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« The question(s) of representation »

Lives driven by works

Nicolas Adell

Nicolas Adell is an anthropologist and senior lecturer in anthropology at the University of Toulouse - Jean Jaurès. After several works on mentoring and the place of the initiatory method in contemporary societies (*Des hommes de Devoir*, Editions de la MSH, 2008), he has led his research into two directions: the notion of immaterial cultural heritage (*Transmettre, quel(s) patrimoine(s)?*, Michel Houdiard Editeur, 2011) and the anthropology of knowledge (*Anthropologie des savoirs*, Armand Colin, 2011). He is currently working on the anthropology of scholarly life. The first synthesis of his works on this topic has recently been published under the title *Ce que la science fait à la vie* (Editions du CTHS, 2016).

Abstract

This article examines a recurrent situation in the history of sociology. After criticising biography as an intellectual approach, a scholar carries out a seemingly biographical project. The confrontation of two famous cases (Siegfried Kracauer and Pierre Bourdieu) shows them as opposite proposals of intellectual history and anthropology (social biography vs. sociology of one's life). The field thus temporarily organised becomes a choice object to rethink the place of biography in the history of human sciences, but also to propose a way to overcome this alternative. To do so, the author suggests that a new tool be developed, the notion of "scholarly life."

Keywords

Pierre Bourdieu, scholarly life, scientific biography, Siegfried Kracauer

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“Tomorrow is written”: these are the words Pierre Bayard¹ used to describe his project, which targets writers and aims to “set the biography straight,” or in other words to raise works back to life, since they lead the way and are portentous, as Rimbaud dazzlingly suggested: “Poetry will no longer give rhythm to action: it will *be ahead*.”² Initially a philosopher’s challenge, it seems to me that this proposal must be taken seriously, and tackled by a set of methodological adjustments and precautions, regarding scholars as a whole, and maybe all “lives of works” (artists, artisans, etc.). Indeed, I consider these lives as best suited to fulfil the fantasy, incidentally a nightmare too, of a “life without chance” to quote Balzac, the life of heroes who were told about their fate. These lives are strongly scripted, full of milestones – of works –, acting like a reserve of ready-to-use forms. Lives that are re-presented before they are lived, achieved by a few singular individuals who are “made up of rhyme, coincidence, omen, periodicity, and presage,” as Ralph W. Emerson put it.³ However, the poet-philosopher from Concord did not identify the possible reasons for the specific “nature” of certain lives.

I am suggesting that in our societies, the makers of intellectual works or craftworks, among others, are of this caliber. Based on this assumption, an anthropology of scholars – since a subgroup of “makers” is required to start our research – could prove useful. The research seems indeed to be at an impasse, somewhere between two aspects: “the-life-and-the-work” and “the-laboratory-life.” I will get back to this later. In the manner of Pierre Bayard, focusing on the effects of work on life as a form of *double*, which I find particularly relevant in the case of lives of works is central to the development of the notion of “scholarly life,” which we will analyse.

However, the anthropology of scholars and scholarly life shall not be considered as intellectual secluded areas. In my opinion, they also constitute a choice gateway to deal with more general problems most people are facing, problems that are brought out in Western contemporary societies without being exclusive to them. These topics can be put together in a simple proposition: you have to have your *life ahead of you* to lead your life. However, what does it mean to have your life ahead of you? By this, I refer to phenomena as diverse as planning an action, looking to the future, anticipating, but also believing in the existence of a double or creating it (avatar), complying with a model, taking a course of action, drafting a *curriculum vitae*, telling your life story, wanting to live your life, etc. Having your life ahead of you both means facing the future and being able to objectify your past life through the production of objects, images, writings, stories, moments that sometimes take the form of little personal shrines. To have your life ahead of you means to shape your life and shaping your life amounts to putting shapes into your life.

1 Pierre Bayard, *Demain est écrit*, Paris, Minuit, 2005

2 Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,” 2009, p. 347.

