



Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Through her Eyes

Analysis of the Female Gaze in Juliette Mancini's *Eveils* and Erin Williams's *Commute*.

Auteur : Martin ESCOUFLAIRE

Promotrice : Véronique BRAGARD

Lectrice : Antje BÜSSGEN

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Introduction



(Peyo, 1967)

"... [U]n boisseau de gourmandise, un quarteron de mauvaise foi, un dé d'inconscience, un trait d'orgueil, une pointe d'envie, un zeste de sensiblerie, une part de sottise et une part de ruse ..." (Peyo, 1967).

The above quote by Peyo, the famous creator of *The Smurfs*, illustrates some of the descriptions used by Gargamel to describe Smurfette during her creation. Peyo, real name was Pierre Culliford, was a Belgian cartoonist born in 1928 and best known as the father of these little blue characters. Gargamel's perspective on Smurfette, reveals in many ways the manner in which men view women in a patriarchal society, and their vision of feminine nature. This male gaze, which reduces the female character to sensitivity or stupidity, conveys the gender stereotypes characterising women.

The eye is something that constantly extends itself, relentlessly and without restriction. It looks at our own person, at other people, and at the world that surrounds us. These gazes, whether male or female, affect our vision and construction of society. Two women, first Laura Mulvey in 1975 with the male gaze, then Iris Brey more recently in 2020, with the female gaze, have elaborated theories on the role of the look. Cinema stands as the primary arena for applying their theories, where the visual sense takes centre stage. By examining the representation of bodies in cinema, it becomes clear that the codes of the patriarchal system are central to the

ways in which the female body is apprehended. Mulvey points out that little room is left for female expression; everything is confined to filming the female body in order to satisfy the male eye, who is the representative of the spectator's gaze (Mulvey, 1975: 20). Brey further developed this theory to define the concept of the female gaze. This perspective builds upon the foundation of the male gaze, yet it shifts the camera's focus to consider women as subjects, a notable departure from the objectification of the female body that has become prevalent.

The world of cinema has enabled the development of theories centered around the visual, such as the concepts of the male and female gaze. However, when considering other artistic domains, the scope of such theories has remained somewhat limited. While these theories have primarily thrived within the realm of cinema as a focused field of study, there is an intriguing opportunity to broaden their applicability. This prompts the exploration of literature, another widely embraced art form, as an avenue for delving into the study of the female gaze. The choice fell on comics and graphic novels. This might raise the question of how the concept of the female gaze can be used to approach graphic novels. In reality, graphic novels are an art form that represents the perfect blend of the literary side and the visual side of cinema through drawings. For this purpose, I have selected two recent graphic novels that encapsulate the female experience: Erin Williams's *Commute* (2019) and Juliette Mancini's *Eveils* (2021). Both explore a myriad of societal nuances, mirroring the multifaceted contours of contemporary female perspectives. *Commute* is set in an American urban landscape, where the reader follows the protagonist from the beginning to the end of a typical day, where she shares her traumatic experiences. The book is a colourful French graphic novel in which the protagonist narrates various moments in her life that have shaped her. This results in a new awareness of what being a woman means in this society. This naturally triggers a compelling inquiry: how can a concept initially rooted in cinema effectively shed light on other art forms? How could a theory as recent as the female gaze adapt and bring new perspective in the world of comics? How would it differ from Brey's purely cinematic theorisation?

All the while asking the main question ultimately bringing all these together: "How can the female gaze be observed and analysed in *Eveils* and *Commute*?" As a primary source, these two graphic novels enable an exploration of the various ways in which the female gaze can manifest itself in the comics medium. That is to say, to observe the female gaze it is necessary to report on the way in which female experiences are adapted in these two works. A detailed and comparative analysis of both works helps to understand them better. While the thematic

threads intertwine across sections, they are meticulously examined based on their contextual relevance to each chapter.

Keeping this perspective in view, the first chapter introduces the historical essence of the female gaze. With this in mind, a fundamental exploration of the male gaze — the precursor concept — becomes paramount, with Mulvey's critique of the male gaze. This segment lays the foundation for understanding the fundamental principles of portraying bodies in cinema. It then examines, with Brey's conceptualisation of the female gaze, various cinematic approaches that enable audiences to break out of the patriarchal and sexist constraints that are omnipresent in modern film productions. Consequently, the focal point lies in the body's significance, not solely through incessant objectification, but in its representation as an equally powerful subject.

After an introduction to the two graphic novels analysed and to the specific genre of the graphic memoir in this master's thesis, the second section gets to the heart of the matter by analysing how the male gaze is represented in both works. It explores the comics techniques used to highlight how it works and to what extent it affects women's everyday lives. The objectification of women's bodies and the domination of public space by men represented in the two works are conveyed via distinct graphic and narrative techniques.

The third chapter looks in more detail at the representation of the consequences of this systematic male gaze for women. The artists use subjects such as gaze and desire, line and intertextuality to denounce and exemplify the long-term impact that the male gaze can engender. These analyses reveal how both works address the deeper consequences that this gaze can have on these women's perceptions. It creates shame and suffering, but through this they also become aware of this oppression and the spirit of the female gaze gradually starts to flourish.

Building upon this contextual backdrop, the concluding section scrutinizes how both pieces convey the female gaze. Self-reflexivity, for instance, stands as a compelling technique accentuating the genuineness and vulnerability of female creators. Moreover, delving into emotions as conduits of lived experiences illustrates the female gaze within the realm of comics, extending beyond the mere depiction of the physical body. This gives rise to a representation of the traumas and fear experienced by women. Motherhood and sisterhood also participate in conveying a female approach elucidating the collective resilience shared among women. These

analyses will show, through *Eveils et Commute*, how women expose their critics and liberate themselves through all their forms of empowerment.

As a man, my legitimacy to tackle themes related to the female experience could be questioned. It is true that in growing up as a man in this society, I did not have to face up to all these inequalities. However, becoming aware of them has given me the will to take a look at these injustices. This seems to be an inevitable step for any man, in order to achieve an egalitarian society. The inability to fully experience women's lives may therefore have contributed to distancing my reading, influenced by my personal sensibilities. Although it was difficult for me to fully relate to the feelings of the protagonists during certain powerful passages due to a difference in perception, it is interesting to have a man's point of view to also demonstrate that some events are still difficult to read. To compensate for these limitations, it is worth mentioning that the interview that author Juliette Mancini granted me¹ was beneficial in several respects. It helped deepen the questions, thoughts and interpretations of my analysis of her graphic novel through the prism of the female gaze.

¹ See appendix page 118

Chapter 1: Theoretical aspect of the female gaze

Beware, patriarchy is watching

Throughout the history of art, the representation of the female figure has been primarily defined by the male gaze, but a growing body of feminist scholarship suggests that it is time to shift our focus to the female gaze and explore how women have represented themselves and others in the visual media. The original concept of the male gaze was initially studied in cinema. The concept was coined and developed in 1975 by cinema specialist Laura Mulvey to refer to the tendency of the camera to objectify or sexualize women to satisfy a heterosexual male viewer seen as representative of the film audience. Mulvey wrote *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, a theoretical essay on the origins of the male gaze. But in 1981, she revisited her theory in the magazine *Afterthoughts*. This indicates the early stage of her reflections on the society surrounding her and how the passing years have enabled her to refine and enhance her ideas. With her feminist perspective, she conceived this concept. She criticizes the male gaze, highlighting its foundation in phallocentrism. Additionally, she expounds on how the subconscious of patriarchal society permeates every film. Mulvey's argument started with an observation: spectators do not simply watch a movie through a camera lens, they also experience it. Given that the lens is often the extension of the main male character's gaze, who takes pleasure in watching women as objects, the spectator feels the same. He dominates women through his position.

In her work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, she defines the male gaze as follows:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey, 1975:19)

This means that in mainstream cinema, the camera and the audience's point of view are usually positioned as male, objectifying and sexualizing female characters, and presenting them as passive objects of male desire. With the prism of the camera, the audience has learned collectively to take pleasure in objectifying women. Thus, the male gaze originated in the cinema. It is a concept that analyses the cinematic world around it and offers a critical perspective on it. By analyzing and examining the present-day cinema and its characteristics,

she formulates a theory encompassing the entire *septième art*², from its inception to the legacy it will leave behind. Her theory is still and even more relevant today, because where it was innovative to question cinema in the seventies, it has become a societal issue today. The questioning of art and gender within it is most topical and Mulvey's argument is therefore even more powerful.

Within the male gaze theory, the concept of scopophilia also plays an important role. It refers to the pleasure of the voyeur, who takes pleasure in watching. This means observing someone without their knowledge, such as looking at someone through a keyhole. The individual being watched remains oblivious to the scrutiny, and it is this element of secrecy that evokes pleasure in the voyeur. (Tuailon, *Les couilles sur la table* #56, "Male gaze, ce que voient les hommes", 2020) Mulvey here refers to Freud's work, who notably researched scopophilia in his essays on sexuality. The latter explains that scopophilia allows the appropriation of individuals as objects of pleasure, all through the power of the gaze (Hardy, 2012). Laura Mulvey, for her part, has taken up Freud's ideas and linked them to cinema, and more particularly to Hollywood films, which perfectly meet the expectations of male scopophilia (Loreck, 2016). To illustrate her point, she shows how cinema is the perfect place to produce voyeurism. The darkness of a movie theater allows the spectator to fulfil his primary role: to look, while at the same time permitting him/her not to be seen. This satisfies a voyeuristic desire. When immersed in darkness, spectators are isolated from each other, indeed the only source of light is the screen. The screen separates the spectator from the object of their gaze and enables voyeurism, the pleasure of secretly watching other people (Hardy, 2012).

Even though the presence and impact of this male gaze in cinema are now acknowledged, Hollywood films continue to reinforce the objectification of women's bodies and attitudes, the James Bond films are a case in point. This well-known franchise is based on the male gaze. Although there has been an evolution between the first films and the most recent ones, the foundations remain centred on a way of thinking for and through the male gaze. The most obvious example of this is the Bond girl, who in every film will play a role purely for the pleasure of the voyeuristic male gaze. Every Bond girl is represented primarily through her appearance. They are shown on screen through their bodies, which the viewer is encouraged to desire and possess through his gaze. By being seen and looked at by the male character as well

² Way of referring to the art of cinema in French

as by the viewers through his eyes, the Bond girls become objects of the gaze. The most striking example is in the film *Die Another Day* (2002) where James Bond looks through binoculars at the body of Giacinta "Jinx" Johnson. This amplifies the sensation of looking without being seen, with close-ups breaking down and exposing the body of Halle Berry, the actress in the role of the "Bond girl". Although more recent Bond films feature more complex female characters and carry their own story, the male gaze persists. Their stories have been developed but the anchoring of the male gaze remains central and objectifying.

Moving away from male perspectives

Having female bodies in cinema is inevitable. The true question is how these bodies are filmed, how the camera positions itself to look at the women's bodies (Loreck, 2018). In films, a female character can often be defined by her body before she has a name. The audience is often first attracted by the appearance before discovering her personality. Sexualized scenes are pervasive in our media culture, this is the reason why these mass media play a key role to normalize the male gaze. As Janice Loreck argues in her article, "[t]he male gaze creates a power imbalance. It supports a patriarchal status quo, perpetuating women's real-life sexual objectification" (Loreck, 2018). The male gaze refers to a representation of the body as an object of desire, whether that body is male or female (Brey, 2020:12). What is played out with women's bodies obviously also impacts men's bodies in films. Women do not perceive men's bodies in the same way. Even though men can also look attractive, they will not be searching for desire. Female audience members will rather seek identification with a female character or representation (Tuillon, *Les couilles sur la table* #56, "Male gaze, ce que voient les hommes", 2020). A new gaze called the female gaze by Brey makes women subjects and no longer objects of the camera and thereby defies the male visions embedded in patriarchy.

In many ways, the male gaze has, as a matter of fact, has become the norm, and is rarely questioned. It reflects patriarchal society and hierarchies. This form of gaze goes beyond the boundaries of cinema. One of the reasons it is so entrenched is that it is institutionalised, as the "language of the patriarchy" (Mulvey, [1975] 1989: 15). In the sense that just as the male gaze constructs men, it also defines women, as women are only constructed through the projection of male desires. By looking at the female character as an object, the eye of the male spectator, whose role is played by the camera, deconstructs the woman into many small parts. She becomes a multitude of parts, deconstructed with close-ups. As Mulvey explains, the

objectification is further reinforced by the cinematic narrative. Since it is predominantly a male character who drives the action and it is also through him that the objectification of female characters takes place; when the viewer watches the film, he identifies more easily with a male character and thus reduces the woman to a passive object. By focusing on the male characters' point of view, they have power over the narrative, while the female characters are confined to their physicality and consequently to their visual appeal. Mulvey further explains that the combination of the male characters' power to act and power to look gives the audience the possibility of control as well (Mulvey, [1975] 1989:20). In doing so, a film normalises and bears witness to the reality of patriarchal domination. The male gaze is therefore a tool of patriarchy. The male gaze often fails to share emotions with the spectator. The latter witnesses but does not feel the experiences of the characters. This gaze can be perceived as a triangulation between the camera, the spectator, and the male character.

While the male gaze represents a significant portion of the films produced, it does not account for the entirety. It represents quite well the great majority, the one created by Hollywood, but the avant-garde cinema, the reflexive cinema or simply feminist films cannot systematically be included in this male gaze. The latter cannot define or characterize every film or every scene. The male gaze has a strong and unconditional link with patriarchy. It is one of its pillars and does not question it. This is why the emerging part of cinema, the part that wishes to redefine the rules, to dismantle social codes, cannot be achieved through the male gaze. Therefore another way of looking has appeared.

Looking with new eyes: the female gaze

The theory that has got the upper hand in recent years, possibly because the author has theorised it in an essay, is the one supported by Iris Brey. This French film specialist has theorised, like Laura Mulvey, a concept in her book *Le regard féminin: Une révolution à l'écran*. This book is the most cited because it is the first to lay the foundations of a reflection on what the female gaze is. It obviously responds to the characteristics of the male gaze, which is its counterpart, but it also questions itself, and takes the gender approach that was lacking in current cinematographic analyses. Iris Brey's argues that the female gaze "moves away from an unconscious way of seeing and taking pleasure in women as objects. It places the spectator within the woman's point of view, making it possible to share what she is feeling. [...] a gaze that sees women as equals, as subjects" (Brey, 2020).

It is in 2020 that Iris Brey made her contribution to this subject by refusing to persist in this sexist model of making movies and watching them. As Brey explains in her book *Le regard féminin*: "The female gaze is a conscious gesture. It produces therefore conscious, politicised images. The female gaze is not mere coincidence, it is a way of thinking"³ [My translation] (Brey, 2020:20). Filming differently means putting women at the centre of the story, having access to their points of view, their emotions and bodily experiences. While the male gaze plays with bodies through close-ups and by fragmenting the body, the key word for the female gaze is "experience". Its purpose is to learn to look differently. To illustrate this, the film *Pleasure* (2021) is an excellent example. As pornography is the perfect representation of male gaze in our culture, most pornographic films are created with the male gaze. By making this film, which narrates the story of a woman who wants to make a place for herself in this industry, the director Ninja Thyberg gives another view - her own -, a female look. She explains it by saying that "a film is [...] a tool for social change, as much as art"⁴ [My translation] (Moury, 2021). Through its various scenes showing the backstage, depicting the feeling of a woman in this environment, *Pleasure* allows the audience to look with other eyes, those of Bella, the main character. The film portrays the feelings of an actress in this over-dominated male world, for men and their desires. Patriarchal structures are thus depicted through the lens of a personal story, embodying an experience lived within an environment emblematic of the essence of patriarchy. This approach involves examining events from an individual's perspective to gain a thorough understanding of society as a whole.

This change happened because it became necessary over time. Since the male gaze is linked to patriarchy, to a gendered society that is increasingly being questioned, the gaze has changed and this is where the female gaze has opened up new ways of representing the female body. The significance of gender issues is growing, leading to shifts in thoughts and behaviours. The appearance of the female gaze in the film is very recent, but strongly linked to feminist struggles and voices. One of the difficulties with the female gaze arises when one wishes to define it. While Laura Mulvey created and thus theorised the male gaze, the female gaze appeared as a response to this patriarchal concept. As a result, there is not one theory but many. Some people — for the most part women — have spoken out about their personal views on the

³ "Le *female gaze* est un geste conscient. Il produit de ce fait des images conscientisées, politisées. Le regard féminin n'est pas le fruit du hasard, c'est une manière de penser."

⁴ "un film est [...] un outil de changement social, autant que de l'art"

female gaze and as a matter of fact, not all reach agreement. Within these various perspectives on the female gaze, which naturally respond to Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, interpretations can notably diverge. Brey discusses, for instance, her difference in opinion with author Alicia Malone, who uses the term "female gaze" in her book *The Female Gaze: Essential Movies Made by Women* (2018). In this book, Malone does not provide a strict definition of the female gaze but rather portrays it as the perspective of a female filmmaker. Brey's viewpoint contrasts with Malone's, as she argues that "[a] filmmaker's gender does not dictate how they film female characters"⁵ [My translation] (Brey, 2020:37). The genre of the director has no influence on his or her ability to create the female gaze. Others, such as Joey Soloway perceives the female gaze as an avenue to depict the authentic experiences of female characters. For this, they — the pronoun used by Soloway — base their theory on three aspects: the emotions that prevail over the action, showing the spectators how they are objects of the gaze and finally the return of the gaze, that is to say knowing that the viewer is also seen. In another logic, although still focused on the female experience, Iris Brey has also theorised the female gaze. For her, one important element of this gaze is that it is conscious, unlike the male gaze which was the tool of a patriarchal unconscious. In defining the female gaze, she says that "it would therefore be a gaze that gives subjectivity to the female character, thus allowing the viewer to feel the experience of the heroine without identifying with her"⁶ [My translation] (Brey, 2020:39). In this state of mind, the female gaze does not depend on the gender of the director but on the gaze produced during the film direction.

Because of its denomination, the female gaze has been a site of disagreement. For some people, this is problematic because it focuses on the female gender and not on the feminist aspect of the cause. In the idea that this word *female* does not mean anything, a better manner to define it would be to talk about a feminist gaze. This would go against the prevailing sexism of the milieu, which would be the real oppressor, as bell hooks says (Notéris, 2020). This lack of precise agreement, of unanimity can be explained in various ways. One possible explanation is that, being relatively recent, this concept might have faced challenges in being applied and tested in real-world contexts. For instance, its application in various societal settings or across different cinematic styles. It could be questioned whether the idea has reached maturity or is still under construction, given the differences of opinion it contains. Moreover, being a theory

⁵ "[I]e genre d'un cinéaste ne conditionne pas sa manière de filmer les personnages féminins"

⁶ "ce serait donc un regard qui donne une subjectivité au personnage féminin, permettant ainsi au spectateur et à la spectatrice de ressentir l'expérience de l'héroïne sans pour autant s'identifier à elle."

based on another one — the male gaze — it does not come out of nowhere, but its context unsurprisingly plays a role in one way or another. The contention arises that a direct female equivalent to the male gaze is absent, given that the female gaze operates in complete contrast to the male gaze. It puts an end to the objectification of women and opposes patriarchal norms.

However, as seen previously, hers is not the only definition that exists. Other theorists have given some definitions, therefore a whole debate has emerged. There are diverse examples in the introduction to her book, for instance when she states "...the philosopher Sandra Laugier is wrong. She considers a bare-chested shot of Brad Pitt as a kind of female gaze, while the representation of the body as object of desire, whether it is a male or female body remains a type of male gaze. The female gaze shoots the body as a subject of desire"⁷ [My translation] (Brey, 2020:11-12). This example shows that the same scene in a recent film — in this case *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019) — can have different interpretations depending on the definition of female gaze.

Despite this, the concept of the female gaze offers a potential pathway towards more diverse and inclusive representations of women in art, literature, and media. By centering the perspectives of women and challenging traditional gendered norms, the female gaze has the potential to transform cultural narratives and create new possibilities for gender expression and identity.

The essence of the female gaze is, therefore that there is still a lot of debate in the field. It enhances the subject matter, but it is obviously also important to find common ground, so that all people with the same struggle can move in the same direction. The female gaze ultimately has the sole purpose of offering a new manner of constructing thoughts in the art of cinema. This is made from the construction of a movie to its distribution. Obviously, even if debates are all the more recent, they exist and have their own importance.

While Iris Brey's female gaze is based for the most part upon the female experience, other visions of the female gaze exist, such as those of Teresa de Lauretis, Mary Ann Doane or Amelia Jones. Iris Brey wants to showcase a woman as a subject and not an object — it is in

⁷ "...la philosophe Sandra Laugier se trompe. Elle considère un plan du torse nu de Brad Pitt comme une forme de female gaze, alors que la représentation du corps comme objet de désir, que ce soit un corps masculin ou féminin, reste une forme de male gaze. Le regard féminin filme les corps comme sujets de désir."

this way that she responds to the male gaze. By contrast, other theorists imagine a female gaze that, on the contrary, would be opposed to the male gaze insofar as it objectifies men. These divergences of opinion are nothing new in feminist criticism, between more humanist, ecological or radical brands of feminism. Inevitably, these disagreements are partly due to its recent discovery. Even though the female gaze is imbued with novelty and progress, without being completely installed within the feminist activism, it has had to face some redefinitions, appropriations and contestations. As a more egalitarian principle, the female gaze is favourable to less misogynistic, less patriarchal forms of representation.

Thanks to this emerging awareness developing in contemporary society, a progressive change in mentalities becomes evident. It is indeed this awareness that enables us to doubt the multitude of reasons that have never been questioned before, including the conventional methods of filming movies. While adopting the Hollywood way of shooting as the norm and the only possibility, it is important to remember that a plethora of diverse shooting methods have been rendered invisible. Obviously, this new cinema does not throw out everything that has been done in the past, but it wants to give more choices — choices on how to represent. It is a cinema that makes it possible to look at women in a better way; they become the subject instead of being only objects. Furthermore, this subject is in motion and not frozen as the object was, which makes it more prominent.

Regarding invisibility, it is crucial to specify that the female gaze is not a recent invention; it emerged simultaneously with the inception of cinema. However, it did not become the norm, it was not transmitted as the male gaze was. As a result, this has resulted in the disappearance of this practice. Conscious efforts were made to render the female gaze invisible (Brey, 2020:74-76).

The female gaze is based upon several essential themes, which are developed in Brey's theoretical book. It is important, nonetheless to bear in mind that beyond these themes (which are "the aesthetics of desire", "rape", "pleasure" and "the body in movement of unchained women"⁸) some general principles are important to be remembered, such as the significance of the body. To express the female gaze, it is necessary to be aware of the spectator's physicality and the image — the directors themselves have to be aware of their own bodies while shooting

⁸ "Une esthétique du désir", "Le viol", "Jouissance", "Le corps en mouvement des femmes déchaînées"

(Brey, 2020:44). The female gaze principle is to bring the body back to the forefront because it has too often been forgotten or put in the background while it is through it that emotions are felt. In reality, the female gaze serves to enhance the art and encourages viewers to question their perspectives, particularly concerning gender themes in movies. The simple act of being aware of having a choice, between male and female gaze, could help make better movies. The author explains that it is also a matter of aesthetics. (Brey, 2020:32-33)

Through desire, Brey skilfully highlights the intimate bond between the body and cinema. The author states that "the body has a key role, since watching a film or series is first and foremost an embodied experience where the presence of spectators' bodies and the movie cannot be cast aside"⁹ [My translation] (Brey, 2020:56). Contrary to what has been demonstrated for decades, she explains, through cinematographic examples such as *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), that "desire can blossom without domination, without shame, without power struggles"¹⁰ [My translation] (Brey, 2020:63). She, therefore, demonstrates the possibility and existence of it. This allows patriarchal practices to be questioned. The female gaze comprises various themes that contribute to its definition. These themes are, for example, the woman as subject — and no longer as object, as the male gaze had standardised — or the emotions and feelings observable on screen. Throughout all these topics, the place of the body is obviously a key issue.

These different perceptions or nuances of the female gaze are all based on the same principles. Numerous themes characterize the female gaze, akin to the scopophilia or voyeurism associated with the male gaze. One of the most evident themes is certainly the importance of the body. As in its male counterpart, the body remains a primordial theme. Except that here the body, or rather bodies, are celebrated. This theme is mixed with another very important point in the female gaze, which is diversity. It is the diversity of bodies that matters. This challenges the beauty standards that predominantly influence women's perceptions of themselves. This recognition of all bodies allows viewers to appreciate the singularity of each one. The place of the body is thus consistently interrogated in films that embrace the female gaze, aiming to avoid reproducing productions solely oriented towards male desire. Secondly, as women emerge from the position of object of the gaze that male gaze imposed, they become the subjects of what we

⁹ "le corps possède une place centrale, puisque regarder un film ou une série est avant tout une expérience incarnée où la présence des corps des spectateur.trice.s et du film ne peut être écartée"

¹⁰ "le désir peut éclore sans domination, sans humiliation, sans rapports de pouvoir"

watch. To do this, it is essential to have access to emotions. By focusing on the woman as a person, she is then understood through her relationships in society and her feelings. Each event makes the character experiences a feeling or emotion that is made perceptible to the audience. Another major thematic of the female gaze is desire. Body image and emotions go hand in hand with the idea of desire. This is a different perspective than what we find in the male gaze, where desire is controlled by the male vision. Through desire, a profound examination of stereotypes and objectification of the female body becomes possible, thus allowing a more authentic representation. Finally, following the gathering of several themes from different struggles under the same denomination, that of the female gaze, a certain commonality of female experience becomes noticeable. Hence, it revolves around the diversity and uniqueness of each body, yet all converging towards the same direction in this collective struggle. Each woman can recognise herself in the experience of another. The theme of everyday life is as a consequence of paramount importance. Each daily struggle and every moment in the public space can be experienced by any woman, because society places a burden on each and every one of them. This can be observed, for example, in the well-established and widespread vice of sexism and misogyny within patriarchal society. By reversing the gaze and expressing what a woman may feel, everyone can recognize themselves.

Following the example of the Bechdel-Wallace test, theorist Iris Brey has also created a test, or rather an interpretative framework, to determine whether the female gaze is present in a film. It is interesting to make a short reminder of what the Bechdel-Wallace test is and who its main creator is. Alison Bechdel is an American comic book writer. Her work focuses in particular on lesbian comics. In her first graphic novel *Dykes to Watch Out for* (1985), she unintentionally created what would become a universal assessment tool for sexism and character portrayal problems in films. The test was named as the Bechdel-Wallace test because it is her friend Liz Wallace who inspired the original test plate. This test is based on three questions. The first one is whether there are at least two female characters in the film, the second question is whether these two women interact with each other, and if so, do they talk about anything else than men. Over time criteria have become more precise, the women must be protagonists and have a discussion lasting more than sixty seconds. All this serves to demonstrate the great difference in gender representation in film and in the media in general. The idea of Bechdel and Wallace was inspired by a well-known author, Virginia Woolf. It was in her work *A Room of One's Own* (1926) that the narrator searched in vain for novels about women and their relationships with each other (Petit, 2022).

This test also opened the door to a multitude of further questions about the film industry and its representations. Some looked at the genre of the films that did or did not pass the test to see if a correlation was possible. This could also be used to examine diversity on screen, through the representation of various ethnicities in cinema. Others have also looked at whether the gender of directors, writers or producers have an impact. With this last point, we come closer to another test: Iris Brey's one, which she constructed on the basis of the Bechdel-Wallace test, to find out whether a film can be characterised as the female gaze or not. She explains how this frame of reference works in her essay. It consists of six points that are divided into two categories:

First, from a narrative point of view, it is necessary that

- "1/ the main character identifies as a woman;
- 2/ the story is told from her point of view;
- 3/ her story challenges the patriarchal order."¹¹

Then on a more formal side, it is required that

- "1/ through the staging, the spectator feels the female experience;
- 2/ if the bodies are eroticized, the gesture must be conscious (Laura Mulvey reminds us that the male gaze stems from the patriarchal unconscious);
- 3/ the pleasure of the spectators does not derive from a sceptical impulse (to take pleasure in looking at a person by objectifying them, like a voyeur)"¹² [My translation] (Brey, 2020:77).

This test from Brey is therefore less simple but still very logical. This encompasses an analysis of all the themes that are important for a film to respect the female gaze, whether it be the lived female experience, the opposition to patriarchy, the importance of bodies or the value of the gaze. However, Brey admits that this test is not always perfect and can be more complicated to apply than the Bechdel test, especially as it requires an analysis of the staging, which can be complex.

The female gaze obviously first took its place in the cinema, in response to the male gaze which is mainly confined to this medium. However, given the characteristics of the female gaze, it would seem possible to find them elsewhere, in other arts. Given the themes and the

¹¹ "1/ le personnage principal s'identifie en tant que femme;
2/ l'histoire soit racontée de son point de vue;
3/ son histoire remette en question l'ordre patriarcal."

¹² "1/ grâce à la mise en scène le spectateur ou la spectatrice ressent l'expérience féminine;
2/ si les corps sont érotisés, le geste doit être conscientisé (Laura Mulvey rappelle que le male gaze découle de l'inconscient patriarcal);
3/ le plaisir des spectateurs ou spectatrices ne découle pas d'une pulsion sceptique (prendre du plaisir en regardant une personne en l'objectifiant, comme un voyeur)."

interpretative framework, it is easy to think that, with slight modifications, the female gaze could be adapted to other arts, at least the visual arts to begin with. The female gaze is therefore becoming increasingly studied, understood and disseminated. This gaze is even beginning to become one of the new pillars of a society that is extricating itself from retrograde patriarchal dominance. Whilst the main sphere of the female gaze remains the film industry, its art of preference, it is interesting to ask what it would be like in other arts.

The first and most rational extrapolation would be to move from cinema to other arts, especially visual arts. In this manner, the connection to the image that is so important to the female gaze and cinema is still present while touching on other domains. Pop culture in particular allows it as it spans a multitude of mediums. It is interesting to imagine that the female gaze could extend to painting, photography, or sculpture. Theoretically, all these arts encompass the themes present in the female gaze. By being able to adapt Brey's test to other arts to make it more appropriate, the female gaze can be identified in many places. This applies not only to recent works, but to all artistic productions. Artists did not wait for the female gaze to be theorised before producing it. It is simply that thanks to this new concept, it is possible to take a new look at past works. Books are beginning to appear, such as Katy Hessel's *The story of art without men* (2022), which draws up a list of works from all quarters and from every period of time created by female artists. This is not to say that every piece of work produces the female gaze, but it does show a progress towards awareness and rejection of patriarchal ways of creating.

To return to the various visual arts that could also be directly concerned by the female gaze and to give a precise example, the photography practised by the Belgian Charlotte Abramow could be a fitting demonstration of the expansion of this female gaze. Indeed, this director and photographer shows her vision of the world to anyone who wants to see it. This conscious and feminist vision can be felt in her choice of subjects and the way she practices her art. Abramow chooses subjects such as sexuality, playing with bodies, putting the human being at the centre of her work. Bodies have an important place, allowing her to show them all, beautiful in their differences and singularity. She also works in connection with music, on topics touching the daily life of women, in particular through the realization of certain music videos of committed artists like Angèle (Bergé, 2022).

Another art form that is a little further away from the one that saw the birth of the female gaze, but which nevertheless remains linked in one way or another, is the *neuvième art*¹³ form, that of comics. Graphic novels remain linked to the cinema on the one hand, thanks to the visual creative work that they share, but they diverge a little more by being related to literature, which is not basically graphic. On the other hand, however, comics remain an interesting playground, both in terms of content and form, because the image has a different value. Themes are expressed by other means, especially through the literary part of the art, but everything is demonstrated through the drawings. This is where the narrative arc can be present as well as the thematics and stagings of the female gaze; by having graphic novels that are aware of what they produce and that challenge the patriarchal order. This is why it will be interesting to analyse and to look deeper into the relationship between the female gaze in a medium other than cinema and in comics in particular. Due to its distance from the basic visual arts, but while keeping this precious link with the latter, that it is the perfect medium to demonstrate that the female gaze can be present everywhere.

Another parallel in terms of visual arts is also possible between drawing and painting, proving that the boundaries of the fine arts are blurring. This is demonstrated by Karen Kurczynski in *Drawing Is the New Painting* (2014). She claims that drawing used to be less respected and less popular, but that it is now coming to the fore (Szép, 2020:34).

The female gaze can also be seen in painting, and this is part of the work in the graphic novel *Une place* (2022) which exemplifies the forms of the female gaze present in the art of earlier centuries. Today, painters and their famous paintings such as Gustave Courbet's *Le sommeil* (1866) or Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* (1647-1651) have often practiced the male gaze. Except that other painters also produced art but depicting the female experience. This is the case with Laura Knight's *Self Portrait with Nude* (1913), which allows us to see a nude made with the eyes and experience of a woman, unlike the majority of nudes that were made by men. This is what John Berger says when he explains that men and women do not see themselves in the same way. Men look at women while women see themselves through men's eyes. He talks about nude — as art genre — as a way of being seen but not having the opportunity to be really understood and recognised for their person. (Berger, 1972) Even earlier in history with *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (c. 1612-1613) painted by Artemisia Gentileschi. In her graphic novel, Eva

¹³ Way of referring to the art of comics in French

Kirilof also claims that some male painters did not only express themselves through the male gaze. Rembrandt's *A Woman Bathing in a Stream* does not sexualise the model. He depicts her in an intimate and personal atmosphere without imposing a male gaze on her. But a better example might be the *Mona Lisa* (c.1503-1506), the most famous portrait of a woman in history, which is free of any fantasy or sexualisation.

Capturing the female bodies

As previously explained, the body is one of the main themes of the gaze, whether it is male or female. From the point of view of the female gaze, all the other themes developed are in fact related in one way or another to the body. So this is sort of the central theme, what is visible first. There is obviously the diversity of each body and therefore the singularity of each human being, which is strongly linked to bodies and their representations. Emotions also pass through the representation of the body, for their transmission and for the feeling of experiences. Just like desire, which is strongly linked to the perception of the body in society. Moreover, the way in which the image of the body is controlled by women to choose to be desired when they want and in an appropriate manner. This can make them powerful.

Consequently, the centrality of the body perspective is fundamental to the female gaze approach. First of all, in cinema, as Iris Brey explains in her chapter "The body in motion of unchained women", the body plays a decisive role for women. One of the examples that Brey uses in this chapter is Agnès Varda's cinema where "her heroines do not need a man to feel alive. Her fictional stories express the violence women face daily and the battle fought to exist in the public space, without being humiliated, attacked, or killed. Moving is resisting the dominant order"¹⁴ [My translation] (Brey, 2020:195). Giving movement to women so they can take up space, allowing them to be more powerful. With Varda, we talk about the corporeality of heroines, which is equivalent to giving them character, importance.

