

Too
much
imagination

As far as I know, she was
spring of ¹⁹⁸³ ~~1976~~, and the
proved to be catastrophic.
though it took years for the
the past and the present
between Sachs and Lillian
courting trouble in whatever
never would have entered
Sachs's apartment in 1979.
Stern became possible. It took
that possibility was realized
directly back to Maria. Long
out one morning to buy a
address book lying on the
event that started the whole

Chapter I

‘A narrative of what wishes what it wishes it to be’: An Introduction to ‘Creative Writing and Art History’

Catherine Grant

It can be argued that all writing is to some extent creative, so what does it mean to write art history creatively? This special issue considers the relationship between creative writing and art history in a number of ways, from the creative writing of art history to dialogues *between* modes of creative and art-historical writing. The focus of the essays here is on different uses of writing in relation to art history, particularly on writing that is self-conscious of its own process, foregrounding form as much as content. This self-consciousness ranges from fictionalization to experimental styles of description to quotation. Some authors analyse historical examples of art-historical writing that have a creative element, others explore conversations between literature and art history, whilst others attempt their own modes of creative writing about art. Whilst the subject matter covered is diverse – from late Neolithic stone circles to the writing of a sentence by Flaubert – there are a number of questions that circulate, in particular the stakes involved in various forms of art-historical writing, and the claims made for the art historian’s interpretation. By paying attention to the writing of art history, and particularly creative moments in that writing, the act of interpretation as requiring some level of fictionalization or projection is often a key area of discussion in these essays. Whilst this might be seen as a commonplace in the wake of poststructuralist theory, the essays here examine the importance of creative writing in a variety of manners that extend beyond the postmodern: from engaging with modernist experimental forms of description to challenging realist models of contemporary art-historical writing to focusing on bodily sensations as a mode of descriptive analysis. By paying close attention to creative writing and its role in the writing of art histories, this collection addresses questions of authorship, authority and history across historical periods and disciplines. As Paul Barolsky has explored, one of the founding books of art history, Vasari’s *Lives*, is a work of literary invention, a work of creative writing that can tell the reader as much about the conception of history that is being presented as any notion of factual information about an artist or artwork.¹ Therefore, creative writing’s relationship to art history is not seen here as something new, but is nonetheless one that rewards close attention. As research in the humanities becomes more and more oriented towards ‘outputs’, perhaps it is timely to consider the process of writing as a key element in its own right.

In this introduction, rather than trying to write a creative history of art, a number of strategies explored through the collection will be addressed to consider what is at stake in this interchange between creative writing and art history. Underpinning the discussion here is an attention to bodies: as a body of work, the body of the art

**Detail of Sophie Calle with
Paul Auster, *Double Game*,
1999 (plate 2).**

Creative Writing and Art History
Edited by Catherine Grant and
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of Art Historians.

historian and the body of the artist. The body of the art historian is considered as a way into the desires and performances that take place in the writing of a history, the body of the text focuses on the materiality and visual nature of words on a page, and the body of the artist is discussed in relation to how art history constructs a narrative around and of an artist and their work.

Writing Art History

This collection of essays comes out of a two-year project 'Writing Art History', hosted by the Research Forum at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. This was a cross-period examination of the changing role of the art historian through a series of lectures, symposia and seminars, with a group of scholars working on a diverse range of projects considering in some way how art histories are written. One of the most fertile exchanges from this project came with a symposium on 'Creative Writing and Art History', which revealed an appetite amongst both the audience and speakers to address this issue as a way of invigorating art-historical discourse. During the course of the 'Writing Art History' project questions of how art histories are written, and the ways in which this should be addressed by our own writing were continually discussed, from anxieties around style to issues of political intention. From these discussions this collection of essays emerged, with contributions from a number of early career scholars alongside more established voices. Rather than mapping the field of the current creative writing of art history, this collection is an exploration of what creative writing has meant at different moments in art history, alongside experiments in how art history might be written now.

The discussion of how art history should be written is obviously not a new one, but a focus on creative writing as providing potential modes has been gaining momentum in recent years. In the teaching of art and art history, a number of courses are significant in their attention to interactions with creative writing. Goldsmiths' MFA in Art Writing was set up in 2008, described as a 'programme for practitioners who want to develop work that addresses art as writing, writing as art, and writing about art.'² Under the directorship of Maria Fusco, who is also the editor of a journal of experimental art writing, *The Happy Hypocrite*, this course has attracted much attention, with a number of innovators in this field teaching on the course.³ Fusco has run a number of events that explore the position of writing in art practice, particularly during her writer's residency at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 2009, although it is significant that both the course and these events have been dominated by artists, rather than art historians. There is a rich legacy of artists' writings that play with the conventions of academic scholarship, something that is addressed in essays in this collection which consider texts by Paul Gauguin and Georges Bataille. However, the stretching, questioning and refusal of academic conventions is not confined to artists' writings, although the more extreme forms are often found there. Even the most proposedly scientific art-historical discourse, as in the connoisseurial investigations of Morelli in the mid-nineteenth century, have strong elements of fiction writing, as explored here by Jeremy Melius. In his discussion of Bernard Berenson's 'Amico di Sandro', this fictional artist created by one of Morelli's most ardent followers is seen as the outcome of the art historian's desires to construct an interpretive framework, with the scientific mode of his text belying the fantasies of authorship and eroticism played out in this fiction. Whilst Morelli's methods are mostly discredited, this instance of creative attribution is a moment in which the creative writing of art history is laid bare for the reader to see.