3 Ralph W. Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1860, p. 39.

Now, it seems to me that Western contemporary societies have given individuals more resources than any other society to meet this fundamental requirement, which has otherwise become explicit: “Live your own life.” I thought it would be a good starting point to study this complex process through case studies (namely scholars), who feel this *double* as the core of every self re-presentation on a more regular basis. They are more prone to writing their autobiographies and in some cases, already regularly practice the art of biography in the form of journals or research logs.

A surprise

This starting point, summed up in the expression “scholarly life,” may seem vertiginous, both positively and negatively. Positively because the abundance of leads to explore may induce a certain giddiness, which is conducive to creativity. Negatively, because there is reason to believe that the study of scientific life, whether in the form of a description of scholarly networks and sociability, or “laboratory life,” has become so circumscribed over the past forty years that one can legitimately doubt that anyone may ever come up with an original perspective. However, the horizon stretches far beyond – it is *life-ahead-of-you* set up as a concept – and the initial motive behind this problematic formulation is radically different from that of works, whether regarding the “life and work” or the “laboratory life.”

I must confess that the elaboration of the object comes with an element of surprise, and the resulting reflection on self-representation derives from an intellectual surprise, which is the spotting of a small paradox of slightly excessive singularity. My intuition that there was an object to be made was confirmed as I noticed the repetition of this paradox, or reproduction of the singularity. Is it not a sign that there are rules governing the emergence of these characteristics, the revelation of which is one of the fundamental aims of anthropological research, if not every research? In this case, the same situation was found several decades apart, without the “reproduction” being aware (to my knowledge) of the original.

This situation is that of a relatively famous sociologist who had developed a critical sociology, especially based on the artistic fields and intellectual elites. At one point in his career, he proposed a virulent criticism of biography as a mode of knowledge production, before embarking on a seemingly biographical project a few years later. This situation finds a contemporary illustration in the case of Pierre Bourdieu. After he analyzed the reproduction modes of the intellectual elites and proposed a critical sociology of artistic taste, with the study of photography as an “average art” serving as a laboratory,⁴ he denounced in 1986 the “biographical illusion,”⁵ yet writing *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*⁶ about fifteen years later, the epigraph of which reads: “This is not an autobiography.”

Despite the utterly exceptional nature of his work, there is indeed a precedent to the case of Pierre Bourdieu in the history of sociology, a kind of original, of whom he is not a copy, although the similarity is surprising. This is the case of Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), who remains famous to this day for his theories on History.⁷

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Un art moyen. Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, Paris, Minuit, 1965.

5 Pierre Bourdieu, “L’illusion biographique,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, t. 62, no. 1, 1986, p. 69-72.

6 Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Paris, Raisons d’Agir, 2004.

7 Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1969.

He would consider this discipline as neither a science in its own right, nor as a true art, but rather as a mode of capture of “singular entities” almost “cases” as defined by Jacques Revel and Jean-Claude Passeron,⁸ and the choice approach of which consisted, in his own words, in “changing focal length” according to a “rule of levels” that he was looking for and which is evocative of the “scale games” that were centre stage during the 1990s⁹ and very directly questions the issue of representation.

He is also one of the pioneers of photography sociology, and more generally of media. He regarded cinema as one of the defining features of modern life and sought to analyse it in a critical way, like his contemporary and friend Walter Benjamin. Unclassifiable and versatile, Kracauer was also a writer, an ethnographer of the “class without a conscience” consisting of the Berlin employees,¹⁰ celebrated as such by Walter Benjamin who described this author as the modern-life “ragman,” a term with a high added value since Benjamin meant that even the object that seemed the least noble or the most insignificant could be worthy of attention and could constitute an ideal observation point to look at profound changes.

