving a single promising gesture on her part and soon enough, Erik is frustrated and angry about his failure to win Miranda.

Although his mental reactions may seem like an ordinary crush, my reading says that Erik suffers from unrequited desire because his `I` is disfunctional. For further elucidation, I quote Freud saying: "Die funktionelle Wichtigkeit des Ichs kommt darin zum Ausdruck, daß ihm normalerweise die Herrschaft über die Zugänge zur Motilität eingeräumt ist. Es gleicht so im Verhältnis zum Es dem Reiter, der die überlegene Kraft des Pferdes zügeln soll…" (1975: 294). The metaphorical rider that dwells in Erik's body should have been trained to handle the horse, the inner forces and sense organs, by learning to tame the wild animal without breaking its will; practically, the rider makes use of the reins, an emblem of mind, which emerges in between Erik's hands (his embodied understanding) and the horse (his sense organs), and, one step further, the inner forces. I would recommend an art form or strategy which liberally governs the Id, the power of the horse, is thus the key to a successful implementation of a functional 'I'. Evidently, Erik, whose inner life is a stranger to himself, has no such tool to understand, control and direct his inner drives – and his drives succumb to base motives. This failure to set himself in order, to observe and control himself, is a serious problem because Erik can only organize his path of life by setting straight his inner life – that would have been his power.

Erik's self-description of being "…a man possessed…" particularly raises the reader's suspicion – is the man possessed by his own vandalizing Id (SoA 122)? Clearly, Erik's storms of inner desire amplify after his father's funeral, suggesting that below Erik's sexual cravings are conflicts whose tensions and stresses built up without having an outlet. I suppose that Erik's problems with Miranda are not the cause of his depression, his desire to win her also results from the underdeveloped relations to his family – the Oedipal conflict pulls him down and prevents a proper period of mourning. There is a key paragraph in the *Sorrows of an American* representing Erik's dire condition which awakens his obsession to appropriate Miranda's life to improve his own. Yet, much to his regret, her reluctance to answer his needs reinforces his desolation (cf. 122-4). In the paragraph, the choice of qualitative adjectives reveals his condition: the adjectives 'bleak, loveless, bad, possessed, fragmented, disjointed, alone, slender (his mother's body), involved, responsible, unmistakable, erotic, obedient, not gentle, hard, angry, anxious, injured, fictional, strange, lost, hidden, shameful, distraught, stupid, uncanny' disclose his entirely depressed state of being. The paragraph insinuates that Erik has not settled the oedipal conflict with his mother and father, as a result, he prefers to repress his unresolved family relations, his life is bleak.

I assume that the conflict blocs the re-emergence of memories to his mind, and those memories cannot undergo a process of an appropriate re-ordering. He acts on grounds of tension building up in consequence to the inhibiting reluctance to question his attitude to his parents and ends up in a downward spiral. His family relations have not matured properly – in that case, it is hardly possible to properly commit to a relationship or a family in the future. Because his old inner conflicts show up in his present relations, Erik accepts Miranda's reluctance to date him at some point. He dates another woman instead but my point is that this switch is only superficial and the new date, as we will see at the end of the novel, is a distraction from a conflict of inner objects he did not settle internally.

I think that apart from his love life, Erik's relationship to his patients is sorely afflicted by his inability to grieve his father and his inner unrest apparently shapes his work as a psychoanalyst. If he does not grieve, he cannot take on a positive attitude to his past and let it repeat itself supportively in the future. Erik attempts to heal his patients are doomed to fail since he is prone to unreflectively project his resulting smouldering discontent onto his perception of the patient. In a conversation with his friend Magda about his problems at work he admits "You think what's happening with Ms. L. has something to do with my father" (139). Though the two talk about his grief, the fact that Erik cannot do grief work adverts to problems below the conscious awareness of his 'I' – amongst it a mood disorder involving anxiety (cf. 215, cf. 228). Problematically, he does not research the cause of his anxiety, let alone the intense moments of aggression and irritation. Which childhood interactions with his father may have been first instances of these emotions? Because Erik does not go in search of the triggers which allow patients to irritate and distract him, his delinquent inner life does not get proper treatment. When patient Ms. L. visits Erik the last time, showing symptoms so severe that he could not have solved them, Erik concedes that in between patient and doctor his fear was just as present as Ms. L.'s personality disorder (cf. 234). I think that the problem about his unresolved fear is that it again hinders a good implementation of new relationships in life. Here, Erik's fear prevents the improvement of life structures because he does not try to overcome his anxieties.

Problematically, these issues lead to an utter state of confusion at the end of the novel. This is not surprising considering that Erik has not adjusted his memories and emotion, the higher levels of thought cannot create an accurate thought that direct him properly in life. I will provide evidence that Erik's conduct does not help him control

and organize his unconscious forces, too, but allows them to direct maladjusted interactions. I suppose that Erik circumvents working through grief, anxiety and fear and, therefore, develops symptoms including uncontrolled aggression, desire, a greedy will to power and wish to assume control over other people's life. There are three scenes highlighting this point and a third one analyzed in the coming chapter. The fact that Erik crosses conversational borderlines in relation to his dead father, Lane and Miranda is symptomatic because he desires to know what is not meant to be known to him instead of focusing on an understanding of himself. Yet, all intensify his inability to think about himself clearly, the anxiety-ridden "poisonous fog" he is lost in increases rather than decreases in the course of the novel (110).

Like Miranda and Lane, Erik makes use of a form of self-expression in ways which dangerously entangle him in his problems rather than solving them because culture and art become an instrument of the symptoms rather than strategies to deal with their causes. What I see is an unfortunate cascade of emotion: When Erik and Inga empty out their father's study at the very beginning of the novel, Erik thinks that he is "about to ransack a man's mind, dismantle an entire life" (2). I suggest the reading that this aggressive attitude does not indicate inarticulate and unsophisticated uses of language. It is a defense against an empathetic consideration of his relationship to his father – Erik fears to become aware of his conflictive feelings towards him. Towards the middle of the novel, Erik's inner tensions have built up significantly and he finds relief in a fist fight with his antagonist Lane after the latter has pointed to his failures at the work place. The immediate "sensation of joyous release" would, in the moment, cause confusion and the inability to understand the subsequent communication with Lane. After the fight, Erik observes: "We shook hands, but I had no idea what this gesture meant" (217). The comment foreshadows his later state of confusion and his dwindling understanding. I think that if Erik does not know the situational causality in his life, if he acts on impulse only, he cannot create a plotline that makes sense and is meaningful. Erik crosses boundaries again when he and Inga research a secret of his father's past – he desires to know too much, and in consequence thereof, he is "battered by confusion" the next morning (249). When Eglatine accidently falls out of a window, Erik gets involved in his tenant's life again. He visits Eggy and her mother in the hospital and intervenes without need, he gets involved in Miranda's and her daughter's life, and as a result, he experiences the same disorganization (cf. 277). In the hospital, Erik's mind produces no more than "an awful accumulation of meaningless sensory

information", although his "hunger to know" still drives him into a direction which is clearly harmful to him (299).

Emotion and desire spur Erik's initiative in these situations but they do not build a healing plotline because his I is not in power and he is driven by harmful unconscious desires. He does not make use of the power to organize his life by establishing a proper order within. Instead, he acts impulsively and cannot learn to make sense of them because he does not relate their origin to similar childhood experiences or memory templates in the way Inga does. He is a passive victim to his vandalizing Id and has no artform that informs the I about its problems and strategies to put them in order. Erik has not learned to write his own plot, he taps into Miranda's life to distract himself instead of inventing his own field of verbal and bodily action. More than anything else, he does not muse about how his current emotions relate to similar emotions in the past, what unsettles him within. I thus think that following his desire which is largely uncontrolled by a functional I, letting desire act as the motif for actions causes opportunistic actions which do not add up to a meaningful and logical self-organization. The last pages present a haphazard disconnection of his thoughts. I, therefore, conclude that his unconscious inner desires and drives have caught him up in adversary actions and his 'I' could not control his thoughts and dreams to direct his life for the better.

4.4. Photography, Drawing and Film

In this section, I interpret how Erik's rival Lane, his tenant Miranda and his brother-in-law Max use art as a means of creative self-reflection. As they raise relational issues stored in memories to consciousness and see them reflected in their art, they engage in sophisticated narrative medicine projects. My goal is to show that on the level of the plot, the characters' work with memory templates can direct their path of life in a direction that promises more stability. I argue that the character's simple visual representation of mental or family problems has no convincingly positive influence on the artists. Their art is engaging but it does not fully live up to the idea of healing the mind as narrative medicine would suggest. However, they reveal their subjectivity in art. I think that it is possible to approach, understand, articulate and approach their mental problems through an interpretation of their artworks. The following interpretation is thus meant to study challenging mental development through the analysis of film, photography and drawing in life writing. Its contents provide explanatory approaches to study problematic repetitive emotions and relationships in

context of narrative medicine. In comparison to Inga's success, the interpretation of their art then helps me pointing out why some artistic or writerly approaches to life crisis are less promising, emphasizing the necessity of the critical discussion of medical life writing strategies. Apparently, the agents of arts do not always use art appropriately. Harriet Burden in *The Blazing World* is another example.

Lane and Miranda are both visual artists. Miranda draws on her intimate inner life, her dreams, fantasies and horrors, and aspects of imagination technology cannot make visible. She works with her hand. Lane is into digital photography and likes to display his shattered family in galleries. After Miranda moves into her new apartment in Erik's house, Lane gets wind of her being situated in close proximity to a potential competitor. From Lane's perspective, his territory now extends far into Erik's; Erik's encroaching on his territory provokes him and, after strolling around, he leaves behind disconcerting photos as territorial markers. Lane leaves these traces of warning and territorial claims at their doorstep to make his anger known to the residents: many photos show Miranda and Eggy as if their mind has been erased. Accordingly, Miranda, Erik and Eggy live in a state of distressing tension or thrilling suspense, and he disturbs the drab monotony of Erik's everyday life. Lane's art is no more than mere spectacle, it does not have a particular effect on his inner life: rather than refining his inner life he just represents the external reality on photos and in that case, there is decay.

The digital representation of his life with Miranda, Miranda's excursions with Erik, a photo he shot when he once broke into Erik's house (cf. 262-3) reveal that the "multiple fictions" he lives in counter the premises considered important goals of life writing and narrative medicine. Lane's thinking about photos counters an understanding of what it means to be human, and he is the character whose life is most antagonistic to the goal of healing through autobiographical work. I deduce that his photography is hence not beneficial to his life, it exerts no healing power because it facilitates a spectacle without working through deeper mental contents. I further infer that this character contrasts greatly with any other character because he deliberately chooses to not work through his memories and consider it real enough to take it seriously. Lane believes in façade. Saying that the "world's going virtual anyway; there's no reality left", he pursues a postmodern nihilist argument (SoA 217). I think that this choice of theory is at odds with the aims of narrative medicine and this has serious consequences on those who depend on him. Lane believes that he can represent the "mess" he calls his life on film but he does not research or display its causal connections, nor does he

add reflections to his representative art to inspire change (SoA 217). He lacks the motif of finding solutions to the chaos he lives in. Rather than remembering and representing memories for the sake of understanding its patterns or analyzing how they relate to his present life, he is caught up in the present. Lane's example clearly shows that decisive work with memory is necessary in his case to avoid life to succumb to chaos. The first step towards doing so is the acceptance that there is reality, and that each person is responsible for creating their own life experiences.

Lane thinks that the present, the world he experiences, is a simulation. Because Lane celebrates simulations of life on film and photo, he cannot control his unfolding plot. Therefore, his art does not seriously consider options to solve family drama by actively changing the interactions and exchanges. If media consumption and production replace an actual view upon mental realties, the consequences are stern. In Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, published in 1977, Sontag points out that "…in situations where the photographer has a *choice* between a photograph and a life, to *choose* the photograph" is a clear sign that the person has been fully absorbed in the superficial worldview it promotes and wrongly assumes that photos represent reality as our eyes perceive it (cf. 12, cf. 153, emphasis added). Sontag assumes that photos "cannot create a moral position," because photos are not expressions of the artist's ethical worldview and it does not engage or express the photographer's emotional life (Sontag 2008: 17). Other than painting or writing, this mechanical art form does not necessarily require an empathetic thought process that involves emotional processing of a scene and a complex view into reality. Lane's answer to his daughter's request and offer of talks, the one occasion he could have chosen to step out and begin a dialog with his daughter to better their circumstances, is that he cannot help but take photos. He conceits of acting on grounds of necessity and pretends that he has no choice (cf. SoA 217). Sontag argues that even though such a person might pretend to find no way back to reality, the person has indeed come to a decision and has chosen the world of appearances. I think that in that manner, Lane has most obviously made the choice of not establishing himself as the respectable other to whom his daughter can relate. The idea that he lives in a simulation does not justify his escapist attitude and is an excuse for not considering pain in his life.

Because Miranda draws pictures, I may be inclined to think that her move towards her family problems is more promising. Erik caught a first glimpse of Miranda's work within the novel's first few pages and describes "a large female figure

with a gaping mouth and sharp teeth like a wolf's" (SoA 23). During the dinner party in Inga's apartment, she admits that she dreams about becoming a monster, an imagined monster Erik immediately associates with her drawing (cf. SoA 103). I suggest that the monster visualizes her unrest and rage, yet, it does not translate into parallel behavior in her life. Miranda does not experience rage enough to feel the need to change her relationships to Erik and Lane just as Inga's states of dread motivate her immediate intervention into the unfolding plot line. Rather, Miranda remains comparatively passive and lets coincidence decide her case. The young mother does not even change her attitude after her daughter falls out of a window and onto her head on a visit at her father's place and forfeits her remarkable creativity and intelligence. I propose that Miranda explains her apathy and indifference to family affairs and her daughter's fate in a conversation with Erik. Miranda explains:

> "I'm drawing."
> "Dreams?"
> Miranda looked suddenly remote. "In a way, yes."
> "What way?"
> I watched her hesitate, but then, she said. "I dreamed that I was pregnant again, but the child wasn't growing right inside me; it was a tiny girl shriveling up, and it was my fault because *I kept forgetting about her*, not doing the right things, and *not wanting her enough*. And then a woman was there, standing in front of me. A really tall dark-skinned woman. She said, 'We'll have *to clean the knife*.' (211, emphasis added)

In this key conversation, Miranda talks about her artwork and reveals that she may regret her decision of having the baby. She explains that because she has not wanted the pregnancy, the dream state, apart from not being able to pay full attention to her daughter, visualizes her drastic and unconscious wish to cut the cords to her daughter. I think she never planned to have Eggy and finds herself in a life she did not envision for herself. Miranda is dissatisfied with cutting back her artistic aspirations for the sake of the unplanned child. Therefore, she is not enraged that Lane, who shares the lack of sympathy for his daughter's concerns, has not paid attention to the kid. Yet, the artwork has no satisfying effect on her life: I think that Eggy's later fall out of the window exemplifies that her artwork failed to improve the problematic relationship by finding a way to create a bond between mother and child.

> …I've been reading a lot of Jamaican history." She pointed to the wrinkled skull, "This is like the little white colonial head that wanted to rule the huge body of Jamaica. Look, one foot is chained, enslaved, the other is free, like the Maroons. It's as if my brain collapsed it all into a single horrible figure." She paused. "But I also think that the tiny old hand and body in this part," Miranda traced the covered body with her finger, "must have come from my gran… . Her grandfather was a white man, so you see, it's all mixed up, and there's Indian blood in the family, too. Gran was many things. She went to Anglican schools, read English poets, and was big on propriety and manners. (114-5)

In the paragraph cited above, Miranda says that her brain has collapsed the symbolically and personified history of Jamaica into one unsightly figure which is to say that the historical structures made from decisive events and situations and the derived political regulations crumbled and fell. As I often observe in life writing, family history, national and colonial history coincide, and in this case, the national history is figuratively reflected in Miranda's family history and particularly in her grandmother's life, too. I argue that the picture is a piece of visual life writing, of representing a failed attempt to organize her extended autobiography. Although the drawing sketches Miranda's inner reality in relation to her past, it does not contribute to her mental health because it does not contain an idea of how to rebuild narrative structures upon whose foundations future events could take shape. Miranda works with personal and historical memories, but she does not work with spatial and temporal images whose implementation create a better vision of her future. This image does not provide a frame for the future. Yet, it provides ample evidence for the fact that she has not yet worked through family history enough.

In "Unformulated Experience: From Dissociation to Imagination in Psychoanalysis" (1997), Donnel B. Stern argues that in order to deal with familiar chaos and the dissolution of coherent structures, it is appropriate to dissociate from processes of decay. He expounds on decay in family life and notes that the way repression brings forth repressed content, dissociation is a reaction to the unwanted effects of another person's unformulated experience, experience she has not interpreted and not analyzed although such measures were necessary (cf. 87). Stern observes that chaos is due to "*defensively* motivated unformulated experience", stating that the person's mind crumbles because the ego has defended itself from the appearance of unwanted material in consciousness and prevents its therapeutic treatment (87, emphasis added). Obviously, the other family members should not get involved with and attach themselves to the dissolving mind. They must formulate repressed mental contents but they must dissociate from those who do not formulate unconscious wishes and desires. In the last part of this chapter, I argue that Inga's husband Max slides into chaotic living conditions because his behavior is a reaction to repression rather than a formulation of repressed mental contents; his motif is repression and it inspires his last project. Precisely, Max represses the conflict with his mother, his life decays and the other family members must dissociate from those production of his mind which express his languish state of mind. In contrast, Inga is, like her father able to express her dreaded

and conflictive feelings and continues to write even after her father died (cf. SoA 2, cf. 46).

I emphasize that defensively ignoring his own mental contents and memories is dangerous for Max whereas dissociating from actions pursued by people whose mind decays in reaction to the repression of disconcerting mental contents is advisable (cf. Stern 94). I move on to explore how Erik interprets and spells out, how he formulates a work Max has made after and in reaction to his mother's death in a state of mental decay. Only Inga, equipped with a better perception of the respective work, empowers herself in the course of understanding the effect Max's last work had on her life aptly. Stern defines that dissociation is, in these cases, not comparable to simple avoidance but the rightful decision to refrain from reflecting upon and abstracting from another person's experience and not giving in to the urge to understand and interpret verbally or in writing what is happening to that person and what we could easily observe in detail (cf. 87). Thus speaking, Inga must not interpret her husband's behavior after his mother dies and his conflict with her ignites.

Inga considers the role the shooting of the film *Into the Blue* has played at the end of Max's life: Max meets a young actor and they begin an affair, yet, he does not inform his wife about it nor does the new woman inform Max about her pregnancy. Max's secrecy makes Inga vulnerable to attacks and threatens the life-world Inga has created for her daughter's sake. Inga watches the film, she speaks to Erik about her response to it and the changes in her relationship to Max at the time of the shooting of the film. She understands that the movie was taken after and in reaction to the death of her mother-in-law, was shot not long before before she became a widow, and it stages Max's lover and the mother of Max's son and Sonia's brother, Edie Bly, as Lili. She is exposed to his chaotic life style. I argue that the causality at work in Max's life at the time he is immersed in the film project is due to inner conflict: Max cannot mourn his mother's death because he represses his conflictive relationship to her, his eyes dim and his mind decays because his conflict with his mother is unresolved and obstructs working through the unconscious mental material. The disordered and repressed desires cause mental decay and chaos, his failure to mourn prevents the necessary change of his position in the family and hierarchy. Instead of coming to terms with his conflicts, he writes a screenplay articulating his morbid thoughts and hands it over to the director without essential revision: I think that he acts in reaction to repression, he desires a younger woman who is the actor in the movie because the oedipal conflict attaches his

mind to the image of young faces and bodies, he impregnates her at the peak of his oedipal conflict and his spirit dies (cf. SoA 129).

The film's two fatal mistakes come into view upon reading Erik's nuanced description of its contents. Erik, who watches the movie in Inga's place, introduces the film by suggesting that it was Max's intention to write a screenplay "about a young man Arkadi", who meets a young attractive woman, played by Edie, in the streets. The people in the city are in a state of Babylonian confusion. Erik's retelling of the film's scenery signifies that its color system has lost its vivacity and strength, and replicates sickly and dull shades (cf. 65).

