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

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### Abstract

Autofiction as realised in cinematic practice adds a figure of identification to the literary author-narrator-character: that of actor/actress. The filmmaker, playing him/herself, employs innovative strategies in audiovisual narration to generate this autofictional identity. This article analyses these strategies as seen in French cinema, on which literary autofiction has a determining influence. My analysis of this practice is mapped along a double axis. The first classifies the films in a progressive evolution from the factualisation of the fictional (documentary's starting point) to the fictionalisation of the factual (fiction's starting point). The second analyses the films with regard to the filmmaker's presence: from the *filmeur/filmeuse* who stands behind the camera and records the images him/herself to the *acteur/actrice* who exclusively appears in front of the camera. This cinematic exploration of the self thus situates the filmmaker in all possible positions so as to develop autofictional strategies for exploring postmodern identity and alterity, using parody and irony as effective tools. In this laboratory of the self, filmmakers experiment with the topics they address – reflection on cinema, artistic exploration, self-knowledge, ideological reasoning, and socio-political criticism – as well as create valuable screen manifestations of resilience, empathy, sorority, and even pedagogy.

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

### 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 works of this literary autofiction have in turn become raw material for film creation (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2018b). Additionally, “born cinematic” autofiction flourishes, but has been studied to a lesser extent (Bouilly, 2006; Roche, 2006; Quéinnec, 2007; Sirois-Trahan, 2009; Libois, 2008; Fontanel, 2016, among others). This article aims to analyse French cinematic autofiction by parsing the filmmaker's presence in these films. Since the term *autofiction* first appeared on the back cover of *Fils* by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, critics and writers have developed and discussed its conceptualisation within literary theory (Colonna, 1989; Darrieussecq, 1996; Forest, 2007; Gasparini: 2004, 2008; Vilain, 2010, among others). Coining the term three decades earlier, Doubrovsky himself defended the

actuality of this practice: “Autofiction is the postmodern form of autobiography” (Doubrovsky, 2007: 64-65). Autofiction thus stands at the literary crossroads of postmodernity, which Chloé Delaume analyses in her book *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).

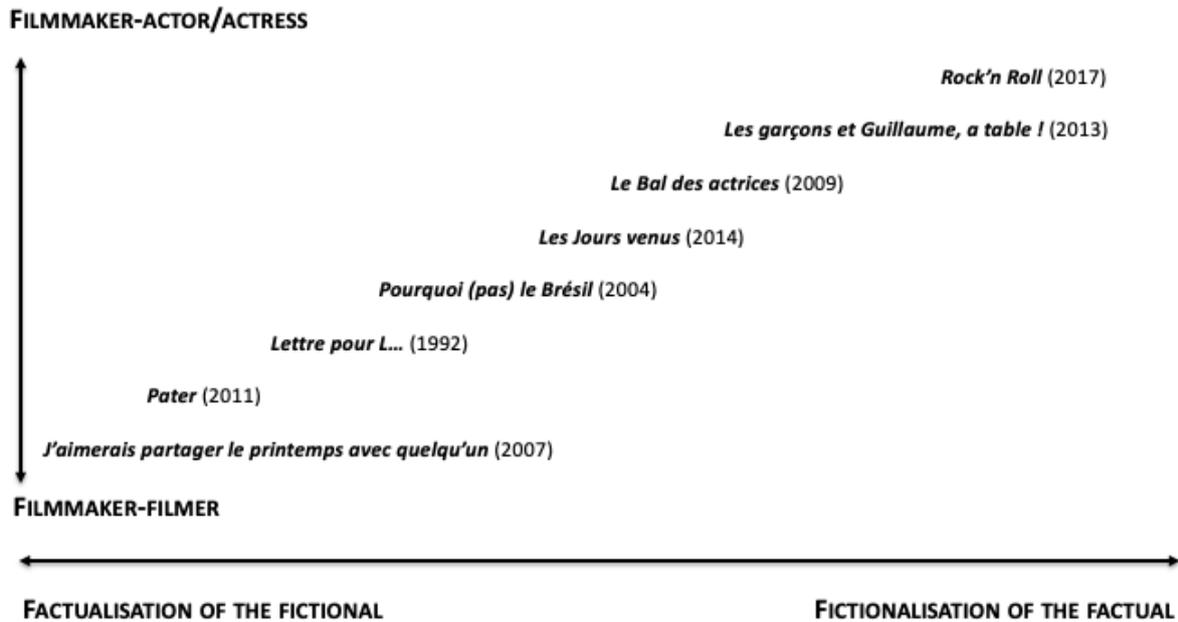
Cinematic autofiction confronts a crucial issue. The identification author-narrator-character within literary autofiction: “figurative and nominal identification of the author, the narrator and the character” (Fontanel, 2016: 69), is now expanded to include that of the actor/actress, finding the filmmaker playing him/herself. In this regard, Vincent Colonna’s concept of *self-fictionalisation* becomes crucial in pointing out the difference between documentary’s showing of oneself and autofiction’s showing of different degrees of self-fabulation and self-representation. Whereas Jean-Luc Godard shows himself in the documentary space, and Agnès Varda creates fictionalised self-portraits, the filmmakers analysed here employ self-fabulation and self-representation in reflecting on their life experiences and biographies.