Also a literary critic, Siegfried Kracauer was among those who identified, within the general crisis (of reason, sciences, the world) of the early 20th century, a “novel crisis.” According to him, and contrary to appearances, this crisis was not a lower-ranking one. In fact, he specifically identified a “character crisis” (apparent in the works of Gide, Kafka, Musil or Joyce), which in his opinion expressed an “individual crisis,” an individual who would have “lost [their] contours.”¹¹ The expression, a superb one,¹² indicates that the individual is no longer a relevant unit to discriminate the real, because he’s caught in the masses or crowds, which are the new scales of action and conscience, but also because of the urges and streams of the unconscious that constitute the true driving forces of their identity, their words, their actions. The rise of mass sociology and psychology on one hand, and psychoanalysis on the other hand, have led to the collapse of the individual’s contours, according to the intellectual avant-garde.

More precisely, it is the independence and sovereignty of the individual that have collapsed. In an essay entitled “The biography as an art form of the new bourgeoisie”¹³ and published in 1930 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* for which he was a

8 Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel (eds.), *Penser par cas*, Paris, Éditions de l’EHESS, 2005. For a connection between Siegfried Kracauer’s “exemplary cases” developed in *Les Employés. Aperçus de la nouvelle Allemagne* [1930] (Paris, Éditions de la MSH, 2004), and “case thinking,” we refer the reader to Jacques Revel’s analysis (“Siegfried Kracauer et le monde d’en bas,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *L’Histoire – Des avant-dernières choses*, translation by Claude Orsoni, Paris, Stock, 2006, p. 7-42).

9 Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d’échelles. La micro-analyse à l’expérience*, Paris, Gallimard/Seuil, 1998. For an assessment of the rediscovery and contemporary reading of Siegfried Kracauer’s work by historians, cf. Philippe Despoix and Peter Schöttler (eds.), *Siegfried Kracauer, penseur de l’histoire*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2006.

10 Siegfried Kracauer, *Les Employés. Aperçus de la nouvelle Allemagne* [1929], translation by Claude Orsoni, Paris, Éditions de la MSH, 2004.

11 Siegfried Kracauer, “Die Biographie als neubürgerliche Kunstform” (“La biographie, forme d’art de la nouvelle bourgeoisie”) [*Frankfurter Zeitung*, 29 juin 1930], *L’Ornement de la masse. Essais sur la modernité weimarienne*, translation by Sabine Cornille, Paris, La Découverte, 2008, p. 83.

12 This matter has since been problematised in a different and broader way, in Gregory Bateson’s “Pourquoi les choses ont-elles des contours?” [1953], in *Vers une écologie de l’esprit 1*, translation by Ferial Drosso, Laurencine Lot and Eugène Simon, Paris, Seuil, “Points,” 1977, p. 55-60.

13 Siegfried Kracauer, “Die Biographie als neubürgerliche Kunstform” (“La biographie, forme d’art de la nouvelle bourgeoisie”) [*Frankfurter Zeitung*, 29 juin 1930], *L’Ornement de la masse*.

film and book reviewer, Kracauer denounced the contemporary biographical trend that he regarded as a pathetic, old-fashioned and bourgeois resistance to the irreversible disappearance of the individual as king.

A few years later, in 1937, the sociologist set about writing a biography of Jacques Offenbach, operetta champion and creator of vaudeville during the Second Empire.¹⁴ However, the contradiction is only apparent as Siegfried Kracauer explains. Offenbach is but a pretext, a perspective from which to examine the whole social and political life under the Second Empire.

Incidentally, he resorts to photography to explain the ins and outs of his approach. Kracauer reproached historical and social sciences for their insufficient use of the photographic model of reality uncovering, which relies on changes in perspective and focus, in focal length, accounting for the role and need for lighting systems, without actually making the situation look “artificial.” In fact, the situation cannot exist without artifices. In the same way, he reproached traditional biographers for their fondness of clear portrait in the foreground (although the individual had “lost their contours”), immersed in an intentionally vague background. By examining the case of Offenbach, he proposes to do the exact opposite: a “vague” portrait (in visual terms, an accurate depiction of the individual losing their contours) with a clear background on which the focus is set.

