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The filmmaker's presence in French contemporary autofiction. From *filmeur/filmeuse* to *acteur/actrice*

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Abstract:

The materialization of autofiction in cinematic practice allows a new identification, adding to the literary author-narrator-character that of the actor/actress. The filmmaker then plays himself generating multiple and interesting procedures of this autofictional presence only possible in audiovisual narration. This article aims to analyse these procedures in French cinematic creation, in which the thoroughness and relevance of literary autofiction have a determining influence. The analysis of this practice establishes a double axis. The first classifies the films in a progressive evolution from the factualisation of the fictional (documentary starting point) to the fictionalisation of the factual (fictional starting point). The second analyses them regarding the filmmaker's presence: from the *cinéaste-filmeur/filmeuse* who stands behind the camera and records the images himself to the *cinéaste-acteur/actrice* who exclusively appears in front of it. This cinematic exploration of the self situates the filmmaker in all possible positions, developing autofictional procedures that delve into the concepts of postmodern identity and alterity using parody and irony as efficient tools. In this laboratory of the self, filmmakers experiment with the topics they address –cinematic reflection, creative search, personal self-knowledge, ideological self-criticism, social and political criticism– as well as they create valuable materialisations of resilience, empathy, sisterhood and even pedagogy.

Keywords: French cinema, autofiction, *filmeur*, subjectivity, alterity, film analysis

1. Introduction

Among the various ultra-contemporary French-speaking literary practices, *l'autofiction* is undoubtedly one of the most fertile, both in its own production and in the theoretical work it generates. Some of these literary autofictions have in turn become raw material for film creation (Monterrubio, 2018b). Besides, properly cinematic autofictions appear, whose autofictional nature has been studied to a lesser extent: Bouilly, 2006; Roche, 2006; Quéinnec, 2007; Michel, 2008; Sirois-Trahan, 2009; Libois, 2010; Fontanel, 2016, among others. This article aims to analyse French cinematic autofiction based on the filmmaker's presence in the film. Since this expression first appeared on the back cover of *Fils* by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, different authors have developed and discussed this concept within literary theory (Colonna, 1989; Darrieussecq, 1996; Forest, 2007; Gasparini: 2004, 2008; Vilain, 2010, among others). Three decades later coining the term, Doubrovsky himself defended the actuality of this practice: "Autofiction is the postmodern form of autobiography" (Doubrovsky, 2007: 64-65). Autofiction thus becomes the literary crossroads of postmodernity, which Chloé Delaume analyses in *La règle du je*: "Autofiction is an experimental genre. In every sense of the term. It's a laboratory [...] A real laboratory. Of writing and living" (Delaume, 2010: 20).

Cinematic autofiction faces a crucial question. The author-narrator-character identification of the literary work is now extended with that of the actor. When the filmmaker plays himself: “figurative and nominal identification of the author, the narrator and the character” (Fontanel, 2016: 69), Vincent Colonna’s concept of *self-fictionalisation* becomes crucial, pointing out the difference between documentary material –showing oneself– and autofiction material –different degrees of autofabulation and autoperformance. While Jean-Luc Godard shows himself in the documentary space or Agnès Varda even creates fictionalised self-portraits, the filmmakers analysed here address autofabulation and autoperformance regarding their life experience and biography.

Thus, this autofictional materialisation can be analysed as the spectrum that emerges between the two ends defined by Marie Darrieussecq’s expression: “The autofictional text is then an irresolvable text en bloc. ‘Fictionnalisation’ of the factual and ‘factualisation’ of the fictional” (1996: 378). It can be then established the “factualisation of the fictional” (documentary extremity) and the “fictionalisation of the factual” (fiction extremity) as the two ends of autofictional cinematic representation. On the other hand, the presence of the filmmaker as the protagonist of his own work leads me to analyse it equally in a second axis: from the *cinéaste-filmeur/filmeuse* who stands behind the camera filming to the *cinéaste-acteur/actrice* who only appears in front of it. I use the French expression *filmeur/filmeuse*, coined by Alain Cavalier and after used in reference to another filmmakers, since it defines the filmmaker’s position and cinematic gesture holding the camera (Monterrubio, 2019). This spectrum will also allow me to study the different materialisations of the filmmaker in relation to the topics addressed: intimate, artistic, professional, social, political, etc.

I present below the French cinematic corpus that I consider most relevant to this analysis:

- *Lettre pour L...* (1992) by Romain Goupil
- *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* (2004) by Lætitia Masson
- *J’aimerais partager le printemps avec quelqu’un* (2007) by Joseph Morder
- *Le Bal des actrices* (2009) by Maïwenn
- *Pater* (2011) by Alain Cavalier
- *Les garçons et Guillaume, à table !* (2013) by Guillaume Gallienne
- *Les Jours venus* (2014) by Romain Goupil
- *Rock’n Roll* (2017) by Guillaume Canet

The belonging of this practice to 21st century is confirmed by an exception of great importance, the film by Romain Goupil *Lettre pour L...* (1992) which he builds as a cinematic autofiction, transferring to the screen the complexity and possibilities of literary one. The filmmaker creates a second autofiction 20 years later, *Les Jours venus* (2014), which give us the measure of the diversity of the possible practices and confirm the evolution towards a progressive fictionalisation, as I will analyse below. Trying to place them on the exposed axes confirms the complexity of the task due to the multiple nonfiction-fiction hybridization procedures that are developed in the different films. All of them in accordance also with the autofiction topics: self-fictionalisation, subjectivity, alterity, experimentation, hybridization and fragmentation, among others:

told the encounter of a Super 8mm *filmeur* (Lucien and Mark respectively, played by Morder himself) with two women they wanted to film. The *filmeur* repeats the experience, but this time with a man. Following his interest in nonfiction-fiction hybridization, Morder uses an unknown actor (Stanislav Dorochenko) to insert autofiction and materialise a fortuitous encounter that the spectator can take as real, since it captures the spontaneity and discomfort of this situation with a stranger very different from him.

