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**FROM AUTOBIOGRAPHY TO AUTOFICTION:
ANAÏS NIN'S AVANT-GARDE REVISION OF
THE DIARY**

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NOTE ON THE CORPUS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

D1: Anaïs Nin's Early Diary, Volume 2 (1920-1923) (1983)

D2: Anaïs Nin's Diary, Volume 1 (1931-1934) (1969)

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INTRODUCTION

The plural identities of Anaïs Nin: from eccentricity to idealization

“There is a feminine touch in the arts, she has it. It's disturbing, it forces a man to an opposite extreme¹” declared American poet William Carlos Williams about Anaïs Nin’s nimety. By highlighting the new functions of the 20th-century diarist and her relation to surrealism, this paper will show that Anaïs Nin transmuted the potentially fallacious and self-censored autobiographical value of the journal into a more authentic account, precisely autofiction, an avant-garde spontaneous genre mingling imagination and facts. In the eccentric diary of more than sixty-nine volumes (approximately 35,000 handwritten pages) that is collected in the Special Collections of the Northwestern University Library along with her erotic short stories, Anaïs Nin introduced herself as an ambivalent woman who knew how to play with what she called “Bergson’s mensonge vital,” namely illusions and lies. She seduced men to rob them from their creative monopole, took revenge over her father by having incestuous relations, and inverted sexual and gender codes by cultivating several triangular relationships, the most famous one being with Henry and June Miller. This atypical woman, who devoured *fin-de-siècle* decadent literature and yet rejected Antonin Artaud’s pessimism, furthermore explored psychoanalysis with Otto Rank, and her passion for André Breton’s surrealism made her practice *automatic writing* in a *Nadja*-like diary interspersed with photographs. In a word, Anaïs Nin lived her life in the manner of a 20th-century artwork and fused with her writings as if she were following Nietzsche’s precept “man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art²”:

¹ Williams, William Carlos, “Men... Have No Tenderness’: Anais Nin's *Winter of Artifice*,” *The Critical Response to Anaïs Nin*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 70.

² Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872], Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999, p. 121.



Marlis Schwieger (1950), *The Diarist and her Manuscripts* (D2 194).

If the feminist dimension of Anaïs Nin's works was challenged by Sophie Taam who demonstrated that the diarist only strove for her own, personal liberation and scarcely knew about feminism when she began to publish her diary³, her relationship with the avant-garde is undeniable, the famous American avant-garde poet William Carlos Williams being even one of the first writers who experienced the richness, complexity and sometimes contradictory dimension of Anaïs Nin's writings: he was "trying again and again to get the exact right tone in dealing with Nin's own more complex and astringent attitudes toward men⁴." He even wrote to American poet James Laughlin:

I'm doing some pages about Anaïs Nin and her new book [...] I'm having a hell of a time with the Anaïs Nin thing. I've rewritten it four times and am going into the fifth. It requires as much discretion as insight.⁵

This paper's corpus, composed of two chronological volumes of diaries, namely those written between 1920 and 1923 and those constituted between 1931 and 1934, illustrates Anaïs Nin's two lives, precisely before and after arriving to Paris and discovering the avant-garde

³ Taam, Sophie, *Anaïs Nin : Genèse et Jeunesse*, Nice : Chèvrefeuille étoilée, 2014, p. 12, my translation.

⁴ Mariani, Paul, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked*, San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1981, p. 467.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 819

movement. The volume written after 1931 describes the fantasized Bohemian polyamorous life she led in Paris with her ambiguous friend Henry Miller whereas the 1920s volume, which was published posthumously and is seldom read, advocates patriarchal values by being centered on housework and her husband Hugo Guiler. The gap in personalities and shift in tone between the two volumes of diaries imply two different Anaïs Nins, one of them wearing a mask, but for what purpose? Why was Anaïs Nin a “manipulator of femininity⁶”?

She began her diary when she left France for the United States after her reportedly abusing father abandoned her with her mother. This trauma was the cause and driving force of her obsessive writing: while detailing Anaïs Nin’s therapy, the first published volume of diaries also bears witness to incestuous relations with her father who finally came back. As a materialization of revenge, she set down on paper the way she later coldly abandoned him. The traumatic and unhealthy relationship she maintained with her father thus accounts for the different masks and plural identities she puts on, as well as all the artifices at stake in her journal: her diary is a censored substrate of a life replaying and scriptwriting different scenarios which either deny or endlessly resolve her traumatic past. Simon Dubois Boucheraud’s Ph.D. dissertation proved that the author had reworked her manuscripts before their publication⁷, showing how theatrical she was. Besides, one must not forget that initially, her diary was not addressed to a readership, and thus not written to deceive the reader but elaborated as an auto-suggestive lie to the author herself, as if her writings were waking dreams to decipher. Hence, added to the autobiographical value of the journal is not only a fictional aspect but also a surrealist dimension enhanced by both the oneirism and the form of her work, the diary being experimented in the first half of the 20th century in both surrealist and existentialist novels, in particular in Breton’s *Nadja* (1928) and Sartre’s *Nausea* (1938).

⁶ Nalbantian, Suzanne, *Anaïs Nin, Literary Perspectives*, London : Palgrave MacMillan, 1997, p. xiv.

⁷ Dubois Boucheraud, Simon, *Etudes du Moi : Genèse et Créativité, les Mises en Scène d’Anaïs Nin*, Claudine Raynaud, Montpellier 3 : Ecole doctorale 58 LLCC, October 14, 2011, p. 10.

The cryptographic facet of her diary also draws her closer to 20th-century visual artists, who underlined the illusory dimension of life: when she describes her abortion as a miscarriage, she offers different perspectives on the loss of a child, a method of concealment and revelation that Bettina Knapp's *Anaïs Nin* (1979) compares to cubist representations. Likewise, she often refers to conceptual or indefinite notions evocative of abstract art, declaring for instance that "poetry is the description of an intangible state" (D2 227). Finally, Anaïs Nin also pursues pure aestheticism via the *fin-de-siècle* slogan "art's for art's sake," highlighting her interest and consideration for the autotelic nature of art and the beauty it involves. The diary is thus two-folded, its therapeutic aspect being ornamented with a creative dimension, which triggers the following question: does Anaïs Nin's journal constitute an autobiographical document, or a creative, fictitious text? Criticism seems to focus more on the biography of the author than on the artistic dimension of her diary, a closer look at the critical reception of her novels may nonetheless bring about information about the diarist's treatment of fiction.

State of criticism: reaching beyond academic circles

The critical reception of Anaïs Nin's works can be divided into three phases: a first wave of writers, poets and critics wrote about her as she was still alive in the 1960s, emphasizing her singular style. Then, after her death, criticism knew a period of respite before the posthumous publication of her unexpurgated journal and the making of a film about her triangular amorous relationship with Henry and June Miller that triggered a second wave of criticism mainly composed of biographical works on Anaïs Nin. The third wave of criticism, which developed during the 21st century, is still flourishing despite its non-academic purport: Anaïs Nin's works are being vulgarized in popular journals or online by passionate individuals notably interested in her eccentricities. The diarist has therefore reached beyond

the academic system, hence the need for a formal, substantiated demystification and analysis of Anaïs Nin's nimety.

