

POST-QUEER AUTOBIOGRAPHY: PLACING/FACING FABRICE NEAUD

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Although recently elevated to the status of *neuvième art* in France, *bande dessinée* is still haunted by the popular conception of the medium as juvenile, or worse, adolescent-masturbatory. This is perhaps comparable to the early history of the novel, which, even after it had been elevated to the status of serious art form, nonetheless bore the mark of its original association with women's leisure reading, both in the writing and reception of the genre. This state of affairs presents as many challenges as it does openings to authors of BD interested in expanding the range of subject matter expressed in the medium. I think this is particularly true for *bédéistes* writing about explicitly gay or lesbian subject matter; they must contend in some way with the medium's history of reception, associated with straight adolescent male fantasy and dominated by super-hero, sci-fi, action, and fantasy genres—all synonymous with caricatured representations of heterosexual desire. What is more, at this moment in the history of this newly elevated art form, an author's choice to depict gay and lesbian subject matter in BD is inevitably construed as a "statement" (perhaps celebrated as such, but all the same, it cannot "just be" a simple work of BD). There are, of course, a few *bédéistes* working on explicitly gay subject matter in France today. Some of the more visible authors include Hélène Georges, Nicholas Presl, Cunéo, and Jean-Paul Jennequin, writing for a number of markets, from the independent comics scene to the quasi-porn gay bookstore scene. But here, I would like to look at the most visible and controversial of queer comics authors in France today, Fabrice Neaud, who is particularly relevant to this special issue of *Contemporary French & Francophone Studies: Sites* devoted to the post-queer, given his expressed hostility towards identitarian discourses and "le politiquement correct" in France today.

Neaud's autobiographical *bande dessinée*, entitled *Journal*, is unique in the French BD scene, both in its form and content. Although his writing touches on a number of aspects of his daily existence, Neaud's *Journal* is primarily devoted to describing the author's loves. The tone of *Journal* alternates, sometimes dramatically, between tender poetic avowals of love and almost coldly didactic treatises on sexuality and love. What distinguishes *Journal*, formally, from other autobiographical comics projects (what Ann Miller and Murray Pratt have termed "autobiocomics" [1]) is that Neaud conceives of it as an open-ended journal. In other words, there is no preconceived unity to the project, and no preconceived end. Nonetheless, each volume of Neaud's *Journal* has a certain formal unity that would distinguish it from a *carnet*, a format made popular by such notable *bédéistes* as Joann Sfar and Lewis Trondheim. The scale of the project distinguishes it further from other autobiocomics in France. *Journal* is almost Proustian in scope: four volumes of *Journal* have been published so far (an impressive total of 765 pages), spanning the period of Neaud's life from February 1992 to July of 1996, and a fifth volume is in the process of being written according to Neaud's personal website.¹

Neaud takes a contentious position in regards to questions of gay identity and gay community in France, a position that makes him useful in any examination of what might be called French identity politics. He is all the more interesting in that his strong positions are often subject to telling slippages. Neaud is somewhat of a dialectician, taking a strong counter-stance, often more out of distaste for thoughtless consensus than anything else. The author infamously rejects the gay community (both the idea of a gay community and the actual existing community in Angoulême, where he resides) while at the same time, during some of his more didactic moments, Neaud find himself speaking on behalf of gay men using a *nous* (*nous, homosexuels*) to apostrophize a *vous* (*vous, hétérosexuels*), belying, at the very least, a conflicted sense of desire for gay community. The relationship between the rejection of the idea of gay community and the adoption of a collective pronoun is worth examining. Neaud is critical of the ways in which gay communities accept and embody "intelligible"—that is, easily monitored—social identities as though they were essential and timeless, but his isolation from community is felt as painful. Much of Neaud's writing is devoted to lamenting this sense of isolation, which, he seems to acknowledge, is partly self-imposed.

In refusing community and gay intelligibility, Neaud works most often on two particular conceptual and representational domains, which I will name (somewhat arbitrarily) "place" and "face." Both represent conceptual battlegrounds for the resistance to tropes of gay intelligibility as well as the space of a certain work on the self. Place names a preoccupation with socialized spaces accompanied by a certain utopian ("no-place") strain in Neaud's work, while face names a preoccupation with intimate intersubjectivity, along with related questions of appropriation and projection. Both of these are also,

not coincidentally, common formal dimensions of BD, a medium that is architectural and is also preoccupied with dynamics of masking and unmasking. The question of the medium is indeed inseparable from this work Neaud does on “place” and “face.”

