THE SILENT PARTNER

A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO TEXT AND IMAGE IN PERSEPOLIS

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CHAPTER 1

“On the far side of language”

An Introduction

COGNITIVE LITERARY THEORY

Suspended somewhere between art and science, in a metaphorical juncture between the left-brain and the right-brain, there is a little-known discourse spiriting its way into English and Literature Departments around the world: cognitive literary theory. Cognitive literary theory is a new approach to literature which appears to be “gaining the force of an imperative in academia.”¹ It is the quintessential interdisciplinary study, bridging gaps between literature and “linguistics, computer science, psychology, neuroscience, philosophy of mind and anthropology.”² It ventures to answer those overwhelming questions at the very heart of literary study: how and why do we read? What is it that has kept us and our ancestors for thousands of years returning to the narrative? To answer these questions, the literary scholar must turn to her colleagues in the social and natural sciences; she must seek out the answers in the peculiar machinery of the mind.

This is not to suggest that cognitive literary theory is a polarized exchange between the humanities and the sciences—where only one stands to gain from the relationship; this is a two-way exchange. Cognitive studies have as much to learn from the study of literature as literary studies have from cognitive theory. Some current theorists, like Patrick Colm Hogan,³ use the study of literature as evidence to bolster theories of cognition; indeed some theorists, like Mark
Turner, George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, suggest that the entire cognitive power of the brain functions in a form of narrative interpretation and in terms of literary discourse. However, other theorists like Mary Crane, use current cognitive theories to offer new insights into literature; this is the moment in research where literary scholars can revel in the work done by their scientific colleagues and adapt it to suit the needs of their humanistic colleagues. Mary Crane calls them text-based theorists:

Unlike cognitive sciences, which take the brain as their focus of study and which often use formal languages (such as mathematics or computer ‘languages’) to describe them, the text-based theorists... study the literary and cultural productions of the mind and use recognizably literary discourse to interpret them.

This project will approach the study of literature primarily from this point of view, using cognitive theories to explore in new ways the question of how we read and write. The specific theories used in each chapter will be explained in context as they pertain to the literary analysis. However, this project will approach a branch of literature which has, as of yet, only a small scope of critical analysis and which merits further study. This is a branch of literature which is on “the far side of language”—when language alone is not enough to capture the visceral and variegated nature of human experience. This is the 9th art, the comic book, or the graphic narrative.

The Graphic Narrative

The graphic narrative as a genre has been elusory since its inception, changing nomenclature and definition with each generation of authors and critics. Some refer to the genre as “comics,” others “graphic novels.” The most recent generation of theorists, however, have adopted the term “graphic narrative” to encompass all subgenres of the form—fiction and nonfiction alike (although any name can be interchanged for the others without serious qualm
at this point in the development of its scholarship). In 1993 Scott McCloud, the pioneer of comics criticism, first defined comics as “[j]uxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.” However, this definition might include works of art like the Bayeux tapestry and Andy Warhol’s “Campbell’s Soup Cans” that clearly do not fall under the same category as the *The Adventures of Tintin*. So in 2001, Robert Harvey suggested a new definition:

It seems to me that the essential characteristic of ‘comics’—the thing that distinguishes it from other kinds of pictorial narratives—is the incorporation of verbal content.... And the history of cartooning—of ‘comics’—seems to me more supportive of my contention than [McCloud’s].

In 2008, Hillary Chute offered her own definition which did not constrain it only to the relationship between text and image, but also incorporated its narrative structure: a formal system of dually presenting time and space. The following definition, if not in so many words, has been the reigning one in current scholarship:

Comics might be defined as a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially. Comics moves forward in time through the space of the page, through its progressive counterpoint of presence and absence: packed panels (also called frames) alternating with gutters (empty space). Highly textured in its narrative scaffolding, comics doesn’t blend the visual and the verbal—or use one simply to illustrate the other—but is rather prone to present the two nonsynchronously...

Historically, the comic book has been considered a frivolous medium for the mass consumption of popular culture—from penny-dreadfuls to gag cartoons to superhero, romance, and mystery comics. Whether it was considered frivolous because it was popular, or whether it was popular because it was frivolous is a debate still raging amongst cultural theorists and historians. Even still, modern culture stigmatizes it as “infantile, vulgar, or insignificant.”

Within the last few decades, however, the graphic narrative has felt a dramatic shift in mood and content. Art Spiegelman has been the unofficial herald (at least in the United States) for the
shift when his graphic narrative *Maus*—a two-part story about the multigenerational trauma of Holocaust survivors and their families—won a Pulitzer Prize Special Award in 1992. Author-artists like Spiegelman, Joe Sacco, and Marjane Satrapi have transformed the medium into a powerful cultural force for examining historical traumas and the personal experiences born within them. Artists like these are evidence for the power of the graphic narrative medium. The fact remains that artists like Spiegelman, Sacco, Satrapi and many others did not choose any other form to express their stories, though they had a wide range of mediums from which to choose—the novel, the short story, the canvas, the stage, etc. There was something which drew these people to the graphic narrative for expression—something which neither visual art nor language could have done alone.

The graphic narrative capitalizes on its unique treatment of the convergence of word and image which rests on the premise that word and image live in a symbiotic relationship with each other. Even the prototype of the comic strip—drawings done by Swiss artist Rodolphe Töpffer as early as 1827—stressed the important relationship between text and image. As a theorist, himself, Töpffer wrote, “The drawings without their text would have only a vague meaning; the text without the drawings, would have no meaning at all. The combination of the two makes a kind of novel.”\(^{14}\) The graphic narrative medium is one whose gravitational center—the point from which everything originates, finds its ground, and stretches into infinite possibility—is the relationship between processing visual and linguistic signs of communication to one end. This is the cognitive juncture of word and image.

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**Text, Image, and the Mind**

Noam Chomsky’s theory of a Universal Grammar changed the way the world perceived language and human nature. His theory submits that each human being is biologically equipped
with the capacity to understand, produce, and manipulate language. The tremendous impact of his theory on cognitive processes shifted the scholarly focus of human cognition to linguistic processes. Evolutionary biologists believe the human capacity for language—what Chomsky calls the Language Acquisition Device (LAD)—coevolved with the development of the prefrontal cortex. As a result of the development of the prefrontal cortex, increased encephalization—the development of brain mass—led to increased human intelligence, all of which unfolded simultaneously with the development of human language. Thus, scholars regularly attribute the basis of human intelligence with our unique capacity for language. Certainly this cognitive development was a crucial one in human evolutionary history. Some evolutionary biologists like Stephen Jay Gould, however, go so far as to claim that “speech (or writing) is the quintessential act of human mind... the centerpiece of our evolutionary distinctiveness from all other creatures.”

Yet the human cognitive capacity for communication extends beyond language. Allen Paivio writes,

[L]anguage never worked its magic alone and it cannot do so now. Instead, it was always dependent on a silent partner that provides it with something to talk about, a general cognitive system that had evolved to a high level before it invited language in as a coplayer in the evolutionary scene.

The basis for human cognition—the silent partner in language’s crusade for communication—is rooted in sensory input. Before communication commences in sensory output—for example, the aural stimuli in speech or the visual stimuli in writing—an external stimulus must first be received and processed by one or more of the senses. Paivio continues,

I see language as a benevolent, octopus-like parasite whose tentacles invaded the brain and was empowered by it to survive and thrive to the point where it could contribute something useful to its host.

The general cognitive system on which language thrives is knowledge acquired through sensory experience.
Mark Sadoski and Allan Paivio suggest that all “external experiences are perceived through the stimulation of our various sense modalities, including the visual, auditory, haptic, gustatory, and olfactory sense modalities.”\(^{19}\) Through the Dual Coding Theory of literacy, they argue that \textit{verbal} and \textit{non-verbal processes}—which include all non-linguistic sensory experiences—exist on equal cognitive planes. Their theory offers a unified approach to human literacy which takes into account the “two great symbolic systems of cognition: language and mental imagery,”\(^{20}\) where language is stored as verbal processes and mental imagery is derived from various perceptions in our sense modalities. Through \textit{associative processing} (within the verbal system or within the non-verbal system) and \textit{referential processing} (between the verbal and non-verbal systems), the verbal and nonverbal modalities work together to form the basis for human cognition.

For Ellen Spolsky and other cognitive theorists, the visual sense modality takes precedent over other sensory experiences as an effective aid in human communication. Ellen Spolsky argues that human beings have a cognitive hunger for images—that it is our primordial affectation to hunt and gather visual stimuli in order to survive. Our overwhelming desire to feed our visual sense modality is \textit{iconotropism}. She writes

\begin{quote}
Iconotropism, then... hypothesiz[es] that human beings feed on pictures, metabolize them—turn them into nourishment—because we need the knowledge they provide. We turn toward pictures when they are available, we imagine them if they’re not, and we produce them if we can.\(^{21}\)
\end{quote}

Just as Chomsky proposed human beings developed an innate language faculty to understand, process, and manipulate language, Spolsky suggests that human beings are cognitively equipped to do the same with images. While evolutionary biologists argue the development of language was a crucial evolutionary survival tactic, Spolsky suggests that iconotropism was a much earlier, equally important evolutionary development.
Most theorists can agree that cognition is not restricted to either verbal processes or non-verbal processes and that each set of processes operates differently. Each process affects different ways of knowing. In particular, the debate over the competing cognitive functions of text and image—“the imagistic and the concrete” versus “the verbal and the abstract”—has raged on for centuries, pitting one against the other. Yet iconotropism suggests that there is as much a need to represent the experienced world physically as linguistically. Some argue that the demand for images may even surpass the demand for verbal communication. Spolsky writes, “The interesting point for us is the idea of the gradient: some problems require more [visual] representation than others.” Typically these moments arise out of a need to specially process significant cultural, historical, or emotional stimuli. Of considerable interest, then, is the new wave of graphic narratives which combine both nonverbal and verbal (or linguistic) lines of narration in order to work through these types of cognitively demanding issues.

Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is just such a text, a graphic memoir about the author’s experience growing up during the Iranian Revolution. The narrative explores the life of Marji, a young girl exposed to the horrors and complexities of mass violence and tyranny. It traces her mental torment of grappling with extremist ideologies in the Shah’s Iran, a subsequent sojourn to Austria as a political refugee, and her return to Iran as a transnational in the new Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. “I give myself this duty of witnessing,” Satrapi explains. It is a two-fold duty: to be a witness to the cultural situation of modern-day Iran—to experience first-hand—but also to bear witness and relinquish to others a vicarious experience. She charges herself to bear the burden of the senses as a witness who sees, hears, feels, and touches history. Contingent on that burden is the duty to communicate her experience through narration. The consummation of verbal narration and sensual experience—a meeting of word and embodiment—sires a multimodal cognitive experience. *Persepolis* is a project which at
once recalls and reimagines a history such that it is not only remembered but reenacted through images on a page. Satrapi’s version of witnessing transforms typical autobiography into the graphic novel: the hybrid *autobio-graphic novel* with two lines of narration, the visual and the verbal. *Persepolis* will be our point of entrance into the combined study of the graphic narrative and cognitive literary theory.

**An Overview for What Follows**

The purpose of this project is to examine how text and image function cognitively in the graphic narrative paying particular attention to its manifestation in Satrapi’s *Persepolis*. The structure is such that each chapter will progressively become more specific, from medium to genre to text, drawing on specific examples from *Persepolis* for support. Chapter 2 will first categorize the various relationships between text and image as they function in the graphic narrative as a medium. They are described in terms of the reader’s cognitive experience of the verbal narrative line’s juxtaposition against the visual narrative line. Chapter 3 will examine how a multimodal narrative—a dual verbal/visual narrative—affects the genre of nonfiction in the graphic narrative medium. It will define not only the tensions that text and image necessarily bring to the authenticity of nonfiction, but also the benefits. Chapter 4 will focus on *Persepolis* as a cognitive product in its own right. Stemming from theories of autobiography which suggest that an autobiographic text is a self-construction or self-understanding of identity, one can examine *Persepolis* as a material product and personal construction through this lens. Consider the competing cultural influences which manifest themselves in *Persepolis* because they manifest themselves in Marjane Satrapi’s own transnational identity: the Persian, the Islamic, the Modern Iranian, the Western. I offer a cognitive approach which suggests that *Persepolis*
functions as a material anchor of a conceptual blend—cognitive theories developed by Mark Turner, Gilles Fauconnier, and Edward Hutchins which are further explained in Chapters 2 and 4.

While the primary goal of this project is specific to the research goals explained above, the secondary goal is *advocacy*. Both cognitive literary theory and comics criticism are marginalized in current literary studies. The former—whose scientific method looms over literature—threatens to overshadow the beauty and philosophy behind prose and poetry, while the latter—as a product of mass consumption and popular culture—threatens to undermine the legitimacy of literature. However, this project will show the viability of both cognitive literary theory as a method and the graphic narrative as a subject for serious academic inquiry.
**CHAPTER 2**

“Understanding the last blacksmiths”

**Verbal and Visual Narrative Lines Explained**

**Introduction**

The graphic narrative as a medium solicits a multimodal cognitive experience because of its dual form. It offers both a *verbal narrative line*—the text—and a *visual narrative line*—the image. The simultaneous presentation of two lines of narration will induce a multiplicity of cognitive experiences. The multimodal presentation will give rise to moments of enhanced understanding and moments of great tension. These two lines of narration provide two ways of reading, two ways of learning. Ellen Spolsky muses over the need for such juxtaposition as she writes, “Together the texts and the pictures ask whether we learn different things by hearing a story than by seeing and by touching.”¹ She suggests that text and image each play a different role in the narrative process; when the two come together in varying degrees, it results in distinctive cognitive experiences neither present in visual narration nor verbal narration alone. A productive friction between the two lines of narration results in new kinds of reading-viewing experiences. The cognitive experiences induced by the dual verbal/visual narrative lines can be categorized into three major experiences: the illustrative experience, the convergent experience, and the divergent experience. Each experience has a unique relationship between text and image which affects the way the reader cognizes the narrative as a whole.
The *illustrative experience* is elicited from a mirror presentation of the verbal and visual narrative lines. One line of narration illustrates the other, producing one continuous, integrated experience, like an illustrated instruction manual for instance. Information is *overcoded* in both verbal and non-verbal cognition (i.e. visual, haptic, or other sensorial processes). The goal of overcoding is to use multiple, overlapping modes of cognition to guarantee accuracy of transmission. It is used only when the audience is at risk of being disengaged with the flow of visual information or linguistic narration alone. An additional mode of narration supplements the original mode to act as guarantor of information communication.

Consider the sportscaster who converts visual information into verbal information so the audience can understand the game play. Vin Scully, sixty-year sportscaster for the Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers, watched the final game of the 1986 World Series and described the action in the last few moments, “There’s a little roller up along first, behind the bag! It gets through Buckner! Here comes Knight and the Mets win it!” Contra, consider the choreographer who might follow up a complicated call—“On the third beat you need to move quickly: one, two, kick, turn. Down, up, kick, turn”—with a kinetic demonstration. Both the sportscaster and the choreographer guide their audience to understand information in one mode through mirrored information presented in another mode: the sportscaster added a verbal narrative line to the visual experience of game play; the choreographer added a kinetic or visual line to verbal instruction. Each provided congruent pieces of information in separate modes to create one continuous, hybrid narrative. The goal is to be sure that the audience can follow a real-time experience from moment to moment, particularly at times when they might be jarred by a moment of cognitive difficulty.
The difference between the illustrative experience in the previous examples and the illustrative experience in the graphic narrative is its sustained elaboration. Whereas the former is a temporary lapse into illustrative experience, the latter is an entire project. In real-time narration, the illustrative experience overcodes information when, for example, the choreographer finds the original mode of instruction insufficient to fully communicate the intentions of an 8- or 16-count sequence. On the other hand, the target element for the graphic narrative is the not one episode of the narrative, but the majority of the project. The moment of cognitive difficulty is the entire narrative development.

The illustrative experience has become the default mode of cognition in the graphic narrative in part because of its history. From the mid-1800s to the 1920s, most cartoonists were only using images to literally illustrate the text. At times, captions to illustrations could be two to three paragraphs in length, leading long-time cartoon editor of the New Yorker, Lee Lorenz, to dub them “illustrated anecdotes.” Here, pictures were not used to tell the story but only to overcode the text. Gradually, cartoonists refined their technique of incorporating the visual narrative line into the verbal narrative line, minimalizing the use of captions and dialogue and letting the image deliver the punch line, so to speak, in an “economy of expression.” The visual line would continue to develop into a stable, independent narrative force, but the graphic novelist would always return to the simplicity of the illustrative experience.

The mirrored lines of narration offer stability to a medium ripe with tensions. To compensate for the cognitive difficulty of a multimodal narrative, the graphic novelist defaults his narrative to the illustrative experience. It provides basic structure to the narrative and overcodes information to guarantee the reader can follow the narrative action. As a structuring agent, the illustrative experience first develops the simple narrative action, introduces the “visual lexicon,” and provides thematic structure.
A. Developing Narrative Action

As explained above, the illustrative experience is suited for narrative action because it overcodes information fundamental to narrative development. “Fundamental,” here, does not refer to that which is at the ‘root or heart of the matter,’ but that which is a foundation for the narrative. Most instances of illustrative experience do not relate to what may be at the ‘heart’ of the narrative, the gritty emotional elements. Most are, in fact, instances of simple action used to further the narrative. For example, in the second half of Persepolis Marji, invited by her half-Spanish, half-Austrian boyfriend Enrique, goes to an anarchist’s party in the woods of Austria. This two-page spread is fundamentally illustrative, the visual and verbal narrative lines reflecting each other (Figure 1). When she says “we arrived in the middle of the forest,” the panel indeed shows a car arriving in the middle of a forest; when she says she “saw a group of adults chasing one another and shouting,” “[playing] hide-and-seek… then volleyball,” and

![Figure 1](image)
“[grilling] sausages while singing Janis Joplin,” each illustrated panel unobtrusively reflects the verbal narrative line. Thus, the reader is guided to follow the simple narrative action, panel by panel, allowing the action, itself, to take precedence over any other interpretive or cognitive strategies.

One might ask why the illustrative experience in the modern-day graphic narrative acts only as a tool for basic plot development—the ‘simple’ moments of narrative—when it is used in real-life for cognitively difficult moments. One must return to the history of the graphic narrative for the answer. It is true that the illustrative experience was originally implemented for the cognitively difficult. However as the graphic narrative medium developed, the modalities used for overcoding information—the visual and verbal narrative lines—evolved complexly and independently. The project remained always the same—to overcode the cognitively difficult—but because the medium evolved independently, the goal—to understand the cognitively difficult—was compromised. Remember that for the graphic novelist, “the cognitively difficult” is the story. As the narrative lines as a form grew in complexity over generations of cartoonists, the story in that form, too, would grow overwhelmingly complex. Additional cognitive experiences evolving out of the illustrative—specifically, the convergent and divergent experiences—complicated the original process of overcoding. The graphic novelist’s goal for the reader to understand his story was thus compromised.

As the graphic narrative developed, the illustrative experience’s goal and project no longer coincided. In order to restore order, the graphic novelist returned to the illustrative experience in structural moments in the narrative—moments of basic plot points. These provide a necessary rest in the, at times, frenzied dual-processing of the verbal and visual narrative lines. Without the illustrative experience to provide basic narrative structure, the
reader is at risk of becoming disengaged from the text. The illustrative experience keeps the narrative and the reader on track.

**B. VISUAL LEXICON**

The illustrative experience also structures the graphic narrative by providing it with a visual lexicon, but before introducing the visual lexicon as it applies to the illustrative experience, it is important to understand how it originated as a visual application of a linguistic concept. It is tempting to analyze the structure of the verbal-visual modes of the graphic narrative in terms of language as some theorists do, calling it a “pictorial language,” and this approach does have its advantages. However, the verbal mode, as a sequential cognitive process, is dependent on syntax—the discrete set of constraints, rules, and processes of grammar—making it a sequential process. It is nonsensical and ungrammatical to have a sentence which reads, “Ad one saw I in newspaper a.” Similarly morphological constraints on language make it ungrammatical for a word such as “dress-re” to exist. Non-verbal modes of cognition are usually not so limited. Instead, the nonverbal mode is usually based on synchronous processing. But because text and image are so intimately connected in the graphic narrative, one easily—even naturally—cognizes one in terms of the other, particularly in the illustrative experience when text and image mirror each other. Additionally, a narrative structure requires narrative conventions. In a verbal narrative, all the constraints and rules of language apply. In a multimodal narrative, the nonverbal mode needs a similar set of constraints and rules to communicate necessary information. The illustrative experience fills this role in a way similar to the linguistic constructions of a lexicon.

