Graphic Novels: Literature without Text?

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Literary graphic novels: adaptation, illustration, collaboration, and beyond

More and more, the hype surrounding the graphic novel concerns its literary qualities. Many graphic novels appear to have a *literary subtext* (in the case of adaptations) or present themselves, in a more radical form, as the visual development of a literary text that is *completely reproduced* within the graphic novel. In the former case, the literary graphic novel takes the form of an adaptation, as one may adapt a book on screen (think of David Mazzuchelli's version of *City of Glass*[1]). Various major mainstream publishers in France, the world leader in serious comics and graphic novel production, have now specialized series in this field.[2]

 All these series are strongly and explicitly inspired by the pioneering work by authors such as Dino Battaglia (who adapted for example Maupassant), Alberto Breccia (who made extremely creative reinterpretations of, among others, Poe and Lovecraft), or Jacques Tardi (well known for his work on the detective novels by Léo Malet, for instance). In the latter case, the graphic novel takes the form of an illustrated version of the original text. The French publisher *Petit à Petit* has a series of these "word and image" books, although for obvious reasons most examples concern poetry (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Hugo, Prévert, La Fontaine) rather than prose (short stories by Maupassant). The Dutch artist Dick Matena has recently realized three "comics illustrations" of (more or less lengthy) novels by highly canonized Dutch and Flemish authors (Reve, Wolkers, Elsschot), which contrary to previous forms of novelistic works illustrated by comic artists (the Louis-Ferdinand Céline versions by Jacques Tardi are the first example that come to mind) are real graphic novels: the layout is that of a comic book or graphic novel (in Europe the boundaries between the two genres remained blurred), with all the text included as balloons or captions, instead of being that of a traditional book containing isolated illustrations. In both cases, that of the adaptation as well as that of the illustration, the literary text precedes the graphic novel, which helps to distinguish this (double) subgenre from another type of graphic novel that is also quite popular today, namely the collaboration between a graphic artist and a scriptwriter with a literary background (more and more authors are invited to write original scenarios, or they are hired to adapt other literary texts; a good example of this is the rewriting of *Moby Dick* by Jean Rouaud, who collaborated on the story with the Belgian artist

Denis Deprez). It is of course not absurd to enlarge the subgenre of the "literary graphic novel" so that it can include this third subgroup as well. However, the discussion on the graphic novel as a literary genre goes well beyond these clear cases of a direct link between a literary model and a graphic interpretation. Authors such as Chris Ware (*Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth*[3]), Adrian Tomine (*Summer Blonde*[4]), Charles Burns (*Black Hole*[5]), Daniel Clowes (*Ghost World*[6]), Craig Thompson (*Blankets*[7]), whose models are not primarily literary in the traditional sense of the word, are nowadays also read from a literary viewpoint. It is this point, namely the literary interpretation of work that, at first sight, has nothing literary in it, that I would like to discuss in this article. In order to do so, I will focus on two types of arguments that are often found in criticism on the topic: negative criticism, i.e. criticism stressing the flaws of the graphic novel, and positive criticism, i.e., criticism underlying the specific qualities and possibilities of the genre. It is the combined reading of these two approaches of the graphic that may offer new insights into the possible literariness of the genre.

One might say that this literary turn is a European reappropriation of the graphic novel—first coined as a concept in the United States and now more and more used as a genre label in Europe, where the graphic novel existed as a cultural practice, yet not as a recognizably labelled item.[8] I do not think it is very rewarding to overemphasize the cultural differences or analogies between the two sides of the Atlantic. After all, comics and graphic novels are a good example of transcontinental exchange and dialogue. More interesting questions can be raised. In this article, I will not focus on what has been until now the most hotly debated issue, namely quality: Is it a good thing to make literary graphic novels? Shouldn't graphic novels remain just graphic novels and stay away from their literary superego? Is it possible anyway to keep the literary touch in graphic form? and so forth.[9] Instead, I would like to foreground here a more general question, which has to do with the very definition of what we call "literary" in the graphic novel and with the current tendency to consider the genre a literary genre. The very fact that the label of "literary" has been extended well beyond the obvious cases of adaptation, illustration, and collaboration, implies that it is now used also for graphic novels with no clear literary subtext, on the one hand, and that the genre itself is more and more seen as a new form of literature, on the other hand (it has now become perfectly thinkable that the next version of the Norton Anthology may include pages by Chris Ware, that one day this author may be awarded the Nobel Prize, and so on). For this reason, I would like to reflect here on two questions (a "what" question and a "why" question), which are for me directly related. First, what do we mean when we say that a graphic novel is (or can be) a literary work? And second, what is it good for, when we call a graphic novel a work of literature?[10] Either of these questions presupposes a minimal definition of the "literary." Many of the conflicting definitions oscillate between the antagonistic viewpoints of an internal and essentializing stance (the word literature can refer to works submitting to a predefined set of criteria, such as, for instance, beauty, autonomy, and complexity) and a more ad hoc and contextualizing stance (the same word referring to those works that are considered literary by a certain community at a certain point in time). In this

