IN THE MIRROR: REWRITING OF THE SELF. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRATICE AND GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Donatella Azzollini[1]
University of Bari
donatella.azzollini@uniba.it

Michele Baldassarre
University of Bari
Mail
michele.baldassarre@uniba.it

Double Blind Peer Review

Citation
Azzollini, D., & Baldassarre, M. (2026). In the mirror: Rewriting of the self. The interaction between autobiographical practice and generative artificial intelligence. *Italian Journal of Health Education, Sport and Inclusive Didactics, 10*(3).

Doi: https://doi.org/10.32043/gsd.v1i3.1754

Copyright notice:
© 2023 this is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Open Journal System and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

gsdjournal.it
ISSN: 3103-5744

ABSTRACT
This exploratory qualitative study examines how adults respond to AI-generated rewritings of their autobiographical texts. Three participants read variants produced through emotional intensification, narrative distancing, and a change of perspective. The findings suggest that algorithmic rewriting may function as a reflective mediation device when its outputs are critically interpreted.

KEYWORDS
Autobiographical writing; generative artificial intelligence; interpretive explicitation.

Received 2026-07-22
Accepted 2026-10-26
Published 2026-10-30

[1] Author contributions: although the authors jointly developed the overall structure of the article, Michele Baldassarre is credited with writing 1, 2, 5 while Donatella Azzollini is credited with writing sections 3 and 4.

1. Introduction

The spread of generative artificial intelligence raises new questions within the field of autobiographical practice. Writing about oneself, traditionally understood as a space for reflection, distancing, and the attribution of meaning to lived experience, now encounters tools capable of intervening in the text by modifying its tone, amplifying particular aspects, and proposing alternative narrative perspectives. This is not merely a technical transformation. The possibility of receiving a reworked version of one's own account introduces an additional element into the autobiographical process: the subject no longer confronts only what they have written, but also a version of their own text that appears simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar.

The present study examines this space of tension. Its focus is neither the capacity of artificial intelligence to authentically understand human experience nor the literary quality of the rewritings it produces. Rather, attention is directed toward the reactions such rewritings may elicit; from this perspective, algorithmic rewriting can be understood as a mediation device.

The article is structured as follows.

The first section outlines the theoretical framework, beginning with the formative function of autobiographical writing and the role of material and digital devices in processes of memory construction and reworking. Particular attention is then given to artificial communication: the chatbot is considered as a linguistic interlocutor that, although lacking embodied experience, can produce plausible texts and generate tangible effects in its interaction with users.

The methodology of the qualitative study is then presented. Given the exploratory nature of the research, the sample is intentionally small and comprises three participants with prior experience of autobiographical writing. Their autobiographical texts were collected, and three algorithmic rewritings

were generated using distinct prompting protocols. After reading the three variants, participants completed a semi-structured qualitative questionnaire.

Because autobiographical material is inherently rich in sensitive information and cannot always be fully anonymized, particular attention was paid to the protection of personal data.

The original autobiographical texts were then compared with their respective rewritings, and the questionnaire responses were analyzed qualitatively.

This study explores the hypothesis that, under specific conditions and without attributing interpretive authority to AI, algorithmic rewritings may be used as a mediation device capable of prompting new questions about one's own narrative.

2. Theoretical framework

Educational autobiography is a pedagogical practice that can foster processes of awareness, transformation, and the resignification of lived experience. In educational contexts, it functions as a formative method because it enables individuals to take their own histories as objects of reflection, reorganize the relationship between memory and experience, and attribute new meanings to their biographical trajectories (Cambi, 2002; Benelli, 2013).

In autobiographical narration, the narrator coincides with the narrated subject: the person who tells the story is simultaneously its subject and object.

This entails a shift in perspective: rereading one's own history through writing activates a process of distancing and resignification of the self. Writing about and rereading oneself involves a form of 'bi-location' (Demetrio, 1996), situated in the tension between proximity and distance.

Although autobiographical practice can employ different media—particularly visual media, which can facilitate access to narration in contexts of social or linguistic vulnerability—the present study focuses specifically on writing.

Writing constitutes a privileged space for interpretation and reflection, in which connections among experiences are constructed and meanings are attributed to lived events. Narrative identity is not immutable; rather, it is continuously shaped through interpretation and autobiographical reflection (Ricoeur, 1988). Autobiographical writing unfolds in a slow, non-chronological temporality in which past, present, and future intersect: the autobiographer writes about the past, from the present, and toward the future. Writing about oneself therefore involves constructing a provisional configuration of one's biography by selecting and interpreting experiences, without claiming to provide a linear reconstruction of events.

Self-narration does not conform to a paradigm of factual truth or documentary exactness; autobiographical material belongs instead to the domains of authenticity and interpretation.

Autobiographical thought is introspective and oriented toward intimacy (Jedlowski, 2025), yet it is also constructed within collective contexts and sustained by evocative objects, images, diaries, photographs, and personal archives. Material and relational environments help make certain memories accessible while leaving others in the background (Heersmink, 2018).

