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# **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS AS HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES: REREADING FERNAND BRAUDEL AND ANNIE KRIEGEL**

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Recent critical approaches to life writing highlight the ways in which autobiographies are being inscribed and used, the expanding field of writers from diverse cultural and professional spheres, and the renewed manner of structuring self-representation. Today, writers of autobiography include recent immigrants, politicians, survivors of traumatic experiences, ex-presidents and their wives, corporate CEOs, and, interestingly, historians. Indeed, the growing number of autobiographies that have arisen from the academy, traditionally the domain of objectivity and ponderation, obliges us to reconsider the place of autobiographical writing in possible dialogue with scholarly production.

In this epistemological context, the significant rise of historian-autobiographers leads us to consider a “historians’ autobiographical turn” after the 1970s. At this point, approaches to history and historiography became more complex, as historians began to dialogue more personally with the events that they had previously analyzed from a clearly defined critical distance. In his recent book, *History, Historians, and Autobiography*, Jeremy D. Popkin analyzes this phenomenon, studying the connections between history and autobiography and using historians’ autobiographical accounts as sources for historical understanding. He unravels the connections between history and autobiography as a way of reconstructing the past, approaching life writing texts as a source for the knowledge of the historians’ experiences and professional positions. This perspective, which foregrounds autobiography as a framework for knowing the ways in which authors function professionally, can be taken a step further. I argue that these same autobiographical texts can also be used as a reference for comprehending the way historians construct

our access to the knowledge of the past: the historical texts. In this way, we increase our understanding not only *of* history, but importantly, of the *writing of* history. Indeed, the practical and methodological links between history and autobiography are important: they share structural formulations that invite us to read them in conjunction, and decipher possible ways their enactments of events might be similar.<sup>1</sup>

This article engages autobiographical texts as historiographical sources to comprehend a personal life, and also, significantly, to discern the motives and processes that govern the articulation of historical texts. This critical approach to life writing enables us to examine to what extent the scholarly production of historians has been conditioned by personal experience. Or in other words, how historical texts have been influenced by both the general historical context and the personal story of the historian who wrote them—family background, childhood and adolescent experiences, intellectual formation, and commitment to ideology or political movements. Indeed, some historians' autobiographies describe the development of their own historical texts from the inside, focusing on the objectives, motivations, and difficulties in their historical project, and providing information on their scholarly elaboration. I propose to take this existing perspective further by unraveling autobiographical traces in historical writing by professional historians in order to negotiate issues of historiographic intervention in writing. I posit, therefore, that a fruitful critical approach lies in reading historians' autobiographies as a reconstruction of the *writing* of the past.

In this regard, Gayatri Spivak uses the expression "worlding" to mean that our description of the world is not mere reportage, but that textual practice contributes towards its uniqueness: "Our circumscribed productivity cannot be dismissed as a mere keeping of records. We are part of the records we keep" (105). This point will be developed from both a theoretical and practical perspective. The first part of the article centers on the theoretical dimension, where I discuss the links between historians' autobiographical exercises and their historical projects. Second, I apply this theoretical model to the study of the autobiographical and historical texts of two eminent twentieth century French historians, Fernand Braudel (1902–1985) and Annie Kriegel (1926–), both linked with two of the most important trends in twentieth century Western historiography: Structuralism and Marxism. I will identify intertextual connections between their scholarly and autobiographical texts, specifically Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949) and "Personal Testimony" (1972), and Kriegel's *Aux origines du communisme français* (1964) and *Ce que j'ai cru comprendre* (1991).<sup>2</sup> This approach engages with Popkin's theory but takes it a step further by

exploring the reciprocity of critical approaches in a synchronic reading of personal and scholarly narratives. I will demonstrate how Braudel's and Kriegel's autobiographies revise our perception of their scholarship—and, by extension, the work of historians in general—by illuminating how this ostensibly intellectual exercise is actually more governed by personal experiences than previously believed. By relating Braudel's paradigm shifts to the envisioning of his *Méditerranée*, and suggesting how Kriegel's dissertation served as an act of emancipation from a difficult experience, I posit that we need to consider historical writing as a complex process that involves the personal to a significant degree.

### HISTORIANS' AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

Jeremy D. Popkin states that “readers of a novelist's autobiography may be interested in details of the writing process that produced the works by which the author entered their lives, but historians know better than to assume that their books are so meaningful to their readers that the circumstances under which they were written will be of much interest” (*History* 170). A novelist's memoir generally gives both trivial and fundamental information about his or her writing process. Gabriel García Márquez's *Vivir para contarla* [*Living to Tell the Tale*], for example, narrates not only his childhood, youth, and early adulthood, but gives us stories of the fascinating family that engendered the elements of magic realism in his fiction. Yet in reading historians' life writing, we tend to focus on the circumstances of their lives, ignoring perhaps that they are *also writers*, and that their historical production is as much a literary artifact—with its engagement with narrative structure, style, and metaphor—as the writing of a novelist.