The non-verbal mode in the graphic novel creates its own lexicon—a visual lexicon—from within its own morphology. A morphology is a system of the smallest meaningful elements
in a language; the graphic narrative’s morphology is a system of individual images and elements of images. For example, Satrapi introduces us to Marji, a simply drawn girl with a down-turned mouth, arched eyebrows, a part down the middle of her hair, etc. In the opening panel of Persepolis—our first text-image interaction—Marji is drawn with a veil and accompanied by the text, “This is me when I was 10 years old. This was in 1980.” Our first entry in our visual lexicon is the veiled Marji. She provides various types of the same token in the immediately following panels to expand our visuo-lexical entry to include unveiled images of Marji.

In another example, little white stars against a black background represent jasmine flowers, specifically those jasmine flowers used for perfume which fell from Marji’s grandmother’s breasts when she undressed (Figure 2). The image reappears in a different context in Marji’s dreams sometime later (Figure 3), but the essential morphological capacity remains the same. The image becomes fused with the conceptualization of the grandmother, and the grandmother need not even be present (Figure 4). The image retains information and is instilled with meaning because of its visuo-lexical entry in the graphic narrative as having some quality of [+ GRANDMOTHER] in addition to other qualities like [+ SMELL], as having a unique smell. The reader is able to cognize a white background with black jasmine flowers as Marji’s grandmother in her nightgown because of the information stored in the visuo-lexical entry.

**Figure 2 - The first entry for the image of the jasmine flower in the visual lexicon.**
C. THEMATIC STRUCTURE

Thematic content can also be generated and recognized through the structure and use of the visual lexeme. Just as the jasmine flower visuo-lexeme had attached to it the qualities of [+ GRANDMOTHER] and [+ SMELL], certain visuo-lexemes can also contain thematic content like [+ IDENTITY] if a visuo-lexeme is associated with understanding character development. One such example is the “collective identity” visuo-lexeme. Based on Persian classical art, the collective identity images are iconographic in nature, usually with symmetrical, identical, and repeating figures. They allow the reader to track the thematic content of identity. The varying forms of the collective identity images, or “collective identity portraits” separate the complete version of Persepolis into three parts corresponding with a developing identity: Marji’s childhood in Iran, her exile to Europe, and her return to Iran as a transnational.

The first part of Persepolis, during which Marji is growing up in the turmoil of a revolutionary Iran, is marked by a series of collective identity portraits. Nearly every page has collective identity portraits or references to their iconography. In fact, the first visuo-lexical entry the reader receives—the veiled Marji—combines with the visuo-lexical entry of the
“collective identity” (Figure 5). In the next panel Marji continues, “And this is a class photo. I’m sitting on the far left so you don’t see me.” Beneath the text, Satrapi has drawn four girls uniformly wrapped in black veils with their arms crossed. However, the faces beneath the veils are subtly different as if they had stuck their faces in cut-out holes of the State’s ‘virtuous Iranian girl.’ The unique aspects of their face emphasize their struggle against being captured in the uniformity of their surroundings. Thus, Satrapi immediately introduces in the “collective identity” visuo-lexical entry the thematic content of her struggle against an imposed collective identity. The following panel (Figure 6)—“In 1979 a revolution took place. It was called ‘the Islamic Revolution’” accompanied by a group of Iranians with the same face, the same posture, and the same revolutionary gesture—then shifts immediately into the established collective identity of her Iranian history.

The collective identity portraits also tend to show up particularly in scenes of mass violence and historical situation, moments when Marji is noticeably connected to her identity as an Iranian. This adds a further thematic and historical layer to the lexical-entry. Perhaps the most striking use of the collective identity portraits occurs when Marji describes her country’s history as “2500 years of tyranny and submission,” essentially converging the two catalysts of

![Figure 5](image_url)
the collective identity portrait—history and violence, indeed a history of violence. This panel, covering two-thirds of the page (which suggests its importance to the narrative), employs four different versions of the collective identity portrait. The bas-relief imitation images oscillate back and forth from left to right as the panel is read from top to bottom, reflecting the recursive nature of the Iranian revolutionary history of a country made unstable by its rocking in and out of tyranny. Each of the levels creates a taxonomy of historical actors, using iconographic visuals—synchronicity, repetition, and indivisibility—to do so.

Figure 6

First, the Persians—presumably Marji’s ancestors—are represented with their faces hidden, neat rows of bodies bent in a groveling bow before a tyrant built from within their own people. The emperor’s great sword, arched over their heads, marks the beginning of their extended history of tyranny, submission, and violence. Moreover, his sword directs the
reader—reading from left to right—to reverse his gaze over the backs of the subjugated Persians, thus triggering the first of many more oscillations of power in Iranian history. The throng of Arabs follows on horseback wildly galloping from the West, swords and daggers drawn. Then the Mongols surge past from the East on their white steeds, raining arrows in their wake. Finally, the modern Imperialist forces of America, Great Britain, and Marxism march forward, accompanied by hooded executioners.

The identity Marji has constructed in her narrative is thus molded in relation to the visuo-lexical entry of the collective identity portrait. Because the “collective identity” visual lexeme has the thematic content [+ IDENTITY] as established in the opening pages, she and her family relate themselves to the conquered, orderly figures with those hidden faces in Figure 6. Thematically, the inability to show their faces represents a virtual obliteration of the legitimacy of their culture; however, the ordered rows of individual bodies demonstrate a strong union to subvert the wild tyranny of their oppressors. In comparison with Marji’s “othered” collective identities in the panel—the Arabs, the Mongols, and the Imperialists—the Persians are the only group who maintain some degree of individuality in the representation of singular, separate bodies united by synchronized color and form. The “othered” collective identities, on the other hand, are homologous but chaotic and indistinguishable, characterized furthermore by their wanton use of swords, arrows, and axes. In opposition to these “othered” identities, Marji creates a collective identity situated in the Iranian historical moment that unites the Persians in solidarity against their oppressors.

The second part of Persepolis, during which Marji lives in Austria as a political refugee, is marked by a conspicuous lack of collective identity portraits. Instead, individual portraits without any traditional iconography dominate this section. Even in instances when it would have been appropriate, indeed necessary, to characterize the actors in a collective identity (i.e.
scenes of violence or revolution), Satrapi does no such thing. On the contrary, revolutionary fantasies as seen in the chapter “Hide and Seek” are unexpectedly presented unceremoniously in the same style as the contemporary narrative (Figure 7).13

![Figure 7](image)

Though drawn in three distinguishable groups as marked by the layout of the page, the groups are not cloaked in iconography that visually links each individual to its part in the collective identity, such as uniformly raised fists14 or synchronized bodies lurching forward.15 Marji is undergoing a psychological shift from her experienced collective identity to a newly formed individual identity, catalyzed by the European underground of punk-anarchist influence. The shift is further evidenced when she writes: “A revolutionary anarchists’ party!’ It reminded me of the commitment and the battles of my childhood in Iran.” Marji’s link to her cultural history
without the need to form collective identities suggests that her mode of intra-narrative identification has changed from the collective to the individual.

**THE CONVERGENT EXPERIENCE**

The *convergent experience* is the first of the multimodal experiences that blend the visual and verbal narrative lines in a productive manner in their own right. Whereas the illustrative experience did elucidate important secondary analysis of the graphic narrative, its cognitive complexity—to overcode and mirror—is nominal. The convergent experience synthesizes disparate visual and verbal narrative lines into a complementary presentation. When the two disparate lines converge, the cognitive result is a new and unique experience neither present in the verbal nor the visual narrative line. When two elements come together in a productive way in cognition, it creates a *conceptual blend*. Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier’s conceptual blending theory will explain how the convergent experience works in the graphic narrative.

**A. CONCEPTUAL BLENDING THEORY**

Conceptual blending—also known as “conceptual integration”\(^{16}\)—is a cognitive process creating a productive relationship between an otherwise unassociated source and target in order to better understand the target, such as a metaphor or simile. When an element of the target conceptual framework, or *domain*, is cognized in terms of the source domain, and the cognitive blend enriches the target. Turner and Fauconnier assume a modular neural architecture: different types of information are handled in distinct “cognitive spaces”\(^{17}\) and integrated by intervening processes.\(^{18}\) Simple conceptual blending requires four cognitive spaces: one input space for the *target domain* \((A)\); one space for the *source domain* \((A')\); a
generic space identifying and containing common elements; and a blended space for the synthetic understanding of the target element.¹⁹

Three basic processes operate within and between these four neural spaces: composition, completion, and elaboration. First, composition assembles the target and source domains in input spaces A and A’, respectively. Then, completion identifies the parallel elements by mapping the target domain onto the source domain and bringing the elements together in the generic space. Lastly, elaboration maps the completed domain from the generic space onto the blended space to create novel associative meanings for the target element.

Metaphor is a simple example of conceptual blending.²⁰ Consider the example: “The surgeon is a butcher.”²¹ All the qualities of a butcher occupy input space A; all qualities of a surgeon occupy input space A’. Simultaneous consideration of these two spaces constitutes composition. Completion proceeds by mapping the two input spaces onto each other as follows:
Initially, the metaphor may seem to [be] explainable in terms of direct projection from the source domain of butchery to the target domain of surgery, guided by a series of fixed counterpart mappings: “butcher” onto “surgeon”; “animal” (cow) maps onto “human being”; “commodity” onto “patient”; “cleaver” onto “scalpel”; and so forth. Grady, Coulson, and Oakley note that this may seem like the entire content of the metaphor, but the cognitive blending is not yet complete. A surgeon is surely incompetent if he is being compared to a butcher, but there is no source “incompetency” inherent in “butcher-ness” that could be projected onto the target surgeon. How did it get there?

