

The Art of Comic Reportage¹

This essay offers a comparative and narratologically-informed close reading of four recent comic reportages from refugee camps around the world. The short accounts by Lucas Wild, Damien Glez, Reinhard Kleist, and Didier Kassai showcase a diverse set of comics journalism with revealing similarities and differences. Focusing on the concepts of immediacy and mediatedness, I show how the reportages use the multimodal affordances of comics to elicit witnessing or meta-reflection effects, sometimes even summoning both in a single act of representation. In particular, I analyze intrusive vs. unobtrusive narrators and monstrators, respectively, as well as the function of portraits and interviews for the narratives. Although the four reportages contrast in the authors' inclination to more obvious vs. veiled mediation and the different liberties taken to dramatize second-hand knowledge, they all complicate dichotomies such as subjectivity / objectivity, journalism / art, and immersion / reflection as they waver between and blend narrative strategies. Thus, these works present various possibilities of how journalistically-legitimized comic art looks today.

1. ARTE's *Refugees* Project between Factual Reportage and Media-Conscious Narrative

Fifty-one million two hundred thousand. That is the present number of men, women and children who, according to the United Nations, are forced to live in a place foreign to them [...]. If all these people were to form a nation, they would constitute the 26th largest country in the world. (Huet 2014, n. pag.)

This is how Franco-German TV channel ARTE frames its dossier *Refugees* in which numerous journalists and artists report from camps around the world covering sites as far apart as Nepal, Iraq, Lebanon, and Chad. The above-quoted pronouncement indicates ARTE's wish to ground the accounts in reality and objectivity in that it gestures to statistics and sources. Yet, the German-language website that introduces the individual camp projects also shows an awareness that facts alone do not appeal to the reader without a narrative framing: "The series 'Refugees' [...] *tells* of the lives of these people [...] through the eyes of 24 artists: directors, photographers, writers, and comic artists"² (anon. n.d.; emphasis added).

Furthermore, the quote demonstrates that ARTE casts the reportages as narrated in specific artistic media, comics arguably being the most unusual of them and the focus of this essay. Independent of the medium, *Refugees* aims at reflecting real people and events while at the same time channeling these impressions through comics. Thus, ARTE says about the team that consisted of comic artist Damien Glez in addition to a photographer, a writer, and a video artist that they "have taken a look at the refugee camp Breidjing in Chad and processed their impressions in their respective art form"³ (anon. 2016, n. pag.). On the one hand,

the journalists capture a reality that they perceived by the, seemingly direct, act of “looking around”⁴. On the other hand, this perception coexists with personal impressions that are the result of a processing operation⁵ and thus the product before the reader is everything but direct.

These excerpts show that *Refugees* straddles a tension between factuality, often equated with objectivity (and thus with journalism) and *something else*. That “something else” is not necessarily fictionality, but narrativization and artistic reshaping of the facts. What defines the reportages is this shuttling between poles, an aestheticized factuality achieved with the tools of comics. This shuttling ultimately has a communicative and ethical effect: to raise the reader’s interest for real-world disasters and the people who endure it, to encourage the reader’s empathy by using sometimes more subtle, and sometimes literally eye-catching narrative staging.

Comic reportages or comics journalism, in Kristian Williams’s (2005, 52) words “serious nonfiction comics about current events”, is a genre often associated with Joe Sacco, whose long-form reportages from crisis areas in Europe, the Middle East, and the U.S. have had a formative influence on the young but burgeoning scene that now includes artist-reporters such as Patrick Chappatte, Sarah Glidden, and Oliver Kugler. Comic reportages about refugees make up an important subset of the current comics journalism, Kugler’s *Dem Krieg entronnen* and Glidden’s *Rolling Blackout* are examples from the German and US-American context respectively. Questions of objectivity and stylization, aesthetics, genre formation, memory, and ethics are at the heart of the scholarly discussion that has accompanied the growth of this genre.⁶ Thus, when I ask how the reportages in ARTE’s *Refugees* project negotiate factual reporting, visual representation, and playful narrativization, I follow well-known paths of inquiry. In contrast to previous analyses, however, I offer a comparative close reading of four reportages by different authors whose similarities and differences showcase the possibilities of comics journalism. I am mainly interested in how a narratological approach elucidates both artistic techniques and their effect on the reader. Honing in on the concepts of immediacy and mediatedness, I show how the reportages use the multimodal affordances of comics to summon witnessing or meta-reflection effects, sometimes even integrating the two into a single act of representation.

The concepts of ‘narrative’ and the ‘narrator’ are often invoked to explain why comics in general and comics journalism in particular engage readers strongly and in medium-specific ways. In this respect, Amy Kiste Nyberg (2006, 111, 105) praises comics journalism as an art that “foreground[s] the role of the journalist as narrator” and discovers in Williams’s early theory of the genre an “unstated assumption that comics are irreducibly narrative”. Hillary Chute in her book *Disaster Drawn* (2016, 229, 198) aims at analyzing how artists like Art Spiegelman or Joe Sacco attempt an “ethical narrativization” of historical events, and she values nonfiction comics for their inherent tendency to put into plain view “history’s discursivity”. However, we are still in need of more detailed narratological readings of comic reportages.

We can see how ARTE's reportages vacillate between the mission to report factually and the mission to deliver a self-conscious artistic re-creation. Verbally, the artists mark their reportages as factual with temporal and geographical indices. Nicolas Wild (2016, n. pag.), for instance, opens his reportage with two panels of a landscape and the caption: "Refugee camp of Beldangi. Damak, Nepal, September 2013."⁷ Similarly, Damien Glez (2016, 13) who reports from Chad, frames the image of a woman holding a book by informing us that we are looking at "Sara Ibrahim Issak, 23 years, Sudanese teacher"⁸. Not surprisingly, the artists use the pictorial plane to anchor their work in reality. Hence, they include maps of the regions where the camps are located (Kleist 2016, 13; Glez 2016, 2; Wild 2016, n. pag.) or depict real-world logos, particularly those of relief organizations such as the World Food Program or the UNHCR. The verbal signal, 'This is where / who it was,' teams up with the visual claim 'This is how it looked' to authenticate the account.

Yet all four comic reportages also contain elements which undermine their factual status and highlight the artistic representation. They use the verbal, the pictorial, or both planes to send hermeneutic warning signs. Wild, for example, questions his authority, and thus the reliability of his reporting, by drenching his account in self-ridicule. Wild shows the moment when ARTE officials call him to commission the reportage. Not only do they wake a drooling artist who shares his bed with a teddy bear, they are also about to give a weighty undertaking to a man who is embarrassingly out of work, as the close-up of his fridge calendar betrays: "Thursday: poker [...] Sunday: swimming pool"⁹ (Wild 2016, n. pag.). Such a tenor of self-deprecating humor surely endears the reader to the author and connects the comics to the funnies tradition. Yet, this can also undermine the author's integrity. Even though narrator and author are logically not identical, the reader's default expectation in reportage will be to equate the two. Therefore, a reporter-narrator who exposes himself to self-ridicule signals to the reader to take the reportage with a grain of salt.

We can find a different form of narrative distancing in Glez (2016, 6) who goes so far as to break the fourth wall with a panel in which the narrator muses about imagining a grim militia man in his "floral underpants"¹⁰ to avoid panicking. The man promptly materializes on the page in the said underpants and complains to his creator "Stop this immediately!"¹¹ As has been shown for other comic reportages, 'You cannot trust me, this is *not* how it was / looked', is the message that such techniques send, indicating that we should expect a subjective perspective. In sum, the reportages are a medium-specific negotiation between fact and *artefact*, between artistically reshaped journalism and journalistically legitimized art. They thus answer what, to speak with Hillary Chute (2010, 3), could be called an "ethics of testimony" with a two-fold duty: it is their duty to report faithfully, yet faithfully to *their* vision, to how they apprehend that reality.

