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La nouvelle bande dessinée: *L'Épinard de Yukiko*

INTRODUCTION

Labelled as 'very French' when launched in Japan and 'very manga' when published simultaneously in France, Frédéric Boilet's *L'Épinard de Yukiko* forms an original work which includes his strong interest in Japan and manga. With the use of innovative techniques, including photography, video camera work and sketches, Boilet brings the comic art form closer to the 7th art. As evidence to the strong influence of the narrative and graphic hallmarks characteristics of manga, strong new wave features, glossy pages, unusual format and monochrome features, *L'Épinard de Yukiko* is one of Boilet's finest piece to date. Asian and European cultures intermingle in the development of the amorous encounter between the French Boilet and Yukiko, his Tokyoite lover, while the narrative subscribes to the autobiographical movement of 'nouvelle bande dessinée' of the nineties, unveiling an intimate reality of the everyday life in Japan. Boilet avoids the far-fetched western clichés on Japan usually found in comic books. As evidence of his interest in depicting real life, Boilet portrays a heroin aside from the recurrent stereotyped female representation. *L'Épinard de Yukiko* shows evidence of the strong influence of the narrative and graphic features of manga, placing emphasis on illustrations with a minimalist dialogue where movements and expressions can be compared to a film. Boilet launched the label Nouvelle Manga, during an event he organised, the 'Manifeste de la Nouvelle Manga' that aims to bring together alternative comics artists from France and Japan in order to reach a larger public¹.

NOUVELLE BANDE DESSINEE

The comic art form finds new sources of inspiration all over the world from manga and comic strips to bandes dessinées... Japanese, American and European artists contribute to the rich diversity of the *neuvième art*². In France, since the beginning of the nineties, the nouvelle BD artists have revolutionised the comics discipline, profoundly reshaping and bringing new inspiration to the field of comic art. Appealing to a wider audience than just comics enthusiasts, artists of nouvelle BD focus on 'Dessiner des choses senties, vécues, vues!' (Blutch in Blain et al., 2002:49). Peripheral to the mainstream production of super heroes or heroic fantasy, the nouvelle bande dessinée is driven by ambitious and creative artists who share a common interest for all art spheres and have chosen to employ the comic form to tell non-fictional stories. It was in the early nineties that the new genre appeared (autobiography, literary adaptation, documentaries...) through the work of distinctive artists like Fabrice Neaud, Edmond Baudoin, Julie Doucet, Marjane Satrapi, Joann Sfar, David B., Nicolas De Crécy, Frédéric Boilet, Lewis Trondheim, Jean-Cristophe Menu, Pascal Rabaté... With their own stylisation and narrational specificities, these artists explore types of narratives new to the field of comics including that of autobiography, epitomised in David B. and Fabrice Neaud's work.

'Graphic novels unfold over significant periods of time, and readers' consciousness grow and change over the course of engaging such works' (Frank L. Cioffi, F.L., 2001:117). The eight hundred pages of Neaud's *Journal* depict an intimate testimony while *L'Ascension du Haut Mal* depicts David B.'s memories of the illness of his elder brother during his childhood. The comic book format, still prejudiced as a child orientated and non-serious art form, is also chosen by other artists/reporters as a '*graphic memoir*', a theme previously developed at length in the 7th art, including Roman Polanski's most recent award-winning long-feature film *The Pianist*. It is interesting to note at this point that while the work of a handful of artists is contributing to change the cartoonish concept that the West tends to hold against the comic art form, the Japanese hold the style of drawing itself to the level of fine art with masters like Hokusai, Tesuka or Otomo... Thus, since the powerful account on the Holocaust³ by the American Art Spiegelman who '*presses on the boundaries of conventions in his art*' (*The Language of Comics*, 2001:116) cartoonist and cutting-edge journalist Joe Sacco reports on political and armed conflicts. Sacco has indeed depicted in a comic book form since the 1990's intimate testimonies of the lives of war-trapped civilians in the Occupied Territories in '*Palestine*' or the Balkan war-zone in '*Safe area Gorazde*'⁴. Like Sacco, Marjane Satrapi's main concern focuses on a drawing that reflects reality and offers in the first Iranian comic book '*Persepolis*' an intimate account of the effects of the war on the lives of people recollecting moving childhood memories in her war-torn country. '*The comics artists are not offering a comfortable world to escape into. Rather, they use all the resources of their medium to break down such preconceived ideas of what comics should do*' (Cioffi, F.L., 2002:121). The reader of these comics is '*someone who is willing to take certain risks - as they themselves have taken risks - for a view of the human condition that is all the more upsetting of equanimity since it is something encountered within the pages of comics*' (Cioffi, F. L., 2002:122). The comic art form has matured through time since Rowlandson and Toppfer's pioneer works, faced a period of censorship under the 1949 Law, and finally turned to a more adult content in the late sixties with a '*dépoussiérage des modèles culturels*'⁵, reaching a Golden Age in the seventies. The BD d'auteurs of the eighties coupled with scholarly research and national media coverage of events such as the Angoulême Festival contributed to impose this art form as a '*média à part entière*'⁶. Pushing further the boundaries of the media, the new BD movement of the nineties continues to grow in strength into the XXIst century. Artists are engaged in addressing more adult and serious subject matters, which prompted Hughes Dayes to describe the nouvelle bande dessinée in such terms: '*Parlons de livres, et plus d'albums, de comics, vignettes, strips...*'⁷. Cartoonists contribute to this new development of the comic art form all over the world while around 1800 new publications were launched in the Hexagone alone in 2002.

INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL COLLECTIVES

Independent editorial collectives have enabled the comic art form to explore new forms of reading and writing with a distribution to readers other than the comic enthusiasts of the mainstream. Limited to the formal 46 (to 54)-coloured page format and standard heroic characters, some artists, concerned with addressing the comic art form with more realism ventured into setting up their own publishing house in order to publish their work. Thus small editorial collective such as L'Association were born out of low finance with artists in their late thirties with an

interest in all art spheres who brought together their individual skills and experience. Other collective francophone editorials followed such as *Ego comme X*, *Amok*, *Cornélius* or *Atrabile* and together, these are central to the identity of the new BD. Independent houses have not only gained a larger stature since 1999 - indeed they now occupy a prominent space in bookstands next to mainstream publishers, i.e. in the Angoulême festival - but they have also enabled some artists to enjoy transnational success outside l'Hexagone, which was until recently still best known for the famous Hergé and Goscinny's characters. Thus David B. or Frédéric Boilet's work, available in translated forms, will contribute to reach people further afield and widen the circle of readers outside the Hexagone.

CROSS CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND MANGA INFLUENCE

As we have seen above, the comic art form enjoys today, within the growing globalisation, cross-cultural influences from Europe, America and Japan. At the heart of bandes dessinées, comics or manga, lays a tradition of graphic art and in the case of Japan, animated art ⁸. The recent craze on Japan is highlighted by national press headlines⁹ as manga continue to infiltrate the West through television series, cinema productions of animated films including the fashion world ¹⁰. At the same time, 'Hollywood manga'¹¹, with recurrent themes of fantasy violence offer sex-orientated publications and films. An alternative publication of 'quality manga' (as described by Kakuchi, S., *Wingspan*) or 'manga d'auteurs', that Frédéric Boilet distinguish in the feminine form in French as '*la manga*' will be the one referred to in this paper. These Japanese graphic novels (including Jirô Taniguchi, '*L'Homme qui marche*', '*Le Journal de mon père*') are based on the quality of a narrative depicting the everyday life and have gained a privileged status amongst the critics of the comic art form. It is no coincidence that, as everyday life-based narratives are a central locus in manga and as the exploration of new styles continues to take place, manga have also infiltrated the work of some artists, such as Baru, Fabrice Neaud and are epitomized in Boilet's *L'Épinard de Yukiko*.

BOILET BACKGROUND



Page 67, *Yukiko's Spinach*,
Frédéric Boilet, Ponent Mon
S.L., 2003

Boilet's previous work, in collaboration with Benoît Peeters, '*Love Hotel*' and '*Tôkyô est mon jardin*' (for which he found inspiration in Japan) depicts the everyday life of modern Japan and, away from the usual clichés found on Japan in comics, deals with the reality of life. With previous collaborative work with French and Japanese artists, including Benoît Peeters ('*Demi-Tour*'), or Jirô Taniguchi (adaptation of '*Quartier lointain*'). Boilet's interest in Japan lays on ten years observation of Japanese manga. Of the necessity of depicting the reality of everyday life, and stepping away from the recurrent clichés on Japan found in comics, Boilet said '*Pour moi, la réalité est plus surprenante que tout ce qu'on peut inventer*' (Animeland n 43 (été 1998). Propos recueillis par Ilan Nguyễn Copyright AnimeLand/Frédéric Boilet). This is

achieved through Boilet's thorough observation of the outside world and his attempts at activating events with an end product including drawings of all his

experiences with characters and places as observed in real life, while straying from formal comics code conventions. This is the case, most visibly, in terms of how each new sequence opens with extracts of his diary, inviting the reader to reflect on the codes of the comic art form. The reader not readily acquainted with these codes might not notice the subtle changes of Boilet from narrator to character (epitomised in pp67-70).

