

ÉLISE HUGUENY-LÉGER: Projections de soi. Identités et images en mouvement dans l'autofiction [Self-projections. Identities and moving images in autofiction]

Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2022. 324 pp. ISBN 978-2-7297-1379-9, DOI: 10.4000/books.pul.47931

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2023.15.4.10>

The discourse about writing the self has become an inseparable part of thinking about contemporary, predominantly Anglophone and Francophone literature. Since the term “autofiction”, referred to as a particular and expanded form of writing the self, was coined by the French writer and novelist Serge Doubrovsky in the late 1970s, it has become a key concept in the research of many scholars and writers (Philippe Gasparini, Vincent Colonna, Madeleine Ouelette-Michalska, etc.). Autofiction, however, does not concern only literature, but has become relevant also in the context of digital media, cinema, and the audio-visual industry. The interweaving of private life and the public sphere, literature and other forms of art, inspired Élise Hugueny-Léger, a researcher in the field of contemporary French literature and culture at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, to examine writing the self as an intermedial artistic approach. In her latest book *Projections de soi. Identités et images en mouvement dans l'autofiction* (2022), she examines dialogues between literature and the moving images in relation to self-representation, and the impact of media on autofiction in France in the last several decades. Her monograph, which in the course of five chapters provides a thorough analysis of the works of internationally recognized authors such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, Annie Ernaux, Christine Angot, Georges Perec, Emmanuel Carrère, Delphine de Vigan, Chloé Delaume and many others, is the latest publication of the collection “Autofictions, etc.” directed by Roger-Yves Roche.

The introduction provides an argumentatively solid theoretical base of Hugueny-Léger's thinking about autofiction. Starting from Bernd Herzogenrath's concept of “intermediality”, which refers to the study of interrelations between media in a broader sense (literature, painting, cinema, music, digital art, photography, etc.), she exposes a cultural context of writing the self. For Hugueny-Léger, intermediality is likely to express the impact of socio-cultural and technological transformations on artistic practices (the process of production) as well as on the reception of works (6). It is related to a relatively recent explosion of various media (e-mails, blogs, vlogs etc.), which give self-representation a strong visual and intermedial dimension. Media, especially television screen and digital technologies, play a significant role not only in helping writers to construct their own identity, but also in being a resource of authorial criticism, irony, or experimentation. The author pays special attention to the role of moving images (motion pictures, videos, etc.) with regard to the question of identity in autofiction, as indicated by the book subtitle. At the same time, she exploits the polysemic term “projection” (analyzed among others by Vincent Colonna, Italo Calvino, Stanley Cavell, Linda Haverty Rugg, etc.), which comprises the act of projecting a film or an image onto a screen, the film or the image itself, the act of imagining, anticipating or expressing one's feelings and wishes (28). Thus, the projection – conceived as a technical resource, a mental process, and a metaphor – enables Hugueny-Léger not only to study the prac-

tice of autofiction in the context of renewed interest in writing the self and reality, but at the same time to reflect it on a cultural level (34). She therefore searches for causes of the rise of writing the self in France, which she tends to identify with the democratization of writing and publishing in the second half of the 20th century, related to feminist claims, student revolt, etc. (15).

Huguény-Léger also points out that the genre of autofiction has been frequently associated with feminine writing because of its characteristics – writing the body, romantic relationships, fragmentation, etc. However, the so-called feminine characteristics of writing are typical of writing of some men, as the author argues based on Doubrovsky's style, and rather result from the socio-historical context. Thus, most contemporary autobiographical works (regardless of the author's gender identity) are characterized by dislocated and hesitating writing of exclusion, violence, physical and psychic trauma, and by a difficult quest for identity, tending to express collisions more often than fluidity, and alienation rather than reconciliation (38–45).

