Storylines

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While many of the most influential models in narrative theory emerged out of the study of literary narrative, it has from the start been motivated by what James Phelan calls an "expansionist impulse" to direct its gaze to across media (Phelan 206). Such expansion is never without its tensions, of course. Given the profound differences between cinematic narrative and literary narrative, for example, one could have imagined narrative theory beating a hasty retreat. After all, as Metz reminds us, film is *not* a language system; it has no easy equivalent to punctuation or the sentence. And yet the history of the encounter between film studies and narrative theory has on the whole proved remarkably productive despite these differences, and the exchange of ideas has by no means been a one-way street. Indeed, we can see how conversations across media have helped bring new precision to concepts in narrative theory: interventions in the muddied concept of *point-of-view* were certainly informed by conversations along the borders between narrative theory and film theory, and Genette's concept of *focalization* and Chatman's proposed refinements of *slant* and *filter* (Chatman 144) draw in part upon the mechanics and theory of narrative film.

At almost exactly the same time that film began to form its fundamental grammar and mechanics as a new narrative medium, sequential comics emerged as the other new storytelling medium of the early twentieth century. A century later, especially since the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* directed academic attention to the form in the U.S., the conversation between narrative theory and comics studies is finally under way, and there is every reason to be confident that it will be challenging and mutually beneficial. But as with all such encounters, there is always the danger of importing wholesale from the study of narrative fiction methods and tools that might not be ideally suited to the task at hand—dangers in this case especially tempting as comics are rebranded "graphic *novels.*"

I want to focus on one key element of comics in order to start thinking about where and how narrative theory might need to expand or revise some concepts in addressing this vital narrative form: the *line*, arguably the most undertheorized element in comics scholarship and one that has no neat equivalent in any other narrative form. Much of the best narrato-

logical work on comics thus far has focused on aspects of narrative that translate relatively effortlessly from novel to comic: the representation of time, narrative frames, the narratee, genre. Very little attention has been spent addressing the one feature of comics that marks them as profoundly different—and perhaps even irreducibly so—from both novel and film: the trace of the hand, the graphic enunciation that is the drawn line.

Moving Script

The vast majority of texts we read (especially in the 21st century as the handwritten letter moves steadily toward extinction) render the hand of the linemaker invisible. For this reason it is worth reminding ourselves that the notion that the graphic line exists in a space apart from that of the line of writing is a product of relatively recent history (and one for the most part unique to the West), made possible by new technologies (printing) and institutions (academies). In *A Brief History of the Line*, Tim Ingold argues that by the late eighteenth century, the literal making of lines, once understood to be central to all arts, had become associated not with the artist but with the artisan, and specifically with the printer (128). Writers were transformed from scribes—those who literally inscribe lines upon the page—to wordsmiths. The author was now a master of words, working with his mind as opposed to his hands, able to find the right words and place them in the right combination to convey an emotion or describe vividly a scene, real or imagined. For the writer, choice of tools (pen, typewriter, laptop) have become irrelevant: the achievement of the author seems wholly independent of the tools or the act of making.

The shift can be usefully illustrated by comparing portraits of English prose writers from the early eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery. As an example, portraits of both Addison and Steele from the 1710s show them each in the act of writing. As late as the 1750s, a portrait of Richardson similarly shows him with pen to paper. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, representations of authors in the act of inscribing lines on paper are extremely difficult to find.[1] Instead, for example, Walter Scott in 1831 is represented in his study meditating on a historical document, surrounded by a collection of historical curiosities, while Charles Dickens in 1839 is portrayed with left hand holding open a book while he looks off over his right shoulder in contemplation. In both cases, the proper work of the author is study, contemplation: mental labor. The writer at work has moved from one who inscribes lines upon paper to one who crafts ideas in his mind.