Such notable critics as Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra have reminded us of the literary properties of historical texts, urging us to reconceptualize the act of historical writing in the context of narrative conventions and strategies. Since Hayden White defined the historical work as “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse” (*Metahistory* ix), historians have become less apprehensive about considering their texts literary artifacts. This helps us understand why the linguistic turn, to use Richard Rorty's phrase, a general tendency in the social sciences after the seventies, has deeply influenced the writing of history. One of the most important effects is the spread of what Lawrence Stone called “the revival of the narrative” in the writing of history. In the last thirty years, historians have designed their historical texts using techniques like discursive tropes and emplotment in the narration that reflect literary narrative styles and structures more closely than

the historical “scientific” methodologies. Such techniques inform the historical narrations of Carlo Ginzburg on the miller Menocchio (1976), Natalie Z. Davis’s account of the peasant Martin Guerre (1982), and more recently, Simon Schama’s vision through *Rembrandt’s Eyes* (1999). As a result of these new tendencies, the relevance of literary theory for the reading of historical texts has grown considerably. Indeed, this revisionary focus helps us contextualize the number, construction, and design of historians’ autobiographies. The linguistic turn has alerted historians to the active role of language, texts, and narrative structures in the creation and description of historical reality, and as a consequence, heightened their awareness of the blurring of the boundaries between historical and literary texts (Kramer 97–98).

This epistemological context helps us understand the increasing number of historian autobiographers who are more and more comfortable in assuming the role of authors of their own stories. Consequently, consciousness of the historian’s function as “narrator,” rather than merely “scientist,” has grown significantly, heightening the analogies between historical and literary texts. Thus we find in historians’ autobiographies not only testimonies of their lives but also data that explain their historical projects. For this reason, historians’ autobiographies must be examined to reveal information not only about the context in which historical texts were articulated, but also about how the writers’ ideological and intellectual convictions may have conditioned the methodological and epistemological nature of their texts.

A real problem that arises when reading autobiographies as historiographical sources lies in historians’ proverbial reluctance to reveal details of the trajectory of their projects—a hesitation that reflects their preoccupation with rigor and objectivity. But the increasing influence of postmodernism in the historical discipline has altered this natural apprehension, and as the writing of autobiography has become more ubiquitous and complex, we can now revise our perceptions. The thematic and methodological range of historians’ life writing is wide, a spectrum that moves from strictly academic autobiographies such as Georges Duby’s *L’histoire continue* (1991) to Carlos Eire’s *Waiting for Snow in Havana* (2003), the story of a boyhood linked to a historical account of the Cuban past. Though strictly academic autobiographies may appear to be better historiographical sources than wider life writing projects, I argue that details of these historians’ lives, isolated or disconnected from their academic itinerary, also provide valuable information for reading the process of the creation of historical writings. For example, the German medievalist Ernst Kantorowicz’s decision to study the figure of the Emperor Frederic II was clearly conditioned by his personal experience of the political rise of Nazism during the Third Reich, as he himself recognized years later,

exiled in Princeton. Braudel's Argelian experiences manifestly conditioned his comprehensive vision of the Mediterranean, and his ability not to underestimate the role of the South in relation to the North, as western historians tend to do.

We can posit that historians' autobiographical writing furnishes information on their historical texts to different degrees. Clearly, the most evident and beneficial are academic autobiographies, as I will demonstrate in the second part of this article, using the examples of Braudel's article and Kriegel's book. In fact, the phenomenon of the academic autobiography is relatively recent, and is an excellent reflection of the evolution of the social sciences during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> During that period, the academic world increased its visibility and influence in Western culture; academics began to be public people, whose opinions on issues and activities beyond the classroom began to matter. One of the effects of this greater visibility is the reinforcement of the connections between academics' personal and professional identities that validate the publication of an autobiography. I want to suggest that this publication of what was previously protected as a "private" life often supports the academics' professional position. A notable case in point is the late Edward Said, whose autobiography, *Out of Place* (2000), elucidates the reasons for his often controversial commitment to the Palestinian cause.

Positive critical reception of historians' academic autobiographies developed considerably after the publication of Pierre Nora's *Essais d'ego-histoire* in 1987. In his introduction, Nora censures the standard that made historians "keep themselves out of the way of their work, disguise their personality behind their knowledge, barricade themselves behind their notes, flee from themselves into another epoch, express themselves only through others," to positive effect: the initiation of a trend in historians' autobiographical writing (5). Certainly there had been some precedents of autobiographies written by historians, but those texts were judged separately from autobiographies narrated by professional historians immersed in the academic world, like those who participated in Nora's project: Maurice Agulhon, Pierre Chaunu, Georges Duby, Raoul Girardet, Jacques Le Goff, Michelle Perrot, and René Rémond. This new generation of historian-autobiographers widens our perspectives on both the implications of our access to the past and our understanding of the art of autobiography itself. Before them, with very few exceptions—like Braudel, who published his life writing text in the December 1972 issue of the *Journal of Modern History*—those accounts had not won credibility. That was probably explained by the scant acceptance of autobiography as a serious, objective, and rational genre among historians.