Creative Anxieties

So why might there currently be an interest in creative writing and art history? From a slightly different perspective (that of contemporary art and performance, rather than art history in general), Gavin Butt explores anxieties around art criticism and critical theory in the collection *After Criticism*. He asks the question ‘has art indeed passed through the moment of its encounter with theory, and should we be looking for novel, less overtly theoretical, ways of writing about it and producing it?’⁴ In the present collection of essays, it is not so much a problem with theory, but an interrogation of the art historian’s voice that dominates. However, a number of key concerns are shared with the contentions set out by Butt, as he explores how this contemporary moment of anxiety is a different moment to that of postmodern deconstruction, which he ironically presents as having itself become an authorial voice within the university:

What does the undergraduate student do in order to substantiate his argument about, for example, the representation of masculinity in contemporary art? Answer: he cites the proper name Derrida (or similar), and the authority of his body (of work), in order to underwrite his analysis of masculinity’s rhetoric of ‘presence’.⁵

Butt explores an unease with the conventionalization of postmodern discourse, and calls for a more performative engagement with the act of criticism, one that focuses on the act of writing and interpretation. I would expand this to include a more historically wide-ranging investigation of the ways in which art history has set out its terms, with attention paid to creative writing allowing for a discussion of the idiosyncrasies, experiments, conjectures and erasures that take place in the construction of narratives around art, artists and art historians. Interestingly, when Butt calls for a more performative, involved production, he uses the word ‘creative’ to describe what might take place: ‘the theorist, rather than being remote from that which he or she surveys, is – in the production of books, articles, conference papers, etc. – enmeshed in the very, perhaps even “creative”, production of the cultural fabric itself.’⁶ Della Pollock, in an essay on ‘Performing writing’, also points to a blurring between critical and creative writing when in a performative mode, which she says ‘collapses distinctions by which creative and critical writing are typically isolated. It is neither entirely self-constitutive (in the manner of an avowed fiction) nor referential (in the sense of pointing to or revealing a world outside language).’⁷ Although she states that not all writing is performative that blurs this boundary, the character of performative writing draws attention to the act that is taking place in the writing of a history, both with the physical presence of the writer and the writing itself as an active participant in the creation of a story. Describing performative writing, she also describes the engagement between art history and creative writing found in many of the essays in this collection: ‘It forms itself in the act of speaking/writing. It reflects in its own forms, in its own fulfilment of form, in what amounts to its performance of itself, a particular, historical relation (agnostic, dialogic, erotic) between author-subjects, reading subjects, and subjects written/read.’⁸

Although published in a collection on performance art, a number of examples cited by Pollock are from art history: Carol Mavor looking through nineteenth-century photographs of Hannah Cullwick at the Wren Library in Cambridge, ‘performing viewing’ and Jane Blocker’s engagement with the absent body of Ana Mendieta in both her art and life.⁹ This focus on the art historian’s intentions in their viewing and writing has been explored from a rather different perspective by Michael

Ann Holly in her essay describing art history as 'The melancholy art'.¹⁰ Holly argues that all art history has a component of melancholy as it attempts to resuscitate an object from the past, complicated by the object's continued existence in the present, using this idea to discuss what cannot be contained by scholarly pursuit in the writing of art histories: 'I take it as axiomatic that all written histories are histories of desire, full of both latent and manifest needs that exceed the professional mandate to find out what happened and when.'¹¹ This emphasis on desire, on feeling, on the irrational and intuitive is often put aside as an art-historical text is written. By engaging with the body of the text, whether through formal experiment or the evocation of the writer's body in the act of looking and/or writing this emphasis can be recaptured.

The challenges to the conventions of art-historical writing in the essays here assume that there is not one particular way to be a 'proper' art historian, with all the associations of propriety that this word brings to mind. One very 'improper' art historian, Adrian Rifkin, explores his wilfulness in the face of the archive, explaining how 'Some years ago, when I began to realize that the archive, in the more limited and technical sense of being a series of organized historical records, more often than not, and too easily, gave me what I was looking for, I decided that it was an interesting departure to make things up.'¹² Going on to explain how he sometimes keeps his most precious discoveries to himself, Rifkin explores assumptions of art-historical scholarship to reveal them to be conventions rather than necessities, and what it might mean to not follow their imperatives. For Rifkin, this has led to him producing a rich and varied body of writing on art, with a continual attention to the tensions between the object of study, the desires of the writer and the expectations of the reader. His excursions into 'porno-theory', as seen in his book *Ingres: Then and Now*, utilize S/M narratives written in a pulp fiction style to interject a very bodily queer presence into his discussion of Ingres, a politicized gesture that refuses to 'closet' his range of subject matter, even if (or perhaps precisely because) they may not fit easily into an academic monograph.¹³ Rifkin's main body of work indeed refuses the monograph, and instead operates in an essayistic mode, with his wide range of lectures, essays and fictions collected together in his website, side-stepping the need for publishing to always take place under the regulatory eye of academia.¹⁴ This questioning of conventions that is found so energetically in Rifkin's work is essential for both the creation of new narratives about art history, and as a reflection on what occurs in the writing of a history.

In attending to the act of writing, the desires of the art historian can be brought back into focus, with many of the essays in this collection using the body of the art historian as a site where stories are created, rather than being separate from what occurs in the text. This is done in very different ways by Nicholas Chare and Francesco Ventrella. Chare begins with his own bodily experience of the Rollright stone circles in Oxfordshire to explore modes of descriptive interpretation that go beyond the visual, imagining how his own sensations might translate to late Neolithic man's uses of the circles. Ventrella's analysis of the art historian's hat explores a number of scenes, both literary and photographic, by and of three very different art historians: Erwin Panofsky, Bernard Berenson and Aby Warburg. The hat becomes a symbolic presence for the body of the art historian and the conventions acted out by him, mapping out tensions between the rationalism of Panofsky's iconographic systems against the connoisseurial eye of Berenson and the creative comparisons of Warburg. Ventrella's links between these three art historians through their different uses of hats in both their writings and self-presentation allow for an interweaving of their actual bodies with their textual ones.