To take a contemporary and eloquent example, the film *Wonder Woman* (2017) is perceived as a female gaze film. This may come as a surprise given the image we have of the heroine, who wears alluring clothes, but in this film the spectator has access to the experience of Wonder Woman. For instance, in the no man's land scene, where she goes alone on the

¹⁴ "ses héroïnes n'ont pas besoin d'un homme pour se sentir vivre. Ses fictions expriment la violence à laquelle les femmes font face quotidiennement et le combat à mener pour exister dans l'espace public sans être humiliée, agressée, ni tuée. Se déplacer, c'est résister à l'ordre dominant."

battlefield to join the enemy trenches, one can observe and especially feel all the power of the heroine. Unlike a James Bond film where Bond girls are sexualised as previously explained. With, for example, the camera that shoots their body from the bottom to the top, as an eye that takes possession of their body. In *Wonder Woman*, the heroine is not sexualised. When she arrives on the battlefield, she is strong and dominant. She impresses everyone who looks at her and from another point of view, she scares the enemies. Close-ups are made, but on her armour with her shin guards or on her arms with her shield, not on her body. When she emerges from the ground, the camera keeps focusing on her face, with a shot that zooms out gradually until she takes up the whole screen. There is not zooming effect from the top to the bottom that would cut up her body. It is also important to observe the movement in this scene that helps demonstrate the power of the character (Brey, 2020:21-24).

Furthermore, in comics the body is also often associated with movement. The presence of the body in a place, the way it is staged, gives it weight. The authors of graphic novels often give movement to their character's bodies, giving them agency. However, drawn, a body is often not static or fixed, it occupies the space. Therefore, the place where the body is shown is obviously important. Thomas Mathieu expressed this perfectly with his comic book *Les crocodiles* (2017). In this graphic novel, he illustrates ordinary sexism and harassment in a very representative manner. To do this, he drew all men as crocodiles. This is done not to gather them all under the image of (sexual) predators, but to express a social reality, a culture, one of the problems of our society. Thomas Mathieu explains that it is "an image that encompasses many ideas such as male privilege, sexism, clichés about the role of men and virility, and even the fear of running into someone in the street without knowing if they are going to hurt you"¹⁵ [My translation] (Mathieu, 2017). The way the subject of harassment is treated shows bodies in motion, because whether in the street or in public spaces, women can be victims of men who act as predators. Showing these bodies in movement allows them to describe their own expressions, whether it be fear, anger or bravery.

Consequently, the body in comics is an extremely important topic, especially when it comes to autobiographical comics. At first sight it may seem intriguing, but the fact that the same character and therefore the same body is drawn many times makes the drawing impactful.

¹⁵ "une image qui englobe de nombreuses idées comme le privilège masculin, le sexisme, les clichés sur le rôle de l'homme et de la virilité, et même la peur de croiser quelqu'un dans la rue sans savoir s'il va vous faire du mal"

The question of the body is so noteworthy in comics that it is a specific point of interest in Thierry Groensteen's *Le bouquin de la bande dessinée: dictionnaire esthétique et thématique* (2020). Using *Habibi* (2011) as an example, Groensteen explains that the body is gradually becoming a primary subject in the world of the *neuvième art*. However, he points out that "the frame of the box often segments, it can amputate the body, only showing a fragment of it"¹⁶ [My translation] (Groensteen, 2020:173). It is in this respect that the issue of camera angles, which cut off bodies with close-ups, can be associated with this explanation. Therefore, in the graphic medium of comics, the panel can be a brake on representation. However, it can also be a means of freedom for the cartoonist who can play with this way of expressing himself.

Concerning autobiographical comics in particular, which are in full expansion, he explains that they have opened new doors concerning the body and its intimacy, through the representation of the body of autobiographical narrators. He even adds that the work of women is undeniable in this progress. He takes the famous Julie Doucet as an example, who, among other things, won the *Grand Prix de la ville d'Angoulême* in 2022, and who places the body in all its facets at the heart of her work. Whether it is sexuality or themes specific to the female body, such as menstruation or pregnancy and childbirth, her work covers it all. The body has thus gradually become a central aspect of comics, thanks to these autobiographical works.

To continue with autobiographical drawings, Laurence Brogniez in her article "Féminin singulier : les desseins du moi. Julie Doucet, Dominique Goblet" (2010), explains how women have made a place for themselves in the world of comics, which was initially very male. At first, they were confined to comics with girls as the target audience. It was therefore focused on subjects seen as feminine. But little by little, especially thanks to independent publishers, the desire to tell the female point of view gained in importance. This has allowed female authors to express their sensibility and singularity, which until then had been little represented. To do this, many turned to autobiography or diaries, ways of expressing themselves that were often chosen in other arts as well (Brogniez, 2010:119-120).

Today, the intimate narrative is quite popular. The medium of the graphic novel offers a variety of ways to illustrate itself. However, it is possible to observe a difference in the manner of producing this narrative between Americans and Europeans. While in France the story is

¹⁶ "le cadre de la case est souvent segmentant, il peut amputer le corps, n'en donner à voir qu'un fragment"

partly related to childhood memories, in the United States the angle of attack is more explicit when it comes to intimate life or sexuality. With autobiographical stories breaking taboos, women will take advantage of this to incorporate a feminist aspect, it becomes a medium that allows the deconstruction of sexual identity. The construction of identity is a question which finds for that matter an appropriate place in the autobiographical genre. Femininity and the place left to women in society are also two points that are linked to the author's relationship with her body. By representing themselves, a new question also appears, that of identification, but also of voyeurism. In a way, this medium allows them to express themselves in a bold way, playing with form and content.

Brogniez chose to illustrate her remarks with the work of two comic book authors that is Doucet's work and that of Dominique Goblet. The latter is particularly well known for her autobiographical work called *Pretending is lying*, published in 2007, in which she experiences a certain vulnerability through the descriptions of her family relationships. These two French-speaking authors, one Canadian and the other Belgian, differ on certain aesthetic points. Doucet, for example, has a more traditional approach compared to American alternative comics. It is interesting to note that in the world of American feminist comics, themes such as the body or desire — which are also important in a female gaze approach — are treated in a very direct manner. Both of their styles are very personal. They evoke experiences that have had an impact on their identity construction (Brogniez, 2010:132-133).

The author concludes by saying that, eventually, the graphic novel is an art form that permits a great deal of freedom of expression with regard to autobiographical work. Nevertheless, it is still complicated to build a sustainable career. Women are gradually finding their place, but it is complicated to stay in it. The genre of personal narratives can therefore be a springboard for some authors as well as a trap for others (Brogniez, 2010:137).

Another author who has succeeded perfectly in theorising the roles of the body in graphic novels, with all the implications it can have, is Eszter Szép. With her book *Comics and the Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability* (2020), which focuses on the representation of the body in the genre of graphic novels, Szép is the first to have realised the symbiosis between the two concepts. In addition to this monograph, the author is also involved in a multitude of projects related to the world of graphic arts, especially in her native Hungary. In her book, she explores how comics can represent and question the human body. Among other things, she

questions the correlation between body and identity as well as certain bodily experiences such as pain and trauma. She also focuses a lot on the autobiographical part of the works, which obviously play all the more with the notion of corporeality, given that the authors do not represent characters, but it is themselves that they constantly represent. This is of great interest in the study of creation. She sheds light on that by saying that "the creation of the autobiographical avatar's body is a never-ending performative process, during which the body is perceived and visualized as monstrous and vulnerable at the same time" (Szép, 2020:51).

It is also interesting to understand how authors choose to represent bodies, what techniques they use, especially to depict vulnerable ones. The representation of these bodies plays a role in the readers' ability to identify with the characters. Through this, she shows how comics are an art form in their own right and that they really do play a role in our perception of the body and identity. She further explains, based on Sobchack's theory of engagement, that just as in cinema, where film and viewer can be able to see as well as be seen, the engagement in comics is similar. She offers an explanation by writing that "the performance of the body is central to experiencing it either as an artist or as a reader" (Szép, 2020:2).

In her book, the concept of vulnerability is extremely important. She expresses it not as a weakness but as a strength that brings out new ways of interaction. Three important elements characterise vulnerability. First, we need others, because each person takes care of another. Second, the need to communicate vulnerability is risky because it is not possible to control the response. Sharing a vulnerable aspect can be tantamount to sharing a weakness and it is never possible to anticipate the reaction of an outsider. Finally, according to Freud, vulnerability is a prerequisite, a step to the experience of pleasure (Szép, 2023: Conference). Szép also takes the example of James Elkins who worked on the visual worlds. She summarises part of his argument by saying that this is often abstract. The body being a physical entity, it can be a problem to represent it in graphic novels.

Synopsis

In order to analyse the development of this female gaze in the world of graphic novels in a conscientious way, it is more appropriate to choose a specific corpus that will allow a detailed study of this concept in a new medium. For this reason, the analysis presented here will focus on two graphic memoirs: *Eveils* by Juliette Mancini and *Commute: An Illustrated Memoir of Female Shame* by Erin Williams.

Firstly, it is interesting to define the term "graphic memoir". Kyler defines it as follows: "Graphic memoir is not just comics with another subject or autobiography in another medium, but rather a distinctive genre-medium with unique possibilities for exploring life narratives" (Kyler, 2010: 2). Hence, she emphasizes the importance of regarding the graphic memoir as an independent medium. It provides novel ways to convey life stories. This has led to a fresh perspective on the role subjectivity can play in narratives. The interplay between bodily representation and storytelling establishes an embodiment, forging a link between the body and the mind. What is typically personal and therefore subjective is externally transcribed through the depiction of the body (Reinerth & Thon, 2017:81).

These two works are therefore of great interest because they deal with women's struggles that develop in the context of a well-defined patriarchal society. They are endowed with a strong feminine power, related to a touching intimacy and singularity that still allow them to convey a communicative value in their words. The choice of these two books is also partly justified by their recent publication, the first having been published in 2021 while the second is not much older with a publication in 2019. Both books therefore take place in an era that is awakening to feminist struggles and fighting for equal rights.

With their self-narratives, the descriptions are full of sincerity. This makes it possible to understand and feel their experiences all the more, which is a key to the female gaze. As with any memoir, it is obviously essential to take an interest in authors. Juliette Mancini is a talented young author-illustrator born in 1989. She began by studying graphic design before turning to comics. At the Angoulême International Comics Festival, which is arguably the be-all and end-all of the *neuvième art*, she finished second in the Prize for Young Talent in 2014. Four years later, she won the Prize for Alternative Comics at the same festival. In addition to these awards, Mancini has created a political and philosophical comic magazine called *Bien, monsieur*. In

2016, she published her first album *De la chevalerie*, which already discusses the role of patriarchal society, in the publishing house Atrabile. In 2021, she released her second album, *Eveils* (website: That's what x said). With this second production, the author puts herself on performance. Through themes related to self-construction, Mancini depicts his evolution within the surrounding society. The decision to create his work in the form of a memoir then becomes evident given the subjects she explores.

Within the graphic novel, as the title suggests, the reader witnesses the author's plurality of realisations during the different stages of her life. Throughout the story, the reader follows Juliette Mancini's evolution as a child, then as a teenager and finally as an adult. She illustrates this through different environments, whether family or personal, in public or private spheres. Through the portrayal of these life moments, Mancini effectively illustrates how these events shape her life due to her gender. The role of women in society thus holds significant prominence within this graphic novel. It serves as a representation of the formation of a woman's identity within a patriarchal framework. The narrative unfolds as readers journey through the story's progression, witnessing the development of Juliette Mancini as the protagonist. Her struggles and fears are often closely linked to her gender, forming central themes.

Regarding the visual aspect of the graphic novel, the author's style becomes recognizable quite swiftly. It is characterized as experimental and is notably rooted in a strong interplay between text and image, imbued with a sense of tension. Right from the cover, the colours that permeate the pages of this comic book are showcased —vivid coral and deep pastel blue — setting the tone for this work. The presence of boxes on the cover and back cover also foreshadows the interplay that will unfold within the pages. Juliette Mancini thus delves into the medium of comics, primarily through her affinity for coloured pencils and the array of possibilities they offer (Hakem, 2021).

The author of *Commute: An Illustrated Memoir of Female Shame*, Erin Williams, is an American writer and illustrator living in New York, where she published this graphic novel with Abrams ComicArts. She is also the co-author of a book series titled *Big Activity Book*. Prior to embarking on her career in the world of graphic arts, Williams worked as a data manager and scientific researcher in the medical field. This background could notably explain her interest in subjects related to health and medicine in some of her books, particularly mental health.

For this first more personal and introspective project in the world of graphic arts, Williams began with a self-portrait. However, this one is focused on a facet of her life, or rather a representation of what her life is as a woman. She demonstrates how her gender has impacted her experiences up to this point. The title *Commute* is a hint of what awaits the reader upon entering the book. The author guides the reader on a journey through her lived experiences. She depicts what has shaped her as an individual: her struggles and her challenges. Each chapter sets the rhythm for a moment of her day, whether it is her awakening, her journey to work, or the one that takes her back home at the end of the day. It is within her daily commute that she expresses the significant stages of her life as a woman, often through memories or flashbacks.

Erin Williams transforms her anger and vulnerability into an eloquent and expressive creation. The vulnerability she has displayed has been transformed into an energy, a strength that she lays bare for us. This catharsis by the author is in complete harmony with the current societal struggles. Her personal experience serves as an example to which other women can relate. Beyond the portrayal of her own life, she more broadly illustrates the everyday experiences of numerous women in modern society. It is a book by a woman for women. (Williams, author description)

The themes addressed throughout the journey that the reader undertakes with Erin Williams are diverse. Just as depicted on the cover, it is possible to observe all those men looking at her. She is the object of their gaze, a persistent gaze especially due to their numbers. Her relationship with the male gender and her sexuality are thus at the heart of the work. Accompanying this is, of course, the role of men and women in her personal development. She also delves into more intimate subjects such as motherhood and her relationship with alcohol. The connection she maintains with her body can also fit within this context. She shares a significant portion of her traumas and their consequences. Some of these themes can resonate more strongly and transcend an individual framework to become more universal.

In this graphic novel, the style is far less focused on seeking beauty, sometimes appearing harsh. Its primary purpose is authenticity. The character drawings lean more towards abstraction than meticulous detailing. Except for a few representations that resemble anatomical diagrams, likely influenced by the author's scientific background. Contrary to the cover, Williams uses very little colour in the pages of her graphic novel. When she does incorporate colour, it emphasizes the drawing. However, on the majority of pages, white, grey, and black

dominate. Her style is, for instance, somewhat comparable to that of Liv Strömquist, with a play on all the possibilities that the comic medium allows. This includes typography as well as the incorporation of photos or shifts in drawing style. Sentences are also often handwritten. Furthermore, there are no distinct panels. One panel is present per page, occasionally featuring wavy borders to depict memories or flashbacks. Otherwise, the page's boundaries serve as the panel. A significant amount of space is dedicated to text at certain moments, with occasional pages focusing solely on text.

Although distinct in their execution and style, these two graphic novels approach a shared perspective through themes that are sometimes similar, sometimes different. By inviting readers to engage with their stories and perspectives, the authors enable them to grasp the depth of their challenges and the magnitude of societal pressures as women. The reader's gaze transitions from the image to an experience.

Chapter 2: Denouncing the male gaze Objectifying the female body

To delve into a more detailed analysis of a very significant aspect of the male and female gaze, we need to look at the role of the body. When watching a film, before an actor's performance, the first thing that is seen is the actor's body. It is through this body that the message is conveyed, whether it is through face expressions, the movement, or something else. The same is true in comics, the representation of bodies plays a very important role because it reflects the soul of the character that is given to read and that accompanies the reader. The main characteristic being that the body is continuously redrawn. But it is even more fundamental in a graphic memoir. The person represented is the self, the author represents themselves personally. This adds an element of intimacy and vulnerability to the representation. Groensteen also mentions this aspect when he says that "[l]'essor des bandes dessinées du Moi a profondément renouvelé l'approche du corps et de son intimité. L'espèce humaine est contemplée dans sa nudité constitutive à travers un échantillon privilégiée qui est le corps du narrateur autobiographique, sexué, précieux, unique, quelquefois encombrant, inhibé ou malade" (Groensteen, 2020:175).

The different themes that are going to be analysed obviously come together, and merge at times. The aim here is to illustrate the different techniques used in these two graphic novels, and to provide a precise and comparative analysis. However, the links between each part must be taken into account, so that the work can be seen as a whole.

In her work *Éveils*, Juliette Mancini expresses in a variety of ways and through several moments in her life, how in this society she may have felt like an object. One of the first strong scenes she depicts is a moment in her childhood when a teacher at school, who is often a symbol of exemplarity for children of that age, marks an inferiority between girls and boys through a remark (fig. 2.1). The teacher asks to carry a table and to do so, she says she needs two strong boys. Mancini then represents herself at this age and to illustrate her feminist predispositions, she draws herself as a table. This reflects a feeling of invisibility. The boys are seen, but she feels invisible. She becomes the object in question, the one that sends her back to her status as a member of the second sex — as theorised by Simone de Beauvoir. By transforming herself into a table, by representing herself in such a position, she marks the

inferiority imposed on her. Behind the teacher's remark lies not only a vision of physical inferiority but also a way of inferiorising the female gender in general. She is instilling in the children that in the society in which they will grow up and awaken, there is an order to be respected, a hierarchy between genders. This can therefore be linked to social constructivism, a concept that can be explained by Vinney as follows: "From a social constructionist perspective, many things we take for granted and believe are objective reality are actually socially constructed, and thus, can change as society changes" (Vinney, 2019). It is therefore with the help of remarks of this kind, which are taught from the earliest years of childhood, that sexism is institutionalised and anchored in our society. As the next page shows, the author says she feels "impuissante puisque [l'infériorité] était supposément innée"(Mancini, 2021:28). She shows her awareness towards this injustice, but she is disarmed by the image that society sends back to her, that of a person of the wrong gender. She blends in with other tables to express her role of object. But she also emphasises the notion of being human. By being a girl, she tells us that she is not considered normal, she is under-considered. A difference is made between girls and boys from a very young age, because that is what is instilled through remarks that are often seen as harmless. It is in this division between individuals that the female gender is seen as inferior (fig. 2.2). The alternating blue and orange colours of the panels graphically mark this gender dichotomy. By representing herself as a table, she seems to blend into the background, which is how she feels. She does not feel any different from the other tables and therefore from the other objects, as she illustrates with this table grouping. Even the fact that the boys' arms move the table in which she represents herself supports this idea of objectification.



Another important element is related to the representations of women in art that abound in *Éveils*. Mancini manages to represent the power of other arts such as painting and sculpture in her medium of preference — comics — to exemplify the objectification of women in society. She begins with a direct reference to painting, with a representation of one of the paintings illustrating the "Martyrdom of St. Agatha". Without any further information or context, she redraws herself when, as a young girl, she experienced her "premier choc esthétique" (Mancini, 2021:25) at the sight of this piece of art (fig. 2.3). In her posture, the young Mancini looks astonished. Being so small in front of a painting that takes up almost the whole page, it seems even more violent. She looked at it with a captivated expression, marked by the shock. What is interesting to notice is the significance behind this painting. The Britannica website explains the origin and legend behind this representation of Saint Agatha:

Having consecrated her virginity to God at a young age, she resisted the advances of a Roman prefect sent by the emperor Decius to govern Sicily. Her profession of faith and rejection of the prefect resulted in her brutal torture, during which her breasts were cut off (a condition often reflected in her iconography). (*Britannica*, 2022)



Fig. 2.3: Her depiction of the martyrdom of Saint Agatha (p.25)



Fig. 2.4: Allegory with the painting of Saint Agatha (p.29)

Behind this religious and historical significance, the protagonist seems to have been fascinated or traumatised by this painting and this from childhood. It helps us to understand her instinctive feminist unconscious, because at the time she could not have known that it represented the suffering of a woman clinging to her values. However, the image speaks for itself: a vulnerable woman tortured by a man who dominates her, by being her executioner and the instigator of her suffering. All the more so as she depicts this painting a second time, but without colour, on the following page, focusing on the pincers used to tear off the saint's breasts. Breasts that are one of the major bodily symbols of femininity. She also recalls this painting just afterwards by depicting herself in a gigantic way (fig. 2.4), hiding her breasts, accompanied by the phrase "[l]e paradoxe d'être pressée de grandir, mais pas de devenir femme" (Mancini, 2021:29). The nudity of her upper body and this position to protect her breasts are reminiscent of the painting of the martyr, and she shows an appropriation with the sentence that captions the image. With her hands on her breasts, she depicts herself as wounded. She seems to feel empathy. This expresses an embodied relationship with the painting. Here is one of the ambivalences that run through this graphic novel and express the ambiguities of the author's reflections, as well as the difficulty of growing up as a woman in such a society. Childhood and the insouciance that accompanies it are often marked by a desire to grow up, but here the young Juliette Mancini already understood that becoming a woman was fraught with complications. By drawing a parallel with Saint Agatha, she wanted to represent this fear.

The other predominant art form is sculpture, with a multitude of references present in the graphic novel, playing with its meaning and relating it to the feelings of women in society. Mancini plays on this parallel between the objectification of bodies and the role of the statue. Both are assigned the same function, that of being the object of the male gaze. The first representation of a statue is on a page constructed as a mirror, where the author draws herself as a double and each of her two representations looks at and judges the other (fig. 2.5). In the accompanying text describing the illustration, Mancini explains the change she has made to conform to expectations. The illustration follows her explanation by depicting her metamorphosis into a statue. The problem is that the expectations of a patriarchal society turn women into objects. This is why she draws a parallel with statues. One of the primary purposes of art is to contemplate. So, if she conforms to society's injunctions, her body becomes nothing more than a form on display to satisfy the eye, and so she obtains the same role as a statue in a museum, whence this transformation of her body into a statue. She uses

this metaphor to demonstrate what society imposes, the way women are forced to act. She illustrates how the male gaze works and denounces the way women are objectified. In the following pages, she draws several statues in a museum and places herself among them, reproducing their postures. With ironic intent, she denounces the fact that it is as if she had her place, or rather was taking her place, among the objects open to the gaze of others. At the end of this part of the book, she draws a statue posing on a full page to finish in a blaze of glory (fig. 2.7). The most interesting aspect of these two demonstrations of the woman-object as statue is that the author allows the pages to respond to each other, while modifying them all the same. The mirrored pages are more colourful, but at the same time messier too, and on this occasion the statue is whole, whereas the first time she had her arms cut off (fig. 2.6). However, the two representations of her being transformed into a statue are always accompanied by a unique word "object". When it comes to the full page with a statue drawn on it, this one is also shown in the rest of the book, but this time the colours have changed, with blue dominating, but the most important thing is that the limbs — arms and legs — have been cut off (fig. 2.8).

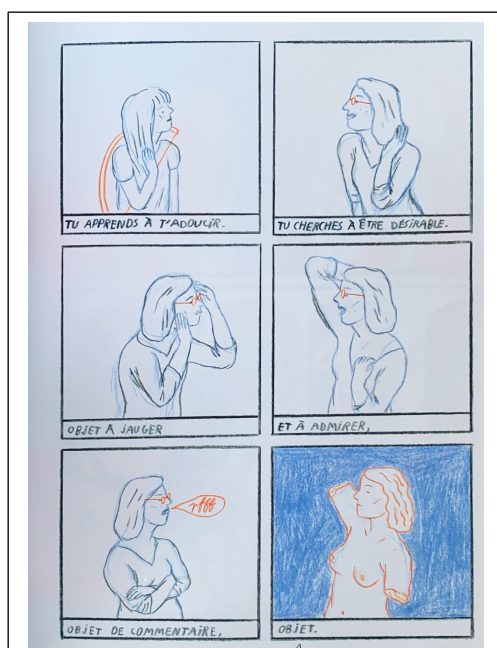


Fig. 2.5: Mirror representation of a woman as a statue (p.65)



Fig. 2.6: Mirror representation of a woman as a statue (2) (p.77)

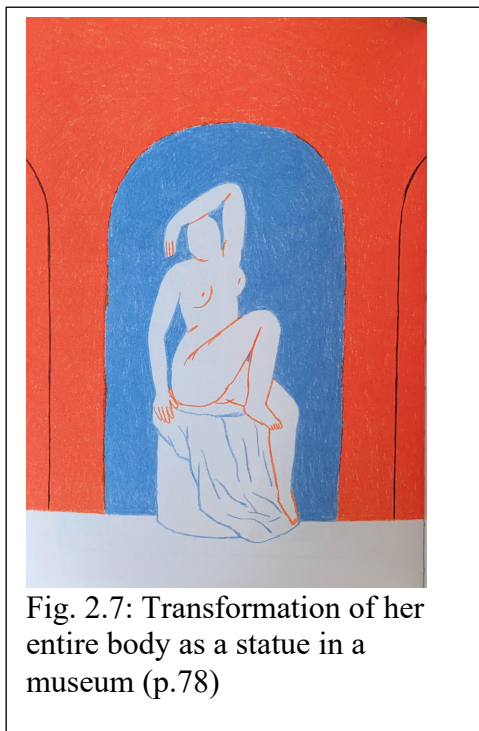


Fig. 2.7: Transformation of her entire body as a statue in a museum (p.78)



Fig. 2.8: Same representation of the transformation with broken body parts (p.112)

These broken statues can be analysed in two completely different ways. They could evoke a malaise, an internal fracture due to the male gaze that is becoming societal and characterised by all the male dictates. The representation in statue form supports the objectification, in particular by preventing the representation of living and moving bodies. Whereas, according to Brey, the use of movement gives women a real body, rather than an object body (Brey, 2020:191). But it could also symbolise a visualisation of the concept of deconstruction. Mancini shows one of her awakenings to society through this drawing of a statue that is being deconstructed, in order to better rebuild herself. As if she were becoming aware of this societal male gaze and wanted to dispose of it. Seeing Mancini play with her medium by representing other arts such as painting and sculpture to exemplify the male gaze is a strong gesture. As the graphic novel *Une place* (2022) shows, the male gaze has been theorised in cinema studies, but it is possible to observe it elsewhere. Therefore, exemplifying it in comics thanks to these other art forms is a relevant and significant choice.

Always linked to the body and its objectification, Juliette Mancini also expresses the sexual abuse suffered as a woman in a male-dominated society. She denounces "la première main aux fesses" (Mancini, 2021:38), and to do so, she creates a close-up of her buttocks and the wandering hand (fig. 2.9). She shows her body freezing, all the emotions and questions tumbling through her mind, but her body remains blocked. She goes even further by showing the viewer her body through her clothes. Her transparent clothes show how she feels, naked in the face of a society that takes possession of her body as it pleases, without her

consent. With this intrusion, her whole person is associated solely with her body. Using close-ups and alternating transparent and non-transparent clothing to support the text, she also plays with the familiar male gaze. The view of her buttocks accompanies the gesture of the assailant's hand, in other words the male point of view. She cuts out her body as viewed by the boys around her at school, where the harassment took place. To represent once again the difficulty of being a woman, because she is always referred to her body image, she says that her body becomes exclusively a "corps sexuel" (Mancini, 2021:42). She conveys this with another representation of her clothes, which become transparent, putting her body on display for all to see (fig. 2.10). She makes her emotions and physical reactions palpable. She feels men undress her with their eyes giving her a naked appearance in front of society. No matter how she is dressed, she will be reduced to her breasts, her vulva or any other sexual part of her body. While making her clothes invisible, she zooms in on each part of her body, first her crotch, then her breasts and finally her legs. Just as the male gaze does in cinema, and as men's gazes do in society, the body is cut up into parts to satisfy a voyeuristic gaze. Her *tour de force* comes down to using their way of examining her body to denounce the situation. She uses the language of the male gaze to denounce and criticise it. By showing it in this way, she allows the reader to understand that this should not be the norm. She creates a tension, and therefore lets the reader see the discomfort that this male gaze brings to women. So she does not directly offer the solution through the female gaze, but uses these representations of the male gaze to show its many problems.



Fig. 2.9: First sexual touching at school (p.38)



Fig. 2.10: Sexualisation of the female body under clothing (p.42)

The male gaze, which is a tool of patriarchal society, considers women as objects. As Mancini points out in her mirrored pages, whether an object to be gauged, admired or commented on, women remain objects of the gaze and objects of society. However, it is worth noting the dichotomy between the descriptions of objectification and the genre used to narrate them. The contradiction between the portrayal of women as subjects in their own stories and lives compared with a description of their experiences in society, where these same women-subjects become objects, is more than intriguing. It exposes the tension that the comic medium makes possible. This highlights the difference between the personal view they take of their identity and the view that the people around them perceive them on a daily basis.

This recurring objectification of women is also a theme in Erin Williams' work *Commute*. On several occasions, she denounces this male gaze in a way that is sometimes more direct – in keeping with her less poetic but more assertive style – than Juliette Mancini. She shows that the objectification of the body can happen to any woman, in any place, such as a coffee shop (fig 2.11). In a fairly mundane scene, the author depicts a man staring at a woman's bust. That woman does not seem to realise it, while the dotted lines indicating the man's gaze reveal the extent to which he is sexualising the female body. In this case, the protagonist is a witness rather than a victim of objectification, a theme that is developed in a later chapter. In this situation the man seems at ease, the situation is portrayed as usual and not as something out of the ordinary. This emphasises the constant nature of such objectification. The male gaze is omnipresent; it can be observed through the author's representation of the concept. It is well-known, because people are increasingly talking about it, and society is becoming aware of it, but it persists. Women remain the object of attention.

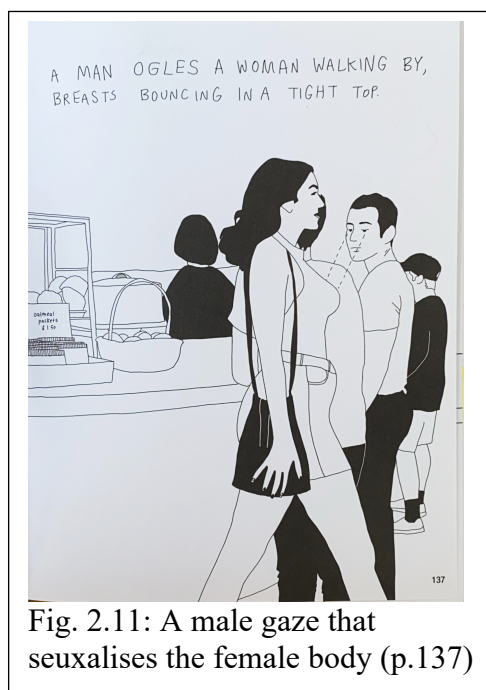


Fig. 2.11: A male gaze that sexualises the female body (p.137)

In a press article in the blog section of the French newspaper *Libération* (2020), this concept is referred to "eye rape". The question raised is how far a gaze can be acceptable before violating a person's integrity; and whether a malevolent gaze, whether degrading, unwanted or insistent, could become condemnable. The article explains that "partant du principe que le "regard masculin" est par essence celui d'un prédateur — un regard qui vous déshabille —, certaines femmes l'assimilent à une forme insupportable de domination". The gaze could therefore be seen legally as a form of sexual harassment, as the two authors demonstrate through their drawings and their choice of representations of female objectification. Wherever they occur, the stares they are victims of — symbolically and legally — can be terrifying. The authors show that the stares are becoming commonplace, and that this is not just the case for a minimal proportion of male representatives. Being objectified can therefore mean being a victim. The article even argues that "la propagande actuelle [...] nous encourage à dénoncer tout acte qui fait de nous des "objets" passifs et à condamner toute image qui montre l'humain comme "objet de désir" (*Libération*, 2020). She also gives the example of an application in a Swiss town that allows users to report any form of sexual misconduct to the police, with a list that includes whistling, rubbing but also insistent stares. Proof that women's unease is gradually making itself heard.

To denounce this male gaze, Williams also addresses the relationships of domination that stem from this patriarchal system. Because men are seen as the dominant figure, women are under constant pressure. This position of dominated and vulnerable is not chosen by women, but is imposed on them. In describing a conversation with a colleague — both cancer researchers — the author shows the turning point in the conversation when her male colleague puts Freud directly on a pedestal (fig. 2.12).

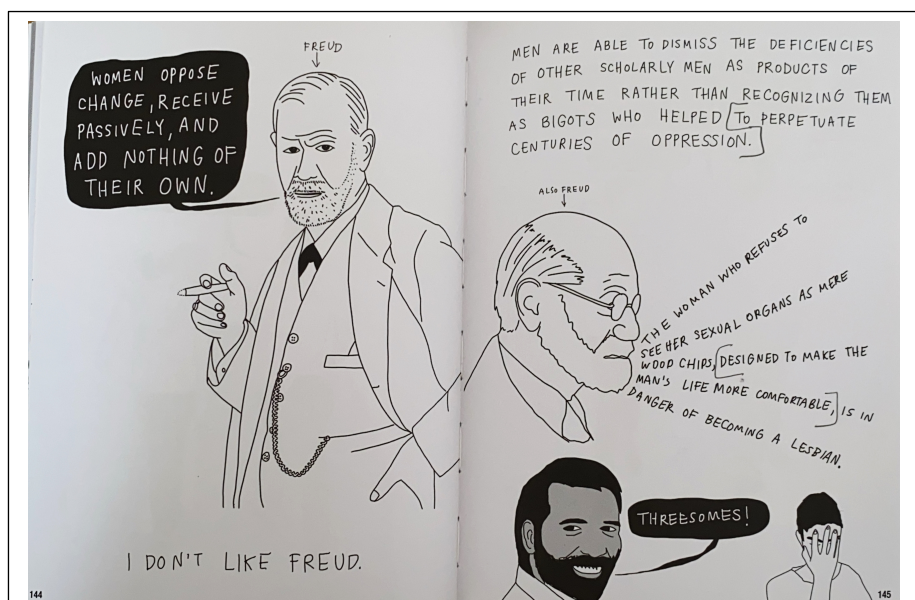


Fig. 2.12: Freudian thinking taking root in the male unconscious (pp.144-145)

The author, on the other hand, talks about her dislike of Freud. Through their argument about Freud, Williams shows the patriarchal vision that derives from the thoughts of the famous psychoanalyst. She demonstrates that the kind of thinking that is transmitted and taught contributes to "perpetuate centuries of oppression" (Williams, 2019:145). In effect, it is by making the feminist thinking of the time invisible — because feminist thinking did exist — and by passing on these thoughts of domination, that patriarchy continues to be the norm. By illustrating this discussion, she shows that Freud's school of thought has survived the years and entered the unconscious of many people, like her colleague's, without even questioning the ideology of his approach. This parallel with Freud is interesting, given the importance of the latter in Laura Mulvey's definition of the male gaze. Among other things, it was by relying on Freudian reflections that Mulvey was able to theorise the male gaze, basing her theory in particular on the concept of scopophilia that Freud developed in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905). As Mulvey writes, taking up the Austrian theorist's idea, he "associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey, [1975] 1989:16). In this splash page, Freud is portrayed as a great man with a dominant, erudite posture. His second portrayal focuses more on his thinking and the impact it still has today. In contrast to these large drawings, the protagonist is depicted small, in the bottom right-hand corner of the page. Her hand in front of her face suggests that she is protesting against these sexist theories and their consequences for men today with her colleague shouting "Threesomes!" (Williams, 2019:145).