This sequence presupposes certain knowledge of the codes of the comic art form. While words and images mutually support each other, it also suggests the process by which Boilet returns to being the artist at work while exploring the technicalities of his art. The text implies a narrator, who will make various apparitions in the overall narrative line in the form of bubbles and when Boilet chooses to step outside the panel, the text appears at the bottom of the page. Far from generating its own stereotypes, Boilet employs bubbles, closer to a more traditional BD as well as text below the panels. All the poetry and sensibility in Boilet's work lays on the force of his graphic style. Whereas chromatic values (shading, shaded tones and hatching) of black and white were a necessity when young collectives were formed, they represent a choice today. Boilet's central choice of monochrome, closer to the writing, echoes Joe Sacco's own words ' *J'aime l'aspect du noir et blanc, pur et simple alors que la couleur est attirante et captive le regard*'¹². Likewise, monochromatic features are also one of the hallmarks characteristics of manga. The monochrome trademark in *L'Epinaud de Yukiko* includes an innovative technique using crayon and wash designed from a series of photographs (including the originals in page 48) and video footage that contribute to reinforce the effects of realism.

According to Boilet, these are '*des sortes de pièces à conviction. La mise en scène de documents manuscrits, mais aussi photographiques ou vidéo, m'a toujours semblé aller de soi dans la bande dessinée*'¹³. Boilet's narrative close to manga-graphic style, along with other comics artists like David B., Baru, Trondheim, Guibert... raised interest in Japan and that of the publisher Kôdansha. His work has been well reviewed by the Japanese comics scene despite relentless competition between mangaka¹⁴.



Page 48, *Yukiko's Spinach*,
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THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

L'Epinaud de Yukiko was first published under the title *Yukiko no hôrensô* in Japan from April 2000¹⁵. It was then published simultaneously in September 2001 by Ohta Shuppan in Japan and Ego comme X in France¹⁶. With near-to-cinematic effects comparable to the eyes of a subjective camera, Boilet's innovative style includes new wave features (close-ups, realism and everyday life). Hallmarks characteristics of manga are also pregnant in *L'Epinaud de Yukiko*, designed in monochrome on glossy paper, where realism and fiction coexist side by side. While the textual narrative voice and visual narrative layer incorporate cultural features of Asian and Western societies, the specific influences that coexist within the graphic novel echoes that of its simultaneous publication for Japanese and French

readerships. And as ideological moral codes prevail differently for each society, each readership is likely to be endowed with its own schematic cultural images and note the more *Frenchness* or *manga-nese* elements [17](#). Although it would have been interesting to examine this in more detail, the purpose of this paper is to look at a selection of textual and visual elements in *L'Épinard de Yukiko* that more specifically underpin these influences into a coherent whole.

INTRODUCTION TO GRAPHIC AND TEXTUAL DEVICES

L'Épinard de Yukiko's unconventional layouts and close-to-manga features, the realism injected in the narrative layer together with a mixture of jotted words on the pages of a diary, the narrator's voice-off texts and scarce bubbles for minimal dialogues, all contribute to exhibit Boilet's craft. More than words, visual intimacy is based on close-ups of Yukiko's face, eyes and smile. Redrawn photos and sketches are artfully intertwined by Boilet and their boundaries confused to produce careful characterisation of his models. Like in the French new wave, where directors like to cast their friends in the leading roles, Boilet opts for a naturalistic and authentic approach to 'stardom' with his own friends acting as models for his characters. He also uses himself to model the main character. As in Boilet's previous work '*Demi-Tour*', his cartoon-self and that of the other characters is created from photographs in various positions and with different expressions, drawn to a style close to sketching. Far from the super heroes of the science fiction landscape, this approach enables him to retain the realism of the every day life, endowing *L'Épinard de Yukiko* with a degree of authenticity, imposing Boilet's authorial expressivity.

INTRODUCTORY SEQUENCE

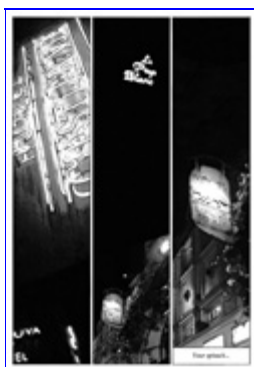
By setting his opening sequence with three long thin panels (in each of the seven pages) in monochrome, Boilet set the manga style of *L'Épinard de Yukiko*. Together, the manga and new wave features present in the sequential introductory panels include seven pages of three thin vertical panels each, like a cinematic montage, with a text acting as a voice-over. Although not portrayed in the panels at this stage, the reader is introduced to the characters through the cover. Referencing seminal new wave movies in his graphic novel, Boilet draws a range of references from '*Le Mépris*' by Godard to '*L'homme qui aimait les femmes*' by Truffaut. A number of allusions to new wave cinema are included in the introductory sequential panels and later page 13, where the two lovers meet for the first time in an art gallery which has a display of photographs of star persona, i.e. Jean-Pierre Léaud, Claude Jade and Charles Denner.