After Nora's project, other leading historians embarked on a description of their academic and historiographical itineraries. But, if *egohistoire*—the “new genre” Nora defined by stressing the academic dimension of historians' personal testimonies—was warmly received by the professional community, it was due partly to an understandable interest in discovering the personal trajectory of one's colleagues, and partly because those accounts were regarded as first-rate documentary sources. Thus, the emergence of autobiography—in the conventional or intellectual-egohistorical form—arises from the sweeping changes in historical epistemology since the seventies, which gave greater credibility to subjective elements, and legitimized individual experiences. Indeed, recent historiographic tendencies provide autobiography today with an ideal context in which to flourish by reason of current emphasis on junctures rather than structures, accounts rather than systematic constructions, singular cases rather than statistics, biographies rather than monographs, descriptions rather than analyses, everyday life rather than public events, consumption rather than production, and microhistory rather than macrohistory.

Egohistorical texts authorize entry into a deeper knowledge of historical methodology because of the metanarrative quality of these professional itineraries. The historical text may be reexamined for renewed significance after taking context into account. Duby's *L'histoire continue* establishes the complex intellectual evolution of a historian, and allows us more informed access to his works. Marc Bloch's dramatic autobiographical pages about World War II, *Strange Defeat* (1968), written shortly before he was shot in 1944 for his clandestine activity in the French resistance, tell us more about the citizen than the historian, but also illuminate his committed historical research. Eric Hobsbawm's memoir, *Interesting Times* (2002), is as valid historically as historiographically, because it provides both a context for his work and a reflection on the intellectual mechanisms that govern historical observation. Hobsbawm applies such historical techniques as footnotes to his autobiography, giving the writing a form which radically distinguishes it from the memoirs of literary figures, politicians, or intellectuals. This book establishes beyond reasonable doubt the connections between the historical text and the context in which it has been constructed: the historian's training, his intellectual tendencies, his ideological preferences, and his political opinions influence not only the design of his works and the methodology used, but also the choice of subject itself.<sup>4</sup> Following Philippe Lejeune, Popkin argues that “autobiography thus yields true information, not about the author's past but about the way he or she chose to represent the past” (*History* 29). For this reason, some scholars have concluded that the value of autobiography as a documentary source is very limited because “it sheds more light on the

state of mind of the author when he wrote his recollections than on the events when they actually occurred" (Laqueur 401). But this issue leads us again to the very notion of historiography itself: where the act of writing becomes the object of study and the writer's decisions regarding structure, form, and style are as important as the facts inscribed.

The proliferation of academic autobiographies and our engagement with their historiographic potential prove that we can no longer speak of historians' "objectivity" even when they are writing ostensibly impersonal accounts of historical events. The historian who writes autobiography crosses the threshold of what Dominick LaCapra, in the context of the debate on the Holocaust, calls the "transferential relations" between the story of oneself and history (*Representing the Holocaust* 45–46). The "historian with transference" considerably increases his subjective charge when narrating his own life, which undoubtedly increases the historiographical residues in his text. In fact, when writing their autobiographies, historians encounter the paradox of undertaking a genre that they have warned themselves (and their students) against. For example, if present at all, first person narration has always been confined to the introduction where historians recount the vicissitudes of their documentary inquiries, or give the cordial thanks that usually appear in academic studies of any depth. This reticence in the face of the fragility of other people's memories has warned them against making the same mistakes. For that reason historians do not often publish their autobiographies until they are fully established in academic circles (Popkin, *History* 57–91).

By acknowledging their ideological tendencies, religious beliefs, or political opinions, historians run the risk of revealing the links between those stances and their historical texts—an exposé that might carry as many disadvantages as advantages. Quite a few historians have been accused of manipulating their texts when their links with the Communist Party have come to light, or when a *presentist* reading of the past has been recognized in their work. As Georges Duby has pointed out, the historian is obliged to defend himself from this charge on pain of understanding nothing: "chaque époque se fait sa propre vision du monde . . . les manières de sentir et de penser varient avec le temps et . . . par conséquent l'historien est requis de se défendre autant qu'il peut des siennes sous peine de ne rien comprendre" (119). Natalie Davis was accused of projecting some of the postulates of twentieth century feminism onto the peasant woman protagonist of her account of life in a peaceful village in the French Pyrenees in the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The British historians of the Communist Party—E. P. Thompson, Eric J. Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Raymond Williams, Maurice Dobb, Vere Gordon Childe, Perry Anderson, George Rudé—were only able to elude



criticism for their excessive ideological combativeness because of the excellence of their work, which accredited them in the academic community. The passage of time, however, has revealed that those texts were really conditioned by their ideological tendencies—an understanding which has, nonetheless, not managed to devalue the importance of their writing. Indeed, autobiographical traces found in historical writing—revealed as we use the frame of autobiography to reread the historical text—need not invalidate an academic's years of work. I do not contend that a particular childhood experience or ideological position necessarily leads to less profound scholarship; I do argue that our knowledge of the historians' past through their own personal narratives gives us multilayered insight into the processes and perspectives that governed the writing of their texts. These autobiographical imprints in scholarly texts serve an important historiographical purpose. A concurrent reading of historical and autobiographical production articulates the historiographical paradigm in important ways: by stressing the importance of the act of writing, we understand how even professedly unbiased accounts are subject to the rules of narrative and the experiential positions of writers.