Erin Williams also exemplifies in another way the objectification standardised in society. On her commute from work to her train station, she shares her thoughts on what she sees on a daily basis: advertisements. Since the street is a place where different people meet and where they pass through, it is an interesting place from a commercial point of view to reach a wide audience. This commercial aspect was then associated with women, who are very often naked, because they draw attention. Given that the aim of advertising is to catch the eye, it is quite conceivable that advertisers would use the male gaze to satisfy both the eye and the image that society expects. Products are often accompanied by women in unnatural positions, showing off their buttocks for instance (fig. 2.13). It is with this in mind that the author depicts women and their representation in commercials. Using large advertising hoardings, the author expresses the habit of always sexualising the female body. Passers-by seem very small, and the focus is clearly on these advertisements, which are omnipresent in the city. Using large advertising hoardings, the author expresses the habit of

always sexualising the female body. Passers-by seem very small, and the focus is clearly on these advertisements, which are omnipresent in the city. The other areas of the city are drawn in grey, giving a rather dull appearance, while the white billboards are more eye-catching. The problem is the identification this suggests. This nudity, which is the chosen way of representing women, affects the identification of women who see these ads. It creates remorse and complexes because it sets up the idea of a feminine body ideal. An ideal that does not exist, but which fulfils the criteria of the male gaze. The rules of patriarchy establish criteria of beauty, whereas feminism strives to prove the beauty in every body, every difference.

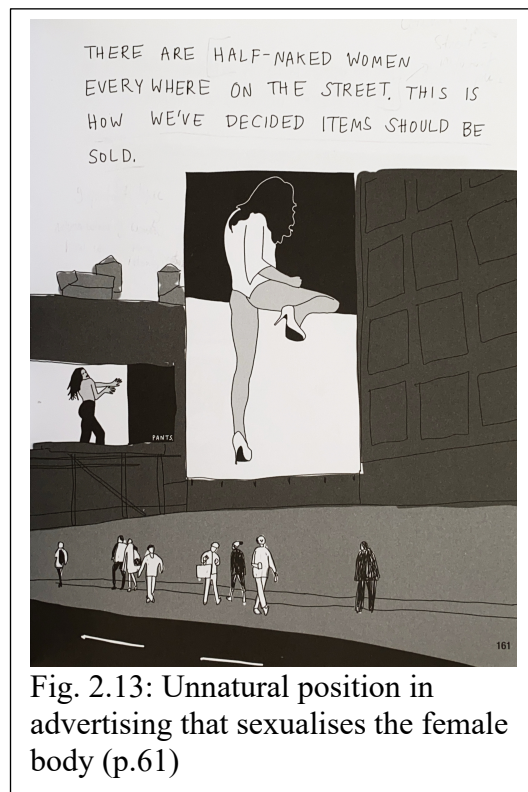


Fig. 2.13: Unnatural position in advertising that sexualises the female body (p.61)

This topic of the impact of advertising on women was already discussed by Indhu Rajagopal and Jennifer Gales in 2002 in the article "It's the Image that Is Imperfect: Advertising and Its Impact on Women". This article evokes the idea that the norm spread through the images conveyed is abnormal. It is advertising, by not faithfully representing women's bodies, that influences society's perception of the female body. Taking up Margaret Matlin's idea, the authors write: "Women are often shown in a sexual or vulnerable position in order to sell the product, whether it is an advertisement for shaving cream or alcoholic beverage, for instance, Edge Shaving Cream, Pepsi-Cola or Absolute Vodka" (Rajagopal & Gales, 2002:3333). This assertion echoes perfectly figure 2.14 where Williams depicts an advertisement on a lorry with two elements, the product, a bottle of vodka, and the eye-catching element, buttocks in a swimming costume. She criticises it by showing the excesses

that are made with a sexualised body that is even bigger than the product in question. It is a perfect illustration of the objectification of the female body for profit-making purposes. It brings to mind the idea developed by Mancini when, from childhood, she understood that being a woman meant that she was not considered on an equal footing and that a differentiation was made between human beings on the basis of gender. Here we understand that advertising uses women and their bodies as marketing objects and not as human beings. This necessarily relies on stereotypes and inscribes them in posterity. The focus is solely on appearance.



Fig. 2.14: Female body used to sell a product (p.162)

Consequently, either through representations of women as objects or through an illustrated denunciation of the male gaze present everywhere in society, the two writers express their weariness and unease with the society that surrounds them. They denounce and condemn all the psychological pressure that these images exert on women, especially to change the shape of their body.

Female presence and sexualization in public spaces

What both works denounce is not only the objectification but mostly the sexualisation of the body experienced by women. In figure 2.15, Mancini illustrates all the ways in which the harassment she suffers recurs, in a variety of situations. With some background lines, she depicts touching by sketching the individuals who "se collent" or who "s'autorisent un baise-main"; the sight with the persistent glances of the voyeurs who "matent"; or the voice with the harassers who "commentent". The use of orange to colour each disturbing part, such as the eyes of the voyeurs, the mouth of the man who allows himself to kiss her, or the comments about her appearance made by strangers, highlights all the uncomfortable moments she experiences. In the last panel, the entire space around the author is filled with orange, thereby illustrating that this discomfort is spreading to everything around her. This harassment, whatever form it takes, means that she can no longer feel at ease in the public space.



At one point or another, both graphic novels create a link with the street. This is expressed in a variety of profound ways in the two graphic novels. First of all, *Éveils* shows us that this place is nothing more than the theatre of the male gaze when it reaches its climax. Here the narrator feels like an object, she feels sexualised when confronted with a society in which men are represented only by silhouettes. Whatever their faces, they represent a whole, they form the patriarchy that sexualises women. All these men passing judgement on her

body are nothing more than a "brouhaha sonore et visuel" (Mancin, 2021:41). On this page, she emphasises the representation of women's bodies by drawing her body and those of two other women. She depicts men, conversely, without defined bodies, because they only exist through the way they look at women (fig. 2.16). This demonstrates the pressure Mancini feels when she moves around in a place that is supposed to be a safe space to everyone: men watch, women endure. It is interesting to notice that a frame surrounds the panel. It gives the impression of imprisonment. In this drawing, with the repetition of these silhouettes and all these lines, the women seem suffocated.

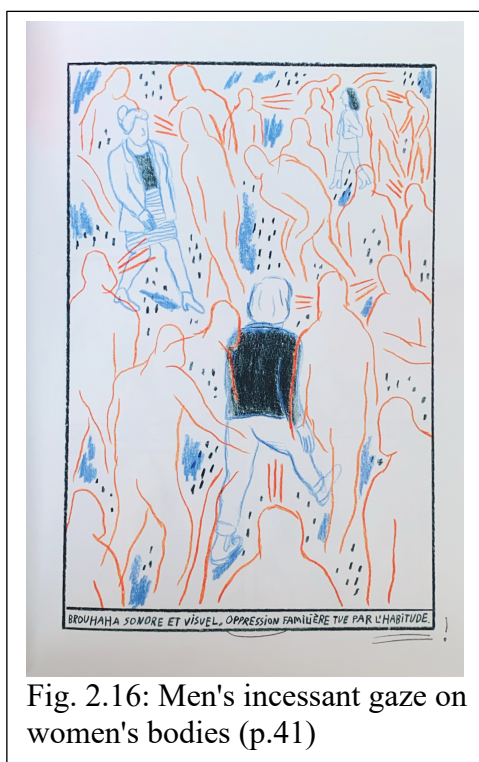


Fig. 2.16: Men's incessant gaze on women's bodies (p.41)

The absence of gaze on the part of the protagonist and the two other women represented is also perceptible. None of them responds with a look, none of them looks that way. The reason for this is that this pattern of oppression is mainly rooted only in the male gender. The woman is effectively placed as an object, and without any words or actions other than looking, the female character is a victim and the men seek their place as dominant. In this attempt to avoid portraying all the people staring at women's bodies, it is not specifically stated that the silhouettes are those of men. Even though any reader can suspect this from the preceding pages and the patriarchal microcosm that this situation represents. However, it makes no difference whether the shapes are men or women, because the emphasis is on the objectification of the protagonist solely because of her gender. In this particular case, the choice to depict these silhouettes in orange shows firstly that the colour

is being reused to express danger. Secondly, the author's decision to depict the aggressors in a single shape is not insignificant. It brings to mind Thomas Mathieu's comic book *Les Crocodiles* (2014) depicting scenes of sexual assault based on testimonies in which the perpetrators are always drawn as crocodiles. With *Eveils*, the choice of the aggressor representation is less assertive, unlike the crocodiles, which expressed the violent aspect associated with the animal. But the colour of the stroke of a pen used to draw these silhouettes also evokes violence in its own way, with this orange colour also evoking a certain fierceness. Behind this idea of a unique representation for a group of individuals, there is the idea of firstly expressing that they are a whole and that they are far from being isolated cases. Then, they are of little importance in the stories or in these memoirs. The important point is that they are attacking and sexualising people in a public space that is not theirs, but which they claim as their own.

The street as a public and dangerous space is traumatizing, not only because it can easily be linked to harassment, but also because it represents a space that provokes fear and flight, as Mancini shows us towards the end of her graphic novel with a succession of very interesting pages and panels. It starts with a representation in a street, scattered with remarks Mancini has heard earlier in her life that relate to her place as a woman in a public place (fig. 2.17). These comments, which concern clothes ("tu ne vas pas sortir comme ça"), the time of day ("tu rentres seule à cette heure-là?") and the way she gets around ("t'es folle de faire du stop"), are obviously linked to the protagonist's gender (Mancini, 2021:106).



Fig. 2.17: Comments that provokes a fear of the street (p.106)

This daily reality, which depicts the street as a hostile environment for women, is also addressed in the short film "Be A Lady They Said" (2020). As its name suggests, this hard-hitting video highlighted the impossible standards to which women are subjected on a daily basis. The video illustrates this with injunctions such as "Don't walk alone; don't go out too late; don't dress like that". The fear that the street represents for women can be perceived through the remarks that Mancini writes and those that appear in the short film. It is a dangerous place for them, and it takes away their freedom because of the presence of men. An article in *The Guardian* quoted Rothstein, the producer of *Girls Girls Girls* magazine, as saying "I don't understand why sexy has become a negative thing. I take those classic stereotypes that are considered negative when seen through the male gaze and flip them on their head" (Finnigan, 2020). This is implicit, but this type of comment indicates that patriarchy is institutionalised and transmitted through the male gaze. This can be compared with the normalised sexism that the author experienced as a child at school, with remarks such as those made by her teacher. Through all these reflections, society teaches us that the female body is vulnerable and in danger. These comments also encourage women to see the outside world as a hostile environment, in which it is up to them to restrain themselves, rather than eradicate the danger. Indeed, all these statements illustrate a certain danger for the female gender, represented by the male gaze. Women thus internalise the fear that this space provokes, with anxiety and fear stemming from the inculcated vision of the female body.

The construction of this street sequence starts with a splash page, which can have a very specific purpose, as explained in the book *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel*:

A creator can take advantage of the space the page provides to use an entire page as a single panel. Such "splash" pages are sometimes used at the beginning of a story to offer a dramatic introduction; sometimes they are reserved to mark dramatic moments later in the story. (Duncan & Smith, 2017)

The splash page here is therefore used to offer a dramatic beginning to this street sequence. All the more so since, this full page then splits to reveal 4 boxes, 2 lines of 2 panels each. From then on, the reader enters the public space with the author, in a small tunnel, and moves with her. What is more, her silhouette is seen from different angles, surrounded by the black or dark walls of the buildings and an unwelcoming atmosphere (fig. 2.18). Except that page after page, Mancini adds boxes and rows. The pages go from 6 to 12 then 15 to end up with 24 boxes on the same page. In addition to this, it is also interesting to note that the number of words diminishes, the author describes less and less the images and simply lets her body

speaking within this environment. The space of fear also becomes a space of escape. As Mancini writes during her movements – which could almost be called an escape – "tu apprends l'évitement plutôt que l'affrontement" (Mancini, 2021:108).



Fig. 2.18: Representation of its route through the city (p.107)

This helps us to understand how she feels. The street is a place of potential violence where a woman has to make herself small so as not to disturb. This is in fact what she becomes in the following pages, with the reduction in the size of the boxes. On the following page, she goes on to explain that with all these internalized and assimilated remarks, she knows she has to try as hard as she can not to be noticed. Since patriarchal society has constructed an image that considers her to be weaker, she has integrated this and is therefore trying to make herself invisible. This succession of boxes, in which the character seems to be going round in circles, with no way out, is also at one point reminiscent of a labyrinth. This technique of proliferating squares expresses a unique problem: finding one's place. By showing us this, the author explains in her own words all the instructions society gives her to fulfil her role as a woman and fit into society's boxes. This walk through all these public spaces could therefore express the author's inability to find her place in this dichotomous society. However, the image that emerges from this multiplication of boxes, with its choice of dark colours for the locations and orange for the drawing, is more instinctively one of imprisonment. Form and content come together to define the problem: the lack of freedom for a woman in a public

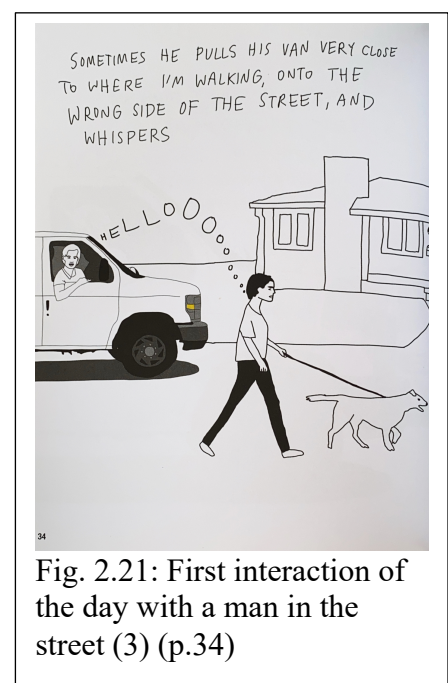
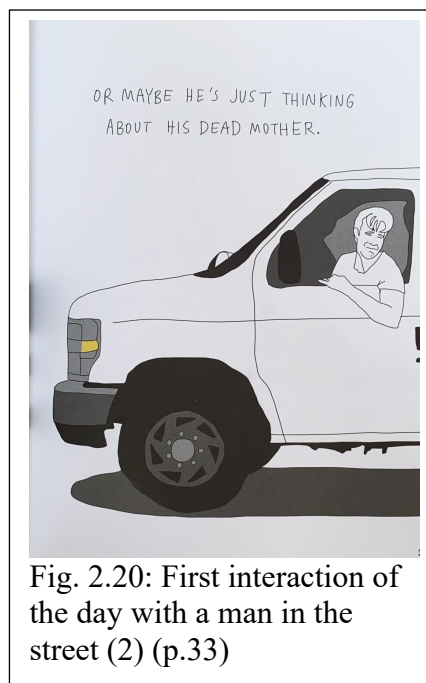
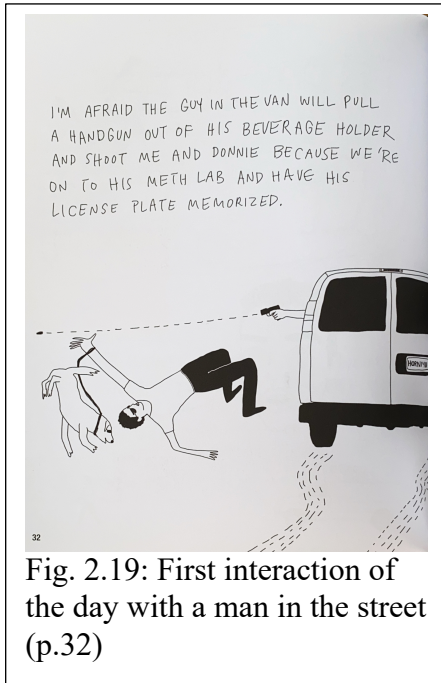
space. Because of her body, a woman must endure the fear of the other, of an aggressor in a place that belongs to everyone. The street is no longer a place of emancipation, but a labyrinth or a prison.

In *Commute*, the findings about public places are the same: it is a place of fear and unease. Nothing but the front cover of the graphic novel sets the tone, with Erin Williams' posture looking annoyed or embarrassed while dozens of men's eyes stare at her. This mass of men interested only in one aspect: their bodies. She accentuates this objectification by the way she is dressed, perhaps to show how she feels when these strangers look at her. As she is "*déshabillée du regard*", which is a French expression to say that someone is looking at someone's body with strong sexual desire, she finds herself almost naked in front of them. This whole situation takes place during her commute, which implicitly indicates that this happens every day, and that she is becoming weary of this male gaze.

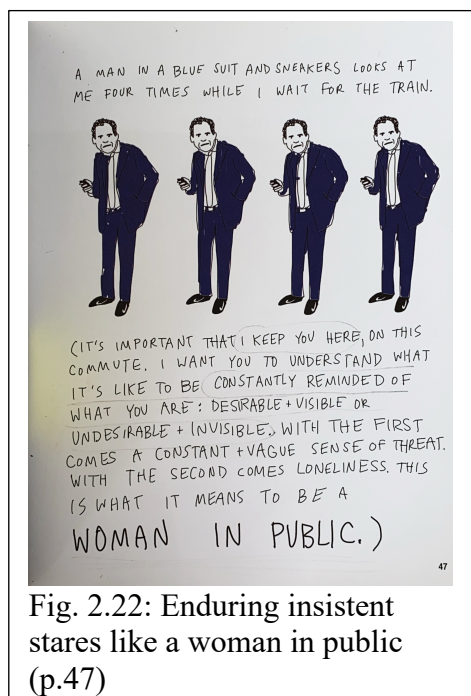
The importance of public spaces in drawing has also been studied by Giada Peterle. In her theoretical book *Comics as a research practice: Drawing narrative geographies beyond the frame* (2021), she also analyses the front cover and explains that "there is at least a double reason for the author to represent herself almost naked: first, she wants us to empathise with her fragilities and sense of being violated by others' gazes; second, since the very beginning of her illustrated graphic memoir, through sharing her own story she appears somehow undressed and thus vulnerable in front of the reader" (Peterle, 2021:113). Peterle's point is that public places are far from being places where women can express themselves. They feel vulnerable, particularly in the presence of the male gaze, as shown on the cover of Williams' graphic novel. This vulnerability is also palpable when they expose themselves to the reader through the style of writing that this memoir represents.

In her graphic novel, Erin Williams specifically addresses the objectification of women in the street and on public transport. She first points out that the street is a place of potential danger. A number of cars or men seem suspicious and put her on her guard. From then on, she explains what her fear makes her imagine as in figure 2.19. Her first interaction with a man on a typical day, and therefore the first depiction, is in a context of oppression in the street. She deliberately imagines an implausible situation, but this enables her to express the extent to which fear in the street can make people imagine dangerous situations. She makes her own criticism by showing that this man might be normal and does

not wish her any harm (fig. 2.20). She realises that this fear can make people see evil all round. But then she exposes the reality of the situation, where the man is doing something suspicious by using his van to get closer to her and whisper some words. Her body seems to be "hunted", she seems to be a prey (fig. 2.21).



In her chapter "Wait for the train", the author denounces what it is like to be a woman in public, showing it with the aim of making the reader understand. With this in mind, she depicts the man looking in the direction of the protagonist, putting the reader in the character's shoes, giving him the impression of feeling the gaze, of being the object looked at. When she narrates that the man has looked at her several times, she just shows him looking in our direction (fig. 2.22).



The fact that the reader can put themselves in the author's shoes makes it easier to feel what she wants to convey. She also adds a parenthesis to explain her choice to convey what it means to be in one's place as a woman in society. She explains in writing the message she wants to get across through this situation: a woman's body is always referred to as what it is, either "desirable and visible", in which case a feeling of fear or threat will be felt, or "undesirable and invisible", in which case a feeling of solitude will dominate (Williams, 2019:47). This commute is used to describe what she feels, what a woman in public experiences. The male gaze dictates how men see the female body, but it also has an impact on how women perceive it. Whether they are seen or not, whether men desire them or not, there is ultimately no good choice. A tension exists between not wanting to be seen in this way by men and not wanting to go unnoticed either, because this creates a feeling of dissatisfaction. This is proof that the male gaze has become a very important part of society as a whole. So the battle has to be fought on both sides.

On her journey to work, Erin Williams shows us on a page with a more detailed and realistic drawing how the street can also become a place of meetings or conflicts (fig. 2.23).

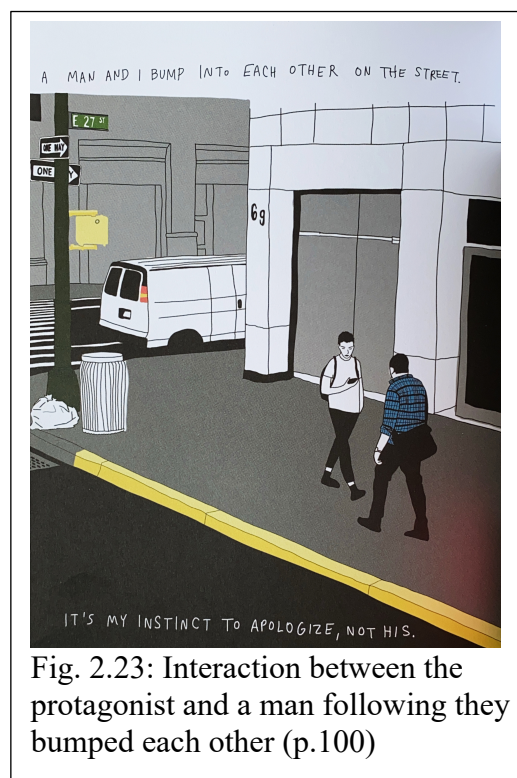


Fig. 2.23: Interaction between the protagonist and a man following they bumped each other (p.100)

She recounts a moment when she and a man bumped into each other. The sentence she writes to describe her reaction is quite intriguing: "It's my instinct to apologize, not his"

(Williams, 2019:100). This questions all the inequality that has been there since early childhood. The use of the word "instinct" makes it clear that her reaction is a reflex, rooted in her subconscious. She apologises for being there, she takes responsibility for the fault because it is an unfortunate event. Mancini made the same observation about the words heard in her childhood, which take root in the unconscious and define her as dominated. In noting this, she adds that the man has not had the same reflex, certainly because he has never been educated in the same way as women, where they apologise for taking up space in the public arena. The problem here is not that the man misbehaved, but that he did not act at all. This implicitly demonstrates patriarchal domination and its consequences, which might go unnoticed if some women did not wake up to the fact, as the author does.

What is interesting about this page — as well as the one a little further on where Erin Williams crosses the road (fig. 2.24) — is the beauty of the pages, created in particular by the realism and precision of the street drawings. While in the vast majority of this graphic novel the drawings generally resemble sketches, or at least drawings that do not strive for absolute realism, these two pages are quite the opposite. Giada Peterle addresses this theme by stating:

Despite his figurative precision, by representing the small details of buildings, roads, single houses and apartments buildings, streetlights and shop signs, the author wants readers to experience everything but a sense of being perfectly located. These details represent still and meaningless fragments of an extremely mobile and, thus, paradoxically immobile era (2021).



Fig. 2.24: Introspection in the street (p.126)

This precise drawing does indeed create an atmosphere, but it seems frozen. Readers are immersed in the drawing, which makes it easier for their imagination to picture the scene described, but they cannot put themselves in the character's shoes. This gives the graphic novel a different feel and has an impact on the pace of the reading. Readers tend to linger, but as Peterle explains, this is contradictory. While Williams draws and narrates events in which she is in motion, she draws pages that require more attention because of the details and colours, which slows down the pace. For instance, in this case the body is moving on the pedestrian crossing, but the drawing does not convey the feeling of this movement. Whether it is the sudden change of style for this particular page or the precision of the location, this page allows the reader to witness the moment but not to live the experience. There is no sound, for example, to make one feel immersed. What's more, the drawing in no way illustrates the reflections on her ex-boyfriends that the protagonist shares with the reader as she walks down the street. It keeps the reader at a distance.

Then, in addition to the street, transport is obviously very important in this graphic autobiography, as the name *Commute* might suggest. She illustrates the insistent stares she can be subjected to, by men (fig. 2.25). The same man who stared at her at the station continues to do so on the train. She explains that she acts as if she did not notice; her reaction is to deny it rather than have to face this person. Her attitude shows that she did not dare or did not have the courage to react. Being placed, without her will, in the position of an object being watched, without having the right to defend herself against this incivility, seems to weigh heavily on the character.



Fig. 2.25: Insistent stares on public transport (p.62)

Several times in her "illustrated memoir", she depicts bodies in a very anatomical style, with bodies that look more like diagrams with their legends. This may be due to her links with the scientific world through her previous work in this sector. However, in the case of figure 2.26, Erin Williams decides not to represent her own body or the body of another protagonist with a cross-section, but to represent Grand Central Station through a body diagram. Thanks to this, she draws an analogy between means of transport and the body. The representation, with the entrance to the metro being the anus and then arriving at the torso symbolising the station and the intestines representing the whole journey, which is certainly due to the very corporeal and anatomical language chosen. As Peterle says, "through the repetitive gestures and movements dictated by public transport routines, the author perceives her own body as a cell in a broader urban body" (Peterle, 2021:111). Here, each commuter, of which she is one, represents a cell, and the wider urban body is therefore the station. This commute is then associated with the journey of the gastric system.

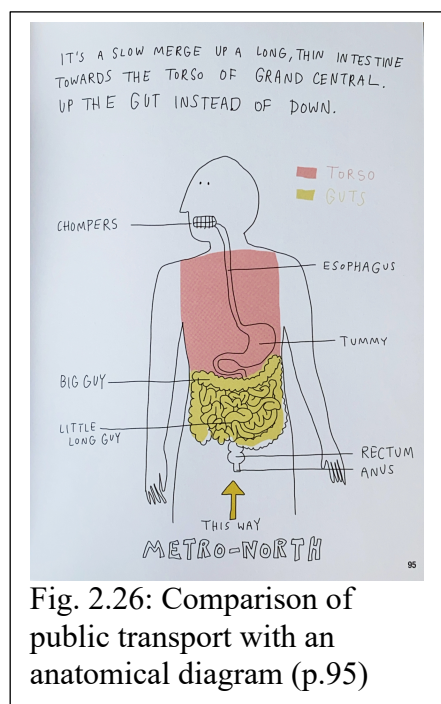


Fig. 2.26: Comparison of public transport with an anatomical diagram (p.95)

Solitude at night on public transport, or rather the fact of being surrounded only by men, also inspires fear. Men are seen as a threat, even as predators or rapists. Erin Williams shares her thoughts on the situation, and to which extent the fear affects her. She has reached a point where she judges which of the men with whom she shares the means of transport is most likely to be a rapist and which one might save her from being raped. She therefore imagines the worst, seeing these men as threats and feeling vulnerable in such a situation. She represents these pages with a dark veil over the drawings, certainly to express the night, but it can also represent a nightmarish vision. She is afraid of other people. She judges them

by their appearance and expresses her concern because she is not comfortable in the company of these two men and being the only woman. Her fear stems from the fact that she is the only woman and feels like a prey. Her fear is intensified by the stares she feels being directed at her. She can only estimate the threat and hope that she is mistaken about the nature of the men around her. Fear is linked in particular to the way people look at her. The fewer people there are, the more danger she feels, because there is less chance of being saved. This moment of commute is therefore a moment of anguish that she has to endure because of her gender. In other words, solitude is not the only source of fear in a public place, since the presence of certain men also represents a threat and they are seen as predators. Another typical example is that of the women who are afraid of walking in the streets of a city at night when other men are around, as they feel followed. As a result, they opt to cross to the other side of the street to evade the perceived threat. This is in contrast to Mancini, who also expresses a fear of men, but explains that she sometimes seeks the company of a man to deter aggressors.

Chapter 3: Long-term and systemic impact of the male gaze

Facing the male gaze and her own

Whether in the sense of a look or a glance, the term "gaze" has already been discussed in all its nuances in the above analyses. But it is worth taking a closer look at the conceptualisation of the gaze in both graphic novels to understand how the gaze can become an unsuspected tool of domination. Juliette Mancini conveys the feeling she gets when she is scrutinised, saying that she is nothing more than an "enveloppe vide flottant sous les regards" (fig. 3.1). With this sentence that speaks volumes, the drawing is unequivocal. She represents herself as a shape – two arms, two legs and a grin – on which the gazes of the men around her are fixed upon. The smile on this woman's bodily shape relays the impression of emptiness she is describing. She seems dispossessed of her body, and this feeling is reinforced by the close-ups of the voyeurs' eyes. The source of the unease is clearly identifiable with the close-ups and the orange colour. This is further emphasised by the dotted lines that cross the page to illustrate the aggressiveness of the staring eyes. The latter pierce the empty silhouette. The drawing of the corporeal envelope, which shows this passive form against a blue background, with orange lines blurring the peacefulness by attacking the female body, makes it clear that the author has no choice but to empty herself in order to combat the male gazes that attack her.

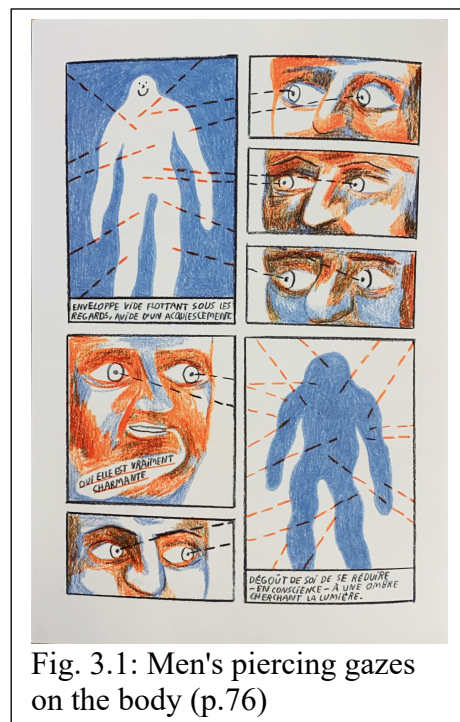
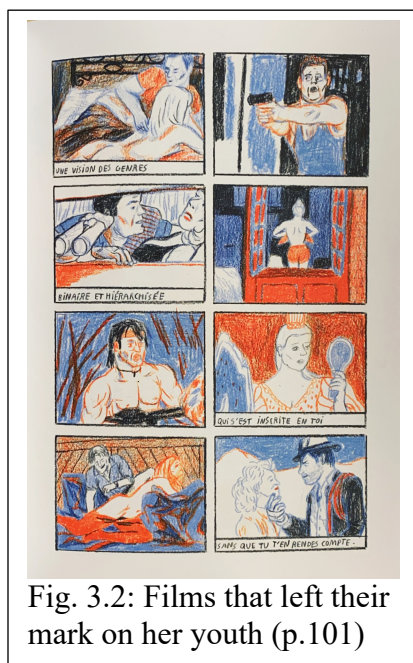


Fig. 3.1: Men's piercing gazes on the body (p.76)

As far as the gaze is concerned, *Éveils* allows Mancini not only to illustrate the gazes she is subjected to, but also to take a critical look at herself. She takes a step back, and this allows her to confront and face herself. She first talks about her cinematic inspirations (fig. 3.2), which have shaped her vision and perceptions of the world she lives in. With a more mature outlook, and through illustrations of scenes from films such as *Rambo* or *Indiana Jones*, she insists on the status of women and their representations in such works of cinema. She draws women as they are portrayed in films, with sexualised bodies, whether as in the first panel, with a view on a woman's buttocks, or with a voyeuristic look at the back of a lady getting dressed. In an exclusive interview with the author, she commented that "tous ces films sont des films où les femmes sont regardées, sont admirées" (Appendix 1). Thanks to the graphic novel medium, Mancini was able to forge a bond between film and comics. She represents, without naming it, a patriarchal society, which she describes in terms of a "vision des genres binaire et hiérarchisée" (Mancini, 2021:101). The construction of a subconscious and a patriarchal norm inevitably comes through cinema. However, the author later mentions what fuelled her feminist intuitions. To do so, she no longer refers to cinema, which is therefore a conveyor for the male gaze, but rather to her feminist reading (fig. 3.3), particularly of women authors who have succeeded in imposing their writings in a literary world that is still too male-dominated.



She depicts herself reading and building a feminist culture thanks to Annie Ernaux's *La femme gelée*, Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Françoise Vergès' *Un féminisme décoloniale*. These books have in common that they relate women's stories, allowing women to feel involved, whatever their point of view. She admits that Annie Ernaux inspired her significantly, as did

Chris Ware's narration, whom she admires (Mougey, 2021). Literature has quenched her thirst for feminist knowledge. She illustrates a tension in her construction as a person, between the cinematographic references in her youth that transmitted a patriarchal unconscious and her feminist readings that allowed her to identify with lived experience. She was aware of the male gaze and challenged by her feminist readings. She therefore takes a look at her self-construction and confronts the differences in her perceptions. She slowly developed a critical perspective toward binary and patriarchal representation of women. This shared corpus, which has had an influence on her vision of society, also finds echoes in the work of Erin Williams. In *Commute*, the artist has a similar page where she explains her unwillingness to read books written by men, explaining that she has already too often witnessed the male experience. Instead, she shares her knowledge about books written by inspiring women. Among these are *I love Dick* by Chris Kraus and *Eileen* by Ottessa Moshfegh.

The gaze can also be approached from the point of view of the objectification of the body, as was done in a previous chapter. In figure 3.4 and 3.5, the construction of the page creates a mirror effect for the character, enabling a double vision of the body.



The interesting aspect here, apart from the transformation into a statue to exemplify the woman-object role already explained, is that she is looking at herself, not at society. Although the reflection that accompanies this gaze is the one institutionalised in society and integrated into mentalities, including those of women, this exchange of glances with the character represented doubly and facing each other illustrates the criticism and the gaze that the author puts on herself.

It represents both self-criticism and a certain powerlessness in the face of social conditioning. This pattern of mirrored pages is also apparent in *Commute*, albeit in the style of Erin Williams. In figure 3.6 we see two pages, two faces side by side that oppose each other. First is Erin Williams against a pink background with her eyes closed. She looks soothed, but in reality she is afraid, because she does not know what to expect: to be saved or to be raped. The reason for this fear is represented on the other page by a man drawn as a police sketch, with blue eyes, frowning eyebrows and a threatening gaze. Erin Williams accompanies her drawing with a sentence that aptly illustrates the sensation: "the intensity of the fear is related to the intensity of the stare" (Williams, 2019:205). These pages, which respond to each other, indisputably express the fact that fear is transmitted through the eyes, or at least through the way one looks. In the end, Erin Williams is not portrayed as appeased as one might think, but as frightened. The monstrosity and threat embodied by the man is conveyed solely through his facial expression.

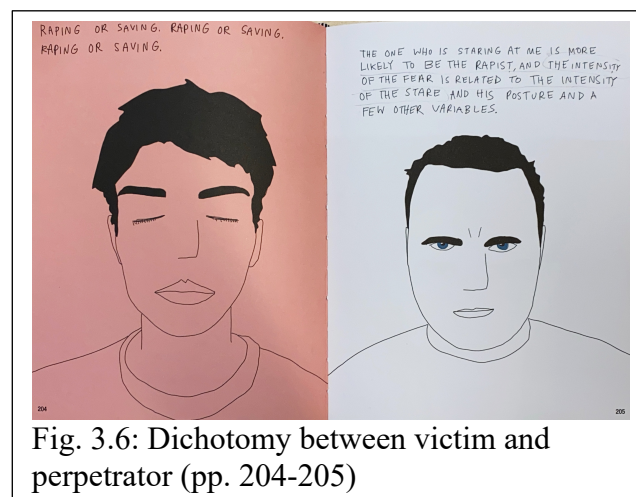


Fig. 3.6: Dichotomy between victim and perpetrator (pp. 204-205)

The gaze plays an equally interesting role in *Commute*, but in a rather different way. Another aspect of Erin Williams' work is the way she plays with her eyes. The author often depicts herself with the same gaze, but in certain situations she plays with it. On a number of occasions, she seems to be looking directly at the reader, as if to include him/her in the graphic novel, showing that she is aware that this comic book is intended to be read and that the reader is not only witnessing this commute but is also participating in it, by including him/her. For instance, in illustrating her morning routine before going to work, she does not depict herself putting on make-up in front of a mirror, but in front of us. The angle she uses to represent this action puts the reader in the mirror's place. In this scene, the reader can be seen as a reflection of the author's self-image. Furthermore, using a similar example from a scene in a film, Iris

Brey (2020:212-213) explains that when the character looks at the audience, this allows her to regain power over it. Indeed, it would be the spectator - in this case the reader - who would have the power, but by representing herself as looking at him too, Erin Williams seizes the power. It is therefore possible to see a similarity between the methods used in film and comics to counter the male gaze.