The spread of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the spaces of memory: smartphones, platforms, applications, and cloud services no longer function merely as archives, but also select and organize users' lives according to specific criteria. Through processes of datafication and interpretation, data can be embedded within frameworks that generate new existential meanings (Osler, 2026).

The introduction of chatbots based on large language models marks a further shift: technology now produces linguistic responses and can thus become a 'quasi-other' (Osler, 2026), an artificial interlocutor capable of generating real effects within interaction.

Diary writing, typically a unilateral practice, can become relational when mediated by chatbots. Although chatbots lack embodied autobiographical experience, the generation of linguistically plausible texts can elicit reactions and open spaces for self-reflection.

Communication can therefore produce effects even in the absence of intentionality comparable to human intentionality (Rivoltella, 2024). Algorithmic rewriting has no intrinsic value; its significance depends on the relationship the subject establishes with the text that is returned.

What happens when a person encounters a variant of their own account produced through a specific linguistic operation?

Kvietkute and Ness (2026) investigated how AI may become an interlocutor in autobiographical processes of meaning-making.

As the authors ask, what happens when ChatGPT participates in this process?

This constitutes a 'hermeneutic paradox': algorithmic rewriting by ChatGPT may produce reflective effects even when users know that these effects do not derive from an authentic understanding of their experience. The chatbot's response may be useful not because it is true, but because it prompts individuals to view their own histories from another perspective and to formulate new questions (Kvietkute & Ness, 2026).

However, several risks must also be considered.

One such risk is narrative deference toward AI. On the one hand, AI may appear as an accommodating interlocutor; on the other, its ability to process vast amounts of information may encourage users to perceive it as highly authoritative or even infallible. This deferential attitude can be reinforced by the oracle-like effect created by AI's orderly, assertive, and empathetic tone (Rivoltella, 2024). The central risk is that individuals may delegate to the machine the authority to define who they are (Osler, 2026).

A further risk concerns the presumed neutrality of the narrative configurations returned by AI, which may reproduce stereotyped, consolatory, or self-improvement-oriented patterns.

Using ChatGPT as a comparative tool for the analysis of autobiographical narratives, Mansfield et al. (2026) identify a tendency to transform ambiguous or painful experiences into orderly narratives of maturation, resilience, and redemption.

Similarly, Fabre et al. (2025), in their study of longitudinal interactions with an artificial narrator, found that generative systems often introduce a bias toward positivity, unexpected elements, and unsolicited narrative developments.

In the present study, AI is therefore conceptualized as a symbolic mediation device. The machine returns to the subject a text that is simultaneously recognizable and altered, and the underlying hypothesis is that this discrepancy may generate reflective effects. From a pedagogical perspective, the interest lies precisely in its capacity to generate questions.

When an autobiographical text is rewritten by a generative AI system, the core events may remain unchanged while their narrative presentation is modified through shifts in tone, attenuation or intensification of emotion, changes in point of view, and varying degrees of introspection. A gap thus emerges between autobiographical writing and algorithmic rewriting. Its potential value lies in its capacity to provoke a reaction—a reflective movement in which the subject may recognize themselves in the text, feel misunderstood, perceive distance or discomfort, reject particular formulations, or identify an element that had remained implicit in the original narrative. Rewriting becomes significant not because the machine understands, but because the subject responds.

3. Research design and methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, exploratory design and aims to examine, within a deliberately circumscribed setting, the reactions that emerge when individuals encounter algorithmically reworked versions of their own autobiographical texts.

Three participants were recruited. Each had previous experience in autobiographical writing workshops, had already produced a brief autobiographical text that remained personally significant, and voluntarily agreed to submit that text to a rewriting procedure using a generative AI system.

Given the small sample, participants' biographical characteristics are not reported, as they were not considered relevant to the exploratory aims of the study. Each text underwent data minimization and pseudonymization through the removal of proper names, specific locations, precise temporal references, and other information not essential to the analysis.

For each text, three variants were produced, corresponding to three prompting protocols:

- emotional intensification;
- narrative distancing;
- change of perspective.

Table 1*:* Prompting protocols used to generate the three rewritings of each autobiographical text

Prompt 1 Emotional intensification	**Prompt 2 Distancing**	**Prompt 3 Change of perspective**

Read the following autobiographical text. Rewrite it while maintaining the same situation, the same events, and approximately the same length. Do not add new events and do not modify the main facts. Intervene exclusively on tone, style, and depth of interpretation. Objective: to make the intimate and inner dimension of the experience more explicit. Specific instructions: Make explicit thoughts, emotions, and states of mind that in the text are implicit or only hinted at Amplify the emotional nuances already present, without introducing new ones that are not justified Give linguistic form to hesitations, ambivalences, internal tensions Do not use generic or stereotyped language Avoid excessive emphasis Maintain the concrete	Read the following autobiographical text. Rewrite it while maintaining the same situation, the same events, and approximately the same length. Do not add new events and do not modify the main facts. Intervene exclusively on tone and style. Objective: to reduce explicit emotions and introspection. Specific instructions: Reduce explicit emotions and introspection. The text must seem faithful to the facts, but told from an external gaze that introduces an interpretive distance. Use the third person singular. Avoid generalizations and maintain the concrete details of the original text. Do not use generic or stereotyped language Avoid excessive emphasis Maintain the concrete specificity of the experience	Read the following autobiographical text. Rewrite it while maintaining the same situation, the same events, and approximately the same length. Do not add new events and do not modify the main facts. Intervene exclusively on tone and style. Objective: to rewrite the text from the point of view of another character, as if he or she were narrating or observing what happened. Specific instructions: Change the narrative point of view Bring out what the character sees, interprets, or imagines about the situation. Do not use generic or stereotyped language Avoid excessive or melodramatic emphasis Maintain the concrete specificity of the experience Do not transform the text into an explanation

