

ASPECTS OF VISUAL DISCURSIVITY IN GRAPHIC JOURNALISM:

narrative enunciation and visual witness in *Le Photographe*

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ABSTRACT - The article examines some of the features designating comics as samples of a sub-genre labelled as “graphic journalism”: characterized by bringing together visual and discursive resources of graphic narratives, and exploitation of topic universes associated with historical and social actualities, such materials raise discussions about several defining criteria for journalistic practices, as recognized in its basic elements, resources, institutions and devices. I am interested in observing the characteristics of a particular work in this context, the album *Le Photographe* (GUIBERT, LEFÈVRE and LEMERCIER, 2009), with special focus on the enunciative and narrative regimes of visual forms used in this graphic narrative. Preference is here given to methodological approaches discriminating the dialectics between specificity/integration of different media (drawing, photography and graphic composition), constituting a *testimonial discursivity* of contemporary visual narratives: I concentrate on the narrative schemes of representation of actions and the game-like structure that marks the different discursive positions of narrative enunciation, through the oscillation between drawing and photographic formats.

Keywords: Graphic Journalism. Graphic Narratives. Graphic Enunciation. Documentary Formats. *Le Photographe*.

ASPECTOS DA DISCURSIVIDADE VISUAL DE UM JORNALISMO GRÁFICO: enunciação narrativa e testemunho visual em *Le Photographe*

RESUMO - O artigo examina algumas das características que fazem de obras quadrinísticas exemplares de um sub-gênero designado como “jornalismo gráfico”: caracterizado pela aproximação entre recursos visuais e discursivos das narrativas gráficas e pela exploração de universos temáticos associados à atualidade histórica e social, tais materiais suscitam discussões sobre critérios definidores das práticas do jornalismo, reconhecidos aí seus elementos, recursos, instituições e dispositivos. Interessa-nos observar as características de uma obra neste contexto, o álbum *Le Photographe* (GUIBERT, LEFÈVRE e LEMERCIER, 2009), observando aquilo que ilustra os regimes enunciativos e narrativos derivados das formas visuais empregadas nesta narrativa gráfica. Privilegiam-se abordagens metodológicas que discriminam a especificidade/integração de diferentes mídias (desenho, fotografia e composição gráfica), constituindo uma *discursividade testemunhal* das narrativas visuais contemporâneas: focalizam-se os esquemas narrativos da representação de ações e os jogos que demarcam as diferentes posições enunciativas da narração, pela oscilação entre formas desenhadas e fotografias.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo em quadrinhos. Narrativas gráficas. Enunciação narrativa. Formas documentais. *Le Photographe*.

ASPECTOS DE LA DISCURSIVIDAD VISUAL DE UNO PERIODISMO GRÁFICO: enunciación narrativa y testigo visual en *Le Photographe*

RESUMEN - El artículo examina algunas de las características que designan los cómics como muestras de un subgénero etiquetado como “periodismo gráfico”: se caracteriza por reunir recursos visuales y discursivos de narraciones gráficas, y la explotación de los universos de temas asociados con realidades históricas y sociales, tales materiales plantean discusiones sobre varios criterios para la definición de las prácticas periodísticas, como se reconoce en sus elementos básicos, recursos, instituciones y dispositivos. Estoy interesado en las características de una obra en particular, en este contexto, el álbum *Le Photographe* (GUIBERT, LEFÈVRE y LEMERCIER, 2009), con especial énfasis en la enunciación y regímenes narrativas de las formas visuales utilizados en esta obra. Preferencia se da aquí a los enfoques metodológicos que discriminan a la dialéctica entre la especificidad/integración de los diferentes medios de comunicación (dibujo, fotografía y composición gráfica), constituyendo una *discursividad testimonio* de narrativas visuales contemporáneas: me concentro en los esquemas narrativos de representación de las acciones y el juego que marca las diferentes posiciones discursivas de enunciación narrativa, a través de la oscilación entre el dibujo y formatos fotográficos. **Palabras clave:** Periodismo Gráfico. Narrativas Gráficas. Enunciación Gráfico. Formatos documentales. *Le Photographe*.

PROLOGUE

I propose an examination of a set of materials proper to the empirical universe of the so-called “graphic narratives”, particularly to a segment which presents major problems for an evaluation of journalism’s discursive practices and enunciative regimes: I focus on a segment of these productions that have received several labels, such as “documentary comics” (ADAMS, 2008), “autobiographical comics” (EL REFAIE, 2012) and “comics journalism” (ROSENBLATT; LUNSFORD, 2011).

In this approach of “comics journalism”, I analyze the collective work *Le Photographe* (GUIBERT; LEFÈVRE; LEMERCIER, 2009): among the reasons for this choice, I highlight the fact that this album is precisely situated in a borderline, gray zone between documentary record and journalistic testimony, incorporating the art of comics to a critical self-reflection on the cultural place of these discursive practices, especially in its privileged mediation of historical actuality. In addition, the work in question helps us to think about the possible critical inflections of journalistic discursive practices, in contrast to the canons, institutions and rules of this professional field.