Days later, Morder travels to London, where he fears to have lost the agenda containing Sacha's phone number, and expresses this moment of stress, almost panic, during the recording. This new *filmeur-acteur* makes that the supposed emotion affects the filming. The image moves and shakes without any framing control (Image 1). Previously, he records a sort of invocation addressed to Sacha through a self-portrait in the dark. Autofiction conveys in both cases an emotional expression that is linked to filming, in the first case on its loss of control and in the second on its most intimate expression. Back in Paris, the filmmaker recovers his lost diary and travels to Moulin d'Andé, where he confesses his "lovesickness" (March 15). Days later, he receives a text from Sacha, who proposes to meet him on his return to Paris. Their second encounter (April 10) takes place in a cafe. Morder's recording seems to spoil the date. Sacha agrees to be recorded, but the fact of filming seems to distort the encounter. Thus, the topic of filming as an adulterant of the intimate personal relationship appears and Morder reflects on this conflict: "Which do I like more, love or cinema? Or do I like both?" (Image 2). While the *filmeur's* emotion distorted the filming earlier, now the latter would adulterate the affective relationship.

Images 1 and 2. *J'aimerais partager le printemps avec quelqu'un* (Joseph Morder, 2007)

Later, Morder receives a visit from Françoise Michaud (his friend and protagonist of *Romamor*), who he asks for advice on whether to film Sacha in their next date. His opinion is emphatic: "Allowing being filmed implies a relationship of submission." The fictionalization progresses therefore interweaving with the filmmaker's diaristic activity. It is then a third character who becomes an accomplice to it. During the conversation, Françoise takes the camera to film Morder. The filmmaker entrusts the camera to a loved one, turning the self-portrait into a portrait and the *filmeur* into *acteur*. Autofiction, so far enunciated from behind the camera, also materialises then in front of it. Finally, the third date with Sacha will take place on May 14 at the filmmaker's house, and Morder narrates it the day after, while filming the empty bed where they spent the night together:

Sacha called me yesterday, he came home in the afternoon, for the first time. I decided not to film him. It was more important for me to see him for the first time with my eyes, without an intermediate gaze [...] I already knew, when sleeping with him, that I would film the empty bed in the morning. The empty bed, the rumpled sheets, everything that belongs to the domain of the trace, therefore, to the imaginary [...] And here I am, reconstructing in the morning reality a night event that took place in their reality, ours. And it's ok. It is what I wanted, what I had wanted for this spring.

Therefore, the *filmeur*, placed behind the camera, introduces autofiction in the diary through a character/plot –factualisation of the fictional– without being identified as such, generating a *filmeur-acteur* who reflects on the cinematic showing of the intimate experience.

In *Pater*, Alain Cavalier, another leading exponent of French *filmeurs*, turns the solitude of filming into an encounter and dialogue with the actor Vincent Lindon, transforming him into co-author of the work by giving him a camera: "By revealing ostentatiously the instruments of its so particular writing, the film confesses the cinematic pact on which it is built. Foundational, capital, generic confession: in the same way as Cavalier is an actor in the film, Lindon is also a *filmeur*" (Fargier, 2011: 14). On this occasion, the experience of

reality is hybridized with the creation of a fiction: “we both film ourselves in our daily lives. And under the gaze of the spectator, we transform ourselves into fictional characters regularly and depending on the circumstances, before returning to our daily affairs” (Cavalier, 2011). While Morder inserted fiction in his diary without revealing it, proposing a discussion about its indiscernibility, Cavalier addresses this same topic through its dialectics. The filmmaker becomes President of the French Republic and Lindon its Prime Minister and expected successor. This double nature of the work will involve very interesting displacements inside its device. The film begins in a sort of *in media res*, since we attend the *filmeur*'s activity, to which Cavalier has accustomed us, but it is Lindon who records while Cavalier distributes the food on the plates. From this moment on, the spectator must decipher the nature of the autofictional device created. The *cinéaste-filmeur* records the actor whom he later legitimizes as a *filmeur* by handing him the camera in the dressing room scene, in which Lindon lends him a tie to play the President. As in Morder's film, the gesture of handing the camera to another person becomes a recognition ritual of its autofictional nature. This same *cinéaste-filmeur* records the fictional scenes in which he does not participate, also camera in hand. However, the dialogues between the two characters are initially filmed from an external point of view, but it gradually moves towards the subjectivity of both characters, until the subjective shot/counter-shot materialises, turning the characters into *filmeurs*. In addition, the character of the President continues his activity as a *personnage-filmeur* in solitude, generating reflections that he also shares with a cat.