Within this repeated singularity of two important sociologists’ utter rejection of biography, who end up proposing a form of biography, there is a strong contrast between Pierre Bourdieu and Siegfried Kracauer. On the one hand, Pierre Bourdieu carries out a project on the *sociology of an intellectual life* (his, in this case), at least to provide the information that he would have liked to find when working on Flaubert or Manet.¹⁵ As he clearly states it, he also does so to give in to “the realistic identification” experienced by younger people (and not an “excited projection”), for it could allow them “to slightly improve what they live and do.”¹⁶ As for Siegfried Kracauer, he is not interested in the sociology of a life but in a *social biography* (that of an era, the Second Empire, a background, Paris and its bourgeoisie, which are part of the biographer’s identity). From the former to the latter, the chiasmus is almost perfect.¹⁷

The two idols of scientific biography

It seems to me that from the 1930s on, scientific or intellectual biography forming a full genre has followed Kracauer’s model. The focus has been put on the background, accounting for the multiplicity and entanglement of contexts, from which emerges, superimposed, the nearly erased contour of an individual consisting in pieces of the “background” where they barely stand out. This makes these

Essais sur la modernité weimarienne, translation by Sabine Cornille, Paris, La Découverte, 2008, p. 82-86.

14 Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach ou le secret du Second Empire* [1937], translation by Lucienne Astruc, Paris, Gallimard, 1994.

15 Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Paris, Raisons d’Agir Éditions, 2004, p. 140.

16 Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Paris, Raisons d’Agir Éditions, 2004, p. 142.

17 In a quite complementary perspective, though driven by a different intention, one can look at the way Vincent Debaene constrasts Bourdieu’s project of *Esquisse* with anthropology historian George Stocking Jr.’s, who invites us to plunge into his “black box”; Vincent Debaene, “Un anthropologue et sa boîte noire. L’essai d’ego-histoire de George Stocking,” *Critique*, no. 793-794, 2013, p. 556-573.

biographies look like Arcimboldo's portraits showing characters that are made up of the very matter of their supposed functions or "nature."

Now, in my opinion, this common form of scientific biography refers to two current idols in the history and sociology of sciences: the *environment idol* and the *materiality idol*, the latter being a specialisation of the former. They are two undoubtedly essential dimensions in the life of scientific ideas, although the contemporary focus tends to overlook certain aspects that could equally draw attention.

The environment idol is thoroughly expressed in the idea that the explanation of a work (as well as of the scientific, or even artistic or literary *fact*) goes through, and even wears out in the reproduction of its context (or contexts) of production, or in other words the exposure of its *environmental conditions*. This phenomenon can take a variety of forms. To simplify, they can be organized into two clusters.

The first one is *the-life-and-the-work*: a very active and galvanising cluster, namely in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of scientific biography. We could call it "Sainte-Beuve's side." It is driven by the conviction that the maker's life, in this case the scientist, explains, announces, justifies the work.

The second one is the *laboratory-life* cluster, that of Bruno Latour, to sum things up. However, in order to retain a degree of similarity while expressing a certain distance with the former, I find it more relevant to label it "Gustave Lanson's side." The founder of the new literary criticism at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries openly spoke against Sainte-Beuve's approach and fell within the "scientist" movement (and in particular that of the historical method), according to which the work can no longer be explained by its maker's private life, but is to be analysed in light of the reproduction of the contexts and peripheral players. Thus, explaining amounts to contextualising. In this sense, and in a slightly exaggerated way, the laboratory-life may look like a kind of neo-Lansonism in which the "background" (the idea that "science is social") and all of its constitutive agents (both human and non-human) – which are involved in the production of the work or scientific fact –, are simply more substantial and numerous than in Lanson's perspective. The real difference – which is but an extreme version of the general tendency to focus on the background resulting in the disappearance of the individual and its contours – lies in the fact that this "background" is raised to the rank of "main character." Contrary to Kracauer's view, here the character is no longer applied to the background. This is a turnaround. The former massive, inert or landscape "background" has disappeared because of its "elevation," in favor of a combination of elements that are as many "main characters" and possess the same "agent" value. This set of elements ends up in the foreground, since it has eventually become one single "plane."¹⁸ Without depth, the issue of representation becomes null.