We should start then by reading Neaud’s rejection of gay community in relationship to his decision to use a medium that has traditionally been exclusionary. Simply put, why does Neaud choose to write in a form in which he is out of place? I would like to suggest that “out-of place” is precisely the “place” from which Neaud needs to write his autobiographical BD. Being out of place in the medium reflects meaningfully his sense of himself as an outsider both to gay and straight communities. It also promises a certain *succès de scandale*; what would have been an uneventful self-revelation if Neaud had written an autofiction or literary autobiography, becomes a bold “statement” simply by virtue of his choice of medium. I will also suggest that *bande dessinée*, because of its exclusionary history and because of formal constraints specific to the medium, has a certain openness that makes it possible for Neaud to write in the mode of public intimacy without relying on tropes of intelligibility or suturing strategies typical in gay autobiographical writing. This essay looks closely at the first volume of his *Journal*, published in 1996, but will situate close readings of the first volume in relationship to the larger project.

Fabrice Neaud’s Place

On a most basic level, Neaud, as a gay BD author, is out of place in his medium. Like many BD authors, Neaud is interested in formal questions of space and place presented by the constraints of the medium. And as a gay man living in the provinces, the question of place (public vs. private, Paris vs. province, and attendant questions of home, nation, and family) is an especially fraught one. This being-out-of-place in a medium for which space and place are central to its signifying practices, Neaud exploits in a number of ways worth our attention. The very matter and form of the *Journal*—a kind of public intimacy—produce constant conflations of the divide between public and private, revealing the division of public and private space to be built on an imaginary opposition. Indeed, he manages to offend many of his friends and colleagues by using their faces and revealing facts about their lives, offenses that enter the narrative of the *Journal* as its writing becomes part of the story, giving way to lengthy discursus on the hypocrisy of bourgeois division between private and public.

The first place of importance for Neaud is, significantly, the park, which is a point of condensation for many of his personal and artistic preoccupations, most particularly, his concerns about questions of place and space, public and private, and the like. In the opening pages of the first volume,

he depicts a primal scene, which he dates and places: “centre aéré—1975” (5). The first two pages show a series of panels depicting three young bullies chasing, presumably, the young Fabrice through what appears to be a public park. They succeed in stripping him, leaving the boy with his pants down in an abject (almost fetal) position. This abject position becomes a leitmotif in the *Journal*, one that links and ultimately conflates a number of places (his own bed, an art show in his apartment, beach dunes, the sidewalk), all associated on various levels with the author’s sexuality. In this primal scene, his shame is not only tied to the sexual humiliation of being bullied for a difference he embodied before he was old enough to fully understand it, but also to a sense of disillusion and injustice when social laws he thought to be universal turn out to apply only to the privileged. Once caught by his tormentors, young Fabrice first cries out “Aïe! Pouce!” to which the bully responds, “y’a pas d’pouce.” He makes a second appeal, “. . . attends . . . j’me suis fait mal en tombant . . .” which only inspires more cruelty from the bully, who responds with mocking irony: “Vous avez entendu les gars? . . . le pauvre petit chéri s’est fait mal en tombant” (5–6). First appealing to the rules of the playground, and then appealing to the law of sympathy, both social laws that shape the public sphere, the young Fabrice experiences his first great disappointment, which takes the shape of a retrospective realization: for gay people (and even for proto-gay boys), the social laws that are designed to protect the good republican citizen are not timeless truths. He is also introduced to the more brutal lesson that gay people are out of place in these public spaces for the paradoxical reason that their very presence—apparently, a legible presence—is viewed as a public offense. Their legibility offends the (heterosexual) republican subject’s sense of the sacred nature and safety of the divide between public and private.

