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Presenting Minds in Graphic Narratives

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Recent narrative theory has been increasingly interested in the representation of consciousness in narratives. Some of these approaches, especially the ones redefining narratives in cognitive terms, have emphasized the centrality of the mediating mind for all narrative understanding. For instance, Monika Fludernik demonstrates that narrativity, a set of properties that characterizes narrative, fundamentally involves the presentation of a consciousness, reflecting on and reacting to events and evaluating them. In developing her influential notion of narrative experientiality, Fludernik suggests that any extended piece of narrative relies on the experiential portrayal of event sequences and human consciousness (1996: 28–30).

In this paper I examine the presentation of minds in the mixed media environment of graphic narratives,¹ following up on the development given to the notion of narrative experientiality by Alan Palmer's compelling idea of mental functioning as action in narrative fiction (2004). Palmer highlights and problematizes what he calls the "verbal norm" in the predominant speech-category approach to narratological analysis of characters' thought processes. By the verbal norm Palmer means specifically the preoccupation with the highly verbalized flow of self-conscious inner speech and thought (14, 63–67), as well as with free indirect perception where the narrator uses a character's consciousness as the perceptual angle on narration (48). The verbal bias that Palmer perceives in the speech-category approach has also privileged, in narratological research, fictions that employ techniques of inner speech and thought. The approach has not, as Palmer cogently shows, given an adequate account of the form and function of more indirect means of thought-presentation such as reported thought — meaning the narrator's discourse of a character's consciousness — or the systematic use of external focalization in the so-called behaviorist narrative.²

¹ By "graphic narrative" I mean a "narrative work in the medium of comics" (Chute and DeKoven 767).

² Gerald Prince defines behaviorist narrative as a "narrative characterized by external focalization and thus limited to the conveyance of the characters' behavior (words and ac-

Furthermore, the verbal norm of the theoretical discourse on fictional consciousness has contributed to a highly limited notion of “thought” and “mind” in classical narratology. Recent cognitive approaches in film studies, for example, have been examining the spectators’ engagement with characters whose minds and emotions are predominantly displayed through images, with little or no direct access to the characters’ verbal thoughts.³ The limitation, then, is especially problematic if we undertake the challenge of developing a narratology that would transcend the boundaries of a single medium.⁴

The analysis of mind-presentation in graphic storytelling might suggest ways to loosen the grip of the “verbal norm” in narratology, while also helping us evaluate what in the speech-category approach might work across narrative media. What makes graphic narratives and comics, and their medium-specific constraints and preferences especially interesting in this respect is that the medium stimulates the viewer’s engagement with the minds of characters by recourse to a wide range of verbal modes of narration in a dynamic relation with images that show minds in action. Many aspects of this multimodal interaction between words and images are similar to the way film narratives function, as for instance in the relatively limited use of narrators in both media. Yet graphic storytelling is also radically different from film narration. The most distinctive medium-specific features include the necessarily discontinuous form of the page setup, the expressive use of the graphic line, the importance of the space in between the panels (the so-called gutter), and what seems to be the infinite flexibility of the panel shape and size (in contrast to the normally fixed shape of the cinema screen). In regard to speech-act categories, further challenges to narratological analysis of mind presentation in graphic storytelling are posed by the spatial demands of the medium that specifically limits the use of certain speech categories. For instance, an extended employment of inner speech, direct thought presentation, and thought report is relatively rare in graphic narratives.

The question of mind construction in visual narratives is worth posing insofar as we wish to learn more about the presentation of minds in differ-

tions but not thought or feelings), their appearance, and the setting against which they come to the fore” (10). See also Fludernik’s discussion of “neutral” or “camera-eye” narratives (1996: 172–77).

³ See, for instance, M. Smith 1995; G. Smith 2003; Bordwell 1985; and Branigan 1992.

⁴ The project of transmedial narratology has been recently outlined, for instance, in Ryan 2004 and Herman 2004.

ent narrative genres and across diverse media. Here I shall focus on three issues in regard to the presentation of minds in graphic narratives: the mimetic aspect of the image; the problem of the narrative agent; and the interaction between visual focalization and verbal narration. All of these can be addressed in regard to other types of visual narratives as well, especially in respect to film narratives, but I shall refrain from extended cross-media comparison. My theoretical discussion will be illustrated by some representative extracts from graphic narratives, moving from third-person to first-person narration, both in fiction and in non-fiction.