Men's domination is also reflected in their gaze, when Williams says that on her way to work, she met ten men who looked directly into her eyes. This suggests that men are more likely to gaze upon other parts of the body than at the face and eyes of those they are staring at. This eye contact is certainly rare enough to be worth mentioning. It is logical to deduce that by objectifying women, men are more likely to look at body parts they sexualise.

A number of scenes raise the question of self-image. Mancini tackles the issue of defining oneself through the others' gaze (fig. 3.7 & 3.8). She expresses this in particular through the theme of her illness with her grandmother. She begins by no longer being recognised by her grandmother, then no longer recognising her mother, and finally herself.



She represents this doubt by the absence or even total loss of her face. She no longer recognises herself and her own image disappears. This orange (or black) shadow in place of the face indicates this loss of identity. It catches the reader's eye when in reality there is no face to look at. Doubt sets in, and the questioning ends up being total, with the question "Qui es-

tu ?"(Mancini, 2021:116). Through this sequence, the reader can question him/herself and wonder if the image (s)he has of him/herself is only related to the image (s)he is given by others. Juliette Mancini uses these pages and the interview to explore her own identity: "C'est aussi la question de l'identité, comment est-ce qu'on se présente aux autres et est-ce que la personne qu'on présente aux autres elle est en phase avec ce qu'on a l'impression d'être ?" (Appendix 1). Which brings to another point of interest in these two memoirs: authenticity and transparency.

Slave to desire

Within her theoretical work, Brey sets out her vision of desire from a female perspective, writing that "le désir peut éclore sans domination, sans humiliation, sans rapports de pouvoir" (Brey, 2020: 63). In support of this theory, these two graphic novels show the reality that women experience through the male gaze. Desire is shown as a constant means of oppression that weighs on women throughout their lives. The reader can observe this both in the early adolescence of the protagonists, when bodies change and become immediately sexualised by society, and later in life, when women are on a perpetual quest for recognition through the way others look at their bodies. Patriarchy creates this desire – often rooted in the subconscious – for women to be desirable in order to please the male gaze.

This is obviously broached from different angles in the two graphic novels, in which the authors denounce this foundation of the male gaze and express their desire to combat it. This perception of desire can be discerned from Juliette Mancini's early adolescence, when she expresses a multitude of negative emotions through the drawing of her body being touched by numerous hands and associates them with desire (fig. 3.9). The last panel moves away from this representation of her body, from behind and abused, to focus on her face, which seems to be in the throes of questioning. This is coupled with the caption for this panel, "Une pensée surgit: ainsi donc je serais désirable ?". The use of the first person emphasises this awareness. This questioning indicates that, at this young age, the culture of desire is perceived in this way – that is to say in a disrespectful way – and that being desirable means being attacked.



Fig. 3.9: First dispossession of her body (p.38)

However, Mancini also expresses a completely opposite feeling about this awareness of the desirability of her body. In figure 3.10, when she is whistled at, she feels proud. It gives her a sense of validation or acceptance, as if a whistle in the street were a kind of recognition or rite of passage to become a woman. The role of the gutter here is noteworthy because this group of three people seems to be divided between the one caught up in the noise represented by these lines – again orange, like any external threat – and the other two who do not turn around. This may give the impression that one of the girls is validated by the whistle and feels this pride while the other two do not. The gutter therefore acts as a separation within the same group, as a visual mark of desire.



Fig. 3.10: Being whistled at in public (p.43)

Women are also constantly referred to their body image, which is either perceived as desirable or disgusting (fig. 3.11). Depending on social criteria, this desirability can swing from one extreme to the other. In the interview with Juliette Mancini, she discusses this situation: "C'est un corps qui va être désirable que s'il correspond à certains critères et puis dans le cas contraire il pourra être considéré comme dégoûtant. Par exemple, tout ce qui est pilosité ça va être perçu comme dégoûtant et puis en fait c'est quelque chose qui s'ancre très rapidement, sans qu'on en soit forcément conscient" (Appendix 1). In this figure, it is possible to understand that the clothed body is certainly desired by the dominant gaze of society, but that once she is naked with her body hair showing, the judgement can totally change, and these same gazes would find it disgusting.



Fig. 3.11: Body seen as desirable or disgusting (p.42)

Once this desire has been incorporated into their unconscious, the urge to appeal to men becomes natural for women. This is what Mancini represents in *Eveils*, particularly in figure 3.12, in which she illustrates some moments of her adolescence that show that she wanted to do everything she could to be feminine.

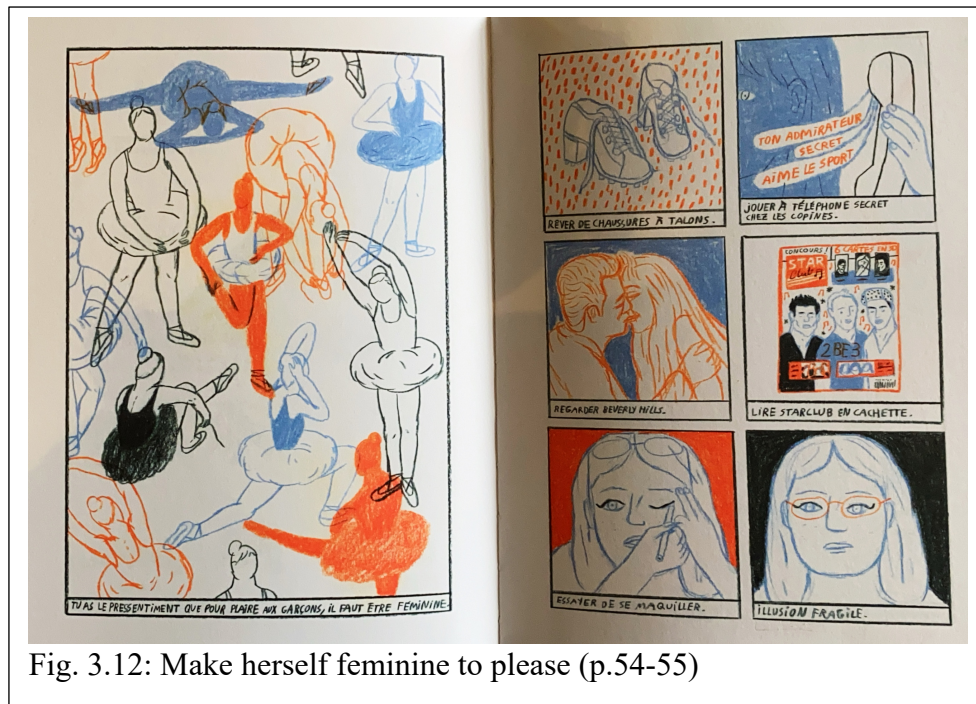
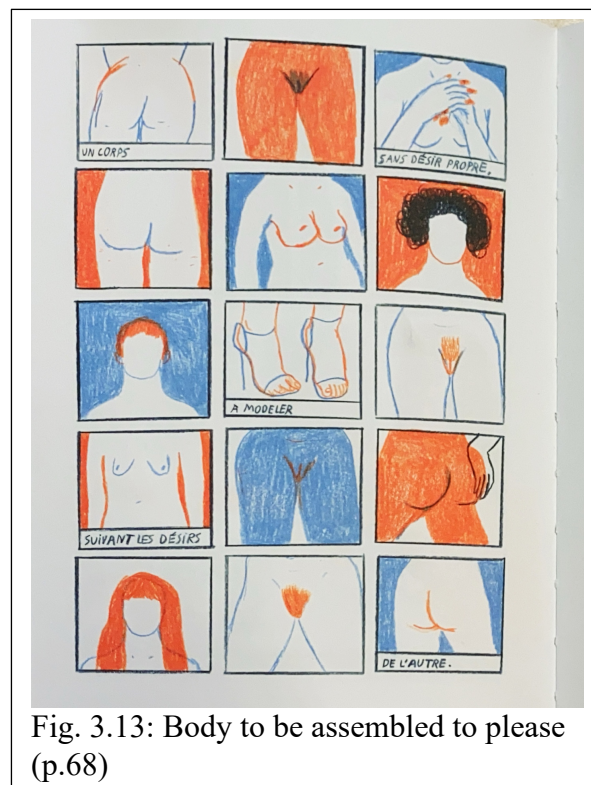


Fig. 3.12: Make herself feminine to please (p.54-55)

She met all the criteria of female stereotypes (e.g. wearing high-heeled shoes and make-up) because she felt that was precisely what boys were interested in. Young girls are therefore prepared to do anything to satisfy the norms and be accepted by being desirable, even if it means conforming, which symbolises the passage into adolescence. In order to comply with social conventions, the young protagonist is aware of playing a role: "L'impression d'être une piètre comédienne dans ce rôle de fille" (Mancini, 2021:56). Youth sees desire through the eyes of men, who are perceived as the stronger sex given that women want to satisfy their wishes. This is why being feminine, or in other words "jolie, légère et désirable", is a shameful desire (Mancini, 2021:57), because this reveals a willingness to fit in with the widespread image of the woman in society, with the idea that there exists a unique representation of women. Behind this lies a wish to be attractive and accepted. Mancini confirms this idea by stating "Tu voudrais un mode d'emploi pour savoir comment te comporter pour être aimée de ~~lui~~ tous" (Mancini, 2021:66). This ties in with the idea of shaping oneself in order to please, by defining oneself through the eyes of others, the eyes of society as a whole.

Taking figure 3.13, which was previously used to address the issue of the representation and meaning of bodybuilders, it is also relevant to analyse it in terms of desire, particularly in relation to the sentence that accompanies these boxes. "Un corps sans désir propre. À modeler suivant les désirs de l'autre" (Mancini, 2021:42) proves the idea that women are indeed the owners of their bodies, but that they have yet to be shaped. They still have to be sculpted to satisfy the desires of others, which means that the body is made available to these people. The idea that it belongs to women and exists to appeal to them is nonexistent. With this point of view, Juliette Mancini could have used these drawings of cut-up body parts to denounce the male gaze, by directly playing with it. It could be seen as a representation of the masculine Holy Grail, where body parts simply need to be assembled so that each person can create their own feminine ideal according to their desires.



In addition to expressing the impact that other people's desire has on her, a partner's desire is obviously very impactful (fig. 3.14) She argues that the purpose of a relationship is to fill a void. To feel the other person's desire is, to some extent, the purpose of a relationship.

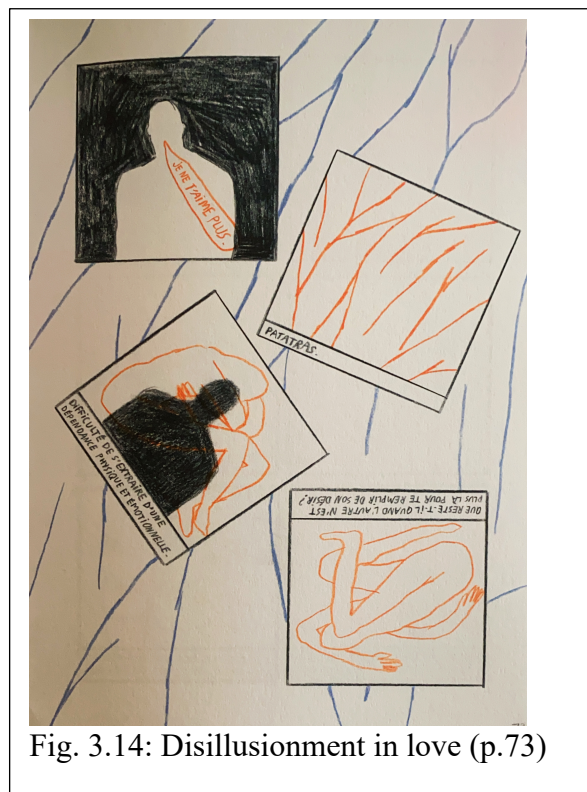


Fig. 3.14: Disillusionment in love (p.73)

Through the break-up that she expresses in this page, love is seen as a dependency. She gives the impression of losing her agency. It is a situation that jolts her, that turns her upside down, and this is directly reflected in the drawing where Mancini manipulates the frames, gradually turning them inside out and forcing the reader to turn round – with her – to read the last frame. In this case, her formless representation goes hand in hand with the idea that without desire, there is nothing left. The desire that the partner brings is what allows a person to be built. It is an end in itself.

Finally, with a more adult and mature outlook, the protagonist becomes aware of this perpetual quest for desire. Because of this need to please and shine, she goes to the point of expressing disgust with herself (fig. 3.15). This is undoubtedly due to Mancini's self-criticism of her actions and herself, and the fact that she was no longer in tune with her past self, the one unconsciously shaped by patriarchal society. Whereas she was the target of everyone's gaze in a similar figure used in the section on gazes, here she no longer seems to be pierced by men's gazes. On the contrary, she represents herself as a shadow "cherchant la lumière" (Mancini, 2021:76). The dotted lines coming from the eyes are therefore no longer necessarily perceived as aggressive, but rather as the light that allows her to shine, the desire she wanted to feel. With hindsight, however, she is disgusted to have been reduced to this, and as she grows older, she displays a new awareness.



Fig. 3.15: The desire to be looked at (p.76)

Desire is also an integral part of Erin Williams' life. She narrates it in flashbacks during her commute. She begins by addressing this topic, showing that men attach little importance to women's desires; they impose their own. Their urges take precedence over those of women. This is noticeable at any age, and particularly sexually. For instance with the "first dick she ever saw" (Williams, 2019:86), which she clearly evokes in figure 3.16 explaining that she did not want to see this penis and did not want to touch it. But with these two sentences "I didn't want to see it. Now it'd always be the first one I saw" (Williams, 2019:87), she demonstrates that even at this young age, the boy did not heed the young protagonist's desires. He only considered his own. Women's desires were not taken into account or respected.

By contrast, the description of the penis as something undesirable and dreadful allows her to regain power over the situation. Using another example from later in her life, she reiterates the idea that men are only interested in their own desire. In figure 3.17 she illustrates another situation in which she is losing blood because of her period, which means that she does not want to have sex according to her – as she wrote on the previous page – but the man explains to her that they should have a sexual relation. This contrast between the posture of the woman who tries to hide her menstruation, perhaps out of shame, and the man who seems determined

to make his point of view and his desire heard, confirms that men focus solely on their own desire.

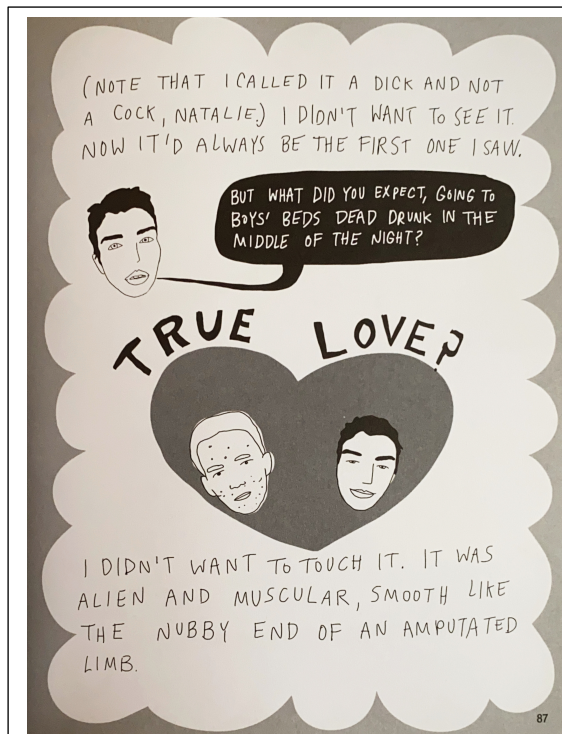


Fig. 3.16: Disgust at the male sexual organ (p.87)



Fig. 3.17: Menstruation not taken into account by the partner (p.46)

In figure 3.18, the comic artist depicts Chloé, an ex-girlfriend of one of her former boyfriends. She uses Chloé as a comparison tool. Chloé represents the archetype of the woman desired by men, the one who has the right degree of passivity and is fairly domestic. This exemplifies the vision of the woman sought by the patriarchy, a woman subordinated to the needs of a man. As expressed in this figure, she is a desirable woman because she shaves or cooks for the man. So this relates strongly to a dated image of women. In keeping with this idea, figure 3.19 shows the other side, to denounce the fact that women are only accepted when they are desired.

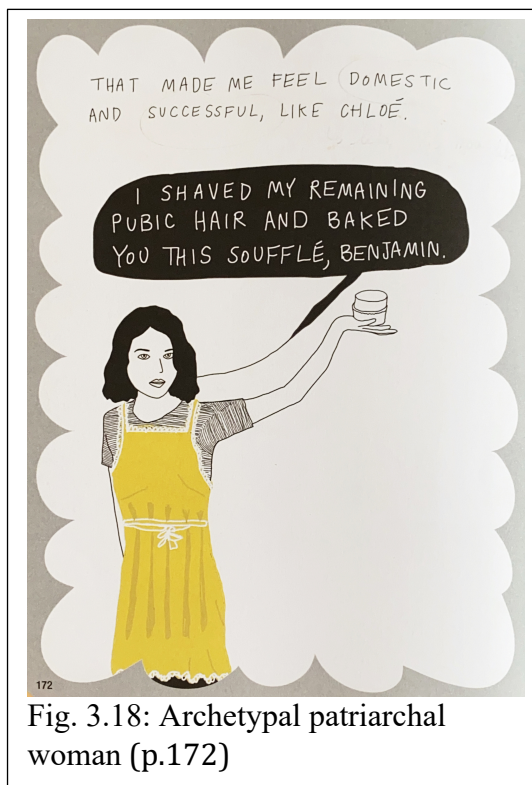


Fig. 3.18: Archetypal patriarchal woman (p.172)

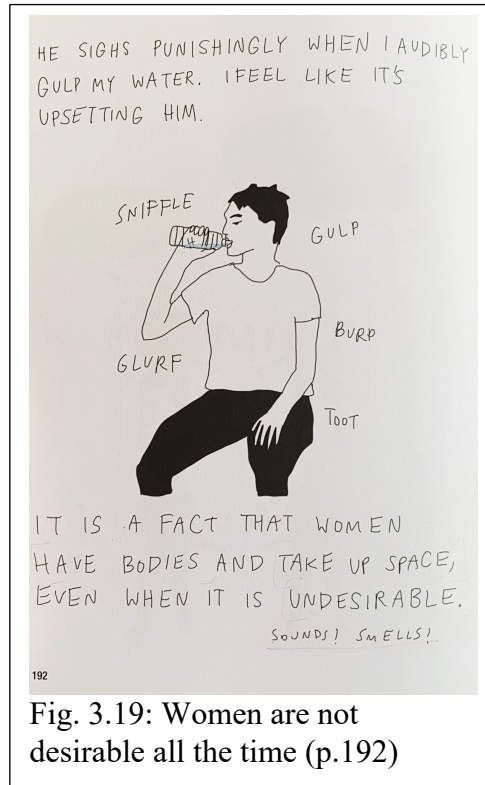


Fig. 3.19: Women are not desirable all the time (p.192)

When this is no longer the case, when they are undesirable, they just feel that they are taking up space, that they are too much. The philosopher Camille Froidevaux-Metterie blames this problem in her book *Un corps à soi*, when she writes: "Il s'agit bien sûr de souscrire aux critères patriarcaux du corps désirable et de la personnalité soumise" (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2021:312), otherwise women are rejected. This illustration shows that when women are not desirable, they embarrass people, which is what the author was referring to when she wrote "Sounds! Smells!" (Williams, 2019:192). A body does not disappear on demand. If it seems pleasant to see a female body when it is desirable, men must realise that this body still exists even when it is no longer considered as such, with its noises and its smells.

At the end of her work, Erin Williams goes beyond desire to talk about consent (fig. 3.20). Given that power is in the hands of men and that they use it against women, she even calls it predation. This game of power, which she claims is rigged, puts women in a situation where they are seen as prey subject to men's desire. A number of situations that she mentions throughout her memoir help the reader to understand the harm that men do, due to the fact that they are powerful in this patriarchal society and that their quest for desire blinds them. This notion of consent is rarely understood by these predators. Then with figure 3.21 she combines the issue of rape with that of consent. The writings first insist on the very definition of sexual abuse and rape. It can occur on a daily basis, in various forms, anywhere and not only with a stranger, as is often rooted in the imagination. This erroneous image of reality can hurt women.

She explains that some sexual experiences can be difficult to overcome for some women, and this is never something to be played down, out of respect for the female experience.

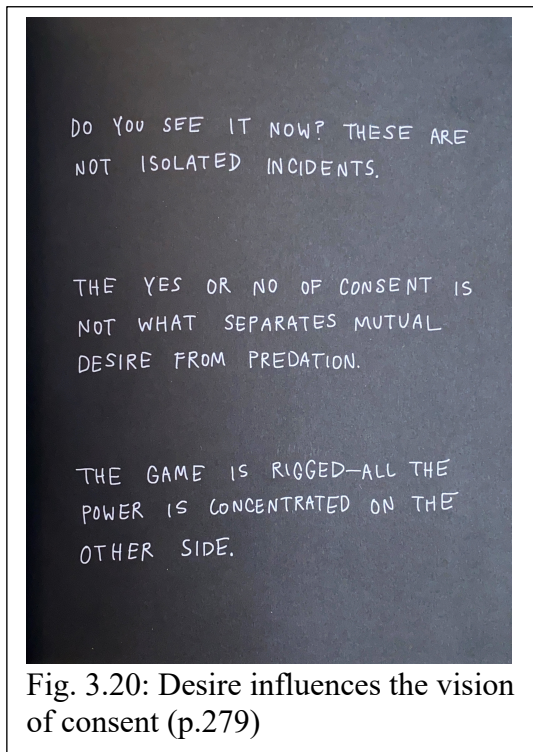


Fig. 3.20: Desire influences the vision of consent (p.279)

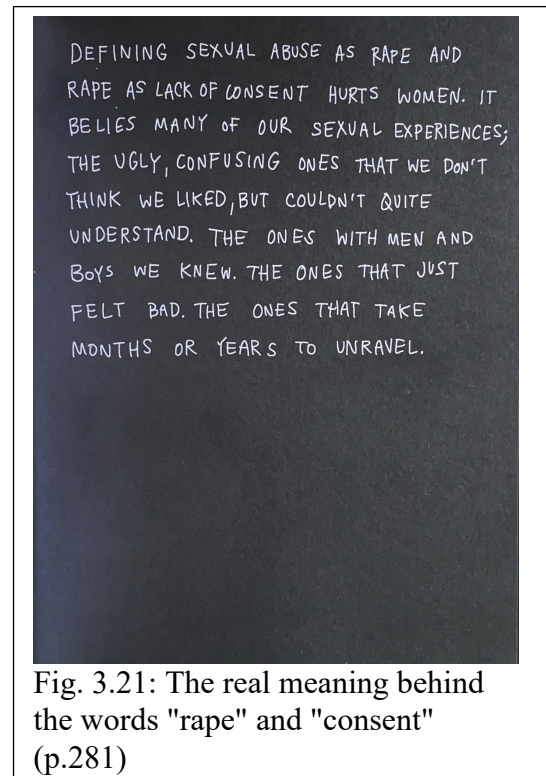


Fig. 3.21: The real meaning behind the words "rape" and "consent" (p.281)

The comic book author-illustrator concludes by writing that no one needs to ask if women want to be desirable, since they obviously do. Except that it does them a disservice because they want to be, but in the end it is detrimental to them. "Female desirability is the illusion of power" (Williams, 2019:282) is a sentence that sums up this mindset. It is relevant to normalise the wish to be desirable, but it is a simulacrum of power, which is not that positive in reality. Although feeling desired by a man can make it possible to feel put on a pedestal, the power remains in the hands of men. Being aware of this is the best weapon for controlling one's own desire as well as the desire that it is natural to seek to create.

Chapter 4: The female gaze

Take a look in the mirror: self-representation and the body Authenticity

The authenticity deconstructs how society forces the female body to act. That can be felt throughout the two graphic memoirs. Williams describes her routine in sixteen steps, which are the equivalent of the sixteen products she uses to distort her face, which she represents only with a drawing of these products, in the form of a list. She seems to hide behind this make-up to suit society's beauty standards. She explains that she has been wearing make-up since she gave birth because being a young mother makes her feel invisible to men. This proves that part of her is defined by it. To regain attention, she prefers to lose her naturalness. She describes society's lack of authenticity by explaining that you have to wear make-up to look pretty, without it being noticeable. The trick is to hide this and look beautiful and young in all circumstances. This is what Erin Williams calls "self-care", as if taking care of yourself means taking care of the way others look at you.

However, Erin Williams does not seem to want to make herself noticed, given her self-representation. This self-representation is a crucial point, as Groensteen points out: "Les deux questions principales que pose la représentation de soi en contexte autobiographique sont celle de la fidélité à soi (c'est-à-dire de la ressemblance) et celle de la stabilité de la représentation proposée" (Groensteen, 2020:70). In this case, the author generally tends to use a simple, realistic representation of herself. Without embellishing her features or her reality, she draws herself authentically.

The narrative therefore seems faithful. From the very first pages of her book, she depicts herself urinating and talks about her constipation, which sets the tone for a frank graphic novel that includes the reader in its intimacy. She also depicts her menstruation, expressing her openness on this topic to the reader. Nonetheless, in this representation she puts her hand over the bloodstain to hide what could be uncomfortable, proving that society is still embarrassed about this, in contrast to the author. Williams can be considered close to Strömquist's influence, given that she also tackles themes that are sometimes controversial, even taboo. The styles of Williams and Strömquist are similar in many respects, whether in the way they deal with subjects that are unfortunately still all too often invisible, or in their frequently frank and straightforward form. The positions in which Erin Williams portrays herself are not glamorous

either, which is a further proof that she is not necessarily seeking to make herself attractive but real, allowing the reader to access her intimacy. By proceeding this way, Williams breaks down the barriers between herself and the reader, which is certainly one of the aims of memoir. Moreover, this graphic novel is sometimes characterised by less emphasis on self-representation and drawings, in favour of writing (fig. 4.1).

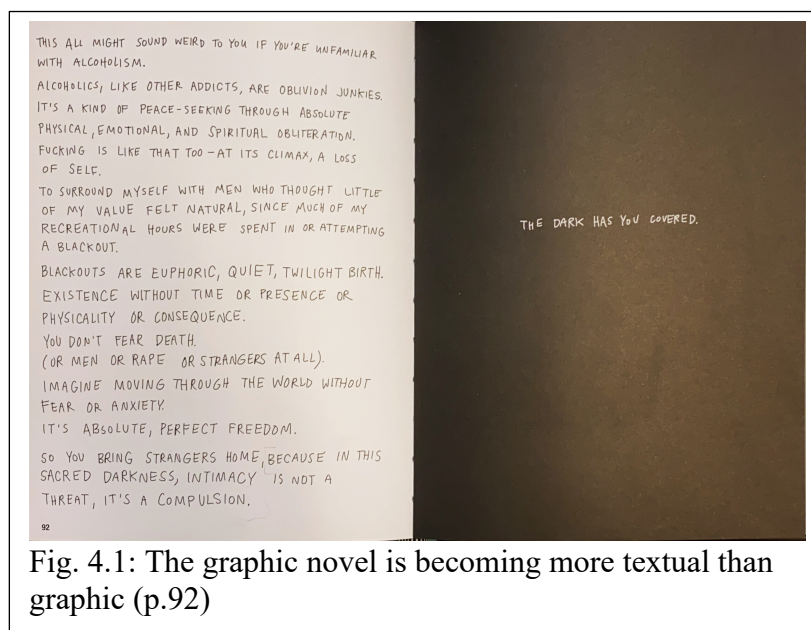


Fig. 4.1: The graphic novel is becoming more textual than graphic (p.92)

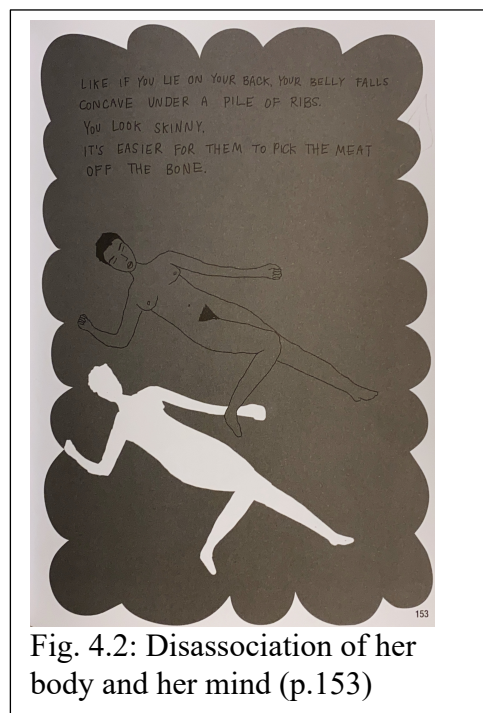
Nevertheless, the writing remains as authentic as possible, with a style that looks like handwriting. Hillary Chute explains this relationship between drawing and handwriting in *Graphic Women*:

That the same hand is both writing and drawing the narrative in comics leads to a sense of the form as diaristic; there is an intimacy to reading handwritten marks on the printed page, an intimacy that works in tandem with the sometimes visceral effects of presenting private" images (2010:10).

This link between the lines that each time draw the same body and this handwritten typography supports the intimate side of this graphic novel. By laying herself bare in this book, she chose transparency and did not want to shy away from it. She decided to describe the alcoholism she suffered for a long time. To do this, she opted to describe her choices and feelings rather than illustrate them, either for the sake of simplicity or sincerity. The author may have felt that her sincerity would be more easily expressed through words than illustrations. Her words cover the most innermost areas of her thoughts. The ambivalence between this first page with a white background filled with text and a page with a black background containing a single sentence is

very intriguing. In this respect, which is more written than graphic, the last sentence, isolated from the rest and on the second page, is much more impactful. It gives food for thought about the state of mind and unease that Erin Williams carries throughout her commute.

She does not represent herself in a feminine way, she is not in a quest for beauty. In this double-page confession, though, she connects her alcoholism to her womanhood. In particular when she says "To surround myself with men who thought little of my value felt natural, since much of my recreational hours were spent in or attempting a blackout" (Williams, 2019:92). She hides behind this addiction to try to feel free. However, she explains that she immersed herself in alcohol as a solution after a bad sexual experience, except that alcohol then became a habit. When it came to sexuality, and therefore became one of the sources of her problems. Alcohol allowed her to dissociate body and mind. From then on, the author perceived herself solely as a bodily shell. At the end of a sequence recounting memory, she shares her feelings about being seen as nothing more than a piece of meat (fig. 4.2).



We see her naked body – because she is referring to a sexual act – dissociated, as if there were her real body and her envelope. She talks about how she feels when seen by men, saying "It's easier for them to pick the meat off the bone". The posture she adopts also reminds one of a crime scene, with the outline of her body, as if tracing the outline of a corpse. Since she is talking about a dissociation of body and mind, this could show that her body dies when her mind leaves it. In addition, she chooses not to represent a man. The perspective she decides to

use to show this scene places the reader above it. This adds a distance between the protagonist and the reader. The latter has more of a bird's-eye view, far from being able to share the heroine's feelings.

A further element worth exploring is the portrayal of *Commute's* other characters. Men or women, old or young, part of the author's private circle or not, they very often seem more easily identifiable. Both their textual descriptions and their graphic representations are more defined and precise. This may be because the author has spent a long time observing the people she meets on a daily basis during her commute, or because she wants them to be more identifiable in the story she is telling, her story. She is perhaps more interested in drawing others because she draws them sporadically, whereas as Szép states: "When drawing their memoirs, autographers face the challenge of re-representing themselves in a consistent way from panel to panel" (Szép, 2020:94). Williams therefore might pay less attention to portraying herself. As for the representation of her face, which is less realistic and can therefore sometimes appear to have an androgynous body. An alternative interpretation might be that she would like to enable readers to distinguish the characters who have influenced her story, such as the men she has met and who have shaped her.

Self-reflexivity

Juliette Mancini writes her memoir in the second person. As she constantly redraws herself, this plurality of identities is emphasised visually. This allows her to allude to Rimbaud's famous line: "Je est un autre". Groensteen explains this for that matter when he writes:

Le dispositif de la bande dessinée, qui astreint le personnage focal du récit à être représenté de multiple fois, encore et encore, pris dans une tension entre des signes permanents assurant son identité et la nécessité d'endosser à chaque nouvelle occurrence l'expression quelconque que réclame le rôle (pour reprendre les termes de Töpffer), implique que le moi ainsi figuré est, nécessairement, un moi diffracté (Groensteen, 2020:72).

In reality, first-person writing does occur, but only in three short passages, all relating to dreams. Juliette Mancini explains this decision: "L'écriture du récit a commencé avec le « je », mais à un moment, cela m'a inhibée parce que j'avais besoin de prendre de la distance. Alors j'ai tout réécrit avec un « tu »" (Mougey, 2021). She ends her graphic novel on one of these passages dedicated to her dreams, where she writes as her last words "j'aurai l'autorisation de me délester de mon moi passé" (Mancini, 2021:125). This mighty sentence is accompanied by the drawing of two bodily forms, which are supposed to represent a double identity. As the

story draws to a close, it becomes evident that the author is showing us how she has changed after all her awarenesses and *awakenings*. She wants to lighten herself of her past after her "deconstruction", which she represents in this dream sequence as a dead weight, in order to move forward without this burden weighing her down. She seems to want to fully embrace her metamorphosis, and to do so she needs to put an end to her past identity.

In this same pursuit of sincerity and identity, the question of intimacy created towards the reader also plays a key role. This idea of openness to the reader is understood in the literal sense by Williams when she depicts her limbs anatomically, giving access to the perception of her inner body. This can be interpreted in two different ways, as a scientific scheme or as dehumanisation. In the first approach, this anatomical representation is reminiscent of science, and biology in particular, where diagrams of this type are frequent. She represents her organs and her body as a scientific diagram with a caption for each part. This may be linked to Erin Williams's scientific career, as she has previously worked as a cancer researcher. As illustrated in figure 4.3 she depicts a baby to the reader as a DNA replication. The baby is therefore seen only as a reproduction of a genetic whole made up of molecules. The body is reduced to diagrams and science, which demonstrates that the baby is not taken as a living and individual entity.

