Fragmented Lives:
Representations of the Self
In Franco-Belgian Autobiocomics

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Abstract

How do authors/artists represent themselves in comics? The thesis assesses what strategies are mobilised in comics in order to construct an autobiographical self. It explores to what extent the interplay of text and image in autobiocomics can propose new ways of approaching a self that is fragmented, complex and contradictory. As the thesis focusses on the artistic process of producing such fragmentations, my argument is that these fragmentations are represented in autobiocomics in creative and celebratory ways.

As I investigate the processes of self-formation, self-learning and self-transformation, I adopt the term 'self-crafting' – which emphasises the materiality of autobiocomics and their technical aspects – to refer to the textual and pictorial representations and questionings of these processes in autobiocomics. I examine 'self-crafting' as a relational process, one that relies on the ongoing interplay between text, image and frame, by means of detailed case-studies on the respective works of Judith Forest (2009; 2011), Lewis Trondheim (1995), Fabrice Neaud (1992-2002), Dominique Goblet (2007) and Bruno and David Cénou (2014).

Each chapter acts as a stepping-stone towards a more coherent articulation of the creative processes of comic production, and their significance in the representation of a sense of self. Shifting from a more inward-looking form of self-production, which folds the subject in on itself, to a more outward one, I approach autobiocomics not only as a contemporary form of 'self-teaching', but also in their potential for educating others. I investigate to what extent the multiplicities of self-representations in autobiocomics allow for explorations of social issues. I show the significance of the framing processes both in terms of formal composition – how each panel's content complements and contrasts the others – and as a selective and interpretive act: how the formal frames work as interpretive frames that elaborate and validate a point of view, and how they reveal and unsettle normative representations, which open up possibilities for an ethical engagement with others, directed towards more overly collective political action.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning. No sources other than those acknowledged in the bibliography have been used.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

> […] no autobiography can take place except within the boundaries of writing where concepts of subject, self and author collapse into the act of producing a text
>
> (Sprinker, 1988: 342)

How do authors/artists represent themselves in comics? Within this question lies another one: is there an obligation to represent oneself as author as a coherent self? The thesis assesses the resources that comics can mobilise for the construction of an autobiographical self and explores how the reader might engage with such representations. This study opens with a theoretical chapter in which I outline key concepts of analysis and offer frameworks within which to approach and discuss the formal processes of 'self-crafting' in 'autobiocomics' – an all-encompassing term coined by Miller and Pratt (2004) for autobiographical practices in comics. It explores to what extent the interplay of text and image in autobiocomics can propose new ways of approaching a self that is fragmented, complex and contradictory. As the thesis focusses on the artistic process of producing such fragmentations, it suggests that these fragmentations are represented in autobiocomics in creative and celebratory ways.

To explore the potential of autobiocomics to provide a fruitful challenge to conventional notions of both authorship and self, I borrow the notion of 'self-crafting' from Judith Butler. Butler uses this term when discussing the construction of a sense of self to designate the process of 'self-making' which takes place in relation to an imposed set of norms (Butler, 2005: 19). I find its connotations particularly useful for my study, which focuses on the creative aspects of the comics form. By 'creative', I mean the set of conventions at work within the specific context of the comics format, and how these conventions are constantly questioned and reshaped. I find the term 'self-crafting' more helpful than the term 'self-transformation', as the word 'craft' suggests not only artistic production but also a technical skill, a tradition. It denotes

care and detail. The notion of 'self-crafting' emphasises the materiality of autobiocomics and their technical aspects. As the noun 'craft' may also refer to some kind of vessel – a container and also a form of transport – 'self-crafting' hints at a sense of movement rather than the production of a fixed object. I thus use 'self-crafting' as an umbrella term referring to the result, the act and the process of creation.

As I investigate the processes of self-formation, self-learning and self-transformation, I adopt the term 'self-crafting' to refer to the textual and pictorial representations and questionings of these processes in autobiocomics. As a reader of autobiocomics, I am equally interested in the selves that autobiocomics express, in the stories they tell and how they tell them – regardless of their statuses as relatable or enabling escapism – in the society they depict and the issues they offer up for discussion. I examine 'self-crafting' as a relational process, one that relies on the ongoing interplay between text, image and frame, and I ask to what extent the multiplicities of self-representations in autobiocomics allow for explorations of social issues.

The notion of 'self-crafting' enables me to shift the focus onto more material aspects of the representation of the self. I refer to the materiality of the frame and examine what is inside and outside border panels. I not only examine the variety of self-portraits within the comics frame, but also how the framing changes the dynamic between the author and her or his autobiocomics, as well as how it raises questions about the relation between the two.

I see the space of the frame as liminal, and in order to approach the interplay between text, image and frame, I make small but significant references to the idea of 'assemblage', which I borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and use with reference to subsequent developments of the concept (De Landa). In comics studies, Cortsen (2012) and Doel (2014) show its relevance for examining the comics form. In their respective works, they use assemblage to define the form of comics itself. I propose we use the notion of assemblage not only to approach the multiplicity of panels arranged within the comics grid, but also to evacuate the problematic issue of authenticity that emerges when focussing on the notion of author and subject. I

argue that the relationship between framing and assemblage is a more fruitful engagement with the autobiographical project in autobiocomics. I posit frames as multidimensional and assemblage as a continual process of framing and reframing, and having established my theoretical apparatus in the opening chapter, I then use it to illuminate the question of 'self-crafting' and the issues that this practice raises in detailed case-studies in the five subsequent chapters.

In each subsequent chapter, I will show how each comic provides a specific take on the question of the construction of a self. I will explore the ethical, pedagogical and political dimension of autobiocomics when telling someone's story, whether it be one's own or giving others the ability to speak and be heard – although the specific focus (ethical, pedagogical, political) will vary according to the comic. Each chapter will act as a stepping-stone towards a more coherent understanding of the creative processes of comic production, and their significance in the pedagogical representation of a sense of self. Moving from a more inward-looking form of self-production, which folds the subject in on itself, to a more outward one, I investigate to what extent self-writing in autobiocomics is self-learning. I approach autobiocomics not only as a contemporary form of self-teaching, but also in their potential for educating others. I examine how they open up possibilities for an ethical engagement with others, as they propose a conception of self-crafting, which is directed towards more overly collective political action.

My study explores works by five different artists or collectives, starting with an examination of the collaborative work of three Belgian male cartoonists, William Henne, Thomas Boivin and Xavier Löwenthal, *1h25* (2009) and *Momon* (2011). Both were published as the autobiographical sketchbook of a French artist named Judith Forest. My subsequent chapters focus on French Lewis Trondheim's autofictional work *Approximativement* (1995) (Chapter 3), French artist Fabrice Neaud's diary-practice (1992-2002) (Chapter 4), and Belgian artist Dominique Goblet's approach to autobiographical practice in *Faire Semblant c'est Mentir* (2007) (Chapter 5). The study concludes with the examination of *Panthers in the Hole* (2014), the autobiography of three incarcerated African-Americans, Robert King, Albert Woodfox and Herman

Wallace, to whom two French artists, Bruno and David Cénou, lent their voice (Chapter 6).

While these authors come from different backgrounds and comment upon their respective social backgrounds through various use of the resources of comics, they call into question many assumptions about masculinities, femininities and racial constructs. They also shed light upon their own relationship with art and culture, and through such explorations, they question their place within the field of autobiographical practice and that of comics. The record of their everyday life is entwined with larger narratives. Indeed, autobiography with its focus on the everyday has the potential to discuss wider cultural and political issues, pushing boundaries as well as querying what is usually taken for granted and formulating new understandings. Through their assertion of individuality, autobiographers can resist what Jameson defines as "the death of the subject, the end of individuality, the eclipse of subjectivity in a new anonymity" (Jameson, 1991: 74). They may thus challenge the dominant heteronormative and patriarchal institutions of late capitalism as well as Jameson's conception of the postmodern space as highly objectified and without any subjective possibilities (Rerick, 2011: 1-2).

My examination of Judith Forest's work in Chapter 2 helps me to approach comics as a tool that exceeds the artist's self-construction – which enables me to evacuate the contested notion of 'authenticity' and ask instead questions about the significance of authorship in the process of self-crafting. In Chapter 3, I examine another form of self-crafting as I see how Lewis Trondheim turns depictions of mid-life and artistic crises into an unexpected source of creativity. In Chapter 4, Fabrice Neaud's *Journal* helps me to explore the significance of a sense of belonging in the construction of the individual, while I investigate his reservations about the gay community and his search for other ways to be part of a group. In Chapter 5, I further explore the tensions within a network of relationships, this time in Dominique Goblet's text.

These chapters lead me to approach self-crafting as the creation of a sense of the collective. In my last chapter, I could have focused on David Cénou's *Mirador, Tête de Mort* (2013), in which Cénou relates his self-transformation into a politicised

and political individual. Instead, I chose to examine his subsequent project, *Panthers in the Hole* (2014) in order to demonstrate how an early and ongoing practice of self-crafting has affected the individual. Cénou's previous work helped him to move from personal ethics to political activism and in this chapter, I show how this collaborative work takes on the ethical responsibility to speak for those who cannot speak. This final chapter draws a bridge between the everyday and the political, between the individual and the collective, and between the Francosphere and other cultures.

Chapter 1
Approaching Autobiocomics

I will start by outlining the theoretical frameworks and key concepts, which will enable me to approach and discuss the representation in autobiocomics of the fragmented self. I start this investigation by considering the terminology used by various commentators to refer to autobiographical practices in comics. As a preamble, I show to what extent the issues that these different terms raise bear witness to issues of legitimacy that affect autobiographical practices in comics – as well as the academic field of comics studies. Then, identifying issues that come up with the concepts of 'self' and 'subject' leads me to consider the potential for autobiocomics to propose and explore alternative modes of subjectivities that try to break free from established discourse.

After discussing issues raised by temporalities, reading pacts and narrative instances that are specific to the form of autobiocomics, I will articulate my investigation of the notion of truth-formation around the notion of authenticity. I draw on Judith Butler's notion of performativity as a solution to some of the problems raised by the notion of authenticity. Identities may appear natural but, for Butler, they are produced through repetitions of imitative acts (Butler, 1997a: 49). These conventional iterations reinforce discursive norms, and performativity can be seen as the "miming of hegemonic ideals" (Butler, 1993: 125). The fragmentation of the comics form seems ideal for expressing and exploring these repetitions together with the representation of a perception of self-fragmentation. In order to examine the potential of autobiocomics for revealing and questioning these discursive norms, I will focus on the processes of framing and reframing, by looking at socio-culturally determined frames as normative processes, and at the narrative frames and the

visual frames of the comics grid as means of representing, exposing, questioning and challenging these normative processes. I will approach the dynamic set of connections between the subject and these normative processes by making small but significant uses of assemblage theory, which will help approaching the open-ended-ness of subject-formation in autobiocomics, as well as their potential for destabilising dominant frameworks. I will suggest how framing and assemblage can be used in relation to the notion of self-crafting, a term, which, as suggested above, leaves space open for a discussion on skills and craft and how to make comics, in addition to its relevance for philosophical discussion.

Nomenclature and Legitimisation

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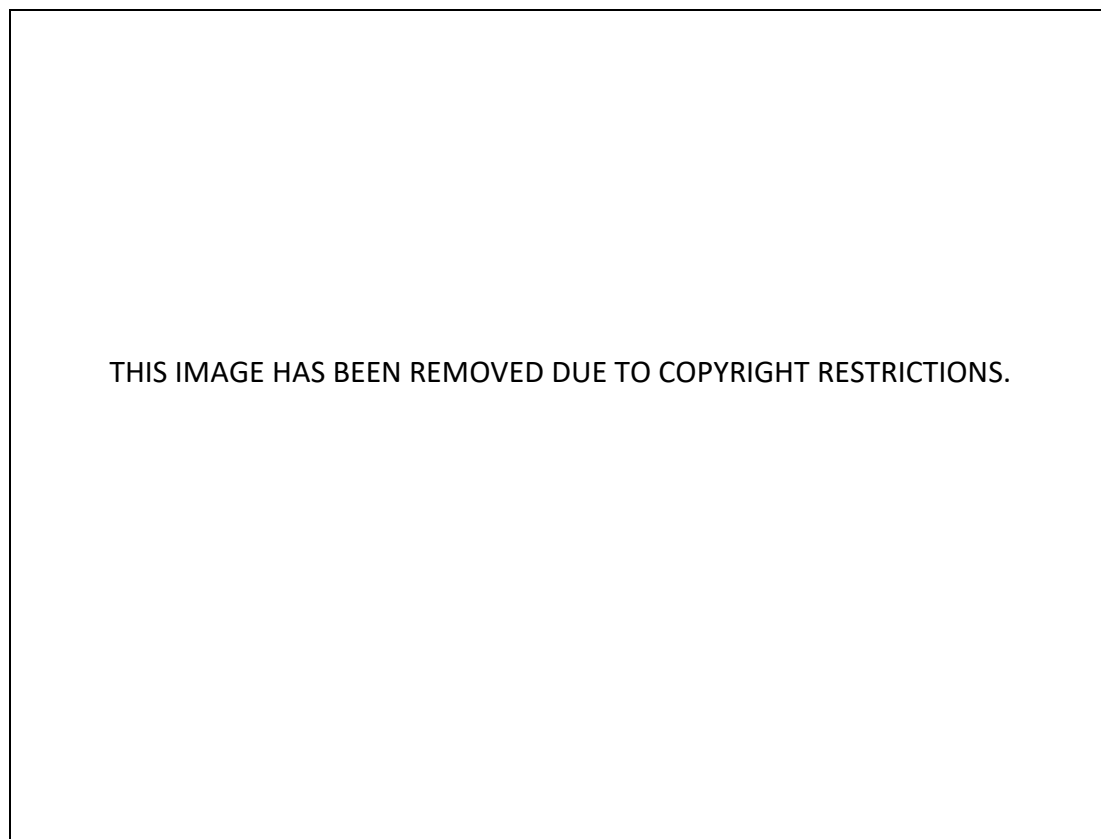
(Figure 1: Trondheim, 1991: unpaginated)

This short piece entitled "Emmaüs" and published in *Rackham Putch* in 1991 is a collage of three panels taken from Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (Spiegelman, 2003

[1986]: 38-39) by French comics artist Lewis Trondheim, who completely rewrote the original dialogue between Art and his father. This affectionate parody provides a fictional account of the genesis of *Maus*. Through Art's concluding remark: "Je vais quand même pas en faire une bédé...", Lewis Trondheim refers to the discrepancies between highbrow art and what was still considered to be a lowbrow art-form in a pre-*Maus* era. The last speech balloon contains a reminder that it was indeed the commercial success of the critically acclaimed *Maus* in 1986 that helped to bestow legitimacy on comics – or at least, the ones that were elevated to the rank of "graphic novels", a supposedly more mature and serious form. Here, Trondheim alludes to the critical reception of *Maus*, which showed a wider audience not only that autobiographical practice was possible in comics, but also that the form could offer new approaches for autobiographical practices.

Writing about the Franco-Belgian field of comics production, Bart Beaty argues that autobiographical practice in comics "offers the most explicit promise of legitimizing cartoonists as authors" (Beaty, 2007: 143). Yet, in his nod to the critical re-appraisal of comics and their possibilities, Trondheim also alludes to autobiographical comics artists' insecurities and status anxieties, which are reflected in the difficulties amongst both comics practitioners and theorists in reaching any consensus regarding nomenclature. Autobiography is practiced in comics under many names; comics scholars and practitioners keep coming up with new labels – the most creative contribution to this day being Lynda Barry's "autobifictionalography" (Barry, 2002: 7). The supposed lack of legitimacy associated with comics lead some commentators to continue to use 'graphic novels' rather than 'comics', despite the fictional status that 'novel' implies. The resulting "graphic novel memoir" (Chaney, 2011a: 22) and "autobiographical graphic novels" (Chaney, 2011a: 24) are as clumsy as they are unhelpful and ambiguous.

Other arguably more successful attempts to eliminate 'comics' from the terminology include Whitlock's "autographics", inspired by Leigh Gilmore's "autobiographics" (Gilmore, 2001), which she uses in her study on life narratives, in order to express a focus on the changing discourses of truth and identity that feature in autobiographical representations of selfhood. Whitlock claims that her term draws

"attention to the specific conjunction of visual and verbal text" and "to the subject positions that narrators negotiate in and through comics" (Whitlock, 2007: 966). However, the term "autographics", while widening the scope to include other visual practices, omits references to the textual elements. The term 'autocomics' would suggest comics that are made by one author, who writes, draws and inks – which is common practice in alternative comics and zine culture – but a clearer reference to autobiographical practice seems to be needed. Therefore, I prefer 'autobiocomics', a term coined by Miller and Pratt (2004), which problematises autobiography on the one hand and comics on the other hand. This term comes with a variety of assumptions and questions about various societal and cultural conventions that are otherwise taken for granted, as they significantly influence the process of identity formation through discourse.

I use 'autobiocomics' to refer to life writing practice in comics and under this umbrella term I explore autobiographical practices in comics, including texts which negotiate the borders and boundaries between autobiography and fiction, and everything in between: memoirs, non-fiction, autofiction, etc. It is common practice to discuss these various forms together, as they are at least partly autobiographical. In her study on life writing in comics, El Refaie states using "the terms autobiography, memoir, and life writing more or less interchangeably" (El Refaie, 2012: 4). However, these labels need to be closely examined to the extent that they are a testimony of the authorial intent: they participate not only in the reception of the text but also arguably in the process of subject-formation itself, which I discuss when analysing specific texts in the following chapters.

The most significant contribution to the scholarship on autobiographical comics is El Refaie's *Autobiographical Comics: Life Writing in Pictures* (2012), in which she identifies major trends in autobiographical comics by examining eighty-five different comics from Europe and North America. She points out the limits of a purely formalist approach and draws on different approaches (discourse analysis, narrative theory, semiotics, psychoanalytic theories, performance theories, etc.). Other studies in autobiographical comics include *Graphic Subjects*, a collection of essays edited by Michael Chaney (2011b), Hillary Chute's monograph *Graphic Women: Life Narrative*

and Contemporary Comics (2010) on the respective works of six female comics artists and focussing notably on the visual representation of trauma. In his monograph *Alternative Comics* (2005), Charles Hatfield dedicates two chapters to autobiographical comics. Seminal contributions to the field include Rocco Versaci's chapter on comics memoirs in his 2007 study *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Litterature*, as well as Ann Miller's various studies on Francophone autobiographical comics, which bear relevance to the wider field of autobiographical comics, notably *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-language Comic Strip* (2007). In her 2011 chapter "Autobiography in bande dessinée", Miller identifies three aspects of autobiographical comics: the inscription of subjectivity in the images, the rendering of temporality by spatial means and the proliferation of the self. El Refaie apprehends autobiographical comics through the analysis of five key aspects: marginality, 'picture-embodiment', 'commemoration', authenticity and reader's participation. In this preliminary chapter, it is helpful to consider their respective contributions before outlining my own theoretical framework for exploring self-crafting in autobiocomics.

El Refaie pursues the question of legitimation further as she identifies the tension between comics' new-found respectability and their status as subversive. Ji-Hyae Park rightly notes that El Refaie does not delve into these implications for comics studies (Park, 2013); comics scholarship is riddled with "status anxiety" (Hatfield, 2005: xii). The issue of legitimation also affects the development of a comics canon. While the field of autobiocomics studies is only burgeoning, and the monographs dedicated to autobiocomics are still scarce (Chute, 2010; El Refaie, 2012), it is puzzling to see that the exact same panels and the same quotes are used in order to make the same points. For instance, when questioning the relevance of Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact[1] to autobiographical comics, the pivotal quote by *Our Cancer Year*'s protagonist – "Am I some guy who writes about himself in a comic book called *American Splendor*?… Or am I just a character in that book?" (Pekar, 1994: unpaginated) – can be found in Versaci (2007: 53), Hatfield (2005: 110), Chaney (2011a: 22) and El Refaie (2012: 58). Similarly, Lynda Barry's quote "Is it

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[1] For a discussion on Lejeune's autobiographical pact, see the fifth section of this chapter.

autobiography if parts of it are not true? / Is it fiction if parts of it are?" (Barry, 2002: 7) is used in El Refaie (2012), Versaci (2007: 58), Chute (2010: 108-109) and Chaney (2011a: 22). And it seems difficult to avoid discussing the insertion of the picture of Art Spiegelman's father Vladek in *Maus* (2003: 294) when investigating the significance of using picture-references (Hatfield, 2005: 146-147; El Refaie, 2012: 171). These specific panels hardly constitute the only instances where these issues are raised. The recurring use of the same comics panels in comics studies suggests the emergence of a comics canon. This is especially concerning because canon-formation implies selective criteria and is particularly vulnerable to political and cultural bias.[2] I have tried to avoid such pitfalls through my choice of texts but with it comes the risk of reifying the remarkable examples that constitute my corpus as canon and essentialising from them properties which would not apply to other autobiocomics. When studying autobiocomics, it is fruitless to seek to determine their formal specificities by opposing them to those of fictional comics. It would seem counterproductive as well to try and apply the specificities of autobiographical practice in prose to comics. Instead, it is necessary to evaluate these specificities – as well as issues surrounding the autobiographical pact in comics, referential self, subjectivities, etc. – in order to see what the form brings to autobiographical practice and to evaluate its significance in the process of self-crafting.

By the end of this chapter, I will have gathered the theoretical tools that will help me to approach the following questions: how is the self represented in autobiocomics? What are the relationships in these texts between the "I" of the text and the author, and between the self and her or his social context? How are these represented? How is a sense of identity constructed visually and textually? How is autobiographical meaning-making created and negotiated in comics?

But first, as I will make extended use of the terms 'self' and 'subject' in this study, I will briefly set out these key concepts before discussing the issues that their representation and exploration in autobiocomics raise.

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[2] On the critique of canon in literary theory, see for example Hicks (2004: 18) and Spivak (2003).

Self and Subject

Before I explore the notion of 'self-crafting' in autobiocomics, it is helpful to identify key conceptual differences between 'subject' and 'self', the movement from subject to self and ultimately from object to practice i.e. self as a collection of practices rather than fixed identity. Indeed, I need analytical tools to apprehend the open, fluid and dynamic nature of self-knowledge.

Self and subject are often used interchangeably, but the word 'subject' cannot be conceived as a separate and isolated entity. Sigmund Freud decentres the rational *cogito* inherited from René Descartes: for Freud, the very issues that define and anchor the subject – gender, sexuality, the body, family relationships – are ambiguous and unstable, as they complete, contradict and complicate one another (Freud, 1923). The term 'subject' thus suggests a wider set of complex social and political relations.

> Critics shifted from the concept of a universal 'self' – achieving self-discovery, self-creation, and self-knowledge – to a new concept of the 'subject' riven by self-estrangement and self-fragmentation. […] As a result, the project of self-representation could no longer be read as providing direct access to the truth of the self. (Smith and Watson, 2010: 201).

As for the term 'self', it will not be discarded; it will be used to signify the notion of an entity that is envisioned and conceived as whole and independent.

Many commentators envision the subject as a set of Matryoshka dolls, with distinct parts complementing, influencing and conflicting against each other. In his theory of the social construction of the self, George Herbert Mead describes this set of relations as follows: the subject is split between the 'I' (i.e. the private 'I', the inner, true self of the individual) and the 'me' – and there is an inner 'I' managing the 'me', which is constituted through interactions with others (Mead, 1934: 107). This inner 'I' is thought to be our true self, which is authentic and runs the risk of being contaminated by society, generally perceived as full of constraints and false. For Michel Foucault, however, the dichotomy between the inner and outer 'I' is irrelevant, as well as any distinction between public and private selves; the subject is bound-up with the workings of social structures and institutions.

In his examination of the technologies of the self [*techniques de soi*], Foucault argues that the literature of the self cannot be understood unless it is integrated into the framework of the practices of the self. As Foucault studies the technologies of the self together with the notion of self-gouvernance, he asks "quelles sont les formes et les modalités du rapport à soi par lesquelles l'individu se constitue et se reconnaît comme sujet" (Foucault, 1994b: 541). In his study of ancient Greek thought, Foucault explores the active process of the subject constituting herself/himself via the production of commentary on the self. He argues against perpetrating the assumption that the process of identity formation remains constant in different cultures and historical periods, among other similar false universalisations. However, his study provides valuable insights for discussing the formation of an aesthetic of existence, 'truth'-telling and power-relations in a modern setting. Among these insights, I find the following five points particularly illuminating for my study:

- the question of 'truth'-formation

- self-knowledge as a constitutive practice aiming at self-transformation

- the elaboration of alternative modes of subjectivity

- the possibility for resistance to norms

- and the question of the (in)visibility of these processes.

Starting with the question of truth-formation, I briefly set out each of these points and outline their relevance for my investigation of self-representation below.

In his examination of the ethical transformations of the subject, and the subject's relation to self and others dependent on a particular kind of truth-telling, Foucault is less interested in the validity of true discourses than in the modes by which these discourses are considered as true. When examining the question of truth-formation, Foucault focuses on the act by which the subject manifests himself when speaking the truth, which he defines as how a subject "thinks of himself and is recognised by others as speaking the truth". Rather than the act of telling the truth, Foucault proposes to analyse "the form in which, in his act of telling the truth, the individual constitutes himself and is constituted by others as a subject of discourse of

truth" (Foucault, 1999: 3). This helps him uncover the interplay of power relations between the subject and truth. By looking at how modes of 'veridiction' and forms of self-practice interweave (Foucault, 1999: 8), Foucault examines the forms of power, i.e. the procedures by which people's conduct is governed, and the techniques of governmentality at work in personal ethics and the formation of the moral subject.

Foucault shares with Nietzsche a perspectival notion of truth, with 'truth' understood as a convenient fiction: 'Truth' is to be understood as "un ensemble de procédures réglées pour la production, la loi, la répartition, la mise en circulation et le fonctionnement des énoncés " (Foucault, 1994a: 160). For Foucault, language does not conceal or reveal:

> Le langage, cela se joue. Importance, par conséquent, de la notion de jeu [...]. Les relations de pouvoir, également, ça se joue ; ce sont des jeux de pouvoirs qu'il faudrait étudier en terme de tactique et de stratégie, en terme de règle et de hasard, en terme d'enjeu et d'objectif. (Foucault, 1994a: 541-542)

'Truth', for Foucault, is a discursive construct. He writes about a game of truth, with different truths and different ways of expressing them (Foucault, 1994b: 733). Foucault in his later works articulates the idea that dominant power structures do not have the monopoly on defining 'truth'. Foucault meant to conclude his last lecture with the assertion that truth-formation itself is relational. On the last page of the manuscript of his final lecture in 1984, Foucault writes:

> Il n'y a pas d'instauration de la vérité sans une position essentielle de l'altérité. La vérité, ce n'est jamais le même. Il ne peut y avoir de vérité que dans la forme de l'autre monde et de la vie autre.

(Foucault, 2009: 311). Alternative 'truths' can emerge from marginalised and oppositional individuals who exercise their power of free speech to question and challenge the words and actions of those in authority. As they destabilise the concept of an absolute truth, the oppositional truths have no greater claim to 'truth' than official discourses. They are fluid. Strategies of resistance can be articulated through them, and lead to the destabilisation of dominant discourses from within.

How is subjectivity formed and developed through practices that separate themselves from dominant social discourses? In his examination of different modes of self-formation, Foucault identifies in ancient Greek society the practice of 'hypomnemata', the collection of fragments from reading and listening.

'Hypomnemata', while close to a daily diary to the extent that they contain records of experience (which may or may not have a therapeutic function), were not about personal experience *per se*.

> Il s'agit, non de poursuivre l'indicible, non de révéler le caché, non de dire le non-dit, mais de capter au contraire le déjà-dit; rassembler ce qu'on a pu entendre ou lire, et ceci pour une fin qui n'est rien de moins que la constitution de soi. (Foucault, 1983: 8).

Through his study of 'hypomnemata', Foucault examines the active process of the assimilation of fragments and how identity is developed through the process of producing commentary on the self. Self-writing has the potential to open up possibilities for self-commentary and alternative modes of care. Foucault links the care of the self to the knowledge of the self, and sees writing as a means for transmission of knowledge. The text is a personal exercise, "le récit du rapport à soi" (Foucault, 1994b: 426), whose result is to be read by others. Self-writing is thus conceived as "se mettre soi-même sous les yeux des autres" (Foucault, 1994b: 429), articulating one's position in terms of one's relationship to others in order to achieve "le gouvernement de soi par soi dans son articulation avec les rapports à autrui (comme on le trouve dans la pédagogie)" (Foucault, 1994b: 214). Foucault considers 'hypomnemata' as a form of self-writing that enables the inscription of alternative modes of subjectivity, identity and relationships, which try to break free from established discourse, or operate as a supplement to these. While Foucault's study is historically circumscribed, it outlines different forms of practices of the self and thus provides us with analytical tools for discussing current modes of self-formations. Foucault highlights through his examination of 'hypomnemata' the potential of self-writing for self-learning and self-transformation.

Foucault provides us with the analytical tools to apprehend the open, fluid and dynamic nature of self-knowledge not only as a form of self-contemplation and self-examination, but also as a form of exercise aiming at self-transformation. I draw from the definition of 'hypomnemata' the notion that through various practices of the self, the individual constitutes herself/himself as a spectacle, which confronts each individual with her or his own contradictions. Moreover, for this practice to be successful, there is the need for a reiterated, suspicious decipherment of the self

(Foucault, 1999: 337), although the severe gaze that one must focus on oneself may also be accompanied by the feeling of a distance with regard to the world. Those are the aspects that I want to examine and put in dialogue and tension through the umbrella notion of 'self-crafting'.

Normative Processes

Technologies of the self suggest alternative modes of self-constituting and self-understanding. But to what extent can these modes be alternative when 'self-crafting' operates within dominant frameworks? In his later writing, Foucault states that there is no self-making outside of dominant discourses (Foucault, 1983). This work on the self, this act of delimiting, takes place within the context of a set of codes, prescriptions, or norms that precede and exceed the subject. These frameworks orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take. They are internalised, which makes their processes very difficult to examine.

> Il ne s'agit pas de dire que les relations de pouvoir ne peuvent faire qu'une chose qui est de contraindre et de forcer. Il ne faut pas s'imaginer non plus qu'on peut échapper aux relations de pouvoir d'un coup, globalement, massivement, par une sorte de rupture radicale ou par une fuite sans retour. (Foucault, 1994a: 542)

Before exploring the very possibility for resistance to these frameworks and the question of rendering both normative processes and resistance to them visible, I need to define the concept of 'norm'. For Judith Butler, the norm operates by way of providing the subject with an identity – or rather by providing the subject with a frame, which renders her or his identity intelligible and recognisable. Butler refers to this framing process as the norms imposing "a grid of legibility on the social" (Butler, 2004b: 42). Subject-hood is thus bound to recognition, and the subject is dependent on others. But the capacity of others to recognise a subject's identity depends less on their intentions than on the availability of suitable, socially articulated norms of recognition (Butler, 2004b: 2, 57). Butler claims that "the 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms". (Butler, 2005: 8). A normative frame is necessary for the emergence and encounter between the self and the other (Butler, 2005: 25). Self-questioning involves questioning the

norms of recognition that govern what I am. When questioning these norms, the subject questions the coherence of himself or herself, and risks unrecognizability as a subject (Butler, 2005: 23).

The subject emerges through reiterative practices. Butler uses the term 'self-crafting' to refer to the activities that the subject exercises in forming and negotiating relations with the norms (Butler, 2005: 22). But Butler does not expand on the nature of these practices and activities. She provides no account as to what these activities entail. For Foucault, the practice of self-stylisation in relation to dominant frameworks goes beyond self-awareness. The practice of critique, which Foucault defines in his 1978 lecture « Qu'est-ce que la critique ? », is to engage in an aesthetic of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms. There is a two-way relationship between the subject and the norm. Subject-hood is dependent on the norm, yet the subject constitutes the only site for the norm's enactment and reproduction. The subject needs the norm in order to appear as a legible human being, yet the norm needs to be enacted and performed to gain its force. The subject participates in, shapes, strengthens and weakens the norms. The norm needs to be reiterated in order to maintain its normative status. As the norm is always in formation and performed in various contexts, the very possibility of its alteration lies in these reiterations.

Drawing on Foucault and Butler, I note that while the subject can never fully free itself from the norm, the subject is never fully determined nor radically free: the subject is not outside of prevailing relations of power, but does not simply reflect institutional norms either. The notion of self-crafting suggests a potentially critical activity in the subject's relation to the norm. The normative processes that both enable and restrict the subject may exceed the limits of the subject's self-understanding. I argue however, that autobiocomics can render the working of the norm intelligible, in order to expose and contest its normative processes.

In this section, I have considered together with the question of 'truth'-formation to what extent self-knowledge may be a constitutive practice aiming at self-transformation. Building on Foucault, Butler claims that the conditions of the emergence of the subject can never be fully accounted for (Butler, 2005: 19). I argue

that as autobiocomics try and depict the emergence of the 'I', they also help us to explore how a subject may appropriate a set of norms yet maintain a critical relation to normative processes. In order to apprehend the representation and deconstruction of norms in autobiocomics, specific attention will be given to the framing process and existing theories of the frame. But first, it is necessary to identify the various narrative instances in autobiocomics through which alternative modes of subjectivity might be elaborated.

Temporalities

According to Mounir Laouyen, the subject in New Autobiography is dissolved into multiplicity, which works against any fixity of the autobiographical project (Laouyen, 2002: 3-4). A similar phenomenon can be observed in autobiocomics due to the fragmented nature of the comics form. Discussing autobiographical practices in prose, Eakin writes about the narrative sequence of self: "The extended self is the self of memory and anticipation, extending across time. It is this temporal dimension of extended selfhood that lends itself to expression in narrative form" (Eakin, 2004: 122). He underlines the tensions between the unified sense of self over time and a more fragmented perception of the self through time: "Our sense of having selves distinct from our stories is, nevertheless, hugely productive, serving our need for a stable sense of continuous identity stretching over time." (Eakin, 2004: 129) Comics give to the representation of time a particularly interesting set of challenges, on top of the issues specific to autobiography. In comics, the "first-person captions […] often create a retrospective temporality by making comments from an assumed present about the visualized past" (Chaney, 2011a: 24). Versaci states that the memories have to be organized in a certain chronological sequence: "the reader is confronted with visual signs that the memoir is a reconstruction of the past, and not that past itself" (Versaci, 2007: 64) and the text has to accept small inaccuracies in a search for larger truth, as it has to have a narrative, a development. As comics creator Jason Lutes points out, "imposing retroactive order on the messy unfolding of experience may be unavoidable in autobiography" (Lutes, 24, quoted in Versaci, 2007).

Comics also raise the technical issue of representing time. Following Lessing's distinction between text which he associates with time, and image which he claims represents space (Lessing, 1802), Scott McCloud argues that space is time in comics – with panels on the page signifying moments and the series of panels expressing the passing of time and a temporal sequence (McCloud, 1993). Chute uses this concept with convincing results when discussing the fragmentation of memory (Chute, 2010). El Refaie and Miller are more tentative in this approach and are in this regard closer to Douglas Wolk's conception of rendering temporality in comics by spatial means. Miller and El Refaie both recognise comics' potential for distending or collapsing time between and within panels and hint at a more complex relation between panels than that identified by McCloud but do not devote much space in discussing juxtaposition and fragments. El Refaie is more interested in "commemoration", which she describes as the deliberate mediation of memory, with the author "revealing connections between experiences that initially were most likely not perceived to be causally linked" (El Refaie, 2012: 129). For Hatfield, the difficulty of capturing and rendering memory in comics is part of the challenge of representing a sense of identity. "The representation of time through space, and the fragmentation of space into contiguous images, argue for the changeability of the individual self – the possibility that our identities may be more changeable, or less stable, than we care to imagine" (Hatfield, 2005: 126).

The question of the representation of time adds to the complexities of representing the self: the present self has to distance her/himself from her or his past self, and the representation of past and present selves on the comics page is only one of the many challenges that autobiocomics encounter. But this temporal split does not exclude the possibility that past and present selves ever meet, not only as an older and wiser self narrates and comments on the deeds of a less experienced self, but also through the transgression of the convention according to which different versions of the self should not meet. I show in my subsequent chapters how artists can express their sense of self as discontinuous or split by allowing disparate selves to inhabit a single panel, expose the feuds between conscience-figure and super-ego,

and conclude with the failed attempts to assert their individuality in the face of multiple selves.

Pacts

Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical reading pact may be an appropriate starting point when approaching the narrative instances in autobiographical practices. For Lejeune, the stability of the name – « l'identité de nom entre l'auteur (tel qu'il figure, par son nom, sur la couverture), le narrateur du récit et le personnage dont on parle » (Lejeune, 1975 : 23-24) – guarantees the referential character of the autobiographical writing. The autobiographical text posits the nominal identity between author, narrator and protagonist. This pact between the author and the reader is a commitment, "un contrat d'identité […] scellé par le nom propre" (Lejeune, 1975: 33), and the text can be submitted to a test of verification (1975: 23), notably through examinations of the paratext (Genette, 1987).

Eakin calls into question the author's honest intention, as he points out the impossibility of distinguishing facts from fictions in autobiography: "the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure" (Eakin, 1985: 3). Eakin's "autobiographical intention" consists in the sincere attempt to understand the self and share this process with the reader. Since the veracity of the account does not appear verifiable, the author's reliability is based on her or his intention to tell the truth. To sum up, autobiography requires an autobiographical pact, whether honest or complying (Eakin, 1985: 3), between the author and the reader, in order to reunite the initial division of the protagonist-narrator-author entity.

In a later text, as Lejeune examines how the reader approaches (in terms of content, narrative techniques, and style) an autobiographical text (Lejeune, 1986: 25) – he highlights the performative aspects of the autobiographical pact: "Passant un accord avec le narrataire dont il construit l'image, l'autobiographe incite le lecteur réel à entrer dans le jeu, et donne l'impression d'un accord signé par les deux parties"

(Lejeune, 1986: 21--22). The autobiographical pact "suppose une intention de communication, immediate ou différée" (Lejeune, 2005: 27) and implies reciprocity, yet this "contrat de lecture" is a mere reading suggestion: the reader remains free to interpret the text but the reader will have to take this contract into consideration, even to reject it or neglect it (Lejeune, 2005: 15-16). Lejeune's autobiographical pact deliberately plays with with referential text-strategies, and might be better understood as a performative, autobiographical act. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler sums up the complexities of enunciation in autobiographical practices as follows: "I create myself in new form, instituting a narrative 'I' that is super added to the 'I' whose past life I seek to tell" (Butler, 2005: 39). In autobiography, the different instances are connected but may not be viewed as identical, as Sidonie Smith points out *in A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*:

> the doubling of the 'self' into a narrating 'I' and a narrated 'I' and, further, the fracturing of the narrated 'I' into multiple speaking postures mark the autobiographical process as rhetorical artifact and the authorial signature as mythography (Smith, 1987: 47)

 "[T]he notion that an author and his memoir's protagonist share a name is not sufficient evidence of their inextricable identicalness", explains Jonathan D'Amore, further differentiating "the illustrating-I" from "the illustrated I" in autobiographical comics (D'Amore, 2012: 214).

In her second chapter, El Refaie questions the relevance of Lejeune's autobiographical pact for autobiographical comics as she argues that it conflicts with the authors' need to make multiple self-representations and makes it difficult to assume that the author, narrator and protagonist are the same. For Hatfield, the unifying project is threatened due to the very fragmented nature of comics.

> The syntax of comics – specifically, its reliance on visual substitution to suggest continuity – puts the lie to the notion of an unchanging, undivided self, for in the breakdowns of comics we see the self (in action over a span of time) represented by multiple selves (Hatfield, 2005: 126).

Yet, for Hatfield, autobiographical comics "still demand and play with the reader's trust" and the autobiographical pact is "upheld even as it is abused" (2005: 124). Reflecting on Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* (1994) and comparing "Harvey-the-persona" with "Pekar-the-author", Hatfield ponders "how we fashion our very selves

through the stories we tell. Who is Harvey – creator, creation, or both?" and suggests that we locate the self within the tension between creator and creation, or within the space in-between (Hatfield, 2005: 109). The presence of different personae takes on another dimension when discussed in terms of masks and *"mythes de soi"*, as the creator may end up "mythologizing himself" (Hatfield, 2005: 109) "into a property that belongs to him (or he to it?) but which nonetheless exceeds him." (Hatfield, 2005: 109).

Other commentators have also been reluctant to abandon the autobiographical pact: for Versaci, it is the narration that ties the narrative instances together and enables the unifying project. "To present radically different selves in prose narrative would, in all likelihood, be incoherent. However, because they are bound together by the text boxes, this potentially incoherent concept achieves formal unity in the comics medium." (Versaci, 2007: 49). For Miller, the autobiographical pact takes many forms. She argues:

> the pact can be both visually and verbally realized […], which allows not only for the identification of the extratextual model with the drawn character and as the source of the dialogue in speech balloons, but also with both the verbal narrator of voice-overs and the graphiator responsible for graphic line, composition, framing and layout. (Miller, 2011: 244)

In order to unpack, analyse and discuss this claim, I first need to identify the different narrative instances that can be found in autobiocomics: the extratextual author, the narrating 'I' and the protagonist drawn within the diegesis.

Narrative Instances

With its multiple textual and visual resources, the comics form is ideal to explore the different narrative layers in an autobiographical account. The notion of a singular, unified and unchanging self is challenged by the syntax of comics, whose sequential mechanism, i.e. graphic iterations, causes a precarious sense of continuing identity. The nominal identity between author, narrator and protagonist is called into question as the medium presents a clear visual distinction between three instances: the protagonist within the diegesis is represented inside the panels, the narrator's

comments appear in the narrative captions and the implied author is alluded to through her or his drawing style and stylistic choices. Moreover, the protagonist is subjected to the proliferation of the self, as she or he is drawn anew in each panel.

For Versaci, comics memoirs can represent complexities around the nature of identity and the self "in ways that cannot be captured in words alone" (Versaci, 2007: 36). With this claim, Versaci runs the risk of falling into a counterproductive divide opposing prose to comics, which he then tries to avoid by producing a list of prose memoirs that arguably push the boundaries between fact and fiction. Versaci insists that comics "complicate the issue of truth-telling both implicitly and explicitly [...] through their unique formal elements" (Versaci, 2007: 36). This is a typical example of the "search for comics exceptionalism" (Beaty, 2008), which leads to dubious claims about features supposedly 'unique' to the comics form. It is crucial to consider comics' particularities without falling into such traps. Versaci's claim that comics 'complicate' the issue of truth-telling implies that in other media, such a prose, there could be an uncomplicated approach to 'truth-telling'. On the contrary, I would argue that the complexities were always there, and that comics are ideal as a form to explore these issues. And while Versaci's conclusions about the specificities of comics are dubious at best, he correctly identifies that "comics memoirs are capable of demonstrating a broader and more flexible range of first-person narration than is possible in prose." (Versaci, 2007: 36).

Kukkonen uses the term "autographic agents" to refer to the narrator, the focalizer and the observer (Kukkonen, 59). I find Kukkonen's use of the term 'focalizer' – which she defines as the autographic agent "on whose knowledge [the image] is based" – particularly confusing. Definitions such as "the narrator, who creates the image" and "the observer, whose embodied spatial position is represented and which the reader is invited to share" (Kukkonen, 2013: 59) are far too ambiguous and using them would only lead to further ambiguities. Nevertheless, the term "autographic agent" when referring to the various narrative instances to be found in 'autobiocomics' is particularly interesting for the postmodernist connotations it conveys. Indeed, it raises issues as it implies a certain conception of the subject: the term 'agents' suggests 'agency' and hints at autobiography's potential as a source of

"agency in self-representation", as Gilmore argues in her introduction to *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Gilmore, 1994: 14), offering agency and empowerment to the individual. This is particularly significant in the potential for 'autobiocomics' for 'self-crafting'.

For Philippe Marion, there are two instances of enunciation: transitive and figurative 'monstration'[3] on the one hand and reflexive 'graphiation' on the other hand, which has to do with the graphic gesture (Marion, 1993: 36). Groensteen argues that the distinction between 'monstration' and 'graphiation' is redundant, as separating the two would imply that monstration could be neutral (Groensteen, 2011: 92). Since "un degré zéro du style graphique est impossible à concevoir", Groensteen suggests that it would be more useful to accept the artist's subjectivity and approach the graphic traits in terms of "intention narrative" (93). But Groensteen perpetuates some confusion when he defines the "narrator" as "[t]he ultimate authority that is responsible for the selection and organization of all the information that makes up the story telling" (Groensteen, 2010a: 14).

A solution may be to turn to Miller instead. Building on Genette's terminology, she identifies three instances:

- the extratextual author, whose name is on the cover

- the narrating "I", who is expressed through the verbal narrator responsible for the voice-over and the 'visual graphiator' responsible for the graphic line (Miller, 2011: 244)

- the characters (242).

Miller makes a compelling point when she identifies 'graphiation' as part of a visual pact (244-5). But then, in a misleading image caption, referring to two panels in which the graphiator's role in producing repeated likenesses of the character is stressed, Miller appears to refer to the protagonist as graphiator (255). I would prefer to avoid the issues raised by this ambiguity by strictly referring to the 'graphiator' when I examine the traces of the artist's process as they are visible on the page.

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[3] Marion borrows the concept of 'monstration' from Gaudreault, 1990: 91.

Therefore, I do not consider the 'graphiator' as the protagonist as drawn within the diegesis, but as the clues left by the extra-textual artist that signifies her or his hand at work. The 'graphiator' would therefore refer to an idea of the artist that floats between the text and the extra-textual author. Moreover, it would be a mistake to use the term 'graphiation' to refer to the clues themselves. The suffix -ation suggests a process rather than the resulting visual clues. Miller has a point when she discusses meta-representation and visual clues to the work being made, such as representations of the protagonist at the drawing board, and the metonymy of the drawing hand that confirms that the hand belongs to the artist and protagonist. She defines 'graphiation' as the narrative instance responsible for the graphic lines, composition, framing and panel layout (244).

The artist's hand provides the reader with clues to the artist's subjective vision. Some clues may be more obvious than others, yet everything on the page is made by the same hand and thus can be read as 'graphiation' – on the condition that the artist/writer/inker is the same individual of course, and matches the name on the cover, if that information is to be trusted – see on that point my discussion of Forest's works in Chapter 2. It is therefore crucial to consider 'graphiation' as the visual clue that makes the work of the artist more blatant.[4] These clues may be a commentary on the making of comics, but they are most certainly not the process itself and should not prevent the reader from considering the whole text, however 'objective' it may seem, as the artist's subjective vision. Marion considers that 'graphiation' is self-referential and mentions the subjectivity *implied through* 'graphiation' (Marion, 1993: 36), which should not make us forget the overall subjective quality of the work. While I find 'graphiation' relevant as a concept, its use in formal discussions around 'immediacy' and 'transparency' of the creative process remains ambiguous. Notions such as the "third-person perspective of the image" (Versaci, 2007: 44) also have to be used with extreme caution.

I will now investigate the representation of the first-person character in the diegesis, as well as the visual and textual clues pointing to the narrating 'I'and

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[4] I use here 'work' instead of 'process' since we are indeed looking at a finished page and that the 'process' is only signified.

evaluate the relevance of the binary opposition between 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity', as I pursue my exploration of the issues surrounding the representation of subjectivities in autobiocomics.

Crafting the 'I': Reader's Involvement and Traces of Subjectivities

Comics studies came up with various terms to refer to the autobiographical persona drawn within the diegesis: the avatar (Whitlock, 2006: 971, 977), the mask (Hatfield, 2005: 114-115) and the "I-con"[5] (Chaney, 2011a: 24) being the most popular ones. Chaney notes "the ubiquitous materiality of the I-con as an actor of narration" since "[w]hile these I-cons are the visual equivalent of the narrated 'I' of written autobiographies, they are always on view, being viewed rather than merely revealing the view." (Chaney, 2011a: 24) Indeed, the visual aspect of comics[6] affirms the centrality of the body. According to Drew Leder, the body is marginal to our sense of self (Leder, 1990). Attention rarely dwells upon our own embodiment: bodies remain part of our "corporeal background" but ordinarily fade from consciousness in the context of our lived experiences. Leder identifies this phenomenon as "corporeal absence", which Braidotti partly explains by "the loss of Cartesian certainty about the dichotomy mind/body" that led to the proliferation of discourses about the body: "there is no more unitary certainty or uncontested consensus about what the body actually is". This further induces the "simultaneous overexposure and disappearance of the body" (Braidotti, 1994: 60). However, in comics, the body occupies a central position, as it is visually represented in panels. The centrality of the body in autobiographical comics is particularly interesting when contrasted with the near-effacement of bodies in autobiographical life writing in prose (Neuman, Shirley, in

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[5] Chaney's "I-con" is a play on words on the speaking 'I', its visual representation in the panel and the notion of "iconicity" which I investigate later in this section.

[6] Traditional comics scholarship so far has investigated comics as a form of visual representation to the detriment of the other senses. On this particular point, see Ian Hague, who in *Comics and the Senses* (2014) seeks to present an alternative mode of understanding comics that transcends the limitations of considering comics as a visual art form only.

Ashley, Gilmore and Peters (eds), 1994: 291)[7]. El Refaie explores what she calls "pictorial embodiment". For Versaci, comics are particularly apt at representing physical identities, issues related to body image, and the tensions between the perceptions of the body that vary in time (Versaci, 2007: 53-57).

Because of their visual aspect, autobiocomics raise the issue of physical likeness regarding the author's intra-textual representation. Resemblance in "autobiocomics" is a matter of degree. The graphic likeness of the autobiographical protagonist may be shaped by the artist's own sense of self, when it comes to the drawn persona of the cartoonist in autobiocomics, a "character that just happens to bear an unmistakable likeness to his creator" (Hatfield, 2005: 109). 'Likeness' does not have to be understood as photographic realism. El Refaie notes that "graphic memoirists are typically concerned less with trying to capture their outer appearances as accurately as possible and more with expressing character traits and shifting states and emotions" (El Refaie, 2012: 147) and for McCloud, this likeness can be either "realistic" or "iconic" (McCloud, 1993: 46).[8]

McCloud links the opposition between 'realist' and 'iconic' drawings to the notions of subjectivity and objectivity and uses this dichotomy to discuss the process of reader identification. The less realistic – and therefore the more subjective, according to McCloud – the drawing, the more the reader will project him-/herself into the images and identify with them (McCloud, 1993: 36). He argues that this seems to work particularly well when the bold, almost abstract cartoons of characters are contrasted with more realist settings. According to McCloud, this contrast draws the reader into the 'diegesis', the world of the comics narrative. For Versaci, "the story of the life lived exerts a powerful hold over many readers" and "we are drawn to others' lives out of the desire to connect with and learn from their stories, which have the ability to raise questions about the nature of art, our lives, and how the two intersect" (Versaci, 2007: 76).

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[7] Patient narratives of illness are notable exceptions.
[8] I explore this point further notably in Chapter 3 as I examine "Le Bec", Lewis Trondheim's short contribution to *Les Ignorants* by Etienne Davodeau (2011: 56).

Reader participation is crucial to autobiographical practice in comics, as it is not only the crux of the autobiographical pact, but also, according to McCloud's concept of 'closure', a defining element of the very nature of comics. The gutter (the inter-frame space) provides a blank space that needs the reader's active interpretation and participation (McCloud, 1993: 136). Harvey provides a counterpoint to McCloud by identifying a gap between picture and caption that the reader "fills in" (Harvey, 2001). Both Harvey and McCloud see the reader as a critical producer of meaning. McCloud goes as far as to claim this process is unique to comics, an assertion that Hatfield only slightly tones down by stating that comics are more demanding of active participation than prose (Hatfield, 2005: xiv). Readers must make imaginative links. El Refaie evokes the collaborative role played by readers, with references to McCloud's argument about the gutters favouring reader's involvement and participation in the creation of the story (El Refaie, 2012).

Discussing McCloud's concepts of identification and closure and his claim that schematic, simplified drawings approach universality, Miller challenges McCloud's conflation of categories including realistic/iconic, objective/subjective and specific/universal (Miller, 2010: 226). She points out that McCloud's distinction between schematic and detailed drawing and its effect on the reader's perception fails to account for the fact that the readers of *Maus* do not identify with the schematic Nazi cats as they do with the Jewish mice, which rightly demonstrates how restrictive McCloud's definition is. Instead, Miller suggests we look at the question of identification while considering the impact of the story's focalisation, institutional contexts, discourses and ideologies, and she reminds us not to forget that the actual reader is raced, gendered and historically situated (Miller, 2011: 227, building on Shohat and Stam, 350). Miller also questions McCloud's assertion that a more detailed drawing would be more objective. She points out that objectivity is more often connoted by diagrammatic rather than by realist illustrations and that contrary to McCloud's assertions, some readers may find the more detailed and realist portraits more engaging.

It is quite puzzling to note the lack of definition of what constitutes 'realistic' as opposed to 'symbolic' comics art, especially considering that the question of

reader's involvement has been addressed using these terms. It would seem that commentators borrow these terms from other forms of visual culture and literary criticism, but no definition is ever provided. As a result, these undefined concepts are misused in unhelpful debates that underline the need for more precise and technical vernacular with which to describe graphic style – and which would go a long way towards asserting the artistic validity of comics.

The tension between 'realistic' and 'symbolic' graphic styles also pervades the notion of the 'I-con'. Chaney's "I-con" is a play on words between the speaking 'I' and its visual representation in the panel. With reference to Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches to the self, Chaney suggests that the I-con seems to function as the mask of the imaginary (Chaney, 2011a: 24). The I-con "merges with captions and other conventions of sequential art and storytelling to produce an identity that may be legible within the prevailing symbolic order" (Chaney, 2011a: 24). McCloud uses the term 'icon' "to mean any image used to represent a person, place, thing or idea", while he considers 'symbols' as a category of icons "use[d] to represent concepts, ideas and philosophies" (McCloud, 1993: 26-28). Charles S. Pierce distinguishes between symbolic (arbitrary), iconic (motivated) and indexical (direct, causative) signs, which leads Miodrag to urge comics scholars to make a distinction between "arbitrary symbols" and "motivated icons". She makes further distinctions between, on the one hand, "icon[s] of the image type, the subdivision of iconicity that describes representation through straightforward material likeness, and which we tend to conflate with the entire category of motivated signs in defining it". On the other hand, she identifies "icon[s] of the metaphor type, depicting a representative character of a signified. That is, the depiction is suggestive of the abstract idea but does not (could not) embody physical likeness" (Miodrag, 2014: 150-151).

The difficulties raised by this endless debate can be illustrated with a comparative look at the difference in drawing styles that can be observed not only across the corpus of this study, but also within each of the texts. Perspective realism is an aesthetic, a set of instituted conventions, developed within the Western artistic tradition. A 'realist' style may be understood as opposed to overtly exaggerated or caricatured. Comics rely less on resemblance, but that does not make them

necessarily symbolic and arbitrary. Through the processes of simplification, realist details are abstracted away. But this simplification does not transform motivated icons into arbitrary symbols (Miodrag, 2014: 192) as the resulting signs are highly recognisable and evocative. Whitlock notes the "wide iconic range from the abstraction of cartooning to realism" that can be found in comics (Whitlock, 2006: 968). More clearly-marked differences in style may appear within the same panel, as "sudden bursts of iconicity" that erupt within a realistic visual style. Joseph Witek associates visual realism with authenticity, a claim that El Refaie challenges, as she points to autobiographical comics that do not feature a realist style (El Refaie, 2012: 150). While the significance of these stylistic variations will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters, it will not be in terms of their impact on the reader's involvement. I follow Miodrag's lead and choose instead to discuss these stylistic variations in terms of how visual images actively mediate their messages (Miodrag, 2014: 225).