The Mimetic Image and the Redundant Word

Among the most obvious constraints of verbal mind construction in graphic narratives is contextual character portrayal: the rendering of a character's thoughts and sensations with the help of the physical context. The reasons for this are, generally speaking, twofold. On the one hand, the narrator's verbal report of a character's thought, feeling, and perception may introduce redundancy to the story in relation to the visual information of the images. On the other hand, reporting syntax can create an arbitrary shift in the narrative from images to words, at the risk of turning the images into illustrations of the text. These restraints are especially pertinent in the case of third-person graphic narratives, but first-person varieties are also affected by them.

In classical French-language third-person perspective comics and graphic novels, from Rodolphe Töpffer to Hergé, the presentation of a character's thought as mental action is realized predominantly in images, distributed through what is seen on the page, often from an impersonal viewpoint. In Töpffer's *Monsieur Vieux Bois* ("The Story of Mr. Wooden Head," 1827) the narrator's reporting voice is much more dominant than in *Tintin* and often mentions things that can be seen in the images. Yet even here it is the visual image that directs the reader's attention to the social situation, gives justification to action, and embeds a character in a physical setting. In two panels from the story (Fig. 1), we first see the main character, Mr. Wooden Head, asking for his loved one's hand in marriage from her parents; then we see him in his own house, jumping for joy as his proposal has been accepted. In the meantime, all his furniture seems to have been overturned. The juxtaposition of these two images, if we only look at the visual information given in the two panels, suggests a process of intense positive experience. The physical shape of the body, body language, facial expression, and scenery are shown rather



Figure 1. From Rodolphe Töpffer, *M. Vieux-Bois*.

than described. In contrast, what the images cannot fully reveal on their own is the precise meaning of the visit to his loved one's house, the difference of location (it is possible to think that he is jumping in the same room as in the first image), the precise meaning of his emotions while he is jumping (joy), and the duration of this jumping (three hours).

By contrast to this example, many of the features of time condensation or expansion that Dorrit Cohn associates specifically with reported speech — or what she calls psycho-narration, “the narrator’s discourse about a character’s discourse” (14) — can be shown in graphic storytelling directly through images, without resorting to words. The different functions of summary, its iterative, durative, and mutative rhythms or patterns of recurrence, persistence, and gradual change (Cohn 35) can be established through purely visual cues or through the narrative breakdown between the panel images. For instance, in an open-frame panel from Hugo Pratt’s *Corto Maltese* (*La Ballade de la mer salée* [*The Ballad of the Salty Sea*]), we see the repetition of the same information in a chain of changing interlocutors (Fig. 2). The verbal content of the information — that a white young woman has been seen with a Maori man on the island — must only be related once. Similarly, the sense of the expansion of the moment, often realized in reported thought in modernist literature, can be achieved by purely visual means, for instance by enlarging the size of the picture panels or by eliminating the panel frame. Twentieth-century graphic narratives and comics invented such visual conventions



Figure 2. From Hugo Pratt, *Corto Maltese: Ballad of the Salt Sea*, 128.

and devices to portray repetition, temporal duration, and spatial change in order to avoid the use of a sustained narrative voice. The expressive function of the panel frame's shape, size, and focalization, pointing to changes in narrative space and time, as well as in the character's state of mind, was already part of Töpffer's narrative inventiveness. In Fig. 1, changes in the panel size and focalization between the images also accentuate changes in the narrative focus: the move from the polite encounter between the suitor and the parents in the living room to the expression of intense private joy in one's own room. The second image, the smaller one, brings the man closer to the reader's view, showing him from the front so that we can focus on the expression on his face.