The violent nature of this “public” humiliation Neaud posits as the origin of a highly ambivalent eroticization of both humiliation and public spaces. The author suggest as much by linking this outdoor humiliation scene to a park sex scene: immediately following the primal scene, Neaud depicts a nighttime walk to the “jardins publiques.” With no text to mark the transition, the *Journal* cuts first to a panel showing an adult Fabrice in bed, curled up in a similar position (7). The abject position links the two succeeding panels through a type of visual metonymy Neaud employs often to link divergent spaces to one another. After being awakened by a phone call, Fabrice decides, “je crois que je vais aller faire un tour . . . une petite balade sur les ramparts. Tranquille” (8). In the following panels Fabrice, looking coyly innocent, walks to and—as the caption reads—“Hop,” the drawn figure enters the gates of the *jardins publiques*. But before we see what goes on inside the park—of course most readers would have a guess—the *Journal* cuts to another scene. The panel that follows the entry into the *jardins publiques*, an entry we see only from the outside, is followed by

an interior, not of the park, but of his friend Loïc's apartment. Why does Neaud defer the reader's access to the space of the park here?

At this point Neaud inserts a second primal scene, this one depicting the earliest conception of the *Journal*. In eleven asymmetrically formatted panels, Loïc suggests that Fabrice use the medium of *bande dessinée* to tell his own story, and encourages Fabrice specifically to recount stories of his "petites ballades nocturnes" (10–11). The two primal scenes are thus connected via Fabrice's nighttime walks in the park, a place that both names Neaud's subject matter, designating in a certain way the public intimacy of a BD journal, and stands in as the displaced, and displacing, origin of the *Journal's* post-queer subjectivity. The park is both an intersection and a site of origins for the *Journal* and its becoming-subject.

The second primal scene is followed by a narrative parenthesis. Twelve evenly spaced 1/9 panels, presented in a rhythmic tempo, depict a phone call to Stéphane, whom we find out later is Fabrice's love object. The two make a rendez-vous for Stéphane to model for Fabrice. Then follows, quite tellingly, a 1/3 horizontal panel that quietly depicts the city, a quiet idyll of rooftops and large open sky (12–13). The city, although never named, is Angoulême, home to the largest BD festival and also site of one of only two art schools that offer a serious concentration in *bande dessinée*. The place cannot be separated from the medium: the city, metonym of the medium of *bande dessinée*, is here represented in a contemplative mode as open space. This open conception of space and place is central to Neaud's use of the medium, and is linked in his imagination to the space of the park.

But before returning to the inside of the park, Neaud includes one more scene in which questions of representation and exclusion are raised together. Fabrice and his friend Alain are shown planning and drafting for a commissioned series representing the Stations of the Cross for a local church. Alain is concerned that their art school friends believe the two of them will vote "à droite," since they now work for the church. Fabrice, who has apparently been raised as an atheist, responds annoyed with the dogmatic atheism of his French leftist friends and, perhaps only out of provocation, declares to Alain, "Dieu est une hypothèse plutôt intéressante" (14–17). Neaud visibly enjoys his participation in an institution that traditionally excludes homosexuals, precisely because its exclusionary history gives him room to be something other than a homosexual. Like the medium of *bande dessinée*, and like the park, to some extent, the church represents an open space, open for resignification. Here Neaud makes the Stations of the Cross resignify through ironic juxtaposition. He brings his participation in the representation of the Stations of the Cross, the archetypal walk into juxtaposition with his own walks, seeking nighttime sex in the *jardins publiques*. He calls this juxtaposition an irony, "ironie du sort," (9) but deliberately and provocatively leaves it unclear which of the walks is

supposed to ironize the other: Neaud insists on keeping the ironic juxtaposition indeterminate.

The narrative parenthesis Neaud opens between his entry into the *jardins publiques* and his description of the goings-on inside the park suggest a relation among the narratives sandwiched between the interior and the exterior of the *jardins*. It is in his description of the interior of the *jardins publiques* that these relationships materialize most clearly.