The visual, which occupies a central place both in the formation of identity and the representation of the self, seems to enable 'objectivity' through the distance established between the viewer and what is seen. 'Objectivity' can be suggested within the text through the insertion of photographic images, maps or copies of documents. In his biographical work entitled *Le Photographe*, Emmanuel Guibert inserts Didier Lefèvre's photographs as panels in the narrative and fills the gaps with his own drawings (Guibert, Lefèvre and Lemercier, 2012). The method has proven its efficiency in its direct rendering of personal experience, since, as Barthes succinctly puts it, "la photographie authentifie l'existence de tel être" (Barthes, 1980: 166). Photograph's mechanical processes of production makes it easy to overlook the traces of authorship in its product, in opposition to a drawing, which is usually read as more personal and therefore supposedly more subjective. The respective works of Forest and Neaud, who both build their account by editing or redrawing pictures, and thus expressing the subjective filter of the artist, explore and challenges the assumptions about the difference between photographs[9] and drawings regarding

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[9] El Refaie states that photographs claim to offer a "direct, mimetic representation of the world" (2012: 165).

their degrees of mediation.[10] The very idea of the objective quality of the photograph is at odds with techniques such as framing, which I will examine later in this chapter. The idea that photographs are unmediated pervades our approach to comics. It seems to be reinforced by its contrast with 'graphiation', which is read as the inscription of subjectivity in the drawn page.

Subjectivity can be expressed through the breakdown of representation, and transcribing affects onto the page may lead towards abstract art. Expressionistic bursts of iconicity may disrupt photographic realism. Different graphic styles may be juxtaposed even within the same panel, in order to communicate emotional disruptions. The images can be suffused with emotion, which, for Miller, shows the permeability of inner and outer worlds through the inscription of subjectivity into the text and the image (Miller, 2011: 248). Varying the level of 'iconicity' in a single panel may also imply greater or lesser clarity of recollection.

These considerations should not detract from the fact that everything in comics is "transformed through somebody's eye and hand" (Wolk, 2007: 118) and "graphic style", following the idea of the significance of the author in the making of the work, is the evidence of the artist's hand (in pen strokes, etc.), "the highly individual way an artist handles pen or brush" (Harvey, 1996: 152). Through framings, embodied viewpoints and graphiation, autobiocomics artists represent how they see their entourage and surroundings. These visual clues thus suggest a self-portrait en creux. This discussion of the notions of 'objectivity' as implied through 'realism' and subjectivity as implied through 'graphiation' has pointed out how unconvincing and unhelpful these notions are regarding the formal analysis of comics. It has nevertheless underlined that these variations in graphic style are necessarily planned and carefully constructed rather than spontaneously produced. This is particularly relevant when approaching the notion of hypothetical intentionality[11] and implied author, as clues can be given as part of a playful game with the reader about the identity of the graphic narrator. This 'graphiation', the "constant visual reminder of

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[10] I discuss the significance of the insertions of photographs in the diegesis, either digitally-edited in Forest (Chapter 2), or redrawn in Neaud (Chapter 4).
[11] For a discussion on intentionality, see Sheringham (1993: 1-5).

the hand of the artist" (Marion, 1993, discussed in Baetens, 2001 and in Groensteen, 2010), may play with the very feasibility of making comics – a convention with which, as I will show in the following chapters, Forest's works deliberately plays. In the following section, I examine the notion according to which these key stylistic elements may also work as an authenticating device giving shape to an inner sense of self in a visual medium. This leads me to an investigation of the very notion of 'authenticating strategies' as they are identified by previous commentators.

Authenticating Strategies

The text's "admissions of artifice defer the question of trustworthiness to a new level, that of the very act of creation." (Hatfield, 2005: 125). As truth lies "not in the 'facts' of the story itself, but in the relational space between the story and its reader" (Gunn, 1982: 143), alerting the reader to the possibilities of deceit or insincerity is another step towards gaining the trust of the reader, through the admission of artifice. By drawing attention to the artistic forms and narrative techniques that are used, the author gives the reader unprecedented access to the process of creation. Many autobiocomics are riddled in their printed version with not only spelling mistakes but also spots of ink and even more strikingly, scratched-out figures. It may be futile to discuss whether these mistakes are a conscious authorial choice or the result of the editorial team's inadvertence. More significant is the fact that these 'mistakes' contribute to the overall impression of transparency of the process of making comics and the editorial choice to publish the sketchbooks as they are, thus providing the text with a seemingly spontaneous quality. The sketch-like quality of diaries – their "apparent artlessness" (Miller, 2011: 216) – is perceived as raw and unmediated. The evocation of the editing process seems to make the text appear paradoxically more authentic, according to El Refaie (El Refaie, 2012: 166).

El Refaie argues that in autobiocomics, the author acts as a mediating instance between a representation and the objects or events it depicts. She sees authenticity as emerging as a process of constant negotiation between author, text and reader.

For her, it is up to the reader to evaluate the author's performed integrity and ultimately validate the autobiographical reading pact. El Refaie's list of authenticating strategies include elements that are not exclusive to 'autobiocomics' (El Refaie, 2012: 144-172). I shall return promptly to the examination of the specificities of 'autobiocomics', but I wish to underline now the specificities of comics, as identified by Miodrag (2014). In a strong stand against what other comics theorists have suggested, Miodrag argues that the collaborative play of word and image (which can be found in many visual media), the incorporation of "literary" writing in multimodal form, "closure" required from the audience, and 'sequentiality' are not unique to comics. For Miodrag, what is unique to comics are speech balloons, the simultaneity of narrative content and the composition, which, she argues, functions as a network rather than a sequence (Miodrag, 2014: 165). Miodrag shows that comics are "not a mere hybrid of graphic art and prose literature" (87). While comics differ from literary prose, she recognizes their possibility for "visual arrangements [to] create literary effects" (76).

El Refaie rightly notes "the centrality of reported speech" and claims that "speech balloons offer such a straightforward means of including direct quotations into a narrative" (El Refaie, 2012: 149). She argues that speech balloons convey immediacy that not only helps describe real-life conversations but also re-enacts them before the reader's eyes. Versaci goes further and claims that by "creating an 'I' through direct address" (Versaci, 2007: 38), speech balloons are "effective at achieving an immediate intimacy with the reader" (38). Versaci conflates here the notion of immediacy with that of intimacy.

The use of thought-bubbles in autobiocomics have become scarce as both fictional and autobiographical comics now seem to favour visual over textual narration. In line with the current trend of avoiding thought-bubbles and narration text boxes, as much as possible, across Western comics production from the late-nineties onwards, thought-bubbles in autobiocomics are increasingly replaced with carefully selected uses of first-person narration text boxes. Versaci attributes the capacity for expression of reminiscence to the narration text boxes (41), therefore the narration text boxes conflate two functions, and the tension between

reminiscence and immediacy makes their rare use all the more significant and worth examining in detail. El Refaie claims that

> […] the visual appearance of the hand-lettered words in the balloons suggests the irregularities of tone and pitch that are characteristic of the human voice […], thereby reinforcing the sense that this conversation actually took place and was not simply imagined or invented. (El Refaie, 2012: 149).

El Refaie seems to suggest that it is the fact that the lettering is handwritten that is crucial to the authenticating strategy. However, the use of handwritten lettering in speech balloons can hardly be a significant authenticating device, as the same rhetorical device can be found in fictional narratives. Similarly, while El Refaie claims that "graphic memoirists often use a style of drawing that quite openly and deliberately diverges from the styles commonly associated with conventional comic books" (El Refaie, 2012: 150), I would argue that while handwritten lettering and distinctive graphic style have become specific features predominantly associated with alternative comics, these formal features are associated with alternative artists and are therefore artist-specific, rather than genre or practice-specific. [12] This permeability between sectors and genres may be explained by the growing interest that the mainstream publishing industry has developed in alternative artists. Of course, these features can also be used in autobiographical comics but it seems to me that the specificity of their uses and analyses of the resulting effects are missing from El Refaie's otherwise thorough analysis. Most of the formal resources that have been identified so far as authenticating strategies are the same rhetorical devices that are used in fictional comics as well, which deflates the argument at worst or displaces the onus onto the reader to determine what is and what is not authentic.

El Refaie identifies strategies that autobiographical comics deploy to establish authentication. But she fails to challenge authenticity as a criterion, as she refers to "authentic thoughts and emotions" (El Refaie, 2012: 167) in her examination of the "verbal and visual strategies [that autobiographical comics [creators commonly use]

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[12] Jeffrey Brown uses handwritten speech balloons both in his autobiographical comics and his more recent affectionate Star Wars parodies in comics. More strikingly, Eddie Campbell uses his handwritten lettering not only in his autobiographical comics, but also in his mainstream production, notably in his *Batman: The Order of the Beasts*, a 2004 superhero comics published by DC comics.

to convey their honesty and integrity" (El Refaie, 2012: 222).[13] Comics creator Daniel Clowes refers to the multiplicity of the selves in autobiocomics to challenge autobiography's claims to truth, as noted and discussed by both Versaci and Hatfield, and the latter sees in them what he calls "ironic authentication", the denial of any authentic and irrefutable identity (Hatfield, 2005: 125). The visual multiplicity of the self as the protagonist is drawn anew in each panel and the proliferation of the self even within the same panel (Miller, 2011: 252-3) challenge the sense of continuing identity as it suggests a sense of self that is never definitive. In autobiocomics, identities are unstable and ever-changing, always re-enacted and reiterated through time, and in order to apprehend them, I turn to Judith Butler. In her discussion of gender, Butler describes identity as "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts", an effect "produced through the stylization of the body", "the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self." (Butler, 1999: 179). This conception of identity shares similarities with the stylized persona repeatedly drawn throughout the formal comics panel structure. For Butler, these repeated acts are not the representation of some inner self, since the 'I' is constituted and constructed through the performative process.

Authenticity, transparency, realism, veracity, accuracy, sincerity, truthfulness, emotional truths, inner and outer worlds… Much more useful to 'autobiocomics' studies than all these problematic notions is the concept of performativity – regardless of whether there is a true self to imitate. El Refaie makes compelling arguments about comics' elements of meta-reflexivity (2012: 19; 140-144) and links them with performance, building on Goffman (1969) who incorporates, in his analysis of the performative aspects of social interaction, the idea of frames that come with expectations and boundaries. While his analysis is about shared, interpretative frames, comics panel frames also come to mind, a reading that El Refaie uses in her monograph. Multiple selves are realised through diverse performances. The self is

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[13] El Refaie's study shares this aspect with previous studies on autobiographical comics. See for instance, Pekar's claim according to which "the more accurate, the more readers can identify with them." (Pekar, 1988: 84) – or Hatfield, for whom "the goal is absolute honesty" (Hatfield, 2005: 113); "the genre isn't about literal but rather *emotional* truths" (Hatfield, 2005: 113; emphasis in original).

produced through social interactive processes and performed in appropriate social situations – or in reaction to these situations – either by agency or inadvertence.

Performativity

In *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*, Elizabeth Bruss argues for understanding autobiography as a "personal performance" (Bruss, 1976). Identities may appear natural but are a product of the performative process. For Butler, identity is produced through the compulsory and compulsive repetition of imitative acts, but appears as the source of these acts. Iterability for Butler is the dissimulatory process "by which the subject who 'cites' the performative is temporarily produced as the belated and fictive origin of the performative itself" (Butler, 1997a: 49) and the "citational" nature of the performative acts is concealed. Conventional iterations reinforce discursive norms, and performativity can be seen as the "miming of hegemonic ideals" (Butler, 1993: 125), which Bell sees as "the embodiment of normative ideals via a process of mimesis whereby the body is rendered culturally intelligible" (Bell, 2007: 100).

Building on Foucault's arguments in the later volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, and Butler's *Excitable Speech* (1997), Bell argues that "[p]erformativity has no compatibility with a notion of resistance figured as the avoidance of the lines of power relations": there is only ever a working with and even along these lines (Bell, 2007: 28). Butler warns us that the practices of successive poses or masquerades may result in "flat repetitions [of dominant poses]" which may lead to "political stagnation" (Braidotti, 1994: 6-7). But this does not mean that there is no possibility to resist the norms that are enforced through discourse: "though language is indeed constraining and strongly influences the way we conceptualise the world around us, there is some scope for manipulating its conventions in order to draw attention to and even challenge discursive norms" (Miodrag, 2014: 55). For Deleuze, the subject does not coincide with her or his consciousness, nor does it coincide with "the normative image of thought based on the phallogocentric system" (Braidotti, 1994: 101). In her examination of the notion of "nomadic subjects" and their alternative

accounts in a late capitalist context of a crisis of values, Braidotti exacerbates the perceptions by dominant subjects that those alternative accounts are factors of this crisis of values (Braidotti, 1991). But she also sees crisis as "the opening up of new possibilities and potentialities" (Braidotti, 1994: 97).

Fragmentations

The self may be experienced as dissolving and fragmented, and if so, the unifying project of autobiography to build a self-image may only lead to the exacerbation of the multiplicities of the self. The persona drawn within the 'diegesis' may be questioning that fragmentation. Both Miller (2010) and Chaney (2011a) note in their respective studies the recurrence of scenes in autobiographical comics in which the persona raises issues regarding self-fragmentation. Chaney points out the significance of mirrors in the depiction of these scenes. As the mirror offers an image of wholeness, it may provide a sense of unified selfhood. By contrast, a sense of discontinuity seems an undesirable state. Formal discontinuities in self-representations may thus express an emotional turmoil. Chute demonstrates the significance of formal discontinuities in her examination of trauma narrative in comics – or "traumics", as they are now known.

After investigating the question of ethics in relation to notions of self-constitution in the face of trauma (Chute, 2010), Chute takes the issue further in *Disaster Drawn* (2016) where she examines "how these works push on conception of the un-representable and the unimaginable that have become commonplace in discourse about trauma" – what W. J. T. Mitchell calls "trauma theory's cult of the un-representable" (Mitchell, 2011: 60). Building on her discussion on the risk of representation (Chute, 2010: 3), Chute argues that "[g]raphic narratives, on the whole, have the potential to be powerful precisely because they intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking […] the risk of representation" (Chute, 2016: 5). She shows that traumics engage the difficulty of spectacle – a term that she uses in lieu of "witnessing" – instead of turning away from it. In "Family Pictures", Marianne

Hirsch states that comics try "to produce a more permeable and multiple text […] that definitely [erases] any clear-cut distinction between the documentary and the aesthetic". According to Hirsch, comicsher succeed in doing so when incorporating photographs alongside drawings (Hirsch, 1992: 8-9). Chute however argues that comics offer the "permeability" on their own, because of their gap-and-frame form (Chute, 2016: 273). Chute demonstrates that they not only risk representation but also refigure representation, in Peter Galison and Lorraine Daston's sense of the contemporary movement from representation to 'presentation' – the shift from "image-as-representation to image-as-process" (Galison and Daston, 2007: 382-383) (Chute, 2016: 17).

But formal discontinuities may not always signify processes of alienating self-fragmentation. Or if they do, there may be grounds for considering alienation in the Sartrean sense of the term: the revealing of one's vulnerability to another freedom, an experience which eventually leads to the certainty of the existence of other subjects (Sartre, 1956: 439). In order to gather the analytical tools that will allow me to revise the perception of self-fragmentation as alienating and with it, the assumption that this alienation is necessarily negative, I turn to 'assemblage' theory.

Autobiocomics as Assemblage

The concept of assemblage is to be seen as a small but significant part of my theoretical framework, as I make targeted uses of it in the following chapters. It is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's free-floating assemblage of interweaving and cross-fertilising relationships, which consist in a web of social flows, with neither stable centre nor margins.

> An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously […]. There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from these orders. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 25).

For Deleuze and Guattari, the subject is produced by the repetition of connections. Identities are decomposing and recomposing. There is no permanent structure, but

ever-changing possibilities are forged. There cannot be any excavation of internal structures, as there is no such thing as an inner self or inner workings of society, but endless connections of surfaces, flux and flows. Braidotti describes Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage as an "affirmation of fluid boundaries, a practice of the interval, of the interfaces, and of the interstices" (Braidotti, 1994: 6). Her choice of words is particularly interesting for my study, as her description bears important similarities with the comics form. The interstices recall the gap of the gutters and the fluid boundaries may be understood as the framing processes at work in autobiocomics. Drawing on these semantic parallels which suggest formal ones, I assert that 'assemblage' may thus be ideal for the exploration of these connections. Referring to assemblage when relevant will help me redefine the fragmentation of the subject and comics as 'openness' with a view to self-crafting.

An assemblage is defined along two axes: one is its range of discursive and non-discursive components. The assemblage is not an organic totality: its components have a certain autonomy. The other axe is the range of movements which the assemblage instigates. As such, assemblages can be 'stabilised' and 'destabilised'. Deleuze and Guattari also refer to these movements as 'territoralisation' and 'deterritorialisation'. Assemblages are entities with a definite identity and yet they are not defined by an essence but by a process of emergence. Assemblages should not be considered as a tracing of the world present and past, or as a tracing of established concepts and essentialist presuppositions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 26).

In order to read fragmentation as creativity and to analyse the intersection of lines, their expansion and their tangled paths as the social machine in autobiocomics, I make infrequent but significant references to assemblage theory. There is a growing interest in assemblage within the field of comics studies, with Marcus Doel's examination of the plastic qualities of Chris Ware's comics being one of the most notable contributions to date (Doel, 2014: 161-180). Doel refers to assemblage as he demonstrates how comics have the capacity for departing from linear time, with juxtaposed panels representing different moments in time (Doel, 2014: 172). He then proposes replacing the notion of 'sequencing', which he considers ill-conceived, with

that of 'voiding', which supposedly describes the multi-panelled page as "an inconsistent multiplicity suspended in the void of the gutter" (Doel, 2014: 162).

Unconvinced by Doel's conception of the comics page as a 'collage' of stills rather than a more dynamic set of connections, I posit that 'assemblage' can be successfully conjured up to discuss the flows and destabilised relations between formal elements of the comics page, notably in an investigation of the openness of the framing processes at work in autobiocomics. I wish to make use of Rikke Cortsen's assemblage theory, a critical framework that she claims to develop in order to investigate the open-ended-ness of comics. Cortsen borrows from De Landa's multi-scaled model of assemblage in her application of assemblage theory to comics. She also expands on Thierry Groensteen's conceptualization of comics as network, by looking at interrelations and disconnections between many key formal components of comics (style, text, colour, etc.) across the text and beyond – notably through the examination of the text's inscription in a network of intertextual references. Comics panels are not absolute partitions but interconnect with varying intensities. Cortsen's approach insists on the examination of the 'tensions' of comics as identified by Hatfield:

> tensions between codes of signification, between the single image and the image-in-series; between narrative sequences and page surface; and, more broadly, between reading-as-experience and the text as material text (Hatfield, 2005: 36).

Assemblage theory proposes an investigation of separate parts and the interaction between those parts, with a specific emphasis on the fact that "the properties of assemblage are not just the sum of the properties of its parts" (Cortsen, 2012: 114): hence, the need to "consider all components of comics on their own as well as determined by their relation to other elements" (Cortsen, 2012: 134). Indeed, "[assemblage] theory focuses on how the parts are connected and how the parts can participate actively in keeping the whole together as well as breaking it apart" (Cortsen, 2012: 137).

What characterises Cortsen's theoretical approach is her focus on the open-ended-ness of comics: by refusing a stable definition or a fixed model of classification,

assemblage theory not only reveals the dynamic qualities of comics, but also enables the uncovering of multiple layers of meaning:

> the concept of comics as assemblage is sufficiently amorphous to enlarge this model to make us envision the many possible connections there are across a work and even more so across several works. (Cortsen, 2012: 137).

Cortsen rightly identifies that comics are in flux (Corsten, 2012: 199) only to apply assemblage theory to a close-text examination of iconic iterations – the final banquet depicted in the last panel of each *Astérix* album, and recurring stills of Valérian and Laureline's space-ship in the eponymous series. In this respect, it appears that her analysis fails to demonstrate the potential for her conception of assemblage theory to become an analytical tool for more dynamic connections between the formal elements of comics, and the thematic issues that autobiocomics explore.

When approaching nets of relationships, I find it useful to refer to the concept of assemblage. For Deleuze and Guattari, relationships are to be understood mostly as arborescent. Deleuze and Guattari borrow from botany the concept of the rhizome. They use the imagery of the expanding roots, the shoots and leaves, in order to describe the creation of connections between elements which were previously disconnected and seemed unrelated (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 18). Drawing on their theories, I argue that the interpenetration of dynamic elements in autobiocomics can be more fully apprehended in all their complexities when approached as rhizomatic assemblages. Indeed, rhizomatic assemblages not only allow for perceiving the expansion of these elements in any directions, endlessly, without a centre, but also challenging the idea that interconnections have a cause or origins. Rhizomatic assemblages flatten out relations to the point that there are neither hierarchies nor foundations. They counter-actualise the given. This absence of causes and origins is useful as it reconfigures the relation between the subject and its object of knowledge. Moreover, it allows for the conflation of the narrator with the author. In doing so, it provides a way of reframing the problematic notion of authenticity, and with it, avoiding approaching subjectivity and interiority as products or effects. Instead, a more interesting set of questions appear. Rhizomatic connections are to be approached

not only in terms of the author's intention and the reader's reception but also in a much wider, more complex set of possible interconnections that blur established, that is to say hegemonic, distinctions of class, culture, race, sexual practice, and others (Braidotti, 1994: 102).

Approaching autobiocomics as assemblage helps to reveal agentive and creative connections; it thus seems a useful tool for examining formal repetitions and variations, and their relations to what can be stated ["l'énoncé"] and the visible. A targeted application of 'assemblage theory' should help to establish connections beyond mere linkages between points and positions (as Cortsen and Doel do in their respective studies of stills) and invites us to consider the multiplicities of the narratives assembled in heterogeneity. I argue that assemblage theory can be drawn upon convincingly to reveal the dynamic movements and open-ended-ness of subject formation in autobiocomics.

This net of interconnections raises questions of approaching the subjects in terms of their compliance and resistance. Rhizomatic assemblages thus open up new possibilities of exposing hegemonic, normative models of thoughts. Analysing encounters and interactions as well as the relation of components to one another, through the prism of assemblage theory will enable me to apprehend how autobiocomics interrogate social structures and destabilise them, and with them, destabilise experience and the subject. In contrast with Cortsen who goes as far as seeking a different vocabulary in order to avoid "connotations of power" and thus evacuate the question of power-relations (Cortsen, 2012: 116), I use assemblage in order to apprehend the net of power-relations that the subject finds him/herself tangled in as well as the possibilities for resistance to social norms that are suggested and explored in autobiocomics. I argue that these are processes to be viewed less in terms of failure or loss than as the opening out of possibilities for the destabilisation of dominant frameworks.

Framing Processes

'Framing processes' are to be understood not only as the narrative framing devices – in the case of embedded narratives, for instance – but also as formal,

rhetorical and political frames. Framing processes are particularly important to my thesis because the authors under study make significant use of conventional framing devices in order to question normative processes, as I will show in my subsequent chapters.

Frames have an inside and an outside, isolating the inside and detaching it from the outside. This is what Derrida calls "the rigorous criteria of a framing" (Derrida, 1987: 18). While the frame is rightly considered a defining component of comics (Groensteen, 2007: 25), few have examined its properties: in terms of formal considerations, four studies come to mind. In *Principes des littératures dessinées*, Morgan identifies the need for an expression describing the operation of "plate layout" [*mise en planche*], alongside "framing" [*mise en cadre*] and "rendering in drawn form" [*mise en dessin*] (Morgan, 2003: 65). McCloud focusses on the relation between contiguous panels from left-to-right following the reading process – as made explicit in his attempt at designing a terminology of six different types of panel relations. In *Système de la Bande Dessinée*, Groensteen points out the inter-relational production of meaning between panels, whether they are contiguous or not. Cohn helps us apprehend panels in a relation that is closer to the actual process of reading – with the eye wandering on the page often disregarding the left-to-right process of reading – due to mass or blocks of colours and shadows that attract the eye, etc. (Cohn, 2013).

In *Case, Planche, Récit*, Peeters focuses on the organisation of panels on the page: he describes four modes of panel layout (conventional, decorative, rhetorical and productive) and the distinction between these modes is based on the relation and interaction between the visual and textual elements of each panel (2000). Among other categories to interpret the spaces of the pages that the reader's gaze navigates, Cohn (2013) proposes "the framing plane", which comprehends pages borders and captions. Cohn argues that the reader's eye relies on the outlines around the panels, which guide it and help it circulate among the panels. In a lesser-known but significant contribution, Chavanne objects that on the contrary, the reader focusses less on the

peripheral areas of the panels than on their centre (2010).[14] And so do Peeters (2000) and Groensteen (1999), whose respective studies evoke the framed panels only to discuss their content.

> Lorsqu'il rencontre un cadre, le lecteur est tenu de présupposer qu'il y a là, à l'intérieur du périmètre tracé, un contenu à déchiffrer. Le cadre est toujours une invitation à s'arrêter et à scruter. (Groensteen, 1999: 64)

While Groensteen rightly points out here that the frames exert some control over the reader's gaze (Groensteen, 1999: 64), he is more interested in the spatial relationship between panels – their connections, articulations, disconnections and ruptures. Yet he neglects examining the content of the panels in relation to the role, function and significance of the frames: what is depicted and how, what is left out and to what effect.

Approaching the layout of images – how they are arranged on the page in relation to each other – can be challenging especially when the layout is not constructed as a '*gaufrier*' [a 'waffle iron'],[15] with the same numbers of panels in each strip and on each page, and all the panels being exactly the same size, length and width. Regular layouts of panels abound in 'autobiocomics'. Their function is to avoid attracting attention to the form and help the reader to focus on the narrative. The immutability of the panel layout also distracts the reader from the framing process. When panels on the same page vary in size, the reader is more likely to perceive their irregularity and notice the significance of the frames. As I am less interested in the configuration of panels on the page than in the significance of framing, I will neither discuss here the nomenclature of these variations nor approach the 'autobiocomics' that compose my corpus in terms of their regular, semi-regular or rhetorical compositions, following Chavanne's taxonomy. In order to overcome the lack of analytical tools on the functions of the frames beyond aesthetic considerations, I step outside the field of comics studies and examine to what extent Butler's conceptualisation of the framing process is useful for my study.

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[14] Chavanne's work is only available in French, but Ann Miller translated a concise summary of his main thesis in English (Chavanne, 2015).
[15] This term coined by André Franquin and popular among practitioners has been adopted by comic scholars.

In her examination of frames, Butler draws on Susan Sontag who argues that whereas both prose and painting are "interpretative", photographs are "selective". This suggests that photographs are a cropped version of a bigger picture and that photographs give us a partial 'imprint' of reality in a dissociated moment (Sontag, 2003: 154). The frame restricts the gaze. But "the frame functions not only as a boundary to the image, but as structuring the image itself", Butler rightly objects as she points out that the frame determines what counts within its borders (Butler, 2009: 71). Writing about war photographs, Butler describes them as "framed for a purpose, carrying that purpose within its frame and implementing it through the frame" (Butler, 2009: 70). As she revises in *Frames of War* her reading in *Precarious Life* (2004a) of the pictures of the Guantamano Bay inmates in the light of the infamous ones dehumanising Abu Ghraib prisoners, Butler sees the act of framing as "interpretive" (Butler, 2009: 67):

> The frame functions not only as a boundary to the image, but as structuring the image itself. If the image in turn structures how we register reality, then it is bound up with the interpretive scene in which we operate. (Butler, 2009: 71)

Drawing on Butler, I argue that any frame is interpretive regardless of the nature of the medium it frames (whether it be photographs, paintings or comics). I thus approach any frame as elaborating, crafting, commending and validating a point of view (Butler, 2009: 65). The frame "not only organises the image, but works to organise our perception and thinking as well", thus making the image "actively interpreting, sometimes forcibly so" (Butler, 2009: 71) – a process which can take place regardless of context since I argue with Foucault that everything can be politicised (Foucault, 2004).

The frame determines and regulates our reading of the image, and according to Butler, its operations can be indiscernible. "We can think of the frame [...], as active, as both jettisoning and presenting, and as doing both at once, in silence, without any visible sign of its operation" (Butler, 2009: 73). Butler points out that "the operation of the frame [...] is not normally representable" (Butler, 2009: 73). As a result, "the mandatory framing becomes part of the story". Yet Butler warns against the dangers of having "framing become part of what is seen" or "what is told" (Butler, 2009: 72). She contemplates "a way to photograph the frame itself" which "yields its

frame to interpretation thereby opens up to the critical scrutiny the restrictions on interpreting reality" (Butler, 2009: 71-72).

But the frame, while often barely registered in photographs, is made visible in comics through the formal device of panel borders, a device used extensively as we will see in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, and examine the significance of its absence in chapter 2. What are the consequences of having the comics frames hinting at the framing process? Building on Butler, I explore to what extent the autobiocomics which constitute my corpus expose "the delimiting function of the frame, its organising features", and how they represent "its operation as an operation of power" (Butler, 2009: 73). Butler encourages us "to consider what forms of social and state power are 'embedded' in the frame" (Butler, 2009: 72) and I want to examine to what extent framing in 'autobiocomics' invites the reader to "interpret the interpretation that has been imposed upon us, developing our analysis into a social critique of regulatory and censorious power." (Butler, 2009: 72)

"[N]orms are enacted through visual and narrative frames, and framing presupposes decisions or practices that leave substantial losses outside the frame" (Butler, 2009: 75). The frame not only restricts what is perceivable (Butler, 2009: 100). Norms work to "give face and to efface" (Butler, 2009: 77). The frame conducts the norms, but may also unsettle them, partly due to the very nature of the frame. For Butler, the frame is unstable: "the point would not be to locate what is "in" or "outside" the frame, but what vacillates between those two locations, and what, foreclosed, becomes encrypted in the frame itself" (Butler, 2009: 75). Butler suggests that while we may never escape the systems, there is some potential for resistance within. For Butler, if the subject is constructed and produced in and through the effects of heteronormative discourses, exposing its normative construction is part of the challenging and thus undoing process. So the politics of gender performativity, as Butler sees it, consist in subtly revealing and exposing the workings of the pervasive normative processes that classify and exclude individuals – the processes which our standard accounts of identity fail to see.

The unstable processes of the frames need to be scrutinised, as they are either normative or opening up spaces of resistance. In the next chapters, as I study

the framing processes at work in works by five different artists or collectives, I examine not only the formal complexities of comics but also the potential of autobiocomics for producing social commentaries: through close-text analyses of their panel layout, I examine how autobiocomics expose the various and reiterated processes by which normative frames legitimise and normalise alienation, social exclusion and violence. The norm, however, does not automatically equate a removal of agency: assemblage will also help me apprehend the ways autobiocomics suggest and explore the fragmented self's potential for resisting the normalisation of identities.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I have explored tensions between the ideas of an 'essential', 'authentic' self (and the visual and textual processes by which comics can be recognised as 'authentic'), and conceptions of the self as performative and context-dependent. These considerations coupled with discussions on the state of research in the burgeoning field of autobiocomics have helped me to establish a theoretical framework in order to explore the possibilities that comics can offer in the field of life writing practices through the analysis of the construction and representations of a sense of self in autobiocomics.

I have argued that the formal resources of comics make autobiocomics an ideal form to present and explore the variety of voices at work in any autobiographical practice. As comics dedicate specific space on the page to each narrative instance, autobiocomics not only reveal the multiplicities of narrative instances and temporal layers, but also constitute a powerful tool for exploring the tensions between these narrative instances and pedagogically presenting their complexities to the reader. However, an initial problem emerges from the very plurality of narrative instances and their representations on the comics page. There needs to be a consensus over how to refer to each of them. As I have outlined and contrasted different sets of concepts in the first section of this introductory chapter,

I have evaluated their usefulness for my project. These various nomenclatures build on different conceptions of the subject and the self, which I have briefly examined before analysing the representation of subjectivities in comics.

In my discussion of the representation of subjectivities in autobiocomics, I have considered the authenticating strategies at work. I have noted in the second section of this chapter that authenticity is a pressing concern for most commentators of autobiographical practices in comics (Beaty, 2007, 2008; Chaney, 2011; Gardner, 2008; Hatfield, 2005; El Refaie, 2012) and in their respective studies, discussing autobiocomics in terms of their authenticity inevitably lead to considerations on the so-called specificities of comics (Beaty, 2007: 138-151; Hatfield, 2005: 108-127; El Refaie, 2012: 135-178). These claims for authenticity seem to be linked with the need for 'cult figures' that can be found in any emerging subculture. I argued that these considerations say more about status anxieties in comics scholarship than they do about autobiographical practices.

I showed to what extent questions of authenticity are unhelpful for approaching autobiocomics, and I choose instead to approach them as practices of self-writing and self-learning and in terms of their potential as a pedagogical tool. I use the term 'self-crafting' to refer to these practices. In the third section of this chapter, I have outlined assemblage theory, which constitutes a useful analytical tool in order to approach and examine the theoretical and formal processes of self-crafting. Through small, targeted uses of assemblage, I aim to show the significance of the framing processes both in terms of formal composition – how each panel's content complements and contrasts each other – and as a selective and interpretive act: how the frames elaborate and validate a point of view, and how they reveal and unsettle normative representations.

In the subsequent chapters of the thesis, I will be applying this framework through a detailed analysis of a selected range of autobiocomics, by focusing on the following three steps:

Firstly, I investigate the author's autobiographical or auto-fictional project by looking at the referential pact and exploring issues related to intentionality and self-

reflexivity. I examine the visual and textual representation of the self by considering the persona within the diegesis, the narrator and the implied author, as well as the significances of an overwhelming centrality of the self (when the persona is represented in almost every panel) and questioning her/his agency as a subject tangled in a network of power-relations.

Secondly, I explore the formal resources of comics and to what extent they push the boundaries of what comics can do. I make the deliberate choice of focusing on the works of comics artists who maintain a traditional approach to the form of comics and use regular grids of panels, speech balloons, gutters, and other generic characteristics. Within a rather traditional layout, these works provide instances of formal innovations, such as the display of the codes of comics as identified by Miller (2007: 75-102), self-reflexivity on references to the physicality of the text, *mise en abyme*, intertextuality and the play on narrative levels through transgressions of the boundaries of the diegesis (Miller, 2007: 133-146). I argue that these formal innovations are more than mere playful experimentation with form. I show to what extent these formal experiments destabilise the boundaries that delimit identity, the narratives question the process of representation itself, and through these interrogations, the process of identity formation.

Thirdly, I argue that through a playful exploration of the formal resources of the medium, autobiocomics open up new spaces for reflection. Within these spaces, autobiocomics are thus able to acknowledge, expose, explore, resist and challenge existing ideologies. To what extent do they suggest new models of being in the world? I explore the political dimension of the texts. Political issues include but are not limited to considerations of the authors' status, comics' formal possibilities, the risks of self-exposure and the texts' reception. I focus on the representation of the self in terms of her or his gendered and sexualised life. Furthermore, by exploring the tensions and interconnections through the theoretical framework of 'framings', with specific references to the concept of assemblage when relevant, I examine what each text, studied as an object, says about life writing practice, about the form, about contemporary life, and how the authors reframe personal questions ("who am I?") as social ones (LGBT and racial identities, parenthood, gendered and sexual anxieties,

etc.). I will now turn my attention to two autobiocomics attributed to Judith Forest, and will be exploring specifically the problematic notion of authorship and its traces in these texts, as well as the inscription and deconstruction of gendered framings.

Chapter 2
Judith Forest's *1h25* and *Momon*

After outlining in the previous chapter a theoretical framework that allows for the exploration of the artistic process that relies on the ongoing interplay between the text, image and frames, in the chapters that follow I employ this framework to examine how autobiocomics affirm the self as fragmented, presenting this self as complex and contradictory, which question assumptions about identity and its representation. I start with texts that propose a conception of self-crafting which folds the subject in on itself. In later chapters, I move progressively on to a conception of self-crafting that is directed towards a more overly collective political action.

In this chapter, I focus on a more inward-looking form of self-production and transformation, as I examine two 'autobiocomics', *1h25* (2009) and *Momon* (2011), both attributed to Judith Forest. *1h25* derives its title from the time it takes Judith to travel by train from Paris where she graduated, to her new home in Brussels. *1h25* chronicles Judith's final year as an art school student and her questioning of her identity both as a recovering drug-addict and as an artist.[16] After she graduates, Judith explores different media, photography and, of course, drawings from life in her sketchbooks. *1h25* ends with the prospect of compiling and publishing her drawings into the form of comics, but the idea causes quite a stir and Judith's mother's vehement reaction foreshadows the reaction of many readers when the book is finally released. Indeed, while the book received overall praise for its honesty – see Groensteen's review:

> Judith ne triche pas, n'enjolive pas, ne se donne pas le beau rôle, ne s'apitoie pas sur elle-même, son livre a des accents de vérité qui impressionnent et parfois bouleversent (Groensteen, 2010b: unpaginated)

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[16] Miller noted the emphasis on the professional milieu in autobiocomics (Miller, 2007: 62).

– it also sparked controversies notably regarding its crude sexual details contrasting with the shy, elusive treatment of Judith's drug addiction and bulimia trauma (Wivel, 2010).

Momon takes its elusive title from "Savon", a long poem by Francis Ponge : "Un momon est une mascarade, une espèce de danse exécutée par des masques, ensuite un défi porté par des masques." (Ponge, 1967: 41) In *Momon*, the protagonist Judith recounts the slow process through which she comes to the self-shattering realisation that *1h25* is in fact the collaborative work of three of her publishers, Thomas Loiwin, William Henne and Xavier Löwenthal, who hired an actress, Sabine Lucot, to play the part of 'Judith Forest' during TV interviews and book-signing events (Forest, 2011: 108; 128). Symbolising her existential crisis, a stain appears every time she checks her reflection in her mirror, growing bigger each time. Threatened with disappearance, Judith finds solace in the arms of French comics diarist Fabrice Neaud, with whom she starts an affair.

The respective titles, *1h25* and *Momon*, hint at two fundamental aspects of 'autobiocomics' that are placed in tension in both texts. The precision of the title *1h25* suggests factual accuracy, which brings up the notion of authenticity, while *Momon* alludes to questions related to the authorial persona and a multiplicity of voices. I will explore the tensions between these notions, starting with considerations on the editorial context before moving on to forms of self-crafting through signatures, intertextual references, multimedia visual self-representations that open up questions on the gaze, because of the absence of referent and how the frames work.

1h25 was published in 2009 in a rather troubled context. The overwhelming popularity of 'autobiocomics' raised issues in the years that preceded *1h25*'s publication. Autobiographical practice in comics had become a selling point, with mainstream publishing houses (Dargaud, Delcourt, Dupuis) going as far as creating 'autobiographical lines' or subsidiary imprints dedicated to the publication of autobiographies in comics.[17] Autobiocomics may have become a victim of their own

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[17] This commercial move bears certain similarities with the creation of subsidiaries dedicated to the publication of either translations or manga-inspired French-made comics (Akata for Delcourt, for

success, as, for some commentators, autobiography ceased to represent an artistically ambitious current in Anglophone and Francophone comics (Hatfield, 2005: 112). With the flourishing of a narcissistic sensibility and the multiplication of works about the Self (Groensteen, 1996: 61) both in Anglophone and Francophone comics, came virulent accusations of "navel-gazing", self-obsession, egocentrism, self-exposure, banal exhibitionism, and immodesty (Hatfield, 2005: 111-112). Such adverse reactions were previously heard in the not-so-distant autobiography-as-literature debate [18] and the more recent polemic regarding autofiction's literary merits. [19] These accusations are all the more detrimental to comics as the indisputability of the merits of comics as a form is relatively recent and remains fragile.

La Cinquième Couche is an independent publishing house based in Brussels. *1h25* is its most mediatised and commercially successful publication to date. With the publication of *1h25*, la Cinquième Couche was accused of selling-out to trends (Lorfèvre, 2011). Inspired by the commercial success of newcomer Aurélia Aurita edited by a competing publishing house, with the 'Judith Forest' affair, La Cinquième Couche deployed a marketing strategy inspired by Aurita's artistic career. Aurita gave her account of the reception and media impact of *Fraise et Chocolat* (2006) – an autobiocomic for which she was accused of exhibitionism and nombrilism – in a latter autobiocomic entitled *Buzz-moi* (2009). The title is a reference to another scandalous publication, Virginie Despentes's notorious *Baise-moi* (1994) and the media frenzy that its 2000 cinematic adaptation (directed by Virginie Despentes et Coralie Trinh Thi) attracted. With the publication of *Momon* (2011) about the publication of *1h25* (2009), La Cinquième Couche's cynicism (Lorfèvre, 2011) affected the visibility and legitimacy of French female comics artists (Gheno, 2013). Gheno notes that *Momon* and the reveal about the hoax that it contains got less media attention than the publication of *1h25* (Gheno, 2013: 76). *1h25* is not the first hoax perpetrated in autobiocomics, far from it – the Frantico affair, in 2005 being the most notorious case. Could this be the result of some sort of deception fatigue? Or, would this suggest that

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instance), with the notable difference that when it comes to publishing autobiocomics, mainstream publishing houses are less reluctant to have their name and logo on the front covers of their products.

[18] As described by Gilmore (1994: 3-18), who discusses the failure of autobiography to be taken seriously by either literature or history.

[19] See, for instance, Doubrovsky, Lecarme and Lejeune (1993: 232-234).

the status of *1h25* as an autobiocomics gathered more interest and stirred more controversy than the reveal in *Momon* of its status as a hoax?

There are different degrees of acceptability regarding literary imposture. Gender deception is mostly regarded as a creative game, which is deemed more acceptable than fake misery memoirs or dubious Holocaust testimonies (Vice, 2014: 38). Taking a female pen-name does not have the same purpose and significance as the literary device of assuming a male pen-name. While there is a history of the use of cross-gender pseudonyms in literary history, this has been less common in comics.[20] This is not to suggest that female artists in comics do not encounter similar obstacles to those met in prose literature. With a female name on the cover of an autobiocomics comes expectations and limitations, as female comics authors tend to become associated with a certain content: either harmless and consensual 'sociobiographies' that are sometimes considered as a feminine subgenre (Olivier, 2016), or transgressive autobiographical accounts that put the emphasis on their 'graphic' i.e. sexually transgressive aspects (Chute, 2010).

Practitioners point out what they see as a decline of autobiographical practice in comics, both in terms of quality and ambition. Writing on the crisis in autobiographical practices in comics, David Turgeon notes the virulent tone of Fabrice Neaud and Jean-Christophe Menu, as they fustigate the arrival of online blogs published as autobiocomics (Turgeon, 2010). Neaud sees in the proliferation of these the source of a "calcification" that affects current autobiographical practices in comics. Neaud fulminates against the recent output of formulaic autobiocomics that are published in the form of online blogs and which consist in an accumulation of pseudo-intimate anecdotes (Menu and Neaud, 2007: 455, 457), and the homogenisation that accompanies this approach. Addressing Neaud's concerns, Menu does not seem to discard these recent productions for the sake of artistic value

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[20] Interestingly, some female writers still use male-passing pennames (J. K. Rowling, E. L. James) as they write so-called male genre literature, in contrast with superhero comics that supposedly target a male readership and which are written by female comic writers who use their full name: Gail Simone, Marjorie Liu, Kelly Sue DeConnick, Marguerite Bennett, Kate Leth, etc.

as Neaud does so vehemently, but he nonetheless denies them any autobiographical value, since

> [...] l'auteur se propose comme personnage principal, se fixe comme gimmick, et parle de sa vie quotidienne sous un angle consensuel, en évitant les sujets fâcheux ou non politiquement corrects, donc en évitant toute vraie question. (Menu and Neaud, 2007: 457)

Menu states that these formatted products should be called "sociobiographies" on the ground that they do not seem to express the relationship that one individual has with the social world, but simply describe the profile of the target readership. In these works, "[on] *s'expose* plus qu'[on] ne se raconte" (Delporte, 2011: 53. Emphasis in original). For Neaud,

> la nouvelle autobiographie *light* ne se pose jamais la question du « je », elle se contente d'inventer un personnage qui dit et qui ressemble vaguement, par convention de proximité, à l'auteur.
> (Menu and Neaud, 2007: 466. Emphasis in original)

Neaud sums up this approach with the expression "autobiographie de proximité" (Menu and Neaud, 2007: 460). The resulting autobiocomics are increasingly codified commercial products, which, according to Neaud, avoid taking any risks. Beyond the risk of betraying one's family and circle of friends, risk-taking in autobiographical practices is a process that Delporte sums up as follows: introspection, confession and "démarche esthétique engagée et personnelle (la singularité de l'autobiographie)" (Delporte, 2011: 44) through the political dimension of the autobiographical practice. The deliberate avoidance of taking such risks, according to Neaud, goes against what he thinks any autobiographical practice should be:

> A mon sens l'autobiographie ne peut se pratiquer sérieusement sans une réelle mise en danger de son auteur. Cette mise en danger me semble devoir opérer dans tous les champs de sa vie, aussi bien concernant sa vie intime que ses conceptions esthétiques [...] (Menu and Neaud, 2007: 455).

The way comics authors seem to have a political investment in the autobiographical genre is worth noting. As the discussion is framed around aesthetic value and artistic achievement, it suggests the process of canon-formation. This attempt to define and dictate autobiographical practices in comics could be seen as a high vs. low brow culture debate articulated around an intrinsic set of values put forward by white cis-male authors, with these established authors decrying newer

forms and terming them 'crisis'. Such criticism demonstrates how these authors seek to define other artists according to their own concept of authorship.

Author-ities and Signatures

In this chapter, I examine the artistic production of a sense of self, the technical skills and the use of specific tools in order to produce not only a fixed object (the persona, and the book), but also a sense of movement (various readings and interpretations of the text, as well as the conception of self-crafting as self-transformation). Starting with the question of authorship, I investigate the crafting of the 'Judith Forest' persona in *1h25* and its deconstruction in *Momon.* With the reveal of the hoax, Judith Forest appears as a construct limited to the representations on the page. Yet, I begin this section with an account of 'her' use of social media to extend but also blur the lines between the 'real' author and their constructed identity within the space of the comic.

1h25 is embedded in the French-Belgian BD scene, as it multiplies references to it, through blatant name-dropping of various well-known personalities from the scene either in the narrative:

> Aujourd'hui, Joann Sfar et Olivia Ruiz ont accepté mon amitié sur Facebook. // Reynold Leclerc, de la librarie Brüsel, m'invite à passer à la librairie pour présenter mes dessins. (Forest, 2009: 121)

In the reproduction of Judith's *MySpace* profile, Frédéric Poincelet and Dominique Goblet, as well as the publishing house La Cinquième Couche are listed among her online friends (Forest, 2009: 162). These frequent references to social networks, together with the insertion of photographic images, maps, screenshots of social media pages, copies of documents – such as the scanned copy of a Paris-Bruxelles train ticket featured on the dedication page (Forest, 2009: 2) – function as documentary evidence that may anchor the narrative in verifiable events and establish authority. Their insertions also give the narrative its rhythm: the bitter and violent email correspondence with her father structures *1h25* and frames its significant moments (Forest, 2009: 15, 57, 94, 103, 150, 156, 174, 263, 283). The

insertion of numerous screenshots of Judith Forest's Facebook pages in *1h25* suggests a recurring concern about visibility. Both Judith's email address (Forest, 2009: 15) and *MySpace* details (Forest, 2009: 57) are displayed in full. This is either an attempt at authentication gone too far, or a discerning hint at her generation's notorious lack of concern when it comes to keeping their identity safe while online – "je suis une jeune fille de mon temps" (Forest, 2009: 13) –, or rather the staging of both these things, since Judith Forest herself is a fabrication.

During the promotion campaign, Sabrine Lucot, an actress hired to play the part of Judith Forest gave several interviews to the Franco-Belgian press and major French TV channels, including the prestigious *Arte* channel, which helped to bestow legitimacy on *1h25* as an autobiocomic. Rather than raising doubts among readers and commentators, the "paratext" – this "'[z]one indécise' entre le dedans et le dehors, elle-même sans limite rigoureuse, ni vers l'intérieur (le texte), ni vers l'extérieur (le discours du monde sur le texte)", a threshold, a "frange". This "frange", which for Genette, is

> [...] toujours porteuse d'un commentaire auctorial, ou plus ou moins légitimé par l'auteur, [et qui] constitue, entre texte et hors-texte, une zone non seulement de transition, mais de transaction
> (Genette, 1987: 8)

– helped to build the image of Judith Forest, assure the readers of her existence and give her account a sense of veracity, thus encouraging trust. Her existence is then questioned and denied in the second half of 'her' second opus, *Momon*.

In order to approach the notion of self-crafting in all its complexities, I momentarily venture beyond the comics frames, and examine screenshots captured from Judith Forest's Facebook account (fig. 2 and 3), which is still available online even after the reveal of the hoax. I now examine how an author and his/her constructed identity 'spill' out of the comics and investigate the multiple framings and re-framings occurring within the screen space, the various windows, etc. as well as the comics space. This 'spilling' over social media can be seen as both crafting and undermining the 'Judith Forest' persona.

(Figure 2: screenshots retrieved from Judith Forest's Facebook account)

In the screenshot of a Facebook status updated posted on 05/02/2011 (fig. 2), 'Judith' expresses self-doubts about 'her' artistic *démarche*, which reinforces her depiction in *1h25* as a chronic sufferer from imposter syndrome both personally and professionally. Indeed, the protagonist repeatedly describes herself as a hack, as a student who does not deserve her success, and who suffers from a debilitating lack of ambition. Here, the ironic use of the adverb "sincèrement" hints at debates regarding the intentionality of the author, literary deception and its impact on the reader. Moreover, the original post is characterised by a notable absence of the grammatical subject: the reference to 'Judith' is only reflexive, which suggests a playful deconstruction of the author's identity, as she is turned into an object.

These screenshots allow us to observe the fluidity between the comics persona and the online persona on social media. 'Her' Facebook profile picture

asserts 'her' identity as an author of autobiocomics. This choice, instead of a photographic picture, is in line with numerous autobiocomics artists and authors on Facebook but with Forest, it has another layer of significance: it consolidates the construction of 'Judith Forest' as an *auteur*, while the fact that the Facebook account does not feature any photographic evidence of 'her' hints at the lack of referent. She is only a drawn image, a protagonist in an autobiocomic. Therefore, the choice of 'her' profile picture both establishes and undermines 'her' existence as an author of autobiocomics. 'Her' Facebook posts accumulate and disseminate information that is factually incorrect, such as in the second screenshot reproduced here, taken from another Facebook status posted on 16/05/2011 (fig. 2). 'Her' posts play with the verifiability of events, and this game enables an exploration of the tensions between expectations and assumptions that surround the artist's persona, while acknowledging the role that authenticity plays in creating a community of readers around an author or a persona.

(Figure 3: screenshot retrieved from Judith Forest's Facebook account)

In a series of comments posted on 'her' Facebook page (fig. 3), one comment features a quote from *L'Art poétique*'s Chant III (1674) by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux. Although Boileau was describing the theatre, his verses are used here to celebrate the creative power of art and to make an oblique reference to reader reception. Fabrice Neaud, posting as "Fabrice No" – the patronym that he used on his personal Facebook profile back then – points at how irrelevant the status of *1h25* as fictional or autobiographical is. The misspelling feels like a "snag"[21] here, since he is correctly identified in *Momon* as "Fabrice Neaud". The two spellings sound the same, the same way that the Neaud character in *Momon* looks like him and is drawn in Fabrice Neaud's graphic style, only with different tools (water and ink) than his preferred thin-lined ink drawing technique. Using a negative form *in lieu of* his civil identity, Neaud also hints at another form of 'mascarade', as the 'no' that he uses as a mask also refers to a form of staged performance, and brings in mind the one that the title *Momon* evokes.

"Angoumois" is a reference to the annual Festival International de Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême. Autobiocomics helped to bestow legitimacy and status to the form of comics. The suffix "-mois" in "Angoumois" may refer to the weeklong festival that usually gains a full month of press coverage and mainstream media attention. It could also be a bastardised plural version of the pronoun "moi", thus hinting as the mass production of Ego literature in comics, as well as a homophonic game with the word "engouement" to refer to the passion for the mainstream press for the consecration of comics art that month. The final "(chut!)" is obviously ironic as the secret is seemingly told in confidence, while posted on a public Facebook page and made visible and for everyone to 'like' and 'share'. It is of course a carefully constructed announcement increasing the visibility of 'Judith Forest'. Published as some kind of author response, as its subtitle indicates: "Apostille à *1h25*", *Momon* is dedicated to the "journalistes qui m'ont permis d'exister" (Forest, 2011: 2), which asserts the fluidity of identity outside and inside the text. These questions around authorship and referentiality underpin both *1h25* and *Momon*, and in order to

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[21] ["accroc"] which I use here in the Deleuzian acception of the term (Deleuze, 2004: 105).

approach these texts, I need to move beyond debates about the problematic notion of authenticity.

An *oeuvre* is ascribed to a name referring to an individual. Through the name on the book cover, the text points to a "figure" that "is outside it and antecedes it". Chaney argues that the author-function in autobiocomics is the represented protagonist (Chaney, 2011a: 27). However, Foucault in "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" reveals how misleading this description of the authorial function is, as he makes a distinction between 'persona' on the one hand, and 'implied author' on the other (Foucault, 1969). For Foucault, the author is not the source of the text; the author is a function defined by some practices and attached to some types of texts. Foucault stresses that the author is one of the ways in which the text signifies and he underlines the series of specific and complex operations by which a discourse is attributed to an individual. The distance between the author-function and the individual is all the more significant when approaching Forest's work, since the publishing house La Cinquième Couche went as far as hiring an actress who acted out the authorial persona during the promotional campaign. There is no evidence that the actress who impersonated Judith Forest actually went to signing events, and this notable absence was justified in her various press interviews by putting the blame on her debilitating shyness at the very idea of performing in front of a knowledgeable and informed audience.

Despite mentions in *Momon* of signing events, the Judith of the narrative is shown actively trying to avoid them. When she is finally represented taking part at a signing event, it immediately unravels into a nightmarish situation which is then revealed to be a dream sequence (Forest, 2011: 46-47). Yet it is interesting to note that *Momon* cultivates the ambiguity as to whether the Judith of the narrative actually succeeded in her avoidance of all the signing events that are mentioned in the text, since they are never depicted. This avoidance of signing events is significant as signatures are commonly seen as a guarantee of reliability, even though the signature as insignia of the author can be an evidence of literariness and creativity too. Signatures are characterised with mimetism and repetition, but according to Georgio Agamben building on Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), a signature is

not an exact duplication but an intermediate form. There is a displacement between what the signature denotes by means of resemblance, an unbridgeable gap between the sign and what it designates: "signs do not speak unless signatures make them speak" (Agamben, 2009: 61). Yet the signature is a statement that does not create meaning but which marks the signs as signifying something and predetermines its interpretations and uses according to a set of rules and practices (Agamben, 2009: 64). It can only be interpreted in its relation with other signs. Writing about the postcard, Derrida claims that signing your own name is an affirmation of fakeness, a way of faking it. Commenting on his own signature in the preface to *La Carte postale*, Derrida considers a signature as the ultimate fraudulent act (Derrida, 1980).