article, the notion of literary will be used to qualify works that function in more than one way *simultaneously*: a literary work both teaches us something (see Roman Jakobson's *referential function*) and draws attention to itself (see his *poetic function*); it never diverts without persuading, nor persuades without diverting; if it is a work of fiction, it will always keep a certain documentary value, and if it is primarily a document, it will be a document that can be read for its own sake. The problem—or the challenge—is that none of these definitions can monopolize the field. Various definitions are always intertwined and changes in production and reception always have a complex impact on what we think literature may be as well as on how we define it.

The graphic novel as an example of visual literature

Leaving aside the (after all anecdotal) question of the presence or absence of a literary subtext, one may reasonably argue that the literary status of a graphic novel is related to the specific way it tells a story, in this case not only by the means of words, as in literature (but do we consider a novel is less literary if it contains also illustrations?), but also by the means of images. Put more plainly: if one accepts that the graphic novel is a way of visual storytelling, what are the characteristics of such a storytelling that make it particularly literary?[11]

It is probably easier to answer this question in a negative way at first. In the discussions of the graphic novel, certain kinds of visual storytelling are indeed considered less valuable than other ones. Most surprising, in the light of our discussion, is the strong condemnation of these types of storytelling that reduce the visual dimension of the graphic novel to a mere illustrative role, as if, for instance, the graphic artist has nothing else to do than to add images to texts (speech balloons and narrative captions), while having to obey a preformatted layout (for a fictional treatment of the classic production line in the comic industry, see Eisner's *The Dreamer*.[12]). Generally, the mechanical and servile visual transposition of a completely finished script, which the graphic artist cannot modify in any single way, is seen as a castrating practice that prevents the comic or graphic novel from becoming a token of real literature. Indeed, all the theoreticians in the graphic novel field stress the added value of creative collaboration, in which the visual and the textual do interact in an open and non-hierarchical way.[13]

Of course, the disapproval of illustrative visual storytelling does not necessarily signify that good literary visual storytelling supposes the refusal of any screenplay. A good example of such improvisational storytelling is Martin Vaughn-James's experimental graphic novel *The Cage*, first published in English and then, after its translation, fully incorporated in the French literary system.[14] Vaughn-James's book is exceptional in the history of the graphic novel both for the story it tells and for the way it does so. *The Cage* is a lengthy narrative of almost two hundred pages without any human characters, its protagonists being places and objects that continuously morph (to use a modern anachronism) into each other, with no apparent plot or previous script. The fact that each page of this graphic novel contains only one drawing and one short caption insists that the reader's eye is educated as he or she assimilates progressively the idiosyncratic laws, constraints, exceptions, and organic growth

of Vaughn-James's visual universe. Not surprisingly, European critics have noted the clear relationship between *The Cage* and the French New Novel.[15] Yet neither *The Cage* nor the return of the dream of textless storytelling in avant-garde production (paramount here is the work by Vincent Fortemps) suggest that good visual storytelling ought to be wordless, despite the great prestige of wordless books—like the older woodcut novels studied.[16] Still, the fear of decorative illustration seems to push artists toward a type of storytelling that resists the traditional view of the narrative as text-based or text-driven. In literary graphic novels words and images often clash, creating a kind of autonomy for the image overall.