While she was still alive in the 1960s, a first wave of criticism began with Oliver Evans's *Anaïs Nin* (1968), which offered a critical and interpretative analysis of Anaïs Nin's erotic fiction. Sharon Spencer's *Collage of Dreams: The Writings of Anaïs Nin* (1977) discussed Anaïs Nin's eccentric literary techniques and descriptive devices:

Dispensing with plot and with the framework of conventional chronology, Nin portrays her characters again and again in a series of 'shots'.⁸

Later, Bettina Knapp's *Anaïs Nin* (1979) established a parallel between Anaïs Nin's writings and the visual arts, namely cubism, impressionism and fauvism, asserting that "Nin's growing fascination with fragmented personalities and their image equivalents, shattered mirrors, draws her to the Cubist fold – to Picasso and Braque⁹." Moreover, "impressionism allows her to experience form and movement¹⁰," while the fauves "Monet, Sisley and Pissaro¹¹" made her rediscover the purity of color. In addition, her characters are sometimes inspired from "the primitives¹²," notably because they are guided by their impulses. Bettina Knapp equally asserted the importance of music in the diarist's works: "For Nin, as well as Proust, musical tones had a literary equivalent¹³." The same year, Benjamin Franklin's *Anaïs Nin: An Introduction* (1979) focused on Anaïs Nin's style, which is a "fusion of language, poetic style and diction¹⁴."

It was only in the 1980s that Rupert Pole, Anaïs Nin's widower, began to publish the unexpurgated complete versions of her diary, which encouraged a second wave of literary

⁸ Spencer, Sharon, *Collage of Dreams: The Writings of Anaïs Nin*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, p. 137.

⁹ Knapp, Bettina, *Anaïs Nin*, New York: Ungar, 1978, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁴ Franklin, Benjamin, *Anaïs Nin: An Introduction*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979, p. 4.

criticism. The publication of these journals therefore motivated the writing of a notable monograph by Philip Jason, *Anaïs Nin and Her Critics* (1993), in which the author established a historicity of criticism and valued Anaïs Nin's "Symbolism and Surrealism [in a] trajectory of feminist literary criticism¹⁵." The release and spreading of the movie *Henry and June* (1990) also revived the public interest for the diarist. Even if, "this publicity made Nin a secondary literary figure in the shadow of Henry Miller¹⁶," three biographies of the female author were written during the following decade: Noel Riley Fitch's *The Erotic Life of Anaïs Nin* (1993) and Deirdre Bair's *Anaïs Nin: A Biography* (1995) center on her many love affairs and incestuous relationships whereas Linde Salber's biography *Tausendundeine Frau. Die Geschichte der Anaïs Nin* (1995) has a more psychoanalytic approach, putting emphasis on the various subterfuges at play in the diarist's life.

A third wave of criticism appeared in the 21st century, as Paul Herron decided to publish the non-academic journal entitled *A Cafe in Space: The Anaïs Nin Literary Journal* (2003 – 2018), itself inspired from Anaïs Nin's agent Gunther Stuhlmann's *Anaïs, An international journal* (1983-1997). Maureen Wingrove, a friend of Anaïs Nin, and Donna Ippolito, the diarist's editor at Swallow Press also created the website "Thinking of Anaïs Nin" in 1996 to share memories of the writer. However, Anaïs Nin may not have approved of such a cyberization of herself since she once expressed how technologies were deceitful as they created greater distances instead of connections in her lecture at Northwestern University on January 24, 1972. More recently, Wendy Beckett wrote the French play *Anais Nin, One of her Lives*, performed in Paris in March 2019 and highlighting the feminist stance and sexual liberation brought about by Anaïs Nin.

¹⁵ Tookey, Helen, *Anaïs Nin, Fictionality and Femininity: Playing a Thousand Roles*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2003, p. 9.

¹⁶ Nalbantian, Suzanne, *Anaïs Nin, Literary Perspectives*, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

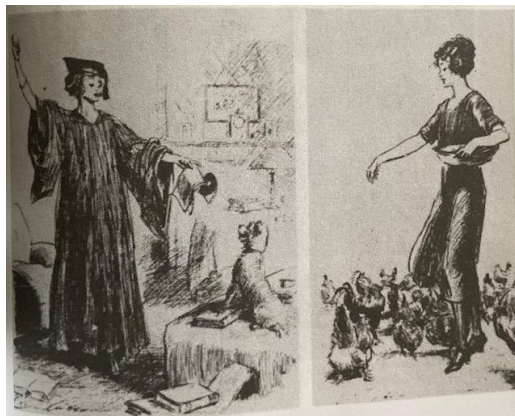
The state of criticism and the 2019 play on Anaïs Nin demonstrate that critics mainly focus on the diarist's biography, presenting her more and more as a timeless icon, paying no heed to the literary and artistic dimension of her journal. This paper will therefore replace Anaïs Nin's diaries in their context by exploring them in their cultural confluence with 20th-century arts, literature and philosophy. While witnessing the civilization crisis triggered by a century of wars and traumas as well as political and economical threats, the 20th-century history of ideas and aesthetics contributed to a better understanding of the complexity of the mind, in particular the unconscious, popularized by Sigmund Freud. 20th-century artistic movements including impressionism, cubism, Dada, suprematism and abstraction were rather revolutionary and subversive in their represented subjects, media and methods used while literature experimented with style and form as illustrated by the modernists' extensive use stream of consciousness and Breton's interspersing text and images in *Nadja*. Complementarily, philosophy took possession of the mutations of art, and Nietzsche's 19th-century theory on Apollonian asceticism and Dionysian excess as the two characteristics of art became prominent while Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art* (1935) discussed the ontological tension, inside the artwork, between concealment and "unconcealment" of truth. Other concepts such as Derrida's deconstruction also questioned artistic logocentrism and norms. The changes and crises that occurred in the 20th-century thus generated revolutionary visual arts, literature and systems of thought that corresponded to the changing, eccentric and innovative persona that Anaïs Nin depicted in her diary. Therefore, Anaïs Nin's journal assumed new artistic ambitions that conformed to the 20th-century transmutations of art, literature and history of ideas. Shifting from intimate to artistic and public confidences, is Anaïs Nin's diary still an autobiographical document, or is it rather transfigured into autofiction by its avant-garde influences? A first part will discuss the journal as a historical witness of the 20th-century avant-garde and non-figurative literature, music and visual arts.

However, if the diary is attached to the 20th-century aesthetics, its historical aspect is disturbed by the author's artistic fantasies; therefore, a second part will demonstrate that the diary's loss of autobiographical value transmutes it into hybrid autofiction. A last part will finally show that the journal's fictional dimension still allows self-exploration and experimentations with the unconscious, which constitutes a revolutionary form of self-portrayal.