After these considerations on the external framing of the author, the impersonation and embodiment of Judith Forest outside the text, I now take a closer look at traces of 'her' subjectivity this time within 'her' work, as I build on the notion of 'signature' in comics and consider other traces of graphiation. Graphic style can arguably be considered as a form of signature in comics.[22] The signature of the artist 'Judith Forest' appears "en creux" as graphic style through a process of differentiation with the appearance in the narrative of disruptive graphic styles that are recognisable as signifying another artist's hand. The sudden appearance of the black and white figure of "FO" within the narrative is highly disruptive as the pages featuring "FO", also referred to as "the Parisian", are inked in a manner similar to François Olislaeger's graphic style (Forest, 2009: 211-212, 219, 255), which 'Judith' hints at in her narrative voiceover: "En me mettant à sa place / Avec son dessin" (Forest, 2009: 210-211) (fig. 4). This insertion in between panels drawn in softer graphic style, is all the more striking, especially in the panels depicting their sexual encounter.

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[22] See the discussion building on Marion (1993), Groensteen (2010a; 2011) and Miller (2011) on the significance of graphiation and the artist's hand in the opening chapter.

(Figure 4: Forest, 2009: 211)

A similarly disruptive change in graphic style accompanies the entrance of Fabrice Neaud's avatar in *Momon*: Fabrice does not stand out of the group represented in the frameless panel, since the whole panel is drawn in watery ink, in a graphic style absent from Fabrice Neaud's *Journal* and closer to Emmanuel Guibert's (Guibert, Lefèvre and Lemercier, 2012). The technique may be unusual but Fabrice's portraits in *Momon* are so successful that they invite the reader to believe that Neaud himself has participated in *Momon*. This process is not unheard of: Robert Crumb and Aline Kominsky-Crumb collaborated on a number of autobiocomics in which each drew herself or himself (Crumb and Crumb, 2012). This interpretation is appealing, even though nothing can be found in the paratext that would either confirm or refute such a multi-layered collaboration. These changes in graphic styles and the resulting process of differentiation contribute to the construction of Judith as a subject with her own artistic identity, one that emerges from the contrasts in graphic styles conjured inside the same panels.

In "La Mort de l'auteur", Roland Barthes defines writing as the black-and-white space where all identities – starting with the body who writes – get lost. He posits writing as the destruction of all voices and the end of all origins (Barthes, 1984: 63). Writing is not recording anymore: writing starts where the author ends. The author is seen as a mediator, who performs the narrative – notably by mastering the narrative codes. Yet her or his hand is detached of all voice: writing is a gesture of pure inscription rather than expression, a text whose only origin is its own language, and which incessantly questions its own origin. Julie Kristeva makes a distinction between the 'pheno-text' (coined after "phenomenon, or "appearance", the relation between words and their meanings) and the 'geno-text', which encompasses the origin, i.e. the process through which the text has been produced (Kristeva, 1974). Building on her conception of authorship, I cannot be reliant on the apparent meaning of the text, and need to map out the process of construction of the text and its relations to ideologies.

Kristeva shifts the reader's attention from the gender of the author to the gender of the text. Is this gendered text an amalgamation of feminine and masculine elements? Approaching the text as "écriture feminine", i.e. the inscription of the female body and female sexuality in textuality and discourse, risks essentialising women and would not help to apprehend the fragmentation of subjectivity in its complexity. Instead, I build on Barthes and suggest reading the text as multiple writings, quotations, traces, voices (Barthes, 1984: 69). This conception of authorship opens up possibilities for approaching both *1h25* and *Momon* in the space between their two points of origin.

Throughout this chapter, I refer to the protagonist in the diegesis, the body presented on panels and the voice in the narrative boxes as 'Judith'. While I am aware of the three male authors who produced the text, I make references to the nominal author 'Judith Forest', as I examine the motivation of the three male authors in inventing this character as well as 'her' authorial motives as they are implied in the narrative. This allows me to question both origins in the process and explore the flows between these two points of origin.

Intertextual Sociobiography: in the Shadow of Fabrice Neaud's *Journal*

"Je pourrais évoquer les aspects les plus banals de mon existence. Décrire le quotidien d'une jeune femme. Une sorte d'anthropologie de l'étudiante ordinaire en milieu urbain." (Forest, 2009: 9) Judith muses about the scope of her project which seems to oscillate between a personal account and a mise-à-distance with a wider anthropological scope, as the distancing mention of "une jeune femme" hints at Judith's status as a textual construct. While the project as outlined by the Judith of the narrative may lean towards "sociobiography", it nonetheless situates itself in the space between "sociobiography" and "autobiography", where a socially-constituted subject positions herself in relation to others and constructs herself in a network of differences and similarities with the people around her. This movement of differentiation and identification characterises the whole approach of *1h25.* Judith makes references to well-known brands, pop culture and everyday life objects, which inscribes the narrative into the realm of the everyday and the ordinary, a set of references that she shares with her readers.

> Je sors, je bois, je consomme. // Quand j'en aurai les moyens, je ferai les boutiques, j'acheterai des fringues et des produits de beautés. En attendant, les filles qui magazinent, c'est des pétasses. // Je vous l'avais dit, une vraie jeune fille.
> (Forest, 2009: 13)

This quote not only features an ambivalent attitude towards consumerism, which she rejects only because she cannot afford it, but it also denotes an on-going process of identification and differentiation, where the subject defines herself according to what she is not, and recognises this definition as ephemeral and renegotiable. Moreover, this quote gives the first clue about the nationality of the narrative's author(s): "magaziner" is an obvious non-French marker, which is used in French-speaking Belgium and Quebec, whereas French people would instead "faire les magasins". While Judith's online profile states that she lives in "Ile de France, Paris" (Forest, 2009: 162), the narrative subtly inscribes itself in a Belgian context through the occasional linguistic slip, which participates in the representation of identity as fluid and fragile.

Hints of the narrator's pseudo-anthropological gaze can be found throughout the text: the narrator is very cynical about 'her' milieu (art school and student circles,

then the comics milieu). Writing about a young couple, the narrator states that "Ce ne sont pas des bourgeois… mais ça s'installe, ça convole, ça chine avec rien. Ça n'a pas vraiment d'argent. // Les posters rock sont déjà relégués aux toilettes, les affiches de design sont soigneusement encadrées. On s'assied n'importe où. On est toujours jeune." (Forest, 2009: 22-23) ; "la soirée rassemble les plus beaux spécimens de la faune estudiantine branchouille" (Forest, 2009: 24). Describing the crowd at Angoulême's comics festival, "ils retrouvent leur part animale: mouton, coq, pigeon", she writes acerbically (Forest, 2009: 108); "Drôle de faune. Bedonnants, parkas vertes et survêts, casquettes de base-ball ou chapeaux de Spirou, sacs en plastique, piles de livres sous le bras. Des gens de goût." (Forest, 2009: 109). These statements echo Neaud's attempts to describe the cruising scene's fauna in his own *Journal*, as we will see in Chapter 4.

The autobiographical subject constructs herself in relation to another autobiographical enterprise, as the protagonist entertains an intertextual affair with both the text itself and its author's avatar. The drawing of the cover *Journal I* (Forest, 2009: 106) accompanies the first of many references to Neaud's autobiographical work, acknowledging the influence of Neaud's *Journal* over Forest's autobiographical project: "Mon projet autobiographique prend forme. Je m'interdis de relire le *Journal* de Neaud". This suggests that Judith has indeed read Neaud and feels the need to differentiate her work from his (Forest, 2009: 178). When Judith reflects on her process, she makes further allusions to Neaud:

> Je n'arrive ni à être intéressante, ni à être sympathique. Je n'ai ni la culture, ni l'expérience, ni le talent de Neaud. Je n'arrive pas à parler de mes traumas, et je ne sais pas si je devrais. Je ne peux pas non plus faire des bonhommes au regard pétillant qui attireraient la sympathie. (Forest, 2009: 178)

Behind Judith's pondering of what should constitute her subject-matter lies a thinly veiled refusal to have the ideology of the "sympa" become a pervasive component within her work. This ideology constitutes one of the underlying societal issues that Neaud exposes and most vehemently discusses in his *Journal*. Building on Renaud Camus, Neaud uses this phrase to refer to the processes by which people who view themselves as open-minded – in their efforts not to offend anyone and be seen as

nice or "sympa" – reproduce stereotypes that may lead to "fascisme ordinaire" (Neaud, 2010: 282).[23]

The latter allusions to Neaud's *Journal* are subtler yet equally significant, as *1h25* borrows some of his imagery and rhetorical devices. The spread on pages 214-215 feature a black and white picture of a dinner party. A red sticker entirely covers a girl's face. The explanation for it can be found in *Momon* (Forest, 2011: 20) and echoes the rectangular black box that Neaud draws on people's eyes either to protect their identity or to signify guilt (Neaud, 1996: 95). By blocking out her face, the sticker both protects but also erases the woman's identity. On pages 234 and 236, Judith's friend Richard is also represented with a rectangular black box hiding his features. On page 234, in the first panel, Richard's face is left blank, which is another echo of Neaud's *Journal* (1996: 95). *1h25* goes even further in its referencing of Neaud's *Journal*, as the following narrative excerpt:

> Richard est toujours mon ami. Je ne le montrerai pas dans ces pages. Et il ne s'appelait pas Richard (Forest, 2009: 234)

offers a striking parallel with Neaud's: "Il s'appelle Patrick*" (Neaud, 2002: 175). Although the sentence is affirmative, the asterisk introduces a doubt ("*voir plus loin"), which is confirmed on the following page, when the narrator reveals that Patrick's name is in fact Fabrice (Neaud, 2002: 176). Forest also briefly borrows the imagery of the anatomic heart (Forest, 2009: 87), which appears repeatedly throughout Neaud's various *Journal* volumes: its most striking occurrences may be Fabrice's heart touched by God's finger, inspired from Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* fresco, as a metonymic representation of Stéphane's effect on Fabrice (1996: 61). Other metonymic occurrences of the anatomic heart include a heart threatened by a loaded gun, as Stéphane refuses to spend the night with Fabrice (Neaud, 1996: 63), and a bruised and battered heart, when Fabrice receives the news that his grandmother has had a heart attack (Neaud, 2002: 204).

The 'Judith' of the narrative defines herself from the outside in, as who she is as an individual derives from whom she differentiates herself, and with whom she

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[23] For a detailed discussion of Neaud's reappropriation of Camus's ideology of the "sympa", see Schehr (2009: 104-108).

identifies. Her autobiographical practice is defined in a similar movement through a game of repetitions with Neaud's autobiographical enterprise. The dissemination of these intertextual echoes participates in the authenticating process insofar as it invites the reader to compare both texts. In the process, the reader may ascribe *Journal*'s autobiographical status to Forest's *1h25*. However, when Neaud's avatar is introduced within the narrative of *Momon*, the text shows one of its most blatant "snags,"[24] the small differences between the outside and its repetition that makes up an inside: "C'est Fabrice Neaud! LE Fabrice Neaud" (Forest, 2011: 34). "L'icône gay de la bande dessinée, mon modèle en autofiction !" (Forest, 2011: 37). This statement is incorrect and therefore problematic, as Neaud has never described his *Journal* in such terms. It may be the first of the intra-textual clues in *Momon* hinting at *1h25*'s problematic status as an autobiography, but *1h25* would hardly qualify as an autofiction either. While it is tempting to label *1h25* as "fake autobiography", it may be more fruitful to consider it as "the autobiography of a fictional character,"[25] on the grounds that the authors of *1h25* went to even greater lengths to establish the authentic status of the text by multiplying the sources that enable the reader to verify the text's authenticity. Judith and Fabrice start an affair, which constitutes Judith's most fulfilling relationship of all the sexual trysts that are described in both *1h25* and *Momon*. Neaud's avatar in *Momon* may be a double of his extra-textual model, but a double in a Deleuzian sense, a double as a redoubling of the Other, a repetition of the different, an Always-Other or a Non-Self (Deleuze, 2004: 104-105). Judith's identity is equally a derivation of the outside, a fold of the outside as she is textually and visually constructed both as a subject and an object of an autobiographical project in the assemblage of references to Neaud.

The arrival of Fabrice Neaud as a character within the diegesis in *Momon* is the culmination of a long series of visual and textual references to Neaud's *Journal* embedded in the narrative of *1h25*, embedding the narrative into another recognised text. 'Judith' constantly compares herself with Neaud. Similarly, my own analysis relies on drawing comparisons with his work. I started my investigation with a critique

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[24] ["accroc"] which I use here in the Deleuzian acception of the term (Deleuze, 2004: 80).
[25] This phrase is also used as the subtitle for Frantico's online blog (2005).

of his statements on autobiocomics. Using Neaud as a figure of authority and as a benchmark, suggests that in order to enter the canon, an autobiocomic must define itself in relation to existing texts authored by white male comics artists. Can the female-authored autobiocomic be analysed differently? Or does it demonstrate the difficulty of the task at hand, within the suffocating male comics book industry? The works of 'Judith Forest' play with these restrictions but the very possibility of this game relies on a certain privileged position: these three-male-authored texts "jouissent" from the resources and freedom to construct an identity in this way. How does the 'Forest' hoax constitute male appropriation of alternative voices and forms of self-representation? I will tackle this question by examining in the following section the visual crafting of 'Judith Forest' and the reflexion on the male gaze that it triggers.

Mirrors and Selfies

The series of 'selfies' integrated in the narrative may also participate in grasping a sense of self through the repeated capture of 'her' visual self. As evidence of the significance of self-portraits in *1h25*, it is a panel showing 'Judith' contemplating herself in a mirror (Forest, 2009: 37) that has been chosen for the cover for *1h25*. Building on Chaney's examination of the trope of mirror-scenes in autobiocomics (Chaney, 2011a), it may be argued that the mirror grounds Judith's construct of a sense of self in *1h25* and that its presence on the cover suggests the autobiographical status of the text. Indeed, Chaney argues that mirrors and photographs are used in numerous autobiocomics as authenticating devices. Self-portraits abound in *1h25* and take many forms. Pages 16 and 17 feature four self-portraits: two are photographs showing Judith pointing her camera at her reflection in the mirror. The process is similar to the spontaneous self-portraits that are uploaded on social network websites. The resulting pictures are out of focus, which Judith justifies in a dismissive confession:

> Comme je n'ai pas de talents, je fais du flou. J'ai pas encore compris pourquoi, mais mes profs aiment bien (Forest, 2009: 16).

Two self-portraits in soft pastels complete the sequence of poses struck by Judith. The sequential arrangement of these panels bears some similarity with Guibert and

Lefèvre's *Le Photographe*, a BD reportage constituted of mixed media, with drawings filling the gaps when no photograph was available to depict the events (Guibert, Lefèvre and Lemercier, 2012). In *1h25*, however, the drawings are included to give the reader some insight into the supposed working process. Alternating the drawings with the photographs also gives the reader an opportunity to compare Judith's drawn self-portraits with her selfies. The latter function of the alternation of drawings and photographs in the narrative of *1h25* builds on the persistent preconceived idea that drawn images remind the reader of the material conditions of their production, while photographs seem less mediated and appear more 'real', despite anxieties surrounding the development of digital photography and the possibilities of photo-manipulation. For Azoulay, photographs are "partial, false, incidental, biased" (Azoulay, 2012: 9). *1h25* plays with these assumptions as the panel sequence features self-portraits in which the face is blurred, and invites the reader to compare the body shape in both media.

The de-familiarisation of the self-imagery via the use of blurring points to the fact that photographs are not only images, but also objects that are made for specific purposes: the self-portraits are part of an art project, and they participate in the construction of Judith's sense of self as an artist. Moreover, the photographs participate as objects of study in the autobiographical project. As the camera is visible in the mirror, it denotes their making process and suggests the agency of their author. The visibility of the camera in the self-portraits in *1h25* brings the resulting image close to the practice of 'selfies'. At first glance, these selfies may seem to help to ground a sense of self.

It is tempting to read this as a binary opposition between photographic selfies that function in the narrative as authenticating devices on the one hand, and drawn mirror scenes introducing doubts about the unity of the self on the other hand. For Chaney, mirror-scenes in autobiocomics eventually unify the sense of self (Chaney, 2011a). In *1h25*, Judith's reflection in mirrors are visible both in photographic self-portraits that are part of 'her' art project, and in drawn panels pictures depicting both 'her' face and its reflection. It would be tempting but reductive to claim that mirror scenes in *1h25* unify a sense of self – both as an individual and an artist –, in contrast

with *Momon*, in which the protagonist's disintegrating sense of self is suggested through yet another series of mirror scenes. Yet, even in *1h25*, the take on the trope of mirror scenes in autobiocomics should not lead to such a reductive reading. The mirrors in *1h25* are sources or rather reflections of anxieties about the image – and the sense – of self. The mirror in *1h25* and *Momon* contains an interrogation on the fictional status of the artwork and of the author.

In both texts, the mirror becomes a space for reflecting on the self, self-identity, self-knowledge and self-representation. The term 'mirror' in Latin refers to any painting or representation. A mirror's function is to reflect the external world in a limited space. The mirror is thus the synthesis, enclosing and concentrating its content. The mirror is not only a mode of representation but also a mode of structuration. Contemplating one's reflection necessarily asks for interpretation. The mirror is part of the didactic project. Mirror as an instrument for knowledge invites a self-critique. It creates dynamics, as it proposes a reflection and an identity but also suggests and amplifies the inadequacy between the subject and his/her representation, a space between perfection and imperfection, knowledge and illusion. Mirrors, a tool for simulacrum, oscillate between duplication and duplicity, truth and illusion, perfection and deformation, contemplation and action.

As the narrative of *Momon* reveals that Judith Forest may not exist outside the text, there is increasingly less and less subject matter for the mirror to reflect. The visual leitmotiv of a mirror's black stain grows and expands over the surface of the glass, obscuring 'her' reflection (Forest, 2011: 50; 94; 96), climaxing in a nightmarish sequence where the mirror stain replaces the protagonist's face in the mirror (Forest, 2011: 61). A failure of recognition in an encounter between the narrator and 'her' own photographic self-image leads to the disintegration of the sense of self. In the last panels of *Momon*, the mirror-frame disappears, and only the stain seems to indicate that the portrait is indeed the reflection (Forest, 2011: 96). It becomes increasingly difficult to tell the reflection apart from the reflected, which leads to the suggestion that both are images without a source.

The mirror functions here as a formal device fragmenting the body, as it provides a close-up that shows only a part of the body, with its frame severing it from the rest of the body. Writing about close-ups in cinema, Doane notes:

> The close-up in general is disengaged from the mise-en-scène, freighted with an inherent separability or isolation, a 'for-itself' that inevitably escapes, to some degree, the tactics of continuity editing that strive to make it 'whole' again. (Doane, 2003: 90-91)

Is the mirror a trap, a static device paralysing the gaze into a contemplative position? For Luce Irigaray, who writes about the snapshot, what is visible surges forward but the context making the frozen moment of this snapshot visible is itself elusive. A similar effect is at play in both texts. As the drawn mirror scenes in *1h25* and *Momon* do not contain any temporal clue hinting at their duration, these static panels are floating without context amidst the narrative, just as the close-ups are free-floating, pretty faces without a body and images without a source. "[T]he image becomes, once more, an image rather than a threshold onto a world. Or rather, the world is reduced to this face, this object" (Doane, 2003: 91). The mirror scenes thus are characterised by an interplay of visibility and invisibility, presenting a body only visible as fragments and – Irigaray would argue – frozen in time (1999).

Yet, not unlike Norman Rockwell's 1960 "Triple Autoportrait" which features multiple self-portraits in various media, each self-portrait contradicting and completing the others, another layer of signification emerges from the series of selfies in *1h25* when they are considered in the sequence of panels in which they are included together with the soft-pastel drawings. While each individual image represents a moment in time, the discrete objects (the photographs) and the isolated moments that they denote are constituted through their insertion into a sequence of panels forming a coherent narrative. As a series of self-portraits in different media (selfies and drawings), they may seem to be arranged in chronological order, but the repetitive movements and the similarity between the resulting images brings the sequence closer to a form of assemblage which freely collects together juxtaposed images. Self-identity is not so much revealed as it is accumulated, and both selfies and mirrors participate in the ceaseless reinvention of the self and the fragility and fluidity of identity – an aspect that is reinforced by the blurring and erasure of the photographic portraits in *1h25*. Barthes in *La Chambre claire* writes about the self-

constitution in the process of 'posing', self-transformation into an 'image', which paradoxically obscures the authoring process (Barthes, 1980: 30). Moreover, the close-up on the mirror's reflection provokes a tension between an excessive affirmation of the body and an excessive denial of the body through the isolation of a detail – the severing of the head from the rest of the body. The photographs are themselves assemblages, composed of fragments of the subject's body through photomontage, while the majority of the soft-pastel drawings portray Judith in full body views – a significant difference which I will now explore further.

Self-Exposure and Body Image: Embodied Views, Impossible Selfies

The subjectivity of perception is taken quite literally, as embodied views – with Judith's body represented from her embodied viewpoint – abound in *1h25* (fig. 5). These instances of representations of Judith's visual perspective constitute a constant visual reminder of the hand of the artist. But the plausibility or feasibility of creating comics is a notion which Judith's works deliberately play with: *1h25* also contains numerous candid portraits in which the protagonist is not looking at the lens. Indeed, these embodied views (Forest, 2009: 61) contradict those taken of the back of her head (Forest, 2009: 63), while she is lying on a bed (Forest, 2009: 62) or drawn turning her back completely to the reader (Forest, 2011: 6-7).

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

(Figure 5: Forest, 2009: 6-7)

Most of the poses that Judith strikes seem rather difficult to draw from life, let alone catch in a mirror, which raises the question of the process of creation. These tensions are further explored in *Momon*, where the impossible self-portraits multiply. Judith is drawn from behind, either sitting on a windowsill (Forest, 2011: 6), walking with her luggage (Forest, 2011: 7) or sitting on a bench (Forest, 2011: 29; 2009: 231) (fig. 6). In a later scene that shows Judith making a phone call, the frameless panel presents a head view of Judith from behind, only allowing us to see the back of her head, her neck and her right ear (Forest, 2011: 63). The narrator reinforces the ambiguity of the working process with observations that seem to explain the process: Judith "se dessine de mémoire" (Forest, 2011: 41) and "par cœur" (Forest, 2011: 42). Yet, these are not images made from self-observation. Such unusual poses raise the inevitable question of their making, as it necessitates picture reference and introduces doubts as to Forest as sole author.

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

(Figure 6: Forest, 2009: 230-231)

Chaney notes how many 'autobiocomics' have their narratives of 'self-coherence' interrupted with another self, a competing I-con (Chaney, 2011a: 30). This is not the case in *1h25* and *Momon* where self-fragmentation and the multiplicity of the self are represented in a different way. Rather than competing instances of the self, the distinction between 'Judith'-as-narrator and 'Judith'-as-protagonist are flattened out. This is further emphasised with the aesthetic of the sketchbook and the narrative time in the free-floating narrative captions seemingly coinciding with the time of the actions depicted inside the panels. *1h25* starts with a seemingly strong sense of self as suggested by the dichotomy I/they. The narrator constantly affirms who she is and is not in opposition to her entourage. Then, the text accumulates instances of visual fragmentations as if the process of crafting as autobiocomics weakens the sense of self. Of course, it is all ironic since there is no original self to begin with. This notion of authorship seems to be an authorship in absentia (Chaney, 2011a: 39) where the I-con is a visual object of consumption (Chaney, 2011a: 23).

The overwhelming centrality of the self in *1h25* leads me to investigate the significance of Judith's self-exposure. El Refaie notes that in autobiocomics

> the requirement to produce multiple drawn versions of one's self necessarily involves an intense engagement with embodied aspects of identity, as well as with the sociocultural models underpinning body image (El Refaie, 2012: 4).

Lewis Trondheim in *Approximativement* expresses the estrangement that he feels about his body – as he struggles to come to terms with ageing and weight gain (Trondheim, 1995). Neaud constantly refers to his physical inadequacy – too tall, too thin – in various daily situations, whether he describes his difficulties of sitting comfortably in airplanes or when cruising in public parks, and goes as far as labelling himself as part of "les moches" in unpublished pages of his *Journal 5* (Neaud, 2012: available online). Although Judith refers to herself as a recovering bulimic, she does so in a cursory way: "J'ai renoncé à d'autres addictions plus dangereuses. J'y reviendrai peut-être." (Forest, 2009: 14) However, this is not followed through and Judith remains vague: "ça me rappelle douloureusement d'autres soirées..." The gap is left wide open and the reader is left to imagine the worst. When the nature of the compulsion is eventually named, it is only in passing – "Habiter là réprime mes impulsions boulimiques." (Forest, 2009: 197) – or through the de-familiarisation and re-interpretation of objects of the everyday, the most striking instance of this process of de-familiarisation being the drawing of a bent can of coke (Forest, 2009: 226) used as a metaphor for the nature of Judith's addiction (Forest, 2009: 225-237). After mentioning in passing bulimia and a cutting episode, the narrator laments: "Faire des livres ne suffira jamais" (Forest, 2011: 71). Neither *1h25* nor *Momon* provide an in-depth exploration of her body issues. An exploration of the usefulness in the recovery process of producing autobiocomics is also absent from the narrative. Wivel reads these very elusive confessions as a sign that Judith may not be ready to share her traumatic experience with her reader yet (Wivel, 2010). Wivel describes Judith as insecure and self-loathing, but his reading seems at odds with the overwhelming presence of Judith's naked body throughout *1h25*. Insofar as they are devoid of any depreciative commentary, Judith's nude self-portraits may seem rather empowering. Moreover, *1h25* avoids the clichés about body issues that abound in French girly

comics-blogs, which revolve around clothes not fitting anymore and other similarly trivial everyday concerns about body image.[26]

In the following part of this chapter, I examine to what extent Judith's sexual agency is being denied – or at least heavily controlled and tailored for the heterosexual male viewing pleasure and consumption. However, as I approach the text in its multiplicity of origins, I can move beyond the reductive reading of three male authors projecting their gaze onto their creature and objectifying her. Instead, I ask how the text – framed as it is as produced by a female artist – holds a mirror to the male spectator – and its reader – to expose such objectification of female characters. I discuss the text's play of gender, the masks, the embodiment of a female character and performance of the female voice. As I examine how the text plays with the reader's expectations, I put this interplay in dialogue with Hatfield's notion of 'radical intimacy' and argue that the text opens a discussion about internalised misogyny and assumptions about the male gaze. The text explores the tensions between phantasm and 'impudeur' and its depiction of female pleasure oscillates between a celebrated passivity and a lack of agency.

Reading as *Jouissance*, Drawing as Aggravated Procuring

Momon contains an acerbic commentary on what makes autobiocomics successful:

> Ce qui plaît aujourd'hui […], c'est des filles qui racontent leur vie, leur cœur, leur cul. Et si en plus le lecteur s'identifie, qu'il pleure un peu, qu'il bande un peu… (Forest, 2011: 78)

Because of the loosened layout of speech balloons in this panel, the reader cannot know for sure who, among Thomas, Xavier or William, came up with Judith Forest as a concept. The avatars of the authors behind Judith Forest share Judith's story of origins with the reader: she was created for financial gains, in response to their frustration at the respective commercial success of Aude Picault and Aurélia Aurita, while La Cinquième Couche's author Ilan Manouach, despite an exhibition, failed to

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[26] Such as in the respective works of Penelope Bagieu and Margaux Motin. For a discussion of their works and the emergence of a 'BD Girly' genre, see Olivier (2016).

sell a single book (Forest, 2011: 76). In an attempt to find an author who could remedy the situation, by bringing to La Cinquième Couche an author who could produce an autobiocomic featuring "du sexe genre intello avec de la légèreté" (Forest, 2011: 78), they settle for "Si on faisait une bédé de fille ? Style une nana qui raconte à la première personne ses histoires de cul ?" (Forest, 2011: 78). Then, considering the possibility of hiring a female author, they consider first publishing the work by "n'importe quelle auteure et puis on engage une fille sexy?" "Haha ! mais alors, on n'a qu'à l'écrire nous-mêmes, carrément !" "Et on se la taperait nous-même !" (Forest, 2011: 79) which they eventually do in both *1h25* and *Momon*.

It is tempting to see Judith as a sexual object offered to the reader's viewing pleasure and consumption in *1h25*. According to comics artist Johanna, "[d]errière toute artiste se cache une prostituée n'hésitant pas à se mettre à nu pour séduire son public" (Johanna, quoted in Cestac, 2009). Judith's role as sex bait is further implied with *Momon*'s cover, which features Judith in a red-lit window, sitting in her racy underwear, fishnet stockings and high-heels. The trope of the female comics artist as a prostitute in *Momon* is in line with Florent Ruppert and Jérome Mulot's 2009 "Maison Close" project. Ruppert and Mulot produced a series of drawn settings representing the interior of a brothel. Thirty-one artists from the French-Belgian comics scene including eleven women contributed over the span of ten weeks. The resulting collaborative work was unveiled as an installation at the 2009 Festival International de la Bande Dessinée (FIBD) in Angoulême. The work questions the distance between comics and performance, and explores creative possibilities for improvisation and performativity in comics (Beaty, 2010: 103). Beaty notes the ironic use of autobiographical representation in *La Maison close* (2010), as contributors draw their avatars. But as the male contributors participated in this improvised exercise under formal constraints by playing the part of customers and facilitators – with the exception of Lewis Trondheim who acted as a bouncer in a nod to his role as an editor of the "Shampooing" collection for Delcourt –, the female artists were asked to carry out the role of prostitutes. Some participants voiced their initial reluctance to participate in the project due to the inherent sexism of the set-up. The installation

also stirred controversies at Angoulême, backed up by Association Artémisia, a French association that promotes female comics authors (Cestac, 2009).

Forest's texts further explore the recurring trope in French-Belgian BD male productions and projects of the female comics artist-as-prostitute by adding another layer. Not only do both *1h25* and *Momon* feature recurring depictions of the female artist as a prostitute, but the practice of exploring the space between autobiography and fiction is itself branded as a venal activity: "L'autofiction, c'est un bon créneau." (Forest, 2011: 68). Judith notes "le coté putassier du bouquin" (Forest, 2011: 68). She reiterates: "Et si la "sincérité" n'était qu'un argument de vente ? Et si l'autobiographie était la putain des genres littéraires ? Et si j'avais été écrite en trois jours ?" (Forest, 2011: 96). Her identity as a textual construct is further emphasised as she merges with the textual object *1h25*: "Je me vends bien. Je suis une pute." (Forest, 2011: 88).

The overwhelming presence of Judith's naked body throughout the book may be seen as Forest's very literal take on radical intimacy. "Radical intimacy" (Hatfield, 2005: 114) is to reveal and show everything, to leave nothing out, not even the most embarrassing moments. It could be argued that this is the postmodern or late capitalist apotheosis of the 'confession' which commodifies rather than seeks to dispense with the shameful self. The term "provocation consensuelle", used by Judith-the-narrator commenting on 'her' own approach to her photo-manipulation in *1h25* (Forest, 2009: 43), functions as a tongue-in-cheek meta-textual commentary on the purpose of *1h25* itself. These recurring discussions within *1h25* are starting points to debates taking place amongst a community of readers about the practice of autobiography as exhibitionism, made even more problematic with the visual aspect of comics. For Hatfield, the rawest kind of self-exposure goes beyond exhibitionism and becomes an authenticating strategy that can validate the author's social and political observations. I want to move beyond this public debate about the artistic and political value of pornography, and ask instead how *1h25* destabilises the debates taking place amongst a community of readers who demand a certain 'quality control' concerning authenticity.

Real-life reader responses are alluded to in *Momon* (Forest, 2011: 27) through the reaction of a fictional character, Judith's mother, towards the publication of *1h25.* Although her mother fustigates the depiction of casual sex –

> elle me dit que mon livre est obscène, que c'est de la pornographie et que j'y ai l'air d'une traînée. Elle ne parle pas du dernier chapitre, mais de mes amants et des scènes de cul. (Forest, 2011: 27)

– the scenes that 'Judith' refers to as "impudique" ones allude to her battle with addiction, whose depiction concludes with "Voilà. J'ai été au bout de l'impudeur." (Forest, 2009: 236). "Impudeur" is not to be strictly associated with the showing of explicit sex scenes and relates instead to the representation of intimacy and self-introspective practices – a view shared with Neaud, who answered in those terms critiques who branded his *Journal* "impudique", as we will see in Chapter 4. Here, *Momon* plays with the reader's expectations, explores the fluidity between real-life reader reactions and the response of the fictional character, and deflates criticisms.

These responses to the accusations of "impudeur" are staged. Judith's mother appears as a representation of misplaced 'shock', as she seems more concerned with the graphic depictions of sex scenes than with her daughter's sufferings (depression, bulimia, drug use). This is not only a metafictional commentary on the reception of the autobiographical genre, but also a reflexion on the fact that attempts at getting parental attention often miss their mark. I will return to this question and explore the representation of this gap as I examine Dominique Goblet's take on this in Chapter 5.

While the reviews of *1h25* laud the frankness of this liberated woman and her freedom in the way she lives her sexuality, Judith repeatedly fails to take responsibility for her sexual acts: after taking part in an orgy where "je me suis frottée au corps des autres" ... "je me suis sentie salie de tous ces attouchements" and thinking about the sexual acts, "je me sens sale" (Forest, 2011: 48). The sexual acts depicted in *Momon* may make its heroine feel "salie" (Forest, 2011: 7) yet are surprisingly tame. In sharp contrast with Aurita's *Fraise et Chocolat* whose title comes from the consequences of having sexual intercourse during menstruation or without the preliminary use of a douche, both *1h25* and *Momon* present a heavily sanitised sexuality in a world devoid of any fluid – thus devoid of any sexually-transmitted disease and free from any pregnancy risk. The world of Judith is populated with

bodies that look like dolls, as the only hairs are capillary and facial hairs. It is a world where periods are only mentioned in the context of explaining women's mood swings (Forest, 2011: 12), where sequences showing Judith using the toilet are opportunities for introspection and part of the creative process (Forest, 2009: 231), and where ageing editors can have unprotected sex with their young up-and-coming female artists in post-Angoulême orgies (Forest, 2011: 37).

The representation and exploration of Judith's sexuality situate itself in the space between celebrated passivity and blatant lack of agency. She is presented as a young woman, neither at ease with her body, nor her sexuality; she is a sexual object contributing to her subordination. The tensions in Forest's works between sexual liberation and further objectification are exemplified by the connotations conveyed in her patronym: Gheno notes the significance of Forest's patronym, which reminds the reader of Jean-Claude Forest, the creator of Barbarella, a feminine erotic icon considered by some a feminist icon. According to Marie-Christine Lipani Vaissade, Barbarella represents the emancipation of female characters in comics (2009). But the take on feminism that is proposed in the Barbarella comics is not exempt of exploitative fetishism, far from it. Moreover, the initials of Judith Forest add another layer to the ambiguity of the filiation with Jean-Claude Forest's creature: "JF" is an abbreviation used in lonely hearts columns to refer to "jeune femme" but could also, as Judith ponders in *Momon*, point to "jeune fille" (Forest, 2011: 85). This ambiguity suggests the tension between the emancipated young woman or the girl/daughter whose sexual agency is denied, or at least heavily controlled, sanitised and tailored for male viewing pleasure and consumption.

In this section, I have apprehended 'Judith Forest' as a textual construct and showed how the sex scene with 'her' editor at Angoulême (2011: 37) is the symbolic climax of the conflation of the female figure, the avatar, the fictional author, the autobiocomics as material object, the subject matter and meta-discourse. In the next section, I argue that this performance of female pleasure allows for the deconstruction of the male gaze. I read both *1h25* and *Momon* as texts presenting a critique of the male gaze and exposing its process notably through framings.

Frameless Controls of the Gaze

No line delineates the panels from one another. *1h25* is laid out with two frameless drawings per page, each with their own handwritten caption. The juxtaposition of these drawings on the page suggests an assemblage of panels, but the grid is invisible. The loose, sketchy delineation that characterizes the drawings in soft pencils contributes to their overall spontaneous quality, which is enhanced by Cecilia Dos Santos's off-green wash tint. In contrast with a cropped image inside the frame of a panel border, the unframed images appear unfinished: yet we are reading the final version of a published text and the account of its crafting – or rather an account of it. The frameless panels in *1h25* raise questions about the status of the text: is it a sketchbook rather than comics? A sketchbook denotes the notions of authenticity, spontaneity and immediacy as it seemingly reduced the distance between the hand of the artist and the 'I-con' or avatar. Drawings stress their material condition: drawings have been drawn from the point of view of the artist and show the artist's perception.

As we have seen in the opening chapter of this study, the frame is viewed as selective, delimiting boundaries and conveying interpretation. The absence of frames in *1h25* paradoxically points to the importance of the framing process: the frames restrict what is perceivable (Butler, 2009: 100). Here the unframed images appear non-definitive and floating in an open space. *1h25* cultivates the spontaneous aesthetic of the creative process, suggesting the text as text-in-becoming, just as it pretends to capture the process of self-crafting. With the apparent immediacy of the sketchbook, 'Judith Forest' is given a backstory with discernible authorial motives. This is all part of a game that destabilises notions of identity and authorship, as well as the readers' expectations of 'authenticity'.

 In order to apprehend the signification of this lack of frames, I borrow from another Judith (Butler's *Precarious Lives* (2004a) and *Frames of War* (2009)) the notion that frames are to be considered as tools of analysis. Butler also sees the frames as critical and political objects of analysis that should be examined and investigated in their own rights. Indeed, she argues that frames make and unmake

the object of analysis that they isolate. Moreover, in the context of comics studies, frames are to be understood not in isolation but in their relation to the other frames, the different levels of material frames (panels, page, spread-page, etc.) and the flowing nature of our interpretation of them as the narrative elapses and evolves.

Free from any frame, the numerous panels containing the full-body naked portraits of 'Judith' may seemingly appear free from any framing process. 'Her' body seems offered to the reader's viewing pleasure while the question raised by the hand of the artist offering the view of Judith's body – all the more problematic when the hand is not Forest's – is erased. In this instance, the lack of framing invites a reflection of the ubiquity of the male gaze, so potent and so every-day that the working of the gaze is made invisible and thus taken for the norm.

Laura Mulvey's now classic definition of the male gaze posits man as the owner of the gaze and woman as the passive object of the gaze (Mulvey, 1975). She argues that in films, female characters are created as a spectacle for heterosexual male desire through the gaze of the camera, the gaze of the male in the narrative, and the gaze of the male spectator. Indeed, as suggested in *Momon*, Judith was created so she could be looked at, and as three male authors are uttering her origin story (Forest, 2011: 79), the narrative frames her as an object of consumption for the heterosexual male gaze.

A comparison with Neaud's *Journal* will help me to exemplify this issue. When representing his sexual encounters, Neaud opts to represent his partners in great details, focussing on the body parts he finds particularly attractive. It is worth noting that Neaud's own body disappears temporarily from view, as his attention – and the reader's – are directed to his partner (Neaud, 2010: 33). By contrast, when depicting her sexual encounters, Judith Forest's exhibitionism is all the more significant as it further emphasises the absence of the male body, even in scenes depicting sexual acts with male partners, since the male body is only partially represented underneath and around Judith's body (Forest, 2009: 90-91). The lesbian scene is the only sexual encounter in which both partners are fully visible and both equally eroticised (Forest, 2009: 51-52). When Judith is represented having sex with male partners, the male bodies are only alluded to. Male bodies are relegated to props, whose main function

is to provide background shading framing Forest's body and visually contrasting with her curves and femininity (Forest, 2009: 90-91; 211-212). These male figures are props for the staging for another male gaze or meta-gaze, but these male figures are exempt from objectification thus able to retain their agency and subject-hood.

In *1h25*, the impossible selfies are a visual representation of the male spectator's point of view. Beyond these considerations on the male hand(s) producing the panels and choosing the angles in which the naked body of Judith is presented for the viewer, the framing invites a wider reflection on the trope of the male gaze in general. The female body is the subject of the reader's prolonged gaze: "woman as image, man as the bearer of the look" (Mulvey, 27). The male gaze has been defined in visual arts as follows: "Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at" (Berger, 1972: 47). Women are objectified in representations from both "high" and "low" culture. Women are admired, contemplated from a distance, and transformed into an artificial object of worship.

Practices of seeing and looking play a vital role in framing the body. In *The Forgetting of Air*, Irigaray claims that men establish limits, and surround themselves with borders (Irigaray, 1999: 47). The frames function as clear demarcation and confinement, and Irigaray sees in the frames an assertion of specifically male traits. As I interrogate the frames by which 'Judith Forest' is introduced, presented, questioned, I turn to Lynda Nead who wrote on the artistic genre of the female nude, and sees in the framed nude "a means of containing femininity and female sexuality" (Nead, 1992: 2). For her, the nude is a way of "controlling this unruly body and placing it within the securing boundaries of aesthetic discourse" (Nead, 1992: 2). In the nude, the female flesh is framed and its flaws are concealed. Similarly, we have seen that in *1h25* and *Momon*, the 'graphic' sex scenes present a sanitised version of the feminine, as well as 'sexcapades' that appear quite tame and underwhelming in comparison with female-authored autobiocomics (for example, Aurita). *1h25* depicts a barely consensual sex scene between Judith with an older man in position of power, 'her' editor, which in many countries would consist of a blatant instance of statutory rape, but its problematic status is completely erased. It is a scene told from Judith's point of view but which fulfils a male fantasy. As Mary Devereaux points out, "the

male gaze is not always male, but it is always male dominated" (Devereaux, 1990: 339).

Writing on the frame, Derrida posits the image inside the frame as an image that is made and apprehended as object (Derrida, 1987). But the frame also suggests that there is a space outside the image, from which the context of the image is formed. For Derrida, the frame opens a space between the inside and the outside, and points at the negotiations between the object and its possible interpretations. We have seen that *1h25* has a sketchbook-like form; its boundaries are not clearly drawn. For Irigaray, femininity is pushed outside the realm of representation, into interstices (Irigaray, 1974). In the numerous sex scenes, 'Judith' herself momentarily becomes a passive negative space, framed by the male bodies. Yet, it seems that the absence of border panels in *1h25* plays on this irreducibility of differences between men and women. Irigaray affirms the centrality yet marginality of femininity, which always retains elements of fluidity and liminality in order to escape the binary. During medical observation, the speculum enables the subjection of the female body to the male gaze. Irigaray develops the notion of woman as the 'specular image' of man. This 'specular image' is a disfigured variation of masculinity, a mirror reflecting, projecting and confirming the male's view and his 'speculations' about women and femininity. The lack of frame raises questions about the complicity of the reader in these acts of framing and their effects. The significance of the absence of the frames and with it, of the absence of gutter, suggest that the white space behind the figures is not a background but an active part of the image: everything is image.

To what extent can the male authors of *1h25* and *Momon* avoid assuming this gaze? Can the male gaze be refracted by the creation of a fictional autobiography such as *1h25*? If *1h25* holds up a mirror to the male viewer, it is still rooted in the realm of representation. It may not escape the frames of representation but may help to keep them under scrutiny.

Conclusion

A close-textual examination of both *1h25* and *Momon* uncovers some of the expectations and assumptions that lie with a book authored by a young female artist after the Franco-Belgian boom of autobiocomics in the late 1990s-early 2000s. But *1h25* is at odds with La Cinquième Couche's editorial line and catalogue due to the unlikeliness of its production and publication as well as its status as an unlikely object – an impossible book containing an assemblage of impossible portraits. While *1h25* successfully passed as an autobiocomics, it oscillates between performances of the female voice and traces of the male gaze. As for *Momon*, it further explores the relations between the textual author construct and 'her' autobiographical project, and between the authors and their 'object' of study, as well as the tensions between the autobiographical subject as an object of study, as a textual and visual construct, and as an object of consumption – and with it the question of the consumption of both the autobiographical text and of the female body.

'Judith Forest' appears as a construct limited to the representations on the page. Yet 'her' use of social media extends but also blurs the lines between the 'real' author and their constructed identity within the space of the comic. Therefore, 'her' identity is equally a derivation of the outside, a fold of the outside as she is textually and visually constructed both as a subject and an object of an autobiographical project in an assemblage of references to Neaud's *Journal*, (Jean-Claude) Forest's Barbarella and Tiqqun's *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la Jeune-Fille* (2006). The use of frameless panels and the insertion of "selfies" turn *1h25* into a text-in-becoming, pretend to capture the spontaneous process of self-crafting, and give 'Judith Forest' a backstory with discernible authorial motives. The material frames allow for the technical control of the image, but the absence of panel frames opens up the possibility for a dual reading, one naïve (with Judith Forest as sole author of the text) and one knowing. One brief appearance of Tiqqun's *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la Jeune-Fille* (2006) inscribes *1h25* in post-feminist discourse and suggests a reading of *1h25* as a critique of the "jeune fille" as a neo-liberal product. The text is framed as produced by a female artist and holds a mirror to the male spectator – and its reader – to expose the objectification of female characters. Free

from any frame, the full-body naked portraits of 'Judith' seem offered to the reader's viewing pleasure. The absence of frames to delimit panels raises questions about the complicity of the reader in these acts of interpretive framing and their effects. With 'her' deconstruction in *Momon*, this lack of formal framing invites a reflection of the ubiquity of the male gaze, questions its normative process and keep it under scrutiny. In this chapter, I contributed to the debates on the question of authenticity by examining a text that displays a set of authenticating devices for what they are: rhetorical strategies. I continue my investigation of autobiocomics as a tool that exceed the artist's self-construction in the subsequent chapters. For Chaney (2011a), the mask hides the referent/face of the author, a notion that I will interrogate further in the following chapter in my investigation of the notion of self-crafting in the works of Lewis Trondheim.

Chapter 3
Lewis Trondheim's
Approximativement

I continue my investigation of the representation of the self in autobiocomics, this time focussing on the crafting of an autobiographical avatar who appears to be stuck in a state of *stasis*. In his autobiocomics, Lewis Trondheim seems to wear a mask the immutability of which, I argue, paradoxically allows for an exploration of the changing nature of identity. As I study the significance of his autobiographical avatar, I continue my exploration of the notion of authorship as performative. I examine Trondheim's self-crafting into a protagonist and a character in a narrative, and I investigate his playful exploration of narrative levels and of the fluctuating distinction between autobiographical practices and fiction. Trondheim's variety of masks invites a reflection on the oscillation between a sense of recognition and de-familiarisation of the self. I show how the questions of self-representation in Trondheim's work are intertwined with anxieties surrounding the absence of subject matter, the loss of meaning and his own relevance as an author and an artist, and I analyse the textual and visual representations of these interrogations.

This chapter will mostly focus on *Approximativement* (1995), as it is arguably the text through which the most recognisable of Lewis Trondheim's avatars was created, defined and refined. Due to its contemplative nature, it is not an easy task to provide a fair summary of *Approximativement*'s plot: the book is a collection of six separate volumes originally published between May and September 1993, and reads like an accumulation of anecdotes and fragmentary accounts of conversations, internal soliloquies and dream-like sequences. Some commentators have seen the benefits in discussing *Approximativement* in the light of the development of Trondheim's autobiographical practice from this first autobiographical work to his on-going online blog *Les Petits Riens*, including considerations on his *Carnets de Bord* (2002) and his essay in comics form, *Désoeuvré* (2005), on ageing authors in the BD

milieu (Ciment, 2007; Turgeon 2008; Mao, 2013). Gerbier and Ottaviani (2001) see the facets of Trondheim's autobiographical self in his use of recurring characters. They argue that his work typifies an autobiographical matrix, which functions as a set of simplified codes enhanced as formal constraints are worked into it. My reading of Trondheim's *Approximativement* is informed by references to his fictional works, which highlight the porous boundaries between facts and fiction in his works. Moreover, Trondheim most intriguingly questions and challenges issues of autobiographical self-representation in his fictional works.

Trondheim's autobiographical and fictional works are formal experiments. By having his autobiographical avatar interact with fictional characters who challenge the authority of the protagonist and of the textual narrator as an author, Trondheim not only plays with the author-construct through meta-textual discourse, but also challenges the boundaries between narration and narrative through the use of "metalepsis", which has significant repercussions on the referential pact. In this chapter, I examine these interactions between Trondheim's author-construct and his fictional characters as part of a wider enterprise, which I propose to read as a technique of the self. I show how Trondheim questions the process of identity formation both within and outside his works through the careful elaboration of his persona into a myth of the self. After examining Trondheim's many masks, I investigate how the assemblage of relations between his avatar and his fictional characters participates in his efforts to take responsibility for himself and better himself as an individual. These considerations lead me to explore a form of self-crafting that is turned inward, before progressively examining in the following chapters more politicised forms of self-crafting.

Author-Constructs and Other "Myths of the Self"

Before approaching the various textual and visual self-representations of Lewis Trondheim, I now offer a brief sketch of the man behind 'the Bird', his most recognisable avatar in autobiocomics. In this section, I show to what extent his official

biography is itself a carefully self-crafted account that participates in the construction of the persona both inside and outside the comics grid.

Laurent Chabosy was born in 1964 in Fontainebleau. Although the origin of his pseudonym is well-known – with a French-sounding name come stylistic expectations that he perceived as limiting constraints -, it is however more difficult to pinpoint the circumstances of the birth of Lewis Trondheim's avatar. Among all the assumptions that surround the creation of this public persona, two are widespread and persistent, the first one being that *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie* (1992) was Trondheim's very first comic. The second assumption, which stems directly from the first, is that Trondheim could not draw before he learnt how to draw comics through the making of this five-hundred-page epic. Trondheim himself does little to dismiss these assumptions as he usually omits to mention any work he made prior to *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie*, and it is indeed the oldest comic listed in the bibliography posted on his official website.

Undeniably, *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie* constitutes a stepping stone in Trondheim's output. *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie* was a formal exercise which helped him to gain a graphic efficiency that would serve the narrative developments better. The stunning rhythm of production of *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie* – five-hundred pages drawn over twelve months – is the first example of Trondheim's prolificacy and the spontaneity that ensues from it. *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie* also constitutes Trondheim's first known "œuvre en dessin direct", with the panels directly drawn in ink, without any preliminary sketches on the page – with the notable exception of the opening chapter. Indeed, in a move that helps to build the myth surrounding *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie*, Trondheim produced each panel of the first chapter on separate pages that he then cut and arranged in sequence.

Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie may be considered as Trondheim's advent as a comics artist but it certainly does not constitute his first comic. Indeed, *Approximate Continuum Comics Institute H3319*, a "twelve and a half"-issue fanzine was published from September 1988 to February 1990 under the penname of Lewis Trondheim years before the making of *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie. ACCI*

H3319 includes some photocopied panels that are assembled into comics-strips, alongside black and white comics pages which Trondheim drew and inked, and whose sense of pacing, use of shadows and detailed backgrounds are all the more impressive considering the great variety of attempted graphic styles. Indeed*,* his series of experimental comics is characterised with an ever-changing style ranging from minimalist, geometrical forms to a manner reminiscent of Will Eisner's.

Not only is *Approximate Continuum Comics Institute H3319's* title very similar to *Approximate Continuum Comix*, a six-issue comics series (1993-1994) later published in one volume as *Approximativement* (1995), but it also features fully developed characters that would later be depicted in longer stories such as *Psychanalyse* (1990), *Monolinguistes* (1992a), *Le Dormeur* (1993), etc. *ACCI H3319* thus constitutes a formal laboratory for years of publication to come. Plots, situations and secondary characters in later works also have their origin in other previously published but underrated works. For instance, the last panel on page 7 in *Approximativement* features a foreigner selling roses in the restaurant where Lewis Trondheim has dinner with his wife Brigitte and Père Vincent. The character first appears in the last panel of a short story entitled *Les aventures du steeple-chase des petits boulots*, published in *Frank Margerin présente* n°6 (*Les Humanoïdes associés*, 1992b). Such characters do not seem to have undergone any significant changes regarding their characterization. Their visual designs remain unchanged when they reappear in later books. The process of rewriting is so limited that it would not be tenable to interpret Trondheim's silence as disdain for his pre-*Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie* work, and discard it on these grounds.

Although these early works were already published under the pseudonym of Lewis Trondheim, it would appear that the idea of an artist whose early work encompasses the work to come does not fit with Trondheim's personal myth: that of an autodidact whose alleged inability to draw is not only a leitmotiv in his work but also abounds in the paratext. Biographies usually downplay the fact that he studied at a school of graphic design and advertising before his highly documented epiphany at Cerisy in 1987 where a first encounter with Jean-Christophe Menu made him realise that "poorly drawn" comics could still be interesting (Loret, 2007). This

emphasis on the 'mythic' meeting and the recurring claim that this is the moment that started it all illustrate the importance of the author-construct not only in the persona of Lewis Trondheim himself but also in Trondheim's work. In the following section, I examine the many masks of Trondheim and their significance in relation to questions of authorship.

The Bird and Other Masks

Trondheim's most recognisable self-representation in his autobiographical and fictional works is a cartoony human bird. While Ann Miller describes Trondheim's avatar as a cockatoo (Miller, 2007: 219), other commentators among whom Thierry Groensteen and Bart Beaty see in him the bald eagle, an interpretation that could be supported by the choice of an American-sounding first name, Lewis, for his pseudonym. Gilles Ciment describes Trondheim's avatar as a budgie (Ciment, 2007), Catherine Mao as a parrot (Mao, 2013), David Turgeon simply gives up (Turgeon, 2008). Although Trondheim never dismissed these interpretations, he shows an unambiguous preference to refer to his avatar as "a bird". The reference is voluntary vague and denotes the whole of the French expressions that are built around the imagery of the bird. "Un oiseau" – or "un drôle d'oiseau" – can mean an oddball as well as a crank, a particularly significant connotation for his depiction in his books.

Trondheim inscribes both his fictional and autobiographical works in the funny animal tradition or zoomorphism; his works feature humans wearing animal masks/costumes, who may also encounter pets and wild animals. Their identity is therefore fluid: they appear animal-like yet are referred to as humans. The animal mask, just like any mask, marks the tension between identity and anonymity, as it paradoxically accentuates the identity. The mask is a tool of individuality and anonymousness – although the debate on the indexicality of the mask in comics is still open[27], with Scott McCloud outlining the possibilities for the reader to identify with a cartoon-like avatar.

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[27] As discussed in the introductory chapter of this study.

When Trondheim makes an appearance in other artists' autobiocomics, he is sometimes represented as his zoomorphic avatar. In his online autobiocomic, Boulet once drew Trondheim as a man in a giant chicken suit whose unmasked face is clearly recognisable as Laurent Chabosy's, with the following caption: "Afin de préserver [sa] vie privée, Lewis Trondheim sera représenté en poulet." (*BouletCorp*, entry 2009/02/10).

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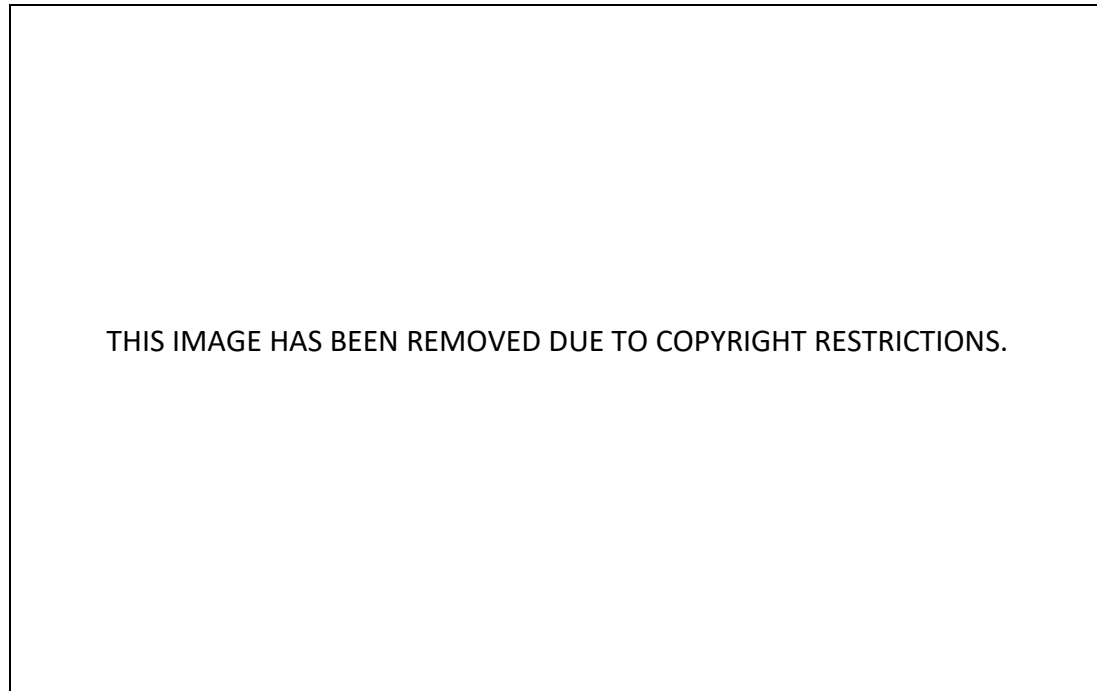
(Figure 7: Boulet, Gilles. *BouletCorp*, entry 2009/02/10.)