The presence of Warburg in Ventrella's essay is also felt in Holly's discussion on art history's character, with a number of art historians taking up his idiosyncratic method in the investigation of creative modes of art-historical writing in recent years. Griselda Pollock's book *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (2007), is a good example, in which she reworks the traditional art-historical book format to imagine a museum comprising images brought together from various periods and places, provoked initially by an encounter with a series of postcards of *The Three Graces* in a museum shop. Intentionally placed both inside and outside the traditional spaces of art history, Pollock uses a Warburgian approach to collect images and through them trace feminist readings which are placed in tension with traditional boundaries of art-historical investigation that delineate topics under categories of 'nation, period, medium, artist, genre'.¹⁵ For Pollock, this 'virtual feminist museum' is one that uses the term virtual ironically: not in a digital sense but instead as a museum that will only remain in the imagination, one that will not be housed by an institution. Here the body of writing is imagined as a virtual space, a museum in which text becomes one element in the curation and interpretation of objects. Text and image are employed by the writer to create virtual scenes of encounter for the reader, so that critical distance is replaced by an interplay of bodies, interpretations and historical moments. This refiguring of the art historian's relationship to the object(s) of study has been addressed by a number of contemporary authors, with another notable example being T. J. Clark's *The Sight of Death* (2006), in which his close, daily engagement with two Poussin paintings at the Getty Institute provide a frame for a meditation on what it means to look at an image and to elaborate a series of narratives around it, both from close visual analysis and historical study. Incorporating the act of looking, interpreting and writing into his text, which includes edited diary entries alongside poetry and more formal discussion, Clark writes with an intimacy that can make the reader feel uncomfortable at times and a mastery of different modes of writing that reveal a pleasure in the ways in which art histories are constructed. As he tries and discards various interpretations, he revels in the uncertainty of the images before him, presenting them as an antidote to what he sees as the dominance of the verbal, even within visual culture, in the contemporary period.¹⁶ Whether his argument convinces or not, the writing itself compels the reader to follow him on this fictionalized route through the act of writing an art history. As these few examples show, this current creative anxiety about the forms and conventions of art history encourages a situating of the act of writing, entering into the topic at hand through a specific engagement with the object, from a postcard in a shop to a painting returned to daily in a gallery.

Creative Experiments

A different approach to writing art histories is found in this collection through a number of essays that address experimental modes of writing from the early part of the twentieth century. Charlotte de Mille explores 'intuition as method', an idea drawn from the philosopher Henri Bergson, in a number of Virginia Woolf's modernist texts. Again dwelling on the act of writing, de Mille argues that Woolf employs a visual style of writing, one which focuses on how writing takes place, rather than what is being written about. De Mille attempts to use this intuitive method, which foregrounds the engagement with the artwork at the moment of looking, in a discussion of a painting by Woolf's sister Vanessa Bell. A similar interaction between modernist experiment in canvas and print is considered by C. F. B. Miller through an analysis of Georges Bataille's essay on the 'Rotten Sun',

with its concluding reference to Picasso. Miller takes up Bataille's anarchic chain of associations and extends his reworking of solar imagery back through Plato and then forward to Jacques Derrida. In this corroded solar interchange, Miller uses Bataille's symbolism of the sun as blinding and castrating rather than life-giving and masterful as a way of complicating the narratives of genius that circulate around Picasso, both as a way of re-reading his imagery and as a figure within a heroic history of art. Bataille's associative, visually driven text is seen as a parallel to Picasso's art, rather than a straightforward interpretation of it, providing another model through which to think about the body of text. This attention to visual aspect of writing is addressed in a rather different manner in Linda Goddard's discussion of Paul Gauguin's use of a collage style in his collection of quoted writings and images *Diverses choses* (1896–7). As Goddard explores, this collection of texts is normally dismissed in the literature on Gauguin, but through considering how the visual modes of collage and painting are employed in the creation of a text, Goddard allows for the complexity and delicacy of Gauguin's constructions to be assessed.

This formal linking of the visual and textual underlines the materiality of writing, the body of writing as it appears on the page. Modernist experiments dismissed realist conventions of narrative, with the visual and aural aspects of language being emphasized, rather than their descriptive capacities. This is something found in the work of Gertrude Stein, another modernist innovator, whose interest in language led her to use words almost as objects on the page, repeating words and phrases with minute differences, focusing on what she called the experience rather than the event.¹⁷ My title comes from her essay 'Regular Regularly in Narrative' (1927), in which the repetition of words make poetic combinations across the pages, and is almost as impossible to quote from as it would be to indicate a brushstroke to stand in for a whole painting. The sentence that forms my title is one of few that holds some of her alliterative interest in only a few words, and explores the intentions of narrative and how this might be thought through its form as well as its content. 'A narrative of what wishes what it wishes it to be': again we are drawn back to presence of desire and imagination in the act of writing, as described by various authors discussed in this introduction.¹⁸ Not fixed by the intentions of the author or the proposed subject matter, Stein explores what is excessive in words and their interplay, what escapes simple description, what might hide behind the purported interest in 'the facts'.