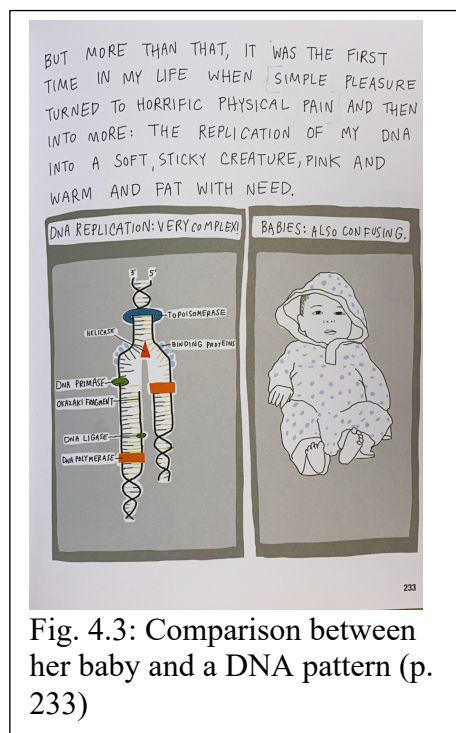


Fig. 4.3: Comparison between her baby and a DNA pattern (p. 233)

Again, she here removes all human perception and describes the body purely pragmatically. With a textual description of her baby that she characterises as "a soft, sticky creature, pink and warm and fat with need" (Williams, 2019:233). This also reveals her point of view on motherhood, which will be developed later. In any case, this representation of her

inside organs conveys her frankness to the reader. Obviously, this graphic novel is free of taboos and Erin Williams handles any subject with ease, but the matters are sometimes introduced directly, without delicacy. This ties in with what Martha Kulman claims when she writes about confessional comics and certain authors who have created a movement to go against the grain of commercial comics. The confessional comics genre is based on ordinary life, full of concerns (Kulman, 2017:114). Erin Williams's work is clearly part of this movement and artists for "creating work that was deliberately provocative and breaking taboos against depicting subjects that were considered "private" in mainstream society, especially drug use and sexuality" (Kulman, 2017:114). This can be noted in figure 4.4 where she shares her vision of her sexual practices and abruptly explains: "We had anal sex [it was the first time]. Not because it was pleasurable for me, but because it felt appropriately violent and violating (It was my idea; he merely complied.)" (Williams, 2019:121). Putting this so abruptly is a choice rather provocative even if it also participates in a form of therapeutic self-writing. In the pages that follow, she goes on to describe other sex-related experiences. However, in the one depicted in this figure, she makes it clear that she did not give in to the man's pleasures, but clarifies her wishes and desires in making this choice; even though this relates an unhealthy desire referring to her past traumas.

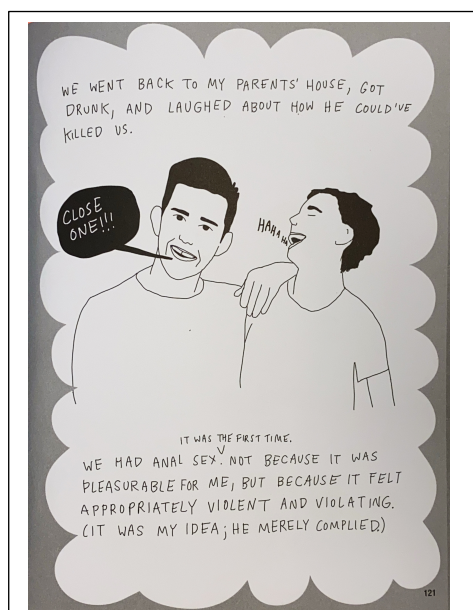


Fig. 4.4: Crudeness in her comments about her intimacy (p.121)

The associated drawing and text do not allow the reader to feel any pleasure whatsoever, the opposite of what the male gaze would have allowed. By depicting her reality so transparently, Erin Williams goes against the male gaze by sharing her feelings and her story. Instead, she gives the impression of self-destruction. The drawing seems to represent two friends, far

removed from the role of the passive or victimised woman. It is a way of deconstructing the stereotypical image of women in society, as Juliette Mancini does in her own way with the image of the fragile, innocent woman.

The authenticity and transparency demonstrated by the authors lies mainly in their representations of the nude, sex and intimacy. As far as sexuality is concerned, she tells of a relationship she had with a man in which, behind some romantic elements, the man just wanted to have sex. She first illustrates this at the beginning of the sequence by talking about their allegedly romantic epistolary exchanges, depicting herself with arms full of aubergines. The writer plays on the fact that the aubergine emoji is now often used to refer to the penis on social media, particularly because of its phallic appearance. This symbol is then transformed into an overt reference to sex. Once the moment of meeting her partner has taken place, she lets the reader know that (s)he is approaching a sex scene, in which the man transforms and loses his human appearance to become a monster (fig. 4.5).

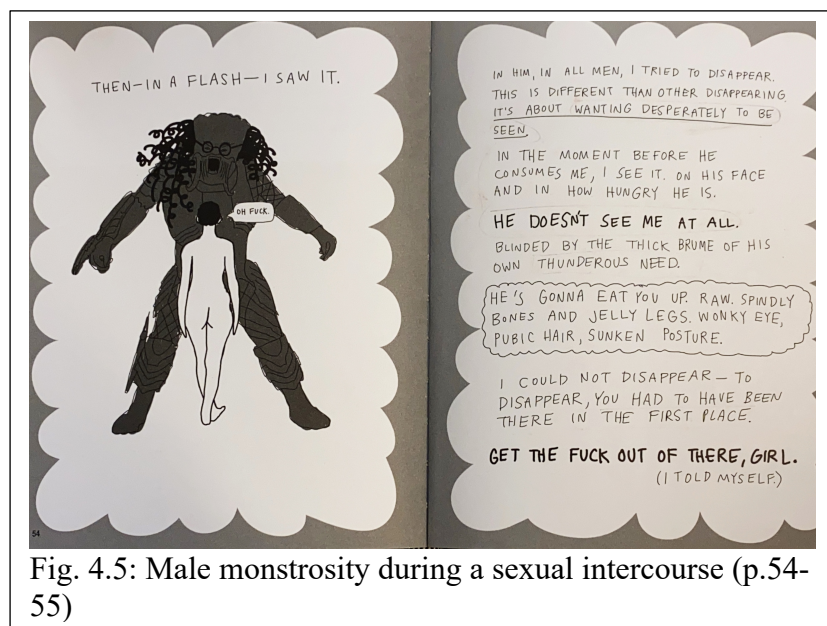
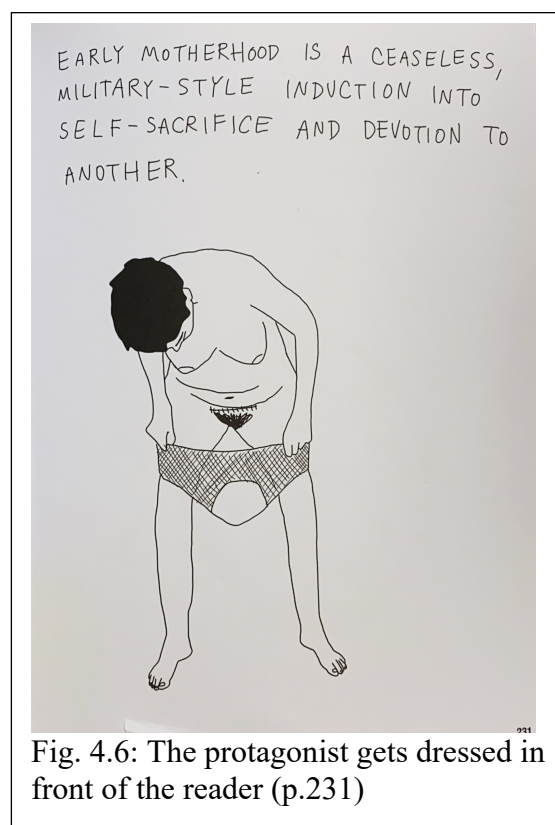


Fig. 4.5: Male monstrosity during a sexual intercourse (p.54-55)

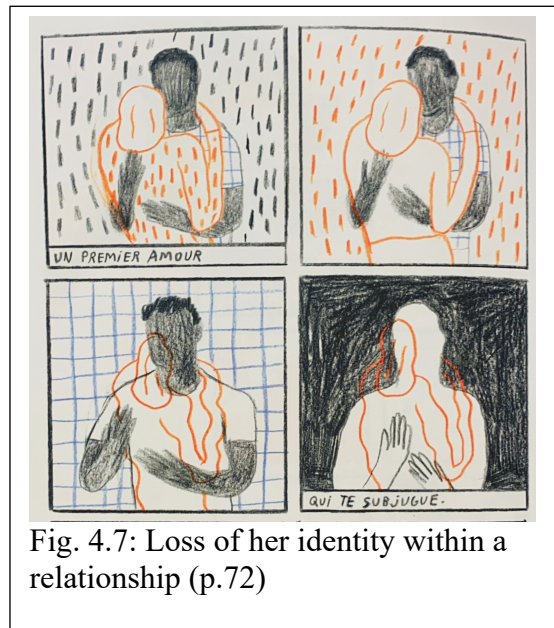
Sex erases the romance she had hoped for. She first illustrates the monstrosity of the situation before describing in words what she was feeling. The person in front of her is no longer human but a monster, more specifically a monster inspired by the *Predator* film series. Once again, Erin Williams uses this cinematic reference to show that the man has transformed into a sexual predator. She portrays herself naked and smaller than him, as if he has been transformed at the moment of making love. This gives the idea that she saw herself as victim to this predator. On the next page, she describes this sensation by saying "In the moment before he consumes me, I see it. On his face and in how hungry he is. He doesn't see me at all" (Williams, 2019:55). She

feels like an object to be consumed and conveys it in the image: the huge monster is about to devour her. The image of prey is reinforced by the word "consume" she uses to describe the situation. What is more, she loses her human nature in the face of this monster because, as she explains, he no longer sees her, it is as if he sees only her body instead and is blinded by his predatory desire. Williams reuses the vocabulary associated with food, as when she compared herself to a piece of meat, explaining that she thought he was going to devour her. She herself no longer feels perceived as human, but merely as a body to satisfy his desires and his sexual appetite. This echoes Thomas Mathieu's *Crocodiles*, in which the author plays on the double meaning of the word predator, between the animal known to be dangerous and the man who brings out his sexual desire.

Finally in terms of intimacy, in addition to depicting herself naked – albeit as a scientific diagram – the artist does not hesitate to represent herself from all angles. Representing her body in the form of a captioned biological diagram might provide some distance, but on the next page she draws herself putting her clothes back on (fig. 4.6). The reader is abruptly reminded of the affect and suffering that lie behind the female body. Moreover, she does not present herself in a "sexy" position. She defies the male gaze, which emphasises the female body as an object of desire.



The author of *Éveils* also changes with her body and its representation when she talks about her first love affair (fig. 4.7). Her body gradually seems to dissolve through the relationship.



It is as though she lost her agency because she fell in love. The man remains the strong, imperturbable element in these panels, while the woman loses her position and takes leave of her senses because of her feelings. In this drawing, the author seems to be abandoning herself in the arms of her partner, illustrating a kind of emotional dependency.

In self-representation, it is possible to see an evolution in the drawing of her self-portrait. Considering that Mancini narrates her life journey and her various awarenesses from her early years until she is twenty-five, her memoir is evolving over all these years, both intellectually and physically. For this reason, her representation in this graphic memoir has changed, from drawing herself as a child to drawing herself as a young woman and as an adult. In this way, she shows how her body changes and evolves, keeping pace with her awakenings in society. It also shows a certain confrontation between the little girl she was and the woman she has become; more specifically, between the desire for freedom that characterised her childhood and her development into an adult disillusioned. On figure 4.8 where alone on the page young Mancini is seen aiming her bow and arrow towards the first square on the right-hand page. This square is where the child looks at what she is going to become: an adult who has adopted the social codes. This is a return to reality for the young child, who on the previous pages was in a frenzy of freedom. In this sequence, in which she depicts herself as younger child, the panels gradually disappear, ending up with four pages in a row with no panels at all. The only boundaries are the borders of the page, but it is easy to imagine further than these limits. Indeed,

the child is playing, wandering and having fun in nature without any constraint. This sense of action is linked to the freedom of movement and emerges as the opposite of the patriarchal world that confines women to labels and makes specific gender roles. In these pages, where she climbs trees, runs around and shoots with a rifle, she moves away from gender stereotypes, but it is at this very moment that she is perceived as truly free.



Fig. 4.8: Character as a child full of freedom (p.64)

Mancini distinguishes herself by her freedom of action and therefore of drawing. By showing her true nature through movement and screams, she frees herself from the frames and moves into splash pages. These movements also give the protagonist agency in the ways in which she can occupy space, as explained in the first chapter; in contrast, then, to this return to adult life where, as she says, you have to learn to soften. This implicitly means that what she was as a child was not what a woman was expected to be in society. She therefore had to change to conform to the standards. Mancini has here a more mature look at who she was and who she has become. The opposite of these unframed boxes can be seen, for example, in some of the pages on classical dance. Femininity is then associated with the tutu, a feminine outfit that is supposed to highlight femininity. In her drawings, these gender stereotypes are linked to an immobility and framing, both literally and figuratively, by the shadow behind her but also by the frames (fig. 4.9). This emphasizes forms of confinement. In these four panels, the woman in the wrap-over top behind her appears to be manipulating and structuring her. Her freedom

seems controlled and limited. Comparing the dance teacher's words and the way the girl's face evolves over the course of the panels is also interesting. It creates a tension between sentences that seem to be encouraging and positive, such as "Comment ça tu te trouves nulle ?" or "Regarde comme tu es gracieuse" (Mancini, 2021:57), while the face gradually becomes tense and ends in tears. The ballerina pose is executed, but all with a sadness described by those orange tears.



Fig. 4.9: Manipulation and imprisonment of the body (p.57)

Many pages play with the structure of the panels. When the drawing develops within the pages, it highlights what society expects of a woman. The feminine side has to stand out. Whereas, on the other hand, when the drawings expand and become part of an unframed sequence, with no boundaries, it evokes freedom, a desire to be oneself, and this feminist element can shine through, even though it may seem frightening. This obviously reminds figures 4.10 and 4.11 with their representations of bodybuilders and bodies cut into pieces. Juliette Mancini makes the reader look at body parts, all of them different, with close-ups of the body parts that are often the sites of desire in society. The sentence "Un corps sans désir propre, à modeler suivant les désirs de l'autre" (Mancini, 2021:68) is also cut out and spread between the different panels. In these images, the reader looks at breasts, small or large, buttocks, rounded or not, faces with short, long or curly hair, and different vulvas. Although the subject will be explored in greater detail later, desire is here inevitably linked to the body. In this case, the sentence emphasises that the body, before being desired and sexualised by the male gaze, is free from all desire. It is society, with the help of the male gaze, that transforms this body and constructs it as an insatiable source of desire. The body is available to the desire

of the other. The fifteen panels along with the gutter literally cut up women's bodies, preventing readers from looking at them as a whole, but forcing them to look at one part at a time. This allows the author to represent the way women are seen in society and, to a lesser extent, to experience their everyday lives.

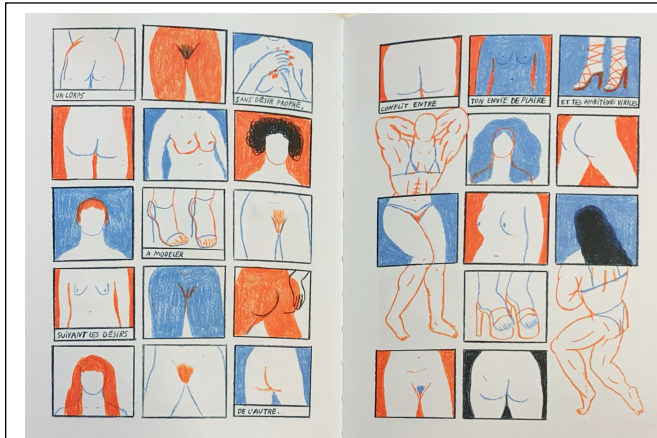


Fig. 4.10: Cutting up the bodies to reveal bodybuilders (p. 68-69)

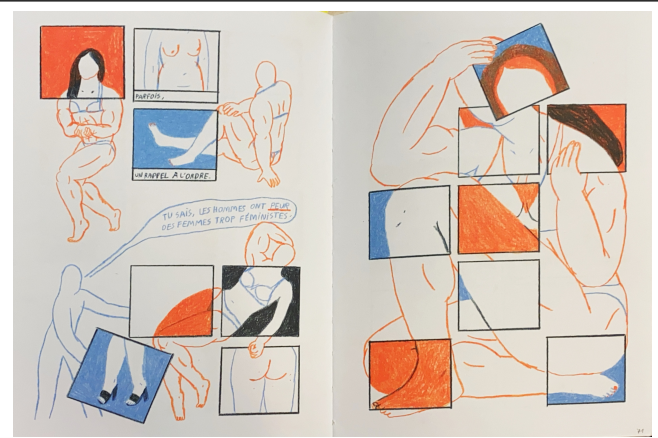


Fig. 4.11: Cutting up the bodies to reveal bodybuilders (p. 70-71)

On the next page, the panels are arranged in the same way, except that in some places they have opened up. The words accompanying the panels indicate a conflict, and this can be seen in the deconstruction of some of the panels to reveal bodybuilder bodies, a visual symbol used by Mancini to express the virile side of women. These bodybuilders are constructed with frames and out-of-frames, like off-screens, but it is only when the frames have disappeared that the bodybuilders express themselves. When a part of their bodies is still enclosed in a frame, that part remains feminine. But once gender barriers are removed, the body becomes muscular, almost to a point of excess, reinforcing this contrast in style. This form of virility therefore contradicts the desire to please that is imposed on women in society. The ambivalence is considerable, and is expressed majestically in these pages, which oscillate between virility and femininity, while remaining womanly.

At the end of this sequence, the author demonstrates the weight that society places on women's shoulders. With the sentence "Parfois, un rappel à l'ordre." and the speech balloon "Tu sais, les hommes ont peur des femmes trop féministes." (Mancini, 2021:70), the idea is clear: men are now the ones who are confused. With the word fear underlined, it emphasises the fact that women who dare, who want to break out of society's pre-constructed boxes, are perceived as frightening. This undoubtedly brings to mind a much more distant and historical battle, that of the witch-hunt. For centuries, women who disrupted society because of their knowledge,

particularly medicinal knowledge, were treated as witches and condemned. Nowadays, women with feminist ideas are once again upsetting this patriarchal society (Chollet, 2018).

On the one hand, these bodybuilders represent the strength of spirit of feminists: they are enlightened women, powerful in their thinking. On the other hand, these excessively muscular bodies are in some ways disturbing, like those of bodybuilders in our society, who are often seen as masculine. On the last page of this sequence, the reader gets back to the front cover to some extent, with this set of panels that define the body that is shown to the reader. This body fills the whole page, and some of the panels dress it up. This alternation occurs between the drawings in the sections that show the feminine side and the muscular body on the outside. For instance, on several occasions feet in high-heeled shoes appear in the panels representing femininity. This can be understood as a sign that the body can be shaped by clothes. Inside the panels, the protagonist is what she wants to be, but outside, she is herself. This muscular body is a sign of independence faced with all these diktats that are imposed in order to be perceived as feminine. The protagonist seems to struggle between her self-image, what she reveals about herself to society, and to what extent society has an impact on her body and how far she can break away from it. It all adds up to a certain tension in these pages. Another very intriguing element is the fact that she holds on to certain panels. She places them and moves them around, so she has a certain power over them, even if some of them seem fixed. She demonstrates that she can play with the authenticity of the representation she presents.

The final point of interest in *Commute*'s self-reflexivity is also the way she represents herself in her story. A kind of meta-reflection occurs when, at the end of her graphic memoir, Erin Williams shows herself at her desk (fig 4.12), her head once again turned straight towards the reader, addressing him/her directly.

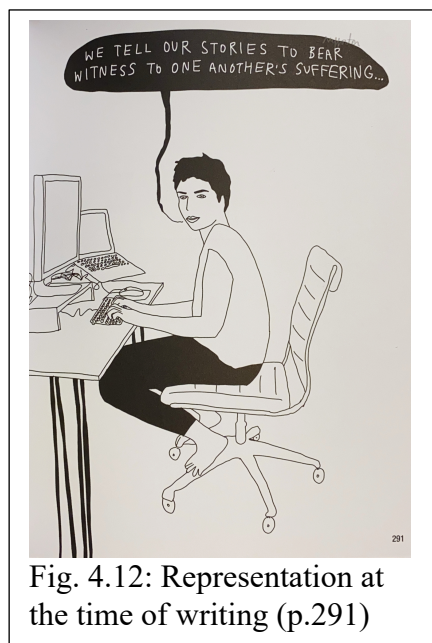


Fig. 4.12: Representation at the time of writing (p.291)

Her decision to depict herself writing in front of her computer is certainly no coincidence. It evokes one of the reality of the novel, a reminder that this story is not fictional but grounded in reality. The conclusion is that she is probably writing the last lines of her book. All the more so as the last passage of this memoir is more textual than graphic, which makes logical the idea of depicting herself writing the last lines. The author puts herself on stage, distancing fiction and emphasising self-reflexivity. By establishing a link with the reader through this page, the author is first and foremost supporting her narrative objective: to pass on the experiences of these women as a testimony.

Finally, in figure 4.13, Williams represents herself as facing her commute, or at least she adopts the same posture as on the front page. Except that here she is in the centre of the two pages, alone.

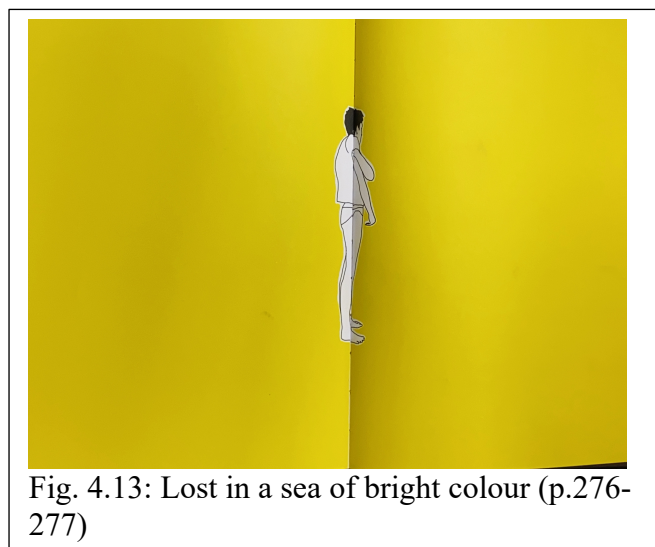


Fig. 4.13: Lost in a sea of bright colour (p.276-277)

The colour is bright, a brilliant yellow that is often associated with joy or well-being. The reader is invited to wonder whether the author wanted to depict herself as lost – an interpretation that can be deduced from her posture and the fact that she is alone without a precise location – in front of her happiness, or at least in front of her path towards these changes in her life. Consequently, the reuse of the same pose as on the cover, this time in a setting where she is the only eye-catching character and her surroundings are bright, suggests a positive idea. While on the cover she seemed embarrassed by so much attention, this time her non-verbal language is analysed from a different angle, closer to the idea of being unsure of where to go. She may also seem less affected by the stares, therefore turning her back on them. The fact that, despite the same posture, she no longer turns her body to the left but to the right could also

indicate that she is about to take a new path, as the following pages suggest. Motherhood might have been the triggering factor for this radiance.

Turn the emotions inside out

After having analysed the state of mind of both authors with the male gaze, seeing in what ways it affects them and how it impacts their lives, it is more than relevant to focus on the female gaze. The female perspective shows how Erin Williams and Juliette Mancini push their writing and drawing even further, whether consciously or unconsciously. To achieve this, three techniques stand out in these two graphic novels, which perfectly express the female gaze. The first concerns the way in which emotions are described and portrayed. The expression of the protagonists' feelings is one of the topics that allows this female gaze to shine through. Then, although these two memoirs tell the story of each of the authors, with a remarkable singularity, they do not forget to remind readers that beyond these personal stories, there is a common experience, a shared feminine experience.

First of all, in order to address the theme of exposing the emotions of the protagonists, Juliette Mancini seeks to express their inner feelings through the colours she uses. The woman then truly becomes the subject of the story, because this helps to see beyond the outward appearance and perceive her in her entirety. The artist chooses to ignore the drawing of her body, as the external appearance has little appeal in this particular case. She disregards her body as an object to give it agency and to think about her position in society. The drawing focuses on what lies beneath the outer appearance, at the deepest level of the person: her emotions. Graphic representation supports this idea by representing feelings through shapes that move within a silhouette. Managing to describe a feeling in a visual way is obviously a considerable challenge. Mancini does it in her own style, using colours, lines and shapes to convey the strength of each emotion. In figures 4.14 and 4.15 the orange spot that appears on his face makes it easy to deduce a certain embarrassment in view of the situation.



Fig. 4.14: She is getting ready to sing (p.30)

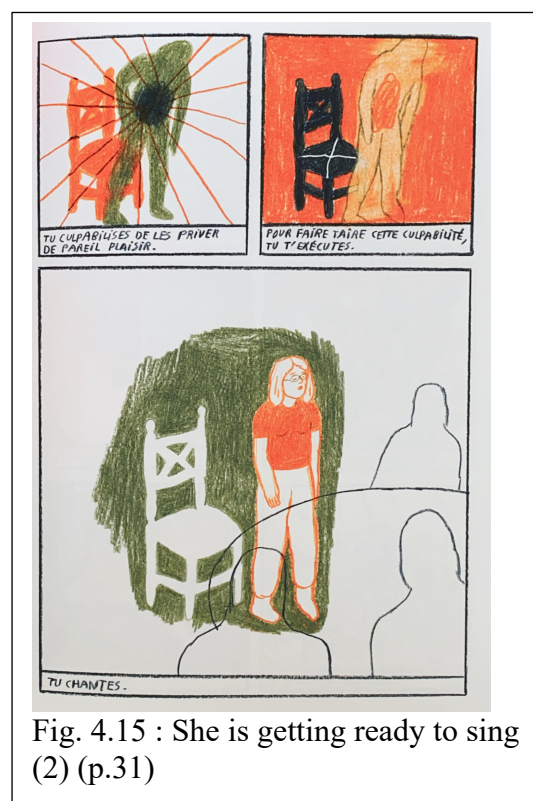


Fig. 4.15 : She is getting ready to sing (2) (p.31)

The orange shape in place of her face indicates that she is blushing. Then, as she stands up, the attention narrows on her, as the background makes clear with the focus sharpening around her, and the embarrassment – the orange shape – moves from her face to her stomach. The focus is no longer on the fact that she is blushing, but on the fact that she has a knot in her stomach. By expressing her guilt, "[t]u culpabilises de les priver de pareil plaisir" (Mancini, 2021:31), the illustration becomes even more explicit, and the unease now represented by a black ball seems to make her implode, with all those orange lines coming out of her body. Finally, it ends with a feeling of guilt that she can no longer manage, and the whole square is orange, a colour often used in the novel to represent a worrying aspect. In the final panel of this sequence, the reader finds the body and face of the protagonist, finally ready to sing, even if it means curbing her emotions to please her close family. This demonstrates a self-reflexivity that is critical of the system and gender roles. She denounces the fact that women are supposed to prioritise men's pleasure over their own. The use of silhouettes helps to express the emotions she is feeling and how she feels them in her innermost being. A real dichotomy is portrayed between what she lives deep down inside, but hides to present a beautiful image on the outside. It is often this aspect of women that is rarely shown, and for good reason: women do not seem to feel the benevolence within society towards the expression of their emotions.

These colours, which symbolise inner emotions, can also be observed in a different light in figure 4.16, in which the author describes the family situation in which she grew up.



Fig. 4.16: Silent family moments (p.95)

The family has inevitably had an influence on her development and her perception of society, given that the entourage often operates as a microcosm. In this particular case, the protagonist tells us about her family's prudishness. Silences mean a lot; they can be pensive, intimidating, burdensome or hard to break. To depict this family "au monde intérieur surdéveloppé" (Mancini, 2020:95), Mancini draws all the members of her family – except herself – with blurred faces, using green and orange pencil strokes. This confirms the use of colours instead of the body to express the inner life, which is often hidden, kept quiet and rarely represented in society. In the next panel, the roles are reversed. The protagonist steps aside and lets the faces of the members of her family show through. Everyone spies on each other, without saying a word, to understand these noisy silences. She is looking at her family, at the world. The reader is looking through her perspective. She looks, she is not looked. The reader is really with her. In the last three panels, which show young Mancini's face in front of a silhouette that certainly symbolises a member of her family, there seems to be a degradation of the image. This marks the evolution of her difficulty in handling the silences she experiences. She would no doubt prefer to be able to express herself freely in a family that would do the same.

In the final sequence of *Eveils* (fig. 4.17), the same approach is adopted. The body is redrawn but no longer exists, it is destroyed to reveal only the emotions that make it vibrate. Unease, empty fascination, guilt, suspense, anger or shame, each panel represents with its lines, shapes and colours the emotion described. The body envelope seems to be no more than a tracing paper; the inside is what counts. Mancini makes visible what is usually kept secret, invisible. She demonstrates that the body is the memory of emotions and experiences. By venturing into this dark shadow, she enters the unknown that represents memory, and questions herself (fig. 4.18).

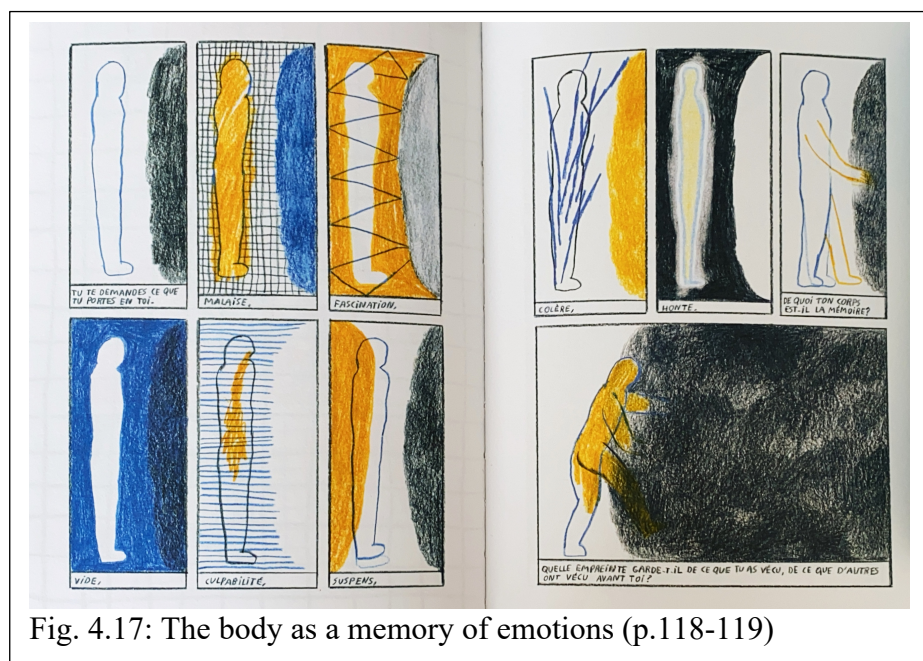


Fig. 4.17: The body as a memory of emotions (p.118-119)



Fig.4.18: The body as a memory of emotions (p.121)

In many ways, her drawn body evokes nothing more than the materialisation of an entire experience. Every part of her memory can be found there. In this confusion of all the parts that shape a person, there is a real search for the self. She wonders about the influence that others have on her, and on people in general. She concludes this graphic novel by depicting herself in reconstruction, through this silhouette in a cloud of fog (of thought), seeking her identity, her own definition in this society. She wanted to redefine herself, so she began by questioning and deconstructing herself, before starting the process of reconstruction by listening to her needs. To achieve this, she kept herself away from society's gaze and social constructions, which enabled her to take a step back. This enabled her to find herself, without external influence, to accept her true personality, to attain her true awakening. This is what female gaze is all about: enabling people to experience the female body (Brey, 2020:9). It means taking an interest in all the other aspects that hide behind a body.

Secondly, the second graphic representation of emotions that can be studied within the two graphic novels, in both *Eveils* and *Commute*, is the figure of the mask. This mask appears for the first time in Mancini's book, when she talks about the duplicity she still sometimes displays in certain situations (fig. 4.19).



Fig. 4.19: The mask appears instead of the face (p.74)

By explaining that at times she puts on this mask "de petite fille sage" (Mancini, 2021:74), she shows that she uses it because she still needs validation from the outside world. This obviously ties in with the point about desire that will be discussed later. This mask seems to hide her repressed emotions and anger. She mocks society by showing exactly what it wants to see, what it expects of a woman, which is docility and passivity, whereas behind this mask lies an independent person. Except that her reflex is to put on this mask in order to be accepted, by conforming to expectations. It is a critical look at oneself. The protagonist hides her real emotions. As can be noticed on the next page (fig. 4.20), she wears this false face when, for example, she is confronted to sexist remarks, but chooses not to react to avoid a confrontation, or when she does not want to educate someone who is unaware of her institutionalised sexism.



Fig. 4.20: Masks as a reaction to sexism (p.75)

In the interview, she comments: "Le masque c'est pour parler du masque social [...] c'est montrer comment malgré nous on peut se laisser avoir parce que dans le fond, il faut être poli, alors que la personne en face est complètement malpolie" (Appendix 1). The "doux, tranquille et souriant" (Mancini, 2021:75) mask is designed to express all this. It is easily discernible as a fake, with its frozen smile and empty eyes, allowing the reader to understand the irony of the situation. The female gaze positions itself at a certain distance from stereotypes and uses them as a means of criticism.

This mask returns fairly quickly afterwards (fig. 4.21), with an added use of colour in the background, oscillating between orange and black, conveying the angry tone of the situation. This angry background brings even more irony to the smiling mask that hides this anger. While she describes how she hides her emotions from others, she represents deception. However, she conveys her genuine emotions through various elements, such as the crude and colourful colouring or even the choice of representation of the mask, which expresses the idea of wanting to hide her emotions while still allowing the reader to guess them. The figure of the mask has such an impact on the visual creation of her graphic novel that Juliette Mancini has depicted it on the cover, within a frame that covers her face. As analysed above, these frames represent the patriarchal vision expected by society to fill the imagined feminine vision. Adding a fake smile to one of these boxes is therefore a fine symbol.



Fig. 4.21: Mask as a reaction to any comment (p.77)

Without any consultation whatsoever, this figure of the mask was also used by Erin Williams in her graphic novel. It is less common, but no less relevant. The author uses this figure 4.22 to address the rape she suffered. She decides to hide her real emotions with this totally false face. However, the simplicity of the drawing on this page is so direct and powerful that it captures her emotions. The face is unsettling, bringing reading to a standstill. The strength of this page lies in these three words and this face. The false emotion to hide the real ones, the ones hidden inside. The smile painted on her face clearly contradicts the rape situation, and it

is this irony that lends weight to the meaning of this page. The irony of the situation between the context and the mask is therefore also present here, as it is in *Eveils*. The character's real face with its real emotions seems to have been erased and then painted over with those empty eyes and that exaggerated smile.



Fig. 4.22: Mask face due to rape (p.211)

From another perspective on the presentation of Williams' emotions in her graphic novel, there is a relationship between alcohol and her feelings. Firstly, she points out that it has an impact on her self-confidence and therefore, in a sense, on her emotions. She explains in a text page "You don't fear death (Or men or rap or strangers at all). Imagine moving through the world without fear or anxiety. It's absolute, perfect freedom" (Williams, 2019:92). She seems anaesthetised, she no longer feels anything either positive or negative, which she describes as freedom. Alcoholism is therefore also linked to her femininity, since it affects her intimacy. With figure 4.23, the author describes her daily link with alcohol through emotions or events, whether guilt, sadness, celebration which can mean happiness and Tuesday certainly for boredom.