Etienne Davodeau's *Les Ignorants* features a page drawn by and featuring Trondheim, in which his aviary avatar is metonymically referred to as "Le Bec" (Davodeau, 2011: 56) (fig. 8). While published in someone else's autobiocomic, this page by Trondheim arguably marks a pivotal moment in his autobiographical enterprise. Regardless of the tonal and modal dissonances that this insertion provokes within a work characterised with a more realistic graphic style, the human bird is instantly recognisable as Trondheim: the transformation of the self into a recognisable brand is complete.

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(Figure 8: Davodeau, 2011: 56)

As Miller examines unvarying visual traits of drawn selves in autobiocomics, she builds on Sheringham (1993) and suggests that the autobiographer may fetishise a particular manifestation of selfhood (e.g. Trondheim's permanent frown) that makes it stand for totality, in order to redress a sense of amorphousness (Miller, 2011: 250-251). The drawing of the bird has barely evolved since *Approximativement* as it is the text that sets up not only Trondheim's appearance and characterization within the books but also his persona outside the pages. Ever since the publication of *Approximativement*, whether dedicating his drawings or answering mails, the author makes a habit of signing off his recipients and fans off with "Approximativement, Lewis". It could be tempting to read Trondheim's work as autobiographical whenever the bird appears.

Hence, *Approximativement*, *Carnet de Bord*, *Désoeuvré*, *Les Petits Riens,* which feature the bird are generally considered as autobiographical, whereas works featuring Lapinot as the main protagonist (*Lapinot et les carottes de Patagonie* and the *Formidables aventures de Lapinot* series) are regarded as fictional. Gerbier and Ottaviani (2001) have a very similar if more detailed approach to the Trondheimian body of work as they divide Trondheim's fictional works into two categories. They distinguish the plot-driven stories (*Les Formidables Aventures de Lapinot* series), from the formal experiments (*Le Dormeur*, *Psychanalyse*, *La Mouche*, *Diablotus*, *Monolinguistes*, *Lapinot et les Carottes de Patagonie*, which, they argue, follow OuBaPo constraints). Jeanine Floreani (2007) finds a weakening in quality between *Approximativement* and *Les Petits Riens* whereas David Turgeon (2008) establishes a formal similarity between *Approximativement*, *Désoeuvré* and *Carnet de Bord* and argues that *Les Petits Riens* must have found their origins in *Les Formidables Aventures sans Lapinot: Les Aventures de l'Univers*. As the latter is clearly stated to be a book in which Lapinot does not appear, it seems that the author is keen to make a clear distinction within his own body of work between the Lapinot books and every other book, thus shaping his reader' expectations as well as playing with them.

Trondheim puts into test the boundaries of a generic definition of autobiography, as hinted by the opening words of *Approximativement*, "Comme si". It is thus quite legitimate to question Trondheim's take on the autobiographical project, in focusing on "l'œuvre la plus profonde de ce brilliant créateur: 'Son Traitement Psychiatrique'" as Emile Bravo describes it in *I's'rend pas compte !*. Trondheim indicates in the postface of *Approximativement* that he initially wished to "intercaler des fictions et des gags avec des morceaux de rêves ou de vie réelle". Indeed, as he was working on what would become the series entitled *La Mouche*, he was planning to "intercaler des morceaux de vie réelle pour agrémenter [*La Mouche*]", although he claims that "au bout du compte, il n'y a quasiment que de l'autobiographie" (1995: 149). Or is there? Indeed, *Approximativement* seems to question any conception of autobiography as referring to a united self, based on its author's authenticity and honesty through the account of his eventful life.

Trondheim always said that reading Carl Barks's comics made a deep impression on him as a child and that his drawing style is an affectionate tribute to Barks's work. Trondheim heavily hints that he chose to draw in "gros nez" style (in reference to the École Belge graphic style of the 1950s-60s) because he was not gifted enough to draw in any other way. The protagonist in *Approximativement* supports this idea as he claims "ne pas savoir bien dessiner" and accuses himself of "bâcler" from the very first page of *Approximativement*. However, these affirmations are in contradiction to the level of sophistication in the details of the cityscape behind him. As for the claim that "gros nez" is the only graphic style in which Trondheim could draw, it can be refuted with a mere look at the last page of *ACCI H3319* issue 12 and half. Trondheim represents himself as an author in a human form, bidding farewell to his characters, who would later feature in stand-alone books that are respectively entitled *Le Dormeur* (1993) and *Psychanalyse* (1990). The lesser-known fact that Trondheim used to represent himself in human form before the first appearance of the iconic bird is significant as it leads to a reconsideration of the later representation of himself in "gros nez" style. Instead of assuming that due to his artistic limitations, the author settled down to making a tribute to what he liked to read as a child, as most commentators did as they built on Trondheim's own assertions, this study examines the cartoon-like self-representation as the result of a conscious choice.

Zoomorphism, which is characterised with human beings in disguise who have human behaviour but wear animal masks, could arguably be interpreted in the work of Trondheim as an instance of the "masking effect". According to McCloud, the "masking effect" builds on the contrast between detailed backgrounds and "iconic" characters drawn in a less detailed, simple style, in order to encourage the reader's identification with the protagonist (McCloud, 1993: 36-43).[28] Reader involvement could seem at first at odds with the main purpose of autobiography, which cultivates individuality through the uniqueness of the individual's experience and self-realisation. The masking effect is not unknown in autobiographical comics: Art

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[28] Here, "iconic" is used according to McCloud's definition, meaning a minimalist, simplified graphic style; but its use here would also fit Hannah Miodrag's definition, as she builds on Charles Pierce's terminology of signs to define "iconic" representation as "motivated, representing through some form of likeness" (Miodrag, 2013: 171).

Spiegelman makes outstanding use of it in *Maus*, by representing Jewish people as mice, Nazi as cats and Non-Jewish Poles as pigs. However, *Approximativement* seems to rely on the masking effect to a lesser degree, as the portraits are closer to the tradition of the "funny animal". Unlike the oversimplified mice faces in *Maus*, the animal faces in *Approximativement* retain a striking resemblance with their real-life counterparts.

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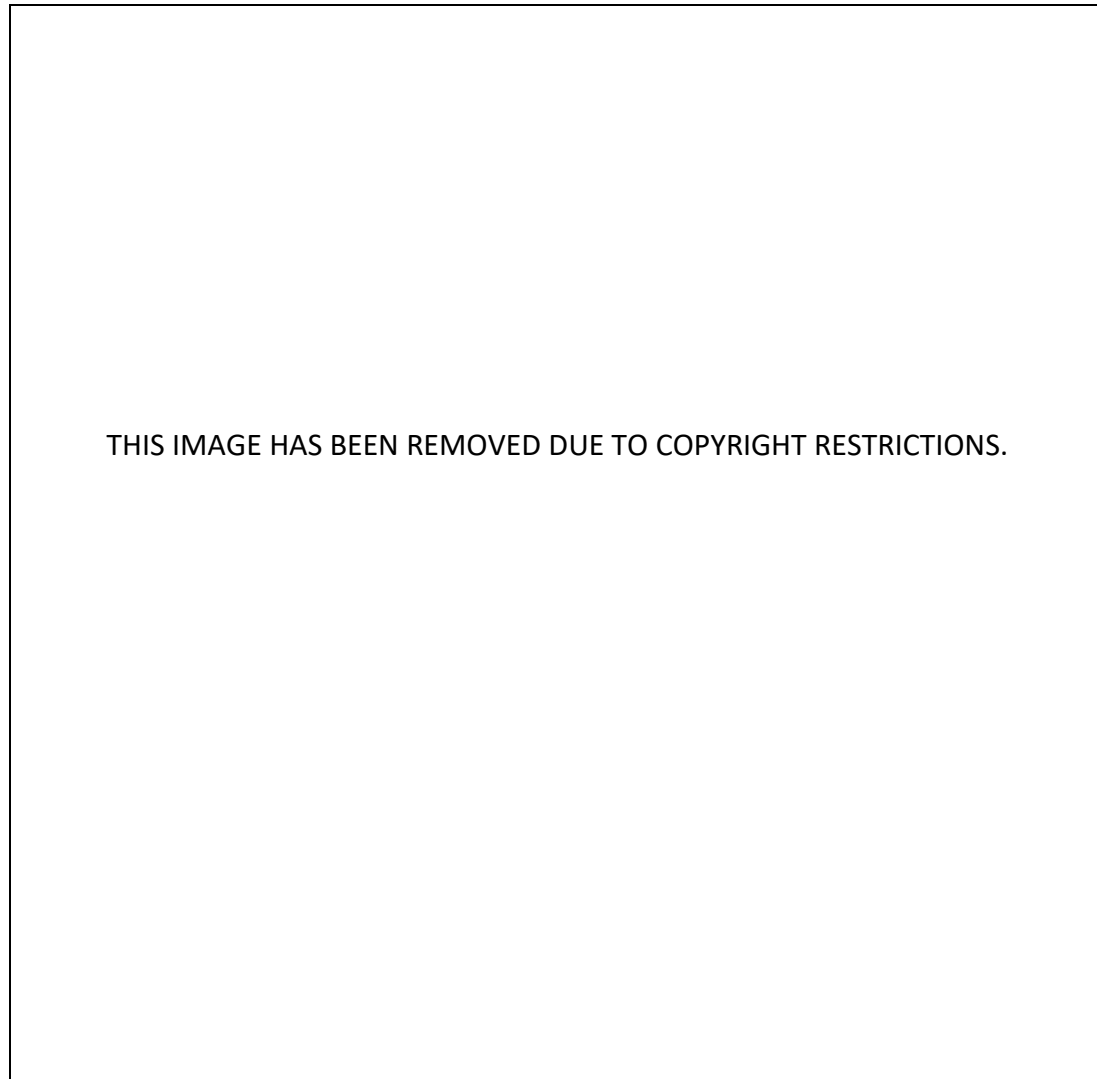
(Figure 9: Trondheim, 1995: 11)

Zoomorphism may also challenge the depiction of a believable world, since it features various degrees of animality within the same panels. For instance, Trondheim as a bird scares off a pigeon (1995: 28). Boundaries between the human world and the animal kingdom are permeable and can be easily crossed. In

Approximativement, during a civilised dinner with his wife and Père Vincent, the bird expresses his growing frustration with a foreign flower-salesman who interrupted their conversation (fig. 9). He first does it in a polite manner, then as his frustration grows, he suddenly bursts into animality: his feathers ruffle with anger as he caws at the stunned flower-man. An oversized "Kriiiiikk!" looms over him. The bird eventually takes on a more human behaviour as he declines politely, implying that the animalistic behaviour that preceded was an illustration of the bird's inner turmoil.

The animal masks in Trondheim's works seem thus closer to the tradition of zoomorphic caricature, as particular traits of their physical aspects and personalities are exaggerated through the choice of a specific animal; as in Jean de La Fontaine's moralistic satires, animals are used for their symbolic significances.[29] This choice raises some issues regarding the adequacy of the fit between the model and his representation. In the postface of *Approximativement*, Charles (Berberian) states that representing him as a badger does not do him justice. A vulture seems a particularly questionable choice for David (B.), who points out that liberties have been taken regarding animal references (*Approximativement*, p.147). Emile Bravo practises his right of reply in a one-page supplement to *Approximativement* entitled "I's rend pas compte !*"*, in which he confides his despair regarding his representation as a panda.

As Barthes points out as he finds himself contemplating two portraits of himself taken at different times in his life,

> Mais je n'ai jamais ressemblé à cela ! – Comment le savez-vous ? Qu'est-ce que ce « vous » auquel vous ressembleriez ou ne ressembleriez pas ? Où le prendre ? À quel étalon morphologique ou expressif ? Où est votre corps de vérité ? Vous êtes le seul à ne jamais vous voir qu'en image, vous ne voyez jamais vos yeux, sinon abêtis par le regard qu'ils posent sur le miroir ou sur l'objectif (il m'intéresserait seulement de voir mes yeux quand ils te regardent) : même et surtout pour votre corps, vous êtes condamné à l'imaginaire. (Barthes, 1995 (1975): 42)

it is towards an image of himself that Trondheim turns in order to identify with his reflection. In a double portrait published in French magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, the Bird is depicted at his drawing board, and the positioning of the sketch on the

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[29] For an analysis of the uses and significance of animal imagery, see Baker, 2001.

magazine's page suggests that the Bird is frowning at the photograph of Laurent Chabosy that accompanies the drawing (fig. 10).

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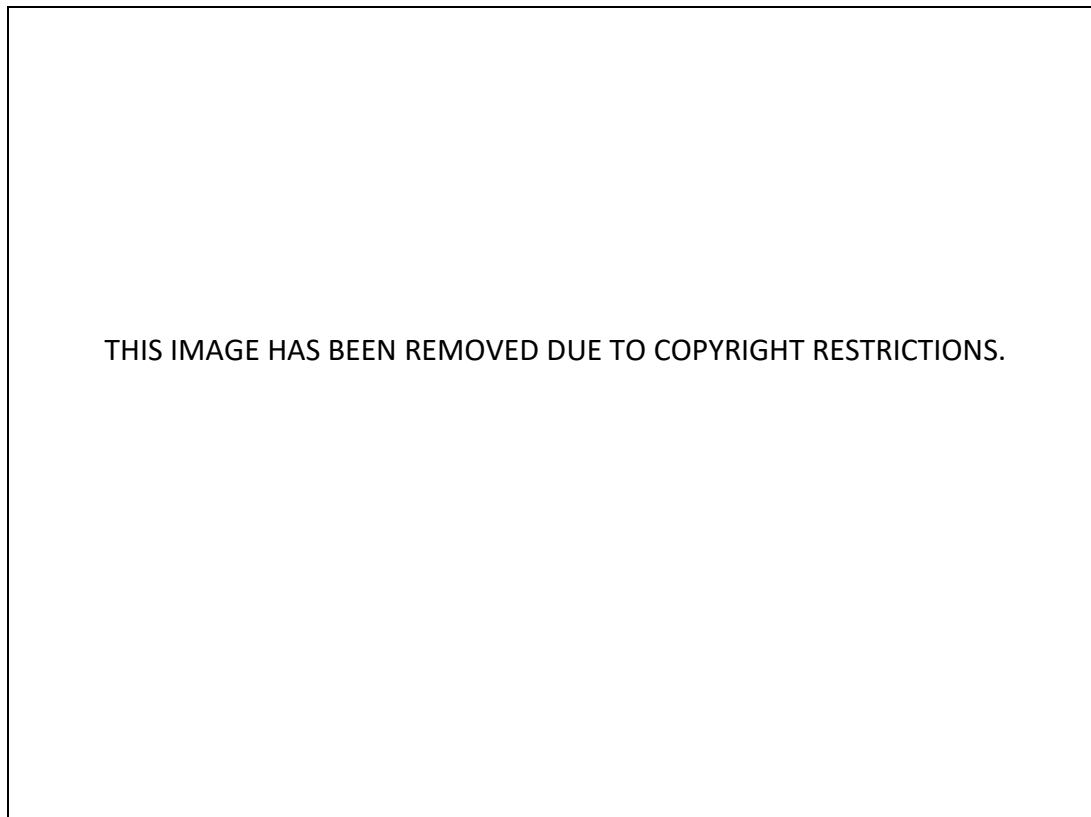
(Figure 10: Les Inrockuptibles, 1996: issue 45)

The frown suggests a prolonged gazing and a careful inspection of the photographic portrait, as much as it hints at the Bird's critical stance towards it. Here, Trondheim alludes to the fact that the Bird is a more recognisable avatar than a photograph of himself. The question formulated in the speech balloon suggests that the photograph has no identifiable origin, in stark contrast with the drawing that shows the author's signature and is further authenticated through the representation of the drawing board, as a self-reference to its own making process. The photograph seems to operate here as a distorted mirror. In order to discuss this, I now provide a very cursory engagement with Jacques Lacan's theory of subject formation focusing on the mirror stage (1966: 90). Instead of conceiving the mirror as returning a more or less faithful likeness of an original, pre-existing self, Jacques Lacan argued that the mirror constructs the self or rather an imaginary wholeness, an illusion of identity. A sense of self-awareness is formed. Recognising their image in the mirror, the subjects

internalise a principle of otherness, and as they develop a fantasy of their own wholeness, they acquire a sense of power over themselves. The photograph of Laurent Chabosy presents an image of the self that is eventually dismissed in favour of a more cartoony avatar, yet one deemed more accurate.

The term "persona" etymologically refers to the mask and to the role that one plays in society. Moreover, the theatricality of the device stresses the performative aspect of the process, as the protagonist is depicted as taking on a role and playing a part. The protagonist is thus marked as an actor. Actors need a stage and this animalistic avatar lives in a world which has its own rules – as the permeability of dreams and numerous metalepses demonstrate –, and yet is recognisable as our world. With the use of animal avatars, Trondheim's autobiographical work seems to be less about observation, and to put more emphasis on convention. However, the schematic depiction of the self allows for quicker output, thus reducing the temporal gap and allowing for more spontaneity. This spontaneity allows for more dream-sequences and permeability of the unconscious into the conscious.

The avatar needs to be easily recognisable, so the reader can identify the protagonist as the author. Hence the iterations of the persona, repeated and seemingly unchanging: a cartoon-like figure. The author converts himself into a character. But Trondheim expresses some resistance to the un-changeability of the persona through the apparition of various figures that are not stable in time and which point to the fictionality of any identity-construct based on continuity. This could be approached as a "flottement identitaire", borrowing from Mao when she discusses graphic variations of Jean-Christophe Menu's self-portraits within the same page (Mao, 2013) – or, on the contrary, as an affirmation of a certain conception of the self as multiple, an assemblage of different personae at different moments.

The representation of the self as the avatar needs to be further problematised. Is the protagonist hiding behind his avatar? Or is the avatar enabling further access to self-knowledge? The pedagogical aspect of the avatar allows for movements of introspection and self-analyses – a process further amplified by the very act of drawing the self which automatically involves its exteriorisation. The use of the avatar thus participates in a process in which the author turns outward, "une mise hors de

soi" that leads to a "mise à distance" of the self. This distance allows for self-observation. The use of the animalistic persona enables him to place his own body at a safe distance, while at the same time the animal-ness of the personae participates in the de-familiarisation of the human body.

The act of drawing allows for a process of distancing – through the movement of withdrawing even slightly from the world one observes in order to depict – as well as affirming one's identity as an artist. Autobiographical approaches usually involve placing oneself in the space between the project of telling the story of the formation of one's personality and that of strengthening the posture of one's character as a witness of the time.[30] Trondheim does not propose to do either. Indeed, the title *Approximativement* keeps his autobiographical project clear from achieving the former and *Les Aventures de l'Univers* are surprisingly self-centred, too self-centred to offer a reflection on wider, social issues – yet Trondheim provides a portrait *en creux* of his time in both.

The cover itself challenges any concept of autobiography presupposing a unified identity as the referent, since instead of showing an individual, it is entirely covered with multiple versions of the bird; they each illustrate a mood or a daily activity (such as brushing his teeth, playing video games, etc.). Whereas most of them are standing next to each other in gravity defying postures, some of them are in conflict and one of them even punches another. The dark tops and grid-patterned jackets affect the reader's eye movements and add to the overall impression of disarray, while providing particular entry-points. They capture the reader's attention, and as the reader focusses on these dark blocks that are arranged in a "S-path" – less common than the usual "Z-path".[31] but still encouraging a left-to-right and down reading –, she or he can navigate more easily through the layout and notice more details.

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[30] For an example of this in comics form, see *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi's coming-of-age autobiographical account of her childhood in Iran and her adolescence in Vienna (2007).
[31] For an analysis of the "Z-path", see Cohn (2013).

(Figure 11: Trondheim, 1995. Cover)

These disordered, aggregated versions of the bird are various personae, who will make an appearance in the book. A few will even get a name. Trondheim introduces Débile, Exaggeratorman and Justiceman, as well as "ce type qui est incapable de s'exprimer" and whose "seul moyen d'expression, c'est la BD" (1995: 84-85). It seemed at first that they all are a part of a whole, each representing an aspect of Trondheim's personality with Trondheim being represented as the point of origin, the sum of each part and the fragmented self who is made out of each of them. Yet this assumption is immediately challenged as the bird from whose beak Débile, Labafouille, Exaggeratorman and Justiceman originate is referred to as "Monsieur Je-sais-tout, le philosophe de banlieue". Moreover, Justiceman dismisses him on the grounds that "tu es toi-même un des personnages qu'il déteste." This affirmation is

particularly significant as it stresses an us/him dichotomy that challenges the previous utterance of "chez moi" that was then read as "Trondheim's" and is now revealed to be a part of him only. Either the self is constituted as a complex set of Russian dolls, i.e. Justiceman, Exaggeratorman, Débile and Labafouille all co-exist within Monsieur-Je-sais-tout, who is himself part of Trondheim's psyche. Or, the self is dissolved into multiplicities, with different personae being in charge one after the other. As suggested by a hundred conflicting portraits of Trondheim on the cover, none predominates and their multiplicity restrains the quest for self-knowledge, which makes any attempt approximate.

> Quand écrire sur soi conduit fatalement à se rater, à se représenter l'image d'un autre, la plus fidèle représentation de soi-même ne devrait-elle pas alors se trouver, plus subtilement, non dans l'image dissemblante de soi, non dans cette peinture manquée, mais dans le geste-même de ce ratage, dont l'inaccomplissement même nous renvoie à l'impossibilité de se figurer totalement en autre et permet déjà de se représenter par défaut ?
> (Vilain, 2005: 18-19)

Seemingly echoing Vilain's concerns, Trondheim does not promise much more than a playful attempt at portraying and defining himself. It is nonetheless worth a try, as suggested by the design chosen in order to frame the title and the author's name on the 1998 re-edition cover. This design is reminiscent of the stickers that feature on the covers of primary school textbooks: "le cahier d'essais" contains drafts for other works and completed exercises. In French, "essai" literally means "attempt". As the sticker features not only the title but also the author's pseudonym, it seems to indicate that the author is not only working at his first autobiographical book but also refining his author persona as he is working on who he is and what constitutes the self. Moreover, the sticker also metaphorically invites the reader to approach *Approximativement* as an OuBaPo work ("Ouvroir de Bande Dessinée Potentielle", a movement which encourages formal experiments in comics in the vein of Raymond Queneau's OuLiPo). OuBaPo comics (*Oupus* vol. 1-6, L'Association 1997-2015) were puzzles, games and playful parodies in the form of constrained comics. L'Atelier Nawak who founded the OuBaPo movement takes its name from French slang for "nonsense". The sticker on the cover, a *clin d'oeil* to OuBaPo movement, thus brings *Approximativement* closer to a formal experimentation about self-representation characterised by self-imposed constraints.

According to Lejeune, intentionality provides a crucial link between author, narrator and protagonist. The author is thought to intend to honour the signature of the pact (Lejeune, 1975: 26). The name on the title page is the signature that gives the contract legal authority. The identity of autobiography is thus grounded on a speech act. In *Approximativement*, the protagonist is introduced by his wife Brigitte as Lewis (1995: 6), which would suggest that the author, the narrator and the protagonist are the same individual. However, Trondheim does not seem to be portrayed as trustworthy and reliable, as he is accused of dishonesty both within the text – as the hydra symbolising his guilty conscience points out: "Tu n'es pas honnête avec tes intentions." (1995: 132) –, and in the postface which comprises a collection of interviews and reactions of Trondheim's relatives, friends and colleagues who are depicted in the book. Most of them aim at justifying or denying some elements of *Approximativement*. Expressions such as "l'image que Lewis a choisi de donner de moi" (Jean-Louis's comment on page 166) stress the subjectivity of the account. Others are even more vehement in pointing out the author's dishonesty. (Patrice) Killofer claims that "Lewis n'est pas du tout intéressé par la vérité" (166). Didier (Daeninckx) refers to the whole book as "cette parodie de justesse" and Emile (Bravo) is even fiercer as he dismisses "ce tissu de mensonges" (149). However, the postface seems to play with the notion of right of reply, as well as the honesty and authenticity of those replies. Indeed, each comment appears together with the name and a picture of the person who is interviewed. Yet the pictures are drawn portraits by Trondheim and the names are the ones that are mentioned in *Approximativement*, which in most cases means that they are referred to on a first name basis only. The form thus blurs the boundaries between Trondheim's real-life entourage and their avatars in the text; and what looks like transcription of their reactions may be Trondheim putting words into their avatars' mouths.

The question that comes to mind here is whether the postface is as peritextual as suggested. The answer to this question comes one year later with the publication of *Chiquenaude*, whose odd pagination starts from page 151. This tiny detail is quite significant as *Chiquenaude* has been explicitly described by its author as *Approximativement*'s sequel. However, *Approximativement*'s last comics page has

the number 144. The only satisfying explanation for this gap is to count what could otherwise have been read as peritext – the unpaginated comment section and the tongue-in-cheek masthead (fig. 12) – as an integrated part of Trondheim's text, instead of a mere fringe from external commentators. This assemblage of conflicting reactions reinforces the humorous tone of the book. Here, Trondheim plays with the common trope in which an author sets up critics against him. As this section is ambiguously situated between critical responses and self-depreciative comments, it participates in the liminal state of the text. Just like everything else in that book, Trondheim invites his reader to read these critiques with some critical distance. Everything in between the title featuring on the cover and the last line of the humoristic humorous masthead is approximate. This is the pact of trust that Trondheim offers to his reader. It also establishes the text as a carefully-crafted formal experiment.

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(Figure 12: Trondheim, 1995. Masthead.)

Approximate Author-ity

More ambiguities concerning the status of the peritext in *Approximativement* can be found in a later work entitled *Chiquenaude*. With it, Trondheim plays with the permeable borders between autobiographical practice and fiction, and in doing so, raises further questions about what it means to be an author.

In 1996, Dargaud commissioned a supplement for the promotion of a Lapinot album entitled *Pichenettes*. The resulting *Chiquenaude* was incidentally made a year after the publication of *Approximate Continuum Comix* as a whole book entitled *Approximativement*, and it became its short sequel when published in *Les Inrockuptibles* issue 45, as indicated by the pagination, before being revised and republished as the opening scene of *Les Formidables Aventures sans Lapinot: Les Aventures de l'Univers*. In *Chiquenaude*, the bird claims that the respective personalities of the characters from the Lapinot series are very different from his. However, the characters are all resting on hangers in the bird's closet, which implies not only that the bird owns them but also that they are costumes that he can wear at leisure. The characters are lifeless: Lapinot has crosses in place of his eyes, a visual symbol used to express that the character is either unconscious or dead, and Pierrot's goose neck is hanging lifeless along his torso, ironically contrasting with Trondheim's claim that showing the characters "va donner de la vie" (1996: 155). The characters need their author to bring them to life. Although he creates them, he does not show them much respect, as he grabs Lapinot's ears – in a move which emphasises Lapinot's rabbit-likeness –, drags him to the floor and leaves him there while he gestures towards the other characters still hanging in the closet. This scene bears certain similarities to the introduction of the characters in the printed version of a play, as the bird lists his highly typed characters ("le héros", "le dragueur", "l'intello"…), their function and relationship. Therefore, the bird appears to be an actor playing different parts. In *Approximativement*, expressions suggesting that the protagonist may be playing a part abound: "on n'aime pas les sales types mais on joue soi-même le rôle?", a hydra symbolising his guilty conscience taunts him (125). Although the bird shows some reluctance about "jouer au gros con de touriste" (134), he nonetheless embraces playing this part in the latter four *Carnet[s] de Bord*, which

relate his adventures around the world as a reluctant traveller. However, he still shows some anxiety about the idea of taking other parts: "que je ne ferai pas le râleur, l'angoissé ou l'hypocondriaque ?" (2002a: 45): the vocabulary is particularly significant as "faire le" is a depreciative expression for "playing a role", thus suggesting that the bird is staged.

The conception of the bird as an actor may explain why his second appearance after *Approximate Continuum Comix* (1993-1994), was as a secondary character in the follow-up album of the *Formidables Aventures de Lapinot* series. In this book entitled *Blacktown* (1995), the bird is the sheriff of the town, a figure of authority, or "author-ity", who enforces the law and thus makes the characters respect the rules. Trondheim deliberately plays with the homophonic similarity between "auteur" ("author") and "autorité" ("authority"). In English, "author" takes its origin from the medieval term "auctor", which refers to one who is endowed with "auctoritas", ("authority"). The fundamental quality of the medieval "auctor" is to guarantee an argument's validity. Barthes builds on this conception in order to define his concept of the "Author-God", who not only has ownership rights over the text but also a certain authority over its interpretation, its "message" (Barthes, 1984: 64). Trondheim often depicts himself as an Author-God, only to see his authority questioned and challenged, in ways that recall Barthes's notion of the death of the tyrannical author. After examining various depictions of Trondheim as an Author-God, this study will move on to discuss to what extent his "author-ity" is challenged.

In *Chiquenaude*, the characters that were hanging lifeless in the closet come to life in a panel taking liberties with the rules of depth perspective, as it shows the bird leaning on his elbows on the meadow (1996: 156) (fig. 13). Taking such liberties is a meta-fictional device that emphasizes the materiality of the panel and alludes to the making of comics, as Trondheim is portrayed holding a quill whose end brushes Richard's head. Hence, it presents Trondheim as a demiurge. He is the Maker.

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(Figure 13: Trondheim, Chiquenaude. 1996: 156)

A similar image is conveyed in the last issue (number twelve and a half) of *ACCI H3319*, Trondheim appears as "God", who has the power of reshaping the world that surrounds him, as well as the characters inhabiting this world. The character who would later be known as the main character of *Psychanalyse* (1990) asks his creator to make him appear as whole. When his creator accepts, it has to be noted that the process of drawing is not even alluded to here, as all "God" has to do for changes to occur is to snap his fingers: this process puts emphasis on instantaneous result rather than artistic process. Trondheim may be a maker, but the narrative here does not hint at his drawing process. Instead, it shows his power over the narrative as a

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framing process: the snap of fingers produces a reframing of the character within the grid in order to display the lower part of the body. The displacing of the frame reveals another set of details, thus suggesting some pre-existing reality, which implies and participates in the construction of the author as a mere transcriber of events.

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(Figure 14: Trondheim, *ACCI H3319:* issue 12.5)

Moreover, in *Carnet de Bord Tome 3* (2002b: 18), Trondheim as the bird is floating in the air, which provides him with an ideally remote viewpoint as he observes a family scene and comments on it. This representation constructs the author as an omniscient theological figure, who requires withdrawal in order to carry through the autobiographical project.

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(Figure 15: Trondheim, 2002: 18)

Despite his God-like status, the bird seems to struggle to make his characters respect his authority. The author is accused of abusing his power. Lapinot confronts him over his death in *Désœuvré* and in *Galopinot* (2000) on page 6, Lapinot rebels against his creator's authority: "J'ai deux mots à dire aux auteurs." As the adventures of Galopu and Lapinot do not quite meet the authors' expectations, Lapinot

repeatedly offers his own suggestions for the next book: he expresses the wish to sleep over sixteen pages. It is an obvious reference to *Le Dormeur* (1993) and it suggests that Lapinot is not only aware of being a fictional character but also jealous of the treatment of other characters in other books by Trondheim, thus implying that he has some knowledge of these books. Lapinot displays his awareness of being a comics character and acknowledges his author's responsibilities for his fate, which somehow contradicts previous claims that the whole adventure was improvised. Indeed, *Galopinot* also plays with the idea that the characters evolve on their own and that the authors only transcribe what becomes of them to the reader. On page 2, the characters state that they are free and that they are improvising as they go along. Their claims of freedom are reinforced visually as the panel is unframed. This panel is also used for the cover, which extends the implications of this selective statement to infer our reading of the whole book. The authors are shown as mere scribes, who most of the time struggle to keep up with the improvised adventures of their characters but are not shy passing judgement over their characters' actions.

In *Chiquenaude*, Lapinot expresses contempt over the landscape, which he finds simplistic, since the desert is suggested with random potato-shaped rocks and upright traits to symbolize grass. Moreover, Lapinot gestures towards the landscape and indicates that Trondheim has drawn that exact landscape on the same page. While the first occurrence of the setting seems a fitting representation of the inner desperation that overwhelms the artist, who finds himself unable to express any idea worth-mentioning, the second occurrence appears as evidence of laziness and Lapinot denigrates his maker's ability to draw: "quelle feignasse!" (1996: 156).

In this section we have seen that Trondheim deliberately interrogates the construction of authorial identity in various ways. His author persona is carefully crafted as a personal mythology. When he represents himself as an omniscient author in his most experimental texts, it is only to play with the notion of authorial control over his art. Just as Barthes dismantles the "Author-God" ("l'Auteur-Dieu") in "La Mort de l'auteur" (1984: 67), Trondheim dismantles the author's singular authority by multiplying his avatars, thus withdrawing himself from his prominent

position as sole authority on his texts. Moreover, when Trondheim uses 'the Bird', a seemingly constant, unchanging avatar across his fictional and autobiographical works, he instates the notion of authorial representation as a performative act of self-invention, which opens spaces for new forms of author-figures.

In the following section, I suggest that the dismantling of the author-figure and the author's voice leads to anxieties regarding what there is to say, and I explore the link between authorship and agency – or the seeming lack thereof.

Writing the Void

Approximativement encompasses a running theme in the Trondheimian corpus, which is the supposed absence of subject matter when depicting the everyday. The everyday is uneventful. In the words of Maurice Blanchot, "[r]ien ne se passe, voilà le quotidien" (Blanchot, 1969: 360). The blurb for Trondheim's *Les Petits Riens : Le Syndrome du Prisonnier* (2007) – "un livre avec beaucoup de pas grand-chose" – also seems to describe aptly *Approximativement*, an earlier text. In his attempt at turning the ordinary into subject matter, Trondheim not only decentres but also redirects the focus of the narrative onto what is overlooked and usually neglected. Highmore identifies two forces in the everyday, namely boredom and strangeness, which de-familiarises the everyday (Highmore, 2002: 2-3). These forces are in tension and they are reflected and explored further in the craft (Schneider, 2010: 45). Schneider shows the resources of comics for conveying the everyday by examining how they represent subjective temporal experiences. She studies tensions between "ennui" and contemplation notably through the predominance of description over narration (Schneider, 2010: 50). Schneider's research examines comics' formal manipulation of rhythm, but she deals with "ennui" and contemplation in the reading experience by mainly focusing on the emotional responses of the reader. I am more interested in the formal exploration in comics of the everyday as subjected to alienation, so I can approach its significance in the process of self-crafting. In this section, I look at the expression of absence, lack and loss in the text and their impact on subjectivity. *Approximativement* is a text located

in the space between "autobiocomics" and "auto-socio-graphy". The text's supposed absence of subject matter reveals anxieties linked with the normative conception of the middle-class male, a default position that escapes formulation.

Writing about *Le Syndrome du prisonnier*, which constitutes the second volume in print of Trondheim's web-blog "Les petits riens", Jeanine Floreani sees in it evidence of the decline of Trondheim's artistic ambition which, for her, parallels the exhaustion of his autobiographical approach (Floreani, 2007). In his attempts to refute Floreani's arguments, David Turgeon makes an interesting contribution as he proposes to read *Les Petits Riens* as part of an autobiographical project that comprises an oft-overlooked publication, *Les Aventures de l'Univers* (Turgeon, 2008). While *Les Aventures de l'Univers* may be plagued by the circumstances of its publication (a series of one-page comics published in *Les Inrockuptibles* commenting on everyday concerns), by considering it as an integral part of Trondheim's autobiographical enterprise, Turgeon unveils its relevance for understanding the analytical and formal developments in Trondheim's later works. It is indeed via its relationship to Trondheim's other works that the importance of *Les Aventures de l'Univers* in Trondheim's corpus appears. Turgeon argues that despite including fables of the everyday and digressions on current social and political affairs, *Les Aventures de l'Univers* constitutes a "faux départ" for an autobiographical practice, which, according to Turgeon, is more successful in Trondheim's latter published *Les Petits Riens*. In this discussion adumbrated by Turgeon, glimpses of another debate emerge, inviting us to read the different autobiographical approaches in these two works through the lens of tensions between exemplarity and identification. The titles of these works seem to point to these tensions: from "Les Aventures de l'univers" to "Les Petits Riens", these titles suggest a movement from the outside in, turning inwards, only to reveal and explore the feeling of emptiness and lack of purpose that plagues the Trondheimian individual.

Trondheim's autobiographical enterprise *sans* Lapinot is characterised by the void, the depiction of which takes many forms. This void is first and foremost a semantic one: there is nothing to tell, as the title "Les Petits Riens" points out. To a

lesser degree, temporality is rendered null as well, with each anecdotal episode depicted in *Les Aventures de l'Univers* and *Les Petits Riens* over a single page and accumulated without transitions or thematic links. But first and foremost, Trondheim's autobiographical works are characterised by the tensions between the light-heartedness of everyday anecdotes and the existential crisis of the protagonist. In psychological terms, the void is also known as the 'lack'. Throughout *Approximativement*, Trondheim describes the lack of subject matter that causes him so much anxiety, as it threatens his identity as an artist. On one noticeable occasion, Trondheim cannot resist comparing Jean-Louis and Jean-Christophe Menu's respective childhood memories with his own, which leads him to conclude that his are nowhere near as "fracassant[s]" (1995: 52). Therefore, he points out with great despair that "Je raconte ma vie alors qu'il n'y a rien à raconter" (1995: 53).

Trondheim suffers from a sense of inferiority to an idealised norm, and his masculine anxieties focus on unattainable ideals. He repeatedly expresses his feelings of inadequacy and his sense of loss and exclusion both as a man and as a failing autobiocomics artist. As his avatar is depicted exposing his own vulnerabilities, he embodies this sense of lack, which can be seen as engaging in compensatory behaviours. Here, the construction of masculine subjectivity revolves around integrating this void, and self-crafting in Trondheim's work includes making the void become part of his own sense of self both as a man and as an author of autobiocomics.

This lack of things to say or events to tell has to be filled and, as in autobiography, the subject matter is the self, Trondheim speculates on who he is and who he may become, or rather who he would not want to become: "un vieux et gros con" (1995: 53). He thus receives confirmation that "un vieux gros con" is definitely who he is not and who he will never be. The bird's ego is thus founded on alterity, as the individual confirms his sense of the self in opposition to a speculated self. After contemplating himself in the mirror, in a sequence of panels that shows a close up on his face, Trondheim states firmly: "ça suffit les conneries. Dans ce corps et dans cette tête, c'est moi le patron." (1995: 54) This scene is not only a literal representation of the "mirror stage" – Lacan's theory of subject formation founded on alterity (according to him, the subject only exists as dependent on a mirror image

and the sense of a unified identity is illusory) (Lacan, 1966: 90) – but also perfectly illustrates its final step, that of the construction of a unified self. However, this imaginary unity is of very little comfort and only makes matters worse regarding self-acceptance. On the following page, Trondheim struggles to come to terms with his own body-image. Indeed, he pinches his stomach and declares emphatically: "Tout est foutu!" (1995: 55).

Creative crises leading to reflexive, innovative works is a trope in autobiocomics (see Dupuy and Berberian's *Journal d'un Album*, or Jean-Christophe Menu's *Livret de Phamille*). This absence of subject matter leads to formal creativity that is inscribed in the tradition of OuLiPo and OuBaPo. The – ironic, if we consider Trondheim's output on the subject – creative crisis leads to an exploration of a personal one, where the protagonist, while in the nexus of his family unit, suffers from deep isolation, as demonstrated with the almost complete absence of his wife and children from the narrative. This absence may be the subtlest way that the narrative suggests Trondheim's anxieties as a failing paternal figure. When the narrative provides brief mention of his children, it only seems to be as an afterthought by the narrator. The most notable instance of this can be found on page 29, where exploring possibilities of moving out of Paris, his partner reminds him that he needs to take their children into consideration, two toddlers suddenly appear at his feet on the panel, with Trondheim staring at them as they abruptly interrupt his day-dreaming. The children are so removed from the narrative, their presence so rare that it takes a second reading of *Approximativement* for the careful reader to realise that his children are not even born at this point in the narrative. It takes another hundred pages before the first mention of his partner's pregnancy, immediately followed by the mention in passing of the birth of their first child, whose gender or first name is never mentioned in the text.

Ironically, the text suggests that the reason behind this silence is motivated by a lack of artistic skills and creativity. "La vérité, c'est qu'en fait, tu n'as pas eu de bonnes idées originales pour un faire-part original pour ton propre enfant" (1995: 129). His shortcomings as a father are inherent in his failures as an artist. Yet his shortcomings as a father, a husband and eventually as a friend are precisely the crux

of his creativity as an artist, as he demonstrates formal ingenuity in order to express these shortcomings. As Trondheim has a conversation with Charles Berberian over the phone about the aftermath of the catastrophic Beaujolais party at the atelier of L'Association on page 109, then on page 110 with his own mother, Trondheim mentions in passing that he and his partner Brigitte got married a few hours before the deplorable party. While the party descending into chaos is related in excruciating details over eleven pages, only a line in a speech balloon is dedicated to the account of the wedding. Then, on page 139, this news is turned into a punch line: in another conversation over the phone with a friend, Trondheim struggles to find anything interesting to share, as there is nothing new in his life – except for the fact that his partner and he got married last November, he suddenly recalls. As the reveal appears in a speech balloon in the very last panel of the page, the punch line is both textual and visual. These pivotal moments in the life of Trondheim are left out of the narrative and their absence is emphasised through formal playfulness, which may seem to diminish their importance, but really redefines what is considered essential in an autobiographical narrative and sketches new boundaries and definitions of what constitutes significant events in the individual's life. His wedding and the upcoming birth of his first child are relegated to an anecdotal note, and approximate accounts of inward-looking observations become the primary concern of his autobiographical project.

If the subject is part of a complex set of connections and relations, these appear meaningless and purposeless, as they fail to anchor him in a stable role. Instead, the subject floats aimlessly in search of meaning and purpose, slowly coming to terms with the absence of references and of definition. The notable absence of the family members in the narrative has a further effect on the exploration of the formation of a sense of self. *Approximativement* and the autobiocomics that follow are characterised by the overwhelming presence of Trondheim's persona on panels - in 839 panels out of 973, as noted humorously by his fellow comics artist Jean-Yves in *Approximativement*'s postface. This can be read as self-absorption or even self-obsession, as the lack of interactions with others may also suggest. Yet this overwhelming presence of the self in panels arguably results from Trondheim's

exploration of possibilities of bettering himself as an individual. His attempts, failures and prospective successes constitute the subject matter of *Approximativement*. Their depiction can be explored by turning to Foucault in his exploration of how the notion of a care of the self can extend beyond the individual's tendency to self-fascination.

Foucault identifies and discusses the care of the self in relation with specific moments in Ancient Greek and Roman thought and society. While the care of the self is not a transferable practice, Foucault's study provides us with analytical tools to approach self-examination as a form of exercise that aims at self-crafting. Indeed, for Foucault, the care of the self means the concern for the self and encompasses the attention to and knowledge of the self but also activities, works and techniques that are collected and compiled, as an inherent part of the process. Autobiocomics are a contemporary form of self-writing which is peculiar to the sociohistorical moment, as they emerge within a certain moment in late capitalism but also provide a response to that moment. The technical and material framework of this enterprise is significant, and Trondheim is not only concerned with making his own life into an object for knowledge, but also with the form that his autobiographical recollections take on paper.

Foucault points out that the role of the *hypomnemata* (as discussed in Chapter 1) is to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which has been heard or read (Foucault, 1994b; 1999), and while Trondheim endeavours to do this in his work, he only promises to do so 'approximately'. His fragmentary recollection of the logos is a process that is hinted at in a conversation about selecting a town where he would settle with his wife and raise their children: "faire des recoupements de ce que chacun nous dit et on choisira après" (33). Interestingly, this peek into the decision-making process is immediately followed by considerations on his graphic style and creative process. As the conversation moves on to a discussion about the previous scene and how it was depicted, Trondheim justifies his creative liberties: "J'en avais un vague souvenir et j'ai juste reconstruit selon les différentes directions qu'a pris la conversation." (1995 : 33) As his interlocutor points out, "[c]'est comme ta façon de reconstruire les décors et les perspectives sans documentation." (33): this seems to be the overall approach that unifies Trondheim's œuvre. The juxtaposition of two

seemingly unrelated observations suggests putting the two unrelated statements in relation and enlightening the latter with the former, revealing the method that shapes his creative process, his autobiographical practice and care of the self.

Approximativement features evocations of Trondheim's work on the self not only as an artist, but also as an individual: the relation between the two is suggested from the opening panel, and made explicit a few pages later: "pas d'exigence sur son travail, ça veut dire pas d'exigence sur soi-même" (1995: 5). Trondheim strives to apply this value to his own existence. On page five, as he acknowledges the need for making "des efforts sur moi-même", the text in the narrative boxes coincides with the time of the diegesis. It transcribes Trondheim's inner monologue, his thought-process and reactions as events unfold - such as his anxieties about the image that he gives of himself when shaking the hand of Père Vincent on page 6. His apprehensions and reactions are conveyed with what seems to be spontaneity and immediacy.

Trondheim's prolificacy and the spontaneity of his techniques are significant in the context of his autobiographical approach. In contrast with slower productions such as Fabrice Neaud's – whose *Journals* were published years after the period that they relate as we will see in chapter four – Trondheim, thanks to his minimalist approach, has the artistic abilities to shorten the time that separates the making of his autobiographical work from the period that it relates. In Neaud's *Journals*, most panels depict Fabrice's ocular viewpoint. On the few occasions where Neaud represents himself in panel, the narrative boxes tend to disappear. In these instances, the panels do not provide any transcription of the protagonist's train of thought: there is no access to the mind anymore. This reinforces the unity between Neaud-narrator and Neaud-protagonist, as access to his thoughts can only be provided when the panels depict what can be seen through his mind, thus placing the reader inside Neaud's mind. Trondheim takes an opposite approach: the protagonist is represented in almost every panel, as external representations abound in *Approximativement*. This viewpoint is far from being unique to autobiographical comics; Dupuy and Berberian's *Journal d'un album* and Jean-Christophe Menu's *Livret de Phamille* are also characterised by a recurrent use of this type of

representation. However, this viewpoint is used to an overwhelming degree in *Approximativement*, as one of the commentators cheekily points out in *Approximativement*'s postface. Indeed, instead of a depiction of what is observed, the origin of the gaze is not only pictured but is the focus of the visual representation, while the object of the gaze is usually described in the text, whether in dialogues or in the narrative boxes. The image thus changes the first person of the narration into a third person. This omnipresence of the "Bec" in panels not only stresses the dichotomy between Trondheim-author, Trondheim-narrator and Trondheim-protagonist: the subject also becomes object and objectified.

Describing the world surrounding him is, for Trondheim, an indirect way to access a certain interiority: through his relation with others, the protagonist describes his own interiority. Yet, there is a blatant lack of interactions with others in Trondheim's works, with only rare and furtive depictions of his family. His wife, children and colleagues only appear as narrative devices, in order to "[lui] donner la réplique" (Beckett, *Fin de partie*). Trondheim's relationships with his entourage are significantly absent from his autobiographical works. Men define themselves against the other (women), yet in Trondheim's world, where the interactions with the other are reduced to a bare minimum and hardly enlightening, oppositional definition comes from the encounters and confrontations with various versions of the self. This aspect of his work points to the self's own multiplicity and fluidity. Indeed, the great majority of the dialogues in *Approximativement* take place between Trondheim's personae, each symbolising different aspects of the self. Self-exploration is conducted through recurring interactions between the different aspects of his personality, which are exteriorised through the representation of different personae – not only different aspects of his personality but also different temporal selves, taken at different times of his life. The temporal merges as the spatial divides itself, with one individual split into different bodies interacting with each other. His avatar is an assemblage of relations with these different personas. His sense of self is built through renewed encounters with them, and each time, a source of conflict.

The presence of the body of Trondheim's avatar is overwhelming but *Approximativement* features sequences in which the protagonist experiences a

sudden lack of control over his own body – not only in terms of ageing and weight gain (1995: 55), but also in dream sequences in which the representation of his body fluctuates between panels. In one of these sequences, his hand uncontrollably grows to epic proportions as he fantasises about correcting the appalling behaviour of fellow metro passengers, but this indulgence of male fantasy is short-lived as he only manages to hit himself over the head with his disproportionate hand (1995: 5). These recurring sequences are emphasised by the graphic style, which denotes spontaneity and reinforces the impression that, just as the body seemingly escapes control, the drawing frees itself and escapes careful planning. The body is distorted, his proportions suddenly escaping the rules that were established in previous panels, and the narrator's voice-over emphasises this lack of control by staging its own struggle to regain control over the narrative. This blurs the fragile distinction between self and subject, and hints at the difficulties brought up through the process of self-crafting. This game of chess between the implied author and his avatar in the narrative is not only part of an experimental exploration of the formal codes of comics. It also denotes the first glimpse in Trondheim's works of a deeper concern about body issues. Trondheim continues in *Approximativement* the exploration of his own body image more blatantly in a later scene, in which he depicts his reaction when confronted with the realisation of his own body's ageing process (1995: 55).

When the text shows traces of narrative distance, it is for dressing a quick *bilan de fin de journée* and listing small resolutions for the following day. "Heureusement que cette journée s'achève, je tâcherai d'être de meilleur poil demain et de faire plein d'efforts." (1995: 8). Nevertheless, these short-term efforts from one day to the next are futile as his small resolutions are countered by his increasing difficulties in changing his behaviour (21). Making better use of his time than just playing numbing video games necessitates "un vrai effort sur moi-même" (25). Trondheim laments: "je cherche juste à m'améliorer. // Et encore... Je cherche à reculons. // Juste ce qu'il faut pour ne pas devenir trop vite un vieux et gros con." (53) There is a subtle link here between the care of the mind and that of the body – *mens sana in corpore sano* – reasserted by the giant sandworm harassing him, repeatedly hurling "gros" as an insult, and asserting that neglecting the body is

detrimental to the development of the mind (56). "C'est plus facile de se laisser aller que de se reprendre en main" (54), Trondheim concludes. As he decides to work on himself, physically, by lifting weights once – he confesses "ça m'a pris d'un coup. J'ai fait 25 minutes de gym. J'ai bien sûr eu des courbatures pendant deux heures et je n'ai pas recommencé depuis." (48). Self-derision and humour are important aspects of Trondheim's work, with humour often masking other feelings such as anxiety.

Self-control seems to derive from self-imposed austerity practices: Trondheim contemplates – rather than imposes upon himself – a series of renunciations, interdictions and prohibitions. The temptations are great, as demonstrated in his inability to resist terrorising pigeons just one panel after he forbad himself from doing so (28). For Trondheim, resisting temptations inevitably implies some form of bargaining. Addressing his "mauvaise conscience" that took the form of a giant sandworm, Trondheim minimises the state of his current demeanour: "Je vous ferais remarquer que je me suis exprès dessiné un peu plus gros afin de culpabiliser tout seul" (57). And in a rare but significant flashback sequence, Trondheim is shown taking risks as a child to get what he desires (52) with the erroneous belief that the higher the risks, the worthier he becomes of their possible rewards. He narrates his resulting conduct as a sin, using a confessional tone. "Dégoûté de moi", he tries through *Approximativement* to come clean, revealing for the first time his sins since "personne n'a jamais rien su". Trondheim's 'renunciation of the self' may be linked with Foucault's critique of Christian practices in *Surveiller et Punir* (1975), and the later opposition that Foucault sets up between these and care of the self. Here, Trondheim enacts a care of the self via a self-writing which evokes a renunciation of the self only to renounce this via his comics production. As he puts his confession on paper, his atelier becomes a monastic cell. This seems to embody perfectly a form of care – based on parody – fitting to a contemporary moment in which the confessional has been recast as a form of affirmation of self-identity and validation. But the constitution and care of the self through the keeping of drawn notebooks is not an easy practice, and numerous pages (60, 77, 83 and 94) end with one last panel featuring Trondheim's anguish as he sits at his drawing board.

This is one example of the many instances in which Trondheim uses the syntax of comics in order to provide a visual counter-narrative against his textual claims. The last panel of page 26, captioned "Je suis un être abouti", features Trondheim walking down a corridor, with imaginary people applauding him, while Trondheim waves back at them. The bottom of the page often suggests the end of the sequence, and Trondheim cultivates this expectation by having the previous pages, from pages 16 to 25 all constructed as sequences running on one page each and ending with a panel that has the narrative weight of a punch-line. With this reading pattern in place for almost ten pages, the reader is unsettled in her or his reading by the first panel that opens page 27, a panel which not only continues the sequence that seemingly just ended but also contradicts it. "Et entre abouti et abruti, il n'y a qu'une lettre de différence", the narrative box states, as the panel shows Trondheim with his arms raised, still smiling, yet the disparity between the blissful image and the statement in the narrative suggests that he froze on the spot; the following panel confirms this interpretation, as it shows Trondheim has stopped smiling (27). The pedagogical dimension of his work, just like *Lapinot et les carottes de Patagonie*, was about him working on his narrative skills and improving as an artist, the fictional characters interact with his persona in *Approximativement* in order to help him improve as a person – and as an author, as it all is a *double jeu* around the constructed self, where a confessional/renunciation of the self is transformed into a care of the self.

Conclusion

Trondheim draws attention to the conventions that supposedly characterise hierarchic relations between the artist and his creatures, only to flatten these relations. Through this process which sometimes takes the form of self-parody, Trondheim maintains a critical relation to the autobiographical project by suggesting to the reader that his avatar is a mere character. Yet by performing "author-ity" and deconstructing this very notion through playful experiments, Trondheim provides a carefully-crafted self-portrait and explores potentials for creativity within the normative constraints of the autobiographical project.

The body image in Trondheim's works is less a reflection – or a forced choice due to artistic limitations, as he tries to suggest in the carefully constructed narrative of his own official biography – than a conscious choice underlining his agency as an individual. The body becomes the site of questioning self-identity and redefining the other, making the self other and becoming other. Trondheim's playful explorations of his body image participate in the de-familiarisation of the generic, universal "man". By enacting alterity and playing the various roles of otherness, Trondheim experiments with the notion of alterity within identity, and through this very process, questions the very notion of interiority.

