



# EDUCATIONAL NOTE

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## 3 EPISTOLARY FILMS

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### ECHANGES - 3 EPISTOLARY FILMS

The project “Echanges”, also known as “3 epistolary films” is a collective creation that gathers three short movies with the same subject: epistolary interactions.

It took place as part of an art residence at school which involved 3 classes of 1ère CAP at the Sainte-Thérèse hotel and catering school in La Guerche de Bretagne.



This project could come into world as a response to a call for projects by the DRAC Bretagne and is part of the school's educational program. It is coordinated by Cinéma35, the movie theater association of Ille-et-Vilaine, and is led by director Paul Marques Duarte and director of photography Mathieu Chesneau.



### THE PROJECT

The project consists in the creation, together with the pupils, of three three-minute black and white short movies that follow the “epistolary interactions” guideline. The creation involved each time a different group of a dozen pupils.

- the “research and writing” phase: the pupils each looked for a letter, a text message, a postcard or an email that could be used as raw material and was used as a raw testimony. Then, they started to write three fictional story-lines.
- the “shooting and rewriting” phase: the pupils staged the three story-lines that had previously been written and they shared the different roles in front of and behind the camera.
- the ultimate “editing and rewriting” phase: a third group of pupils edited what had been filmed and therefore gave the final result a fresh perspective.







## THE OBJECTIVES

- Sensitizing and initiating to the world of cinema and audiovisual language
- meeting a director and his director of photography, following them and immersing in their work, their world and their way of creating
- developing creativity, putting into practice the notions learned, giving prominence to imagination and expression by filming their ideas
- using professional filming material
- creating a collective work and thus an unprecedented and positive experience for the pupils, that complies with the school's educational project: in their French literature class, the pupils studied literary and cinematographic works dealing with epistolary interactions.



# INTERVIEW WITH PAUL MARQUES DUARTE

**Is there a difference between your expectations and the final result?**

"I love leading workshops in middle and high schools because it's something new every time! It was particularly the case here because I had written a common thread to the project beforehand, but I didn't know at all where the pupils would take it! It's the pupils who brought the raw material: their letters, their ideas, their words. I was immediately thrilled by their energy and I'm very proud of what we made together."



**How did you work with the pupils? How did you earn their trust? Were there obstacles, times when they censored themselves or nice surprises?**

"Strangely enough, things went immediately well. From the first day when I presented the project and the main steps of the creation, I felt a lot of enthusiasm from the pupils. I think my role was more to make them trust themselves rather than to earn their trust. I wanted to show them that they were capable of making a movie. They immediately played along, from the writing phase, where they put a lot of themselves in the texts, until the shooting and the editing phases."

**What do you want to remember from this experience as an artist-in-residence?**

"I think that this type of experience reminds me why I love making movies: it's a collective work that anybody can do. All along this art residence, I rediscovered the energy I had when I shot movies as a teenager, when I realized that pointing a camera to the world means telling the world in your own way. Those kid have so much to tell, I'm proud to see that they took this opportunity to express themselves. I must also admit that sharing those things is really precious in the times we're experiencing. I believe it helped them a lot, some personalities uncovered themselves all along the project. And it helped me a lot too!"

### III · Letter n°1 : Aurélien

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Dear Camille,

I'm not used to writing letters and even less talking about love, but for you I'll try to put my heart and soul into it. Thinking back over the past year, it's as if there is a projector casting images in my mind. The time we spent together keeps playing over and over again.

The first image is of our first meeting on the sports field. When I saw you, I had feelings that I never knew existed. Your face haunted my days and nights. I was scared you wouldn't feel the same. So, I pretended that I wasn't into you, but secretly, I was living in the rhythm of your looks and smiles. Then I summoned up all my courage and asked you out for a drink. In the end, you didn't come but it didn't matter, we found each other later in a corner of the park, we sat on a bench and we had our best kiss. What we had between us was nothing like I had experienced and I hope it is the beginning of a novel filled with many beautiful chapters.