Thus, cinematic autofiction can be analysed along a spectrum that emerges between the two extremes defined by Marie Darrieussecq: “The autofictional text is then an irresolvable text en bloc. ‘Fictionalisation’ of the factual and ‘factualisation’ of the fictional” (1996: 378). It can be then established that the “factualisation of the fictional” (documentary end) and the “fictionalisation of the factual” (fiction end) occupy the two extremes of autofictional cinematic representation. On the other hand, the presence of the filmmaker as the protagonist of his/her own work calls for its analysis simultaneously along a second axis: from the *filmeur/filmeuse* who stands behind the camera filming, to the *acteur/actrice* who only appears in front of it. I use the French expression *filmeur/filmeuse*, coined by filmmaker Alain Cavalier, defined by the filmmaker’s position in holding the camera (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2019), and I translate it as “filmer”. This spectrum additionally allows me to study the different materialisations of the filmmaker in relation to the range of topics addressed: personal, artistic, professional, social, and political.

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

- *Lettre pour L...* (*Letter for L...*, 1992) by Romain Goupil \
- *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* (*Why (Not) Brazil*, 2004) by Lætitia Masson
- *J’aimerais partager le printemps avec quelqu’un* (*I’d Like to Share the Spring with Someone*, 2007) by Joseph Morder
- *Le Bal des actrices* (*All About Actresses*, 2009) by Maïwenn
- *Pater* (2011) by Alain Cavalier
- *Les garçons et Guillaume, à table!* (*Me, Myself and Mum*, 2013) by Guillaume Gallienne
- *Les Jours venus* (*The Days Come*, 2014) by Romain Goupil
- *Rock’n Roll* (2017) by Guillaume Canet

This corpus’s affiliation with the 21<sup>st</sup> century is confirmed by an exception of great importance, Romain Goupil’s *Lettre pour L...* (1992), a work of cinematic autofiction that brings to the screen the complexity and possibilities of literary autofiction. Goupil created another autofictional work 20 years later, *Les Jours venus* (2014); together the films demonstrate the diversity of possibilities and confirm cinematic autofiction’s evolution towards a progressive fictionalisation, as I argue below. Placing the films within this corpus on the aforementioned axes proves challenging due to the multiple nonfiction-fiction hybridisation strategies employed in the different films, all of which exhibit autofiction’s main interests: self-fictionalisation, subjectivity, alterity, experimentation, hybridisation, and fragmentation, among others.



This first attempt at classification provides an overview of my analysis's development: autofiction arises from the experimentation of the filmers and their reflections on cinema (Morder and Cavalier); it emerges from the dialectics between the personal and the political (Goupil); it materialises through the nonfiction-fiction *dédoublément* that catalyses artistic exploration (Masson); and finally it instrumentalises the fake documentary (Maïwenn) or the postmodern autobiography (Gallienne and Canet) as fictionalisation strategies.. Building on Charles Burgelin's argument, I will analyse how reflection on the possibilities afforded by literary autofiction expands when applied to cinematic creation.

Autofiction widens the field of self-exploration, plows and sows it differently without really leaving the traces and furrows of facts. By making heard on all kinds of levels what can be played between objective accuracy and subjective truth, autofiction becomes an adventure of language [image], imagination and intelligence particularly stimulating. (Burgelin, 2010: 15)

### **Autofiction as filmers' experimentation for reflection on cinema**

Along with Alain Cavalier, Joseph Morder is a noted French filmer (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2019), who since the age of eighteen has been filming his so-called *Journal filmé*. This diaristic practice, conducted with camera in hand, has continued over five decades, although it has evolved over time: from silent Super 8mm, to sound Super 8mm, to MiniDV and HD. *J'aimerais partager le printemps avec quelqu'un* (2007), created under the diaristic form, and covering from February 21 to May 15, 2007, is a deep experience about filming with a mobile phone, becoming the first film made entirely with this device to be released in commercial theatres in France. Morder's primary interest in the mobile device's audiovisual characteristics mean that both image and sound (exclusively direct) were recorded in auto-mode, without the filmer's manipulation, and without any modification in post-production.