In a more general way, visual storytelling will achieve a more literary status if the images of the book do not lose their structural independence. Although the graphic novel remains a sequential art, to quote Eisner's pertinent formulation, the images in question are not only the links of a narrative chain, but also autonomous items that function not merely to bridge the gap between images.[17] By stressing the non-narrative part of the image it is possible to oppose its absorption by the narrative whole (as can be seen in an almost superlative way in Olivier Deprez's reinterpretation of Kafka's *The Castle*).[18] Why does the literary graphic novel stick so fiercely to a certain independence of some of its elements? Because images are very hard to "tell" when they are not clearly involved in narrative, and because the over-all difficulty of verbal paraphrasing acts as a kind of warrant that the proper visual qualities of the image will not be forgotten or neutralized when the global storytelling takes over. Thus, it would be absurd to oppose the narrative and the non-narrative: each picture tells a story, yet not all aspects or elements of a picture do so, and a literary graphic novel attempts to maintain a healthy tension between these two forces.

The negative definition of visual storytelling that claims the status of literature, i.e. the discussion of those features that seem to obstruct the emergence of really literary storytelling in the graphic novel, provide us with a certain number of paradoxes: in order to be taken seriously by the critique—the idea being that a good graphic novel can mean becoming a literary graphic novel, and that bad graphic novels will simply remain graphic novels or, worse, comics–, visual storytelling in the graphic novel has to avoid the all pervasive influence of three elements that are often associated with literature: first, the script (which is often accused of eating the images), second, the word (to which similar critiques apply), and third, the sequence (which may appear, given its closeness to the script, as an obstacle for the exploration of the internal visual properties of each image). The more a graphic novel can keep these elements at a distance, in order to exploit the visual specificity of its panels and plates, the more it will prove able to be seen as a challenging, worthwhile, and therefore literary work. What the negative approach of the literary qualities of the graphic reveals, then, is that literariness is defined in a very ad hoc way: not in reference to textual models, but in reference to standards of quality, originality, and medium-specificity within the field of visual storytelling.

When tackling the question from a more positive viewpoint, the medium-oriented perspective becomes even clearer. When one tries to fine-tune what is actually meant by visual

storytelling in the graphic novel field, it is often said that good visual storytelling, i.e., storytelling capable of competing with the best practices in literature, has to exploit the narrative possibilities of the images themselves (of course not independently from the verbal and textual elements in the work, but in such a way that the image can play its own creative role). Yet what does this mean concretely? I suggest three main elements.

First of all, the image should be able to make its own contribution to the making of the story (not independently from the sequence, of course, but in a creative tension with it). In other words, the reader is supposed to infer the story not only from the textual and verbal indications that are given, but also from the internal structure of the image. If it is true that every picture tells a story, the story told this way should be more than a reduplication of the story told by verbal means. Secondly, the image should also co-create the story by relying on the narrative possibilities of montage and sequentiality. The transition from one panel to another should have an active function in the production of the plot, instead of simply spelling out in an uneventful way the progression of a story the reader is already aware of. Third and last, the storytelling possibilities of image and sequence are expected to take advantage also of the publication format of the graphic novel, which remains largely that of the installment form, since many graphic novels published in book format are first pre-published in installment form.[19] The play with the stop-and-go structure of the installment format adds a dynamic that exceeds the simple dialectics of cliff-hanger and surprise, and is one that clever graphic novels manage to maintain in their final book version (I will come back on this point in the last part of this essay). Ideally speaking, good storytelling, i.e., storytelling that is able to transform a graphic novel into something more (let's say a work of literature), tries to explore and to combine the narrative virtues of each panel, the narrative added value of the sequence of panels, and the narrative subtleties opened by the tension between the various publication rhythms of the work as it has been disclosed to the public.

All three features of the positive approach of literary storytelling in the graphic novel have their flip side, however, since each of them also opens the door to possible misuse, which diminishes the intrinsic qualities of the work—and hence its possibilities of being read as a thorough example of literariness in the graphic novel. The risk of an excessive emphasis on the storytelling capabilities of an image is that any picture may become narrative. Whatever it represents and however it is made, an image is always capable of provoking a narrative response in the mind of the reader, and this universal possibility implies that graphic novelists might become lazy, instead of carefully constructing the narrative triggers of the image (this construction implies necessarily the attempt to minimize the narrative potentiality of other aspects of the image). The second point—sequentiality—presents the specific danger that the image may fall into the montage and construction mechanisms from the cinematographic medium. In the "remediation" terms of Bolter and Grusin, we would speak here of a "repurposing" of the graphic novel trying to imitate the dynamic possibilities of a stronger medium.[20] Yet the results of such an imitation are not necessarily successful: just because it is so directly active within the language of the graphic novel, the presence of the