specificity of the experience Do not transform the text into an explanation	Do not transform the text into an explanation	

ChatGPT, a generative artificial intelligence system developed by OpenAI, was used to generate the rewritings through a ChatGPT Plus account. No advanced generation parameters were manually modified; the interface default settings were used. For each protocol, the output obtained in the corresponding session was retained, without selecting among multiple alternative generations and without editing before presentation to the participants.

For each autobiographical text, previously subjected to minimization and pseudonymization, three distinct prompting protocols were applied: emotional intensification, narrative distancing, and change of point of view. A new conversation was started for each rewriting.

After reading the three variants individually, each participant completed a semi-structured qualitative questionnaire. Data collection took place remotely in February 2026 over an approximately fifteen-day period. Participants had not been informed in advance of the specific function of each of the three prompts.

The questionnaire was organized into five areas:

a. immediate reactions to the reading, including emotions, bodily sensations, resistance, and discomfort;
b. recognition of thoughts or emotions made more explicit by the rewriting;
c. effects of distancing and changes in perspective;
d. perceptions of authenticity, distortion, and the interpretive authority attributed to the system;

e. open observations not attributable to the preceding categories.

The analyzed corpus comprised:

- 3 original autobiographical texts;
- 9 rewritings generated by the system;
- 3 qualitative questionnaires completed by the participants.

3.1 Data protection and treatment of autobiographical narratives

The use of autobiographical texts requires particular attention to the protection of personal data. Self-narratives constitute unstructured qualitative data in which potentially identifying elements are not limited to explicit references but are distributed throughout the narrative. Alongside direct identifiers, such as proper names, specific places, or immediately recognizable references, indirect details may also have identifying relevance, including family relationships, biographical events, health information, professional and social contexts, temporal sequences, and stylistic features.

In the present study, anonymization was therefore not understood as the complete removal of every situated element from the narrative. Such an approach could have compromised the semantic and formative value of the texts by transforming embodied narratives into excessively abstract material. Before the texts were entered into the generative system, direct identifiers and references not essential to the analysis were removed or replaced. The autobiographical texts were processed exclusively for research purposes, and the excerpts included in the article were selected so as to limit the disclosure of details not necessary for understanding the findings.

The guiding principle was data minimization: preserving the narrative richness of the texts while reducing the risk of participant identification.

Autobiographical narratives contain indirect identifiers distributed throughout the narrative fabric, including family relationships, biographical events, health conditions, professional references, temporal sequences, places, as well as style, vocabulary, and expressive patterns. Complete anonymization is therefore problematic because it may compromise the very situated elements that constitute the formative and interpretive value of autobiographical narration (Weitzenboeck et al., 2022; Kaźmierska, 2024; Stam & Diaz, 2023).

It should be specified that the study was not submitted for approval to an ethics committee, nor was a formal statement of exemption obtained from a competent body. The research, qualitative and exploratory in nature, involved three adult participants on a voluntary basis and used pre-existing autobiographical texts that, before processing, underwent minimization and pseudonymization procedures. Participation took place after informed consent had been obtained. Participants were informed about the aims of the research, the methods used to process their texts, their entry into a generative artificial intelligence system, and the use of selected excerpts for research and scientific publication purposes.

The research corpus, consisting of the autobiographical texts, the rewritings generated by the system, and the qualitative questionnaires completed by the participants, is stored digitally on the computer of the researcher responsible for collecting and managing the materials. Access to the complete corpus is restricted exclusively to the researchers involved in the study. Each participant had access only to their own autobiographical text and the related rewritings, and not to the texts, rewritings, or questionnaires of the other participants. The materials are used exclusively for purposes connected with the present research, its documentation, and the scientific outputs arising from the study.

The data will be retained for five years from the conclusion of the research in order to allow for any documentation and verification needs relating to the

research process. At the end of this period, materials containing information potentially attributable to participants will be deleted or, where it is necessary to retain some of them for scientific purposes, subjected to further anonymization so that the individuals concerned can no longer be identified.

With regard to processing by generative artificial intelligence, only versions of the texts that had previously undergone minimization and pseudonymization were entered into ChatGPT.