At this point, we need to consider briefly some difficulties this approach might entail. One of the problems encountered when using historians' autobiographies as historiographical sources lies in the discrete time frames engaged. While autobiographical texts are usually written late in the historian's life, or towards the end of his or her career, the historical texts are generally written years before, when the subjects' intellectual production is just beginning or is at its peak. In the case of the historians analyzed in this article, the sequence is 1949 and 1972 for Braudel, and 1964 and 1991 for Kriegel. We have to consider all these nuances to conclude that autobiographies are referential texts, in the sense that they can provide reliable information about the past. This referentiality can be cushioned both by the fragility of the memory—depending on the scope of time between the autobiography's writing and the time of the facts written about—and by the autobiographer's imagination, which can turn facts into fiction, or use invention to fill in gaps of memory. Yet the same specific academic formation of the historians on the rules of positivist research helps them avoid the traps of both the memory and imagination when writing autobiography.

**FERNAND BRAUDEL: THE MEDITERRANEAN EXPERIENCED,  
THE MEDITERRANEAN HISTORIED**

Braudel begins his "Personal Testimony," published in *The Journal of Modern History* in 1972, with a series of reservations, rejecting the proposal that

would “compel me to look at myself in an unaccustomed way, to consider myself in some fashion as an object of history, and to embark upon confidences which must at first glance seem signs of self-satisfaction and of vanity. . . . I confess to having doubts as to whether this account, all too personal and of questionable interest to the reader, really gets to the heart of the matter” (448). By engaging in this life writing exercise, the French historian broke, once more, with convention: he was one of the first to recount the details of his professional career at a time when this practice was considered a dangerous transgression of academic rules.<sup>6</sup> He not only had doubts about whether his reflections would be of interest—Eric Hobsbawm would suffer the same scruples thirty years later, when autobiography was comfortably validated among historians! (xi–xii)—but also concerns about possible professional risks triggered by this enterprise. And yet, when the journal editors asked Braudel to narrate his academic itinerary, they knew very well that the benefits of this document would surpass any imagined disservice, and that if any historian should write his memoirs, Braudel was the foremost candidate at the time.

Braudel’s *Méditerranée*—a massive undertaking that shifted the course of Western historiography—established his position as one of the most outstanding historians of the twentieth century: any multidisciplinary discussion of the Mediterranean necessarily makes references to this dissertation (Trevor-Roper 472). And as Braudel admitted the year he died, he spent twenty-five years of his life working on it: “J’ai commencé à travailler sur la Méditerranée en 1922—ceci me rajeunit beaucoup, mais vous rajeunit peut-être trop—et je n’ai achevé ce livre qu’en 1947, vingt-cinq ans plus tard.” Braudel’s geographic and historic determinism became known as “structuralism” after the publication of *Méditerranée*, and the timid revitalization of the various historicisms from between wars was replaced by the imposition of postwar paradigms.<sup>7</sup> Rather than describe the enormous influence of *Méditerranée* on Western historiography, I will focus on the circumstances and details of the creation of this work by examining Braudel’s autobiographical account to stress how his personal itinerary influenced the choice of theme and perspective. Specifically, I note two personal experiences that significantly shaped the idea and form of his work: his trips to Algeria and Dubrovnik, and his time in prison camp.

Braudel studied at La Sorbonne from 1920 to 1923, but the “vocation as a historian did not come to me until later” (“Personal Testimony” 449). In 1923, he moved to Constantine (Algeria), and was instantly captivated by the geography and the light of the Mediterranean Sea. He explained that feeling in the very opening of his book: “J’ai passionnément aimé la Méditerranée, sans doute parce que venu du Nord, comme tant d’autres, après tant d’autres”

(*La Méditerranée* I, 13). This passion served him well for over twenty-five years. Braudel began his career as a professor of the history of events (*histoire événementielle*). He wrote his first historical texts as “closely as possible to the facts,” even as his travels in the North of Africa were modifying his geographical and historical perspectives. His first crucial revisioning of previously uncritical paradigms was geographical, caused by his experience of the Mediterranean Sea from a new position: “I believe that this spectacle, the Mediterranean as seen from the opposite shore, upside down, had considerable impact on my vision of history” (“Personal Testimony” 450). His historiographical transformation arrived later, when he found “by chance” some interesting documentation about the Peace of Vervins (1598), and he decided to center his thesis on Early Modern Spain rather than on German history, which seemed to him “poisoned in advance by my overtly French sentiments” (“Personal Testimony” 451). This first academic decision wavered rather quickly, as the passionate Braudel found himself more drawn to the bright and ardent Mediterranean than to the prudent and sad Philip II: “It was during these years, between 1927 and 1933, when I lived in the archives without hurrying—not even hurrying to choose my subject—that my decision ripened of its own accord. And so I chose the Mediterranean” (“Personal Testimony” 452). But, what Mediterranean? Braudel had traveled in Northern Africa, but in 1935 he discovered a really “new Mediterranean” in Dubrovnik, where he truly began to *understand* the sea, and perceive nuances that he would not have fathomed otherwise:

Ce n'est pas tout de suite que j'ai réussi à voir la Méditerranée dans son ensemble. Il a fallu que j'attende 1935, treize ans d'attente! J'ai eu la chance à ce moment-là d'arriver à Dubrovnik, c'est-à-dire à Raguse. Ses archives son merveilleuses et c'est la première fois que j'ai eu la possibilité de voir des navires, des cargos et des voiliers qui s'en allaient jusqu'à la mer Noire, qui remontaient au-delà de Gibraltar jusqu'à Londres, Bruges ou Anvers. C'est là que j'ai commencé à comprendre la Méditerranée. (*Une leçon d'histoire* 6)

This paradigm shift, clarified in his autobiographical text, constitutes the essence of his scholarly work. The experience of the Mediterranean “from the opposite shore” effected a profound change in Braudel’s perspective: a modification of his Euro-centered position to create a broader outlook on many levels, one that produced a more organic vision of the intersections of geography and history, as well as of the possibilities of narrating them. As Charles Morazé explains, Braudel required the Mediterranean light to see Mediterranean history better (114). As such, the autobiographical trace in his historical work is unmistakable: had Braudel not experienced the Mediterranean

from Dubrovnik, he would have written a completely different book, one certainly less animated and less multilayered.

Braudel's dilemma about how to *present* his renewed vision was resolved in the most unexpected way. World War II, which would become crucial in the development of his historical convictions, broke out just before he began the book. He served on the Rhine frontier, was captured, and made prisoner from 1940 to 1945, a circumstance that he transformed into one of the most worthwhile experiences in his life: "For prison can be a good school. It teaches patience, tolerance" ("Personal Testimony" 453). He wrote *Méditerranée* there, in the Mainz and Lübeck prison camps, far away from the sea, which ironically may have given him more critical perspective than if he had been close to it. The Mediterranean was his real company in captivity—"that which distracted me in the true etymological meaning of the word" ("Personal Testimony" 450)—as he recognized many years later.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, he admits that during this experience, "my vision of history took its definitive form without my being aware of it, partly as a direct intellectual response to a spectacle—the Mediterranean—which no traditional historical account seemed to me capable of encompassing, and partly as a direct existential response to the tragic times I was passing through" ("Personal Testimony" 454).

This second point in Braudel's itinerary is as vital as the first, and may have also configured his lifelong obsession with the intersection of space and time. After the dramatic paradigm shift that led him to reconfigure his Eurocentric perspectives on geography and history, his physical separation from his object of research gave him the opportunity to explore the totality of the context of the Mediterranean Sea. Specifically, understanding the necessary distinction between the three sections he highlights—geography, society, events—was permitted by his detachment from the daily experience of the sea. Each section of the sea thus occupied a particular place in Braudel's imagination that led him to both individualize and link the issues that configured this palimpsestic place. Moreover, in connection with this—and perhaps as a result of the meditations on time typical of the experience of captivity—he articulated three time frames that correspond to the temporal organization of Mediterranean time: long, middle, and short duration ("Histoire et sciences sociales"). Importantly as well, the distance from the object may have also allowed him to separate himself, intellectually and psychologically, from his present situation. Thus, Braudel wrote *Méditerranée* because of his excellent memory, unexpected captivity, and the support of a good scholar friend.<sup>9</sup>

In his autobiographical writings, Braudel always considered this historiographical shift—from events to structures, from short to long duration—as

a response to the tragedies he experienced during the war. His revolutionary vision of history, expounded in his germinal article in the *Annales* in 1958, matured during those five years:

Une année, ça ne compte pas; un siècle, c'est un clin d'oeil. Et, peu à peu, au-dessous de l'histoire des fluctuations, au-dessous de l'histoire événementielle, de l'histoire de surface, je me suis intéressé à l'histoire quasi immobile, l'histoire qui bouge, mais qui bouge lentement, l'histoire répétitive. . . . Cette histoire immobile, cette histoire que j'ai fini par appeler l'histoire de longue durée, est la structure de l'histoire, elle est l'explication de l'histoire. Elle est l'explication de la Méditerranée elle-même. (*Une leçon d'histoire* 7)

The relationship between the personal story and the writing of history intensifies. Braudel continually had to revise his perspective, to transcend, reject, and deny all the facts he learnt, day after day, from the radio and the newspapers during the war: “Down with occurrences, especially vexing ones!” (“Personal Testimony” 454). He had to believe in a history written at a much more profound level than that of events in order to transcend psychologically the daily adversity of captivity.

Far removed from our persons and our daily misery, history was being made, shifting slowly, as slowly as the ancient life or the Mediterranean, whose perdurability and majestic immobility had so often moved me. So it was that I consciously set forth in search of a historical language—the most profound I could grasp or invent—in order to present unchanging (or at least very slowly changing) conditions which stubbornly assert themselves over and over again. And my book is organized on several different temporal scales, moving from the unchanging to the fleeting occurrence. For me, even today, these are the lines that delimit and give form to every historical landscape. (“Personal Testimony” 454)

“Historical landscape” is historical time and geographical time. In the end, Braudel’s experiences in the real Mediterranean may be traced in his poetic description of the writing of the book, found in the preface to the original edition: “J’ai passionnément aimé la Méditerranée. . . . Ja lui consacré avec joie de longues années d’études—pour moi bien plus que toute ma jeunesse. En revanche, j’espère qu’un peu de cette joie et beaucoup de sa lumière éclaireront les pages de ce livre” (*La Méditerranée* I, 13).