2. Through My Mouth and Pen: The Comic Reporter's (Im)Mediacy

As comic *reportages*, the four texts promise to be factual and objective to a large degree, an ethics Sacco (2012, xii) calls “the journalist’s standard obligation: to report accurately, to get quotes right, and to check claims”. As something reported or in more traditional narratological terms, as something “told”, however, the accounts are by nature the result of mediation, and this introduces subjectivity again. More specifically, as *comic* reportages, many scholars and artists argue, the mediation and subjectivity becomes a focus of the product, especially when contrasted with its visual next-of-kin, the photo reportage. Comics journalism differs meaningfully from photo reportage because the hand-drawn images and visual stylization make the artist’s influence, which is present in all forms of reportage, strikingly visible. The question is thus not, if a given comic reportage is the result of mediation or not, but if and how this mediation is foregrounded for the reader. Here, the concept of *immediacy*, that is, the reader’s illusion of direct exposure to the events portrayed, helps clarify techniques and effects of the comic artists’ choices. *Immediacy* is not identical with factuality and objectivity, but pragmatically entangled with it as the reporter’s promise is to relate to the reader what s/he has experienced with minimal interference during the transmission.¹² Journalists simulate immediacy, when they suppress the act of mediation, when they purport to be stand-in witnesses on behalf of the reader. This illusion of direct contact with the reported scene – we might call it a witnessing impression – is particularly strong in visually-based journalism as readers can easily, even though falsely, get the sense that what they see on the page is a neutral representation of an external reality.

The terms mediation and immediacy belong to the basic conceptual toolkit of narratology (Stanzel 1984; Genette 1983; 1988; transmedial discussions in Chatman 1990; Ryan 2004; Thon 2016). I use *immediacy* here to denote the impression that the author’s mediating presence is minimal, or even – allegedly – absent in the extreme. In these cases, the narrative setup is, in Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik’s words (2014, §6), “evocative of actual experience of the world”. Alber and Fludernik define this effect negatively, as the seeming absence of an intermediary transmission system, a “veiled mediacy” (*ibid.*) or veiled mediatedness. In opposition to veiled mediatedness, mediatedness is both the act of transmitting as such and the explicit unveiling of this act to the reader. Though not logically necessary, highlighting mediation in narration often foregrounds the narrator and the act of narrating at the expense of immediacy. Especially if narration *as* narration is the center of a narrative act – most extremely in what Werner Wolf (2014, §29; §22) calls the “self-reflexive foregrounding of the means of transmission” – it becomes a “potentially distance-creating factor”. When dealing with comics, mediation becomes a more complex issue, since words and images instantiate two channels of mediation and thus two scales on which mediation can be veiled or foregrounded (for a more detailed discussion

of narratological implications of the visual and verbal planes see, for example, Groensteen 2013; Packard 2006; Schüwer 2008). Following Groensteen's terminology (2013), I differentiate between a verbal narrative instance, an "(actualized) narrator" and a visual transmission instance or "monstrator".¹³

Where, then, is the act of mediating highlighted or effaced in the reportages discussed here? Beginning with the verbal plane, the narrator can be unobtrusive or intrusive, a distinction that is similar to the traditional pair of covert and overt narrator (cf. Stanzel 1984; Chatman 1990). Unobtrusive narrators provide short and / or neutral comments while intrusive narrators make lengthy and / or opinionated comments. Wild's and Glez's narrators offer good examples of this distinction. At one end of the spectrum, they can organize and orient the narrative with short, neutral signposts such as "Breidjing, October 2014... the Wadai region in the sub-prefecture Hadd, 60 km away from the Sudanese border"¹⁴ (Glez 2016, 3) or the almost comic-specific formula "And thus..."¹⁵ (Wild 2016, n. pag.). At the other end of the spectrum sit narrators who set the scene and / or provide personal, non-informational reflections. Thus, Wild introduces his reportage with a quasi-encyclopedic exposition about his regional focus, Bhutan: "At the beginning of the 90s, a wave of nationalism swept over the country. A large portion of the population with Nepalese roots was expelled. They found refuge in the east of Nepal, the homeland of their ancestors"¹⁶ (ibid.). Glez (2016, 15), in turn, closes his reportage with a series of philosophical questions: "What are refugee camps? Haven or trap? 'Temporary' or 'final'? Everyday expression of uprooting or inevitable putting down of roots?"¹⁷ These comments prompt the reader to put the impressions gleaned from the panels into greater historical or moral perspective. Contrasting these different narrator types, one could say that heavy-handed, intrusive narrators explain, frame, and comment; they set the stage and overtly guide the reader's thoughts while unobtrusive narration shifts between scenes when the context is established.

When we look to the monstrator, foregrounded and backgrounded mediation can take various shapes. I focus here on the difference between what I call a mimetic versus a non-mimetic depiction of people, places, and events. The mimetic mode approaches realistic representation, without ever truly achieving it, of course, but evokes it effectively. The non-mimetic mode, in contrast, consciously violates the illusion that we are looking at real people, places, and events. Kleist, who portrays people in the Iraqi camp Kawergosk, wavers between mimetically depicting people in full color and non-mimetically leaving them as outlined sketches, complete with the yellowish background of the sketching paper, a detail of Kleist's portraiture I discuss further below. His colleague Glez takes the non-mimetic to a different level. While he has many depictions that can be taken as realistic, even if abstracted, he excels at visual metaphors. The most striking of these illustrates the theme of refugees' "identity problem" (Glez 2016, 13) with a person whose skull has been cut open to reveal one half of the brain as "Made in Sudan" and the other as "Made in Tschad" (ibid.), the brain halves overlain with the colors of the respective country's flag (fig. 1).



Figure 1: Panel from Glez's *Breidjing* (2016, 13).

Wild (2016) and Kassai (2014), in turn, dedicate some of their most detailed, most mimetic work not to people, but places. Wild's very first panels show intricately drawn trees and shrubbery at Beldangi (2016, n. pag.) and Kassai offers the reader several full-page panoramas of the camp Mokhayam in Lebanon (2014, 3). In reference to the aforementioned landscapes we could speak of "campscape" that present meticulously drawn nested, half-finished buildings, rubbish-ridden alleys, and walls covered with propaganda graffiti (fig. 2).

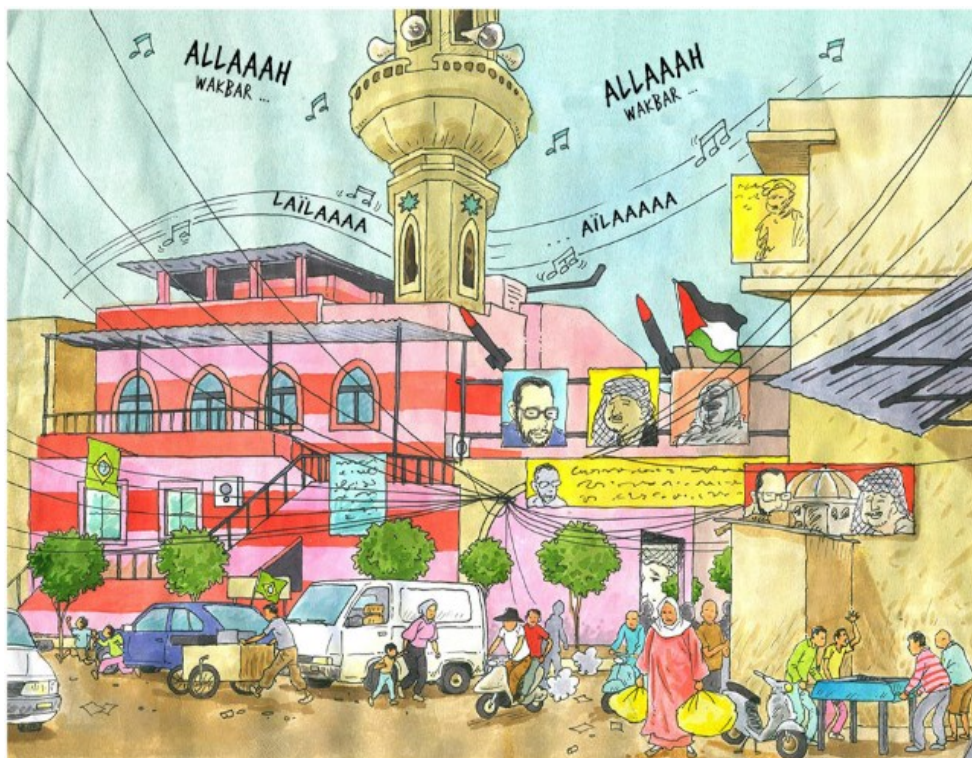


Figure 2: Panel from Kassai's *Mokhayam* (2014, 2).

