

Literary auto fiction as a tool for investigation in arts. An approximation

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This Project of investigation in arts proposes firstly, to inquire cases of artists who are creating a work and their narratives regarding their process of investigation, and secondly, to retake the experience of the investigator transforming his/her own testimony in self-writings. It is made up of two well defined parts which have one point in common: the artistic creation.

The objective of this project is to know the particularities of the creative process that I live as an artist during the creation of a work as well as the testimonies of other artists regarding their creative processes. A second purpose is to articulate the results of this inquiry into a narrative product of the auto fictional type. In this way, the process of investigation is connected to the area of investigation in arts.

Auto fiction has been analyzed from different perspectives in the last 40 years. Manuel Alberca proposes a conceptualization of auto fiction as an intermediate genre between autobiography and fiction. This project searches to emphasize the fabulation of the investigator's experience as well as the narratives of the artists, to build an artistic work where the investigated reality and my own construction converge at the same time in a book.

Developing this type of narrative strategies in projects of investigation in arts allows the investigator artist to blend in only one product the art work and the investigation report accounting for the process that creation implies according to different perspectives.

Another advantage for applying this strategy consists in the possibility of sharing this mode of inquiry with educational communities. As a university professor, it is feasible to introduce students into processes of creative investigation that prioritize expressive forms that account for the way they build their examples in self-writing as well as transforming these narratives into auto fictions. This contributes for the students to recognize themselves as integral subjects of a community

I

In the realm of artistic investigation, Henk Borgdorff (2012) identifies four perspectives from which it is frequent to bring up processes of investigation: instrumental,

interpretative, performative and immanent. This project is proposed from the immanent perspective of investigation in arts as defined by Borgdorff:

(...) I earlier described this approach as the 'immanent' and 'performative perspective'. It concerns research that does not assume the separation of subject and object, and does not observe a distance between the researcher and the practice of art. Instead, the artistic practice itself is an essential component of both the research process and the research results. (...) Concepts and theories, experiences and understandings are interwoven with art practices; and, partly for this reason, art is always reflexive. Research in the arts hence seeks to articulate some of this embodied knowledge throughout the creative process and in the art object.

This project tries to know the particularities of the process that I live as an artist during the creation of a work, as well as the testimonies of other artists about their creative processes. For that I pretend to inquire the creative process of different artists which allows giving account to a diversity of options in the investigation in arts procedures.

To write a book using self-writings, specifically auto fiction and auto essay, is not a very novel idea. Among the self-writings texts of autobiographic type (diaries, memories, confessions, autobiographies and self narratives) are included. These genres maintain certain polemic due to the debate about their referentiality and the issue of the presence-absence of the author.

Among others, Philippe Lejeune (1994) proposes with the autobiographic pact a delimitation of the autobiographic genre and its reception at the moment of reading.

This is a contradictory pact to that of fiction which establishes a contract of reading totally distinct. One of the answers on the scenery of this debate is the one that originates the concept of autofiction.

II

Autofiction as pointed out by Philippe Gasparini (in Casas [comp], 2012) far from being a fashion phenomena is inscribed in a very accentuated tendency of self literatures and consequently of our cultural milieu. In face of the increasing complexity of the autobiographic narrative, the genre crystallizes in the French cultural context of the late XX century with the convergence of three distinct literary categories: the egotist tradition, the formalist avant-garde and the identitary testimony.

Serge Doubrovsky, in 1977, coined the term “autofiction” to designate a literary phenomena consisting in a hybrid between autobiography and fiction. Thus, he contradicted the delimitation Philippe Lejeune had proposed in the autobiographic pact.

In face of the popularization of the term, its undifferentiated use has been generalizing to name any work presenting this hybridization, owing to the fact that the term itself admits all sort of gradations going from autobiography to novel. Then, diverse critics and specialists proposed limits and classifications to the concept initially linked to autobiography. With the passage of time it has been more associated with novel.

Vincent Colona (in Casas [comp], 2012) understands auto fiction as a series of procedures of self fictionalization, relating it not so much with autobiography but with novel, and proposes a four type classification: fantastic, biographic, speculative and authorial.