Fig. 4.23: Alcoholic drinks for every occasion (p.243)

So for any occasion there is an alcoholic drink. Her emotions were - in the past tense given that she talks about her desire for sobriety - strongly connected to her addiction. That was one of the causes. She mentions just afterwards that she was filled with shame, in particular because of her addiction to alcohol, but also because of the men and the aggressions she had endured.

Consequently, it is also through her relationships that she expresses her feelings. She writes: "I would have done anything to rid myself of this rare threat of intimacy. (There was no greater violence than affection)" (Williams, 2019:111). This feeling seems to have been frequently absent from her past relationships, and is therefore practically unknown to her, at least before she became a mother. It is certainly because of this that she rejects this affection. She does not want to embrace all the love and affection she could receive but she prefers to protect herself from it and therefore to distance herself from it. With figure 4.24, the author of *Commute* demonstrates that she is also able to feel concern and positivity for a man. Except that in expressing this, she describes the man as being too good for her, and in so doing she belittles herself.

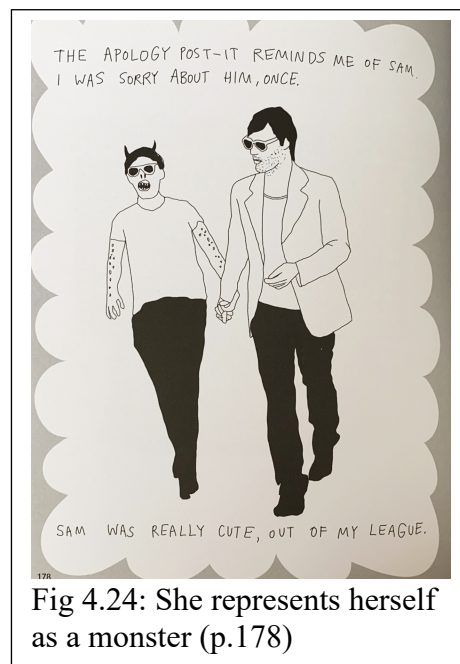


Fig 4.24: She represents herself as a monster (p.178)

This time she depicts herself as monstrous, with horns, a mouth reminiscent of a reptile and scales on her arms. So it seems that to accept the break-up she always needs to find someone to blame, even if it means putting herself in a difficult position to justify it, which sometimes goes against her emotions. Through her relationship with this particular man, she explains that the reason for the break-up was the sex, which was not good enough. This highlights the importance

she attaches to sex, even if it means giving it priority over her feelings. Even the man's farewell letter was full of kindness, which provoked a certain feeling of regret in the protagonist.

Still linked to the way she expresses her emotions, during her commute the protagonist decides to write an email to one of her ex-boyfriends. In it, she refers to the link between objectification and invisibilisation within that relationship, except that here she shares her feelings and expresses to what extent it has affected her. She goes on to talk about female subjectivity and vulnerability in these words: "I loved to disappear it's an important element of female subjectivity. Otherwise my vulnerability is like an open wound (Williams, 2019:198). Through this, she seems to perceive her vulnerability as a wound, a weakness that is best hidden. She also suggests that, in order to exist, women have always had to take a back seat, that women's identity role has long been seen as their ability to make themselves invisible, to make way for men.

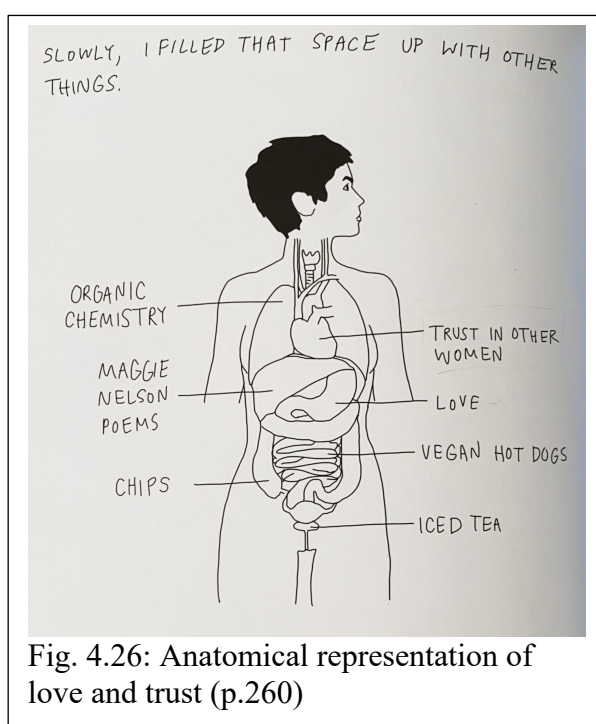
Erin Williams continues to demonstrate the intransigence she shows towards her emotions by admitting she has no empathy for herself, only for others, evidence of her firmness that is surely due to all she has been through (Williams, 2019:245). She does not accept to be kind with herself. She feels guilty, as she says in the sentence "it could only be my fault" (Williams, 2019:246). Nevertheless, she has decided to change the way she deals with all her feelings about herself and others. Among other changes, she went to church to learn how to be close to others, which was not innate given that she had become used to protecting herself from the outside world with her armour. Thanks to figure 4.25, she shows the most precious help she received which was from a poet. The latter helped her to pull through, to rebuild herself.



Fig. 4.25: Introspection thanks to a poet (p.255)

It was the first step, the first time she shared all her wounds. That led to this book, the culmination of that sharing and opening up to all the emotions she was holding inside. This opening up was achieved by asking difficult questions that enabled her to move forward. By rephrasing the problems using metaphors, the poet was able to help her look at her life and her experience as a woman in a new light. It was at this point that Erin Williams realised she had to rectify her shortcomings and take care of herself before expecting others - especially men - to do so.

In her own way, she represents the fact that her foundations are more solid, that her body is healthier, thanks in particular to her trust in other women and the love she is learning to tame (fig. 4.26). Whereas Juliette Mancini showed the reader a reconstruction, Erin Williams uses the image of a real rebirth. This is combined with forgiveness, an element that comes into her life at the same time as her motherhood. Gradually she replaces the rage in her life with forgiveness, which is necessary to move forward (Williams, 2019:271). As a conclusion to all this emotional baggage, she refers to the vulnerability that accompanied her throughout her commute. Saying "[t]here is no greater obstacle than vulnerability, but this is what's required" (Williams, 2019:274), she proves that her vision has also changed in this respect. Although it is frightening, the vulnerability in all of us is necessary to evolve. Szép raises this same question when she explains her point of view by writing "I do not think of vulnerability as a negative quality or as a lack. Rather, vulnerability is seen as a shared quality that enables new modes of interaction" (Szép, 2020: 8).



The unspoken aspects of motherhood

In most women's lives, motherhood is a complicated topic to avoid, often directly associated with the woman's role. As if they had to become mothers to be totally fulfilled. Our two authors are no exception to the rule, describing how motherhood has affected their lives as women.

Juliette Mancini starts to do this quite early on in her graphic novel with this second representation of a dream (fig. 4.27).

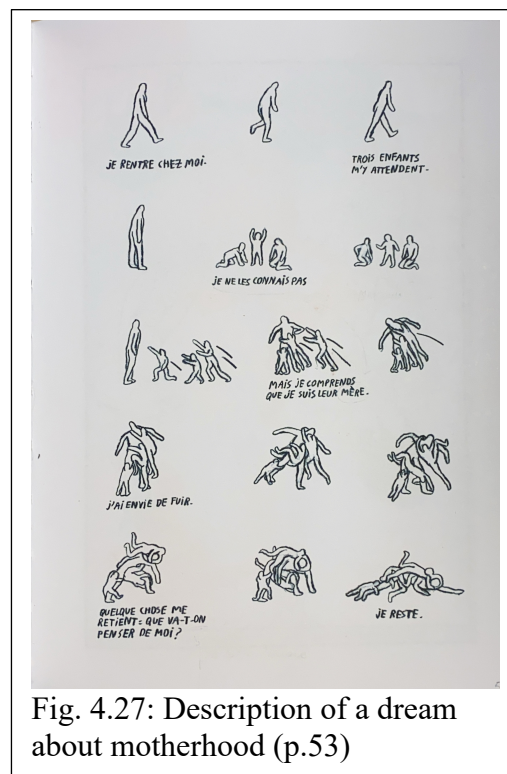


Fig. 4.27: Description of a dream about motherhood (p.53)

On this page, she relates a maternity dream in which she returns home and is greeted by three children. She admits that she does not know the children, but from their reaction she deduces that she is their mother. Her first reaction is to want to leave this place and this moment, and running away is her instinctive solution. Except that she refrains from doing so for fear of what society might think. The social pressure extends to her dreams, a place often described by psychoanalysts as the unconscious. This page shows that this questioning, which is certainly constant in a woman's life, threatens her freedom to act and follows her in her reflections. The societal pressure on women is not very visible, but it is omnipresent. Women are often assigned the role of mother at some point in their lives, as if it were inevitable that every woman should want to have children. Whereas this is not the case, and people are slowly beginning to speak

out on this issue. If women are beginning to voice their opinions on this subject, it is because until recently this was not the norm. On Mancini's page, interestingly, in the end she decided to stay, because the social pressure was too strong. It is easy to understand why women used to raise their voices very little on this issue: because of this social pressure to be judged by the patriarchy. These days, many more women are expressing themselves and demanding that they stop assigning a role to their own bodies. Although it may seem obvious and unnecessary to specify, there are still too many women who have to make it clear that they are in control of their own bodies, and that being of childbearing age does not mean that they are under any obligation to do so. Women's society therefore needs to educate the rest of this world - and that means men - to show that mores are changing and that women no longer have to be assigned the sole role of looking after their offspring while staying at home in the family whilst the man works. Women have far more rights and independence than ever before, and this is also reflected in the choices they make about their own bodies, including the choice to give life.

Then, the author of *Éveils* explores motherhood from a completely different angle, that of abortion (fig. 4.28). These six panels start and end by showing the evolution between two different feminine generations. However, this sharing happens in whispers. The grandmother shares her experience of having an abortion in a whisper. These murmurs seem to show that for an older generation, this is still a matter that is not really accepted and that needs to be kept quiet.

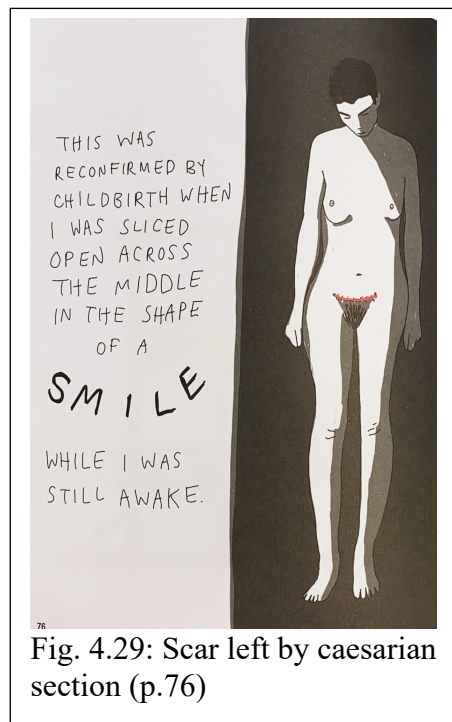


Fig. 4.28: Revelations on abortion (p.104)

As the author writes in the description of the other panels on the page, those depicting bodies, "une mémoire féminine qui, quand elle ne se tait pas – par peur, par pudeur, par honte, par douleur – se transmet discrètement". Whatever the reason for this discretion, the subject still seems taboo among certain generations. The older woman explains that this type of contraception was not legal at the time, and that the law was not on women's side. This confirms that women's rights to enjoy their bodies as they wished were not yet accepted. It was therefore possible to find solutions, but these were illegal and often more complicated. Female contraception therefore seems to be a bargain in this specific example, through the words of a person from another generation. By contrast, society's perception of female contraception today is often synonymous with a mental burden. It no longer seems to be a right won by women to achieve gender equality on this issue, but an obligation that weighs heavily on them. In today's patriarchal society, women are increasingly taking on the role of the one who has to assume the burden of contraception in the absence of men, who can enjoy their freedom without having to think about it. Where the absence of female contraception was once perceived as a hindrance, society has managed to change this and turn it into an obligation.

In addition to this, the body drawings, which appear to be in the midst of lovemaking, represent a certain sexual freedom that has been vastly increased thanks to these means of contraception, such as the pill. This comparison between the possibility of having the choice or not of keeping a child is perfectly represented by this panel which compares the body of a woman who is pregnant and another who is not. This superimposition of the two bodies allows the reader to see the impact on the body, both in terms of the stomach and the bust. In reality, the body that is not expecting a child represents a woman who has had an abortion. The abortion is therefore shown in opposition to a body that is carrying a child, and then with the loss of the child through a blood flow. This contrast between two bodies firstly sets two generations against each other, showing the difference in their freedom, and implicitly their struggles and their rights. It also conveys the idea of the changes made to a body and its freedom of action. In a succinct but precise way, it evokes the consequences for women's bodies of becoming pregnant or having an abortion.

The theme of motherhood is also very present in *Commute*, and therefore in the life of Erin Williams. This theme is particularly developed towards the end of her illustrated memoir, in the *Home* chapter. At the end of her day, after her life at work and her life as a woman in society, the author embraces her role as a mother. The home seems to be associated with motherhood. Nevertheless, she tackles the topic sporadically in her graphic novel. In figure 4.29, she shows that giving birth destroys the body.



She depicts her naked body realistically, with all its particularities. This page is divided in two, a white background for the written part on the left and a black background for the representation of her naked body on the right. Beyond talking about her role as a mother, she addresses the act of giving birth. She approaches the subject through the prism of the damage it has done to her body. More specifically, she refers to the scar left by the caesarian section. Firstly, through the character's face, head down, she shows the effect this event has had on her self-perception. Secondly, the drawing directly exemplifies her words. In describing her scar, which looks like a "smile", she represents the word smile and the scar on her body with the same curve, that of a smiling mouth. The parallelism reinforces the sadness of the ironic situation in which the mark on her body that has caused her so much pain resembles a smile, the very opposite of what she is feeling. The posture in which the author represents herself is also interesting to analyse. This is one of the few times when she depicts her body with slightly more precise features than usual. It is also possible to interpret a certain play of light. One part of her body is lit up while the other is in shadow. Except that the whole area under the scar is also shaded, whereas in the

logic of the lighting, it should be illuminated. This could be interpreted as the author wanting to make it clear that this has hurt her and affected her self-image, to the point where she sees this part of her body as condemned. It feels as if the author is mourning the loss of her body. Using the next page, Erin Williams explains more precisely in her own words how she feels about giving birth. She gives the impression of feeling a loss, or at any rate questioning the beauty of her body following motherhood. The author explains that being in control of her body and her image is a daily struggle; she is seen and considered as nothing more than a body. This brings to mind Juliette Mancini, who expressed the difference between being human and being a woman. Williams also stresses the extent to which this caesarian, which she does not name but prefers to describe as "I was sliced open across the middle", destroyed her self-esteem. She writes that she feels she has no control over this body of hers. With her line: "The body remembers things that the mind would rather forget", the body seems to be a second memory, the one that keeps all the marks of time and actions. In contrast to the mind, which allows to forget memories that one does not wish to recall. In this particular case, the bad memory of childbirth seems to have been quite painful, both physically and psychologically. This is why she would have preferred not to keep so many memories, but they are written in her skin.

However, during another passage on her maternity (fig. 4.30), she includes archives of her pregnancy and childbirth.

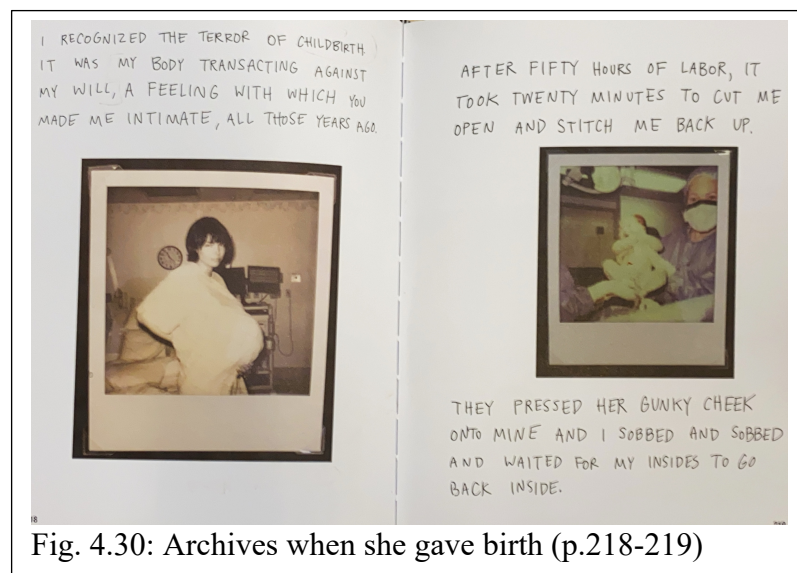


Fig. 4.30: Archives when she gave birth (p.218-219)

She illustrates these moments not with drawings but directly with a photo of herself pregnant, probably in the hospital before giving birth, and another photo of the baby in the nurses' arms just after she had given birth. She therefore keeps a record of this event. It is also a way of showing the change in her body. Just as Mancini did with the superposition of a drawing of a

pregnant woman with a round belly over a drawing of a non-pregnant woman with a flat belly, Williams does it through a picture. She describes this moment in a rather sad way, as a horrible moment, talking about her sobbing and the fact that she felt cut in two. This again emphasises the destruction of her body. She was terrified, even years later; the rape seems to have had an effect on giving birth. Even the newborn baby is not described with positive adjectives.

At the beginning of her *Home* chapter, she returns home and gives the impression that the house is like a safe place for her, a place where she can feel good, sheltered from the outside world. When she returns home, her baby seems to save her from this. She expresses her role as a mother most at home.

In the idea of motherhood that Erin Williams conveys to the reader, it is evident that she sees it as a mourning of her own person (fig. 4.31), in addition to the mourning of her body image. Through her explanation of what motherhood means to her, she shows that the woman moves on to become the mother. The image of the woman is slowly broken, only to return in another form: "With new motherhood you are broken, and keep breaking and breaking until you are new. The new person who emerges is the mother." The woman she was before is replaced by the mother. This is tantamount to a loss of personality and a new identification; she is now defined by a new role. The focus on the bust on this page is also interesting, as it is in no way used to be sexualised; it is represented for the sole purpose of depicting a maternal role, which is further supported by the presence of the baby. The baby's face and the mother's look quite calm and at peace. The other page reinforces this idea by depicting the bust in a breastfeeding role, thus serving a useful purpose. Her body is seen from a maternal perspective, and is devoid of objectification. Even if breastfeeding seems more like a moral duty than a pleasure.

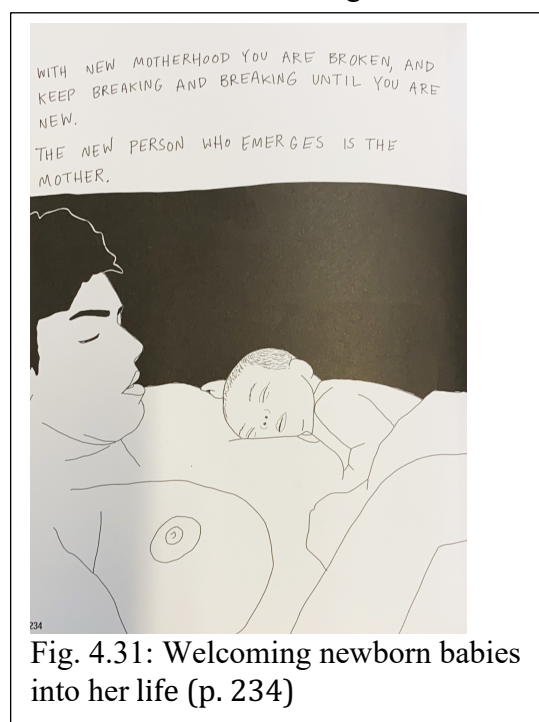


Fig. 4.31: Welcoming newborn babies into her life (p. 234)

On this panel, she shows herself fighting her personal monsters, the demons left behind by her past relationships, which have shattered her self-image. But she opens up and talks about a process of acceptance, rebuilding herself. Belly round and gazing at the reader, she expresses her inner rage, but for the first time she evokes forgiveness. This desire or ability to forgive seems to have been brought on by her motherhood. She is constantly working on herself, with this process of accepting her body and what it has been through. She is recreating a body constructed from her strengths and learnings. Possibly making a difference between the intimate body and the social body. It is also an awakening. On the next page (fig. 4.32), she points out that the birth of her child enabled her to make a new start in her life. It gave her a new perspective on her body and helped her begin to accept it. This page makes a kind of reference to figure 4.31 as it is possible to imagine that they are both representations of the author in hospital immediately after giving birth. The kiss she gives her baby supports the message of thanks above, of the freedom that this birth brings her, even though it was not originally seen in a positive light. Added to this, the fact that the drawing is colourful corroborates this idea of happiness. In the end, it is motherhood and the symbiosis between mother and child that brings this measure of happiness.



Fig. 4.32: Accepting her role as a mother (p.272)

This is all the more significant because, before this transition to motherhood, rape is one of the most impactful themes in this memoir, and for good reason. It starts with the question of consent. Through one date, the reader witnesses the male pressure to act and not to respect

women's needs. While the man shares his desire to make love, the protagonist refuses. Although in all sane logic and respect for consent a no is a no, here she explains the man's distressing reaction. Instead of accepting the refusal, he was not satisfied with a no and argued and complained to achieve his aims. The woman's body was thus transformed into a kind of negotiable commodity. This underpins the patriarchal vision of society in which the body, and specifically women's bodies, are seen only as objects with a value to be acquired. As a result, Erin Williams appears to be negotiating, given that the man will not accept her refusal. She has to parley to ensure that he respects the needs of the woman in front of him. The reader thus witnesses a scene in which the protagonist shows her breasts in order to obtain his departure, as a kind of compromise. This example leads to the deduction of a hypersexualisation of the female body as a result of male pressure. It borders on a kind of commercialisation of the female body in which men are the blackmailers. To imagine the opposite in society, where a woman asks a man to undress before leaving, is almost inconceivable. Therefore, this is not a matter of normalising, but of questioning.

After this section on consent, the author takes a franker approach to what happened to her when she was young. With hindsight, she is able to face up to the rape she suffered. She shares her thoughts in pages of dark, nightmare-like memories in which she depicts herself as dead. It was years later that she was able to understand that it was not her fault. Her first instinct was to blame herself and find reasons to understand, in an attempt to explain the inexplicable. She only realised later, once she had all the resources to do so, that there was no excuse for what she had endured. On a powerful page (fig. 4.33), three states of mind are noticeable. First, there is the letter addressed directly to the rapist, in which she takes him to task and lets the reader discover how much she has suffered. From there, she transitions to her learnings, in the form of thought balloons.

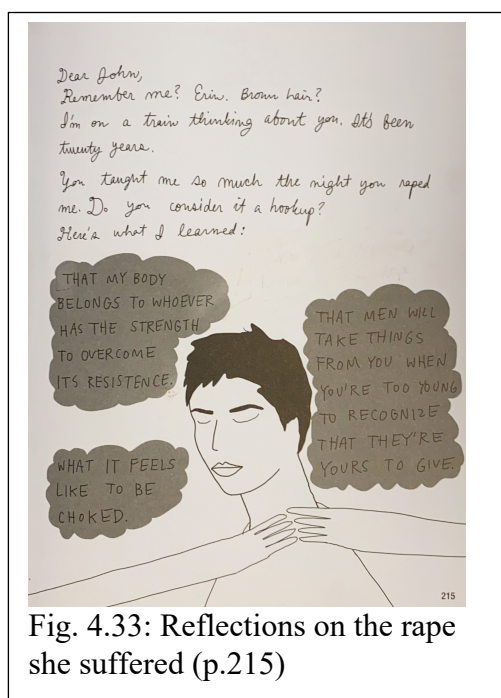


Fig. 4.33: Reflections on the rape she suffered (p.215)

One of these is very powerful, as she expresses what she has learned: "That my body belongs to whoever has the strength to overcome its resistance". There she shows an awareness of vulnerability in society. Women will always be seen as fragile and dominated as long as the world functions on a principle of overdomination, where those who have the capacity to do so are able to take possession of whatever they want, including bodies. This is the harsh reality behind rape. Finally, there is the drawing of her face and hands, where she seems to be portrayed in a peaceful way. Although the text is powerful, she finally appears at peace after so many years. She will not forget, it is impossible, but she has accepted in order to survive. It is impossible for her to forget because of the marks it leaves, both physically and mentally. She says verbatim that she thinks about it every day. Proof that a rape is not a violent act in a specific instant, but an event that has consequences that persist over time and affect the victim for life. In addition to these hurtful memories, the body that suffered the attack cannot be changed. The marks of a rape remain forever on a body. So when she decided to have a child, she had to accept what had happened to her in order not to reject her body eternally, the body that was going to give her the opportunity to give birth. Logically, this was a challenge and one of the consequences of the rape.

Apart from these noteworthy events, it is interesting to note the ambivalence between male and female behaviour. Whether it concerns the rape or other events, the man is frequently portrayed as proud, while the woman is shown as suffering. This can often be seen in dates or meetings that the author mentions. This is depicted, for example, after a sexual act in which the man proudly poses naked in front of the reader. During another experience with a man, she invites him to join her at her home. Erin Williams draws the man arriving at her house in a dapper manner. Then, on the next page, she depicts herself in bed, apathetic and unsure of what had happened during the night. The contrast between the representation of the man and of the woman is quite striking. A similar situation arises during a date with another man, when she says that all he does is blather about himself with his pride and narcissism, while she listens bored. Another instance shows a man using his position in society to express his superiority and dominance over her. This man, who is a bartender, started dating her because of his job, but when she told him she was not interested, he refused to allow her to be served in his establishment. He therefore used his function to take revenge for her refusal. In a similar case, it can be noticed that men allow themselves a great deal of freedom, whereas women often restrain it. This is the case when she runs into a man with whom she had a relationship years later and he tells her that she has put on weight. This suggests that men generally feel free to

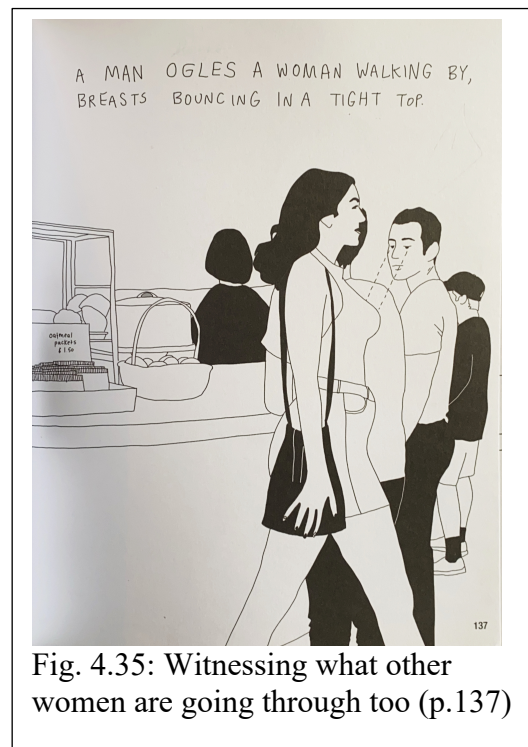
give their opinion on a woman's body without being asked or needing to. Finally, during a relationship with a man, she brought up the age difference. At the time of their relationship, she was twenty-three while he was in his forties. She depicts him saying "But age is just a number, right?" This raises questions about the gendered difference in terms of age. Usually, an advanced age for a man in a relationship is seen as positive, but when it comes to women, it is quite the opposite. An older man is a symbol of experience and knowledge, while an elderly woman is synonymous with uselessness. One of the consequences of this is that women are always in search of their youth, particularly with beauty products. This reflects the inequality of society, always to the detriment of women. Mona Chollet expresses this age-related injustice:

On peut présumer que si, aujourd'hui, les femmes sont réputées se flétrir avec le temps alors que les hommes se bonifient, si l'âge les pénalise sur le plan amoureux et conjugal, si la course à la jeunesse prend pour elles un tour aussi désespéré, c'est largement en raison de ces représentations qui continuent de hanter notre imaginaire, des sorcières de Goya à celles de Walt Disney. La vieillesse des femmes reste d'une manière ou d'une autre, laide, honteuse, menaçante, diabolique (2018, 37).

Sisterhood: the power of one voice

In addition to the fact that *Commute* and *Eveils* allow Williams and Mancini respectively to tell their story, it exceeds the boundaries of the personal. The strength of these two memoirs is that they remain unique while simultaneously evoking a sense of universality, in the idea that these women's experiences are shared by all women. By narrating their personal stories, they are narrating those of other women, because their fight against patriarchy is a daily one and knows no limits.

By reusing one of the figures analysed earlier (fig. 4.34) to depict the harassment suffered by women in this male-dominated society, the protagonist is represented in the centre of the page, but interestingly, two other women have also been drawn. In this manner, she shows that she is not the only woman to endure this, that there are many others going through the same ordeal. This point is also echoed in *Commute* when, in figure 4.35 Erin Williams witnesses a scene in which a man stares lustfully at the breast of another customer. She is therefore a witness to this phenomenon. This indicates that she is not the only one affected, that she is not at the centre of these problems, but that she is a powerless bystander because this is a problem that concerns all women.



A key illustration in *Eveils* is figure 4.36 which was previously analysed from the point of view of the body, of desire, and also here of the community. In this specific case, it is interesting to realise that all these bodies are different, but that they undergo the same experience. What makes these bodies beautiful is precisely their differences. This highlights the beauty of all women, regardless of their body type. There is not just one type of woman, contrary to the idea shared by the patriarchy, with this society that wants to standardise the image of women so that it becomes the image of *the* woman. This is exactly what the female gaze aims to destroy, as Brey explains: "[s]i le concept du female gaze s'appuie aussi sur le regard qu'on porte sur un corps féminin, cela ne revient pas pour autant à dire qu'il n'existe qu'un seul corps féminin. De même que LA femme et LA sexualité féminine n'existent pas, LE corps féminin n'existe pas non plus" (Brey, 2020:56).

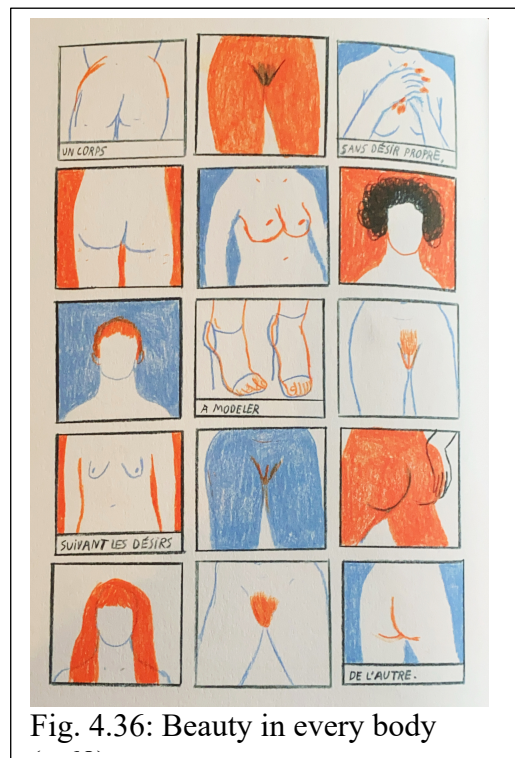


Fig. 4.36: Beauty in every body

In this respect, a parallel can be drawn with March 8th, known as International Women's Rights Day. Except that it is often wrongly called "Women's Day", which enables many companies to misuse this day – which was originally intended as a protest day – as a marketing tool to promote their products in a sexist way. This day, which exists to claim gender equality, is distorted by merely changing its name. It runs completely counter to the feminist cause, because it reinforces patriarchal thinking (Oxfam France, 2023). Women have the same goal, but that does not mean they are the same. This generalising idea can be anti-progressive. This proves that an awareness of each woman's difference is necessary in order to move forward. In this figure, Mancini uses the traditional cutting of the male gaze to emphasise the differences and beauties of each individual. With this page, she demands that we see each body as important because of its difference. She uses the male gaze and its objectifying close-ups to turn the tables and allow each body to express itself and be beautiful in its own distinctive way.

Then, in figures 4.37 and 4.38, as opposed to pointing out all the differences between the female bodies, there is a symbolic opposition between two genders, the masculine and the feminine. She exploits this binary and hierarchical perception of a "strong and a weak sex" to denounce the patriarchal unconscious that is spreading in society. All the orange drawings, a colour perceived throughout the novel as violent, represent the masculine attributes, while the blue drawings represent the feminine ones. However, the structure of these two pages divided into three columns breaks down this binary vision of the world. With this kind of representation, Mancini disregards the particularities of each individual to bring them together under a unified

category. Once again she plays with the essence of the male gaze, but she uses it to criticise this patriarchal vision. She pillories these representations of gender in order to voice her criticism.

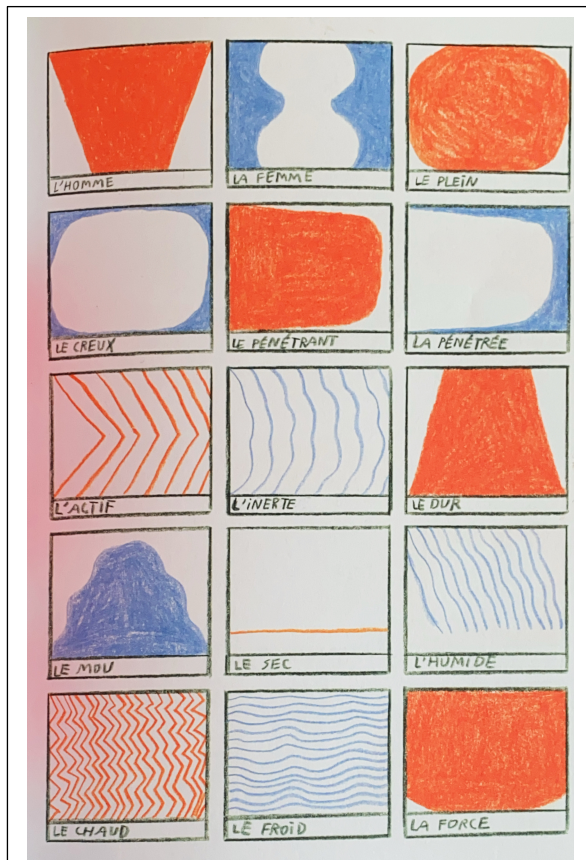


Fig. 4.37: Symbolic representation of gender binarity (p.99)

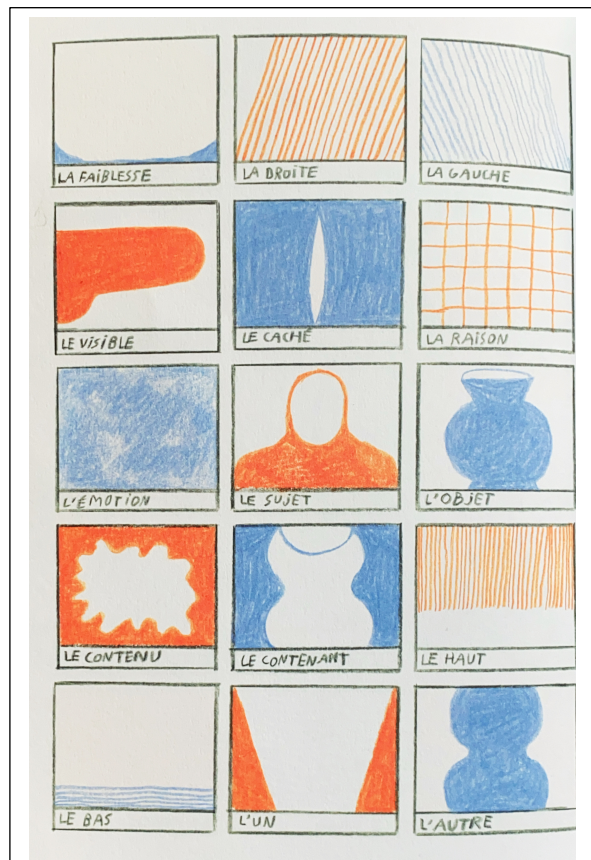


Fig. 4.38: Symbolic representation of gender binarity (2) (p.100)

Naturally, she also carries out this opposition in her own style, moving away from bodily representations to convey her message through symbols. She works with shapes and colours to express her feelings, which are generally of little interest to patriarchal culture and the male gaze. She demonstrates, for example, the invisibilisation of the female sex with "le caché" in the form of a vulva, compared with the hyper-representation of the male sex with "le visible" and a phallic form. Consequently, by generalising it, she makes this opposition universal, but she does not accept it; on the contrary, she condemns it. Juliette Mancini therefore uses the male gaze to criticise it directly, in both form and content, and this is how she invokes her female gaze.