In verbal narratives, reported thought and speech are often indistinguishable from scenic description, as for instance when the description of sights that a character sees or sounds that he hears, introduced by perception verbs, links his or her psyche with the scene (see Cohn 49). In graphic narratives, generally speaking, verbal scenic description becomes redundant, as images show scenes, as it were, at once, creating the effect of panoramic views, or presenting a character gazing at something

and reacting to it. Verbal “telescoping” can of course serve an interpretive purpose, as a pointer to the image and its details: in Töpffer’s stories the narrator’s comment actually accompanies each image. An extended use of verbal report of a character’s emotions and thoughts, however, can slow down the visual narrative flow considerably. The presentation of abstract thoughts and that of prolonged soliloquies pose special challenges to graphic narratives in this light. Reported thought is generally restricted to localized use, as in a scene from the epic western *Blueberry* (*Le Spectre aux balles d’or*), where the narrative box summarizes the character’s diffuse feelings (Fig. 3). The narrator explains that the dry basin just discovered by the character Prosit Luckner is already strangely familiar to him. The sensation of familiarity, the narrator explains, contributes to a growing sense of fear and the emergence of memories from the shady corners of his mind.

In classic twentieth-century third-person graphic novels, narrative comments are even more severely limited. The most common means for verbally presenting minds is dialogue, in interaction with visual information. The ironic treatment of dialogue in *Tintin au Tibet*, for instance, where Sherpa Tharkey calls for the yeti in the mountains of Tibet and gets no answer, and Captain Haddock shouts to his own echo, presents the characters’ minds in action. The scene is yet another instance of dialogue, and of action through reaction, that reveals something of the puzzling workings of the captain’s mind. After Tintin has explained that what they have heard is only the echo of Haddock’s voice, the captain still insists that the echo is a person with whom one could have a conversation (“The echo! No one asked him anything, the one up there!”). The interaction highlights the captain’s inclination to respond to any verbal stimulus, to take every word literally, and to assume that there must always be a speaker behind every word. In another example of the interaction between dialogue and visual information, consider a scene of an encounter on a beach from the same Corto Maltese story as above (Fig. 4). The first panels of this scene imply the character Cranio’s viewpoint and his interest in the girl lying on the beach. We see the girl first from behind Cranio’s back. The visual focus then shifts to the girl’s viewpoint as she asks about Corto’s whereabouts. The next panel, wider and wordless, reveals the man’s reflective mood, and implies a longer duration of time. The subsequent conversation then reveals, retrospectively, the content of his earlier thoughts and the reason why he needed some time to answer the question.

The localized use of the direct discourse of inner or silent speech is also relatively common in third-person classic examples. Unlike re-



Figure 3. From Charlier & Giraud, *Blueberry: Le Spectre aux balles d'or*, 32.
© DARGAUD 1972, by Charlier & Giraud.

ported thought that clearly belongs to the margins of the image, or to the narrative box detached from the image, inner or silent thoughts (direct discourse) can be placed within the picture panel with visual markers of its own, mainly by the thought balloon.⁵ The thought balloon forges a double link between the text and the image in that it simultaneously constitutes a message while its presence, position, and visual shape also convey information relating to the character's state of mind. The example I used from *Blueberry* (Fig. 3) involves an instance of inner speech, indicated by the thought balloon. In the balloon, we hear Prosit's direct reaction to what he sees. The bold letters of the sentence "au pied de ce monolithe, que j'ai ..." ("at the foot of this monolith that I ...") indicate the most important and emotionally charged content of these thoughts, the recollection of something that the character has done at the foot of the monolith. The possibility of integrating inner speech and thought within the graphic image, while indicating the emphasis or other qualities of the thoughts, makes this speech category convenient for the medium. Any extended use of this mode, however, naturally alters the balance between the visual and the verbal component in favor of the latter.

⁵Most typically, the thought balloon is connected to the character by a line of smaller bubbles, instead of the arrow-like tail common in speech balloons.



Figure 4. From Hugo Pratt, *Corto Maltese: Ballad of the Salt Sea*, 102.

Thus third-person behaviorist graphic narratives like *Tintin* and *Corto Maltese*, a genre still predominant in the medium, very rarely explore characters' psyche through indirect verbal discourse like reported thought. Instead, these narratives resort to direct verbal discourse through dialogue and inner speech, as well as multimedia narrative techniques to which I shall now turn.

The Agent of Narration

A second cluster of problems that affects mind construction in graphic novels is the mixed-media nature of the agent of narration. There is a wide range of options for the degree of the presence of verbal narrators in third-person graphic narratives. It is typical of the nearly pure reflector mode, as in *Tintin*, that the narrator is marginalized, strictly limited to the function of tying down the temporal and spatial relationship that links or separates the panels. The narrator thus indicates, when it is absolutely necessary, the passing and duration of time, flashback or flashforward, or

changes in space between episodes and scenes. A more recent example, Jason Lutes's historical graphic novel *Berlin: City of Stones* is consistent in giving no voice to any outside, heterodiegetic narrator. The only exception is the first panel of each chapter, which indicates the time frame — the month and the year — for the chapter at hand.

