SILENT AND SEMI-SILENT ARGUMENTS IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL[1]

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Abstract

This study focuses on the iconographic channel of the graphic novel as a particular occurrence of silence. In Comics, images provide not only the data required for the development of narration; they also render available the concrete circumstances of the enunciation and often orient the reader towards the identification of language in action, or towards the selection of a particular communicative intention, a process which coincides with Saville-Troike's silences carrying illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect (1985), or with Kurzon's silences – intentional signifiers alternating with an utterable signified. Through the analysis of concrete scenes taken from three graphic novels dealing with sociopolitical contexts of conflict – Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000), Folman and Polonsky's *Waltz with Bashir* (2009) and Sacco's *Palestine* (2007) – we identify two different sets of arguments: (1) semi-silent arguments resulting from the interplay between verbal and visual language & (2) silent arguments emerging within an entirely visual, extra-linguistic scene, where images alone regulate the quantity or the quality of information given at a certain point of narration with the aim of leading the addressee to a certain tacit conclusion.

Keywords: Silence; Graphic novel; Comics; Meaning-construction; (Visual-) argumentation; *Persopolis*; *Waltz with Bashir;Palestine*; Cooperation principle.

1. Introduction

In general, graphic novels convey meaning through various interactions between two concurring communication channels[2] – text and image. The range of these interactions may vary from images perfectly matching the text – and thus consolidating a verbal message – to images creating different kinds of gaps with relation to the text, with the aim of promoting contradictions or irony.

This study focuses on the iconographic channel of the graphic novel as a particular occurrence of silence. In Comics, images provide not only the data required for the development of narration; they also render available the concrete circumstances

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[1]This paper is based on a talk I've presented at the 12th International Pragmatics Conference, Manchester, U.K., 3-8 July 2011.

[2]Cf. Abbott (1986), Carrier (2000), Chute & DeKoven (2006), Eisner (1985), Groensteen (1999 & 2005), Kohn (2003), McCloud (1993 & 2000), Mitchell (1986 & 1994), Panofsky (1993), Peeters (2003), Pomier (2005), Töpffer (1833) (in Groensteen& Peeters, 1994), Varnum& Gibbons (2002), among many others.

of the enunciation and often orient the reader towards the identification of language in action (Austin 1962), or towards the selection of a particular communicative intention, a process which coincides with Saville-Troike's silences carrying illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect (1985), or with Kurzon's silences – intentional signifiers or marks (and not: non-marks) – alternating with an utterable signified, i.e. a content that may be expressed verbally (Kurzon 1998)[3]. Moreover, pictorial messages in Comics, as much as silence[4], may be beneficial in many ways, for instance when the message is too delicate or controversial to be put into words. In other terms, these elements of a nonverbal nature prove to be indispensable for meaning-making, in general, and as we hope to show in the following paragraphs, for the generation of arguments, in particular.

A word on argumentation: If we bear in mind the fact that Comics are not specifically intended to persuade, one wonders how argumentation could be of any relevance to the realm of Comics and graphic novels. However, and as Amossy (2008) argues, a text which does not exclusively aim at convincing, does not seek any less to exert influence over its addressees or to adjust their standpoints. Amossy (2008) thus distinguishes between "argumentative purpose" and "argumentative dimension": The former being an intended attempt at persuasion, whereas in the latter the endeavor of persuasion is indirect and often undisclosed.

This amplified conception of argumentation – rendering Comics and graphic novels a rightful vessel for the practice of argumentation – allows us to look into the silent and semi-silent components used for the purpose of arguing in favor of a point of view in the graphic novel.

We claim that the argumentative formation is not exclusive to voiced messages. We adhere to semioticians such as Barthes (1964, 1977), Bergman (2000), Dillon (1999), Eco (1976), Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) for whom iconography is not only a legitimate vehicle for the transmission of relevant information[5] but also constitutes, at least for this specific purpose, a language in its own right. Images, whether isolated or in a sequence, can have a persuasion goal; they can, inter alia, stir up the addressees' emotions so as to lead them towards action or at least so as to modify their positions[6]. Moreover, the visual organization or "syntax"[7] may function as a premise from which an aimed conclusion is to be drawn, similarly to discourse, where the order of propositions may be of significance to the promotion of a certain argument[8]. Let us also recall that in addition to logical reasoning, the argumentative discourse comprises a component of seduction[9]. It is clear that the esthetics of the image satisfies this last function.