In short, these comic artists pretend to deliver ‘immediate’ impressions of people and places by sticking to realistic representation and by offering saturated, detailed images. The mimetic mode authenticates the reportage as truthful and provides a sense of place. It is therefore no surprise that the most saturated panoramas are often located at the beginning of the reportages and when new locations are introduced. This mirrors, perhaps, the technique of opening shots that set the tone for a film. It also means that these saturated mimetic panels provide narrative structure. Consider Wild who places his panoramic panels where the readers sees “some strategically located places”¹⁸ (2016, n. pag.) for the first time, places like the camp canteen, hospital, and ashram. Techniques such as visual metaphors or a reduced style, especially when they leave traces of sketching, foreground the artist’s hand instead. In these cases, the artists are less eye and more commentator; they bring to the fore what Chute (2016, 206) has called a distinctive “visual voice”.

What do these examples tell us about the mechanics and narrative function of the effaced or foregrounded mediation in these four comic reportages? Veiled mediation comes in the form of unobtrusive narrators who limit themselves to short and neutral remarks, mimetic monstrators that convey realistic and saturated images, and, as discussed in the first section, in the form of an overall neutral stance that does not call the reportage itself into question. In contrast, the artists foreground their mediating presence by letting intrusive narrators tell their stories with long and pensive comments, by intervening with non-mimetic monstrators, and by casting their reportages in a (self-)mocking tone. This is just a schematic categorization, and combinations across categories are, of course, possible. My point is that the foregrounding of mediation happens at the service

of the narrative with the veiled mediation propelling the story forward while the marked mediation arrests the flow of the story proper in order to comment, question, and reflect. This is not a new insight, as a mono-modal literary text can use the alternation of forms of narration in much the same way (cf. the notion of “narrative rhythm” as expounded in Stanzel 1984).

What is noteworthy, though, is that there seems to be a division of labor between the verbal and the pictorial plane with respect to the neuralgic points at which the narrator or the monstrator leads. “Leading” here means that a channel is perceptionally and conceptually primary; that one mode catches the attention and needs to be understood first in order to create meaning holistically. While the verbal narrator leads during the beginning and end of the reportage, when shifting scenes, or when commenting critically, the monstrator is logically most dominant when words are scarce or absent altogether. This tends to be the case when authors want their readers to delve into rich pictorial details, when places, moods, and individuals are, literally, in focus. The narrator sets the stage, explains, and shifts, then retreats and lets the monstrator deepen the impression of intricate landscapes, camp scenes, and subjects. Thus, Wild’s reportage, for instance, alternates between orienting, explanatory narrator portions and larger, atmospheric landscape / campscape panels that indicate to the reader novel places or time frames (“Some strategically located places”; “Early morning in the camp...”¹⁹ (2016, n. pag.)). We see here an ebb and flow between these two channels and representational functions which is not logically necessary, but arguably typical of these and other comic reportages.

Three of the four reportages include portraits, that is, detailed and prominently-placed representations of individuals who are identified by name. What makes these portraits interesting is that they exemplify a doubling between veiled and highlighted mediation, between factuality claims and forthright artistic creation in one and the same act of representation. I have briefly mentioned the peculiar status that Kleist’s (2016) sketched portraits hold: on the one hand, they are devoid of color, with minimal background and drawn on yellow sketchbook paper, thus clearly recognizable as a former mnemonic aid. On the other hand, they are minutely drawn with shades and expressive faces. In a similar double bind, yet with different parameters, Wild’s (2016) portraits are colored highlighting elaborate clothing patterns, yet they appear two-dimensional with little shade variation and reduced strokes. Nevertheless, we get the sense that we are face-to-face with an individual whom we could recognize, a message that is enhanced by the handwritten names that complete most of the portraits. But precisely the inclusion of names *within* the portraits – sometimes distinguished by different background paper on which the sitters themselves have noted their names, address, and even their telephone number – emphasizes the portrait’s collage nature, a patchwork of different modes that bespeak different sources and thus mediations. Glez, in turn, takes an altogether different route. In the portraits, his distinctly cartoonish style borders on caricature, with which he has made a name for himself. Thus, we may recognize characteristic features of people like Housna Souleyman Ahmar, but also notice her oversized lips, very narrow eyes,

and the even more bizarre *doppelgänger* next to her who sports blond braids and traditional Dutch apparel in order to illustrate her dream to study in the Netherlands (2016, 14). These portraits unify in themselves the double message of factuality and *artefactuality*, of immediate presentation and mediated re-presentation: they are, to use a term by Elisabeth Klar (2014, 169), “body signs” (“Körper-Zeichen”), hence they index real and individual bodies even though they reflexively refer to themselves as mediated signs.

However, the portraits also carry with them a different appeal, namely one of identification and empathy. As much as they signal that “This is a *real* human,” they also engage the reader, because “This is a real *human*,” or more precisely, the rendition of a real human. Here then, is one of the instances in which journalism and fiction revert to the same techniques to interest the reader: individualization and humanization. They give their subjects a face and a story and therefore ultimately have an ethical impetus: they create interest for stories and people and thereby invite empathy.²⁰

3. Immersion vs. Reflection

Not only do the reportages oscillate between journalistic credibility and artistic self-fashioning, or between suppressing and exposing mediation, but ultimately between different reading effects, namely between immersion and reflection. Immersion is an effect closely related to transportation and to Wolf’s (2014, §1) notion of aesthetic illusion which “consists primarily of a feeling [...] of being imaginatively and emotionally immersed in a represented world and of experiencing this world in a way similar (but not identical) to real life”. That ARTE aims at immersing its readers becomes clear in its travel metaphor when it promises that with each reportage, the TV station is “taking you to a new destination” (anon. 2014, n. pag.). One strategy traditionally used in narratives to allow readers to experience this kind of mental state is to unfold for them a story world whose details resonate with real life schemata (cf. Wolf, 2014, §21) and easing reader’s access to that story world. When mediation recedes to the background of the reader’s attention and leaves the mental stage to a mimetic display, a form of immersion is likely to occur. Inversely, foregrounding mediation can hinder immersion, namely in cases where “the reader’s focus would shift from the represented world as the center of aesthetic illusion to the conditions and means of its construction and transmission” (ibid., §24). Yet this kind of almost Brechtian meta-thinking on the reader’s part about the act of reading and the status of the presented story is an extreme form, and subtle combinations of foregrounded narration and immersion exist. Take, for example, the case of an unreliable narrator. Even though such a narrator introduces some distance with respect to the believability of the mediated story, the readers might still be immersed, maybe even more so if the comments evoke emotional participation and / or identification with the narrator’s views.

It is tempting to assume that fiction has a privileged connection with immersion, and that is certainly the case with much of what Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2012, §11) calls “artistic fiction”. In a similar vein, the act of reflection and non-immersion seems to be, at first sight, a defining characteristic of non-fiction genres, journalism being one of them. Reflection, according to a layperson’s rationale, must be a prerequisite of focusing on facts and being able to form an opinion. Despite these stereotypical associations of fiction with immersion and journalism with reflection, counterexamples come from both journalistic and fictional texts. Journalistic texts can integrate literary techniques aimed at immersing and engaging the reader; “New Journalism” even made the self-conscious blending of factual reportage and literary elements its hallmark. Immersion can be an effect of non-fictional narrative, as Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) has argued.²¹ Many examples of fictional literature, too, work with a deliberate back and forth between more and less immersive passages. Different modes within the same genre (i.e. fiction) are also at issue in the classical distinction between telling and showing and its various associated concepts (Lubbock 1921; Genette 1983; Fludernik 2010).²² Interestingly, explanations of the difference often invoke the acts of reporting and witnessing, as is the case in Tobias Klauk and Tilmann Köppe’s (2014, §4) definition: “telling” is defined as “the impression on the reader’s side that the events of the story are being reported” while “the impression of somehow witnessing the events [...] constitutes showing”. Here, we see how intricate the alignment between different narrative techniques (showing vs. telling) and genres (journalism vs. fiction) can become, when narratologists make reference to classical *journalistic* terminology to explain what happens in a *fictional* text.