For Walter Benjamin the result of the disassociation of writer from the work of literally making words was the novel, the child of print, the narrative form that "neither comes from oral tradition nor enters into

it" (3:146). True storytelling, for Benjamin, requires a living connection to *work*, to the artisanship of making words. Unlike the novelist, whose biological, biographical imprint on the narrative is necessarily effaced, "traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel" (3:149). Throughout his career, Benjamin explored the possibilities of once again restoring the "living immediacy" of the maker to the work of art, a vital human presence effaced first by the "aura" that surrounded the traditional work of art and effaced now by the technologies of mechanical reproduction. While his "The Storyteller" reads more like a eulogy for a lost tradition, in *One-Way Street*, Benjamin suggested that the traditional book is nearing its end, and he imagines a time approaching "when writing, advancing ever more deeply into the graphic regions of its new eccentric figurativeness," will allow for the "founding of an international moving script" (1:457).

The way to restore the living handprint of the storyteller was not through a nostalgic return to the traditional work of art. After all, if writing had effaced the hand of the author through print, visual art had long ago dissolved the graphic line of the artist. As Benjamin put it in one of his earliest essays in 1917, whereas in drawing the line of the artist defines itself against the background (and in so doing summons the background into existence), "there is no background in painting, nor is there any graphic line" (1:85). Thus throughout his career Benjamin sought out examples of art—such as Chinese painting or the work of Paul Klee—that, as Esther Leslie puts it, "was positioned somewhere between painting and drawing, an art in which the 'linear structure' dominates the image" (Leslie, *Walter Benjamin* 38). In essence, what he was looking for—and calling for—was an art that blurred the distinction between image and text, a "moving script" that would restore the biological and biographical author without restoring the auratic tyrannies of the traditional work of art. As Azade Seyhan points out, throughout Benjamin's career "images are often seen as a text to be deciphered, whereas texts are just as frequently read as visual phenomena" (229).

Given his interests, it is surprising that Benjamin did not attend to the comic form, already a fully mature narrative form by the 1920s. But like many other German intellectuals at the time, he *was* keenly interested in animation (Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands* 18-19). Animation traces its immediate genealogy not only to the new twentieth-century narrative media of film and comics, but perhaps even more directly to the late nineteenth-century phenomenon of the chalk talk or lightning sketch (Crafton). The chalk talk as a storytelling form was popularized initially by Frank Beard, a religious cartoonist whose formula for combining quick drawing technique with oral storytelling quickly became a fixture in Sunday schools across the country. By the turn of the century, the chalk talk had become

secularized as a vaudeville routine, a pedagogical tool, and a party trick. Cartoonists such J. Stuart Blackton and Winsor McCay, for example, both made names (and supplemental income) for themselves performing live drawing exhibitions while lecturing about their craft or telling stories. A good chalk talk presenter could capture likenesses with the minimal amount of broad, theatrical strokes, and then transform those likenesses in an instant: with a few lines, landscapes would become seascapes, faces would be aged from infant to elderly, etc. The wonder of the chalk talk is that we see pictures "come to life" seemingly effortlessly, and this apparent effortlessness provoked in its audience both awe and the desire to imitate—to pick up one's chalk and attempt to duplicate what had been seen at the theatre or the church. Dozens of books produced in the early years of the 20th century promised to teach the lessons of making "lightning sketches" for education, entertainment, or profit.

Very quickly, the chalk talk was adapted for cinema, but it was an adaptation that almost immediately subsumed the thing itself, as the act of drawing the line was displaced by the magic of cinema and the voice of the storyteller was lost to the limitations of the still-silent medium. Using stop-motion technique, pioneering animators let their chalk drawings step away from their hand and take on a life of their own. For example, in his 1914 film, *Gertie the Dinosaur*, McCay begins performing a chalk talk setting at a dinner party with fellow cartoonists, performing a lightning sketch of Gertie, to everyone's delight. But his friend reminds McCay that he had promised something more: to set his dinosaur in motion. With that, McCay steps aside with a theatrical show of his lack of hand in what is to follow, and lets Gertie walk and interact on her own. In McCay's animation, however, the laboring hand of the artist remains a focus, not only in the lightning sketch performance, but in the backstory to the performance with which the film begins, in which we see the artist working on the thousands of individual drawings required to create the illusion of a drawing moving independently of the hand of its creator. In the following decade, and especially with the rise of Walt Disney, the hand of the artist, the imprint of the chalk talk performer, would be effaced altogether in favor of the magic of cinema. Unlike the chalk talk, which generated wonder and emulation, animation demanded from its spectator only awe.