The question of the nature of a narrative agent in third-person graphic novels, with non-character-bound focalization, is in many ways similar to the debate around narrative voice and discursive source in film theory. The concept of a *cinematic narrator* continues to be probed in film studies for its dependency on the models of verbal and literary narration, and for its assumption that narrative fictions in all media have narrators (see, for instance, Thomson-Jones 2007; Gaut 2004). It is not simple to relate the mimetic character of cinema and ultimately the optical point-of-view of a camera, possibly presenting views that no single character of the story could see, to a mode of enunciation of a verbal narrative.⁶

True, there are many obvious differences between cinema and graphic narrative, some mentioned above. Here, however, I shall point to one significant similarity between the two media that has to do with their strategies of showing and means of focalization, the way they display a world and not simply narrate it. More precisely, what I wish to highlight is the crucial role of the distinct, spatially determined point-of-view of the image, the perspective from which the world is seen, whether this viewpoint is personal or impersonal. In graphic storytelling, this viewpoint obviously cannot be associated, as it is in narrative film, with the movements of a camera, but this does not make it more personal. The spatially determined perspective of the graphic image is usually marked, as in images in narrative film, by a relative independence from the center

⁶Narrative agency in graphic storytelling has attracted less theoretical and less narratologically grounded interest than in film studies, save a few exceptions such as Philippe Marion's notion of *graphic showing* or Thierry Groensteen's *system of spatial articulation*. Marion's coinage "monstrateur graphique" or *graphiateur* from his 1993 dissertation is in many ways similar to the various definitions of a cinematic narrator, or a filmic composition device. In fact, Marion derives this concept from André Gaudreault's theory of film narration which distinguishes between *narration*, including, for instance, the means of montage, and *monstration*, or showing, as in presenting images of characters' actions (Gaudreault 83–93). At the core of Marion's theory is the idea of the graphic line, a feature that he sees as specific to this art form. For Marion, the graphic line associates the written signs with the image in the expressive whole of "graphic identity" — *graphiation* being the agent responsible for both the graphic and the narrative enunciation in graphic storytelling (34–36). See also Baetens 2002.

of perception, e.g. from the character whom the story follows, and from the verbal narrative information that accompanies the image.

There is a wealth of existing possibilities for different kinds of internal and external visual focalization in graphic narratives, in both first- and third-person contexts. For instance, internal focalization is frequent in heterodiegetic narratives like Lutes's *Berlin*, where the changing angles of vision often (but only in one or a few panels at a time) prompt the reader to postulate a particular character's point of view based on the character's unique spatial position, and to see, as it were, through this character's eyes. This is the rough equivalent of heterodiegetic figural focalization in literary narratives where the viewpoint belongs to some character who is not the narrator. Such a subjective viewpoint is used, for instance, in a panel where we look at a picture book as if through the eyes of one of the minor characters (Fig. 5). In other cases, the angle of vision and center of perception may be partially subjective; that is, the field of vision, or the focalized object, is marked by or encompasses a subjective viewpoint. This occurs, for instance, when we look at a scene as if from behind a character or next to him, as happens in Fig. 6, where we follow a street scene with the eyes of a traffic controller (the second panel), moving behind him (the third panel), while we overhear his musings about stepping on a beetle and about what he has in his lunchbox. In panel three, where we look at the scene as if from behind him, in the *vision avec*, we watch alongside the character even if what we see may not exactly coincide with what he sees. In fact, while in this panel and in other views of the scene we see from positions where no perceiving character could be present, the overall perspective is strongly marked by the character's subjective perception and experience. The effect is in some ways analogous to free indirect speech, which can blend the narrator's and character's speech styles.⁷ Still, in a great number of externally focalized images, no supposition of an individualized perception can be made. For these panels, we may postulate some anonymous agent, a non-character-bound external focalizer.