cinematographic model can be a weakness, for the harder the graphic novel tries to take into account the lessons of the cinema, the more the reader will start noticing the unavoidable differences. The risk of stressing the impact of the installment form within the final book format, finally, might be that the graphic novel avoids exploring longer narrative forms that help distinguish it from the world of the gag strip as well as that of the short story, which tend to be seen as less ambitious and therefore less literary than the world of the novel and more in general the book-length stories.

In order to become visual literature, the graphic novel has both to avoid a certain number of pitfalls (this was the negative approach) and to pursue a certain number of qualities (this was the positive approach) that all prove very ambivalent and complex. The most important conclusion one can draw from the discussion on the "what" of a literary graphic novel is that there appears to be a very strong relationship between the often opposed fields of visuality and literariness. In the case of the graphic novel, literariness does not depend (only) on textuality, verbality—in short, language—but on the specific use of visual storytelling devices and mechanisms at various levels.

The graphic novel as a challenge and an opportunity to literature

A discussion on the literary dimension of the graphic novel cannot be limited to the question of what a literary graphic novel is or, corollarily, if there should be room for the graphic novel in the house of literature in general. A second and perhaps more exciting question is to ask why this discussion matters, not for the graphic novel but for literature itself. The internal and external frontiers of literature—the former have to do with the canon: what is at the center of the system, and what is at the periphery; the latter have to do with the boundaries between literature and other arts—are of course always subject to sharp debate and often polemical reappraisals. The encounter, if not the merger, between the novel and the graphic novel, between verbal storytelling and visual storytelling, and between words and images in general, is not exceptional. Roughly speaking, I think the contribution of the graphic novel to the literary novel can be developed in two directions: a very general one—how does the graphic novel challenge our idea of literature?—and a more specific one—how does the graphic novel force us to adapt methodological and theoretical tools that we use to study literature? I will briefly present each of these two new directions, and then concentrate on some specific considerations on narrator, narrative style, narrative tension, and narrative units that fold into two larger issues: narration and materiality.

On the one hand, the very broadening of the novelistic field, which now can encompass works that are wordless, forces us to rethink our most basic definitions of the meaning of once self-evident notions such as text, novel, and literature, that become more problematic every day (and one might add to this list also the notion of national language: it is perfectly thinkable that very soon the boundaries between languages will start moving, so that English literature will entail works written in non-English languages, but this is of course another story).

What is happening today with the literary and the graphic novel is therefore just one small epiphenomenon of a much larger logic, yet the extreme form of the blurring of the boundaries between the world of comics (of which the graphic novel is after all nothing but a small subfield) and the world of literature (of which the novel is currently the dominant form) should function as an incentive to rethink the regime of postmodernism more radically than it has been done. Such a blurring of boundaries, which is typical of postmodernism's global tendency towards "de-differentiation," can of course not come as a surprise.

On the other hand—and this is what I would like to expand on a little in the last part of this essay—the graphic novel proves extremely helpful if we want to redefine certain general tools and concepts in the literary field. I would like to give two examples here: first, that of the narrator, or certain types of narrator; second, that of the relationship between storytelling and the material constraints of the medium. In both cases, the graphic novel offers challenging opportunities to open and widen our often too simple ways of theorizing literature. Obviously, other tools and concepts might be targeted here, such as the difference between narration and description, which seems quite elementary in literature but which is much more difficult to distinguish in graphic novels, or the status of linearity and nonlinearity, where the graphic novel escapes the easy antagonism between the classic regimes of writing and reading literature. For practical reasons, this article will concentrate on two specific cases, yet all the examples given above demonstrate how profoundly reading graphic novels can influence and change our ways of thinking literature.