Through the analysis of concrete scenes taken from three graphic novels dealing with contexts of sociopolitical conflict – Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000), Folman and

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[3]See also Saville-Troike (1982: 144) for the influence of silence in understanding the message content, and Saville-Troike (2006: 379) for silences as signifiers. Consider as well Kendon (1983), Jaworski (1993: 78) and Ephratt (2008, 2011) for voluntary, communicative silences. Let us just point out that in contrast with Kurzon (1998), for whom intentional silences are verbal but non-vocal, according to Ephratt's mapping (2011), silences are vocal as much as verbal.

[4] According to Saville-Troike (1985: 14), for instance, silence may be used when there is a risk to transgress religious taboos.

[5]In which the signified is associated to a visual signifier.

[6]Cf. Varga (1989).

[7]Cf. Barthes (1977).

[8]Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958).

[9]Cf. Grize (1981).

Polonsky's *Waltz with Bashir* (2009) and Sacco's *Palestine* (2007) – we will identify two different sets of arguments:

(1) semi-silent arguments resulting from the interplay between verbal and visual language (see also Adler 2011);
&

(2) silent arguments emerging within an entirely visual, extra-linguistic scene, where images alone regulate the quantity or the quality of information given at a certain point of narration with the aim of leading the addressee to a certain tacit conclusion.

In the context of political dissension, where there exist several ways to seize reality, the graphic novel may aim at mobilizing the audience's adhesion to the issues under examination (Perelman's & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958: 5), or at bringing a targeted audience to action (Grize 1981:30))[10]. In a more attenuated tone, we could at least say that these graphic novels seek to expose an alternative approach to weigh a given reality.

In the first set of arguments, we have a speech-silence relation in which the visual channel may be seen as a lack of physical manifestation of a voiced signifier. This does not by any means imply that the visual channel is less communicative than the textual channel: We claim that both channels are intended as signs, both are intentional and thus significant, both allow for inferences. Only the nature of the communicative signifiers in the interaction is different.

The second set comprises entirely silent arguments which may be seen as a kind of silence within silence. If we take into account the overall artistic style or standard of the work, we will be able to detect those instances where the author intentionally silences pictorial elements that the receiver would expect to find in a certain visual context. Likewise, sometimes the author adds graphic elements that we would not expect to find in a certain place. In both cases, the artistic manipulation is a cue for the receiver to go beyond the overt visual message.

Both cases agree with Kurzon's (2007:1677) "thematic silences" or with Ephratt's (2011: § 5.3.1) "unsaid messages"[11] in a sense that the addresser chooses silence as a convenient strategy in order to avoid a particular topic supposedly known to the addressee. In the political graphic novels under examination, silence enables the addresser to refrain from speaking out a certain critique, assuming that the addressee will be attentive enough to detect fully the critique while apparently reading a personal story and following the events of the narrative.

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[10] Let us remind that Grize's (1981: 30) conception of argumentation is dialogical in the sense that it is always constructed for someone.

[11]See also Ephratt's "eloquent silences" (2008) linguistically replacing speech and having the status of symbols. According to Ephratt (2012), silence (more precisely: "Verbal silence") is a means of communication within human interaction in a sense that along with speech, it belongs within the verbal – linguistic – phase of the communication process, or in a sense that the speaker chooses to use silence as a variant of a certain linguistic component. Hence, the 'communicative' dimension of silence.

Let us just quickly point out that silences occurring between the frames, in the space called the ''gutter'', where the signifier is equivalent to zero in the sense of complete absence of material support, are not accounted for in the present study[12].

2. Satrapi's *Persepolis*

Persepolis is an autobiographical graphic novel depicting the life of the author between 1974 and 1994 in Iran, during the Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. Three scenes will enable us to analyze the functioning of silence and its contribution to argument structuring. The first scene is taken from the opening chapter of the first volume – *Le foulard* (The veil). This chapter sets the tone for the rest of the work: Satrapi and her friends are forced to wear a veil at school (in 1980)[13].

