

Joe Sacco, *Palestine* (1993)

Seminar/Study Sheet

“Certainly his images are more graphic than anything you can either read or see on television.” Edward Said, “Homage to Joe Sacco” (iii)

1. What claims about “comics” does Edward Said make in his introduction? Write down 5 single-word points or themes. Does Said think comics are “alternative” to novels or poems?
2. Why does the simple title immediately give us something to think about?
3. What kind of aims and claims does Sacco make for his “comics blockbuster” (76)? See pps. 76; 218-21; 208;
4. How do we read comics as “graphic novels”?

With a partner, “read” and interpret the double page spread depicting a scene from Jabalia refugee camp (Ch6, pps. 146-7). What kinds of things can you discern that “tell the story” of the camp? Why does this work visually, as well as narratively? Can you find other “novelistic” or poetic qualities? Where is “Sacco” here (turn the page to 148 to discuss this further).

Read over the excerpts from “Understanding Comics” Use it to read sections – pps. 113 (Ch.4); 118-19 (Ch.5); 123 (Ch.5); 135 (Ch.5); 186 (Ch.7); 249 (Ch.8). Find a scene by yourself to analyse in this way.

5. Is the novel tendentious? Partisan? Didactic in its political revelations and stance? See Said (iii); 92 (“what can we do except continue the struggle?”); 131; 241; 256; 283; His ‘disgust’ 24; the depiction of soldiers – 16; 128; 241; 270; the depiction of settlers: 37; 63; the tomato guys 173.
6. “Another authentic refugee camp experience” (217)

What “role” and “character” does “Sacco” have/produce in the text? See Said (v), “Author’s Foreword (vi).

As “tourist”: 38, 75-6, 145, 148

As “journalist”: 58-61

As “spokesperson”: 66 (“she had no ability to reply”); 77 (“did you get a picture?”); 99; 121-22

As “intrepid”, “heroic”: 121-22; “Too heavy” 71; “A goddamn adventure cartoonist” 208.

As “outsider”: 185; 189 (“You gotta keep some distance”); 217; 221 (“That’d make a good picture”)

Remember, *mis*representation is a crucial theme. (see, for example, the Newspaper cutting scene: 132)

7. What other aspects of novelistic technique can you discern? There are repeated motifs, for example: Mud (42, 145-46, 151, 175); Fences (86, 90-91, 222); Mazes, Crowds. Food and Tea. He also uses Talking Heads a lot. The story of certain characters such as Ammar, Ghassan, etc. Anything else?
8. How do we interpret the ending?

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as turning to "explore these kinds of stories in their own communities . . . [and] take some form of action to stop these things."<sup>20</sup> In addition, the seemingly random nature of the four places chosen as subjects of the notebooks (Ingushetia, Burma, Ciudad Juárez, Malawi) underscores the lack of definition of the form that "action" might take in relation to the stories narrated in the text.

Temporality in relation to action has a distinctly aesthetic (as opposed to pragmatic or ethical) cast in *I Live Here*. More than one review refers to the "immediacy" of the collection, but always in relation to the text's "unusual" form, its "vibrant, collage-like approach to the subject matter," as *Publisher's Weekly* puts it. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is instructive in reminding us that the quality of immediacy refers not only to time but also to person and place: "Said of a person or thing in its relation to another: that has no intermediary or intervening member, medium, or agent; that is in actual contact or direct personal relation; in reference to place: often used loosely of a distance which is treated as of no account; of time, occurring, accomplished, or taking effect without delay or lapse of time; done at once; instant." Each of these senses of the term is relevant to Kirshner's project, which, through the metanarrative of its producer and the blurring of genre and media, collapses time, place, and person even as it records stories that are distinct in setting, character, and plot. The portions of the text composed of Kirshner's journals often collapse time and place in musings about what Kirshner was doing at the time the story she writes about was happening, or what the subject of one of the stories or testimonials "would have been like" in a different place or time, a strategy that operates as part of the metanarrative search for identification, if not understanding.