The lightness and manageability of the mobile camera allow for innovative shot composition and almost a complete freedom of movement. On the diary's second day, Morder records himself in front of the mirror, directing his gaze and words to the spectator to share that he is the same age as his father was when he died (57 years old). On February 23, he

appears on camera depressed, confess his desire to “share the spring with someone.”<sup>1</sup> On March 3, on a walk through the city, Morder returns to a topic explored in two of his previous fictional films: *Le Grand Amour de Lucien Lumière* (1981) and *Romamor* (1992). Those works narrated the encounters of a Super 8mm filmer (Lucien and Mark respectively, played by Morder himself) with two women they wished to film. Now the filmer repeats the experience, but this time approaches a man, Sacha, he’s interested in filming. In his new aim to create a nonfiction-fiction hybrid work, Morder uses an unknown actor (Stanislav Dorochenko) to yield autofiction out of a fortuitous encounter that the spectator may 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 having lost the agenda containing Sacha's phone number. In recording this moment of near-panic, his supposed emotions are imprinted on the image, which moves and shakes without any motion control (Figure 1). Previously, he had recorded a sort of invocation addressed to Sacha through a self-portrait in the dark. Thus, autofiction in both cases serves as conduit for emotional affect linked to filming, in the earlier case exhibiting film’s conveyance of intimacy and in the later its loss of control. Back in Paris, the filmmaker recovers his lost diary and travels to Moulin d’Andé (in Normandy), 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. Sacha agrees to be recorded, but the fact of filming seems to spoil the date, becoming an adulterant in the intimate personal relationship, causing Morder to reflect: “Which do I like more, love or cinema? Or do I like both?” (Figure 2). While the filmer’s emotion had earlier distorted the filming, now filming adulterates the affective relationship.

Figures 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 the protagonist of *Romamor*), of whom he asks advice about whether to film Sacha on their next date. Her opinion is emphatic: “Consenting to being filmed implies a relationship of submission.” Thus, the fictionalisation progresses since it is shared, becoming interwoven with the filmmaker’s diaristic activity. It is then a third character who becomes Morder’s accomplice. During their 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 filmer into actor. The film’s autofiction, thus far enunciated from behind the camera, materialises then in front of it. Finally, the third date with Sacha takes 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 filmer, placed behind the camera, introduces autofiction within the diary film through character and plot – factualisation of the fictional – without being identified as such, generating a filmer-actor who reflects on the cinematic depiction of the intimate experience.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of films quotations and French references is mine.

In *Pater*, Alain Cavalier, that other 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 hybridised 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 as such, proposing a discussion about its indiscernibility, Cavalier addresses this same topic through the dialectics between fiction and non-fiction. The filmmaker performs as the President of the French Republic and Lindon plays its Prime Minister and expected successor. *Pater*’s double nature thus involves interesting displacements within its conceptualisation. The film begins in a sort of *in media res*: Cavalier prepares lunch and it is Lindon who records him. From this moment on, the spectator must decipher the nature of the autofictional device he/she seeing. The filmmaker-filmer records the actor whom he later legitimises as a filmer 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 ritual recognition of its autofictional nature. This same filmmaker-filmer also records, camera in hand, the fictional scenes in which he does not participate. The dialogue between the two characters is initially filmed from an external point of view, but the camera positioning gradually shifts to the perspective of both characters, until the subjective shot/counter-shot materialises, turning the characters into filmers. In addition, the character of the President continues his activity as a character-filmer in solitude, voicing reflections that he shares with a cat.

These displacements, which constantly play with this hybridisation of fiction and reality, seek to materialise the indiscernibility between them or rather their complementarity. It is thanks to that hybridisation, to the transmission that takes place between person and character, that they know themselves and each other, and the spectators knows them. This hybridisation comes to the fore at two moments. First, in a brief shot in front of the mirror, Cavalier, in character as the President, observes 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 some skin on his neck (Figure 3):

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 judging him, and today I love him.