The chosen frame[14] shows two groups of women demonstrating for and against the veil. The narrator's comment apparently matches the visual scene: We see two groups opposed according to their respective political interests (on the left, pro-veil – the text associated to this group of women and their clothing substantiate this understanding – on the right, against the veil: Again, for corroboration we see the outfit and we read the repetitive slogan 'liberty'). The internal cohesion of each camp around a common ideological denominator, the gestural communication and finally the rhythmical repetition of slogans also contribute to the production of a stereotypic demonstration scene.

However, two elements in the scene catch our eyes in a way that leads us to the understanding that the visual channel is far more than just an illustration of the text. Its additional details as well as its absent ones (absent in relation to what is expected in a certain place) help generate a message delivered in perfect silence.

Following Grice (1989), we argue that visual communication may also obey a basic principle of co-operation between addresser and addressee. Grice's maxim of quantity, which makes up alongside the quality, relation and manner maxims the co-operation principle, requires that verbal contributions (which, again, we transpose to image) should contain neither more nor less information than is necessary. In our case, however, the quantity maxim is violated twice: In the first case the transgression is due

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[12]For the notion of "gutter", see McCloud (1993). For argumentative silences in the gutter, see Adler (2011).

[13]See alsoChute (2008) for other aspects related to this graphic novel (for example, Chute deals with the notion of ethics as it applies to autobiographical/ political graphic narrative).

[14] Also available at: http://www.google.co.il/imgres?start=13&num=10&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:he:official&biw=1280&bih=534&tbm=isch&tbnid=PuCNh8xCDGFyRM:&imgrefurl=http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/node/11832&docid=Yb6AJha5yj88HM&imgurl=http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/files/authors/952/freedom%252520v.%252520the%252520veil%252520.jpg&w=800&h=369&ei=IHVdUMOVH4GH0AWfqYCYCg&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=351&vpy=266&dur=5895&hovh=152&hovw=331&tx=175&ty=73&sig=117346417109573114469&page=2&tbnh=127&tbnw=276&ndsp=23&ved=1t:429,r:5,s:20,i:19 or at:
http://www.google.co.il/imgres?start=310&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:he:official&biw=1280&bih=534&tbm=isch&tbnid=NB28KpzfSmVfjM:&imgrefurl=http://www.tanger-experience.com/%3Fcat%3D24&docid=lbl9Xg51BcXiVM&imgurl=http://www.tanger-experience.com/wp-content/themes/lifestyle_10/images/2012/07/persepolis1.png&w=600&h=262&ei=13ddUIntNYmy0QW0k4DoDw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=228&vpy=142&dur=2795&hovh=148&hovw=340&tx=189&ty=111&sig=117346417109573114469&page=15&tbnh=123&tbnw=282&ndsp=19&ved=1t:429,r:18,s:300,i:58

to a lack of information one expects to find, in the second case, to additional information which seems, at least at first sight, irrelevant to a certain context.

If we bear in mind that our addresser is guided, as a rule, by the principle of co-operation, this so-called violation becomes the source for the generation of implicatures[15], since while saying or, in our case, showing something in a certain way, the addresser makes us understand that this was a necessary operation to communicate certain facts. Following Sperber and Wilson (1989 [1986]), we may also suggest that the receiver takes as axiomatic the fact that the communicator did everything to transmit the most relevant possible information with an aim of inferring certain pragmatic consequences.

In the case of the chosen scene, the violation of the quantity maxim consists, on the one hand, in the removal of the contour lines for the group of women in black (those who are pro-veil) and, on the other hand, in the addition of a detail considered as non-customary for wakefulness: That of the closed eyes (for the same group of women). As a message, the observer comes to the conclusion that only the 'white group' (the women who are against the veil) represents the 'standard' situation. The image discloses that in the demonstration, verbalized in a totally neutral tone (says the text: "Everywhere in the streets there were demonstrations for and against the veil"), there is nonetheless a favorite group, a group to which not only Satrapi, but also any reasonable human being should adhere, if s/he wants to preserve his or her contour lines or, without the metaphor, his or her individuality and conscious, free, rational thinking.