> Three men dressed in **red** shout nonsense at him and point to his clothes, howling with derisive laughter. He is wearing ordinary **blue** jeans and a T-shirt. Not long after that, he sees the back of a woman in the street. She turns her beautiful head, smiles at him, and disappears into a crowd of people in **yellow**. Seconds later, he is beaten **bloody** by a group of strangers in **green**. After a series of misadventures, Arkadi is taken in by a friendly, deaf inn-keeper… . While he's there, the colors of the inn change slightly. One morning the carpet is **bluish**, the next day **greenish**, the following day a more **yellow-green**. … He decides there must be a mysterious color code that must be penetrated in order to understand this new city (66, my emphasis).

I think that the colors indicate that the represented standard and quality of life declines. Erik, who is at that point in time already in a state of confusion, describes the film verbally and, in the process of translating visual impressions into a linguistic expression, he provides a first interpretation and entangles his mind with Max's unpleasant thoughts. Erik's visual perception fades therewith and only gains vivacity on his walk home, when he, first, remembers Sonia's counterargument that the film and her mother's unease have to do with the father rather than Arkadi, and second, brings to mind one cheerful photograph of Max, a photo Inga keeps in her apartment. I suppose that Sonia's final autobiographical categorization of the film – "I think it's about Dad" – situates the film in Max's life and in relation to her mother's response, the photograph preserves the memory of his happiness (67). In combination, it restores the quality of Erik's color perception and felt quality of life (cf. SoA 67). He narrates: "The colors of red geraniums and purple pansies in pots…, the blooming deep pink crab apples and the white dogwoods felt as strong as pain" (67). Unfortunately, Erik does not draw these conclusions and watches the movie again, this time without counteracting its unwanted effects: his mind gets absorbed in a system devoid of lively colors, a system trying to get away from colors associated with womanly tastes. His thoughts are entangled to a plotline which has brought about Max's decline and from which Inga has disentangled. I thus resume that Inga has dissociated herself from Max's mess whereas Erik takes part

in his decline. Then, Erik's loneliness increases because his closest family members are now active in a field he cannot take part in (cf. 69).

I may ask why the color system is in touch with an autobiographical reading of the film. Why does an autobiographical categorization improve the colors and quality of life? One passage hinting at the division of work at home tells us that, to intensify its vivacity, Inga usually revises Max's scripts before their publication. The passage indicates that Inga works through her husband's handwritten drafts and embellishes the qualities of his scripts (cf. 240). In the process, the fictionalized or truthfully represented life experiences undergo one process of refinement and amelioration. The revision intensifies the represented colors and, in this manner, improves the represented and created quality of life in retrospect. It balances the natural fading of memories and betters the projection of such memories into the future; if the character does not balance the natural fading of memories, the projections' quality declines over time, too. In the next step, the author re-reads the text and, willingly or not, recovers his mind in correspondence to the augmented aesthetic value of the script. Therefore, I suggest that the reason why Inga cannot prevent her husband's downfall after his mother's death is that she has, other than his previous writings, not been in charge of revising the screenplay: she had no possibility to improve the color descriptions and breathe life into the plot. It is dead and dull and Max's deterioration accelerates because he re-reads and works with a text which lacks vitality (cf. 240). This point emphasizes that the reading of a text and its interpretation is either enlivening or not and it makes a difference whether a person reads and interprets a text which either *vitalizes* the inner life or *moderates* the perceptual organs: the former betters the mental state and the latter is sickening. The film shows that not every piece of art is of therapeutical value in itself and only those working with memory and perception with the intention of getting better can improve and heal the characters' mental states. In a broader context, this example shows that revisions dedicated to promote life writing as a genre should indeed go imperial for the sake of supporting the mental health of the readers and writers of such narratives (cf. Banerjee 2-3).

Inga did not have the possibility to adjust the color system represented in the film's screen play to the one she has put into effect at home – a system that has helped Erik to temporarily raise the level of his perceptual experiences and quality of life to Inga's high standards. I think that colors speak to all perceptual experiences and all perceptual experiences can become an experience of color. Color is the lingua franca of

our impressions and expression. Inga does not interpret the run-down movie but dissociates from Max's inglorious end; she does *not* translate the plotline, which is the defensive reaction to his repressed conflicts, into her ways of understanding the world. Inga does not engage herself with the movie itself but with what happened to her marriage "*around* the time of the movie" (SoA 129, emphasis added). The *preposition* 'around' defines her focus on the *temporal setting* of the artwork and dissociates her from the deadening artwork itself. Inga dissolves her attachment to her husband's state of mind at the time, she dissociates from his productions of chaos, which result from a defense against the original conflict he cannot formulate in and through his art.

In "Narrative Permeability: Crossing the Dissociative Barriers in and out of Film" (2006), Arthur Heisermann and Maura Spiegel, who also use films for the purpose of narrative medicine, lay out that films and movies primarily engage emotion. Certainly, good movies can stir emotion with the necessary complexity but if they can, they are effective. Heisermann and Spiegel go one step further, telling us that films and movies especially "locate neglected or dreaded parts of ourselves" (cf. 464). Which dreadful feelings does Inga confront during and after she watches the movie? Sadly, Max's betrayal and its consequences, that is, the letters he wrote to his lover. The problem that nobody is informed about the fact that he has a son exposes his daughter's life and wife to attacks from journalists and to the intrusion of a complete stranger, Edie Bly. The possibility and threat provokes a repetition of dreadful feelings which have already flooded Inga's feelings in her years at school. The apprehension which haunted Inga's youth is also about to seep into Sonia's teenage years. After watching one scene of *Into the Blue* which informs Inga about Max's desire for Edie, dread enters Inga's existence. She speaks about '*losing my insides*', about the banality of being the cheated wife and widow, she remembers Max's unrequited love, accuses herself of being guilty and mad, dreads being ignored and attacked, moans and complains, supposedly fails to acknowledge that she is the successful wife next to a famous husband (supposedly because she is actually right that she is ignored because she cannot infer from media attention and book sells that she is seen for her writing's contents and the life necessary to write such books), she is angry, jealous, she reaffirms that she owns the contents of the letters Max has written to Edie, letters whose contents would make the affair subject to public scrutiny. She comes to the conclusion that she must re-write her story and, a little later, restates that the motif of her action is the protection of her daughter (cf. 129-134).

The genre of life writing guides my understanding of *The Sorrows of an American* because it presents characters in positions such as that of a psychoanalyst, artists, a widow and half-orphans with empathy. It is committed to a careful and critical recreation of their subjectivity. Their use of unconventional communicative settings and artworks gives the possibility to reconstruct their feelings, perception and emotional memories. The characters' use of communicative settings, art forms and formats are compelling because these activities allow for decisive retrieval of memories and the representation of their current state of mind. The reconstruction of their subjectivity in life writing uncovers their own vulnerability and gives them a voice in the development of the plotline in the literary world they inhabit. The plot is also honest in its portrayal of accomplishments and failures, yet, it certainly shows that characters willing to engage with their past can live with unsettling experiences. The possibility to do so has to do with the deliberate work with autobiographical memory that were repressed up to that point. Once they appear to consciousness characters like Inga and her daughter Sonia become aware of it and can change their attitude towards these experiences. In their case, life sciences still serve as explanatory model in the background as it allows me to argue that work with upsetting or traumatizing memory is efficient and shows positive effect. Surely, Inga has also successfully practiced narrative medicine on the level of the plot: though her creative activity she has changed the course and direction of her life. The portrayal of Erik's interaction with his patients, his vantage point as a psychoanalyst, the practice of talking about life and death in the novel situates it in the field of narrative medicine, too. Assuming the perspective of a psychoanalyst can encourage the critical understanding of conflicts between patients and therapists.

Throughout the chapter, I suggested that Inga's approach to her memories is more successful than any other character's strategy to deal with the problems they are involved in. Although Inga's methods are less obvious and more ambiguous than the other character's artistic activities, her implicit advances allow for a decidedly profound way of directing the upcoming situations in her life. I wanted to point out that on the level of the plot, her choice to manage her life culminates in her ability to imagine and realize her own plot strands. She engages with practices of narrative medicine more successfully than other characters because she is willing to make correction. Her life is not just happening to her, she takes matters into her own hands and reinvents it herself. In the next chapter, I will show that in the fictional world Hustvedt imagines, the protagonist Harriet Burden makes use of a similar idea of inventing her own plot line.

Yet, Burden does, unlike the previous characters we have discussed so far, change the discriminating mechanisms of her own perception in order to prevent the proliferation of derivative destructive social patterns, too. She thus paves the way for kind interactions and the creation of utterly new plotlines of future characters.

5. *The Blazing World*

The Blazing World narrates the life story of Harriet Burden, an ageing New York woman artist, and includes elements of fictional diary entries. The female character is built on the experience as woman intellectual and artist struggling to be accepted in her work field. The female perception of being subordinated to male productions and achievements is a recurring motif in Hustvedt's writing. It opens a representational field for self-portrayals of a women-artist who are otherwise neglected or pushed to the margins of public attention. In so doing, the novel also explores the possible liberation of the female artist from social inhibitions. The autofictional novel is part of the genre of life writing. It gives voice to characters from various walks of life and social positions, and it makes use of different art forms and media to express inner development. In so doing, characters engage in practices of narrative medicine because they express their mental issues in art and see themselves reflected in the artworks they create. They reverse a process of alienation in that narrative medicine process and familiarize themselves with unconscious inner life which would otherwise remain obscure to them. In *The Blazing World*, more characters make changes to their inner life through that activity by raising awareness, changing attitudes and working with memories.

Burden confronts a life crisis after her husband's death and, sadly, it ends in her own. Her story therefore connects to the topic of death in life writing, which is one of the common denominators of my thesis and the three texts I study. Her comparatively early death seems to challenge the opportunity of changing one's plot line for the better which I have developed in the previous chapter with the example of Hustvedt's autobiography and Inga. It puts the possibility of changing life according to justified needs into question by confronting challenges to such ambitions. I think that in this chapter, I am obliged to critically point to the failures of the main character Harriet Burden as much as I highlight her achievements. Among them is the fact that she paved a smoother path for her children and that she has produced artworks that encourage similar processes in others. As well, her shortcomings pave the way for writing in which they are overcome. Burden's failures are also productive because they provoke an interesting cascade of thoughts about and research of her personal history that would not have been necessary if she had been successful right from the start. To be precise, the artist Harriet Burden is frustrated by a lack of success as a woman artist. I will clarify which childhood memory templates keep her from being successful as an adult and

proclaim that her work with memory is a great source of creativity at the end of her life. I think that I can deduce a solution to Burden's situation.

I argue that in *The Blazing World* the characters' practice of life sciences and life writing refines the strategies of narrative medicine. Notably, in the years before her death, Burden manages to initiate and guide many art projects that negotiate social conflicts. That's why they allow for profound research in the field of life writing. I think that apart from researching exactly how problematic early memory templates cause Burden's later crises and lack of success, the interpretation of art represented in the novel advances research on the negotiation of social conflicts crucially. It is Burden's thesis that she experiences discrimination throughout her life because she is publicly and privately perceived as a woman artist. She unveils the prejudiced system of perception that governs the way people react to others, inhibits marginalized groups of society, and prevents fair and open exchanges amongst them. She continues by offering a solution: On the one hand, the artworks express marginalized positions and perspectives and reconstruct subjectivity. On the other hand, she creates artworks that carve out, negotiate and alter the dominant American perceptual system through successive art installations. Other than art represented in *The Sorrows of an American,* these art installations incorporate a temporal structure and change the system of social perception. The possibility of negotiation may help establish new and mutually supportive relationships and immense intersubjective resources that would otherwise remain unused.

The Blazing World is discussed in academia and media. Critics often refer to mental disorders or challenges of characters and discuss possible diagnoses. Their view is significant or my own research as I approach character behavior in reference to mental and emotional challenges. Other researchers' diagnostic ideas are highly informative about possible ways of understanding the characters' medical conditions. In order to introduce the topic of mental conditions, I outline critical voices on the characters' mental states and patterns in the next section. Afterwards, I will shed light on the characters' mental patterns by analyzing their creative productions. I will show that their possible mental illness – as it is reflected in artworks, dreams or writing – is also a source of knowledge and provides a legitimate perspective on the character's unconscious ideas.

5.1. Critical Response to *The Blazing World*

There are a growing number of publications on *The Blazing World*. This is no surprise because the outstanding novel develops an exceptional force and dynamic reading flow. In *The Blazing World*, Hustvedt brings ekphrasis – the description of art works – to perfection. In "'The Image makers': Reality Constitution and the Role of Autism in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*" (2016) Susanne Rohr observes: "In examining visual art in ekphrasis writing, the novel examines processes of perception, the structures of memory and imagination…" (149). The literary representation of visual art in the novel fascinates the reader who can imagine the artworks as if she saw them in a museum. The novel gives voice to unusual artists, who are often eccentric or wacky, and subvert the common idea of normalcry. Critics discuss the characters' possible mental disorders which are sometimes related to great excesses of creativity. Several characters also appear as narrators and the fact that some of them are not entirely mentally credible raises doubt of reliability (cf. Rohr 252). Nevertheless, there is truth in each character's perspective because the distorted perception of reality discloses their point of view and emotion – a perspective that makes sense if one considers it against the background of their biographical development.

The novel gives voice to a variety of artists and as artists, they create a world of their own. Profound self-expression in art permits the discussion of the artist's mental peculiarities because art can perfectly represent the artist's pattern of mind. In this section, I want to discuss critics' response to the mentality of *The Blazing World*'s main character Harriet Burden and her son Ethan Lord. The protagonist Harriet Burden is in psychoanalytic treatment. She works through her past to better deal with the strained relationship to her dead father. Additionally, Heike Schwarz discusses the possibility of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), although she does not explicitly say that Burden suffers from MPD. She writes: "Hustvedt is also not tempted to use the concept of multiple personality disorder or mere metaphor, while Harry/Harriet might be prone to a more metaphorical application" (394). Her reading is ambiguous and speaks to the complexity of the character. Burden experiments with different voices, uses male fronts for her art shows and realizes that assuming alter egos or fronts brings forth personality traits she has not been aware of before. However, the reader never has the feeling that Burden does not know anymore who she is – her inner core self remains unshaken and loving family relationships which are deeply fulfilling. She does not mistake herself for someone else but realizes that the modern self has the possibility to enact different

personas (cf. Schwarz 395). In an interview with Susanne Becker, Hustvedt says that Burden "is driven by ambition" and despite the love in her life, she feels an emptiness because of the lack of public recognition. Her masks get attention but as she can differentiate herself from them, she feels that she does not get what she deserves. It seems quite obvious that the father, who did not always approve of her, has left a wound that could never heal. Despite her perfection in art, she eventually dies in agony about public misrecognition.

Ethan Lord, the protagonist's son, "fall[s] […] into the high autistic spectrum somewhere'" (Hustvedt 2014: 92 cited in Rohr 249). Autism is obviously a diagnostic label which is applied to symptoms that vary from person to person. In spite of individual differences, the diagnosis sheds lights on Ethan's behavior which diverts from the expected norms for people his age. His mother does not fully comply with an exclusively medical perspective on her son. Although she is aware of Ethan's difference, she defies pathologizing his mental state. She believes that he has a "different pattern of mind" and the novel values Ethan's view by presenting the brilliant presentation of a dream that emphasizes his strong emotional entanglement in the family system (Hustvedt 215, cited in Rohr 256).

> By introducing autism into the fictional reality of her novel and granting the autistic personality a vital role in it, Hustvedt seems to share the distinct interest that American culture at large has in this mental illness … [an] that has grown exponentially over the last years. … In my view, high functioning autism seems to represent America's cultural condition, one that increasingly is steering away from direct interpersonal contact towards mediated exchange via technological means that in their ever growing sophistication necessitate a high level of technological competency. This kind of exchange is precisely that in which persons with high functioning autism excel… . (Rohr 249)

Rohr relates Ethan's individual experience to tendencies in American culture and makes readers of *The Blazing World* aware of why autism is a topic in the public these days. It is widely discussed amongst critics because it reflects a general tendency in society and the glorification of potentially high performance. Hustvedt's portrayal of Ethan's mind also reveals exceptionally creativity in art and an intimate relationship to his family. Instead of focusing on the diagnostic label, the novel may promote the idea that Ethan thinks differently and that his pattern of thought and emotion is valuable.

In the next section, I will analyze Ethan Lord's dream analysis and show that his pattern of mind is exceedingly creative. It produces a dream that is strikingly complex and meaningful. He shows great sensitivity to his environment and an emotionally rich inner life. Ethan's dream allows him to understand previously unconscious feelings that he has not yet been aware of before. It also reveals crucial life experiences which have

challenged him emotionally. In the next section, I exploit the possibility of life writing to approach unusually creative minds like his through interpretative work.

5.2. Medical Writing Strategies

The negotiation and medical transformation of processes of thought, perception and emotion through life writing strategies is powerful and innovative. I think that the transformative process aims to negotiate social and personal conflicts and practices narrative medicine. I first argue that the novel's life writing strategies make unconscious feelings known to the characters and raise unconsciously biased perception to awareness. The biased perception thematically points to prejudice and the serious structural fights in American culture. They proliferate by the character's social perception of others and may contaminate interactions such that they might succumb to acts of emotional and verbal violence. I further argue that Burden's installation art transforms the patterns of social perception because it changes the patterns by which the intellect predetermines and biases social perception. Finally, I propose that the novel itself creates a liberal social discourse that negotiates the attitude towards the other.

Apart from Burden's artworks, I analyze artistic formats used by other characters for the purpose of self-portrayal. They present their subjectivity in art works, installations, films and dreams. The novel is hence a primary example for the innovative narrative strategies of the genre of life writing and on the level of the plot, the character's practice narrative medicine. The characters' productions again reconstruct subjectivity in great detail, express their particular position in their family or social system and provide new perceptual stances towards life. They often thematize their own or someone else's emotional or mental challenges and propose new practical approaches to these peculiarities. On the level of the plot, they take part in the engage with and develop narrative medicine strategies to study and make their lives as characters better. Therefore, I think that the concatenation of life writing and narrative medicine is particularly promising.

In this section, I study how Burden, her son Ethan and her daughter Maisie develop ways of reconstructing their own or someone else's subjectivity against the background of the person's personal history and living situation. The three examples show how characters make use of three representational formats of the genre of life writing to understand different patterns of mind. Their activities are primary examples of narrative strategies common in the genre of life writing because they use narrative

formats to negotiate oppositional perspectives. They engage in the practice of narrative medicine as they get involved in these activities in order to improve the level of self-perception or perception of others on the level of the plot. This is possible through the artistic recreation of their own or another person's subliminal mentality. In this section, I first portray Ethan's dream world. He reconstructs his mental life by analyzing a complex dream about his family. In so doing, he also understands his position in the family system better. As well, I analyze Maisie's documentary film about another woman who obsessively collects waste. In the documentary film, Maisie tries to make sense of her seemingly compulsive behavior. Finally, I interpret one of Burden's own autobiographical memory patterns, which repeats itself in her life and finds expression in her diary entry.

A first step towards understanding how the novel works with its characters' unconscious is my reading of one of Burden's son's dreams. I propose that Ethan's method of remembering and writing about his dream links disconnected mental pathways and helps him come to terms with the complexity of family conflicts that are imprinted in his unconscious mind and act as stressors from within. In the chapter "A Dispatch from Elsewhere", Harriet Burden's son Ethan Lord reports a semi-lucid dream which takes him back to his old apartment (cf. 284-5). I think that the objects in his dreams come to consciousness associatively. The room appears in front of his inner eye while more and more objects appear and furnish the room: these objects co-exist, they are spatially close to one another, and yet, they are related by association. The dream plot invokes a flowing succession of objects, minor actions and emotions. Ethan wakes up, lets the room reappear in front of his eyes and quickly recalls how the room's objects come back to his inner eye:

> "E opens the cupboard to retrieve a no. 2 coffee filter, but he cannot find it. His disappointment is acute. Then he notices that layers of dirt and large lumps of mold oozing liquid and sprouting gigantic spores have grown inside the cabinet. He stares at the configuration of mycelium…" . (283)

I suggest that in the first step, Ethan describes the objects one after the other. The dream representation of the room is slightly defamiliarized and the dream objects have a symbolic significance. In the next step and within a narrow time-frame, he analyzes the different dream objects and elements. He approaches them each through free association and writes down which situation or context comes to his mind in relation to each given object. The process is associative and creates a spatio-temporal grid which binds the

dream objects – consequently, they are in time and connected on a preconceptal level. Initially, the causal force behind Ethan's associative flow remains unknown.