Concerning the question of the narrator, a good case in point might be the question of autobiography. In our traditional view of this genre, the specific feature of autobiography is the coincidence of author, narrator, and character.[21] Although this basic model has been nuanced by later research dealing with, for instance, issues of unreliable and multiple narrators, even the advanced model does not really cover some fundamental, almost universal aspects of autobiography in the graphic novel (which, by the way, is characterized by an overrepresentation of the autobiographical regime).[22]

One of the most striking features of autobiography in the graphic novel is the possible tension between the style of the drawings and that of the text. Even if the same person is responsible for the visual and the linguistic dimensions of the work and even if there is no divergence at content level between word and image, there is never a warrant that these two aspects converge at the level of the "enunciation" (the production of both the words and the drawings). Indeed, as clearly demonstrated by Philippe Marion, the enunciation in a graphic novel is by definition split into two conflicting registers: the verbal and the visual (which he calls *graphiation*).[23] Although both registers can encompass the same variety of more or less subjective or more or less objective (cf. the famous juxtaposition of discourse and story coined by Benveniste), it is very hard to obtain the same impression of subjectivity and objectivity in words and images in the graphic novel. At textual level, it is quite well known which types of words or syntax structures infer such an impression, and the choice is only between "discourse" (the subjective mode: roughly speaking, everything that refers

to the triad *I, here, now*) and "story" (the objective mode, roughly speaking everything that refers to the triad *s/he, there, then*). At visual level, however, these distinctions are much harder to draw: Does the color red mark an increase of subjectivity? Is a lack of technical skill a symptom of the hand of the artist? Can rapidity of execution be interpreted as an index of the body? In his study of *graphiation*, Marion rapidly abandons the binary approach of subjective versus objective, in order to replace it by a sliding scale between the two extremes of high subjectivity and high objectivity. In the case of the autobiographic graphic novel, questions should not only be raised on the partial or complete identity of author, narrator, and character, but should also be raised regarding the convergence or divergence of words and images. Such questions, which at first sight seem not very pertinent for non-graphical literature, should encourage us to question with more precision and nuance the possible tension between enunciated and enunciation or, to put it in different terms, content and style. In other words, the graphic novel can increase our awareness of the possible polyphony of the narrative voice in the non-visual autobiographic novel. In certain cases, which are relatively normal in the graphic novel, this polyphony can add even more to such awareness.

Take for instance Emmanuel Guibert's *Alan's War*, a book that offers a very interesting blend of subjective and objective elements, of first- and third-person narrative in the autobiographical register.[24] *Alan's War* is the autobiography of an American GI, Alan Ingram Cope, as told by himself to Emmanuel Guibert, who eventually reconstructs his whole life story by means of a graphic novel written in the first person. From a narrative point of view, the formal complexity of such a work is both business as usual and breathtaking. Usual, for no reader familiar with the codes of the graphic novel will qualify *Alan's War* as an experimental work, quite on the contrary. Breathtaking, for although author and character coincide, the position of the narrator of this graphic novel is radically split. It is Alan Ingram Cope himself who tells his own story, but what he says is in a certain sense quoted within the broader narrative made by Emmanuel Guibert. Moreover, there is a systematic play with the convergence or divergence of text and image, the latter being very objective: most of the times, we do not see what Alan is seeing, but we see Alan himself, in the visual equivalent of a third-person narrative. Finally, *Alan's War* also brings together a wide range of media (written documents, maps, pictures), which are all fused while at the same time maintain many properties of their original context. What this example makes very clear is that it is not necessary to look for weird or non-mainstream graphic novels in order to notice immediately the shortcomings of the classic tools of literary reading. Even in cases such as *Alan's War*, brilliantly and poignantly told but rather traditional in its narrative and visual techniques, the necessity of shifting grounds comes to the fore straight away.

My second example concerns not a concept like "(autobiographical) narrator," but a genre, namely the installment novel, which has become quite outdated in literature, but remains relevant for the graphic novel. Once again, the idea here is not to make a plea for the reintroduction of the installment format in non-graphic literature, but to suggest that some sub-

tleties of the graphic novel format may induce a renewed interest for certain aspects of installment literature in general, which we tend to analyze in too exclusive a way in the dialectics of cliff-hanger (at the end) and surprise (at the beginning). As we will see, what literary studies of the installment form can learn from the graphic novel is not only the critical reappraisal of an apparently anachronistic genre (the installment novel), but also the increased awareness of the way in which installment techniques are rooted in the materiality of the host medium. This awareness has been partly lost in literary studies, where one studies for instance the installment novel as it eventually is published, as a book, instead of reading it in its original material context, that of the newspaper or the journal. In the case of the graphic novel we can shift more easily between the various forms and formats, and this possibility helps to disclose some characteristics of the installment technique that tend to be forgotten in literary studies.