#### **ANNIE KRIEDEL: BETWEEN SCHOLARSHIP AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT**

Like Braudel and most other historian autobiographers before and after her, Annie Kriegel hesitated before writing her memoir. She actually declined the invitation to participate in Nora’s *egohistoire* project, but eventually produced

a volume of nearly eight hundred dense pages, which begins with the admission that she deferred publication until the last minute, and then waited even more (11). *Ce que j'ai cru comprendre* is formulated conventionally, as a full comprehensive autobiography, rather than an academic life exercise. Although she occasionally falls into narrative excess—one of her sentences occupies almost an entire page (709–710)—Kriegel narrates her intense life in calculated, neutral, and dispassionate prose, as if to prove that her dramatic experiences did not contaminate her academic itinerary and critical distance. The excessive moments, which sound more like oral narrative than written discourse, suggest that consistent critical distance was not always easy to achieve. She begins narrating her childhood and early adulthood, focusing on her relationship with her parents, her experiences in Paris, and school and University life. A particularly interesting part of her text records her participation in the Resistance and later the Communist Party. Significantly, she avoids mentioning personal issues, such as her marriage, her children, and home life. These silences focus the reader's attention on the central points in her exercise: the story of her membership in the French Communist party, the stormy end of this association, and her academic itinerary—clearly connected to her political commitments, because her dissertation was about the origins of the French Communist Party.

The process of writing this dissertation was formidable (it took her ten years to complete). Both Braudel and Kriegel undertook massive research projects, producing sophisticated and complex works unthinkable today at the graduate level. The magnitude of these texts is comparable only to other French historical works of that time, like George Duby's *Mâconnais* (1953), Pierre Chaunu's *Seville* (1955), or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Languedoc* (1966)—a cycle known to historians as "La terre et les hommes" (Bisson). The amazing range of these works was due to the specific requirements of the French University system's doctoral degree programs in the 1950s and 1960s, which centered upon the elaboration of the monumental "thèse d'Etat," a monograph of about a thousand pages that generally took more than ten years to research and write. Differing notably from the American or British doctoral requirements, this system accounts for the singular and vigorous methodologies developed by postwar French historiography. The successful presentation of these "thèse d'Etat" gave the candidates the title of "professeur," which explains the recognized elitism of the French university. In 1968, the "thèse d'Etat" was replaced by a more modest "thèse de troisième cycle," and the scope of French historians' research decreased notoriously.

If the bulk of Braudel's dissertation was composed during the war and captivity, Kriegel's thesis was shaped in a time of hard-won peace (1954–1964)

after the intense years of her engagement with the Resistance and the French Communist Party (1942–1953). As such, while for Braudel the war is located in the final part of the process of elaboration of his work, for Kriegel it lies at the beginning. In a metaliterary gesture, she describes the beginnings of this dissertation in 1955 as fraught with difficulties. First, Kriegel had to persuade her supervisor, the social and economic historian Ernest Labrousse, that she was capable of managing sustained research and entering successfully into the academy in spite of being a woman, a mother, and at the time of the dissertation proposal, pregnant. When she succeeded in convincing him of her determination, and further informed him that she planned to explore the origins of the French Communist Party, Labrousse, knowing that she had been expelled from the Party two years earlier, responded: “Délicat, madame, très délicat” (*Ce que j’ai cru comprendre* 616). Kriegel suggests that Labrousse would have preferred a less controversial and more distant historical topic, implying as well that her personal circumstances may have also influenced his reluctance to supervise her work. Yet she does not mention the possibility that perhaps Labrousse’s reservations were caused primarily by her difficult alliance with her future topic. She had joined a Communist youth group in 1942 at the age of sixteen, and had taken her political activities seriously. Her commitment was motivated by both her patriotism and Jewishness. After the war, she continued her engagement with Communism, but rejected it after being ousted from the Party in December 1953, due to a restructuring and an increase of bureaucracy within the Party.

Kriegel’s commitment to and experiences in the Communist party obviously conditioned the choice and the treatment of her historical object.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in this case, personal and temporal proximity with the historical topic did not produce a distortion of historical facts. No one can deny Kriegel’s robust sense of history, illustrated in both her historical and autobiographical texts. In the extensively researched and solidly articulated monograph that resulted from her determination to negotiate academically the history of the French Communist Party, *Aux origines du communisme français* (1964), Kriegel follows the dictates of contemporary historical projects in the scope of the research, the quantitative range of documentation, and the volume of footnotes, among other things. In fact, considering her personal commitment to the cause, it is interesting that the first person singular appears only once in the text, in the last sentence at the end of the introduction, as part of the acknowledgments: “A sa patience (of Prof. Labrousse), à sa rigueur, à ses mises en garde, à ses encouragements, de combien je suis redevable!” (*Aux origines* I, 22).