Ethan analyzes each dream object in written form and takes notes of the upcoming emotion and descending memories he spontaneously associates with them. The desired chronology itself creates connections amongst the things although their causality is unclear. Why does he first mention one object and then the next? What is the cause for their temporal proximity? I suggest that in fact, *emotions* carry him from one moment to the next, and from object to object. Urge or desire in its various disguises brings forth one object after the other and in accordance with the activated emotional dynamic. His interpretative chain of association carries him through feelings of struggle, oppression, panic, hate, disappointment, confusion, anger, being inapproachable, relief, sadness, pity, triumph and disgust (cf. 285-9). From my point of view, his analysis shows that in the dream, the simple objects *represent* the still hidden feelings, as if the object contains and conceals the emotion. Second, in order to understand and expose the emotional meaning of each object, Ethan writes sections about them by connecting them to specific memories and emotions. The process of understanding the object manages to reveal the reason for its appearance. My interpretation says that it sets a narrative process in motion which pushes him from one emotion to the next and confronts himself with the challenging feelings in the course of the writing process. I think that Ethan's dream plot flows in the same way any plotline develops in time: his writing is like associative dreaming, there no cause relation and consecutive emotions guide the young author through the account from one scene to the next. The associative movement is driven by his deep rooted desire to understand himself. The plot's causes and effects are equivalent to an emotional concatenation – with each scene, the writer finds verbal and objective representations for them. Consequently, below the surreal dream is emotional truth and autobiographical subtext.

Ethan's dream presents an emotion as an object or an object's association with an emotion. Surprisingly, Ethan's dream is not chaotic: the aconceptual inner objects have names, the irrational plotline is meaningful and not a bit out of order. Whereas postmodern writers are often keen to present lists of objects whose organization is devoid of emotional meaning, the chapter makes the painful effort to reverse the tendency for atemporal tabulation and the loss of meaning those enumerations imply. Ethan's childhood room is full of emotional objects which are meaningfully connected

to the emotional experiences of his early life. The relational association is the sole reason why the personal objects have any meaning at all.

There are no temporal or spatial references in the unconscious. The mind only reintroduces spatial and temporal parameters to unconscious contents when they become conscious again, for example in dreams. The different qualities just exist as repressed raw affect in the depth of the mind. I suggest that the moment the dreaming mind unconsciously associates the emotions with different decorative items chronologically, they pass the censor and move 'under cover' through the preconscious to consciousness: the emotion, which has previously been sitting in the unconscious, assumes the shape of a decorative item, is associatively attracted by consciousness, and then slowly woven into the temporally unfolding narrative. This kind of figurative objectification makes the different bundles of psychic energy palpable and facilitates their movement in the mental space. I think that once they are established in consciousness, Ethan unpacks the objects in writing and analyzes their emotional meaning backwards. In that moment he has successfully practiced a narrative medicine writing strategy. Its raw affect becomes comprehensible in the stories: each object reminds Ethan of a past event or interaction and upon remembering the details, a more connected emotional state comes up and memories appear to his conscious mind. Ethan's complex analytic work goes hand in hand with overcoming his repressive psychic barrier. Inconvenient inner objects are now conscious and in time.

His work with the dream is an example for life writing which makes the practice of narrative medicine possible. From a neuroscientific perspective, the fact that unconscious emotions can pass left frontal lobe inhibition verifies findings in the life sciences: bypassing the censor, autofiction raises unconscious emotions to awareness. The dream's experience is dense but other than being overwhelmed by flashbacks, Ethan manages to integrate his own emotion and his life experiences. The reader learns, for instance, that the dream object "*suit of clothes*" moves Ethan back to thoughts about his school. The context 'school' makes sense of raw feelings such as anger, "bad feelings" or high tension (cf. 286-7). He, an utterly sensitive person, shares feelings of breathlessness with his mother in the family residence and feels alienated from his father's circles. Next, Ethan writes that the dream object "*strangling bedsheets*" is a "possible reference[s] to a sense of oppression felt by E in household…panics, during which he could not breathe" (285). He also notices states of pure chaos, of mess and confusion regarding his aspirations as a writer. He brings up intellectual aversions, hate

and the painful relationship to his father in the same manner. Again, I suggest that these uncomfortable states of being have been sitting in his unconscious and used the dream objects as vehicles in order to move past the censor up to consciousness. Upon arrival, Ethan weaves them into autobiographical stories which contextualize their origin and help transforming them into more manageable mental states.

As I already suggested, Ethan's writing strategy works associatively. The dream object "*No. 2 filter*" loops past his hate for binary thinking towards the intricate relationship to his parents – "the world in pairs" (285). In his case, the associative motions are psychoanalytically relevant, in that the symbolic objects first come to mind in a dream state and their later interpretation uncovers repressed sentiments. Strangely, in the course of writing, Ethan ends up with a name of a Norwegian scholar in a suit pocket, which reminds the reader of the note his father has left in a suit pocket in order to indirectly inform his mother about the father's affair with a couple in Berlin. Mysteriously, Ethan's dreaming mind guesses a secret Ethan cannot consciously know and has not yet discovered at that point in time. I infer that Ethan's dream analysis has uncovered a parental emotional constellation which makes me wonder whether the reason the father cheated his wife is not only attributable to his personal weakness but because the family is entangled in an unfortunate relational and emotional dynamic.

Ethan's dream associations gives way to an autobiographical chapter which automatically captures key facets of his childhood and youth. I assume that the web of associative thinking in the dream enables and corresponds to an accurate mapping of emotional truths of his childhood. The nature and strategy of generating associative connections is consequently relevant to life writing, just as the emotional work involved and discussed in the previous paragraphs provides a crucial example of narrative medicine activities of characters in fiction. I provide proof for the latter argument in the coming passage.

So far, I sketched that Ethan's association of autobiographical memory traces covers his earlier stage of life precisely. The relations *between* the dream associations vertically connect the mind's emotional underground with its upper floors: Ethan's emotions moves up by means of its symbolic association with objects and appears to the inner mind. Referring to the perspective developed in the chapter on neuropsychoanalysis, I revisit the connectivity between the limbic core and cerebral activities: the dream signifies a vertical mental pathway between the limbic core and the cerebrum. Emotional units present in the limbic system attach themselves to or

become visible as conceptual objects. This connection shows that the mental pathway Solms and Turnbull signify (see chapter 2.2.2) not obstructed in the dream because the frontal lobe does not control this exchange in the nightly dream. In the next step, Ethan's writing engages horizontal neural pathways. Writing about his associations with the object and attached emotions establishes left brain connectivity to right brain memories – repressed and forgotten life stories converge. The left and right brain connect and information can travel via the corpus callosum to the conscious left side. This second step is necessarily an embodied process. The fact that emotion becomes conscious is, in this case, not random but only possible because Ethan's intuitive strategy of dream association eludes the mental blockages. The dialog with neuropsychoanalysis suggests that he has thus successfully joined the aims of life writing and narrative medicine. On the one hand, he is able to retrieve crucial hidden memory templates and becoming aware of them helps him processing upsetting contents. On the other hand, he has shown profound competence in portraying feelings of discomfort and crisis which had a hold of him in the past. He could only put autobiographical memory into writing because he had used a narrative strategy that gives him access to unconscious memories. Without the narrative strategy the portrayal of his life would have been fragmentary as he would not have been able to remember in the first place.

The following narrative strategy touches upon Spinoza's philosophical reflection on panpsychism in order to see and understand how it affects the daily life and psychology of a woman who has adopted Spinoza's worldview. Burden's daughter Maisie Lord, director of independent documentary films, contributes a chapter to the collection in which she relates the making of her film *Esperanza*. In the chapter, she describes and reflects the film shooting. In her first full-length movie, Maisie portrays the New Yorker called Esperanza, who collects discarded objects and items and reconstructs her subjectivity. She uses the selected life writing format successfully. The young woman has the gift of being able to look at the woman's behavioral or psychic symptoms from a cinematic viewpoint and questions a diagnostic label. Instead, she offers a view according to which the perception of Esperanza's supposedly abnormal behavior changes, makes sense and appears less obscure. In her hands, the camera captures vantage points which shed light on hidden motifs, zoom in on neglected details and contextualize absurdities meaningfully. The documentation throws Esperanza's unconventional personality into sharp relief, and the director omits socio-economic and

psychological schemata commonly employed in such media. The film introduces Esperanza via the habit of gathering things, most of it waste, in her apartment. I think that a typical involuntary mental reaction to her habit is fear that the woman may run into danger of crowding herself out, disgust that her space eventually plagues her and the neighbors with an unbearable stench, the realization that the collection of waste is a sign of severe personal imbalance and loss of control.

To my surprise, the producer offers a second perceptual approach which offers a different interpretation and negotiates the perception of her habit. To begin with, Maisie takes time to have a very close look at the apartment, the accumulated stuff and Esperanza's attitude towards the gathered objects. By and by, the young woman finds out that Esperanza has "touched" the inconspicuous objects "every day for thirty years." Maisie carefully examines and names the variety of items and begins to perceive that they are neatly arranged and organized in stacks, piles and corners (cf. BW 90-3). The reader of Maisie's chapter or spectator of her film barely notices that Esperanza earns very little. The description gradually intensifies the perception of the room's interior arrangement, too. By and large, I think that Maisie legitimately excludes points of view suggesting that Esperanza's routine is a burden to the neighborhood, although she admits the apartment's unpleasant effects on odor perception in a conversation with her father (cf. 90, cf. 92). I suppose that the most striking observation is that Esperanza does not suffer from her mentality. Esperanza is content with her 'way of life', even though she is "keenly aware" that "the world at large disapproves of her" refusal to take part in the convenient system of waste disposal, including the general differentiation between waste and objects of utility (91). It is at any rate noteworthy that the solitary woman may even be *keen* about having a repellant effect on others.

Due to my second interpretation, I can turn around the analysis of Esperanza's case: there is no indication in Maisie's account that Esperanza is in conflict with herself about the behavioral oddity, whose compulsiveness has been convincingly invalidated. *Notabene*, the fact that Maisie perceives an order in the midst of the presumed chaos and the remark that the owner is actually well aware of each and every object she takes in adds to the astonishment about the cause of the habit. Maisie does not indicate that Esperanza gathers every object she comes across and she does not suffer from an inability to throw away every object she can get her hands on, too. The report also rebuts the possibility that the things have some sort of sentimental value – Esperanza takes things home from her wanderings through the city, from coffee shops and discount

stores. The stuff is not immediately attached to her personal history or relationships. The crucial explanatory moment certainly arises on account of the director's unimpaired inquiring mind. While carefully rummaging around and finding softly wrapped up or "tucked in" objects, Maisie begins to understand that the woman aims to provide for the things by giving each a bed and other comfortable, proper places (91). I suggest that through her preconceptual visual awareness, grasping and understanding, Maisie works out the reason for the lifestyle, that is to say, Esperanza is compassionate with each thing she brings home because, and this is in fact the cause, she considers them to be "imbued with thought and feeling" (91).

I have already discussed Maisie's cinematic angle and her tendency to abstain from using psychological diagnostic concepts. In the novel, Maisie represents the circumstances of the film shooting and how the film chooses to view the research subject. At that point, the film's perceptual experiment ends but the critical engagement takes another unexpected turn. Maisie's mother discloses that the film captures a bizarre case of panpsychism. Burden immediately associates the term with 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza although the worldview is significantly older. Maisie quotes her mother's explanatory note according to which the belief "that mind is a fundamental feature of the universe and exists in everything, from stones to people" is a "'…perfectly legitimate philosophical position'" (91). From my point of view, the strategy of introducing the perceptual approach right before the intellectual theory is important because the perception of the explored film location precedes finding the philosophical correlate of what it discovers. If the process were in reverse order, say, if Maisie had first spoken to her mother about her new friend Esperanza and then started the movie, her camera work would have been biased and guided by what Burden told her to expect. Her mother's suggestion would then have predetermined what she would later see and capture with the camera.

The quote which was again cited and which Maisie remembers so well exhibits how Burden articulates the basic idea of panpsychism in just one sophisticated sentence. The woman, who is often almost critical of fundamental philosophical works, suddenly bursts out with a surprisingly affirmative statement. Burden does not say that she believes in panpsychism, nonetheless, she gives credit to the theory by stating that it is

a justified approach to philosophically pertain to or express reality[12]. To support Esperanza's view and Burden's interpretation, I want to outline the philosophical background: In *Ethics*, first published in 1677, Spinoza elaborates on a number of thoughts which reflect the understanding that mind is ubiquitous rather than limited to individual creatures equipped with heads. Ideas[13] – without a doubt reminding us of Plato's theory of ideas – are terminologically closely entangled with the mind, as is the human body with affect. The theory owes much of its attraction to the identity of mind and matter – derived from the assumption that both express one and the same thing. Material and non-material world, animate and inanimate things converge. His thought implies that an object perceived in nature must have a representative idea in the mental realm – and a parallel chain of causation.

Esperanza clearly and knowingly acts on grounds of the attitude that material things have a congruent mental attribute and that's why she wants to take care of them. I think that her way to bestow things with a mental attribute is philosophically transparent. Instead of diagnosing her, I suggest that she is mentally healthier than expected. That's why I hope that my reading negotiates her and society's view upon her habit of collecting trash. She does not need to be cured but the discourse about her has to change. More than that, Burden has identified the exact school of thought, the position, which appears to underlie and *causes* Esperanza's lifestyle. Esperanza is aware of objects in the form of compassion and even if it sounds awkward, there is no sufficient reason to consider it mad. From my point of view, the philosophical position (panpsychism) is causally adequate because its effect, the fond collection of items (lifestyle), follows an explicable intention and order. The narrator supports my assumption by confirming that she discovered the full "explanation" for Esperanza's content "lifestyle". She thus proclaims that the case is sufficiently clarified, assuming that upon finding the reason, no effect remains obscure (BW 91). Given the found ideational cause and its lawful implementation in life, I can approve of the word 'lifestyle' instead of mental disorder. Esperanza is not in conflict about her behavior.

[12] Spinoza treats reality as being equal to perfection (*Ethics II*, definition 6). Certainly, reality is not the impartial picture we receive via our sense experience. Spinoza fathoms reality in a continuum, saying that the degree of reality increases with the number of essential attributes (*Ethics I*, proposition 9)

[13] Spinoza makes use of the term 'idea' in a sense that reminds us of Plato's Analogy of the Sun (*Der Staat* 508a-509b), Analogy of the Divided Line (*Der Staat* 509d-511e) and Allegory of the Cave (*Der Staat* 514a-517a). Like Plato, he ontologically believes that, for instance, a circle is present as an idea in a mental realm and as an empirical thing in nature. In contrast to Plato, who introduces epistemological hierarchies concerning the plane of reality and primarily pursues the recognition of the heaven of ideas, Spinoza concerns sameness, i.e. the equivalence of the idea and its manifestation.

On the contrary, she has no desire to stop the habit nor is it a hindrance to her well-being. Hence, the cause is known, and the effect perceived and understood (cf. Ethics IV, definition II, definition V).

There are two arguments running parallel and they allow me to verify the theory by its own means. First of all, the case exhibits an example of living panpsychism and second, the adequate exhibited relation between cause and effect provides evidence for the adequacy of concatenation. I would therefore emphasize again that Esperanza's feeling for things (panpsychism) is an adequate cause because the effect (lifestyle) is clearly perceivable and understandable. Reading the case, the film, Maisie's explanation and Burden's intellectual classification, I conclude that no shown aspect of the given symptoms remain obscure, they make perfect sense. Maisie's investigation has almost the opposite effect of what is expected at first sight: The documentary does not diagnose and show mental disorder. It adds the exact amount of sensory and intellectual information needed to perceptually and intellectually transform the suspicion of madness into the recognition of an adequately implemented philosophical position. Esperanza's behavior is legitimate because it anticipates theory, the concatenation of cause and effect is everywhere consistent and cannot discern any error in reasoning.

Other than Ethan, whose interpretation of his dream reaches far into the past, Maisie perceives a situation without any reference to the history of the case. There is no need to include biographical details or crucial events in the documentary about Esperanza. Spatiality and speculation about states of being dominate the scenes. The present situation is self-explanatory due to the particular arrangement of objects, meaning that the configuration of things reflects the idea which patterns the given space. Yet, in both instances a person can see the mind reflected in room description. Consequently, the dream interpretation lessens Ethan's feelings of self-estrangement and Esperanza's objective expression of her affects and ideas decreases supposed alienation from the world. The two instances of using particular formats in the genre of life writing demonstrates that subjectivity is reconstructed effectively.

The previous two sections provided insights into deeper layers of emotion and perception by making use of two creative formats. Here, I will highlight a study of memory structures of Harriet Burden to complete the introductory section to the analysis of *The Blazing World*. The novel comprises interviews, articles, short stories

and chapters of Burden which are of autobiographical and biographical relevance. In fictional autobiographical notes that are included in *The Blazing World*, retrospective views into Burden's life sit next to fragmented memory, thoughts, quotes and intellectual insights. In the last part of this section, I want to show that the different representative formats reveal disturbing memory structures in Burden's life which go back to experiences in her youth. The recovery of these memories is important to understand her later life crises, her marvelous installations and her assumed failure to become famous. The fact that her reminiscences appear in different formats makes her aim of bringing unconscious mental contents to awareness possible. They show that life writing and the diagnostic/healing intention of narrative medicine are implemented well. In this section I will argue that working with memories and social perception, Burden successfully reestablishes her social life and creative work after the death of her husband, yet, she does not accomplish her goal of becoming famous for her art.

Burden reveals the very bitter experience that if she cannot consciously remember the past, she will repeat it (cf. BW 147, cf. Hustvedt 2012: 209). In "Jenseits des Lustprinzips", published in 1920, and "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten" published in 1914, Freud writes about the compulsion of repeating excruciating experiences which the ego represses in order to prevent the conscious confrontation with the original pain. Freud observes that his patients endlessly repeat unpleasant behavioral patterns. He sees it as his task to allow the patient to recall and work through the causal traumatic experience to put an end to the inner terror. Without such treatment, the repetition re-performs situational memory traces, meaning that the person acts out former relationships and structures, including traumatizing or abusive interactions. The repetition can take various shapes. It is entirely possible that a person simply reenacts forgotten abuses of power and accompanied states of mind or emotions such as shame or guilt are repeated. Regarding an emotional repetition, the current situation may then be beyond all recognition but it provokes the exact and forgotten bodily state which has been significant in the past. In these instances of compulsive behavior, the "feelings come back, but we don't know what they mean" (BW 154). To that effect, I examine the plot development with regards to Burden's repeatedly struggling relationship with men. More precisely, I interpret the initial interaction with her father and her husband Felix Lord, her rival and antagonist Rune, and her later partner Bruno Kleinfeld, with whom she is able to break the pattern. Importantly, I discuss how Burden investigates her own case to break through the painful monotony of repetition.

The reader stumbles upon a repetitive pattern in the Burden family which includes dinners, opening shows and women crossing the borders between the private and public sphere. To begin with, I observe that Burden's mother has played the role of the docile housewife throughout Burden's childhood. At a later point, she would confess to her daughter that when she dared to question the status quo and informed her husband that she suffers from hardly ever getting "a word at a dinner party", he punished her with silence (218). Her mother's submissiveness towards her husband is repeated in her own life and brings comparable discord into the family. Retrospectively, she discovers the transmitted dogma that "Felix always deserves what you don't. Why? Mysterious feelings: ingrown, automatic, thoughtless" (cf. 63). The women pass on the belief that the husband deserves more than his wife from one generation to the next and it serves as implicit pretext to justify predominance of men in the life of both. I think that being intellectually well-versed in gender theory does not automatically change the expectational imprint in the mind. I believe that women as well as men proliferate discriminating structures in the family from infancy onwards. Although Burden used to behave gently and discreet at dinner parties she would give for her husband and his acquaintances, she is finally no longer able to abide by these unwritten laws. Consequently, at dinners she blurts out whatever she knows about the area of knowledge the group of men has hitherto so eagerly discussed (cf. 19). Felix Lord is displeased about her ostensibly disgraceful behavior and, I suggest, prevents her respectful participation in the conversation.