Arnaud Schmitt (in Casas [ed], 2014) proposes, in order to clarify the concept , to evolve the term towards “selfnarration” to designate, such as Gasparini points out (in Casas [comp], 2012), a contemporary form of genre that includes the totality of autobiographic space to which auto fiction and autobiographic story would form part.

In Spain, Manuel Alberca and José Maria Pozuelos Yvancos, among others, address auto fiction from different positions. The first one refers to it as an intermediate genre between the autobiographic pact and the novel pact described by Lejeune, in such a way that he sets up a new space which he calls ambiguous pact where he puts all self novels classified in autobiographic novel, auto fiction and fictitious autobiography (Alberca 2013). For Alberca, self novels constitute a peculiar type of novels that could be true autobiographies, or viceversa, autobiographies solved in the way of novels.

Pozuelo Yvancos (2010) criticizes the generalized manner with which the term auto fiction has been employed to name a great amount of works. He proposes coming back to the concept that Doubrovsky defined in 1977 besides contributing with the concept of “self figuration” with the purpose to differentiate and clarify the panorama in relation with the works.

Pozuelo (2010) quotes the definition of autofiction given by Doubrovsky as follows:

Unlike autobiography, which is explanatory and unifying, expecting to recover and outline the threads of destiny, auto fiction does not perceive life as a whole. Aonly has separate fragments, broken pieces of existence, a subject cut out into pieces that is not coincident with itself.

The concept of “self figuration” though it shares with auto fiction that in both the author provides its own narrative voice, it keeps the difference that in this case the voice of the author is a narrator that has emphasized the ironic mechanisms which mark the distance regarding the one who writes until it converts the personal voice in a fantasized voice, intrinsically fictionalized, figured, or literary (Pozuelo, 2010)

One aspect of self figuration is the possibility of being a reflexive voice, in the sense that it can be personal and not be biographical at the same time. This voice is also found in the self figuration that happens in essays. As the author says:

It is a voice that allows building the self a discursive place, which belongs and does not belong to the author, or belongs in a different form to the referential. It belongs as a *figured* voice, it is a place where *the solidarity of a thinking self and a narrator self* are fundamentally unfold (Pozuelo, 2010).

While Pozuelo Yvcancos addresses self-writings, including the essay, with the concept of selffiguration, Gasparini (in Casas [comp], 2012) proposes the denomination of “auto-essay” to an area that corresponds to a referential and speculative approach.

Gasparini also points out that two types of auto-essays exist, the fictionalized and the purely discursive. Both are distinguished from the narrative genres in so far they reject subduing self writing to a temporal structure.

III

The investigation Project with Nahui

Nahui, professor at the University of Guadalajara, Mexico, during 2015 to 2016 carries out a project of investigation through art (Hernandez, 2008) with students of a representative group of the Plastic Arts School of the University of Guadalajara.

I participated in her project between May and December 2015, accompanying the process in two laboratories and making two interviews. The interviews were done in May; the first laboratory of investigation was in June and the second in October. Actually she continues with the process of investigation that will end in a multidisciplinary collective creation and staging.

The following text is an example of a selfwriting which corresponds to a self fiction very near an auto essay. What I narrate comes from data of the first part of the interview.

Nahui

...it is not only about developing a mental part, but also a physical and emotional part, that is what I want to do , that is the subject to investigate

Nahui, 2015

I visited Nahui an evening in may 2015 to interview her just before she departed to a trip to Canada. She wanted to renew herself, change profession, leave art and experiment any other vital role, beginning from the simplest one, cherry picker to continue later as stage assistant in a circus, and then ,, who knows, life would tell her where to go.

At the very beginning of the interview she says:

...It seems very good for me to feel doubting all the time, doubting something, and investigating is something that generates more doubts, but also makes me think of different ways.

For her, doubts, questions and her own questionings constitute the motor for her life and work. To answer her curiosity she resorts to Tai chi, theatre, butoh dance, and whatever contributes to satisfy her curiosity. Her virtue is to convoke.

When I met her, she was creating a stage work. During the training of her team of actors, dancers, clowns and singers, she convoked teachers of different disciplines who developed a program directed to a space that was more than the staging of choreography. For Nahui creating a work unchains personal growth in the artist. The process integrates the individual and connects it socially with its group.