In her autobiographical text, because she both sees and represents herself as a historical object embedded in a particular context, she justifies her

commitment to communism as an honorable and ineluctable responsibility at that time (186–210). Popkin argues that “Kriegel’s memoir certainly makes the connection between her research topic and her own life clear, but the result is not to discredit her scholarship” (*History* 208). Notably, her communist engagement provided her with extraordinary sources for her research, and a growing consciousness of the discrepancies between the party’s official version of itself and the evidence that her documentary exploration provided. We cannot, unfortunately, infer that this objectivity was the general rule for all the historians who combined communist commitment and historical research during the mid-twentieth century. In his memoirs, Eric Hobsbawm recognizes that the duty of the Communist Party members was “not only to get good degrees but to bring Marxism into our work, just as politics entered the activities of those who went for acting or undergraduate journalism” (113). Indeed, historiographical revisioning of texts of the time reveals manipulation in the interpretation of data to support the communist cause, even as historians were becoming personally disillusioned with the actual practice.

Reading Kriegel’s autobiography, we may argue that she does not fall into the revisionism typical of persons who have had traumatic relationships with organizations they have abruptly abandoned. In his autobiography, Hobsbawm links Kriegel with such French historians as François Furet, Alain Besançon, and Le Roy Ladurie, who were “eminent and eventually anti-communist historians who were hard-line young CP activists at the time” (328). Kriegel’s intellectual engagement with Communism in her dissertation provides her with a balm for the dramatic rejection from the Party to which she had dedicated the best years of her life. The academic work on Communism moved her away from the battlefield, and endowed her with the critical distance from which she could examine dispassionately not only a specific historical object, but also her personal endeavor. In her memoir, she explains that, after the “tourments” of the personal crisis caused by her rejection from the Communist Party, she decided that all her academic work would be informed by the autonomy and the independence of her own research:

Plus de trente-cinq ans ont passé depuis ces tourments. Depuis mon propre tourment—entamé dès 1954–1955—je n’ai plus relâché un seul jour mon examen des affaires juives avec la double règle générale que je me suis très tôt fixée: reconquérir ou plutôt conquérir ma totale autonomie dans tous les ordres—information, élaboration, rédaction—qui concourent à l’expression d’une opinion réfléchie; n’appartenir à aucune structure de décision qui m’engagerait partiellement à l’aveugle et pèserait sur la fiabilité de mes analyses. (780)



Kriegel chooses to deal with the Party's rejection through the serene reconstruction and revisitation of her historical experience, her own story. This strategy deviates from habitual autobiographical practice. Most subjects choose to use the life writing text, rather than the academic project, as the therapeutic instrument. In her memoirs, she describes clearly the influence of the experience of her historical work, and how it gave her heightened objectivity when she had to negotiate the dramatic changes within communism in 1950s Europe (the twentieth congress of the PCUS, the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the rise of Khrushchev, and the fall of Stalinism) at the same time she was constructing her dissertation. All the ideals she had committed to in her adolescence and youth were being demolished one by one: the proletarian revolution, the mythological value of the USSR, the demonization of capitalism, the universal scale of the fight against capitalism. She had started her project devoted to communist orthodoxy, without critical distance, using the archetypal terminology of historical materialism: "mon projet initial avait été, dans sa conception, sa texture, sa langue, encore marqué d'une candeur orthodoxe inaltérée" (*Ce que j'ai cru comprendre* 686). Yet the disruptions of Stalinism crumbled her candid trust in the system, and made her revise her historical perception of Communism: "Par rapport à ce projet [the original project based on an acritical confidence in Marxist orthodoxy], l'écart s'était accru d'autant plus que, s'il s'était creusé au fil de mon travail historique se déroulant portes et fenêtres closes, il se trouvait comme justifié et redoublé, bien qu'il n'en dépendît nullement, par les événements—le XXe congrès du PCUS, l'année 1956, Khrouchtchev, le dégel. . . .—qui, au même moment, bouscullaient l'ordre stalinien" (*Ce que j'ai cru comprendre* 687). Thus, though her historical research in the fifties reveals the convergence of the painful shift of her personal beliefs and the change of Communism's historical realities, she continued studying the history of the French Communist Party, trying to transcend both her personal demons and the historical collapse of Communism. Yet her anti-communism was simply confirmed ("justifié et redoublé") by the historical facts, and revalidated many years later by her autobiographical project.

Examining autobiographical traces in historical writing, I argue that Kriegel was able to combine action with introspection precisely because both experiences—her political activism until 1953 and her scholarly research from then on—focused on the same object: the French Communist Party. Her frenzied political activism during and after the war contrasts radically with her serene archival research in the late 50s and early 60s—a serenity compatible with the frenetic rhythm of the work of a woman who was at that time bringing up her children and working as a secretary of a "éphémère

employeur” like Fernand Braudel (*Ce que j’ai cru comprendre* 297). Kriegel wrote her dissertation between 1955 and 1964, becoming one of the exponents of the post-war academic generation, who could work steadily for a long time because they were not interrupted by war, captivity, or emigration. Yet, like Braudel, Kriegel suffered a methodological trauma caused by dramatic life experiences: personal experiences—her expulsion from the Communist Party in 1953—and “contextual” experiences—the crisis of Communism in the late fifties.