The example of Hergé, who was not only the inventor of the Clear Line aesthetics but also a great master of the installment narrative, can be very helpful here (I hope readers of *ELN* will allow me to include Hergé not just in the field of the graphic novel, but even in its very heart). When we analyze Hergé's art of the installment, we notice first of all that his use of the basic techniques of cliff-hanger followed by surprise was more than discreet. Of course, this unobtrusiveness does not mean that the usual treatment of surprise elements and the more general construction of narrative tension is absent in *The Adventures of Tintin*. On the contrary, tension and surprise are present everywhere, but in a more diffuse way (if this was not the case, there would be an overkill of this kind of narrative device and its impact on the reader would be lost very soon). The basic installment principle is no longer restricted solely to the end (cliff-hanger) and beginning (surprise) of each page but is active in each strip (the average page of a Hergé book entails four strips, and it was the page that was the fundamental unit of the story). We can here draw a preliminary conclusion: the graphic novel by Hergé shows that the analysis of the installment form should not be limited to the traditional strategic (or marked) places in a text, in this case the beginning and the end, but should be considered an overall technique that saturates the complete work: each strip creates a kind of narrative tension at the one (right) end of the panel row and offers a small narrative surprise at the other (left) end of the row. Besides, Hergé's installment techniques demonstrate from the very beginning the fundamental importance of the materiality of the host medium. Due to the early success of the Tintin's stories, Hergé, unlike most of his colleagues in the 1930s and the 1940s, almost immediately had the possibility to publish his works not only as a weekly comic but also in book form. This dual output encouraged him to develop a type of installment narrative that would no longer depend on the mere dialectics of tension and surprise week after week, but that relied instead on a completely different rhythm in the management of these effects, which was everywhere (i.e., in each panel) instead of concentrated at the turn of the page.

Moreover, and this is a second useful observation for the study of installment literature in general, Hergé pays careful attention to the space in-between the strategic places. Given the

fact that each strip encompasses usually no more than three or four panels, given also the fact that the first and last panels are expected to be occupied by very discreet surprises and cliff-hangers, the remaining space is so small—usually one or two panels—that it is not possible to consider them a kind of auxiliary force or buffer that can be used in an elastic way to fill in the gaps between the beginning and the end of each minimal narrative unit: in Hergé's work, each panel must by definition be part of the permanent tension between expectation and denouement that provides the narrative with its fundamental charm. The central panel(s) of each strip must contribute to the continuation of the initial surprise as well as to the preparation of a new cliff-hanger, and this is a lesson that should inspire both authors and critics of non-graphic installment literature. Here too, Hergé takes marvellously into consideration the material possibilities of the medium. He does not try to undo the material limitations of the panel, for instance by trying to transform the plate into a "splash-image," with one image covering the whole surface, but uses the empty space between surprise (left panel) and cliff-hanger (right panel) as a rebound space, giving a new twist to the small surprise offered by the first panel while feeding already the reader with new material that will provoke new question marks in the last panel of the strip.

Finally, *The Adventures of Tintin* also suggest that the basic devices of the installment narrative exceed by far the mere discussions on the material segmentation of the story and the best way to treat the temporal interruption between two units. Since Hergé's work aimed simultaneously (so to speak) to perform successfully in installment as well as album format, we have seen that it was imperative for him to introduce a kind of double narrative logic within the same material: the pages had to prove able to entertain the reader week after week, but also to enable a continuous reading. Since the readership targeted by Hergé was also "universal," i.e., ranging "from 7 to 77 years," one can imagine easily the difficulties that were raised by such a narrative program. Hergé's answers to these structural problems— for instance his use of the *categorical* principle analyzed by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in their study of the non-fictional film, i.e., the successive presentation of the various aspects of a given theme (for instance: a chase scene, first by car, then by plane, then by boat, eventually by tank, etc.)—are, I would like to argue, still extremely stimulating for those eager to learn how to write and to read an installment novel.[25] From a narratological point of view, Hergé's example offers new knowledge of the management of narrative tension: tension is built up by slowing down the storyline, by repeating information with a difference, even by downsizing climax construction. What is interesting in the case of the graphic novel is the fact that these installment techniques do not arrive out of nothing, but are determined once again by the material properties of the host medium, which imposes a double constraint: that of offering each week the sense of an ending, to quote Frank Kermode, and that of postponing the real ending, of stretching the narrative arc in order to keep the story going.