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

In this way, fiction and nonfiction feed each other through an autofictional experience that consists of framing both spaces in the mirror. First, mirrors are placed in front of oneself, as in this case, in which autofiction’s possibilities are ideally on display in offering a brilliant reflection on the shift between factualisation and fictionalisation. Second, mirrors are placed in front of the other, as in the final sequence described below, in which this transition works to confront alterity. In the last dialogue between the two, all of these displacements materialise. We view 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 takes his camera to capture the moment from his point of view. Agreeing to film the action in another take as a subjective shot/counter-shot, the President/Cavalier takes

his camera and they repeat the action (Figure 4). For the first time, the spectator contemplates the scene of the double filming from the exterior perspective. Fiction returns to the documentary space of these filmer and actor *playing* to create a fiction. The final part of the scene returns to the point of view of the filmer, thus repeating the synthesis of the film that concludes:

Figure 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 clever device generates autofiction from multiple displacements of the filmmaker-filmer and the actor, with which different autofictional mirrors emerge, revealing the nature of the frontier between nonfiction and fiction and enabling self-knowledge and mutual knowledge.

### **Romain Goupil: autofiction as an expression of “the personal is political”**

Romain Goupil's *Lettre pour L...* is a letter-film that perfectly aligns with the literary parameters defining antifictional practice (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2018a: 365-374). The filmmaker creates a letter to L (played by actress Françoise Prenant), who recently suffered a serious illness and who prompts him to make “a good film.” The filmmaker-filmer creates an autofictional letter-film in diaristic form during his stays in Moscow, Gaza, Berlin, Belgrade, and Sarajevo throughout 1992 and early 1993. Its multiple materials (film, video, photography) evidence its complex hybridisation and enable the filmmaker's presence in all possible positions: behind and in front of the camera as filmmaker-filmer (Figure 5), in front of it as filmmaker-actor, and also through his voiceover. In analysing its autofictional realisation, I differentiate among three practices: autofictional reconstructions of the past; parodic autofictions in the form of short pieces or sketches; and autofiction in the present.

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

First, the film's autofictional reconstructions of the past, which revolve around the love affair between the correspondents, are generated through materials expressly created for the film – cinematic and photographic images, both in black-and-white – to which material from their real-life personal archive and the fictional material of other authors are added. In an exemplary instance of the hybridisation of fiction and reality that autofiction performs, Goupil illustrates the breakup with L through images from Raymond Depardon's *Une femme en Afrique* (*Empty Quarter, A Woman in Africa*, 1985), in which Françoise Prenant played the protagonist, thereby confusing the identities of L and Depardon's character.

Second, the account of their past affair moves from personal to political space, the axis on which the film is built, through a sort of parodic autofiction in the form of brief sketches. Among them, a reflection on cinema's essence and its relationship to 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 performs a parodic imitation of Jean-Luc Godard, who assigns his brigade (called “Une image juste”) the mission of finding “an Arab, a real one, a worker, a real one” (Figure 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 quotation attributed to Mikhail Gorbachev, and which functions to parody a naïve socialist utopia. A subsequent sketch presenting Goupil as director of the film *Fermeture pour travaux* as he is interviewed for television on the occasion of its premiere offers a critical 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?"

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

After the stay in Gaza, where Goupil shows his innermost feelings, the letter-film focuses on narrating and portraying his stays in Berlin, Belgrade, and Sarajevo. In this present of the wartime conflicts in the Balkans, the filmmaker continues to ask himself, and others, what constitutes a good film. While in Berlin, autofictional expression materialises through a third practice. The filmmaker-filmer meets a woman named Regine and films her while asking about the city. He then becomes a filmmaker-actor 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 within the portrayal of the present. In Belgrade, documentary images and epistolary voiceover alternate with the autofictional present 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 sees, in order to capture the reality of the besieged city, thus resuming his practice as filmer. 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 autofictional ones in order to show the reality of the city's inhabitants. Goupil also shows Kenovic's filming. This cinematic action in the middle of the war conflict makes the question "What is a good film?" more relevant. For all these reasons, *Lettre pour L...* becomes an exemplary cinematic materialisation of Gasparini's definition of literary autofiction as an "autobiographical and literary [or cinematic] text presenting many features of orality, form innovation, narrative complexity, fragmentation, alterity, 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 autofictional creation by reversing the terms between factualisation and fictionalisation. Here he offers a fictionalisation of his present life, which in this moment revolves around his family (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 affair now occurs in his familial space and concerns his roles as father and son, out of which ongoing self-criticism around ideological *embourgeoisement* and the contradictions of the cross-generational strife arise. The filmmaker, about to turn 60, is preparing to retire and even taking out a funeral insurance policy (with a firm named *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 reflect on the capacity of cinema to be part of social transformation: "What is doing good?" Here again autofiction offers a harsh parody of masculinity, in which Goupil's ego needs constant attention by women with whom he establishes relationships showing the structures of patriarchy: with his producer, played by the actress and filmmaker Noémie Lvovsky; with his financial agent, with whom he has a flirtation, played by the actress and filmmaker Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi; and with a young neighbour, played by Marina Hands, to whom he exhibits paternalism.