In her autobiography, she distinguishes clearly the three stages of the process of creation of her historical project: the gathering of information, classification, and writing. She admits that each of these stages led to diverse emotional states, and in particular to anxiety about the time needed to collect the information—a state recognized by all historians conducting long research. Yet, during those seven years of work, she succeeded in “l’opération intellectuelle de transformation du matériaux brut . . . l’extraction du minerai précieux, l’élimination de la gangue et des scories” (*Ce que j’ai cru comprendre* 686). The second stage of her work hovered between serene organization and nervousness. “On ne bouge plus!”—don’t move any more—she said to her material when she was done (*Ce que j’ai cru comprendre* 686). Because Kriegel felt she needed to complete her research because of its vital connection with her own position as simultaneously a former member of the Party and an ambitious academic, she needed the typically dynamic flow of information to become, at this point, static. Obviously, this contrasts with the natural attitude of the historian who knows that she could continue collecting information forever. But this discrepancy is understandable in the context of her need to finish the project, and to liberate herself from its object. Finally, Kriegel makes clear in her autobiography how the actual interpretation and inscription of the data, in her rational and precise style, was the fundamental act: by writing the story of the Communist Party, she engaged her own life. The articulation of the process of the Party’s rise and decline mirrors Kriegel’s own experience. Her autobiography leads us to question the ways in which we can reread her historical text. By suggesting that *Ce que j’ai cru comprendre* is actually an act of coming to terms with the most dramatic rejection of her life, she shifts autobiographical truth away from the life writing text back to the academic exercise. Yet so cleverly has the author privileged historical data over personal commitment and feelings that this insight is gained only by reading her autobiography. Her memoir therefore shows the hidden performative elements in her historical intervention, which now stands externally as a serious analysis of a situation, but is actually a process of self-representation and emancipation.

Rereading academic texts through the prism of autobiographical narratives extends the possibilities of historiographical interpretation. By highlighting the personal experiences and epistemological processes that governed the development of the historical text, we enable ourselves to perceive more clearly these texts as *writerly acts* that limn the boundaries of scholarship and interpretation. Perhaps Braudel's and Kriegel's autobiographies are the best tribute to Roland Barthes, who in 1967 presaged profound changes in the writing of history with his influential essay "Historical Discourse." With his claims of the creation of a new linguistic discourse in history—more appropriate to the conception of history as an *image* of reality rather than reality itself—he foreshadowed the shift from early narrativism to the poststructuralist narrativism of such authors as Louis Mink, Dominick LaCapra, and Hayden White (Breisach 72–88). Five years after the publication of Barthes's article, when in 1972 Braudel reluctantly agreed to inscribe his personal/professional itinerary, he broke one of his own basic rules as an "objective" historian. Yet he also contributed to creating the "new linguistic discourse" that Barthes claimed for history. Nonetheless, we can argue that Braudel was probably following his own epistemological instincts, since he was an early advocate of cross-disciplinary approaches in historical research.

By analyzing how historians work, and by viewing the genesis and development of their monographs, we understand more clearly both the position and responsibility of the writer who increasingly admits the futility of separating personal experience from intellectual activity. Indeed, I would suggest that this interdisciplinary form of reading enriches our appreciation not only of historical inscriptions, but of entire processes in the development of intellectual history.

## NOTES

1. For more details on the relations between autobiography and history, see Weintraub, Steedman, Gossman, and Hamilton.
2. This study is part of a larger project that examines autobiographical traces in the historical writing of major European and North American historians of the twentieth century. To give this article more coherence, in both cases, the historical texts considered are their authors' PhD dissertations.
3. "Academic autobiography" has been defined as a "published text presented as a truthful account of the author's own life, written by someone who has spent a significant part of that life as a professional member of an academic discipline, and in which the role of that academic discipline in the author's life is evident either in the content or in the construction of the narrative, or both" (Popkin, "Coordinated Lives" 802).
4. In defining Hobsbawm's memoir, I juxtapose two seemingly contradictory terms: "documented memoir." For more on Hobsbawm's memoir, see Cronin.

5. For information on this debate, see Finlay, and Davis's response in "On the Lame."
6. For the difficulties experienced by historians when narrating the stories of their professional careers, see Popkin's chapter "Speaking of Careers: Historians on Their Professional Lives" (*History* 151–83).
7. See Stone (4–15) for a discussion of historicism between the wars.
8. For details on Braudel's captivity, see his wife Paule's fascinating testimony, "Braudel en captivité." Only one volume of those school copy books remains extant, conserved by Febvre's son: *Les écrits de Fernand Braudel. Les Ambitions de l'Histoire*.
9. See the preface of the first edition: "Puis-je ajouter, enfin, que, sans la sollicitude affectueuse et énergique de Lucien Febvre, ce travail ne se serait sans doute pas achevé de sitôt?" (I, 17). Braudel repeated the same idea in 1976: "without him the *Méditerranée* would doubtless not have seen the light of day"—again the light (Foreword 13).
10. Since my focus is on the relationship between her autobiographical exercise and her academic production, I cannot enter into the details of this commitment. But see her own reflections, especially on pages 609–630.

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