These displacements, which constantly play with this hybridization between fiction and reality, seek to materialise the indiscernibility between both of them or rather their complementarity: it is thanks to that hybridization, to the transmission that takes place between person and character, as they know themselves, they know each other and the spectators knows them. This hybridization generates two outstanding moments. In a brief shot in front of the mirror, Cavalier, characterized as President, prepares himself and he observed his double chin; it seems then an aesthetic concern belonging to the character. In a later sequence, however, it is the filmmaker, still shirtless, who looks, in front of the mirror, at the scar from the operation that removed the skin on his neck (Image 3):

Image 3. *Pater* (Alain Cavalier, 2011)

3.000 euros, without anaesthesia. Was it the President who did this or was it me? My father had it and I didn't like it. I didn't like that, I didn't like his authority over me. I did not like his sufficiency, the pleasure that exercising his power as a high official brought him. The problem is that today I look like him. I am him, I am his clone. Therefore, I regret to judging him, and today I love him.

In this way, fiction and nonfiction feed each other through an autofictional experience that consists of placing both spaces in mirror. First, mirrors in front of oneself, as in this case, in which autofiction finds a perfect materialisation of its possibilities, showing the successful reflection result of the transfer between factualisation and fictionalisation. Second, mirrors in front of the other, as in the final sequence, in which this transfer is confronted to otherness, exposing the influence and interrelationship of this dialectics. In the last dialogue between the two, all the displacements described materialise. We attend the scene from the outside, thus situating us in the fictional space, in which the President offers the Prime Minister a pin of the French republic. Then, the Prime Minister/Lindon pulls out the camera to capture the moment from his subjectivity. Both agree to film the action in a new subjective shot/counter-shot and the President/Cavalier takes his camera and they repeat the action (Image 4). For the first time, the spectator contemplates the scene of the double filming from the exterior shot. Fiction fades back to the documentary space of these *filmeur* and *acteur playing* to make a fiction. To conclude, the last part of the scene is repeated from the point of view of the *filmeur*, thus repeating the synthesis of the film that concludes:

Image 4. *Pater* (Alain Cavalier, 2011)

Cavalier: ... and I told myself, but you are stupid... and besides, it's a film, it isn't true...
but yes, yes, it's true.
Lindon: It's a film and it's true.

Therefore, this lucid device generates autofiction from multiple displacements of the *cinéaste-filmeur* and the actor, with which different autofictional mirrors emerge, showing the nature of the frontier between nonfiction and fiction and enabling the self-knowledge and mutual knowledge.

3. Romain Goupil: autofiction as an expression of the personal is political

Romain Goupil's *Lettre pour L...* is a letter-film that perfectly fits the literary parameters that define autofictional practice (Monterrubio, 2018a: 365-374). The filmmaker creates a letter to L (played by actress Françoise Prenant), who recently knew suffering a serious illness and who prompts him to make "a good film." The *cinéaste-filmeur* creates an autofictional letter-film of a diaristic nature throughout his stays in Moscow, Gaza, Berlin, Belgrade and Sarajevo during the 1992 and early 1993. Its multiple materials demonstrate its complex hybridization and include the filmmaker's presence in all possible positions: behind and in front of the camera (Image 5) as *cinéaste-filmeur*, in front of it as *cinéaste-acteur*, and also through his voiceover. It is possible to analyse its autofictional realization by differentiating three practices: autofictional reconstructions of the past; parodic autofictions in the form of short pieces or sketches; and the present autofiction.

Image 5. *Lettre pour L...* (Romain Goupil, 1992)

Firstly, the autofictional reconstructions of the past revolve around the love relationship that the correspondents had and which are generated through different materials. To the one expressly created for the film –cinematic and photographic image, both in B/W–, their real personal archive material and the fictional material of other authors is added. In this way, Goupil illustrates the breakup with L through images from Raymond Depardon's *Une femme en Afrique* (1985), in which Françoise Prenant played the protagonist, confusing the identities of L and Depardon's character. This is an exemplary materialisation of the hybridization work between fiction and reality that this autofiction proposes.

Secondly, this narration of the past love relationship moves from the intimate space to the political one, the axis on which the film is built, through a sort of parodic autofictions in the form of brief sketches. Among them, the reflection on the cinema essence and its relationship with history takes up L's question again: "But what is a good film?", which leads to a new parody, entitled *Un film bien*, about modern cinema. In it, Goupil plays a parodic character of Jean-Luc Godard, who assigns his brigade *Un image juste* the mission of finding "an Arab, a real one, a worker, a real one" (Image 6). This parodic and ironic criticism of militant cinema is followed by a new version of *Un film bien*, this time followed by the subtitle *Le paradis est ici*, a quote attributed to Mikhail Gorbachev, and which shows the parody of a naïve socialist utopia. Later, a new sketch presents Goupil as director of the film *Fermeture pour travaux*, interviewed for television on the occasion of its premiere. It generates a parody of the achievements of the political commitment of French intellectuals and the role of the media within the film industry. This autofictional parody concludes with the same question, now asked in anger: "But fuck, what is a good film?"