Thus, this seemingly descriptive scene ends up turning into a scene of criticism. The closed eyes contribute their share to this criticism, suggesting that these women have chosen to follow this new dogmatic universe being imposed on them blindly, without protest, or that they simply do not take a hard look at reality. That is why we recognize here an attempt – through the image – to achieve a modification of the addressee's epistemic universe, to direct the audience towards a certain tacit conclusion, without pretending to have a monopoly of the situation[16].

Indirectness, or the fact of conveying unstated meaning (Tannen 1989), and we add 'with the aim of leading the addressee to join the call against despotism', is supported here by iconographic data referring to a common encyclopedic knowledge[17]. To say it straightforward: 'To obey blindly, especially when personal freedom is at stake, is inconceivable'.

If we borrow from Searle (1979) the notion of indirect speech acts where a primary 'illocutionary' act is performed indirectly through a secondary 'literal' act, we may recognize in the image an illocutionary act diverging from the textual content (and even from the plain visual content depicting a situation of demonstration). This illocutionary act consists in the delegitimizing or the disqualification of the submissive women on the left (or, at least, in a self-differentiation from the 'black group'). In McCloud's terms (1993: 154), we will identify in this scene an "additive" combination in which "words *amplify* or *elaborate* on the image and *vice versa*", rather than a "duo-

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[15] Cf.also Fillmore (1971), Grice (1957, 1969), Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1986), Searle (1982), Wright (1975).

[16] Taking as a basis Grice's concept of 'implicature' (1957: 380) "to get someone to think something" (as opposed to 'explicit', which is equivalent to "to tell something"), we identify in the visual strategies a supplementary tentative for communication.

[17]Groensteen (1999) holds that in the interpretation of images, the observer refers to an encyclopedic knowledge as well as to the network created by the ensemble of images.

specific" panel where "both words and pictures send essentially the *same message*" (ibid. p. 153).

It is yet possible to apply another theoretic approach in order to decode the visual channel: We might say that this image is 'polyphonic' (following Mikhail Bakhtin) in the sense that several different 'voices' or points of view interact on more or less equal terms: One 'voice' is that depicting the situation of demonstration, and expressing itself openly by creating a seemingly symmetrical protest scene. The other 'voice' might be appreciated by having recourse to symbolism or to an encyclopedic luggage (for the closed eyes) as well as to the work's visual standard (for the lack of the contour lines, which does not conform to the work's general artistic style). Thus the addressee ends up discovering that the illustrated situation is not at all symmetrical. The parsimony or, on the other hand, abundance of visual data enables the sender of the message to convey criticism while 'saving face' in case his or her interpretation of a certain reality is not well received by the audience (the communicator can thus deny having meant certain facts).

In an article entitled "Silence: Anything But", Tannen (1985: 97) points out two advantages of silence as an intentional strategy: Rapport and defensiveness. Says Tannen: "The rapport benefit comes from being understood without putting one's meaning on record, so that understanding is seen not as the result of putting meaning into words […] but rather as a greater understanding of shared perspective, experience and intimacy." Whereas "the defensive value of silence comes from omitting to say something negative – not confronting potentially divisive information […] or being able later to deny having meant what may not be received well". Tannen's conclusion, highly relevant for our case, is that "the meaning of silence in interaction […] can be understood to grow out of the two overriding goals of human communication: To be connected to other people, and to be independent".

For the sake of comparison, let us consider another scene belonging to the chapter "the bicycle"[18] (*Persepolis*, 1st volume): The scene reports a massacre committed by the Iranian police forces during which 400 victims were locked up in a movie theatre before it was set on fire. The frame at the very centre of the page shows the policemen with eyes closed. Despite their being representatives of the totalitarian regime, the visual channel does not spare the contour lines here. The question is, of course, why. Is it, again, because of the overall artistic standard of the work? But, if it were indeed the case, why associating a strategy of individuation to the 'fanatic' camp? Wouldn't this tactic be contradictory to Satrapi's principles? In fact, this strategy, in the context of violence and brutality, allows Satrapi to express her profound frustration and to intensify her condemnation: She is communicating that among all these soldiers, there is not even one individual who prevented the slaughter. As individuals, someone could have done something to save the victims. Instead, each one of them deliberately chose not to look, which makes them entirely responsible for the crime, according to the author.