Turgeon describes *Approximativement* as "une dissimulation de soi", and when describing in 2010 a trend in autobiographical comics of the late 1990s, Turgeon claims that they are characterised with "une moindre importance accordée au je" (2008). There is in Trondheim's works a shift in emphasis, a different approach to the question of the "je". Just as Trondheim's intentions oscillate between an examination of the self and an exploration of the creative possibilities of the comics form, it is through one that Trondheim achieves the other, yet there is no causal relation here but a movement between the two, one feeding the other in a back and forth movement. The processes of drawing himself and capturing his persona on paper work here as a technique of the self, and constitute attempts at understanding the significance of the resulting persona. But the process of knowing oneself through self-depiction is a non-linear process with editions and self-interruptions.

Hypomnemata, for Foucault, consist in a "matériel et un cadre pour des exercices à effectuer fréquemment : Lire, relire, s'entretenir avec soi-même et avec d'autres" (Foucault, 1994b: 419). Trondheim's enterprise is a self-imposed frame, a formal *carcan*, and his autobiographical output seems to be repetitions and variations of this exercise, resulting in different forms of the autobiographical practice in Trondheim's career. There is no grand discovery or epiphany moment. Self-knowledge is an on-going process, always revised and questioned, with no certainty and no definite answers. The form of *Approximativement* itself reflects upon this, as it ends with a spatial move, with the family moving out of Paris and to Montpellier, but with the protagonist no doubt taking his ongoing existential questioning with him.

In the following chapter, I will consider the significance of these questions of authorship in Fabrice Neaud's *Journal*, an autobiographical project that focuses less on the solipsistic depiction of the self and more on the formation of the individual subject as part of a nexus of relations. I examine the impact of these questions on the pedagogical aspects of the text and its emerging political overtones.

Chapter 4
Fabrice Neaud's *Journal*

I pursue my investigation of the representation of the self in autobiocomics, this time in a text where the self is omnipresent yet decentred. I have shown in the previous chapter that the many encounters related in Lewis Trondheim's *Approximativement* are hardly transformative, let alone meaningful ones. By contrast, Fabrice Neaud's *Journal* presents and explores the transformative power of interactions of the self with others. Trondheim's playful explorations of his body image participate in the de-familiarisation of the generic, universal "man". By enacting alterity and playing the various roles of otherness, Trondheim experiments with the notion of alterity within identity, and through this very process, questions the very notion of interiority. In Neaud's *Journal*, the self is both an object of study and a tool for a wider didactic project. And it is through this pedagogical work – which aims at producing and transmitting non-normative knowledge – that a social, politicised subject eventually emerges. In the previous chapter, we considered Trondheim's autobiographical enterprise as a self-imposed frame, where self-knowledge is an on-going process, always being revised and questioned. We saw via Trondheim's works that repetitions and variations constitute the crux of this exercise of self-crafting. In this chapter, I will show that Neaud uses formal repetitions and variations in order to obtain and convey a better understanding of the traumatic experience and its effects on the subject.

Fabrice Neaud's four-volume *Journal* was published between 1996 and 2002, with the third volume getting a significantly revised edition eleven years after its first publication. Fabrice Neaud's *Journal* is published by "Ego comme X", a now defunct publishing house that was based in Angoulême. The name appears on the cover of the *Journal* and its connotations cast an interesting light on Neaud's work. The expression "Ego comme X" not only plays on the words "comics" or the even more significantly charged "Comix", which refers to North-American underground comics.

Neaud asserts that he feels closer to comix – he lists the respective works of Joe Matt and Chester Brown among his influences – than to any of the Franco-Belgian authors (Soleille, 2008). The name "Ego comme X" also formulates a premise that underlies Neaud's *Journal*, which is the tension between the Ego – which may be considered in the Freudian sense – and the unknown. Indeed, X could refer to the unknown in the mathematical sense. It could imply that Neaud is willing to free himself from any preconceptions in his quest for knowing himself, which leads him to consider the self as a distant object to be studied. Neaud further questions the notion of the unknown, as his work explores the tension between exemplarity and anonymity.

In this chapter, I articulate my examination of the decentring of the self in Neaud's *Journal* around three key aspects: I start with considerations on the *Journal*'s temporalities and depictions of space, which leads me to approach the *Journal* as a didactic project. I move on to questions related to the image, from the sublimation of the loved ones to the risks of representation. I then examine the decentring of the self not only as a consequence of PTSD but also as a way of overcoming the un-speakability of the traumatic experience.

Autobiographical Practice

It is difficult to pinpoint which autobiographical practice most accurately characterises Neaud's work. The title "*Journal*" itself is vague, and the cover does not provide any clear-cut affirmation regarding the exact nature of Neaud's diary practice. Whenever mentioned in the narrative or in interviews, Fabrice Neaud's *Journal* is never given any qualifier, as though its nature were self-evident. It would be tempting to approach Neaud's *Journal* as a "journal intime" – as opposed to a "journal spirituel" or a "journal de voyage", for instance. The "journal intime" is often conceived as a project of spontaneity that takes the form of an accumulation of notations. Its content is heterogeneous and fragmentary. When published in an elaborated form, "le journal intime" becomes "journal intime à caractère littéraire". But the mention "journal littéraire" also implies that the author is a chronicler, an observer whose account has no retrospective perspective but provides a "témoignage sur une époque et un groupe" while at the same time containing "l'affirmation d'une subjectivité" (Braud, 2007: 21-31).

There is no doubt that Neaud voluntarily plays on this ambiguity, as the very first pages of *Journal* (I) may be puzzling as the identity of the protagonist is ambiguous. Indeed, the brutalised child who appears in the opening pages is at first faceless. In the first series of panels, his face is either left blank or blurred. When on page 6 the child is finally given distinctive features, his identity remains unknown. On page 7, a first portrait of Fabrice Neaud is featured in a foetal position which recalls the splash-page featuring the child left in a foetal position after his physical assault, which suggests that they share the same identity and that the opening scene was analeptic. However, the reader has to wait until (I), 12:4 in order to get the name of the protagonist, in the course of a conversation over the phone: "C'est Fabrice au téléphone". Fabrice's surname is never mentioned in (I) as its first occurrence is to be found in *Journal* (II), 10:6, but from then on, the reader may assume that the *Journal* is autobiographical. Only the *épitext* (such as real-life pictures of Neaud) could enable the reader to obtain the confirmation that the protagonist and the author share similar characteristics, which would lead her/him to conclude that the protagonist is Fabrice Neaud. Only then can the reader assume that Fabrice Neaud is the author-

narrator-protagonist, and legitimately consider that Neaud's *Journal* follows Philippe Lejeune's "protagonist equals narrator equals author" equation that defines autobiographical practice (Lejeune, 1975: 26) .

Each volume of *Journal* features on its respective cover a cropped picture of a panel to be found within the book. The covers of *Journal* (I), (II), (III) and (4) respectively feature the back of a man's head, a pile of magazines, the lower part of another man's face and neck and a butterfly. The choice of the framing is significant as the reader is only offered a cropped picture, which distorts the full view and may lead her/him to make the wrong assumption. Based on the definition of conventional autobiographical practice that equates the object of autobiography with its subject and the author with its protagonist (Lejeune, 1975: 26), the first supposition regarding the cover of *Journal* (I) is that the man in the picture is a portrait of the object and the subject of the *Journal*: Fabrice Neaud (fig. 16). However, this assumption is proved to be wrong: the picture featured on the cover is in fact the reproduction of a panel's fragment representing Stéphane, Fabrice's love interest (I), 108:4.

This ambiguity has bewildered some of Neaud's readers. In order to mock their superficial and erroneous interpretation, Neaud exercises his right of reply in "Ego comme X" #5, in which he confirms the identity of the man in the cover picture, as he compares the back of Stéphane's neck with his own, and concludes that the two cannot possibly be mistaken for one another. Yet as s/he was only given access to a fragment rather than a full view, the reader was invited to make assumptions, only to be called out on them during the reading process. The cropped picture on the cover thus acquires the characteristics of a peephole and invites the reader to embrace her or his role as *voyeur*. When starting to read *Journal* (I), the reader is about to follow the man who is turning his back on her/him. This picture on the cover suggests that the *Journal* is more than a mere receptacle for Neaud to set down his memories – since this is the function of Neaud's unpublished notebooks, which Neaud started in 1998 and are on-going. In the subsequent paragraphs, I explore the complex temporalities of the *Journal* in order to better understand its aims.

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

(Figure 16: Neaud, Journal (I) cover.)

Neaud's *Journal* is chronological overall. Temporal indications are given in Day/Month/Year format within the *récitatif*. Some entries start with extremely precise indications, such as: "Nuit du dimanche 31 octobre au lundi 1er novembre 93 – Chapitre 3 – il est 2 heures du matin" (II), 36, while other entries are thematic, as suggested with headings such as "Quelques notables changements de paradigmes" (4), 83 and "On ne choisit pas ses voisins" (4), 152 and 155. As indicated on the cover of each volume, the volumes relate his life without any interruption from *Journal* (I) starting in February 1992 to *Journal* (4) ending in July 1996. Nevertheless, Neaud does not subject himself to working daily on his *Journal*. Whereas Neaud's *Journal* arguably follows some of the criteria of diary-practice in prose, namely referentiality and dated diary-entries, it does not constitute a draft or a collection of notes for other works by

the same author. Neaud's *Journal* has become a comics adaptation from Neaud's diaries in written form (from 1998, with the content of the first volume of Neaud's *Journal* starting in October 1992, and its 1996 publication related in *Journal 4*: 116). *Journal* does not appear unmediated – even in the case of a drawing style as hyper-realistic as that of Neaud – and diaries in comics hardly allow immediacy – or near-adequacy/concurrence between the time of the events and their account. On the contrary, diaries in comics are characterised by a complex set of multiple temporalities, as while entries indicate a chronological order, the narrative features analepses, prolepses and juxtapositions of distinct temporal layers. The temporality in a diary in comics is made even more complex with the addition of meta-discourse, self-reflexivity and the use of *mise en abyme*, and many panels in *Journal* feature the representation of the artist at his drawing board, and the artist showing his pages to his entourage.

Neaud's diary practice is discontinuous and his *Journal* does not recount every day: some events are given more weight than others, which are only evoked in passing. The time of narration is subjected to accelerations and ellipsis. Emphasis is obviously placed on the events that shape Neaud's sense of self-identity. As Neaud gives his account of past events, he does not necessarily maintain the illusion that he is unaware of more recent developments. For instance, the *récitatif* contains a prolepsis in (I), 65: "Le mercredi suivant, il ne viendra pas." The narrator shows foreknowledge to reinforce his emotional disarray when saying goodbye. Another example can be found in the parallel made between a second evocation of the physical abuse to which Neaud was subjected as a young child and the verbal abuse of which he is the victim in the street (I) 98. These acts of violence have a similar traumatic impact on the victim. As the narrator clearly poses as the organiser of the narrative, the *Journal* is marked with temporal discrepancies between the *récitatif* and the diegesis. This is especially problematic as diary-practice is characterised by their author's dedication to making the time of the events and the time of their account coincide. Diary-practice can thus be considered as immediacy writing. However, the *Journal*'s narrator does not pretend to abolish these temporal gaps, as he points out that transposition always happens, whatever the form that the

autobiographical work takes. The *Journal* is constructed and is a personal interpretation. Moreover, Neaud's realistic drawing style requires time: Neaud's creative process does not allow for immediacy. Before 1998, Neaud only worked from memories and photographs (Soleille, 2008). From 1998, Neaud's *Journal* volumes are based on his unpublished "carnet de bord" which contains notes and very few sketches (Soleille, 2008). *Journal* (III) is the volume for which the temporal gap between the events and the making of the journal is the shortest: indeed, Dominique's monologue was drawn three months after it occurred, which raises obvious issues for the narrator: "Comment raconter la période 'Stéphane' ? Comment résoudre l'énorme décalage temporel ? Comment parler de Stéphane après Dominique ?" (4), 57:4. "Comment réécrire cet amour comme s'il était encore vif ? Impossible tâche !" (4), 61:1.

The "considérations des circonstances de l'écriture" constitute a determining element of diary-practice (Simonet-Tenant, 2001:22), and illustrations of the process of creation abound in *Journal*. Conversations with Loïc that constitute the origins of the *Journal* are related at the beginning of *Journal* (I), 10:5 and 11:4, and the *Journal* is mentioned as an on-going project: "Je compte faire un peu le point sur les derniers événements… et (pourquoi pas) penser à ce foutu journal." (I), 35:4. Later, and throughout the *Journal*, the *Journal* is referred to as a project, then an object whose pages are reproduced in the panels. Preliminary sketches are inserted into the narrative (I), 69, (III éd. aug.) 83, (4), 102 and (4) 170, as well as photo-references. Nevertheless, Neaud chose to redraw the pictures he used for reference, instead of inserting the pictures themselves, which is a process that is also to be found in Forest's *1h25*. This choice can be explained as a desire for aesthetic homogeneity throughout the work, as well as a tacit assertion that everything in *Journal* is represented through the subjective filter of the author in order to enable him to "[s']ancrer au réel pour laisser le moins possible le savoir-faire de la main et de l'imagination prendre le dessus", as Neaud points out in a conversation with Romain Berthes and Jérôme Lepeytre (Neaud, 2003: 151).

As for preliminary sketches, instances of *mise en abyme* generate more temporal paradoxes: the panel (I), 37:8 shows a page of the notebook featuring a

preparatory sketch that Neaud used in order to make a portrait of Stéphane, which appears in a panel of a previous entry (I), 33:1. After relating the first night he spent with Stéphane (I), 24 to 26, Neaud inserts within the diegesis what appears to be an excerpt of his own notebooks. The panel is the reproduction of a page containing a dialogue. Parts of it are crossed out and amended. Here, the glimpse into the creative process also functions as a metaphor for the beginning of a new relationship. The work in progress parallels the relationship in progress, as the awkward conversation is transcribed into a rough draft. This preliminary draft of the dialogue is annotated in the margins. Instead of providing the author with personal notes regarding what needs to be amended for a later publication, the comments are explicitly aimed at the reader.

Neaud uses the temporal discrepancies and builds on them, thus making an authorial choice that leaves him with the possibility of editing and improving the *Journal*, as is the case with the revised edition of *Journal* (III "édition augmentée"). New entries notably expand scenes that were already featured in the previous edition and provide another perspective. Neaud notably provides a further developed reflexion regarding the muddy circumstances of the recording of the video trapping the fake paediatric doctor and the consequences of its showing to the art students. The *Journal* thus frees itself from the imperatives of immediacy writing, privileging instead a retrospective account, and plays with its creative potential – but to what effects?

Considering the initial ambiguity about the identity of the protagonist coupled with the complex temporalities of *Journal*, what are the functions of the *Journal* for Neaud? The protagonist confesses in the radio scene in *Journal* (4) that the aim and main subject-matter of *Journal* (I) is to make a portrait of Stéphane. This aim may seem at odds with the autobiographical enterprise. Yet, Lejeune points out the impossibility of a truly solipsistic autobiographical project:

> […] presque toujours la vie privée est une co-propriété […]. Raconter sa vie privée, familiale ou amoureuse sous son propre nom, c'est fatalement porter atteinte à la vie privée de ses proches. (Lejeune, 1986: 55)

Thierry Groensteen indicates in the foreword for *Journal* (I) that the book was originally to be published with the title "Test-amant". This title suggests that Neaud would be putting to the test his love life and sex-life through the journal, as well as bringing the notions of "testimony and last will" together with Christian imagery, which would have posited the *Journal* in the space – or at a crossroads – between a legally binding document, a confession, and a sacred text. For Groensteen in his preface to *Journal* I, Neaud's *Journal* operates "[…] un double mouvement, à la fois de remémoration et de dessaisissement, de rappel à soi et d'assignement à un passé que l'on espère surmonter enfin en le fixant". This suggest that Neaud may write for reasons corresponding to those suggested by theorists of trauma and of diary writing: in order to forget and to discard painful memories (Gilmore, 2001), or as Pachet puts it, "pour dispenser de garder le souvenir vivant en soi" (Pachet, 1990: 65). In his own reading of *Journal*, Schehr describes Neaud as a figure "who is angry at the entire world, and who uses this diary in images to work through problems" (Schehr, 2009: 100). According to Schehr, Neaud moves from an adversarial position (and in isolation) to a more peaceful position, suggested by three panels depicting a flowering tree that closes volume 3. For Schehr, this pastoral imagery (Neaud, III éd. aug., 424) represents Neaud's self-acceptance. This leads Schehr to claim that Neaud makes therapeutic use of his art (Schehr, 2009: 110). However, the narrator denies the cathartic function of his *Journal*:

> On ne fait pas des livres pour guérir de quoi que ce soit. On réalise des livres pour exposer au lecteur le fruit raisonné d'un TRAVAIL, une pensée et son cheminement, pas pour déballer ses tripes. (4), 132: 3.

In *Journal* (III éd. aug.), 341:8, Dominique states "Je ne suis pas […] ta catharsis. Mon image est à moi, et c'est à moi seul d'en jouir." The narrator objects to this statement in the following volume of *Journal*: "Le VISIBLE appartient à ceux qui le REGARDENT et qui fabriquent de l'image à partir de lui, auteur de BD compris." (4), 127:6. Neaud thus resists or challenges the idea of his autobiographical practice as cathartic. Neaud develops his position in an interview in which he highlights the difference between a diary-practice that would remain private, and one that is destined for publication, and he puts the onus on the reader:

> L'idée même d'exutoire ou de la catharsis est un cliché. […] 'Tenir' son journal peut être une activité prépubère cathartique, en effet. […] Un journal publié, c'est la catharsis du lecteur, pas celle de l'auteur. (Soleille, 2008)

The narrator of the *Journal* directly addresses the reader, which is at odds with the notion of a private, intimate practice that is a distinctive part of the definition of "journal intime". As Neaud's *Journal* was designed from the start with a view to publication, the diarist's activity is not marked by the seal of confidentiality and is thus far from diary writing as a private practice, traditionally published posthumously. The author identifies with the reader and expresses her/his reader's supposed thoughts: "…mais je sens que ces pages s'indignent et leur hypothétique lecteur (une partie de ma conscience) avec." (4), 161:2. The ambiguous syntax is significant. Is the part in brackets a reformulation of what precedes it? If this were the case, it would hint at the fact that the author is his first reader. Moreover, the first sentence in the quote ascribes to the pages the ability to react as a reader would. The whole quote thus plays on the assimilation between the author, the reader and the text, and thus implies that the reader is in fact a textual construct. The implied reader, who is also known as the "narratee" or "addressee", is often referred to as a plurality of hypothetical readers in *Journal*: "Mais dites-moi…" then, in another narrative box within the same panel, "dis-moi, journal". In (II), 71, which stresses the multiplicity of the intended readers, whose nature is also ever-changing. Indeed, they are at times Neaud's confidents – "Cependant (Etes-vous prêts à l'entendre ?), j'ai peur…" (II), 70:7 – or his critics: "Je vous entends déjà rire de votre rire qui se veut distancié, vous autres français moyens de la tolérance…" (II), 70:9. Here, the pedagogical stance of *Journal* acquires political overtones. The narrator anticipates the reader's criticism as he thinks that he will be judged "trop bavard". He thus exercises his right of reply in his "*Credo"* published in *Bananas* #3, among which three panels feature three typical reactions from three different readers: denial, threat, and contempt.

Alex Hughes (1999: 3) points out that conventional autobiography – which she defines as attempts at conforming to Lejeune's strict categorisation – is impossible. According to Hughes, this problem triggers innovative forms of life writing. Neaud's autobiographical project does not quite follow the definitions of diary practices in prose. One key aspect of his work is the notion of his autobiographical enterprise as

a "travail", a term that hints both at a "travail sur soi" and "travail" on the form. Both are encompassed by our notion of self-crafting.

In contrast with the respective works of Trondheim and Forest, Neaud addresses his reader throughout his *Journal* both visually, by inviting his reader to follow him via the picture on the cover of *Journal* (I), and textually, with direct shouts out to the reader. I argue that these acknowledgements of the reader's active role participate in the underlying didactic dimension of the *Journal*, which I develop in the following section, and which I articulate with an examination of the tensions between anonymity and representation in the topology of the *Journal*.

<u>Liminal Spaces: the *Journal* as a Didactic Project</u>

While details regarding time are given up to the hour – and even to the second, when the narrator counts down to Stéphane's appearance in (I), 88 to 91 – information regarding setting are scarce, vague and neutral. The *Journal* is said to be set in France (II), 70:9, but instead of providing the reader with further information, a road map of the town and its surrounding villages in (III éd. aug.), 235:3 conceals further, as the names featured on it are a cluster of random consonants, which makes them read like anything but French. Although the park is symbolised with the repeated motif of the statue that marks its entrance such as in (III éd. aug.), 169:1, the reader is not provided with the park's name or precise location. This elusiveness is part of Neaud's willingness to offer a portrayal of his own life as a series of situations that could happen to anyone living in a similar setting. Hence, in *Journal* (4), a whole chapter, entitled "La ville de (…)", is devoted to raising the issue of non-identification of the setting instead of providing an answer to the opening question: "Quelle est donc la ville du *Journal* ?" (4), 195:8. The *Journal*'s setting could indeed be set anywhere in any provincial town in France. On another scale, the toponym "Le Café" could not be any more common and generic. Moreover, "Le Café" is distinct from another similar setting, "le café François 1er" (III éd. aug.), 55:2. "Le Café" that is not named also lacks an adjective, which is nonetheless heavily suggested: "Le café gay". The clientèle knows what type of café it is. Therefore, this lack of precision is

part of Neaud's social commentary insofar as it implies that gay life in provincial France is a microcosm, as small provincial towns in France usually have no more than one openly gay venue.

These recurrent efforts to establish the seeming neutrality of the *Journal*'s setting (4: 59) – and thus widening the relevance of the *propos* to a larger audience – participate in the didactic stance which underlies Neaud's work – with the cover of its first volume both suggesting and playing with *Journal*'s pedagogical aims. As the cover invites the reader to follow the male figure into an unfamiliar world. *Journal* proposes a submersion not only into Neaud's private life but also into the world he inhabits, made out of two undiscovered microcosms, those of gay life ("le biotope gay" (4), 117:2) and his life as a BD artist in a French provincial town. The narrator addresses a reader who has no insider knowledge: "Je tenais à le préciser. D'habitude, on ne parle jamais avec un mec qu'on a trouvé au jardin." (I), 27:1.

In Neaud's *Journal*, homophobia is linked with topology (III éd. aug.: 235). Sequences of panels suggest the unease of the protagonist in standing on the street as cars pass by (III éd. aug., 253-255). On page 247, two panels represent the same street corner at night with etched shadows; these panels are almost identical except for a slight difference in terms of framing, which is barely noticeable and thus reinforces the impression of unfamiliarity and fear. The narrator laments: "Ils m'ont eu. Ils ont gagné le territoire des deux côtés. Je ne suis plus chez moi nulle part ici." (III éd. aug.: 248). This statement is followed by a panel representing the same place this time by day and from a different angle, accompanied with the following caption in the narrative box: "De jour comme de nuit, cette rue est devenue insupportable […] Je n'y ai pas ma place." (III éd. aug.: 249). Yet the narrator tries to re-conquer these lost territories.

The presence of the protagonist of the *Journal* within different spaces reveals their liminal nature. Spaces are ever-changing, simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, always safe and unsafe. Indeed, the constant re-definition of the notion of safety underlies Neaud's autobiographical practice. *Journal* (I) opens with the dangers of the public park, where a child is physically assaulted by a horde of schoolboys, immediately followed by the protagonist as an adult waking up in his bed after a

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nightmare. This nightmare may or may not be related to the traumatic scene (a childhood memory?) recounted in the previous pages, but the spatial closeness may invite a reading of these two separate sequences as bearing a relation. Fabrice leaves his small apartment and goes to the public park, which is here presented as a source of comfort, in contrast with his own bed. Also, he wakes up in the foetal position, here re-coded as an expression of despair, and the bed a place of potential dangers. His bed is not only a space haunted with PTSD nightmares, but it can also become a place of risky exposure, with the risks run when inviting a sexual partner back to his place, the negotiations about sex acts and the gamble about whether said partner is going to respect boundaries, and the fear of experiencing pain (III éd. aug.: 32-44). His bed is redefined as a space of risky exposure, this time an artistic one when it becomes the centrepiece of an art installation that takes place in his own home; his own bed is reinvested as a public space, with him lying on it exposed to the public's view (III éd. aug.: 50).

The relative safety of the various spaces in Fabrice Neaud's *Journal* is always explored and redefined, as the protagonist is attacked on his front doorstep and finds solace in his nocturnal visits to the public park. The public park may be marked as a safe haven for homosexual practices but for this very reason, it is also a space where homophobic assailants target vulnerable homosexuals. Moreover, the public park is also a space where homophobic slurs can surge unexpectedly – especially when they are uttered by straight-identifying men who have sex with other men, the same who are found enjoying the very practices that they verbally dismiss. The separation of the public and the private is a patriarchal construction (Nicholson, 1984; Walby, 1990), and the distinction between the public and the private spheres is a notion which is sexualised, with a different significance when applied to a non-heterosexual context. Neaud challenges the boundaries of public "tolerance" that only guarantees safety as long as the subject does not occupy the public sphere, or at least in a non-threatening way.

Neaud's work foreshadows contemporary discussions around safe spaces within a context of heightened fear (e.g. AIDS, homophobic attacks). Some spaces may be marked as safe spaces. But by providing a temporary haven from external

sources of violence, safe spaces paradoxically normalise this violence. The very fact that safe spaces are needed asserts the ineluctability of violence. They establish a narrative in which victims must be able to remove themselves from risky situations rather than confront these. Regardless of the question as to whether potential victims must create this safe space or be provided with one, this narrative puts the onus on the potential victims and further erases the responsibility of the perpetrators from safe space discourse.

This issue is complicated further by the fact that the Fabrice of the narrative is presented as a lone individual who does not recognise himself in the gay community. The narrative situates itself in a society where, following the 1981 depenalisation of homosexuality in France, "le discours dominant est de dire qu'il n'y a 'plus aucun problème'". Queerness has been "normalized", which, according to the *Journal*'s narrator, leads to a double oppression. In addition to ongoing oppression by heterocentrism through various forms of homophobia, the narrator also identifies forms of oppression from within the so-called gay community. Neaud depicts the mechanisms of homonormativity that reinforces normalizing stereotypes (Neaud, 4: 117-118) as well as the notion of "bonheur obligé" and his own sense of alienation and isolation when failing to experience this compulsory happiness (III éd. aug.: 235; 311). Instead of enabling emancipation, the projection of gayness stifles the gay individual through the perpetuation of normative ideals. Failure to meet these expectations only leads to further exclusions.

Schehr examines Neaud facing the "collective, communautarian other" (Schehr, 2009: 99) and his reactions to the normative in the margins of heterocentric society but also in the margins of the gay scene, "the collective of gay life, i.e. the communautarian feeling that has overtaken late capitalism's version of globalized queerness" (Schehr, 2009: 100). Fabrice points out the hypocrisy of this community as it only harbours a restricted set of acceptable practices. "Le Café" condones a (nuclear) family-friendly vision of the gay community, one that promotes the idea of a virtually sex-free community. By contrast, Fabrice opposes another acceptable face of homosexuality, one promoted by the Paris-based Gay Pride: muscular men sporting leather/moustache or wearing feminine attire. Neaud deplores the fact that

he is asked to conform to either of these poles. He highlights the damaging nature of these binaries and their reductive aspects. Moreover, he claims that these stereotypical ways of being gay are only acceptable at specific times and places, such as Paris's Gay Pride. He points out the tensions in daily life in a rural town between labels (with his straight friends lamenting that Fabrice is not readable, coded or immediately identifiable as a gay man) and the need for un-visibility – the same circle of friends regretting Fabrice's recurrent resurgence of "gay discourse" in daily conversations while ignoring and dismissing the alienation that he feels when confronted with their blatant, endless "complicité commune autour de ce goût": heterosexuality (III éd. aug.: 76). as well as the unease surrounding the sexual identity of Dominique, straight by default and whose sexuality according to his straight friends cannot possibly be anything but straight considering his macho mannerisms.

Schehr rightly notes the absence of a well-defined network in the world of Fabrice Neaud: the protagonist sets himself up against collectivisation (Schehr, 2009: 100), by not participating in the gay community (Schehr, 2009: 101). Schehr notes the dissociation of Fabrice "from any cohort or any institutions of homosexuality" (Schehr, 2009: 103). Similar didactic tirades can be found in the diaries of Renaud Camus, who also refutes gay identitarian and communitarian labelling. Schehr rightly identifies the subversive potential of the social commentary in *Journal*, as it challenges and subverts heteronormativity and heterocentrism. Neaud also fights against the "idéologie du sympa", the unraveling of complacency (Schehr, 2009: 101, 104-107), la doxa and its clichés and commonplaces, what Neaud calls "fascisme ordinaire" (Neaud, 1999 3: 282) and, which, according to Renaud Camus, characterises the *petite bourgeoisie*.

By making the topology of the *Journal* less specific, Neaud plays with the idea that anonymity favours the reader's identification with the difficulties repeatedly met by the protagonist. The referentiality of the *Journal* is placed into tension with the notion of exemplarity, which goes a long way towards helping the *Journal* in its published form to assumed a highly didactic role. In his study on Neaud (Schehr, 2009: 99-110), Schehr links Neaud's rejection of homonormativity and his difficulties in expressing his independence from the gay community (Schehr, 2009: 15) with the

fragmentations and distortions of the subject in Neaud's *Journal*. I want to push this reflection further by studying the ambivalence in the inscription of the self, by exploring the question of representation in Neaud's *Journal* and suggesting how it turns into an ethical and political question.

The Question of Representation

"Ego comme X" is an expression that stands like a manifesto on each *Journal* cover. The letter "X" conjures up not just the notion of the unknown in maths but also suggests that anything can be substituted here. "X" is the mark of Chronos, "time" in Ancient Greek, but also the God who devoured his children. It evokes the idea of effacement – or crossing out – which could allude to error, or death. "X" refers to the idea of the Christian Cross, and with it, the idea of a crossroads, where people who committed suicides were buried (Taylor, 1987: 62). "X" can also have a legal meaning as it can refer to any individual whose identity cannot or should not legally be revealed – for instance, in the case of a child "né sous X" in France, following the mother's legal request that her name does not appear on any official records of her child's birth. Moreover, "X" hints at the playful dynamic between graphic representations such as the ones that can be found in "films X", and poor attempts at hiding them from view. The letter "X" may anonymise, yet it paradoxically also marks the spot.

When addressing the issue of making the people who are mentioned in the *Journal*, identifiable, Neaud explores not only the technical but also the ethical complexities that the art of portrait raises. We have seen the tensions between identification and anonymity regarding space. A similar duality can be found when dealing with personal identities, as Neaud shows ambivalence between anonymity and the portrayal of people including himself in crude detail.

The *Journal*'s narrator occasionally reveals people's first names and otherwise refers to them using nicknames only, as is the case with "le beau sergent". No surname, with the exception of that of Neaud, is ever mentioned in *Journal*.

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Nonetheless, the reader can easily gather information from the *epitext* in order to find out that Loïc is Loïc Néhou, Denis is Denis Bajram, Christophe is Christophe Bec and Richard is Richard Marazano, as they have since become recognized, if not well-known figures in the milieu of independent BD publishing sector. A parallel can be drawn here with Chris Kraus' *I Love Dick*, from the same period (1997), as in some respects the U.S. theory scene in the 1990s resonates with that of the graphic novel scene. The narrator of *I Love Dick* claims that the only question that matters is to ask who gets to speak, and why (Kraus, 2016: 175). She also affirms that the idea that art supersedes what is personal is a philosophy that serves patriarchy (Kraus, 2016: 214). These aspects echo the concerns expressed in Neaud's *Journal*, as I will show in the following paragraphs, starting with who gets to speak, to be named, to be drawn and why.

The *Journal* features people who are identified only with by letters, such as "Ch." who is mentioned in (I), 15:6. and "M." (I), 81:1, whose face is only partially drawn. In (I), 27:1, Stéphane's surname and telephone number are crossed out in order to preserve his identity. Yet, they are clearly distinguishable as surname and telephone number, as Stéphane's willingness to share his personal details with Fabrice is more significant than the details themselves. It seems like the narrator does not wish to reveal their name or may simply not be provided with enough information, as it is the case with "Eric", who introduced himself to the protagonist under an alias in (II), 38. When the protagonist faces the fact that "Eric" did not share his real name with him, the use of black and white in the panel is inverted. Lights become shadows, which brings out the emotional impact of the revelation on the protagonist in (II), 38:7. Nevertheless, the narrator does not hesitate to play the same trick on the reader when he states "Il s'appelle Patrick*" in (4), 175:6. Although the sentence is affirmative, the asterisk introduces a doubt (" *voir plus loin"), which will be confirmed later (4), 176:1, when the narrator reveals that Patrick's name is in fact Fabrice. The narrator legitimates the liberty he has taken over this namesake's identity with humour: "on s'amuse comme on peut" (4), 175:7. Neaud provides another Fabrice with another name but reveals his real name a few pages later. Since the book is published as a whole, the readers discover his true identity shortly after

he first appears under a false name, so what is the point of his short-lived disguise? It seems that Neaud wishes to place doubt in the reader's mind, which enables him to assert his control over the narrative. Here, Neaud is also playing and subverting genres. Raising questions about the claim for authenticity in the *Journal*, Neaud warns her/his reader:

> Qui dit que les prénoms cités sont bien les vrais prénoms, en dehors de ce qu'affirme le récit ? Comme les visages d'ailleurs… Le livre est un monde tautologique et clos. Rien en son sein ne prouve quoi que ce soit. (Soleille, 2008)

Similarly, the reader is confronted with the fact that some faces are physically unidentifiable. Some are blackened (I), 99, left blank (I), 28 and (III éd. aug.), 15, left unfinished (III éd aug.), 65, or blurred (4) 24-25 and 81-94 in a fashion that is not without bearing similarities to some of Francis Bacon's most famous paintings, which Deleuze sees as

> […] déformation, et non de transformation. Ce sont deux catégories très différentes. La transformation de la forme peut être abstraite ou dynamique. Mais la déformation est toujours celle du corps, et elle est statique, elle se fait sur place ; elle subordonne le mouvement à la force, mais aussi l'abstrait à la Figure. Quand une force s'exerce sur une partie nettoyée, elle ne fait pas naître une forme abstraite, pas plus qu'elle ne combine dynamiquement des formes sensibles : au contraire, elle fait de cette zone une zone d'indiscernabilité commune à plusieurs formes, irréductible aux unes comme aux autres, et les lignes de force qu'elle fait passer échappent à toute forme par leur netteté même, par leur précision déformante […]. (Deleuze, 2002: 59)

These aesthetic distortions can be read as an artifice in order to hide someone's true identity – as it is the case with "M." in (I), 81:1, for instance.

Anonymisation is not only an apt textual and visual metaphor, it is also crucial in Neaud's autobiographical practice. Alain provides the protagonist with some advice: "Mets-toi une moustache... // Tu ne peux pas te représenter réaliste comme tu le fais. Ni les autres, d'ailleurs." (4), 74:3-4. Alain even goes one step further: "C'est choquant !" (4), 75:1. The protagonist may not take the advice, but he does consider, explore and question other possibilities of representation. "Ne dois-je pas 'transposer' comme on dit ? Changer les visages pour protéger les êtres dont ils sont l'interface ?" (4), 57:6. In the following panels, a series of portraits of Stéphane are subjected to distortions that morph his features into those of various other men, among whom Camille and the Sergeant. Then, the narrator dismisses the possibility of interchanging the faces (4), 58:1 and 2, and justifies his final choice (4), 58:4: "Il ne

suffit pas d''intervertir' pour transposer mais bien d'inventer totalement", which leads him to reassert his rejection of fictitious accounts: "Une fiction ? C'est justement ce que je ne veux pas faire." (4), 58. For this reason, the people who are mentioned in *Journal* (I) do not see their name or face altered and remain identifiable in the later volumes. Neaud justifies this choice for the sake of coherence throughout the volumes, despite receiving many threats of legal pursuits and condemnations.

Neaud plays with these visual signifiers; for instance, as Fabrice feels betrayed by Stéphane , Stéphane is represented with a black rectangle that hides his face and makes him appear like a criminal (I), 95, and thus signifies the narrator's condemnation of Stéphane's actions. The same device of guilt representation is used in *Journal* (III éd. aug.), 131 to 134, this time over the protagonist's face, since Fabrice is found guilty of his one-sided love for Dominique according to his entourage, and of making too revealing, graphic pages, according to "ceux-là mêmes qui me reprocheront ces planches" in (III éd. aug.), 132:2.

The risks associated with representing the loved ones led to the publication in 2000 of "Emile, du printemps 98 à aujourd'hui (histoire en cours)", an experimental 32-page-long autobiographical comic depicting Neaud's unrequited love. "Emile" presents an experimental attempt to overcome the risk of representation as it excludes any visual representation of said Emile. Instead, Neaud expresses his love and desire for him through textual narration, while the panels only show objects and furniture associated with the loved one. This oubapien (from Oubapo: Ouvroir de BAnde dessinée POtentielle) exercise of "iconic restriction" may be a source of creativity but is above all experienced as an unbearable sacrifice, as the narrator admits: "L'absence de son visage dans ces pages me rend fou de douleur" (*Emile*, in "Ego comme X", issue 7: 82).

In *Journal*, Neaud allows his reader access to the image of his loved ones, yet also shares the careful choices that guide the process of depicting them. The panels in *Journal* III which show Fabrice's encounter with "the sergeant" (fig. 17) are drawn from the protagonist's point of view: these panels only show the Sergeant, and therefore suggest the gaze of the protagonist on him. Autobiography limits the reader's interpretive autonomy (Boyle, 2007: 20) and the reader is thus invited to

look at the Sergeant the way Fabrice looks at him. This sequence of panels bears similarities with the unapologetic gaze at work in Jean Genet's *Journal du voleur* (1949). The confirmation that these panels represent Fabrice's ocular viewpoint is given on page 31, which features one panel with the depiction of Fabrice's torso and legs suggest that Fabrice is looking at the Sergeant's hand on his thigh (III éd. aug.: 31). Up until this panel, the reader is only given to see the Sergeant through Fabrice's eyes, and these iconic iterations run over twenty panels, no less, out of the thirty-three panels that this sequence contains (III éd. aug.: 26-31). Each panel features a portrait of the Sergeant – his image captured from the side, since the protagonist is sitting on the passenger's seat – inviting the reader to rest her/his eyes on his structured jawline, his muscular neck and shoulders.

As the first three panels only focus on the depiction of "the Sergeant", his hand on Fabrice's thigh in the fourth panel comes as a surprise: the reader has all but forgotten that Fabrice was even there. As this panel is the only representation of Fabrice's body in the sequence, the physical impact of the hand on his thigh is amplified and given an emotional weight. Indeed, his corporeal presence had been erased from the first three panels, with his scarce replies indicated in floating, non-attributed speech bubbles, whose outline is significantly lighter, suggesting automatic, short answers that could not be more different in tone from the flailing inner monologue of the narrative boxes. Unlike the traditional function of the narrative boxes in autobiographies and memoirs in the comics form – which usually imply some narrative distance, as the narrator reflects *après coup* on the events depicted in the panels – the narrative distance is abolished in many diary comics. Here, the narrative boxes contain an inner monologue transcribing the emotions of the protagonist as he experiences them. The sudden reappearance of his body on panels, and with it the assertion of Fabrice as an object of desire, foreshadows the sexual encounter to come (III éd. aug.: 32-45).

Neaud indicates that he draws using picture-references and if the model did not provide him with any pictures, he has to rely heavily on memory, given the temporal gap between the events and their account. Neaud illustrates the unreliability of memory by enumerating throughout *Journal* (III éd. aug.) different

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versions of the license plate of his attackers' car (III éd. aug.), 239, 255, 256, 308 and 385 – the significance of this iteration will be discussed in a later section. The narrator also expresses a doubt as to whether Mattt Konture was at "Autarcik '95". "A cette heure, aucun moyen de vérification ne m'est donné… première brèche spatio-temporelle du *Journal*." (4), 100:2. Admitting that his memory may be faulty makes Neaud a reliable narrator. This is a notion he deliberately plays with, as he evokes "Mon beau sergent, (qui se bonnifie fantasmagoriquement dans ma mémoire)." (4), 177:40. An unexpected, positive impact of "les brèches spatio-temporelles du *Journal*" is indeed the beautification of memories.

(Figure 17: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 31)

The unreliability of the narrator's memory is also expressed through gaps in Neaud's art.

> Dans le tome 1, le flou opéré sur les visages pouvait générer beaucoup plus de
> confusion de sens : parfois, c'était juste parce que je n'avais pas d'" image " à
> proposer à ce moment-là. (Soleille, 2008)

In (III éd. aug.), 180:1, the narrator struggles to give an accurate rendition of his beloved Sergeant. "J'ai du mal à retrouver son visage. Surtout ne pas chercher à le dessiner." The Sergeant's face is thus only outlined roughly, as the narrator does not want to fall into the tempting trap of making up the features that he fails to recall. Nevertheless, the failure to remember is an artifice, since the previous pages featured fully detailed portraits of the Sergeant, during the scene of their first encounter: Fabrice's failing memory is thus rhetorically and artistically constructed. He sometimes struggles and shows his attempt within the *Journal*, which provides the reader with a glimpse of the process of creation.

Neaud addresses his memory shortcomings and the technical challenges that the art of portrait represents by finding famous doppelgängers that he can use in order to represent the Sergeant (III éd. aug.: 44) (fig. 18). This is a technique that he also uses when trying to overcome the challenge of depicting his assailants – as we will see in a later section – which leads him to ponder about the ethics of this technique (III éd. aug.: 229). These concerns reappear when the protagonist spots "his Sergeant" from afar one year after their first and only encounter: the Sergeant is drawn in three consecutive panels, each time with a different face (III éd. aug.: 299) (fig. 19) – which reminds the reader of the complexities of the process of creation, as well as her/his complicity in identifying these representations.

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(Figure 18: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 44)

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(Figure 19: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 299)

In these panels, the dissonance between the visual narrative and the self-reflexive –

and ulterior – commentary serves the didactic project both in terms of discussing the

narrator's frustration regarding the implicit rules of cruising and suggesting a reflexion about the ethics of representation.

The narrator disagrees with Dominique's comment that the art of portrait is "de la branlette de petit bourgeois" (III éd. aug.: 137), and he does not hesitate to play with the conventions of the portrait in comics – notably through his refusal to use recognisable, immutable avatars throughout his *Journal*. As a consequence, the portraits evolve and it is not always easy to recognise the protagonist from one page to the next. For instance, the narrator announces his decision to shave his head (III éd. aug., 143). Neaud is aware of the disruption this may cause and plays with it. He delays revealing his new physical appearance and the reader has to wait until p.145 for a cropped portrait and eventually p.146 to see a full drawing of his face.

Neaud's seldom but significant use of "gros nez" representations – using Trondheim's terminology, or what Neaud happens to refer to as "homme patate" – is significant. For instance, in *Journal* (III éd. aug.), Neaud draws his love-interest Dominique as "Le Doumé" in an aesthetic style that could be interpreted as Neaud's personal take on the *chibi* tradition: as Neaud cannot possess the real-life model, he creates a persona of Dominique that he can make his own. As for his use of "gros nez" style in order to represent himself in *Journal* (4), it intervenes at very specific moments: that of a commentary on the state of the comics industry in France and where his production lies within the hierarchy. Occurrences of cartoon-like representations within *Journal* become increasingly frequent over the years. For instance, Fabrice is drawn in a cute, cartoon-like fashion as he cuddles the Sergeant in (4) 27:9. Another use of cartoon-like graphic style can be found in repeated instances of the portrayal of Fabrice as a caricatured pygmy in (4) 71:3, then on pages 72 and 76 to 78. These caricatures bursting out among aesthetics otherwise highly influenced by Academism make the overall style heterogeneous. Neaud's bursts of iconicity in *Journal* (I) are integrated parts of his realist project, both in terms of his desire for realistic, accurate representation as well as the desire to seem realistic whilst challenging the expectations this engenders in the reader, to the extent that Neaud's playful use of realist conventions is didactic.

These alternative representations serve the author's intentions and provide an illustration of the protagonist's state of mind. Other aesthetic experimentations can be found in *Journal*, such as the representation of the bartender who has his face hidden in a sequence of close-ups that are subjected to graphical distortions, each of them different from one another in (I), 44. Another approach can be found in a series of portraits that can be identified as being those of Alain, whose defacement graphically transcribes his feeling of discouragement and despondency. While the *récitatif* does not translate much emotional response, the iconic iterations that characterise these sequences emphasise the various slight pictorial alterations in the physiognomy of the people. In his rejection of detachment, Neaud does not provide any objective representation of his models. Instead, he emotionally invests in their portraits. Consequently, his drawing style selectively appears "expressionistic". The author's own sensibility is thus transcribed through the aesthetic alterations of drawing style from the scarce use of "ligne crade" to total de-facement, which makes the representations highly subjective.

The whole content of *Journal* is made through the subjective filter of Neaud: the most explicit representation of this filter is the scene when a slide film of a picture of Dominique is projected over the real-size painting of Dominique. As Fabrice stands between the projector and the canvas, Dominique's silhouette and features overlap with Neaud's (III éd. aug.): 157 (fig. 20), which is a reminder that Neaud is acting as an intermediary between the picture references and their reproduction in *Journal*.

(Figure 20: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 157)

Neaud shows awareness that observation changes the nature of what is observed. He thus wishes to use it to his advantage but can only deplore the negative consequences: "Je croyais que raconter mon histoire aurait permis de réparer ce que la vie avait pris tant de soins à démolir… Je n'ai fait que démolir davantage." (III éd. aug.), 386:5. Neaud illustrates this consideration with intertextual references to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice who respectively represent Fabrice and Dominique in (III) 384, as the narrator points out that "Nous perdons ceux que nous aimons, à trop

les regarder." (III éd. aug.), 384:4. "Si Orphée perdit Eurydice, ce fut pour l'avoir réifiée, transformée en choses. Pour avoir subordonné son amour à un seul de ses sens : la vue. Pour avoir résumé son être à une image." (384:5). Nevertheless, the narrator resigns himself to it: "C'est mon rôle […] // [d'] emprisonner l'autre dans une photo, un portrait // et [de] le perdre." (III éd. aug.), 131:1-3.

Merging his model with a mythical figure is one of the many ways Neaud turns his loved ones into sacred icons. The narrator states the significance of patronyms in the *Journal*. " Tous ces prénoms m'agréent comme autant d'incantations." (4), 29:3, " Elles s'adressent non plus à une abstraction, mais à une visibilité archaïque et sacrée." (4), 29:4 "Dont les icônes, bien concrètes cependant, labourent les rues." (4), 30:5. The cartoon-like quality of Dominique's representation as "le Doumé" recalls the process that McCloud calls "iconicity" (1993), and the term "icon" brings up religious connotations here. Turning Dominique's image into an icon and distributing his image in the form of homemade comics participate in the aesthetic sublimation of Neaud's loved ones. Neaud's reference to Orpheus and Eurydice not only participates in the sacralisation of the loved one by imbuing the portrait of the loved one with mythic undertones; but by placing a heteronormative imagery in a sequence of panels depicting homosexual desire, it also challenges the heteronormativity of these myths – which constitutes another step in the didactic and political project of the *Journal*.

In this section we have seen that the *Journal* relies heavily on bodily deformation and transformation, notably through the aesthetic defacement of people, in order to express Neaud's feelings towards to the external world. These distortions are often a way to signify the inner turmoil of the narrator's feelings.

> Dès qu'il y a un flou, quel qu'il soit, c'est qu'il y a le souci de laisser la projection
> imaginaire et émotionnelle du lecteur opérer. (Soleille, 2008)

(I), 47:1 features an assimilation between anatomy and more precisely the process of autopsy, and BD-related projects and aims: an arrow pointing at an incision has the caption "ouverture sur de jeunes auteurs", while the guts represent innovation: "une BD de création" and the penis is accompanied with the caption "aucun tabou". (I),

47:1. Dominique's "regard sur mes planches est un scalpel qui m'équarrit." (III éd. aug.), 51:6. Here, Neaud's body equates his work and criticism is compared with autopsy.

For Schehr, Neaud struggles to find a way to represent identity (Schehr, 2009: 101), and he sees in Neaud's formal experimentations with self-depiction techniques – notably Neaud's uses of self-erasure – an attack on the assumption of an identity (Schehr, 105). I have suggested however that Neaud uses these innovative techniques not only to question an essentialist view of identity but also to propose a reflexion on the representation of *autrui*. Moreover, what seems missing from Schehr's interpretation is the function of these disappearances. Schehr fails to consider them in the context of Neaud's attempts at representing his traumatic experience. This is the concern of the second half of this chapter, with a view to examining its impact on the representation of the self.

Journal III contains panels that are close-ups of the reproduction of a painting, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (circa 1512-1515), by German Renaissance artist Matthias Grünewald. The reproduction of the painting echoes the question the narrator of the *Journal* raises about the very possibility of reproducing a painting – Richter's (III éd. aug.: 25) – in a comic and thus suggesting the transformative nature of the process. The painting is a panel from the Isenheim Altar, thus isolated from its original sequence. In the original painting, hope is conveyed with the patch of yellow, solar-like light in the upper left-corner of the painting. However, Neaud's black and white reproduction erases the feeling of hope conveyed by the original colours. Taken out of its original sequential context, the painting on its own is very pessimistic, as Neaud's cropped version reframes its focus on the violent attack of the Saint by a horde of demons. Their demonic aspects and cruel traits are further emphasised by the etched graphic style and the dark tonal palette. Their hybrid nature appear all the more monstrous as they are inserted within a hyper-realistic graphic context: the contrast that they offer is all the more striking. This particular painting shows Saint Anthony visibly distressed, frightened and in pain. Some demons threaten to bash

the Saint while others wait directly above his head, suggesting that he may soon be subjected to more violent acts.

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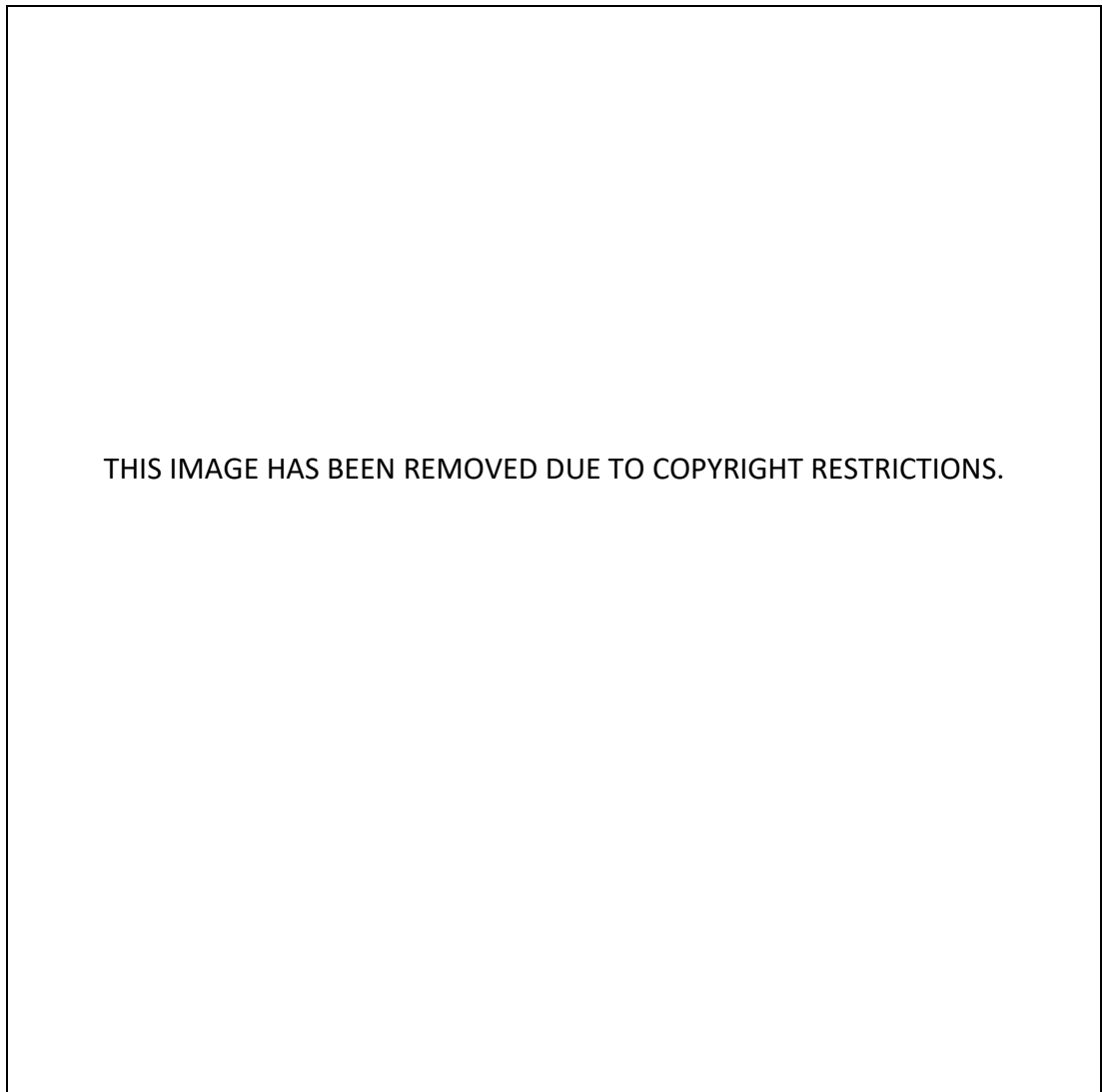
(Figure 21: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 309)

Further levels of fragmentations operate in *Journal III* as Neaud not only inserts a black and white drawing of the painting as a full page (III éd. aug.: 309) but he also disseminates details of his own reproduction of the painting – in a hatched graphic style that is recognisable as Neaud's, rather than a black-and-white mechanical reproduction of the oil painting. How are these fragments inserted or disseminated in Neaud's *Journal* and what is their significance? Do these fragments disrupt or complement the narrative? What relation do they have with the panels

around them and within the page? And what relation do they bear to the full-page reproduction of the painting?

Schehr discusses the illustrative value of this inter-pictorial quotation, which he examines in relation to Neaud's statements on the complexities of identity formation and identity representation. Schehr argues that with the reproduction of this painting, Neaud suggests the transformational power of his art, through which he draws his identity (Schehr, 2009: 102). In contrast with Schehr's study, I will examine the role of these iconic iterations, the endless repetition of the same visual details, in the depiction of trauma and traumatic experience (Gilmore, 2001). As I explore the fragility of the concept of the self in Neaud's *Journal*, I will now focus on these inter-pictorial panels that not only disrupt the narrative, but also distort his sense of self. I will show that these disruptive insertions participate in the representation of the narrator's difficulty to express his experience. I will however also show that, as they are successfully conveying the dissolving sense of self, their role is didactic.

I will start my investigation of the representation of traumatic violence, the unspeakable and what cannot be represented as well as the overcoming of the difficulty of representation through inventive textual practice. I explore the visual representations of monsters with particular attention to their formal representation. I show how Neaud didactically presents through them the effects of repeated traumatic episodes on his sense of self.