Image 6. *Lettre pour L...* (Romain Goupil, 1992)

After the stay in Gaza, where Goupil reaches the highest expression of intimacy, the letter focuses on the narration and showing of his stays in Berlin, Belgrade and Sarajevo. In this present of the war conflicts in the Balkans, the filmmaker continues to ask himself, and others, about the meaning of a good film. Thirdly, already in Berlin, autofictional expression materialises through a new practice. The *cinéaste-filmeur* who meets Regine in Berlin and films her while asking about the city, then becomes a *cinéaste-acteur* who proposes her to accompany him on his trip to Sarajevo as his assistant. From this moment on, the epistolary addresser also becomes the protagonist of the present shown. In Belgrade, the documentary image and the epistolary voiceover alternate with the present autofiction in which Goupil meets the actress Milena Vuskovic (played by Anita Mancic) with whom he converses throughout a day.

In December 1992 Goupil arrives in Sarajevo with the intention of filming everything he see, in order to capture the reality of the besieged city, thus taking back his practice as *filmeur*. He meets there the filmmaker Ademir Kenovic, who guides and offers him his valuable testimony about the horror suffered by Sarajevo's citizens. Documentary images then replace any autofiction in order to show the reality of its inhabitants. Goupil also shows Kenovic's filming. This cinematic action in the middle of the war conflict makes the question more pertinent: "What is a good film?". For all the above reasons, *Lettre pour L...* becomes an exemplary cinematic materialisation of Gasparini's definition of literary autofiction: "Autobiographical and literary [cinematic] text presenting many features of orality, form innovation, narrative complexity, fragmentation, otherness, contrast and self-commentary which tend to problematise the relationship between writing [cinematic creation] and experience" (2008: 311).

More than two decades later, in *Les Jours venus* (2014) Goupil once again addresses the autofictional space by inverting the terms between factualisation and fictionalisation. On this occasion the film is created as a fictionalisation of his present life, which in this moment revolves around his family space –partner, children and parents, played by themselves–, his community –the Cité des artistes and its tenants' association– and his professional activity. In this present autofictional space, the reflection on the indiscernibility between personal and political that in *Lettre pour L...* revolved around the love relationship now occurs on his family space and his role as father and son within it, from which a constant criticism of his own ideological gentrification and the contradictions of generational change arise. The filmmaker, about to turn 60, is preparing his retirement and even his decease insurance (*Le Jour venu*). In the professional domain, the film relates his efforts to launch his new project, whose plot focuses on a *caméra catastrophe* that would cause disaster every time it films. This autobiographical episode of failure allows the filmmaker to take up the reflection on the capacity of cinema to be part of the social transformation: "what is the good?" Finally, autofiction once again produces a harsh parody of masculinity, in which Goupil's ego needs the constant presence of women with whom he establishes relationships that portrait the mechanisms of patriarchy: the relationship with his producer, played by the actress and director Noémie Lvovsky; the relationship with his financial agent, with whom he has a flirtation, played by the actress and director Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi; the relationship with a young neighbour, played by Marina Hands, with whom he shows his paternalism.

Throughout the entire film, the present fictionalisation is confronted with past family images in which the *filmeur's* activity takes place in the intimate space. They are recordings, almost entirely, of his partner and children over the years, especially in Sarajevo, his partner's city. The filmmaker's voiceover comments on the first three fragments and the penultimate of these past images (twelve in total), linking the present and the past autofictions:

It was my first shot in Sarajevo. It was in 1992. The city is under siege. It shoots everywhere. I am sheltering behind this building [...] How would I have known that in this building lived Sanda, with whom I was going to fall in love? Four years later the war is over. Same building, my son at the window. Who could know?

Thus, the two autofictions constitutes a kind of diptych, standing in mirror. The “factualisation of the fiction” of sentimental life with L. became the factual of the encounter with *Elle* (Sanda) (Image 7), whose present is now fictionalized, on which he also reflects:

Image 7. *Les Jours venus* (Romain Goupil, 2014)

I remember one day of terrible bombings in Sarajevo. I filmed this bush with dozens of sparrows twirling [...] flying away [...] coming back to rub their beaks on their legs. For me, it was the image of what we wanted: to circulate in freedom, not to have to give neither our name, nor our nationality, nor our destination.

Goupil thus reveals, through the juxtaposition of both spaces, the multiple differences between the materialisations of the *cinéaste-filmeur* and the *cinéaste-acteur*, between the naked subjectivity of the former and the multiple processes of objectivation that give rise to the latter; a sort of reality filtering that leads to its stylisation. The lucid final sequence of the film materialises a self-criticism about the abandonment of the *filmeur's* activity and its consequences in political commitment. We attend Goupil's funeral in the consolidated space of the present fictionalisation until, accompanying a crane shot alien to the previous montage, we hear the filmmaker's off-screen voice cutting the take (Image 8). For a moment, the filmmaker's gaze identifies with that of the crane, from which Goupil angrily descends because his actors, his family and friends, “are not up to the shot”.

Image 8. *Les Jours venus* (Romain Goupil, 2014)

Using parody, the *filmeur* of the past documentary images turns into a filmmaker who uses a camera crane –symbol of the capitalist film industry in total opposition to the *filmeur's* work– to represent his own funeral: “It isn't me who speaks. It's the film”. The abandonment of the filmmaker's commitment is thus symbolised with the quoted sentence addressed to Mathieu Amalric, that component of the brigade *Une image juste* that sought to make *Un film bien* of militant cinema in *Lettre pour L.* Finally, Goupil's intention of his failed project to use the cinema in order to “change the world” or “do the good” becomes the authoritarian practice that perpetuates what he intended to combat, and about which Daniel Cohn-Bendit sentences: “Trotskyist one day, tyrant always”. The sequence thus becomes a hilarious, intelligent and critical self-parody of the filmmaker's activity, evidencing the ability of autofiction to convey self-criticism, to materialise a critical gaze on ourselves.