We together set out and initiated in June a process of investigation through art with the students of the representative group of the school of plastic arts of the university. She designed the project; she was searching for the maturation of awareness abilities and global health of the stage artist from the practice of the creative laboratory.

During these work days , to accompanied the process of investigation; I could understand what she was referring to during the interview when she talked about investigating during practice

Yes. That's very funny but I like it. It is like...I don't really want to investigate if it does not happen in practice, in what I do during the day or in what I see other people do, that is when the questions come, no? Being in practice, developing something, without thinking what I would have to investigate, No? But what happens there, doing things, its when I say Ah and the Here and the questions just come, it's not until then that the investigation begins just there. And this unchains a series of questions that I want to follow, and that chain of questions, sorry, leads again to practice. I think they go together; I cannot go the next without the other.

It is about being present in everyday life because from there comes the proposition of movement for artistic expression in all its levels. Nahui is not waiting a wave, she lives on the wave, surfing among creative ideas, questioning everything, even how to take a spoon.

At work, while I taught them the Feldenkrais method of somatic education, she organized the dynamics to generate a communicative atmosphere where each participant could integrate movement phrases from free, everyday life, funny expressions. During the exploration we were always playing.



Nahui playing

IV

Why to write? There are endless reasons. What happens during our life happens as an experience that we live all of a sudden. “We usually are not aware of this because we collapse the experience with the explanation of the experience, remaining only with the explanation of the experience” (Maturana, 1997) Writing the own vital experience configures the own history of life.

In reference to narratives in general, Donald Polkinghorne (1988, in Bruner, 1991) points out:

We accomplish our personal identity and the concept of ourselves through use of narrative configuration, and we give unity to our existence understanding it as the expression of a singular history that unfolds and develops. We are after all our histories and we cannot be sure how they will end; we have to review constantly the argument in the measure new happenings add to our lives

According to Bruner (1991) to have a general notion of a determined “self” in practice we must obtain a sample of its practical activities in different contexts, which should be culturally specifiable. An obvious and viable way to retrospectively accomplish the investigation is the autobiography, being this simply understood as a description of what one believes has done, in which situations, in what ways and for what reasons, in one’s opinion. It would inevitably have to be a narration which form would be as revealing as its substance.

Gergen (2007) points out that the conception of self-narration as a monologue must expand towards dialogue because “the incidents typically woven in a narration are not only actions of the protagonist but also the actions of others”. The need for context is undeniable because in the same manner individuals usually assume they know

themselves better than the others they depend on the action of others to make themselves comprehensible.

In this way, the characterization that the students generate about their labor as artists, members of a community, depends directly from the narrations and the way they express them in a context of social exchange. When these narrations depart from a realistic context and are later oriented toward auto fiction, a critic labor is produced over them that flows into a creation of second order.

Brunner (1991) points out that Gergen warns that despite the uniqueness of the narrations, two generalities exist that must be considered, reflexivity and imagination of alternatives.

In this sense, while autobiography requires a reflexive attitude to put order in oneself or to build oneself through writing, the writings of auto fiction allow the individual to talk about itself with greater freedom, moving away or getting closer as much as they decide to fill the sincerity requirement of autobiography or the fictional element of literature. Imagining alternatives is an opportunity to facilitate creative expressions through word, to stimulate imagination and to give account of the manner everyone builds its own identity referents.

Contemporary stage creation is biased towards multi and transdisciplinarity in such a way that the works integrate textual constitutive elements. Why to write? Because the creative work requires a greater and greater integrated participation of the artist in its work and word is a fundamental expressive form as well as the other artistic languages.

Conclusions

This Project is just the initiation of a proposal of thesis. Thus, the only possible conclusion in this respect is to insist that auto fiction while self-writing, can be used as a useful tool in investigation in arts.

The exercise of writing allows young investigators to access to the construction of creative spaces where they blend their autobiographic observations as well as other fictitious alternatives. On one side they recover their autobiographic experience and recognize identity traits linked to their community, on the other side they unify these self-writings in built and enriched texts with imaginary elements that take them towards the pole of literary fiction up to the point of constituting themselves, building their own identity in an active manner .

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