Besides, the environmental idol has recently been subjected to a specific, almost independent treatment that constitutes a new fetish on its own, that of materiality. Here, one has to refer to the many works, largely initiated by the seminal researches carried out by Steven Shapin on "science incarnate,"¹⁹ that rightly and in several

18 For another critical perspective of the approach to the "laboratory life", we refer the reader to the brilliant text by François-André Isambert, "Un 'programme fort' en sociologie de la science?," *Revue française de sociologie*, t. 26, no. 3, 1985, p. 485-508.

19 Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin, "Introduction: The Body of Knowledge," in Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin (eds.), *Science Incarnate. Historical Embodiments of Natural Knowledge*, Chicago/Londres, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 1-20.

cases subtly²⁰ establish that the first environment of the scholar consists of their desk, cabinet, books, technological and technical tools for the production of the work (including writing) they have at their disposal, but also of their bio-physical tools (especially their hands). The first “external constraint” of the scholar is their body.

These perspectives are important in the sense that they allow to broaden the range, which we undoubtedly need the fullest and most diverse possible, of external constraints and definitions. However, I consider that limiting oneself to this account implies that these perspectives are inadequate, inasmuch as some of the resulting works suggest that the task of exhaustive description of the scholar environment is also a task of explanation of the creation process, when we are just – and that represents already a great deal – provided with a detailed account of the conditions of creation.²¹

Going as far as to describe the ways in which the scientific agreement relies on “fact” or “evidence” is undoubtedly pushing the study of scientific life quite far, while implying that one stops on the verge of exploring the way scholar life is lived and of its motives. This stop should not be viewed as a failure though since it is assumed, insofar as there is a will to “objectively” describe science, to make do without the “words of the tribe” in order to distance oneself from the phenomena that act the tribe (here, the tribe of scientists). At some point however, this methodological constraint prevents one from understanding certain facts, the description of which precisely requires the terms and tools of the group, and which cannot be detected without a certain amount of description.

However, one can easily understand the logic behind this kind of attempt at delineating the program of the new “science of science.” It was a matter of reacting to the still important illusions of power and independence of the mind, as well as to the freedom to create. Moreover, there was a criticism, sometimes explicit, of a certain hermeneutics of works that proposed to study intellectual productions from within these very productions, in other words from the works and through their vocabulary. If the outside and the environment have been overinvested, it was also to counter the true excesses of the interpretations cut off from the world.

However, in both cases, haven’t we rejected a bit quickly tools or aspects that allow for an approach to other motives of the creation process? Admittedly, it was reasonable to abandon this history of ideas that was afoot in the ether of ideas. However, this did not necessarily apply to the hermeneutics of the 1970s, or to the “new criticism” before that, which only postulated that the “outside” was not predetermined and that it should build itself based on the object. In the same way, there were reasonable responses to the excesses of psychocriticism in the 1960s, which sought to free the motives behind the work from the scholar’s various complexes (in the psychanalytical sense of the word).

20 Among others, I refer here to the various essays that make up the second volume of *Lieux de Savoir*, directed by Christian Jacob (*Les Mains de l'intellect*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2011) and to the analytical study I have carried out on this work (Nicolas Adell, “La pensée donnée à voir,” *EspacesTemps.net*, 2011. [Online] <http://www.espacestemp.net/articles/la-pensee-donnee-a-voir/> [accessed 13 February, 2017]). For a recent historical synthesis of this perspective, cf. Françoise Waquet, *L'Ordre matériel du savoir. Comment les savants travaillent (XVI^e-XXI^e siècle)*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2015.

21 On the issue of the analysis of the creative process (in sciences and arts), please refer to Nicolas Adell, “Des vies créatives,” *L'Homme*, no. 217, 2016, p. 109-122.