Throughout the film, the present's fictionalisation finds cause to confront the past through family images in the form of recordings of his partner, Sanda, and children taken over the years, often in Sarajevo, Sanda's native city. The filmmaker's voiceover comments on the first three 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. There are shootings 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 stand as a kind of diptych, mirroring one another. The “factualisation of the fiction” of sentimental life with L. became the factual of the encounter with *Elle* (Sanda) (Figure 7), whose present is now fictionalised, on which he also reflects:

Figure 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 filmmaker-filmer and the filmmaker-actor, 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 that reality’s stylisation. The brilliant final sequence of the film self-critically reflects on the filmmaker’s decision about retirement and its consequences in terms of political commitment. We attend Goupil’s funeral in the consolidated space of the fictionalised present until, accompanying a crane shot absent apart from this scene, the filmmaker’s off-screen voice is heard saying “Cut”. (Figure 8). For a moment, the filmmaker’s gaze aligns with that of the crane, from which Goupil descends angry that his actors, family, and friends “are not up to the shot”.

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

Using parody, the filmer of the past’s documentary images turns into a filmmaker who uses a camera crane – symbol of the capitalist film industry that stands in total opposition to the filmer’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 member of the brigade “Une image juste” that sought to make *Un film bien* as militant cinema in *Lettre pour L*. Finally, Goupil’s intention in his failed project to use the cinema to “change the world” or “do good” becomes the authoritarian practice that perpetuates what he intended to combat, and about which Daniel Cohn-Bendit proclaims: “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 turn a critical gaze upon ourselves.

### **The nonfiction-fiction *dédoublement* as artistic exploration**

In *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* Lætitia Masson carries out a unique experiment of cinematic autofiction – the filmmaker’s – taking off from *Pourquoi le Brésil* (2002), (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2018b), Christine Angot’s “transfictional autobiography” (Genon, 2013: 21) that inspires Masson’s attempt at a parallel work in her film practice. Faced with Angot’s autofictional and metadiscursive writing, the filmmaker fulfils the same task in cinematic creation: “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 wherein three dimensions coexist: the nonfiction in her work as a filmmaker-filmer 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 *dédoublement* of the filmmaker’s

first-person enunciation emerges in the first scenes of the film. Masson, in front of the camera, introduces herself and explains 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 adaptation of the novel. From that moment on, the filmmaker instrumentalises the nonfiction to reflect on the creative process of the film and that of fictionalisation so as to narrate her personal and professional experience during its creation. It is crucial to point out that this fictional space exposes her inability to *play herself*, to perform 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 by means of two approaches: Masson’s self-filming in her solitary personal space; and the exterior filming of her encounters with other people. In addition, both are overlaid with the filmmaker’s voiceover, which also moves between autofiction and fiction, thus becoming the first way of reflection. Masson portrays herself in a revealing progression. First, she places the camera in fixed positions that capture her on-screen, and in which she sometimes looks at the camera. Next, she takes the camera in hand to film herself in the mirror (Figure 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 shit”. 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, while continuing her musing on the creative conflict she’s facing: “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 on- or off-screen in this first intimate space. Expressed in voiceover, her reflection carries over into the other two spaces. As Kate Ince indicates, these tactics 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 demonstrates that not only are her reflections a result of an intellectual activity but of the physical environments she inhabits and behaviour therein.