My employment of Stein's sentence as my title is not only a nod to her collection of essays from which it is taken on 'How to Write' (the lessons Stein might have to impart on this subject are not easy to follow!), but is also an act of appropriation. I first came across the phrase when watching Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey's 1977 film *Riddles of the Sphinx*. The sentence is the film's epigraph, as the filmmakers (who are both also writers) highlight their film as a Brechtian meditation on the construction of narrative as an essential part of their argument around the representation of women in literature and film and how this contrasts to everyday experience. A film-essay, *Riddles of the Sphinx* expands the ways in which writing can be brought to life, here presented as text on the screen, intertitles, text read out by Mulvey as she sits facing the camera, and as a screenplay acted out for the audience. Here creative and critical writing are interwoven with filmic scenes, staging the act of reading in different registers to activate the viewer's interpretive capacities. As has dominated my examples in this introduction, this attention to how writing is written is often employed as a way of politicizing and particularizing the act of interpretation, whether done by the reader or the writer. Their quotation brings together a moment

in the 1970s when the discipline of art history was being radically reshaped alongside a previous modernist moment of re-thinking on representation in general. This draws together two strands that have dominated my own thinking about the creative writing of art history in this introduction: the influence of 'the New Art History' on rethinking the ways in which art history is written, and how that has been taken up by a new generation of writers with an emphasis on performativity and the body, as well as how writers involved with 'the New Art History' have turned to creative modes of writing in recent years as a critical strategy, writers such as Pollock, Clark and Rifkin.

Wollen and Mulvey's film-essay also operated as a vehicle through which the visual presence of words is attended to, something that is found (albeit in a very different manner) in the writings of many modernists. To return to Stein for a moment longer, her creative engagements with art and artists often give a visual quality or solidity to words. Whilst not taking on the role of the art historian, she provides an instructive example of a writer writing with, rather than on, art. Two texts on Picasso play differently with ideas of description, changing mode from the 1910s to the 1930s. A special issue of the journal *Camera Work* contained two essays by Stein on Picasso and Matisse, with the editorial unusually stating that the focus of the issue was not the artworks, but the writing on them: 'it is precisely because, in these articles by Miss Stein, the Post-Impressionist spirit is found expressing itself in literary form that we thus lay them before the readers.'¹⁹ This introduction continues to explain how this style of writing is as different from 'current interpretive criticism' as 'the work of the men of whom they treat to the painting and sculpture of the older schools'.²⁰ Whilst Stein's writing is commended as an essential part of post-impressionism, as well as a commentary on two important artists of the movement, there is also an anxiety about moving into a more creative mode: 'We wish you the pleasure of a hearty laugh at them upon a first reading. Yet we confidently commend them to your subsequent and critical attention.'²¹ As might be expected from the author of 'Regular Regularly in Narrative', her essays use the modulation of phrases to form key ideas, with her essay on Picasso musing on the ideas of following, working and meaning. Difficult to quote, the movement through her sentences play with ideas of innovation, perception and interpretation. A couple of sentences don't do justice to her text, but give something of its quality:

Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one working and was one bringing out of himself then something. Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one bringing out of himself then something that was coming to be a heavy thing, a solid thing and a complete thing.²²

Almost three decades later, in 1938, Stein returned to write on Picasso in a rather different style, but one that also employed the materiality of words to modulate the meaning of her text. *Picasso* is one of her series of portraits in which the subject is described from many different angles and approaches, with a more descriptive writing style than her previous poetic emphasis on individual words. Here too, however, is an attention to the creation of narrative as a fiction, as something that can be altered and reassessed over and over again. In this book, Stein concerns herself with a key theme: how to create in the twentieth century. She discusses the differences between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and explores how the artist may be placed in a particularly useful position to interpret the modern world, as

is the writer. She ends with a description of flying in an airplane, and seeing the earth from the sky as a cubist painting, although none of the cubists would have had such an experience, concluding that:

Picasso is of this century, he has the strange quality of an earth that one has never seen and of things destroyed as they have never been destroyed. So then Picasso has his splendour.
Yes. Thank you.²³

Creative Fictions

As we settle into the twentieth-first century, Stein's words provoke questions of how to write about art now, in what seems to be a moment of reflection in art history. A call to take up creative modes of writing is something that has threaded throughout modernism and postmodernism, as ways of challenging authorial mastery in a variety of guises, but is not an issue that has been settled. As Stein makes clear, there is not a straightforward progression in either art or writing and their relationship to the world beyond them. In focusing on creative writing, what perhaps happens is an acceptance of the fictions, fantasies and paradoxes that occur in the writing of a history. In this collection, Patricia Rubin's essay on Henry James' portraits in fiction pay attention to the ways in which late nineteenth-century notions of portraiture are an unstable mixture of idealism and realism, individual psychology and type. Discussing the ways in which James' notions of portraiture in literature can illuminate the genre in painting, she considers a strange coincidence between the attacking of a painted portrait of James and a fictional attack of a portrait in James' short story 'The Liar'. Rubin's essay reminds us that realism is not an easy category to define in writing or art, foregrounding fiction as a mode of criticality. This close consideration of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century realism gives background to essays in this collection that consider how modernist and postmodernist experiments fight against its conventions.²⁴ Gavin Parkinson explores the dominance of realist modes of writing in art history, and calls for more creative solutions, drawing on Hayden White's 1966 request for history to be written 'using impressionistic, expressionistic, surrealistic, and (perhaps) even actionist modes of representation' with the acknowledgement that history writing is never simply stating the facts.²⁵ In parallel with his argument on the dominance of realist writing in art history, Parkinson presents a sequence of short texts written in the 'middle voice', a tense that is situated within the subject, and refers to processes taking place within rather than outside the subject, such as 'to be' or 'to sleep'. Parkinson argues that the middle voice allows for a particular kind of subjectivity that is grounded in the present moment of action, one that allows for a constant change in the act of viewing and writing. His discussion and use of the middle voice provide a contemporary parallel to de Mille's essay on intuition as method, and point to the historical recurrence of an attention to how writing is written to particularize what is being said.

