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Deconstructing Boundaries: Autotheory's Feminist Legacy

İlmiye Sarıkaya[1]
ORCID: 0000-0002-4374-9471

İfakat Banu Akçeşme[2]
ORCID: 0000-0002-8217-9360

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Abstract

Autotheory is a feminist style of writing and artistic practice that integrates lived experiences with critical theory and/or philosophy. Having roots in a long history of feminist literature, philosophy, and activism, autotheory deconstructs traditional boundaries such as those between theory and practice, the personal and the theoretical, art and life, and mind and body. This article outlines the feminist genealogy of autotheory, tracing its roots from the eighteenth-century women's confessional writing, through second-wave feminist ideas such as "the personal is political," to poststructuralist critiques of Cartesian subjectivity, postmodern feminist notions of gender performativity, and intersectional feminist interventions. It also highlights how autotheory resists the phallocentric hierarchies of knowledge production. Moreover, it examines the transformative potential of autotheory due to its re-definition of the self as plural, diverse and relational through strategies like citation and collaborative writing. Ultimately, this study emphasises autotheory's role in dismantling traditional epistemic structures regarding subjectivity and theory-making while providing a space for marginalized voices to engage in theoretical discourse through lived experiences.

Keywords: Autotheory, Feminism(S), Subjectivity, Critical Theory, Lived Experiences.

Sınırların Yapısökümü: Ototeori'nin Feminist Mirası

Öz

Ototeori, yaşanmış deneyimleri eleştirel teori ve/veya felsefeyle bütünleştiren feminist bir yazı ve sanatsal uygulama tarzıdır. Kökleri feminist edebiyat, felsefe ve aktivizmin uzun tarihine dayanan ototeori, teori ile pratiğin, kişisel olan ile teorik olanın, sanat ile yaşamın ve zihin ile bedenin arasındaki geleneksel sınırları yapıbozuma uğratır. Bu makale, köklerini 18. yüzyıldaki kadın yazarların itiraf yazınından, "kişisel olan politiktir" gibi ikinci dalga feminist fikirlere, Kartezyen öznelliğin postyapısalcı eleştirilerine, postmodern feminist 'toplumsal cinsiyet performatifliğine ve kesişimsel feminist müdahalelere kadar takip ederek, ototeorinin feminist tarihini özetlemektedir. Aynı zamanda ototeorinin bilgi üretiminin fallus merkezli hiyerarşilerine nasıl direndiğini de vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca bu makale, ototeorinin, alıntı yapma ve işbirlikçi yazım gibi stratejiler aracılığıyla benliği çoğul, çeşitli ve ilişkisel olarak yeniden tanımlaması nedeniyle, dönüştürücü potansiyelini incelemektedir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, bir yandan marjinalleştirilmiş seslerin yaşanmış deneyimler aracılığıyla teorik söylemle meşgul olmaları için bir alan sağlarken, bir yandan da öznellik ve teori oluşturmaya ilişkin geleneksel epistemik yapıları parçalamada ototeorinin rolünü vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ototeori, Feminizm(Ler), Öznellik, Eleştirel Teori, Yaşanmış Deneyimler.

[1] Lecturer, Abdullah Gül University, School of Foreign Languages. ilmiye.sarikaya@agu.edu.tr
[2] Associate Professor, Erciyes University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature. bakcesme@erciyes.edu.tr

Introduction: Autotheory as a Contemporary Term

Autotheory, though it has numerous precursors in the long history of literature and philosophy, is an emergent mode of writing and artistic practice that is closely bound up with feminisms.[3] Lauren Fournier views autotheory as "a post-1960s feminist practice" that refers to "contemporary works of literature, art, and art-writing that integrate autobiography and other explicitly subjective and embodied modes with discourses of philosophy and theory in ways that transgress genre conventions and disciplinary boundaries".[4] Coined by Stacey Young (1997)[5] but gained recognition through Maggie Nelson's work *The Argonauts* (2015)[6], the term *autotheory* basically describes the integration of auto, or the "I" of autobiography, with critical theory and/or philosophy.[7] This mixture of the personal with the critical in autotheory embraces feminist resistance to the boundaries established during the Enlightenment, including those between theory and practice, or theory-making and the self, and the self and the body. Fournier approaches autotheory "as a practice of performing, embodying, enacting, processing, metabolizing, and reiterating philosophy, theory, and art criticism. . . as an often self-reflexive and performative practice in the post-medial present."[8] In fact, the distinction of autotheory from conventional modes of life-writing like autobiography can be briefly explained in terms of a shift from life-writing towards life-thinking, with its strong roots in feminist ideas of resistance. Autotheory, or rather feminist autotheory in the context of this essay, is a dissident mode of literature and art. On aesthetic, ethical, and political levels, it goes against the grain of both the autobiographical and the theoretical, in other words, academic understandings of subjectivity and knowledge. It embodies deconstructing the distinctions between art and life, theory and practice, fiction and non-fiction, and mind and body as well as reconstructing the notions of subjectivity and knowledge production. Autotheory is, in this sense, anchored in feminist movements of resistance to modernity, in other words, the Enlightenment that promotes the dichotomies and imposes subjectivity as the self-conscious, self-sufficient, and individual self.

1. Feminist Autotheory against the Grain

> Indeed, the history of feminism is, in a sense, a history of autotheory.
>
> — Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice* (2021)[9]

As Lauren Fournier, a prominent scholar of autotheory, articulates in her book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, autotheory originates from feminist philosophy, movements, literature, and art. Fundamentally, the autotheoretical ventures are feminist attacks on the notion of individual self, on the theoretical discourse, and on the established separations such as theory and practice, art and life, self and body—structures which have historically marginalized women and the other groups of people, including disabled and queer individuals. These ventures also represent reconstruction projects which involve re-defining the self as relational and generating theory from the lived experiences. All these autotheoretical aspects are deeply rooted in different forms of feminism beginning with the eighteenth-century feminist texts, particularly in the Western context. Thus, to understand the autotheoretical turn as writing and practice against the grain, it is essential to recognize the feminist

[3] Definitions of autotheory vary, with no consensus on whether it is a genre, a methodology, or a mode of writing and practice. In this essay, I prefer defining autotheory as a mode of writing and artistic practice.