In fact, alone of all of the narrative arts born at the end of the nineteenth century, the sequential comic has not effaced the line of the artist, the handprint of the storyteller. This fact is central to what makes the comic form unique, and also to what makes the line, the mark of the individual upon the page, such a unique challenge for narrative theory. We simply have no language—because we have no parallel in any other narrative form—for describing its narrative work. In comics alone the promise of

Benjamin's looked-for "moving script" continued to develop throughout the twentieth century. Here the act of inscription remains always visible, and the story of its making remains central to the narrative work of the graphic narrative form in a way we haven't begun to theorize because, in short, we have been trained to not see it. And so we must begin, like Benjamin's privileged child reader, by relearning how to see the stories the line invites us to tell.

Linework

To be fair, even within the emerging field of comics studies, analysis of the line has fared only slightly better. Especially in U.S. comics scholarship, analysis of the work of the line in comics—with a few important exceptions—has served primarily as the moment when critics address the "aesthetic" qualities of the work, usually falling back on broad characterizations—"clear line," "expressive line"—before returning to more familiar territory for *narrative* analysis, focusing, for example, on the unique ways in which the multimodal form can represent multiple narrators, or the ways in which the space between panels—the "gutter"—involves the reader intimately in the work of providing "closure" to the gaps in narrative time.

The reason for the lack of sustained critical attention to the line in comics is not hard to understand. First, we should not underestimate the degree to which Lessing's partitioning of text and image into inviolably separate disciplines continues to govern, especially within the modern academy he helped to define. For if we are inclined to resist such neo-classical articulations of limits and boundaries, as many today indeed are, few have been schooled equally in textual and visual disciplines. And even those who have such training will find little in their academic background to allow them to see the graphic line in *narrative* terms. After all, art criticism remains, despite articulate challenges from within, largely grounded on the principles which two generations ago privileged abstract expressionism as "pure art," focusing on what was essential to visual art—marks on a flat surface; or, as Greenberg put it, "the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness" (Greenberg 29). Given that narrative theory is concerned with "time, process, and change"—with, borrowing from Gerald Prince, the recounting of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by narrators to narratees (Prince 58)—the line, the mark on the page, would seem inevitably to fall to the *non*-narrative aesthetics privileged by the proponents of "pure art" from Lessing to Greenberg.

From the perspective of narrative theory, the line most easily comes under the umbrella of *style*—roughly analogous to diction and syntax in narrative fiction. While certain traditions in narrative poetics dating back

to Aristotle have historically neglected style, to varying degrees the narrative work of style is all but universally acknowledged, and most especially in the last century when *how* something is said is often explicitly more important than *what* is said. As David Herman puts it, "style in fiction is not just a device for characterization or a narratorial format but a way of encoding modes of alignment, opposition, and conflict operating at other levels of narrative structure as well" (194). Nonetheless, when narratology addresses issues of style it is often to collapse questions of style into the less technically (and linguistically) specific issue of discourse—a distinction between what is told and how it is told that extends considerably beyond linguistic concerns, including especially attention to temporal issues of tense, order, duration, frequency etc. (Shen). Indeed, in his foundational account of the aspects of discourse that he called tense, mood, and voice, Gérard Genette devotes twice as much space to tense as he does to mood and voice—thereby paralleling Lessing's alignment of the literary with time.

Similarly, it is not surprising that as narrative theorists have turned their attention to graphic narrative, it has been the temporal aspects of discourse that have received the most attention. For example, *Maus* has been the subject of rigorous analyses from narrative theorists in recent years, with McGlothlin examining how Spiegelman's text complicates the familiar distinction between story and discourse by adding a third narrative strand, and Ewert discussing how meaningful narrative information is conveyed by visual elements in the text, destabilizing the language-centered focus of narrative theory. But these and other narratological approaches to *Maus* have for the most part left untouched the question of the quality of Spiegelman's line: his decision to draw *Maus* in a rough sketchbook style with a fountain pen, a decision that is especially notable when compared with the finely crosshatched style of his original take on the style in his 1972 short story "Maus."