In sum, rather than forcing immersion vs. reflection or showing vs. telling into neat generic categories, the point is to trace the functional shuttling between these extremes in a given text. This interest is at least as old as Wayne Booth’s 1961 *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (16), which advocates for looking at the play of telling and showing rather than normatively favoring any one technique. What Booth cherishes in an artist like Boccaccio is “his ability to order various forms of telling in the service of various forms of showing” (ibid.). In this spirit of a double focus, the following two sub-sections highlight techniques by which the four comic artists invite their readers to immerse themselves in the reportages or to reflect critically on the events therein. While I focus on the extremes of these two poles, I also discuss the grey zones and fluctuations between them.

3.1. Enhancing (and Manipulating) Immersion

The advantage of a pictorial medium such as comics is that it can represent visual information more directly than a purely verbal medium ever could. This does not mean, of course, that pictures are automatically more truthful, as drawn representations, and even photos present a certain selection, an angle, a focus, and can be manipulated. But it does mean that comics and other pictorial media can

create a sense of space and environments quickly, virtually at the blink of an eye. Therefore, they seem to promise a priority route to immersion and the illusion of immediacy as I have argued above for mimetic and saturated monstrators. A saturated representation of an environment aids in creating a sense of place and thus gives the reader access to places and people that are otherwise inaccessible, as is the case for most refugee camps. I describe how this effect takes shape in interview scenes because interviews are a staple and authenticator of both classical journalistic work and comic reportages.

The deeper rhetoric of interviews is that they allow the journalist, and by extension the reader, to listen to a person's story in their own words; immediacy here attains an ethical dimension. As we listen to the interviewees through simulated direct encounters, the refugees acquire narrative agency. Thus, the drawn interview is a powerful tool to achieve what Gillian Whitlock (2006, 978) has argued for comics as a medium more generally, namely "an imaginative and ethical engagement with the proximity of the other". Given how entrenched the interview is as a technique in traditional journalism as well as in prominent comic reporters such as Joe Sacco, it is no surprise that all four artists incorporate direct statements from identifiable people by depicting individuals and adding speech bubbles. Yet, Kassai and Kleist in particular reproduce interview situations re-occurring over several panels and in which refugees 'talk' with extended direct speech often sitting in their private camp environments. Thereby these two artists come closest to the comics equivalent of a full-fledged interview. A typical interview response in Kassai's reportage comes from Kayriyeh, an elderly woman who recounts from her life as a refugee: "My husband has not had any work in 10 years. When he still had work, things were a little better. We didn't need anything. [...] Now, we're getting by ... The PLO supports us financially, because my son Jamal is a martyr. Here in the camp, we only have electricity for 2 hours. The water is not potable. We had nothing of this life. This here is like a prison. We are not content. No one is content here!"²³ (2014, 16)

The spaces in which these interviews take place reveal something of the interviewees' personality and life. Thus, comic artists capitalize on the socio-cultural and biographical indexicality of environments. Kleist's (2016, 1) very first panel, for example, shows the family of the refugee Farhad sitting in their former living room in Syria. Immediately, we see a TV set, heavy window curtains, and a colorful rug, and we can deduce that we are looking at a family who previously enjoyed a good middle-class life. Likewise, Kassai visits a family in the Lebanese refugee camp he is commissioned to portray. Here, too, the interior betrays a relatively good standard of living, and this confirms Kayriyeh's assessment that, until recently, "We didn't need anything"²⁴ (Kassai 2014, 15). Readers can also identify the man whose portrait hangs prominently on the wall as Kayriyeh's dead son Jamal. By calling him a martyr (16), she hints at the family's political leanings as much as at their private sorrows. These two examples show not only how the artists use their words and pictures to give the reader a sense of being present in the interviewees' homes, but also how they carefully select what items

they depict to, literally, situate their interviewees socially, economically, and psychologically.

What is more, the reader often takes the position directly vis-à-vis the subjects, in close proximity. This way, the artists simulate a situation in which the readers are the direct addressee of the refugees' accounts; that the *inter-view* lives up to its etymology as the scene happens in between (our and their) views.²⁵ We have the impression of looking at and even hearing the interviewed people. In this way, the interview scenes present themselves as faithful depictions of what happened. Except, they are not. They are curated artistic arrangements that deepen immersion at the expense of truth in a strict sense. This becomes clear upon closer inspection, particularly when we zoom in on two aspects of the interviews: the language of the interviews and how the authors decide to represent the inhabitants' stories verbally and / or pictorially.

The default option to represent an interviewee's voice are speech bubbles that allegedly relate direct speech. Another way of relating refugees' words and stories is through captions in which the narrator filters interviewees' voices, a more obvious mediation, somewhat akin to indirect speech. One such instance is Kassai's (2014, 14) above-quoted caption, "The elderly lady tells about her life as a refugee", which continues, "She is a mother of 8. One of her children is a martyr. Because of the war between Palestine and Israel she left 'Kabre,' the village where she was born – she was 8 years old back then."²⁶ In contrast to this indirect quotation in the form of a caption hovering in the upper part of the panel, Kayriyeh's comment, that "Kabre was totally destroyed"²⁷ (14), appears as a "direct-speech bubble" in between the hostess and her guests.

However, interviews are always mediated and processed. Even if we disregard editing, selecting, and paraphrasing, the interviewees' statements are also translated; a fact that Kassai, Kleist, and Wild do mention by pointing, for instance, to a "translation by Geith" (Kassai 2014, 14), a "translator Hassan," (Kleist 2016, 7), and "Dippina, my interpreter" (Wild 2016, n. pag.).²⁸ But the narrators reference these acts of translation in passing and mostly only *after* they have already represented what readers understand to be original speech. Here the artists veil most likely the translation from Arabic or Nepalese into English or French, and then into the German of the online reportages. They doubtlessly do that to reinforce the impression that readers are immediately present and have direct access to interviewees' voices, to create the illusion of eavesdropping. Interestingly, the reportages also contain passages in which the language barrier and translation come to light. In some of these instances, the reporters overcome the barrier as in Kassai's conversation with Kayriyeh which shows her briefly speaking in Arabic only to continue on in "German" (2014, 14). In addition to this harmless codeswitching, there are several unresolved translation issues as well. Wild's reportage, for example, contains passages in which the local language represented through Nepalese script is left provocatively untranslated. Here, the unbridged gulf of linguistic mediation turns into the symbol of cultural distance. In the interviews, however, such a barrier is not only not problematized, but for the most part, wiped out.

A second technique through which the artists enhance reader immersion takes place when the refugees' narratives are not marked as direct speech in bubbles, but represented instead as embedded narratives that take over the monstrator plane. Wild's monstrator, for example, re-stages a story that the author must have heard as an account from a woman by the name of Budhi Maya Biswa: elephants have stampeded into the camp, killed several inhabitants, and prompted the remaining crowd to perform a Ganesha Pooja, a religious ritual to appease the elephants. Even though Biswa, the intra-diegetic narrator, is visible separately in the act of narrating with lengthy speech bubbles, the monstrator also shows two panels that Wild cannot have seen himself, one in which an elephant breaks through the wall of a hut and a second one that shows the Ganesha Pooja, people sitting around the statue of the elephant god Ganesha in the light of a sacrificial fire. In this second instance, Wild deliberately blends diegetic levels by moving Biswa's narrator avatar into the panel and illuminating her face with the fire that burns on the level of the embedded meta-narrative (fig. 3). The journalistic ethos of objectivity and verified knowledge is rubbing against the wish to engulf readers within the situation, to immerse us not only in the moment of listening to a refugee, but to "suck" us into a second level of immersion, into their stories.



Figure 3: Panel from Wild's reportage (2016, n. pag.).