[4] "Autotheory-Lauren Fournier," *Lauren Fournier* accessed March 18, 2025. http://laurenfournier.net/Autotheory

[5] Stacey Young, *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics and the Feminist Movement* (Routledge, 1997).

[6] Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts: A Memoir* (Graywolf Press, 2015).

[7] In the context of autotheoretical studies, critical theory often refers to literary theories including poststructuralism, postmodernism, and many more. This term is also preferred to underline the institutionalization of theory within academia. See, for example, Robyn Wiegman, "Introduction: Autotheory Theory," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 76, no. 1 (2020): 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2020.0009.; Ralph Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 76, no. 1 (2020): 85–107. https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2020.0003

[8] "Autotheory-Lauren Fournier."

[9] Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2021).

endeavour to combat the dynamics of oppression generated by the patriarchal structures, and their grand narratives or hegemonic discourses.

Therefore, this article intends to uncover the feminist foundations of autotheory as a growing way of writing and artistic practice which stretches the borders of life-writing and intellectual, academic and theoretical discourse. Tracing its development from early feminist writings to its current manifestation, this article shows how autotheory has emerged from feminist resistance to both the theoretical discourse and the Enlightenment notion of the self, which exclude the knowledge and lived experiences of those who are otherized and marginalized. The feminist background of autotheory first gained prominence with American queer writer Maggie Nelson's labelling her work *The Argonauts* (2015) as autotheory.[10] Nelson's work, as Max Cavitch (2022) states, has been "everybody's go-to example of autotheory" since Nelson distinguished it from the traditional life-writing when telling the reader about her and her partner, Harry Dodge's life.[11] She transforms the practice of life-writing into life-thinking by critically sharing details from her experience of pregnancy, love, and sexuality, alongside her negotiations with Harry on theoretical topics such as language and sexuality. Expanding upon the act of writing solely from the personal experiences, Nelson philosophizes on topics including sexuality, gender, and language through citing critical theorists and philosophers like Roland Barthes, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Judith Butler. Moreover, she does this collaboratively with Harry. Hence, this collaborative life-thinking also challenges the idea of singular, sovereign self. All these considered, Nelson's work has sparked up the discussions concerning autotheory; that is, autotheory's feminist genealogies, definitions, and practices.

Although Nelson's work has contributed to the rise of autotheory, its roots can be traced back to feminist movements from second-wave feminism to intersectionality. There are a lot of feminist writings which can be labelled as precursors to autotheory. Nelson has already acknowledged that she borrowed the term 'autotheory' from the writer and curator Paul B. Preciado's novel, *Testo Yonqui* (*Testo Junkie*) (2008).[12] In fact, it was not Preciado who coined the term, but it is Stacey Young (1997) who is credited with generating its adjective form and as the first scholar to mention its feminist lineage. In *Changing the Wor(l)d*, Young describes the feminist anthologies written by (queer) women of colour like Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981)[13] as autotheoretical. In Young's view, these autotheoretical anthologies are the "counter-discourses" emerging from the third-wave feminist and intersectional approaches as well as the famous slogan of second-wave feminism, "the personal is the political."[14] They are linked to discursive politics, serving as an attack not only on patriarchal discourse itself but also on its internalization by feminists. They call for resistance to "the hegemonic subject of feminism" who is "the white heterosexual cisgender woman with class privilege."[15] In this sense, Young's coinage to highlight coloured women writers' endeavour to give voice to non-hegemonic subjects and make them visible through the articulation of their lived experiences can be considered fundamental to the autotheoretical turn in the present-day literature and art. This article aims to explore the feminist roots of autotheory, tracing the evolution from the eighteenth-century women's writings to the poststructural French feminist deconstruction of phallocentric discourse, as well as theories of gender performativity and intersectionality.

[10] Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts: A Memoir* (Graywolf Press, 2015).
[11] Max Cavitch, "Everybody's Autotheory," *Modern Language Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2022): 81–116. https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-9475043
[12] Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson. (New York, NY: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013).
[13] Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, (eds.) *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (London: Persephone Press, 1981).
[14] Young, *Changing the Wor(l)d,* 61.
[15] Young, *Changing the Wor(l)d*, quoted in Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 32.

1.1. Early Feminist Autotheory: Confessionalism in Women's Writing from the 18th-Century to Post-Internet Feminism

Most of women writers' confessional texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are antecedents to autotheory. Confessionalism and self-disclosure can also be observed in medieval and early modern works including Saint Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings.[16] However, what makes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's confessional texts distinctive and an aspect of feminist autotheory is particularly their integrating the confessional tone of writing with feminist criticality in order to fight against the patriarchal structures generating and reinforcing gender inequalities. These women writers combine the self-disclosure component of their writing with a critical evaluation; that is, an evaluation of their individual experiences of oppression. Hence, for women writers, this writing practice becomes a site of resistance and a way of reclaiming their female subjectivity supressed by man-dominated culture.

Of the numerous confessional works, Sojourner Truth's speech *Ain't I a Woman?* (1851)[17] and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper (1892)"[18] with her subsequent essay, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" (1913) are just a few preliminary examples of feminist autotheory.[19] Both writers bridge the separation between the critical and the confessional in order to critically evaluate oppressive structures. Referring to her own life experiences of the patriarchal domination and subjugation, Truth seeks to convince people that women, regardless of their race, must be treated as equals to men. Like Truth, Gilman shares her experiences with readers to make them critically think about repression and victimization women suffer from in man-dominated societies. She demonstrates how men manipulate even the sciences of medicine and psychiatry to control and subjugate women. She writes "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a tale of a nineteenth-century woman suffering from mental disorders and her husband's and the male doctor's ways of treatment which can be described as a rest cure keeping her away from social interactions and mental activities including writing. After the publication of her story in 1913, Gilman explains what motivates her to write this story in "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'." It is her personal experiences of the man-inflicted 'madness,' and the detrimental treatment offered to her which she wants to disclose. Therefore, her intention is to attack the treatment of rest-cure, normalized and promoted by patriarchy by exposing how unbearable and unacceptable such inhibiting treatment is for women. All in all, Truth and Gilman both write about their lived experiences of oppression imposed by patriarchal structures such as marriage, education and medicine. Ultimately, this act of self-disclosure provides the opportunity to challenge and problematize these structures. The combination of confessional style of writing and criticality continues in the subsequent feminist discourses, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s.