If we observe closely the introductory sequential panels, the intertextuality with one of the early shots in '*Contempt*' between Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli comes out as striking. While in '*Contempt*' the visual portraying of a sensual BB lying on a bed at the sides of her husband reinforces the textual narrative voice depicting her female attributes, Boilet subtly experiments with the narrative comic art form in an unconventional way. Boilet infers a narrative with strands combining images and text in a non-traditional design. He therefore explores the narrative potential of



Page 13, *Yukiko's Spinach*,
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the comics form in such a way that panels function independently from the text. Set in Shibuya (craziest part of Tokyo and a drinking place at night) the sequence includes panels showing a series of urban facades at night time with a camera-like cinematic technique and close ups of neon lights of a *Love Hotel* ('*Labuho*' for young people). The placement of the text upon the page, at the bottom of the selected panels and in white spaces acts as a voice-over effect with a visual appearance in italics and delicate typography. The sparse textual elements successively depict and praise the attributes of a female body: '*Bon sang... T'es drôlement jolie à voir... Ton cou... Tes épaules... Ton ventre... Ton épinard...*' (the meaning of which, a key element in the narrative, appears in later pages pp128-131).

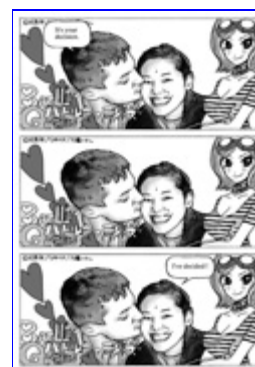


Page 10, *Yukiko's Spinach*,
Frederic Boilet, Ponent Mon
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Without complementing the images, the text cohere with what Peeters describes as '*sensory accentuation*', an innovative means of working with text and images to bring originality to the narrative (Peeters, B., 1991:91), enabling to focus on the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Images in highly contrastive tones of monochrome take the reader through a night tour of street adornments (hotel signs, tops of facades, roofs and electrical wires) indicating an urban environment. The first panel, pitch black, moves to a crescendo of white soft rounded spotlights intermittently alternated with names of hotel signs leading to a white panel, that concludes the sequence with a close up of a neon light. As the text unfolds, the reader is able to form a connection between the contrastive night time urban imagery and the crescendo that is taking place through the textual device, of an erotic nature, with the last panel suggestive of intense climax.... This sequence illustrates Boilet's style and encompasses the narrative devices that are used in his graphic novel. Thus '*Bon sang... T'es drôlement jolie à voir...*' in the sixth frame does not portray a female body but instead shows a neon light and a bar sign with a cartoon character and blurred Japanese writing that contribute to contextualising the Japanese setting. The deliberate placement of text every three panels, to the exception of the first and last three panels of this sequence, acts like a tempo, formed by a regular rhythm, pausing after three panels to welcome another piece of text as the textual narrative line infers to a gradual depiction of parts of a female body. Two silent panels are followed by a third one with text, inviting the reader to pause and feel the sensuality of the depicted erotic scene through the textual device that is not supported visually thus giving free rein to his imagination. '*A good storyteller, in whatever medium, appeals to his or her audience's imagination. The potent effects of a story derive not from what is told, [...] but from what is omitted, not told. [...]*'

Omissions play a crucial role in narrative because story does not and cannot exist without both narrator and audience' (Berona, D. A., 2002:24). Each textual device is followed by three dots that add tension to the narrative and raise the reader's expectations, while the next piece of text unveils another part of the female body. It is interesting to note at this point how Tisseron sets a parallel between BD and fetishism because the 'characteristics' of the original "body" offered by the BD for the reader to look at' thus comparing the sequential narrative of bd to a 'strip-tease, mimed by the unfolding of the frames': the white lines that divide the narrative up are the equivalent of the black lines of a suspender belt' (Tisseron:1987:61) ¹⁸. The erotic textual narrative voice may seem mysterious to the reader when '*Ton épinard*' follows. Echoing the title of the book and suggesting some playful element, and a recurrent feature in Boilet's work, this mystery is elucidated in the concluding part of the story. The near-to-white concluding panel of a close-up of one of the neon light of the *Shibuya Love Hotel* sets the tone in Boilet's work with its suggestiveness of erotically charged elements that will prevail throughout the narrative. Although they first appeared dissociated, the simultaneous narrative strands convey a fuller sense of '*intériorité*', typical in the comics art form of the nineties. The narrative layer is built on both a textual (voice-over effect) and visual (the cinematic graphic account of the *Love Hotel*) elements. Further to referencing new wave cinema, Boilet's work based on cinematic story telling is also a specific feature of manga. Manga include the illusion of movement and, far from the 46-54 page format of Western comics, they are produced in a large number of volumes allowing plenty of space for more creative cinematic techniques. Rhythm is a key feature of manga, alternating between close-ups and long shots, with several pages devoted to one movement in order to emphasise a character's imminent movements and feelings. '*The humanism and respect for life that did characterise Osamu Tesuka's pioneering works, with series running over 3000 pages, made manga into a serious medium of expression, as well as a social phenomenon and made him akin to a national hero*' (Schodt, F. L., 1983:160). One example of this in Boilet's work is a sequence based on a photo booth (pp40-47), running over 8 pages of, unlike the thin vertical panels in the introductory sequence, three large horizontal panels each.