This phenomenon is crucial to elaboration. Productive—or “emergent”—content is revealed by the juxtaposition of elements in the generic space. In this example, productive content emerges from incompatible means-end relationships between the butcher and the surgeon. In input space A, the butcher’s goal is to kill the animal and carve its flesh from its bones; in input space A’, the surgeon’s goal is to heal the patient. When the source’s means-end relationship is mapped onto the target’s means-end relationship, the resulting product is an incompetent surgeon. Thus, the characteristic of conceptual blending theory is this productive content which emerges from the comparison between target and source.

**B. Conceptual Blending in Graphic Narrative**

Conceptual blending in the graphic narrative can work on any of three separate levels: the verbal, the visual, and the integration of verbal and visual. Verbal blends, as in the example above, will typically blend semantically—that is, through the linguistic organization of referents and semantic categories (i.e. agent, action, environment, instrument, etc.). Visual blends in the graphic narrative (and other subjective, artistic representations), on the other hand, will blend stylistic elements which may or may not have underlying semantic content. For example, the recurring use of a particular icon, such as a cross, will carry cultural meaning that cannot be
disassociated from it. There are other artistic techniques that do not carry semantic content; rather, they emerge from and are representational of a deeper cultural attitude, like the introduction of perspective during the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. There is no direct semantic content available in the use of perspective, but it is representative of the rational enlightenment of the era. For the purposes of this project, however, focus will be on the cross-modal blend.

Because the graphic narrative simultaneously presents verbal and non-verbal modes, it is possible for there to be a blend across and between modalities. The elements from the verbal and non-verbal modes can be mapped onto each other, creating a cross-modal conceptual blend. The cross-modal blend can be likened to Edwin Hutchins’ material anchor theory of the conceptual blend.24 According to his theory, combining material structure with conceptual structure is a key reasoning strategy because it grounds the abstract in the concrete. A materially anchored blend is one in which “one input space is an input space in the usual sense, a conceptual domain consisting of conceptual elements and relations.... The other input is a structured configuration of material elements.”25 An example is a clock which maps the conceptual input of “time” onto the material structure of a clockface, a timeline with direction. In the graphic narrative, the drawn images function as the material anchor in the blend, providing stability and structure for cognitively difficult elements of narrative. However, Hutchins’ material anchor differs from the graphic narrative’s in two distinct ways: application and form.

Whereas Hutchins’ material anchors are primarily applied to logical inferences, graphic narrative’s material anchors are more commonly applied to psychological observations. This comes as no surprise to the medium for which logical inference as a cognitive strategy inherently takes a back seat to psychological development. In the Western tradition, the
narrative trajectory traditionally rises to a climax and ends in a dénouement in hopes of instigating an emotional response from the reader. While logic has a place in narrative, it is secondary to emotion. In the graphic narrative, the material anchors are not only applied differently but also appear in a different form. Rather than mental imagery of material structures to stabilize the psychological and emotional states in the narrative, the graphic narrative makes the mental image concrete in what Sadoski and Paivio call “physical imaging.”

In *Persepolis*, for example, Satrapi uses the verbal-visual blend to elicit a non-verbal experience of the revolutionary war as it grows out of control. Satrapi breaks from the narrative of her home life, zooming out to contextualize her own story in the greater story of Iranian political history. At the breaking point of frustration with her mother, after arguing over school, Marji asks to go to the basement (*Figure 8*). Visually, the panels shift in color from black-on-white to white-on-black. The caption reads, “The basement was my hideaway,” shifting the
verbal narrative from a simple script—one action leading to another—to description. The verbal shift to description stops the narrative action and freezes temporality. The abrupt transition alerts the reader to a different kind of narrative experience. As a multimodal experience, it changes immediately from the illustrative experience of a tense home life to the convergent experience of psychological change induced by the war.

According to conceptual blending theory, the verbal narrative would be considered the conceptual domain of wartime. The non-verbal structure of Marji’s descent down a staircase acts as material anchor. It anchors the conceptual domain of wartime in the visual imaging of an orientational metaphor. An orientational metaphor, as Lakhoff and Johnson proffer, internally organizes a system of concepts with respect to one another in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors. They are not random associations, but are rooted in physical and cultural experience. For example, the non-verbal experience of “happiness” and “consciousness” are often related to the spatialization metaphor of UP, as in “My spirits rose,” or “I’m getting up.” Additionally, “sadness” and “unconsciousness” are often related to the spatialization metaphor DOWN, as we see here. This is directly related to the biology of human experience. Specifically, when a human being dies, he loses his ability to stand upright and his body falls down. Sickness and disease restrict the human body to a horizontal (or anti-upright) position. Lakhoff and Johnson suggest that our understanding of health’s effects on the body’s spatial relationship to the earth—healthy as an upright human being, unhealthy as a human being lying down—elicits fundamental metaphors of good as UP and bad as DOWN.

During composition, elements of wartime fill the domain of input space A while elements of the spatialization metaphor fill the domain of input space A’. During completion, the visuo-spatialization metaphor is then mapped onto the verbal conceptual domain of wartime. The completion is perhaps best realized in the middle left panel on the second page of
the two-page spread, in which Marji actively descends the stairs and says aloud, “So we plunged deeper into war” (Figure 9). This panel represents the generic space of the conceptual blend, bringing together common elements of the wartime script and the spatialization metaphor DOWN, re-assigning the spatialization metaphor to describe the war’s intensity. The most complicated step in this blend is elaboration.

Figure 9

In elaboration, the blend reveals that the state of war is rapidly descending into negative states of being. Because the spatialization metaphor is a fundamental one, the reader can presuppose the outcome of any conceptual blend which includes the DOWN metaphor. The ultimate physical basis for the DOWN metaphor is understood as death of the human body. The visual nature of this metaphor acts as a continual reminder of what’s to come—actively pushing Marji deeper in her descent, closer to the metaphor’s final stage (Figure 10). “Death,” as an element of the conceptual domain, hovers over each panel of the graphic narrative sequence until it is visually realized. In the final full-page panel of the descent sequence, Marji looks down into a gruesome scene of wartime death with explosions and dismemberment. The verbal narration accompanies the image both above, “They [the Iranian government] eventually admitted that the survival of the regime depended on the war,” and below, “When I think we could have avoided it all... It just makes me sick. A million people would still be alive.” This final
panel represents the final blended space of the conceptual blend, anchored by the spatialization metaphor. Elements from the two input spaces have been mapped onto each other so tightly that the target, wartime, assumed the end-goal of the DOWN metaphor, death. Characteristics of the blend have not only been mapped onto each other, but have extended onto Marji, as well, who has become “sick” by the display. The new mapping is a result of elaboration. Marji assumes a psychological state of wartime opposition, opposition which was neither inherently present in the conceptual domain of wartime nor the spatialization metaphor DOWN.

Figure 10
Verbal and Visual Narrative Lines

THE DIVERGENT EXPERIENCE

Marjane Satrapi claims that “the drawing part of the narration is not illustration. Whatever you don’t write, you draw, and vice versa,” but is that really the case? There are instances in which certain information is not represented in her writing, other instances in which it is not represented in her drawing. These moments in the narrative—when one narrative mode is privileged over the other (indeed, to the exclusion of the other)—are classified as moments of divergent experience. With the introduction of the divergent experience, one must ask how the reader processes a missing line of narration in a multi-modal text. How does the sudden onset of a mono-modal narrative function cognitively?

The processing of divergent experience in real life parallels the evolutionary development of diffuse information processing. Evolutionary survival tactics selected for overlapping modes of cognition—which may or may not offer compatible information streams—to augment the process of information gathering. In the real world, if one mode fails to provide critical data or fails to accurately interpret that data, the other modes act as “back-up.” Consider a moment before bed when you suddenly smell something burning outside. You do not see anything wrong from your front window, so you ask your family member, if she or he remembered to turn off the grill on the back porch. She or he says yes and stumbles off to bed. Here, the visual and verbal modalities do not suggest danger, but the olfactory does. You go to the back window, see the smoldering grill, and run down to put it out. The augmentation of data collection by the olfactory sense modality protected you from danger. When competing sense modalities present different streams of information, the synthesis of and interference between the two streams can save a life, and thus is biologically beneficial to our species.

For the graphic narrative, the verbal and non-verbal modes will at times offer divergent information streams. It suggests there are moments in the narrative which necessitate an
override of one or the other of the narrative lines. Again, we are directed towards Ellen Spolsky’s reflection, “Together the texts and the pictures ask whether we learn different things by hearing a story than by seeing and by touching. What kind of learning is surest? Which most esteemed?” The divergent experience in the graphic narrative takes its cue from this. Its multi-modal presentation may offer competing information, leaving the reader to sort out which “is surest.”

The divergent experience will appear in the graphic narrative in any number of ways, but the most common is what I will call the _occluded experience_. The occluded experience is a daughter to the divergent experience, unique to the narrative mode, in which one line of narration is temporarily occluded. Rather than existing as a naturally-occurring experience, as the divergent experience does, the occluded experience is controlled by the author. Thus, authorial choice plays a crucial role in the graphic narrative’s form of divergent experience. It is the author’s deliberate course of action that elicits the divergent experience by refusing to give information in certain modalities. To do this, the author takes advantage of the “narrative scaffolding”—the balance of panels with focused narrative content structured by the gaps of the gutters. As Chute suggests, “A comics page offers a rich temporal map configured as much by what isn’t drawn as by what is: it is highly conscious of the artificiality of its selective borders...” Consequently, what I call the occluded experience is self-reflexive, exploiting comics conventions. As a graphic narrative tool, it emphasizes the author’s “awareness of the limits of representation:” the impossibility of true-to-life narrative transmission.

This is the authority from which the occluded cognitive experience arises in the graphic narrative. It can appear in any variation on occlusion and sequence. The occluded experience will function as any combination of modality occlusion and duration: verbal narrative line vs. visual narrative line, and single panel vs. an episode or series of panels. In _Persepolis_, Marjane
Satrapi occludes the verbal modality by panel and by episode, whereas she will only occlude the visual modality by individual panel. The exclusion of a certain modality begs the questions, “What is the effect of choosing one narrative line over another? Is there a cognitive distinction between visual and verbal narrative occlusion that could be made a steadfast rule such that in any given situation, the author will choose one narrative line over the other with the same cognitive effect?” Consider the following examples.