Kleist (2016), too, embeds mini-narratives in his reportage, but takes this strategy one step further. Over several panels and at various points in his reportage, he re-stages Farhad's family's flight from their home city, their journey, and arrival at the camp Kawergosk, Iraq. This narrative decision gives the first pages of his reportage the shape of an interweaving and diegetically complex alternation between two storylines. Kleist does not, like Wild, mark his epistemic distance from Farhad's family's odyssey, and he leaves the narration to an amorphous voice that blends free indirect and indirect speech as can be discerned in the German verb forms "verschwand" (free indirect) and "habe" (indirect): "When their

house disappeared behind them, he has left his heart behind, Farhad said”²⁹ (Kleist 2016, 2). Both authors, Kleist and Wild narrativize their reportage to an extended degree, and they immerse the readers in the stories of the refugees through what they imagine to be the refugees’ eyes and ears. In one panel Farhad’s father even looks directly at the readers and addresses them as if they were identical with Farhad listening to his father: “Now stop filming and help your mother, Farhad!”³⁰ (Ibid., 6)

Let us look at one more example from Kleist’s reportage that takes the composite and reimagined nature of the depicted ‘reality’ to an extreme in a move that by now belongs to the repertoire of comic journalists. From the beginning, even before the monstrator projects for us as quasi immediate what is in fact a second-hand account of the flight, Kleist mixes re-staged imagination and authentic reporting. The very first panel is overwritten with what sounds like the traditional, neutral information that a reporter would provide: “Farhad’s family comes from Qamishli, that’s in the north of Syria, approximately 100 km away from the border with Iraq. They are Kurds”³¹ (2016, 1). Right after this sentence, however, the narrator continues in the past tense entering into a storytelling mode often associated with the simple past in German (as seen in the words “zusammenrief” and “verkündete”): “It was in August when the father called the family together and announced that they had to leave the country”³² (ibid.). Yet a sentence later, the narrator glides again into a different voice which reports things more immediately in present tense and which uses an epistemic modal verb (“soll aufgemacht worden sein”) in a way that the reader identifies with the (uncertain) knowledge and ultimately the experience Farhad’s family’s had *back then*: “The border with northern Iraq is said to have been opened”³³ (ibid.). The narrator now temporally and experientially identifies with these events. Thus, most obviously he is no longer identical with Kleist, because Kleist cannot have experienced this conversation first-hand. The monstrator chimes in with this illusion and contributes what, upon close reading, is a logically and experientially impossible panel. While the narrator had clearly located the situation at a time before the reporter was ever there – “in August” and in the family’s Qamishli living room –, the family members all look towards the reader, a non-represented and non-identified listener, arguably the reporter with whom the reader is coaxed to identify. The father, too, looks straight at the reader, but when he provides the reason for the family’s impending departure from their hometown (“When the Al Nusra takes Qamishli, they will displace us from our house”³⁴ (2016, 1), he likely addresses the family, not the reader at whom he is looking. This is suggested by the narrator’s comment which states that the father has “called the family together and announced that they have to leave the country [...]”³⁵ (ibid.; fig. 4).



Figure 4: Panel from Kleist's *Kavergoske* (2016, 1).

The picture embodies an immersive descent into an imagined memory, a representational conflict easily overlooked. In one and the same panel, we get a blend of the seen and the re-created: on the one hand, Kleist has seen in person the family sitting across from himself, which we can deduce by comparing the following sketched portraits, in which the family members wear the same clothing as they do on this very first group panel; and on the other hand, Kleist cannot have been present during this particular moment in August in Qamishli. Such a hybrid of what is seen and what is recreated could not be evoked as convincingly in TV or photo reportage. Different time slices and epistemic certainties are melted together in the reporter's drawings through the double messages that both narrator and monstrator send and that we seamlessly integrate into a witnessing impression.

What we get with all of these techniques, the veiled translation, the embedded mini-narratives, and the blending of first-hand reporting and artistic re-imagination, has both the powerful allure of immersion and an empathetic impact as we experience people's voices and stories, allegedly, from their own mouths and through their own eyes. As we have seen, this immersion comes at a price, namely that of severe mediatedness up to downright re-imagination, yet this does not necessarily catch the reader's attention. The fact that the authors depict these acts of mediation – be it the translation or the second-hand knowledge – makes their invitation to immersion all the more intriguing as they appeal to epistemic distance, yet also draw readers in emotionally and authenticate the mediation *as* journalistic mediation. Nevertheless, when readers are complicit in ignoring these signals and the strategic mediation, they willingly give themselves over into the artist's hand. It takes stronger markers of distance and distancing, narrative

disturbances almost, to pull the reader out of the story and induce reflection. Such disturbances are the subject of the following and last sub-section.

3.2. Enhancing Reflection

The act of drawing itself has a prominent place in Kleist's, Kassai's, and Wild's reportages. While Kleist and Kassai depict themselves drawing in the comics proper, and Wild as well as Kassai preface their reportages with photographs of the artists drawing, Wild is the only author to include a meditation on the challenges of reporting with images. About halfway into his reportage under the sub-heading "The Time for a Drawing"³⁶ and above the half-finished sketch of an outdoor market scene in Beldangi, Wild's narrator breaks into a digression ripe with his, by now familiar, sarcasm and a direct address to the reader: "Look at this great sketch with a 'wavy' line. It [the line – J.L.] optimally describes an everyday scene. You are enthusiastic, that much is clear to me. [...] What has happened during the creation of this masterpiece, you will ask me. OK, then, here is a making-of in two steps"³⁷ (2016, n. pag.). The two steps are the line work and the coloring which Wild addresses in turn. But Wild does more than subdivide the time for a drawing into two phases, he provides a time-stamp for each of the seven sub-steps of the line work, a phase that covers fifty-five minutes in total. He turns the drawing process into a stop-watch race of craftsmanship, and while he exposes the reality of the artistic process, he exposes the art *qua* art as well. With biting irony, the narrator-artist purports to merge with the objects he draws, including a turnip: "I and this turnip become one. I turn into my model in order to better capture its essence"³⁸ (ibid., n. pag.). Wild satirizes the trope of identification between artist and model by choosing an inanimate, decidedly non-regal model. In a meta-comment shortly after the turnip remark, the narrator laments the slow process of drawing and consequently the impossibility of truthful drawing. Because reality does not wait for artists to capture it, by the time he wants to complete the sketch of a woman, she is gone. No other option is left to the artist but to reconstruct a patchwork of reality snippets, to stitch slices of times together that did not co-exist: "The sketch [...] is a collage of several small realities"³⁹ (ibid., n. pag.). He admits outright, for example, that the laundry he draws in the next step had not been there when the woman was still present. Even more so than with the time-stamps, Wild reveals the mismatched temporalities between events and their representation, and points the reader, however humorously, to the fact that the allegedly immediate and truthful images produced by comic journalists are always out of sync with reality.

Almost mischievously, he casts even greater doubt on veracity and immediacy with the second step, the coloring, which happened astonishingly long after Wild has left the camp: "I am coloring a drawing from 2 ½ months ago"⁴⁰ (ibid., n. pag.). Even the alleged turnip turns out to be a squash – Wild learns this from a Google search instead of proper observation *in situ* – a squash whose color he

has not represented truthfully. Wild's narrator accepts factual inaccuracies in exchange for getting the long overdue work done soon: "But the real color of the squash doesn't matter, does it? (Much like the color of the saris, of the drying laundry, and of the sand. The main thing is that the drawing gets finished quickly"⁴¹ (ibid., n. pag.). In sharing the narrator-creator's embarrassed and embarrassing thoughts with the audience in a mode that uses the generic pose of a diatribe, Wild gleefully destroys the illusion of truthful reporting and teases the reader. This move has its very own entertainment value. And yet, while he destroys the illusion of a truthful representation with respect to camp life, he very much immerses us in another reality, namely that of the comics creation process. For all its humor, Wild is arguably very serious about the mechanics of comic art, its incremental coming-into-being and ultimately about the complicated immediacy and immersion status of comics journalism. Yet, despite all the anti-immersion and anti-immediacy warning signs Wild has laid out for us with his meditation on the unreliability of drawn journalism, readers will find themselves tempted to take the following depictions at face value, even the panel that immediately follows which, as the narrator acknowledges, has been created with the same composite method ("with the same technique"⁴²; ibid., n. pag.). Wild thus enlists the reader's complicity, not to close the gap between panels, but to 'auto-correct'; he, literally illustrates for us how seductive the sufficiently mimetic and logical image is.⁴³

Showing oneself in the act of drawing and / or musing about it, is but one way to pull readers out of the immediate flow of events and invite them to think about the representational contingencies of such an act. Another, maybe complementary, path is to let the refugees themselves draw and include those representations within one's own reportage. This is a path Kleist and Wild take. Both artists held drawing workshops for children in the camp, born out of an ethical, also justificatory, obligation which Kleist describes thus:

[...] I wanted to bring something with me to give to the refugees, to feel better myself. I thought that if I brought colouring pencils and paints, I would give the children something useful and, at the same time, learn about their feelings and their lives here. It could also help them forget the war and the things they saw in Syria. (quoted in Spindler 2013, n. pag.)