The actual imagery itself includes a strong cultural Japanese element (the writing and the cartoonish figure in the foreground). The sequencing also includes the hallmarks characteristics of manga, where '*readers grasp the story through their eyes rather than through the dialogue, which tends to be rather simple*' ¹⁹. The serial sequencing in these pages focuses on intimacy. Sketches, rough drafts and more finished drawings are combined in the pages with a graphic variation (sketches when the flash goes and a more blurred effect when Boilet comes nearer to Yukiko). Sparse bubbles break the apparent stillness of movement in the panels, which are repeated with very little change in the close-ups of the two lovers' faces, as is typical in manga, to emphasise the feelings of the characters. A series of near-to-still panels show close-ups of the faces of the two main characters alternatively turning their heads towards each other or looking at the length of the photo booth. Bretécher also uses a narrative device based on a simple graphic stillness of movement in the panels



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and a textual emphasis of the narrative layer. The reader is invited to view this intimate sequence through the eyes of the camera that flashes in the photo booth, concluding on the pearly white smile of Yukiko.

EROTICISM

Eroticism is a common feature in adult comics - and manga in particular, where it is considered a natural part of life. It is pregnant in *L'Épinard de Yukiko* with five sequences where passion, intimacy and desire are epitomised. The sexual content of these sequences forms an integral part of bande dessinée and an obvious proof of their adult content. Heroic fantasy and science-fiction relish on images of undressed female bodies ('Barbarella' was the first heroin who, during the course of her adventures, scattered her clothing in the panels or on screen for the pleasure of the reader/viewer). Female characters are often portrayed as femme fatales or victims and examples that represent the sexuality of females under a perverse spell in order to assume male voyeurism abound in erotic comic books. According to Tisseron (1987:61) 'BD is still very often marked by transgression. The pleasure of reading a BD comes from the fact that sex and violence are not hidden in BD, hence the high male readership'²⁰. Erotic sequencing is often exclusively supported by a visual narrative layer (i.e. in '*Valentina*', Guido Crepax). Both visual and textual narrative layers contribute to reinforce eroticism in *L'Épinard de Yukiko*. Thus, the reader follows the couple through Tokyo's hottest places: Shibuya with a *Love Hotel* (p10), Shinjuku (p14) a very rough area popular with teenagers, Golden Gai (p27) a bustling drinking place, Yokohama (p30) a typical place for dating. Also, graffiti in page 29 has altered the original '*no parking*' sign to '*no kissing*', suggesting a forbidden element to their embrace... At the heart of Boilet's work lays a celebration of the feminine gender, that is addressed recurrently in his publications to-date. From Picasso to Doubrowsky, artists like Boilet endeavour to '*live through women and for women*'²¹, leading to the treatment of erotic sequences. Boilet has also published short erotic manga, including a recent publication in the publication BANG (2003:127-133). Pressing on the boundaries of a dominantly male readership in this art form, Boilet hopes to attract with *L'Épinard de Yukiko* a wider female readership by breaking away from erotic publications concerned with exploiting the sexuality of female characters for the sole gaze of the male reader. Boilet draws on the erotic potential of his female character through close-ups of Yukiko's body that portray her with fragments of a carefully designed composition complementing the textual narrative layer.