I know that right now we are not living in the best times. I hope that my friends accept you as you are and will stop judging you all the time. Soon I'll tell them what you mean to me. Then, there's my parents who refuse to let us see each other, who understand nothing of what we are going through, with their closed minds. And now this awful virus that keeps us locked away from each other as if to say they were right. Without you, I am like a sky without stars, a river without fish, like some guy who has tasted a burger and is now forced to eat spinach. Every beat of my heart is an "I love you" that I send to you. If my love were a country you would be its capital. Today, I write this letter to you to tell you that you need to stay hopeful. Together we will get there, we are stronger than all of this.

Camille, you are the one that my heart has chosen. You are the man of my life. Against all viruses, you are my vaccine, my antidote. And if there is another wave, I will surf above it with you, confined in your arms.

I love you,

Aurélien



### III · Letter n°2 - ADAMA

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Hello my brother Ousmane,

I hope you are fine and the family is doing well. I think about you a lot. Already 8 months since I left, time flies... For my part, I'm doing well. Things are finally starting to work out. I am very happy to be in a cooking course in a professional hospitality high school.

Afterwards, I hope to work in a big restaurant. There are a lot of differences between Malien and French cuisine. Even the equipment is different. Yesterday, I learnt how to prepare a short crust pastry. I can make it for you one day, it's really good.

The classes are sometimes hard to follow, but I am motivated. I am learning the language, even if French people often speak too quickly, I have started to speak well. I have made some friends who help me and give me advice. Sometimes, they want to learn some words in Bambara or in Arabic. They are learning fast!

In France, everyone will soon be celebrating Christmas. I am very curious to experience these festivities. It's a little like 'Eid'. Families gather, give each other presents, eat together for hours. It's difficult to imagine a celebration like this without you. I miss you a lot. I have new friends and a new family, but they'll never replace you.

I'd like to spend my holidays with you. I'll tell you all about my experiences in France. My brother, you know when I was at home, nothing was easy for me. Thanks to you, I was able to leave the country with your best friend. I will always be grateful to you for allowing me to leave instead of you. We had a lot of difficulties on our journey. I almost died crossing the Mediterranean sea. Thanks to God we arrived safely. I am proud to have you as a big brother.

Ousmane, hug all the family for me. I am happy to have you all in my life.

Until we see each other again,

Adama

### III · Letter n°3 - LIZA

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Wednesday, November 25th. 5:42 pm

Hi, my name is Liza, I'm 16 and I'm a high school student. My friends call me a "sweet pain in the butt", because I'm a pain in the butt, but I'm sweet too! I have a bad temper, but I'm also a positive girl and I desperately cling to life. I've wanted to tell you all this for a while, but I didn't really have the courage. I know that you won't judge me, I can show myself as I really am, not like the one I pretend to be at school. It's funny, you've been around for a while now, but it's only today that I've managed to conjure up some nerves. So today's the big day, and I can finally start to speak to you.

This year, I've decided to adopt my own style. I sold my old clothes to buy new ones: crop tops, colorful skirts, tights, jewelry. And a few months ago, I discovered a passion for make-up. For the first time, I've finally felt like myself, I wasn't scared of accepting my weird body. But I soon started to realize that people were staring at me everywhere I went.

At first, I didn't really pay attention, I just lived my life for me, I felt good about myself, even though I could hear them say "look at that tart", "hey, here's the slut". But soon I started to get messages on Instagram, like "you whore", "you better kill yourself". I didn't dare talking to my friends about it. To no one in fact. I was too ashamed to go see the vice principal. So I kept my head up, I pretended it didn't hurt me, but at night, in my room, I started to have dark thoughts.

So I changed everything overnight. I borrowed old clothes from my parents and went to school in a tracksuit, with no make-up on. But I got even more insults. "Frigid", "tomboy", "misfit". They point their fingers at me, I can hear the catcalls, they laugh at me. I had finally gained self-confidence. But now it's gone, I just want to wear baggy clothes and crawl under the covers.

If I wear make-up, I'm a slut. If not, I'm scruffy. If I wear a skirt, I'm a whore, if I wear a tracksuit, I'm frigid. What's the problem with our clothes? Either they're too short or too long. And strangely enough, they never say anything to boys.

When you're a girl, you can't do or say what you want. And people don't seem to get that. I don't dare to say this to my friends. I can only tell you.

Dear diary, today I told you everything that was on my mind. See you tomorrow for another day.