Hence, giving back to the refugee community is the ethical aspect of letting children draw. *Reprinting* their drawings within the reportages serves yet another function, namely to authenticate the artist's stay and observations: these children really did exist and we can see their presence in the form of their drawings, much like a signature. However, this very signature also disrupts the narrative proper, and thus diverts, if not impedes immersion. In contrast to Kleist's and Wild's embedded mini-narratives discussed above, these elements are neither narrative (presenting a sequence of events) nor are they stylistically homogeneous with respect to the monstrator's "voice". Quite the contrary, and rising from their authenticating function, the drawings clearly stem from different hands and, yet more importantly, they come from a different representational ethos. Kleist prompted the children to draw their camp, for example. The children delivered strictly two-dimensional images with the disproportionality and abstraction that

is so typical of children's drawings. The children's drawings are unpolished, which is to say, unconcerned with the mimetic conventions we associate with the professional artistic gaze. These drawings are not aimed at, cannot aim at, mimetic verisimilitude – both Kleist and Wild even feel the need to annotate the children's drawings in order to make them legible to the adult and mimetically-‘pampered’ audience. Yet, precisely by breaking the expectation of easy immersion and verisimilitude, in their necessarily different poetics, these drawings are touching. They emanate an eagerness to express oneself in blissful disregard of ‘grown up’ representational and journalistic standards. In short, they are as artistic and raw as can be. Again, on the one hand, as with Wild's diatribe on the challenges of truthful representation, these drawings break the story flow, they ask the reader to reflect on how differently children see the camp's reality and how an immediacy-preventing filter is inherent to the children's form of representation. On the other hand, the drawings also establish a second plane of representational ‘honesty’: this is their, that is, the children's perspective and we immerse ourselves not in their *world*, but in the alterity of *their perspectives*.⁴⁴

Ultimately, Kleist and Wild honor these alternative perspectives by reprinting the children's drawings; they literally include the children's views at the expense of arresting immersion in their own reportages. Thus, they give up pictorial and narrative homogeneity in order to showcase multivocality and collaboration. This sense of respect is evident in Kleist's title which emphasizes that his reportage was created “With the Support of the Children of Camp Kawergosk.”⁴⁵ Nowhere is this multivocality more visible than when the children take on the task of drawing the same ‘model,’ which is the case when Wild willy-nilly agrees to be a model himself. Half-jokingly, half-impressed, Wild's narrator reflects on the different aspects each child has noticed about him. One student, he remarks, was the only one to draw him, Wild, “how I present my drawing pads”, another one has noticed “how poorly I am handling the tropical climate”, and yet another one shows a fleshy Wild and finds that the comics author “eat[s] too much”⁴⁶ (2016, n. pag.). Here again, Wild asks his readers half-jokingly, half in earnest, to consider how different viewers perceive and draw an apparently objective reality in strikingly dissimilar, yet not ‘untrue’ ways.

4. A Complex Notion of Reportage

In reporting from refugee camps around the world, all four comics gathered in ARTE's *Refugees* project use their medium to complicate theoretical and epistemic dichotomies such as factuality vs. artistic license and objectivity vs. subjectivity. As journalists with a sketchbook, the four artists share many strategies: they give the titular refugees a face, a voice, and sometimes even a pen. At the same time, they also make revealing choices with respect to when and how they approximate the above-mentioned poles.

One area where this becomes clear is in the ways in which the artists foreground or background narrative and artistic mediation (cf. discussion in Section 2). Glez and Wild, for example, tend to highlight their narrative and monstrative presence obtrusively, be it through overt narrators as in Wild's direct addressing of the reader ("you will ask me"), or through non-mimetic monstrators like Glez's visual metaphors such as his image of the split brain. Kassai, on the other hand, leans more often towards the immediacy-producing pole, for example by offering mimetic and saturated panels (land and camp spaces) that provide a sense of direct encounter with the camps, or by having a relatively covert narrator who advances the reportage without pointing to himself too often. Kleist and Kassai are also the artists who mediate inhabitants' comments through direct speech at many points thus producing an immediacy effect for the conversations they record, while Wild couches what he must have heard from his interviewees in the narrator's voice, as when he adds captions to his portraits such as: "Her name is Purna Darjee, she will fly to her family in Pennsylvania"⁴⁷ (2016, n. pag.). Glez chooses a different route in that his inhabitants speak little and the narrator is the dominant voice, both in terms of quantity and in terms of speaking about his subjects or, as is more often the case, about life in a refugee camp in general. Thus, generalizing – one could say encyclopedic – narrator comments such as the following often overlay an illustration in Glez's panels, here the depiction of a man carrying what is apportioned to him: "The food rations consist of sorghum, oil, and beans. Soap is handed out as well"⁴⁸ (2016, 8).

Overall, the artists occupy different positions on a spectrum of more obvious versus more veiled reporting and, related to this, on a spectrum of pretending to report more neutrally (objectively) versus in a more opinionated manner (subjectively). However, such holistic categories hide the complex flickering of (im)mediacy that happens in all four reportages. Thus, it is informative to trace the dynamics of veiled or highlighted mediation in each of the reportages and to chronicle the division of labor between narrator and monstrator as I have sketched out in Section 2. Some elements, like portraits, even serve a simultaneous double-function; they showcase the artist's presence as much as they foreground the external reality of the sitter, individuals whom one could recognize in real life.

Ultimately, I argue, different shades of immediacy and mediatedness correlate with different reading effects, which are aimed at either immersing us in the reported world or prompting us to reflect on the work in front of us: on the events and people we encounter as much as on the mediated nature of the encounter itself (see Section 3). Even in those instances where immersion or reflection are the primary effect, secondary signals can add complexity to the reading experience, if readers choose to notice them. Hence, as I outlined with respect to the internal translation, for example, immersion-producing effects are often strategically construed immersion. Conversely, reflection-enhancing techniques, such as Wild's diatribe on the process of drawing, can immerse us in another narrative, namely that of artistic production and that of different representational possibilities.

Narrativization is a key strategy to enhance immersion, and also one of the axes where artists differ. The aspect of narrativity I have analyzed here is the degree a) to which the four artists let their subjects tell their stories in interviews and b) to which they dramatize these embedded narratives through their own monstrosity, sometimes unabashedly re-imagining what they as artists could not have seen or heard first-hand. Kleist and Wild both do the latter, while Kassai sticks to first-hand experiences, and lets the subjects tell their stories over extended interviews. As mentioned above, Glez grants his subjects barely any direct speech portions. In addition, his reportage contains almost no consistent narrative strands. Instead, he most often reflects and comments from an authorial viewpoint about the people and circumstances he finds in the camp. In comparison with the works of his three colleagues, Glez's reportage really appears to be a stylistic and narrative outlier, as it is an illustrated essay more than a window into direct visual and verbal impressions. This evaluation makes sense once we remind ourselves that Glez is a cartoonist, and hence his reportage has the aura of a chain of one-panel, highly metaphorized and authorially heavy-handed cartoons.