Even the title, *I Live Here*, makes a claim to readers based on shared temporal immediacy and geographic distance. Our sense as readers is that we bear an ethical duty to respond because we share the same historical moment, coupled with the sense that we are able to respond even though we live in different places or contexts (the implication of "I live here" is "You live there"). The graphic narrative's form—its play with sequentiality, juxtaposition and overlay, and the space of the white gutters between frames—encourages its specific engagement with the problems of representing historical trauma. As Hillary Chute has commented, the "formal grammar" of graphic narrative "rejects transparency and renders textualization conspicuous, inscribing the context in its graphic presentation."<sup>21</sup> This attention to the problematics of representing human rights violations in historical context can also be found in recent books such as Marjana Satrapi's *Complete Persepolis*, Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, and Emmanuel Guibert et al.'s *The Photographer*, all of which include a sometimes ironic or poignant commentary on the author-artist's aesthetic-political position toward the violence at hand and clear attention to the challenge of rendering the violent ruptures of history as visual-textual object.

*I Live Here* is distinct from these related graphic narratives, however, in its depiction of multiple locations, predominantly heartfelt tone, and collage of media, genre, and points of view. As opposed to the (often interrupted) sequentiality of "comics," *I Live Here*'s collage implies simultaneity in two registers. On one level, collage provides a rich textual flow that refuses a simple narrative of the causes, implications, and effects of suffering. With only the barest historical context provided on

another event, is repeated in a different context throughout *Watchmen*.

## FOCALIZATION AND NARRATIVE SITUATIONS IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

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Just like literary prose fiction, graphic narrative relies on a narrator as well as one or several focalizers who together produce the text that we read and look at. However, due to its multimodality, both the narrative mediation and the focal filtering of the story tend to be more complexly structured than is the case in the monomodal, literary prose narratives for which narratological tools and concepts were first designed. At first sight, things seem simple enough. While the narrator of a graphic novel may, in principle, be either a character or a mediator who is not a character, the filtering of the focalizer may similarly proceed either from a character source or be located outside of any character and thus lie with the narrator. On such a basic level, then, the concepts of narration and focalization as they were first designed by Gérard Genette and further refined by Mieke Bal, Manfred Jahn, and others appear well suited to study graphic narrative. Indeed, differentiating between narration and focalization when analyzing graphic narrative can be highly productive because it allows for the crucial distinction between one or several characters' experientiality of events and existents on the one hand and the narrator's reporting of them on the other. Due to the different degrees of narrative authority and foresight involved, this distinction is particularly pertinent in cases where an impersonal narrator embeds the focal filtering of one or several characters.

A close reading of our three sample texts, however, has shown that graphic narrative's combination of a visual and a verbal track may considerably complicate the possible permutations of narration and focalization. Like their precursors in literary prose fiction, graphic memoirs, represented in our article by Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (other examples include David B.'s *Epileptic*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, and *Blankets* by Craig Thompson), are related by an autodiegetic narrator. However, in graphic narrative, the autodiegetic narrator not only mediates the verbal track (by way of extradiegetic comments in text boxes), but usually also draws the visual track.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, graphic memoir may introduce gaps and lags not only between the experientiality of the experiencing-I and its retrospective reconstruction by a narrating-I, which is necessarily tinged by the aspectuality of the latter, but also between the two semiotic tracks. Although aspectuality and hence focal filtering can be detected, it cannot always be unambiguously ascribed either to the experiencing-I or the narrating-I, even though these two options would result in divergent interpretations of the narrative.

That focalization in multimodal narrative is thus an incredibly ambiguous category is fully exploited in *Watchmen*, a graphic narrative that like Ben Katchor's *The Jew of New York* and Jon J. Muth's *M* combines a covert impersonal narrator with one or several focal filters to destabilize both narrative order and authority. Through the use of braiding, the pattern of references between panels across sequences of various degrees that links a graphic narrative and its reception, identical visual material can

**“CROWNED BY THE PAIN OF EXILE”**

*As gay men, we’ve all heard these labels—Bean Queen, Rice Queen, Curry Queen, Potato Queen. Campy, but really heartbreaking tags if you are a multi-grain-eating-queen like myself trying to survive in this racist country. It is in response to these labels placed on men who are attracted to other men of a specific race that I made the tiaras. I wanted to complicate things as they are in nature. This, my tiara, is mounted with Indian and French lentils, Japanese red azuki and black Cuban beans, green mung beans, brown, black, and white rice—all immigrant seeds that could potentially grow anywhere at anytime. When I think of a crown I think of inheritance—a thing passed along from one queen to another. I wanted to create my own inheritance by making a tiara out of bamboo in honor of the conceptual inheritance that was passed along to me while growing up in the Philippines.*