Liza



### NARRATOR

*What are the particularities of a first-person narration?*

*How can it translate the narrating “I” on screen? What does the spectator feel?*



The narrator's voice-over is the thread that connects each movie from beginning to end. It's the voice of the thoughts that sets on paper the feelings and resentment towards a lover, a brother or even oneself. Those words directly set the audience inside the character's mind, making it omniscient, knowing the thoughts, the actions of the person who tells the story. It immediately establishes trust and complicity between the narrator and the spectator. As there's no judgment, it elicits the viewer's empathy towards these young people who reveal themselves on paper and also in front of the camera, and they can become their confidant.

Although the voice is always off camera, the narrator is in every shot: we can follow every step, in different situations that illustrate his words. These particular scenes are, for example, the basketball game at Aurélien's, the Christmas dinner and the gift giving moment with Adama, the bullying and the staring for Liza. As a result, the audience is immediately involved because of the used of the “tu” form. The narrator openly speaks to the audience, speaking in the first person, the letter acting as a proxy. The facecam scenes, with the series of tight shots and close-up shots totally immerse the audience in the narrator's psyche shown by his eyes dropping to the ground, his shifty gaze or else staring straight at the camera. This is all emphasized by the hand gestures which clearly mean something (intertwining fingers show Aurélien's reserve when he speaks about love, Adama's hand playing with the necklace that represents Mali, the home country dear to his heart).

### INTIMACY/PRIVACY/CONFIDENCE

*How much do they share their privacy? How do the narrators bring us into their confidence? What processes support realism on screen?*



The intimacy of the bedroom plays an important role in the narrator-spectator relationship: in addition to the familiarity, it fully immerses us in a personal and individual universe, such that we are immersed in another identity. The realism on the screen is supported by all the details residing in the decor, which resonate with each of the spectators, identifying themselves in or remembering their teenage bedroom. These facets of their identities are marked by artifacts on the walls of their respective bedrooms. We see the posters of the singers Black M, Big Flo & Oli or even Maitre Gims, a photo of a basketball player next to the pennant of the Angevin football club SCO in AURÉLIEN's room (setting up the male cliché which is often opposed, in the mainstream masculine culture, to homosexuality).

We see the map of Mali and his drawings on the wall in ADAMA's room, and in LIZA's room we see the photos of her and her friends. Thus, much of the action is situated in the narrator's head, then in his room, and this puts the viewer in the place of a trusted friend.

The spectator intercepts a story that is not intended for him at first glance. ADAMA appropriates the space by covering the walls with his creations. He expresses himself through his art, which constitutes the familiar cocoon in which he takes refuge and refuels himself. In addition, it establishes a parallel with the creativity and manual work specific to the culinary field (he draws fruits and desserts). We note the pervasiveness of LIZA's image, that she has of herself, but also within the group. Everywhere around her are clichés, selfies, surrounded by others or alone, joyful scenes (echoes of the positive images sent on social networks) in opposition to what she feels deep inside her: a deep feeling of injustice in the face of rejection and harassment.

Close-ups make it possible to see the uniqueness of each one, like the use of the facecam which supports the sense of us being taken into confidence. The viewer is never in the place of a voyeur, because the intimacy is constant throughout the story with all the elements knowingly shared by the narrator. The latter is at the same time author, reader and actor. The relationship evolves with the double game between the facecam shot in the studio linked to confidence, and scenes of reality with the desire to show a reflected image of oneself, which corresponds to an integrated social “norm”.

### OUTSIDE

*How are the characters located in their context?*

*What are the differences between sequences where the character is alone and those where they are in a social context? How does the outside world contribute to the overall story?*



There is a double game in the life of each of the narrators: the image systematically juxtaposes their external appearance, in the outside world, and the intimate moments of writing, in the heart of a teenager's room.

AURÉLIEN, who seems so well integrated and popular with his friends, gathered together for the same sport, is under pressure vis-à-vis his feelings. He does not have so much trouble admitting them in the private sphere, but accepting them and sharing them in front of those around him in the public space is not as easy.