A. Occluding the Verbal Modality

In an interview, Marjane Satrapi was asked about her decision to give her readers three consecutive pages without words. She responded clearly, “Sometimes talking is just too much. Sometimes just showing is enough. I think when people look at this, they understand perfectly what is happening, so I don't need to add.” But how is the reader—or at this point, the viewer—able to understand perfectly given just one mode of cognition? What effects does it have on the reader to simplify the cognitive experience to the visual narrative alone? For over one hundred pages, the reader-viewer has been bombarded by a multimodal presentation, by a variety of cognitive experiences—the illustrative, the convergent, the divergent. Finally his brain has come to terms with the simultaneous narrative lines. Suddenly, the verbal narrative line is taken away, and he is left with images alone. There is a jarring disconnect. How now does he process the single line without the safety net of the other? I will return later to the episodic example mentioned in the interview above; first, examine the single-panel examples.

Chute alleges, “The most important graphic narratives explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories,” and that the occluded experience (what she calls “awareness of the limits of representation”) most often arises out of this intersection in moments “specific to the problem
of articulating trauma.”

Her claim proves true for *Persepolis*: the majority of single-panel verbal occlusion occurs immediately following traumatic events. Twelve out of seventeen instances of verbal occlusion occur immediately before, after, or during a traumatic event or related traumatic event, with three of the five exceptions occurring during Marji’s sojourn to Austria, when she was geographically removed from the horrors of the Iranian revolution. Of the twelve instances of trauma, ten relate directly to military action: eight are a result of fatal military action (or the threat of it) against innocent civilians (*Figure 11*), two a byproduct of military engagement.

The high volume of the verbally occluded experience in relation to military action suggests that there is something which cannot or need not be *said* about this type of experienced trauma. Instead, it redirects your sensory capacities away from the verbal mode and towards the non-verbal mode. The result is a raw sensory experience of an event, unmediated by the verbal mode. Exclusion of the verbal modality—often an *aural* modality—comes when there is an excess of environmental noise: demonstrations, missile attacks, etc. The reader-viewer no longer occupies his auditory capacity with the text, as he had done previously when the verbal mode was present, but lends it entirely to imagining ambient noise.

Sadoski and Paivio suggest that simplification of auditory information is necessary because, attempting to perform two different tasks in one modality causes a disruption in one or both of the tasks, but performing two tasks in separate modalities does not interfere. For example, we can listen to music (auditory task) while exercising (motor task) without interference; in fact, the two may harmonize. But it is difficult to listen to two conversations simultaneously (two auditory tasks); we must shuttle back and forth between the two (the “cocktail-party effect”).

The simplification adds significance, even urgency, to the remaining auditory task. Without verbal mediation, without distraction, the entire cognitive experience surrenders itself to a
After the border towns, Tehran became the bombers’ main target. Together with the other people in our building, we turned the basement into a shelter. Every time the siren rang out, everyone would run downstairs.

Put your cigarette out. They say that the glow of a cigarette is the easiest thing to see from the sky. But we’re in the basement here!
single stream of information from the non-verbal mode. This draws the reader-viewer more deeply into the synchronous, concrete nature of the non-verbal mode and, consequently, into the reality of the represented experience.

Yet, one may ask, “Why is simplification of the auditory mode at all necessary when the graphic narrative—with written text and drawn image—is not and, particularly in these instances, cannot be heard?” There is nothing inherently auditory about the graphic narrative; however, a narrative’s purpose is to involve the reader in the experience. It must suggest auditory information when the experience calls for it. To do so, it takes advantage of the only directly present non-verbal mode: the visual mode. Thus, as Tehran is bombed (Figure 11), jagged flashes of white against the black background suggest violent movement. Our experience—real or perceived—of bombings relates this visual mode to the necessarily accompanying auditory mode of shattering explosions and deafening crashes. Here, our non-verbal experiences allow the extension of one non-verbal presentation (i.e. the visual) into another non-verbal mode (i.e. the auditory). Even suggesting the use of the auditory capacity is thus enough to activate it cognitively and require that it be simplified should two auditory tasks compete with each other (i.e. the text and the ambient noise).

The same can be said for the episodic example of occluded verbal experience, mentioned earlier. In this case, the occluded experience stretches outside the single panel and into the series of panels constructing an episode. The only extended version of the occluded experience is a finale of sorts—the last time the occluded verbal experience appears in the narrative (Figure 12). Over the course of three pages and twenty-three panels, Marji describes the mass hysteria of a party that was violently raided by the “guardians of the revolution,” which terrifyingly builds to a harrowing escape. For one man, it was no more than life-ending attempt at escape: a miscalculated jump from roof to roof, a tumble to his death.
Figure 12 – The only wordless sequence in Persepolis. Page 1 (top left), 2 (top right), and 3 (bottom).
Again, the simplification of narrative lines increases the urgency of experiencing the non-verbal mode, drawing the reader-viewer into the action. However, the shift from panel to episode also affects the reader-viewer’s experience of temporality, which is typically established by the verbal narrative line.

Theorist Henry John Pratt claims that linguistic items are essential elements in relegating the narrative’s temporality. Silence in a panel creates an ambiguous temporality, an image with the potential to extend into infinity. However, “when words are added,” he writes, “the passage of time within the part of the narrative encapsulated by a panel is regulated, guiding the reader’s attention and interpretation.” Comics theorist Wolk agrees: “…[Y]ou don’t look at a given panel’s image for less time than it takes to read all the words in it.” He suggests that this is why readers tend to hit the brakes when they encounter wordless sequences.... Without language acting as a “timer” or contextual cue for understanding the image, every visual change causes the reader to stop and assess what exactly is happening, and how long it’s supposed to take.

Wordless sequences effectively transfer the power of creating a narrative temporality to the reader-viewer, himself. He is no longer hindered by the sequential nature of the verbal mode, in which “the words of a comic... [determine] the pace at which we can read comics and the efficiency with which this is possible.” It forces him to actively participate in the narrative, experiencing the unfolding action as he personally must experience it.

The two-fold temporal shift—from finite to ambiguous temporality, and imposed to reader-controlled temporality—elicits an important cognitive change in the Persepolis episode. The reader-viewer is uniquely united to the narrative in this moment of trauma. When the temporality shifts into infinity, the episode becomes one that could be experienced at any given point in time—one that the reader-viewer cognizes as beyond the finite presentation of the Persepolis narrative. It lends the trauma certain gravity, warning that this type of horror could
happen at any point in time and to anyone at all, given similarly tyrannous circumstances. At the same time that the episode suspends itself in a meta-narrative, it grounds the reader-viewer in an active experience of the episode. The simultaneous suspended narrative and grounded narrative allows the reader-viewer to process the episode potentially as part of his or her own narrative.

B. Occluding the Visual Modality

Marjane Satrapi rarely employs the occluded experience for the visual modality, though other graphic narrative author-artists may be more inclined to do so. Accordingly, the occluded visual experience is carefully applied in single panels, only when necessary. Moreover, it has a distinct motivating factor compared to the occluded verbal experience. In this case, the reader is left fumbling without images entirely. Unlike the convergent experience in which the visual narrative line is present but does not reflect the verbal line, the occluded experience removes the visual line entirely.

Complete occlusion of the visual modality occurs only once in the entirety of Persepolis (Figure 13). A missile from an Iraqi attack on Tehran destroys a childhood friend’s home. The text reads, “When we walked past the Baba-Levy’s house, which was completely destroyed, I could feel that she [Marji’s mother] was discreetly pulling me away. Something told me that the Baby-Levy’s had been at home. Something caught my attention.” The visual mode allows the reader-viewer to see what Marji sees: to catch our attention with a turquoise bracelet amidst the rubble, a bracelet belonging to her friend Neda. The following series of four panels progress into complete visual occlusion. Panel 1 of the series focuses Marji’s gaze on the bracelet while the verbal line describes the bracelet’s significance. Panel 2 retreats to Marji’s watery gaze alone, hand covering her mouth for the unspeakable: “The bracelet was still
attached to... I don’t know what.”  At this point, the narrative still rests in the illustrative experience. Indeed, the covered mouth visually illustrates Marji’s inability to speak—to verbally materialize what is non-verbally realized. Panel 3 prepares the reader-viewer for the transition into the occluded visual experience: what she could not utter in Panel 2 is what she can no longer bear to see, so she covers her eyes and says nothing. Panel 4 is complete darkness, complete occluded visual experience. A bar of text at the bottom of the panel is all that remains: “No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger.” Absence of image and by extension absence of ambient noise, fittingly relieve the multimodal narrative of virtually all non-verbal experience. The narrative is simplified to the verbal mode, with all auditory capacity limited to the text of the page—hardly a scream.

Just as in the occluded verbal experience, the occluded visual experience occurs most often in representations of trauma; however, rather than motivated by a heightened sensory experience of trauma, it seeks to mediate the traumatic experience. This type of trauma cannot be experienced, cannot be seen, because of its incredible impact on the developing Marji. With extreme hesitation—progressing only panel by panel—the image of Neda’s fractured, dead body is occluded not only from Marji’s memory, but from Satrapi’s representation of the memory. It is not just an act of reverent omission, protecting the memory of her friend, but it is a distinct cognitive strategy. The text must act as the mediator for the narrative and separate the sensory experience from the narrative action. Once separated from the concrete, the moment can be processed abstractly. First, this allows Marji to dehumanize the experience and distance herself from it. Second, it jars the reader from the comfortable presentation of text-image. It asks him to first process the text, and then image for himself.
When we walked past the Baba-Levy's house, which was completely destroyed, I could feel that she was discreetly pulling me away. Something told me that the Baba-Levy's had been at home. Something caught my attention.

I saw a turquoise bracelet. It was Neda's. Her aunt had given it to her for her fourteenth birthday...

The bracelet was still attached to... I don't know what...

No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger.
C O N C L U S I O N

_Persepolis_ is a prime example of one of Hillary Chute’s proposed “most important graphic narratives”: “[those which] explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories.” The reader-viewer’s experience of the text will vary significantly based on the author’s manipulation of those conflicted boundaries. The illustrative experience primarily gives the narrative structure, allowing the convergent and divergent experiences to manipulate the tensions inherent in text-image juxtaposition.