The scene opens with a 1/3 horizontal panel depicting a dark outdoor locale, formatted somewhat like a horror movie still. Describing his nocturnal wanderings, Fabrice lists the various types of men who frequent the park. He assumes an almost anthropological, even zoological, tone, “le reste du temps s’exhibe une faune pour le moins insupportable et totalement caricaturale, comme les coiffeuses . . . les vieux pervers inoffensifs, mais voyeurs . . . et des maris qui s’ennuient de leur routine conjugale et viennent trouver ici ce qu’ils croient être le must de la perversité” (18). Neaud then depicts an encounter with one of these bored married men. A set of four panels show a man whose face is obscured by the dark, and who has come to the park seeking easy sexual gratification in the safety of his car. When Neaud refuses him, the man insults him, calling him “pédé,” an insult that recalls the remarks of his childhood bullies: “Ce sont eux. Ce sont les mêmes qui me traitaient de ‘tapette’ alors qu’ils ne savaient même pas ce que ça voulait dire . . . tout simplement parce que je n’aimais pas leurs jeux . . . Ce sont les mêmes qui m’ont fait tant douter quand ‘tapette’ je suis devenu, et que j’ai cru qu’à m’insulter de la sorte . . . ils l’avaient lu sur mon front” (19). The three panels in which these words appear both visually and verbally conflate the primal scene, in which the bullies humiliate Fabrice, with this nighttime scene in the *jardins publiques*. A young Fabrice, curled in the abject position, pants pulled down, enters the top of the first panel as though he were falling in front of the married man’s head, and by the third panel the curled up body comes to occupy the entire panel.

In the next three panels, the primal scene is rewritten. The young Fabrice gets up out of the abject position and sits up to insult his insulter, “pauvre blaureau . . . tu te crois irrésistible?! Va donc te toucher devant Drucker!!! (19).” The insult, which probably refers to French television personality Michel Drucker, asks the married man, in so many words, to return to the space of the public, where, protected by the bourgeois division of public and private space, he hypocritically enjoys a position of superiority over Neaud and other (visible) homosexuals. The captions to these three panels read: “Mais c’est moi qui décide. Car ici, je connais toutes les règles. Je suis dans mon domaine, je suis un peu chez moi, je suis à ma place / Ils ne sont pas à la leur” (19). It is the particularity of this park space—a paradoxical space of public intimacy—that makes it a little bit home to Fabrice, and this gives him a position from which to respond at last to his insulters. The space of the nighttime park is not claimable along any kind of identitarian lines, but rather, Neaud feels it is his domain

precisely because the park exists outside of and is, in fact, disavowed by the gay community. In the space of the park there is no pressure to perform an intelligibly gay identity, one's social mask can be removed. For this reason Neaud is disappointed in the majority of the men who frequent the park for sex, because they fail to live up to the openness offered them by this space of public intimacy: "N'ont-ils pas compris que c'est justement parce qu'ici tout nous est donné de liberté qu'on peut enfin penser à offrir le meilleur de soi?" (21). The space of public intimacy, in which he is both "a little" at home and also out of place, is where a reflectively gay self might emerge out of "real" (that is, not scripted) encounters between men. But while the ideal encounter Neaud imagines does not occur between socially intelligible identities, he does nonetheless envision it as a face-to-face. These formulations, "offrir le meilleur de soi," "le visage découvert," for Neaud, mean to offer one's face without the masks of the social. But can the masks of the social ever be entirely lifted? In other words, can the space of the park really be isolated from the social as such? Doesn't park sex still involve a certain social economy, with its own type of circulation of capital, power dynamics, identitarian exchange, etc.? While there may be some freedom from the homonormative performance of identity in the space of the park, another kind of sociality emerges. Other "commodities" always, inevitably, end up scripting one's encounters with others: beauty, masculinity, cock-size. At the end, there is little space for what Neaud would call a "true" encounter in the park: it is the space of a failed utopia. Even during nighttime sexual encounters in the park, the masks of the social cannot ever be fully lifted. The next part of this essay will thus examine Neaud's work on the face with these considerations in mind. Neaud reflects at length on the question of social masks and more generally on the function of the face (both the question of how to represent faces in his *Journal* and the question of face-to-face encounters in and outside of the park).