ADAMA continues his discoveries by traveling to new places, to the city that hosts and trains him, but it nevertheless highlights the importance of his origins and of his family, now far from him. He moves in this welcoming environment with ease and rigor, in the street as in the kitchen, socially accepted by his group of friends and his host family. At the same time, he can be seen on screen in the middle of the writing process, in front of his drawings, his chessboard and the map of his native country. The viewer empathizes with this young man who has left behind all that he has known to fit in. Seeing him draw, indulge in an individual activity, breaks with the public image that he conveys.

LIZA, on the other hand, appears bright and joyful in character in front of the camera, contrasting with her sad expression and her questions, which she finds herself alone in front of when writing. She doesn't turn around, doesn't react when her classmates criticize her, doesn't talk about it. She takes the hit in silence hoping the problem will go away.



### IMAGE AND SOUND

*What are the benefits of black and white image processing? To what extent does the format serve the purpose? What can we attribute to the editing effects on audience reception?*



Black and white is an aesthetic bias. This process has the particularity and quality of sublimating the contrasts by bringing a particular atmosphere to the film. The close-ups in the studio bring out all the beauty, purity and depth of the actors' features, which slip wonderfully into the skin of these characters. The point here is to leave a major place for emotion.

Thus, the innocence and purity of feelings are brought to the fore and exposed unvarnished. In addition, the black and white image supports the fictional character of the short films, imposing an elegant distance between the narrator and the audience. The grain of the image supports the singularity of the stories told, and offers the view of a soft, tempered image, far from black / white, good / bad Manichaeism.

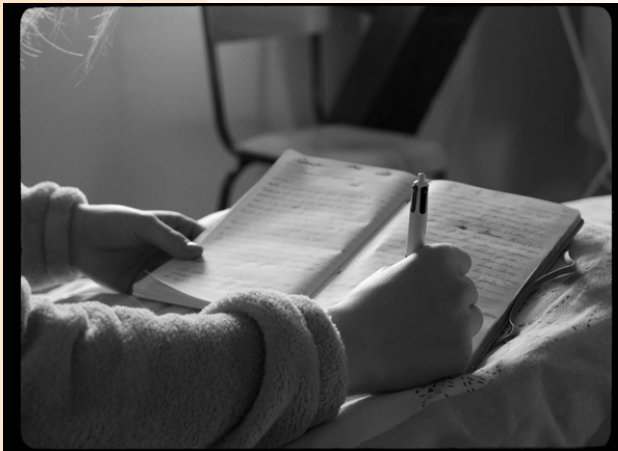
The slow motion invites us to observe, pay attention to detail and take the time to immerse ourselves in the story of the narrator.

In fact, we are rediscovering the commune of La Guerche-de-Bretagne in a new light. The city and the school are now the scene of three adolescent destinies.

The music discreetly imposes a dominant feeling on the viewer's ear. Each short film has its own identity, made up of stories and images, all supported by a tailor-made melody. We retain a light and exciting melody for AURÉLIEN, evoking his love for Camille, unlike LIZA whose story is accompanied by an aria with sad tones which conveys an awareness, like an echo to negative experiences and her questions, which come to encourage her writing. The music with African tones for ADAMA gives us a fresh look through the exotic and inspired feelings he has towards French architecture and customs.

### THE LETTER AS AN OUTLET

*What evolution is there in the narrator's thinking? How does the camera support this progression? In what manner does writing allow us to express feelings? Does it allow you to protect yourself, or on the contrary to reveal yourself? How are the feelings and novelty expressed? What processes involve us in the reasoning of each of the narrators?*