Women's literature in the 1950s and 60s continues to depict their personal struggles with patriarchy, intertwining the critical with their lived experiences of societal constraints. The confessional works of the postwar decades, such as those by Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, are good illustrations of this combination. According to Fournier (2018), for instance, Plath's poems and her only novel *The Bell Jar* (1963)[20] show "a woman's experience of madness of patriarchy" and explore her "taboo experiences of mental illness, suicidal ideation, and personal relationships."[21] In Plath's works, the confessional tone about mental disorders serves as a means of challenging patriarchy. Similarly, Sexton's poetry embodies the critical-confessional approach to mental illness along with her personal relationships

[16] Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989).; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000).

[17] Sojourner Truth, *Ain't I a Woman?* (National Geographic Books, 2021).

[18] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Virago Press, 1981).

[19] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "'Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper?'," *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 17, no. 4 (2011): 265. https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.17.4.265

[20] Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, 1st US ed. (Harper & Row, 1971).

[21] Lauren Fournier, "Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice," *A/B Auto/Biography Studies* 33, no. 3 (September 2, 2018): 646. https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2018.1499495

with her mother and daughter. In her poems, Sexton reflects upon her own experience of illness under patriarchal norms. In *Live or Die*, which is a collection of her poetry (1962-66), she confesses how desperate she feels because of not being understood by others.[22]

The confessional-critical style that Plath and Sexton used can also be seen in succeeding feminist works of the post-1960s. The twenty-first-century post-internet feminist texts and artworks involve a confessional tone which is meant to critique oppressive structures. Intersectional feminist movements on social media like #MeToo share with feminist artists' combining their self-disclosure with criticality.[23] The #MeToo hashtag is autotheoretical in the sense that women expose their experiences of sexual violence with the hope of resistance. In addition to such post-internet feminist hashtags, another example of the confessional-critical style is Johanna Hedva's "Sick Woman Theory (2016),"[24] which is "an essayistic text accompanied by self-images of the artist lying on their bed and sitting in their wheelchair surrounded by pill bottles and books."[25] Fournier underlines what Hedva aims to do as follows:

> It has a manifesto-like reasoning and tone: it is directly tied to social justice activism and rooted in lived experience, and it is disseminated online to promote wider accessibility of information, as a manifesto is wont to do. It advances certain calls to action, advocating for understanding different forms of agency and political participation from the perspective of a sick person. Yet Hedva does not call the work a manifesto but a "theory."[26]

In line with Fournier's analysis, it is clear that Hedva's work is an autotheoretical attempt that amalgamates her personal experience of chronic illness with her critique of theory. She overcomes the condition of inaccessibility to theory and calls for action. Hence, she gives voice to the sick and disabled.

1.2. 'The personal is political': Second-wave Feminism and Feminist Autotheory

In addition to women writers' and artists' confessional-critical writing tradition as a precursor to autotheory, second-wave feminism also profoundly contributes to the rise of the autotheoretical turn in feminist literature and art. The second-wave feminist mantra, 'the personal is political' re-shapes the critical self-disclosure in women's writing and determines the basis of feminist autotheory. Established in Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949), particularly in her argument of gender that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman," this restructuring turns out to be the foundational perspective of the autotheoretical resistance.[27] This slogan plays a crucial role in the 1960s' feminist movement as a consciousness-raising project that aimed at addressing the social, political, and cultural inequalities that women face in their daily lives. A Beauvoirian notion of gender—as something not inherent, but rather ideologically and politically constructed by patriarchal culture, broadly inspired the second wave feminism. This also enhances feminist resistance that critiques the essentialist and naturalized gender identities. In their discussion of the historical roots of autotheory, scholars like Fournier (2021) refer to this change as follows:

> The revolution of the everyday that took place in the 1960s led to a recognition of daily and domestic life as political: feminist writers, artists, scholars, and activists came to see that, as the slogan had it, "the personal is political," and that their practices (as artists, activists, educators, caretakers) could and should engage with

[22] Anne Sexton, *Live or Die* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

[23] #MeToo is "a social movement and awareness campaign against sexual abuse, sexual harassment and rape culture, in which women publicize their experiences of sexual abuse or sexual harassment. The phrase "Me Too" was initially used in this context on social media in 2006, on *Myspace*, by sexual assault survivor and activist Tarana Burke. The hashtag #MeToo was used starting in 2017 as a way to draw attention to the magnitude of the problem." "Wikipedia: MeToo Movement," Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 7 February 2025, at 19:13 (UTC). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MeToo_movement

[24] Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory," *Mask Magazine. Mask Media* n.d. 2016.

[25] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 38.

[26] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 38.

[27] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. H. M. Parshley. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

the particularities of their lived experience as women, as queer, as racialized, and so on.[28]

Fournier argues that second-wave feminism has brought attention to the everyday inequalities women face, framing them as political issues. Gender oppression is increasingly recognized as systemic, structural, and socially constructed. One prominent second-wave feminist Audre Lorde, for example, has reflected upon the oppression of women, specifically, coloured women in line with the personal-is-the-political idea. Her works *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982)[29] and *Sister Outsider* (1984)[30] display the systemic oppression women are exposed to. These examples represent Lorde's critical viewpoint as to how politics, literature, and philosophy, like many other disciplines, are male-dominated, sexist, and racist.