—Cirilio Domine on his series “Untitled”

As delineated in the work of theorists of autobiography such as Gillian Whitlock, Julia Watson, and Nicole McDaniel, and critics working in the realm of cartoons and visual culture studies such as Jared Gardner, Charles Hatfield, and Melinda deJesus, cartoonists who have entered into the terrain of memoir have drawn upon the formal conventions of their medium to reframe and reconfigure the norms that create templates for individual identities, political formulations, and social expectations. For example, in “Thrilling Adventure Stories” (1991), Chris Ware uses the visual form of a seemingly conventional superhero strip to frame a narrative about childhood memories that range from the narrator’s ambivalences about figures of paternal authority to his attempts to decode the grammars and lexicons of racism.<sup>6</sup> Joe Sacco reframes the visual idiom used by Harold Gray in his creation of *Little Orphan Annie* by presenting himself in works such as *Palestine* (1993–2001), *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000), and *The Fixer* (2003), as a vacant-eyed journalist whose privileged perspective at times blinds him to the complexities and fragilities of the war-torn communities through which he moves. In works like “The Breast” (1997), Phoebe Gloeckner draws upon her training as a medical illustrator to show the ways in which social conventions—manifest in the idiom of medical illustrations and maintained through medical interventions—construct the illusion of normativity only through acts of radical revision. Such cartoonists delineate the ways in which cultural norms and conventional histories are encoded in visual idioms—motifs that establish character and direct one’s point of view—as well as in archetypal narratives (such as that of the self-sacrificing hero who fights to secure others’ freedom and independence) to provide a lens through which to see the world anew.

literary works such as *Gemma Bovery* (Posy Simmonds, 1999) and *Alice in Sunderland* (Bryan Talbot, 2007). As R. Crumb's much maligned illustration of the biblical book of Genesis (*The Book of Genesis Illustrated*, 2009) testifies, even sacred texts have been reworked by cartoonists. In a parallel development to the illustration of classic works, numerous [auto]biographical and historically-based texts have been created by professional cartoonists and increasingly by teams of writers and cartoonists.

As the title of this essay suggests, the relationship of word and text in graphic novels has been and will inevitably continue to be in flux. In general though, texts have increasingly gained space and complexity in relation to images, and graphic novels often concretize literary ambiguity. But there are exceptions to this rule, particularly the employment of the *absence* of text to heighten graphic impact. The term graphic novel "signifies a movement rather than a form" (Eddie Campbell, cited in Fingerroth 6), and such novels are inherently iconoclastic, being "marked by the exploration of innovative stylistic features, i.e. non-conventional formats and monochromatic techniques." Graphic novels are also an international phenomenon, as my examples from the US, France, Germany, Lebanon, Israel, and Malaysia will demonstrate.

Art Spiegelman's first volume of *Maus* was published serially from 1981 to 1986 in *Raw*, an alternative comic book anthology co-edited with his wife Françoise Mouly. *Maus* was a watershed publication for the graphic novel. It was well received by the public (albeit not so initially by critics) and considerably raised the visibility of the genre. Exhibiting many of the characteristics that came to be hallmarks of the graphic novel, *Maus* became a paradigmatic work. It inaugurated a number of characteristics that have become standard to the genre: a frame/tale construction which includes a multilayered narrative; black and white drawings (despite the conflicting and continuing tradition of colored book covers or dust jackets); animal symbolism and anthropomorphization (talking animals);<sup>2</sup> and (auto) biographical elements, including metatextual representations of the artist in the narrative. Like other graphic novels to follow, *Maus* presented a serious, rather than comic or supernatural, subject matter: in this case, a confrontation with the Holocaust and the protagonist's fraught relationship with his father.<sup>3</sup> Like later graphic novels, *Maus* also was published serially, with the intent, however, from the beginning for eventual collection into and publication as a volume. Spiegelman included mixed media, particularly the use of photographs in addition to the drawn cartoon cells. He began the narrative *in medias res*, with corresponding flashbacks, and offered a linguistic but primarily visual wittiness and ludic irreverence reminiscent of *Tristram Shandy* or perhaps the more genre-appropriate *Mad* magazine. To this list one might add what Stephen Weiner in *Faster than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel*, describes as "sophisticated, rich, visionary storytelling" (38).