Growing up, Burden learns that men seem to deserve public attention whereas women should choose to put back the need of expressing themselves in public. The father reminds his daughter of his conviction concerning gender relations when, after seeing his daughter's first art show in New York, he refuses to give credit for her work (he thereby sets the tone for coming public misestimations). Other than his wife, *who has accompanied him through the evening* with delight, he puts forth that his daughter's art does not fit in the social conventions of the time (cf. 128-9). Decades later, Eldridge remembers Burden telling the story and concludes: "He shut her up", meaning that he forbade her to have a voice in the mainstream public discourse (BW 129). A transgenerational change is obvious from what Maisie reports about the premiere of *Esperanza*. Although Felix Lord, whose relationship to Burden resembles Burden's parental constellation considerably, is not entirely elated by what he sees, and although Maisie is hurt by her father's initial "reticence", she challenges him at the following

dinner. Without hesitation, the father and Maisie's husband willingly enter a serious conversation about her film (cf. 92). I think the fact that Maisie has not been silenced proves that the power structure is about to dissolve in that generation. I suppose that Maisie's report also disguises the structural decision about who deserves to have a voice, a power relationship which is here apparently cemented at premieres and dinner parties, as being purely relational.

The novel has no happy ending. Accordingly, I cannot yet end my recourse to situations in Burden's past that haunt her later on. The most elusive and uncanny scene Burden digs out speaks of her father's reaction to her spontaneously popping up at his office at the age of 10 or 11 (cf. 151-2). Upon presenting herself to his scrutiny, his shocked voice informs her that she should, by no means, come around at his workplace. The violent reaction may surprise the reader but what it describes is the girl being heavily sanctioned for leaving the domestic and appearing in the public sphere. He asks: "Harriet, what are you doing here? You should not be here" (152). I suggest the reading that the father does not only silence her, he infused her with shame and guilt. The emotions then begin to poison her entire body. To the day of writing in her notebook, she has never professionally freed her mind from shame[14]. Burden has not only learned to not have a voice, her embodied existence in public is put into question. The father has structurally blocked her entry into the glamorous parts of American society. He sets up an experience that quickly sinks into Burden's unconscious and plays havoc with her aspiration of becoming a famous artist. Burden re-experiences this structural incident ever since because it is stored in her memories and it translates into life events repeatedly. The father has paved the way for her later obliteration from the public discussion of her three installations.

Importantly, the scene unfolds its full power when Burden meets her third mask Rune to plan the revelation of the installation's 'background' figure. To shut Burden up most effectively, Rune disconcertingly uncovers his affair with Burden's husband implicitly by showing her footage in which both men sit next to each other on a couch. The fragmentary notebook entries covering this incident merge with memories of the office scene – all over again, the sentence appears: "What are you doing here, Harriet? You should not be here" (295). And the result is again her complete silence, shameful impotence and powerlessness (cf. 294-301). After this incidence, she withdraws from

[14] The experience resembles Hustvedt's own when she discovers her shameful experience in Bergen by writing an autobiographical narrative.

public life. In conclusion, Burden's case shows that she has not yet started to negotiate and transform roles of the father-daughter and wife-husband relationships. Yet, the fact that she became aware of crucial memory templates helps negotiating oppositional interests in her current relationships and is an example of the practice of narrative medicine. She eventually creates collaborative artworks to reach that aim.

Throughout her youth and marriage, Burden's agency is limited because oppressive relations of the past repetitively translate into her present circumstances. The memories force her leading a life in the shadow of her seemingly more presentable husband, next to whom she feels irrelevant. Yet, after her husband's death, Burden feels the freedom to intensify her work as an artist independently as well as in cooperation with various other artists. Burden makes use of the initially unsettling occasion such that she begins to actively scheme her remaining years. Her plan of carrying out a long-term art project (1998-2004), which comprises three exhibitions, turns her into a character whose narrative strategy is – in the fictional world she lives in – of her own making. On that level, Burden invents makes her own plot, is director and character at the same time. Crucially, Burden decides to make the exhibitions available to the public without disclosing her persona. Instead, she hires three male fronts performing the role of the artist: obviously, the personas help circumvent her father's obstructive measure. Burden even sets out her desired end of the plan – her aim is, first of all, the triumphant proof that the spectator's expectation regarding an artwork depends on the sex of the artist and biases the perception of the artwork. In public, the same artwork therefore generates a better perceptual experience if it is presented by a man rather than a woman. Her second aim includes disclosing the masks, the revelation of her persona and her leaving the stage to applause. After her threefold plan shows first signs of success, she bluntly proclaims: "As for the plot, it seems to be working" (157). The reader can hardly imagine the strong disappointment she must endure upon realizing that, once more, she has been silenced and obliterated (cf. 317) – and is bitterly forced into retreat: the art world acclaims the three exhibitions but questions her authorship. The artist, indeed, dies in agony about her destiny to never see the blaze of fame and public approval. What is more, I think that Burden could not even have decided otherwise: the artist would have found it impossible to adapt to the dictated role of the self-effacing, moderate and charitable widow. Her inner desires drive her ambitious plans and

function in the same way any insidious involvement has, in previous centuries, determined the fall of many tragic heroes and heroines.

Burden eventually dies of cancer and to the day of her death, she shows great powers of inventing the plot of her own life. Yet, stressors hold her back and seemingly defeated her and her freedom of self-determination (cf. 364). On the level of the plot, the reader may wonder whether she has made the mistake of creating a tragic storyline for herself. Or else, is her death simply proof of her failure to come up with a better plot? I answer in the negative, if I consider that she produced a great number of artworks and was well-received posthumously (cf. 4). What has hindered her is not necessarily a failure in devising the course of the installations but due to the complexity of the scene her father has made upon her arrival in his office: Burden has remembered the scene itself but she has never released the shame and changed the plot he has envisioned for her. Primarily, the emotional complex and attached thoughts resurface at the very end of the novel and block her appearance in the public sphere *ab initio*. Finally, the repetition of affect thwarts the progression of her plot.

From a different angle, the biographical elements of the text collection speak in favor of estimating the novel's end as the inevitable finale that grasps a person's life events and relationships with the intention of creating a complete plotline. The advantage of placing autobiographical notes next to biographical modes is the possibility of reflecting on a person's life from different angles that is typical for the genre of life writing. Yet, biographies are often written after the person's death. In brief, although Burden never reached old age and died in her 65th year. Her death is caused by a tragic disease rather than being a tragic death by disease. The complexity of the book's autobiographical, biographical and tragic elements makes the attempt of a firm classification according to the traditional genres obsolete. Instead, the topic of death that reappears in different narrative formats emphasizes that the novel is autofictional and part of the genre of life writing.

Speaking about the fictional world, Burden has indeed invented the plotline of her later years but that was only possible because she has been able to plot her *previous* life stages. Burden's friend and psychoanalyst Rachel Briefman's insight into Burden's autobiographical writing skills will help us understanding the involvement of our hero and her plot. She writes:

> Harry has been rewriting her own life in psychoanalysis for years, that what she called a "revisionist text" of her own life had begun to replace an earlier "mythical" one. People and events had taken on new significations for her. Her memories had changed. Harry had not discovered any dubious memories from her childhood… . (251)

Elsewhere, Briefman confirms that the practice of psychoanalysis has reconfigured her own memories (cf. 49). Burden goes as far as questioning the representative truth of her memory considering that the contents it grasps have been transformed and modified through ever new modes of interpretation (cf. 64). She has actually started to negotiate different ways of understanding her past. The premise is that once the content of and reflection upon her own memories change, Burden's biographical past takes on new meanings. The projection, thereof, translates into better life prospects. Therefore, I am inclined to explore why, how and to what level of success these changes produce new life patterns in her life. The answer becomes obvious the quote is set in relation to the instances of silencing I have expanded on above. Burden's process of recalling the memories of being silenced only appears to come easily. Her opinion that the father is cruel and cold may be self-evident but the text suggests that neither the emotional recollection nor the ethical evaluation were available to consciousness before the act of writing. The fact that Burden has repeated the pattern in her marriage indicates that these crucial scenes have lingered in the unconscious and only surfaced through repetition in her middle years. I argue that the pattern only comes to consciousness through extreme efforts in psychoanalytic sessions, art and writing. As soon as the old memories become visible and graspable, once Burden lives through the emotion consciously and learns to reflect on it with moral vigor, the power structure loses its strength and partly dissolves.

At the outset, there is the aim to retrieve disconcerting memories and to reinterpret them according to more appropriate moral standards. In Burden's case, I talk about memory templates which govern how she enters and stays in oppressive relationships with men. These templates root back to childhood experiences. Because unjust patterns of relationships are "ingrown" and seemed natural to Burden when she was a girl, the weirdest circumstances seem acceptable to her as a woman: she has not learnt it otherwise (cf. 63). Although she considers herself a feminist, these patterns shape her expectations, and she puts them into practice eagerly (cf. Hustvedt 2012: 208-9). Above all, Burden is not consciously aware of the value system behind the distribution of power in her family setting. The moment her father shames her and she feels guilty about her unconventional conduct, she cannot think about the moral grounds

of his authority but develops nagging self-doubt. I think that her inability to challenge the oppressor follows from the mythical quality of her earlier years. The indoctrination comprises misogynist value systems and ideas about the ideal family setting and social fabric. The supposed myth that men are naturally more gifted for public roles and public speech runs so deep that Burden accepts living according to its rules for years despite the dissatisfaction it causes. Yet, after her husband's death, she opens her own plot for revision by understanding why and how her father has ruthlessly sanctioned her courageous transgression of power relations. Burden's ingrown "mysterious feelings" are the emotional underground for the myth she needs to replace.

I argue that Burden has first entirely forgotten and underestimated the experiences of being silenced. Burden has repeatedly been given the feeling that she should not act in the way she does (BW cf. 129). Her mind has therefore learned to release feelings of shame and guilt (cf. 65, cf. 151-2), and her unconscious will let her repeat patterns which provoke situations that initiate bouts of guilt and shame (cf. 19, cf. 92, cf. 294). However, in order to put alterations of the conditioned emotional cycles into effect, in order to enforce the revision, the protagonist's memories and internalized norms must co-evolve. The process of moral revision marks the memories as evidence of injustice rather than as justified commonplace. In practical terms, this means that the 'silencing' scenes come back to consciousness in the shape of imagery and feelings. She is then asked to question the underlying misogynist myth which corresponds to the drama that speaking up for herself is inappropriate. The strategy implies that if Burden revisits her memories from the vantage point of considering the practice of silencing women unjust and unacceptable, the revisionist memories take the place of the mythical ones. This means that before she has revisited her memories, she has unconsciously believed that women are not supposed to be equal to men. After changing her moral disposition, the state of mind saying 'I did something wrong' or 'I am wrong', which correspond to the feelings guilt and shame respectively, transform into "That was cruel!" (248). During the process, Burden learns that what has been considered just is not just anymore, so that her feeling of self-worth may appear on the scene. The subsequent moral reinterpretation of her mythical past slowly brings a revisionist text into focus.

Burden substitutes 'mythological' childhood memories with revised and coherent autobiographical fragments and subjects its contents to a normative reevaluation. I would say that writing down repressed experiences contributes to end

what Freud calls the repetition compulsion which, otherwise, turn her everyday realities into a reflection of unconsciously active memories – in Freud's words, it is a "Spiegelung einer vergessenen Vergangenheit" (Freud 2010). Freud argues in favor of psychoanalytic treatment to tackle the problems of the compulsion. He proposes that the analytic session provides the field in which the patient can overcome the resistance of the ego by remembering the morbid events. The patient is then free to recollect her past, work through the emotion and thereby step out of the repetitive pattern (cf. Freud 1992: 134).

While writing in her notebook between the sessions, Burden digs out and configures repressed states of mind about the office scene. On the level of the plot, she practices narrative medicine because she works with problematic autobiographical memories. Consequently, the emotions return to consciousness: she begins by recalling her age at the time, mentally resituates herself in the girl's body, remembers the place and its atmosphere, her father's appearance and words, and finally her embodied reaction to his rejection: "What I recall is the drawing of my breath, the pang, the shame. Why shame (BW 152)?" The fragments, consisting of visual, auditory, emotional memory bits and pieces, configure in a temporal and spatial nexus. Patiently answering the questions she poses, the sensual fragments start to join and create a whole. Burden realizes that her father scolds her the exact moment he sees her entering the office, his words trigger the reaction of her lungs, shame and guilt arrive due to his prejorative tone of voice. Using a life writing strategy, the emotional bit connects to the father's pitch, his words begin to correspond to the muscular contraction of her lungs, the room links to her feeling of being in the wrong *kind of place*. The conglomerate of sense impressions makes perfect sense once they are set up in the shape of a story and into the spatial-temporal grid. Burden begins to understand each impression because she configures it through the act of narration, and, as a whole, the scene exposes itself as being a toxic blueprint for years to come.

Freud recommends therapeutic recollection by way of a story. Traumatic or challenging experiences of the past, which reappear as repetitions, lie dormant without spatial and temporal organization, and it is the task of the writer to associatively retrieve memories and emotion, to plot the bits, pieces and fragments. The difficulty Freud points out is that the ego obviously blocks working through repressed memory pieces (1920). They only appear directly to consciousness if a trigger attracts it or indirectly because the

repression causes symptoms like inner tension, behavioral disorders or worrisome experiences. In her youth, Burden has been silenced by her father, so that upon the attempt of speaking, repression of speaking is reinforced and breaking the silence is an immense effort. Burden makes use of the potential of writing to better her memory performance so as to reverse her unconscious inner schemes of being silenced. Her unconscious finds expression on paper to be grasped and understood by the author herself because by writing she can access unconscious memories of being silenced by her father better. She stops the repetitive pattern by becoming aware of it in life writing. She also reflects and learns to reassess its meaning.

Practically speaking, Burden tells hitherto untold stories, they come back to her in writing, during psychoanalysis and when she works on her art projects. Quite often, she practices narrative medicine successfully. But although Burden grasps and understands the emotion of her father's rejection in writing, her own desire drags her into the final game against Rune to achieve revenge and recognition she could not achieve in the past. Even though Burden remembers, the blueprint of the past still manages to block her success. Her unhappy artistic interaction with Rune is certainly a repetition but is, at the same time, an example of transference in a dangerously indefinite field. Rather than choosing the psychoanalyst or intellectual as benevolent counterpart, she faces her rival as her playmate in a rigorous game rather on an earnest playground. And instead of giving her diary to a trusted reader with whom she can engage in a dialog and develop good judgment, she keeps her games a secret out of shame about what they uncover.

Considering whether Burden would have stopped enacting the repetitive pattern if she had lived longer is debatable. Her partner recounts, not without regret, that she obsessively works and lives through old emotion and memories in the process (cf. BW 318). There is no final interpretation. Therefore, I suggest that rather than deciding whether Burden's final activities lean more towards working through or repeating, it is evident that she does not deduce the final essential step of engaging with the past: her future is her expectation. Hustvedt says that we expect in line with what was – I argue that exchanging the past memory templates for the better is therefore a necessary act to influence what is to come and must follow remembering and revision immediately. To reconfigure a memory template for the better implies the writer must have the proficiency of knowing what interactional aspects of a memory template she can modify intentionally. In this moment she engages in practices of narrative medicine. In life

writing, the process of rewriting can go as far as imagining an embellished outcome of the crucial situation in order to make sure that the potential repetition is advantageous. It brings autofiction and the practice of narrative medicine to full effect. The writer changes her life story to embellish a bad autobiographical memory template and benefits from projecting that better template into the future. On the fictional level, the writer has accomplished the goal of practicing narrative medicine. This implies that would Burden have dared to write more fiction rather than less, had Burden indeed rewritten a better ending for herself, would she have been foolish enough to imagine the troubling scenes in a better light in terms of the interactions and emotional quality, she may have been able to manifest the chosen pattern in her life. Burden, ironically, sticks too closely to the expectation which haunts the autobiographical mode – of writing the truth. Ergo, the idea that she has mistakenly written herself a tragedy is in some way correct. Burden excluded herself by not rewriting the remembered scene according to her wishes and misses out on giving herself a chance of getting in.

The interpretation is never closed, and writing her plot on the fictional level, Burden admits that there is no "perfect answer" (154), more than one "turn of the screw" (248) and readers are consequently forced to speculate on grounds of good reason. In the comment quoted above, Burden's friend Briefman explains that Burden continuously attributes new significances to people and events in her life. Merleau-Ponty explains that the significance of an event refers to "the achievement or the expression of a single aim", and it is possible to create significance when informational units like "facts or signs" is grasped (428). Understanding the facts and signs of one's own life is hence equivalent to bestowing it with an intention, life is in that case not objective: it has an aim and meaning. Understanding grasps an act of significance by taking on a point of view upon the event, a certain distance to and direction of the perceiving subject (cf. 429). Briefman's observation that Burden's memories have taken on new significances thus indicates that Burden changes her *phenomenal* position towards key events and people of the past in that manner. With the modification of the phenomenal stance towards those memories, the intention intensifies. I may say that this is why her public obliteration parallels her productive cooperation with several artists and the supportive relationship to her children, entering a loving relationship to her new partner Bruno Kleinfeld, who gives her a voice even after her death. In the end, these collaborators lend their voice and continue the project she has brought into the world after her body has disappeared from the world stage.

5.3. Self-representation of female lives and vision in art

Harry Burden is the only daughter of a professor father and a devoted Jewish mother. Her father's tendency to keep himself aloof from the family life, his perceived disregard for her being a woman rather than a man, and his lack of understanding for her works of art, have wounded her self-esteem as a woman and artist. Tragically, she never fully overcomes her feeling of being a *persona non grata*. The way Burden internalized patriarchal patterns as a girl resurface in the guise of her elusive husband and, after his death, even intensify the painful misrecognition by the artistically interested public. On the level of the plot, the injustice of subliminal prejudice seduces her into a self-created plot whose dynamics and currents get out of hand. After her husband's death, Burden stops presenting art herself, and instead, she asks the male artists Tish, Eldridge and Rune to collaborate on and present art projects in public. They are her mask. She expects her art to be more widely accepted if the creator seems to be a man. *The Blazing World* experiments with the idea that experts and lay persons alike appreciate male productions of art more willingly than those falling out of the white male heteronormative matrix. Burden's hypothesis that these expectations run unconsciously, rise up as vague aversions the viewer will then rationalize retroactively, is at the center of the novel and my analysis. I further suggest that the visual art the novel represents triggers theses biases and makes changes to unconscious social concepts. Burden thus uses living and actual masks to study and negotiate gender roles through the ambiguous perception of art. In the following argument, I argue that the use of a mask changes the performance of gender role and the perception of performance in reference to Susanna Egan's *Burdens of Proof* (2011). I develop the concept of the persona to understand the dynamic emerging between Burden and her male masks, and explain how she develops a male persona in reference to C. G. Jung. I continue that Burden finally falls victim to her play with masks because she uses them as a manipulative tool in her fight with the artist Rune.

In *Burdens of Proof* Susanna Egan discusses impostures in autobiographical writing. She argues that in autobiography the reader assumes the truth of the text in its resemblance to what really happened in the writers' life. As well, she considers plagiarism and the creation of inauthentic identities which go awry if truth is brought to light. Egan says that writers are "claiming their texts or claim the identity of what their text represents" (19) and if an imposter steals intellectual property, the scam leaves feelings of severe injustice. The possibility of imposture reflects the necessity of

individual achievement and liability. In reverse, "[C]claims to authenticity depend on a cultural climate that is liable to accept them, but also on such evidence as the signature or face of the author" (19). The readers demand an authentic piece of writing, a piece of writing which meets the requirements of the genre. The genre is significant for the reader's expectations and if the writer fails to live up to its standards, they feel betrayed.

In the following section I research the play with authorship in life writing. The question of authenticity and intellectual property provokes a heated debate in *The Blazing World* because Burden's narratively represented installation art is not presented by herself but by other male artists. She does not tell the audience the truth about the art works' origin and later on, two of three artists seem to forget the source themselves. The question is whether both are impostures as the right declaration of the artist's identity is a trusted convention. Burden wants to explore whether the appraisal and acceptance of her artwork depends on her gender. The deliberately misleading declaration of the artist's identity is therefore part of her search for truth. The reason is that there is not just a level of communicating the meaning of the artwork and a separate level which communicates social facts about the artist. Both are intertwined so that the audience's relational level to the artist heavily influences the way the audience perceives and appraises meaning of what they set eyes on, i.e., the artwork. Burden thinks that the success of the artwork depends on the gender of the assumed artist. Yet, it changes the interpretation of the artwork, too. In that case, Burden's male masks reveal and hide truth, they add layers of interpretation and possible meaning. The ambiguity indeed achieves a greater immersion into and configuration of her life world so as to unravel the entanglements of interpretation and evaluation of cultural productions which are biased and reflect the audience's expectations. Her imposture of the public is not a negation of truth and meaning, it investigates the reality people create in their minds and intensifies the relation to reality rather than questioning it.