Thanks to feminist activist-writers like Lorde and her consciousness-raising project, feminist writers, artists, activists, and scholars have come to recognize that politically and ideologically constructed categories such as gender, sexuality, and race shape women's subjective experiences. This highlights the influence of the personal-political mantra on autotheory. Feminists have realized that their lived experiences are intrinsically linked to social and political structures, in other words, to power dynamics. Moreover, their literature and art have the potential to critically, thus politically, reflect on these experiences and challenge the dominant narrative and artistic traditions that devalue, inhibit and exclude women's experiences. In short, second-wave feminism has inspired feminist works for dismantling separations such as those between the personal and the political, the fictional and the non-fictional, and the self and the body. It has also fostered the expression of women's individual experiences of domination and subjugation and served as a site for problematizing oppressive hegemonic discourses.

1.3. The personal becomes theoretical: Poststructuralism and Feminist Autotheory

Feminist autotheory is in close association with poststructuralism. The poststructuralist critique of the Enlightenment subject and its institutionalisation in academia, which is referred to as critical theory in this article, become pivotal points which autotheory both appreciates and challenges. The first-wave poststructuralists, including Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, attack and reject the Enlightenment conception of the subject, whose foundations are deeply rooted in modernity—particularly in Enlightenment thought and further solidified by René Descartes' rationalist declaration of *cogito, ergo sum* in the seventeenth century. This idea of the human subject traces back to the Renaissance notion of individual as an intellectual and free man with his own agency, meaning that "thinking processes are not coerced by historical or cultural circumstances."[31] Translated as "I think, therefore I am," Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* foregrounds the rationalistic aspect of a human being which leads to the conceptualization of the self as conscious, autonomous and unitary.[32] According to Descartes, the mind (consciousness) and the body are fundamentally separate. While the mind is a thinking and non-physical substance, the body is a material and physical substance that takes up space. Descartes, through his method of doubt, concludes that being separate from the body, the thinking mind, that is, consciousness, proves his (man's) existence. The very fact that "I think" about – I doubt about– my senses and memories proves that I exist, and I am a self-sufficient, self-consciousness subject. The Cartesian self that constitutes the foundation of the Enlightenment subject is challenged by poststructuralism. In a nutshell, poststructuralism offers a critique of Descartes' notion of *cogito*. The poststructuralists' declaration of the death of the [Enlightenment] subject represents an anti-humanistic stance toward the Enlightenment project, resisting the depiction of the self as rational, autonomous, conscious, and, in essence, as an individual. At the centre of Foucault's arguments on discourse is the critique of the Enlightenment, underlining the failure of the Enlightenment self. For Foucault (1977; 1980), the subject is discursively constructed through the

[28] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 11.
[29] Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1982).
[30] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984).
[31] Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).
[32] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method; and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993).

mechanisms of power.[33] The subject does not originate consciousness, he is not the source of meaning or truth either. As Madan Sarup (1993) also underlines, "the individual subject was an empty entity, an intersection of discourses, … constituted by power relations, power being the ultimate principle of social reality."[34] Foucault declares the death of the autonomous, sovereign knowing self, and proposes his poststructuralist understanding of the subject as "a locus of multiple, dispersed, or decentred discourses."[35]

Like Foucault, Derrida also contests the Enlightenment project that promotes the notion of the individual self who can understand and control the world through reason and logic. While Foucault discusses subjectivity in its relation to discourse, Derrida approaches it with his method of deconstruction and he suggests that rather than having a fixed essence, subjectivity is constructed through a play of differences including linguistic, cultural, and historical factors, which prevent any universal and complete understanding of the self. Derrida reduces the subject to textuality, as he explains in *Of Grammatology* (2016): "there is nothing outside the text."[36]

Poststructuralism also influenced French feminists who came up with the criticism of the Enlightenment subject. Like Foucault and Derrida, French feminists including Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous defy the autonomous, rational, and sovereign self. They argue that the individual self is structured by discourse and constituted in and through language with no fixed essence. French feminists also pose a two-fold critique of critical theory's "declaration of the death of the subject" because of the absence of the female subjectivity, and the reduction of the subject to textuality.[37] Such ideas in French Feminism lay the foundations of autotheoretical texts. French feminists argue that the Enlightenment subject, particularly identified as 'man,' is intrinsically phallogocentric, and that critical theorists like Foucault, perpetuate this phallogocentrism. Irigaray (1985) asserts that the gendered/sexed subject is constituted in binary categories through the phallogocentric discourse, in which the rational self exclusively refers to men whereas women are considered the irrational, the outside, and the unrepresentable.[38] Sarup points out Irigaray's perspective as follows:

> It is clear to Irigaray that Enlightenment values have not been applied to women. Moreover, the faith in reason underestimated the non-rational elements in the human mind and its will to power, to control, manipulate and destroy in the name of the rational. She sees this reason as peculiarly male. For Irigaray the culture of the West is monosexual; the status of women is that of 'lesser men', inferior or defective men. She insists that there is no neutral or universal in this culture. What is taken to be neutral, for example, science or philosophy, is in fact gendered: it is the discourse of the male subject.[39]

As can be clearly seen, the Enlightenment project promotes, prioritizes and overvalues man as the singular subject possessing self-control and consciousness while women as marginalized are pushed on the periphery. To Irigaray, in a Lacanian sense,[40] women are located out of the symbolic order, thus, devoid of language which is controlled and dominated by men. In fact, what Irigaray aims to do is to deconstruct discursive practices that reinforce binary categories of the subject/object "by theorizing from the social reality of women and their experience."[41] The creation of a distinct female language is the solution Irigaray proposed for women's emancipation. This is essential to construct a discursive space through writing and theorizing from the female self, body and from women's

[33] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138.; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon. 1st American ed. (Pantheon Books, 1980).

[34] Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 73.

[35] Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 74.

[36] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2016), 163.

[37] Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," 89.

[38] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill. (Cornell University Press, 1985).

[39] Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 117.

[40] Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink. (WW Norton, 2007).