Page 115, *Yukiko's Spinach*,

Yukiko persona incarnates youth, tenderness, playfulness, yet her embodiment of femininity retains her innocence, even in the erotic games with her lover. She possesses the attributes of a gamine: a typically petite Japanese physique with a bouncy personality, radiant health and big brown eyes - which she directs fearlessly to Boilet's camera-pen. She functions both as beautiful female '*object*' with its traditional iconic erotic representation in BD (p85: '*il y aura des scenes érotiques?*') and as a '*subject*' focusing the interest and love of the artist she poses for as model (p66: '*Dis... Tu voudras bien que je fasse une BD sur toi?*' and p83: '*mon modèle*'). Yukiko's simple beauty,

youthful looks and physical presence is portrayed textually with great presence, endowing her to the rank of a heroin. Her erotic portraying includes close-ups of her face and body but not necessarily (except in p 51) with suggestive pieces of clothing usually present in erotic BD, such as suspender belts and fine lingerie... instead she might be portrayed in simple underwear or wearing a kimono.



Page 116, *Yukiko's Spinach*,
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Tisseron (1987:61) also points out that 'any part of the body or item of clothing may trigger sexual interest [...] as the latter sustains a privileged connection with the feminine gender'²². The latter may be a metonym, like her underwear or metaphoric like the curves of her thighs. Water themes are often recurrent in erotic narratives ('*Voyage à Tulum*', Milo Manara) and they are used by Boilet to introduce two scenes with a high erotic content. where nudity is natural - and the second one in the hot springs of Yugawara, reinforcing the '*Japaneseness*' (japonité) of the narrative.

AUTOFICTION

As Groensteen²³ explains clearly, autobiography, normally found in a more traditional literary form, is also at the heart of the French BD of the nineties with three main themes: intimacy and love, childhood memories and portraying of the cartoonist at work. Groensteen also points out how Julie Doucet, like Boilet, have chosen to leave ambiguous the status of the stories in which they are portrayed : autobiography or autofiction ?²⁴. Boilet had addressed the autobiographical genre in previous work *3615' Alexia* and the partly autobiographical '*Love Hotel*'. There, he echoed Marcus's opinion that '*autobiography, clearly, should be neither lightly undertaken nor lightly received*' (Marcus, L. 1994:3). '*Comics are like novels about life*' Boilet contended and '*in writing them*' he tries '*to convey deep feelings and emotions through his characters just as a good novelist would*'²⁵. The autobiographical link in Boilet's work is reinforced by the close complicity he shares with his models, enabling him to attain a true-to-life quality in their expression through close-ups of their faces. This is achieved through the careful selection of faces amongst his friends to be modelled for his fictional characters, which expressions he records on video in great detail²⁶. '*The essential character of the representation of faces in the comic art form is the main drive of the artist*' '*La représentation du visage, le dessin de tête, est le moteur principal du dessinateur*'²⁷ with a plurality of expressions and expressivity while remaining immediately identifiable to the reader. Boilet pushes the boundaries of realism to give his drawings a true to life quality. While Joe Sacco takes '[...] *many pictures that*' he '*then uses as points of reference*' ('*Je prends beaucoup de photos dont je me sers ensuite comme référence*')²⁸, Boilet embraces the use of photo and video work with his digital drawing skills to model his characters on real people. This serves to increase the innovative quality of his art, for the combination has the effect of bringing more realism into the subject matter. Thus, Boilet endeavours to '*focus on the individualisation of his characters, a major concern in his artistic approach and the object of all his attention*'²⁹. Indeed, Yukiko's face is granted with