Perhaps the sophistication and richness Weiner cites are based in part on the meta-textual elements, already visible in the first volume of *Maus*, but that particularly come to the fore in volume two. In this regard, one might cite as an example those frames where Spiegelman represents himself sitting at his desk musing on how to proceed with both the project and his relationship with his father, and he depicts himself not as a mouse, but rather as a human wearing a mouse mask—a fine, but significant distinction. Spiegelman has said that he created *Maus* to “sort out and put into linear form, the chaos of my own personal history” (cited in Weiner 37). This comment refers to the autobiographical element so common to many new wave graphic novels, as well as to the confrontation with a traumatic event. Spiegelman’s comment also raises the issue of an important distinction in the creative process. Professional graphic artists choose the medium available to them based on their particular skill set, whereas other creators of graphic novels, who are not artists, must collaborate with a graphic illustrator. This latter group may have had numerous art forms available to them for treating a topic, but for a variety of reasons—that would differ from those of professional graphic illustrators—have opted for the graphic novel genre. Alissa Torres, who falls into the second category, is the author of *American Widow* (2008), which deals with her husband’s death in the World Trade Center on 9/11. She has commented on the visual nature of 9/11: “We were constantly bombarded by the same images over and over: the burning towers. And I was bombarding myself with images of my husband. That’s all I had . . . 9/11 was such a graphic event. Just writing about it wasn’t enough. I needed to take control of the images” (Torres, Interview 2D). Torres had kept a journal (“purging my emotions onto the page”) and had written essays on 9/11, but she said that she wanted the book to do more, including the posing of questions, so she sought out a graphic artist. Both Spiegelman and Torres use the graphic novel format to help shape narratives (giving them linearity), separate various narrative strands (both begin *in medias res* and use flashbacks), and untangle emotions. These traits are characteristic of many other graphic novels as well.

Graphic novels have played an iconoclastic role since their inception. But this iconoclasm has not occurred merely in terms of thematic content; it has also concerned the nature of the art itself. Numerous critics link comics with film, highlighting the similarities between the two genres. Both forms employ sequences of pictures to unfold the narrative; the main difference is that the images move more quickly in film. But, sequential art also expresses time and can control tempo (like long or short camera shots) through repetition or the relationship of large and small images. It conveys emotion, similar to cinematic close-up shots through absence and the size of both text and images; it conveys voice-overs or does the work of establishing shots via text boxes. Sequential art represents dialogue through speech bubbles and creates movements like cinematic pan or tracking shots by

breaking the boundaries between comic cells either with figures that transgress the frames, or through a complete lack of framing, or even with speech bubbles and other texts that flow across cells. Like films, sequential art can also represent flashbacks. It makes linkages and commentary, like cinema, through the use of montage—the juxtaposition of (perhaps unrelated or even conflicting) images. Commenting on the mechanics of graphic novels, Roger Sabin has written: “comics are a language: they combine to constitute a weave of writing and art which has its own syntax, grammar and conventions, and which can communicate ideas in a totally unique fashion. They point, for example, to the way in which words and images can be juxtaposed to generate a mood; to how the amount of time that is allowed to elapse between images can be used for dramatic effect; to the way that cinematic cutting can be used for extra movement; and to the fact that, ultimately, there is no limit to what a comic can do other than that imposed by a creator’s imagination” (Sabin 6–7).

Let us now turn our attention to some examples of the graphic novel that make explicit their subversive and iconoclastic function. Just as the early film at the turn of the century poached topics from classical literary works in order to gain legitimacy with a public, that looked askance at this apparently unwholesome new form of public entertainment, so the graphic novel has turned to classic authors and works as a source of both *Stoff* and respectability. I mention here just a few examples from an ever-growing list of publications. Kafka’s *The Trial* was made into an English-language graphic novel in 2008 by a writer and an illustrator both working in France. It was published by Sterling of New York and London, a publishing house active in the production of graphic novels. This classic text now lists three “authors” whose names, Kafka—Montellier—Mairowitz, appear across the bottom of the cover in equally large typeface. The cover already engages in interpretation by featuring the face of a young man who could be the protagonist Joseph K or, based on known photographs, could be Kafka himself. The background of vertical black and white stripes could reference the bars of a prison or a jail suit and allude to Joseph K’s sense of entrapment. The young man on the cover fixes the reader with a compelling stare that already invites engagement. Two motifs contextualize the narrative: Joseph K’s thirtieth and thirty-first birthdays as well as skeletons, which foreshadow his execution on the final page.