Such vindications I make about *Le Photographe* must be contrasted with certain aspects ascribed to other already “canonical”

samples of this emerging sub-genre in contemporary visual culture: considering the critical inflection of the work to be here evaluated, I understand it as manifesting a more important character of the definition of “comics journalism” (or, as I prefer to designate from now on, “graphic journalism”) than that attributed to works such as Joe Sacco’s, for instance. In my evaluation of this Maltese/American artist, the comics approach to journalistic subjects have failed to sufficiently discuss the ways in which the appeal to pictorial and graphic forms radically affects the cultural position of journalism as an instance of alleged historical mediation - especially in the emphasis in reporter’s persona, an aspect that characterizes the construction of enunciative places on most of Sacco’s albums.

Although Sacco’s work represents an important novelty, because of the new coding of traditional journalistic practices, this supposed innovation does not exceed the threshold of the adoption of unusual devices in covering events of a certain interest: several issues of journalistic discursive positioning towards the significance of historical eventfulness are still preserved untouched in his works. In this sense, Joe Sacco’s graphic journalism reflects the same aporias featuring the traditional position of institutions, practices and discourses of journalism, in regards to the schemes of enunciative mediation and self-attribution of a preferred historical understanding - a point about which many of his commentators have not failed to notice, for example, in the recurrence of certain patterns of the listening of characters involved in his stories.

[...] What seems to bother Sacco the most about this form of listening, even (or especially) when He is implicated in it, is how it blurs the agency of his subjects, making them objects of study rather than actors in their own history. It is, ultimately, a purely instrumental form of listening, where the repórter listens not to know a person or to form a relational connection through listening but to obtain that person’s objectified experience, which in some ways then no longer belongs to him or to her [...]. For the reporter, instrumental listening turns the person and the experience into a commodity to be sold to the news; for politicians, this form of listening renders whole territories and their people into property that can be used to barter, trade, or coerce. (LUNSFORD; ROSENBLATT, 2011, p. 134).¹

On the other hand, in *Le Photographe*, the issues of enunciative positioning towards journalism’s factual reporting do not imply the discursive instance of the story with reporter’s persona (or the institutional status of media couverture that he represents): being a work whose authorship is negotiated among three discursive positions (the photographer, artist and book designer)

results in the most interesting effects for the consolidation of these “actantial positions” of narrative mediation of events. Accordingly, *Le Photographe* not only reflects three distinct discursive and authoral perspectives, but also a sharing of resources and expressive means used in the consolidation of certain testimonial effects of narration – especially in the emotional impacts it will generate in its readership. Therefore, this work expresses not only a variation of the instances that effectuate the narrative discourse, leading the episodes in its aspects such as of succession, rhythm, intensity, but also signify the meeting event (simultaneously tense and harmonic) among drawing, photography and graphic ordering of visual and verbal materials.

Precisely for this reason, my analytical choices for the work of Guibert, Lefèvre and Lemercier also points to the interpretive strategies that I shall employ here, as something ultimately reflected in the argumentative structure of this article²: in its first part, I evaluate the property of the association between “comics journalism” and documentary practices of contemporary visual culture, especially in the question of the openness and willingness towards historical, social and geographical singularities; for instance, I link the enunciative orientation of *Le Photographe* to this attitude, that some philosophers label as “aesthetic” (SCHAEFFER, 2000), especially characterized by the joint between a more receptive “listening” and an active “enunciative positioning” of the narration instances.

In the second part, I shall develop the problem of the functions fulfilled by the schemes of “graphic enunciation” (BAETENS, 2001) that are updated by the combination of design, photography and visual composition: it works both in terms of the action schemes comprising the adventures of the photographic mission with the team of *Doctors Without Borders*³ and also on the various enunciative positions ascribed to the combination of these significant materials – both implying narrative enunciation functions and the *pragmatic dimension* of the mediations of social and historical realities. In this segment of the article, I shall evaluate the graphic enunciation as working upon a double dimension of the promotion of “rhythmic” and “tensioned” aspects of narrative development, in its aspect of the evaluation of reception schemes for historical, social, geographical, and personal singularities emerging in the story’s level.

In the last part of the article, I shall put in perspective the significance of all these expressive procedures and discursive strategies in *Le Photographe*, departing from the hypothesis about

the ways in which graphic journalism effectively problematizes the conditions for a privileged mediation characterizing the professional exercise of historical actuality: in such a context, I refund the evaluation of *Le Photographe* to certain functions attributed to the imagery of press coverage, featuring photojournalism as a proof field of a consolidation of pictures within a permanent state of the “crisis of their uses” (POIVERT, 2009; PICADO, 2014).