I. AVANT-GARDE ART AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A CUBIST FRAGMENTATION OF THE DIARY

Experimentations with visual arts: from drafts to impressionism and cubism

The 20th-century diary explores beyond the limits of written form, creating a space of experimentation with visual arts and music. Anaïs Nin's writings share similarities with the style of Francisco de Goya, a painter she discusses in her journal (*D2 23*) and that was inspirational to avant-garde artists and friends of her such as Hans Hartung, who reproduced at least three versions of Goya's *Tres de Mayo* (1814) entitled *D'après le Trois Mai de Goya* (1921, 1922). If Goya used to conform to the ordered neoclassicism, notably by representing religious figures, the war and his exile made him experiment with a new subversive style that was later called "*botecismo*¹⁷," which means draft-like. Anaïs Nin's journal displays the same shift in style since the canonical features of diaries are progressively replaced by sketch-like undertones, hence the reprint of Charles Gibson's draft-like portraits in her diary:



Charles Dana Gibson (1920), *Preparing for Graduation* and *Little Mother*, Entitled *A.N. as a Gibson Girl*, Two drawings by Charles Dana Gibson in the diary (*D1 368*).

Sketching is completed by cubist and impressionistic undertones participating to the literary syncretism of arts created by the author:

As a writer I wanted simply to take all the various expressions of art into writing, for I believed that each art must nourish the other, each one can add

¹⁷ Cabanne, Pierre, *L'Art du XVIIIe Siècle*, Paris : Somogy, 1987, p. 277.

to the other... In every form of art there is something that I wanted to include, and I wanted writing, poetic writing, to include them all.¹⁸

Impressionism is conjured up by colorimetry and the juxtaposition of complementary colors (“orange and blue” *D2* 23) as well as Anaïs Nin’s double focus that opposes proximity and distance:

From afar, our house looks like those they paint on Christmas cards. From near you can see it needs paint, that the porch is not very steady, that the railing which comes up to the entrance is rotted. (*D1* 3)

The diarist’s parallelism evokes an impressionistic painting (in which the distance between the viewer and the artwork gives it either an abstract or figurative aspect). The photographs of houses reprinted in Anaïs Nin’s diaries equally evoke pointillism, the texture of the ground and walls being dot-like:



Anaïs Nin (1932), *The House at Louveciennes*, (*D2* 194).

The shift in scale in the incipit of her 1920s diary additionally opposes illusion and reality and thus hints at Anaïs Nin’s appeal for masquerade: placed at the beginning of the diary, the double-focused description of the house constitutes the duplicitous essence of the whole journal. The incipit’s accumulation that divides the house’s components also suggests a

¹⁸ Nin, Anaïs, *A Woman Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars, and Interviews of Anaïs Nin*, Evelyn J. Hinz, Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1975, pp. 177-178.

similitude with Fernand Léger's art that displays a "physical destruction and fragmentation of the landscape"¹⁹. This incipit therefore constitutes Anaïs Nin's first attempt at creating her own theory of art that she later developed in her three pamphlets "Realism and Reality" (1946), "On Writing" (1947), and "The Novel of the Future" (1968), that promoted an interpenetration of modernism, notably cubism and drafts with more classical art.

The diary as a cubist portrait: fragmenting the self

Anaïs Nin's visual experimentations are double-bound: she explores analytical cubism while revising primitivism, those two movements being respectively allegorized by Henry Miller and herself. Anaïs Nin is indeed interested in the cubist-inspired multiple perspectives from which she can represent her own fragmented self: in her diary she includes letters and dialogues that fit the cubist ideal of *collage*, hence Wendy Beckett's cubist and *collage*-like multifaceted representation of the diarist for the advertisement of her 2019 play:



Halcyon Pratt (2019), advertisement for Wendy Beckett's *Anaïs Nin: Une de ses vies*.

Conversely, the descriptions of Henry Miller are not prismatic but binary, opposing primitivism (notably through impulsivity and folk music) to his mundane nature:

That article [Henry Miller's] has something primitive, wild. [...] It looked like a jungle to me [...] the words are handled like hatches, they explode with hatred, and it is like hearing tom-toms in the middle of the Jardin des Tuileries. (D2 19)

¹⁹ Marcus, Daniel, "Fernand Léger, Objects, Abstraction, and the Aesthetics of Mud," in *Nothing but Clouds Unchanged*, Gordon Hughes and Philipp Blom, Los Angeles: Getty, 2014, p 55.

The alliteration in unvoiced /h/ grants the text a spectral dimension, which discloses Henry Miller's *alter ego* while the antithetical image evoking folk music points to his animalized and primitive self. While experimenting with scopic literary devices, the numerous references to visual arts therefore allow the author to fragment her own self while, as a counterbalancing, grotesquely emphasizing Henry Miller's primitive impulses. A similar counterbalancing is to be found in Anaïs Nin's musical oscillation between harmony (associated with herself) and dissonance (associated with men). The gate's "cantankerous gratings" (D2 16) and Anaïs Nin's father who "played untimely and thus made the symphony discordant" (D2 281) create cacophony whereas each language spoken by Anaïs Nin is given the same place in the journal, creating a polyphonic and more harmonious system close to atonality, a system in which each note is given the same importance:

Anaïs Nin wrote that Spanish was the language of her ancestors, French the language of her heart, and English the language of her intellect. [...] Anaïs unconsciously lapses into the language of her heart.²⁰

Dissonance is thus counterbalanced by atonality, and harmony is finally rediscovered with Bach (D2 172), who is mentioned several times. Anaïs Nin thus re-purposes the composer's technique of counterpoint by oscillating between harmony and dissonance, temporal consistency and fragmentation. In Anaïs Nin's diary, the mingling of music, sounds, and pictorial art furthermore appears as the synaesthetic mirror of one's state of mind:

Each room is painted in a different color. As if there were a room for each distinct mood: lacquered red for vehemence, pale turquoise for oenirism, peach for sweetness, green for resting, grey to use the typewriter. (D2 17)

The synaesthesia at work in the diaries echoes Vassily Kandinsky's idea that "the artist is the hand that purposefully sets the soul vibrating by means of this or that key²¹." Such spirituality is also to be found almost *verbatim* in Anaïs Nin's diary, where she wants to "put one's finger

²⁰ Pole, Rupert, "Editor's Note," *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume 2*, New York: Stock, 1981, p. viii.

²¹ Kandinsky, Wassily, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, in *Art in Theory*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2002, p. 89.

on the forces that move a soul!” (DI 291). However, contrary to Vassily Kandinsky who focuses on abstract art, the diarist explores synaesthesia with photography and the pictures printed on textured pages in the Stock edition of the diary make the reading tactile and palpable.