4. The nonfiction-fiction dédoublement and the creativity research

In *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* Lætitia Masson carries out a unique experience in this space; that of creating a cinematic autofiction –the filmmaker's– from a literary autofiction –*Pourquoi le Brésil* (2002) by Christine Angot– (Monterrubio, 2018b). The writer's “transfictional autobiography” (Genon, 2013: 21) is the literary experience that leads Masson to accomplish a parallel work in her film creation. Faced with Angot's autofictional and metadiscursive work, the filmmaker fulfils the same task in the cinematic space: “Lætitia Masson adopts in *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* the same relationship to cinema as that maintained vis-à-vis to the novel by Christine Angot in *Pourquoi le Brésil?*: they both speak of themselves directly, right to the eyes of the reader or the spectator” (Prédal, 2008: 170). Masson creates an autofictional and metadiscursive cinematic space where three different dimensions coexist:

the nonfiction in her work as a *cinéaste-filmeuse* behind and in front of the camera, where the writer also appears; the fictionalisation of Masson's own life; and the fiction of Angot's novel. This *dédoublément* of the filmmaker's first-person enunciation materialises in the first scenes of the film. Masson introduces herself and explains in front of the camera the economic reasons that lead her to accept the project. This same shot is then repeated, but now the filmmaker is played by actress Elsa Zylberstein, who will also play Angot in the fictionalisation of the novel. From that moment, the filmmaker instrumentalises the nonfiction space to generate the reflection on the creative process of the film and that of fictionalisation to narrate her personal and professional experience during it. It is crucial to point out that this fictional space materialises the impossibility, precisely, of *playing herself* in the film; the inability to show her experiences in the first person: "I could never say I love you, like that, in a film. Like Christine does in her book. I film other people's love, because I can't film my own".

After the initial sequence described, the space of nonfiction is constructed through two procedures: Masson's self-filming in her intimate and solitary space; and the exterior filming in her encounters with other people. In addition, both are completed with the filmmaker's voiceover, which will also move to autofiction and fiction, thus becoming the main element of reflection. Masson portrays herself in a revealing progression. First, placing the camera in fixed positions that capture her, and in which she sometimes looks to the camera. Next, she takes it in her hands to film herself through the mirror (Image 9), while her voiceover expresses the personal conflict that the project has caused: "No producer, no money, no more actors... Nearly no husband, he is sick of my stuff." As Julia Dobson analyses, these shots "articulate a deeper ambivalence about the relationship between lived experience and creative agency" (2012: 150). Later, she films her surroundings through succinct panorama shots, along which she continues the reflection on the creative conflict she faces: "I can't do it either. The book resists me. Their story resists me. How to show the complexity of their relationship. I'm not sure I understand it." However, except for the initial scene described, we will never hear her voice-in or off-screen in this first intimate space. It is her voiceover that leads the reflection and also transfers it to the other two spaces. As Kate Ince indicates, all the above implies "a feminist phenomenological approach to embodied female subjectivity, by allowing a female director's self-reflexive approach to her own subjectivity to be explored as it is performed" (2017: 129). Masson shows not only her reflections as a result of an intellectual activity but the physical situations and processes they need to materialise.

Image 9. *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* (Lætitia Masson, 2004)

Angot's narrative implies the total exposure of her private life and the experience of the love encounter, of falling in love. Married, with a stable love life, Masson decides to explore that reality through her attraction to her children's pediatrician, and in the fictionalisation space. As already observed, the filmmaker recognises her limitations to face the narration in the first person, which even leads to the blockade. Masson meets with Angot to discuss the conflict she suffers and tries to overcome: How "exposing myself but protecting the others". Angot's answer is emphatic: "It's impossible". Her writing is born from what she calls "a hate for secret". Her literary experience is unattainable for Masson. A key self-filming then occurs and for the first time another camera captures the filmmaker while she films herself (Image 10):

Image 10. *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* (Lætitia Masson, 2004)

Hotel room, Nancy. Christine, you say there is no secrets, no shame. You say you write everything in the book. I don't film everything. There are secrets, my secrets, and my shame too. Maybe your book led me here. To Nancy, to the heart of shame.

Masson's discovery thus reveals: her artistic experience consists neither in adapting the literary work nor in filming her private life. Only two images justify her creative search: those of the real characters of her grandmother and the pediatrician. Thus, the film responds to the autofiction description offered by Bruno Blanckeman, according to which autofiction enables “to know the other of myself, through the autofictional narrative; to know myself in the other, through the transpersonal narrative” (2000: 21). The film ends with the filmmaker’s disappearance, who decides to abandon the project, offering a lucid reflection this autofiction work has led her to: “I don’t live thing to make films. I make films because I can’t live things. That’s it, mostly”.