The multimodal presentation can be cognitively difficult. With the graphic narrative only beginning to grace critical discourse, many are frustrated by the multimodal presentation (not to mention its mass appeal), unable to “decode” the “double-coded narrative.” As Art Spiegelman said, “If comics have any problem now, it’s that people don’t even have the patience to decode comics at this point…. I don’t know if we’re the vanguard of another culture or if we’re the last blacksmiths.” However, this chapter sought to explicate a basic understanding of the variety of cognitive experiences available to the graphic narrative so that those “last blacksmiths” of coded narrative can share their talents with a greater audience.
CHAPTER 3

“How truth trades in 1,000 words”

How Imaging Affects the Authenticity of Nonfiction

INTRODUCTION

An autobiography is a self-portrait. Each of those italicized words suggests a double entity, expressed as a series of reciprocal transactions. The self thinks and acts; it knows that it exists alone and with others. A portrait is space and time, illusion and reality, painter and model—each element places a demand, yields a concession. A self-portrait is even more uniquely transactional. No longer distinctly separate, the artist-model must alternately pose and paint. Autobiography is a literary version of this curious artifact.¹

Without a breath of hesitation, William Howarth unites literature and art, explaining one in terms of the other. For him, as for many of us, the bond between different artistic mediums is undeniable: music, sculpture, dance, literature, and art all privilege the subjective expression over the severity of strict objective documentation. To unite autobiography to self-portraiture, no less—invoking the artist’s brushstroke in the writer’s script—Howarth unintentionally marries text and image together in his theory of autobiography. Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis manifests that marriage in the very project of an autobiographic novel.

The previous chapter categorized the interactions between (and formal implications of) the visual and verbal modes in the graphic narrative as a medium; however, a multimodal presentation has specific and far-reaching implications for the nonfiction genre within the medium of graphic narrative. As a genre, nonfiction graphic narratives range in form and content from technical writing (i.e. instruction manuals) to journalism (i.e. photograph essays)
to autobiography. Of most importance for this project is that subgenre which infuses
autobiography with a visual modality—a graphic element—transforming the autobiographic
novel into the autobio-graphic novel. The subjectivity already inherent in autobiography as a
self-constructed narrative gets compounded with the subjectivity in hand-drawn renderings of
nonfiction images. This chapter will reveal the tensions within a multimodal work of nonfiction
with layered subjectivity. It will further demonstrate why images are used at all in a work of
autobiography and how they benefit the project, despite the tensions it creates.

**Autobiography and Authenticity**

Like its mono-modal cousin of conventional literature, the autobio-graphic novel
adheres to certain constraints of the autobiography genre. One of autobiography’s earliest
premises is a “promise to tell the truth,” but what sort of truth does it tell? One theorist argues
that autobiography “is an attempt to reconcile one’s life with one’s self and that therefore the
core of autobiography is not historical accuracy but metaphorical truth.”

Autobiography is an
opportunity to shape and reshape the author’s truth to reconcile meaning in her life and attach
causality to a series of events. It stands in opposition to objective nonfiction—reports, agendas,
and news articles, for example—because of its subjective, reconstructed nature. Yet there
remains a balance between the historical accuracy and metaphorical truth. Philippe Lejeune
identifies this as the “referential pact” of autobiography:

As opposed to all forms of fiction, biography and autobiography are referential
texts: exactly like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to provide
information about a “reality” exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of
verification. Their aim is not simple verisimilitude, but resemblance to the
truth. Not “the effect of the real,” but the image of the real. All referential
texts thus entail what I will call a “referential pact,” implicit or explicit, in which
are included a definition of the field of the real that is involved and a statement
of the modes and the degree of resemblance to which the text lays claim.
The referential pact induces a contingent cognitive understanding of nonfiction; rather than “suspension of disbelief” in fiction, or simply “belief” in testimonials or documentation, autobiography induces conditional belief. The reader will believe in the truth of the narrative if its representational qualities do not overshadow an attempt at historical accuracy. It thus creates a problem of authenticity. As soon as the subjective enters into nonfiction, the reader instinctively weighs the authenticity of the source. Authenticity, here, has a twofold meaning: colloquial and diegetic. Colloquially, authenticity is the character of being “authentic or entitled to acceptance.”

Diegetically, authenticity is a narrative quality describing the ability to convince the reader that the narration does, indeed, have some degree of truth. It is a narrative which passes the test of the reader’s truth-value judgments. This necessarily implies that the reader does pass judgment on the authenticity of a subjective work presented as truth under its “nonfiction” name.

One might think, “If the subjective can enter into the verbal modality alone (in conventional autobiography) and problematize the authenticity of nonfiction, then surely additional subjectivity from a second modality would further complicate the problem of authenticity.” This is not always the case. Added modalities do not automatically and exponentially problematize authenticity. Indeed, Sadoski and Paivio suggest that dually coded information is “more memorable” and assists in “making sense of text where that phrase is taken literally. We invest a text with meaning by making it a quasi-sensory event...” However, the following analysis of images in nonfiction will describe the ways in which the additional visual mode can simultaneously increase and decrease the authenticity of the autobiography. First, consider an author’s justifications for the decision to include the visual mode in a nonfiction narrative.
Graphic novels are defined by their simultaneous presentation of separate narrative lines—the visual and the verbal. Each line of narration affects a separate sense modality which bombards the cognitive process of reading a singular text with a flurry of multimodal sensory information. Charles Hatfield writes, “...[C]omics [or graphic novels] can be a complex means of communication and are always characterized by a plurality of messages. They are heterogeneous in form, involving the co-presence and interaction of various codes.” He argues that some readers would consider the graphic narrative framework to be “fragmented and unstable” because of the dual presentation of the stereotypically divergent entities of text and image. Cognitive theorists confirm the difficulties of processing multimodal information:

...[S]ilent reading (visual task) may be disrupted by experiencing related visual images (visual task) at the same time. A qualification here is the degree of activity—barely perceptible imagery will probably not cause a ripple in the reading process, but intense visualization may interfere until rereading is necessary.

While there are certainly tensions in juxtaposing the verbal and non-verbal lines of narration, there is the possibility for productive and creative associations, as well. “In some cases our imagistic associations blend across modalities into a holistic, multimodal experience that reflects physical reality.” It seems reasonable to assume that greater sensory information generates a more complete representation of experienced reality. If you can see a steaming mug, smell fresh-ground coffee beans, taste the whisper of hazelnut against the dark bitter grounds, and feel the warmth spread from fingertips to tongue to the rest of your body, chances are you are fully experiencing a fresh-brewed cup of coffee. The multiplicity of sensory experiences provided in communication here, resulted in a more holistic communicated message. The blend across sense modalities in this sense did not produce tensions.
However, when mental imaging materializes in physical images, will produce tensions—what one person produces in mental imaging will not always synchronize with someone else. This is due to the unique collection of sensory experiences on which mental imaging is based. The infinite variety of sensory perception and nonverbal processing differs from individual to individual and will produce a unique mental image. Graphic novels present this as the author’s style or perspective. Douglas Wolk provides an example:

When you look at, say, a Will Eisner drawing of a tenement in the Bronx, you know that what you’re seeing represents a tenement in the Bronx, and you believe on some level that it’s real, because it’s in front of your eyes. But you also understand that you’re not seeing an actual building or a building you could have seen unaided by the drawing. What you’re looking at is a manifestation of Eisner’s style, a personal interpretation of what that sort of building looks like.12

Here, the reader is removed as active participant from the graphic narrative on one level by virtue of subjectivity. When graphic novels provide images for the reader—depriving him of a creative imaging process of his own—the reader is forced to process the given visual stimuli as his own. If the provided image conflicts with his own mental imaging, then the standard cognitive reading process—that ‘suspension of disbelief’—is jolted. Indeed, tensions can arise stylistically—if the given images do not correspond with perceived reality, like caricatures, for example—and diegetically—in the divergent cognitive experience of the graphic narrative, for example. The reader, unfamiliar with these new variations on the reading process and jarred by its complexities, must recognize the multimodal sensory input to make sense of it. Theoretically, the author is dangerously close to alienating the reader by removing—or reshaping—his usual role in processing the narrative.

Why is it then that so many theorists have argued that the graphic narrative is an “art of tensions,”13 often characterized by the complications of its multimodal sensory experience, the juxtaposition of disparate visual and verbal narrative lines? It would seem that the more sensory information received, the more completely a message is communicated. There should
not be this discrepancy, yet it remains common knowledge in the realm of comics criticism. In graphic narrative, the question shifts from “How does multimodal sensory information communicate a more realistic message?” to “What happens if the multimodal sensory information does not correspond with our perceived reality?”

Going beyond Sadoski and Paivio’s assertion that we use images to make sense of text, some theorists have argued that human beings “hunger” for images and have coined the term “iconotropism” to describe this state. Ellen Spolsky explains, “Iconotropism... [hypothesizes] that human beings feed on pictures, metabolize them—turn them into nourishment—because we need the knowledge they provide. We turn toward pictures when they are available, we imagine them if they’re not, and we produce them if we can.”14 In fact, it is creative imaging and sign manipulation that differentiates us from other cognitively developed species.15

However, when text and image join together in the act of representation, they create “gaps” in cognition. The modularity theory of cognition, as explained in Chapter 1, contends that parallel processes of cognition occur simultaneously, but the multiplicity of knowledge cues creates these “gaps.”16 In the autobio-graphic novel, for example, the reader is presented with the verbal and visual narrative lines and must “bridge the gap” between the verbal and nonverbal modalities, between word and image. When the bridge crosses between word and image, it can be liberating for the reader-viewer but dangerous for the genre of nonfiction. “The gaps between word and image, signifier and signified, mind and body, will and reason...” writes Spolsky, “are precisely the sites of our freedom to hypothesize and test hypotheses, to reorganize and reinvent ourselves as needed.”17 The cognitive possibilities of multimodal experiences and dual processing are indeed cognitively stimulating, but “reorganization” and “reinvention” are terms virtually antithetical to the authenticity of nonfiction. Regardless, Persepolis and other autobio-graphic novels persevere, so how is the gap problem mediated?
In the context of dual coding theory, this “bridging the gap” between verbal and nonverbal is defined as referential processing. The problem for the nonfiction author is how to adequately control the reader’s referential processing; or, more appropriately, the author must develop a way to stimulate the reader’s referential processing to induce the ‘correct’ cognitive bridge—one that leads to the author’s intended narrative destination. This is where imaging becomes important.