4. Data analysis

In comparing the original text and the rewritings, an analytical distinction was also adopted among three types of discrepancy. Prompt-prescribed transformations were defined as changes directly consistent with the requested operation: intensification of emotions and meanings already implicit in the first protocol, reduction of introspection and third-person distancing in the second, and a shift in point of view toward another character in the third. Autonomous model interpretations were defined as attributions of emotions, intentions, meanings, or relationships not explicitly present in the original text, even when plausible within the narrative context. Finally, unsupported additions or errors were defined as factual, temporal, relational, or contextual information with no basis in the source text or in conflict with it. This distinction prevents modifications resulting from the system's own inferences or additions from being automatically attributed to the prompting protocol.

4.1 Narrative analysis of texts

The narrative analysis of the original autobiographical texts and the three AI-generated rewritings produced through the different prompting protocols focused on the principal narrative units. For reasons of concision, the article

does not reproduce all analyzed passages in full, but presents selected examples that illustrate the discrepancies emerging from the comparison.

Table 2: Case 1- autobiographical text "My very own home."

Narrative nucleus	**Original text**	**Prompt 1 Emotional intensification**	**Prompt 2 Distancing**	**Prompt 3 Change of perspective**
Children as an element of resurfacing	«The homes where I was able and am able to meet children […] to make me always come back afloat again, rise from the depths of darkness to the splendid light of their smiles and their games.»	«Today, my breath calms only in the homes where I meet children: it is there that the darkness that sometimes inhabits me dissolves…»	«Finally, there are places intended for meeting children, spaces defined by play and by ludic interactions.»	«Only when she tells me about the children's homes, where she works, do her eyes change; there she seems finally to resurface…»

Personal home	«But my very own home exists, without my ever having really inhabited it. A home that I sought with spasmodic determination and resolutenes s in order finally to feel in the right place.»	«And yet, a "my very own home" exists, an entity that belongs to me even though it has not been fully lived. It was the fruit of an almost fierce will…»	«There is then a specific dwelling, purchased and renovated with the intention of establishin g a definitive and independe nt dwelling.»	«Then, however, the conversatio n always falls on what she calls "my very own home." I saw her fight for that apartment, determined to conquer an independen ce…»
Hom e duri ng Covi d	«Covid home, home to find refreshmen t and peace, home to find myself again in essentiality. »	«An essential refuge during the silence of Covid.»	«Used during the Covid period as a space of isolation.»	«It became her den during Covid […] where every now and then she invites us for a moment of peace.»

Home of the "we" never realized	«That home of the "we" that is not there, that home of love […] of motherhood never lived […] the space of emptiness, the space of a hole or chasm that remains inside me.»	«It is the home of the "we" […] where motherhood, remaining only an echo, would have found voice. It is an emptiness that has the shape of a chasm…»	«There remains, finally, the project of a shared dwelling never realized […] it persists as a lacuna in the succession of homes inhabited. »	«It is the home of the "we" […] the space of a motherhood that never happened […] I perceive that chasm, that emptiness that no renovation will ever be able to fill completely. »

Table 3: Descriptive observations

Narrative nuclei	**Observation**
Children as an element of resurfacing	Prompt 1: a prompt-prescribed transformation, because it preserves the image of resurfacing and intensifies its emotional value. Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, reducing the symbolic image to a more functional description. Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed by the protocol, but the statement that the protagonist “works” with children constitutes an addition unsupported by the original text.

Personal home	Prompt 1: a prompt-prescribed transformation, amplifying determination through the expression “almost fierce determination.” Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, neutralizing symbolic language and translating the home into a concrete housing project. Prompt 3: the shift to an external perspective is prescribed; however, constructing an observer who claims to have “seen” the protagonist struggle introduces a relationship not made explicit in the original and is therefore considered an autonomous model interpretation.
Home during Covid	Prompt 1: a prompt-prescribed transformation, because it preserves and intensifies the home’s function as a refuge. Prompt 2: neutralization is prescribed by the protocol, whereas defining the home as a “space for isolation” constitutes an additional interpretation compared with the original wording. Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed, but the reference to invitations extended to other people is an addition unsupported by the original text.
Home of the "we" never realized	Prompt 1: a prompt-prescribed transformation, preserving and amplifying images already present. Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, neutralizing symbolic language and replacing the “emptiness” with a “gap.” Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed by the protocol; attributing the perception of pain to another person instead represents an autonomous interpretation constructed by the model.

Table 4: Case 2- Autobiographical text on "komorebi" in the radiotherapy bunker

Narrative nucleus	Original text	Prompt 1 Emotional intensification	Prompt 2 Distancing	Prompt 3 Change of perspective
Bunker and lexicon of care	«Those were the mornings of an anomalous komorebi, the one I observed in the bunker where I went to undergo radiotherapy. Those were the days when the words radio/lymph nodes/cords /oncologist had the upper hand over the others»	«There were mornings when the light did not seem like a gift, but an interference. I went down into the bunker for radiotherapy and felt the weight of a vocabulary that did not belong to me, but that claimed to define me…»	«The radiotherapy sessions took place in an underground department, commonly called a "bunker." In that period, the everyday lexicon was limited to technical terms…»	«The bunker is always the same: underground, isolated, with that still air that radiotherapy departments have. […] She arrived again this morning, punctual, carrying with her an energy that almost clashes with the gray of the walls»