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

Angot’s narrative offers up her private life for complete exposure, in particular an experience of falling in love. Married, with a stable love life, Masson decides to explore that experience through her attraction to her children’s paediatrician, and in the space of fictionalisation. As already observed, the filmmaker recognises her limitations in voicing the narration in the first person, which even leads to writer’s block. Masson meets with Angot to discuss the conflict she suffers and tries to overcome: how to go about “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 secrets”. Her literary experience is unattainable for Masson. A key instance of self-filming then occurs and for the first time another camera captures the filmmaker while she films herself (Figure 10):

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

Hotel room, Nancy [*city in France*]. 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 that her artistic practice consists neither in adapting the literary work nor in filming her private life. Only two images justify her cinematic search: those of the real characters of her grandmother and the paediatrician. Thus, the film responds to the description of autofiction offered by Bruno Blanckeman as enabling one “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 Masson’s departure, having decided to abandon the project and offering a clever reflection on what 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.”

### **Fake documentary as an autofictional device**

*Le Bal des actrices*, the second directorial work of actress Maïwenn, is an autofictional film premised on the making of a documentary about French actresses, which instrumentalises fake documentary (Dobson, 2012, McFadden, 2014) as its enunciative form. 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 project’s filmmaker, seen filming the actresses with a handheld camera (Figure 11). These first-person images are inserted into the film at intervals. In this way, and for the first time, the presence of the filmmaker-filmer 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 it is the filmer, more specifically, who relinquishes her non-fiction practice behind the camera so as to create a fictionalisation that allows autofiction in front of it, which 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 filmmaker-filmer belongs to the autofiction, and so points out “the ambiguity between the real and fictive while highlighting representational practices” (192). In addition, Maïwenn fictionalises her personal life, with the rap singer Joeystarr (Didier Morville) playing 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 a shoulder-mounted camera, thus trying to infuse the autofictional space with documentary aesthetics.

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

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). Each portrait includes a musical autofiction in which each actress performs a song describing experiences from their lives that speak to the topics addressed in their respective portraits, thereby “enact[ing] their dreams, fears and fantasies in the musical scenes” (251). In this way, the stereotypes by which they are judged (the ambitious startlet, the ingénue, the diva, the struggling actress, the model-turned-actress, the *grande-dame*) are systematically exposed in musical autofictions, and the gender discriminations they suffer (emotional abuse in castings, the tyranny of hi-res imagery that mandates cosmetic procedures, the family judgment, despotic directors, ageism) emerge from the quotidian portraiture.

To conclude the film, Maïwenn circles back to one of the subplots interwoven through the film. Having had an early encounter with actress-model Estelle Lefébure that then leads to a dinner game with friends in which they kiss, Maïwenn falls in love with her and finally meets

to confess her feelings. The filmmaker uses it as an excuse for having herself be the last actress the film portrays (Figure 12). Estelle asks her why she fell in love with Joey, and Maïwenn's answer is revealed at the private screening organised for the crew of the now-finished film. Facing Maïwenn's image on the screen, the actresses – now spectators of the documentary on which the film is based – angrily criticise what they consider to be Maïwenn's narcissistic film, and not a documentary about them. Once again, the filmmaker ironically references the stereotypical narcissism associated with both actresses and autofiction, turning it into self-criticism on both counts. This irony thus completes the circular structure and the protagonists of the autofiction become spectators of it in order to, once again, construct a parody that offers criticism of the cinematic industry and vindication of the actresses, denouncing the professional discrimination they endure.

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

As in the case of Masson, Maïwenn's film expresses the value of feminist resilience and becomes a clear expression of sorority, which, as Annie Richard explains with regard to the literary sphere, emerges as a kind of "altruism" within 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. (2013: 158)

As in other women's cinematic adaptations of women's literary autofictions – *Borderline* (Lyne Charlebois, 2008), *Nelly* (Anne Émond, 2016) – women's cinematic autofictions are intrinsically bonded with sororal experiences that fight machismo and patriarchal stereotyping and strengthen female intersubjectivity (Monterrubio Ibáñez, 2018b).

### **Autofiction as postmodern autobiography**

*Les garçons et Guillaume, à table !*, the film adaptation of the play of the same title (2008), also created by actor Guillaume Gallienne, is yet another exemplary realising of autofiction's possibilities, in this case for achieving the postmodern autobiography that Doubrovsky described. Gallienne proposes a new autofictional structure that also instrumentalises theatrical space. The actor appears on the scene characterised as his adolescent self, who will be both narrator and protagonist of a monologue addressed to spectators, and who will mature as his narration progresses. This enunciative configuration establishes a first great difference with respect to canonical autobiographical narration since the narrator is placed in the present of the narrative.