This line of thought allows me to move from C.G. Jung's terminology of the mask to Maisie Lord's film *The Natural Mask* about her mother, and to the exchange between mask and persona in *The Blazing World* at large. Further, I approach Butler's performativity within the scope of the study. The ideas converge in the interpretation of the novels' *grande finale*, the interaction of Rune and Burden. Surprisingly, the original meaning of the word persona counter-intuitively reveals its origin in the opposite of what we, nowadays, want to say if we use the word. Thereby, the bond between mask

and persona is utterly ambiguous. Both stand in immediate etymological proximity[15] in Latin, Greek and Etruscan, and we accordingly try to understand persona 'in terms of' mask (cf. Schmitz-Emans 8, cf. 24, cf. Brasser 54). Someone wearing a mask is a persona, or a persona is a mask in life or on stage. Persona and mask are not synonymous but represent phenomena which overlap and determine each other. If an actor changes her countenance by means of a mask on stage, new aspects of herself will show up whereas her usual character is overshadowed. Thus, the mask has the power to reveal and disguise simultaneously. *The Blazing World* works with the assumption that Burden achieves a similar effect whenever a metaphorical mask, such as a pseudonym, is made use of to present given works of art. The alter ego frees the artist of her regular identity and conjures up traits and capabilities that would not match with the ordinary temperament or perspective. In that manner, I think that Maisie Lord's film about her mother called *The Natural Mask* thematizes the fact that beyond the fact that Burden masked herself to reveal hidden layers of meaning and to conceal her established persona, her natural countenance is masklike as well. Even her name is a mask. That is not to say that she, or anyone else, is not serious about what she stages, she is certainly not a manipulator or narcissist. The mask is a question of which role she plays in the social field; importantly, her persona is practically connected to that *role*, a phenomenon which according to Sartre leads to an aberration: bad faith[16]. Sartre denotes: "The condition of the *possibility for* bad faith is that human reality, in its most immediate being, in the intra-structure of the pre-reflective cogito, must be what it is not and not be what it is" (1992: 112, emphasis added). Disappointing those who think that there is some actual stable being or identity sitting behind the mask, which only waits to be uncovered behind the mask, Sartre posits that to its very core, being is ambiguous.

The mask, persona and (gender-) stereotypical concepts such as race, class or age match the social system because the other and her artworks is perceived based on these concepts. For example, social/conceptually influenced perception predetermines the perception of person of color as if she wears a particular mask and the attitude towards her is heavily influenced by that mask. The mask therefore attributes the role the social discourse deems appropriate. Likewise, a person with wrinkles and grey hair

[15] The explanation goes back to Schmitz-Emans who is able to introduce her reader to the ambiguity of the terms (2009). A person is a mask-like countenance, and often associated with the particular social role someone performs in public life rather than an expression of an individual's core (Brasser 2008).
[16] Bad faith means that someone thinks that she *is* her social role. There is a too strong identification with the persona she presents others (1992: 109).

is ascribed the role and persona an old person is supposed to perform in society. From my point of view, the viewers' interpretation of Burden's work changes according to the masks she assumes. I thus argue that the relational information has a tremendous effect on the perceptual and intellectual processing of the content of Burden's artwork. In my opinion that is no problem in itself. When she speaks, for example, she speaks as a woman. What Burden, however, points to is the disadvantageous apprehension of women-artists by men *and* women.

Burden is aware of the problem, and she wants to negotiate social perception of the other through her artworks. I think that she is motivated to change conceptual/stereotypical social perception because she has suffered from its consequences all her life. Instead of only working through painful memory templates such experiences left behind, she researches the prevention of adverse social perception. I argue that her first installation negotiates gender concepts and non-conceptual/stereotypical views upon woman, the second mingles and merges conceptual social perception in general and the third guides the perception of the other without applying the conceptual scheme.

Burden's three male masks free her from the limitations of her role as a woman in her allegedly declining years and the expectation attached to that function. Whereas her collaborator Anton Tish is not up to the task of performing the first show's ambiguous mask, Eldridge, who sees himself as co-worker, tolerates the trick of the senses and indefinite self-reflection in the art. The challenge is twofold for each collaborator: First, tolerating the feeling of being the gofer and accepting master Burden's instructions, and second, understanding the ambiguity of performing the master but actually being the worker. The artists must accept the ambivalence of cultural productions which are never to be appropriated by one person only but are necessarily collaborative and sharable without limitation.

Burden's third mask is Rune. Burden and Rune *seduce* each other into getting to know their inner demons. Rune, whom Burden appoints as her own "Johannes the Seducer: terrible, sly, brilliant mask", is seduced into seducing her (213). In terms of power, Rune has an ace up his sleeve: on the one hand, his hinted at affair with Burden's husband, and on the other hand, the fact that they did not agree on a contract which obliges the other to concede as true the joint realization of the installation. The novel takes up their struggle such that Rune lures Burden into a play that brings her hidden personas to consciousness. It reconstructs subjectivity although what comes to

consciousness is not necessarily what Burden hopes to find. Later, Burden lures Rune into the maze of beguiling conceptual perception that confuses his sense of identity. I thus first analyze the play that stages the shades of Burden's shadow personas. The play appears in the Book O, titled *The Fifth Circle*, which has been lost for a while, very likely because it contains an incidence that is shameful to its writer. The deliberate loss is, on one side, a symbol of repression and, on the other side, an indication that Burden was well aware that her notebooks will be uncovered and read after her passing.

In Jungian terms, the play captures the field of anima and animus, i.e., female and male powers – those two oppositional forces which are both present in each person (cf. Jung 1995: 197). I think that the performance of anima and animus in Book O is attributable to the distribution of male and female forces in Burden and reveals its role in the projected social distribution of power. Burden and Rune first meet under the presumption that Burden wants to entangle Rune into the role she has given him, namely that of performing as her mask in public, and acting as if he is the creator of her third installation. I think that at that point Burden is completely unaware that her trust in the verbal agreement, which places him under the obligation that he recognizes her authorship after the fact, is more than naive. They meet without suspicion and decide on putting on a male and a female Japanese Noh mask in reverse, so that Rune transforms into a female persona and Burden takes on a male role. Being masked, The life writing strategy uncovers layers of subjectivity: Rune fabricates a woman he calls Ruina and Burden a man she calls Richard Brickman.

In the beginning, the two look at each other's masked faces and unchanged bodies. Rune enthusiastically performs his role, expresses exaggerated girlish gestures and makes sounds in foolishly high tunes. I believe that the whining, hysterical and insecure womanly style of acting infuriates Brickman to the degree that Brickman's mind cannot hold back its hidden persona and begins to reprimand Ruina with the full weight of patriarchal disdain (cf. BW 238). Facing the helpless figure Ruina performs, Richard bursts out: "You disgust me. You sound like a kicked dog… I am not mean. I am reasonable. You hear me. I am just speaking rationally" (BW 238). Brickman is about to hit Ruina. She cries. Rune laughs about the scene. They take off the mask and Rune is all into it. What great fun! Burden, however, has discovered a role she has not seen coming, a persona she performed yet does not consider being her "inside" (cf. BW 236). Apart from the individual connotation, they have performed a contemporary enactment of anima and animus with its current facets of norms and power relationships.

I may wonder where they come from. I think that the game exposes that each has performed an internalized gender role, a role that has become part of the 'I' during childhood and is based on the opposite-sex parent. I further suggest that the performance of the role is based on the mask which features basic male and female facial characteristics respectively: Burden perceives Rune's female mask, activates the concept 'female role' in her mind and reflects the attached expectation back upon Rune. Rune then connects to the internalized female role in his mind and performs it on stage by means of gesture and voice. He then reflects the concept 'male role' upon Burden, who again reacts in the implied manner. Awkwardly, Rune, the person with a narcissistic personality disorder, exposes a problem by laughing as Rune instead of Ruina behind the mask. He deflects Burden's gaze and his own self-reflection, he is not able to fully take in the female role as his. For him, his personas are only appearance, an illusion or simulation lacking a connection to an actual core. Yet, the passion Ruina conveys through her way of acting triggers a correspondingly extreme reaction in Brickman. The more Ruina exploits her gender role, the more Brickman exhausts his oppositional persona. Burden, the fervent proponent of gender rights, is ashamed about finding a persona who is diametrically opposed to what she assumes to be morally right. Burden is clearly against thinking that men are rational beings who must and cannot help but confront female frailty rigorously. Yet, she must ruefully accept the presence of the fiend being somewhere in her mind, always ready to be performed.

My interpretation of the play reaches into psychoanalysis and gender theory. The interpretation is connected to the analysis of reflection and attachment to same-sex parents and the acquisition of social roles. Admittedly, reading the intellectual reconsideration of the Electra- and Oedipus Complex in Butler's *Gender Troubles*, first published in 1990, definitely leaves us with the question 'Who actually wants what of whom?' and only very precise working through the family relationships can provide answers (cf. Butler 1990: 59-9). I thus posit that following Butlers' argument, a girl, after achieving the mother's recognition, chooses the father as her intellectual counterpart until she can work on her own. The girl enters the next stage of personal development by repressing or renouncing her desire to connect to him and accepting the loss of the father. She compensates the loss by connecting to the mother through the internalization of her female role. In the chapter "Freud and the Melancholia of Gender", Butler discusses that in the homosexual setting, the heterosexual norms as expressed through the Oedipus complex, does not apply (cf. 1990: 61, cf. 63). In that

case, the girl is interested in the mother, becomes aware of the loss of the mother as possible partner and internalizes the male role. That way, we may internalize male and female roles and that is also why Burden could perform a male role perfectly. The compensatory internalization of characteristics parent can include conflicts with that parent; these problems therefore also become part of the ego, so that the implied debasement is directed against the self upon self-regulation.

Butler writes about the zone of intersecting gender roles and bodies and despite many readings I would not be able to pinpoint them conceptually. The argument rather works under the hypothesis that gender relations are not based on a factual biological reality as reality is always unreality and extra-discursive sex an illusion (cf. 2011: x). Butler says that sex is performed rather than represented in and through discourse: Discourse is man-made and implements the social relations it pretends to discover in a socio-temporal setting, meaning that the relations are cultural rather than natural (cf. 2011: 144). The performativity of gender means that the materialization of the body comes into being in the moment of discursive action without being grounded on some essential requirement. This means that neither archetypes nor biology entails regulations of *how* to feel and enact male and female persona in social space. According to Jung, anima and animus are the female and male features of *every* human being (cf. Jung 1995: 197). Gender roles, in contrast, are based on the governing discourse, and I can only consider its power under the caveat of the body's failure to fully "comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled" (1993: xi). The body could actually produce complex immediate meaning which may stand in metaphorical relation to the contents of our mind and is vitally important to regulate and transform emotion. The picture is not comparable to the 'mind as stage'. It is the body unbound – a body that has its own will-power, which knows and wants irrespective of the field of socially structured temporal and spatial patterns. However, in society the body does not enjoy that freedom. Butler states "…performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (2011: 178). Burden and Rune's performance is an example for Banerjee's argument: the reconstruction of subjectivity in life writing is due to the possibility to subsume non-verbal expressions or new narrative formats in life writing (cf. Banerjee 2019). In this example, the bodily performance of the

characters accompanies their verbal expressions, and verbal communication only recounts what happened on a stage in a second step.

I can classify Rune and Burden's embodied spectacle as instance of performativity in life writing even though what the game exposes is precisely *not* what Burden wants. Despite Burden's misgivings, moving in between the two staged performative extremes brings motion into the concepts of being male or female, aggressor and victim, and relates them to each other. I suggest that Burden's experiment verifies the theoretical conclusions about masks and personas. They are structurally based on images of the collective unconscious, anima and animus, upon which society modeled objectionable, imprisoning and exaggerated social roles. The performance shows that it is reasonable to assume that she plays roles in her daily life instead of exhibiting some inner truth that couldn't be different. If she can feel, behave and think differently depending on her countenance and the other's response to it, if her persona is just one option among many, her female ego and her role are not fixed. The incidence shows that both are in a process of reconstructing subjectivity by means of the format of enacting gender roles which uncover formative relationships in their lives. Burden and Rune's play exemplifies that their gender roles are not an innate feature but an acquired optional pattern of behavior, thought and speech and are open to negotiation.

I think that Burden accomplishes the task of intellectually negotiating the revealed persona and she does so by starting to write under the pseudonym called 'Richard Brickman'. The pseudonym and persona share the name, both function as mask, one in written form and one on stage. Because Brickman appears in writing only in papers dated after 2001, which is the year of the play's performance, I argue that the pseudonym follows and is the consequence of the persona. Butler's chapter "Performativity as Citationality" unmistakably and almost humorously reappears in the structure of the novel's field of statements (xxi). The novel verifies Butler's insistence that discursive practice "enacts and produces that which it names" literally and such that switching the name and gender entails changing the discursive rules to which the text must comply (xxi). The way Brickman relates to and *cites* Burden in written form is an allusion to Butler's citationality. Brickman cites Burden critically but seriously and tries to show his repellant attitude towards her irrational writing and unconventionally working intellect. In writing, Brickman's patronizing persona transforms from the debasing persona on stage into a colleague on equal terms, and the change in tone has an immediate effect on the internalized gender role Burden carries

within herself. I think that by means of the citational practice she learns to change Brickman's attitude into constructive criticism. He, thereby, assumes the role of being Burden's dispassionate "confessor" in a letter to the editor of an academic journal (BW 266). Hence, the relationship between biographer and autobiographer intersects with the question of personas and gender. Brickman has the honor of revealing Burden's mastery over the three exhibitions and provides the scholarly and scientific argument to support her artistic experiment. The crucial point is that Brickman turns away from Ruina's grip. Brickman's change of attitude depends on changing the oppositional structure by turning his attention away from Ruina and towards the natural mask, Burden. In the course of the argument, he is thus able to select a more moderate view in terms of the intellectual position and style so as to generate a voice which complies with the sober tone used in academic writing. He widely quotes from Burden's letter – explaining how an artist's persona changes the way a viewer perceives a piece of art – and transforms Brickman's patriarchal attitude and performance.

Brickman suggests that Burden's artistic trilogy in disguise aims to uncover the grounds of perception and conducts experiments to explore the question whether or not perception is based on unconscious conceptual expectation. Verifying Burden's thesis, I come to the conclusion that the viewer evaluates art according to the artist's s persona and the social concepts attached to it. The involuntary and unconscious application of these concepts channels the viewer's perceptual process content-wise. In any case, although this type of conceptual perception is the product of learned social discourse, the corresponding emotional reaction reflects the viewer's *own* states of being. This means that the viewer's understanding grasps external artifacts conceptually and in line with given social conventions, but the aversion or affection present at an unconscious level are her own. Praise for Rune's performance is made possible because he is conceptually regarded in a less critical light than, say, Eldridge, because the learned conceptual social discourse predetermines the perceptual process and privileges Rune. In other words, conceptual perception triggers an unconscious emotional reaction, from which conscious thoughts are then only produced in the next step. These concept-based objective thoughts rationalize an emotional reaction. When a spectator sees an art work, I suppose that the arising thought thus results from between the viewer's internalized social concepts about the artist and her own emotional states. The way Brickman cites Burden helps him transforming these findings into an academic argument and in the

course of the process, he does not "cite the conventions of authority" but plays with them humorously (Butler 2011: xxi).

5.4. Installations as Life Writing

The coming three installations are experiments, and for me, experiments of thought, to research Burden's theses:

> (1) "All intellectual and artistic endeavors … far better in the mind of the crowd when the crowd knows that somewhere behind the great work or the great spoof it can locate a cock and a pair of balls" (BW 1).
>
> (2) "Much of prejudice is unconscious. What appears on the surface is an unidentified aversion, which is then justified in some rational way" (BW 32).

The first quote says that the intellect provides conceptual schemes for perception according to the sex of the artwork's or thought's producer. As a consequence, these concepts channel perception. If a work is supposedly done by a man, a person produces nicer mental representations of that object in our mind. The content and appreciation of what I see thus depends on my structural relationship to the producer. If the same work is supposedly done by a woman, the perception deteriorates, and the mental representation is less compelling. The second quote states that if a critic considers a woman-artist or an object produced by that artist, the conceptual gender matrix unconsciously invokes off-putting inner currents. The critic's conscious thoughts, which are based on the initially prejudiced feeling, rationalize the unconscious conceptual stance. The reason for the critic's final intellectual statement is not the free evaluation of a person and her work but the critic's prejudiced conceptual scheme. Their productions of thought give voice to their own inner bias because the conceptual prejudice distorts perception and the mental representation of works done by women. I infer that normally, theoretical and rational thought is built upon underlying values and intentions. Only an inclusion of psychological thought can help understanding the motives for reason and questioning rational judgment. My aim is to understand how the installations negotiate adverse social perception which has grown stiff and static. That is why I think that on the level of the plot, Burden's art puts narrative medicine into practice. Additionally, I want to explore the hidden conceptual perceptions which cause unjust aversion and thinking. I argue that Burden's first installation raises gender biases to awareness, her second installation changes biased social perception through

successively changing their concepts from one polarity to the next, and the third leads the way out of biased perception.

Burden tricks the audience by letting three men act as her front. Anton Tish serves as her front in the installation called "The History of Western Art" (43). The 'kid' is in his early twenties, an artist, and intellectually and culturally undetermined. Unsurprisingly, the critics happily and readily accept Tish, the wannabe boy-genius, as the man behind a puzzle. Nonetheless, I think that the interpretation of their artwork can negotiate their male and female roles. The puzzle consists of a protruding women-sculpture lying nakedly on the floor, thoughts, images and symbols are inscribed on her body and story boxes lie scattered and dispersed around (cf. 43). Of all people, art critic Oswald Case informs us about the story-boxes' interiors. To peek[17] into the boxes he lowers himself to the ground and looks through barred little windows. Six boxes show the interior furnishings of a house, which does not exist as a whole, and its four inhabitants. An awkward American family, a boy, a girl and their two-dimensional parents live with their uncanny stuffed toy-pet in a mess. The house is greasy, dirty and none of the decoration is inviting, Case discovers arms and legs sticking out in unexpected directions. There are books and words. The girl mutates into a tomboy but doesn't change her weary gesture: her mouth is open and arms raised. A woman almost breaks the mold, she is too large for the room and cannot even hold her head high. Paintings, portraits and photographs add to the scenery and other than telling a coherent narrative, they leave behind a sinister impression (cf. 44-45). The rooms' state of neglect is so severe, some boxes outline allusions to violence and desperation in such detail, so that the final collage of the family members provides no solace the viewers (and readers). I think what is important is that rather than telling a coherent story, each story-box evokes a nasty feeling representing childhood memories. What comes about is a depressing mess which contrasts with the surrounding glossy art world, the lolling beauty and the silky man in a suit. The remaining question is whether the gloss and glitter makes up for the murkiness of past.

The story boxes and the installation as a whole add spatiality to a textual form which otherwise foregrounds temporality. Just by reading (looking), the reader (viewer) shows an emotional reaction to these rooms. I argue that these reactions draw on the

[17] Peeking into rooms is like the habit of writing confessions because it reveals the private life and feelings that are normally hidden from public scrutiny. What is seen inside the room splits off from what the mask enacts in public life. Looking into and facing once own memory boxes helps going beyond afterwards and furnishes our thinking outside the box.

reader's (viewer's) own stored rooms of the past, with arrant emotion clinging to each one of them. In short intervals, each box retrieves odious or repellant situations from the reader's (viewer's) memory. The rooms assort vague remembrances in space so that the reader's (viewer's) activated mental rooms of the past come up to consciousness simultaneously. But what is the advantage of having disconcerting feelings and memories sitting next to each other in mental space? I suggest that the rooms draw up uneasy issues of the body and transform them into better manageable packages. The obscure body memories are better accessible if they arrange themselves spatially because they specifically stem from body experiences. The mess becomes more orderly, the nerve-stretching inner disorder becomes approachable. These boxes can represent and trigger states of feelings which do not need to fit into a narrative or answer to cause and effect. Intangible memory traces can find representation as such. The reader (viewer) who has attracted them to consciousness may free herself from their limiting frames and learn to think outside the box.