⁷ Free indirect discourse (FID) entails, without being clearly internal or external, both a reference to the perceiving subject and the narrating instance (see Cohn's "narrated monologue," 99–140 and Mildorf's article in this volume). In film studies, Charles Forceville has suggested that studying techniques like character-bound camera movement in terms of FID, specifically when such techniques create ambiguity between the external "narrator" and the character, could contribute to a transmedial narratology (133). I believe this to be an interesting suggestion for the study of visual narratives in general as long as we are ready to modify our understanding and use of speech-act categories in the mixed-media environment.



Figure 5. From Jason Lutes, *Berlin: City of Stones*, 39. Reprinted by permission of the author.



Figure 6. From Jason Lutes, *Berlin: City of Stones*, 21. Reprinted by permission of the author.

These widely drawn categories are not absolutely distinct from one another, nor are they the only options. For instance, the distinction between internal and external focalization may be complicated, and rendered ambiguous as in my last example, by fields of vision that appear to be individualized even when there is no identified perceiver-character.

Variable focalization is common; different modes often slide into each other. The mixed-media nature of narration, moreover, requires that the reader pay attention to the changing relations between the verbal and the visual component.

In Lutes's graphic novel, the transitions between the impersonal "camera" viewpoint and the interior visual focalization links a character's mind with the exterior field of vision. Similar changes in the windows of focalization take place in most classical examples of behaviorist graphic narratives. In *Berlin*, the shifts in visual perspective are further complicated by the way verbal narration, in a number of localized manifestations, shifts into the direct discourse of character-narrators. Two characters, Kurt Severing and Marthe Müller, take turns as narrators, speaking as if directly through quotations from their diaries; in such passages thought report is also used.

Visual focalization constitutes an interface between the scope of the image and the verbal component in constructing the sense of a mind. All verbal narrative commentary necessarily suggests a relation with the pictorial information and the visual angle of the images that it accompanies, but what is seen does not have to be in harmony with verbal information. Indeed, in order to detect whether some graphic narrative is externally or internally focalized we have to look for both linguistic and visual indicators, and for the relations between the two. In particular, the cases of heterodiegetic internal focalization and of the ambiguous *vision avec obtund* the analogy between the techniques of visual narrative and verbal deixis. It is often precisely the tensions and transformations between the visual features of the immediately observable perspective and the verbal narration that move the story forward in this medium. The subjective point-of-view shots show a field of vision as if immediately and simultaneously with the character's act of perception. Such perspectives can be frequent, as in *Berlin*, but they are almost never extensively used. Instead, they alternate with the more numerous ambiguous or objective points of view. The impersonal agent of the "camera" angle, far from being an exercise in indirect presentation by a zero-level or so-called omniscient focalizer, also pretends to show things directly, as if immediately, without a sense of a filtering consciousness. The non-character-bound perspective, generally speaking, is coded for transparency: while showing and framing a field of vision, it does not presuppose a human narrator or a reporter. Depending on the narrative context, however, as in the scene above, the objective shot can be marked by a character's subjective field of vision and perception, or encompass it, and thus bear traces of his thoughts and emotions.

Interaction of Word and Image in First-Person Graphic Narration

The idea of a continuing-consciousness frame as Alan Palmer (15) defines it, that is, the reader's creation of a sense of consciousness out of the isolated passages of the text that relate to a particular character, as well as the notion of thought-action continuum (*ibid.*) — meaning that action and consciousness descriptions are often inseparable in fictional narratives — are useful tools for analyzing homodiegetic graphic narratives where the narrator is a character in the story and where the narrator's voice is sustained throughout the story.

In Guy Delisle's travel memoir from North Korea, *Pyongyang*, the narrator's words provoke a sense of a continuous "voice-over" in the reader's mind. Tensions between verbal narration, scenic showing, and visual focalization are crucial to an understanding of the story. The narrative employs various means of visual focalization, from the subjective perspective to the objective camera eye. The story begins with the narrating "I"'s arrival at a North Korean airport where, due to economic reasons, no electric light can be used. The scene is first shown from an impersonal, exterior perspective. It soon becomes evident, however, that the viewpoint actually belongs to the passenger going through customs, the narrator himself. The subjective viewpoint is finally evoked in the panel where the eyeline is matched with the character who is looking at the shadowy man who greets him (Fig. 7). The subjective perspective is then affirmed gradually through several changes in the windows of focalization, from the external showing of the scene to the main character's angle of vision and finally to his verbal self-communion.