Trauma and Fragmentations

In her work on trauma theory, Cathy Caruth defines Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a "*possession by the past*" (Caruth, 1995: 51, italics in original), the "phenomenon [...] in which the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them." (151). Caruth identifies PTSD's characteristics as "insistent re-enactments" of "a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred. Trauma [...] does not simply serve as record of

the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned." (151). How does Neaud represent and communicate his traumatic experiences? Neaud's *Journal* hints at some uncertainty about the chronology of the events. Details are missing and the events are incomprehensible, as illustrated by this series of traumatic flashbacks. When attempting to enter the pin number of his debit card in a supermarket, the protagonist mistakenly enters the number featured on the registration plate of his attackers. 6414 SK (III éd. aug.: 239); 1641 SK 49 (255) and 9164 SK 14 (256). The memory comes back only partly. In her examination of PTSD, Caruth explains this phenomenon: "[…] what returns in the flashback is not simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness" (152). Caruth continues, "[…] the unerring 'engraving' on the mind, the 'etching into the brain' of an event in trauma may be associated with its elision of its normal encoding in memory." (153). She goes further and suggests that "the literal registration of an event - the capacity to continually reproduce it in exact detail - appears to be connected, in traumatic experience, precisely with the way it escapes full consciousness as it occurs." (152-153). There is a connection between "[…] the *elision* of memory and the *precision* of recall", Caruth finds. (153, italics in original). What activates or triggers these episodes? And what form do these episodes take? And when attempting to represent these, what is at stake in the re-enactment or reconstruction of a flashback within the comics form?

The first panel which contains a reproduction in ink of a close-up of Grünewald's painting (III éd. aug.: 197) is inserted in the narrative after the protagonist's first attempt to report the homophobic assaults that he was subjected to (188-193) to the authorities and his attempt to recount the experience to his friends (194-197). The second panel featuring another cropped reproduction of the painting follows the protagonist's second report after a second assault: the attackers are waiting on the car-park in front of the police station (209). The impact of this realisation upon the protagonist is suggested with the transition between the current chapter and the next. The caption "chapter 12" accompanied with the date (September 1994) appears beside another panel that contains a cropped drawing of

the monsters, but the monsters are only partially represented, although a weapon is identifiable as it is raised before the blow. The panel shows an open mouth caught in the process of either screaming in pain or shouting threats.

The following occurrence accompanies a panel featuring the street where the traumatic attack took place, and a smaller panel, a cropped version of the panel on page 197, as the weapon this time is almost cropped out of the frame, but the raised hand is emphasised by the framing and its central position on the page of the panels. The shading of the monsters is darker than anything else pictured in the panels that surround them. The recitative in the previous panel contains the narrator's pondering whether he will ever be able to speak to his friends about his "[...] terreur lente et noire? ... celle de fréquenter le jardin public ?" (199).

Soon after, the protagonist is threatened as he walks down the street (202) and beaten up by one assailant (203-207) for reporting the assault, while an accomplice watches (203) and the narrator points out the presence of eye-witnesses and their indifference (203-204). This scene features a striking depiction of dissociation: "[...] je ne suis pas ici. Je suis ailleurs. Je ne suis même plus moi-même." Then, in what the narration implies to be an outer body experience, the narrative moves away from a first-person's vantage point – a panel drawn from Fabrice's ocular viewpoint showing the protagonist's lower body, and the assailant's leg about to kick him again – to a third-person's vantage point in the following panels – with, this time, a full body depiction of the protagonist, helplessly attempting to shield himself with his arms from the kicks (205) (fig. 22). This change of viewpoint is indicated with the narration statement: "Je ne m'appartiens plus" (205). It not only conveys the protagonist's pain and the brutality of the vicious attacks, but also transcribes the inability of the protagonist to identify his aggressors. Moreover, Fabrice expresses his despair as he finds himself able to describe the attacks but unable to communicate his trauma after the aggressions (190-193, 203-207): "A pouvoir décrire de façon quasi millimétrique ce qui m'est arrivé, j'ai décrédibilisé ma peur." (220 :7). While "[l]es mots ainsi posés sur ma souffrance créent un nouvel écran entre les autres et moi" (196:6), the subjective viewpoint seems to overcome this difficulty as it enables him to show the attacks from the vantage point of the victim and communicate their

violence and traumatic consequences to the reader. However, during the sequence of the attack, the viewpoint is not that of the protagonist. After panels (III), 205:4 and 5 showing the protagonist's legs as he falls backwards while one of the attackers dangerously leans over him as he is about to kick him again, the violence of the attacks provokes the dissolution of the self, which is represented through the multiplication of alternative vantage points. The scene is depicted through a quick succession of panels alternating between cropped images of Fabrice's body and his assailants', and the depiction of inanimate objects, among which are a "lacet" (204:1), a "bout du mur" (204:2), a "trou dans le mur" (204:3), a "bout de béton" (204:4), a "feuille" (204:5), the "sommet d'un poteau" (204:6), the "lunettes de soleil d'un complice passif" (204:9), from whose vantage points the protagonist appears as "un sous-homme" or "un bout de viande qui se tortille". Through this process, the whole scene relates the protagonist's outer body experience: "J'attends, pierre, feuille, arbre, poteau et ciel devenu" (206:5). The narration goes on:

> De là où je suis feuille, je ne vois qu'une boule de viande qui se tortille. Du ciel, il n'y a qu'un corps pitoyable qui ondule comme un ver dans un bocal électrifié. Et d'ici, il n'y a qu'une pédale qui ne sait même pas se défendre, une lopette qui ne mérite pas de vivre, un sous-homme.

The narrator's use of homophobic slur "pédale" could indicate amongst other things some form of self-loathing culminating in his permutation into "un sous-homme". The last part of the narration is accompanied by a depiction of the attack from the vantage point of the accomplice, who is waiting in his car. Indeed, on page 204-205, when listing the different vantage points the protagonist adopts during his dissociative episode, he listed among them the sunglasses of the accomplice: "je suis devenu un objet, une chose" (III éd. aug.: 204).

(Figure 22: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 204-205)

Fabrice's acute awareness of his surroundings during the assault is implied both by the narrative recitative and the detailed drawings of tree-leaves on the ground, asperities of the road and stone wall, clouds in the sky, etc. (III éd. aug. 204-205). The assault leaves the protagonist in a state of shock, as suggested by the disappearance of the background in the panel that closes the sequence, depicting him floating in a blank space (207). It is to be noted that the panel is still framed, as the narrative is deemed to continue. As the protagonist points out, this panel is part of a wider sequence. The narrative will go on and the episode may repeat itself. The assailants will come back – Fabrice knows that much. The following page contains depictions of trauma and its various effects on the protagonist, suggested by various textual and visual techniques: the narration mentions his tachycardia, his difficulty breathing and his panic attacks, and the page ends with a portrayal of the protagonist as a hybrid creature, whose upper-body has been replaced with an overflowing sink (208). Pichet reads it as a metaphor for vomiting (Pichet, 2006: 121) but this imagery could also be interpreted as endless tears (fig. 23).

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(Figure 23: Neaud, *Journal III*, éd. aug.: 208)

After the attacks, Fabrice is only represented through an intertextual prolepsis (III éd. aug., 210:1), as the dismembered, headless, anonymous body which will be found on the railway and whose suicide is reported later in the narrative (410-411). This parallel is explicit with Xavier's interpretation of the suicide as Fabrice's opportunity to find closure: "[il s'est] suicid[é] à [t]a place" (410). This portrait occupies two-thirds of the page, with the jaw wide-open as if the corpse was

screaming, yet no sound can get out. This forced silence is stressed by the wall behind him, left blank in sharp contrast with the other walls, surrounding and framing the corpse in the void. The panel is followed by the transcription of a phone call – even though we are only given to hear the protagonist's side of the exchange – as a soundtrack overlapping panels representing the street where the attacks took place.

As these fragments are accumulated through the narrative, they seem to provide glimpses that both conceal and disclose un-verbalised memories, which, due to their traumatic natures, escape other modes of representation or expression. The actual beating-up during these repeated gay-bashing episodes are replaced with another scene. Van Der Kolk and Van der Hart note that the

> experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level, and this failure to arrange the memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organised on a somatosensory ['behavioural re-enactments, nightmares, and flashbacks'] or iconic level
> (Van der Kolk and Van Der Hart, in Caruth, 1995: 172).

Traumatic experience "therefore cannot be easily translated into the symbolic language necessary for linguistic retrieval." (Van der Kolk and Van Der Hart, in Caruth, 1995: 173). Traumatic events escape representation and as soon as they can be made sense of and captured, then their essential traumatic nature is betrayed. Therefore Neaud relies on the use of a seemingly unrelated image – thus making full use of the potentiality of a "non-sequitur relation between panels", in McCloud's terminology (1993). This disruptive process operates here as a technique which suggests the extent of trauma.

These fragments interrupt the narrative flow in the form of intrusive thoughts, nightmares, flasbacks, etc. and they also disrupt the timeline:

> [...] the history that a flashback tells [...] is a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood.
> (Caruth, 1995: 153, italics in original).

These intrusions notably take the form of silent panels whose content is seemingly unrelated to one another (Neaud, III éd. aug.: 220): the empty seat after his visiting friend left and a panel depicting hyper-space surround a panel featuring yet another fragment of Grünewald's painting, this time framed differently. The monster with the weapon has disappeared from the frame and the other monster is now in the bottom-right corner of the panel. The new framing now reveals two monsters, whose mouths

are closed, suggesting that they are silent witnesses to the attack that is taking place outside the frame. But as their eye-line is higher than the beating, they appear to be staring at the reader, bringing the reader in and confronting her/him as to her/his role also as witness. These details come back during episodes that seem to be unrelated, which alludes to the intrusive power of the traumatic memory.

Other panels disrupt the linearity of the narrative, such as the recurring panel of the accomplice sitting in the car and nonchalantly asking the attacker whether he is done (III éd. aug.: 205) and (230), thus suggesting the obsessive reconstruction of the event. Caruth notes trauma's "repeated imposition as both image and amnesia" (Caruth, 1995: 153), "intruding memories and unbidden repetitive images of traumatic events" (Van der Kolk and Greenberg, 1987: 191). "[whose] occurrence defies simple comprehension." (Caruth, 1995: 153). The monsters hint at the incomprehensibility of the traumatic event. The visual depiction of trauma in Neaud's *Journal* is as part of daily life, as it is drawn in the same unassuming way as other daily life actions are drawn. The traumatic memories are integrated into the narrative, or rather, evoked to disrupt it. For Freud, the insistent reproduction of memory is a way of remembering. Non-integrated experiences, which one have yet to make sense of, are relived repeatedly, until the traumatic experience can be accessed, understood, and properly articulated through language in order to be overcome. For Freud, this process involves acting out the traumatic experience (Freud, 1926: 150), while in Neaud's case, it takes the form of reproducing its representation over and over.

It is to be noted that while the dialogue and angle of the drawing remain the same, there are a few changes that occur most significantly to shading and the placement of speech balloons. The recurring panels are not exactly the same, which suggests the slightly changing nature of the flashbacks. For instance, the repartition of the text from two (III éd. aug.: 205) to three speech balloons (230) may imply a difference in delivery rhythm. The same details keep reappearing with a difference. Time is not "a permanent duality, not exactly a split or a doubling but a parallel experience [...] not a sequence but a simultaneity" (L. L. Langer, 1991: 95). This simultaneity is

related to the fact that the traumatic experience/memory is, in a sense, timeless. It is not transformed into a story, placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end (which is characteristic for narrative memory).
(Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995: 177).

"Unable to reconcile oneself to the past" (178), Fabrice experiences the trauma in its totality or has episodes disrupting the current experience. L. L. Langer identifies the traumatic past and the present as two incompatible realms of experience, and the coherent narrative view is prevented. Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart write:

Repression reflects a vertically layered model of mind: what is repressed is pushed downward, into the unconscious. The subject no longer has access to it. Only symbolic, indirect indications would point to its assumed existence. Dissociation reflects a horizontally layered model of mind: when a subject does not remember a trauma, its "memory" is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness, which may be subconscious or dominate consciousness, e.g., during traumatic re-enactments.
(Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995: 168).

"[T]raumatic memories cannot be both dissociated and repressed." (1995: 169).

Communicating the Traumatic Experience

The narrator raises another concern, which is the difficulty for the protagonist to get his friends to believe him. Indeed, his account of the attack is perceived as too detailed, which for his friends discredits him. The last panel of the page is striking, as the final panel echoes another panel featured during the attack (III éd. aug.: 203), save for the slightly different angle of the neck. Both panels feature the protagonist on the ground, with his mouth wide open but we are not given to hear the victim's screams. While the panel on page 203 has the narrative caption "je ne suis pas là", the panel on page 220 features a caption placed across Fabrice's throat, effectively silencing him while alluding to his vocal chords through its position on the drawing. This caption says "Que faut-il faire pour se faire entendre?" and the mouth screaming suggests Fabrice's helplessness.

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(Figure 24: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 196)

The act of sharing his experience is represented in three ways: firstly, what resembles ink stains are projected out of the protagonist's mouth, while he is himself barely sketched out, in contrast with his friend's blacked-out figure. Secondly, the account takes the form of an asteroid crashing down onto the surface of a planet and thirdly, the account is represented as a multiplicity of speech bubbles of various sizes escaping from the protagonist's mouth, but their content is illegible. It is to be noted that the protagonist is missing from the second panel, just as the third panel does not feature his friend. Effectively, when considering these panels as a sequence, his friend in the second panel can be read as turning his back on him and ignoring both the asteroid crashing in the background of the panel and the overwhelming yet undecipherable account pictured in the next panel (III éd. aug.: 196) (fig. 24). The narrator despairs: "Mais les mots ainsi posés sur ma souffrance créent un nouvel écran entre les autres et moi" (196). In an attempt to decipher his friends' apparent lack of compassion, the narrator ventures: "je ne dois pas aller si mal puisque j'arrive à parler" (197). The catharsis of telling the experience is denied as the account going out of the protagonist's mouth is depicted first as a blacked-out speech balloon, then, as the narration quotes the therapist's view "la solution est en vous", as a fake blossoming tree, and thirdly, as a bushy tree that is really just a shape: indeed, its foliage is replaced with a brick-wall (258), recalling the one that separated Fabrice from his friends during his previous failed attempts to communicate his traumatic experience (196).

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(Figure 25: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 164)

Monsters in the Margins

In (III éd. aug.), 164:1 (fig. 25), Fabrice's face is represented as the head of the monster depicted in the third part of the triptych entitled *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* by Francis Bacon. The protagonist states: "Le monstre, c'est moi" (III éd. aug.), 363, and later confirms: "Y a pas à dire, le monstre c'est moi" in (372:6). This has a different resonance from Gustave Flaubert's famous "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" as this claim featuring in the narrative boxes comes as a contradiction with the rest of the work. A clue to understand this affirmation is given in the unassuming position that the panel holds on the page. The affirmative claim may have a punchline effect in French that is denied by the decision of the artist to put this claim in a panel that does not occupy the traditional punch-line space on the page. Rather than being the last panel of the last row on the right page, supposedly the last place the eye of the reader will go to before s/he has to turn the page, the panel does not occupy a significant place on the page. Moreover, the balloon is on the bottom part of the panel, but also slightly unbalanced compared to the other balloons in the same panel; it does not fall into the diagonal alignment of the balloon in the upper part of the panel and runs the risk of going unnoticed and to be missed by the reader. Moreover, "c'est moi" may suggest that there is a need to actually point it out, in order to discard any ambiguity that may have occurred previously. This remark thus asks the reader to go back to the text and search for what may have generated this ambiguity and who may be the possible monster, from which the narrator needs to distinguish himself.

In his postface to *Journal 3: edition augmentée*, Neaud observes that "Seul le mâle hétérosexuel aurait le droit de regarder et, ainsi, par réduction, de filmer l'Autre, de le montrer comme objet, puis de le juger pour, enfin, le condamner (*monstrare*, *censare*, *trinicare*)" (Neaud, III éd. aug.: 428). As he is perceived as feeding on the image of others, he becomes a monster in the eyes of his friends who struggle to understand his artistic approach. Later, the protagonist denounces the monstrous behaviour of his entourage: scandalised by an older man's attempt to contact one of

their friends, the group ambushed the man, filmed the encounter then circulated the video (230-239). Fabrice finds himself identifying with a monster while recording the event from the margins.

At this point in my analysis, I will provide a brief summary of theoretical accounts of the monstrous in relation to representations of trauma that will be useful for analysing Neaud's recurring monstrous imageries. Pliny describes the monstrous races as living on the fringes of the known world: they are not completely outside human society and yet are not part of it. They are both familiar and alien. Freud's essay on the *Uncanny* ("das Unheimliche") argues that the art and the literature of the uncanny represent something intimately strange, "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression." (Freud, 1919: 241) "Un-heimlich" literally means "un-familiar" or "un-homely", and the German word for "monster" is "Ungeheuer", which means "un-familiar" or "un-safe". Monsters disrupt categories of identity, and as such, they may also herald new possibilities. "Monsters signify, then, not the oppositional other safely fenced off within its own boundaries, but the otherness of possible worlds, or possible versions of ourselves, not yet realised." (Shildrick, 1996: 8)

Langer talks about "an unrecapturable identity" (L. L. Langer, 1995: 112), fluctuating and switching from one realm of experience to another (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995: 178), which is not without bearing similarities with the transgressive characters of the monsters, who, traditionally, are seen as straddling two realms, that of the intelligible and the world beyond nature. Monsters are a reminder of the mysterious world, the unknown that escapes human comprehension. "Monster" etymologically comes from the Latin monstrum, "unnatural thing" or "event", derived from a corruption of *monere* – meaning "to warn" or "to teach" - by another latin verb, *monstrare*, meaning "to show", "to demonstrate". Derrida, in *Heidegger's Hand: Geschlecht II* (Derrida, 1989), examines the concept developed by Heidegger of the hand detached from the body and draws a parallel between monstrosity and "monstration". The hand becomes monstrous, as it "points to", reveals, takes hold and grasps – not only materially but also intellectually – as it

produces a monstrous discourse. This etymology implies that the monsters serve to show, therefore define and establish the norm. Monsters traditionally stand as warnings and moral allegories, as they differ from the norm. Monsters may embody warnings of moral transgression.

Monsters inhabit the margins. Kristeva points out how dangerous and potentially subversive a site it is to inhabit. In her 1982 book, *Powers of Horror*, she states that what lies beyond the margins is dangerous and abject (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Kristeva also claims that the margins themselves are a site of creativity (Kristeva, 1974: 15-16). The margin is neither outside nor inside. It represents the limit of patriarchal power. What is repressed and pushed to the margin cannot be fully known or expressed. It furthers its potential to disrupt and challenge the stability of hetero-phallo-centrism.

The monstrous seems to have less to do with its own hybrid form and more to do with the monster's relation to the other. Monsters attract and repulse, and the instability of the concept of the monstrous parallel that of the self, as the protagonist identifies and merges with the dead body he spotted on the railway. Are Neaud's monsters the negation of the normal or the embodiment of what normalisation does to the individual? Through identity formation, the individual builds a sense of self through identification and differentiation, as the difference from the other helps the self to define and refine her of his own individuality. As the other's identity is fluid, so is the monster's. Monsters cannot be reduced to a single meaning. When first encountering that detail, the reader may be inclined to read the monster depicted lying on the ground (III éd. aug.: 304) as a helpless victim, thrown on the ground. But the panel's interpretation is context-dependent. The reader is invited to revise her or his initial interpretation of the image when given to see it in the wider context of the full painting (309). In Grünewald's painting, the monster appears to be an attacker that Saint Anthony managed to defeat before the other monsters assaulted him. If the narrator once refers to his attackers as predators, while he refers to himself as their prey (246), this dichotomy, seemingly clear-cut here, has permeable boundaries and the attribution of these labels fluctuates throughout the text. Monstrous identity

is passed on; it comes and goes throughout the diary, and monstrous imageries function both as a performance and a deconstruction of this identity.

In an episode that starts with the protagonist spotting his attackers and trying to run away, the vantage point changes during the sequence. While Fabrice seems to have outrun his attackers, they find him at the entrance of the public square, and the panel suddenly shows a first-person viewpoint from one of the attacker's vantage points as he grabs the protagonist's arm and pushes him to the ground (191). The reader is then given to see the attack from the vantage point of the attacker, while the monsters appear to be staring silently at the reader as the attack takes place (220). The protagonist attempts to reconquer the territory that he lost to his attackers, the public park where he used to go cruising at night. While the park itself is described as a safe space – the only one he knows and where he feels he belongs –, its surroundings are dangerous, as he is too scared that his attackers may wait for him there.

In an attempt to escape both his aggressors and his demons, Fabrice soon finds solace in violent video games. The insertion of screenshots of the computer game "Doom" in the sequence of panels is significant: what process takes place from playing "Doom" to representing this visually? Video games and comics as subcultures are often associated with isolation and alienation. Video games are often dismissed as mind-numbing. As he plays "Doom" for hours, Fabrice ends up referring to himself as a zombie (246) (fig. 26). While this activity may not be quite cathartic, it is a way of numbing the pain and the memory. It appears to be some sort of process whereby the author/narrator arrives at a better self-understanding. The game also gives him the opportunity to play the part of the aggressor as well as forcing him to acknowledge his desire to play that part at least in his imagination. These considerations are reinforced by the fact that Fabrice is drawn in the maze of "Doom", then in the maze of the town with its dangerous streets, pathways and flight of stairs, in a series of panels whose spatial proximity on the page blurs the boundaries between "Doom"'s fictional immersive world and the reality of the streets of Neaud's Angoulême.

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(Figure 26: Neaud, *Journal* III, éd. aug.: 246)

Doom is a first-person shooter, which means that the only part of the player depicted onscreen is her or his hand holding a weapon. It is also a way of feeling in charge, in control of the commands in his hands, and it could be a way of releasing pent up aggression or anger. This is another example in *Journal* of the link between the hand, the monstrous and "monstration", a link that we evoked earlier with reference to Derrida (1989). Interestingly, when Fabrice is inserted within the world of "Doom", he appears onscreen not as the player's hand but as the monster attacking the player. Fabrice identifies with the monsters that he pulverises, which stresses the ambiguity of the monstrous nature, and displaces the gun-holding hand of the first-person player: the hand shooting at a frail, wounded Fabrice Neaud becomes the reader's, foreshowing the polemics surrounding the publication of Journal III.

When Fabrice gives to Dominique six comics pages for him to see, the narrative box hints at their content yet they are never shown to the reader (III éd. aug., 146). However, the significance of their content is hinted at via their metaphorical replacement with a loaded gun in the following panel – a significance made explicit when Fabrice's friend and confident Cyril explains the risks Fabrice took when letting other people read his pages (148-149) (fig. 27). This sequence foreshadows real life consequences of the *Journal*'s publication, since a copy of the *Journal* was brandished in court by the lawyer of his assailants in a successful attempt to demonstrate that Neaud invited the repeated physical attacks to which he was subjected.

These polemics compromised his autobiographical comics output – the fifth volume of *Journal* may never be published. As his literary 2005-2006 online diary "Du retrait du monde" attracted further detractors, Neaud deleted his blog and pulled out from all existing publication projects. The traumatic effect that his autobiographical diaries were used as evidence against him in court led him to put a halt to his autobiographical output both in comics and in literature and may silence him completely.

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(Figure 27: Neaud, Journal III, éd. aug.: 146)

Conclusion

We saw in the previous chapter that Trondheim conducts an exploration of the creative possibilities of the comics form that serves his examination of the self. I argued that Neaud pushes this potentiality of autobiocomics further with his *Journal*, an autobiographical project that focuses less on the solipsistic depiction of the self and more on the formation of the individual subject as part of a nexus of relations. The individual builds a sense of self through identification and differentiation, as the difference from the other helps the self to define and refine her or his own individuality. As the other's identity is fluid and always to be defined, Neaud's work represents and explores the ambivalence in the inscription of the self, always redefined and as monstrous as the other. A social, politicised subject eventually emerges from this assemblage of meanings, as Neaud exposes the oppressive norms of heterocentric society and denounces the alienating character of the gay community through its perpetuation of normative ideals.

Focussing on Neaud's depictions of various forms of violence, ranging from everyday rejections and verbal abuses to physical assaults in the third volume of *Journal*, in this chapter I have examined the explicit and implicit, textual and visual representation of their traumatic effects on Neaud's persona, notably by investigating how Neaud attempts to overcome the unspeakability of trauma through innovative uses of the formal fragmentation which characterizes comics. Neaud's representations of homophobic violence can be compared to the ways in which he portrays violent confrontations regarding his status as a non-mainstream comics artist. On the one hand, the risk of representation led Neaud to further formal innovations. On the other hand, Neaud's autobiographical diaries provoked further trauma, as violent responses led Neaud to interrupt their publication. Neaud leaves a testimony of new ways of being and proposes alternatives to processes that – under the façade of acceptance – only bring further alienation.

In the next chapter, I continue my investigation into how autobiocomics as a didactic practice can question stereotypical and normative assumptions, this time by examining a decentered narrative that gives space to the voices of others and allows a subversive critique to emerge from their contradictory accounts.

Chapter 5
Dominique Goblet's
Faire Semblant C'est Mentir

The crafting of the self is not a solipsistic affair in Dominique Goblet's *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* (2007), and the text takes the breakdown of the family as its subject matter. In this chapter, I show how autobiocomics may challenge the space of the family unit, and to what extent the comicsform lends itself to such a contestation of established domestic relations. My discussion of the assemblage of strained relationships in Goblet's text will help me to work through the idea that autobiocomics have a very specific political function dependent on their form – an idea which I will develop further in my last chapter. First, I give a brief overview of key events in each chapter of *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, before proceeding with my analysis, with reference to articles by Lefèvre (2008), Mao (2009), Meesters (2010), Brogniez (2010), Baetens (2011), Miller (2015) and Poudevigne (2016), with a view to investigating the representation of relationships and their dynamics.

Faire Semblant C'est Mentir contains an introduction followed by four chapters. It opens with an anecdotal exchange between Dom as a toddler and her mum. The first chapter features another toddler, Dom's daughter, as she is about to meet her grandfather for the first time, and his companion, the elusive Cécile, whose traits evoke those of the figure in the foreground of Edvard Munch's 1893 painting *The Scream*. The reunion between Dom and her father after four years of estrangement quickly turns sour and Dom flees the house with her daughter. In Chapter 2, the relation between Dom and her partner Guy Marc is made difficult and tense by the lingering presence of a ghost, a former girlfriend, who floats between them and inevitably keeps them at distance from each other. Chapter 3 shows Dom's father watching the 1973 Dutch Grand Prix during which English driver Roger Williamson died in a crash. As Williamson's tragedy takes place, another kind of tragedy strikes in the kitchen, with the exasperated mother dragging her daughter to

the attic where she ties her up and roughs her up. Completely absorbed in the crash on TV, the father ignores his daughter's trials and suffering at the hands of her mother. The last chapter revolves around a conversation over the phone between Dom and her estranged companion, hinting that they may reunite.

I approach the text by focussing on a series of doublings or overlaps, repetitions and hauntings – and the idea of estrangement produced by such doublings. These doublings, I argue, are the key to the text's ability to challenge the notion of the family. I begin with an examination of the autobiographical pact proposed in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*. I then focus on temporality and spatiality, which I link with the functioning or malfunctioning of the family, and I analyse Goblet's depiction of the failed family unit through the tensions and paradoxes between different timeframes (memories, and the (re-)imagining of events, etc.), and spaces (home/outside, etc.). I explore how Goblet shows the creative potential for failure in her autobiocomic, starting with an examination of the title and its embedded significations. I relate the Sartrean idea of lying and "mauvaise foi" to the visual as well as the textual aspects of the comic. I articulate around the notions of "mentir" and "faire semblant" my investigation of the layering of voices, the collapsing of subjectivities, and the inscriptions of physical and emotional abuse on the bodies. Trauma in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* marks the dynamic of the relations within the family and the chapter examines the way in which the different sets of relations are played out both visually and in terms of the narrative. The construction of a self is dependent on the different relations – social, physical, etc. – which situate a body or subject as well as the spaces for reflexivity produced when the self creates a distance from itself in different ways. I approach *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* as an example of the ethical and political stakes of autobiocomics, and show how the text provides an examination of the power relations within the family unit. How does it suggest the fragilities of these relations? I investigate how power relations are contested and challenged and I show that for this the visual dimension of the comics is key. I demonstrate how the network of relations is suggested by formal experiments with a cast of different voices, a multiplicity of testimonies characterised by their incompleteness, contradictions and ever-changing nature.

Pacts

A preface and a postface frame *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, and as this "frange du texte imprimé, en réalité, commande toute la lecture" (Lejeune, 1975: 45), I will start this investigation by looking at these short texts and the readings that they propose. In his preface entitled "Douze ans de repentirs", Jean-Christophe Menu, co-founder of Paris-based comics publishing house "L'Association" (where *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* was published in 2007) and Dominique Goblet's mentor, points out that Goblet's "autobiographie nécessaire" emerged after twelve years of "résolutions bien trempées". The title of this preface places the text under the sign of "repentirs". "Repentir" is the French term for "pentimento" which refers to alterations made by the artist during the process of painting, usually hidden beneath subsequent paint layers. "Repentirs" thus hint at Goblet's slow process of self-crafting involving layering and erasures. The term "repentir" also suggests a confessional tone and puts *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* in the lineage of traditional confessional literature (Rousseau, Saint Augustin, etc.) and under the sign of confessional writing. Foucault rightly notes that when the individual speaks, s/he not only takes up a position of subject in a discourse, but is also *subjected* to the rules and regulations of this discourse. Foucault also describes the power relations at work in the confessional mode and points out that the reader becomes an authority figure, as s/he is given the power to absolve the repentant subject.

Guy Marc Hinant's postface to *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, a short piece entitled "Initiales, Outils, Simulacres", insists on the crafting and construction of selves as avatars and warns the reader that Dominique and he just happen to have the same names as their avatars in the diegesis:

> il ne s'agit pas de la vie elle-même mais de l'Art (omnisciente, inattaquable puissance de l'art). C'est pourquoi GM n'est pas Guy Marc et la Dom du récit n'est pas Dominique Goblet – ce sont, en réalité, des avatars contrôlés par des personnes vivantes portant des noms similaires.

Hinant stresses the reconstruction process of the narrative: "Quelle part de fiction produit le simple fait de s'arrêter sur des épisodes-clefs de notre propre existence?", Hinant asks, when creating what we consider to be "notre propre réalité? Le passé

est fiction, re-mémorisation, ré-interpretation, fixation momentanée (sur base d'une réalité admise), projection, hypothèse, opacité". His postface is a call for the reader to reflect on the autobiographical status of the text and to question the very possibility of a truly autobiographical account.

The position of Hinant is more complex than that of Menu. Hinant is Goblet's companion, both a co-lead in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* (with two chapters told from his vantage point) and co-scenarist. The epitext provides a counter-narrative to the pact proposed on the title page. With the mention that "Les textes des chapitres 2 et 4 ont été co-écrits avec Guy Marc Hinant" and the changes in graphic style suggesting that Dominique may not be the artist who drew these specific sections – even though she drew the whole book – the pact is rendered more ambiguous. Goblet sheds some light on this collaborative process in a 2008 interview:

> En général, j'ai un canevas relativement flou au départ. Je donne ce canevas à mon compagnon qui le reprécise, il retravaille des dialogues, amène des éléments narratifs ; puis, il me le repasse et je le retravaille, je réécris des dialogues, je pars sur d'autres idées, et je lui repasse le matériau. Ainsi on avance, mais on ne travaille jamais ensemble. Son intervention est extrêmement ambiguë et pose question puisqu'il intervient à la fois comme personnage dans mon livre, qui se présente comme une autobiographie de Dominique Goblet, et comme auteur puisqu'il écrit ce qui est en principe mon point de vue sur des événements qui nous sont arrivés ensemble. (Lefèvre, 2008: 90)

Baetens notes that Goblet

> collaborates with other people without always making clear who is doing what, an author having a queer, bisexual name (Dominique is both male and female), an author who uses a nickname ("Goblette") that feminizes her male-sounding name ('Goblet' – a word 'without meaning' but with a strong masculine architecture.) (Baetens, 2011: 90).

Baetens's loose use of ideologically-loaded terms renders the second half of his statement less convincing. Without going as far as Baetens who advocates for reading Goblet's work as "autogynography", Brogniez similarly comments on Goblet's femininity: her skirt-wearing avatar, the feminisation of her last name into "la goblette" thus counterbalancing the gender-neutrality of her first name, itself made more feminine with the regionalism "la Dom" (Brogniez, 2010). Both Brogniez and Baetens are correct in pointing out the importance of gender issues in and surrounding Goblet's work.

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(Figure 28: Goblet, 2007: cover)

Brogniez stresses how prefacers (notably Thierry van Hasselt for Goblet's 1997 *Portraits Crachés*) linger on Goblet's physical beauty rather than focusing on her artistic approach and techniques. *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*'s preface and postface fortunately avoid perpetrating this issue. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to note the gendered implications of the preface and postface, as the text receives the support and stamp of approval of Goblet's editor and mentor on the one hand, and her companion on the other hand. Groensteen notes the predominance of the representation of the artist's professional life in Franco-Belgian autobiocomics (Groensteen, 1996: 66) and Brogniez rightly notes the difference in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* between the treatment of Goblet's professional life (succinctly drawn at her drawing board but turned into an object of sexual desire under her companion's gaze; and failing to carry out her duties as an art teacher in another sequence) and Guy Marc Hinant's professional work as a TV producer and writer for television (Brogniez, 2010). Indeed, Hinant's synopsis for Pynchon and Brian Wilson operates as

a meta-textual *mise en abyme* in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*. These male figures use their authority in their respective milieux to affirm the quality of Goblet's work. Their assent suggests the validity of the content of the book in literary and pictorial merits as well as in terms of subject matter. "[L]a préface doit être étudiée comme une stratégie (dans un sens plus large que le seul intentionnalisme) d'accumulation de valeur symbolique" (Meizoz, 2010), and as Hinant's postface closes the book, "c'est même lui qui a le dernier mot", Brogniez points out. Yet is it Goblet's sole name that features on the front cover of the book. The materiality of the book thus puts in tension the notion of a single-authored autobiographical text with the different degrees of her entourage's involvement in the creative process. This ambiguity foreshadows the paradoxes that emerge in the narrative, as different accounts of the same event are given without one prevailing over another.

The absence of any narrative *récitatif* – or narrative captions (with the exception of one occurrence in the opening panel of Chapter 1) – from the whole book could be seen as weakening the referential pact. However, narrative instances in autobiocomics can be implied through other, less blatant but equally significant formal devices. In this section, I investigate the absence of the textual narrator in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* by looking for visual "traces" of narration. In order to do so, I turn to the concept of "graphiation" as articulated by Marion. According to Marion, the graphic narrator is implied through evidences of the material production, such as the choices made regarding the panel layouts for instance. For Bruno Latour, "objectivity is supposed to be *'acheiropoiete'*, not made by human hand." Writing about religious imagery, Latour states that "[t]he more the human hand can be seen as having worked on an image, the weaker is the image's claim to offer truth" (Latour, in Latour and Wiebel (eds), 2002: 7). Intermittently conspicuous evidence of the activity of a graphic narrator is significant in autobiocomics. Baetens notes the importance of "graphiation" in Goblet's work (Baetens in Chaney, 2011b: 84).

The most widespread practice regarding graphic style in comics (pencil-and-chalk drawings, red ink, watercolours, mixed media, etc.) consists in using different ones in specific sections of the book, each style signifying each section's status – whether it be a dream sequence or an old memory (Meesters, 2010: 220) or even an

account from a different vantage point. In his explorations of the great variety of graphic styles in Goblet's *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, Meesters claims that graphic style in comics has three functions: the mark of the artist (her or his signature) inscribed in the lines and the techniques, the aesthetic dimension and the conveying of information: meta-pictorial references to other artists for instance, adding levels of signification (Meesters, 2010: 218). Remarkably, *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* plays with this convention as different graphic styles are used without any obvious demarcation (fig. 29, 31, 32): changes in style seem to reflect a mood change rather than a temporal or enunciative one, which contribute to the ambiguity regarding each section's status.

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(Figure 29: Goblet, 2007: 39)[32]

The contrast between pages drawn in "style mignon" (Miller, 2015: 386; 388) (fig. 31) that open the book and the pages in Chapter 2 (fig. 29) is striking. Meesters describes the graphic style in the section from Guy Marc's vantage point as "dessin d'observation" (Meesters, 2010: 224). But Meesters omits to consider that this scene,

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[32] As *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* is unpaginated, i provided ny own pagination.

while drawn by Goblet, could not have been observed by her, since it is implied that Guy Marc is visiting his parents on his own so he can share with them information that the Dominique of the diegesis is not yet aware of. The degree of objectivity which is implied in the expression "dessin d'observation" may suggest that the scene is devoid of Goblet's affects and emotions. But the context denies the very possibility of the process-making at which it hints. In this disruption of *vraisemblance*, there is a tension between the very idea of an objective recording of the event and the inscription in the graphic line of its emotional dimension in the performance of detachment, and with it, the performance in Goblet's drawings of Hinant's viewpoint.

The plurality of voices inevitably leads to a plurality of accounts and versions of the same incidents (such as the question whether the father was present when his daughter was abused, or whether Guy Marc is unfaithful). These accounts are contradictory and the voices strain against one another. While the diegesis allows us to see actions as they take place, we follow narratives that are left unframed: are they what Dominique knows happened? Are they what her partner is actually doing? Are they illustrating her worst fears? The narrative "traces" suggest various degrees of reliability of the accounts that are related. Similar tensions occur in reported speech, where everyone is given a voice, yet none dominates the other, and the reader is left to form her or his own interpretation.

The space between the pacts proposed by the preface and the postface respectively is the first of many instances of dialogism – the interaction and the confrontation of different, contradictory discourses – at work in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*. For Baetens, Goblet

> eventually produces an autobiography that presents an 'impersonal' kind of subject, less a universal subject than the impossibility to fix any subject whatsoever, to other decisive moments (Baetens, 2011: 90).

Brogniez (2010) underscores Goblet's aspiration of "fai[re] du genre intime un véritable laboratoire formel, permettant l'élaboration d'un style graphique très personnel" (Brogniez, 2010). Brogniez's most notable contribution is his study of Goblet's autobiographical project as "brouillage du moi" and "puzzle identitaire". The

reader is thus invited to read *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* as a text situated somewhere between the different pacts proposed by the preface and the postface.

Time as Assemblage

In this section, I investigate the tensions and paradoxes between different timeframes in order to examine how they participate in the depiction of the failed family unit. *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* features only three precise temporal markers:
- "Mon père ne boit plus. Plus une goutte paraît-il. Je ne l'ai plus vu pendant quatre ans. Ma fille aura quatre ans en juillet… C'est à dire le mois prochain"[33] featured in the panel that opens chapter one, and the only portion of non-attributed, free-floating text whose function is comparable to a narrative caption
- the mention "8 juillet 1998 _ jour de mon anniversaire → LE POMPIER EST MORT" on the splash-page that closes chapter three;
- and "quand?" "maintenant", an exchange featured on the last splash-page of chapter four, effectively closing the book.
The passing of time is alluded to through changes in slight appearance of the avatars – even as they are given recognisable traits which enable their identification throughout the text. Three self-portraits accompany the mentions "chapitre 1", "chapitre 2" and "chapitre 4" on their respective pages. Each of them features Dominique sporting different haircuts, with the last one featuring Dominique almost unrecognisable with long hair: ironically, her avatar does not even appear in that chapter, as there is only her disembodied voice from the textual transcription of a conversation over the phone – a scene which I will discuss in the last section of this chapter. These temporal hints are as subtle as they are vague, and it is difficult for the reader to pinpoint how much time has passed between each chapter.

The reader's first instinct would be to read these chapters as arranged in chronological order. However, the lack of temporal clues is disruptive: temporality in

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[33] As we are told that Dominique's daughter is four, extra-textual information (i.e. Nikita was born in 1990) enables us to fix the date of Chapter 1 (and the framing flashback of Chapter 3) as 1994. The last sequence of Chapter 2 occurs just before the father's death on July 8th, 1998.

Faire Semblant C'est Mentir is much more complex than a first cursory reading may suggest.

The text resonates with Marcel Proust in its attempt to rethink the temporal in order to chart the disintegration of certain established conventions. But then, the text seems to suggest here a sort of anti-Proustian approach to time, a riposte to Proust and the way he organises the temporal spatially by suggesting the impossibility of coherently representing time either in a linear format or using other spatial techniques. The lack of temporal clues exacerbates narrative ambiguities which participate in the rendering of emotional turmoil. The timeline of Guy Marc's affective life is unclear, mirroring Dominique's difficulty in pinpointing when his previous relationship ended. Similarly, the announcement that the father passed away which closes Chapter 2 is immediately followed by an account of painful childhood memories, where the father is killed a second time, this time in his inability to meet the demands of the paternal role.

Menu states in his preface for *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* untitled "Douze ans de repentirs" that time is "la vraie matière première de ce livre". Writing about another text by Goblet, Baetens points out that "Goblet calls attention to the notion of fragment, disrupting the usual management of time and space relationships in the graphic novel." (Baetens, 2011: 82). He observes that in Goblet's *Portraits Crachés*, "time is less *represented* than it is *manipulated*" (87, emphasis in original). This observation also applies to *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, whose back-cover may provide some clue as to how to approach temporality in Goblet's text. Indeed, the back cover features two drawings representing the cabalistic symbol of the Tree of Life, a symbol which also appears on one of Dominique's tee-shirts in the diegesis. It is worth noticing that the symbols have a slightly different organisation, thus emphasising the myriad of possibilities and the fluidity of connections. This cabalistic symbol may suggest how to approach temporality in Goblet's text: rather than a chronological organisation, the text seems to present an assemblage of separate sequences, each alluding to and illuminating the others in different ways.

Goblet structures and invents connections, as Hinant rightly points out in his postface. Goblet herself discusses in detail the creative liberties that she takes:

> Dans une autobiographie, on peut rapprocher des choses qui se sont déroulées dans un passé très éloigné et les mettre en lien avec le présent. (Lefèvre, 2008: 92)

While it is problematic to quote the author on their work in the context of autobiocomics, it is useful to set the conflicting narratives offered within the text against yet another contradictory account, this time coming from outside the text. The disruption of the chronology's most significant consequence is the delayed revelation of the physical abuse, as well as the creative choices regarding its depiction.

> Mais il y a une chose qui m'a vraiment frappée, c'est que l'on peut mettre en lien deux choses qui ne se sont pas passées au même moment. Par exemple, je n'ai aucun souvenir de mon père regardant la télé pendant une des fois où j'ai subi ces violences. Seulement, il regardait souvent la télévision et des courses d'automobiles. Donc, on pouvait très bien les mettre ensemble. Seulement, est-ce vraiment une autobiographie puisque les deux faits sont vrais, mais que je n'ai pas le souvenir que ça se passe en même temps? (Lefèvre, 2008: 94)

Indeed, when recounting in Chapter 3 the physical abuse she was subjected to as a child, Goblet uses "cross cutting", a narrative technique that she borrows from cinematic realisation, which is a montage of two narrative strands presented on the upper and lower halves of the page respectively. As the eye of the reader captures and deciphers both narrative strands at the same time when absorbing the content of the page, what is represented in the lower half of the page automatically impacts on the reading and reception of the upper half, with both strands completing each other in terms of tone and atmosphere. The upper half of the page presents the child's struggle with boredom and her attempt to entertain herself in the kitchen where her mother desperately tries to work quietly. The lower part of the page shows the father oblivious, focussing on watching the 1973 Dutch Grand Prix during which English driver Roger Williamson died. The montage of the two narrative strands leads the reader's eye to capture both the gesture of desperation of the F1 driver, expressing his despair at his own inability to help Williamsen to escape the burning race car, and the daughter with her tiny fists raised up in the air as she is attached to a beam in the attic. Juxtaposed with the depiction of the shocking abuse – regardless of whether he was even in the house at the same time as the abusive episodes took place – the inaction of the father becomes the depiction of another form of violence.

Time in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* is vague, and the multiplicity of conflicting accounts make its representation all the more fluid and ambiguous. Writing about Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*, Deleuze muses:

> Peut-être est-ce cela, le temps : l'existence ultime de portions de tailles et de formes différentes qui ne se laissent pas adapter, qui ne se développent pas au même rythme, et que le fleuve du style n'entraîne pas à la même vitesse
> (Deleuze, 1988 [1964]: 136-137).

It is as though the avatars in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* inhabited different times and sometimes met each other when their respective temporal streams are juxtaposed, assembled and actualised. These encounters are difficult, as the difference in experiencing time is one of the many sources of tensions between the individuals. After looking at temporal disjunctions in this section, I will now explore further Goblet's depiction of strained relationships, as I examine in the next section how the representation of space participates in the de-familiarisation of a sense of home.

Space / Home

In this section, I am interested in how autobiocomics defamiliarise the domestic space, notably by focussing on social interactions. I look at how familial roles are performed in the private space, as domestic space becomes a stage for family drama, a theatre for performances that highlight the construction of the private space, and raise questions about the ideology of privacy.

The domestic space is, by definition, separate from 'outside'. Domestic space's practices are identified as different from those 'outside'. This distinction mirrors the private/public dichotomy. Are those boundaries imaginary? How do autobiocomics question these boundaries? How do they problematise the separation between private and public? *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* is about the private sphere. Goblet plays with the assumption that the domestic space is shaped by forces that are imposed from 'outside', by showing within the pages of *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* that the book was produced within a private space: Goblet's studio is inside

her house. This *mise en abyme* is one of the many ways Goblet problematises the notion of "home".

Goblet's autobiocomics *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* depicts the domestic space and presents various forms of interaction that take place in it, ranging from forced exchanges between estranged family members during family gatherings, to intimate moments. In a house, the practical organisation of the interior maps social interaction. The domestic space participates in the formation of the subjectivities of those who inhabit it. When enclosed in the comics grid, the representation of the household interior may also become a metaphor for the psyche. As Groensteen (2015) building on Baetens and Lefèvre (1993: 26-36) reminds us, there is no "hors-champs" in comics. Everything is framed inside panels, exposed to the reader and placed under scrutiny. The notion of private as something hidden from view is negated.

Wivel identifies in Goblet's text a sense of displacement, which is hinted at through the title and is central to the book. Wivel underscores Goblet's ability to displace emotions through metaphors and transpositions, concealment and disclosure (2011). The nature of Wivel's piece (a short web-blog post) does not allow for further analysis, which I want to conduct here, by examining the sense of displacement through the de-familiarisation of a sense of home, and how it is conveyed formally. This is a key aspect of *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, as this de-familiarisation directs the reader's attention towards the different sets of relations and how they are played out both visually and in terms of the narrative.

Home is a stifling place in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* and the place of abusive behaviours in various states of exposure/concealment – either in the living room in the presence of the extended family in Chapter 1 or hidden from view in the attic in Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, the prospect of entering the house is an uneasy one; although no abusive behaviour actually takes place in the house of his parents, Guy Marc stalls and postpones his entrance as much as he can. By contrast, the scenes set outside the house are filled with blissful figures of parenthood, with Dominique's mum magically fixing the holes in her tights (introduction) and Guy Marc gloating about his cooking skills in a supermarket, posing as the perfect single dad under Dominique's enamoured gaze (Chapter 2). This is especially ironic considering

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Dominique's violent shutdown of her father as he was making similar claims for making his daughter "tartines", in a sequence from Chapter 1 which I will examine later in this chapter.

In his analysis of *A la recherche du Temps Perdu* (Proust, 1971), Samuel Beckett sees in Proust's depiction of banality and habit evidence of their roles in the individual's alienation. Habit, for Beckett, is a pact signed between individuals and their surroundings. Habit is perceived as providing safety (Beckett, 1990: 32), as comforting and reassuring (Beckett, 1990: 33). Yet, Beckett argues that habit – this "normalité rassurante" – also induces a paralysis of our attention and functions as an anaesthetic for our perception (Beckett, 1990: 30-31): "L'habitude est l'ancre qui enchaîne le chien à son vomi" (Beckett, 1990: 29) – this seems an apt description of the persistence of the family unit, as it explains why its members would strive to prolong it.

The domestic space in Goblet's text is a liminal space; supposedly a space for privacy and comfort, it becomes a site of tensions and anxieties. The family meet in the living room, then enter the closed and potentially heated space of the kitchen, with the initial purpose of engaging in a positive moment of sharing their day and food – and alcoholic drinks. In this enclosed space, they act out ongoing tensions via tense silences and arguing. Yet in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, relationships, however strained and difficult, must be preserved. Hence, Dominique's awkward attempts at repairing her relationship with her estranged father, and her renewed efforts to maintain the false comforting intimacy of her relationship with her unfaithful companion. The image of the preparation of a casserole in the second chapter of *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* seems to embody all these possibilities. Guy Marc asks his mother how his dad is doing; the question is vague but the silent panels hint at its scope. His father is in the living room, breathing in an oxygen mask. Guy Marc's mother starts crying while peeling vegetables, yet claims that things are alright. The imagery of domestic chores seems innocuous in its everyday banality, but equally implies tensions inherent to domestic life, and does so without having to spell them out. It also suggests that the family members strive to face these tensions – on their own terms and with varying degrees of success – no matter what.

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(Figure 30: Goblet, 2007: 43)

The familiar is made unfamiliar. Home becomes a site of discomfort with a growing gap between a lost childhood space and the strained relationships of family members sticking together mostly because of social conventions. But in Goblet's world, there is no alternative option. These tensions cause more malaise than clear

moments of rupture and violence, since such moments affirm individual agency over and against attempts to conform to societal norms and the myth of the perfect family unit. In the following paragraphs, I will examine closely how the visual can exemplify tension, unfulfilled promises and resentment in ways that the purely textual cannot without overplaying these.

The domestic space in Goblet's *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* is a domestic space in fragments. Goblet comes up with a wide variety of panel layouts and makes extensive use of their potential for expressing through collage, montage and assemblage complex temporalities and conflicting narrative strands.

When Goblet uses a regular grid of panels (initially reminiscent of the traditional "gaufrier", with panels of the same width and height arranged on the page), the frames are freehand lines and their thickness is therefore slightly irregular. Moreover, a close inspection of the borders reveals that the distribution of the panels on the page may look regular but none of the panels are ever aligned. All the panels look at odds with each other and this is very disturbing for any reader who is well-versed in comics. Indeed, the lack of alignment between juxtaposed panels may slow down the eye on the page and thus slow down the reading process, and eventually produces an overall impression of instability, through disturbances of the formal conventions of comics so tiny that they are barely noticeable to the trained eye, which makes it all the more difficult to identify the source of this persisting malaise. Goblet's take on a traditional layout of comics panels thus functions in a manner that shares similarities with the idea of the grid ["la grille"] as conceived by Foucault in *Surveiller et Punir*: the grid is a cell-like structure that seems to suggest that everything has a neat, fixed space (Foucault, 1975: 227). However, in reality, the grid is subject to its own micro-shifts, which in turn allow the possibility for larger transformations.

Slight but significant disturbances in the traditional layout start to be more noticeable in Chapter 1 of *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*. However, the dis-alignment of the panels started from the very beginning, but the narrowness of the pastel-pink

lines that frame each panel in this opening section makes it less noticeable. The opening pages focussing on a charming scene between Dominique as a young child and her mother who props her up after she fell, dries her tears and "magically" fixes the holes in her tights, are very sweet and the slight formal disturbances in the odd framing devices seem to suggest the fragility and whimsicality of childhood and add some lightness and freshness to the scene. However, the caring mother of the opening scene, framed in thin, frail pink lines, is also the abusive mother who ties her daughter up in Chapter 3. These formal whimsicalities in the opening scene appear a lot more sinister on second reading.

However, the abuse scene does not necessarily negate or contest the potential 'playfulness' of the early scene – the formal disturbances do not imply a lack of genuine warmth on the part of the mother. Instead, with her deliberate use of frames, Goblet may be using the space of the comics to show how happy childhood memories become tainted by experiences of adolescence and adulthood so that a retrospective reading of such events become unavoidable. This exposes the whole problem of authenticity in autobiographical accounts, since there is no 'authentic' experience. There is only an inflected memory of an experience.

In the next section, I turn to Goblet's representation of the violence of language through lies and deception, before investigating the various physical forms of abusive relationships and with them, authoritative discourses and counter-narratives.

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(Figure 31: Goblet, 2007: 10)

Authentic Li(v)es

The title *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* raises the question of faithfulness. This is ironic considering the very nature of comics, since the comics reader is required to "faire semblant" that there is a continuity between the panels. Similarly, the comics reader "fait semblant" to hear the sounds, particularly when onomatopoeia are absent from the text, such as in the scene in Chapter 2 when the sound of a plane above Guy Marc is only suggested through the mere presence of the plane that close to the ground, in a synaesthesic experience in which the sound is being visualised/seen rather than read (Mao, 2009). The book finds its title from the accusatory exclamation by the stepmother "FAIRE SEMBLANT C'EST MENTIR!" By re-appropriating it as a title, Goblet reclaims the verbal abuse which could therefore be read some sort of autobiographical pact. With the question of faithfulness, the title asserts the autobiographical project as mimesis of the real only to immediately question this assumption, as Goblet's avatar disputes the legitimacy of this statement in the narrative: does that suggest a negation of the proposed autobiographical pact, then? Is it a form of complicity or aggression towards the reader? Does Goblet invites the reader "de se méfier de l'illusion autobiographique", as Mao suggests? The phrase "Faire Semblant" conjures up notions of "jeu de fiction". Moreover, "faire semblant" in French, beyond what "to pretend" conveys, also refers to an action, thus clearly linking truth-telling with behaviour, truth and the body. "Faire semblant" is a performative act. This is the notion that gives *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* its running theme and thread, and the most blatant link across all five sections that compose the book.

Lying takes many forms in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* and the individuals have different reasons to do so. From the mother who wants to make her child stop crying over some torn tights in the opening scene, to the same mother who ties the same daughter up for being too loud and disruptive when stuck at home in a rainy afternoon in Chapter 3, and from the now older father who declares in Chapter 1 in a loud yet unsteady voice – as suggested by the uneven font –that "JE VOUS AI TOUT DONNE, J'AI TOUT FAIT POUR VOUS", while in Chapter 3, his younger self is depicted

watching the F1 race on TV and stating out loud how he could have saved the unfortunate driver, while ignoring the abuse that his wife is inflicting on their young daughter as he speaks. The lies seem to be absent from the last section, Pollmann claims. Or are they? Chapter 4 contains at least one last lie: after we get to see Guy Marc releasing an injured bird and the bird flies away, Guy Marc calls Dom and tells her that the bird is hurt and would like her to come and see it as he does not know what to do with it. No answer. So he backtracks: "… pour ne pas te mentir…" and goes on to rectify his tale "il vient de s'envoler" followed by a final confession "… j'ai terriblement envie de te voir !" The exchange over the phone between Dominique and her estranged partner sound like everything she hopes for. But is he truthful and honest this time? The book ends before providing any semblance of an answer.

"Notre passé charrie, comme vrai, des souvenirs où se mêle, le plus souvent, ce qui nous a été rapporté bien des fois (les histoires récurrentes des parents). Comment a-t-on fini par être en accord avec cela ?" (Guy Marc Hinant in the postface) The first lie that opens the book is an act of kindness and compassion, as Dom's mom resorts to tricking her daughter into thinking she magically fixed the holes in her tights when she only turned them the other way round. The deceptive trick dries her daughter's tears. Later in the narrative, another lie is told for a similar effect: as Dom's daughter has to sleep in the vacant bedroom of Guy Marc's teenage son, she is afraid of a snarly head painted on the wall. Following her mother's advice, she finds salvation in pretending that the graffiti has a different meaning, a different function, so it can become less intimidating and less threatening. This graffiti stands as a synecdoche for estrangement and alienation within the family space; it needs to be re-interpreted so it becomes familiar and eventually participates in the construct of a safe home.