When asked to explain his decision to work on *Maus* using a fountain pen and, at least for the early installments, typing paper, Spiegelman suggested that he "wanted to feel more like I was writing than drawing" (Bolhafner). This account underscores the ways in which what Spiegelman was after in his choice of line—the uneven ink-spread of the fountain pen on a paper not equipped to handle ink evenly, thereby underscoring the roughness to the line's edge—bear a striking similarity to the graphic writing or "moving script" of Benjamin's imagining. But it also underscores one important way in which the line in comics is indeed related to style in prose fiction. Like prose style, the line in graphic narrative is precisely what is lost in a paraphrase, as anyone who has attempted to "read" a comic out loud can attest. There is no paraphrase of *Maus* that

can meaningfully "paraphrase" the impact of the line in this book, and yet no reader could imagine that the narrative would mean the same way were it drawn with a *different* line. Our reading of *Maus* is inseparable from our sense of the quality of Spiegelman's line, even if that line is necessarily impossible to convey in paraphrase in precisely the same way that Hemingway's prose style in *The Sun Also Rises* will necessarily fall away from any summary of that novel.

Take, for example, *From Hell*, scripted by Alan Moore and drawn by Eddie Campbell. *From Hell* is a dense, challenging book, and not only for its subject matter (a speculative solution to the mystery of Jack the Ripper). The book is at once an historical argument, an argument about history-making, a meditation on the oppression of the poor, and a commentary on modernity. However, even as all of these characterizations of the central themes of the book seem most clearly indebted to Moore's prose, arriving at a full range of the book's meanings owes as much to Campbell's distinctive linework as it does to Moore's famously detailed scripting.

For example, in chapter 3, we are for the first time plunged into the oppressive Victorian ghetto of Whitechapel after Marie Kelley leaves the studio of the artist Walter Sickert. Marie has just deposited at Sickert's studio a little girl named Alice, the daughter of Prince Albert Victor—Victoria's grandson—whose secret marriage to Marie's friend Annie sets in motion the terrible events to follow. Alice had been left in Marie's care after the royal family had Annie carted off to the madhouse to secure her silence, and Marie is furious at yet another example of the treatment of working women by those in power. "All I want," Marie tells Sickert, whose passivity in the face of the outrage against Annie makes him in every way an accomplice, "is that you should be made to mind the consequences of your bit o' sport" (Moore and Campbell 3:2).[2] Sickert will almost immediately pass on these consequences to Annie's parents, leaving Alice with them without telling them the truth as to the true villains who have destroyed their daughter. Marie, meanwhile, has no such escape, and we watch her return to Whitechapel and the brutal violence of her life as a prostitute in the pages that follow, culminating finally in her plan to blackmail the royal family into supplying her and her friends with the money they hope will buy off the mob shaking them down for "protection" money.

In the script he sent on to Campbell, Moore provides—in addition to dialogue and general action—extremely detailed instructions about how each page is to be laid out, how individual "shots" are to be angled and frames composed, etc. But throughout the scripts to which we have access, Moore speaks not at all to the quality of Campbell's line in individual pan-

els.[3] And it is here that Campbell's contributions as a co-storyteller emerge most clearly. For example, as four of the women who will become Jack the Ripper's victims sit in the Britannia pub determining what to do about the threat from the Old Nichol mob, Moore describes in his script the range of emotions on the faces of each of the women in turn in the long panel on the top tier of the page: for example, Annie Chapman "looks surly and pessimistic"; Liz Stride's "look of concentration has an earnestness to it that is quite endearing" (Moore, Campbell and Bissette 296). Campbell's panel, however, attends much less to the specificity of these expressions than to the texture of the environment in which the women sit (Fig. 1). The women are arranged around the table as Moore's script suggests; in the foreground a dog sprawls, seeming almost to dissolve into the grime

Fig 1. Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell, *From Hell*, Chapter 3, page 13. © Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell. Used by permission of the artist.

and shadow of his surroundings. The women similarly are drawn into their environment through their continuity with the sharp, biting lines that define its contours and depths: Annie's body seems to merge almost continuously into the bench on which she sits; Marie's is enveloped into the walls behind them. The story Campbell's line tells in this panel is much less about the specific emotions passing over the individual women's faces than it is about the ways in which they are bounded and etched by their environment.