A diary with multiple perspectives: the rhizomatic representation of space

The 20th-century diary is a space that favors the interpenetration between the familiar and the unfamiliar, psychology and physicality. After Anaïs Nin’s emigration, the diary became a home, a familiar place of escapism (“the diary became an isle where she could escape this foreign land, [the US]²²”). However, familiarity does not mean simplicity since Anaïs Nin highlights the complex and labyrinth-like topography of her psyche and thus of her journal as she wanted her diary to be the representation of her brain:

The human brain is full of hives that criss-cross like in a labyrinth. In those folds, the traces of thousands of images, of billions of words are hidden. (D2 25)

Like avant-garde artist Hans Hartung, himself being inspired by Rembrandt²³, Anaïs Nin explores folds since the diary’s rhizomic entries, multiplicity and contingency (comparable to the Sartrean “mosaic of incompatible styles that destroy one another²⁴”) are notably entailed by the rhizomic topography of Paris, whose map is fractionally described, and the journal becomes the transcription of what Guy Debord calls a “*dérive*” (drift):

In a *dérive*, one or more people during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.²⁵

²² Stuhlmann, Gunther, “Introduction,” *Journal*, New York: Stock, 1969, p. 10.

²³ Lefebvre, Monique, “Entretiens avec Hans Hartung,” *Personnages de la Vie*, 1975.

²⁴ Idt, Geneviève, “Les Modèles D’écriture Dans ‘Les Chemins De La Liberté’,” *Études Sartriennes*, No. 1, 1984, p. 88, my translation.

²⁵ Debord, Guy, “Writings from the Situationist International,” in *Art in Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 703.

Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller's wanderings and *dérives* in the city reveal the psychogeographical articulations of Paris, in other words, the pivotal points that separate different unities of ambiance: "Each time I got off the bus in Montmartre, [...] my mood, my pace, my entire body were transformed thanks to the gaiety of the place" (D2 282). This literary technique of the *dérive* was used in 20th-century novels, notably in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* ("I walk at random²⁶") as well as in *Nadja*:

She enjoyed being nowhere but in the streets, the only region of valid experience for her, in the street, accessible to interrogation from any human being launched upon some great chimera.²⁷

The similitude between novels and the diary and the author's oscillation between physicality and psyche ("the equivalent of physical torture in the psychic world, in the psychological domain" D2 285) therefore draw Anaïs Nin's journal closer to fiction.

A palimpsestuous diary: diachronic accounts and the aesthetics of collage

The 20th-century diary's articulation between physicality and psychology also blurs temporality and transfigures the journal into a palimpsestuous space that fragments the author into different selves. 20th-century fiction is temporally instable as illustrated by Albert Camus's *The Stranger* ("Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. [...] That doesn't mean anything²⁸") and date formats that vary ("Monday," "7.00 p.m.") and are made satirical ("Shrove Tuesday") in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*. Similarly, the manuscripts of Anaïs Nin mingle past and present times since "the passages written afterwards sometimes blur the exact chronology²⁹." Moreover, Anaïs Nin includes excerpts from her childhood journal in her 1930s diary, which grants it a palimpsestuous dimension:

²⁶ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Nausea*, New York: New Directions, 1963, p. 38.

²⁷ Breton, André, *Nadja*, New York: Grove Press, 1960, p. 113.

²⁸ Camus, Albert, *The Stranger*, New York: Vintage Books, 1988, p. 3.

²⁹ Stuhlmann, Gunther, "Introduction," *Journal, op. cit.*, p. 13.

The palimpsest shows the complexity of representation, where different historical periods are marked on the same textual space, and highlights the multiplicity of writing subjects within a given text.³⁰

The palimpsestuous dimension therefore hints at the multiple alienated subjects, the different Anaïs Nins that are regrouped in the same journal so as to find their proper identity by implementing what Julia Kristeva coins as “the vertiginous staging of an abortion, of an infinitely failed self-delivery that has to be started again³¹,” the mark of “a time that, for a century, seems to have begun an endless delivery³².” Anaïs Nin’s diary therefore takes inspiration from and bears witness to the 20th-century European artistic and aesthetic movements that, according to Julia Kristeva, display the different selves of authors and artists while staging the diarist’s own infinite “self-delivery,” her quest for identity. If the diary is attached to the 20th-century aesthetics, its biographical aspect is nonetheless disturbed by the author’s diachronic accounts, descriptions of physical places injected with psychic chimeras, and artistic fantasies mingling self-portraiture with unrealistic, non-figurative, draft-like and cubist pictorial art as well as fiction, which therefore challenges the autobiographical value of the diary.

³⁰ Rushdy, Ashraf H. A., *Remembering Generations*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001, p. 8.

³¹ Kristeva, Julia, *Pouvoirs de l’Horreur*, Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1980, p. 66, my translation.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

II. DECONSTRUCTING THE DIARY: FROM AUTOBIOGRAPHY TO HYBRID AUTOFICTION

The “*détournement*” of the diary: the aesthetics of theatricality

Like avant-garde art which subverts classical essentialist values, the 20th-century diary and its “*détournement*” express truth through masquerade since contrary to essentialist’s definition of truth, Anaïs Nin’s coining of the term is inseparable from lies and illusion. The idea of ontological truth was indeed controversial in 20th-century art and philosophy: suprematists considered that objective truth was opposed to subjective sincerity (“in art there is a need for *truth*, not sincerity³³”), Dada artists thought that truth was not singular (“there is no ultimate Truth³⁴”), Heidegger’s truth resides in “unconcealment” (“Truth is un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet revealed³⁵”), existentialists such as Albert Camus thought that there was no objective truth because existence preceded its essence (“Everything is true and nothing is true!³⁶”), and Henry Miller – to Anaïs Nin’s utter despair – claimed that truth was opposed to beauty (“Truth is only manifest in people and things that are deprived of aesthetics” *D2* 26). As for Anaïs Nin, her brother Joaquin Nin wrote “Anaïs’s truth, as I said, is psychological³⁷” and double-folded as she opposes “the fiction that always tells the truth [to the] truth that changes from day to day³⁸” while distorting Bergson’s “*élan vital*” that allows organisms to evolve:

I have always believed in Bergson’s ‘*mensonge vital*.’ The problem is not in my lies, but in the fact that we have all been fed with fairy tales. We have been poisoned by fairy tales. [...] But do not forget that all fairy tales rest upon lies. [...] When I lied, I gave birth. (*D2* 266)

³³ Malevich, Kasimir, *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting*, in *Modern Artists on Art*, Robert L. Herbert, New York: Dover, 2000, p. 174.

³⁴ Tzara, Tristan, “Dada Manifesto 1918,” in *Art in Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

³⁵ Heidegger, Martin, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, New York: Harper, 1977, p. 185.

³⁶ Camus, Albert, *The Stranger*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

³⁷ Stuhlmann, Gunther, “Introduction,” *art. cit.*, p. 13.

³⁸ Nin, Joaquin, “Preface,” *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume 2*, New York: Stock, 1981, p. xiv.

In other words, “lies were Anaïs Nin’s means to freedom³⁹,” “Anaïs Nin built an ‘image,’ a ‘persona’ that would allow her to face the world⁴⁰.” The diarist’s “sense of theatre⁴¹” therefore epitomizes the concept of masquerade: she describes her eccentric clothes while a picture of the diarist dressed up as Cleopatra ornaments both 1920s and 1930s journals but is oriented symmetrically so as to create a specular effect that highlights the author’s duplicity:



Unknown (1921), *Anaïs Nin in Cleopatra* (left: *D1* 176) (right: *D2* 194).