Commute also takes a strong interest in the idea of community amongst women. In the final section, after taking the reader with her on her commute and having described many of the details of her life, Williams transforms her own story into a collective one. From this

moment onwards, she no longer uses the first person singular, but all the last pages are written in the first person plural. Her graphic novel is no longer just her story, but the voice of all women, of whom she has become the representative (fig. 4.39). By passing on her story, she wants to portray a reality. She creates a sense of belonging, bringing together all the women who are in the same boat, all the women who are experiencing similar issues. The page that follows reinforces this sense of community (fig. 4.40). Williams does not only narrate her commute to describe her actions on a typical day, but she also does so to reveal the important events that punctuate a woman's life.

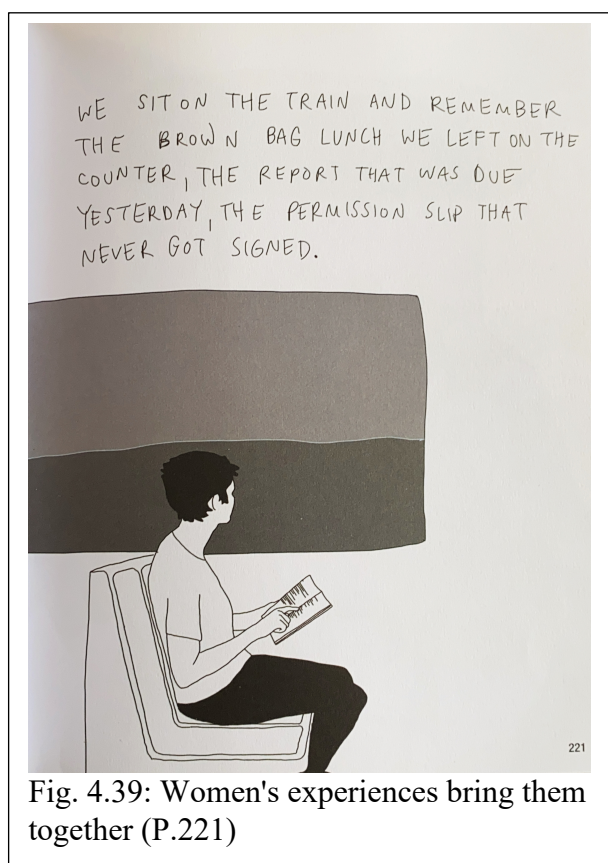


Fig. 4.39: Women's experiences bring them together (P.221)

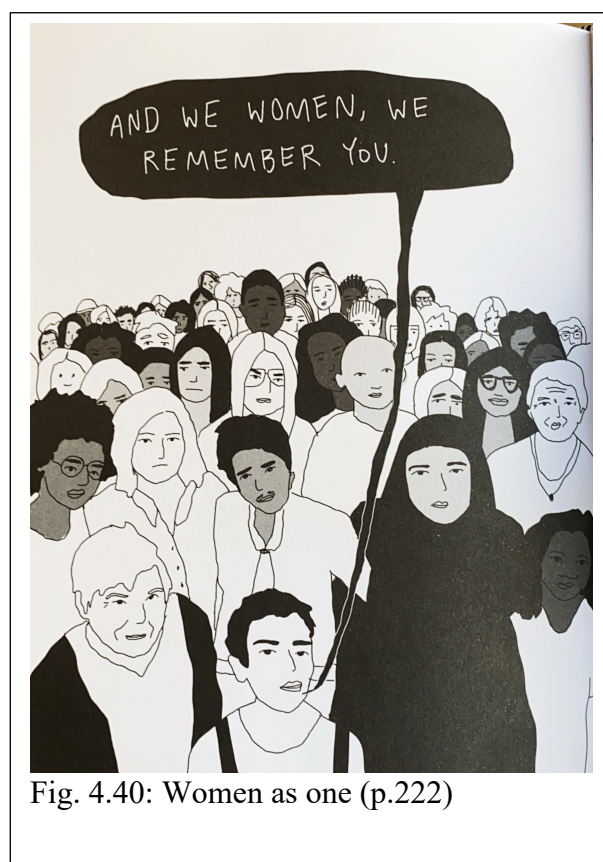


Fig. 4.40: Women as one (p.222)

She brings all the women together, like a community, a sisterhood. They take men to task, looking them straight in the eyes, addressing them with a unified voice and saying: "And we women, we remember you" (Williams, 2019:222). They state loud and clear that they have not forgotten their oppressors, harassers or rapists. Regardless of their age, skin colour or religion, they are all looking in the same direction, standing together in the face of men and also in the face of the reader to display their unity. This demonstrates that, despite the diversity of women's experiences, there is a coherent whole moving in the same direction (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2021:28-29). Their fight is common and they act together. Behind every woman's experience, an established system enables these discriminations, these oppressions and these

aggressions. That is what they are fighting together. This memoir tells the story of all women. Each story is different, with its own nuances, but in the end the conclusions are alike and the experiences are the same. Erin Williams writes: "It's the monotonous and mundane tragedy of every woman you know. We tell our stories to bear witness to one another's suffering" (Williams, 2019:290-291). Every woman experiences this: it has become commonplace for some when it should not be. Williams shows her disgust and wants the reader to feel indignant about it, with her and all the others. They also express an act of solidarity by sharing their experiences. It allows other people, who are not concerned by their condition to understand, and it lets them share their suffering with others who have gone through the same situation.

In figure 4.41, Erin Williams discusses, without naming it, the "double punishment" faced by women who have been raped.

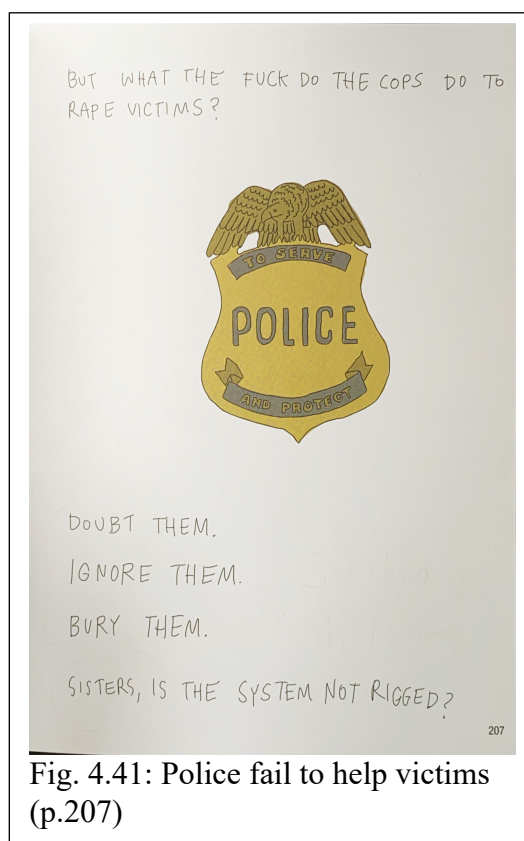


Fig. 4.41: Police fail to help victims (p.207)

This concept is defined by "the suffering of victims who have had to endure an assault AND who have received inappropriate comments about their dress or behaviour during their visit to the police station"¹⁷ [My translation] (Wernaers, 2022). This is similar to victim blaming, which

¹⁷ "la souffrance des victimes qui ont dû subir une agression ET qui ont reçu des commentaires déplacés concernant leur tenue ou leur comportement lors de leur passage au commissariat"

can be defined as "any language or action that implies (whether intentionally or unintentionally) that a person is partially or wholly responsible for abuse that has happened to them" (UK Council For Internet Safety, 2022). This makes the victim shoulder the responsibility or shame of the harm suffered and feel guilty. In addition to facing up to what she has suffered, the victim also has to deal with the police blaming her and not the abuser. In this instance, Williams deals specifically with the issue of victim blaming in relation to rape. On this page she is simply depicting a police badge that states "[t]o serve and protect" (Williams, 2019:207). However, she contrasts this with the real actions of the police, which are said to doubt, ignore and bury victims. Then she addresses directly women because they are united in their sorrow. By calling them "sisters", she immediately establishes the bond of sisterhood that unites them. Living through the same traumas creates a real spirit of unity.

The end of *Commute* also underlines the extent to which the people around her are of invaluable help. The protagonist has often been reclusive in dealing with her problems, but at some point she has an epiphany and began to open up to others, especially fellow women. This happens first in fig. 4.42 where she finds herself with a group of women, who are depicted faceless, presumably to preserve the anonymity that is important in such gatherings.

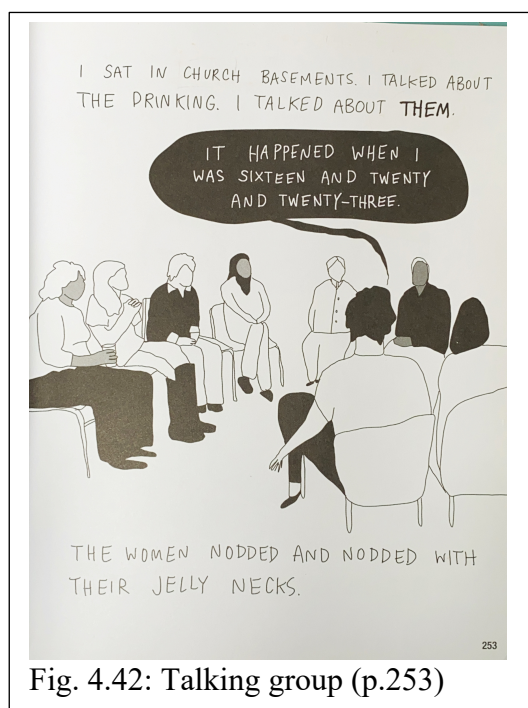


Fig. 4.42: Talking group (p.253)

The church seems to be a place for gathering and listening. There she talks about her alcohol problems and talks about "them". It is a first step towards talking about it and confiding in someone. She might not yet be ready to say their names so openly, although she does in her

memoir, or she might prefer to lump them all together, because they have all hurt her. In response, all the women nod and support, all together, like a genuine listening and support group.

In figure 4.43 she discusses more directly the help she has received from all the women around her. She even writes that it was the women who transformed and protected her. For her transformation, between her old self and the new one, she employs a new metaphor using biochemistry to reflect her life. She compares herself to proteins, whilst the other women are the chaperonins – who have a protective role towards proteins. She explains that women protected her so that she could serenely become herself. Men destroyed her, while women repaired her. In figure 4.44 she continues to talk about the role women have played in her development, but this time she represents them. She names many of them and draws some of them, to express her gratitude. All these women broke down her shell, used to protect her from the outside world. These women not only helped her to rebuild her life, they also encouraged Erin Williams to tell her story, by writing and drawing it. The idea for this graphic novel came from all those women who advised her to share her story. By writing about her experiences, she is saying loud and clear what all women go through on a daily basis.

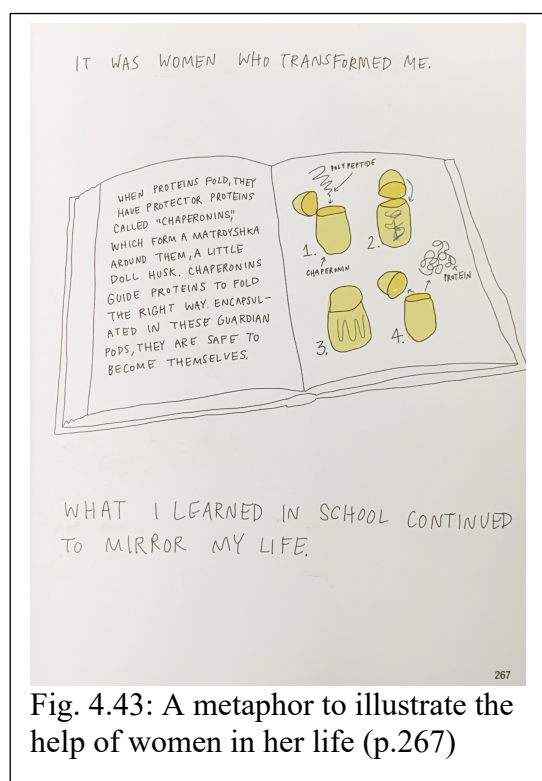


Fig. 4.43: A metaphor to illustrate the help of women in her life (p.267)

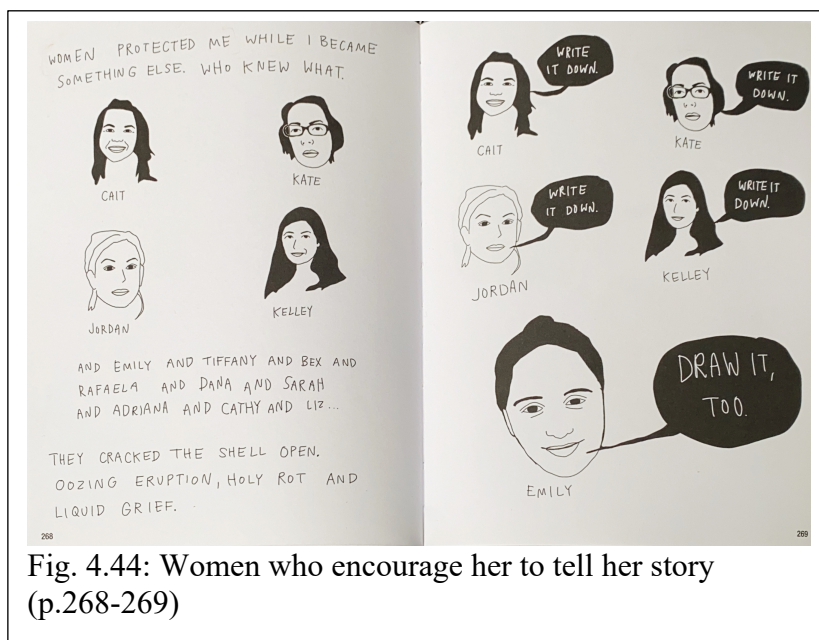


Fig. 4.44: Women who encourage her to tell her story (p.268-269)

One of the major issues in this spirit of sisterhood is the opposition between women's words against men's: "It's our stories against theirs" (Williams, 2019:284). By gathering together in a spirit of collectivity, women dare to confront and denounce male actions. With the sentence "We women doubt the reality of our own experiences" (Williams, 2019:284), the artist shows that male chauvinism is so deeply entrenched in society that women question the reality of their own experiences, whereas they want to stop being invisible. This world of opposition makes them doubt, and they are also afraid of not being believed. Which is why Erin Williams denounces one of the weapons of patriarchy: oppression. This systematic oppression is achieved in particular through the shame imposed on women (fig. 4.45). Nothing is less reliable than a person who writes her story to reassert their power (Williams, 2019:287). To do this, men always shift the blame, find excuses, sometimes even convince themselves of the veracity of their statements to avoid assuming their wrongdoings. They do not take responsibility (Williams, 2019:288). In contrast, the artist criticises the patriarchy and its institutionalisation of oppression towards women. She shares her story to show other women that they are not alone and to open the eyes of those who are unaware of this reality.

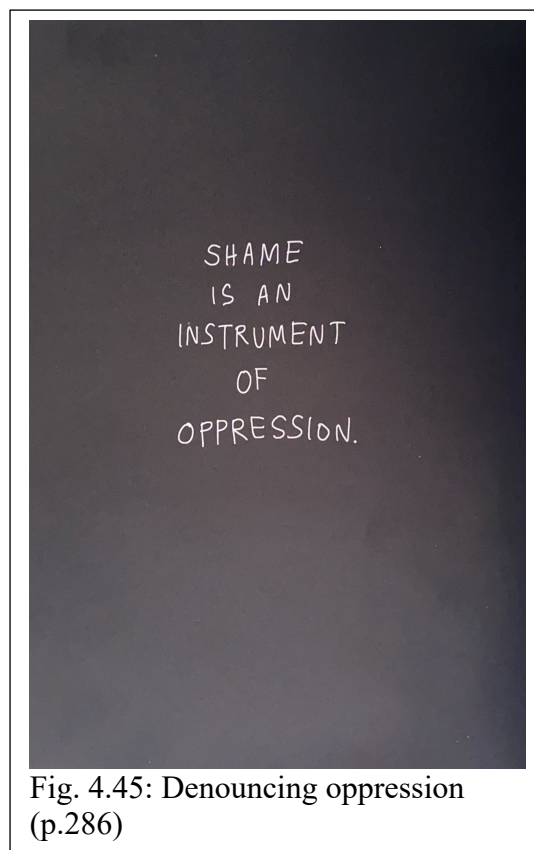


Fig. 4.45: Denouncing oppression (p.286)

Conclusion

This research piece has shown how, through their lines and their eyes, Williams and Mancini give access to their perceptions of the world and shed light on the way comics can convey the female gaze. Both creative works, *Commute* and *Eveils*, have made it possible to export this concept to another field. The transition to the comics medium has made it possible to express the plurality of the female gaze, and thus to reconsider the numerous links between the arts. The essence of the female gaze theorised by Brey has remained unchanged, but has been transposed to suit this new medium, which has its own codes. The techniques used were in some cases similar, in others different.

A comparative and detailed analysis of a number of sequences and pages from these graphic memoirs provided an appropriate field of research for the expression of the female gaze. They allow female authors to take an introspective look at the events that shaped and structured their lives. More than a story of their lives in the form of illustrations, the artists achieve a perfect articulation between the narration of the significant events in their lives and their representation through their personal eyes. For the narrative aspect, the atmosphere is very intimate. They bear witness and do not hesitate to appear "unsexy". The uniqueness of their stories lends weight to their narratives, whilst enabling the reader to easily understand and identify with their experiences. The lived experiences of these two authors enhance the female gaze, as they reveal women's own feelings of vulnerability moving away from the body as an object of male desire by looking at them as subjects. So, this goes beyond the obsessive look towards the body.

Both denounce the male gaze, which has been for a long time seen as the norm and the only method of filming. The female gaze has put the spotlight back on female bodies, by taking a new look at them. It showed that, through her body, a woman does not have to be objectified, as the male gaze suggested, but that all it takes is a change in the way of filming and looking to make women subjects of their own experiences. The place of the body in comic books has made it possible to underline the representation of vulnerability through the illustration of these bodies. This vulnerability, which appears through the lines that outline these bodies, changes the way of looking at them, and immerses the reader in a space of intimacy. This proves the importance of graphic memoirs in the world of comics in terms of female narrative. It fulfils

the main purpose of the female gaze, which is to be with the heroine in her body and to feel with her (Tuaillon, 2020).

The analyses of both graphic novels immediately highlighted the subjects in which the authors intended to express themselves. At one level, critique was directed at the male gaze, as the authors depicted its manifestation through the ongoing objectification of women, spanning from their early years to adulthood. This persistent reinforcement of patriarchal norms highlights the inherent hostility that society can harbor towards women. The choice of colours, particularly orange, to represent this hostility is a case in point. It also includes assaults and sexist remarks, in which the female body is constantly sexualised and women are seen as weak. This patriarchal subconscious is made palpable by sexist comments or the depiction of sexual assaults, but also in advertising.

Both works condemn how women are used as a sales argument. These advertisements objectifying women are not a trivial matter, as the public space is a place completely devoted to the male cause, where men dominate and women suffer the effects of harassment. Before even experiencing it, society teaches women that they should fear public space and that as a result they are not equal in it. As the two artists described in visual metaphors, the streets are a place of imprisonment and public transport is a place of conflict. This fear is caused by the presence of men who control the place. By transmitting fear to women, it implies for men that they are in control of these spaces and therefore have the freedom to act as they please, particularly where women's bodies are concerned. Consequently, the locale ceases to be perceived as a gathering point, transforming instead into a site of conflict. Through all these techniques, the authors express how the male gaze is perceived by women on a daily basis and how it is established within society.

As women feel attacked on a daily basis, the male gaze has inevitably had far-reaching repercussions. Through their gaze and desire, the authors denounce the long-term consequences that are taking hold of their lives. This gaze is the one they feel being fixed upon them, but also the one they face during their introspection. To convey their feelings about the incessant male gaze, they mainly use close-ups. But they also sometimes look directly at the reader, to reclaim agency or use it as a mirror. The complexity of desire lies in the urge to be desirable and desired. These feelings are inherent in the male gaze, but women become aware of them and want to detach themselves from them. The authors depict the patriarchal structures that have built them

up, with memories of a quest for femininity at all costs, as well as their feminist awakenings. They also highlight the extent to which men, through the male gaze, want to control women's bodies by shaping them according to their personal desires. Women's bodies are cut into a multitude of boxes to show that they are perceived as nothing more than bodies to be moulded. Faced with this, women are awakening to the need to respect their own desires, criticising the way in which they are controlled and assigned to feminine roles and stereotypes. Both authors use desire to illustrate the point to which their subconscious has been controlled by the male gaze, which has made them want to feel desired by those gazes that they nevertheless repudiate. With this awareness, they accept their bodies in all circumstances, whether desirable or not, putting their own needs before those of men. They condemn men's behaviour while reclaiming their bodies, it is a sort of empowerment.

It is against this backdrop that the authors set out to liberate themselves from the spectre of the male gaze that hovered over their lives. They relate how the male gaze had an impact on their self-perception. For the sake of authenticity and transparency, the authors describe their doubts and questionings about their experiences. Several themes enabled them to bring their experiences to the fore and share them with readers. The transition from the male to the female gaze was made through a reappropriation of the body with motherhood, for instance, an important subject because, as the authors point out, women are often defined by their maternal role, being assigned to it by patriarchy. However, motherhood is more than a feminine duty, and they bear witness to this, particularly by drawing the physical transformations it brings about and the acceptance it inspires. By reclaiming their stories, their bodies and their experiences, the authors also reveal a certain spirit of unity.

While they have chosen the same art form to express themselves, both expressing a tension between text and image, Mancini and Williams each have their own specific ways of expressing their experiences. Williams has a more childish and minimalist style, without a lot of colour, while Mancini has a more experimental and dense approach with a colour palette. The latter makes a lot of links between image and text to exemplify the tension. These experiences are inevitably unique and personal, but they also reflect a sense of collectivity among women. Through these experiences, each woman will, at certain points in her life, encounter obstacles related to her gender and to the male gaze that discredits her. As a reaction to this, a sense of belonging is created within the same group, and a spirit of sisterhood emerges to enable the sharing of experiences and a strength of reaction. In the same spirit of sharing, the

female gaze allows the characters to be truly represented, both physically and emotionally. The two artists have made it a point of honour to give readers access to their feelings. This gives weight to the protagonists by giving them a body as well as a mind, and thus moves them away from objectification.

In this way, thanks to all these elements, the female gaze as a concept allows for new critical approaches to the comics medium and its possibilities. The characteristics defined by Brey can be adapted to the comic book genre and respect the fundamental principles of the female gaze¹⁸. With this in mind, after having observed the female gaze in film as well as in comics, it seems natural to want to explore this expansion in greater depth. Of what nature would the female gaze be in other genres or other arts? To achieve this, it would be necessary to take a fresh look at the works already produced. Considering that the male gaze has profoundly influenced society's perception of women, adopting a different prism could lead to a reconfiguration towards a more equitable society. To stay within the literary sphere, Nelly Arcan's works who has tackled themes such as objectification and consumerization of the female body, female desirability and condemnatory gaze, could, for example, be analysed as practising the female gaze. Broaching the key subjects of the female gaze from both a narrative and a formal point of view, she makes the female experience felt through her words and her narration (Caporale, 2020:126-138). This could be achieved in novels by eliciting the female experience not through the visual, but through descriptions, just as in music through lyrics and video clips, as well as in painting, sculpture, or performing arts. The concept is now moving to other field of studies. Hopefully, it will "ungender" more the society. In the end, if this is achievable in cinema and comics, why would not it be elsewhere?

¹⁸ See page 15 for the six crucial points of the reading grid

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Appendix

Interview Juliette Mancini par Martin Escoufflaire, 15/11, via Zoom.

- 1) Je vais commencer par la première donc j'ai regardé donc quelques-unes de vos interviews que ça soit celle sur France culture ou un podcast sur la CST ou quelque chose comme ça pour un peu déjà me familiariser et vous parlez beaucoup du désir, du regard, des corps, d'expérience féminine et même de femmes objets/femmes sujets etc, mais je ne vous ai jamais entendu citer le female gaze, alors que c'est vraiment tous les termes qui le définissent et donc c'était pour savoir si vous en avez conscience depuis longtemps ou si c'est un sujet que vous découvrez petit à petit, si vous l'avez découvert en faisant le roman graphique ou si ça faisait longtemps comment il a inspiré votre travail ?

Alors, suite à votre mail j'ai acheté *Le regard féminin* d'Iris Brey pour le lire parce que j'en avais entendu parler, je l'avais entendu sur des podcasts par exemple. Et je dois avouer que je ne suis pas sûre de d'être convaincue par sa définition du female gaze, je suis pas sûre de ce que ça recouvre en fait. Autant le male gaze c'est très facile et compréhensible et voilà, c'est quelque chose pour moi à souligner enfin voilà qui était qu'il était essentiel de souligner pour le conscientiser et pouvoir proposer autre chose. Après le female gaze, je suis pas sûre de savoir ce que ça recouvre, c'est à dire que après avoir lu le livre j'avais l'impression que j'en savais un peu moins sur ce que ça pouvait être enfin voilà parce que dans les exemples qu'elle donne il y a des choses je me dis bah non c'est pas possible de considérer ça comme du female gaze ou enfin voilà je trouve qu'il y a quelque chose qui pour moi est assez confus et du coup j'ai pas enfin c'était évident que dans mes dessins je voulais enfin je veux dire j'ai une culture féministe depuis un certain nombre d'années enfin voilà j'ai lu pas mal de choses et du coup ça a nourrit mon travail aussi visuel et dans *Eveils* il y a une page où je parle de de la binarité qui s'est ancrée sans qu'on s'en rende compte avec des images de films (enfin qu'on reconnaît ou pas hein c'est suivant un peu la culture personnelle ou enfin voilà c'est aussi, c'est pas hyper réaliste comme représentation, mais c'était voilà pouvoir revoir certains films de mon enfance ou de mon adolescence ou des films que j'avais aimés notamment et voilà réaliser aussi le problème que ça pouvait poser au niveau des symboliques et des stéréotypes de genre que ça représentait quoi.

Ok donc c'est une première vraiment prise de conscience alors quand vous êtes revenu sur ces films par exemple, vous vous êtes rendu compte que le moment où vous les avez regardés il y a peut-être 10-15 ans et maintenant si vous les revoyez c'est vraiment plus la même vision du film et de ce qui en ressort quoi.

Ouais

Ok mais c'est très intéressant de marquer enfin de voir que vous n'êtes pas d'accord avec forcément tout ce qu'elle définit, parce que du coup je l'ai évidemment lu aussi et je pense que c'est un ouvrage très important parce que c'est le premier à vraiment définir sur papier comme ça ce qu'est le regard féminin dans son aspect à répondre au male gaze de Laura Mulvey, mais quand je me suis attardé au tout début sur le female gaze, c'est vrai que j'ai vu que tout le monde n'était pas d'accord sur la définition que beaucoup de personnes qui voulaient théoriser cela ne faisait pas la même manière certains avaient un female gaze parfois qu'on dit « plus dur » qui est vraiment en réponse au male gaze, qui est de d'objectifier les

hommes comme ils objectifient les femmes, d'autres pas du tout d'accord avec ça, dont Iris Brey, mais je pense que c'est positif de voir qu'on n'ait pas tous forcément la même définition, qu'on ne soit pas d'accord avec sa manière, enfin moi pareil j'ai aussi des moments où j'étais vraiment convaincu, des moments d'interrogation face à ça donc c'est vraiment bien de savoir ça.

2) Ok du coup j'ai fait une analyse enfin pour les questions j'ai essayé de suivre la linéarité de votre roman graphique donc si jamais vous avez besoin de la page pour que je vous la remontre, il n'y a pas de souci parce que je me doute que enfin moi je l'ai revu là toute cette semaine

Je vais prendre du coup un exemplaire

Je me demandais si vous aviez ressenti une peur quant on fait de rentrer en grandissant dans une société vraiment pas vraiment accueillante voir hostile pour les femmes et comment vous avez géré ce sentiment d'infériorité, enfin on le voit dans l'exemple quand vous parlez de la classe et que la maîtresse dit « j'ai besoin de 2 garçons forts pour déplacer cette table ». Moi je vois vraiment une pensée patriarcale normée et vraiment institutionnalisée et du coup c'est quel sentiment que vous avez ressenti quand on parle du fait de rentrer dans une société, que qu'on comprend assez vite, qui est très hostile et qui n'est pas faite pour libérer la pensée féminine et féministe.

Je pense que ce genre de réflexion ou enfin d'expérience je trouvais ça injuste en fait enfin il y avait quelque chose je trouvais ça injuste et puis ça me mettait en colère donc c'était un peu je pense que c'est un peu les réactions que j'avais à l'époque quoi

3) Et je vais juste revenir du coup sur la première question avec le fait que vous ne voyez pas forcément le female gaze de la même manière parce que moi je le vois voilà avec les émotions avec la question du désir, d'être désiré et être désirable, l'universalité pour les femmes mais donc vraiment enfin ici je trouvais que dans *Eveils* c'était vraiment basé sur les émotions c'est pour ça que les émotions vont revenir plusieurs fois dans mes questions parce que pour moi c'est vraiment mettre quand même la femme en tant que sujet de quelque chose, que ses ressentis soient plus important qu'un corps forcément, donc la question du corps des émotions est très importante pour moi et c'est pour voir vous du coup, comme vous avez eu votre propre opinion en lisant par exemple ou en vous forgeant une idée c'était quoi plus pour vous le female gaze ?

En fait le truc c'est que je ne suis pas sûre de l'intérêt de formuler un female gaze quoi, c'est plutôt ça c'est-à-dire que je ne sais pas, je pense qu'on peut faire des films ou des œuvres avec des hommes qui sont des personnages principaux et que ce ne soit pas un film misogyne quoi je pense que c'est plus ça. Enfin j'ai l'impression que de faire un film féministe qui ne soit pas, qui ne raconte pas forcément l'expérience féminine en fait. Enfin oui c'est plutôt ça, par exemple je ne sais pas moi le truc qui m'a vraiment agacé dans le livre d'Iris Brey c'est l'exemple de *Elle* de Verhoeven. Je ne comprends pas comment ça peut être considéré comme du female gaze alors que par ailleurs c'est un film qui présente une fois de plus le viol comme quelque chose qui peut être objet de fantasme alors c'est plus complexe ce film mais il y a quand même voilà une victime qui est une femme qui se considère enfin qui est une femme forte et qui est complètement froide qui en fait est complètement enfin elle est présentée comme à la fin complètement folle quoi mais en tout cas voilà ayant eu un traumatisme énorme, une réaction un peu enfin décalée par rapport au trauma qu'elle a pu subir et du coup se dire que ce film en fait ça présente un regard féminin je ne comprends pas trop, je ne pense pas que ce soit un film féministe en

fait. Du coup c'est un peu ça ouais et après je ne sais pas dans les exemples, décrypter, enfin parce que voilà en fait dans les exemples j'ai l'impression qu'il y a des choses qui sont des films féministes et puis que comme le female gaze c'est à la fois quelque chose qui peut être politique à la fois quelque chose qui peut être esthétique etc, je trouve qu'il y a tout qui se mélange. Puis il y a des choses à la limite si on cumulait, si c'était à la fois, il faut que ce soit des règles esthétiques, plus des règles politiques, plus des règles narratives par exemple bon pourquoi pas, mais à ce moment-là il y aurait très peu de films qui seraient en female gaze j'ai l'impression. Mais je ne sais pas trop ouais je ne suis pas convaincue de l'intérêt de la démarche en fait.

C'est encore plus gentil du coup d'avoir accepté de vouloir quand même bien en parler avec moi.

Non mais en même temps ça m'intéresse parce que enfin je veux dire de base enfin de toute façon j'ai l'impression que les œuvres elles sont produites et après il y a d'autres gens qui en parlent et qui analysent et qui mettent des étiquettes etc, et puis voilà c'est c'est pour ça que à nouveau pardon mais Iris Brey qui dit « oui les réalisateurs et réalisatrices font pas forcément du female gaze et tout ça, comme si c'était une réponse enfin voilà une voie à prendre j'ai l'impression que c'est complètement déconnecté de la création quoi.

Non mais je ressens ça aussi, le « déconnecter », c'est pour ça que je suis d'accord. C'est que moi je l'imagine un peu trop parfois scientifique par exemple, les films, les romans graphiques, l'art c'est culturel et du coup, là on a une approche peut-être plus scientifique de ce qu'est un film, de comment ça va se passer et de catégoriser et que dans tel film il peut y avoir 3 scènes female gaze et tout le reste est male gaze etc. C'est peut-être alors un découpage de l'art qui n'a peut-être pas lieu d'être parce que l'art existe dans sa forme proposée et donc je comprends ce « déconnecté de la réalité »

4) Du coup quand vous avez créé Eveils, j'imagine que vous n'avez pas du tout pensé à ça parce que je trouve ça fou parce que ça regorge tellement de, plus que de féminité vraiment, plus que l'expérience féminine c'est vraiment comme naturel, ça semble vraiment naturel de mettre tout ça en œuvre et que tout soit relié, que ça soit oui le corps des femmes, que ce soit l'espace public, que ce soit les émotions, que ce soit le mouvement et la binarité des genres et que du coup ça soit vraiment naturel. Que ce ne soit pas une recherche, comme vous dites qu'avec Iris Brey on devrait peut-être commencer à créer en se disant alors ok je veux faire un film female gaze, qu'est-ce que je dois avoir dans mon film pour que ça le soit. Ici ce n'est vraiment pas le cas du coup c'est le naturel de l'œuvre qui rend encore plus puissant je trouve.