In the three panels to follow, we see the idea for the blackmail plan begin to take shape in Marie's mind. As Moore specifies in his script, "the three panels that make up this central tier are all the same shot"; the panels focus on Marie while at the margins of each panel a surly Annie berates Liz's wishful thinking that perhaps they might have something to sell (297). But even as Campbell follows the suggestions for framing and composition very closely here, the sense of the static "shot," the stillness of the "camera," is complicated by the dance of the lines behind Marie's head. Here Marie, having determined to fight against the entrapment that defines the daily lives for these women by directing her energies at the highest seat of power in the land, has separated herself, however temporarily, from her environment. But behind her the lines on the boards move frantically from panel to panel as if seeking to enclose her in their grasp once again (as, inevitably and tragically, they will).

As Jan Baetens has pointed out, we tend to imagine the kind of sketchbook quality of line used by Campbell as an artist's "natural" style, believing that it gives us access to the scene of "initial graphiation" (Baetens 147). Campbell encourages such association through his use of this same line in his ongoing autobiographical *Alec* comics, discussed at length by Hatfield and Fischer elsewhere in this issue. For example in the 1997 story "Forriner," from *After the Snooter*, Campbell describes his family's trip from Australia to Campbell's native Scotland (Fig. 2). While Campbell uses a line similar to that which he uses in *From Hell*—described in his blog as "ultra-fine" "cobwebiness"—the narrative work of the line in *From Hell* and *After the Snooter* is entirely different (Campbell). The same line that in *From Hell* is overworked to create the oppressive atmosphere—the "cobwebiness" of a spider's web from which the poor women of Whitechapel cannot escape—in the autobiographical stories is handled with a lighter, quicker stroke, underworked to evoke a very different quality of cobweb: the fragile spontaneity of the everyday, the transience of daily life that resists our attempts to capture it on paper. The line is uniquely Campbell's and in it we cannot help but imagine the flesh-and-blood artist putting pen to paper, even as he is able to make slight alterations to its articulation in order to serve two stories as different as

can be imagined. Indeed, in another story in *After the Snooter*, Campbell reinscribes the scene of drawing *From Hell*, telling the autobiographical story of the changes the book's success brought to his career and the impact that drawing Gull to life has had on his dreams (Fig. 3).

Campbell more indirectly but even more powerfully draws the connection in a "silent" sequence at the beginning of chapter 5 of *From Hell*, shortly before the murder of Polly Nichols (Fig. 4). Here we see Campbell dropping his "signature" line in alternating panels as he moves back and forth between the rough waking of Polly in Whitechapel (violently detached from the physical line that had bound her to the wall the previous night) and the gentle ablutions in Bloomsbury of the man who will murder her. That Campbell associates his familiar line—the line he brings to bear on his most personal and intimate stories, the line we associate with the autobiographical "Eddie Campbell"—with Polly and Whitechapel and chooses here to emphasize the line-lessness of Dr. Gull's West End in a gray wash is of course no coincidence. It is both a personal claim of alliance and a narrative argument—describing visually how Gull is sheltered from the harsh realities of the slums and from the physical scratches of Campbell's pen as he "tells" this part of the story in a soft wash in which background literally appears to melt away.