Case reports that the main attraction of "The History of Western Art" is the beautiful giantess lying on the floor. The sculpture bizarrely draws on "Giorgione's painting of Venus, finished by Titian" (BW 42). The collaborative Italian painting draws on a motif popular during Greek antiquity and depicts Giorgione's muse Cecilia in the guise of Venus. Rumors say that the painter was completely under her charm and beauty whereas she was not even a faithful lover (cf. Muther 153-4). Burden crafts a visual replica, mixes it stylistically with mid-twentieth century Pop Art and Jeff Koons and writes inscriptions onto the body. The woman's forehead reads PRIMITIVE and the arm pit exposes Sofonisba Anguissola's striking self-image. The nudity provokes the stereotypical perception and objectification of women. Because the visitors think that Tish is her creator, the gorgeous lady seems to be draped in eroticism for men's delight and is a beautiful object used to stage ideas and thought from a history dominated by men. Paradoxically, the perspective is slightly changed and she is regarded as an intellectual vamp, she immediately transforms into a monster. One way or the other, her appearance brings prejudices to consciousness. The aversive concepts which normally guide the perception of women on an unconscious level are provoked to a degree that their appearance as conscious thought or perception in readers and spectators is only a question of time. The two oppositional connotations "sextual object" and "intellectual monster" connect, and no interpretation can replace the other.

Yet, if I the artwork is analyzed with the knowledge that Burden is its creator, the perception of the installation changes: a man in a suit looks at the beauty from a distant with a serious look on his face (cf. BW 43, cf. 59). Such ensembles, here showing a male painter and his half-naked muse, are typical of Renaissance paintings. In this show however, I propose that the formation transforms, and becomes an allusion to Burden and Tish: Burden creates a work according to her own liking and ascribes Tish with nothing more but a marginal position. Such a reading concludes that the installation mirrors the process of its own production and, by means of the inscriptions, puts Burden's inner self on display (cf. BW 73). Tish is no more but Burden's mask, yet, she also uses Tish to spark her imagination and to reach layers of creativity which would remain inaccessible under normal circumstances.

Tish's second role as mere observer rings a bell and opens the door to a physical reading of this chapter. The woman presents herself only because there is an observer: Burden presents her intellectual and artistic self only because Tish has joined her project. The observer effect is not due to the presence of a conscious mind but because observation adds an impulse to the experiment. Further, the fact that she inscribes the body denotes that the words are an expression of the embodied mind. Her almost naked body has, from this angle, a theoretical explanation and claim for embodiment. I think what is important is that Tish's gaze acts upon the rest of the installation because adding the male figure changes the field by establishing a relation between the man and the woman. The installation work done in the field is therefore unpredictable und uncertain. To that effect, the viewer's perceptual experience is just as ambiguous and indeterminate. A work built on statistical, mechanistic or binary formula causes predictable reactions in the viewer. A work constructed to show how two interfering minds materialize, however, excites fluctuating perceptional experiences in a field where categories muddle and the intellect is never fixed.

I confer that Tish's presence in the field initiates Burden's creative productions. Her ideas, images, and symbols move from the inside to the outside and become manifest only because Tish appears on the stage and looks at her. The possibility to create works of ambiguous meaning accelerate her ambition. Negotiating the conceptual reading (Tish as creator looking at a woman as gorgeous status object for entertainment) and the representative reading (the installation represents its own creation process and pushes Tish to a marginal position) brings the interpretation to life (cf. BW 60). The analysis is the relation between both complementary angles. The

imprecision of meaning or ambiguity comes much closer to lively mental and material relations than a binary opposition.

Because Burden inscribes words all over the figures, houses and installations, the thoughts and thought fragments fuse visual art and intellectualism. The specifically chosen words and sentences, each giving an impulse and providing salient imagery, activate the visually operating right brain and the language-processing faculties of the left brain at the same time. I argue that in union, the visual impression dissolves the concepts and categories which govern the intellect and perceptual operations. On top of this, the given inscriptions are not random choices but ideas, symbols, premises, modes of thinking and display which constitute the Western mind and activate the abstractly working cerebrum. The artwork does not converse about any sort of arbitrary thought and sensual information. It is rather about those of outstanding significance to the development of Western civilization. That's why the reader's (viewer's) hitherto dormant cultural mind-set awakens pointedly. The viewer's or reader's inner eye who casts a covetous eye on the lady excites the deeper urges and drives of the limbic system. The woman-sculpture, therefore, activates the lower and upper mental strata and brain areas all at once. Next, walking through the installation is a fully embodied experience, the viewer glimpses, kneels and moves around, and thereby exercises the understanding. Consequently, I think that the naked intellectual woman reconnects and negotiates emotional, bodily and abstract processes in the brain. The play with complementary perceptual or interpretational images of the naked woman, whose forehead does not promise much, on whose body the white privileged male gaze rests with alarming coolness, can easily shift into a derogatory comment about Western art, weirdly re-projecting the label Western world has put on the art of other cultures. A woman artist may have stripped herself off constraining covers to expose her intellectual self to the people, an act the man in a suit can hardly keep pace with and is pushed to the margins. Playing with the complementary images which come to mind tells us that it is not either the one or the other; playing with the opposites in mind reveals the art work's ambiguous meaning and moves the thought system and concomitant perceptual apparatus. Bringing up and adding other readings, the play negotiates and transforms the gaze into the world. The mental powers are alive. Finally, all I can clearly say is that *there is a naked woman on the floor and a man looking at her*.

I assume that the story-boxes, which are dispersed around the woman sculpture, are the product of Burden's and Tish's mutual effort. What is in between them has

become manifest as scattered boxes in which memories of both have mingled to create new coincidental patterns. In reaction to the mental contents of the other, some aspects intensify, and others almost vanish upon contact. Looking at the boxes, the two artists should have but unfortunately failed to recognize themselves and the other. Burden appears ruthless about Tish being absorbed into fame, fame she never enjoyed. She laughs about the press' dupability without taking into consideration the effect the deception has on Tish's feeling of self-worth. She talks rudely about him because she seems to forget that he is not her young father who rejected her as a child but indeed a young person who got caught in a play he cannot control. Asked a question focusing on the scattered story boxes, Tish says that the show "cleared his system of the past" (BW 107). In reality, the sudden fame in the mainstream and the incapability to ever live up to that success as an independent artist has wounded him in the aftermath of the show. Whether the artwork has actually brought up messy memories he first had to work through until he could move on to new pastures remains unanswered. What we know is that he eventually uses the money he earned in the process to travel and writes to Sweet Autumn Pickney "I'm in Venice sitting in a Café… saw some pictures By Giovanni Bellini. There was a Madonna that looked so much like you… ." (BW 106). The boy who did not know Giorgione starts to get in closer touch with the great masters.

The Suffocation Rooms are the middle part of the novel and the exhibition series. Phineas Q. Eldridge, born John Wittier, is Burden's second mask – not as artist engaged in visual art but as a performance artist. The collaboration is the smoothest and Eldridge becomes part of the installation without any confusion and illusion about what he is actually about to perform. That is why a post-installation controversy among the two artists is not an issue. The space between Eldridge and Burden has come to life in mutual play, the young man was neither her puppet who attracted her vengeance nor was Burden drawn into a game which signals her loss of control. I think that their artworks unveil and negotiate stereotypical social perception of people of color, old and gender-neutral people.

This part of Burden's trilogy is not noticed much in mainstream media. The mask creates a piece of art which *supposedly* reflects the life of a mixed raced gay man. Eldridge describes *The Suffocation Rooms* as consisting of seven rooms, which are closed but connected by doors so that the visitors can walk through the rooms. Each room is simply furnished with a table, venyl-chairs and wallpaper, and the visitors

encounter the same two metamorphs. The rooms get progressively hotter while the interiors grow in size. The color of the walls and metamorphs slowly changes from creamy white to dusky caramel and the furniture and people age with each room. The room's window is actually a mirror (cf. 130-1). In each room there is a box with a hermaphrodite figure made of wax and walking through the rooms, the figure slowly hatches. The little body is not subject to the giantism and its realistic looks are modeled according to those exhibited in "La Specola Museum in Florence from the eighteenth century, with its skinned and opened bodies that displayed systems and organs, the *sacro monte* above Varallo with its lifelike figures, and Japanese ghost-scroll images (BW 133)". In the last room, the figure is out and the galantine metamorphs cannot help but face the weird creature to whom the writer of the chapter attributes the status of being a 'person' (cf. 133). The three sit amidst a room in decay and the visitor, who is now clearly undersized in comparison, must wonder about the meaning of this bizarre confrontation.

I think that the installation hits on problems of the socio-economic system in which Burden lives in terms of entropy as a surplus of temperature, on the stereotyped perceptual system in relation to the installation's phenomenological and discursive significance, and on the family system in context of the arrangement of the metamorphs, the wax figure and the spectator. The heat connects to all three sub-systems, supposing that it produces feelings of suffocation in the family system, metaphorically refers back to the effects of entropy in the socio-economic system and, surprisingly, allows the little androgynous person to hatch. I choose to interpret the production of heat metaphorically because even though it signals a higher entropy production of closed physical systems, in the socio-economic system entropy appears in the shape of material and cultural decay. In the installation, the color progressively changes, and the metamorphs get older. Additionally, the genderless person connects to the discussion of social power relations. Issues like the system's decay, the prejudices against people of color, women, homosexuals and aging people intersect in this work. They provide the context of a family situation in which the visitor, who is progressively scaled down until she feels like a toddler, meets her hungry inner child. The three discourses blend into each other, they overlap and mesh just as the categories of color, gender and age flow into each other in the course of the walk-through. The three sub-systems or segments of reality join into a unified discourse, in which the installation phenomenologically represents the subtle processes and power relations of a private and public discourse.

I argue that with regards to entropy the heat and processes of decay increase in each room – I think that entropy has its grip on these neatly structured rooms. The phenomenon points to the physical problem closed systems impose upon themselves – no transfer or exchange of energy or matter is possible. If the system is not open, important life processes come to a halt and everything inside the rooms either decays or dissolves into chaos. Closed rooms and systems at large fail to increase their complexity because their very static and locked construction wards off the necessary exchanges which can create prosperity and complexity through work. Under such circumstances, I think that things and mind do not become better in time but worse and any temporal motion is degradation. Entropy henceforth implies that time has degenerative effects on things or people which are not associated with growth, transformation and metamorphosis but only produce ineluctable disorder or decay. This process occurs even if temporality is not included in the calculation that has constructed the system because space is necessarily time-drenched and always subject to the alterations and processes time entails.

In the essay "Remembering in Art: The Horizontal and the Vertical", Siri Hustvedt points out that the "spatial conception of time in Western culture is most often a horizontal line or arrow moving from left to right. We imagine a narrative unfolding in this direction. Events are felt as happening in a left-to-right motion, and research has shown that in artworks figures with greater agency and power usually appear to the left in pictorial space" (2016: 453). As well, the order of subject and object in a sentence is from left to right which reflects the direction of Western progress (cf. 460). In *The Blazing World*, the story boxes discussed above show narrative details with a focus on spatiality. Likewise, the exhibited rooms are oversized story boxes to be explored from within. Yet this time, the exhibition integrates a temporal sequencing by letting the viewer walk further and further into the past. Somewhat oddly, processes of entropy have the effect that the walk-through leads into the past because things decay due to entropy. The more one proceeds, the older things get, although the time-travel could just as well rejuvenate the interiors. Imagine that the things and people of your memory would age! In my opinion, this is a bizarre idea from which follows that if a person remembered her childhood desk, the image coming to my mind would show a darkened, scratched and shabby table. Yet, this is not the only temporal rarity. Paying more attention, the little one hatches against the chronology since the child-demon should under normal circumstances become younger as the walk-through progresses, just as

the viewer or reader is turned into a toddler again. This again points to the fact that there are at least two timelines running in opposite directions. The Western *concept* of time is, in so doing, not reversed or opposed, but the actual life processes like aging, hatching, emergence or growth do not answer the ordinary expectations. The rooms defy a clear-cut understanding of the various lines of development.

Modern literature, such as the work of William Faulkner, has introduced the spatiality of time. Writers describe temporal experience in terms of spatial metaphors, even though the mind infers space and objects from the succession of impressions. That is subjective time. Spatial awareness and construction of objects follows time and is cognitively structured according to the temporal sequencing. Accessing social concepts which govern subjective time is therefore crucial to change awareness of social space and alter conceptually delimited vision of others. To open mind to discussion, it is necessary to subvert social concepts which channel the reaction to and interaction with others and create a phenomenological experience on a preconceptual level. To achieve the aim, Burden's seven immediately consecutive rooms are indeed not *primarily* "…a space to be walked through…" but rather "… a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion" (Bourriaud 15). But can the installation open a conversation on the issues raised?

Under normal circumstances, a person is socialized to structure the intellect by social concepts such as "woman" and "men", "old" and "young", and these concepts are the product of prevailing discourses. From this time onwards, these social concepts govern perception and let me perceive in line with expectations raised by these common social discourses. Concepts and expectations then control the succession of perceptual operations and evoke perceptual objections reflecting the discursive schema and power structures. One can then only see what one expects to see – the social reality one sees is a mirror of the concepts that have creeped into the intellect. Looking out into the world becomes a maddening experience because what the sense organs can discern is exactly what the mind has dictated them to see. One has stereotypes about vision or rather, vision has become a vehicle for stereotype (cf. Hustvedt 2016: 456). The world is a mere reflection of one's own mental pattern and the discourses by which are communicated, thought, acted out and perceived. Likewise, Burden's room's windows are mirrors rather than transparent – they confront the uncomfortable truth that looking outward comes close to looking inward.

The novel has created a mental walk-through which subverts the common social scheme to counter the automatized influence of social concepts on perception. It practices a writing strategy puts narrative medicine on a systemic level. Since in each room the metamorphs change their color only gradually from creamy white to dusky caramel, the metamorphs age consecutively and a transgender person climbs out of a box slowly, the eyes meet transitional elements. *Walking through the rooms creates a perceptual succession in which rigid concepts are undermined*: due to slow color changes and slow aging the intellect cannot activate its conceptual social grid. The experience takes place on a pre-conceptual level so that non-categorical perceptual processes are possible. The instruction, i.e., the way the artists have built the installation in order to evoke a particular order and concatenation of impression of those who walk or read through it, obstructs stereotyped vision. The visual representation of the rooms and objects seen is unable to trigger the application of potentially discriminating concepts such as skin color which would normally cause an unconscious cognitive and emotional reaction or even aversion in the viewer or reader. Allowing for the perception of the scenes on a pre-conceptual level changes the perceptual system, and consequently our social perception. I argue that it thus opens the formerly rigid concepts to negotiation.

This access to preconceptual perception can actually unfold in the reader's mind as well. While reading, the reader practices narrative medicine. The reader encounters the muddle and undefined field of human life instead of the neat and tidy concepts and categories civilization has constructed to justify the predominance of one group over the other. The immediate imaginative experience alters the concepts which govern the intellect by mixing and bending the categories. I argue that this muddle is not at all comparable to chaos: mixing the categories phenomenologically is not a step from order to entropy's disorder and decay. I have outlined above that preconceptual perception facilitates unobstructed temporal unfolding in a state of mind which precedes any conceptual ordering activity. I think that a change of the discourses requires a changed sequencing of intellectual patterns and perceptual process. Moreover, the young figure's hermaphroditic body offers three readings, first, representing a mixture of Burden's and Eldridge's inner demon. Second, it makes me aware of the social construction of gender roles and discussion of intersex persons. Third, it refers to the hermaphroditic child archetype, a super-powerful monstrosity which is, according to

Jung, is able to unify oppositional extremes, the symbolic representation of our being, and the aim of self-realization (cf. Jung 2018: 188).

The reader and viewer are only unconsciously aware of the effect the successively changing rooms have. Turned into toddlers again, the viewer or reader lets herself be taken back to times of a ”prereflective, preconceptional, embodied relationship to another person”, whose significance for development of the neocortex and the emotional system is profound (Hustvedt 2016: 125). In this formative period in life the child internalizes the “relational music”, the rhythms whose feeling states create the basis of later cognition and understanding of the world (cf. 125). In the last room, the heat is by now intolerable and suffocating, the toddler is face to face with its avenger – the “it”, “the demon”, “the hungry child” (133). There is a recreation of the initial ‘mummydaddyme’ – the novel does not search for an image of a perfect idyll but investigates the first instances of rage and unsatisfied cultural needs. It finally offers a scene in which oblivious metamorphs cannot help but look at the young one. Burden’s father, who, from Burden’s point of view, has never recognized what she was and what she accomplished, strongly leaned towards “neat closed systems: the world in a jar”, exactly those systems which provoke an increase of entropy (BW 129). Failing to support her work as an artist striving to get public attention, he suffocated his daughter’s standing, causing an enormous wild rage, a wrath she has tried to suppress to the day she started to work on her wax child-id (cf. BW 165). The single elements come together in the image of her early life, which has forced her to grow up in an environment which stifled her aspirations of being famous.

The wax figure[18], the only child sharing the room with two adult galantine figures, actually turns out to have a body with organs. The novel describes its facets:

[18] This wax figure alludes to and opposes Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri’s body without organs. They develop their critical response to Freud’s psychoanalysis in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, first published in 1972. From their perspective, schizophrenia as epitome of madness is not so much used as to label a person with peculiar states of mind but to designate the accelerating mechanistic advances of capitalism. Further opposing Freud, they assume that the unconscious is not theatrical in nature but a machine (cf. 2000: 24). They infer that it is not open to play but occupied with deterministic operations. This desiring-machine is coupled with social production, as are the normal bodily functions and body parts (cf. 2000: 31). Nature is fully absorbed into the capitalist paradigm, functions as a part of the productive process and the actual body is one without organs, thus not forming an organism. They think the undifferentiated body-without-organs escapes the mechanistic doctrine. Without doubt, the desiring-machines conflict with the body-without-organs (cf. 2000: 8), and precisely because none of the statements remain unrefuted, the body-without-organs can also “reveal[s] itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjuction of intensities. You have constructed your own little machine, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines” (XXX: 161). The body-without-organs comes around as an egg whose interiors are not yet differentiated. Its fluids are supposedly related to Spinoza’s all-embracing substance or a primordial soup (cf. XXX: 153-4). Typical for postmodern thought, these things cannot parallel a self rich with meaning, a self that “feels, acts and recalls” has vanished (XXX: 163).

"skinny, eerily transparent (liver, heart, stomach, and intestines just barely visible), frizzy red human hair… ", and as such, "the really large (by now) metamorphs have finally noticed that the personage is out and have turned their heads to look at it" (BW 133). I think that this inner child is an artistic representation and transformation of an emotionally challenging Id. Its inner life is fully differentiated and modeled in such detail that its human countenance and body defies the use of mechanistic metaphors. The organ may be read as a response to Guatarri and Deleuze's body without organs. Neither its inner drives and urges nor its organism make it susceptible to the mechanisms of the surrounding perceptual, family and economic system. On the contrary, becoming aware of its needs negotiates the parental and infantile perspective. The fact that the heated rooms provide the purely objective conditions (comparable to those of an incubator) exemplifies that the systemic problems actually and unintentionally encourage its arrival on the scene.

The novel contains two reviews of *The Suffocation Rooms*, each one brief, to the point but without an intention to engage in an interpretational depth to understand the potential of the installation's effects on reader (cf. 210). Obviously, both do not know or suspect that Eldridge *performs* as a front. The first review is dated March 27, 2002, written by Patrick Donan, and offers the most obvious analysis of the installation, namely that the bizarre intersex figure reflects Eldridge's affinity to the LGBT community. Though this idea is understandingly the first at hand, Eldridge is not even an intersex person but a gay man. He is indeed half black and half white, a fact that makes us question why he would place himself into a family arrangement with two white Americans. His observation of the decaying rooms is good but, besides presenting the too common idea that the artwork is a critique of American capitalist aspirations, Donan shows no interest in working out the installation's complexities. He goes on to connect his analysis to 9/11 even though the work was finished before the catastrophe.