1 GRAPHIC JOURNALISM AND DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

I evaluate with considerable concern the lack of distinction with which one could synthesize the more “subjective” character of enunciation in certain graphic narratives and the admittedly “documentary” profile that is attributed to these, as subscription to a particular discursive genre: this hurried junction between *subjectivity* and *documentary forms* ultimately descomprometer the analysis of documentary comics with respect to different records in which testimonial function of speech confers some relevance to something of the order of enunciation regimes of stories, in forms and resources proper to graphic narratives.

In the present examination I propose about “graphic journalism”, it is essential to recognize the immanence of discursive regimes characterized by the relationship between a *subjective enunciation* and the *testimonial mediation* of eventfulness. In the very context of this game-like relationship between *explicit enunciation* and *historical mediation* we can characterize the specific forms of journalism exercised through the features of visual and graphic devices - without having to pay the necessary (and undue) tribute of an automatic assimilation of “graphic journalism” to enunciation regimes defined by the styling of a self-reflexive discursivity – as in the case of modern literary realms, for instance.

We need to return to this problem of testimonial enunciation, departing precisely from considerations of what might be the most specific or immanent aspect of the discursive schemes that confer a journalistic character to graphic narratives. First and foremost, let us start from the standpoint of considerations about the problem of establishing the enunciative instance of reporting genres of discourse, which is the most characteristic feature of journalism. We have already indicated how Joe Sacco’s works on “graphic journalism” expose his very position as a mediator of historical eventfulness, with the ways in which this

“discursive position” (BENVENISTE, 1966) is functionalized, especially in the difference it makes with regards to the self-reflexivity that is proper to literary genres of modernity (in turn reflected in the autobiographical gesture of other graphic narratives unduly assimilated to documentary formats). We now need to extract some possible consequences of this cleavage between the suggested “autobiographical” and “historical” regimes of speech, in order to find the place where the journalistic profile of graphic narratives can be better framed, analytically speaking.

There is an important aspect that helps me in developing this point about historical enunciation, proper to journalistic discourse: it implies that one keeps on thinking about the continuity running through the classification of graphic journalism along the lines of “documentary comics”. Indeed, this is something we have labelled elsewhere as *documentary practices in contemporary visual culture* (FRANÇA; PICADO; LINS, 2013), typifying a considerable extent of discursive regimes, narrative strategies and media devices, in turn associated with visual forms and documentary functions that they assume (as sources, files or vectors of witnessing experiences), in different contexts of mediation of social and historical realities.

In all these documentary practices, one encounters a discursive inflection of pictures marked by a presumed beholder’s positioning before the image, to the point that visual witnessing ends up being a central topic of these documentary forms - through the construction of multiple placements of a *sense of witness* that is mediated by the picture’s visual form: among the elements operating in this process, we consider both the production and explicitation of the “devices of interaction” placed between filmmaker and subjects, by the use of the voice off and the establishment of conversational protocols (LINS, 2011), the constitution of “documentary scenographies”, by means of a “topographical” conception of the shooting spaces (FRANÇA; PICADO; LINS, 2013), or by the building of “immersion vectors” (SCHAEFFER, 1999) by which pictures may bring the various dimensions of its experience as aspects of a “vicarious witness” of depicted scenes (PICADO, 2014).

Once these aspects are transposed to “documentary comics”, this perspective implies a way of thinking the enunciative regimes characterizing the scope of works defined as “journalistic”, not only in its relation to historical eventfulness, but above all to a certain set of attitudes proper to the reporter’s position as a mediator. In such a context, although exposed as an enunciative instance of speech conduction, the position occupied by Joe Sacco cannot be immediately

identified with that of a privileged narrator of events, for most of what we have built as a factual sense of eventfulness effectively stems from his encounter with his witnesses' voices and not from his own speech. As a result, his actantial position as mediator is updated with a considerable burden of perplexity, caring, sincere doubts and even a certain naïvety in the face of social and historical singularities.

In this sense, the construction of the discursive position of the reporter articulating different witnesses with their own voices implies, in a pragmatically more decisive way, the fundamental requirement of a constitutive availability for a *listening attitude*. I have already mentioned above the idea of the “graphic listening” (ROSENBLATT; LUNSFORD, 2011), characterized not only by the reporter's attitudes in gathering informations, but especially for the artist trying to recreate these conditions of an encounter with reality in the forms that both drawing art and album organization provide and preserve together for the reader experience. Others still highlight the quality of a “graphic silence”, another aspect of the narrative enunciation of graphic journalism (BANITA, 2013): the apparent perplexity of certain moments in these stories - in which the repórter/narrator merely contemplates a reality - brings about the critical inflection with which the normativity of a presumed “cosmopolitanism” of journalism is dully questioned, specially in the face of the universes of geographical and historical particularities.

[...] To the banal moralism of conversational reporting Sacco opposes his own brand of [...] cosmopolitan 'suspicion': revealing in friendly chatter with his local friends in both Bosnia and Palestine, yet capturing the war's undercurrent of ambivalence and absurdity best crystallized in large-scale silent panels foregrounding the sheer scale of disaster and deprivation with the zooming gaze of a Hieronymus Bosch, capturing individual faces and seemingly insignificant events that might occur [...] “within just a square inch or two of a Brueghel” (BANITA, 2013, p.56-57).