If Campbell's line is like Hemingway's prose style—distinctly his no matter what he writes—other graphic novelists have the seeming ability to change lines as freely as novelists like David Mitchell can change their prose style. For example, while the expressive "sketchbook" line in Spiegelman's *Maus* might inevitably suggest a genetic connection to what is "spontaneous" or "natural," a quick look at the first attempt to tell the same story in 1972 reminds us that this is not so. Even within the pages of *Maus* itself, we are reminded that Spiegelman's line is a choice among many other possible lines when Art's father discovers an earlier comic the son had written, one drawn in a heavy German-expressionist woodblock style. These aspects of the text underscore that the pages of *Maus*—which have the look at times of being spontaneous, as if drawn hastily, on the run—are themselves the product of many years of reworking and careful composition. Spiegelman's multiple styles serve as a reminder that the line will not give us unmediated access to the scene of composition, to the materiality of the act of putting pen to paper. As Baetens cautions, the line is not "natural": "Graphic representation is a socialized act involving many codes and constraints. It is therefore not only the mechanical or modified reflection of a personality, a body or an unconscious…. Even if the drawing is very personalized or hyper-individualized, it is still as indirect as the writing itself" (Baetens 152).

And yet, even as we remind ourselves that the drawn line shares with writing an indirectness that refuses unmediated access to an individual body in the act of mark-making, it remains nonetheless true that

Fig 2. Eddie Campbell, "The Forriners." *After the Snooter*. From *Alec: The Years Have Pants*, page 428. © Eddie Campbell. Used by permission of the artist.
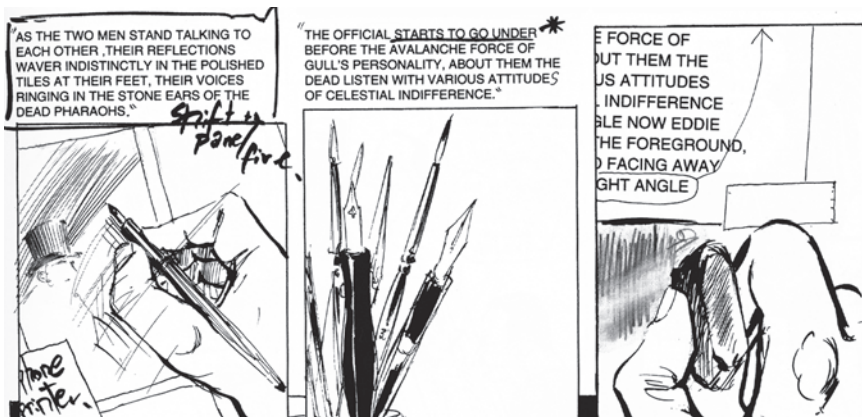
Fig 3. Eddie Campbell, "Running a Publishing House Out of the Front Room." *After the Snooter*. From *Alec: The Years Have Pants*, page 443. © Eddie Campbell. Used by permission of the artist.

Fig 4. Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell, *From Hell*, Chapter 5, page 5. © Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell. Used by permission of the artist.

unlike literary style or indeed any aspect of narrative prose, with the line we come face to face with a graphiateur, to use Philippe Marion's useful term, whose line is determined by physical specificities that cannot be ignored or effaced. It is here we come, I believe, toward the essence of the line—what marks it as unique as an element of narrative meaning. We never look at the printed book and imagine that the font gives us access to the labor involved in the scene of writing—though we might know that the act of composing, for example, *Our Mutual Friend*, was necessarily laborious. On the other hand, we *cannot* look at the graphic narrative and imagine that the line does *not* give us access to the labored making of the storyworld we are encountering (and participating in crafting). There are

reasons why we might *wish* to so forget: theoretical reasons or guilt over how quickly we read a graphic novel that we know the author labored over for months or years—but the line is there to make us cognizant of an embodied graphiateur at all times.

This is not a matter of visual as opposed to textual narrative. After all, as Bordwell suggests, trying to describe a unified narrator in film—the other visual narrative form that came of age in the early years of the last century— is "to indulge in an anthropomorphic fiction" (Bordwell 62). This has nothing to do intrinsically with the visual nature of film narrative, but with the fact that film technologies and conventions—especially within the dominant classical Hollywood mode of storytelling—work tirelessly to efface human agency in the act of storytelling. Graphic narrative, on the other hand, *cannot* erase the sign of the human hand. Even in the clear line style of Hergé, as Marion and Gaudreault point out, we cannot help but be aware of "the extent to which its 'ideality' comes only from work transcended, from the graphic drudgery of erasures, hesitations, and corrections" (Gaulreault and Marion 59). The physical labor of storytelling is always visible in graphic narrative, whether the visible marks themselves remain, in a way unique to any mechanically reproduced narrative medium.