The graphic novel—and this will be my very provisory conclusion—is much more than a marginal practice that menaces the purity of literature from the outside. It offers, on the con-

trary, uncountable opportunities to reframe our views of what literature is in a culture where boundaries will ceaselessly continue to move, for even though some may think that postmodernism is now dead and gone, the dedifferentiating logic of this cultural paradigm will only be reinforced in the coming years. Thanks to the graphic novel, we are invited to redefine our general views on literature as well as some of our interpretations of the basics of the novel, such as the narrator, narrative style, narrative tension, and narrative units.

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NOTES

1 David Mazzuchelli, *Paul Auster's City of Glass* (New York: Harper, 1994).

2 Yves-Marie Labé, "Les bulles et les lettres. Les adaptations dessinées d'œuvres littéraires se multiplient," *Le Monde*, 28 March 2008.

3 New York: Pantheon, 2000.

4 Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2003.

5 New York: Pantheon, 2008 (1st edition 2005).

6 Seattle, Fantagraphics, 2001.

7 Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2003.

8 See Hillary Chute, "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Literature", *PMLA* 123.2 (2008): 453–65, and my forthcoming article "The Graphic Novel," in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, edited by Leonard Cassuto, Clare Eby and Benjamin Reiss (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009).

9 See Jan Baetens, "La bande dessinée 'littéraire': une nouvelle chance pour la littérature, un danger pour la bande dessinée?" *Contemporary French Civilization* 28.2 (2004): 253–73.

10 In what follows, my own thinking is largely indebted to the work of several French theoreticians, mainly Benoit Peeters and Thierry Groensteen, each of them author—sometimes in collaboration with each other—of a wide range of essays and books on the graphic novel. One of Groensteen's books has been translated in English: *The System of Comics*, translated by Bart Beaty (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2007). Peeters is probably only known by the Anglophone reader as part of the tandem Schuiten-Peeters, authors of the famous series *The Obscure Cities*.

11 The same question could also be raised for other types of visual storytelling such as film, videogames, or photo novels, for here too we intuitively know that there is a difference between more literary and less literary forms, but this for practical reasons I prefer not to enter into these issues here.

12 Will Eisner, *The Dreamer* (New York: DC Comics: 2000 [1986]).

13 Benoit Peeters, *Case, planche, récit* (Paris: Casterman: (1998 [1991]). For a translation of a chapter by Jesse Cohn, see *ImageText* 3.1 (2007): http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v3_3/peeters/ (accessed on 20 May 2008).

14 *The Cage* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1975).

15 Thierry Groensteen, *La Construction de 'La Cage,' autopsie d'un roman visuel* (Bruxelles : Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2002).

16 For a survey, see David Beronå, *Wordless Books: The Original Graphic Novels* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008).

17 Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, FL : Poorhouse Press, 1985).

[18] See Olivier Deprez, *Le Château de Kafka* (Bruxelles: FRMK, 2002), and Jan Baetens, "Olivier Deprez's storytelling," *California Society of Printmakers Journal* (2007): 8–15.

[19] For a discussion of the tension between the traditional installment form and the more recent book form in the graphic novel, see Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics. An Emerging Literature* (Jackson: Mississipi UP, 2005): 162, and Hillary Chute, "Temporality and Seriality in Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*", *American Periodicals* 17.2 (2007): 228–44.

[20] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

[21] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989).

[22] For a more detailed reading of the issue of narratorship, more specifically of the issue of (un)reliability, see the already mentioned book by Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics*.

[23] Philippe Marion, *Traces en cases* (Louvain-la-Neuve : Académia, 1993).

[24] Emmanuel Guibert, *Alan's War* (New York: First Second, 2008).

[25] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art* (5th edition) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997).