Several works by Proust including *À la recherche du temps perdu*, have also been given graphic treatments. In the case of Proust, however, the graphics provide less extraneous commentary to the text than in the Kafka novella. Rather, in Proust, the graphics appear to serve a more illustrative purpose in relation to the text. The graphic version of Jane Austen’s *Pride & Prejudice* (2009) also emphasizes illustration, but uses graphics in particularly innovative ways. Like Spiegelman’s *Maus*,



**A nameless truth**

From picture books to graphic novels, the writer's and the illustrator's impulse is the same: to find a form for something that's quite elusive or difficult to represent directly. Ironically, good narrative illustration is not about "illustration" at all, in the sense of visual clarity, definition, or empirical observation. It's all about uncertainty, open-endedness, slipperiness, and even vagueness. There's a tacit recognition in much graphic fiction that some things cannot be adequately expressed through words: an idea might be just so unfamiliar, an emotion so ambivalent, a concept so nameless that it's best represented either wordlessly, through a visual subversion of words, or as an expansion of their meaning using careful juxtaposition. Graphic stories are often self-consciously interested in issues of communication, very aware of that interesting space that exists between the sound of words and the sight of pictures. Often there's some "incompleteness" between these two expressions, a thing left unanswered, which invites—even compels—each reader to draw upon personal memories and associations in order to find their own meaning.

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At the end of the day, this is what reading is all about. Above and beyond any simple story or "message," I believe that the personal reflections of the reader are far more important than those of an author and certainly more important than the style or category of their work. My own practice as an artist, writer, illustrator, graphic novelist—whatever name can be given to this compulsion to draw stories and then make them publicly

available—really just involves crafting a space in which the thoughts of another person can flourish, especially in ways that are impossible to conceive until you actually start reading, writing, or drawing. Why read or create a graphic novel? Because there's always something new, something nobody has ever seen: an untold story in search of a shape, a texture, a color, and a voice.

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## INTRODUCTION:

## GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

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**Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven**

The explosion of creative practice in the field of graphic narrative—which we may define as narrative work in the medium of comics—is one with which the academy is just catching up. We are only beginning to learn to pay attention in a sophisticated way to graphic narrative. (And while this special issue largely focuses on long-form work—"graphic narrative" is the term we prefer to "graphic novel," which can be a misnomer—we understand graphic narrative to encompass a range of types of narrative work in comics.)<sup>1</sup> Graphic narrative, through its most basic composition in frames and gutters—in which it is able to gesture at the pacing and rhythm of reading and looking through the various structures of each individual page—calls a reader's attention visually and spatially to the act, process, and duration of interpretation. Graphic narrative does the work of narration at least in part through drawing—making the question of style legible—so it is a form that also always refuses a problematic transparency, through an explicit awareness of its own surfaces. Because of this foregrounding of the work of the hand, graphic narrative is an autographic form in which the mark of handwriting is an important part of the rich extra-semantic information a reader receives. And graphic narrative offers an intricately layered narrative language—the language of comics—that comprises the verbal, the visual, and the way these two representational modes interact on a page.

This special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*—the first special issue in the broad field of modern and contemporary narrative devoted entirely to the form of graphic narrative—demonstrates the

However, there are important exceptions, and much of the early analysis of *Maus*—which gave us terms and concepts like Marianne Hirsch's important, oft-cited "postmemory"—was groundbreaking and remains influential. While we agree with Umberto Eco's suggestion, in his "Four Ways of Talking About Comics," that "to talk about adult comics does not only mean to talk about the evolution of language, topics, genres. It means to talk about a proliferation of tendencies, and levels, on which comics can be spoken of as written literature is spoken of," we strongly disagree with Eco that this approach involves "forgetting" the medium of comics (3). The project of this special issue is to bring the medium of comics—its conventions, its violation of its own conventions, *what it does differently*—to the forefront of conversations about the political, aesthetic, and ethical work of narrative. For many of us interested in graphic narrative, without any clear-cut methodology established for considering contemporary comics texts as multilayered narrative works (aside from debates within the field of postmodern fiction and postmodernism generally), and, until recently, without a range of examples to sit next to *Maus* on our bookshelves, *Maus* itself set the terms for ways to talk about what comics could do. It continues to set the terms, as a great, lasting work.<sup>9</sup> Yet this special issue, moving forward, attempts to open up a field about which little has been written in the academy.