a unique and authentic expression thanks to three little marks on her forehead, compared to the shape of Bora-Bora island (p21). To engage the narrative, '*a good comic must enthral the reader by capturing his or her imagination. Sometimes this is achieved by blending fiction with reality...*' (Groensteen, T. 2003:37) in what Doubrowsky defines as a '*fiction of real events*' or '*autofiction*', i.e. '*in history that never happened in reality where the only thing that is real is the discourse in which it unfolds*' [30](#). The autobiographical link is also implicitly reinforced through the paratextual identity of Boilet: a Franco-Japanese union settled in Japan, his work as mangaka, his Internet site and press interviews. Boilet's multiple identity as author, narrator and character coexist side by side in *L'Épinard de Yukiko*. The fact that his cartoon-self is not named in the text is also a guarantee of the non-fictional kind. Boilet's textual narrative voice includes annotations in the diary pages, text at the bottom of selected panels and text in bubbles (from page 42). The visual devices include a self-representation of Boilet's cartoon-self on the cover and from page 23 in selected panels identifying him within the work as character. Boilet is present as authorial narrator through his sketched diary pages. Although never claimed, signs of the artist at work corroborate the autobiographical link. The portraying of Boilet's hand in selected panels of his diary pages (p33 and p130) represent a metonymy which reminds his readership of the medium in use, thus leading him to a higher degree of intimacy. It is worth comparing here the work of Fabrice Neaud and Robert Crumb who tend to employ a truthful self-representation, questioning intimate parts of their career, family life and friendships. For Boilet, this is not a necessity. Examples of heroes in comic books being copied from real life people abound in comic books (for example, Bruno Ganz in the *Nikopol* trilogy, Bilal...). Rather than a self-representation of himself, Boilet opts to model his cartoon-self for convenience. His fragmented 'I' form entices the reader to view him either as the main character or narrator and cartoonist. The first flashback (pp 66-71) reveals a subtle yet complex change between the textual 'I' and Boilet cartoonist's identity, blurring the boundaries between fiction and realism in the narrated events while the projection of the author as artist ascribes an autobiographical link to the narrative. Likewise, the use of Japanese text in his diary extracts increases the effect of realism. Written in kanji characters, the elegance of the Japanese writing in selected panels (p31-33, p72-73, p96-97) contributes to setting the scene in its true location, Japan. Boilet also points out the difficulty of the Japanese language and in particular that of the pronunciation of the 'h' (conveyor belt sequence in pp31-33 and pp72-73 used as a warning while '*spinach*' is confused for '*belly bottom*'). Also, the inclusion of real photographs (page 48) taken in the photo booth in a manga-like sequence of eight pages adds to the realism. The epilogue with Boilet's encounter with Mariko Hoya, a fictional double of Yukiko is clearly fictional. It echoes faithfully the sequence depicted in his first diary page ('*Elle m'a souri, elle m'a donné son no de tel portable*'). Even though Mariko's character is based on a real model, the half-finished sketches of her face contrast with Yukiko's beautifully sketched face in the first page of his diary showing that Boilet himself finds it hard to believe in this 'second Yukiko'. By conjoining a fiction of real events in *L'Épinard de Yukiko*, Boilet leaves the reader to ponder these essential words '*... Épinard... Nombril... Qu'est-ce que ça peut faire....*'.

CONCLUSION

Following the 'BD d'auteurs' in the eighties, the nineties saw the emergence of the

new BD which is characterised by authors engaging with issues and concerns of contemporary society, while sharing a common interest in an array of cultural spheres including cinema, photography, art or painting. While addressing new genres, i.e. literary adaptations, documentaries or autobiography, they share a commitment to depict the reality of life. *L'Épinard de Yukiko* integrates the rising popularity of manga in the Western world, the autobiographical trend and hallmarks characteristics of new wave cinema. Beyond the French new wave allusions that appeal so much to Japanese readers, *L'Épinard de Yukiko* includes hallmarks characteristic of manga with an innovative technique including digital-drawn pictures from video stills. Sketches in extracts of a diary bring the realism further through the hand of the artist and remind the reader of the medium in use. The narrative unfolds graphically like a film while its erotic content addresses a female readership (also, signs about the turtles in pp38-40 are typical in ladies manga). With an innovative technique based on conjoining video footage and digital drawing, *L'Épinard de Yukiko* is visually stunningly poetic³¹. Boilet's approach to the narrative recurs to sensuality echoing Barthes's approach to text '*as the object of a desire and the promise of a pleasure*' (Barthes, R. 1966-1973). Boilet's deep sense of mood and time are confirmed in a work that constitutes undoubtedly a unique and original piece that adds to the innovative works of the handful of artists that have helped shape the new BD while pioneering the Nouvelle Manga.

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Notes


¹  The term 'new Manga' was born combining France and Japan. Boilet opts for a French term 'nouvelle' and a Japanese term 'manga', as both terms are understood worldwide. *L'Épinard de Yukiko* is published in its translated forms (Spanish, Italian, German and English) under the Franco-Japanese label 'Nouvelle Manga'.

²  Expression coined for the first time by Claude Beylie, a film critic, in 1964.


³  '*Maus*' won the prestigious first-ever Pulitzer Prize for narrative cartooning.

⁴  in article: "Eyewitness in Gaza". David Thompson. *The Observer Review*, in Books p15, 5th January 2003.


⁵  "L'irrésistible ascension de l'Édition indépendante", *Revue 9ème Art* no 5


⁶  Peeters, B. '*La bande dessinée est pour moi une forme narrative à part entière, qui ne souffre d'aucune infirmité constitutive par rapport à la littérature ou au cinéma*' *Revue Beaux Arts Magazine Hors série 2003*, "Qu'est-ce que la BD aujourd'hui?" p15 "Pourquoi font-ils de la BD?"


⁷  interview of Hughes Dayez in <http://www.canalplus.be/fr/studio/fvideo.asp?SCT=bouquins&ST=153>

⁸  in article "Turning manga-nese" by Charlie Porter in *the Guardian* of Friday November 8, 2002.


⁹  in article 'Turning manga-nese' by Charlie Porter in *the Guardian* of Friday November 8, 2002.