Artists have multiple techniques at their disposal and may well invite immersion and reflection with different approaches, respectively. Even though Wild and Kleist both support immersion with the embedded refugees' narratives, they advance reflection at other points by including an extended meta-comment on the impossible task of reporting truthfully with drawings (Wild) or by including the markedly different visual voices of children's drawings (both Wild and Kleist). These, then, are examples of the different approaches artists take in their reportages: do they smooth out, 'co-opt' others' voices into their narratives (e.g. by filtering interviewees' stories through the narrator) or do they preserve, even showcase those voices as alien (via direct speech or children's drawings)? One might even compare the latter to multivocality in the Bakhtinian sense, a polyphonic clash of aesthetics, repurposed for journalistic commitment.

To conclude, the reportages use the affordances of their medium to play with an aestheticized factionality, with facts and *artefacts*. We could say that they encapsulate – to different degrees and to different overall effects – a productive tension between *transporting* and *reporting*. *Transporting* brings readers *there*, sucks them in by using strategies of narration and immersion, adapted to their multi-modal medium. *Reporting* emphasizes the act of bringing something *back* to the reader, something that bears the mark of mediation and of the mediator and therefore dares readers to reflect. The Latin verb *portere*, “to carry”, emphasizes that a message, an impression is carried (mediated). Hence the four reportages are four answers to the question: How do you carry your impressions and thoughts over to the reader? And: How do you carry out this hybrid act of artful journalism? While the answers vary depending on individual circumstances, they share one essential characteristic: they are four accounts that capture portions of objective reality, but re-work them aesthetically and subjectively to arrive at something that Joe Sacco calls an “essential truth” as opposed to a “literal truth” (Sacco 2012, xii). “For good or for ill, the comics medium [...] has forced me to

make choices. In my view that is part of its message” (ibid.). Comic reportages such as those by Kassai, Kleist, Glez, and Wild defend artistic license and subjectivity precisely because of the journalistic duty to show – and necessarily re-imagine – what normally remains invisible to the average viewer.

Bibliography

- Alber, Jan / Fludernik, Monika (2014): “Mediacy and Narrative Mediation”. In: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. URL: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/mediacy-and-narrative-mediation> (14.05.2018).
- Anon. (2016): “Refugees – Tschad”. ARTE. URL: <https://info.arte.tv/de/refugees-tschad> (10.03.2018).
- Anon. (2014): “Refugees – An In-Depth Look at Camps”. ARTE. URL: <https://info.arte.tv/en/refugees> (14.05.2019).
- Anon. (n.d.): “Refugees. Das Projekt”. ARTE. URL: <https://www.arte.tv/sites/de/refugees/das-projekt/?lang=de> (30.06.2018).
- Booth, Wayne (1961): *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago, IL / London.
- Brister, Rose / Walzer, Belinda (2013): “Kairos and Comics. Reading Human Rights Intercontextually in Joe Saccos’s Graphic Narratives”. In: *College Literature* 40 (No. 3), pp. 138-155.
- Chatman, Seymour (1978): *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY / London.
- Chatman, Seymour (1990): *Coming To Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY / London.
- Chute, Hillary (2006): “‘The Shadow of a past Time’. History and Graphic Representation in ‘Maus’”. In: *Twentieth Century Literature* 52 (No. 2), pp. 199-230.
- Chute, Hillary (2010): *Graphic Women. Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*. New York, NY.
- Chute, Hillary (2016): *Disaster Drawn. Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Cambridge.
- Fludernik, Monika (2010): *An Introduction to Narratology*. London / New York, NY.
- Genette, Gerard (1983): *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*. Ithaca, NY.
- Genette, Gerard (1988): *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Ithaca, NY.
- Gerrig, Richard / Rapp, David (2004): “Psychological Processes Underlying Literary Impact”. In: *Poetics Today* 25 (No. 2), pp. 265-81.
- Glez, Damien (2016): “Bleidjing – Warten aufs Leben”. ARTE. URL: <https://info.arte.tv/de/bleidjing-die-comic-reportage-von-damien-glez> (08.05.2018).
- Glidden, Sarah (2016): *Rolling Blackout. Dispatches from Turkey, Syria, and Iraq*. Montreal, QC.
- Groensteen, Thierry (2013): *Comics and Narration*. Jackson, MS.
- Huet, Donatien (2014): “There have never been so many refugees and displaced persons”. ARTE. URL: <https://info.arte.tv/en/there-have-never-been-so-many-refugees-and-displaced-persons> (02.04.2018).
- Kassai, Didier (2014): “‘Mokhayam – Klein-Palästina’, die Comic-Reportage von Didier Kassai”. ARTE. URL: <https://info.arte.tv/de/moukhaam-klein-palaestina-die-comic-reportage-von-didier-kassai> (06.06.2018).
- Kavaloski, Joshua (2018): “Discordant Discourses. History and Journalism in the Graphic Novels of Joe Sacco”. In: *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. URL: [DOI: 10.1080/21504857.2018.1431801](https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2018.1431801) (14.08.2018).
- Klar, Elisabeth (2014): “Transformation und Überschreibung: Sprache und Text in ihrer Beziehung zum Körper-Zeichen in den Comics von Alfred”. In: Susanne Hochreiter / Ursula Klingenböck (Eds.), *Bild ist Text ist Bild. Narration und Ästhetik in der Graphic Novel*. Bielefeld, pp. 169-189.
- Klauk, Tobias / Köppe, Tilmann (2014): “Telling vs. Showing” In: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. URL: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/telling-vs-showing> (20.05.2018).
- Kleist, Reinhard (2016): “Kawergosk – 5 Sterne”. ARTE. URL: <https://info.arte.tv/de/kawergosk-5-sterne-eine-comicreportage-von-reinhard-kleist> (21.05.2018).
- Kugler, Oliver (2017): *Dem Krieg entronnen*. Zürich.
- Lubbock, Percy (1921): *The Craft of Fiction*. New York, NY.

- Nyberg, Amy Kiste (2006): "Theorizing Comics Journalism". In: *International Journal of Comic Art* 8 (No.2), pp. 98-112.
- Packard, Stephan (2006): *Anatomie des Comics. Psychosemiotische Medienanalyse*. München.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality. Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore, MD.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure (2004): *Narrative across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*. Lincoln, NE.
- Sacco, Joe (2012): *Journalism*. New York, NY.
- Schaeffer, Jean-Marie (2012): "Fictional vs. Factual Narration". In: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. URL: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/fictional-vs-factual-narration> (20.04.2018).
- Schüwer, Martin (2008): *Wie Comics erzählen. Grundriss einer intermedialen Erzähltheorie der grafischen Literatur*. Trier.
- Spindler, William (2013): "German Artist Gives Masterclass to Syrian Refugee Children in Iraq". UNHCR USA. URL: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2013/12/52b067816/german-artist-gives-masterclass-syrian-refugee-children-iraq.html> (17.06.2018).
- Stanzel, Franz (1984): *A Theory of Narrative*. Cambridge.
- Thon, Jan-Noël (2013): "Who's Telling the Tale? Authors and Narrators in Graphic Narrative". In: Daniel Stein / Jan-Noël Thon (Eds.), *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels. Contribution to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*. Berlin, pp. 67-99.
- Thon, Jan-Noël (2016): *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*. Lincoln, NE.
- Whitlock, Gillian (2006): "Autographies. The Seeing 'P' of the Comics". In *Modern Fiction Studies* 52 (No.4), pp. 965-79.
- Wild, Nicolas (2016): "Die Zeichnungen von Nicolas Wild". ARTE. URL: <https://info.arte.tv/de/der-comic-autor-nicolas-wild> (07.05.2018).
- Williams, Kristian (2005): "The Case for Comics Journalism. Artist-reporters Leap Tall Conventions in a Single Bound". In: *Columbia Journalism Review* March / April, pp. 51-55.
- Wolf, Werner (2014): "Aesthetic Illusion". In: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. URL: <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/71.html> (4.5.2019).

Dr. Julia Ludewig
Allegheny College
Department of Modern and Classical Languages
E-mail: jludewig@allegheny.edu

How to cite this article:

Ludewig, Julia: "The Art of Comic Reportage". In: *DIEGESIS. Interdisciplinary E-Journal for Narrative Research / Interdisziplinäres E-Journal für Erzählforschung* 8.1 (2019). 24-47.