In my opinion, this psychocriticism is worth considering, at least for its effort to explicitly solve a tricky question: that of the mystery of the “mind’s life.”²² To do so, it developed a tool called the “personal myth,” which is now abandoned or forgotten. In my opinion, it would be relevant to reuse this tool in order to rethink the way scholarly figures are organized: how do they ensure an internal cohesion? How is the “being a scholar” knowledge passed on? How does this knowledge evolve outside the “reproduction” institutions? This concept was initially established by Albert Béguin as part of literary criticism and from the study of the figure of Gérard de Nerval and his obsessions, namely in *Aurélia*.²³ The notion was then used by Jacques Lacan²⁴ in order to define the patterns gathering the individual’s various categories (imagination, social relations, reasoning modes, complexes, work if applicable; Lacan particularly refers to Goethe). Later on, it was used in the psychoanalysis of literary texts developed by Charles Mauron in the early 1980s.²⁵ There seems here to be a similarity with the notion of *themata* developed by Gerald Holton in his works on the sociology of sciences, which we are going to clarify.²⁶ The *themata* are indeed less about individual motives than the constitutive patterns of a collective myth. In this way, Holton summarizes the ways in which a scholar joins the scholar group by sharing collective obsessions (ideas, values, principles, etc.) that are part of “normal science,” to quote Thomas Kuhn.²⁷ The *themata* express the forms of attachment to normal science. On the contrary, the personal myth refers to the modes of production of attachment to oneself, or in other words how to re-present oneself in a “good” way.

The personal myth

It is at this point that the “personal myth” and the perspective of the “scholarly life” meet. Let me rephrase the central underlying hypothesis: the work is now turning back to life, which allows on a more regular basis than with other individuals to think its existence anew, to further unify it, to launch it into the future, under the pressure of a recurrent fear of an inner break. Hannah Arendt had already noted in her *Denktagebuch* that this characteristic was a feature of genius, that the fear of not living up to one’s work and putting up with the burden of this dichotomy is typical of extraordinary scholars, as opposed to “intellectuals” who think they measure up to their works, which are themselves overrated, but also to ordinary individuals whose worth is always superior to what they do or could do.²⁸

I would like to insist on an essential point. *All* individuals, to various degrees, perform this task of unification and classification (if only to tell their life story, anticipate, solve problems, etc.); and each and every one of them is subjected to what

22 In the sense Paul Valéry gives to this term and on which the *Cahiers* report every day, so to speak.

23 Albert Béguin, *Gérard de Nerval*, Paris, José Corti, 1945.

24 Jacques Lacan, “Le mythe individuel du névrosé” [1953], *Ornicar ?*, no. 17-18, 1978, p. 290-307.

25 Charles Mauron, *Des métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel*, Paris, José Corti, 1983.

26 Gerald, Holton, *L’Invention scientifique. Themata et interprétation*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 1982.

27 Thomas Kuhn, *La Structure des révolutions scientifiques* [1969], translation by Laure Meyer, Paris, Flammarion, 1982, p. 47.

28 Hannah Arendt, *Journal de pensée*, translation by Sylvie Courtine-Denamy, Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 169-170.

Thomas Nagel²⁹ calls the confrontation of “points of view,” both internal and external. The internal and subjective perspective is what makes our life important in our eyes (the very fact of living it makes it very perceptible, present and preoccupying), our birth an obvious and necessary event, and our death a tragic ending. On the other hand, the external and objective perspective turns our existence into an insignificant event (lost in the multitude of other lives), our birth an absolutely random fact (depending on so many circumstances that the chances of finding a world in which one would not exist are infinitely higher than the chances of existing in this one), our death hardly an event.

However, the scholars (like writers, artists and maybe more generally “beings-of-works”) seem to possess this capacity to heighten this *division principle*, as their professional activity leads them to sharpen the external and objective perspective that they can apply onto themselves more often than other individuals. Intellectual work induces a clearcut splitting of the individual, thus revealing this constant work, again carried out by every individual, which consists in overcoming this division, a work which among scholars takes a particularly theatrical aspect established and/or strengthened by the biographical motifs of conversion, split, “twofold life,”³⁰ if not threefold or fourfold.