"Mensonges pieux" may be soothing, but in Chapter 2, the lies we tell ourselves and each other for comfort take a darker turn, as Guy Marc's simple question to his mother about his father's health "Comment va-t-il ?" is met with an elusive "ça va…" while tears are running down her cheeks. The visual elements of the panel contrast with the platitude of her reply, thus operating in a contrapuntal relation with the text. Here, "faire semblant" is a way to protect ourselves and each

other, but one that is eventually unhelpful and needs to stop. A similar movement characterises a heated exchange in the same chapter, this time between Dom and Guy Marc as they argue over his secretive behaviour: "ça me saoûle ces histoires de jalousie. Si encore c'était justifié !!" "très bien, si tu ne le sais pas, moi je le sais… Ne faisons plus semblant !" This call for the ontological harmony between the individual's words (*logos*) and her or his deeds (*erga*), with words spoken freely according what the individual thinks and vice versa, recalls the pact proposed by the title. The phrase "Faire semblant c'est mentir" implies what "mentir" is not and thus provides a definition "en creux" of what truth-telling is. Sartre provides a useful definition of what lying entails: "The ideal description of the liar could be a cynical consciousness, affirming truth within itself, denying it in his words, and denying that negation as such" (Sartre, 1956: 87) By contrast, Sartrean "mauvaise foi" "est un certain art de former des concepts contradictoires, c'est-à-dire qui unissent en eux une idée et la négation de cette idée". For Sartre, the difference between lying and "bad faith" is the intent to deceive. Yet the enterprise of truth-telling is a set-up for failure if taken too strictly, and in this regard, can be approached in terms of "qui perd gagne" philosophy (as conceived by Philippe Knee, 1993) where failure is seen as creative, and consenting to this failure as a victory of possibilities and creative freedom (Knee, 1993: 212). *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* invites us to think the family as a performance which relies on either active lying or "mauvaise foi", depending on the circumstances, to sustain itself as a unit. When things fall apart, when the family unit fails, it is then perhaps that the real potential for family – as a set of complex relations and responsibilities towards one another – emerges.

There is a small frontier however between the lies we tell ourselves and what we hold as the truth. Does Dom's father believe the tales that he tells others? Constructing his own tale, the father endlessly repeats his own truths: "mon voisin m'adore", "mon voisin de pallier m'adore", then, talking about the firefighter brigade "tout le monde m'adorait là-bas." The assertion framed by two panels each containing contradictory statements about his rank. These statements not only raise questions of intent: "faire semblant" is a performative act directed towards an audience, which places the performance under the gaze of spectators emitting a

judgement. In the Foucauldian process of "subjectivation", diverse elements are brought together and arranged into an overarching narrative. The individual then subjects her/himself to the gaze of the other and articulates her or his identity in terms of her or his relationship to them (Foucault, 1997: 216). As we have seen in our opening chapter, Foucault sees "truth" as a convenient fiction, as a system producing and regulating statements (Foucault, 1980: 133). Truth, for Foucault, is a discursive ruse. Foucault stresses its multiplicity and defines it as a game of truth, with different truths and different ways of expressing them (Foucault, 1980: 15, 17). A strikingly similar conception of truth is expressed and explored in *Faire Senblant C'est Mentir*.

> Réaliser une sorte de tissu d'histoire, ça me passionne beaucoup plus que de raconter la vérité. (Lefèvre, 2008: 92)

The father presents himself as a victim and by denying Dom any possibilities of expressing herself, firstly by snapping at her and cutting her, secondly by mocking and stigmatising a phrase she uses and thus defusing any attempt at reflecting on the content of her discourse, and thirdly by repeating himself *ad nauseam* (Poudevigne, 2016: 26) filling both the time of their reunion and the space of the panels to ensure that she cannot retort. "In Goblet's production, the words are always strongly visualised." (Baetens, 2011: 82). Examining the "mise en son", Mao notes that the scenes featuring Goblet's memories of her father are particularly noisy. (Mao, 2009) Poudevigne notes the importance given to levels of speech and registers, which the various interlocutors calling each other out on their respective uses of regionalism and malapropisms; he makes a link between "mal parler" and "mal *se* parler" (Poudevigne, 2016: 20-21 – emphasis in original). Punctuation goes over and beyond the frame of the speech balloons (Poudevigne, 2016: 21). Goblet's very rare thought balloons contain violent thoughts (Poudevigne, 2016: 29) that may be kept within, but paradoxically also appear on the page. The dark borders of the panels when the father gives his circular speech on how he was abandoned by both his wife and daughter produce an effect of confinement, with the narrow frames reflecting narrow judgement as the father stands firm, surrounded with the transcript of his own inane speech (Poudevigne, 2016: 25). Facing the "monumentalité graphique [de la parole du père]" (Poudevigne, 2016: 27), Dom remains silent. Yet alternative discourse is suggested as the author Dominique Goblet comments on the situation

via the visual leitmotiv of the hand pouring glasses of wine, "une corruption silencieuse du discours paternel, qui à mesure que le verre s'emplit, inversement se vide de toute crédibilité" (Poudevigne, 2016: 30).

In Chapter 1, the father challenges the very possibility of any counter-narrative: as "C'est comme ça et pas autrement" is repeated twice at the end of Chapter 1, the words of the father constitute the definite version which cancels any alternative discourse. "C'est pas vrai peut-être?" "Et j'ai toujours été un bon père !". In the next panel, next to the free floating words of the father, there is a spiral on Dominique's head, a classic Franco-Belgian bande dessinée visual tool to express dizziness and confusion. Through these small yet significant markers, "Dominique Goblet, réduite au silence en tant que personnage, retrouve la parole en tant qu'auteure" (Poudevigne, 2016: 20). When Dom finally replies, it is with bitterness: "En vérité… un père remarquable" – as hinted at through the visual of her arms crossed on her chest, as she sits rigidly on her seat. Her sarcasm is not perceived or rather ignored by her father, who continues: "C'est quand même grâce à moi que vous aviez tous les jours quelque chose dans votre assiette !" The following panel is interesting as it features two sets of lines, both free from any speech balloon and unattributed. "C'est vrai ou c'est pas vrai ? // Eh ben ça c'est vrai !" As they occupied two distinct spaces in the same panel, they are clearly separated, but does this separation mean two different interlocutors or simply a temporal break between the utterance of the two? Either the second utterance is Dom's as she is ironically conceding to her father – a reply that echoes their previous confrontation over the minimum requirements of fatherhood – or her father is uttering the answers to his own rhetorical questions.

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(Figure 32: Goblet, 2007: 25)

I continue my examination of the depiction of the failed family unit in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* by looking at the visual ways in which power relations are contested and challenged in this sequence of panels. Meesters notes that the use of stains participates in the "ageing" of the pictures in this sequence of panels. Indeed, the page appears suddenly old, as Goblet interrupts the graphic style of the depiction of their daily life in order to insert drawings of her father and herself as past representations of medieval Christian icons. As the father is depicted as what Meesters describes as a Virgin (Meesters, 2010: 221), a Madonna according to Wivel (2011), or rather as a Roman Saint, sporting an aureole and with a child balanced on his lap. The modern-day setting disappears from the frame and the frameless background now turns into abstract blots of oil and other stains. The surface recording the tale told by the father suddenly appears old, making the tale itself belongs to history. The font of the father's speech also changes into another font, reminiscent of medieval illuminations, in visually striking contrast with the disorderly font of his speech balloons in the previous panels. The visual depiction of his discourse clearly reframes his discourse as the "Law" of the Father: what the Father says is Holy Scripture.

But it could also be interpreted as a clue not only regarding the creative process but also a *mise en abyme* of the process: as Goblet lets the reader see a glimpse of the painting process, the frameless background also features what appears to be pieces of tape that hold the panels together on the page. This hint at the materiality of the page – another instance where the graphiation becomes conspicuous – is significant as it suggests that the father is constructing his own image through his tale: the father attempts at projecting an idealised version of himself in his daughter's eyes. The whole page is "fabricated" and thus invites the reader to question and doubt the Word of the Father. This parallel operates on different levels: the relation between the artist and her subject matter, superimposed over the relation between the father and his own account, the image he has of himself and the one that he is attempting to project. The tape implies the paternal attempt at patching things up with a short-term and precarious fix, and the fragility of the structure, holding together the page hints at the very possibility for everything to fall

apart. This detail in the background tarnishes the validity of the father's claims and the views he expresses about what sort of a father he is. Moreover, the stains left around him also suggest the excesses of wine, which undermines the reliability of his account. The father gives himself a role (Mao, 2009). But the definition of fatherhood proposed by the father is indeed dismantled by his daughter, as she reminds him that his small acts of kindness, "les petites tartines du matin", are a minimum parental responsibility; the Law of the Father – his claim to the throne as best dad – is threatened by the law. The father is unsuccessful at constructing his image as a saint, as his authority is questioned and eventually crushed.

Meesters notes that in the panels depicting the abuse in the attic, there is an unequalled level of detail in the drawings of the objects in the attic (a chair, a chest, a basket, a wheel, etc. as well as detailed surrounding: the flooring, the beams, the brick walls, etc) (Meesters, 2010: 223-224). This may be, as Meesters suggests, a way to slow down the reading process so the reader can linger on this climactic scene and take it all in (Meesters, 2010: 224). The mother is distraught at her daughter's transgressive exploration of the trunk in the attic, Miller points out and correctly notes that the trunk appears in Chapter 1 in the father's living room. The adult Dominique claims that she has never seen that trunk before, which, for Miller, may be the sign of a repressed memory (Miller, 2015: 391; 396). This claim mirrors the reader's experience, as the representation of the trunk in Chapter 1 marks the reader's first encounter with it. The trunk then 're-appears' in the punishment scene, a flashback to childhood. The detailed drawing of the trunk also hints at the considerable amount of time young Dominique was left to stare at it (fig. 33). Moreover, during the depiction of the traumatic experience, there is a textual hint that this is only one of more instances, as the toddler cries out "bouhou ! pas le grenier..." thus implying her full knowledge of what she is going to endure.

When Dominique visits her father after four years of estrangement, it is suggested that she finally tell her father about the traumatic abuse she received at the hands of her mother in the attic. The father's response is shocking, though not entirely unexpected. "Si j'avais su ça ! je te jure… ça, ça j'aime autant te dire, j'aurais jamais laissé faire ça !", he repeats, echoing the tale he repeatedly told about his own

skills as a fireman and abilities to rescue the F1 racing driver from his burning car. This is yet another instance of lying to oneself and others, this time with the father – the irony being that his own speech balloons were juxtaposed with the screaming of Dominique as a child and the transcription of her mother abusively shouting at her, both scripts roaming freely from any frame or speech balloons of any sort, instead invading the room where the father was and revolving around him, suggesting both their spatial nearness, their simultaneity and the father's lack of reaction to them.

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(Figure 33: Goblet, 2007: 111)

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(Figure 34: Goblet, 2007: 107)

Either oblivious or deliberately withdrawn, Dominique's father did nothing to prevent the abuse from taking place. He brushes over his blissful ignorance of what was happening in the room next door by maintaining the image of his own fatherhood, through the repeated production of discourse in which he constructs himself as having the necessary skills and virile power both as a patriarch and a fireman to help and rescue the members of his own family unit. The father attempts to reframe the events as ones that inevitably took place when he was not there, as the very idea that he might have been there conflicts with his identity both as a patriarch and as a fireman. His version conflicts with and contradicts Dominique's in all their exchanges. Yet Dominique's account is one of many proposed in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, without providing a definite, final account of the events – a position which she succinctly summarises as follows: "petit à petit, je me suis rendu compte que ce n'était pas l'événement qu'il fallait raconter, mais plutôt le lien aux gens, et surtout l'ambiguïté." (Lefèvre, 2008: 92-93). The author explains her approach:

> Ce qui m'intéresse dans l'autobiographie, c'est avant tout la manière dont on peut mettre en lien certaines petites parties de notre vie, qui ne sont vraies qu'à travers notre propre discours, puisque le même événement est généralement vécu de façon totalement différente par les autres protagonistes. [...] L'autobiographie n'est qu'un matériau, qui est proche de nous et dont on peut se servir pour raconter quelque chose avec l'avantage d'aller parfois loin dans la précision, le découpage, !'analyse des relations humaines. Ce qui m'intéresse le plus, c'est le lien qui existe entre deux choses vraies, la manière de les mettre en relation. (Lefèvre, 2008: 92)

The text erases all certainty as to who was truly there and when it all happened. The multiplicity of accounts echo the multi-faceted personalities. The exchange in which the father denies knowledge of any abuse taking place under his roof appears as a distorted reflection of another scene in which the father shows genuine concerns over Dom's distress at Guy Marc's departure. The text is constructed around repetitions with variations, with the doubling of conflicting narratives threatening the family unit.

Liminal Bodies

There is an expressive quality in the deformity of the bodies, and the evolution of these deformities seems to reflect degrees of anger. Indeed, the representation of bodies in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* evolves from one panel to the next depending on the emotions that seize them. The bodies are unstable and through encounters and difficult exchanges between subjects, the subjects respond to each other and their bodies change accordingly in shape – they grow bigger, elongate, etc. – as well as in place – they almost disappear into tiny corners of the panels or are expelled from panels, etc. The changes in the proportions of the human figures in that sequence of panels may be linked with the lack of control which, for Meesters, characterises the scene represented and the emotions portrayed: "l'atmosphère de la scène est complètement remplie de sentiments primaires, non filtrés, tout comme chez un enfant qui n'a pas appris à gérer ses émotions" (Meesters, 2010: 222). Meesters notes the changing proportions of the figures and their cartoonish results: the father's moustache, his belly, etc. (Meesters, 2010: 225). Taking this passing remark further, I argue that these signs of hyper-masculinity contribute to the construction of the father as a patriarch, in striking contrast with the liminal female bodies: the anorexic stepmother, Dom's body weakened by migraines and psychosomatic fever, and the spectral ex-girlfriend. Goblet's representation of her father plays with a lot of clichés: she uses creative forms to convey a hyperbolic, ineffectual patriarch whose failure to act is deemed as reprehensible as her mother's abuse. She offers a critique of patriarchal violence via passivity. Goblet visually constructs her father's role as a patriarch, only to provide a counter-narrative to his claims, thus using the form of comics to open up spaces of resistance and emancipation from dominant and manipulative discourses.

In sharp contrast with the ever-changing bodies of the other subjects, the striking immutability of Cécile's face must be noted. Meesters sees in the graphic style used to depict Cécile's face a heritage from art brut and art naïf (Meesters, 2010: 222) ("Art Brut" coined by Bernard Dubuffet refers to non-professionals working outside aesthetic norms). Dominique's stepmother first appears to be immutable and stuck with one facial non-expression – which is not even her own, since it is a direct

inter-pictorial reference to "The Scream" by Munch. Writing about another pictorial "scream", Deleuze writes in *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation* that the scream is dual as it captures or detects invisible forces, both the perceptible force of the scream and the imperceptible force that makes one scream (Deleuze, 2002: 60). The blank face of the stepmother is effectively a mirror, a surface, a blank canvas on which is inscribed the reaction that she stirs in people. Rather than being given individual traits, the stepmother becomes an icon signifying what she inspires in people around her: namely anxieties, abjection, repulsion and fright. Soon, it is her whole body which turns into the Munchian figure of "The Scream": her fingers become exponentially longer and creepier, her eyes change into spiralling black holes, etc. as Cécile becomes a threat for Nikita's safety and Dominique's own sanity. These encounters are transformative, but they are as formative as they are de-formative: the bodies are unstable and they become surfaces of expression reflecting the subjects' anxieties and fractures. The distortions of the body shape, changing from one panel to the next, denote the inscription of power relations and their effects on the body as well as the reaction of the subject. But the subjects in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* are multi-layered and the fractures within the subjects and on their bodies are neither complete nor definitive.

"Ma mère a l'habitude de disparaître de ma vie, et puis de réapparaître." (Lefèvre, 2008: 92) Dom's mother may be completely absent from the scenes of Dom's adult life, but her absence remains the main topic of conversation and point of contention, thus paradoxically ever-present. The stepmother is not the only liminal figure in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*. In a street encounter with an old friend, the latter tries to tell Dom about her father as she has not seen him for four years, but his update is quite vague: "… en fait, … il semblerait qu'il soit mort !" In shock, Dom immediately reacts with a linguistic joust: "Quoi ? Mais qu'est-ce que tu racontes ?? On ne semble pas être mort, on est mort, ou on est pas mort, mais on ne peut pas 'sembler' mort…"

Yet at this moment of the narrative, it is impossible to know for sure: Schrödinger's Dad is stuck in a liminal state. This scene echoes the autobiographical premise of Goblet's fictional tale *Souvenir d'une Journée Parfaite* (2002), whose title

contains a syntactical ambiguity: was the "journée" that she remembers "parfaite" indeed, or is it how she remembers it? The book is inspired by an episode in Goblet's life, during a visit to the cemetery. She failed to identify her father's stele, and as the cemetery was closing, she found herself putting the flowers on a random tomb: that symbolic gesture rendered meaningless, with one body worth another, confirms the liminal status of her father.

By being here and not here at the same time, the spectre defies the rules of space as we know them, as well as the rules of time. The spectre in Chapter 2 of *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* is a ghost of a past that may not be so distant, of a former relationship that may still be ongoing. Its first appearance takes place while Dom and Guy Marc are on a date. Guy Marc is unnamed and Dom's longer hair hints at a time period different from the previous chapter. While Dom is describing a supernatural encounter that her father had when he was young, a spectral figure stands next to the couple's table. Dom is oblivious to the presence of the female form, which is ironic given the nature of her story. Absent-minded Guy Marc seems less than enthralled by her story and non-responsive to Dom's affectionate gestures (her hand caressing his arms, hands and shoulder over various panels): the reader is thus invited to interpret the ghost as a visual materialisation of Guy Marc's thoughts. This interpretation is further consolidated by the fact that the chapter is mostly told from Guy Marc's point of view.

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(Figure 35: Goblet, 2007: 20)

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(Figure 36: Goblet, 2007: 35)

In contrast with the linear figures of Guy Marc and Dom in the same panels, the ghost of the ex-girlfriend is erased from the page. But it is precisely this erasure that inscribes the ghost in its surrounding and in the narrative, blending in while at the same time being erased from its surroundings. Reinforcing its liminal aspect, the spectre in this scene is the product of two opposite artistic processes, namely erasure and filling-in. The spectre results both from the erasure of the pencilled-filled background and the addition of traces of pale blue paint that are barely noticeable at first, but contrasting enough with the black-and-white pencil sketching to make the spectre eerily stand-out of the flat surface of the page. Derrida sees in the spectre some "structural openness" that cannot be articulated: the ghost escapes formulation and representation but it is a key to the narrative as it "gestures towards a still unformulated future" (Davis, 2005: 379). As the ghost's presence becomes overwhelming on the grid of panels, the frames disappear and the panels are replaced with full-page etching of the ghostly presence surrounded with furious cross-hatching.

These contrasts with the following apparitions of the spectre: towards the end of the chapter, the ghost is drawn in the same linear art used for Dom and Guy Marc, only without any shading or colour-filling. The spectre's own liminality fades as its figure becomes more and more detailed. Put under erasure, the ghost becomes a trace of a simulacrum of a presence (Derrida, 1973: 156). At this end of Chapter 2, the spectre is less the expression of Guy Marc's sole concern, and more the materialisation of Dom's imagining of the presence of the ghost. The silent figure of the ghost becomes traces of the author's own fears which are "embodied" and "materialised" in the absence/presence of the ghost.

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(Figure 37: Goblet, 2007: 58)

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(Figure 38: Goblet, 2007: 61)

From a vague presence/absence of a nameless acquaintance who is not buried in the past, to a real, though disembodied, voice over the phone (therefore heard in the room yet not physically on the same plan as the couple), the spectre of the ex-girlfriend disrupts domestic and intimate moments of the couple,

metaphorically and visually stands between them and eventually triggers their separation. Pushed apart by a disembodied voice, it is only fair that Guy Marc and Dom are reunited in a dialogue in which their disembodied, unframed and anonymised voices are free-floating yet very easy to attribute without ambiguity.

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(Figure 39: Goblet, 2007: 132)

In order to discuss the significance of this last sequence of panels, the depiction of a phone conversation that ends *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*, I make a brief comparison with the disembodied voice over the phone in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The phone not only helps communicating despite a physical distance, but it also changes the relation of the individuals with time and space. The narrator of *La Recherche* complains that the phone is now taken for granted. Proust writes about the miracles of the phone as a supernatural instrument, and stresses his own wish to give the phone back its supernatural properties that are lost as the phone turns into a mere habit as it is used for everyday tasks (Proust, 1954 (III): 32). *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* is first published at a time when texting is making communication over the phone obsolete, and thus conversations over the phone are slowly regaining their significance due to their increasing rarity. The emotional weight of the reunion over the phone is expressed via the visual leitmotiv of the electric cables conveying the conversation from one house to the other. This imagery stresses the materiality that makes the conversation possible, at odd with the disembodied voices. This interweaving of the cables hint at mixed signals and echo the previous interrogation around lies and "mauvaise foi".

As the narrator of *La Recherche* calls his grandmother, he cannot help noticing that her voice sounds different over the phone. At first, Proust fails to recognise his grandmother's voice, even though he knows that it is her on the other end of the line. Similarly, the uneven fonts in Faire Semblant C'est Mentir suggest not only the emotion that make the voice falter, but also point at the fact that the phone deforms and masks the voice. It may provoke estrangement, but is also a revealing instrument. When the narrator of *La Recherche* calls his grandmother, he rediscovers her voice, as if hearing it for the first time in his life. "Vue sans le masque du visage" (Proust, 1954 (II): 135), the voice suddenly lets out emotions that were unsuspected until then, emotions that would not be conveyed otherwise (Proust, 1954 (II): 135; 140). "[D]e même qu'on découvre au téléphone les inflexions d'une voix qu'on ne distingue pas tant qu'elle n'est pas dissociée d'un visage où on objective son expression"(Proust, 1954 (III): 528). The uneven fonts in Faire Semblant C'est Mentir raise the question of the visual transcription of the conversation. The voices change during the

conversation, and the font transcribes intonations, the inflexions of the voice dissociated from the face, from the facial expressions – but also revealing the sound of the voice by freeing it from the grid of the face.

The conversation contains the promise of reuniting, but as it takes place over the phone, the text seems to end with the ultimate form of bodily alienation and estrangement. Both interlocutors are turned into disembodied voices. The disembodied voice as represented in the comics grid is a significant trope, as the non-representation of the avatars participates in the hauntings and doublings that give the text its thematic unity. The family unit is not threatened by such hauntings and doublings: in fact, it relies on them for its existence and continuation, even when these seem to render the family unstable. While *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* clearly posits the unity of the family as myth, the text also suggests that the survival of the family unit as concept depends upon its fragility.

Conclusion

It would have been tempting to read *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* as raw exposure (a notion proposed by Hatfield (2005) and already discussed in Chapter 2) as the narrative proposes "raw" fragments that are seemingly "unmediated" and free from the frame of a textual narrator, instead of a linear narrative arranged in chronological order with a narrative voice-over. Yet this is a fallacy, as traces of the narrator can be perceived throughout the disposition of layers. *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* revolves around traumatic experiences which take various forms and that are expressed through different techniques: the collapsing of the timeline with the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated events, and liminalities (the spectral girlfriend, ophthalmic migraines, the liminal status of the father, silences and disembodied dialogues, etc.).

Faire Semblant C'est Mentir opens spaces for exploring identity as not homogenous and characterised instead by fluidity, hybridity, alterity and dissemination. This multiplicity of the subject, rather than being a confrontation of antinomic entities, is brought closer to textual manifestations that are never

constituted or finalised, but always in becoming and in un-becoming. *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* concentrates on the reported discourse of the subjects; it presents each subject's own account and allows for connections and contradictions to appear. The past is neither restored nor reconstructed. Rather, the past escapes representation and the autobiographical project in *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* is closer to an attempt to seize the past as an ever-present that is a-temporal, focussing less on the events than on their ramifications and the repercussions of their evocations on the subjects.

The family unit always seems in the process of being challenged but is never completely dissolving: *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* represents Dom's difficulties of maintaining civil relations with her father and stepmother. Similarly, it explores Dom's difficulties of preserving cordial relations with her estranged partner, yet separation is never really an option. This suggests Goblet's acceptance that no one can never really get rid of the idea of family or family relations. She does not simply critique the idealised family unit, but also presents the family unit as a performance which relies on either active lying or 'mauvaise foi' – depending on the circumstances – to sustain itself. Yet, when the family unit fails and risks falling apart, then the real potential for family – as a set of complex relations and responsibilities towards one another – emerges. She suggests – as the father in her narrative does – that the idea of family relations might be used creatively to produce a different narrative or set of images. Goblet creates a narrative space that uses ambiguity in a very deliberate way to contest established readings of family relationships. Her formal variations in the traditional layout of panels mirror suggest the imperceptible tensions within her family unit. The uneven space between the panels – the irregular gaps between irregularly framed panels – are metonymic formal devices which, I argue, signify the disconnections between the members of Dominique's family. These disconnections contribute to the process of de-familiarisation of the family sphere throughout the book and its approach to the representation of intimacy and alienation in the household.

Faire Semblant C'est Mentir demonstrates conflicting self-narratives. The exposure of such narratives is important to the critique of the family unit, which

survives in broken form via our ability to produce different narratives about events that we shared. This ability allows for a form of agency at the very point one feels most abandoned or helpless – and perhaps this goes some way to rehabilitating the father and understanding his self-deception which enables him to survive the terrible guilt of failing his daughter. The ramifications and repercussions may also open up creative potentialities which are never exhausted but which go some way in ensuring the continuation of social relations and our unshakeable faith in them despite being repeatedly let down by others – thus echoing Beckett's maxim from *Worstward Ho*, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (Beckett, 1992: 101).

As Goblet reimagines the family unit as disembodied, ghostly fragments rather than the family tree, neat domestic space, or linear history, she shows the creative possibilities that emerge out of its failure both in the fictional self-narratives of the fictional father figure, and the comic-object itself. Goblet makes a strong case for how autobiocomics can represent tensions of family life and other relationships via the use of visual framing techniques. The reader is given the onus to articulate the depth and seriousness of such tensions and alienation via visual markers that may relate to her/his own experiences.

What is so effective about how Goblet constructs different ideological spaces visually and textually is that the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' reproduces established conventions about how the family space is performed to the outside world as a perfect, well-managed unit compared to inside where the tensions and violence plays out. I will pursue this discussion on the notion of inside and outside spaces in the next chapter, as I examine the collapsing of inside/outside spaces in *Panthers in the Hole*. This discussion will help me to discuss further how autobiocomics use framing techniques to expose or challenge notions of inside/outside which define society and regulate relationships – or power relations – between individuals.

Chapter 6
Bruno and David Cénou's
Panthers in the Hole

In the previous chapter, the textual analysis of Goblet's *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* enabled me to examine different techniques through which comics are able to express what may otherwise escape representation in text, namely unspoken resentments. Comics evoke the 'unspoken' in ways that cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts – i.e. the text and image components – but which depend upon the framing of these elements and, indeed, the use of the frame itself. This is key to my examination of the comics's resources for representing and expressing the web of relations between individuals and their fluid nature.

In this chapter, I will further investigate how comics overcome the inability of the protagonists to speak, this time in a situation where the speakers are physically incapacitated. *Panthers in the Hole* (2014) is a biographical account by French comics artist David Cénou and writer Bruno Cénou, which focusses on the Angola Three, Robert King, Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace. *Panthers in the Hole* interweaves the life narratives of these former prison inmates as they were put in solitary confinement in Louisiana State Penitentiary, a.k.a. Angola Prison, after the 1972 fatal stabbing of corrections officer guard Brent Miller. Robert H. King spent 32 years in prison, 29 years of them in solitary confinement for the murder of a prison warden in Angola, even though he was 250 km away at the time of the murder. He was released in 2001. Herman Wallace was diagnosed with liver cancer in June 2013 and released from solitary confinement in July 2013, after 41 years in solitary confinement. Released in October 2013, he died three days later, aged 71. Albert Woodfox was released on February 19, 2016 after 44 years in solitary confinement. David Cénou himself went to prison, and described his experience in his first comics, *Mirador, Tête de Mort* (2013), in which he recounts his involvement as a Front National party member and the chain of events that led him to his two-year incarceration in a French

prison for his alleged involvement in a manslaughter. His own experience of the prison milieu is completely absent from *Panthers in the Hole*, and no parallel is made between the carceral situation in France and that in the USA.

Through the triple biography of the Angola Three, *Panthers in the Hole* documents how the Black Panthers were considered by US government and local authorities as a real political threat to be neutralised by whatever means necessary. *Amnesty International* funded its publication. Its underlying aim is to demonstrate how the space of the prison operates as a means of shutting down political activism, and how shutting it down led to politicisation and activism. While there is an overwhelming amount of prison literature, films, documentaries, etc., the deliberate dehumanisation of inmates is a widespread practice in media and popular culture. Even when the inmates are represented or invited to speak, they become complicit in their own dehumanisation and status as criminals by perpetrating images of criminality. *Panthers in the Hole* gives its protagonists a 'voice' precisely at the moment when the absence of their voice is intrinsic to their existence. *Panthers in the Hole* is about educating the reader more than about the self-transformation of the author or subject since it is less about direct empathy and more about questioning the structures that preclude us from feeling empathy. As I investigate the ways in which *Panthers in the Hole* reframes the prison as a space of resistance, I continue my examination of the processes of self-crafting by focusing here on the links between ethics and the emergence of a political subject.

In *Surveiller et Punir*, a treatise on the rise of incarceration as the preferred method of punishment in modern societies, Foucault investigates how discipline is enforced through the organisation of spaces and complex systems of surveillance that ensure the regulation of people's behaviours and activities (Foucault, 1975). I find Foucault's examination of the prison milieu useful for his identification of the disciplinary processes. However, Foucault falls short of providing concrete examples of resistance. I therefore turn to Michel De Certeau's binary opposition between 'tactics' and 'strategies' in order to approach how *Panthers in the Hole* suggests possibilities for resistance to normative processes. De Certeau's 'strategies' refer to the laws, rules and conventions defined and enforced by institutions. De Certeau

builds on Foucault's notion of 'griddling' [*quadrillage*], which he describes as a strategy isolating excluded individuals caught in the network of 'discipline', and making them available for observation and information (De Certeau, 2002: 47). De Certeau sets 'strategies' against the notion of 'tactics', which refers to clandestine, dispersed, combinatory "creative opportunities" that occur in the gaps – which he defines as conventional habits – of everyday life. For De Certeau, 'tactics' are 'poaching' strategies and mechanisms of power. Therefore, practices of resistance stem from distortions of 'strategies'. Among the procedures and 'ruses' that compose the network of an anti-discipline, De Certeau notably identifies the manipulation of spaces, a silent re-appropriation and renegotiation of disciplinary spaces (De Certeau, 2002: 93). This re-composition finds its illustration in the grid of comics which, with its embedded set of frames, both makes visible and questions the disciplinary processes of 'griddling'.

How may autobiocomics expose the intolerability of the disciplinary processes? De Certeau conceives reading as a participative act; building on Roland Barthes's "La Mort de l'auteur" (1984), he sees the text as flat and empty until the reader puts her/himself into it. According to De Certeau, the reader can also deploy 'poaching' for her or his own purpose. Rancière explores this issue of flatness in his own discussion of art and politics, as for him the flat surface becomes a space of articulations between forms of visibility and intelligibility (Rancière, 2009: 73). As Foucault exposes certain exercises of power to scrutiny, he tries to show them as 'intolerable'. Since the question of representation is key to *Panthers in the Hole*, I need to consider it in relation to the notion of 'intolerability'. Common language is needed in order to convey the intolerable experience of the inmate to the reader. If the language for conveying the experience exists, can this experience be deemed un-representable? In his examination of the notion of un-representability, Jacques Rancière asks how it is possible to convey the intolerability of the prison experience if a common language is used (Rancière, 2009: 126). If this human experience is made intelligible to the reader, then we reach the paradox of turning it into an experience that could be compared, apprehended and thus rationalised: "the assertion of un-representability claims that some things can only be represented in a certain type of

form, by a type of language appropriate to their exceptionality" (Rancière, 2009: 137). Representing the experience inevitably makes it intelligible, which may lead to finding explanations and eventually justifications for it: "this exaggeration itself merely perfects the system of rationalisation it claims to denounce" (Rancière, 2009: 138).

Panthers in the Hole's conditions of possibility, which are predicated on the very impossibility of speaking as experienced by those incarcerated, attest to a tension found in the majority of prison literature and visual representation aimed at informing the public of the experiences of those inside. How do those involved in documenting and presenting life in prison adequately and responsibly represent those inside? Do the authors of non-fictional accounts of prison life such as *Panthers in the Hole* need to have experienced prison life as inmates? What are the limits on attempts by those outside the prison to speak on behalf of those inside? *Carnets de prisons* (2010) is one example of artistic engagement with the space of the prison that embodies these limitations. It is a collection of watercolours, more a sketchbook than a comic *per se*, made by an artist, Noëlle Herrenschmidt, during her visits to various French prisons (Fresnes, Fleury-Mérogis, Osny, Digne, Les Baumettes, Strasbourg, Bapaume, Saint-Martin-de-Ré, Rennes and Clairvaux). However, writing about the margins and writing *from* the margins are hardly the same thing; the author-artist is an observer, only temporarily inside the walls of the prison. While the editorial blurb published on the FNAC website claims that the text aims at creating empathy with the inmates (and also with the 'surveillants') – "Découvrez la vie quotidienne de leurs habitants, surveillants et détenus. Regardez-les, ils pourraient être vous." – Herrenschmidt's personal experience, whilst valid in itself, is not that of the inmates.

This issue is more apparent in the recent photograph book *Prisons – 67065* (Korganow, 2015). "67065" in the title refers to the number of prisoners in the French system at the time of publication. The book claims to provide insight into the prison experience but fails to give an account from the inmates' point of view. The photographer Grégoire Korganow actually got a job as a "Contrôleur des Lieux de Privation de Liberté", a prison guard, from 2011 to 2014 in order to gain access to the prison demonstrating perhaps the extent to which French prisons are hidden from

public view with media access limited to carefully controlled tours. Nevertheless, his position as guard rather than inmate means he only ever sees what other prison staff see and, as such, is denied access to the personal experiences and perceptions of inmates. Their accounts are conspicuously absent from Korganow's book. Moreover, Korganow worked in twenty prisons over the period of four years, yet only spent five to ten days in each: his account is hardly representative of most prison staff's experience either.

This issue is less about accurate representation in terms of establishing 'facts' about prison life but rather, establishing loyalty to the personal narratives of those inside – their ability to tell their story on their terms. In contrast with these attempts, *Panthers in the Hole* tries to represent the experiences of those incarcerated in a way which provides a counterpoint to mainstream sets of images that dehumanise inmates and sensationalise violence, notably, as I will show in the latter section of this chapter on the spectacle. They do so by questioning the consumption of images of the prison experience. Their suffering in solitary confinement are unspeakable and the intolerable conditions that they are subjected to seemingly escape representation. This notion of 'intolerable' formed the basis of the activism of the Groupe d'information sur les Prisons – or "GIP" [Prison Information Group]. I approach *Panthers in the Hole* as a continuation of that work as it shows the ways in which the public 'tolerates' incarceration and its brutal treatment of inmates, and calls into question the public's tolerance towards such methods.

A detour via the work of the GIP is important in identifying the paradox of speaking for others as a similar tension is at work in *Panthers in the Hole*. The GIP sought to make visible the inner operations of France's prisons and protested the use of prisoner isolation techniques, by pointing out the arbitrariness and illegality of these treatments. Instead of thinking and theorising the prison, the GIP's main objective is to gather the personal experiences of the inmates in *Enquête - Intolérable dans vingt prisons* (2013), a four-issue publication published from 1971 to 1973, in order to give to the public access to the daily humiliations, interdictions, and banal vexations from which the inmates suffer. These experiences are collected through questionnaires, autobiographical accounts, letters, diaries, etc. The resulting

accounts are heterogeneous and even contradictory, but editing is reduced to its bare minimum, as the GIP is adamant that nothing should be added to the inmates' speech. An illustration of this stance can be found in a public reading on 17 February 1972 by Foucault of a text written by the inmates from "la centrale de Melun": in doing so, Foucault does not speak in their name but uses his privileged position as public intellectual to read out their speech allowing them to be heard by a wider audience. The GIP were always aware that their work was limited and only aimed at giving 'voice' to inmates (Brich, 2008). Therefore, once the prisoners were given the tools to speak for themselves, the group gave way to the "Comité d'Action des Prisonniers", created in 1974 as an attempt to let the inmates express themselves through structures entirely controlled by the inmates.

It took two years for *Panthers in the Hole* to be translated into English, but ongoing interest in American prisons by French researchers and activists regarding issues such as incarceration and race in the US goes back a long way, one of its most notable instances being the third issue of *Intolérable* entirely devoted to Black Panther activist George Jackson (GIP, 2013). This issue opens with a contribution by Jean Genet, whom the Black Panthers invited in 1970 to the USA, where he stayed for three months giving lectures. In his speech, Genet makes it explicit that he is less concerned about whether Jackson is guilty of the crime he was incarcerated for, and is more interested in the persecution that followed George Jackson's politicisation and his involvement with the Black Panthers. In *Intolérable*, the GIP provides a summary of the events leading up to Jackson's death and the campaign of disinformation that followed. *Panthers in the Hole* might be situated within the context of the GIP, as a similar approach is taken in *Panthers in the Hole* in its development of a counter-narrative alongside dominant discourses on the Black Panthers and their incarceration, and the text arguably constitutes an honest attempt to speak on behalf of the Angola Three whilst acknowledging the limits of doing so. Thus, the preface seeks to assure the reader that the book is based on Robert H. King's autobiography *From the Bottom of the Heap* (2008) and that King has contributed to *Panthers in the Hole* by re-reading and approving the text at various stages of its production (Cénou, 2014: 122).

In his study of disciplinary institutions, Foucault claims that is it not simply the prison that needs reforming but society as a whole (1975: 305) and its mechanisms of normalisation (1975: 306). Prisons are part of a wider social malaise. While *Panthers in the Hole* focuses on the situation in the USA[34], American prison has become a paradigm, a special space that defers critique of the French prison system. As the blurred boundaries between interior space of prison and the outside world in *Panthers in the Hole* open a space for reflection, the authors indirectly invite the reader to think beyond borders and reflect on similar issues in their own country's penal system (overcrowded prisons, lack of staff, lack of security, etc.).

Panthers in the Hole is less about solving the murder of Brent Miller – and through it, clearing the name of the Angola Three – than it is about showing how the murder is used as a tool to frame and impose harsh sentences on the Angola Three. The murder is never solved within the pages of *Panthers in the Hole*. The stabbing of the prison guard is announced over the tannoy speakers and reported in conversations between inmates (Cénou, 2014: 58). With the depiction of the victim shown collapsed on the floor, the murder itself is completely divorced from any actual depiction of the crime. It is anonymised and disembodied. *Panthers in the Hole* shows the way that prison recuperates its own failure, in this instance the protection and safety of those working within its walls, to justify its very existence. In doing so, the text offers itself up as a political tract, whose primary aim is to raise awareness and protest against the arbitrariness and illegality of the treatments to which the inmates are subjected. While many pages are dedicated to the trial process and the Angola Three's various appeals (Cénou, 2014: 61; 64-66; 79-80; 85-87; 91; 94-99), the focus throughout the comic is on conditions of detention, the daily humiliation and various forms of torture experienced by the inmates.

Panthers in the Hole exposes the systems in place that are used to justify and legitimise solitary confinement. The title itself with its reference to the 'hole' – slang for 'solitary confinement' – suggests the idea of an interstice, a 'gap', and thus alludes to margins. With this imagery, it refers to politicised subjects put in a hole/gap, with

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[34] For further reading on the links between the criminalisation of poverty and mass-incarceration in the USA, see Wacquant, 2004.

the implicit assumption that they do not belong here. In bringing the account of the Angola Three into the comics form, *Panthers in the Hole* brings in the idea of self-crafting and with it, the possibility for the subjects of regaining agency. But as the comics bring the subjects out of the gap and into the panels, it frames them. As the comics provides a new frame, it exposes and points to the framing processes of the prison system but it also turns the reader into a "penal spectator" (Brown, 2009), extending the spectacle and inviting another form of penal voyeurism. The danger is that the text risks reproducing the very forms of justification for incarceration it seeks to expose and deconstruct; these are the tensions that will be explored in this chapter.

Spectacle of the Condemned

The narration of *Panthers in the Hole* invites the reader to discover the penitentiary from the outside in, as it starts with a description of the fields of the Angola Penitentiary[35]. It then quickly moves on to the evocation of the Angola prison rodeo [36], before bringing the reader inside the walls of solitary confinement. Consequently, *Panthers in the Hole* shows the space of the prisoners as multiple and their representation in *Panthers in the Hole* imitates the way an outsider is brought in, during a typical day-tour at Angola. However, depiction of both the plantation and the arena for the prison rodeo, the most visible and publicly accessible spaces, is

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[35] The State of Louisiana imprisons more of its people than any other state and its number of inmates doubles the national average (Chang, 2012). Louisiana State Penitentiary – Louisiana's only maximum-security prison – is the largest maximum-security prison in the United States. Two-thirds of its 5,000 male prisoners are serving life sentences (Schrift, 2004). Its 18,000 acres formerly served as a slave plantation, named Angola after the area in Africa from which its slaves were taken. From 1880, state-leased convicts were used as labour-supply and since the plantation was sold to the state in 1901 (Martin *et al*., 2014: 71), this practice still continues today. Angola continues to operate as a farm, "a state within a state that produces two thirds of all the organic fruits and veg for the state of Louisiana", Carrie Reichardt, UK spokesperson for the Angola Three and Craftivist stresses. All of Louisiana's license plates are made at Angola (Adams, 2001: 103).

[36] The first Angola Prison Rodeo was held in 1965. The rodeo has been open to the public since 1967 (Adams, 2001: 94), as Angola Prison started configuring itself as a tourist site. In 1995, newly-appointed Angola director Burl Cain gave the rodeo exponential growth, allowing cameras in, and inspiring documentaries such as "The Wildest Show in the South: The Angola Prison Rodeo" (Soffer, 1999), which takes its title from the rodeo's marketing strapline. Running every Sunday in October and one week-end in late April each year, the rodeo takes place on prison grounds with the 7,500-seat arena built by inmates. The participants are untrained and most get their only experience with livestock from participation in the event itself.

limited to just a couple of pages each. Instead, *Panthers in the Hole* devotes most of its space to the representation of solitary confinement, the least visible of prison spaces. Considering first how the comic deals with the 'spectacle' of the prison rodeo in order to expose these intolerable conditions and the processes by which they are made 'tolerable', I will then look at how the comics form draws the reader's attention to the absence of images associated with the widespread practice of solitary confinement via the recreation and reimagining of such images. In order to show the interplay of the mechanisms of absence and presence, resemblance and dissemblance that *Panthers in the Hole* uses, I draw in addition to 'framing' and 'assemblage' on Jacques Rancière's notion of the 'spectacle' (Rancière, 2008). I also make use of Foucault's own definition of the spectacle in the context of public punishment (Foucault, 1975: 14-19), which I consider in the context of *Panthers in the Hole* together with the illuminating notion of 'penal spectatorship' as conceived by Michelle Brown (2009).

The event of the rodeo seems to allow for different levels of engagement between prison and public, potentially forging greater links between prison and the wider community. But does the prison rodeo really constitute an instance where "the prison is made public", as Schrift claims (2004: 331)? I will demonstrate the extent to which *Panthers in the Hole* suggests a more nuanced reading of the event, which problematizes the spectacle of the rodeo via its juxtaposition with other aspects of prison life at Angola.

Panthers in the Hole only makes a passing reference to the rodeo, dedicating only six panels over two pages to its depiction (Cénou, 2014: 9-10). The carnival of the spectacle of the prison rodeo is immediately followed by Angola director Burl Cain's speech on the directives, procedures and practices at Angola, a well-rehearsed speech, which he is depicted delivering to the newly-arrived inmates and to the pupils visiting Angola as part of their school-trip. The framing of the scene alongside Director Burl Cain's speech (Cénou, 2014: 11-15), which might seem inconsequential at first, might be aligned with the juxtaposition Foucault sets up in *Surveiller et Punir*. The account of the 1757 public torture and execution of Robert-François Damiens which opens Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir* is all the more striking as it is immediately

followed by the bureaucratic rigour of the prison timetable. Comparing it to Foucault's account of the public execution of Damiens, it could be tempting to read the spectacle of the Angola inmates as a deterrent for the general public distilling fear in onlookers by suggesting that if they were to commit similar crimes, they too would receive similar punishment. But as Foucault reminds us, the public, whose presence was required as impressionable spectators and as auxiliaries of the royal power, may see the victims of public torture as heroic. Enlightenment-era reformers grew worried that the excessive carnival of the public executions might shock their audience to the point of leading them to rebel against the authorities (Foucault, 1975: 58; 63).

While the public punishments that Foucault describes were meant to have an effect not only on the punished but especially on the crowds of spectators, the spectacle of the rodeo in Angola Penitentiary is divorced from any idea of punishment, as I shall demonstrate. Although the rodeo may be read as a modern-day spectacle of the condemned, the official narrative surrounding the event makes it less about public punishment than about giving the inmates a purpose and some sort of contribution to society through entertainment of the masses. Instead, the spectacle is framed as a special day in the lives of the inmates that gives them a sense of purpose and personal fulfilment, a day full of potential rewards for the convicts. Yet these notions are placed in tension with the various markers of criminality, which ensure that the convicts are visually identifiable as transgressive, criminal bodies. In the next section, I examine how *Panthers in the Hole* gives us glimpses of the processes of dis-identification between the public and the inmates, which make the spectacle "tolerable" and even pleasurable for most to enjoy.

Discussing the intolerability of the spectacle and of viewing the intolerable image, Rancière identifies the political capacity of the intolerable image to raise awareness of the reality it claims to express. But seeing that our existence was

> […] transformée par la machine spectaculaire en image morte, en face de nous, contre nous […] il semblait désormais impossible de conférer à quelque image que ce soit le pouvoir de montrer l'intolérable et de nous amener à lutter contre lui. (Rancière, 2008: 96).

Rancière recalls the seductiveness of the images that may be used to prevent the audience from seeing the processes of domination at work (Rancière, 2007: 71). Exposing the dialectics inherent to the intolerable image, Rancière warns us that the image is not intolerable in itself: it has to be inscribed into a wider history of intolerance. Rancière demonstrates that the political image only works if the spectator is already inclined to read it that way, and therefore requires an audience who is already aware and convinced by the wrongness of the issues that the political image aims to expose (Rancière, 2008: 95).

"Être spectateur n'est pas la condition passive qu'il nous faudrait changer en activité. C'est notre situation normale." (Rancière, 2008: 23). The controlled and careful construction during the rodeo of the individuals as inmates questions even further their belonging in society. It ultimately reinforces and legitimises the need for the convicts to remain separated from the rest of the wider human population; hence, the necessity to de-familiarise, identified by the Cénou brothers, to make strange and intolerable, as well as to expose the discourses that have made the situation a tolerable, acceptable and normal one.

Marker of Criminality

Panthers in the Hole exposes the processes by which the images are made tolerable, and at the same time enjoyable for the rodeo audience. These processes depend upon the evocation of a visual marker of criminality, which I will now identify. This leads me to considerations on the spectacle and its tolerability.

During the rodeo, the audience and the inmates are constantly reminded that the participants are convicts (Adams, 2001: 99) through complex dynamics at play during the various events of the rodeo. Their criminal character is reasserted throughout the event, notably with audio-textual reminders such as the listing of the length of their sentences in the printed programme (Adams, 2001: 99), also announced when each participant is first introduced in the arena (Schrift, 2004: 338). However, no clue is provided to the public as to the nature of the crime for which each inmate has been convicted. The spectacle is thus divorced from the nature of

the crimes of which they were convicted. The public punishment is rendered illegible and therefore meaningless.

Among the various markers of criminality to be found at the rodeo, one that was visually captured by the Cénou brothers is the black and white broad-striped shirts that the inmates wear in the arena – in sharp contrast with the trustees who are operating the Arts and Crafts Fair wearing civilian clothes and thus unmarked (Adams, 2001: 104). It is to be noted that Burl Cain's 1997 decision to have the participants wear those shirts so they "stand out" coincided with the arrival of the ABC news program cameras filming the rodeo for the first time (Bergner, 1998: 283). This hypervisibility of the convicts in the arena is a performance of criminality since the broad-striped shirts are only used for the rodeo. These shirts work as uniforms, and the inmates are completely anonymised in the arena, save for the huge number displayed on their back, which is used for betting purposes. The shirts dehumanise the individuals by visually reducing the inmates to their functions in the rodeo, for instance, as stand-in for keels during the "Human Pinball" game. The inmates have to stand in hoops, waiting for the raging bull to hit them, and the last participant standing in his hoop wins. The broad-striped shirts evoke cartoon images of convicts: they not only operate as a constant visual reminder that these are convicts, but might also go some way in rendering the real physical violence of the rodeo into a cartoon version of itself in the eyes of the spectators, causing further humiliation through forced infantilisation and reinforcing the treatment of the inmates as sub-human. The audience can therefore indulge in the spectacle without much guilt (Bergner, 1998: 283).

The audio-commentator constantly reminds the audience that they are "cowboys for a day", but rather than evoking the myth of the Frontier and the masculinity of the cow-boy, this comment points to the convicts' obvious lack of training and inexperience of the participants with livestock. The amateurishness of the inmates is visually emphasised by the fact that they wear attire, which is not appropriate, nor does it provide them with sufficient protection. While the presence of clowns – whose role is to distract the bull with their bright coloured costumes while the rodeo participants run to safety – may imply some sense of concern for the safety

of the inmates, the bulls do not wear any protective balls at the end of their horns, nor do the inmates wear any kind of protective attire. Official reports claim that no one has ever died in the arena. However, despite the silence of the authorities over the amount of injuries caused by the rodeo or deaths in its aftermath, a narrative caption in *Panthers in the Hole* points out that an inmate who receives lethal injuries may be granted the right to die as a free man, outside the prison walls (Cénou, 2014: 10). The resulting deaths are not viewed as punishment but rather as collateral damage made acceptable by the literally short-lived freedom granted to the inmate.

The narrative at the arena of the Annual Angola Prison Rodeo legitimates and consolidates the needs for such an event. Beyond providing the local community with entertainment, the rodeo is believed to participate in the rehabilitation of prisoners by "making them useful" while "not costing any money to the taxpayers" — since the rodeo arena and facilities were all built using inmate labour. Prisons, especially those now run privately, are proud to announce to the public that they get inmates to work for free or as cheaply as possible – clearly an open acknowledgment of the continuation of slavery in a different form. Writing about the rodeo, Schrift notes that this spectacle of criminality becomes "an unmistakable visual throwback to Southern chain gangs and pre-reform prison labo[u]r garb" (Schrift, 2004: 338). This racist performance is made acceptable by the fact that the participants were found guilty. *Panthers in the Hole* problematises this aspect of the rodeo by representing all the inmates in the arena as Black and hinting that this is symptomatic of a prison where eighty percent of the inmates are Black.

In order to push the boundaries of the tolerability of the spectacle, the Cénou brothers chose to depict "Convict Poker" out of the various 'games' the inmates participate in inside the arena. As such, the poker game is used in *Panthers in the Hole* as a metonym for the whole event. "Convict Poker" has the inmates seated and holding cards at a table while the bull charges them. The last inmate to remain seated wins the game. This is the only event of the rodeo where the inmates do nothing and wait for the arbitrary violence directed towards them – a much more powerful political visual than one that might have been taken from "Guts and Glory" where the

inmates throw themselves at the charging bull and which are frequently used for advertising the show.

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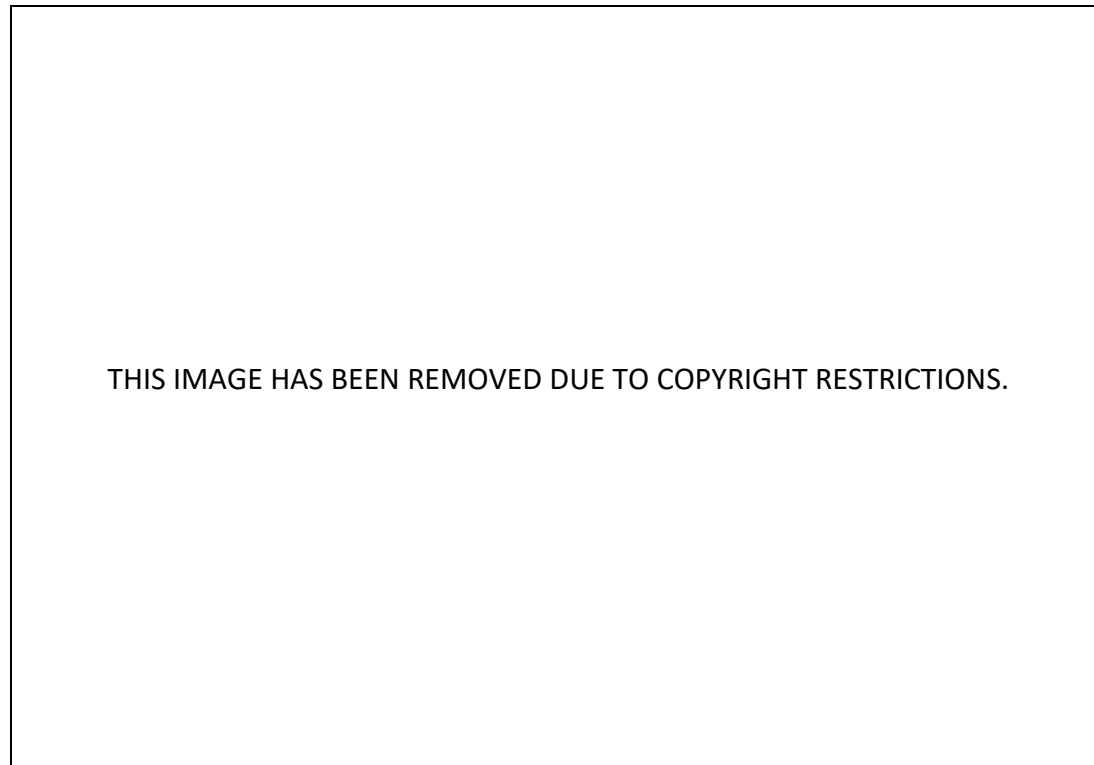
(Figure 40: Cénou, 2014: 9)

The imagery of the figure of the bull deserves detailed attention as a complex yet understated narrative thread running through the comic. As well as embodying the passive helplessness of the seated inmates, the visual metaphor of the charging bull also evokes the penal and judicial systems and policing, which target young Black men often at random. This arbitrary violence is hinted at in *Panthers in the Hole* through the dual portrayal of the bull, from antagonistic figure in the poker game (Cénou, 2014: 9-10), to a tamed animal gently walking beside his warden and looking for water to quench his thirst. The latter scene appears in *Panthers in the Hole* as part of a later dream sequence (Cénou, 2014: 76-78) that depicts Herman Wallace's dream of the house that would later constitute "The House that Herman dreamt" art project.

In 2001, while in solitary confinement in Angola, Herman received a letter from artist Jackie Sumell. After two years of correspondence, Sumell asked Wallace "what kind of house does a man who has been in a six-foot-by-nine-foot-cell for over thirty years dream of?" Together, they designed Herman's idea of the perfect house

and Sumell's art project inspired a documentary directed by Anghad Bhalla and released in 2012. In a dream sequence pictured in *Panthers in the Hole*, the bull is a peaceful figure whose presence, far from disrupting the scene, is on the contrary perfectly accepted by Herman Wallace (Cénou, 2014: 76-78). The imagery of the bull is de-contextualised as it returns in a way that is disarming. The mosaic at the bottom of the pool in Herman's dream is a visual reference to the Black Panthers, who have reclaimed the imagery of the panther – an imagery that seemed definitive and un-reclaimable – as positive (because the panther is a symbol of strength and beauty but one which only attacks when being attacked[37]) and a constitutive and positive element of their identity.