Après évidemment c'est du travail ces pensées etc, mais ce n'est pas pensé, enfin c'est à dire que je joue avec les codes du male gaze par exemple. Il y a des pages où voilà le corps féminin est morcelé, pour autant moi il ne me semble pas que les représentations de ces corps à ce moment-là soient très érotiques. Donc on retrouve cette idée de pouvoir découper le corps féminin en plein de petits bouts, pouvoir choisir entre tout ça pour en faire potentiellement un corps idéal pour autant, je ne crois pas que ce soit des pages qui soient particulièrement érotiques, au contraire. Et du coup à ce moment-là est-ce que si je m'étais dit « alors je vais faire du male gaze mais avec » enfin c'est pas une recette quoi, c'est plutôt je me suis dit bon qu'est-ce que je veux dire du corps féminin, de l'expérience,

de je ne sais pas, de se scruter, de se regarder, de regarder juste des morceaux, de se dire est-ce que cette partie-là elle est jolie ou désirable etc. Après ça vient en fait naturellement c'est-à-dire que voilà en bande dessinée on est aussi très proche du cinéma, on travaille sur le cadrage etc, donc c'est après qu'est-ce qu'on arrive à dire avec le cadrage. Et on peut dire une chose et son contraire quoi. C'est à dire qu'on peut aussi on peut dire on peut faire un gros plan sur des fesses et que ce soit érotique et l'inverse que ce soit complètement dénué d'érotisme.

5) Exact mais du coup je vais directement venir à la question, enfin une de mes questions qui parlait de ce morcelage parce que vous vous faites des gros plans sur les corps, cela les morcelle, les objectifie, mais vous vous en servez pour mettre en avant les différences et donc pour moi on voit la beauté de chaque corps, la différence, parce que parfois on parle de la normativité d'un corps, un corps c'est comme ça alors que là on voit que les ça peut être plus gros, plus petits, plus séparés, les vulves peuvent être différentes, les fesses, etc. Et du coup, pour moi vous prenez ces gros plans et ce morcellement pour mettre en avant les différences, les beautés de chaque corps contrairement au male gaze qui lui en aurait s'en serait servi pour faire un objet de désir. Et c'est en cela que pour moi à ce moment-là vous jouez avec les codes du male gaze pour démontrer, pour prendre le male gaze qui joue avec les gros plans, jouer avec ce qui fait finalement, mais non pas pour s'en servir non pas pour érotiser la chose comme ça l'aurait fait, mais justement pour faire l'inverse. Donc de jouer avec la force du male gaze pour la contrer en fait. Je me demandais du coup si c'était volontaire de jouer avec ça, vous avez déjà en partie répondu que vous avez pris le male gaze, mais non pas de manière érotique mais de manière à vraiment servir le corps.

Oui, en plus c'est à dire que pour moi, je pense qu'une chose que je voulais dire dans ce livre c'est la fatigue que ça peut être d'avoir un corps féminin et d'être sans arrêt rappelé à la sexualité de ce corps quoi. Du coup pour moi, enfin pour moi, pour plein gens en fait, un corps féminin c'est juste un corps quoi. Du coup dans les représentations, enfin je n'ai pas envie de l'érotiser parce que ça n'a pas de sens pour moi et du coup même le corps nu enfin je l'ai représenté de plein de façons différentes, le corps nu mais sous des vêtements, etc. Et par exemple la page où le personnage marche dans la rue et puis elle se sent nue sous ses vêtements, la démarche et tout ça, le corps en fait n'est pas dans une position forcément très plaisante à regarder ou on voit les poils, on voit je ne sais pas de la cellulite ou quoi enfin voilà en fait c'était comment est-ce qu'on dessine un corps de femme nu qui ne soit pas érotique parce que aussi dans l'histoire de l'art, le nu c'est la femme à poil quoi et c'est une pratique de plaisir de dessiner des femmes nues, c'est quand même un truc de jouissance à la base masculine quoi donc voilà. Je pense qu'en bande dessinée il y a tellement d'auteurs qui dessinent des héroïnes de façon tellement stéréotypées et agaçantes, d'une façon sexy alors qu'il n'y a pas lieu d'avoir un personnage qui soit sexy, j'avais envie de prendre le contre-pied quoi.

6) Et du coup le fait de prendre ce contre-pied comme vous dites, mais avec la manière des gros plans qu'on peut voir au cinéma qui sont parfois ragoûtants, avec des scènes où, enfin je ne sais pas si vous avez vu le film *Promising Young Woman*, c'est une femme qui fait semblant d'être bourrée dans des bars pour se faire ramener par des hommes et à ce moment-là et quand ils la ramènent et qu'ils vont finalement abusés d'elle vu qu'elle est censée être alcoolisée elle reprend conscience alors qu'en fait elle joue un rôle depuis le début et elle les tue. Elle fait ça en fait parce que son amie a été violée et s'est suicidée je

pense, ou quelque chose comme ça. C'est la première fois où je voyais, où j'ai pris conscience, quand on rentre dans une boîte de nuit et la caméra vient faire un zoom, un gros plan sur le sexe masculin d'un homme dans son pantalon quand il danse, de son torse, et de me dire « c'est marrant parce que si on avait fait ça sur une femme ça n'aurait pas posé de question, ça aurait semblé logique de voir, de filmer le cul d'une femme ou de filmer ses seins dans sa robe alors qu'un homme on n'a pas l'habitude donc c'est choquant ». Donc je trouvais ça intéressant de prendre ce contrepied pour faire prendre conscience, et donc c'était ça qui m'intéressait, c'était comment vous avez choisi, comment vous avez décidé. Est-ce que c'est venu comme ça naturellement pour faire ce contre-pied de choisir la manière de faire de ce que vous contredisez.

En fait dans ces pages ce qu'il y a c'est ces femmes bodybuildées qui vont parfois être recouvertes par ces cases qui sont des écrans, et puis c'est toute la couverture et du coup c'est aussi pour parler de la difficulté à trouver sa place en tant que femme. C'est à dire qu'à la fois on peut dans l'idée être féministe et en même temps avoir envie d'être rassurée sur sa capacité à séduire etc, et à jouer le rôle de la jeune fille candide, suivant les personnes avec qui elles peuvent se trouver donc c'est aussi ça. Ce livre il parle beaucoup de l'ambiguïté, de la difficulté à trouver sa place, à avoir la force aussi, le culot d'être féministe en toute situation, ou de ne pas se sentir rabaissé, alors qu'au quotidien il y a plein de moments où ça peut être le cas. Enfin des petites phrases qui sont au fond sans importance a priori et puis en fait qui accumulées peuvent être très pénibles quoi donc c'était aussi dire même en pensant être féministe, c'est compliqué de déroger à la règle du male gaze.

En soi, c'est tellement institutionnalisé et dans la société que c'est vrai que c'est dur pour n'importe qui de s'en défaire alors qu'on est entouré que de ça quoi.

Mais je pensais par rapport au corps en train de danser, enfin je pense à un épisode d'une série de Steve McQueen *Small* où il y a un épisode qui est dédié à un lieu de danse dans une communauté caribéenne en Angleterre et pour le coup c'est une scène à laquelle je repense beaucoup parce que c'est incroyable de sensualité mais sans être sexualisé en fait. C'est vraiment des corps qui dansent et filmés d'une façon qui me semble complètement égalitaire quoi, pour le coup on fait l'expérience de la danse quoi. On ne regarde pas des femmes, ou des hommes d'ailleurs, en train de danser.

7) Du coup vous parliez des corps bodybuildés et j'avais une question justement là-dessus sur laquelle je peux rebondir du coup j'avais l'impression que vous représentez des femmes indépendantes de manière justement un peu bodybuildé enfin ma question c'est pourquoi avez-vous représentez des femmes indépendantes avec des corps bodybuildés, est-ce que du coup l'indépendance est reliée aux muscles, qui selon moi les muscles sont parfois reliés enfin dans la société reliés à la virilité et donc je trouvais ça marrant parce que c'était ici où il était marqué « des femmes indépendantes autour de toi » et je trouve ça marrant que les femmes indépendantes soient finalement des femmes de bodybuildées, enfin très musclées et pourquoi ce choix ?

Parce que ces femmes indépendantes, c'étaient des femmes qui ne correspondaient pas aux attentes qu'on pouvait avoir du féminin, et qui par exemple n'étaient pas mariées, n'avaient pas d'enfant, voyageaient seules. Du coup avaient des pratiques qui pour l'époque en tout cas étaient considérés comme viriles, après la question de la virilité elle

revient à plusieurs endroits du livre et du coup c'est aussi se dire en tant qu'être humain on est partagé entre ce qu'on définit comme du féminin et ce qu'on définit comme du masculin. Et puis qu'on peut être une femme et être attirée par des choses qui sont supposément masculines, où se sentir davantage porté par des qualités supposément masculines donc c'était par rapport à ça. Après le côté bodybuildé, bon déjà les personnes bodybuildées en général hommes aussi sont un peu dérangeantes quoi c'est une figure qui peut être un peu troublante qui est aussi dans l'excès et puis bon les femmes bodybuildées c'est encore plus fou quoi donc c'était pouvoir trouver un symbole visuel qui montre à la fois la femme mais dans son côté le plus viril possible.

8) Il y a une question que j'ai, à mon avis vous allez y répondre un peu et on va mêler plusieurs questions mais vous vous représentez souvent avec un visage et les autres pas forcément, parfois vous êtes en situation où ils n'ont pas de visage et hop la case d'après ils ont un visage très défini, donc je me demandais pourquoi.

C'est pour l'équilibre visuel, c'est pour diriger le regard, c'est-à-dire qu'il y a des personnages on s'en fiche qu'ils aient un visage ou pas, il y a des moments où le visage disparaît pour laisser place à autre chose, quand il y a plusieurs personnages ensemble, s'il y a un seul personnage qui a un visage c'est celui sur lequel on va se pencher davantage. Ça dépend c'est un peu au cas par cas quoi. Dans cette page là sur le harcèlement, au départ le personnage, l'agresseur est juste, j'ai envie de dire une ombre mais en fait il est en blanc sur fond noir donc c'est une silhouette, et puis après il y a sa bouche qui se dessine parce que c'est par là qu'il va se faire connaître et puis ensuite, il y a le visage qui apparaît d'abord gentil quoi et puis un peu plus dur par la suite.

9) Bon j'ai des post-its, mais vous allez quand même reconnaître la page je pense. Ça m'a beaucoup parlé et en même temps intrigué, parce que pour moi là on représente, enfin comme moi je l'ai compris, on voit que l'émotion passe d'abord dans le visage, par exemple la gêne voilà, on devient tout rouge. Puis c'est de la gêne qui se transmet dans l'estomac avec de la peur parce qu'on vous demande de chanter si je ne me trompe pas et après on voit que ça vous détruit de l'intérieur enfin voilà c'est un peu une explosion, vous parlez de culpabilité et donc j'avais mis « vous représentez une destruction interne tout en gardant une certaine posture normale » parce que la dernière case c'est vous, vous redécouvrez un visage et c'est vraiment cette ambivalence entre votre ressenti intérieur qui est pour vous VS l'image que vous avez face à ici du coup votre famille. Et je voulais savoir ce que ça exprimait parce que vous parlez beaucoup d'ambiguïté dans votre livre, vous avez dit que ce livre avait beaucoup d'ambiguïté, moi dans mes questions j'ai beaucoup noté l'ambivalence entre vous et le monde extérieur et donc c'est pour voir quelle était la violence que vous vouliez mettre entre du coup ce ressenti personnel et l'image que vous devez avoir ou que vous prenez face au monde extérieur.

Cette scène elle fait écho à la première page avec ce récit de rêve autour du mariage alors évidemment c'est bien moins important mais c'est la même idée quoi, c'est à dire qu'est-ce qu'on fait pour soi, qu'est-ce qu'on fait pour les autres et pourquoi est-ce que parfois on fait des trucs pour les autres qui n'ont aucune importance et pourtant on le fait quand même même si on a l'impression de renoncer à quelque chose de notre personne quoi. Donc c'était plus montrer ça, la difficulté par moment à dire « en fait non je n'ai pas envie de faire ça » parce que ça ne va pas plaire et qu'il faut absolument plaire.

10) Manque la question

C'est un corps qui va être désirable que s'il correspond à certains critères et puis dans le cas contraire il pourra être considéré comme dégoûtant, que le corps féminin, par exemple tout ce qui est pilosité ça va être perçu comme dégoûtant et puis en fait c'est quelque chose qui s'ancre très rapidement, sans qu'on en soit forcément conscient quoi. Du coup c'est quelque chose qui de l'intérieur, peut-être que ce ressort c'est le dégoût du corps tel qu'on l'a et puis tel qu'on le voit consciemment, c'est-à-dire qu'être stressé d'avoir un poil qui dépasse ou de ce genre de truc enfin ça peut être de l'intérieur perçu comme un corps qui fait défaut et en même temps de l'extérieur, il doit être désirable quoi. Donc il y a la dualité.

C'est juste quelque chose que je me demande quand vous parlez par exemple d'être stressé par un poil qui dépasse, si ça se trouve je me trompe complètement et vous ne serez pas du tout d'accord et c'est très bien, mais est-ce que du coup ça ne pourrait pas renvoyer à la charge mentale qu'une femme a par rapport à un homme ? Parce que moi forcément étant homme, je suis favorisé dans le fait où voilà, je ne me suis pas bien rasé pour cette interview, bon ça va passer, alors que si une femme a une jambe mal rasée, les poils sous les bras mal rasés, ça sera beaucoup moins bien vu. Enfin moi par exemple j'ai extrêmement du mal, voilà ça c'est personnel, mais quand je vois plein d'hommes par exemple en vacances qui vont se mettre torse nu dans les rues alors que si une femme faisait ça serait totalement interdit parce que si un homme se balade torse nu sur la voie publique ce n'est pas légal mais ce n'est pas grave parce que c'est un homme et alors que si c'est une femme, parce qu'il y a des seins ça devient grave. Et du coup de fait que oui vous avez cette charge mentale, est-ce qu'on pourrait relier ça pour vous à la charge mentale, de devoir faire attention à tout alors que finalement voilà rien n'est grave mais par rapport à un homme, ça devient grave.

Ouais alors j'ai un projet en cours est un peu un projet ce n'est pas hyper avancé mais un projet sur le poil et j'ai pu en parler avec différentes personnes et notamment des hommes et tout de suite c'était « Ah oui mais moi aussi je pense à mes poils » ou je ne sais pas quoi, enfin il y avait un truc très voilà. Alors peut-être que les temps changent et peut-être que les hommes s'épilent davantage etc, après bon de toute façon ça n'a rien à voir avec l'injonction faite aux femmes à s'épiler. Mais oui évidemment, bien sûr que c'est une charge mentale parce que je veux dire juste avoir la pensée avant d'aller, je ne sais pas, chez le médecin de se dire « Ah zut je n'ai pas eu le temps de m'épiler » c'est quand même grave, qu'est-ce qui nous passe par la tête d'avoir honte de ne pas être épilée avant d'aller chez le médecin alors que c'est quelque chose, on y pense je veux dire.

11) Je vais passer à un autre sujet, une thématique très importante, qui revient à plusieurs endroits donc là par exemple à la page juste après donc avec ici les sifflements par exemple, je ne sais pas si vous avez vu lu ou si vous avez connaissance la BD *Les crocodiles*, entre étudiants on se partage des infos et une étudiante m'avait conseillé de la lire et du coup parfois ça me faisait beaucoup penser à ça du coup, sur ce questionnement de l'espace public donc ici par exemple, mais aussi dans les cases un peu plus loin voire beaucoup plus loin, je crois qu'il y a 4-5 pages où il y a vraiment plein de cases ici sur ce

trajet dans l'espace public et donc c'est déjà 2 manières de l'aborder, à 2 moments différents et vraiment la différence c'est que parfois c'est une case, il y a des grandes cases enfin une case, ou d'autres c'est très dézoomé. Alors qu'après on a des cases, moi je trouvais que ça faisait parfois penser à un enfermement, à quelque chose comme ça à la fin. Et du coup je me demandais, vous représentez extrêmement bien le harcèlement, notamment de rue, avec toutes ces dérives que ce soit avec le toucher, le regard, l'ouïe, la voix et de plus l'homme n'a pas forcément de forme alors que la femme a encore défini ce que moi j'interprète comme une position d'objet à regarder et je vous demandais quel était le processus qui vous a amené à cette manière de représentation. Et du coup je vais vite lier ça par rapport à l'autre manière dont vous l'avez dessiné, j'avais noté « l'espace public semble être un thème important, depuis laquelle la femme évolue, la femme évolue dedans et avec cette quantité de case est-ce que le but était de traduire le poids de ces espaces ou alors un certain enfermement ? Si vous voulez que je répète qu'une question à la fois il n'y a pas de pas de souci.

Ouais après vous vous y répondez en même temps presque [rire]. Non mais effectivement dans les premières cases dont vous parlez les hommes sont juste des silhouettes, d'ailleurs on se dit que ce sont des hommes alors que ça pourrait être [autre chose], parce qu'il y a que les hommes qui vont siffler des femmes dans la rue. Donc ce sont des silhouettes qui pourraient être féminines si des femmes sifflaient d'autres femmes dans la rue mais il se trouve que ce n'est pas le cas donc effectivement ce sont des hommes, des hommes qui n'ont pas de visage parce que peu importe leur visage en fait, parce que ça peut être n'importe quel genre de d'homme, ça peut être des hommes très éduqués, très friqués ou pas du tout, et ce sera tout aussi pénible. Du coup c'était comment retranscrire une menace en fait, quelque chose, une présence dans l'espace public, quelque chose qui entoure, qui vient avec des sons qui arrivent comme ça aux oreilles qui ne sont pas forcément dans la proximité, qui peuvent être des sons qui arrivent depuis une fenêtre, une porte, un bar ou n'importe où. Après par rapport à l'espace public en fait ce que je voulais montrer dans cette scène un peu plus longue c'est l'intériorisation qu'on fait de la menace, c'est à dire que même s'il n'y a pas d'hommes, parfois même quand il n'y a pas d'hommes c'est encore plus stressant que s'il y a des hommes. Du coup rentrer le soir tard dans la rue ça veut dire être en état de de vigilance quoi et puis choisir par où on passe, être peut-être un peu stressée par des ombres, par des lumières, par des portes qui pourraient laisser sortir quelqu'un ou ce genre de choses. Donc là dans cette scène il n'y a aucun homme, il y a juste des ombres.

Vous spécifiez que oui, ce sont des silhouettes, que forcément moi j'interprète comme homme parce que oui avant on voit que ce sont des hommes qui vous touchent et je m'étais posé la question à un moment quand vous, enfin vous, quand le personnage est en tutu en train de danser, c'est marrant parce que je dois avoir lu plusieurs fois le roman à différents moments et c'est qu'ici, la dernière fois que je l'ai lu la semaine passée où je me suis dit que c'était très étrange parce que je l'ai toujours vu comme un homme cette silhouette et en fait ce n'est jamais dit. Mais de par les phrases « Comment ça tu te trouves nulle », « Regarde comme tu es gracieuse », « Une vraie ballerine » et ce fait de toucher le corps, comme une marionnette. Forcément les hommes peuvent faire de la danse classique mais j'ai remarqué que les pieds étaient en ballerines donc le personnage derrière a quand même aussi des ballerines mais je me suis dit que finalement c'est pas dit que c'est un homme et donc dans quel cas est ce que c'est voulu qu'on ressente que

c'est un homme ou est-ce que vous jouez avec le fait qu'on peut le penser ou que c'est même pas voulu finalement.

Non ça ce n'était pas voulu c'est marrant, c'est la première fois qu'on me l'a dit. Mais effectivement ouais après quand même le cache-cœur c'est un vêtement de danseuse normalement quoi

C'était juste voilà une question parce que c'est intéressant que ça parle d'une silhouette bleue et puis après on voit l'accoutrement et après on retourne en silhouette. C'est vrai que ça peut être femme, mais c'est vrai que moi instinctivement avec les pages que j'ai lues avant etc, je me suis dit forcément c'est un homme parce que j'avais l'impression qu'il vous structurait que c'est l'ombre derrière qui vient vraiment modeler.

12) Je reste sur cette page-là, donc là vous êtes en en tutu en train de danser et juste après ça commence par « en réalité tu as un tempérament colérique, plein de force et de violence, tu préfères courir partout » et on parle de la nature etc. Ma question est assez longue mais en gros c'est que quand on parle de féminité, on est dans des cases [voilà ici on est dans des cases] et que juste après on va passer du coup dans quelque chose de plus masculin, grimper aux arbres, sentir l'odeur de la terre, j'ai l'impression que c'est pour faire une ambivalence avec quelque chose qui peut être est plus associé au masculin et on va arriver par finalement sortir de la case, juste avoir une page pleine et puis encore en avoir. Et du coup j'ai réalisé ça après avec que ce soit la couverture ou avec une page qui vient 2-3 pages après, en fait j'ai l'impression que quand c'est un « hors case » donc quand il n'y a pas forcément de cases, on laisse place à la masculinité et qui du coup parle un peu peut-être de spontanéité, de liberté. J'ai l'impression que vous vous sentez plus libre quand vous courez dans les arbres, quand vous vous baladez dans la nature et que quand vous en tutu juste avant c'est très immobile et c'est très carré et donc j'ai relié ça avec la couverture ou la page que je vous ai montré où finalement le corps qui n'est pas dans les cases est un corps musclé, viril, bodybuildé et le corps qui est dans les cases c'est un corps plus féminin et donc je me demandais s'il y avait cette volonté de jouer avec les cases pour traduire ce ressenti masculinité équivaut à spontanéité-liberté et féminité qui équivaut à quelque chose de plus cadré ?

Oui c'est-à-dire, la séquence dans les arbres dans le jardin c'est effectivement pouvoir faire l'expérience de la liberté totale, enfin du corps qui serait non contraint et puis après on retourne dans les cases avec la page « tu apprends à t'adoucir » « tu cherches à être désirable » et du coup là c'est un moment où il y a un apprentissage de la féminité, c'est à dire que quand on est enfant on peut être garçon manqué c'est pas grave enfin voilà mais il y a un moment où à l'adolescence c'est quand même plus compliqué de ne pas rentrer dans les codes féminins. Et du coup dans cette page-là effectivement on retourne dans les cases, en plus il y a un jeu visuel comme si le personnage se regardait dans le miroir donc la case elle sert à dire à dire plein de choses, à dire la contrainte, à dire le morcellement. Dans la couverture le corps féminin pour moi c'est aussi je ne sais pas, des affiches publicitaires ou enfin l'idée de pouvoir se cacher derrière une image qui n'est pas forcément, qui n'est pas soi, mais qui est une représentation. Donc je me suis amusée avec les codes de la BD pour ça.

Et du coup ce que on pourrait dire finalement, parce que vous parlez d'à la naissance ne pas rentrer dans les codes féminins, est-ce que du coup ces codes féminins sont un peu ces cases de livres ou pas ?

Oui après pas que, enfin c'est à dire qu'en BD la case elle aide à structurer, il y a des compositions de pages où la case n'est pas forcément, il n'y a pas forcément de symbolique particulière derrière. Ça dépend des pages.

13) Justement à un moment je me demandais en quoi était-ce important pour vous de jouer le plus possible avec le médium du roman graphique, enfin il y a un moment, je pense c'est plus à la fin où vous jouez et il y a une case qui se retourne et donc on doit retourner le livre pour finalement lire la case et j'imagine que le choix du roman graphique c'est peut-être votre art et c'est vers ça que vous vous êtes tournés mais c'est pas parce qu'on choisit le roman graphique pour s'exprimer qu'on le fait tous de la même manière enfin vous devez avoir des amis ou des collègues qui n'expriment la même manière leur dessin et du coup c'est pour savoir en quoi était-ce vraiment important de jouer avec ce médium ?

C'est ce qui m'intéresse en bande dessinée en fait, les BD que je lis c'est plus de la BD indépendante et puis ça pousse aussi vers la BD expérimentale donc après c'est ça qui m'intéresse, j'ai envie de faire des BD quand même qui soient accessibles à un public assez large donc j'ai pas envie de faire de la BD expérimentale qui soit trop élitiste ou ce genre de choses mais en même temps, je trouve qu'en fait l'intérêt de la bande dessinée c'est pouvoir raconter des choses par l'image et par le texte et du coup l'image ça peut être la façon de dessiner, ça peut être la composition, ça peut être l'agencement des cases, ou pas de cases, c'est en fait tout ce qui apparaît dans le livre j'ai envie que ça serve le propos. Et du coup je n'ai pas envie de laisser des choses au hasard et j'ai envie d'emporter le lecteur le plus le plus loin possible. J'ai une formation en graphisme à la base du coup je pense que ça aussi c'est quelque chose qui me guide dans mon dans mon travail de dessinatrice.

14) Parfait, j'ai peut-être encore 2-3 petites questions, je ne vais pas vous embêter avec les plus petites. Un grand point qui m'intéressait c'était le masque aussi, ce que moi donc j'appelle le masque qui est sur la couverture ici, et qui revient de nombreuses fois. Du coup c'est un symbole assez récurrent de l'ouvrage, il revient plusieurs fois et pour moi personnellement il symbolise une manière de cacher ses émotions face donc à la société ou de les garder à l'intérieur de soi et donc je me demandais si c'était bien ça le sentiment que vous vouliez partager et comment en arrive-t-on finalement à se dire je vais créer un masque dans la bande dessinée

- Dans la bande dessinée ? [Rire]

Oui enfin pourquoi vous avez choisi de non de vous représenter, de représenter ça, pourquoi le masque ? Comment l'idée de masque est venue finalement parce que j'imagine que vous auriez pu choisir plein d'autres manières de représenter le ressenti que vous vouliez faire paraître.

Le masque il n'apparaît pas tant de fois que ça quand même dans la BD...

Moi pardon c'est parce que j'appelle ça [page] masque aussi.

Oui mais du coup la page d'avant il y a et puis la page d'après il y a, mais c'est tout il me semble. Possiblement oui, après il est encore ici quand on sort du cinéma, et après c'était ma question j'avais voulu rebondir dessus mais c'est que du coup après voilà on a ce jeu

avec le masque, mais on a aussi un moment ce fait parfois d'avoir des ombres ou pas de visage de tout. Donc de tout ce jeu-là, mais bon j'imagine que c'est relié au masque.

Oui le masque c'est pour parler du masque social c'est donc là en l'occurrence c'est le masque de la jeune fille sympathique, jeune fille gentille on va dire. Et du coup face à un voisin qui est dans les stéréotypes de genre « est-ce que vous avez un copain costaud pour vous aider à déménager » plutôt que répondre ..je sais pas.. et puis c'est aussi le baise-main quoi se faire avoir au baise-main c'est quand même terrible et à 30 ans encore de se faire avoir c'est quand même grave donc c'est plus ça, c'est montrer comment malgré nous on peut quand même se laisser avoir à des trucs parce que dans le fond il faut être poli, alors que la personne en face est complètement malpolie. Donc c'est ce masque-là, ce masque souriant, qui laisse couler et qui se met et qui s'élève très facilement.

Et du coup sur la couverture quand vous avez voulu vous représenter avec un masque c'était donc de prendre ce regard, enfin ce visage souriant et poli ? Enfin parce qu'ici on n'est finalement encore dans aucune interaction avec un voisin complètement décalé de la nouvelle réalité, comment ça se fait que là vous décidez quand même de mettre un masque finalement ?

Mais est-ce qu'elle le met ou est-ce qu'elle l'enlève ? [rire]

15) D'accord d'accord parfait, et est-ce que c'est pas un peu pour se protéger ce masque parce que voilà la page juste après on a ce regard et je vais revenir juste après, ce sera une dernière question du regard enfin le regard insistant partout, tout le temps, on voit ces pointillés montrent, les focus sur le regard et avec ça sur tout le corps évidemment, sauf sur le visage bizarrement, et est-ce que c'est pas juste un signe de protection en société ? Parce que oui évidemment j'imagine ça peut être épuisant ou c'est une manière de se protéger, de mettre un masque au lieu de dire ses 4 vérités à son voisin ou aux gens qui le regardent.

Oui oui, c'est aussi par facilité, c'est plus facile d'acquiescer que de s'énervier ou pire d'être pédagogue avec quelqu'un qu'on connaît pas, qui pense en plus faire quelque chose de très distingué.

[charge son pc]

16) Ouais alors je vous ai parlé du coup de *Commute* l'autre ouvrage sur lequel je vais travailler, je ne pense pas vous avoir posé cette question-là, si je l'ai fait dites-le moi, peut-être que je m'embrouille avec tout mais du coup dans *Commute*, c'est un livre qui traite du coup en fait d'une journée typique d'une femme donc de l'autrice, Erin Williams, elle fait pas un dessin forcément dans le beau, ça ressemble parfois à quelque chose comme ça, avec peu de couleur par rapport à vous, mais il y a un sujet qu'elle aborde quand même assez c'est la maternité et vous je pense que vous l'évoquez deux fois, une première fois dans un passage dit de rêve et à un autre moment c'est quand on parle de l'accouchement. Enfin pas un accouchement de l'avortement plutôt, c'est ça de l'avortement et donc vous présentez la femme enceinte et en même temps vous montrez son corps comme si elle n'était pas enceinte, son corps d'avant entre guillemets. Mais du coup je me je me demandais, je me basais surtout sur la page avec les rêves parce que du coup dans les rêves, pourquoi décidez-vous d'aborder la maternité dans un passage relatant vos rêves

et le liant un peu avec de la pression sociale parce qu'à la fin vous parlez de cette pression sociale et je me dis pourquoi aborder si peu la maternité mais l'aborder quand même ?

Alors bon les rêves, c'est des rêves que j'ai fait, c'est pas des rêves inventés quoi et ce qui est commun aux deux premiers rêves c'est l'idée de se comporter comme il faudrait se comporter comme on attend de l'autre et du coup que ce soit le mariage ou la maternité, peu importe, enfin dans les deux situations c'est des situations de stress et d'angoisse important et en même temps la peur en fait de pas être à la hauteur, ou de décevoir, ou enfin voilà du qu'en dira-t-on est plus importante que le désir personnel. Donc ça touche à la maternité en l'occurrence après, je parle un peu de maternité avec ma grand-mère par exemple, mais bon c'est abordé de façon très succincte, juste « grand-mère élève ses 4 enfants pendant que son mari est à la guerre » mais après c'est des choses en même temps ma grand-mère elle était peintre, elle voyageait beaucoup, enfin elle était dans quelque chose de très indépendant en fait. Et en même temps elle a eu 4 enfants quoi, donc je ne développe pas mais pour moi c'est un peu des petites pistes, peut-être que je ferai un livre sur la maternité plus tard j'en sais rien. Mais c'est aussi pour dire nos parents, nos grands-parents, nos arrière-grands-parents quelles femmes ont eu des enfants parce qu'elles en voulaient, qui aurait pu s'en passer, qui a été une mauvaise mère parce qu'elle ne voulait pas en avoir enfin je réponds pas du tout à la question, mais c'est des choses en tout cas qui je pense m'ont traversées pendant l'écriture.

17) Du coup là je vous avais parlé du regard, plusieurs fois dans le livre que ce soit ici avec les yeux mis en orange, ça symbolise le regard, on voit plusieurs fois dans le harcèlement le regard, quand je vous montrais le masque tout à l'heure, on voyait tous les yeux avec le regard et du coup je me demandais parce que pour moi avec le male gaze ou female gaze évidemment, on en revient au regard. Donc je me demandais, le regard et notamment de l'autre surtout, à une grande importance où on voit de nombreuses pages où les yeux donc sont mis en avant, et pourquoi lui donner cette importance-là ? Enfin j' imagine que c'est lié à vous, j'accorde par exemple aussi beaucoup d'importance au regard de l'autre personnellement mais est-il à la construction de soi, est-ce que c'est pour vous la société, c'est quoi le regard de l'autre ou le regard tout simplement ?

Pour moi il me semble que c'est la société, c'est ce que je raconte dans ce livre j'ai l'impression, c'est que les femmes de base elles sont faites pour être regardées, c'est ça quand même qui ressort, c'est à dire que voilà quand le personnage prend la pose à côté de statue dans un musée c'est ça les modèles féminins. Dans les films de référence, il y a *Le mépris*, il y a *James Bond*, il y a *Peau d'âne*, tout ça, tous ces films sont des films où les femmes sont regardées, sont admirées. Et d'ailleurs enfant je m'identifiais davantage à Indiana Jones qu'à Brigitte Bardot évidemment. Mais du coup c'est ça aussi, c'est qu'il y a un moment où l'importance du corps, du visage, de sa beauté ou ce genre de trucs, ça prend toute la place quoi. Et ce livre c'est justement essayer de sortir, enfin pour moi c'était ça aussi, c'était se dire comment est-ce que à un moment, comment est-ce qu'on sort de ça ? C'est-à-dire déjà en prendre conscience et ensuite arriver à s'en défaire. Mais d'ailleurs ce qui est marrant, enfin bon ce n'est pas un hasard mais les pages avec ma grand-mère qui ne me reconnaît pas, moi qui ne reconnais pas ma mère et puis après moi qui ne me reconnais plus moi-même, enfin voilà c'est aussi la question de l'identité, c'est comment est-ce que on se présente aux autres et est-ce que la personne qu'on présente aux autres elle est en phase avec ce qu'on a l'impression d'être. Du coup voilà il y a ce jeu de regard entre ces 3 situations, qu'est-ce qui fait que à un moment on ne se reconnaît plus les uns les autres, les unes les autres.

18) Parfait, merci beaucoup ! Je peux garder ma dernière question pour moi, ce sera libre d'interprétation, c'était en fait sur la sculpture, l'art parce que vous faites beaucoup de références à d'autres finalement, à la sculpture surtout, qui fait pour parler la femme objet mais du cinéma etc et je me demandais votre avis. Et donc y a beaucoup de pages qui se répondaient par exemple celle-ci on va la retrouver un peu plus tard où maintenant la statue sera cassée et du coup moi j'y voyais de la déconstruction, et de la reconstruction et c'est là que vous parlez de prendre conscience et puis s'en défaire. Et moi bizarrement enfin c'est le but de mémoire, c'est d'interpréter aussi votre livre, mais c'est pour moi peut-être déconstruire pour mieux reconstruire et voilà il y a beaucoup de pages qui se répondent et il y a des pages miroirs quand vous vous parlez juste après le moment quand vous êtes petite dans la nature, on voit du coup cette page ci et plus tard on la revoit mais ici le fond est blanc, pas plein, et puis après c'est en pleine description derrière donc voilà c'est tout ça mais donc ma dernière question portait du coup quand on parle de femme-objet il y a beaucoup de fois où on vous voyait en sculpture, vous vous métamorphosiez finalement en sculpture quoi. Et vous parlez du tableau avec Martyr de Sainte-Agathe etc et je trouvais ça fou, que vous même deveniez une sculpture d'un musée je trouve ça très fort en fait, c'est le ressenti quoi j'imagine donc voilà.

UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Place Blaise Pascal, 1 bte L3.03.11, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique | www.uclouvain.be/fial