Right now, we are not only witnessing the publication of more and more significant graphic narratives from hugely talented authors—like Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (2001), Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003), Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Daniel Clowes's *Ice Haven* (2005), Charles Burns's *Black Hole* (2005), and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006)—but it seems as though, one might say, in the present moment, images have never been more important, or more under siege. Donald Rumsfeld, detailing the trajectory of his own response to prisoner abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison, famously claimed, "Words don't do it." Rumsfeld went on: "You read it and it's one thing. You see the photos and you cannot help but be outraged."<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this is why images of dead American soldiers, even at funerals and ceremonials in their honor, are currently prohibited. Photography is an embattled medium in the wake of recent disasters in the US: after 9/11, the "falling man" photograph by the AP's Richard Drew, which showed a man who jumped from the North Tower falling head-first before the building collapsed, was censored; in 2005, as the devastation of Hurricane Katrina unfolded, photographs of struggling blacks and whites in New Orleans were presented with different frameworks by a press corps who then faced serious accusations of racism. In the academy, there has already been a significant response to the images produced by Abu Ghraib and the Iraq war,

and to 9/11 photography; the fraught representation of Hurricane Katrina is sure to follow.<sup>11</sup>

Even more recently, cartoons have been at the center of a major controversy over images. In September 2005, the conservative Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* ran cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, outraging Muslims worldwide, and prompting violent protest of the cartoons in January and February that led to deaths in Nigeria, Libya, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Michael Kimmelman, in a *New York Times* article titled "A Startling New Lesson in the Power of Imagery," asked, "Over art? These are made-up pictures. The photographs from Abu Ghraib were documents of real events, but they didn't provoke such widespread violence. What's going on?" (E1). There are many complex, delicate, and thorny issues attached to the Danish cartoon debacle: the parameters of free speech, the force of religious proscription, and the current global context of dire religio-political conflict. What we would like to underline, however, in mentioning the Danish cartoons, is the power of *drawn images*, which this example shows is undiminished even in our current age of the camera and of digital media.

W. J. T. Mitchell notes that we might call the division between word and image "the relation between the seeable and the sayable, display and discourse, showing and telling." No method, writes Mitchell, is going to rescue us from the dilemma of the "contested border between words and images" ("Word and Image" 47, 55). Indeed, Spiegelman, responding to the Danish cartoons in the *Nation*, suggests that the "picture/word divide" is "as big a divide as the secular/religious divide." Graphic narratives, on the whole, have the potential to be powerful precisely because they intervene against a culture of invisibility by taking the risk of representation; it is unsurprising that Spiegelman believes that the Danish cartoons should be shown (and that they had a right to be drawn and published). "Drawing Blood: Outrageous Cartoons and the Art of Outrage," Spiegelman's June 2006 article in *Harper's*, not only broke new ground by actually offering *readings* of each of the twelve *Jyllands-Posten* images—taking them seriously aesthetically as well as politically—but it also cemented Spiegelman's status as perhaps the world's only public intellectual cartoonist, someone who could explain the stakes around the right to tell *and* show.<sup>12</sup> This special issue opens with Spiegelman's "Letter to the Jury," a piece that puts us in the middle of a profound political-aesthetic moment that reflects directly on graphic narratives, discussing how we determine and judge the boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown. With his trademark incisive humor, and again, as in *Harper's*, examining both ideological effects and aesthetic properties, Spiegelman addresses fellow jury members of

the other in the face of death, Sacco and Herr, however, mark the limit of the practice of substitution.

If the limit is inevitable, it has potential. In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Jacques Derrida suggests that there is "no assured passage, following the order of a foundation, according to a hierarchy of founding and founded, of principal originary and derivation, between an ethics or a first philosophy of hospitality, on the one hand, and a law or politics of hospitality, on the other." He claims, however, that this "hiatus" can help us rethink a law and politics without foundation (20). Brian Schroeder similarly traces the limits of the ethical when transformed into the political by exploring the limit case of Levinasian substitution he defines as the self "dying for" (167) the enemy: "Perhaps substitution, even for the enemy, is what alone will make a genuinely political friendship possible. If so, then surely this can only take place by way of a sovereign act of the will, wherein the impossible is taken up and historically, actually, *transformed* into possibility" (166).