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[18]Also available at:
http://www.google.co.il/imgres?hl=en&client=firefox-a&sa=X&rls=org.mozilla:he:official&biw=1280&bih=534&tbm=isch&tbnid=tVsDEBZrgXQgVM:&imgrefurl=http://satrapism.wordpress.com/artword-and-the-visual-persepolis/&docid=v1erTYbU27dIeM&imgurl=http://satrapism.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/kic0000022.jpg&w=1212&h=482&ei=jXZdUNfpLqLK0AWM34H4Dg&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=569&vpy=172&dur=115&hovh=141&hovw=356&tx=189&ty=89&sig=117346417109573114469&page=1&tbnh=119&tbnw=252&start=0&ndsp=16&ved=1t:429,r:2,s:0,i:69

The third and last scene from *Persepolis* belongs to the chapter "the heroes" (first volume). Satrapi gives an account of the release of 3000 political prisoners a few days after the fall of the Shah, two of whom were friends of the family. At the bottom of the page we see two frames portraying the identity of these two ex-prisoners. The information given in each case consists of the name and the first name, the date and the birthplace, the cause and the date of imprisonment, the date of release and the political conviction. This data accompanies, in both cases, a full body portrait of the ex-prisoner under consideration. We will not focus on the absence of the hands, which may symbolically communicate the defenselessness of these so-called heroes. Instead, we will turn straight to the shadow cast from these two characters, which is in a shape of a tomb stone. Under perfect silence, what seems at first glance as an identity card becomes a death certificate after a closer look, where the cause of death is equivalent to the "political conviction" declared in the card. This additional information results not only from the discrepancy between text and image, but also from the work's overall visual standard. In other words, this is the only time where we have such a representation of the shadow, and therefore we cannot help but identifying a message through this strategy.

Indeed, Satrapi discloses later on that shortly after the Islamic Republic seized power, Moshen, one of the "heroes", is assassinated. As for Siamak, the other ex-prisoner or so-called hero, although he managed to cross the border with his family, he hasn't completely escaped death: His sister was executed in his place by the Islamic revolution guards. The shadow in a shape of a tomb stone thus moderates the relaxation or the temporary euphoria created by the narrative, by anticipating what the young Satrapi, the protagonist, does not know yet: In certain political contexts wellbeing is nothing but an illusion (only Satrapi the author is aware of that). The receiver is supposed to detect this message and understand that this event is nothing but a fool's paradise built on very shaky foundations. Consequently our enthusiasm falls just as rapidly as it rose.

3. *Waltz with Bashir*, by Ari Folman & David Polonsky

The documentary graphic novel *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman & David Polonsky raises the question of Israel's complicity in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres following the assassination of Lebanon's President-Elect, Bashir Gemayel.

In perfect agreement with the Kahane commission Report issued in 1983, the graphic novel makes it clear that even if it is the Christian militia (including the Phalangists) who had conducted the slaughter (as a revenge for the assassination of their leader), the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) did not do enough to prevent the massacre, and that Defense Minister Ariel Sharon had an indirect liability, for he should have anticipated the mass murder. In other words, the Israeli soldiers and the political echelon may have had no direct responsibility for the massacres during the Lebanon war, but they surely had participated passively: Among other things, the IDF surrounded the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and controlled their entrances and exits; they occupied multi-story buildings that served as observation posts and provided logistical support to the Phalangists (for instance, they used to fire illuminating flares at night).