URN: [urn:nbn:de:hbz:468-20190603-161103-7](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:468-20190603-161103-7)

URL: <https://www.diegesis.uni-wuppertal.de/index.php/diegesis/article/download/352/558>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

¹ I would like to thank Peter Ensberg, Lynn Kutch, Lynn Wolff, and the anonymous reviewers for providing helpful feedback on this essay.

- ² “Die Serie ‘Refugees’ [...] *erzählt* vom Leben dieser Menschen [...] mit den Augen von 24 Künstlern: Regisseure, Fotografen, Schriftsteller und Comiczeichner” (emphasis added). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
- ³ “haben sich im Flüchtlingslager Breidjing im Tschad umgesehen und ihre Eindrücke in ihrer jeweiligen Kunstrichtung verarbeitet”
- ⁴ “sich umsehen”
- ⁵ “in ihrer jeweiligen Kunstrichtung verarbeitet”
- ⁶ For a sample of recent discussions, see Nyberg 2006; Brister / Walzer 2013; Chute 2016, especially Ch. 5; and Kavaloski 2018.
- ⁷ “Flüchtlingscamp von Beldangi. Damak, Nepal, September 2013.”
- ⁸ “Sara Ibrahim Issak, 23 Jahre, sudanesischer Lehrerin.”
- ⁹ “Donnerstag: Poker [...] Sonntag: Schwimmbad.”
- ¹⁰ “geblühten Unterhosen”
- ¹¹ “Hören Sie sofort auf damit!”
- ¹² This simplistic pipeline model of information transfer has rightly been criticized. Nevertheless, I argue that many a layperson’s notion of journalism functions exactly like that and this is who the ARTE dossier appeals to.
- ¹³ Interestingly, Groensteen (2013, 97) reserves the term “narrator” for “a first-person narration by a character involved in the story and represented in graphic form” and lists comic reportage as one of the genres in which we can actually call the enunciating instance by the classical name “narrator.”
- ¹⁴ “Breidjing, Oktober 2014...Die Region Wadai in der Unterpräfektur Hadd, 60 km von der sudanesischen Grenze entfernt.”
- ¹⁵ “Und so...”
- ¹⁶ “Anfang der 90er Jahre erfasste eine Welle von Nationalismus das Land. Ein Großteil der Bewohner mit nepalesischen Wurzeln wurde ausgewiesen. Sie fanden Zuflucht im Osten Nepals, dem Herkunftsland ihrer Vorfahren.”
- ¹⁷ “Was sind Flüchtlingscamps? Hafen oder Falle? ‘Übergangsweise’ oder ‘endgültig’? Alltäglicher Ausdruck von Entwurzelung oder unvermeidliches Wurzelschlagen? [...]”
- ¹⁸ “Einige strategisch gelegene Orte”
- ¹⁹ “Einige strategisch gelegene Orte”; “Frühmorgens im Lager...”
- ²⁰ Portraits resonate beautifully with what Chute (2016) has referred to as the ethical encounter of the “concrete other” (205) and the “ethics of attention to the face” (210).
- ²¹ Yet, Ryan (2001) also agrees that, typically, immersion is a more central concern to fictional than non-fictional texts: “But if a theory of transportation – and, by extension, of immersion – should be kept distinct from a theory of fiction, the two cannot be entirely dissociated, because imaginative participation in the textual world is much more crucial to the aesthetic purpose of fiction than to the practical orientation of most types of nonfiction” (95).
- ²² Telling vs. showing are entangled with many other binaries and narrative effects, as Tobias Klauk and Tilmann Köppe’s list shows: “[T]here are a number of different labels attached to the distinctions in question. Amongst them are ‘mimetic mode,’ ‘objectivity,’ ‘impersonal mode,’ ‘scenic mode,’ ‘dramatic mode,’ ‘rendering’ or ‘small distance’ as (more or less) synonymous for ‘showing,’ and ‘diegetic mode,’ ‘partiality’ or ‘large distance’ as (more or less) synonymous for ‘telling’” (2014; §6).
- ²³ “Mein Mann hat seit 10 Jahren keine Arbeit mehr. Als er noch Arbeit hatte, ging es etwas besser. Wir brauchten nichts [...] Jetzt kommen wir über die Runden... Die PLO unterstützt uns finanziell, weil mein Sohn Jamal ein Märtyrer ist. Hier im Camp gibt es nur für 2 Stunden Strom. Das Wasser ist nicht trinkbar. Wir hatten nichts von diesem Leben. Das hier ist wie ein Gefängnis. Wir sind nicht zufrieden. Keiner hier ist zufrieden!”
- ²⁴ “Wir brauchten nichts”.
- ²⁵ Cf. the ethical reading Chute (2016, 249) has proposed for what she calls “the significance of the reciprocal gaze”.
- ²⁶ “Die ältere Dame erzählt aus ihrem Flüchtlingsleben. Sie ist Mutter von 8 Kindern. Eines von ihnen ist ein Märtyrer. Wegen des Krieges zwischen Palästina und Israel hat sie mit ihren Eltern ihr Geburtsdorf ‘Kabre’ verlassen – da war sie 8 Jahre alt.”
- ²⁷ “Kabre wurde völlig zerstört.”
- ²⁸ “Übersetzung von Geith”; “Übersetzer Hassan”; “meine Dolmetscherin”
- ²⁹ “Als ihr Haus hinter ihnen verschwand, habe er sein Herz zurückgelassen, sagte Farhad.”
- ³⁰ “Jetzt hör mal auf zu filmen und hilf deiner Mutter, Farhad!”
- ³¹ “Farhads Familie kommt aus Qamishli, das ist im Norden Syriens, ungefähr 100 km von der Grenze nach Irak entfernt. Sie sind Kurden.”

³² “Es war im August, als der Vater die Familie zusammenrief und verkündete, dass sie das Land verlassen müssen.”

³³ “Die Grenze nach Nord Irak soll gerade aufgemacht worden sein.”

³⁴ “Wenn die Al Nusra Qamishli einnimmt, werden sie uns aus unserem Haus vertreiben.”

³⁵ “als der Vater die Familie zusammenrief und verkündete, dass sie das Land verlassen müssen”

³⁶ “Die Zeit für eine Zeichnung”

³⁷ “Betrachten Sie diese großartige Skizze mit ‘gewelltem’ Strich. Er beschreibt optimal eine Alltagsszene. Sie sind begeistert, das ist mir klar [...] Was ist bei der Erstellung dieses Meisterwerks wohl geschehen, werden Sie mich fragen. OK, hier dann ein Making-Of in zwei Etappen.”

³⁸ “Ich und diese Rübe werden eins. Ich werde zu meinem Modell, um sein Wesen besser zu erfassen.”

³⁹ “Die Skizze [...] ist eine Collage mehrerer kleiner Realitäten.”

⁴⁰ “Ich koloriere eine Zeichnung von vor 2 ½ Monaten.”

⁴¹ “Aber die echte Farbe des Kürbis ist egal, oder? (Genauso wie die Farbe der Saris, der trocknenden Wäsche und des Sandes). Hauptsache die Zeichnung wird schleunigst fertig.”

⁴² “mit der gleichen Technik”

⁴³ Cf. the narratological insight that readers’ default mode is the belief in the continuity of the read with the real world and that we need stark signs to deter us from these assumptions (cf. Gerrig / Rapp 2004).

⁴⁴ One could argue that this applies to professional art as well. Even though this is true, the particular learned style of drawing used by most comic artists holds a greater mimetic promise, especially in the context of a piece of comics journalism.

⁴⁵ “Mit Unterstützung der Kinder vom Camp Kawergosk”

⁴⁶ “hat mich als einziger gezeichnet, wie ich meine Blöcke zeige”, “hat bemerkt, wie schlecht ich das tropische Klima vertrage”, “dass ich zu viel esse”

⁴⁷ “Sie heißt Purna Darjee, sie wird zu ihrer Familie in Pennsylvania fliegen”.

⁴⁸ “Die Lebensmittelrationen bestehen aus Mohrenhirse, Öl und Bohnen. Auch Seife wird ausgegeben.”