[41] Emile Levesque-Jalbert, "This Is Not an Autofiction: Autoteoría, French Feminism, and Living in Theory," *Johns Hopkins University Press* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 68. https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2020.0002

experiences, which could enable women to speak from a subject position. Irigaray thus views the female language as a means of empowerment by unfixing and destabilizing patriarchal institutions and as a strategy of resistance to the phallogocentric, master discourse, which is an idea also embraced by feminists autotheory.

The second aspect of French feminists' critique is about the reduction of the subject to a textual entity. The purely textual, or abstract self represents the internalization of the phallocentric discourse and requires the erasure of female subjectivity since it abstracts the self from the lived, embodied experiences of women. By creating impersonality, textuality also preserves all the boundaries including those between the self and the body, the self and society, women and men and reason and emotion. As a poststructural feminist, Hélène Cixous expands upon textuality through *écriture feminine* which refers to women's writing, or "a uniquely feminine style of writing" that is distinct from the master discourse in their using the female body as the main source and focus of writing.[42] She encourages women to write: "And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it."[43] Fournier underlines that as an antecedent to contemporary autotheoretical ventures, "Cixous's *écriture féminine* approached theory as an essentially masculine enterprise of 'power through knowledge,' and used the practice of women's writing as a way of distancing itself from that masculinity logic and signification."[44] Her *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (2005) is a notable example of her rejection of theory and insistence on the necessity of developing a unique style of women's writing. Encouraging women to write about and through the body, Cixous, in *Stigmata,* combines her distinctive poetic style with theory-making. She does not just write about her bodily experiences by philosophising about them, but critically writes through her body about topics varying from sexual difference and writing to literary theories. Thus, Cixous' embodied experiences serve both as a means to reclaim her feminine subjectivity and sexuality, as well as a source for generating knowledge: "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard."[45]

Following the French feminist deconstruction of the death of the subject, feminist autotheory emerges both as a response to and a reinforcement of critical theory. On the one hand, doing autotheory involves the deconstruction of the Enlightenment subject. On the other hand, autotheory is an attack on the poststructuralists' conception of the impersonalized, and textualized subject, as well as a defence of "theorizing from the (female or non-heterosexual) self"[46] as Levesque-Jalbert argues. Writing an autotheoretical text denotes a shift from an abstract theory to a more practical one. Levesque-Jalbert's discussion on the contribution of Irigaray's argument to the autotheoretical turn also aligns with Ralph Clare's (2020) account of the history of autotheory in the context of the US academy. In Clare's view, the autotheoretical theorization from the self means resistance to the academic discourse. It poses a challenge both to critical theorists' keeping women outside "the walls of academe" and to the textuality they defend.[47] According to Clare, the theoretical discourse that is abstract, textual, male-, class-, and race-centred is attacked not only by poststructural French feminism but also by postmodern feminisms.

Clare pinpoints postmodern feminist and intersectional critiques of the master discourse which privileges men while marginalizing women, queers, gay and lesbians, people with disabilities, and so on.[48] Thus, as will be explored in the following section, postmodern feminist and intersectional approaches have fostered readings, writings, and practices that disturb and subvert the dominant discourse. This has encouraged feminist writers, artists, and scholars to performatively value and reflect on their lived experiences, integrating them into the process of theory-making with critical awareness and self-reflexivity.

[42] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4, (Summer 1976): 875–93.
[43] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 876.
[44] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 50.
[45] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 880.
[46] Levesque-Jalbert, "This Is Not an Autofiction," 82.
[47] Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," 89.
[48] Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," 89.

1.4. Redefining Selfhood and Theory: Gender Performativity, Intersectional Feminism, and Feminist Autotheory

Judith Butler, a key figure in postmodern feminism, reconsiders Simone de Beauvoir's notion of gender, highlighting the fluidity of sex, gender, and body. She attacks both on the theoretical discourse and on the feminist frameworks defining 'women' as a homogenous, unified group, preserving the binary categories of gender while erasing the otherized and oppressed identities. Butler (1988; 1990) argues that gender is not a fixed essence, but performatively constructed through repeated, stylized acts.[49] These performances are governed by cultural expectations, societal norms, and hegemonic discourses that create and regulate the normativity of heterosexuality.

To better understand Butler's gender performativity theory and its influence on feminist autotheory, one must examine her critical approach to the theoretical discourse and feminist frameworks that are based on 'sexual difference', accepting the binary categories of gender as normal and natural. Butler's notion of gender as fluid and performative embraces non-normative and non-binary gender categories. According to Butler, regarding sexual difference as "an operative cultural distinction" presents challenges for feminist goals, particularly for marginalized identities, as it limits the expression of "the diverse experiences of women." [50] This is because gender is not a stable, consistent and given entity:

> [It] is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds.[51]

Butler critiques the theoretical discourse, specifically identity politics and feminist discourse that essentialize 'sexual difference,' arguing that they fail to account for the diverse experiences of peripheral groups like queers, gays and lesbians. The conceptualization of gender as fluid and performative creates an opportunity for the emancipation of marginalized identities, offering the potential to overthrow the discourse that underpins binary gender categories.

Since gender is a fluid process, a construct, or a historical idea, it can be a powerful tool for challenging and subverting the societal norms reinforcing heteronormativity. Because of its performative nature, it is constantly open to revision, reconstruction, redefinition and transformation. Furthermore, due to her belief in the potential of change, Butler encourages performative re-readings of Western philosophical texts from the perspectives of the marginalized groups. Re-reading can express diverse lived experiences of women, queer, gay and lesbians. It can also expose the artificiality of the so-called universal truths and offer alternative ways of understanding and producing new forms of knowledge. For Butler, it is necessary for establishing "philosophy as a cultural practice, and to criticize its tenets from marginalized cultural locations."[52] It allows the marginalized to dismantle the master discourse and to bridge the theoretical and the practical.