In their depictions of a perhaps more basic limit case where substitution would produce a form of suicide, Herr and Sacco ask their readers to reexamine politics in a different way. Namely, they suggest that if those whose stories they represent must risk death, they as privileged American journalists can choose either to risk or not to risk death. This gesture toward the unjust political-economic structures that allow them to stay alive while others die shows how the limit case can be used to point to the political. By hyperbolizing the attempt and the inevitable failure to enact substitution, then, Herr and Sacco direct the reader's attention to a global power structure that, if it does not interfere with ethical substitution at the level of subjectivity's construction, produces an unjust political, economic, and social situation. In this situation, the lives of some are privileged at the same time that others inadvertently risk death, discouraging both the acceptance of preexisting responsibility and the active performance of a substitutional self-other relation.

### **Unethical Representation and Conventional Journalism**

Sacco and Herr critique the conventions of official wartime journalism for its erasure of the speech of its subjects. This kind of journalism, they suggest, abstracts embodied experiences for the purpose of a larger story. Official journalism, Herr and Sacco argue, can not only erase the subjectivity and suffering of those who bear the brunt of war's violence, but also serve the cause of the war by using media representation to subtly convince American recipients of news broadcasts and articles that the war is beneficial to them.

### Ethical Substitution

In "Force of Law," Derrida alludes to Levinas when he writes: "To address oneself to the other in the language of the other is . . . the condition of all possible justice" (245). Herr and Sacco deliberately enact what Levinas depicts as a presubjective process, taking themselves hostage and retreating to the backgrounds of their stories. By choosing, for Sacco, to retell others' stories in the words of the other and, for Herr, to use similar language as the other, these writers perform a kind of discursive ethical substitution.

American journalist David Rieff writes that Sacco records the Bosnia "that those of us who covered the fighting actually experienced day by day, rather than the one we mostly reported on" (5). Sacco lives with the Muslims of Goražde whom official journalistic practice abstracts, forming close bonds with those whose stories he transcribes. He records the stories of those who are positioned as victims: those who are isolated and racially targeted by the Serb military. The stories in *Safe Area Goražde* range from the everyday to the life-changing. Sacco describes social gatherings where he and his new friends party "like the resurrected" (9), and young women talk about the intense boredom of their isolation. He recounts everyday conversation exchanged between him and his friend and translator Edin, and Edin's mother's self-sacrificing kindness when Joe gets sick. Alongside these stories of the everyday, Sacco retells the traumatic, violent experiences of deaths, injuries, and displacements that many Goraždans experienced in the months and years prior to his visit, marking these stories off by a black frame. Sacco's illustrations graphically depict wounded or dead bodies; they force the reader to see the results of violence on human bodies. The stories are written in quotation marks, in the voice of each survivor, and are narrated in past tense, as memories.

Herr attempts to produce an ethical representation of "the grunts" in the face of a monolithic communication system. The effect of this system, he writes, is that the story of the war "wasn't being told for the grunts . . . they were going through all of this and . . . somehow no one back in the World knew about it" (206). Herr, then, wants to tell the story of the Vietnam War for the individual Marines who are suffering and to trace back the erased experiences of those who died in this ongoing bloodshed.

In his record of the lived reality of Khe Sanh, his wish to rewrite the official story becomes clear. Herr, in opposition to the official media and military representation that produces a Khe Sanh, chooses to record the day-to-day experiences of the men there, focusing particularly on their individual backgrounds, jokes and conversations he overhears, the dangers to which they must adjust, and the

positions in order to illuminate the limit case of death and their own unwillingness to substitute themselves. They do this, however, in order to gesture toward unequal political, economic, and social structures that privilege and protect their bodies over others'.