Sadoski and Paivio offer a key to stimulating referential processing: concreteness. They write, “Mental imagery is more likely to be evoked by concrete language than abstract language, and still more by pictures than by concrete language.” Representations which include physical representations (i.e. pictures), then, will better stimulate specific referential processing. If an author surrenders imaging to the reader by omitting the concrete representations available in pictures, then the reader’s referential processing is less predictable, less controlled, and—worst of all for communicating nonfiction, truth—more variable. Consider the example of the limitations of imaging a pirate, where nonverbal mental imagery is self-generated:

Nonverbal mental imagery apparently [has] limitations. Visual images seem like “grainy” photos with much out of focus; detail is lost with imagined distance; and they fade rapidly, needing to be “rejuvenated,” or reactivated, frequently. For example, imagine a pirate with a wooden leg. Was the pirate wearing a hat? Logically the pirate either wore a hat or did not. However, because our focus was on the wooden leg, we may not have clearly envisioned the head and must mentally scan upward, take a wider angle, or refabricate the image to clearly ‘see.’ Mental representations in other modalities are similarly imperfect, and our refabrications and rejuvenations can introduce elaboration, distortion, and interpolation.

If an image of a pirate—without any additional emotional or cultural implications—is this vulnerable to mutability, then the gaps in cognizing adolescence, love, war, violence, ignorance—the list goes on!—allow for the possibility of a dangerous turn away from autobiography’s basic premise: to tell the truth. The danger of losing details to gaps in cognition may be too great for authors writing autobiographies that delve into historically sensitive
subject matter, as is the case with Marjane Satrapi and Persepolis. Providing images is a way to remember and communicate the visceral truth of momentous human experiences. These are images which need to be seen, not imagined and left prey to the attacks of Elaboration, Distortion, and Interpolation—a trio of Truth’s enemies. Instead, the autobio-graphic narrative adds the visual modality to protect against these misrepresentations. The visual modality insures nonfiction’s verisimilitude with its mnemonic and epistemic cognitive functions, which are intimately tied together.

**A. **Mnemonic Function

Images “stock” and aid memory: “Vision is constructed and enabled by memory, and memory is stocked by vision,” Ellen Spolsky writes. For centuries, nonverbal cognitive processes were used as mnemonic devices—from Simonides of Ceon’s loci method (circa 500 BC) to dual coding theory’s conceptual peg hypothesis. The loci method is the oldest known mnemonic device. Employed by rhetoricians, it associated specific talking points of a speech first with a geographic location, then with a representational image. The rhetorician would recall a familiar path—walking around his home for example, each room containing an imagined object to cue memory. As he mentally travels from one room to the next, he sees the image cue—perhaps a broken sword to signify the end of a war—and is reminded of the next point in his speech.

Recently, scientists have provided experimental evidence in support of image-memory enhancement. For example, Craik and Tulving designed an experiment to test the correspondence between levels of linguistic processing and rates of memory retention. At any given point, a literate reader must “progress through graphemic (visual), phonemic (sound), and semantic (meaning) codes. The levels-of-processing approach predicts that remembering
depends on the level to which it has been processed with deeper (meaningful) processing leading to better retention.”22 Participants were asked to process a list of 60 common words by answering questions relating to the word’s meaning, sound, or appearance. For example, if the processed word was “BEAR,” participants might be asked any of the following three questions to ascertain levels-of-processing:

1) “Is it an animal?” which targets semantic processing;

2) “Does it rhyme with ‘care?’” which targets phonemic processing; and

3) “Is it in upper-case letters?” which targets graphemic processing.

The results of Craik and Tulving’s experiment affirmed the prediction of the levels-of-processing approach: there was a significantly higher retention rate of words associated with semantic codes (0.90) than words associated with phonemic codes (0.65) and graphemic codes (0.42). Now, contextualize this information in the signifier-signified model of cognitive representation—where the signifiers are the linguistic graphemes, phonemes, and morphemes and the signified are the semantic concepts, or the knowledge gained from real-world experience. A reader is statistically more likely to retain information about the signified rather than the signifier. In other words, a reader will retain information processed on a deeper, more meaningful level that corresponds not to the linguistic representation but to the meaning garnered from sensory experience. A reader will retain the image of the bear, itself, more often than he will retain the image of the word “bear” (or the sound of the word “bear”).

Other studies have shown that images—as a component of nonverbal cognitive processing—are better retained than words in most types of retention tests. This includes even those tests that seem facially logocentric, or those that appear to have a verbal bias:

For example, if a long series of pictures and concrete words [i.e. a picture of a bicycle vs. the concrete noun “telephone”]... are presented, and people are asked to recall them by writing either the words presented or the names of the pictured objects, pictures are better remembered than words. This occurs...
despite the fact that the verbal mode of response would seem to favor verbal over pictorial encoding.\textsuperscript{23}

The referential processing of the images and their recall in the verbal mode did not dampen the effect the nonverbal mode had on memory retention. All of this evidence makes a case for employing the nonverbal modality in memory tasks. Because the nonverbal modality—and images specifically—are better remembered than abstractions and linguistic referents, it is reasonable for autobiography—essentially a memory task—to employ pictorial encoding.

If images and deep semantic content are retained better than linguistic referents, then the remembered event can be communicated with less cognitive mediation. Cognitive mediation, here, is any process which departs further from the experienced reality or event to be remembered. Cognitive mediation is unavoidable in memory tasks where the lived experience is removed physically and temporally; however, the degree to which a memory is cognitively mediated is important. Consider it in terms of a derivation in calculus: a function may have two derivatives—a direct derivation of the function, and a derivation of the derivation. In our case, the function is the memory; the first derivative of the memory is the nonverbal mode of experience; and the second derivative of memory (the derivative of the nonverbal mode) is the verbal mode. Information encoded in the verbal mode is more difficult to retain than information retained in the nonverbal mode (i.e. imagery).

The degree of cognitive mediation directly corresponds to the degree of memory retention: more difficult information to retain is more cognitively mediated. Ergo, less difficult information to retain is less cognitively mediated. The data provided illustrates that memory communicated in the nonverbal modality is less difficult to retain; thus, it is less cognitively mediated than memory communicated in the nonverbal modality. The better remembered the event, the more authentic. In the case of autobiography, using the nonverbal modality makes the communicated story more authentic.
Dual coding theory and the conceptual peg hypothesis posit that images not only aid memory, but construct it. The conceptual peg hypothesis states that episodic memory is organized and processed in “chunks,” and each chunk contains a representative element to which some part of the episode is “pegged” or “hooked.” More specifically, “pieces of a text such as individual story events, points in an exposition or argument, or even individual sentences are temporarily held in memory as represented by key language and/or key images” (emphasis mine). This proves to be an important cognitive detail when analyzing the structure and formal constraints of the autobio-graphic narrative.

Formally, the autobio-graphic narrative parallels the structure and organization of episodic memory. Just as the conceptual peg hypothesis posits that episodic memory is chunked and pegged to an image, the panels of the graphic narrative chunk the narrative into elemental parts, and tie each panel to a particular image. The structure of panels segments episodes into concrete, singular moments that are linked together only by the process of reading. Until now, comics theorists have considered this a convention unique to the medium. Cognitive theory reveals that it is not unique, but in fact a universal cognitive convention. It is the manifestation of our episodic memory processing. So for a project whose aim is to remember, this is particularly relevant. An autobio-graphic narrative is an autobiography told in a way that mimics the actual cognitive process of remembering. It protects even further against cognitive mediation of memory, documenting as accurately as possible—even down to formal presentation—the act of remembering.

Accordingly, this authorial choice seems to bring along with it the complications of episodic memory retrieval. In dual coding theory, “a memory episode is a composite of modality-specific verbal and nonverbal representations derived from external experienced events and the internal verbal and nonverbal representations that are evoked by those
events.” However, in the process of encoding memories and reconciling verbal and nonverbal representations, the external and the internal stimuli, memory’s accuracy necessarily diminishes. It is a matter of simplification for faster, more efficient processing. Thus, episodic memories, however detailed, are almost always incomplete and altered: “They are incomplete because of limitations on encoding; some detail is always lost. They are altered because internal representations are associatively added to the episode.”

Yet, any project which involves episodic memory recall—therefore, any autobiography—will necessarily be incomplete and altered. The graphic narrative, however, brings these problems to the forefront and makes them plainly visible to the reader. The reader is reminded of the incomplete each moment he must jump the gutter from panel to panel; he is reminded of the altered each moment he sees the hand-rendered images. Satrapi has enforced a transparency policy of sorts on her memory. Let it be known that this is memory, that this is autobiography, and while it is incomplete and altered, it is the closest to truth that human memory can reach. When asked about the inability to remember and record specific details of episodes, Satrapi hotly retorted,

…for example, if I say… the Rex Cinema was burned in Tehran—of course I will check out the date, and of course I will say exactly what happened, but how do you want me exactly to remember all the dialogues? Basically, yes, it was an ambience like that, and the things that I’m talking about, of course they are not bullshit—but at the same time, it should be read as a story.

B. EPISTEMIC FUNCTION

The cognitive process of remembering is uniquely tied to the cognitive process of knowing. One has knowledge of something when one can recall and retrieve that piece of information. Cognitive psychologists Roger Schank and Robert Abelson go so far as to suggest that “virtually all human knowledge is based on stories constructed around past experiences.” Mark Turner similarly suggests that all comprehension and cognitive organization are basic
literary functions, explaining how story and projection (combined in parable) are the foundational structures of human thought. One uses memory to construct stories about past experiences in order to be able to recall them as knowledge at a later time.