Despite a rich tradition that explicitly militates against this tendency, we still familiarly describe a rewarding novel as one in which the reader forgets that she is reading a book, so fully immersed was she in the "story"; similarly, in classical film narration the success of the storytelling depends fundamentally on what Alan Nadel, building on Chatman, calls the "learning-as-forgetting" that cinematic narrative requires (Nadel 427). Graphic narrative, however, does not offer the possibility of ever forgetting the medium, losing sight of the material text or the physical labor of its production. In addition to the artist's line within the figurative representation, we have of course other lines equally fundamental to the comic form: the frame, the gutter, the line around dialogue and thought balloons, the lines of the lettering. Comics is a medium that calls attention with every line to its own boundaries, frames, and limitations—and to the labor involved in both accommodating and challenging those limitations.[4] We have numerous accounts of the labor involved in making a movie or writing a novel; and yet the experience of watching the film or reading the novel is often one in which we lose sight of the scene of narration and become immersed in the events themselves as if they were happening "before our eyes," or unfolding in the present, even when, in the case of a novel, the grammar at every sentence should remind us that the event transpired in the past. Narrative theory's core distinction between *story* and *discourse* must be defined and defended because conventionally the

novel and film work to focus our attention on the story while "forgetting" the discourse. Narratology is in essence the science of making visible that which the majority of narratives work to make us forget. The line then epitomizes the challenge of a narrative mode that uniquely *never* lets us forget, in which the kind of immersive magic that seeks to demystify simply cannot happen.[5]

To read a story in a comic is to be reminded constantly that this is a story told *by* someone—and a storyteller who is necessarily and fundamentally bound to often brutal physical realities: the physically demanding and time-consuming work of composing, penciling, erasing, inking, coloring, lettering on one hand; *and* the physical constraints of a narrative form that demands greater use of ellipses and compressions than novel or film to tell even the most basic stories. Too much time, too little time: with every graphic narrative we have an inevitable encounter with the laboring body of the graphiateur and the constrained body of the form itself. As Marion puts it, unlike film, comics "resists … figurative transparency; it creates on the contrary a kind of persisting opacity and prevents the act of monstration from being fully transparent and transitive" (quoted in Baetens 149). In Marion's account, the self-reflexive opacity of the line necessarily invites the reader "to achieve a coincidence of his gaze and the creative movement of the graphiateur" (Baetens 149). And while Baetens (who first introduced English readers to this important work) is right to worry that Marion's approach to graphic enunciation might pose some fundamental theoretical dangers for narratology, I am quite certain that Marion is also right in insisting that such identification with an imagined original scene of graphic enunciation is *necessary* to the reader's comprehension of the story.

Put another way: we know the line of the graphiateur is no more "natural" than are the words of the author (lines do not exist in nature, any more than do words), and yet the line compels a physical, bodily encounter with an imagined scene of embodied enunciation, one necessarily effaced in print. We know the implied author who presents herself to us through her choice of line is not identical to the author who signs the work, and yet the line brings us back to the embodied author whose signature on the page remains as unique and idiosyncratic as an autograph or a voiceprint—again, in a way necessarily effaced by print. Indeed, *voice* might be a useful analogy here—not the metaphorical "voice" of narrative theory but the human voice of oral storytelling, of song, or performance.

When I recently asked several cartoonists for their sense of the work the line performs in their storytelling, it was in fact the analogy to voice that came up most often in the responses. Mary Fleener suggested that "the line is like the timber of a singer's voice"; and Mark Newgarden

similarly analogized the line "to a performer's voice ... distinct from the actual dialog or lyric it describes yet the quality it brings (or does not) can be crucial to how that information is received by a viewer."[6] And indeed it is this analogy to oral performance—to the impact of quality of voice of the physical, individual storyteller or the singer—that necessarily complicates any academic attempts to analyze comics simply using the tools and terms we have derived from studies of the novel. Instead, I would suggest that a narrative theory of the comics form requires a turn to orality and performance studies as much as it does a turn to the more obvious traditions of art theory.