This same attitude also features what some authors have identified with the most striking trends of documentary film in the last fifty years at least, especially in the profiles of both american traditions of “direct cinema” and the French school of “*cinéma vérité*”: in the cinematic documentary tradition restored to the influence of works by both Jean Rouch and Frederick Wiseman, one foresees this aspect of a pre-judicative availability in the face of subjects and issues addressed by the filmmaker, something that helps preserving the visual quality of the encounter between director and recorded reality.

2 “GRAPHIC ENUNCIATION” AND WITNESSING EFFECTS IN “GRAPHIC JOURNALISM”

In the specific context of study of visual and audiovisual narratives, the questions about specific arrangements of enunciation does not constitute a small heuristic challenge: these empirical universes pose difficulties for the analysis of narration, in the measure that their main media devices manifest themselves with a such a sense of “transparency” that end up ultimately affecting the regimes of attention for which audiences follow the workings of narrative enunciation. Unlike resources for which literary narrative not only indicates its utterance instances, but is banned from obscuring it, filmic narration is crossed by a constitutive sense of “impersonality” (METZ, 1991), finally conducting narrative theories to define this problem of filmic enunciation as something functionally connected to the very resources of filmic art - especially in the tradition of semiotic structuralism.⁴

An important aspect of theories of filmic enunciation is that the definition of its object is the result of an effort to specify in the textual structure of a filmic artwork those segments in which the narrative action can be restored to the “act” through which events are represented in a narrative way: filmic enunciation is examined when some constituent elements of cinematic forms (plans, assemblage, focalizations) are functionalized to yield not only the sequential eventfulness, but also to delineate the discursive positions through which actions are recovered or predicated in many respects (moral , psychological, dramatic).

In graphic narratives, this question of enunciative regimes is equally embryonary: in the same way as the filmic theories, there is a tendency in studies of graphic narratives to assimilate the discursive acts of enunciation to the set of devices through which stories are presented; just as in film analysis, in which the functionality of the narrative utterance is defined by acts of “showing” and not by “saying” (GAUDREAU; JOST, 1990), the application of narratological precepts to graphic narratives lends some specificity to particular devices of comics, in regards to its very modes of uttering narrative situations.

There is one aspect of narrative discursivity in the graphic universe that is assimilated to the very character of the “act” typifying its enunciation regimes - which is of the same order of a “showing”. However, there is one special aspect differentiating the art of comics and which is not properly defined by particularities of media devices of graphic

narratives: according to some commentators, this aspect of comics narrative enunciation is only revealed in the interactions promoted by graphic formats with the horizon of a potential readership. In such a context, Jan Baetens highlights the importance of the notion of a “graphic enunciation”, as something originated from theories of Philippe Marion (MARION, 1993), implying an appreciation of the stylistic aspects making up the arts of drawing and graphic design of the page, both defined as “traces” of a discursive singularity through which stories are told.

“Marion refuses to conceive of the production of the graphiated object outside its pragmatic relation with the reader. He contends that, first, it is the reader for whom every work is intended and, second, that it is also the reader by whom the graphieteur’s work is redone. This is an essential point: Marion argues that the reader has the ability to redo, to remake, or at least to re-experience the enunicative work produced by the author for the very reason that this production is based upon gestures and mechanisms which every reader has known and practiced as a child, but which he or she has forgotten as an adult. (BAETENS, 2001, p. 149-150).

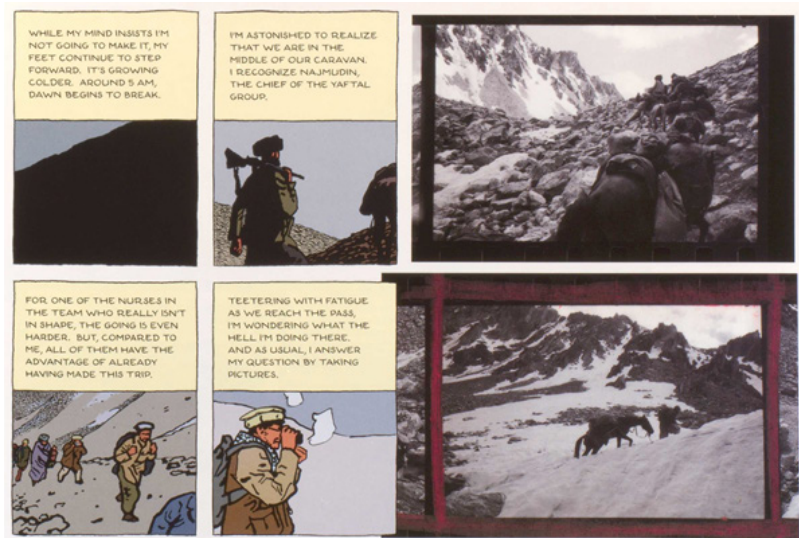
This issue of the regimes of “graphic enunciation” is a central key to my analysis of *Le Photographe*, particularly on the relationship between the discursive positionings of narration (the admission of a subjective instance of narrative utterance) and the modes of recognition by acts of reading (especially in its application to “graphic journalism”). First of all, it is manifested in the artistic unity of the album format, characterized by a singular appreciation of the ways of integration it shows between the drawing of narrative sequences by Emmanuel Guibert and the exposure of photographic contact sheets, originated from the field work of photographer Didier Lefèvre.