Another aspect that is significant in this passage, and typical of many first-person graphic narratives that are common today, is the presence of two first persons in this homodiegetic narrative: the narrating voice and the experiencing self who is seen. The voice and the view of the narrating "I" can coalesce in one panel but then they can again be severed: the narrator re-emerges in the following panels as a figure seen from the outside. The transition is gradual, so that we are first shown the narrator's shadow emerging from the side of the panel's frame, as if in between the interior and the exterior of the panel, whereas the next panel shows him from an external viewpoint (Fig. 8). It is important to note that narration in *Pyongyang* builds on transitions of this sort between the narrative of the mind and the showing of the body, and the act of perception that in itself is split between the perspectives of the experiencing and the narrating self. A whole range of effects is produced by these transitions.

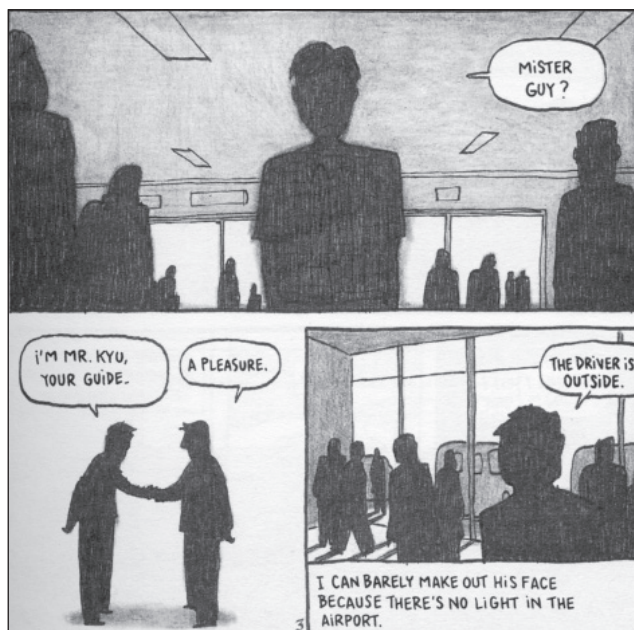


Figure 7. From Guy Delisle, *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea*, 3.
© L'Association/Guy Delisle; Courtesy of Drawn & Quarterly.

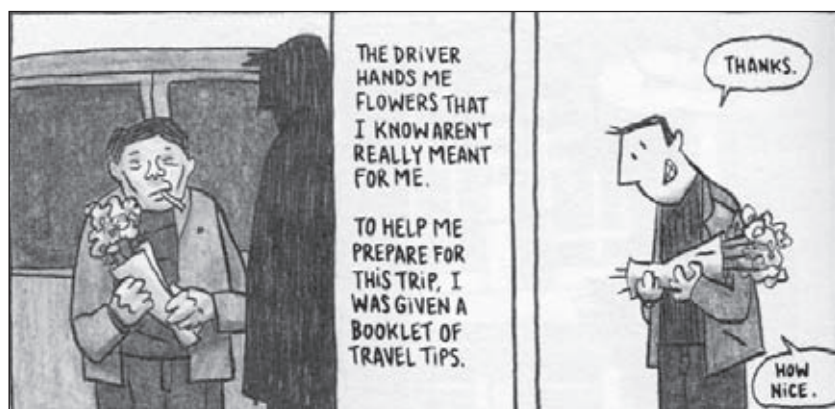


Figure 8. From Guy Delisle, *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea*, 4.
© L'Association/Guy Delisle; Courtesy of Drawn & Quarterly.