This analysis of fiction in writing on art also opens up the question of the artist's body, both actual and as a body of work. What does the act of writing a history do to the artist? One example dramatizes the interaction between writer and artist, revealing the import of these narratives. Under the sub-heading 'The Rules of the Game', the French artist Sophie Calle recounts the steps between fact and fiction that led to her collaborative project with the novelist Paul Auster:

In his 1992 novel *Leviathan*, Paul Auster thanks me for having authorized him to mingle fact with fiction. And indeed, on page 60 to 67 of his book, he uses a number of episodes from my life to create a fictive character named Maria, who then leaves me to live out her own story. Intrigued by this double, I decided to turn Paul Auster's novel into a game, and to make my own particular mixture of reality and fiction.²⁶

Auster 'borrowed' events and artworks from Calle in the creation of the fictional artist Maria in his novel *Leviathan*. Calle, whose artworks often use codified episodes from her life as their base, then took up Auster's fictional elaborations and enacted two artworks that appeared in the novel: *The Chromatic Diet* (1997) and *Days under the sign of B, C and W* (1998). This conversation between the reality of Calle's life and practice, Auster's fictionalization of it and Calle's subsequent enactment of this fictionalization dramatizes the creation of narratives around artists that occur in art history, albeit rarely with such interaction from the artist her or himself. In the book project that comes out of Calle's interaction with Auster's fiction, *Double Game*, Calle's annotated pages of Auster's novel appear, with the artist correcting events with her red pen, adding comments such as 'Too much imagination' (plate 1 and plate 2). As any art historian dealing with contemporary artists knows, to interact with your subject so closely can be a delicate matter, even on points of what appear to be fact. Calle's

I Sophie Calle with Paul Auster, *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999. Annotated pages of Paul Auster's novel *Leviathan* which feature the fictional artist Maria, based on Sophie Calle. Photo: © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2010.

contacts), but as time went on I understood that she was merely eccentric, an unorthodox person who lived her life according to an elaborate set of bizarre, private rituals. Every experience was systematized for her, a self-contained adventure that generated its own risks and limitations, and each one of her projects fell into a different category, separate from all the others. In my case, I belonged to the category of sex. She appointed me as her bed partner on that first night, and that was the function I continued to serve until the end. In the universe of Maria's compulsions, I was just one ritual among many, but I was fond of the role she had picked for me, and I never found any reason to complain.

Maria was an artist, but the work she did had nothing to do with creating objects commonly defined as art. Some people called her a photographer, others referred to her as a conceptualist, still others considered her a writer, but none of these descriptions was accurate, and in the end I don't think she can be pigeonholed in any way. Her work was too nutty for that, too idiosyncratic, too personal to be thought of as belonging to any particular medium or discipline. Ideas would take hold of her, she would work on projects, there would be concrete results that could be shown in galleries, but this activity didn't stem from a desire to make art so much as from a need to indulge her obsessions, to live her life precisely as she wanted to live it. Living always came first, and a number of her most time-consuming projects were done strictly for herself and never shown to anyone.

Since the age of ~~fourteen~~²⁷, she had saved all the birthday presents that had ever been given to her – still wrapped, neatly arranged on shelves according to the year. As an adult, she held an annual birthday dinner in her own honor, always inviting the same number of guests as her age. Some weeks, she would indulge in what she called 'the chromatic diet,' restricting herself to foods of a single color on any given day. Monday orange: carrots, cantaloupe, boiled shrimp. Tuesday red: tomatoes, persimmons, steak tartare. Wednesday white: flounder, potatoes, cottage cheese. Thursday green: cucumbers, broccoli, spinach –

and so on, all the way through the last meal on Sunday. At other times, she would make similar divisions based on the letters of the alphabet. Whole days would be spent under the spell of *b, c, or w*, and then, just as suddenly as she had started it, she would abandon the game and go on to something else. These were no more than whims, I suppose, tiny experiments with the idea of classification and habit, but similar games were just as likely to go on for many years. There was the long-term project of dressing Mr L., for example, a stranger she had once met at a party. Maria found him to be one of the handsomest men she had ever seen, but his clothes were a disgrace, she thought, and so without announcing her intentions to anyone, she took it upon herself to improve his wardrobe. Every year at Christmas she would send him an anonymous gift – a tie, a sweater, an elegant shirt – and because Mr L. moved in roughly the same social circles that she did, she would run into him every now and again, noting with pleasure the ~~dramatic~~^{small} changes in his sartorial appearance. For the fact was that Mr L. ~~always~~^{sometimes} wore the clothes that Maria sent him. ~~She would even go up to him at these gatherings and compliment him on what he was wearing, but that was as far as it went, and he never caught on that she was the one responsible for those Christmas packages.~~

She had grown up in ~~Holyoke, Massachusetts~~^{Pais}, the only child of parents who divorced when she was ~~six~~³. After graduating from high school in 1970, she had gone down to New York with the idea of attending art school and becoming a painter, but she lost interest after one term and dropped out. She ~~bought herself a secondhand Dodge van and took off on a tour of the American continent, staying for exactly two weeks in each state, finding temporary work along the way whenever possible – waitressing jobs, migrant farm jobs, factory jobs, earning just enough to keep her going from one place to the next. It was the first of her mad, compulsive projects, and in some sense it stands as the most extraordinary thing she ever did: a totally meaningless and arbitrary act to which she devoted almost two years of her life.~~ ^{would more or less one year in each state} Her only ambition was to spend fourteen days in every state, and

and if she wanted to fill in for her, he'd introduce her to the boss and see if something couldn't be worked out. Scarcely pausing to think about it, Maria accepted. That was how her next work came into being, a piece that eventually came to be known as *The Naked Lady*. Maria asked a friend to come along that night and take pictures of her as she performed – not to show anyone, but for herself, in order to satisfy her own curiosity about what she looked like. She was consciously turning herself into an object, a nameless figure of desire, and it was crucial to her that she understand precisely what that object was. She only did it that once, working in twenty-minute shifts from eight o'clock in the evening until two in the morning, but she didn't hold back, and the whole time she was on stage, perched behind the bar with colored strobe lights bouncing off her bare skin, she danced her heart out. Dressed in a rhinestone G-string and a pair of two-inch heels, she shook her body to loud rock and roll and watched the men stare at her. She wiggled her ass at them, she ran her tongue over her lips, she winked seductively as they slipped her dollar bills and urged her on. As with everything else she tried, Maria was good at it. Once she got herself going, there was hardly any stopping her.