Indeed, when one examines the pages of the three volumes of *Le Photographe*, she might notice the assimilation of graphic composition of the pages to the physical presentation of photographic contact sheets along its surface. First of all, in the very measure that appropriation that graphic design of the page makes of such photographic materials, it ends up lending a visual impression to the paging format as something marked by the predominance of a vectorial ordering of visual sequences that is proper to the linearity of the comic strip, albeit with some variation in ranges and sizes - all this strongly guided by the pivotal role of photographic resources, favoring this very schemes of a vectorial reading.

On the other hand, this correlation between two distinct significant materials (the complex of drawing styles, linear ordering of

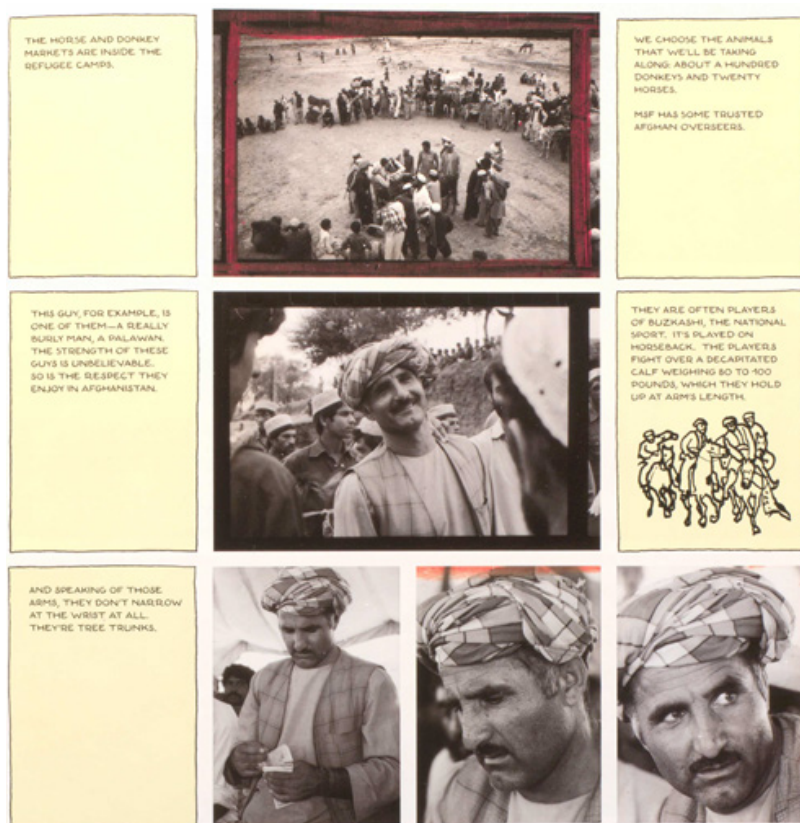
comic strips, and photographic contact sheets) is also responsible for establishing certain effects of the story's discursive drive, a trait pointing to the precise object of my examination: in these several schemes of this graphic enunciation established by the linkage between drawn shapes and photographic arrested forms (managed through the mediation of the page's graphic design), I highlight those aspects guiding the story's discursive conduction in which the acts of reading imply the recognition of a journalistic/documentary profile of enunciation - mainly ascribed to the testimonial genres of historical recordings.

In the latter sense, I noticed that graphic organization permeating the game-like relationships between drawing and photography is characterized by an *iterative oscillation* occurring between these materials, and indicating an equal alternation of the narrative regimes of "focalization": in general, this fluctuation between discursive perspectives attaches a more "externalized" position to the drawing, whereas photographic formats are reserved to fulfill roles predominantly associated with "internal focalization" of narrative enunciation; this is something particularly explicated in the ways the photographer is displayed in the drawing, as always accompanied by a recitative (representing his own voice), expressing his questionings about the journey of the medical staff and referring to their responses to the acts of shooting – ultimately followed by the result of this operation, in the form of a photographic record (fig. 1):



1. *The Photographer*, p. 37 (detail, lower part of page)

In the same context, it is also worthy exploring the ways in which this alternation between visual shapes and discursive positions introduce diverse effects for the readership, either as it occurs within a unique page or in the range comprising the shifting attention of reading between two open pages - or even in the space between a page and the one that opens after one bends it further on. In an equally general way, it is noted that the variation between design and photography, as occurring within an unique page, fulfills functions such as the objectification of characters or situations the disclosure of which is a function of the graphic resources of “recitatives” – this segment of the system of comics that is defined by the textual inscriptions of issues affecting storylines, such as descriptions, external comments, and so on (Fig. 2).