Komorebi: light, leaves, and photographs	«The sun filters through the leaves, the branches define the space with their free signs and the eyes, blinded by light, intercept the directions of the rays breaking without ever getting lost. They were together radial geometry and fractal chaos, rationality and emotion»	«It is the light that filters through the leaves, an instant in which the branches cut the space and the sun shatters into directions that the eye struggles to follow, but that the heart recognizes as home. It is a perfect tension between the rigorous geometry of the ray and the vital chaos of the foliage»	«Images of sunlight filtering through foliage, where the branches segment the space. For the woman, this phenomenon represented the intersection between radial geometry and fractal structures»	«She mentioned to me this Japanese term she likes so much, komorebi, the light that filters through the leaves»
Family morning and	«V. was not well, Tachipirina and school, even though	«V. was not well; I pushed her toward school with	«The morning had begun with the domestic	«She mentioned to me a dense morning:

scho ol	she did not feel up to it. I had accompanie d her and then I had gone back there for a meeting with the physics teacher»	Tachipirina in her body, a compromis e that left me with an annoying sense of guilt. I spoke with her physics teacher»	managem ent of daughter V., who, despite an illness treated with paracetam ol, had been accompani ed to school»	the daughter who was not well, a meeting at school with the physics teacher, the train journey»
Rea ding abo ut fune rals and thou ght of fare well	«They wrote about how a funeral takes place in Japan. Different from ours, above all very slow. […] I imagine myself thus writing prescription s for mine, in five, ten, twenty years? but in reality the thing, at the moment no,	«I was reading about funerals in Japan, about their solemn slowness, so distant from our haste to archive pain… […] But it was only an instant: I closed the thought again, I postponed it to an	«The text under examinatio n described Japanese funeral rituals, characteriz ed by an expanded temporalit y compared with Western protocols. This reading had induced a	«She spoke to me about a book […] on funerals in Japan and on their ritual slowness. For an instant […] the conversatio n slipped onto music, beauty, how she would like the atmosphere around her

	I postpone it»	undefined "later."»	technical reflection on the planning of one's own farewell»	to be, one distant day»

Table 5: Descriptive observations

Narrative nuclei	Observation
Bunker and lexicon of care	Prompt 1: in addition to the prescribed intensification, the medical vocabulary is interpreted as pressure on identity (“claimed to define me”), a formulation not explicit in the original and therefore classified as an autonomous interpretation. Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, with a neutral and distanced description of the context. Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed, but adopting the viewpoint of a healthcare professional and characterizing the protagonist as carrying an “energy” that contrasts with the ward constitute autonomous elaborations by the model.
Komorebi: light, leaves, and photographs	Prompt 1: the affective amplification is consistent with the instruction, whereas the image of the heart recognizing the light “as home” is not present in the original and is considered an autonomous interpretation. Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, with definitional synthesis and reduction of the emotional component. Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed and entails a different selection of elements in the scene; attributing a

	liking for the term (“which she likes so much”) constitutes a further inference by the model.
Family morning and school	Prompt 1: emotional intensification is prescribed by the protocol, but the “sense of guilt” attributed to the protagonist is not formulated in the original text and is therefore classified as an autonomous model interpretation. Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, rendering the episode in an impersonal and administrative manner. Prompt 3: a prompt-prescribed transformation, summarizing the episode within a more distanced relational perspective.
Reading about funerals and thought of farewell	Prompt 1: intensification is prescribed, but the contrast between ritual slowness and an assumed “haste to file away pain” autonomously expands the meaning of the text and is considered an interpretive intervention by the model. Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, rendering the reflection on one’s farewell in technical and distanced terms. Prompt 3: the change of perspective and transformation of the passage into a relational exchange are consistent with the protocol; any details not present in the original narrative unit were analytically distinguished from the simple shift in point of view.

Table 6: Case 3 - Autobiographical text on teacher Carmen.

Narrative nucleus	**Original text**	**Prompt 1 Emotional intensification**	**Prompt 2 Distancing**	**Prompt 3 Change of perspective**

Silence and fear	«We are three little girls, three friends, fortunately. But none of us speaks. [...] When one stays silent, something in the head sort of falls asleep and one can pretend that it is not true at all...»	«There is a mute tension, an implicit pact of silence [...] Staying silent is the only way to anesthetize the mind, to slip into that gray zone where you can tell yourself that it is only a bad dream...»	«Despite their physical proximity, there is no verbal communication among them»	«Now, beyond the metal, there is only silence. [...] Only a few minutes, the time necessary for that dark stain of dust and fear to remain impressed in their heads»
The rare protagonism and the descent	«The three of us were in front in line, something that really happened very rarely, because the three of us are shy little girls [...] And then teacher Carmen	«We, who usually remain invisible [...] were savoring a moment of small, rare protagonism. [...] "Go." We received it as a liberation. We went	«On that occasion, the three exceptionally occupy the head of the line. At the starting signal given by teacher Carmen, the girls begin the descent of the stairs»	«Instead they, the three who usually are not even heard breathing, those who always go unnoticed, decided to challenge me. They set off hopping [...]

	said: "Go." And the three of us set off hopping down»	down hopping...»		ignoring my voice...»
The mark on the apron	«On the white apron the rope left an indelible mark. And perhaps not only on the apron»	«The rope left a gray groove on the immaculate white of my apron. But I feel that that mark has gone deeper, under the skin, where it cannot be seen»	«At the moment of exit, the rope left a visible trace on the white fabric of the aprons»	«When I reopen, I will see the marks of the rope on the folds of the white cotton»

Table 7: Descriptive observations

Narrative nucleus	**Descriptive observation**
Silence and fear	Prompt 1: a prompt-prescribed transformation, because it makes explicit and intensifies the defense mechanism already suggested in the original (“something in your head… falls asleep”).

	Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, reducing silence to an observable fact. Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed, whereas representing the silence as an effect deliberately produced by the punishment constitutes an autonomous model interpretation.
The rare protagonism and the descent	Prompt 1: a prompt-prescribed transformation, amplifying the girls' shyness and their rare moment of prominence. Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, because it preserves the sequence of events while reducing the emotional component. Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed, but reading the descent as an intentional "challenge" to the teacher's authority and the idea that the girls are "ignoring" her voice are autonomous interpretations not made explicit in the original text.

The mark on the apron	Prompt 1: a prompt-prescribed transformation, making explicit the symbolic depth already suggested by the phrase “perhaps not only on the smock.” Prompt 2: a prompt-prescribed transformation, retaining only the material trace. Prompt 3: the change of perspective is prescribed by the protocol and anticipates the mark as an observable outcome of the punishment; in this passage, no factual addition clearly separable from the requested perspectival operation emerges.

4.2 Qualitative analysis of the questionnaires

The feedback forms were analyzed using a deductively oriented qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Four dimensions were identified in the design of the feedback forms to guide participants’ reflections:

a. the relationship between recognition and estrangement

b. the explication of implicit meanings

c. the effects of distancing and changes in perspective

d. the attribution of authenticity and interpretive authority to algorithmic rewriting.

These dimensions served as an orienting framework, while the analysis also remained open to additional themes emerging from the material.

The qualitative analysis considered two types of units of analysis. In the comparison between the original autobiographical texts and the rewritings, the unit consisted of significant narrative units, understood as text segments

referring to the same episode, theme, image, or experiential passage. For each unit, the original formulation and the three rewritings were compared, observing variations in tone, emotional intensity, distancing, point of view, additional interpretations, and any introduction of elements not present in the original text.

For the questionnaires, the unit of analysis consisted of individual response passages with autonomous meaning in relation to the research objectives. Coding followed a predominantly deductive procedure based on the four dimensions defined in the questionnaire structure, while remaining attentive to additional elements emerging from the material. Passages were assigned to categories on the basis of their semantic content and the function they assumed in the participant's response. The analysis was not intended to quantify occurrences, but to reconstruct the ways in which participants attributed meaning to the experience of reading the rewritings.

The excerpts reported in the article were selected for their ability to clearly document the discrepancies observed between the original text and the rewritings and, in the case of the questionnaires, to exemplify the interpretive categories identified. Selection also followed the principle of data minimization, favoring passages sufficient to understand the phenomenon without introducing unnecessary biographical details.

To make the relationship between empirical material and interpretation more traceable, the three participants are identified in the questionnaire analysis by the codes P1, P2, and P3, corresponding respectively to the three cases presented in the narrative analysis. The three rewritings are indicated as R1 (emotional intensification), R2 (narrative distancing), and R3 (change of point of view). When the wording of a response makes it possible to determine with certainty the version to which the participant is referring, excerpts are identified by the combined participant-rewriting code (e.g., P1-R3). In cases

where a comment concerns the overall experience of reading the rewritings, only the participant code is reported.

a. Relationship between recognition and estrangement

Across the three cases, the encounter with the rewritings produced different configurations of the relationship between recognition and estrangement. P1 clearly distinguishes among the three versions: R1 is perceived as close only in certain passages, R2 as "completely cold and impersonal," while R3 elicits a strong emotional response, to the point of tears (P1-R3). With regard to the latter, the participant states that she felt "understood and accepted as I am."

P2 initially reports a feeling of surprise accompanied by a bodily reaction of tension: "the muscles in my back were more active; I was no longer relaxed in the chair" (P2). Perception varies in relation to the different rewritings. R2 is described as "very distant and cold," to the point that it no longer conveys the atmosphere of the original narrative, while R3 arouses curiosity and is perceived as the voice of "a person who empathized a great deal and understood" (P2-R3).

P3 instead reports a prevailing sense of recognition: "I feel understood and mirrored." This recognition is accompanied by differentiated bodily reactions: "expansion in the chest" in all three rewritings, tension in the stomach associated with fear in R1, and pressure between the teeth associated with anger in R3 (P3-R1; P3-R3). The excerpts therefore show that familiarity and estrangement are not distributed uniformly across participants or across the different rewriting operations.

In the three cases analyzed, the reported bodily reactions suggest that reading was not experienced merely as an exercise in textual comparison, but elicited feelings of emotion and surprise.