Thus, the film begins in the theatrical space, and then Guillaume's account becomes cinematic, which turns his voice into a narrator's voiceover. This filmmaker-actor not only appears as a character in both theatrical and cinematic realms, but also plays his mother in the filmic narrative. Gallienne thus creates an essential device well-suited to address the film's topic: his traumatising awareness of his gender identity and sexual orientation as they affect his relationship with his mother, for whom both child and adolescent Guillaume feel total adoration that manifests as imitation and even impersonation. All this, once again narrated with recourse to postmodern parody and irony.

Theatrical space is also "cinematised" through the different camera positions and frame sizes, even allowing for a breaking of the cinematic fourth wall by means of Guillaume's gaze at the camera. What is thus revealed is the existence of two different audiences, the theatre spectators within the film and the cinema viewers, whose differentiation will be crucial to the film's denouement. In addition, different continuity rules distinguish the two spaces. First, the

lines spoken by the theatrical character are responded to by a cinematic character. Second, the theatrical performance and especially body movements and gestures are repeated in the cinematic space and vice versa. This strategy achieves catharsis with the materialisation of the theatrical character in the cinematic image to mark the revelation Guillaume experiences regarding 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” (Figure 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 in Guillaume’s reverie a mental image with two different functions: one comical and parodical (in the scenes of holidaying in Spain, the gay disco, and the second sexual attempt) and the other dramatic in its expression of trauma (at boarding school, undergoing psychological therapy). In addition, the mother is cause for a reverie in which both characters appear reincarnated as members of a Renaissance aristocratic family, generating thus a new level of self-fictionalisation in which Guillaume finally reincarnates as a woman.

Figure 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 identify himself as heterosexual to 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 stage and at the end of his monologue he discovers his mother – the real one – among the spectators. The “cinematisation” 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 (Figure 14):

Figure 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 enables the lived experience to become, through his narration, a pedagogical proposal.

Finally, *Rock’n Roll* as an autofictional film achieves complete fictionalisation, since it rejects both *dédouplements*, that between filmmaker and actor – the former does not appear – and between characters, as those analysed in Gallienne’s film. Here Guillaume Canet’s character suffers a “midlife crisis”; an experience, again treated with recourse to postmodern parody and irony, that materialises in an impressive physical transformation. Thus, autofiction prompts an interesting reflection on the concept of self-image, understood as the meeting and conflict point among different perspectives: the image he has of himself; the image the others have of him (both in his professional and personal lives), including the public’s stereotypes about famous actors; and finally, the interpretation he draws from those external perceptions

of him. The work thus offers multifaceted autofiction (professional and personal, public and private) that gravitates around the vulnerability inherent to autofictional practice. That is, intimate exposure is achieved through bizarre autofiction. The exhibition of Canet's private life implies a second equally interesting autofiction, that of his partner, Marion Cotillard, imagined as a perfectionist and obsessive actress, who keeps working on her acting roles in her day-to-day life. Furthermore, the presence of family members, friends, and colleagues demonstrates their commitment with the autofictional creation.