5. Fake documentary as an autofiction device

Le Bal des actresses is the second directorial work of actress Maïwenn; an autofiction whose premise is the making of a documentary film about French actresses, and which instrumentalises fake documentary (Dobson, 2012, McFadden, 2014) as device. Thus, there is a displacement from documentary to fiction instead of the *dédoublement* of Masson's work. Maïwenn's film is the story of its own shooting. Therefore, she is its main character, portrayed in her task as the filmmaker of the project, what includes portraying her while filming the actresses with her handycam (Image 11). These first-person images are inserted into the film on different occasions. In this way, and for the first time, the presence of the *cinéaste-filmeuse* becomes a character:

Instead of occupying both positions behind and in front of the camera, Maiwenn abandons her post, so to speak, to occupy fully the position in front of the camera. She does not want to present a disembodied voice but rather shows the filmmaker, the person who is holding the camera, in order to disrupt further the divide between filmmaker and actress, between creator and the subject of creation (McFadden, 2014: 197-198)

I would add to McFadden’s analysis that is the *filmeuse*, more specifically, who loses her non-fiction status holding the camera in order to create a fictionalisation that allows autofiction in front of it.

Image 11. *Le Bal des actrices* (Maïwenn, 2009)

This presence of the *cinéaste-filmeuse* in front of the camera produces another interesting effect. On several occasions, the actresses she interviews ask her to stop recording and she does. The spectator contemplates this action from the outside, thus evidencing that the *cinéaste-filmeuse* belongs to the autofiction, what points out “the ambiguity between the real and fictive while highlighting representational practices” (192). In addition, Maïwenn fictionalises her personal life and the rap singer Joeystarr (Didier Morville) plays her partner. However, this intimate space is fictionalised entirely, since in these scenes the filmmaker never appears filming. Therefore, this dimension would not be part of the documentary in development, although the whole film is shot with shoulder-mounted camera, thus trying to impregnate the autofictional space with documentary aesthetics.

For their part, the actresses’ portraits, eleven in total, also generate their respective autofictions: “the actresses are screened through autofictional strategies, maintaining artistic distance and allowing a blurring of ‘reality’ and fiction” (Vanderschelden, 2012: 249). They are completed with musical autofictions in which they perform a song that would describe their life experiences regarding the topics covered in their respective portraits and thus “enact their dreams, fears and fantasies in the musical scenes” (251). In this way, both the stereotypes under which they are judged and the multiple gender discriminations they suffer are tackled. The formers are exposed synthetically in musical autofictions: the ambitious

actress, the young successful actress, the consecrated actress, the unemployed actress, the model turned actress, the mature actress. The latter emerge in the portraits of their day to day: the emotional abuse in castings, the tyranny of the image that forces aesthetic treatments, the family judgment, the despotism of the directors, the discrimination based on age, etc.

To conclude the film, Maïwenn uses one of the small plots with which the film is interwoven. After the encounter with Estelle Lefébure, and a subsequent dinner with friends in which they both kiss as part of a game, Maïwenn falls in love with her and finally meets with her in order to confess her feelings. The filmmaker uses it as an excuse for being herself the last actress portrayed (Image 12). Estelle asks her why she felt in love with Joey, and Maïwenn's answer is transferred to the private screening of the finished film, organised for the entire crew. Facing Maïwenn's image on the screen, the actresses –now spectators of the documentary on which the film is based on– show their anger and criticism for what they consider a Maïwenn's narcissistic film and not a documentary about them. Once again, the filmmaker ironises about the narcissistic stereotype associated with actresses and even with autofiction, turning it into self-criticism besides both positions. The irony thus completes the circular structure and the protagonists of the autofiction become spectators of it in order to, once again, create a parody that conveys the criticism of the cinematic industry and vindicates the women's presence, the actresses in this case, denouncing the multiple discrimination circumstances they must face.

Image 12. *Le Bal des actrices* (Maïwenn, 2009)

As in the case of Masson, Maïwenn's film shows the experience of feminist resilience and becomes a clear expression of sisterhood, which, as Annie Richard explains regarding the literary sphere, emerges as a kind of altruism of autofiction:

The contemporary movement of awareness of the fictions at work in all the writings of the self, a particularly precious lever certainly to sweep away the identities imposed to women, has a universal scope: paradoxically, autofiction would be the most apt path currently to shake up the tyranny of the image and to seek a knowledge that brings us together in an intersubjective reality, a real path towards altruism. (Richard, 2013: 158)

As it happens in women's cinematic adaptations of women's literary autofictions – *Borderline* (Lyne Charlebois, 2008), *Nelly* (Anne Émond, 2016)– (Monterrubio, 2018), women's cinematic autofictions are intrinsically bonded with sisterhood experiences that fight machista and patriarchal stereotypes and built female intersubjectivity.

6. Autofiction as postmodern autobiography

Les garçons et Guillaume, à table ! is the film adaptation of the play of the same title (2008), also created by actor Guillaume Gallienne. Without doubt, we are before an exemplary materialisation of autofiction considered as the postmodern autobiography Doubrovsky described. Gallienne proposes a new autofictional structure that also instrumentalises the theatrical space. The actor appears on the scene characterized as his adolescent self, who will be both narrator and protagonist of a monologue addressed to the spectators, and who will mature as his narration progresses. This configuration of the enunciation means a first great difference with respect to canonical autobiographical narrations, in which the present narrator is situated outside the past story.