¹⁰  Collaboration of the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami with the young designer Marc Jacob at Louis Vuitton, who has successfully brought his cartoon-like images to the West.


¹¹  in Kakuchi, S. "The Finer Side of manga", interview with Frédéric Boilet and Yôji FUKUYAMA in *Wingspan* n° 347, May 1998, in http://www.Boilet.net/fr/presse_wingspan.html

¹²  in article Mercier, J-P. 'Entretien avec Joe Sacco', *Revue 9ème Art* no7


¹³  Tôkyô, 16 juillet 1998. http://www.Boilet.net/fr/entretien_12.html


¹⁴  in Kakuchi, S. « The Finer Side of manga », interview with Frédéric Boilet and Yôji FUKUYAMA in *Wingspan* n° 347, May 1998, in http://www.Boilet.net/fr/presse_wingspan.html


¹⁵  Published in the monthly supplement produced by the weekly French learning television programme *Furansu Kôza* - and the first to include a comics version.


¹⁶  Published in Spanish *La espinaca de Yukiko* and German *Yukikos Spinat* in 2003; Italian *Lo spinacio di Yukiko* and English *Yukiko's Spinach* in 2003, Portuguese *O espinafre de Yukiko* and Chinese *Yukiko de bo tsai* in 2005.


¹⁷  (Barthes 'L'Empire des Signes, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome 2, Le Seuil, 1970: 812 ([...] 'après avoir unifié la race japonaise sous un seul type' le français 'rapporte abusivement ce type à l'image culturelle qu'il a du Japonais, telle qu'il l'a construite à partir de [...] quelques photographies de presse' [...]).


¹⁸  Tisseron établit un parallèle entre la bande dessinée et le fétichisme, du fait des 'caractéristiques du "corps" original offert par la bd au regard du lecteur'... Il compare ainsi le déroulement narratif de la bd à un 'strip-tease, mimé par l'écoulement des vignettes'. Les lignes blanches qui découpent ce déroulement narratif seraient l'équivalent des lignes noires du porte-jarretelles'.


¹⁹  in Kakuchi, S. "The Finer Side of manga", interview with Frédéric Boilet and Yôji FUKUYAMA in *Wingspan* n° 347, May 1998, in http://www.Boilet.net/fr/presse_wingspan.html


²⁰  'la BD est encore 'si souvent rangée du côté de la transgression. Le plaisir que procure la lecture d'une BD vient bien souvent de ce que le sexe et la violence n'y sont pas cachés, d'où un genre avant tout masculin'


²¹  Entretien avec Serge Doubrovsky, "Laissé pour conte", janvier 1999. Alex Hughes, <http://www.french.bham.ac.uk/research/sergedou/intervw.htm>

22  'toute partie du corps ou du vêtement peut devenir le support d'un déplacement de l'intérêt sexuel [...] les pièces anatomiques ou vestimentaires entretiennent un lien privilégié avec le sexe féminin'.

23  In article Groensteen, T. *Les petites cases du Moi: l'autobiographie en bande dessinée*, p66. *Revue 9e Art*: 'La BD autobiographique 'à la française' présente des traits distinctifs [...] la vie intime et sexuelle, [...] la résurrection des émotions d'enfance, et la chronique de la vie professionnelle, la mise en scène du métier d'auteur de bandes dessinées'.

24  'Julie Doucet entretient, 'à la manière de Boilet, une ambiguïté volontaire sur le statut des histoires dans lesquelles elle se met en scène : autobiographie ou autofiction ?' in Groensteen, T. 2003 :72.

25  in Kakuchi, S. "The Finer Side of manga", interview with Frédéric Boilet and Yôji FUKUYAMA in *Wingspan* n° 347, May 1998, in http://www.Boilet.net/fr/presse_wingspan.html


26  Groensteen, T. (2003:36) quoting Boilet: 'Je commence par chercher le visage ami qui correspond au personnage de fiction, ensuite j'en enregistre en vidéo, de façon quasi anthropométrique, toutes les expressions.'

27  Joann Sfar quoted in Groensteen, T. 2003:16

28  in article "Entretien avec Joe Sacco". Mercier, J-P. *9eme Art* no 7.

29  'on the art of 'individuation', Groensteen, T. 2003:15

30  in <http://www.uhb.fr/alc/cellam/soit-disant/01Question/Analyse2/MAGLICA/html>

31  'La technique parfaitement maîtrisée du dessinateur, qui fusionne vidéo et dessin numérique dans des images d'une poésie inédite', in "La manga nouvelle vague - Passerelle entre BD et manga 'alternative'", le Français Frédéric Boilet signe L'Épinard de Yukiko - in article "Sud-Ouest Dimanche", *Rubrique Lire*, dimanche 25 novembre 2001