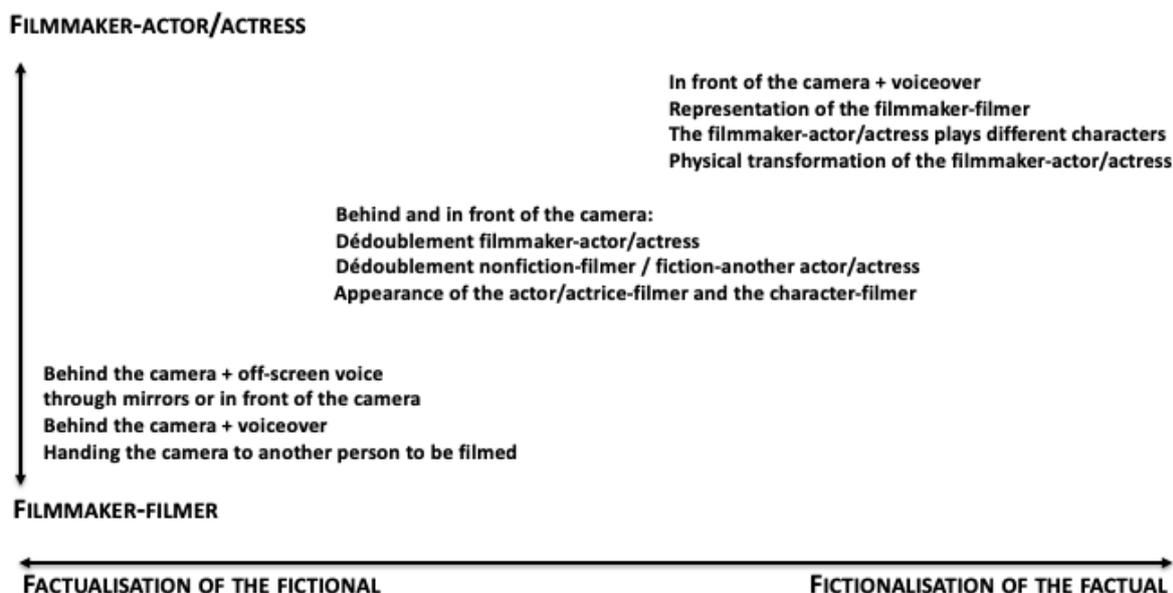
The actor's crisis is triggered by the shooting of a new film in which he must play the father of a twenty-year-old girl. Faced with this generational difference, his self-image suffers a serious blow upon realising how the public's perception of him has changed. He refuses to accept his current status as a middle-aged actor (he has a committed partner and a son) far removed from the younger generation and its lifestyle. At first, his intention is to change that external perception, leading to situations in which he embarrasses himself: flirting with his co-star, about whom he fantasises having a sexual encounter; and a drug overdose requiring treatment by paramedics, resulting in an untimely recording then circulated on social media. But this identity crisis brings him to a deeper questioning of his self-perception, here meaning not the image he projects to others but that which the mirror reflects back to him (Figure 15). Guillaume decides to embark on a journey in search of his lost youth, enabled by cosmetic procedures, chemical substances, and bodybuilding. His gradual transformation improves his self-image, both physical and psychological (Figure 16), in contrast with the reaction of his family and friends. The astonishment expressed by these external "mirrors" – Marion, the producers, the film's director – takes identical form as a gesture of horror: hands covering their mouths and eyes wide-open with incomprehension. Turned into Beauty and the Beast for the tabloids, Guillaume and Marion separate and he continues his transformation despite losing his job and being rejected and ridiculed by the public. Contrary to what would happen in conventional fiction, in which Guillaume would realise his problem and return to his previous life having come to accept his age, this postmodern autofiction delivers the opposite outcome. Guillaume's new image, which could be evidence of a psychological condition, instead becomes the materialisation of his new self-esteem, of a positive self-image that makes him happy despite the social rejection. Unemployed, Guillaume decides to accept an offer to star in an American television series that will take him to Los Angeles for three years. The film ends on the reinforcement of this irreverent parody that breaks with conventions about healthy self-image.

In a happy ending, Marion goes in search of Guillaume a year later, when he has become the star of (the suitably inane) *Crocodile Ranger*. The film's epilogue displays the series' credits, in which Cotillard appears as co-star. *Rock'n Roll* thus shows the extraordinary power of the cinematic autofictional image, of playing oneself when it is the body itself that undergoes autofictional transformation. Its postmodern instrumentalisation implies a crucial subversion of the status quo, thus showing the value of autofiction as tool for critical thinking.

Figures 15 and 16. *Rock'n Roll* (Guillaume Canet, 2017)

## Conclusion

Having covered a considerable range of cinematic autofiction – from the filmmaker-filmer's documentary work, in which an autofictional plot is inserted, to the complete fictionalisation of a filmmaker-actor/actress who enacts autofictional transformation upon his/her own body – the multiplicity, complexity, and generativity of cinematic autofictional strategies are evident. I summarise them below, using the axes established in the introduction:



Thus, the fourth identification inherent to cinematic autofiction yields new possibilities of hybridisation 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 strategies for delving into concepts of postmodern identity and alterity, using parody and irony as effective tools. In this laboratory of the self, filmmakers experiment with the topics they address. Morder, Cavalier, and Masson produce cinematic reflection, artistic exploration, and self-knowledge, experimenting with the filmer's position behind and in front of the camera. Goupil instrumentalises the shift between both positions to engender social and political criticism and ideological self-criticism. Maïwen uses the fake documentary to transform the filmer into a fictional character and to offer, as does Masson, a feminist self-fabulation that creates sororal intersubjectivity. Finally, Gallienne and Canet focus on the filmmaker-actor to generate autofictions as postmodern autobiographies, deepening identity and self-image through postmodern irony and parody. Thus, all these authors provide valuable materialisations of resilience, empathy, sorority, and even pedagogy.

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