Fabrice Neaud's Face

Neaud's work on the face relates to the problem of gay intelligibility. There is a very marked, idiosyncratic kind of *work* being done both on the autobiographical face and on the faces of others in his *Journal*. Indeed, this attention to the face is the signature of Neaud's work, work that takes place both on verbal and visual registers. Thierry Groensteen suggests as much in his preface to the first volume of *Journal*: "il nous sera difficile de dissocier cette signature de cette voix, et ce trait minutieux et léger, de ce visage qui, de case en case, nous interroge" (3). Groensteen's formulation suggests that the face functions like a signature, but that it also has a kind of ethical insistency about (it interrogates us, makes us uncomfortable, Groensteen writes [3]). Formally speaking, the face often stands as the exception to any generalizations that might

be made about Neaud's drawing style. While his meticulously classical, realistic style of drawing would seem to promise a relatively straightforward autobiographical representation, the particular attention he gives to his own face, and frequent departures from his classical style wherever faces are concerned, suggests he is concerned with the way visual representation of the autobiographical face might authenticate self-representation. In more dramatic terms, where the face of the autobiographical author might serve to suture and give a sense of unity to an otherwise fragmented presentation of self, Neaud insists on bringing attention to this suturing function of the face, by refusing it.

From the very first pages of his *Journal* Neaud puts forward a highly nuanced discourse on the face. When he writes about his nighttime sexual encounters in the *jardins publiques*, he criticizes the hypocritical anonymity of sexual encounters that take place there for being encounters that happens without face. Neaud refuses to make his face anonymous, "je refuse l'anonymat des visages" (21). And a few panels later, "je tiens à assumer jusqu'au bout: circuler à visage découvert sans être obligé aux clichés que ceux qui viennent... se sont imposés à eux-même" (21). Neaud's discourse on the face is thus haunted by a metaphoric of masks, associating the notion of masking with gay social intelligibility (or cliché, as he calls it). As he explains it, while he claims to show his "true" face, in other words to fully assume his homosexuality, he nonetheless also refuses to wear the mask of gay clichés. The metaphor of the mask refers paradoxically both to a shame-driven covering of the face and to a "pride"-driven assumption of face. This latter can be called a mask to the extent that it corresponds to intelligible gay identities that are "out there" in circulation—ready-made social faces that can thoughtlessly be "assumed" with the illusory belief that they are one's true face hidden beneath the mask of shame. Neaud refuses both the mask of shame and the mask of pride-cum-gay-intelligibility, claiming to "circuler à visage découvert." But as evidenced by the rest of his *Journal*, this declaration alone will not free him from either the mask of shame or of that gay cliché. Unmasked circulation is nearly impossible, in fact, when faced with an insistent objectifying hetero-normative gaze, a gaze that itself imposes masks on its other, and is all too easy to internalize. (Here Neaud uses Sartrean language to describe this interpellation of intelligible "identity" as a process of objectification). Thus while Neaud blames the gay community for self-imposing these social clichés, he also acknowledges over the course of *Journal* that the pressure to wear these masks of social intelligibility comes just as much from the straight world as it does from the gay community he rejects so vehemently. Confronted daily with a hetero- and homo-normative gaze, he steadfastly refuses to present a legible face—refuses to provide a comfortable or digestible face for the reader of his autobiographical work to relate to. His refusal, however, more than being a simple declaration, is the product of an immense formal and conceptual labor that is reflected in *Journal*.

To give an already familiar example of this, the scene in which Fabrice hurls back insult to the married man is explicitly figured as a face-off. The scene links the question of gay intelligibility with homophobic insult; the married man insults Neaud by calling him a “pédé.” The insult is both an interpretation, that is, a reading of the face, and an interpellation, that is, a giving of face. Here he compares these faceless men to his childhood bullies: “Ce sont les mêmes qui m’ont fait tant douter quand ‘tapette’ je suis devenu, et que j’ai cru qu’à m’insulter de la sorte . . . ils l’avaient lu sur mon front” (19). Neaud is haunted by the thought that his tormentors were able to read his homosexuality on his forehead, that it was “written on the face,” a writing that is evident to everyone but himself. The process of becoming-queer, or we might say in French his *devenir-tapette*, calls upon a retrospective reading of the insult. The insult haunts but it does not define, at least not in the space of the park where the openness of the place gives Fabrice the chance to present a new face, or as he writes “le meilleur de soi.” In effect, as he faces his insulters, his face here is scratched out, literally de-faced over the course of the three panels in question. This defacement is tantamount to refusing the interpellation of the married man’s (and retroactively also the bullies’) insults. We can read this self-defacement as part of a general project to render his face illegible in response to the interpellation of the heterosexual gaze. Neaud reveals the gaze and the insult to be one and the same.