But the sensation of recognition is ambivalent; the participants also report having been annoyed by details that do not correspond to the facts or by artificial formulations. Algorithmic rewriting is perceived as a text that is one's own and not one's own; its reflective capacity resides precisely in this gap, in the space in which the person can interrogate the distance between his or her own account and the narrative form produced by the machine.

b. Explication of implicit meanings

Across the three cases examined, participants report that the algorithmic rewritings expanded certain aspects of their perception of the lived experience, without reporting transformations of autobiographical memory or the emergence of forgotten elements.

The explication of meanings perceived as already present in the experience but not formulated in the original text takes different forms across the three cases. In R3, P1 recognizes formulations such as “the only oxygen capable of bringing her back up from the darkness” and “that chasm, that emptiness that no renovation will ever be able to fill completely” as corresponding to her inner experience (P1-R3). At the same time, she specifies that these explicit formulations do not produce new memories: “I do not recognize any new pieces, nor any alteration of stability,” instead defining the rewriting as “a magnifying glass that expands my lived experience.”

P2 recognizes, above all in R1, formulations capable of making explicit aspects implicit in her own narrative, including the image of komorebi as something “that the heart recognizes as home” and the reference to “our haste to file away pain” (P2-R1). The participant specifies that she does not perceive her own writing as altered and that R2, while preserving the facts, creates such distance that the original atmosphere becomes less recognizable.

In P3's case, the explication is more intense. In R1, the participant recognizes as corresponding to her lived experience formulations relating to "lack of hope," "the emptiness that crushes," "binding our will," "anesthetizing the mind," and the "innate fear of disturbing others" (P3-R1). In R3, she recognizes, among others, meanings expressed in formulations such as "they decided to challenge me" and "that they learned to stay in their place" (P3-R3). The participant states that some of these expressions "disorient me because of their truth" and that the rewritings helped her "reconnect more deeply with the emotions of that time."

c. Effects of distancing and change of perspective

The effects of R2, constructed through narrative distancing, are not uniform. For P1, the third person produces a strong loss of the emotional dimension: the participant states that the external perspective seems to "erase my conflict, my pain" and "devalues, by objectifying," her own reflections (P1-R2). P2 also perceives R2 as cold and distant, although viewing the scene from the outside does not, in her view, reduce the intensity of the experience. For P3, by contrast, distancing produces an effect of recognition: "observing the scene from the outside validated me," and the intensity of the conflict is "if anything, increased," together with greater empathy toward her own childhood experience (P3-R2).

R3 also produces different effects. For P1, the other person's point of view elicits "tenderness" and the feeling of being surrounded "by an embrace" (P1-R3). P2 describes R3 as a narrative that arouses curiosity and retains an empathetic component (P2-R3). P3 considers it "surprisingly credible" and reports that the new perspective enabled her to visualize physical details of the other person that she believed she had forgotten (P3-R3).

d. Authenticity, distortion, and interpretive authority of AI

The responses show that recognizing meaningful aspects in the rewritings does not entail an indiscriminate attribution of authority to the system. Participants, in fact, identify specific errors, additions, and interpretations they do not share. P1 challenges, especially in R3, several factual elements autonomously introduced by the model: “I do not work with children,” “I have not invited anyone for years,” and, regarding the hypothesis about the house that was never realized, she specifies that “neither time nor courage corresponds to the real reasons” (P1-R3).

P2 also identifies both factual errors and formulations perceived as artificial: she challenges, for example, the description of an “artificial darkness” in an environment she remembers as illuminated, and the idea that she drew during radiotherapy, something materially incompatible with the requirement to remain still. She also identifies expressions such as “the domestic management of the daughter” as artificial and considers the term “radiant” a caricature poorly suited to the context of radiotherapy (P2).

P3 documents numerous factual discrepancies across the three rewritings. In R1 and R2 she notes, among other things, the erroneous representation of the girls as tied to one another and an incorrect temporal sequence of their pleas for mercy; in R3 she notes the introduction of Sister Rosi’s presence in the boiler room, a circumstance that did not occur in the original account (P3-R1; P3-R2; P3-R3). Despite these discrepancies, she describes the rewriting overall as “faithful,” while acknowledging that some passages were emphasized.

Overall, the three cases therefore show an attitude of critical evaluation toward the outputs: participants distinguish formulations in which they recognize themselves from interpretations, additions, and errors that they do not consider consistent with their own experience.

5. Discussion

Although the study presents evident limitations linked to the small number of participants and to its exploratory function, in the three cases examined, the algorithmic rewritings elicited reactions that may be interpreted as signs of a possible reflective process.

This evidence does not allow generalizable conclusions to be drawn about the reflective effectiveness of algorithmic rewriting, but it does make it possible to describe some of the ways in which participants reacted to the narrative transformations produced by the system.

In the cases observed, the possible reflective value does not appear to lie in AI's ability to produce more authentic interpretations of autobiographical experience, but rather in the reactions elicited in participants by the comparison between their own text and its different reworkings.