In the first chapter “L'autofiction des Nouveaux Romanciers” (Autofiction of new novelists), the author retraces the origin of the term autofiction, which was established following a debate opposing a “traditional” autobiography (Philippe Lejeune) and a new conception emphasizing the disintegration of the subject (Serge Doubrovsky). In this context, the contribution of “New Novelists”, especially that of Robbe-Grillet and Duras, to the development of writing the self was significant, according to Huguény-Léger, due to their refusal of the referential illusion of literature, the use of visual modes of representation (both were filmmakers) and the splitting of self-representation into the public image on one side and the image mediated by writing on the other side (52). Robbe-Grillet's trilogy *Romanesques* (1985–1994) and Duras's *L'amant* (1984; *The Lover*, 1985) demonstrate that autobiographical fiction includes obsessions and fantasies

(mental projections constituting the individuality of the writing subject) that can reveal much of reality. Moreover, as a result of her appearance on television in the 1980s, Duras introduced the public figure “Duras” that was different from Duras the writer, thus blurring significantly the lines between fiction and reality. By adopting a new (media) role, she became a sort of predecessor of some contemporary writers, who master media communication tools (Amélie Nothomb, Christine Angot, Chloé Delaume, etc.).

In the second chapter “Filer, filmer” (To track, to film), the author analyses the use of cinema (as a technique and a metaphor) in autobiographical projects of several writers/filmmakers. In the metaphorical meaning, the French verb “filer” (in Eng., it means at the same time to weave and to track) and the noun “filature” (Eng. weaving/shadowing) are used to designate the production of the forms of autofiction including the elements of a detective story – disappearance, quest, investigation – that one can find in the works of Camille Laurens or Sophie Calle, among others. For Laurens, the cinema represents in her novels, especially in *L'Avenir* (The future, 1998) and *Ni toi ni moi* (Neither you nor me, 2006), a support of the narrative enabling her to raise the questions of splitting and projecting herself, such as by the use of intertextual references to films (106). For Calle, who is also a photographer and conceptual artist, her film *No sex last night* (1996) brings a possibility for the experimental, performative and parodic practice of autofiction (110) and a reflection on socio-cultural stereotypes and clichés. The motif of disappearance indicated by the verb “filer” serves also to express the vulnerability of the subject and his/her traumatized memory due to historical events. For instance, Perec explores the question of self-representation in his autobiographical text “Les lieux d'une fugue” (The places of a fugue) posthumously published in the book *Je suis né* (I was born, 1990), which was written in 1965 and adapted by him for the screen in 1978. Simply by adopting the third person singular

in the text and by not showing the character in the film, he emphasized the disintegration and the absence of the subject, which is absolutely crucial in his other works.

Another way of investigating the self is developed in the third chapter “Disparition et quête des origines” (Disappearance and a search for origins) through the diptych by Carrère: the film *Retour à Kotelnitch* (Return to Kotelnich, 2003) and the book *Un roman russe* (2007; *My Life as a Russian Novel*, 2011). The writer and filmmaker well-known for practicing a hybrid “non-fictional” genre based on biography, autobiography, essay, and documentary takes a particular interest in fascinating new stories, where reality is constantly tinged with imagination. While the former is appealing for its extraordinary character, it is the latter that conveys doubts, thoughts or worries of the narrator, and thus proves an autobiographical aspect of Carrère’s works. As indicated by Hugueny-Léger, the narrator even comes to transform the real experience by his imaginative strategies (157). Carrère’s approach to writing is also characterized by the use of film techniques, such as montage and juxtaposition, which aim at emotion. Behind them, however, one can recognize the author’s quest for himself and his (Russian) origins.

The fourth chapter “Adaptations et altérité” (Adaptations and otherness) focuses on dialogues between the book and the screen through the analysis of the novels by Annie Ernaux – *L’Occupation* (2002; *The Possession*, 2008) – and Christine Angot – *Pourquoi le Brésil?* (Why Brazil?, 2002) – and their film adaptations – *L’Autre* (The other one, 2008) and *Pourquoi (pas) le Brésil* (Why (not) Brazil, 2004) – realized respectively by Patrick Mario Bernard in cooperation with Pierre Trividic and Laetitia Masson. It is known that Ernaux’s “ethnographic” texts are initiated by a significant personal experience that is transformed by her imagination (the use of images and a visual language) and situated in a collective, objective reality indicated by a number of extratextual references (186–196). Ernaux turns to lit-

erature in order to understand reality, but at the same time she applies distancing from herself (de-realization). The cinema, which implies the splitting between the three instances – author, narrator, and actress – allows to go further in representing the self, as Hugueny-Léger argues. Angot, usually associated with a “vulgar” exhibition of intimacy (208), turns in her works around the same personal traumatic experience (sexual abuse by her father) in a sort of (intertextual) echo. While her novel *Pourquoi le Brésil?* represents an interior monologue related to a love encounter and the search of adaptation between partners, its film adaptation reflects on the role and representations of autofiction in the era of hypermediation (210). In other words, the filmmaker Masson makes us think about the questions of authenticity and reality, besides that of the relationships, hence, surpassing Angot’s original intention.