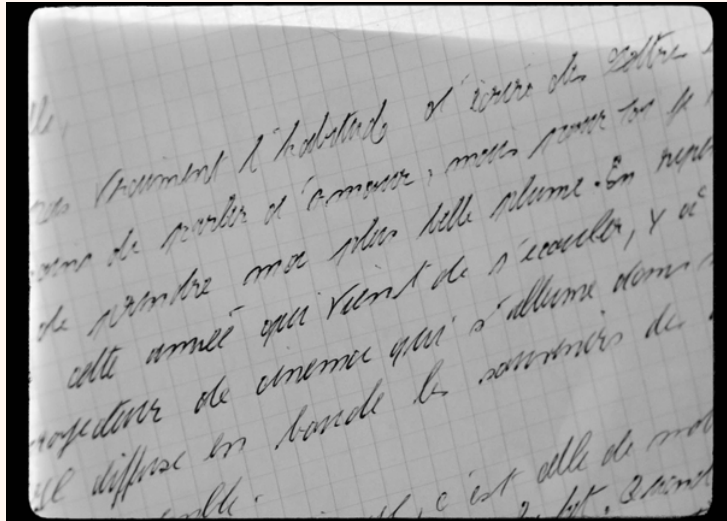


The letter here presents an outlet, it relieves the narrator as they write. Thus, we see the actors evolve as they invite us into their confidence. The stories do not end, the point is not final even if each letter ends with their first name. Each letter gives rise to an opening. LIZA signs her story by setting a meeting with herself for the next day, while AURÉLIEN ends his letter with a statement summarized in three words: "I love you" - the logical outcome of his feelings towards Camille. ADAMA meanwhile, expresses gratitude to his family, far from him. The expression of all these feelings at the end of the film, like the final stripping of the characters, represents a relief, the completion of their thought.

In addition to being a medium of expression, the letter is therefore a means of fulfillment, of liberation of the narrator from embarrassment, barriers and conventions. Modesty is reinforced by the closed door between the narrator's story and the viewer's listening. Despite the disclosure, the narrator hides behind the writing and indirect expression, avoiding face-to-face confrontation with their interlocutor.

LIZA, by confiding in her diary, lets the viewer into her confidence. She finally dares to speak out, alone in the face of the resentments she has carried within her for a long time in silence. Expressing, at first glance, the positive change of being able to dress differently, to see her body change and become more coquettish, she subsequently becomes disillusioned. Daily scenes illustrate the harassment she suffers: mockery, stares, insults by messaging and social networks ... She has entered against her will into a vicious circle, and does not even know how to dress. She comes to doubt her style, her personality and her choices.

### THE LETTER AS AN OUTLET



AURÉLIEN chronologically tells his love story, which the camera translates for the viewer by illustrating moments of his life. He expresses his nascent feelings which he tames, in all sincerity, opening his heart, describing his love sometimes in a colorful way (like a movie projector lighting up in his head, a long novel filled with pretty chapters, comparing his love to a burger and spinach). The viewer is made witness to a personal love that taps into a universal theme.

We learn the truth about ADAMA and the harsh reality of immigration and sacrifice. He expresses a lot of gratitude to his brother who has given up his place to leave their home country so that he might take it. He dares to tell us a sensitive part of his story. Despite his young age, ADAMA already has a whole life behind him; his serene face leads us to accredit him with a certain wisdom.



### THE OUTCOME

*How is the opening of each story presented? What conclusions can we draw from the narratives?*

*How do the issues end up?*

*Why does the ending bring a new angle to each character's story?*



The three letters respectively offer us: a denouement, a form of surprise ending and a reversal of the situation. It is a narrative choice that magnifies these portraits and teaches viewers more about the characters, for AURÉLIEN (Camille), LIZA (the diary), ADAMA (Ousmane his brother).

LIZA progresses in her reasoning to finally bring an end to questions that upset her. She manages to triumph over feeling with reason, becoming more aware of what she is really going through. She takes a step back and that changes her sense of injustice. Finally, she discusses girl-boy relationships and the differences that characterize the two sexes, questioning their legitimacy and the right to assert oneself as a woman in the making.

AURÉLIEN overcomes the fear of judgment, homophobia and the gaze of others by writing directly to the loved one. So his letter is an additional statement that leaves no room for hatred, a letter in the form of a shield. The image follows his daily life, and traces the trajectory of a love through body language, embarrassment (hands touching, embarrassed gazes, looking towards the ground, legs crossed and hands in pockets), to the declaration (laughter, facecam smile, hand in hand, hugs), through to the wait for consummation (a lost gaze through the window).

ADAMA, for his part, expresses gratitude and shares with us his personal enrichment with his discoveries, sometimes with humor. The cultural novelty he experiences is at the heart of his story. Thus, he verbalizes the change that transforms his life through didactic affirmations. He is immersed in a new country, a new environment and in the strange home environment of a host family. By discussing his life and taking a step back, he announces himself to be the master of his history, of his life, by welcoming new experience with a sense of resilience.



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