Within the tension between estrangement and recognition, participants appeared to refocus aspects of their lived experience, opening a space for reflection on autobiographical material that had, in some cases, become relatively fixed in memory.

Algorithmic rewriting can be interpreted as a form of narrative mirror: it does not necessarily return a truth about the subject, but produces a textual configuration that the subject is called upon to recognize, contest, or reject. Precisely for this reason, the pedagogical value of AI should not be sought in the authority of the output, but in the possibility of activating critical work on the distance between the original account and its artificial reworking. The pedagogical relevance of such a device requires further investigation with larger and more diverse samples and cannot be inferred from the cases considered here alone (Vallor, 2024; Fabry, 2025).

The principal risks concern attitudes of deference toward the machine when it is treated as possessing interpretive authority superior to that of the subject.

Algorithmic rewritings of autobiographical texts may acquire pedagogical value only if they remain intermediate materials—devices that stimulate and open new avenues for reflection while retaining an instrumental role. AI may serve as a mediation tool capable of generating narrative variants and questions, but the hermeneutic work on lived experience must remain with the subject.

6. Conclusions and developments of the research

The investigation presented in this contribution sought to observe what happens when an autobiographical text returns into the hands of its author after having been modified by a generative artificial intelligence system. The limited number of participants and the exploratory character of the study do not allow generalizations, nor do they allow the reflective effectiveness of algorithmic rewriting to be established.

Rather, the findings make it possible to formulate hypotheses and identify dynamics that merit further investigation.

Expanding the sample to include a larger and more diverse group of participants could strengthen subsequent research. Further developments could also compare different prompting protocols and experiment with additional forms of autobiographical transformation.

A further line of inquiry concerns the role of educational mediation.

The present study involved a small sample of participants already familiar with autobiographical writing and was explicitly exploratory in scope.

One possible development of the research could consist in proposing guided activities of algorithmic mediation in autobiographical practice within educational contexts, in order to observe whether, and under what conditions, they help participants recognize distortions, contain the risk of interpretive delegation, and problematize attitudes of deference toward the machine.

Further studies examining the conditions under which artificial intelligence may enter autobiographical pathways as an intentionally and pedagogically oriented mediation device represent a possible future direction for research.

References

Benelli, C. (2013). *La scrittura di sé e la formazione dell'adulto*. FrancoAngeli.

Cambi, F. (2002). *L'autobiografia come metodo formativo*. Laterza.

Demetrio, D. (1996*). Raccontarsi: L'autobiografia come cura di sé*. Raffaello Cortina.

Fabre, É., Seaborn, K., Koiwai, S., Watanabe, M., & Riesch, P. (2025). More-than-human storytelling: Designing longitudinal narrative engagements with generative AI. *In Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (CHI '25). Association for Computing Machinery. https://doi.org/10.1145/3706599.3720135

Fabry, R. E. (2025). Narrative gaslighting. *Philosophical Psychology*, 38(8), 3530–3547. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2024.2373284

Heersmink, R. (2018). The narrative self, distributed memory, and evocative objects. *Philosophical Studies,* 175(8), 1829–1849. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-017-0935-0

Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research,* 15(9), 1277–1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Jedlowski, P. (2025). *Il tempo intimo della biografia.* Mimesis.

Kaźmierska, K. (2024). Anonimizacja w badaniach biograficznych – dylematy metodologiczne i etyczne [Anonymisation in biographical research: Methodological and ethical concerns]. *Przegląd Socjologiczny,* 73(4), 87–108. https://doi.org/10.26485/PS/2024/73.4/4

Kvietkute, D., & Ness, I. J. (2026). Encountering generative AI: Narrative self-formation and technologies of the self among young adults. *Societies*, 16(1), Article 26. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc16010026

Mansfield, C. D., Bauer, J. J., Booker, J., Grysman, A., Singer, J. A., & Fivush, R. (2026). What might we learn about autobiographical narrative processing from artificial intelligence? *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications,* 13, Article 182. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-06426-y

Osler, L. (2026). Knowing oneself with and through AI: From self-tracking to chatbots. In I. Werkheiser & M. Butler (Eds.), Finding our place in the digital world: *Philosophical essays on technology, phenomenology, and the environment.* Springer.

Ricœur, P. (1986–1988). *Tempo e racconto* (G. Grampa, Trans., Vols. 1–3). Jaca Book. (Original work published 1983–1985)

Rivoltella, P. C. (2024). Talking to machines: Semiotic analysis, implications for teaching and media literacy. *AN-ICON*, 3(2), 17–35.

Stam, A., & Diaz, P. (2023). Qualitative data anonymisation: Theoretical and practical considerations for anonymising interview transcripts (FORS Guide No. 20, Version 1.0). *Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences FORS*. https://doi.org/10.24449/FG-2023-00020

Vallor, S. (2024). *The AI mirror: How to reclaim our humanity in an age of machine thinking*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197759066.001.0001

Weitzenboeck, E. M., Lison, P., Cyndecka, M., & Langford, M. (2022). The GDPR and unstructured data: Is anonymization possible*? International Data Privacy Law,* 12(3), 184–206. https://doi.org/10.1093/idpl/ipac008