The notion of “scholarly life” somehow goes against the very approach of scientific biography, without dismissing it altogether.³¹ Because starting from the work to reach the life³² does not imply a rejection of the biographical genre. On the contrary, it means to “put the right side up,” to quote Pierre Bayard.³³ This perspective is yet so remote from the expectations of traditional biography the representation of an individual’s life path to others that one may have trouble finding any feature of the biographical genre in it. This is not a problem in itself, since there never was any suggestion that one should write for a genre. Nevertheless, if the approach was to be labeled, I would call it *unbridled biography*, insofar as it is not subjected to a chronological unfolding that would be externally imposed and absolute. However, this poses significant methodological problems, including the writing of such biographies: what modes of reproduction shall one choose or invent for these *unbridled biographies*? This problem is somewhat similar to the one here involved of the figurative representation of a life, in other words the picture consisting of the various self-portraits that the individual has made throughout their life and whose intellectual works constituted either the pretext, or the material, or the forms, sometimes all three at once.

29 Thomas Nagel, *Le Point de vue de nulle part* [1986], translation by Sonia Kronlund, Paris, Éditions de l’éclat, 1993, p. 249-256.

30 Marc Augé, *La Vie en double. Ethnologie, voyage, écriture*, Paris, Payot, 2011.

31 This is the issue of an ongoing research program I am directing in Toulouse, with the support of the ANR: “La vie savante. Vers un renouvellement du genre biographique dans les sciences studies (Anthropologie – Ethnologie, XIX^e-XXI^e siècles).” The main arguments of this work are available at: <http://visa.hypotheses.org>. For an initial development of this notion, please refer to Nicolas Adell, “La vie savante. Perspectives morphologiques,” in Nicolas Adell and Jérôme Lamy (eds.), *Ce que la science fait à la vie*, Paris, Éditions du CTHS, 2016.

32 This wish was expressed by Roland Barthes in a text dating back to 1946, long unpublished, criticising the approaches of Sainte-Beuve and Lanson: “We have seen the determining of the work by the author; but have we sufficiently tried to spot the opposite action of the determining of the author by the work [...]?” (Roland Barthes, “L’avenir de la rhétorique” [1946], in *Album. Inédits, correspondances et varia*, edited by Éric Marty, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 139).

33 Pierre Bayard, *Demain est écrit*, Paris, Minuit, 2005, p. 121-130.

What makes this biographical approach an unbridled one would then first be its preoccupation with avoiding any explanatory exhaustion in a category of external definitions. For all that, this does not mean that the notion of external factors and their role in the creation process are entirely dismissed. However, the problem of the “scholarly life” is elsewhere. In my opinion, it is more demanding and difficult. In fact, the identification of “external” constraints implies that one has a relatively substantial idea of what the outside is. Nothing is less certain though, as demonstrated by Siegfried Kracauer’s question about the “vagueness” of the individual, and then by Gregory Bateson’s writings³⁴: where does the scholar’s self end? The body? The hand? The tools they handle? The reach of their voice? To put it in Siegfried Kracauer’s terms: where are their contours? Thus, while the external factors do not constitute a central element in my approach, it is also because I work on the assumption that the outside is not readily available to us and that we cannot be certain of its limits or its nature.

Let us go even further. I am not convinced that such divide (outside/inside) is as absolutely relevant as it seems. That is exactly the question that Gregory Bateson asked³⁵: why should things (or individuals, for that matter) have contours? According to him, it would be more efficient to account for the *thick* continuities within the experienced events, which will not necessarily have the appearance of systems. This is exactly what one should strive to do by working *in the two directions of the action* (from the life to the work and from the work to the life), without merely focusing on the noticeable split motifs (illuminations, conversions, bifurcations), but also by insisting on the stitching work the self-portraits that they imply.