On March 30, 2001 Zachary Dortmund publishes a very dense portrayal and places it in context of possibly related artworks (cf. 212). In merely 15 lines, Dortmund mentions Nicolas Bourriard and Rirkrit Tiravanija, next to Guatarri. In that case, I argue that he reveals that he has not looked close enough – the hermaphroditic figure is,

according to him, of mechanistic nature, supposedly resembles a body without organs and thereby cuts across Eldridge's own account, who has brought its realistically modeled organs, emotional expression and exquisite material into prominence. Before providing more detail, the relation between the Dortmund's and Eldridge's perceptions are of interest. Both express themselves, think and perceive according to differently working intellects: Donan's expectation of Eldridge's sexuality has blinded him and caused a stereotypical analysis of *The Suffocation Rooms* whereas Dortmund applies postmodern concepts to the visual data the exhibition offers. Yet, he does not notice the disaccords. He does not see the organs which are actually right there staring at him.

Dortmund establishes *The Suffocation Rooms* in comparison to relational art, a term coined by Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), a work whose advances provided the theoretical investigation of the event-based art productions of the 1990s. Artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija backed away from the art object or performance and instead offered an art work in which the visitors play the major role whereas the artist provides the props and the situative occasion for a gathering. Tiravanija is known in the art world for serving Thai food, *pad thai*, in open space normally in use to display objects of art. In a highly cosmopolitan setting, the visitor's activity and spontaneous interaction with each other and the artist are the artwork (cf. Hoptman 1997). The artist creates spaces and fields of interaction for encounters and events instead of lasting pieces of art (cf. Dohmen 37). The strategy is, as a result, close to performance art, and yet, includes random participation on behalf of those who are usually the mere spectators. The method of organizing transient human gatherings and shaping the involved communication between the visitors creates an aesthetic situation able to unify the art work's final ensemble: exhibition and observation turn it into an excellent example of what Bourriaud terms relational art or relational aesthetics (cf. Bourriaud 25, cf. 43, cf. 85). I believe that most remarkably, the distance between artist, performance and spectator disappears and what the art critic studies is the activity, the connection between people (cf. 11). Relational art is at home in an essentially urban and transnational environment, a fact which emphasizes its sociological significance and utopian motif (cf. Bourriaud 14, cf. Dohmen 37). Bourriaud is convinced that the social interstice "creates free areas, and time spaces where rhythms contrasts with the structuring of everyday life" (cf. 16).

Dortmund is well aware that there is no straightforward connection between *The Suffocation Rooms* and Bourriaud – and once one has come to understand why the

installation is "not fully relational art" and is "not altermodern" (BW 212), it is possible to understand how Hustvedt's creation of literary representation of visual art draws on and progresses the prospects writing. The installation is neither an event nor transient, an interaction or even a free utopian space. The estimation is not a crushing assessment of Dortmund's proposal but slightly shifts the critical context he suggests. I argue that the idea expresses that life writing formats are only complete if the reader participates in the reconstruction of relational subjectivity. The art is relational in the sense that it relates to the spectator's past and the consequential emotional and perceptual imprints. It is also relational art by not only including the spectator in the installation but by creating an artwork which is only complete in the moment the visitor walks through it and participates in the negotiation of meaning once she relates to the figures.

The Suffocation Room draws us very keenly into the depth and origin of the individual's family and perceptual system. Even Bourriaud's notion 'altermodern' is not fully applicable for a critical evaluation. The term signals the changes of the sociological context of artists and Western culture after the end of the Cold War. Bourriaud says that high degrees of mobility create a creolisation or hybridization of Western and postcolonial cultures in the cities and result in lives which defy the increasing tendencies towards conservative ideologies and standardized courses and aims of life (cf. Bourriaud 2009). Bourriaud states that the movement stands in the modernist tradition, yet differs from modernism and postmodernism with regards to travelling, interaction and incentives. What he means is that transnational encounters have partly replaced postcolonial interactions because people form and engage in new artistic relationships. I think that is the possible when there is a social space, such as *The Suffocation Rooms,* in which people begin to negotiate the attitude towards the other anew and are consequently open to new relationships that do not repeat traditional ways of interaction. Once it is possible to perceive and communicate with the cultural other, problematic historical interactions cease to dominate cross-cultural interactions. In such cases, negotiation processes of perception were successful and transnational encounters can establish supportive ways of perceiving and thinking about the other.

The novel's last installation, called *Beneath*, is a maze. Burden and Rune, who have seduced each other because they seduce the other by being seduced themselves, run into danger of suffering the same fate as Kierkegaard's Johannes the Seducer. They have both entered each other's mental labyrinth by way of seduction and feel safe because

they think their rational thoughts about the other protects them form harm. As a reminder, Johannes the Seducer, whose cunning mind lacks any morality but starts the good by the mere absence of it (remember that understanding works by moving between oppositional poles), has deeply penetrated the mind's maze to conquer the girl of his liking. Johannes finds his way to the center of the maze he studies, namely his victim's heart, but he cannot possibly find his way back because the act of evil involuntarily activates his conscience, which again triggers his powers of reflection. Once self-reflection sets in, the strategy turns upon itself and causes moral confusion. Instead of understanding the moral ambiguity of his innermost being, the self-reflection has a dazzling effect to his mind. In a backfire, his cunning mind's *self-reflective* powers necessarily do upon him what he has done to others. The negotiation of oppositional motives is not possible anymore. Burden and Rune, who got engaged in a similar undertaking, must find their way out in time. In order to do so, they project their mental pattern into space and built the maze in manifest form (Baudrillard 160).

There are representations of mazes in cultures all around the globe; its basic pattern reappears in innumerable manifestations and is a valuable format in life writing (cf. Wright 73). In *The Maze and the Warrior*, Craig Wright says that "[T]throughout Western civilization the labyrinth has been not only a visible object, but also an archetype in which an ancient combat myth was played out" (4). His strategy of narrowing this archetype down to the West is correct since the theoretical idea, i.e., the archetype, is specific to today's cultural evolution and the product of modernization, whose development has cut the modern self off her roots and human nature and makes a change necessary. The maze complies with different forms, shapes, or types, and yet, they all share a hardly discernable pattern made from parallel and curved lines. These lines lead down a path which dazzles all those who try to find their way through the maze. Though baffling at first sight, the maze provides a pattern with a beginning, an end and a goal. The latter often includes the task of traversing the maze successfully and simultaneously fighting the demons which lie within (cf. 73, cf. 85). "The symbol of the maze demonstrates convincingly that meaning in the physical world need not always be expressed in narrative or chronological order" (159), says Wright. The maze, therefore, allows the representation of mental or life experiences, which differ from the ordinary narrative spatial and temporal organization. The equivalent of the maze in life writing is social perception of others. Only if the reader becomes aware of it and opens it to negotiation, she can find her way out.

I argue that because large parts of the mind's mental experiential realm bears comparison to a maze, which is especially madding for rational thinkers, *The Blazing World* takes advantage of this structural feature: Burden and Rune rebuild subjectivity in the shape of a mental maze, include a riddle, and endow it with guideposts such as video art and art objects – engaging with the art is the solution of the riddle. The reader experiences the walk through the maze from Eldridge's angle. The first obstacle he reports about is called a "visual mantra", that is a repeatedly appearing caramel mask which sits next to geometrical figures on white paper (262). In the course of the route, the visual mantra changes slightly and only those visitors who can recognize the tiny differences and keep the mantras apart will find their way out. The visitor must pay close attention to the altering geometrical lines next to the mask and force the eye to focus and sharpen its view. The eye's focus remains in force once it wanders from the geometrical lines to the side towards the mask. Initially, the mask appears blurrily and its eyes as blank holes. I think that the viewer or reader, who must memorize the mantra's exact look, will go back and forth between the mask and the geometrical figure and learn to mesh both perceptual triggers into one precise impression. The mask will then cease to be blurry and the viewer will sharpen and zoom in on the mask's eyes. Finer facial features appear and the hitherto empty eyes come into focus. On a phenomenological level, the geometrical lines next to the mask teach the viewer's eyes to see past the non-white mask, which normally protrudes blurrily to a degree which makes it impossible to see any individual human characteristics, let alone the eyes (cf. 262). In normal life, this perceptual exercise helps seeing past the gendered or racialized masks of personas and focus on the eyes and actual contours. Hence, the visual mantra helps overcoming racialized facial recognition. On a more general level, de-racializing vision is consequently a significant step for those who aim to exit the system's labyrinth.

Next, Eldridge discovers a film-series showing a calm and still life shot in the aftermath of September 11. The first sequence shows Rune breathing calmly in the room, the second depicts the attack's material destruction, the third portrays the shoes of a number of victims, and the last captures a wintery snow fall (cf. 262-3). The videos reappear and repeat themselves throughout the maze. Their quiet atmosphere contrasts with the sensational media-event people all around the globe absorbed and watched on their TVs. The dreadful disaster zone is an emblem of the injuries of the modern world, the denial of meaning and that which cannot be grasped in art. From my point of view, there is no perceptual clue besides the mere observation of its content for the very reason

that we cannot always transpose severe trauma and agony into an artsy narrative. In this case, simple observation is the means of choice and the only possibility to confront the catastrophe. There is not much we can say about it to ease the upcoming sadness. Yet, it may open the dialogue to a mutual understanding of the cultural and political implications of the event without establishing the cultural other as fiend and aggressor.

The last video sequences a narrative as a dance and a dance as a thought. Eldridge and his partner Marcello watch the film-sequence through a peephole right before they are able to walk out of the bewildering maze. The film shows a masked man and a woman engaged in a dance. The initially rigidly and mechanically moving couple are Richard and Ruina – the reader doubtlessly recognizes them in the way Richard 'yanks' his dancing partner and she is that hampering, whimsical, spineless doll, no self but a bundle, an "airy nothing", who tempts him to pull her, lead her – they wrestle at some point (264). I suggest that the movements embody their thought, the way of interaction their relationship.: If thought happens in between emotion and perception, both of which are embodied, thought may well be represented in the muscular states and movements of the dancing body. Their negotiation process of what the other is and is allowed to be in relation to oneself is in fact a struggle. Yet, it ends well. In the very last film, Eldridge and Marcello watch the magically transformed woman reappearing on stage, this time without the male body at her side, to stage a "fairy-tale ending": she loses the ground below her feet, her footing, and takes off towards the sky (264).

To my own surprise, in Rune's last work *Houdini Smash* the great maze returns in ruins. Rune makes matters worse and dies from an overdose of sleeping pills which he may or may not have taken under the conscious premise of killing himself. In Rune's final art work, which art critic Oswald Case interprets as appraisal of a coming cyber age and his sister Kirsten Larsen Smith understands as portrayal of her childhood accident and plastic surgery, the eyes close, the mind shuts down, the maze crumbles and turns upon itself – his being enters the age of technology and ceases to be of flesh and blood. The *Houdini* proves that Rune himself has, unlike Eldridge, not found his way out of the first maze and thereby reveals that he cannot possibly be its creator (cf. 323). Rune's destiny is akin to the Seducer's fate because his self-reflection has led to acts of confusion and entrapment. Ruina, who has attracted Brickman's gaze and evoked his role, has successfully seduced Brickman and exposed his vulnerability. However, Rune may not have seen Ruina as a feeble aspect of himself. Rune, a fervent proponent of simulation and cyborgs, is certainly not able to grasp Ruina as a persona

he should reflect upon and integrate into his daily presentation. For him, the self is among the conglomerate of appearance, illusion, and deception.

Baudrillard links seduction to the seductive effect of surfaces which resemble reality but are nothing but simulations. Simulation means that an abstraction, representation or sign has no counterweight in reality and that a simulation of reality replaces it in its stead (cf. Baudrillard 1994). From this vantage point, Rune cannot take Ruina seriously. Rune considers Ruina to be a seductive illusion whereas Burden assumes that Brickman's persona uncovers a hidden truth. Ruina is appearance, just as any other aspect of his 'life' is a simulation of something that does not exist and has never existed. Because Rune does not recognize Ruina as being a part of his ego, he rationalizes problems and he cannot transform his inner polarity more favorably. Because he ridicules Ruina, he misses the chance of negotiating his inner male and female forces. Ruina, modeled after Rune's mother, has awakened inside him and she has disastrous effects. Rune's suicidal consumption of sleeping pills, medication that has already killed his mother in a similar way, indicates that Ruina has risen to unseen power and was left alone without any control. Rune has misrecognized his female role and suffered dire consequences. It is even possible that Rune repeats a triggered tragic family pattern and commits suicide. His self-inflicted death shows the complexity of the artists' struggle for recognition and exposes the fact that their gender-related power struggle does not allow for an easy assessment of perpetrator and victim. Nonetheless, I think that their artwork helps the reader to negotiate their roles by raising them to consciousness.

5.5. Gender Studies

The novel's title *The Blazing World* takes up the English writer Margaret Cavendish's (1623-1673) failed attempt to gain adequate appraisal of her writings, since the leading figures of the time would refuse and acknowledge what she had to say or put into writing. Changing gender and assuming a male role is one way of avoiding gender discrimination, and Burden reports that Cavendish would even wear male clothing to escape her hopeless and dire conditions (cf. BW 221). Other than Cavendish, Burden chooses to wear men metaphorically. She plans to implement a male voice and three male masks within a few years, and unveiling her 'natural' persona afterwards. She tries to use art to de-marginalize her position as female artist and to explore social positions in contemporary society. Burden expects to stupefy the public and prove her point about the gender bias. *The Blazing World* begins with introductory pages put forward by the fictional editor I.V. Hess, who develops great interest in Burden's case after her death. Professor Hess decides to publish parts of Burden's notebook entries and contributions of relatives and collaborative artists in book form. The editor fixes the title of the book, the number of texts, articles and interviews and requests comments written by Burden's friends and fiends for the purpose of publication. Finally, the book consists of written statements, contributed by various writers. Roughly speaking, one statement is also one chapter in the book. All statements aim to illuminate Burden's controversial exhibition series *Maskings*, which experiments with unconscious expectations concerning gender and race, in three acts.

The project caught Hess' attention indirectly after reading a peculiar sentence, which is also the first sentence of the novel, in an academic journal. The sentence takes a stand on the gender bias which pervades intellectual and artistic productions, is written by Burden but supposedly quoted by Richard Brickman. Hess traces back his name and, again, stumbles upon Harriet Burden. He thinks about the relationship between Burden and Brickman. Hess is a scholar of Søren Kierkegaard and familiar with the strategy of indirect communication. He wonders whether Burden indeed came up with a pseudonym to rid herself of her prevented female role in public and whether he really deals with a contemporary case of indirect communication. It is a play with voices that makes life writing's play with perspectives more powerful. Hess is suspicious and immerses her- or himself in some detective work about the origin and authenticity of Burden's work. Although (s)he has to wait three years until (s)he has time for further investigation, Hess states that (s)he gets in contact with the remaining Burden family,

is granted access to Burden's extensive notebooks, and finally confirms her or his own suspicion: Richard Brickman is Harriet Burden's male pseudonym (cf. BW 1, cf. 271). It turns out that since Burden thinks that "intellectual and artistic endeavors" are better received if its creator is presumed to be a man rather than a woman (cf. BW 1), she makes use of pseudonyms and indirect communication to subvert the bias towards male contributions to art and the academic-intellectual discourse.

In the novel, the use of indirect communication enters an unexpected dialogic relationship to metafiction in order to facilitate the negotiation of perspectives of different points of view in life writing. This is important for life writing because life writing establishes a field and dialog of voices between oppositional voices. Indirect communication also increases the density of plot lines in autofiction. Metafiction develops a "self-conscious" text in the sense the accomplished postmodern writer William Gass had in mind, that is, "*not* in the obvious sense in which one of the characters is a writer" (Gass 1, 7, emphasis added). Metafiction serves the comparatively young novelistic profession to grasp what it is through the description of what it does and is thereby an activity of cultural self-understanding. But I argue that whereas metafiction immediately breaks through the verisimilitude of a text and exposes the fictional nature of its literary landscape, there is no limit to the layers of fiction – indirect communication can endlessly stratify fictional layers one on top of the other. Consequently, it increases the complexity of autofiction, too. On the one hand, indirect communication allows fiction to reach into the experience of reality whereas metafiction de-fictionalizes fiction. On the other hand, indirect communication allows the editor to include the great variety of texts forms and forms of self-representation that is typical for life writing. Hess' role as fictional editor gives the novel coherence in increases the readers' immersion into the fictional world. On the fictional level, this is a sign for the rising power of characters in life writing and is evidence that the autofictional novel empowers characters to regain power over the plot in the imagined literary world. The characters are indeed the crucial fictional agents writing, editing and inventing the plot intratextually. In *The Blazing World*, the complexity of relations between the fictional contributors is high enough to trick the mind into taking it for real. In contrast, metafiction, unveils the genre immediately. What is more, indirect communication increases the novelistic complexity autofiction must be able to cover and understand. It forces the reader further and further into layers of fictionalization in

order to explore the subjectivity of characters – female characters imagine male characters which again make up other narrative elements and agents. Indirect communication in novelistic discourse posits the character's ability to disclose, to intensify the experience of reading and writing through the liberated emotional expression the pseudonym makes possible.

The Blazing World makes the activity of structuring a novel the topic it deals with on a narrative level: First of all, in reference to Hess's efforts of organizing and collecting the written material and, second, regarding Burden's ambition to implement a plotline that has been of her own making. Adding and editing are not the same; this difference applies to literary works but also to the life sciences. I suppose that these aspirations not alone create a self-conscious narrative but also connect to the urging desire to plot stretches of time, from Burden's perspective her prospective life, and from Hess's point of view, these same years retrospectively (cf. BW 7). Throughout the novel, Hess includes interviews, three in number, each one way or the other questioning the manner major art collectors, critics and gallerists perceive Burden's public performance. Hess makes use of the interviews to verify that the interviewees rationalize their own stereotyped perception of Burden's artworks and to expose the structure of their expectation. In a different part of the novel, Hess even includes a footnote on Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold* in a chapter that is written by Burden's pseudonym Brickman that was originally meant to be a letter to the editor in an academic journal (cf. BW 272). The fictional reference to the author, Siri Hustvedt, raises awareness to the intelligibility of the novel's *raison* – the autofictional strategy does not undermine the text's credibility but emphasizes its applicability beyond the fictional world[19]. I suggest that reality and fiction are, in that moment, not oppositional but permeate each other. The novel makes a point which is applicable to reality even if reality seems less real if you believe in what the argument has to say. Taken together, the two-directional emplotment, the editor's interviews on interpretation of art and the tendency of equipping the novel with editorial footnotes reconnect to indirect

[19] Burden as Brickman seizes the opportunity and makes use of a male persona to comment on Hustvedt's early novel *The Blindfold*. The novel was published before Hustvedt achieved a breakthrough with *What I Loved*. In respect to Brickman's comment on Burden's reference to Hustvedt, and Hess' footnote providing further information on the whole chain of reference, the tense field of poeticized personalities opens understanding to grasp the two novels without the overshadowing effect of the author's sex. The pseudonym, character, editor and author create strata of dialogic interaction and disengage from the novels themselves, so that the novels can be set in relation to each other without the overshadowing effect of the author's role.

communication because Hess directly refers to Brickman at the beginning of the novel and in one footnote. The complexity of quoting quotes establishes a dialogic field amongst the *writers* and splits this stratum off from the bare *content*, the quote itself, which can then engage with its own kind, namely other quotes, regardless of their originators. The text uncouples from its inventor and the interpretation ceases to depend on the author's classification. Instead of contemplating the relation between author and text, the reader can then think about the relationship between authors and texts separately. Indirect communication concomitantly reforms and transforms the concepts which govern understanding.