Chris Kraus' autotheoretical work *I Love Dick* (1997) is a classic example of performatively undoing the boundaries between the theoretical and the personal, as well as the personal and the fictional.[53] This characteristic of autotheory can be viewed as "discursive political activism."[54] Kraus destabilizes these boundaries through the

[49] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).; Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31. https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893

[50] Butler, "Performative Acts," 531.

[51] Butler, "Performative Acts," 531.

[52] Butler, "Performative Acts," 530.

[53] Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*, (Semiotext(e), 1997).

[54] Arianne Zwartjes. "Under the Skin: An Exploration of Autotheory," *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019). Accessed 1 April 2023. https://www.assayjournal.com/arianne-zwartjes8203-under-the-skin-an-exploration-of-autotheory-61.html

character, Chris Kraus, who represents the author herself. She explores Chris' marriage life, her infatuation with a cultural critic called Dick, and the unsent letters she and her husband write to him. Being a filmmaker in her late 30s, Chris is married to Sylvère Lotringer, who is an academic literary theorist, a poststructuralist. The dynamics of their relationship become a site for the writer Kraus' critical reflection on the discrimination she has experienced in academia which is dominated by male theorists. Kraus offers a critique of the male-dominated academia which does not welcome women's creation of knowledge:

> …while Sylvère lectured on poststructuralism, Chris drove out to Hollywood to pick up some publicity photos for her film and shopped for cheese at Trader Joe's" (25), and during the couple's visit with some friends, "Betsey and I made pancakes while Sylvère and Bruce talked Marcel Mauss and Durkheim" (101). "'Who's Chris Kraus?'. . . 'She's no one! She's Sylvère Lotringer's wife! She's his 'Plus-One!'" (116). No matter that Sylvère is both emotionally and financially supportive of Chris, the patriarchal structuring of academia, intellectual values, and the hip academic currency of critical Theory all work against Chris in various ways.[55]

Clare (2020) suggests that Chris' marriage life demonstrates the devaluation and underestimation of women's achievement due to her gender in the Western academic circle. In Kraus' life, the process of theory-making remains a privilege predominantly reserved for male-dominated academia where women are often excluded, as evidenced by Chris' position outside of academia.[56] Theory-creation, according to Kraus' depiction of Chris-Lotringer couple, does not include practice since the man-dominated academic discourse conserves the separation between theory and practice. Lotringer represents the abstraction, or disembodiment of knowledge production while Chris' lived experiences can never be included into theory-making since her embodied, personal feelings and experiences have no place in the intellectual discourse. She also attacks academic feminism which enforces compliance with the established conventions and norms.

Kraus' critical disclosure of the private to the public (the reader) resonates with transgressive potential of Butler's notion of gender performativity and performative re-reading. In her autotheoretical venture, Kraus performatively brings down the boundaries between the theoretical and the practical, art and life in a self-reflexive way. The first part of the novel is constructed in the epistolary form where Kraus and her husband write letters to Dick, Kraus' obsession. While this part reflects the lived experiences of the characters, the second part is more concerned with the critical exploration and offers insight into psychology, philosophy, art, history and culture. One chapter, for instance, is on schizophrenia and another on recent politics in Guatemala. Lastly but not least, Kraus also performatively challenges the essentialized notion of identity as unchangeable, fixed and stable. She brings up gender, sexuality, and desire for discussion via Chris' marriage and her obsession with Dick. Chris shows that she not only acknowledges the fluidity and ever-changing nature of identity, but also makes use of the transformative power of performativity. Fournier (2019) also highlights Kraus' references to Butler's gender performativity theory. She suggests that her relation to Dick helped Chris to defy the "phallocentric" role of "Academic Wife".[57] Kraus underscores the way social scripts function as performances: the failure to iterate disrupts the naturalized effect of the identities, and opens up space for the capacity to reproduce the role differently.[58] Fournier (2019) further maintains that to perform differently finally gives way to Chris' (also Kraus') transformation from the role of "philosopher's wife to that of female autotheorist."[59] She, by utilizing the confessional writing for her self-expression, personalizes the detached and disembodied experiences and knowledge. By performing as an autotheorist, Chris deconstructs her heterosexual marriage and challenges the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy.

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[55] Kraus, I Love Dick, quoted in Ralph Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," 91.
[56] Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," 99.
[57] Lauren Fournier, "From Philosopher's Wife to Feminist Autotheorist: Performing Phallic Mimesis as Parody in Chris Kraus's I Love Dick," *English Studies in Canada* no. 4 (2019): 25.
[58] Fournier, "From Philosopher's Wife to Feminist Autotheorist," 32.
[59] Fournier, "From Philosopher's Wife to Feminist Autotheorist," 28.

The postmodern feminist view of the fluidity of identities and the transformative and subversive power of performativity align with intersectional feminisms whose frameworks, following the Butlerian notion of gender, seek to understand how multiple forms of discrimination such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, etc. intersect, interact, or overlap with one another. bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sara Ahmed are some major figures of intersectionality whose genre-bending texts also embody the autotheoretical turn. Theorizing from the self for the sake of resistance and transformation is the distinguishing component of their texts. This is true, for example, in bell hooks' account of the relationship between feminist theory and the lived experiences of black people. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), hooks emphasizes the significance of blending the embodied experiences with theory for fighting against the societal norms built by the master-colonial, white-centric, and patriarchal discourse.[60] For hooks, reconsidering lived experiences in the light of critical theory is necessary to reclaim and reconstruct subjectivities for the otherized and marginalized including black women. She highlights the importance of theory to make better sense of the self and her environment as follows: "I came to theory because I was hurting – the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me"[61]. Autotheorists attach importance to bringing everyday personal life into theory in order to decolonize the traditional ways of thinking, perceiving and feeling for empowerment. Thus, autotheory offers an alternative model for knowledge production that also involves bodily experiences and lived realities of individuals. Since the construction of knowledge is essential in regaining power and a positive sense of the self, hooks points out the healing potential of the theory. It can treat the traumatic experiences of colonization, and the double oppression black (queer) women have suffered from. Theory-making encourages individuals to consciously confront their painful experiences that have been repressed and with their critical awareness, creatively figure out how to deal with the psychopathological impacts of otherization and oppression.