By contrast, in American artist Paul Hornschemeier's autobiographical fiction *Mother, Come Home* there is an unusually sustained use of reported thought, related to two specific features of the story: it helps to create the temporal perspective of self-narration — the narrator's investigation of his childhood experience, and it contributes to the narrator's concern with the state of another person's mind. Self-narration here manipulates not only the distance between the narrating, verbal "I," and the experiencing self of the visual figure, but also the disparity between the narrator's present self and his childhood self. This is to say that the narrative presents the narrator's childhood self as if to assess it. The story about the death of the narrator's mother and his father's subsequent deep depression, eventually leading to suicide, is told through a perspective many years in the future. Reported thought is used frequently when the narrator tries to understand the diffuse thoughts and feelings that he had at the age of seven, and the decisions he made at that time. For instance, the narrator explains that one long walk to the graveyard, which we see in the images, marked an important turn in the boy's understanding and experience (Fig. 9). In his summary of these memories, the narrator also elaborates on the cognitive and linguistic disparity between the narrating adult and the child. On several occasions he points to the fact that as a boy he did not understand what was happening around him, especially in the mind of his father (Fig. 10). The child's alienation, and his cognitive and temporal distance from the narrating "I," are further visually dramatized by the lion mask that is often drawn on his face.

Conclusion

What does this survey of the strategies for presenting minds in graphic storytelling, placing graphic stories in the broad class of narrative forms, reveal to us about the specific constraints and options for presenting minds in this medium?

It shows that graphic narration subjects to doubt the theoretical pre-suppositions, prevalent in much narrative theory that is based on literary narrative fiction, concerning the distinction between telling and showing. In a mixed-media visual narrative vast areas of mind presentation are not suitable for analysis with the help of the concepts of narrator and voice, or with the help of the speech-category approach (at least not in its predominant form of the verbal norm). The question of narratorial authority, enunciation and control — Who tells the tale? Who authorizes narrative meaning? Who controls it? — must be posed differently when speech categories interact with graphic images.



Figure 9. From Paul Hornschemeier, *Mother, Come Home*. Reprinted by permission of the author.



Figure 10. From Paul Hornschemeier, *Mother, Come Home*. Reprinted by permission of the author.

In reading visual narratives we often *see* the mind in action from a focalized perspective, or through a figure in action. However, it is often doubtful whether third-person graphic narratives involve a sustained continuing-consciousness frame in the same sense as we can perceive it in literary discourse. The framing and the focalization of the panel image typically bear traces of personal or impersonal intelligence, but the attribution of these traces to a continuum of a single individual consciousness is often impossible. Recent narrative theories are not adequate for

explaining the medium-specific restraints of narrativity in mixed-media works.

The understanding of the workings of the characters' and the narrator's mind is certainly important in most graphic novels and non-fiction. Graphic narratives homogenize their visual compositional techniques and sensibilities to create a sense of a coherent narrative whole or to foreground elements of a persistent graphic style. In regard to the so-called behaviorist narratives, which are still dominant at least in newspaper comics, the reader can also always construct a sense of consciousness from mere descriptions of behavior, when there are no inside views (see Palmer 140). What helps in this construction is that the impersonal point of view, though revealing things that the character could not see, are often related to, or encompass, or are synchronized with, the character's field of vision. They show scenes as if from behind the character's back or by his side, present him looking at something, or include his point of view within a broader field of vision in other ways. Therefore, what does seem to matter from the standpoint of narrativity in much graphic storytelling, first-person and third-person narratives alike, is that the character-narrator is regularly shown in the images and that his field of vision, or observable action, is included in them. The showing of the subject and his field of vision, from one moment to another, embedded in a setting and engaged in action and observation, functions as a cohesion device.

The examples that I have discussed all portray characters in action within social environments. The permanence of an identifiable character is not a necessary prerequisite of narrativity in this medium, however. I could have gone beyond the character-driven process of presenting minds in graphic storytelling. Thierry Groensteen has, for instance, listed ways of dispensing with the presence of a stable protagonist and still telling a story in comics (19–20).⁸ The impersonal perspective of a visual narrative can create a sense of a storyworld simply by showing a world in a sequence of images. At this point, I will leave open the question whether such showing requires a sense of any identifiable continuing consciousness behind the showing.⁹ I would assume, however, keeping in mind the

⁸The presentation of minds in these non-character-centered stories, or stories where the character's physical shape remains obscure or subject to endless transformations, and stories where the characters keep changing from one panel to another, would require a separate study.