Sacco and Herr point out with irony and subtle relief the injustice of their own privilege. Sacco writes: "Gorazde was in love with me. People I didn't know hailed me by name. Whole high school classes jumped up when I entered the room. Drunks offered me the town slut. Soldiers wanted to talk girls, and girls wanted to flirt, they wanted me to carry them off to a Gap outlet in the sky." He is valued as a commodity, like the Gap—here, a commodity representing ideal conceptions of "America," "power," and "freedom": "I'd like to tell you it was *me* they loved, but that wouldn't be the Real Truth. What really made 'em swoon was *how* I'd gotten there, not by foot and over mountains through enemy minefields, but by road—the Blue Road, the U. N. route to Gorazde" (57). Here, Sacco deconstructs popularity, camaraderie, and sex appeal as in fact the desire to appropriate his access to the official protection and mobility his citizenship gives him. Herr similarly exposes his own privilege by posing a conversation between himself, another journalist (Lengle), and two Marines (Krynski and "the Avenger"). When the Avenger tells Krynski that Herr and Lengle don't have to be in Vietnam, Krynski replies, stupefied, "Now what's that supposed to mean? . . . You mean you guys volunteer to come over here?" "Well, dumb shit," replies the Avenger, "what'd you think . . . you think they're just some dumb grunt like you?" (201). The politics of status here—who can choose to risk his life, versus who is described as "dumb" and is required to risk his life—are explicit.

The status of the men as American journalists in some ways interferes in their attempts to witness. Herr vividly problematizes the ease of vision numerous times (6,18–19, 22, 168), suggesting that growing up in a media-saturated culture desensitizes the American viewer to the connection between what is seen and what is. Perhaps the most telling example of the desensitization produced by the mediatized image comes when Herr compares his witness of "group death" to gazing at *Life* magazine photographs as a child:

Even when the picture was sharp and clearly defined, something wasn't clear at all, something repressed that monitored the images and withheld their essential information. . . . I could have looked until my lamps went out and I still wouldn't have accepted the connection between a detached leg and the rest of a body, or the poses and positions that always happened (one day I'd hear it called 'response-to-impact'), bodies wrenched too fast and violently into



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Most importantly for these works, the two writers draw attention to their hatefulness in order to expose the conditions that produce or exacerbate that hatefulness. The journalists depict themselves as unwilling to relinquish the privilege they experience, tying their privilege to the ability to continue living. The representation of the self as clinging to life, unwilling to physically and unable to discursively substitute the self for the other, subtly underpins each writer's journalistic ethics. Despite their relatively favorable self-positioning in relation to official journalism, both men enact scathing critiques of themselves, exposing themselves in Herr's case as fundamentally afraid of death and in Sacco's case as a resistant witness.

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Irony, then, assures at least a modicum of truth. Yet for Just, irony seems also to be a way of ethically acknowledging a larger "existential" truth: "What does irony do? It undermines. It's a quality in a piece of prose, particularly in a piece of journalism, that leaves you feeling uneasy. You feel undermined because it doesn't reach a conclusion or verdict. Irony sort of leaves you hanging, because Vietnam was this existential event, and I define existential as a thing that is in a constant state of becoming" (151). If Just eventually abandoned irony in favor of what he considers a more ethical journalistic "verdict," Herr seems to have found a way to link both. In this passage, irony contains within it an implicit verdict, here against not only the unjust structures of privilege that allow Herr's bloody nose to be the closest he gets to experiencing death, but also to the larger absurdity of the war itself.

Sacco similarly portrays himself both visually and anecdotally as an ambiguous figure whose instinct for self-preservation and gratification sometimes outweigh his ability to be an ethical witness. Visually, he makes a strange figure. As opposed to those he interviews, whom he draws realistically, Sacco as journalist shows up as a "cartoony" figure who often has his mouth hanging slightly ajar, sometimes with spit flying from his face. When *Mother Jones* asked Sacco about the

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## The Hateful Self

choice to portray himself in such a fashion, Sacco replied "When I started *Palestine* it was a bit rubbery and cartoony at the beginning,



because that's the only way I knew how to draw. It became clear to me that I had to push it toward a more representational way of drawing. I tried to draw people more realistically, but the figure I neglected to update was myself" ("Art"). I would like to read the representational consequences of Sacco's self-representation, rather than see it as merely a remnant of a previous drawing style. If, as Scott McCloud argues in *Understanding Comics*, less realistic characters produce readerly identification, Sacco entices us to identify with him. I would like to suggest that, in this instance, readerly identification with Joe the character, encourages us to identify ourselves with not just physical, but also moral ambivalence.