The fifth chapter entitled “Sujets médiatiques, figures publiques” (Media subjects, public figures) deals with the term autofiction from a media perspective. Hugueny-Léger points out that in France the term became widely known outside the academic sphere in the 1990s thanks to television (242), and to the boom of reality shows and public debates, which introduced taboo topics such as marital problems, domestic violence, drug addition, etc. Television has the capacity to tell a story and to contribute to the official discourse of history or current affairs while eliminating chaotic elements (250). Otherwise, it can also serve the self-representation and join the text and image in several ways – by the representation of an author on TV, by referring to TV in the text, or by using it for intertextual purposes (251). While the first case is exploited by Emmanuel Carrère, Serge Doubrovsky or Amélie Nothomb, the second one appears in the works of the French performer, musician and novelist Chloé Delaume – *J’habite dans la télévision* (I live in the television, 2006) – and the Belgian novelist and filmmaker Jean-Philippe Tousseint – *La Télévision* (The Television, 1997) –, who reflect on the impact of audiovi-

sual media on our lives. Delaume, just like Frédéric Beigbeder and Angot, belongs to the generation highly visible in the media space, of which she is a product and a critic at the same time (265). Finally, the book by Delphine de Vigan *D'après une histoire vraie* (2015; *Based on a true story*, 2017), adapted for the cinema by Roman Polanski in 2017, engages the reflection on the limits between truth and fiction in the process of writing. By combining verifiable and plausible autobiographical clues, she has created a disturbing referential illusion (272).

The final part of the monograph sums up the multitude of interpretations of autofiction, including a metadiscourse, a reflection of socio-cultural changes, or a process of transformation of the subject and his/her experience through writing (283). According to Hugueny-Léger, the term encompasses nowadays such a variety of sub-genres and trans-genres that it seems to be insufficient (287). Although she mentions potential mutations of the genre due to the impact of emerging digital media and technologies

(tablets, smartphones, etc.) and social media (youtube, Instagram, etc.) on authors' self-projection, she does not develop this discussion further.

Élise Hugueny-Léger's book provides the reader with a profound and thought-provoking insight into the French theory and practice of autofictional writing. The author's intermedial approach clarifies the phenomenon from various perspectives and suggests a remarkable knowledge of literary and artistic works, some relatively less known, by important figures of French culture. Moreover, the book's construction and continuity between chapters ensures its compactness, considering the relatively wide range of objectives defined in the introduction. It might well serve as a relevant and inspiring resource for scholars and enthusiastic readers, who are interested in the dynamic character of autofiction in contemporary French literature.

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SONIA ANTON (ed.): La territoire littéraire de la Seine, géocritique d'un fleuve [The literary territory of the Seine: Geocriticism of a river]

Mont-Saint-Aignan: Presse universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2022. 342 pp. ISBN 979-10-240-1717-4

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2023.15.4.11>

The publication *Le territoire littéraire de la Seine, géocritique d'un fleuve* explores the field of literary geography aiming to depict the river Seine through a geocritical point of view. Under the direction of Sonia Anton, a lecturer in French literature at the University of Le Havre (France), it brings together articles on literary representations of the Seine in various literary works which correspond to the geocritical principle of multifocalization. The contributions by architects, writers and literary scholars emphasize the interdisciplinarity of geocriticism (its interest in mimetic arts, such

as painting, cinema, and photography, as well as in disciplines dealing with space such as urbanism or architecture). Some of the studies were presented in March 2019 at a conference in Le Havre, linked to the GéoSeine research programme and particularly to collaboration with the École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Normandie (ENSA Normandie).

The publication under review is divided into three parts. The first one, "The Literary Seine from the Middle Ages until the present" includes 15 studies, the second part "Say the Seine today: The Seine and the emerging