> Reflecting on my own work in feminist theory, I find writing – theoretical talk- to be most meaningful when it invites readers to engage in critical reflection and to engage in the practice of feminism. To me, this theory emerges from the concrete, from my efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others. This to me is what makes feminist transformation possible. Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making.[62]

According to hooks, the (traumatic) experiences of marginalization based on gender, race, and sexuality can serve as valuable resources of feminist transformation. Apparently, feminist writers, recognizing abstractness as a problem, strive to create theories that are concrete, practical and relevant to their lives and bodies. This can be achieved by grounding theories in the lived, embodied experiences of feminist writers and artists for self-awareness. Through autotheoretical practices, not only can they gain voice and visibility but also discursive existence and self-assertiveness.

Deriving theory performatively from the personal and making the theory accessible to the marginalized groups of people have become the fundamental characteristics of autotheory. Adrian Piper's autotheoretical work, *Food for the Spirit* (1971) is a good example of how the tangible experience and theory-making intertwine.[63] Influenced by hooks and Butler's ideas in her photographical work, Piper performatively re-reads Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*,[64] and produces an alternative understanding of it.[65] "Taking 'proto-selfies' with a camera

[60] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994).
[61] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 59.
[62] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 70.
[63] Adrian Piper, "Food for the Spirit, July 1971," *High Performance* 4.1, (1971): 34–35.
[64] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 71.
[65] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

and a mirror as a way of conceptually metabolizing Kantian aesthetic philosophy," Piper challenges the boundaries between theory and practice, and mind and body by reterritorializing theory through engendering it from her embodied experiences of reading Kant.

Another significant contribution of postmodern feminist and intersectional approaches to the autotheoretical practice is their response to critical theory with an emphasis on the plural and relational aspects of intersubjectivity which prioritizes communal experience, and the interconnected nature of human experience rather than individuality. According to Cavitch (2022), inspired by queer and feminist histories, autotheory disrupts and problematizes the autobiographical strengthening of the autonomous, singular self since feminist autotheory undertakes the project of reconstructing the self as not singular and autonomous but plural, diverse, relational, interconnected and dialogical:

> The term [autotheory] stands for a contemporary disturbance in the entire autobiographical field—a disturbance that, thanks in large part to the queer and feminist genealogies that inform it, helps disrupt the close association of autobiography and the prizing of ontological certainty and reorients the autobiographical pursuit of (self-) recognition away from the scripts of neoliberal individualism and toward the self's more radical and formative intersubjectivity.[66]

According to Cavitch, autotheory unravels the neoliberal, Enlightenment understanding of self and instead promotes an intersubjective identity. Thus, autotheory's way of theorizing from the embodied experiences poses a challenge to genres like memoir and autobiography. In autotheoretical works, the rejection of individual self for the sake of interpersonal interactions and shared experiences and understanding is apparent in various forms, such as citations, critical or philosophical negotiations with others, and embodying the reader as other selves, existing outside the text itself. Considering the reader as another self is the acknowledgment of the idea that the text interacts with and affects the reader beyond the written words. For example, to autotheoretically resist the singular, textual self, Nelson, in *The Argonauts*, directly addresses the reader: "You, reader, are alive today, reading this, because someone once adequately policed your mouth exploring."[67] As Clare (2020) suggests, "her work evinces a critical sincerity and recognition of otherness—a reader "outside" the text who is actually a real person, not simply a textual game-player."[68] Therefore, while opposing both the singular self and the poststructural concept of the textual self, Nelson, by incorporating the reader as an autotheoretical practice, adopts a postmodern view of intersubjectivity that requires establishing connections between individuals for the "joint attention", cocreation of meaning, "emotional synchronization" and "mutual affective exchange."[69] This is a challenge that destabilizes traditional academic scholarship where competition, rivalry, hierarchy and hostility are prevalent.

Creating a relational and cooperative self within autotheoretical works is also obvious in their collaborative writing, or a shared production of an artwork, as Nelson's work showcases. As already mentioned, Nelson employs collaborative writing with her partner Harry to subvert societal norms, to theorize from their lived experiences, and finally to embrace the concept of intersubjectivity. The collaboration includes their negotiations on topics including gender, sexuality, child-rearing, and language. Clare (2020) confirms that *The Argonauts* involves two different perspectives on language and presents how two distinct subjectivities—Nelson's and Harry's—seek to construct a space of intersubjectivity:

> Harry's view of language is that "words are not good enough" and are "corrosive to all that is good, all that is real, all that is flow," while Nelson agrees with "Wittgenstein's idea that the inexpressible is contained—inexpressibly! —in the expressed" and that "words are good enough," although she worries about this (4,

[66] Cavitch, "Everybody's Autotheory," 81.
[67] Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 17.
[68] Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," 103.
[69] Gro Trondalen, "Musical intersubjectivity," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 65, (2019). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2019.101589

> 3, 46). Here we find essentially a poststructuralist view of language's violence (Harry) versus a belief, more properly post-postmodern, in the efficacy of communicative language, regardless of its snags and drawbacks (Nelson).[70]

Clare's analysis highlights Harry's and Nelson's disagreement on the nature of language. From Harry's perspective, language is inadequate and destructive whereas Nelson's perspective points to its capacity to offer an efficient way of communication despite its limitations. This disparity in their views constitutes both form and content of the book. As a result, the self, in Nelson's work, transforms into multiple selves. The plural and relational self becomes a source for critically reflecting on poststructural and postmodern ideas, while also generating alternative perspectives and theories on topics such as language, self, body and identity.