From this theatrical space, Guillaume's narration becomes cinematic image accompanied by his voice, which turn into a narrator voiceover. This *cinéaste-acteur* not only splits into a theatrical and a cinematic character, but also plays his mother in the second. Gallienne thus creates a device of great interest to address the topic of the film: his traumatic gender

identification and sexual orientation in relation to his mother, for which the child and adolescent Guillaume feels a total adoration that becomes imitation and even impersonation. All this, once again narrated through the postmodern parody and irony.

Besides, theatrical space is also cinematized through the different camera positions and frames sizes, what even allows breaking the cinematic fourth wall with Guillaume's gaze to the camera. It reveals thus the existence of two different spectators, the theatrical and the cinematic, whose differentiation will be essential in the film outcome. In addition, different continuity procedures are generated between the two spaces. First of all, the theatrical character is answered by a cinematic character. Secondly, the theatrical performance and very especially the body movements and gestures are repeated in the cinematic space and vice versa. This procedure reaches its limit with the materialisation of the theatrical character in the cinematic image in order to identify the instant of the revelation that Guillaume experiences regarding the female breath: "It was beautiful. It's great... I just understood something wild... In fact, the thing that sets women apart the most... is their breath" (Image 13). The theatrical character takes the place of the cinematic one and he addresses the camera as if it were his stage audience. Thus, the film demonstrates the creative and expressive possibilities of this autofictional duplication and its exchanges. Gallienne also multiplies the autofictional elements in the cinematic space. Her mother becomes Guillaume's reverie, a mental image with two different functions: the comic use –the holidays in Spain, the gay disco and the second sexual attempt– and the dramatic expression of trauma –the boarding school and psychological therapies. In addition, she is the cause for a reverie in which both characters reincarnate as members of a Renaissance aristocratic family, generating thus a new level of auto-fictionalisation in which Guillaume finally incarnates a woman.

Image 13. *Les garçons et Guillaume, à table !* (Guillaume Gallienne, 2013)

In the outcome of this double autofiction, Guillaume falls in love with a woman and can finally state his heterosexuality before his mother. At this moment, Guillaume relates his intention to create a play to narrate his story. The conclusion of the film occurs in the theatre space in which it began. The adolescent Guillaume has become an adult on the scene and at the end of his monologue he discovers his mother, the real one, among the spectators. The cinematization of the theatrical scene now extends to the stage audience, by means of a shot/counter-shot in which the gazes of the real two people, from whom the autofiction has arisen, meet. Then, Guillaume address his speech to his mother (Image 14):

Image 14. *Les garçons et Guillaume, à table !* (Guillaume Gallienne, 2013)

Even if she sometimes calls me baby-doll, she knows that I am a boy. That's how it is. Even if we pretended the opposite she and I. It made our lives easier, right? Hers, to have a daughter. Mine, to set myself apart from my brothers. To distinguish myself. But all that is over now. It's over because I love Amandine.

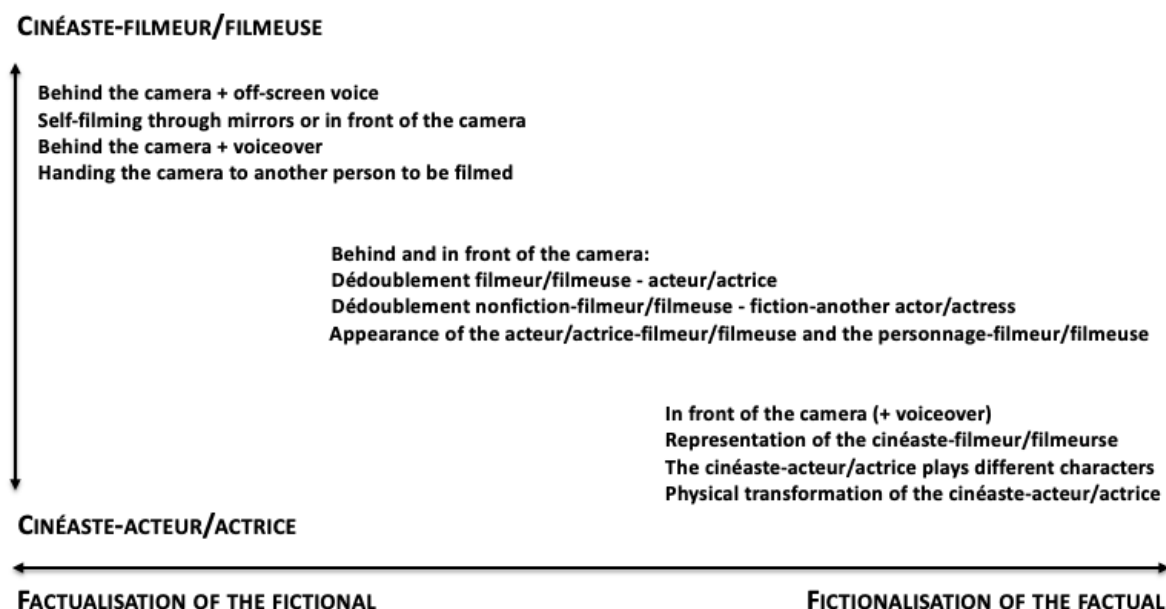
After offering the maximum "fictionalisation of the factual", the film finally allows autofiction both theatrical and cinematic to face the reality from which it was born. Gallienne's film delves into the cinematic specificities of autofiction and its relationship with the concept of alterity, maternal in this case, as indicated by Gontard: "autofiction [...] places the principle of uncertainty and the law of alterity at the heart of the subject issue, in the strongly coded context of autobiography" (2013: 94). Furthermore, the narrator's transformation from adolescence to adulthood enable the lived experience to become, through his narration, a pedagogical proposal.