Even if it isn't until the end of the massacre (and the end of the graphic novel) that Folman, the narrator, pieces together the memories of his involvement and actually

stores the horror in his system, the scene on pages 114-115[19] clearly indicates that the soldiers could have read the signs. Says the text of the last frame of page 114: "We were on the roof and we saw the sky lit by the flares… a light which undeniably contributed to what was going on below"[20]. Folman's friend, a psychologist, asks him – very tactfully – whether these flares were fired by the troops to which Folman belonged in order to support the Phalangists, because Folman himself, at this stage of the narrative, does not entirely recall events[21]. He suffers from some sort of posttraumatic stress disorder. But the fact of having suppressed events as a strategy of self-preservation does not manage to actually erase his and his comrades' involvement. Indeed, the last frame of page 114 brings an answer to the question of who actually fired the illumination flares, and the first frame of page 115[22], containing no text, zooms in on Folman. Now, is it really Folman? Folman may have not yet recollected this episode as a protagonist but, as a narrator, he supplies silent help: The juxtaposed frames disclose an identical human profile (one in the dark, the other one in the light), which makes the verification efficient: Folman was indeed one of those soldiers.

In addition, at this stage of the narrative, the recurring hallucination from which Folman suffers and in which he sees himself and his soldier friends bathing at night by the seaside in Beirut under a shower of flares is finally given a plausible explanation. Some pages earlier (p. 98) the psychologist explains that the sea stands for fear and emotions. Now we understand that Folman has suppressed his involvement, and that all is true in his vision (him, his soldier friends, the flares) except the localization and the context.

The second scene (the grid on page 61) suggests that, at least according to Folman, the whole chain of command is to be blamed even if some individuals are obviously guiltier than others. At the top: Ariel Sharon (his image occupies the first panel of the central grid, and is associated to the text "and then came the order"), next to him Division Commander Brigadier, general Amos Yaron and so on until Folman's partner, Frankel. But it is through the breakfasts that we face the silent message: Sharon's breakfast is not typically Israeli. He eats a steak with eggs (in addition, he is brandishing a knife, and his telephone is red)[23]. General Yaron does not have a real

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[19]In the Hebrew (original) version.

[20]Also available at:

http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_JtXuc1S0rE4/Sdvgc0RZs5I/AAAAAAAABOE/A2wEgs0yMdw/s400/Vals3.jpg

[21] Also available at:

http://www.google.co.il/imgres?hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:he:official&biw=1280&bih=534&tbm=isch&tbnid=KM7zb09mMD2l-M:&imgrefurl=http://www.coffeecoffeeandmorecoffee.com/archives/2009/07/coffee_break_107.html&docid=Bwh1b6nTHvfEQM&imgurl=http://www.coffeecoffeeandmorecoffee.com/archives/waltz%252520with%252520bashir.jpg&w=597&h=338&ei=-3tdUJnkH-_C0AWe84GoDA&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=219&vpy=116&dur=11079&hovh=169&hovw=299&tx=206&ty=105&sig=117346417109573114469&page=3&tbnh=138&tbnw=248&start=30&ndsp=20&ved=1t:429,r:16,s:20,i:227

[22]Also available at:

http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/12/26/movies/26bash.html?_r=0

[23]Also available at

http://www.google.co.il/imgres?start=242&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:he:official&biw=1280&bih=534&tbm=isch&tbnid=bw60TWmf5vlVJM:&imgrefurl=http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/waltz_with_bashir/pictures/14/&docid=QBBaM6P6ULroYM&imgurl=http://content7.flixster.com/rtmovie/32/37/32373_gal.jpg&w=600&h=338&ei=mH1dULebOKes0QXVsIDICQ&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=364&vpy=240&dur=13865&hovh=168&hovw=299&tx=218&ty=94&sig=117346417109573114469&page=13&tbnh=149&tbnw=257&ndsp=18&ved=1t:429,r:44,s:200,i:136

steak for breakfast; nonetheless he has something red in his plate. The officer before the last one has nothing in his plate, but he has a red phone. The scene's background is also red. Frankel eats from a red plate which, in the Israeli army, is assigned for meat dishes (usually served during lunch, not for breakfast): He has preserved meat and eggs for breakfast. When we see him for the second time, Frankel holds an empty plate, now more visibly red than ever. The red color, the knife (for the universal audience) and the meat (mostly for a particular audience acquainted with the local army practices or even with the general, cultural practices according to which Israeli breakfasts and dinners are dairy meals) all speak for themselves. The message being crystallized through this scene has to do with the unbearable lightness of giving fatal orders while enjoying breakfast[24].