Of course the voice, like the artist's line, is not simply a product of nature, of physiology. The voice is shaped as well by environment (region, socioeconomic status) and by training (education, voice lessons), just as the line is shaped not only by the physiology of the hand and the muscular mechanics of the arm in motion but also by tools (pens, nibs, ink) and training (education, art classes, etc). As Gary Panter put it in his response to my query:

> The hand of the line maker is encoded in the line. The heartbeat is visible as are fossils of inhalations and exhalations. The angle that the implement intersects the paper affects the shape of the line. The type of implement and the length of line it makes before dulling or running out of ink affects the brain waves and type of concentration of the drawer. The line is a feedback loop.

For Panter, the line is equally shaped by the technical (nib, ink), the physiological (hand, breath, chemical responses to the impending depletion of ink or dulling of the pen nib), as well as, of course, the story being told and the character of line called for at a given moment. The line is determined by all these forces at once and it derives its meaning from the "feedback loop" that binds them together along a living (and breathing) circuit. In this regard, while the line in graphic narrative has more in common with *oral* performance than either film or the novel, we are also reminded that the line is not finally equivalent to voice, which requires no external tools to articulate itself. Thus the line in graphic narrative is at once voice and writing, orality and print, performance and text. A proper and full analysis of graphic narrative must find terms to attend to both sides equally. The story of the graphic narrative is always finally *two* stories, equally and at once: the story of what happens to the characters and (in the graphic traces we cannot erase but never fully recover) the story of the telling of the story itself. It involves recovering the chalk talk that lies behind every graphic narrative, the voiceprint that is etched into every line—and most of all it requires a physical encounter with both a particular pen and a particular hand that sets it in motion.

Little in the central terms and practices of narrative theory has prepared us for an encounter with writing machines and the hands that move them. But just as narrative theory's extended and often vexed encounters with film—a narrative system that is not a language system—have allowed us to see new things about the stories we tell in narrative fiction, so too might a renewed attention to the physical encounter of storytelling and the voiceprint of the storyteller shape the lens through which we read our prose fiction in the years to come.

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Notes

1. After the advent of photography, "candid" portraits of the author at work again appear.
2. Citations to *From Hell* will be by chapter and page number, as each chapter is paginated from 1.
3. Only the first of four planned volumes of the *Compleat Scripts* of *From Hell* were published, taking us through chapter three.
4. Here we might think about the ongoing influence of projects like Oubapo (Ouvroir de Bande Dessinée Potentielle), which experiments with self-imposed constraints beyond those already intrinsic to the medium.
5. Notwithstanding the Cold War hysteria that led to the creation of the Comics Code Authority, I would go so far as to argue that the comics form cannot produce the kind of immersion or amnesiac experience that accompanies many novels and most films in the classic Hollywood narrative tradition. In fact, while from a distance the hysteria that circulated around comics in the late 1940s and early 1950s looks similar to contemporary anxieties about immersive video games prompting young gamers to lose the distinction between gameworld and real world, a closer examination suggests something very different at work. As I discuss at length elsewhere, both those worrying about the negative effects of comics and those attempting to defend them focused on the ways in which comics' hand-made and elliptical form invited (indeed, required) readers to insert themselves into the panels and the gutter between to fill in details, make connections, and, often, to produce their own comics in response. The pathology of even the most "addicted" readers was thus from the start diagnosed differently than novel addicts in the 18th century or film junkies in the early decades of the 20th. No one worried, as critics of both novel and film (or videogames today) most certainly did, that impressionable readers of comics were losing their ability to distinguish story from reality. Rather, the anxiety Fredric Wertham articulated was that in their intense demands on reader's imagination comics possessed the ability to unlock dark corners of the mind and inspire dangerous acts of interpretation and imitation.
6. Quotations from Fleener, Newgarden, and (below) Panter are from correspondence with author, August 14-16, 2010.

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