The numerous artifices at stake both on the pictures and in the diary saturate the text to create what Roland Barthes calls the “reality effect” that conveys autobiographical true-to-life undertones. However, artifices, especially Cleopatra’s disguise, also constitute non-biographical fictitious elements reminiscent of Jean Baudrillard’s “simulacrum”:

[It is] no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.⁴²

Anaïs Nin’s writings are thus double, tied both to reality and fantasy: “Writers do not live one life but two. First they live, then they write; it’s the come-back, the differed reaction” (*D2* 86).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴¹ Stuhlmann, Gunther, “Introduction,” *art. cit.*, p. 10.

⁴² Baudrillard, Jean, *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, Bran Nicol, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, p. 91.

The diarist's duplicity is notably inspired from journals of the time that tend to mingle truth and artifice; for instance, if artist Marie Bashkirtsev's diary opens with the words "Why lie and pose?" (DI 290), her writings oscillate between sincerity and exaggerations, and thus constitute a *theatrum mundi* extended metaphor that Anaïs Nin admires:

...Amazement at her boldness, her sincerity, her vanity, her conceit, her arrogance, her cleverness. Amazement at her exaggerations, her flashes of wisdom, her skepticism, her folly. [...] I cannot for the life of me concentrate my judgement of this book in one phrase. There are too many sides to it, too many phases and points of view. (DI 290)

If some critics consider Anaïs Nin's diary as a tool of psychic stability and intimacy, the journal also represents otherness and alienation. The diary is indeed both "her armor and her confessional"⁴³ and a place of secrecy in which the author's enunciative strategies multiply, she notably uses typography as a masking device: "[...] XXX!?!? XXXX!!"(DI 51). As Guy Debord explains in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) theatricality is an "exteriority," an appearance separated from truth that drives to self-dispossession⁴⁴, he considers that "truth is a moment of falsehood⁴⁵": the spectacle and the masquerade do not show images concealing reality but display a separate reality similar to Plato's cave in which images are taken for realities and drive to servitude. In other words, Anaïs Nin's masquerade is a "*détournement*" of life and of classical diaries.

The diary as autofiction: oscillating between fantasy and reality

The function of the diary is transfigured and autobiography is fictionalized into what Serge Doubrovsky called "autofiction"⁴⁶. First, Anaïs Nin challenges the autobiographical dimension of diaries, whose incipits are usually deprived of subjectivity and focus on alterity, notably fictional characters: "Louveciennes looks like the small provincial city in which

⁴³ Stuhlmann, Gunther, "Introduction," *art. cit.*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils*, Paris : Galilée, 1977, p. 23.

Madame Bovary was born and died” (D2 15). The diarist also mentions Maupassant, Proust and Balzac (D2 15), placing her diary amongst their fictional works and thus challenging the autobiographical value of the journal while being reminiscent of autofiction. Serge Doubrovsky indeed explained that autofiction involved an “oxymoronic pact⁴⁷” associating two types of paradoxical diegeses: a real narrative telling the life of the author and a fictitious one in which imagination replaces reality. He established a distinction between fiction, autofiction and autobiography, notably because immediacy and emotions are depicted differently depending on the genre:

What distinguishes autofiction from other genres is the importance of immediate verbalization. Autobiographic writing pertains to a narrator entirely conscious of the nuances of his experience and who wants to transcribe them with syntactic effects. On the other hand, autofictitious relation to words and memories are more spontaneous and brutal [...] Therefore, autofiction fictionalizes the real in transcription. It is not a fiction in the sense that fake events are related [...]. But it becomes fiction since it is written like a fiction [...] It is the particular modes of writing I chose that introduced different perspectives on one aspect of my life. [...] Autofiction is a combination of fiction and autobiography. Autofiction constitutes verbal echoes of similar names that combine like a paronomasia, following the logic of thought association.⁴⁸

The other diaries Anaïs Nin read were equally close to fiction: “she was more especially drawn to diarists like Maurice and Eugénie de Guérin, Marie Bashkirtsev and even Amiel⁴⁹,” Eugénie de Guérin’s diary having been defined as “an imitation⁵⁰” by Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly. Parallel to the journal’s loss of introspective dimension, some contemporary fictitious novels take on a biographical aspect and thus begin to mingle autobiography and diaries. André Breton’s *Nadja* notably begins with an autobiographical staging, the question “Who am I?” constituting an ontological reflection including a subjective first person, a technique intertextually reproduced in Anaïs Nin’s *House of Incest* (1936) whose incipit

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ Contat, Michel, *Portraits et rencontres*, Genève : Zoé, 2005, pp. 231-264, my translation.

⁴⁹ Nin, Joaquin, “Preface,” *art. cit.*, p. xv.

⁵⁰ D’Aurevilly, Jules Barbey, *Letter to Guillaume-Stanislas Trébutien*, August 25 1854, in *Journal et lettres d’Eugénie de Guérin*, Paris : Librairie Nationale d’Education et de Récréation, 1863, my translation.

echoes *Nadja*'s: "Do you know who I am?"⁵¹. Because it is spontaneous, autofiction transcribes authorial experiences with more authenticity than autobiography according to Serge Doubrovsky. He indeed explained that because of self-censorship, selection of information and narrative style, autobiography impoverished the discourse's truthfulness⁵². Serge Doubrovsky also specified that the concept of autofiction could be applied to 20th-century works:

Autofiction already existed before me. I simply gave it a name and conceptualized it. In 1928, my birth year, Colette published *Naissance du jour*, and it was a sort of autofiction. When André Breton wrote *Nadja*, it was also the case. And when Céline composed *D'un château l'autre* and his following novels, or when Joyce wrote *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, autofiction was explored but was not thought about as a genre. It was perceived as literary accidents in the life and biography of an author whose other works were often very different.⁵³

If Anaïs Nin declared that she "idealize[d] people" (*DI* 9), one could go further, claiming that she fictionalized people since she notably compared Henry Miller to a fictitious character: he is "like a character by Dostoïevski" (*D2* 23). She is herself no exception to the rule and is "like the characters of her novels"⁵⁴. The diarist indeed assimilated her journal with her fiction:

Anaïs Nin herself often said that the work she published – her author's work, namely the five novels that compose the saga *Cities of the Interior*, as well as other books and short stories – was nothing more than her diary's emergence [...] 'My discourse in the diary is natural,' she wrote more than 30 years ago, 'what I write elsewhere is an abstract, the myth, the poem.'⁵⁵

In her diary, she equally reprints herself as a cover girl, the epitome of the idealized feminine:

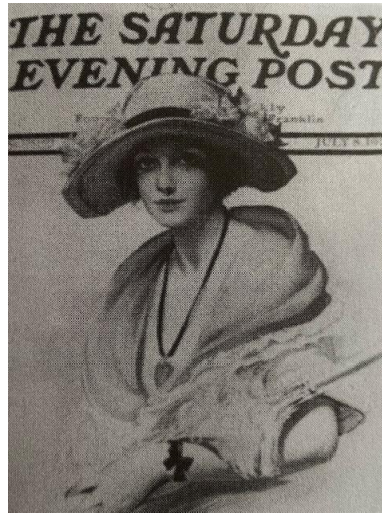
⁵¹ Nin, Anaïs, *House of Incest*, New York: Swallow Press, 1958, p. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Serge Doubrovsky, interviewed by Nathalie Crom, *Fiction Studies*, N° 3372, 2014, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁴ Stuhlmann, Gunther, "Introduction," *art. cit.*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.