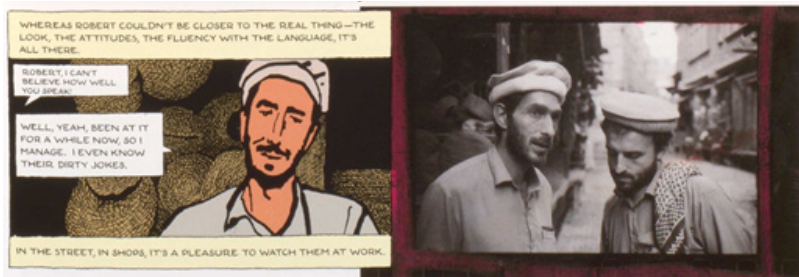


2. *The Photographer*, p. 13 (detail, ¾ upper part of page).

Another instance of this iterative functionality between drawing and photography is the one in which the intense interactions between photographer and his subjects play a central role with regards to the overall meaning of the story: these are contexts in which Didier Lefèvre is involved as a mediator of all things with a considerable importance for his recordings - even when tintured with emotional or personal weight - in his understanding of the medical mission values. These are resources characteristically employed in the early stages of the story, when the photographer is still searching a best position regarding the set of factors involving the registering of the team work (Figs. 3 and 4); it eventually resurfaces as a narrative ethos in those more resting situations of the mission's adventures - when the photographer can take a more contemplative attitude in relation to the spaces or the individuals with which he interacts (Fig. 5).



3. *The Photographer*, p. 16 (detail, ¼ upper part of page).

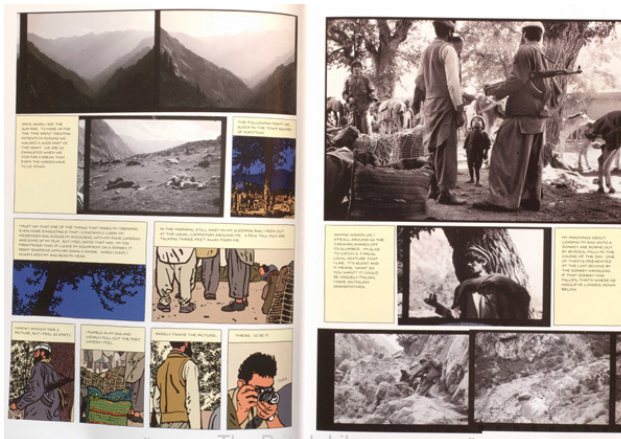


4. *The Photographer*, p. 17 (detail, ¼ lower part of page).



5. *The Photographer*, p. 44 (entire page).

Distinguished are the cases where these negotiations between drawing and photography take place in the interval between two domains of the vectorial reading process, either as part of an opened double page (where the gap is established between the lower end of the page to the right and the upward force that leads the eye to the upper left part of the top of the next page), or in the hiatus between the bottom of the page to the right and the continuation of reading on the next page to be turned. Generally, these negotiations between visual and graphic signifiers is often associated with the production of a certain *suspenseful quality* established between two systems of focalization, as if the page design was constructed for preparing a kind of narrative *amazement*, brought about by the introduction of the visuals of photography – something connoted by the differences of scale in the presentation of these materials, with strings of small *tableaux* designed at the end of one of the pages, with a closure on the next page, through a large-scale photographic exhibition (Fig. 6, 7).



6. *The Photographer*, p. 58 e 59 (entire pages).



7. *The Photographer*, p. 73 e 74 (lower and upper halves of pages, respectively).

A particularly important aspect of this analysis of game-like relationships between visual forms and enunciative positions in comics is found in the way these procedures give to reading instances the conditions for recognizing discursive patterns in which they may lay the historical mediation, finally ascribing it as something proper to journalistic practices. For starters, there is a modulation of the narrated events that characterizes the very regimes of certain genres of storytelling that are linked to documentary formats, especially in what involves certain embodiments of interaction between discursive mediation of the speaker/narrator and visual or verbal testimonies of subjects.

In *Le Photographe*, this is particularly derived from the ways in which the photographer approaches certain contexts of ordinary actions of the team of doctors and the entourage that support them in route, bordering the mountains of northern Afghanistan. By valuing these shenanigans (from an aesthetic regime of proximity and close observation), the combination of drawing and photography (generating effects of a “graphic enunciation”) much resembles a certain attitude of the contemporary documentary cinema, although tinged with a more sensational and emotional closeness of this flavor. Moreover, these procedures - particularly how photographic resources are placed in the work - mean the value ascribed to certain durational arrangements of the construction of narrative utterance. Here, again, I suggest proximities between journalistic discourse and documentary practices of contemporary visual culture.