As far as I know, she went too far only once. That was in the spring of 1976, and the ultimate effects of her miscalculation proved to be catastrophic. At least two lives were lost, and even though it took years for that to happen, the connection between the past and the present is inescapable. Maria was the link between Sachs and Lillian Stern, and if not for Maria's habit of courting trouble in whatever form she could find it, Lillian Stern never would have entered the picture. After Maria turned up at Sachs's apartment in 1979, a meeting between Sachs and Lillian Stern became possible. It took several more unlikely twists before that possibility was realized, but each of them can be traced directly back to Maria. Long before any of us knew her, she went out one morning to buy film for her camera, saw a little black address book lying on the ground, and picked it up. That was the event that started the whole miserable story. Maria opened the

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2 Sophie Calle with Paul Auster, *Double Game*, London: Violette Editions, 1999. Annotated pages of Paul Auster's novel *Leviathan* which feature the fictional artist Maria, based on Sophie Calle. Photo: © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2010.

comments and adjustments to Auster's text show how even the most supposedly straightforward description is bent to the author's own imaginings, as gaps, doubts and absences are often filled in with suppositions and conjecture, however slight. In this instance, Auster's text also changes Calle's oeuvre by her enactment of his fictional artworks, which are then gathered together in exhibition along with the existing artworks discussed in his text. This interweaving of fact and fiction echoes the ways in which the art historian's narrative can change the way an artist or artwork is perceived, from connoisseurial judgements of quality and attribution, to dominant interpretive frameworks. Auster and Calle's collaboration is completed with Calle asking for instructions from Auster for her to follow, the artist being led by the writer, which leads to the reluctantly titled 'Personal Instructions for S. C. on How to Improve Life in New York City (Because she asked...)'.²⁷ Asked to intervene directly in the life of the artist, this writer declines to act as drastically as in the writing of his fiction, asking only for the most modest and benign of events to take place, such as smiling at strangers in New York and keeping track of the number of smiles received. In this interaction between creative writer and artist, the exchange that takes place between the writing of art history and the artworks discussed is illuminated as never simply a description of fact. The writing of a history is always to some extent a story, a narrative that the author smoothes out

in front of the reader, leaving the red pen scrawled across drafts separate from the final flow of words. Whilst this may be an obvious point, by paying close attention to the consequences of writing a history, the authors in this volume present a range of answers as to why this might still be important, from details of biographical mythology to provocations across wide swathes of the discipline.

Whilst writing this introduction, I have been aware of my own presence as co-editor of these essays, along with Patricia Rubin, and the process of selection that has taken place in the examples discussed here. As I write about the body of the artwork, of the art historian and the artist, it seems necessary to place myself, however briefly, partially or rhetorically. As an art historian writing mainly on contemporary art, my own interests in feminist art histories and postmodern subjectivities are clearly found in this introduction. As the co-ordinator of the 'Writing Art History' seminar group from which these essays arise, I have felt that it was important to choose examples that related to the conversations that took place as part of this project, often referencing the work of art historians who had been invited to speak, or whose work had come up in discussion over the course of the project. Of course, in writing about creative approaches to art history, as well as the various conversations between art history and creative writing, my own preference, histories and intuitions have drawn a narrative line through these examples, one that in part hopes to both pull together the broader themes found in the essays, and to address some of the absences found there. As I read back over this text, it is clear that my emphasis is on the ways in which

engagements with narrative conventions have been explored by politicized modes of art-historical writing, particularly that of feminism and its legacies. Perhaps fittingly for this collection, the reader may like to know that an alternative introduction may be found in the concluding essay of this collection by Satish Padiyar, one in which the act of writing is attended to in great detail, drawing a different heritage through the writing of Flaubert, Adorno, Barthes and Derrida. Forwards and backwards, backwards and forwards, the act of writing is full of revisions and reversals, ones which are not ordinarily revealed to the reader, but these are the scenes that are considered in many of the essays here as ways of finding out more about art history's stories and silences.

Padiyar's essay, first given as a response to papers at the concluding symposium of the 'Writing Art History' project, fittingly looks at the act of writing in a very detailed, but no less politically weighted, regard. Like Rifkin's interest in 'making things up', Padiyar contemplates the vertiginousness in the act of writing, the minute substitutions that occur in the creation of a sentence, drawing on Flaubert via Barthes and Adorno via Wagner. By exploring the smallest of acts, the creation of a sentence, Padiyar discusses the shift in writing styles from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, again paying attention to the influence of modernism on the act of writing. Like Stein's minimal repetitions and alliterations, Padiyar examines how the act of substitution might constitute a freedom in the writing of art history, asking:

What would it mean simply to substitute the word Duchamp for Degas, or Ghirlandaio for Gauguin? It would not only set in place a vast out-of-time-ness – delicious and perplexing anachronicity of senseless, or differently sense-producing gestures – it would also unfix our art historical careers and the names to which we tether ourselves, and for which we are known to each other, it would deliver us onto uncontrollable and unimagined terrains.