It goes beyond the park, however. Both in private and in public, Neaud finds himself in constant battle against the objectifying gazes of the straight people in his milieu. Even his “liberal,” non-homophobic friends seem to expect Neaud’s work to “reveal” a certain truth about homosexuality. He is expected to represent, to be the face of homosexuality (that is, he is called upon to make it legible). Neaud describes this interpellation clearly in the second primal scene in which the origins of *Journal* are described. The idea to tell the story of his “petites balades nocturnes” comes from his friend Loïc (there could be a whole reading of the diminutive here, which I will leave aside). We might read the entirety of the journal as an ambivalent response to this demand to be the face of homosexuality.

In a rather funny scene that takes place in the fourth volume of *Journal*, Neaud depicts a radio interview in which the radio interviewer claims that the subject of his journal is “homosexuality.” Neaud responds violently.

[D] to Neaud] “Sinon, faut dire quand meme que ton sujet principal, c’est l’homosexualité. T’as un message à faire passer? [Neaud] Je n’ai aucun message à faire passer sur l’homosexualité!! Il n’y a plus grand’chose à dire sur l’homosexualité!! Est-ce que Roméo et Juliette a pour sujet principal l’hétérosexualité? NON! . . . Je parle de mon quotidien [. . .] Et mon sujet principal, c’est plutôt . . . le portrait de mon modèle: “Stéphane”! (130–31)

The vehemence with which Fabrice responds to the radio interviewer, in refusing to represent “homosexuality,” is operative on a visual level in his work on the face, which is correspondingly violent in visual terms. In effect, all of Neaud’s most intense visual face-work appears in the chapters of his *Journal* most explicitly concerned with questions of gay identity. His resistance to and cynicism towards the autobiographical signature is finally impossible to separate from his refusal to produce the effect of an intelligible gay identity in his autobiographical *Journal*.

On a visual level Neaud’s face-work occurs in a number of different modalities, which I will describe here. The first is defacement. Throughout his *Journal* Neaud defaces himself in a variety of ways. He erases parts of his face (his mouth, his eyes, or both), rubs out his facial features so the face is smudged, scratches the face out, or leaves it blank. In the primal scene, from the very first page, the face of young Fabrice is obscured in four separate panels. In the second and fourth of these, his face is completely blurred. There is perhaps some intentional irony at work in the fourth panel in which the bullies, drawn as silhouettes in the bottom left corner of the panel, yell to Fabrice, “Arrête! T’es vu!!” (5). In the very first page of a visual autobiography, in the representation of a “primal scene,” at the moment when his bullies claim he is visible, the reader sees, to the contrary, no visible face, no recognizable facial features that might connect the young boy being chased to the adult Fabrice. We might interpret this particular mode of face work in the vein of a refusal. The defacement of the autobiographical face reads like a “no” in response to the reader’s desire for the attenuation of a face. The refusal of the autobiographical face, at the “originary” moment of the narrative can be read ultimately as a refusal to suture, and by that token, a refusal even of the primal scene as originary in any kind of straightforward way.

The snap photo effect

Neaud does not hide the fact that he works off of photographs to draw himself and those in his entourage. In fact, he frequently shows himself photographing those around him. Also at various moments we see him sorting through his archive of slides and printed photographs. In one memorable panel, he shows himself projecting a slide of his love object. He stands inside of the projection so that his face is distorted, almost monstrously, by the image of his love object’s face projected onto and overlapping with his own. But it is not just through the narrative that we learn about his use of photographs. We can also see it very clearly in his drawing of the face, Neaud uses a lot of bad, “snap” photography, in which eyes are closed, the face is caught awkwardly in the moment, or made to appear monstrous through unflattering angles, bad lighting, flash, and so forth.