3. A GRAPHIC ENUNCIATION E THE ORDER OF EVENTFULNESS IN “GRAPHIC JOURNALISM”

We are now way closer to the procedures of graphic enunciation in *Le Photographe*, particularly in the ways these operations work for the reader in recognizing the discursive elements of “graphic journalism”, as a genre. Characterized by iterative oscilation between the drawings and the vectorial presentation of the photographs (valuing the sequential order of the photographer’s relationship with the story’s universes), we have seen that the graphic organization of the page presents episodes not only as eventful sequences, but especially as representing the photographer positioning before these events.

From my point of view, however, the best way to examine this process is to evaluate the system of actions privileged in *Le Photographe*, in ways that signal the author's predilections for an eventfulness of a very particular nature, on which details we will discuss further on.

An important index of the introduction of photographic contact sheets in the body of this work is the fact that such a presentation updates a trait of the genesis of photographic depiction less thematized in most of those theories that insist on a purely "indexical" character of the photographic meaningfulness – something heavily derived from assumptions about the pure automatism of its device's operation. In general, what we find in these contact sheets is not only suggestive of the contexts of *photographic agency*, but also a resulting display of these dynamic context of changes in photographic approaches to visual realities – something that is less derived from the synecdochical dimension with which more traditional theories of photography attribute the most salient meaning of this media, namely, that of *ostension* of visual world.

In the case of *Le Photographe*, a good portion of these contacts represent situations of a far less sensational character than those in which snapshots synthesize a whole dynamic eventfulness: in such episodes of the photographer's evolution amidst the medical staff, it is clear that a less intense or synthetic character of the eventful sequences of his gaze is a trademark of the use of photographic resources. Of such a kind are the events of the working routines of the medical mission: we witness the doctors in moments prior to the start of their trip, when the team hosts the materials for the journey, employing proper a discipline with its own principles (Fig. 8); or also when we follow the action of local helpers trying to accommodate the animals that will carry most of the load of the mission, in carts to be taken to a checkpoint near the Pakistani border (Fig. 9); and finally when the photographer observes Juliette, one of the leading medical members of the entourage, on a morning care with her own appearance, arranging the hair, just before the resumption of the travel (Fig. 10).

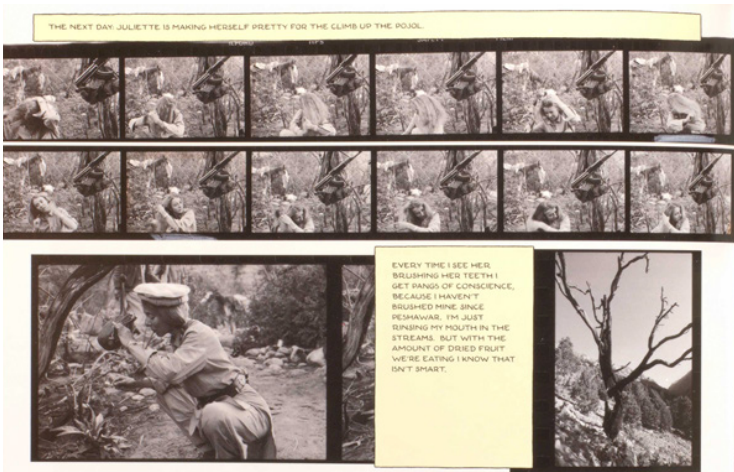


8. *The Photographer*, p. 8 (detail, ¾ lower part of page).





9. *The Photographer*, p. 32 e 33 (lower and upper halves of pages, respectively).



10. *The Photographer*, p. 62 (detail, upper half page).

From a proper narratological perspective, these are moments of a less dramatic intensity, thus usually serving (at least in the canonical context of fictional narratives) to condition the behavior of narrative agents to its precise nature of motivation in many of its aspects. For instance, Barthes designated this segment of narrative functions as “catalysis”, characterizing them by their apparent insignificance with respect to other segments of the story in which certain situations were properly resolved or completed - these latter being defined as the actions’s “nucleum” (BARTHES, 1966).

In the perspective we envision these segments of actional

routines of characters in *Le Photographe*, the presence of these events (which, in Barthes' words, have a merely "cardinal" function in the global economy of the story) is of a pivotal importance, in the measure that the sequential ordering of the story for readership does not imply the assumption that these segments need to be correlated with a higher frequency of moments of a more pronounced dramatic charge. In the ways in which these ordinary events are introduced for the storytelling (through the graphic organization that values the sensorimotor schemes of these sequences in the contact sheets), what is at stake is precisely the recognition of the textual schemes that subscribe the reading experience to a more "documentary" or "journalistic" level of these narrative segments.