4. Joe Sacco's *Palestine*

The third graphic novel, *Palestine* by the journalist Joe Sacco, tells of the author's experiences during 1991 and 1992 in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, where he practiced a so to speak 'war-zone' or 'front-line' journalism. Though Sacco's overt goal is to document events and interview Palestinians, he is quickly affected by the reality of the occupied territories and progressively becomes active as, for instance, he even breaks curfew with the Palestinians he interviews. *Palestine*'s perspective is thus different from that adopted in *Waltz with Bashir* where the narrator does not identify with the cause being dealt with.

   The scenes analyzed below will all disclose the extent to which subjectivity is being crystallized through the many silent contents emerging from the interplay between text and image as well as from the analogy between iconographic scenes. In a chapter entitled "The boys, part three" Sacco interviews a 15-year-old Palestinian named Firas who belongs to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Firas describes his activism (which consists, inter alia, in hurling stones at the Israeli soldiers) and adds that he has been arrested on three different occasions and shot during one of these incidents. Sacco asks him for details. Firas begins by transmitting the 3 following informational elements given all within the same frame: 1. "I was with a lot of young people". 2. "The soldiers came and we ran away". 3. "I was shot in the back". The image depicts the youngsters, from behind, escaping. They do not hold stones in their hands. All these pictorial details suggest that there may have been no assault against the Israeli Forces. In the following frame, Firas continues his testimony: "My friends, the others, they threw stones to keep the soldiers from taking me to prison". He adds, subsequently: "At that moment, an ambulance came and took me to hospital". This time, the image depicts Firas's friends throwing stones as well as Firas's evacuation. The narrative and the image thus suggest that Firas and his buddies were innocent, that, at least on this specific occasion, they did not provoke the assault (due to the fact that the stones incident is chronologically subsequent to the soldiers' attack). In short, Sacco is leading the readers to the conclusion that the Israeli army is the one to have initiated the attack and that the soldiers did not act in response to Palestinian aggression (i.e. as a retaliatory act).

   The contiguity and succession of the events as exposed by Firas is not questioned by Sacco, although he could and should have inquired into the accuracy of the facts relative to this specific incident. This observation is not at all anchored in biased

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[24]For other rhetorical devices in *Waltz with Bashir*, see Kohn and Weissbrod (2012).

experience or political opinions, but rather in the audience's general knowledge that a journalist, even within the fictitious framework of the work, should be aware of the potential logical fallacy *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (i.e. "after this, therefore because of this" or, more specifically, "since the stones event followed the shooting event, the stones event must have been caused by the shooting event"). Furthermore, the question of whether the young Palestinians had their share in this incident is unavoidable, in view of Firas's testimony a few moments/frames earlier. Says Firas: "In the morning, if I go in the streets and see the soldiers, I'll fight them. I won't go to school". Based solely on the premises supplied by the narrative itself, it is expected from a journalist to take into account the relevance of this piece of information so as to try to understand how the incident under consideration occurred.

What is more, Firas's monologue, which carries on in the following frames (until the end of the chapter) benefits not only from the journalist's perfect silence (Sacco steps aside and allows Firas to present his description uninterrupted), but also from an iconographic support which does not hide Sacco's identification with the Palestinian victims, on the one hand, and his aversion towards Israel's policy of force, land theft, etc. on the other.

After the shooting incident, Firas adds that he was hospitalized with other intifada cases. The images concretizing the violence committed by the soldiers against the injured people and the local medical staff, according to Firas, do not leave much space for imagination. We are interested in two particular visual scenes related to this shooting incident: The first one, on the chapter's last page, covers 6 frames portraying a magnified version of Firas in the foreground, and the different stages of suffering until, in the last frame, a complete loss of consciousness. The angle being chosen is that of a bird's-eye view, which contributes to dramatization (the observer constantly focuses on the subject's inferiority or defenselessness). The last frame of this scene is a silent, black frame, which concretely represents the victim's loss of consciousness. From an external description of a growingly wounded body, Sacco ends up knowingly positioning himself in the skin of his subject in order to seize the notion of nothingness but also to encourage reflection.