But why incorporate the photographic into his face work when photography would seem to only reflect the gaze of the other? In other words, all of the photos Neaud uses to draw his own face were taken, that is, framed by others. If Neaud is working to resist the heterosexual gaze, making his face illegible, as I am claiming here, why use photography? I think the answer lies in the way he uses photography—using it in such a way as to refuse to suture the inhuman eye of the lens. So more than using photography, he marks this use in radical ways. By choosing bad, unflattering, snap photos, the autobiographical face is made ugly, not through a process of distortion but on the contrary through the photographic process of representing *too faithfully*. Making reference to the inhuman eye of the camera lens can in fact resist the appropriative gaze of the other, because it reveals the extent to which that gaze is subjectivized. Neaud's use of snap photography, translated as a statement, might read something like the following: "yes, you ultimately frame me, but I can also continue to remind you that you are doing this, that this is not a 'natural' process but rather an imposition." The bad snap shot also highlights the dramatic fleetingness of the moment. Rather than "capturing" the moment, the bad snap photograph marks the moment as "past," "dead," already lost, so that there can be no "face" that would transcend (and thus suture the countless rifts in) time.

Mask

That Neaud claims to "circuler à visage découvert," in the space of the park, does not mean that he buys into the metaphysics of presence such an expression might seem to imply. Neaud is quite conscious that even "the face as such" has a mask-like function, which he makes clear through his face work at the visual level. Throughout the *Journal*, Neaud draws his face in different representational modes, from the photographic, to the caricatural, to the cartoonish and the citational (rendering his face in the style of a Picasso or as a Francis Bacon, for example). Over the course of the four volumes, he develops a set of conventions for representing emotions, a recycled repertoire of facial gestures, each with a limited semiotic function, that come to appear more like a mask than a "natural" face.

He also represents himself as masked a few times in the *Journal*. In the fourth volume, during a lengthy reflection on the hypocrisy of the notion of *pudeur*, Neaud uses the term "mask" to describe the distance from the real, and mediation of the real, that any work of self-expression creates. If by *impudeur*, one refers to a mode of revealing too much, without filter, the notion of *pudeur* has no meaning according to Neaud, since any act of self-representation, by virtue of its being a representation, is already mediated, veiled:

Pourtant, écrire, dessiner, mettre en forme, "faire oeuvre", n'est-ce pas le lieu même de l'artifice? Du détour? De la médiation contre l'immédiateté

abrupte des sentiments? Et par le jeu de la médiation, ne court-circuite-t-on pas le risque d'impudeur? Ne dissimule-t-on pas davantage que l'on montre? L'écran, du cinéma comme de la toile peinte, ne font-ils pas, justement, écran? En filmant, en écrivant, en dessinant, je jette un voile sur le réel, je mets une distance, je place un écran entre vous et moi, je porte un masque . . . (63)

As he concludes his reflection on *pudeur*, which goes on for some twenty-three panels, he depicts his own face as a featureless silhouette covered by an African mask. By figuring the autobiographical face explicitly *as* a mask, Neaud points to (and makes it impossible to ignore) the mitigating function of the face in the rest of his *Journal*.

Post-Queer Autobiography

It is as a post-queer autobiographer that Neaud puts such particular attention into these two formal and conceptual categories, place and face. His work on these categories produces explicit and implicit critique of the identitarian assumptions both his straight readership and the (homonormative) gay community have internalized. While “place” in Neaud’s *Journal* ultimately comes to be a figure for the social, in the larger political sense, “face” comes to be a figure for the ethical. In more formal terms, place is related to a dialectic between the exclusionary history and the openness of the medium of BD, while face is connected to the autobiographical signature and the trope of the mask so historically important to the medium (super-hero comics in particular). Both face and place are, in other words, ambivalent terms for Neaud because they both represent concepts “tainted” by hetero- and homonormativity, while they are also sites of a utopian work on the self, as Neaud dreams of offering the best of himself in his face-to-face encounters, “le meilleur de soi.” It ultimately brings us back to the park, a “space” in which “face-to-face” encounters might, or might fail to occur. The park may be the site of a failed utopia, or failed ethical encounters, but even as a failed utopia it is where we must return, as the space of the park and the “space” of BD are one and the same.

Notes

- 1 See Sébastien Soleille’s “Nouveautés et mises à jour.” June, 2007. <<http://perso.orange.fr/soleille/fabriceneaud/general/accueil.htm>>

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