Neysa McMein (1922), *A. N. as a cover girl*,
Reprinted from *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1922 (D1 176).

However, as Serge Doubrovsky would argue, in spite of their fictitious facts and idealized actors, Anaïs Nin's diaries are more exact and spontaneous than her late interviews in which the retrospective look she has is potentially fallacious. Finally, the oscillation between fiction and reality at stake in the diary, as well as the possibility of transforming fantasy into truth, is echoed and *mise en abyme* by psychoanalyst Otto Rank's ideas. In *Art and Artist* (1932) – read and discussed by the diarist – he highlights the role of creativity and imagination in the creation of oneself, staging art and its fantasy as the essence of existence and truth. Although, “Freud neither really appreciated Rank's theory about birth trauma nor his ideas about illusion and reality” (D2 299), Anaïs Nin, diagnosed with “a malfunctioning of imagination” by Otto Rank, followed his therapy, hence Anaïs Nin's inclination towards creative autofiction rather than mere autobiography:

From the beginning, Rank considered neurotics as failed artists, a creative personality that degenerated. Neurosis is a malfunctioning of imagination. (D2 300)

A similar idea about creativity is to be found in cubism (as Fernand Léger calls for “a realm where the imagination and the real meet and interlace⁵⁶”) and surrealism, notably *Nadja*,

⁵⁶ Léger, Fernand, “The New Realism Goes On,” in *Art in Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

where psychoanalysis and therapy constitute an “expulsion of man from himself⁵⁷,” a technique implemented in the diary where the *persona* oscillates between two narrative strategies that resemble the codes of autofiction defined by Serge Doubrovsky : an internal focalization in which the autodiegetic narrator is the protagonist, and a zero focalization in which the narrator becomes heterodiegetic to analyze the character’s personality more objectively. Anaïs Nin’s “crisis of consciousness⁵⁸,” namely her oscillation between autobiography and fiction therefore not only participated to the “destruction of reality⁵⁹” but also to the deconstruction of the diary.

The deconstruction of the diary: the journal emancipates from its author

The masks and subterfuges the diarist puts on participate to a Derridean deconstruction of the journal. Derrida describes the “*parergon*” as the frame of the artwork, an added artifice:

A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the ergon, the work done [fait], the fact [le fait], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board [au bord, à bord]. It is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er) [il est d'abord l'a-bord].⁶⁰

Since Anaïs Nin declares “embellishing is a vice of mine” (*D2* 139), her journal is ornamented with *parergons* that highlight its preciousity, for instance, “she adorns it [her diary] like a talisman⁶¹” and frames the pictures included in it:

⁵⁷ Breton, André, *Nadja*, *op. cit.* p. 24.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Derrida, Jacques, *The Truth in Painting*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 54.

⁶¹ Stuhlmann, Gunther, “Introduction,” *art. cit.*, p. 11.



Unknown (1922), *Anaïs Nin* (D1 176).

However, for Derrida, the *parergon* is more than a mere external ornament: it is also an internal part of the work of art. Therefore, Anaïs Nin's journal displays a multiplicity of embedded *parergons* such as the box containing her diary, which is also framed by walls of the house. When her "brother Joaquin keeps playing the piano, as if he wanted to melt the walls of the house" (D2 18) he deconstructs a *parergon*. Materiality is also deconstructed thanks to zooms-in that are "de-objectifying"⁶²:

The image that it suggests to me is an alchemist's dispensary. Beautiful crystal flasks are connected thanks to a web of fragile crystal canals. Those transparent bottles only display colored and glistening liquids, or cloudy water, or smoke, and provide the external eye with an abstract aesthetic pleasure. Only the chemist knows how dangerous the lethal concoctions are. (D2 20)

Like Fernand Léger's zooms-in on machines that transmute them into non-figurative representations, Anaïs Nin's focus on the flasks and tubes transforms them into an abstract "web" whose danger is made unintelligible. Finally, the boundaries of language are equally deconstructed by means of neologisms: "I wanted to look up for some words he used in the dictionary, but they did not appear in it" (D2 23). The diary is also subjected to "*stricture*"⁶³: it spreads both inside and outside its frame like the laces of Van Gogh's shoes according to

⁶² Marcus, Daniel, "Fernand Léger, Objects, Abstraction, and the Aesthetics of Mud," *art. cit.*, p 59.

⁶³ Derrida, Jacques, *The Truth in Painting*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Jacques Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* (1978). It is not a surprise, then, to find descriptions of shoes in the journal: “He described his shoes full of holes” (D2 178). Objects therefore participate to the diarist’s self portrait and reach beyond the mere referent and writing emancipates from its boundaries, a process reminiscent of Roland Barthes’s idea of the author’s death according to which the novelist has no utmost authority upon his work:

As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.⁶⁴

The diary’s ornaments and *parergons* are therefore meant to be deconstructed so as to dispossess the author of her own writing. Is not such “absence of any control of reason⁶⁵” that André Breton describes as “the real functioning of the unconscious⁶⁶”? Is not Anaïs Nin’s autofiction an avant-garde form of self-portraiture which transcends autobiography?

⁶⁴ Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 142-148.

⁶⁵ Breton, André, *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 26.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

III. A NEW FORM OF SELF-PORTRAITURE: TRANSCENDING AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY EXPLORING THE UNCONSCIOUS

The hermeneutics of oenirism: towards a surrealist portrait of the diarist

If Anaïs Nin's "immediate lucidity"⁶⁷ is reminiscent of André Breton's psychic automatism, the oeniric aspect of her journal draws it even closer to both surrealism and the exploration of the unconscious. Anaïs Nin herself praises André Breton's methods of automatic writing in which consciousness disappears in favor of "objective chance"⁶⁸ – the encounter between a man's desire and the invisible forces that participate to its realization:

I have always believed in André Breton's freedom: to write as we think, orderly and disorderly as we feel we think, to follow the sensations and absurd correlations of events and images, to trust the new kingdoms where those feelings lead us to. (D2 23)

The diarist was moreover passionate about Jung's essay 'Psychology and Poetry' (1930) that discusses the articulation between writing, literature, the psyche and dreams, declaring:

It is incontestably certain that psychology – as the science of psychic processes – may be brought into relation with the science of literature. The soul is the mother and the receptacle of all the sciences as well as of every work of art. The science of the soul should thus be able to demonstrate and explain the psychological structure of the work of art on the one hand and the psychological postulates of the artistic-creative man on the other.⁶⁹

She therefore wrote a diary of dreams and included dream-like descriptions in her journal: "I surely would grow roots here; the house, the garden and I would be one; they would feed me as if I were a plant" (D2 17). The excerpt is notably transfigured into a hybrid portrait interpenetrating the body and Dionysian nature in instances of condensation defined by Sigmund Freud as mixed images in which "one dream thought represents more than one

⁶⁷ Stuhlmann, Gunther, "Introduction," *art. cit.*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Breton, André, *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, *op. cit.* p. 24.