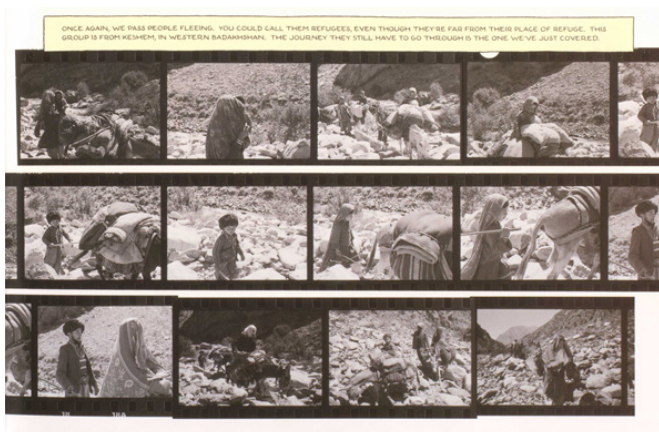
In such episodes of *Le Photographe* we finally resent the graphic organization of events accusing a stronger *testimonial mediation*, something that lends the journalistic discourse of this graphic format the continuity lines I intuit between "graphic journalism" and contemporary documentary formats. Instances of such are those like the medical mission coming to a small Afghan village and being called to help an old woman who is diagnosed with a tumor in his right foot. The photographic look at the action that doctors trigger to remove this cancer combines aspects of a kind of regard more guided by the sense of photojournalistic "shock", but also combined with a sense of "displacement", which is proper to visual documentation, also operating by the display of a seemingly insignificant detailment of this drama (Fig. 11).





11. *The Photographer*, p. 54 (entire page).

Another aspect of this detachment of visual attention on the actions of the medical mission is particularly noticeable in the ways the photographer is shown as sensitive to what is happening around the team's movements and adventures, and what makes up the routine of a war-torn country, which passes laterally by the route that the mission does through Afghanistan. With some frequency, this photographic presence - displaying certain contexts a more everyday action - is employed to confront us with all those creatures affected by war, fleeing to other corners of the country, literally passing through the medical mission, always in the opposite direction of its route (Fig. 12). Or, when the stunning scenery of any part of Afghanistan is what stands out for the photographic eye, even when parts of crossing over these segments imply all sorts of risks to the whole staff - due to the fact that they are made during the day in conflicted areas between Afghan and Russian forces, always under the strict surveillance of snipers from both sides (Fig. 13).



12. *The Photographer*, p. 69 (detail, lower half page).



13. *The Photographer*, p. 78 e 79 (entire pages).

One aspect to highlight about this discursive organization in which *Le Photographe* becomes recognizable as work of “graphic journalism” (and quite especially in the critical condition of the tipping over all journalistic pretensions of a privileged historical mediation) is precisely what arises from the use of these visual and graphic elements. They imply not only a new resource and constituent devices of documentary practices in contemporary culture, but also the *ethical horizon* of such discursive practices by means of the visual image. The “graphic enunciation” that crosses through drawing, photographic and graphic formats in *Le Photographe* present us with important issues for a reflection on the visual discourse inscribed in historical mediation processes, particularly replacing the ethical meaningfulness of these different enunciative positions for the importance attached to a certain pre-judgmental distance of these discursive exercises - especially in the face of social, historical, geographical and human singularities graphically presented in the adverturous contexts of this medical mission in Afghanistan.

The narratological models that favor the most ordinary sense of the pathways of this mission need to be articulated with the ethical horizons of the discursive positionings exercising documentary values of journalistic mediation of reality, precisely because they always keep alive (in the organization of semiotic materials that make up this graphic narrative) a permanent disposition for the listening, for the silence, for the perplexity and for the pure observation - trademarks of a critical inflection that contemporary documentary formats offer to journalism, either as an activity or as historical discursivity.

Notes

- 1 It may be worthy to relativize this characterization of Sacco's work, noting that this « instrumental listening » defines, according to Lunsford and Rosenblatt, only the initial stage of his comics, tending to give way to other forms of the care about characters that typify more open attitudes to other people's testimonies. Still, in contrast to *Le Photographe*, it is quite evident that Sacco leans towards a more « sensational » recording of conflict situations, marking an important difference with respect to the nearer listening attitudes that typifies certain contemporary documentary forms – as in the case of Guibert , Lefèvre and Lemerrier.
- 2 I'd like to emphasize my unique focus on the first of the three volumes of *Le Photographe*, considering the spatial boundaries for the presentation and development of this paper's argument. In future opportunities, I shall discuss other possible registers of this narrative and graphic enunciation, from the examination of the remaining segments of this work.
- 3 Here goes a summary of the story of *Le Photographe*: it is a comics recording of the vicissitudes of French photographer Didier Lefèvre in his visual documentation work of the humanitarian mission of a team of the medical organization *Doctors Without Borders*, in its effort to establish outposts to the auxiliary emergency doctors to communities affected by the war between Muslim rebels and the Soviet army in the northern region of Afghanistan in 1986.
- 4 A good overview of structuralist ideas in film analysis, with its subsequent criticism, can be examined in David Bordwell (Bordwell, 2004).

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