⁹The sense of a continuing consciousness can be made explicit in cases where the character is not seen but we hear his continuing verbal narration. One of Groensteen's examples is the famous page from Winsor McCay's *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend* where the character attends his own funeral.

major role of the authorial focalization of the impersonal “camera eye” in all graphic storytelling, that the sense of a continuing consciousness, at least in the meaning that Palmer gives this term, is not a necessary semiotic channel for mediating information in such narratives. As the ongoing debate over the notion of a cinematic narrator has proved, it is not as simple to argue about visual narratives, where the presence of the narrative agent is only implicit, as it may be about heterodiegetic literary narratives, that the viewers/readers necessarily attribute stylistic features to a hypothetical narrator persona or a character.¹⁰ Behaviorist and first-person graphic storytelling, likewise, constantly exploits the various possibilities of external, objective viewpoint.¹¹

On the whole, an important aspect in graphic narratives is the versatility of the forms of relation between verbal narration and visual focalization. Graphic narratives in general manipulate this relation and cause it to undergo changes in the course of the narrative. It is rare, for instance, to find a graphic story that would obliterate the authorial focalization of the impersonal camera eye throughout the narrative. The subjective point-of-view panels typically remain localized. Were this not the case, the effect would be awkward, as in a film where the camera eye could never leave a character’s viewpoint and the focalizer could never be seen from the outside except through reflections in mirrors and the like.

Study of the cognitive construction of consciousness, especially in regard to behaviorist fictional narrative and contextual character portrayal, is potentially helpful for understanding the presentation of minds in graphic narratives. Alan Palmer’s work on fictional minds is important

¹⁰ Fludernik notes that, despite the theoretical weakness of the communicational model that presupposes the existence of a narrator in each narrative, in terms of reader response to individual literary texts, “the tendency to attribute stylistic features to a hypothetical narrator persona and/or a character is a simple fact” (2001: 622).

¹¹ While developing what she calls visual narratology, Mieke Bal has admitted that even if the distinction between external and internal focalizer may hold in visual arts, this distinction is not always easy to point out (163). In her comments on Ken Apte’s paintings, Bal refers to a similar and potentially ambiguous relation that I have discussed above between the “external” positioning of the figures who are shown in the image and the direction of their gaze, hands, or other gestures that may call our attention to specific aspects within the space of the image. Other types of challenging contrasts and fusions of internal and external perspectives in graphic storytelling include the function of the panel frame as a potentially identifiable frame of vision. Inside a sequence of images, the panel frame can easily alternate between indicating either external or internal vision, or narratorial or figural focalization. Further, the images (and words) in a panel can also point to events that take place outside the frame and are, therefore, only indirectly linked with what is seen.

in this respect in pointing out the often unjustified privileging of “intrinsic” character portrayal in classical narratological approaches, based on modernist figural literary narratives of inner speech, at the expense of reported speech and thought or the “showing” of a mind in action. Nevertheless, graphic third-person novels differ from third-person realist and modernist novels, which are Palmer’s main focus, in that both inner speech and reported thought usually serve only limited, local purposes. At the same time, the meaning of a “behaviorist,” “neutral,” or “objective” narrative may have to be rethought in this medium-specific context where the reader’s cognitive ability to read minds is tested not only in words and images but in placing the two components in interaction. Transitions between internal and external visual focalization are frequent in graphic narratives and even essential to their understanding, while shifts between direct and indirect verbal modes of narration are not as smooth as they may be in literary narratives. Inner or silent speech can be visually marked, integrated within the space of the image in thought balloons. In first-person narratives, the thought balloons can be further accompanied by a continuing narratorial voice, which is differently marked off in the space of the image. Indirect speech, by contrast, as in reported thought of a third-person consciousness, remains doubly indirect, difficult to place within the image, and always in danger of repeating the information given in the image.

In the mixed-media context of graphic storytelling, however, the directness or indirectness of speech can only be adequately evaluated against the visual information of the image, just as the personality or impersonality of the viewpoint in the image must be assessed against the verbal content. I hope that it has already become evident that the study of mind construction in graphic narratives needs to go beyond the speech-category approach, and beyond the categories of focalization that are solely based on literary examples, to consider speech acts in interaction with visual information and the act of showing. Moreover, the study of mind construction in graphic storytelling can benefit from examining the act of showing as a form of thinking, and graphic caricature (of face, gesture, pose) as a form of perception. Our understanding of the strategies of focalization in graphic narratives can also draw from research on narration in films and theater. In turn, the investigation of the means of graphic narration can contribute to our notions of the presentation of minds in narrative acts across media.

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