For Padiyar, as for many of the writers in this collection, the effort to write art histories creatively is about a freedom to write, but what this freedom signifies is not straightforward. Within the structures of the university, of peer review, of departmental boundaries, this freedom can be difficult to obtain, hard to define, painful to inhabit. However, with the legacy of many art historians who have challenged what it is to write an art history, not just as writers but as teachers, there are new generations of art historians for whom challenging the conventions, politics and boundaries of art history has been part of their curriculum. It is with this issue, of pedagogy, and its place within the writing of art history, that I want to conclude.

The project 'Writing Art History' combined the voices of early career scholars with a wide range of eminent art historians, continuing the dialogue of learning beyond the academic structure of postgraduate research. As this collection is dominated by new voices within art history, this conversation is one that is important here, within the pages of a journal in which experience and position is supposedly erased through the process of peer review. A return to the body of the art historian at different points in his or her career, and how that intersects with the body of the text is something that is staged in Rosalind Krauss' 1993 book *The Optical Unconscious*. In a chapter on the work of Jackson Pollock, Krauss uses a variety of writing styles to convey the construction of histories around this key mid-twentieth-century artist. She begins with a recollection of her own teacher, Clement Greenberg, quoted not textually, but imagined in an almost filmic style, recounting an anecdote about Pollock. This shift, from textual quotation to evocation of the

art historian's performance, troubles the authority of what Greenberg says. Rather than paying attention to his words, it is the way he speaks that is emphasized: 'As always I am held by the arrogance of the mouth – fleshy, toothy, aggressive – and its pronouncements, which though voiced in a kind of hesitant, stumbling drawl are, as always, implacably final.'²⁸ This scene is replayed a number of times through the essay, with minimal changes made each time, as if watching Greenberg speak anew. The repetition is also explored in the recounting of Greenberg telling anecdotes about meeting Jackson Pollock over and over again, reinforcing his version of his events through this continual re-presentation. Krauss unfolds the interpretive framework used by Greenberg and other historians such as Michael Fried through a fragmentary style of narration, foregrounding the events that did or might have taken place, presenting the actions of the historian alongside those of the artist, so that rather than a disembodied writer, we are given a number of players on a stage, vying for interpretive authority. As with Stein, and Padiyar's meditation on the smallest of substitutions, here the repetition of the scene draws attention both to the act of watching this scene being played over and over, as well as slowing the reader down as the text changes, requiring a close reading to pay attention to the nuance of both Krauss' description and Greenberg's reported speech. Krauss explores the metaphor of the detective for the work of art history, finding clues that may or may not be relevant to the narrative that will be woven to explain the presence of the corpse, which in this case is both the body of Jackson Pollock and his body of work. At the end of her filmic text which argues for the personal and professional reasons for constructing art-historical narrative as apparent 'fact', she places herself within the scene as a student of Greenberg in the late 1960s:

'Spare me smart Jewish girls with their typewriters', he laments. 'Ha, ha, ha', I reply, sparkling with obedient complicity. I think of that now as I wonder how many of us there were in those days, in the mid-1960s, smart Jewish girls with typewriters, complicit, obedient, no matter what long streak of defiance we might have been harbouring.²⁹

Here, the placing of herself in relation to Greenberg uses the specificity of both of their bodies, gestures and words to complicate the writing of a history that is about art and its writers. I often think of this scene, as it is presented to the reader, as an illustration of the blind spots that can be enacted by both the teacher and student, so that what is present is not seen or discussed. Of course, the Krauss writing *The Optical Unconscious* is not the Krauss listening to Greenberg in the mid-1960s, with this historical memory also drawing attention to her own position of authority and its potential instability.

For my own work as an art historian, it is the ways in which the creative writing of critical texts can reveal these moments – whether in relation to personal histories, the nuance of a word or phrase or the resonance with other disciplines and ideas – that bring the issue of creative writing into urgent focus in the present. Like many of my examples in this introduction, creative writing in relation to art history is often about approaching the task of art history differently, bringing to light not just information about an artwork, but also the decisions, distractions and detours that lead to one narrative dominating another. The self-consciousness expressed towards the act of writing art history in this collection is one that does not prescribe a particular style, approach or set of rules. Instead, it is about thinking around the conventions of art history, paying close attention to the phrases, words,

bodies, conversations and descriptions that make up its texts: to read closely as well as to write carefully. To return to Sophie Calle's comments on Paul Auster's account of her art and life, we might insist not on 'too much imagination' but instead on 'never enough!'

Notes

My thanks to Patricia Rubin and David Peters Corbett for their comments on drafts of this introduction, and to Sam Bibby for his meticulous attention to all aspects of this special issue. Thank you also to the seminar participants of the Writing Art History project at the Courtauld Institute of Art, with whom many of the issues raised in this introduction were initially discussed. Image costs for this essay were supported by the Research Forum, Courtauld Institute of Art.