Panthers in the Hole adopts a similar process in the textual use of the imagery of the bull in its narrative. While the bull was the embodiment of arbitrary violence and cruelty during the rodeo scene, it appears here tamed and docile, and only trying to meet its basic needs. Through the confrontation with the strange image of the bull, *Panthers in the Hole* contests and problematises the construction of the inmates as animals whilst suggesting that such images can be re-appropriated as positive. The figure of the bull clearly hints at the inmates' animality and subjection, along with the inmates' refusal to be reduced to these very traits. The dream-sequence features a striking visual representation of the risks at the rodeo. "On remballe"(Cénou, 2014: 77): in contrast with the very purpose of the rodeo, lethal injuries are hidden from view. It is also possible to re-read the dream sequence as visual metaphor of the promises that winning 500 dollars at the final of the "Guts and Glory" game represents for each inmate: a simulacrum of power and the ersatz of freedom that comes with it. The docile bull signifies Herman's nostalgia for the day out – where, in reality, the bull is a synecdoche that stands for yet another form of control and submission.

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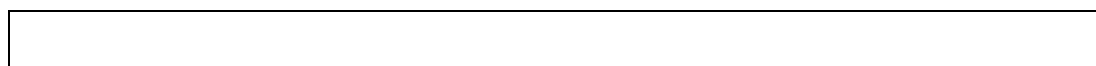
[37] As they attempt to establish themselves as an independent political party to rival the all-white Democrats, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LFCO) picked a black panther, which according to LFCO chairman John Hulett In a June 1966 interview, is "an animal that when pressured moves back until it is cornered, then it comes out fighting for life and death. We felt we had been pushed back long enough and that it was time for Negroes to come out and take over."

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(Figure 41: Cénou, 2014: 77).

Lounging by the pool is an imagery so far removed for an inmate who has spent most of his life in solitary confinement that it might as well be a dream. Writing about trauma survivors struggling "to express the short-term un-assimilability of what they have gone through", Sontag identifies a displacement in their recollection: "It felt like a dream" (Sontag, 2003: 19). The very idea of a pool is so incongruous that it seems as likely as Herman befriending the bull. Moreover, the dream house complete with swimming pool challenges the barriers of race and class, as Black wealth is often deemed vulgar, associated with money gained from criminal activity such as drug dealing or a result of athletic rather than intellectual achievement[38]. Since wealth disparity is the main reason why inmates take part in the rodeo in the first place, the dream sequence in *Panthers in the Hole* invites the readers to confront their own preconceptions and privileges about social inequality, race and imprisonment. This multifaceted imagery forces us to rethink our own penal spectatorship.

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[38] For a discussion on popular representations of gangsters, drug dealers, etc., see Wilson (2005).

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(Figure 42: Cénou, 2014: 77)

The Penal Gaze

Writing about the ubiquity of prison culture, Michelle Brown coins the expression "penal spectator" to refer to someone who has very little first-hand experience of incarceration, for whom inmates are put on display (Brown, 2009). Documentaries, factual TV programmes and prison museums, as well as fictional prison films and TV shows provide instances of what Brown conceives as "penal spectatorship": "a kind of spectatorship emerged which permitted privileged glimpses of a world that both defined and distanced the observer." (Brown, 2009: 93) These distanced citizens are secured in their privileged position and given the opportunity to "exercise exclusionary judgement from afar" (Brown, 2009: 8. See also 56-57). The concept of "penal spectatorship" is useful not only to discuss the rodeo as an instance of the prison turned into a tourist attraction and made ready for consumption, but also to apprehend the politics of the representation of punishment at stake during the evocation of this public event in *Panthers in the Hole*.

In order to examine the representation of 'penal spectatorship' at work in *Panthers in the Hole*, I need to consider it in its relation with the framing processes. The frame as defined by Derrida in *The Truth of Painting* is characterised by its dual properties: the frame not only selects, presents, enhances and defines the image but it is also an unstable space between the object and its background (Derrida, 1987: 61). Therefore, the frame both asserts and destabilises experience and sociocultural interactions and identifications. There is an extra layer of framing at work in *Panthers in the Hole* due to its subject matter; the dual frames of the enclosure and of the formal frames of the comics grid of panels point to the reality of imprisonment which is still ever-present despite the illusion of freedom that the open-aired space may project. By repositioning the open space of the outdoors within the grid of the comics page, *Panthers in the Hole* underlines the notion that the rodeo is far from offering a momentary escape from prison. The comics frame contains the spectacle, thus reaffirming the framed space of the prison, where inmates are doubly incarcerated as they are placed under the scrutiny not only of the prison warden but also of the gaze of the general public. The Angola Prison Rodeo maintains the othering of the

inmates, by throwing them into the arena where they can be scrutinised and objectified as an anonymous bunch of convicts. Their identity as 'convicts' is produced by the conditions and limits of the penal and judiciary systems rather than any inherent criminality preceding their entrance into these systems. *Panthers in the Hole* frames the inmates as objects to be studied but does so with the audience and the penal system surrounding them as well. Inmates and spectators become subjects as well as objects of knowledge.

Writing about her experience among the tourists at the Angola prison rodeo, Schrift aptly defines the prison as "a space that defines itself by its ability to conceal. As a place that both hides offenders from the public eye and restricts inmates from accessing the public, the penitentiary denotes layered meanings of concealment." (Schrift, 2004: 331) The visible markers of criminality, as made visually blatant in *Panthers in the Hole*, inscribe the day as an anomaly in the lives of the inmates, as well as a special day for the public. Yet neither gets to be as close to the other as they hoped: it is after all the simulacrum of a day-in for the public as much as it is a simulacrum of a day-out for the convicts.

Through the representation of the broad-striped shirts, *Panthers in the Hole* reframes the relation between the audience and the convicts by exposing the means that nurture a distance perpetrated by the system and that reinforce the "us"/ "them" dichotomy that is necessary for the show to be deemed an acceptable form of entertainment. The viewers are witnessing an event, but this is what Brown described as "structured ways of viewing which profoundly challenge any possible distinguishing of spectacle from efforts directed at consciousness-raising" (Brown, 2009: 93), leading to the dilution of or even the loss of its meaning: penal spectatorship "distances its observers from a deeper interrogation of the work of punishment" (Brown, 2009: 92). As punishment is framed into a context of leisure, it is turned into a commodified and trivialised object of consumption, and *Panthers in the Hole* points to the fact that the viewers are caught and rendered complicit in the process.

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(Figure 43: Cénou, 2014: 10)

Passive voyeurism enables the perpetration of systemic prejudices, a process which *Panthers in the Hole* vehemently denounces with the unflattering depiction of a group of spectators visibly enjoying the show (Cénou, 2014: 10).

Writing about the rodeo, Adams sees the game as the performance of an escape from either a crime-scene or the prison itself. Therefore, she interprets the cheering as the audience's complicity in a mock-evasion and is thus inclined to read the crowd's reaction as a momentary identification of the public with the inmates (Adams, 2001: 105). By contrast, the Cénou brothers propose a different reading of the same event. The panel depicting the audience on page 10 suggests the public's desensitisation through the depiction of members of the audience smiling at the violent spectacle. *Panthers in the Hole* shows that, overall, everything is done to assert the division between the inmates and their audience, so the latter can engage in unapologetic voyeurism. This divergence of readings is important since it shows that such 'spectacle' can never be fully contained, or reduced to dominant discourses of criminality.

Here to consume the show, these spectators are unlikely to question what made it tolerable. The panel also equates spectating with sedentariness and consumerism by using imageries of gluttony and overweightness. This representation invites the reader to find this type of spectatorship abhorrent and intolerable. The sense of repulsion and abjection that the depiction of the audience intends to provoke in the reader shakes off the anaesthetizing power of the image, which according to Rancière consists in the first step toward the capacity to understand and to act (Rancière, 2008: 113).

The rodeo participates in the various forms of control of the general public, not so much as some sort of deterrent but as a more insidious means of subjecting and controlling the population, by giving them a form of entertainment which they come to want. The repeated spectacle is not only shaping that desire but also nurturing it by enforcing the status of the inmates as subhuman by various means identified in the previous section – while at the same time insidiously subduing the audience as well. The spectacle can mock its illusions, but it reproduces its logic (Rancière, 2008: 51). With the dehumanisation of the spectators, do the Cénou

brothers risk reproducing the very voyeurism that they challenge elsewhere? The visible reframing techniques are here to remind us of our own complicity. The panel on page 10 stirs the reader's abjection at the crowd spectating and enjoying the show. Yet on the previous page, one panel depicts the crowd entering the arena and as the low angle places the reader at the crowd's level, the reader is thus invited to follow the spectators and join them (Cénou, 2014: 9).

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(Figure 44: Cénou, 2014: 9)

The composition of this panel helps to convey the following question: to what extent do we all participate in the system that makes the event possible, tolerable, recommendable or even necessary? *Panthers in the Hole* thus plays on this dual movement of identification and rejection to start a discussion on our passive involvement in these operations. This is an example of the dangers of all forms of penal spectatorship even that which places itself at a distance. At the same time, however, *Panthers in the Hole* invites its informed reader to operate some displacement or deferral in her or his criticism of penal spectatorship. And in the same way that the rodeo comforts the penal spectators in their traditional visual imagery of the convicts, the dehumanisation of the semi-fictional spectators in *Panthers in the Hole* points to the demonization of the lower classes. By inviting us to consume them as images, the semi-fictional spectators confront us with the ease of slipping back into passive consumption of stereotypes.

Framings

In the previous section, I showed to what extent the spectacle asserts the tolerability of punishment. After analysing the penal gaze and visual constructs of criminality, I now further explore the notion that the rodeo and its arena are less an exceptional space outside the prison: instead, *Panthers in the Hole* suggests that they are part of the 'total institution' of Angola prison. This notion of 'totality' will help me apprehend the exercises of power and their effects over the individuals, as I focus on how the disciplinary powers are made visible, exposed and challenged in *Panthers in the Hole*.

I start this investigation with considerations on the purposes of Angola Penitentiary by conjuring up the notion of "total institutions" as defined by Erving Goffman (1957). The totality of the prison is signified through the physical barriers preventing any interaction with the outside. Goffman identifies five functions: total institutions are established to provide care for individuals who either cannot or should not take care of themselves; or whose potential threat to the community make their removal from society a necessity. Their own welfare is not an issue,

Goffman notes. Total institutions may also have the performance of work task for main purpose; they may also be designed as retreats. These traits are not mutually exclusive and albeit in different proportions, Angola Penitentiary shares these traits, as suggested by the speech that opens *Panthers in the Hole*.

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(Figure 45: Cénou, 2014: 14)

"Most total institutions, most of the time, seem to function merely as storage dumps for inmates" (Goffman, 1957: 329). *Panthers in the Hole* opens with Angola director Burl Cain's speech in the narrative box, commenting on the penitentiary's reformatory goals, while the Angola Three are depicted sitting in silence in their individual cells. The comics format thus reflects the discourse of incarceration: each inmate has his place, which is inherent to his role (on the farm, on the religious study programme, etc.) or his lack thereof (in solitary). The inmates are classified spatially, and the formal resources of comics lend themselves to the representation of such classifications. The panels mirror the cells and the grid of panels, with its clear separations, its rows and frames, evokes further enclosing as it has the inmates not only locked-in but also symbolically "framed". Even when portrayed on the same splash page, the Angola Three appear as separated from each other. As their portraits appear each in their own frame, the captions enabling their identification, providing information about their age and sentence, reflect the penal processes of categorisation, classification and labelling as identified by Foucault as

> [...] les procédures pour répartir les individus, les fixer et les distribuer spatialement, les classer, en tirer d'eux le maximum de temps, et le maximum de forces, dresser leur corps, coder leur comportement continu, les maintenir dans une visibilité sans lacune, former autour d'eux tout un appareil d'observation, d'enregistrement et de notations, constituer sur eux un savoir qui s'accumule et se centralise. La forme générale d'un appareillage pour rendre les individus dociles et utiles, par un travail précis sur leur corps, a dessiné l'institution-prison
> (Foucault, 1975: 227).

The frame as a formal device also foreshadows the representation of the conditions of spending years in solitary confinement, with the grids of panels mirroring total isolation in single cells. On the rare occasions where the bars are not drawn on panel, the simple fact that the inmates do not appear in the same panel signifies the on-going practice of solitary confinement, a practice so mundane that the self-evident bars are barely even registered anymore. Moreover, *Panthers in the Hole* informs us that solitary confinement induces major eyesight loss (Cénou, 2014: 74). The bars may eventually escape the inmate's perception. The comics format thus reflects not only dominant discourses but also the way such discourses are structured in terms of who gets to speak and who does not. Moreover, the comic invites the reader to give consideration to these discourses' conditions of possibility: how

certain statements are allowed to be made and how they are imposed as sets of rules on some individuals (Foucault, 1972: 193).

Isolation of the inmates in their individual cells is key to Panopticism, the model upon which many U.S. penitentiaries built in the nineteenth century were based and which has become paradigmatic for prisons worldwide. In letters published between 1787 and 1791, Jeremy Bentham proposes a prison model he called the *Panopticon*, whose architecture is designed to maximise the visibility of the inmates. Hierarchical observation makes the individuals visible by constructing spaces that allow for "general visibility" (Foucault, 1975: 171). Those who are subject to disciplinary power are rendered visible: supervision is total. Foucault suggests that disciplinary power remains invisible. It is fundamental to the panopticon that those watching remain unseen by the viewed. But the surveillance is doubled in *Panthers in the Hole*, as the inmates are placed under the scrutiny of both prison staff and the reader – the latter being also invested in the role of scrutinising the staff themselves as well as the inner workings of the carceral system.

How does *Panthers in the Hole* make the effects of disciplinary power visible? *Panthers in the Hole* features numerous representations of the inmates as they are being watched by trustees. The trustees are inmates armed with rifles who take on the role of prison guards, and in these scenes, they are represented as silhouettes and shadows (Cénou, 2014: 26-28). These faceless, interchangeable embodiments of authority may suggest the disembodied form of power that Foucault described in *Surveiller et Punir* (Foucault, 1975: 223-225). The faceless silhouettes blend with the fences. The trustees and the architecture are all part of the prison system. Moreover, negative space is heavily used in the representations of the faceless, with the erasure of differences between the foreground and the background resulting in lack of depth. Consequently, the flattened surfaces suggest a space even more confined within the enclosure.

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(Figure 46: Cénou, 2014: 26-27)

Through the use of blank space as background behind the fence, *Panthers in the Hole* implies that for the inmates, there is nothing beyond the prison. In contrast with prisons of the nineteenth century that were built in the centre of European towns to warn the community against the consequences of deviance, Louisiana State Penitentiary is situated in a no-man's land, bordered on three sides by the Mississippi River. But this very idea connotes another meaning, equally significant: through the absence of landscape *Panthers in the Hole* suggests that there is only the prison. This not only gives the reader insight into just how big Angola Penitentiary is; the fields of the prison farm surrounding the prison walls are still part of the penitentiary and of the penitentiary system. It also shows a continuum between the prison and the rest of the world, asserted by the narrative caption stating Angola Penitentiary's founding role in the economy of Louisiana.

Angola Penitentiary may be situated in a no-man's land, but one with history, whose plantation past permeates the present and invites us to consider penal labour as a present-day form of slavery, and to see the rodeo as a different form of slave

labour. This reading is key to *Panthers in the Hole* and the context in which we read the biographies of the Angola Three. In order to apprehend how this is made 'tolerable', I investigate in the next section *Panthers in the Hole*'s depictions and mentioning of Angola's reformatory functions.

Paternalism and Pastoralism

The official objective of Angola Penitentiary as laid out by Burl Cain in an official speech transcribed in the opening scene of *Panthers in the Hole* is to reform the inmates by molding them in the shape of some ideal standard (Cénou, 2014: 12). Indeed, the second function of the *Panopticon* as conceived by Bentham is to have the inmates reflect upon their behaviour. This function is inherited from the Christian practice of penitence, with the individual cell and the rigorous timetable ruling on life in prison recalling the monastic cell, as spatial separation is thought to help to 'fix' the mind.

The Angola Prison Rodeo is part of a wider on-going reformatory programme, with Burl Cain's heavily Christianised project of transforming the individual into non-threatening, subordinated subjects. These subjects can then be exploited as free work-force and for popular entertainment, with the promise of individual redemption obtained through helping others. This project is addressed in *Panthers in the Hole* through the portrayal of Burl Cain as a paternalistic reformer of the souls, with the church of Angola prison looming behind him as the narrative caption informs us: "Burl Cain, directeur d'Angola depuis 1995, promeut et met en œuvre un modèle de réhabilitation des détenus fondé sur le travail, l'éducation... // ... et la foi chrétienne." (Cénou, 2014: 11). As the narration runs over two separate panels, the visual gap on the page between "education" and "faith", which the suspense provided with the punctuation emphasizes, is a fitting metaphor for the gap and the opposition between the two concepts in French secular thought. The narration operates here as a chilling punch line as Burl Cain's paternalist discourse hurts the secular sensibilities of the authors, which is most prominent in the opening section of the text, with the narration in this opening part of the text not attributed to any of

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the Angola Three and therefore by default more directly linked to the authors. This reading is confirmed on the following page with the zooming-in on Burl Cain's Christian cross as the director speaks (seemingly addressing the reader directly) of immoral acts and crimes which according to him are caused by the separation of the church and state (Cénou, 2014: 12). Burl Cain enforces religion as the only way out of a life of crime, notably through the religious studies bachelor's degree, which is the only higher education qualification that inmates can obtain in Angola (Cénou, 2014: 12).

Since over 45% of the Angola inmates are serving life-sentences without parole, there is no shortage of mentors. Moreover, they are motivated by the religious prospect of saving their soul through mentoring fellow inmates serving shorter sentence towards their rehabilitation, through the creation of inmate Christian groups such as Angola's "Gang for God". Therefore, they are very likely to continue their work for the duration of their remaining time behind bars, in contrast with trained teachers, nurses and counsellors from outside who may be reluctant to come and work inside Angola prison. However, the reformatory value of this whole operation is questionable. All the inmates working as counsellors and in the hospice are volunteers. Added to the issue of exploitative free-labour, there is also a clear lack of any sort of training. Paradoxically, the reformatory programme has inmates who have been removed from society decades ago attempt to prepare their fellow inmates to return to a society that they themselves have not experienced or lived in for decades and fit in a world that they may barely even remember themselves.

The absurdity of the situation may only emphasise the arbitrariness of the authority that Cain exerts over the inmates. *Panthers in the Hole* identifies in Cain the most visible form of power at work in Angola – a centralised form of power. Cain's discourse is represented as self-evident, as suggested by its visual position on the page: Cain holds the narrator-function only temporarily, but significantly as his speech opens the book. In *L'Ordre du Discours*, Foucault states that "le discours n'est pas simplement ce qui traduit les luttes ou les systèmes de domination, mais ce pour qui, ce par quoi on lutte, le pouvoir dont on cherche à s'emparer." (Foucault, 1971: 12). Cain is the emitter of the law and his voice is not only official but also

overpowering. The formal inscription of Cain's discourse on the page appears at first glance to take part in the processes that legitimate Cain's discourse not least in its elimination of any possibility for alternative discourses to emerge.

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(Figure 47: Cénou, 2014: 15)

On page 15, Burl Cain threatens to turn this account into his own, limit access to discourse and exclude other discourses. To that extent, he embodies the following process described Foucault:

> déterminer les conditions de leur mise en jeu, d'imposer aux individus qui les tiennent un certain nombre de règles et ainsi de ne pas permettre à tout le monde d'avoir accès à eux. Raréfaction, cette fois, des sujets parlants ; nul n'entrera dans l'ordre du discours s'il ne satisfait à certaines exigences ou s'il n'est, d'entrée de jeu, qualifié pour le faire.
> (Foucault, 1971: 42)

Panthers in the Hole depicts here Cain's attempt at imposing his discourse as the one true discourse. Writing about "le discours vrai", Foucault states that

> cette volonté de vérité, comme les autres systèmes d'exclusion, s'appuie sur un support institutionnel : elle est à la fois renforcée et reconduite par toute une épaisseur de pratiques comme la pédagogie, bien sûr...
> (Foucault, 1971: 19).

In his exploration of the exercise of power, Foucault shows that relations of power may appear as binary oppositions, but power is diffuse, rather than centralised: it is really relational and operates in a capillary fashion. Foucault warns us that modern relations of power cannot be fully apprehended through the study of power in terms of struggle and repression. Certainly, power has to be apprehended with reference to the discourses about what is right and the effects of truth that it produces, as these legitimise its exercise and hide its mechanisms. Yet, approaching the mechanisms of power in terms of repression would lead to the failure to understand fully how power functions and how the individual can be constituted as both an effect of power and its articulation. This is how its framing in *Panthers in the Hole* suggests that we read Cain's discourse.

The continuous exercise of power over the lives of the individuals is achieved through a form of pastoral power, a power technique that originated in Christian institutions (Foucault, 1982: 213), which itself finds its roots in Hellenistic society, appropriating the practices of self-examination and the guidance of conscience to achieve the knowledge of the individual's needs, conduct, conscience and "soul". Pastoral power is achieved through "the organisation of a link between total obedience, knowledge of oneself, and confession to someone else" (Foucault, 1981: 239).

The exercise of pastoral power requires not only detail of an individual's actions – such as the rigorous timetable outlined in *Surveiller et Punir* – but also knowledge of an individual's mind, as pastoral power is characterised with the ability to know and direct the individual's conscience (Foucault, 1982: 214). Foucault describes the pastor's altruism as well as his "bienfaisance individualisante", as the pastor watches over all his sheep and provides them with individualised care. The main goal of the pastor is to ensure salvation for each of his wards. The care provided by the pastor is individualised – in the case of Cain towards his inmates, with each ward locked in their own individual cells. However, Alain Brossat points out that with pastoral power the singularity of each ewe is not taken into account, as made clear in Foucault's writing by the exclusive focus on the figure of the pastor. Moreover, Brossat notes in Foucault's analysis a paradox between the promise of self-becoming contained within the rite of confession and the state of complete dependence and servitude that are required from the subject. He warns us that "seule l'humanité des pasteurs est assurée" as he sees pastoral power as the reducing of individuals to sheep incapable of making decisions for themselves (Brossat, 2010).

Cain's pastoralist discourse stresses the power of solitary confinement a means to reshape the individual and mould convicts into better citizens. Writing about super-maxes, Angela Davis also notes the reformatory mission conferred to prisons in the official discourse:

> As is indicated in the designation 'penitentiary', imprisonment was regarded as rehabilitative and the penitentiary prison was devised to provide convicts with the conditions for reflecting on their crimes and, through penitence, for reshaping their habits and even their souls.
> (Davis, 2003: 26)

The process of self-reformation heavily relies on the religious notion of imprisonment as a type of purgatory, where the individual in his cell turns his removal from society into a transformative experience. "During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, absolute solitude and strict regimentation of the prisoner's every action were viewed as strategies for transforming habits and ethics." (Davis, 2003: 51) Following the notion that through the discipline of the body came the rehabilitation of the mind, "[t]he body was placed in conditions of segregation and solitude in order to allow the soul to flourish." (Davis, 2003: 48)

> Male punishment was linked ideologically to penitence and reform. The very forfeiture of rights and liberties implied that with self-reflection, religious study, and work, male convicts could achieve redemption and could recover these rights and liberties. (Davis, 2003: 70)

Yet recent views on solitary confinement as "the worst form of punishment imaginable" (Davis, 2003: 47) conflict heavily with its supposed "emancipatory effect" (Davis, 2003: 48). Davis notes that references to individual rehabilitation tend to disappear from modern day descriptions of supermaxes (Davis, 2003: 49), which further establishes solitary confinement and the notion of rehabilitation as incompatible. The Cénou brothers aim at demonstrating this incompatibility and I now show how by investigating the counter-narrative to the official discourses in *Panthers in the Hole*.

How does *Panthers in the Hole* deconstruct and un-do Cain's official discourse? How does the text propose other discourses? Burl Cain's dominant discourse is especially disruptive as his narrative takes over the space of the narrator. Yet the *diegesis* visually offers a counter-narrative to Cain's discourse. In her analysis of Juillard's *Le Cahier bleu*, Miller shows that the text seems to display narrative authority only for the overall narrative stance to reveal itself to be misleading and manipulative (Miller, 2007: 123). In *Panthers*, it is the dissonance between the *recitatif* of the narrator in a textual position of power and the visual enunciative stance in the *diegesis* that suggests the misleading and manipulative nature of the narration. *Panthers in the Hole* outlines and maps discourses but also questions and corrects them by offering another visual perspective, in which the silenced voices of the prisoners take precedence over Burl Cain's discourse.

Throughout *Panthers in the Hole*, the accounts of the Angola Three exist in tension with the discourse attributed to Cain, whether these confrontations take place at Angola farm, at the rodeo, in the prison's communal areas or in the courtroom. But *Panthers in the Hole* changes its vantage point and each of the Angola Three is given his own narrative section, where he becomes the narrator in lieu of Cain's official discourse. As the Angola Three are eventually given a voice, this formal shift in narration parallels the process whereby the inmates gain their agency and voice.

"Mortification of the self"

After analysing the many forms of Cain's paternalism in *Panthers in the Hole*, and how the Cénou brothers use the forms of comics to destabilise the legitimacy of his discourse, I now examine in further details how *Panthers in the Hole* depicts the effects of disciplinary powers on the individual so I can investigate the representation of the possibilities for resisting 'tactics' in the next section. I now focus on the way in which the comic uses its form to represent and critique techniques used within the space of the prison. I will discuss the representation of penal medical care by building on Foucault and Goffman as these scenes encompass pressures of various natures that are exerted over the inmates.

Panthers in the Hole features scenes in which the inmates are required to stand outside their cells in rows in a state of undress. This process is alienating. In his critique of 'total institutions', Goffman identifies that the "stripping processes" participate in "standardised defacement" and the "mortification of the self" (Goffman, 1957: 317). As Goffman points out, "the effect of each of these conditions is multiplied by having to witness the mortification of one's fellow inmates" (Goffman, 1957: 318). Foucault reminds us that medical examinations enable a *savoir* or knowledge of the individual, but

> […] un « savoir » du corps qui n'est pas exactement la science de son fonctionnement, et une maîtrise de ses forces qui est plus que la capacité de les vaincre : ce savoir et cette maîtrise constituent ce qu'on pourrait appeler la technologie politique du corps. Bien sûr, cette technologie est diffuse, rarement formulée en discours continus et systématiques; elle se compose souvent de pièces et de morceaux; elle met en œuvre un outillage ou des procédés disparates. Elle n'est le plus souvent, malgré la cohérence de ses résultats, qu'une instrumentation multiforme.
> (Foucault, 1975: 31)

In this quote from *Surveiller et Punir*, Foucault suggests that medical examinations are less about collecting knowledge of the body than they are about subduing the convict and establishing power over him.

(FIgure 48: Cénou, 2014: 71)

Far from being organized or regulated, the individual medical visit depicted in *Panthers in the Hole* is also a chaotic, distressing experience, as implied by the unusual fragmentation of the grid (Cénou, 2014: 71). The panels are shattered. The interspace between them is thicker and darker than usual, which hints at the brutality of the process and its destabilising, dehumanising effects on the individual. Moreover, the viewpoints are different in each panel: the first panel represents the medical staff from the vantage point of the inmate as suggested by the canted, low angle shot; this panel and the next show the lamp and its light pointing at the inmate, placing him not only as an object of medical knowledge at the centre of the examination room but also as a subject under scrutiny in a scene that shares similarities with a police interrogation room. The second panel shows an overhead view of the examination room, which highlights the threatening presence of three faceless guards – one with just his boots showing – surrounding the patient and doctor to ensure that no escape or confrontation is possible. The third and fourth panels reveal the extent of the inmate's physical injuries, and the third panel lets the reader take on the vantage point of the medical staff and thus be the judge of the inmate's injuries, while the fourth panel reasserts the threatening presence of the prison staff through a faceless looming shadow (Cénou, 2014: 71). This rapid change

in vantage points is highly disruptive for the reader and suggests the multiple forms of violence to which the inmate is subjected.

These four panels in their unusual layout illustrate the constant scrutiny under which the inmates are placed – a scrutiny that goes beyond medical care while failing to respond to an inmate's real medical needs. The efficacy of the examination lies less in the treatment and care offered to inmates and more in the opportunities it provides for closer observation and management of those incarcerated. The role of the medical examination in Angola is further questioned through the depiction of the effects of solitary confinement on the prisoner's sight (Cénou, 2014: 74). The blurred background in these two panels suggests the deterioration of the prisoner's health and his anxiety about this deterioration. The sequence of panels indicates that while the inmates are able to identify their conditions and needs for treatment, it is apparent that the medical examination is aimed at limiting such care and functions as a further mechanism of discipline and punishment.

Control is also exerted over the inmates' political inclinations, stifling any signs of burgeoning political awareness. But according to Foucault, where there is power, there is resistance and like power, resistance can take many forms. As with power relations which cannot be conceived in terms of binary divisions, Foucault conceives resistance as a multiplicity of forms as well, which parallels the network of power relations. Foucault goes further and claims that resistance to power constitutes a necessary condition of its existence, as he argues that when insubordination or "the means of escape or possible flight" are absent, power relations cease to exist. These relations of power can only be understood through the analysis of the various forms of struggle and resistance. We saw how *Panthers in the Hole* suggests the strategy of power and its "multiplicity of force-relations". Similarly, how does *Panthers in the Hole* suggest the presence of "a multiplicity of points of resistance"?

Spaces of Resistance

Space in prison is meant to guarantee the isolation of convicts. The cell is permanent but due to the very nature of the bars, has interstices. The momentary absence of bars in the drawn panels may invite the reader inside with the inmate, into his cell. *Panthers in the Hole* depicts the permeability of the walls, not only with the visual representation of the sounds of pain and protests but also with conversations that defy the function and very purpose of the practice of solitary confinement.

Sounds are extremely important to the description of the prison milieu. It is to be noted that most noises that are transcribed in *Panthers in the Hole* are those of the architectural environment and produced by the staff's activity: keys in locks, heavy metal doors, footsteps, etc. The use of the font is significant in conveying how loud the noise is, and constitutes an attempt to provide an immersive experience. *Panthers in the Hole* not only uses onomatopoeias but also gets very innovative in the transcription of sounds, by suggesting them more subtly.

On page fifteen (fig. 47), the noises are represented visually, despite the absence of onomatopoeia, as incessant and highly detrimental to the inmate's sanity. But the noises implied by the visual depiction of the tap leaking – and the distress and anguish that the leaking tap may cause – are completely muted, as the recitative – the narrative box on top of each panel – is overbearing: this is Burl Cain, the director of Angola speaking. Only he is given a voice and control over the description of the conditions of detention in Angola. The prisoners' own perceptions cannot be heard and both their suffering and its cause are silenced by his official discourse. *Panthers in the Hole*, by showing the silenced inmates in their individual cells, both suggests the stifling and presents the reality of the conditions of detention that Cain tries to redefine in acceptable terms.

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(Figure 49: Cénou, 2014: 92)

In later sequences, *Panthers in the Hole* reproduces the sounds emitted by the prisoners. The transcription of the screaming goes across the grid of frames, overlapping panels to the point that its origin – the identity of the emitter – is ambiguous (Cénou, 2014: 92). The snake-like shape of the onomatopoeia not only conveys the idea that sounds of the prison can go through walls. It is deafening, upsetting, and as the onomatopoeia does not quite follow the conventions of the reading path (typically, from left to right and top to bottom), it is also very disruptive for the reader as well. We might consider this as a precise example of how the political can be located within the aesthetic. According to Rancière, politics concerns

> […] whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen […] it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise. (Rancière, 2004: 30)

The inhuman sounds that the inmate emits from the cell in which he is chained is not only rendered visible and therefore audible; the continuous screams are also turning into a political statement.

Unlike Cain's official discourse, the narrative of the inmates has to compete with these other sounds. The existence of such sounds and their disruptive qualities are essential to the comic – they demonstrate the impossibility of an objective or impartial account of the prison and the problems with attempting to give voice to those inside. When other attempts in popular, visual culture e.g. documentaries to allow inmates to speak they are often circumvented by these noises or distractions. Here, the comic puts them to use in order to show exactly what is at stake in giving voice to inmates in solitary confinement. So this is another example of how that which is intended to shut down politics is re-appropriated precisely to that end. This page ends with a direct address to the reader, with the last sentence in the last panel – "vous imaginez…?" – asserting the pedagogical and political scope of the text.

Other sounds permeating the separations also constitute small acts of resistance. *Panthers in the Hole* features very limited and therefore highly significant interactions between the Angola Three. Such is the sequence of the game of chess, with the space of the chessboard both replicating the grids of cells and transcending them, and the voices of Albert and Herman escaping from the confines of the cells in

order to reach each other and recreate the presence of the invisible other on the chessboard. Partnership finds its realisation on the chessboard, a small space created through an unauthorised practice. The chessboard is an object that was neither allowed in nor smuggled in, but an object which the inmates made themselves. With the chessboard traced on the ground of the cell out of memory from a time outside the walls long gone, chess practice in Angola belongs to a re-appropriation of surfaces by the inmates. The Angola Three also came up with their own codification for their move notation, as evidenced by the fact that the chess pieces are hardly identifiable. This not only alludes to their own creativity, but also implies the restrictions of available tools and the daily deprivations to which they are subjected. Something as harmless as chess is denied to them, which hints at the daily challenging by the Angola Three of these arbitrary rules.

The space in comics shows the overcoming of the segmentation of the oppressed, and the re-appropriation of the surfaces by the inmates finds its most striking instance in the Black Panther symbol, which appears on the tiled bottom of Herman's imagined private swimming pool and on a brick wall behind Black Panther leader Malik Rahim. While the former instance is part of a dream sequence, the latter appears in the background of a real-life encounter with recently-released Robert King. In both sequences, the re-claimed surfaces become surfaces of expression of a sense of belonging to a community. With the inscription of the Black Panther symbol in his private swimming pool, Herman affirms his own individuality through the assertion of his own artistic taste while making a political statement, as he not only claims his Black Panther affiliation but also reimagines his social status as signified through his dream villa.

The reclaiming of surfaces by the Angola Three is not only symbolic or personal. They successfully raised awareness about the subhuman conditions of the feeding system in Angola and their protests led to the installation of more appropriate openings in cell doors.

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(Figure 50: Cénou, 2014: 68)

The inmates are also shown re-claiming their own bodies. The Angola Three successfully put an end to systemic rape in Angola. They not only ended sexualised gang violence committed by inmates (Cénou, 2014: 52), but also fought against another form of sexualised violence: cavity search, an expression of power and a form of control with demeaning effects on its victims, which the Cénou brothers explicitly depict as another institutionalised form of slavery (Cénou, 2014: 69).

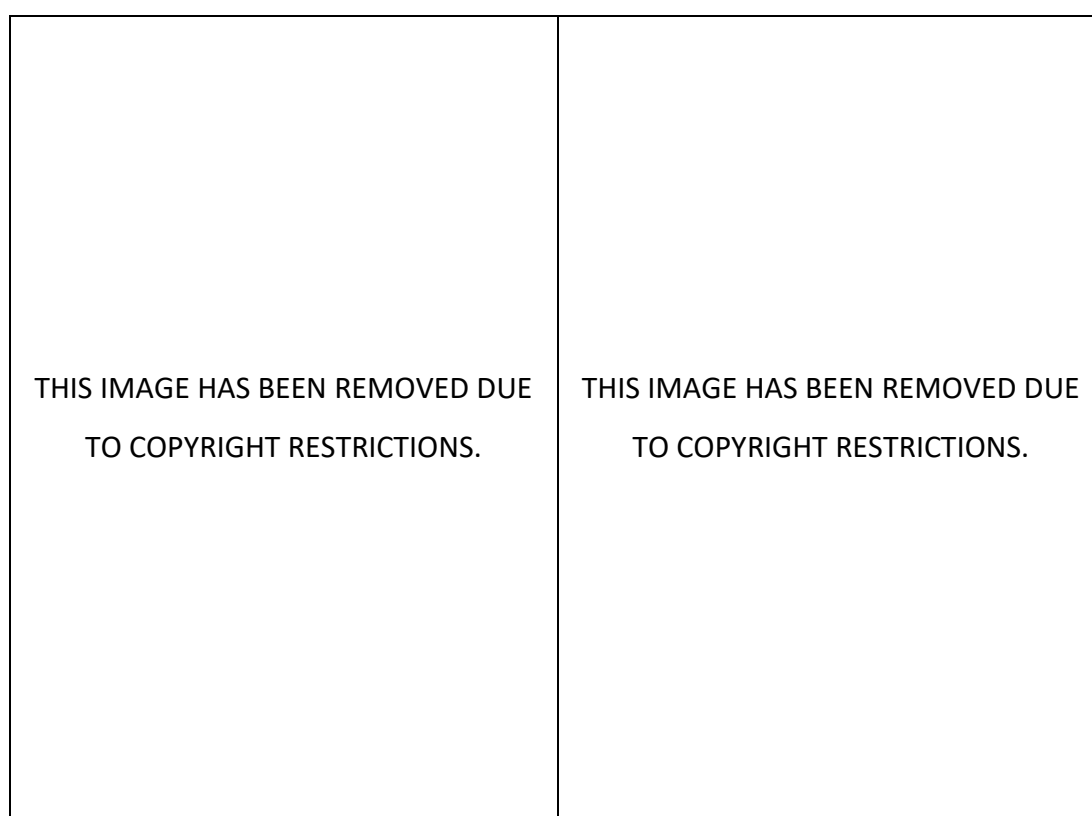THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

(Figure 51: Cénou, 2014: 69)

Panthers in the Hole conveys the idea that punishment is not determined according to the infraction (circumstances and intention) but to the delinquent. Davis disputes the established belief that the increase in the U.S. prison population can be directly correlated to increased levels of crime (Davis, 2003: 84). Examining the ways in which Black people were made into criminals (Davis, 2003: 33), she points out the processes by which petty thievery is transformed into a felony[39]. The judicial system criminalises not only the individual but the community as a whole, as *Panthers in the Hole* suggests through the symbolic and effective framing of the Angola Three (Cénou, 2014: 60). An early scene in the comic features a childhood memory that illustrates the criminalisation and pathologisation of Black culture. The narrative box here contains a voice-over, with the protagonist reflecting on his childhood. Looking at the top left corner of the spread page and the last box in the bottom right corner of the page, the last formal device on which the reader rests his eyes before turning the page, we can see how the formal resources provided by the materiality of comics are used here to "frame" the child. His deeds are irrelevant. He belongs to a group that makes him a criminal from birth and which led him to "Angola".

Panthers in the Hole charts the Angola Three's fight for freedom through the narrative of unfair trials and other legal absurdities. The raised clenched fist, depicted in key moments of the narrative (Cénou, 2014: 87; 102), embeds *Panthers in the Hole* into a wider narrative, the history of the Black Panthers Party. *Panthers in the Hole* shows how the Angola Three became political prisoners. The Angola Three come to the realization that justice can only come from the community as a result of activism (Cénou, 2014: 87); as the raised clenched fist appears on panel in this key moment, this visual symbol signifies the transformation of the individuals into political subjects. But they were put in prison because of their status. The childhood narrative as framed by the two captions is a good way of showing how the story of the Angola Three extends to a wider consideration of the U.S. prison and judicial system as inherently racist. Therefore, the narrative of their political awakening is less a process of becoming than that of becoming aware of who they are and what it means.

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[39] For further reading on these processes in a post-Civil Rights era, see Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010), which looks at the War on Drugs.

The comic 'speaks' for some but not all inmates: the way in which the Angola Three are posited as 'exceptional' individuals against other people, cf. the fat-shaming of the rodeo audiences as well as against the inmates who rape and kill other convicts (Cénou, 2014: 62-63). Serial rapist Hezekiah Brown gave false testimony, although, by his own admission, he did not witness the murder of Brent Miller. *Panthers in the Hole* reports that as a reward, Brown was given a pack of cigarettes a week until his release fourteen years later (Cénou, 2014: 80). The text tends to demonise the inmates who gave false testimony in order to get a shorter sentence (Cénou, 2014: 80). But in doing so, it also indirectly exposes the processes by which marginalised groups are made to compete against each other, which is yet another form of control: divide and conquer.

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(Figure 52: Cénou, 2014: 18-19)

Conclusion

Panthers in the Hole is not only a triple autobiography but also an autobiography in absentia, where the subjects were denied access to their spokespersons. The Cénou brothers present themselves as mere receptacle and messengers. As well as the idea of speaking on behalf of others, they also explore the relationship between politics and aesthetics as they also apply their art and craft to service the autobiographical account to turn it into a political plea for abolishing solitary confinement. "La politique porte sur ce qu'on voit et ce qu'on peut en dire, sur qui a la compétence pour voir et la qualité pour dire, sur les propriétés des espaces et les possibles du temps." (Rancière, 2000: 13-14). Their use of specific aesthetic techniques demonstrates the inseparability of art and politics, and it is not a question of calling one into the service of the other. Should the Angola Three have been sent to prison in the first place? *Panthers in the Hole* may challenge the conditions of incarceration but avoids taking a position on the abolitionist debate. Instead, the text insists on processes of framing, and discourses of resistance. After the release of Albert Woodfox in February 2016, *Panthers in the Hole* remains a powerful pedagogical tool for wider discussions about solitary confinement, which its 2016 translation into English will only widen and further. The text exceeds the status of prison writing as "confession of the scaffold" (Foucault, 1975: 47): it is less a matter of weighing guilt against the cruelties of solitary confinement than an exploration of the systems that led the convicts there.

Panthers in the Hole contests established images and narratives about incarceration. It questions established forms of penal spectatorship by reframing visible markers of criminality, forms of penal labour that give the convicts a "purpose" (rodeo, farm and factory) as present-day forms of slavery, and the processes by which solitary confinement is made tolerable. *Panthers in the Hole* deconstructs the identity of the inmates as "criminals". Through its use of form to replicate the prison space and its tensions, the comic produces further possibilities for transformation in public consciousness of prison life, which build on the political awareness and forms of resistance achieved by the inmates within the prison. It depicts spaces of

rehabilitation and self-transformation that favour the construction of the individual as political and become spaces of resistance. In exposing tensions between reformatory discourse and a slowly growing political awareness, Panthers in the Hole shows symbolic and effective acts of resistance that induce small but significant changes in the inmates' everyday existence.

In this chapter I explored how comics as an aesthetic form can function politically, not simply by recounting a story but also by pushing its form in order to contest the very way in which stories are told – notably when examining the representation of Cain's official discourse and its counter-narrative told visually in *Panthers in the Hole*. I analysed the comics form's means of producing a space of resistance by contrasting overbearing and silenced narratives, deconstructing markers of criminality, and contesting established forms of spectatorships by questioning the penal gaze of fictional spectators and our own spectatorship as readers. With this text I examined how the fragmentation of the self leads to the emergence of a political subject, I explored the depiction of tactics within the norms and how comics can expose and suggest ways of destabilising the normative processes, through processes of flattening out, processes of framing and reframing.

Conclusion

Autobiocomics question self-image, anchoring this interrogation in the realm of representation, and explore how identities are produced, embodied and performed. In this thesis, I examined the crafting of avatars, explored the tensions between denial of the body and excessive affirmation of the body in the process of self-constitution and self-transformation into an image – and I analysed what it means to represent the other. As I investigated how autobiocomics may propose and explore alternative modes of subjectivation, the question of self-identity turned into a metanarrative question, as self-writing raised the question of the formal means of (re)constituting the body via the avatar in autobiocomics. The notion of self-crafting is a more helpful term than self-transformation, as it implies not just artistic production, but also technical skills, and the use of specific tools. Self-crafting invokes the meanings of "vessel" and "transportation", which suggest a sense of movement rather than the production of a fixed object. Building on the idea that autobiocomics produce a conflation of identity and text, between the narrative voice and the narrated subject, coupled with the Butlerian notion of the production of selves as effects (Butler, 2005: 22), I used the notion of self-crafting to refer to the activities that the subject exercises in forming and negotiating relations with the norms. Through the articulation of these reiterative and performative practices, a critical stance towards normative and dominant frameworks emerged.

In this thesis, I have identified the need to reframe the notion of authenticity by highlighting its performative aspect building on the work of El Rafaie, whilst acknowledging the role that authenticity plays in creating a community of readers around an author or comics persona. Making small but significant uses of assemblage as part of my theoretical framework has offered a more fruitful engagement with the autobiocomics project, as it removes the notion of the original subject and allows for an examination of the complex relations between the author as textual construct, the avatar, the autobiocomics object, the subject matter and meta-discourse. I outlined the tensions between these notions in my chapter on the works attributed to Judith Forest.

As I examined how Judith Forest's *1H25* and *Momon* play with the codes of autobiocomics. I showed how the text establishes itself as an autobiography whilst deconstructing the autobiographical project. I demonstrated how Forest's works question assumptions about what constitutes femininity and womanliness. I showed that Forest's works can be read within the space between a long tradition of objectification and the wake of third-wave feminism. I examined what seems to be the expression of sexual freedom but what in fact leans towards a form of compulsive and compulsory sexuality, and arguably becomes a site of further alienation and submission to the male gaze. By exploring the relationship between surfaces and masks in Forest's works, I looked at the absence of referent throughout the textual and visual performativity of womanliness. I argued that inventive intertextual writing illuminates the notion of creativity as a form of resistance and concluded with considerations on the limits of this resistance in *1h25*. Forest is a textual creature produced by three middle-aged male artists, a revelation which reframes our reading. Whilst I examined the text as oscillating between performances of the female voice and traces of the male gaze, I showed the apparent contradictions between a reassessment of the text as reinforcing patriarchal views, and the textual construct of a young female voice resisting traditional feminist stances and proposing new ways of being a woman. I investigated complex power relations between, on the one hand, the textual author construct and 'her' autobiographical project, and, on the other hand, between the three authors and their 'object' of study. And with these questions, I examined the tensions between the autobiographical subject as an object of study, as a textual and visual construct, and as an object of consumption (as an autobiographical text and a female body).

I further investigated in Chapter 3 the significance of the flattening of the relations between the author and his characters: the narrative seems to undermine the work of Trondheim as an artist, further suggesting the flattening of the creative process. Lewis Trondheim's diegetic persona seems to be stuck with an immutable mask and appearance, and one facial expression, as though caught in a state of stasis, a still figure in an ever-changing world. This lack of engagement with the world becomes a source of anxiety that turns into a mid-life and artistic crisis questioning and stifling his relevance as an artist and as a middle-aged white man

confronted with the seeming absence of subject matter and the loss of meaning. In chapter 3, I argued that this stifling stance turns into an unexpected source of creativity. Using a highly recognisable avatar, Trondheim transforms himself into a brand. This not only partakes of the elaboration of a personal myth, but the immutability of his cartoon avatar also points to another approach to the autobiographical project: fixing a seemingly fleeting experience on the page. This project is in tension with the autobiographical pact proposed in the title *Approximativement*. Moreover, the autobiographical project is seemingly thwarted by the assertion repeated throughout the text that the author has nothing to say. However, in his attempts at transcribing his creative block and his mid-life crisis, Trondheim pushes the boundaries of limitations imposed both by the comics' form and by the autobiographical pact. My analysis scrutinised the inscription of the interplay between representation and invention in the comics form and I examined how Trondheim addresses concerns about personal and artistic inadequacy, the lack of subject matter, boredom, the general feeling of irrelevance and obsolescence, and their resistance to representation through inventive textual and visual practices. Playing with the rules and conventions of autobiocomics (notably through the visual transformations of his avatar), Trondheim performs small acts of resistance within his autobiographical practice. *Approximativement* also contains traces of an exploration of heterosexual masculinities and the anxieties that these roles trigger in the subject. Trondheim does not really open up spaces of resistance, but by de-familiarising his condition, he suggests in his autobiographical work new ways of thinking the heterosexual ageing man.

The notion of the author as the transcriber of a pre-existing reality participates in the erasure of the framing process. This erasure paradoxically stresses the importance of the frames. The notion of framing enabled a textual examination of the representations of subjectivities in autobiocomics, notably through the analysis of the multiplicities of narrative instances and temporal layers. Frames and assemblage reveal the inter-relational production of meanings between panels; not just the production of a fixed object (the persona, the text, the material book) but also a sense of movement. With the flows, dynamic, open-endedness of the various readings and interpretations, a panel is always to be re-interpreted in its

relations with other panels and other texts. This allows for a textual examination of the representations of subjectivities in autobiocomics, notably through the analysis of the multiplicities of narrative instances and temporal layers. With assemblage, the reader can also see the continual process of framing and re-framing occurring within the comics space, and the many ways that the multidimensional frames legitimise and normalise. The panel frames, the narrative frames and other rhetorical framing devices are a tool for highlighting and exploring the role of socio-culturally determined frames in the representation of identity, as they may suggest the destabilisation of relations and dominant frameworks.

I pursued my examination of the many ways autobiocomics may expose the normative construction of the subject by looking at how Fabrice Neaud's third *Journal* volume explores– through the depiction of traumatic experiences, the representation of PTSD and its effects on the subject (which are conveyed through complex temporalities, radical changes in graphic style and networks of visual metaphors) – the fragility of identity and self-preservation. I examined the visual and textual representation of this fragility in the didactic account of his individual experience and his difficulties of being a member of a gay community that under the façade of acceptance only brings further subjection, stigmatisation and alienation. I examined how Neaud's avatar enacts and performs his identity to render it legible during encounters that are part of the process of subject-formation as much as they are disruptive and alienating. I focused on Neaud's depictions of various forms of violence, ranging from everyday rejections and homophobic verbal abuses to physical assaults. I examined the explicit and implicit, textual and visual representation of their traumatic effects on Neaud's persona, notably by investigating the ways in which Neaud attempts to overcome the unspeakability of trauma through innovative uses of the formal fragmentation that characterises comics. This didactic text depicts the decentring of the self as a consequence of PTSD, but also as a way of overcoming the unspeakability of the traumatic experience. Narrative disruptions through the insertions of cropped, reframed inter-pictorial quotations (that are all the more striking that they occur in a regular panel grid) destabilise and reconfigure

meaning as are part of a cathartic process whereby the author/narrator arrives at a better self-understanding and shares it with his reader.

The following chapter continued the exploration of legitimised and normalised alienation and violence, the representation of these normative processes and the opening up of potentialities for challenging them, through the analysis of the interweaving of voices in Goblet's *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir*. In chapter 5, I considered narrative shifts, transitions and flux. I examined how the network of relations fluctuates and how affective transformative encounters invite re-readings, which lead to de-familiarisation of seemingly familiar concepts that are never set but are redefined through a process of constant negotiation between subjects, by investigating notably how the text challenges the notion of "home". Goblet goes beyond mere de-familiarisation of the private sphere and exposes power relations. I approached *Faire Semblant C'est Mentir* as a text whose primary concern is the anxiety caused by the idea that autobiographical practice can lead to further knowledge of a textual construct rather than of the self. Building on my examination of the title and its embedded significance, I centered my investigation around the layering of voices, the collapsing of subjectivities, and the inscriptions of physical and emotional abuse on the bodies, using the notions of "pretending" and "lying". I demonstrated how the network of relations is suggested by formal experiments with a range of different voices, a multiplicity of testimonies characterised by their incompleteness, contradictions and ever-changing nature.

By revealing and exposing the workings of the frames by which the avatar is introduced, presented and questioned, autobiocomics raise the question of the complicity of the reader in these acts of framing and their effects – an aspect that we explored further in the last chapter by moving beyond a self-centered perspective in order to examine external framings of the individual.

Bringing the concept of individual self-transformations into wider notions of political and ethical responsibilities, I turned in chapter 6 to the examination of an autobiographical text where the authors lent their voice – and art – to subjects deprived of their rights. My last chapter focused on *Panthers in the Hole*, a biographical account by French comics artist David Cénou and writer

Bruno Cénou who interweave the life narratives of the Angola Three, Robert King, Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace, with wider considerations on racial segregations and detention conditions in the USA. *Panthers in the Hole*'s authors, the Cénou brothers, disappear from the account of the Angola Three's lives in solitary confinement. By eclipsing themselves from the text, they raised the question whether, in their laudable attempt at giving a voice to those who do not have one, the Cénou brothers were speaking for them or over them.

Choosing the comics form for the account of the Angola Three*, Panthers in the Hole* introduces the idea of self-writing and, with it, the possibility for the subjects of regaining agency. I showed how growing political awareness and forms of resistance achieved by the inmates within the prison are represented in *Panthers in the Hole*. However, as the comic brings the subjects out of the 'hole' and into the comics panels, it reframes them. As the comic provides a new frame, it not only exposes and denounces the framing processes of the prison system but it also turns the reader into a "penal spectator", extending the spectacle and inviting another form of voyeurism. In doing so, the text risks reproducing the very forms of justification for incarceration it seeks to expose and deconstruct. My contention was that these tensions produce further possibilities for transformation regarding public consciousness of prison life, as the notion of "spectatorship" raises questions about readership and our complicity in acts of framing and their effects.

The focus of my study has been on the materiality of comics and their potential for developing ideas and raising questions about the self that are more efficiently articulated in the comics form with words framing the visual narratives. As I chose to look at the interplay of the narratives and the formal and stylistic aspects of comics, I did not concentrate on their literariness, but more could be done about the vernacular and registers that are used. Also, the specific autobiocomics that I chose to examine make scarce uses of colour and my focusing on the political aspect of self-crafting left out a consideration of the significance of colour. Many small-press fictional comics that were first published in black and white get re-published in colour. This year, the documentary in comics *The Comic Book History of Comics* by Fred Van Lente is currently being re-released serially this time in colours (Lente, 2012/2017). By contrast, autobiocomics still get re-edited in black and white, which

denotes conscious artistic decisions rather than a choice dictated by material limitations. Yet not all autobiocomics are published in black and white and it would be interesting to dedicate further academic study to the significance of black and white aesthetics and its flattening-down effects in autobiocomics, and examine what the layers of textures and colours can bring to autobiographical practices in comics.

When combined together, all the texts under study in this thesis advocate various approaches to the processes of self-crafting but all suggest in their own, distinctive ways that autobiocomics propose a nostalgic celebration of the fragmented self while presenting this fragmentation as something new, radical and subversive. I looked at autobiocomics that present a traditional play between the artist and the protagonist and examined their construction of the everyday as political. I underlined a shift as my close-text analysis of comics for their own sake developed into an examination of what they could achieve. I have considered autobiocomics as a tool for exploring and crafting a sense of self, as I examined the emergence of a political point of view in the material process of self-crafting, this aspect could have wider implications: future research could be devoted to exploring to what extent 'self-crafting' can be a tool for the communities. As a community of readers emerge, further studies are needed in order to get a sense of their critical engagement in relation to the notion of self-crafting. To what extent does a political point of view emerge from the creation of these communities of readers? This question could lead to another line of enquiry, and the next step could be to explore further the shift from considering comics as a subject of analysis to approaching comics as a tool for investigation and research dissemination to a different kind of audience. Such research would also invite further reflections on the role of comics in academia, building on my own engagement with comics, my doctoral research as self-writing and my self-crafting into a PhD candidate. Framing is always a reframing: have I reconstructed yet another frame and how can I interrogate this frame itself?

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