The analysis of the stitching is often missing in biographies, or oversimplified, while the cut, multiple lives of scholars are magnified as if they were exceptions. In a great many cases, this is what the biographer draws the plan of his work on.³⁶ However, they overlook the fact that multiplicity is the *rule* of the scholarly life. It is not the multiple man (in other words, the “ordinary” man, as every work has determined, from Gilles Deleuze to Bernard Lahire, including Alain Ehrenberg) who is exceptional, but the synthetic one, i.e. the one who strives to make the various categories of his existence match, namely his life and work (hence the “scholarly” fear, says Hannah Arendt, that they do not coincide). While the synthetic man is exceptional, the work of synthesis is a very common one, since it is often tried out (more or less explicitly). This is why we hope, through the identification of this work, to bring out the “personal myth” or, to quote Claude Lévi-Strauss on Roman Jakobson “the striking kinship between the man and his work.”³⁷ This “striking kinship” does not mean that the life explains the work. It does not refer to the ability

34 Gregory Bateson, “La cybernétique du ‘soi’ : une théorie de l’alcoolisme” [1971], *Vers une écologie de l’esprit 1*, translation by Ferial Drosso, Laurencine Lot and Eugène Simon, Paris, Seuil, “Points,” 1977, p. 275.

35 Gregory Bateson, “Pourquoi les choses ont-elles des contours?” [1953], *Vers une écologie de l’esprit 1*, translation by Ferial Drosso, Laurencine Lot and Eugène Simon, Paris, Seuil, “Points,” 1977, p. 55-60.

36 For a quite “representative” illustration of this tendency, which does in no way lessen the high quality of the work, please refer to Regna Darnell’s biography of Edward Sapir, *Edward Sapir. Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist* [1989], Lincoln/London, University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

37 Quoted by Emmanuelle Loyer, *Lévi-Strauss*, Paris, Flammarion, 2015, p. 17.

to turn personal issues into scientific problems and/or social issues either, which constitutes another motive of traditional scientific biography.³⁸

Rather, it refers to the fact that works progress ahead of their maker's life, that they provide a re-reading of the past if only through "assessments of the issue" that are often a good opportunity to get back to one's own works and that they put pressure on the future, not because they would presage the life to come, but because they raise awareness on certain mental operations and reasoning modes. They reveal relationships and sharpen our attention in a way that can be activated in more situations than those provided by the intellectual work alone. Thus, while the work does not presage the future, it *stores the present* for future use.

Now, it just so happens that this *stored present* facilitates the "splitting" of the individual, which one must ensure (although "ensure" is too direct and too aware) that it remains "livable." I believe that this is the object of a more or less reflexive series of operations, which precise case studies should help to identify.³⁹ Traces of this work and its operations have to be visible and therefore significant: hence the interest of the scholars, who feel this splitting more accurately than other individuals. To further improve the analysis of this work, one would have to be in presence of a relatively continuous and high-rate reflexivity (resulting in this task being at a level of conscience that would give us access to it), a state especially implied by the experience of a clearcut splitting or breaking: hence the scholars' specific interest in anthropologists, who are able to show the variety of forms that this reflexive work can take, through their notes, field notebooks and correspondence, but also through parts of their published works (since the construction of the object also depends on a work on its own positioning).

These various studies should allow for the production of a *biography of autobiographical acts*, or more precisely of *recurrent self-poietic acts*. Only a few of these are autobiographical, and among these, very few, as in the case of Georges Balandier⁴⁰ are considered autobiographies.

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38 As an illustration of this approach via conversion, see the works of George W. Stocking on Franz Boas and his circle; cf. George W. Stocking, "The Basic Assumptions of Boasian Anthropology," in Franz Boas, *A Franz Boas Reader. The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911*, edited by George W. Stocking, New York, Basic Books, 1974, p. 1-20.

39 Some of them are gathered in Nicolas Adell and Jérôme Lamy (eds.), *Ce que la science fait à la vie*, Paris, Éditions du CTHS, 2016, p. 21-75.

40 We count over twelve autobiographies in the case of Georges Balandier between *Tous comptes faits* (1947) and *Le Carnaval des apparences* (2012). On this "obstinate quest" for the self, cf. Jean Copans, *Georges Balandier. Un anthropologue en première ligne*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 2014, p. 27-31. André Mary is currently dedicating part of his research work to the sorting out of this autobiographical literature.

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