- 1 Paul Barolsky, *Why Mona Lisa Smiles and Other Tales by Vasari*, University Park, PA, 1991. In this book and his other essays on Vasari (see also *Giotto's Father and the Family of Vasari's 'Lives'*, University Park, PA, 1992 and *Michelangelo's Nose: A Myth and its Maker*, University Park, PA, 1990), Barolsky explores Vasari's *Lives* as a work of literature that has influenced novels and fictions into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the construction of the artistic persona in literature.
- 2 <http://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mfa-art-writing/>. Accessed 17 June 2010. A similar MA course, on Critical Writing in Art and Design, opened at the Royal College of Art in 2010. Central Saint Martins runs a BA in Criticism, Communication and Curation. It is striking that these courses that combine creative and critical approaches to writing have arisen in the context of art departments, not art history. An exception is a course offered by Margaret Iversen and Marina Warner entitled 'Writing Art History' at the University of Essex in 2008 that combined an interest in critical and creative writing for art historians.
- 3 The three professors on the course are Michael Newman, Adrian Rifkin and Yve Lomax. Yve Lomax is an artist whose practice has become increasingly dominated by writing, with the publication of three books over the last decade charting an engagement with fiction, philosophy and art history (the first collecting writings from the previous two decades). In the first volume, *Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory*, London, 2000, Irit Rogoff is an interlocutor, another example of artist and writer blending their positions in writing. Rogoff's own work has addressed the question of the writer's role in the creation of art histories. Rifkin's writing will be explored later in this introduction.
- 4 Gavin Butt, 'Introduction: The paradoxes of criticism', *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*, Gavin Butt, ed., Oxford, 2005, 1–19; 2.
- 5 Butt, 'The paradoxes of criticism', 4.
- 6 Butt, 'The paradoxes of criticism', 3.
- 7 Della Pollock, 'Performing writing', in *The Ends of Performance*, Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, eds., New York, 1998, 72–103; 80.
- 8 Pollock, 'Performing writing', 78–9.
- 9 Pollock, 'Performing writing', 81.
- 10 Michael Ann Holly, 'The melancholy art', *Art Bulletin*, LXXXIX: 1, March 2007, 7–17. Also see the responses to her essay by Stephen Bann, Hayden White, Stephen Melville and Karen Lang. Gavin Parkinson also references this exchange in his essay in this collection.
- 11 Holly, 'The melancholy art', 8.
- 12 Adrian Rifkin, 'Dancing years, or writing as a way out', *Art History*, special issue on 'Contemporary Perspectives on Method', 32: 4, September 2009, 806–20; 806. This special issue can be seen as a companion to the present volume. This issue of how the art historian works is taken up in a collection of essays edited by Michael Ann Holly and Marquard Smith, *What is Research in the Visual Arts? Obsession, Archive, Encounter*, Williamstown, MA, 2008, which also complements Holly's discussion of 'The melancholy art'.
- 13 Rifkin, 'The high window (parable and excursus)', *Ingres: Then and Now*, London, 2000, 132–51.
- 14 See www.gai-savoir.net. Accessed 28 June 2010.
- 15 Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*, Abingdon, Oxon, 2007, 17.
- 16 T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*, London and New York, 2006. 'This leads back to the question of my project's politics. Of course I am more and more aware as the weeks go by that what drives these entries onward, ultimately, is an argument with the present regime of the image – in particular with the notion that some kind of threshold has been passed in our time between a verbal and a visual one the logo, the brand name, the product slogan, the compressed pseudo-narrative of the TV commercial, the sound bite, the T-shirt confession, the chat show q and a Billboards, web pages, and video games are just projections – perfections, perfected banalisations – of this world of half-verbal exchange. They are truly (as their intellectual groupies go on claiming) a "discourse" – read, a sealed echo-chamber of lies.' 176.
- 17 For Stein, events are exciting in the nineteenth century but not in the twentieth, so that existence is what matters, being rather than doing. See Gertrude Stein, 'How Writing is Written' (1935), *How Writing is Written: Volume II of the Previously Uncollected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, Robert Bartlett Haas, ed., Los Angeles, CA, 1974, 151–60; 157–8. In Haas' preface he reports: 'Notes made by Hal Levy during a Gertrude Stein lecture (in 1935) indicate how she referred to this process of direct or immediate description: "She has disciplined her mind to the point where she can concentrate on a subject until it, the subject itself, has taken form. Then, dissociating that mental unit from connotative words and meanings, she writes. She doesn't write what her subject matter looks like. She doesn't write how it feels. She doesn't write about it, or at it, or around it. She writes it."' 7.
- 18 Gertrude Stein, 'Regular Regularly in Narrative' (1927), *How to Write* (1931), introduction by Patricia Meyerowitz, Mineola, New York, 1975, 215–70; 260.
- 19 'Editorial', *Camera Work*, August 1912, np.
- 20 'Editorial', *Camera Work*, np.
- 21 'Editorial', *Camera Work*, np.
- 22 Gertrude Stein, 'Pablo Picasso', *Camera Work*, 29–30, 29.
- 23 Gertrude Stein, *Picasso*, London, 1938, 50.
- 24 Rubin's essay is a reminder that realism is not a monolithic entity, and brought to mind Caroline Arscott's remark on 'the dirt of realism', in which she discussed how realism produces fragmentation through its refusal and pressure on idealism, something not to be forgotten when realism is used as the tradition against which modernism is constructed. Comment made at Writing Art History symposium, Courtauld Institute of Art, 14 November 2009.
- 25 Hayden White, 'The burden of history', *History and Theory*, 5: 2, 1966, 111–34; 131. The full quote reads: 'it would permit historians to conceive of the possibility of using impressionistic, expressionistic, surrealistic, and (perhaps) even actionist modes of representation for dramatizing the significance of data which they have uncovered but which, all too frequently, they are prohibited from seriously contemplating as evidence.' This echoes particularly with the examples explored here that use creative modes of writing to discuss marginalized or repressed issues with the writing of art history.
- 26 Sophie Calle with Paul Auster, *Double Game*, London, 1999, 1.
- 27 See Calle, *Double Game*, 3. The resulting artwork is titled *Gotham Handbook* and is reproduced in *Double Game*.
- 28 Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge, MA, 1993, 242.
- 29 Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 309. Krauss has a picture of herself at a typewriter on the cover of her collection of essays *Perpetual Inventory*, Cambridge, MA, 2010, a collection that covers three decades of her writing.