⁶⁹ Jung, Carl-Gustave "Psychology and Poetry," *In Transition: A Paris Anthology*, New York: Doubleday, 1990, pp. 141-142.

dream element⁷⁰.” Her journal, like dreams, is a form of escapism (“I am aware of being in a beautiful jail from which I can only escape by writing” *D2* 19), hence the omnipresent dichotomy between dream and reality at stake in the diary (“My books are duplicitous: dreams on one side, human reality on the other” *D2* 285). Anaïs Nin therefore “oscillates between [...] dream and reality⁷¹” so as to experiment with the unconscious and truth. As André Breton explains in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), oneirism could indeed constitute a path towards truth:

Dreams give every evidence of being continuous and show signs of organization [...] Why should I not expect from the sign of the dream more than I expect from a degree of consciousness which is daily more acute?⁷²

This search for truth explains the multiple diary entries dealing with “daydream” (*DI* 5) that echo Freud’s essay “The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming” (1908) in which he questions the role of art in the sharing of dreams. As André Breton declares in *Nadja*, the outer world is “a matter of sleep-walking⁷³,” and “perhaps life needs to be deciphered like a cryptogram⁷⁴,” in other words, oneirism has a hermeneutic dimension that is to be associated with revelation:

She is not interested in literary gossip. [...] If Anaïs Nin’s biographical and autobiographical details make the reader know the period during which she writes [...] the ‘revelation’ of Anaïs Nin’s diary essentially lies in that the reader finds for the first time the passionate, detailed and precise story of a modern woman’s discovery of herself.⁷⁵

Anaïs Nin’s journal is therefore a tool of ontological self-discovery. Once deciphered, chimeras reveal the diarist’s use of literary masks and strategies of concealment, the diarist having invented a method of transcribing dreams that relies on pictorial art and dialogic minimalism:

⁷⁰ Freud, Sigmund, *On Dreams*, New York: Dover, 2001, p. 17.

⁷¹ Stuhlmann, Gunther, “Introduction,” *art. cit.*, p. 9.

⁷² Breton, André, *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷³ Breton, André, *Nadja*, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷⁵ Stuhlmann, Gunther, “Introduction,” *art. cit.*, p. 8.

It all needed to be blurred, the outline must be less definite, one image must run into another like water colours. [...] Only a phrase, now and then [because the] verbalization of thought in dreams was short and rare. (D2 58)

Anaïs Nin therefore progressively incorporated the devices of dreams such as condensation and displacement into her writing to create literary masks.

The diary as an exploration of the unconscious: concealing and revealing sexuality

Oenirism in Anaïs Nin's diary creates a tension between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, which unveils a series of dichotomies typical of 20th-century literary fiction according to Julia Kristeva:

Contemporary literature [...] seems to be written by an unbearable id and its pervert positions. [...] With that literature, one crosses dichotomous categories opposing purity and impurity, the forbidden and the sin, morality and immorality.⁷⁶

The diarist and her lover even constitute antagonistic allegories (“Thus, delicateness [Anaïs Nin] and violence [Henry Miller] will meet and provoke each other” D2 20) and the portrait of Henry Miller is the inverted mirror of Anaïs Nin's, which creates an avant-garde specular form of self-portrait. Still oscillating between delicateness and violence, morality and immorality, the diarist transcribes a fantasy in which her father spans her until she has a “violent orgasm⁷⁷” in an unpublished excerpt. She additionally describes the way he penetrates her before correcting herself in an epanorthosis: “I do not believe my father penetrated me sexually but I believe he caressed me while or instead of beating me⁷⁸.” Written at the same period as Anaïs Nin's reading of Freud's “A Child is Being Beaten” (1919), the excerpt thus mingles her imagination and reality, which both hides and reveals truth. Some of the photographs in her diaries also create a tension between concealment and

⁷⁶ Kristeva, Julia, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, op. cit., p. 23, my translation.

⁷⁷ Nin, Anaïs, *Unpublished Diary 1933-1936*, Deirdre Bair, *Anaïs Nin: A Biography*, London: Bloomsbury, 1995, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

revelation by displaying light effects and materials that play on transparency and opacity such as lace:



Carl Van Vetchen (1934), *Anaïs Nin* (D2 194).

This oscillation between concealment and revelation was later tackled by Michel Foucault in *History of Sexuality* (1976) where he describes the double bind in which sexuality is both a social discursive imperative inseparable from its dissemination and an interdiction:

The logic of censorship. This interdiction is thought to take three forms: affirming that such a thing is not permitted, preventing it from being said, denying that it exists.⁷⁹

This logic of censorship was followed by Anaïs Nin when she published her journal since the manuscripts (as well as the unexpurgated versions) tackle the topic of sexuality in a less oblique way than the diaries published in the 1960s. Anaïs Nin's ambivalent rhetoric of concealment and revelation are also reminiscent of Sartre's idea according to which "literature is a hermeneutics of silence"⁸⁰ and Roland Barthes's definition of literature as a means "to express what cannot be expressed"⁸¹.

⁷⁹ Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Paris : Gallimard, 1976, p. 111, my translation.

⁸⁰ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *L'Idiot de la famille, Tome 3*, Paris : Bibliothèque des idées, 1971, p. 29, my translation.

⁸¹ Barthes, Roland, *Essais Critiques*, Paris : Seuil, 1981, p. 15, my translation.

The diarist's rediscovery of identity: from abjection to sublimation

The recurrent abject motif of dismemberment allows the body to utter itself and become autonomous, which participates to the revolutionary form of self-portrayal experimented in the diary. The incipit of the 1930s diary notably involves a bodily fragmentation as well as a *détournement* of history, as if it were not bodies that were dismembered but history itself:

Her lover was beheaded during the Revolution and his head was thrown over the ivy-covered wall of the garden. (D2 15)

Such a satire of history participates to the masquerade at stake in the diary while drawing a veil upon reality, “ivy” being a *leitmotif* associated with secrecy, masks and duplicity in the 1930s diary, as if the journal were a doppelganger: “it is because there is another body in the body, another mind in the mind [...] ghosts and doubles are anamorphic, absurd and perverted projections of drives⁸².” The abortion (or miscarriage) scene is the climax of these two embedded bodies that separate in an abject dismemberment:

I can feel a blade carving into my flesh, my flesh that is ripping somewhere as if scorched by fire: somewhere my fleshed is ripping and blood is spreading. (D2 364)

According to Julia Kristeva, the spreading blood produces a rediscovery of identity⁸³, the blood and the fetus separated from the body becoming autonomous. Such a fragmented body therefore utters itself, acquires an identity of its own, which participates to the new form of self-portrayal experimented in the diary: “In order to *utter* itself, the total body must revert to the dust of words, to the listening of details, to a monotonous inventory of parts, to crumbling⁸⁴.” This 20th-relationship to the body is partly explained by Sigmund Freud’s essay “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1915) in which he declares that because of war,

⁸² Lapoujade, David, *Fictions du Pragmatisme*, Paris : Editions de Minuit, 2008, p. 61, my translation.