The second scene related to the shooting incident belongs to the same chapter. Firas exposes an intra-Palestinian clash over the peace process: The image depicts the members of the two rival factions – Fateh (for the Madrid talks) and the Popular front (against the Madrid talks) – in a violent confrontation. Firas explicitly tells that the members of the two factions "fought with knives" and "sticks" and that "some people were hurt". But when we compare this violence to that provoked by the Israeli soldiers (and represented within the same chapter) we immediately understand that there is violence and violence. Sacco depicts that of the Israeli army as unjust and deliberately practiced against powerless victims, against injured people or the hospital's medical staff; in short, against people who clearly cannot respond with the same kind of force. The soldiers make use of weapons fully intended for the practice of brutality, for instance, they have bludgeons, while the Palestinians improvise with sticks.

But there is more to it: The knives explicitly mentioned by Firas are being hidden in the image whereas the soldiers' weapons are perfectly visible; the contact between aggressor (soldiers) and victim (Palestinians) is being constantly concretized (we can actually see pictorial examples of beating, kicking, breaking arms, pulling hair, strangulation, etc.). The violence connected to the intra-Palestinian fight is, however, no more than suggested. Furthermore, in the case of soldiers attacking Palestinians, there is often an unbalanced situation: We see many soldiers assaulting a single victim, while

the Palestinians fight 'one on one'. In addition, it is difficult to disregard the soldiers' expression: Their look is full of rage and cruelty. On the contrary, the look of the Palestinians attacking each other expresses no more than horror, fear or astonishment (definitely not bloodthirstiness). In short, one gets the impression that in this spontaneous combat between Palestinians, people are more on the defensive than on the offensive.

But there still remains an important feature typical of the graphic novel medium which favors this interpretation of "spontaneous fight between brothers" vs. "methodical force operated by the Israeli army against Palestinians". We refer to the page or the frame's layout[25]. The frames depicting the soldiers' aggression are systematically and uniformly sequenced in a nine-panel grid, iconically suggesting premeditated force. The intra-Palestinian fight scene is rather chaotic, depicted in overlapping frames, metaphorically suggesting a spontaneous, uncontrolled burst of emotions.

Thus, it is not only through the many testimonies collected on the field that Sacco draws up the profile of a victimized people and his struggle for national rights, but also through the various visual strategies he employs, all paving the way for a possible transformation of preliminary convictions and, further on, for potential action.

5. Conclusion

In line with Saville-Troike's (1982: 144) thesis, we hope to have shown that as much the verbalized, the unsaid has proven to be indispensable to message decoding, whether silence is part of the verbal code (co-structured with the verbal signifiers) or part of a greater (pictorial) silence.

A question still remains that needs to be addressed: Do *Persepolis*, *Waltz with Bashir* and *Palestine* have "argumentative purposes" or just "argumentative dimensions"? Let us recall that Amossy (2008) draws a line between these two concepts, claiming that the former is equivalent to an intended attempt at persuasion, whereas the endeavor of persuasion in the latter is indirect or unexpressed.

From several points of view, we tend to see in the graphic novels examined in the present study argumentative works carrying not only argumentative dimensions but also argumentative purposes in a sense that the respective authors do not only seek to amplify the audience's rate of knowledge in regard to a certain situation, but rather to 'retell' the event under consideration[26] in order to design the receiver's perception of a certain reality and to get him/her to see things through critical lenses[27]. In addition, the visual manipulation plays a role in the construction of the communicator's image (ethos). The communicator's ideology and standpoints emerge from the different visual strategies employed, so that what the receiver gets is not only elements constituting the Memoir, but also the fatal outcomes of living a certain experience. Finally, we have shown the extent to which visual manipulation also appeals to the receiver's emotions (pathos) with the aim of promoting certain topics and modifying his/her standpoints.

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[25]Cf. Groensteen (1999, 2005) and McCloud (1993, 2000).

[26]Cf. Grize (1982). This is also in line with van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984): The act of argumenting is an attempt to convince the addressee that a given thesis is acceptable.

[27]See also McAllister, Sewell & Gordon's (2001) *Comics and Ideology* and the role of Comics in either challenging or perpetuating the political/ideological/ institutional status quo.

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