This autotheoretical attempt to replace the singular self with the plural by introducing a variety of voices, diverse perspectives and multiple ideas is also apparent in Nelson's citations. Nelson draws on poststructuralist and postmodern theories from thinkers such as Deleuze and Guattari, Roland Barthes, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Judith Butler to explore philosophical topics like language, sexuality, and beyond. For example, she conveys her perspective on identity politics through citing Judith Butler:

> It's painful for me that I wrote a whole book calling into question identity politics, only then to be constituted as a token of lesbian identity. Either people didn't really read the book, or the commodification of identity politics is so strong that whatever you write, even when it's explicitly opposed to that politics, gets taken up by that machinery.
>
> I think Butler is generous to name the diffuse "commodification of identity" as the problem. Less generously, I'd say that the simple fact that she's a lesbian is so blinding for some, that whatever words come out of her mouth—whatever words come out of the *lesbian*'s mouth, whatever ideas spout from her head—certain listeners hear only one thing: *lesbian, lesbian, lesbian*.[71]

Nelson quotes an extract from Butler's interview as a free-standing block of text written in italics, and then expresses her agreement with Butler's frustration. She aligns with Butler's idea concerning how "the commodification of identity [politics]" is so strong that it overshadows Butler's anti-identitarian arguments.[72] The commodification of her sexuality reduces her to a lesbian identity, which disregards the complexity and the broader implications of Butler's ideas. As Nadir (2021)[73] argues, the politics of citation here can lead to questioning and unfixing the imposed, essentialist and reduced identities, which is necessary for self-discovery and self-actualization.

Throughout the book, Nelson continues citing other postmodern feminist and queer affect critics and theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to provide intersubjectivity and produce her feminist, and queer affect ideas. The citation strategy that Nelson utilizes in her autotheoretical mode of writing helps her not only to theorize from her everyday life, embodied, and bodily experiences with critical reflection on various topics but also to go beyond "the limits of the scholarly gaze."[74] Nelson also makes use of citation as part of feminist practice of memory, a feminist attempt to establish a connection to previous feminist writers. At this point, it will be reasonable to remark Sara Ahmed's discussion of citation which has a prominent contribution to the rise of autotheory. Ahmed (2017) suggests that citation necessarily promotes feminist resistance to the patriarchal, racist, and otherizing discourses:

> My citation policy has given me more room to attend to those feminists who came before me. Citation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow. In this

[70] Clare, "Becoming Autotheory," 98-99.
[71] Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 38.
[72] Judith Butler, "The Body You Want: An Interview with Judith Butler," interview by Liz Kotz, *Artforum* 31(3), (November 1992): 82-89.
[73] Leila C, Nadir, "More Life After Ruins: Autotheory, the Politics of Citation, and the Limits of The Scholarly Gaze," *ASAP/Journal* 6, no. 3 (2021): 547-550. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/asa.2021.0053
[74] Leila C, "More Life After Ruins," 549.

> book, I cite feminists of color who have contributed to the project of naming and dismantling the institutions of patriarchal whiteness. I consider this book primarily as a contribution to feminist of color scholarship and activism; this body of work is where I feel most at home, where I find energy as well as resources.[75]

Ahmed highlights the importance of citations for the theorisation of everyday life and bodily experiences. Citing theory is also valuable to preserve the feminist legacy, and to connect the feminist ideas with one another. Fournier (2021) states that citation in autotheory offers "a mode of feminist networking," and a "shared archive, a kind of textual collective unconscious for feminists."[76] Citing the feminist texts helps the theorists, writers and artists write autotheoretically and deconstruct the singular self to build plural and intersubjective selves. Nelson's *The Argonauts*, as mentioned before, is a useful example as to how the autotheoretical citation strategy has the potential to redefine intersubjectivity, problematize the academic discourse, and to bridge the separation between theory and practice. Rather than promoting the autobiographical role of a sovereign self, Nelson attempts to construct the self as relational through referring to the feminist and queer affect theorists and writers.

To sum up, thanks to the postmodern feminist and intersectional ideas such as gender performativity, self-theorization, and citation, contemporary autotheory has become a performative and self-aware attack on the traditional notions of subjectivity and knowledge production. Autotheoretical strategies such as citation, collaborative writing, and the embodied reader have become, both in form and content, a means of dismantling the boundaries, and the disembodiment of the self, the text, and knowledge.

Conclusion

This article has argued that autotheory is a revolutionary mode of writing and art that queries the constructed divisions between critical theory and personal experience. With its roots in feminist theories, writing and practice, ranging from the early eighteenth-century confessional works and the second-wave feminist mantra, "the personal is political" to the more recent intersectional approaches like those of bell hooks, autotheory denotes a significant change in how we conceptualize the relationship between the self and the theoretical discourse. It rejects the Enlightenment notion of the individual and embraces a more relational concept of selfhood. It also provides a distinctive forum for underrepresented voices to contribute to theoretical discussions.

The practice of autotheory, with its emphasis on embodied experiences and intersubjectivity, and its integration of critical theory with the personal, represents a significant departure from both autobiography and abstract theoretical, or academic discourse. It offers a way to theorize from lived experiences, challenging the hierarchies of knowledge production and expanding our understanding of what defines a theoretical work. Thanks to the autotheoretical turn in writing and art, theory now occurs outside the traditional boundaries of academia. Thus, autotheoretical works become a para-academic mode of theorisation, valuing alternative subjectivities. Furthermore, autotheory's use of citation as a form of feminist memory and resistance, along with its embrace of collaborative writing or practice, shows us its potential as a method to expand the framework to include marginalized histories. Deconstructing the separations between theory and practice, aesthetics and philosophy, mind and body, and art and life, autotheory can enable us to create more inclusive and diverse forms of knowledge and experience by offering novel and creative ways of thinking, knowing, and understanding the self, other and the world. Autotheory can also be considered therapeutic writing by relieving the feeling of inferiority, self-inadequacy that result from repression, oppression, subjugation and marginalization. Thanks to its healing power, autotheory critically and creatively connects us both to our own insights and to other's understanding and experiences in the light of theory. In short, autotheory can change not only how we write about and understand theory, but also how we perceive ourselves

[75] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017), 15-16.
[76] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 201.

and others in our relations. It is this characteristic of autotheory which provides crucial expansion on knowledge production, and creative writing and practice by extending the borders of what counts as theory and scholarship.

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