⁸³ Kristeva, Julia, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, *op. cit.*, p. 65, my translation.

⁸⁴ Barthes, Roland, *S/Z*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1975, p. 113.

people's attitude towards death has been altered: they cannot ignore teleology, hence their regression to a primitive state of violence towards the body. Because of the journal's propensity to violence, dismemberment and sacrilege, one could easily think that the "Satanic pact" (D2 29) at stake in the 1930s journal is related to Nietzsche's antichristian philosophy while Anaïs Nin's incestuous relation is mere blasphemy; however, the diarist's description of incest is articulated around Biblical imagery referring to Lot's incest, and Anaïs Nin's subversive attraction towards the devil is sublimed since "the Sin is also the condition for Beauty [...] the other that reconciles with Satan"⁸⁵. Therefore, Anaïs Nin adopts an aesthetic "sublimatory discursivity"⁸⁶ that counters ugliness and abjection notably thanks to prosodic harmony:

A refusal of ugliness. Of a June that is sprawled in her own vomit wearing her black satin dress. Ugliness and emptiness. The sadness of emptiness.
(D2 165)

Finally, in Anaïs Nin's diaries, abjection and sacrilegious aspects are always defeated by the last the religious note concluding each volume ("I slept in God's heart" D2 369). Such aestheticization of writing and sublimation of sins participates to the falling apart of abjection and constitutes what Julia Kristeva coins as "the sublime point where abjection collapses in bursting and overflowing aesthetics"⁸⁷. This subversive aestheticization of the diary therefore constitutes an avant-garde form of self-portraiture which explains why Anaïs Nin's editor claimed that the diarist "may have given us a new literary genre with her diary"⁸⁸.

⁸⁵ Kristeva, Julia, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, *op. cit.*, p. 144, my translation.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁸⁸ Stuhlmann, Gunther, "Introduction," *art. cit.*, p. 13.

CONCLUSION: REACHING BEYOND THE DIARY, THE LEGACY OF “A NEW LITERARY GENRE”

Anaïs Nin’s diary played with the contrast between autobiography and fiction. Undeniably rooted in its century, the journal picked up fragments of 20th-century art, literature, history and philosophy to arrange them into a collage that fictionalized reality. Such a tension between truth and fantasy was explored by artists and writers of the time, notably Sartre who wrote a fictitious diary entitled *Nausea*. More than constituting a mere blend between biography and autofiction, the diary experimented with the articulation between creativity and psychoanalysis, art and the unconscious. Like cubism, in which “contrast is a matter of color, but also, more importantly, of the conflict between surface and depth⁸⁹,” Anaïs Nin’s diary oscillates between physical exteriority and psychic depth while echoing Derrida’s principle of *stricture*, staging the interpenetration between the inside and the outside. According to the diarist, aesthetics, ornaments, and *parergons* are masks to be associated with truth:

According to Henry illusions and lies are synonymous. Art and illusions are lies, ornaments. In that respect, I feel far away from him, in complete disagreement with him. (D2 30)

In her worshipping of masquerade, Anaïs Nin resembles cubist artists who have “faith in Beauty⁹⁰” and practice “the art of giving to instinct a plastic consciousness⁹¹” while differentiating herself from the suprematists’ aesthetics of simplicity since “suprematism is the rediscovery of pure art which, in the course of time, had become obscured by the accumulation of ‘things’⁹².” In pictorial terms, her diary is therefore a blend between the truthfulness brought about by photography and the illusionary dimension of painting:

⁸⁹ Marcus, Daniel, “Fernand Léger, Objects, Abstraction, and the Aesthetics of Mud,” *art. cit.*, p 56.

⁹⁰ Gleizes, Albert, and Jean Metzinger, “Cubism,” in *Modern Artists on Art*, Robert L. Herbert, New York: Dover, 2000, p. 16.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹² Malevich, Kasimir, “Suprematism,” in *Modern Artists on Art, op. cit.*, p. 118.

Photography is not coloured. Painting is. [...] Painting cannot transpose real colours [...] Photography [...] does not falsify an object by giving it the wrong colours.⁹³

The following photographic *mise en abyme* of Anaïs Nin's portrait painted by Natashia Troubetskoia highlights the diarist's impossible choice between painting and photography:



Natashia Troubetskoia (1932), in Anaïs Nin's *Early Diary (1927-1931)*..

Her diary, as she formulates it, is “the description of an intangible state” (D2 227), a liminal journal oscillating between unconscious fantasized productions and biographical facts. Other diaries of Anaïs Nin's time, such as Hans Hartung's, explore the possibilities of this medium by mingling visual art and writing and thus creating a new palimpsestuous form of self-portrait:



Hans Hartung (1924-1926), *Journal (1924-1926)*, *Carnet n°2*, Paris: Museum of Modern Art, consulted on November 22, 2019.

⁹³ Brik, Osip, “Photography versus Painting,” in *Art in Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

Anaïs Nin's mingling of autobiography and autofiction was followed by the birth of echoing hybrid forms of writing, notably autobiographical mutations in history of ideas and critical writing where the philosophical "I" becomes subjective as in Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* (1980). Speculation was therefore complemented by meditation during the 20th-century and the relationship to autobiography and self-portraiture mutated in a society where, according to Anaïs Nin, "objectivity does not exist" (*D2* 324). Finally, a study of Anaïs Nin's excessive ornaments, inclusions of pictorial art and fantasies both contrasts with and supplements the presence of visual art, imagination and creativity in later more testamentary or historical dairies such as Anne Frank's, in which references to photography, *collage* and fantasies multiply as a form of escapism from the rough reality of war:

Up to now our bedroom, with its blank walls, was very bare. Thanks to Father – who brought my entire postcard and movie-star collection here beforehand – and to a brush and a pot of glue, I was able to plaster the walls with pictures. It looks much more cheerful.⁹⁴

Anaïs Nin's diary also became inspirational to second-wave feminists who reached beyond the limits of journals. For instance, Carol Ann Duffy's "Mrs Darwin" in *The World's Wife* (1999) satirizes and subverts the feminine tradition of the diary while transmuting the journal into a poem:

7 April 1852
Went to the Zoo.
I said to Him—
Something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds me
of you.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Franck, Anne, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, New York: Bantam Books, 1997, p. 22.

⁹⁵ Duffy, Caroll Ann, *The World's Wife*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999, p. 84.

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