Finally, *Rock'n roll* proposes an autofiction that reaches the complete fictionalisation, since it rejects both *dédoulements*: between filmmaker and actor –the former does not appear– and between characters –as those analysed in Gallienne's film. The character of Guillaume Canet suffers the so-called midlife crisis and its experience, again in the space of postmodern parody and irony, materialise in an impressive physical transformation. Thus, this autofiction generates an interesting reflexion on the concept of self-image, defined as the meeting and conflict point among the image he has of himself (intimate), the image the others have of him (professional and personal) –including in his case the stereotypes about the successful actor (public)– and finally the interpretation he does from those perceptions of the others about him. The work thus offers a multifaceted autofiction (professional and personal, public and private) that gravitates around the vulnerability inherent to this concept. That is, intimate exposure is reached through a grotesque autofiction. The exhibition of Canet's private life implies a second equally interesting autofiction, that of her partner, Marion Cotillard, turned into a hyper exigent and obsessive actress, who does not abandon the work on her characters in her private day-to-day life. Furthermore, the presence of family members, friends and colleagues demonstrates this autofictional commitment, including the different facets of his life.

The actor's crisis is triggered by the shooting of a new film in which he must play the father of a twenty-year-old girl. Faced with this generational difference, his self-image suffers a serious crisis when he is aware that the society's perception of him has changed. He refuses to accept his current status as a middle-aged actor (with a stable partner and a son) so far from the younger generation and its lifestyle. At first, his intention is to change that external perception, causing different situations in which he embraces himself: flirting with his filming partner, with whom he imagines a sexual encounter in a disco; and drugs use that lead him to be attended by the SAMU in an unfortunate situation that of course is recorded and broadcast through social networks. But this first awareness brings him to a deeper questioning about his perception of himself; not the image returned by others but the intimate self-image that the mirror returns to him in solitude (Image 15). Guillaume decides to set forth a journey in search of lost youth lead by aesthetic treatments, chemical substances and physical exercise. His gradual transformation improves his self-image, both physical and psychological (Image 16), in contrast with the reaction of his family and friends. The image returned by these external mirrors –Marion, the producers, the film's director– is identical. Their astonished rejection materialises in the same gesture of horror: their hands covering their mouths and their wide-open eyes of incomprehension. Turned into Beauty and the Beast for tabloids, Guillaume and Marion separate and he continues his transformation despite losing his job and becoming a character that society rejects and ridicules. Contrary to what would happen in a canonical fiction, in which Guillaume would realise his problem and return to his previous life accepting his age, this postmodern autofiction proposes the inversion of that experience. Guillaume's new image, which would prove a psychological issue, on the contrary, becomes the materialization of his new self-esteem, of a positive self-image that makes him happy despite social rejection. Without job, Guillaume decides to accept an offer starring an American series that will take him to live in Los Angeles for three years. The film concludes with the paroxysm of this irreverent parody that inverts the postulates around the materialisation of a healthy self-image. A happy ending in which Marion goes in search of Guillaume a year later, when he has already become the star of *Crocodile Ranger*. The epilogue shows the series credits, in which Cotillard appears as co-star. The film thus shows the extraordinary power of the cinematic autofictional image, of playing oneself when it is the body itself that undergoes the autofictional transformation. Its postmodern instrumentalization also implies a subversion of the social consensus, thus enhancing its critical value.

7. Conclusions

Having covered a wide spectrum of autofiction films –from the *cinéaste-filmeur/filmeuse*'s documentary work, in which an autofictional plot is inserted, to the complete fictionalisation of a *cinéaste-acteur* who brings the autofictional transformation to his own body–, the multiplicity, complexity and fruitfulness of cinematic autofictional procedures created is proved. I summarise them below, using the defined axes:



Thus, the fourth identification inherent to cinematic autofiction generates new possibilities of hybridization and experimentation that multiply those materialised by literary autofiction and allow its deepening. This cinematic exploration of the self situates the filmmaker in all possible positions, developing autofictional procedures that delve into the concepts of postmodern identity and otherness using parody and irony as efficient tools. In this laboratory of the self, filmmakers experiment with the topics they address. Morder, Cavalier and Masson develop cinematic reflection, creative search and intimate self-knowledge experimenting with the *filmeur/filmeuse*'s position behind and in front of the camera. Goupil instrumentalises this change of position to materialise social and political criticism and ideological self-criticism. Maïwen uses the fake documentary to transform the *filmeuse* into a fictional character and to offer, as Masson, a feminist autofabulation that creates sororal intersubjectivity. Finally, Gallienne et Canet focus on the *cinéaste-acteur* to materialise autofictions as postmodern autobiographies, deepening identity and self-image through postmodern irony and parody. Thus, they provide valuable materialisations of resilience, empathy, sisterhood and even pedagogy.

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