Apart from indirect communication and metafiction, the novel's form and structure, its style and architecture, alludes to critical literary notions heteroglossia[20], polyphony, and intertextuality. Intertextual allusions and direct references constitute considerable parts of Burden's notebook-based research on interdisciplinary topics (for the most part revolving around the experience of women's role and accompanying expectations on women in Western societies) and invite conversation and negotiation of women's role in art either with herself, her peers, or the reader. The character is at home in the world of letters and she frequently interposes quotations and allusions for the sake of discussing controversial issues. I argue that intertextuality is here not a layer of impersonal cultural strata but subjectivized and intersubjectivized: it becomes intentional and dialogic. Therefore, it is at the service of the genre of life writing and its goal of reconstructing subjectivity. As the text is written from eleven first-person perspectives in which different characters appear as narrators at the expense of one dominating *raconteur*. As it happens, the novel's characters engage with each other to quarrel about the differences of the ideas they represent, and intertextuality saturates and undergirds a facet which is so distinctive of a novel of ideas. Yet, other than in the novel of ideas, the characters are *not* played off each other by an external agent but

[20] I do not take up heteroglossia in this chapter; it is, notwithstanding, relevant to grasp the novel's multiple linguistic styles and belief systems (cf. Bakhtin 2014a: 301, cf. 315). This is especially noteworthy because, despite the tendency to mix a variety of styles and beliefs, the novel does not succumb to an indiscriminate medley, but achieves a plurality that is able to mingle statements productively. At the same time, heteroglossia brings the authorial intention back into play. Although I have hitherto insisted upon the predominance of the intention of each character, the characters do not completely supersede the author from her position. In the heteroglot novel, two intentions (the author's and the protagonist's) co-exist and the character's direct intention is, in fact, the refracted authorial plan (cf. 324). I counter Bakhtin by stating that the effect is not ironic, as Bakhtin suggests, because the novel is fundamentally serious, yet, it does not deny the reader a very humorous experience of sorts, whose overall unburdening impact indeed brings the author back to mind.

respond to an impulse whose origin we can trace back to the impetus of Burden's art project.

The terminological mosaic amounts to one particular entry in Notebook M saying that *"Polyphony is the only route to understanding. Hermaphroditic polyphony"* (BW 221). My research says that hermaphroditic polyphony is, on the one hand, a solution to the gender bias because it transforms and negotiates social discourse and individual thinking. The novel creates polyphony through its various given voices, and its hermaphroditic nature is made possible by the intersex artworks and indirect communication. Consequently, it is important for the genre of life writing as it makes the representation and relation of oppositional or marginalized voices and positions possible. In so doing, it also negotiates marginalized and privileged voices and positions in life writing. On the other hand, hermaphroditic polyphony engages our understanding in an active and lively process of thinking. The reader cannot copy one view, one way of conceptualizing the world, but is forced to move in-between the statements and come up with her own analysis of what is going on. I analyze the stipulated hypothesis in the following argument:

The importance of having a voice is based on the assumption that those who have a say in the life writing discourse can participate in the process of developing structures of thought and perception which are then adopted by the community. The novel offers an interesting approach according to whose ambition different characters are able to speak in the first person so that each can contribute her own voice and intention in the process of establishing a social discourse. Consequently, the novel is exceptionally polyphone: major characters appear consecutively as storytellers, confess their world-view deliberately, and are, in so doing, *not* mere "object[s] of authorial discourse" but implement themselves as being intentional (cf. Bakhtin 2014b: 5). The characters, which represent their divergent perceptions of the artifact ('reference object') and artist, express and explain their worldview without being subordinated to the editor's, or even outside the fictional world, Hustvedt's view.

In the beginning, seeing Brickman quoting Burden in a journal impels Hess to collect and assort statements for the book. Whereas the novel is enveloped by the gender-neutral editorial voice, the relation between Burden's female voice and her male pseudonym ignites the book's debate. Therefore, the creative trigger is hermaphroditic. I further ascertain that Burden's installation art, though admittedly to varying degrees,

is the result of a collaboration and manifestation of a relation between a female artist and her male masks. The artworks, the ('objects of reference') intentional artifact of the novel's discourse, are hence hermaphroditic as well. And just the same, a hermaphroditic thread pervades the plural discourse due to the reappearance of Burden's poeticized personality, Brickman, as a subject matter in other statements. Additionally, and next to the exploration and circumvention of the gender bias by means of the masks, the incidence of indirect communication in the shape of one full statement, meaning that Richard Brickman contributes one full chapter to the book, establishes an amendment of equal rank to Burden's directly forwarded statements. Burden, thus appearing as and splitting into a male and female voice, creates an intrasubjective and hermaphoditic relationship between her own oppositional views. Since the novel's gateway (the beginning), the discourse's intentional artifacts (the installations), and the dialogic relation (between Burden's and Brickman's statements) is hermaphroditic, the polyphone voice the novel brings forth as a whole is hermaphroditic.

The Blazing World lives by diverging and intersecting views upon the same topic (art) and subject (Burden). Two confrontational intrasubjective and several juxtaposing intersubjective points-of-view bring Burden's project into relief. The novel exhibits the greatest opposition between our heroine and her antagonist and final mask, Rune. The journalist Oswald Case takes up Rune's position and gives him a voice even after the artist's death. According to Case, Rune habitually distributes doubtful facts and fictions about his persona and biography in public to make his glamorous and narcissistic personality intangible. Only his sister, who has a say at the end of the novel, provides biographical background information and carves out a personality which arises from a difficult small-town family setting, whose roughest patch is the sister's car accident which distorted her face and made plastic surgery and remodeling necessary and whose lowest point is the mother's suicide through an overdose of sleeping pills. I guess that pain is familiar to Rune. Up until I read the sister's statement, only Oswald Case speaks up for Rune and celebrates the aggrandizement of Rune's ideas on a the contemporary self: "His [Rune's] comment about autobiography as a 'fake' is at once deep and shallow. There can be no depth in our world, no personality, no true story, only images about substance projected anywhere and everywhere instantaneously... . People live in their screens. Social media is replacing social life" (BW 188). The 'nonsense' is, as to the content, taken up again once we analyze the third installation and Burden's struggling collaboration with Rune. My current focus is the statement's relational effect:

Case's fierce criticism of and opposition to Burden and his unconditional support of Rune gains momentum in reference to the discussion to what extend Burden has been involved in the last exhibition. In that context, Case raves about Rune's ahistorical persona, artistic genius and the supposed reality of the technological self. Case's statement is distinctly oppositional to Larsen's but also to Burden's avowal.

"Everything should be understood, and anything can be transformed—that is the modern view" (Sontag 2009: 157). The modern premise this comment critiques is naturally untenable. The opposite proposition, stating that nothing can be understood and change meaningfully, is likewise negligible. Paradoxically, understanding is non-understanding if we move in oppositions about a conflicting theme or contentious issue apathetically. Relating dull oppositional opinions does not elevate and vitalize understanding at all. Alternatively, *The Blazing World's* field of oppositional statements can *negotiate* voices and positions, relate different points of view, and attract them to consciousness. This is possible through the textual representation of oppositional statements the plurality of voices in *The Blazing World* bring forth. Relating the oppositional contents characters like Burden, Tish and Rune make possible a process of understanding the cultural discourse they live in.

In this chapter I have analyzed the negotiation of adversarial social perception through forms of self-representation in life writing. The works do not focus on an intellectual discussion of the underlying issues but work with unconscious and preconceptual biases. The artworks I have interpreted in the beginning of the chapter consecutively bring the stereotypical perception and assessment of others to awareness and modify the view upon them. Burden and Eldridge's suffocation rooms move rigid unconscious conceptualization and her final collaboration with Rune shows the way out of the maze of social perception. That way I expanded the scope of research by showing how art installations are, on the one hand, forms of self-presentation. On the other hand, they modify social perception and make unbiased social perception possible. My reading of *The Blazing World* has also continued my research of formative and repetitive memory templates. Nonetheless, I think that the possibilities of working with memory templates has not yet been exhausted and that is why I will explore the prospects of future research in my conclusion.

6. Conclusion: *Memories of the Future*

This dissertation analyzed life writing to understand how narratives represent and work with memories, emotion and perception that guide contemporary life. I argue that new narrative strategies have a healing effect on the mind of a novel's characters, writers and readers. I studied the possibilities and failures of such attempts by doing research on one autobiography and two novels Hustvedt published after her father had died. In *The Shaking Woman*, I studied key memories which cause her shaking fit, the fear the fits cause, and how Hustvedt's writing strategies discover memories which cause the fit. I analyzed how her writing strategies alter her mind from a neuroscientific perspective, too. In *The Sorrows of an American*, I emphasized Inga's role as a woman, a woman who empowers herself by confronting challenging moments of her youth. She reexperiences intense dread as she works through the tormenting memories of her time at school. Despite her suffering, her approach is successful, yet, the other adult characters in the novel do not manage their life well enough. The novel *The Blazing World* is phenomenologically complex, and I tried to give justice to the ambiguous readings it inspires. The protagonist is a diligent and eccentric artist, who lives according to her own artistic rules, and shows again that in the literary world, characters become active fictional agents in novels and create their own plot. They edit, revise and imagine the future yet to come. In her life, the world she experiences, her art and writing merges and she makes use of them to actively create the very world she lives in. Burden reveals how the relationship to an artist changes the perception and interpretation of the artwork and its content. However, her art reverses the process and shows that each person can modify the patterns of perceiving others through art, too.

This approach culminates in Hustvedt's latest novel *Memories of the Future* – it is a fictionalized autobiography heavily drawing on poetry and poetic verse. In the novel, she clearly takes up themes the readers of Hustvedt's last three novels are by now familiar with: women in contemporary society, their family relationships and the life of female intellectuals in New York. It is encoded by forms of life writing with extensions to the life sciences and narrative medicine because it works through autobiographical memories. In the autofictional novel, she makes use of the strategy discussed in this dissertation: the novel works with autobiographical memories liberally and changes their templates according to the logic of the unfolding plot line. In the process of writing, she merges fact and fiction deliberately. I think that *Memories of the Future*, a novel that grasps the free and wild spirit of the third decade in a woman's life, is, next to its

deeply inspirational and joyous moods, permeated by shame, whose repetitive reappearance in the novel gives rise to problematic situations, too.

Whereas *The Blazing World* kept its focus on the experience of frustration although Burden experiences intense shame, in *Memories of the Future* the focus shifts dramatically towards shame. I will, for the reason of illustration, draw on two key scenes to explain my point of view: Similar to Burden's exasperating experience in her father's office, the fictionalized narrator S.H. experiences a moment of shameful humiliation when she appears supposedly unexpectedly in a place her father works. The place and occupation, however, vary: In *Memories of the Future*, S.H.'s father is a doctor in a rural place and takes care of a woman in birth pain at home. Unlike Burden, S.H. therefore recalls a situation in a domestic sphere, which has turned into her father's temporary workplace. This time the father, who never wanted his daughter to pursue her education as she likes, acts as a barrier and tries to prevent her entry into a position of higher status (cf. 148). At the time of that incident, S.H. is still a girl, she has accompanied her father to the house, and he tells her to stay in the car. To her own surprise, she disobeys him and is lured into the house. When S.H. forbiddingly enters the house, she sees her father's patient Mrs. Malacek during a bloody miscarriage in the patient's house:

> … so much blood I think I stopped breathing. I know I shouldn't be looking at her because she wasn't dressed. It was shameful. They would see me. … "Go wait in the car." My father didn't sound angry, but I turned and ran. I had seen what I was not supposed to see, but I didn't know exactly what I had seen. (MoF 78)

What she sees is not the focus in my interpretation. I think that it is necessary to regard what she feels when she enters the domestic sphere. Most crucially, shame infuses her whole being and mind, and from then onwards, the emotion repeatedly comes to her mind when she lives through a circle of unconsciously repeating that emotion. S.H. has disobeyed the father's advice to stay in the car and the daughter has been exposed to a shameful situation. However, he does nothing to approach her again to limit the damage. That way, he has paved the way for further exposure to shame, and that is, of course, dangerous for his daughter's future and it complicated her relationship to man.

Tragically, years later, S.H. reexperiences that same shame when she is almost raped by a young man, whom she has met at a party, and who is eager to take her home to her own apartment. Just as her father was not amused by her educational aspirations when she was a child, the guy is repelled by S.H.'s accumulating knowledge and expansive reading when she has turned into a young woman. S.H. just met a rival and

she is unaware how dangerous the competitive relationship is. The power struggle takes on a serious twist when he does not shy away from sexual violence to assure his privilege, supremacy and discontent after he had learned about her enthusiasm for books. S.H. unknowingly repeats the shameful pattern in her life by choosing him as a date. When they are about to enter her apartment, he acts out his aggression: "Then I must have been thrown. He must have thrown me. I hit the bookshelf. My head. I fell. I slid to the floor, my bare feet in front of me" (MoF 168). To the reader's relief, the novel has a considerably fortunate turning point in the sense that the assault is no rape and the narrator can live on without trauma. In any case, the feeling of shame has been renewed considerably and the narrator later reports that it is present from then onwards. Just as Burden, S.H. has not released the negative emotion of the workplace situation and she suffers from its presence in her mind throughout her life. I think that the plot shows how shame repeats itself in the narrator's life. Consequently, the narrator's ability to write and control her own plot, her mastery, is delimited.

> We are all wishful creatures, and we wish backward, too, not only forward, and thereby rebuild the curious, crumbling architecture of memory into structures that are more habitable (MoF: 38).

In *Memories of the Future,* I cannot tell how much of what is written is based on Hustvedt's own experiences, even though the narrator's initials S.H. indicates that reality and fiction merge to some degree and autobiographical subtext is stronger than in her other novels. I argue that reality and fiction have merged completely, it's likely that only underlying emotional and relational patterns reflect Hustvedt's own past. In the writing process, some became more extreme and other softened. Other than Burden, who has experienced a similar shameful situation at her father's workplace, the autofictional narrator S.H. reinvents a better memory template for the future. In writing an autobiography, changing the memory for the better has a healing effect. This is wise because her memories become her future and they shape her present situation, too. Working through her autobiographical memories and altering them clearly sets the course for future life situations. In the title of the novel Hustvedt also takes up Damásio's idea that the faculty of imagination and memories are closely related. I think it is important that scholars and scientists should not only think of studying memories to engage our retrospect vision and faculties. On the contrary, scientists and scholars should study them in order to analyze what can happen in the future, too, and reveal opportunities with ease.

The novel shows that it is necessary to bring the "crumbling memory of architecture" into shape again and see their tendency to crumble over time as a chance to alter them according to our needs (38). Hustvedt's narrators and characters must learn to feel what will be good for them in the future in order to live on the page. They take the pen into their hands, they become vibrant and write themselves into, through and out of crisis. They actively engage in narrative medicine and mitigate the impression of being a stranger to themselves. Life crises such as Burden's or S.H.'s, are reason enough to consult pen and paper and ask for answers to open questions. Writing in the narrative medicine context proves to be more than a way of enjoying leisure, in their cases writing empowers them to change the inherited path that has meant to be their path of life. The narrative enables her to write a new script.

> The writer is someone else. It is only on the page, for Page, that the beastly and cold begin to receive permission to appear. The beastly and the cold arrive as small hiccoughs in the writing. It is on the page that I begin to take quiet vengeance for the master script, the script that had been dictated to me for years and years, a barely audible voice in my ear that insisted I obey (MoF: 71).

I think that the writer is someone else because she is not bound to the formalities that direct her daily routines and the formal gatherings she describes. Emotion, such as vengeance, crack open when she leaves the formalities behind. The freedom of letting emotion come to consciousness allows for a process of healing memories in the first place. The informal life on the page is difficult for that very reason but the writer and reader is rewarded with extravagant characters and thoughts. Hustvedt indicates that her writing is not a dictation, it reformulates the given master script and invents a meaningful self-directed narrative. Her writing contains a plea for life that goes beyond the platitudes. The analysis of the previous novels shows that Harriet Burden's, Inga's or Hustvedt's patterns of life that have led them to severe crises only changed upon the capability of working with it creatively to invent new structures. Transforming their script that is imprinted in their memories only then opens their view to new opportunities and completely unexpected life situations.

Burden's, Hustvedt's own and S.H's writing draw attention to the spectrum of good and bad emotion. They expose them to the full range of experience that contemporary life is capable to reveal. Their experiences of success, disappointment, affection and solitude gain force whereas the experience of failure helps to bring about the precision of their views and the depth of their thought. In such moments, new chances and possibilities grant narrators like Burden or S.H. the mastery of their life. This sounds like a minor observation, but it is an answer that helps understanding the

ends of Hustvedt's writing such as that of *The Shaking Woman*. The narrator lives in a state of acceptance of life although the wounds of the past have left may not be forgotten and call themselves to mind.

> In May of 2006, I stood outside under a cloudless blue sky and started to speak about my father, who had been dead for two years. As soon as I opened my mouth, I began to shake violently. I shook that day and then I shook again on other days. I am the shaking woman. (SW 199)

I think that the tendency of life writing to bring forth characters and narrators who write or imagine their own plot is a sign that they master their own narrative. The freedom granted in the previous and in this century makes their new ways of working with memories and the new modes of living which are the product of such strivings possible. The character's modes of living their sexuality, living with people from different backgrounds and cultures, of inventing new ways of growing older, demand a transformation of the mind and a renewal of studying life. I suggest that Hustvedt's novels pave the way to change the mind to facilitate the future progression of lifestyles and that her readers can learn from the book's plurality of voices to imagine how human beings can exist together and alongside each other.

In S.H.'s, as in those of Hustvedt's other characters' cases, the result is not an easy path to success and approval. In the end, the re-written scripts mostly lead to paths of life that are artistically rich. They neither lose their interest in what is off the beaten track nor give in to conventional ideas. But as they continue to do autobiographical work, they even out the desire to go into extremes and gain ever more. S.H. is, for example, in the end of the novel, happy and relieved about a simple moment in which an interested audience enjoys her daughter's music. Characters in other novels return to their families and friends, writing projects, art and solitude. Mostly, they experience a state of acceptance and in S.H.'s case, she liberates herself and flies.

> Something is happening. Something is happening in the now of the book. Something is beginning to happen as you read this sentence. Her feet are leaving the pavement. She rises. She moves up and up. (MoF 314)

I see this moment at the very end of the narrative as an instance and success of life writing: it allows for experiences that are extraordinary and escape the narrator's attention, if she had not liberated herself and changed the script that had been passed on to S.H.

At the very end of this dissertation the outlook is hopefully already given in the topic itself: it is the implementation of life writing contemporary life, the proliferation of its ideas, method and strategy and its promise that a retrospective view upon life can change the way life develops in the future. It is also given in the way I write about how

the character's memories change and are projected into the future. The method is democratic in the way that every reader and writer can participate in that artistic field and make their own astonishing experiences. The hope that contemporary culture will keep up the habit of reading and writing is, of course, part of this prospect. Possible approaches to the existential question "What does it mean to be human?", which I have cited in the first chapter, are related to the engagement with books and grant more than one answer. I think that life writing will continue to engage scholars of various disciplines in the future, and its draws attention to the potential autobiographical research can unfold in future decades. In its combination with narrative medicine and life sciences it shows that the cooperation supports new insights into the given field and strengthens the need to promote and progress autobiographically motivated research in the humanities.

For further research in the field, I recommend novels written by Abraham Verghese, David Grossmann and reading Hustvedt's recent essay collection *Mothers, Fathers and Others* (2021). Verghese's *Cutting for Stone* (2008), *The Tennis Partner* (1998) and *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story* (1994) and Nicole Krauss's *Man Walks into A Room* (2002), whose novel stages an example of a repetitive memory template, provide exceptional research opportunities at the intersections of medicine and story-telling. They focus on the relationship between doctors and patients, and allow for a study of how mutual understanding can better the necessary treatment of the patient. David Grossmann's *A Horse Walks into a Bar* (2017) and *The Book of Intimate Grammar* (1994) develop communication about illness and social boundaries respectively. Both novels negotiate the restrictions imposed on individuals suffering from fatal illness or handicap. I think that the listed novels raise the social disconnection the characters feel to awareness. They call compliance to the rules of society into question and help developing ways of living for those who cannot fully conform. In terms of transnational life writing, I think that the works of Jhumpa Lahiri are promising, as they narrate ways of relating transnational encounters and relentlessly raise questions of morality. All in all, the listed works provide the opportunity of actively changing life narratives by making use of promising new narrative strategies. In so doing they express hope about the possibilities of researching life narratives in the future.

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Erklärungen gemäß § 6 der Promotionsordnung

Hiermit erkläre ich, Catherine Halbach
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keine Prüfung an einer Universität oder einer gleichgestellten Hochschule in Deutschland endgültig nicht bestanden habe und mich nicht an einer Universität oder an einer gleichgestellten Hochschule in Deutschland in einem Prüfungsverfahren befinde.

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Datum:1.10.2023