When knowledge is associated with memory, it is usually attributable to first-hand or personal experience. The key difference between remembering and knowing is one of truth-value judgments. How information is remembered will affect its truth-value. For example, we know how to tie our shoes because it is an action ingrained in our procedural memory. We assign a great truth-value to the action of tying our shoes because of the success one has in recalling and employing the procedural memory. Lo and behold, if the procedural memory is recalled and employed, one’s shoes will be tied. Also, we know that elephants are animals, or keys can lock doors because these are facts ingrained in our semantic memory. We assign a great truth-value to the semantic content of ELEPHANT as ANIMAL and KEY as LOCKING AGENT because of the relative success of applying the semantic content truthfully in any given situation with an elephant or a key. This knowledge was gained first-hand either through physical action, as in procedural memory, or deep cognitive processing, as in semantic memory. Other knowledge is gained from cognitive processing of scripts, which combines procedural and semantic memory, in one type of episodic memory. A script is a “set of expectations about what will happen next in a well-understood situation.” For example, anyone familiar with eating at a restaurant understands that, at some point, a waiter or waitress will approach his table and ask for an order. We accept these facts at face value because they have been personally stored in our memory. This type of knowledge is understood as primary knowledge and processed as such, virtually without hesitation. It is associated with truth and fact because it has been directly, immediately, and personally perceived and stored in memory. Again, this type of knowledge is assigned great truth-value.
However, other types of episodic memory are often considered second-hand memories—or someone else’s memories—and are cognized differently. This type of episodic memory is a type of hearsay, knowledge attained indirectly from another’s personal experience. For example, we may say we know that a friend likes profiteroles because he raved about them at a New Year’s Eve party. However, we cannot personally experience the friend’s taste-buds being pleasurably stimulated. That is stored in and retrieved from his personal episodic memory. What he tells you is in your episodic memory because you process his act of communication as a particular event over time, but it is one degree removed from the directly experienced truth. This kind of knowledge is secondary knowledge: “I know because he knows.” Episodic memory recall of this kind can be described as the “he-said-she-said” problem, the kind one finds in autobiography. It will deleteriously affect the truth-value of attained knowledge.

To combat a diminished truth-value in autobiography, Marjane Satrapi uses images to add an element of primary knowledge to the story. Primary knowledge, as suggested earlier, can be based on direct sensory perception of an experienced event. It is impossible for Satrapi’s audience to have had the opportunity to experience each and every one of Satrapi’s memories directly, and precisely as she experienced them. By offering images of the events, Satrapi can edge closer to offering the reader a primary experience of knowledge. This is because images are given greater truth-value than words, in part due to their close relationship with memory. Memory has been tied directly to knowledge. By extension then, images (and other sensory-induced stimuli of events) are also tied to knowledge and truth-value judgments. In fact, some theorists have argued that images are not only related to experienced reality, but that “an image is not absolutely cognitively distinct from reality, and functions, at least in part, ‘as if it were the real thing.’”32
TYPES OF IMAGES IN NONFICTION

Generally speaking, images in nonfiction may be used in a variety of contexts to give credibility to a source, authenticity to a narrative, or emotional ambiance to an experience. Historically and culturally, however, there is a distinct divide between two types of images: objective documentation and subjective representation, either or both of which may be used in autobio-graphic narratives.

A. OBJECTIVE DOCUMENTATION

Objective documentation is a type of nonfiction imaging which captures an event realistically, naturally, and with as little subjective influence as possible. The most common type of objective documentation today is photography. When we are presented with documented evidence, we accept the evidence as fact and integrate it into our semantic or episodic memory. However, just as in first-hand accounts of memory, nonverbal evidence takes precedence over verbal evidence. Images are given greater truth value than words, as illustrated in our legal system which dictates that hearsay—linguistic evidence, or what someone said or heard—is inadmissible. “The authoritative documentary instrument of modern culture,” Carol Zemel argues, “...is the camera.” Photographs are generally accepted directly as evidence and synthesized into the viewer’s knowledge as fact. The viewer assimilates the picture into his memory and then knows what he has seen to be true. Though it is technically secondary knowledge, the viewer assigns it equal truth value with primary knowledge. Reason for attributing lesser truth-value to an image is directly related to the problems of episodic memory: alteration and incompletion. Though a single photograph cannot escape the problem of incompletely documenting a memory, a series of photographs can mitigate it. More importantly, documentary photographs are trusted to be unaltered. Wolk suggests that it
goes beyond the viewer’s trust, but is implicit in the medium itself. He writes, “Film and photography intrinsically claim to be accurate documents, even when they’re not: they always have the pretense that they are showing you something you would have seen exactly the same way if you’d been present at the right time and place.”

**B. Subjective Representation**

Subjective representation is a type of imaging which is constructed, manipulated, and/or aesthetized to go beyond strict documentation into expression—drawings, paintings, sketches, and even artistic photography to some extent. The historical accuracy is constrained first by the artist’s explicit subjectivity, second by the viewer’s complicit subjectivity in the act of viewing and interpreting. Whereas objective documentation suspends the viewer’s interpretative skills, subjective representation embraces them. However, as discussed earlier, as soon as subjectivity enters the scene, so to speak, the episode’s truth-value assignment diminishes. The historical accuracy of the episode is compromised by external stimuli, which could be emotional, physical, psychological, etc. Subjective representation filters an image through any number of these external lenses, opening the door for misrepresentation. The final product is “a particular, personal version of its artist’s vision—not what the artist’s eye sees, but the way the artist’s mind interprets sight.” The insertion of one step in the imaging process—interpretation—clouds the inherent value of subjective representation as an authentic means of documenting history. In Zemel’s articulate analysis of primary source drawings from the Holocaust, she acknowledges the diminished authenticity art has as a form of historical documentation. She writes, “Instead, the sacral or relic dimension of the drawings has turned attention to their maker, with subjective expression replacing testimony. The move, then, is to
consider the drawing as works of art, valued for their individual expression and evaluated for their artistic mastery.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{C. Objective and Subjective Confl ate: Rendered Fact}

To combat a diminished authenticity, the auto-biographic novel offers its version of visual documentation. Satrapi uses drawn images to give her communicated human experience authenticity, fueling the cycle of image-enhanced memory and memory-enhanced images. At the same time that her images give the narrative a visceral authenticity, the subjectivity of artistic renderings makes it cognitively inferior to photographic documentation. Zemel has argued that this belief devalues expressionistic renderings as “a standard of truthful reportage” and acknowledges only realism and documentation. The stylistic presence of the author-artist’s hand in autobio-graphic novels makes it difficult for a reader to overcome the subjective hurdle in cognizing the truth values of the narrative. On many levels, the reader does accept what he sees as a version of truth, but as Wolk mentioned earlier, it is also recognized as a manifestation of the author’s style.

In Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis, the dual presentation of a visual and verbal narrative takes advantage of the cognitive processes of memory, knowledge, and truth-value judgments. While the subjective nature of drawn images dilutes the truth value of her work, she uses specific cartooning techniques to manipulate the reader’s levels of processing so that the reader is more likely to accept her drawings as a suitable pictorial alternative to documentation. Consider, for example, her use of photographic evidence in Persepolis (\textit{Figure 14}).\textsuperscript{40} During the Iranian Revolution, Marji’s father risked his life to document the revolutionary activity and the Shah’s violent response. Below Marji’s verbal narrative, “He [her father] took photos every day. It was strictly forbidden...” is an unbounded—or, unconfined panel without limiting borders—
picture of her father hunched over a camera, pointing to an open-edged collage of photographs. These are not the actual photographs, however, but a subjective representation of them. When considering objective versus subjective documentation in historical accounts, typically photographs hold more authority in the reader or viewer’s mind. Here, however, the truth-value judgments are complicated when a traditionally authoritative documentation is subjected to an artist’s own renderings. Does the reader accept the drawn photographs as true just as he would real photographs?

Figure 14

Certainly these two types of documentation, though carefully related, are vastly different and are thus cognized in different terms. While objective documentation is virtually always accepted at face value and subjective representation is virtually always recognized as an
affectation, the amalgamation of the two push the boundaries of the viewer’s truth judgments. Subjective representations of objective documentation require the viewer to process both fact and representation simultaneously, inevitably conflating the two. It then produces a new level of cognitive comprehension somewhere between fact and representation, what I call rendered fact. This mid-level of acquired knowledge allows the viewer to accept the image at face value, but also keeps him active in cognitively completing the process on his own. As Hillary Chute writes, “Graphic narrative suggests that historical accuracy is not the opposite of creative invention; the problematic of what we consider fact and fiction are made apparent by the role of drawing.” This is particularly true in the case of conflated objective and subjective images in rendered fact.

Active involvement in the story is integral in attaining and retaining knowledge. The conjunct theories of “knowledge as memory” and “memory as storytelling” described by Schank and Abelson (and separately by Turner) offer evidence in support of this. Theirs is a three-part argument. First, memory is defined as the cognitive storage of events, perceptions, or semantic concepts in narrative form. Second, knowledge is gained by successful memory retrieval of the narrative. Third, successful understanding of knowledge requires that one adopt the memory and be able to “retell” the story. By fusing the reader’s memory with her own in rendered fact, Satrapi is facilitating the successful understanding of her own memories. She is transferring her knowledge to the reader. Rather poignantly, Satrapi echoes her Uncle’s own charge to her as a young girl, “I tell you all this because it’s important that you know. Our family memory must not be lost, even if it’s not easy for you, even if you don’t understand it all.” Marji responds, “Don’t worry, I’ll never forget.” And so she retells the story for us, solidifying it in her memory and passing the challenge on to us to do the same.
CHAPTER 4

“Sitting between two chairs”

Conceptual Blend of Identity in Persepolis

INTRODUCTION

The feeling I am evoking [in the second half of *Persepolis*]... is more a problem of when you are going to a new culture and you absolutely want to adapt yourself, and you absolutely want to be integrated.... [C]ulture takes all of the space inside you. If you want to have another culture come into you, it’s like you have to take out the first one, and then choose what you want from the two and swallow them again.¹

Marjane Satrapi has struggled with her identity and fought the conventional definitions in the process. Living with one foot in Iran, the other in France, she finds it difficult living as a cultural production of both, describing the process as a crude form of regurgitation—an unpleasant but necessary life-function for those lucky few. This chapter will elucidate how Turner and Fauconnier’s theory of the conceptual blend explains self-understood notions of identity and will apply it to Marjane Satrapi’s experienced blend of her Eastern and Western identities. It will further introduce the concept of material and cultural anchors which stabilize conceptual blends. *Persepolis* is a unique project because it acts as a material anchor for Marjane Satrapi’s lived experience in the conceptual blend of identity. The material form and aesthetic style of *Persepolis* will be analyzed in order to demonstrate how it functions as a material anchor for Satrapi’s conceptual blend of identity. Furthermore, the cartooning technique of *Ligna Claire* acts as a cultural anchor for the reader experiencing the conceptual blend, which ultimately elicits reader sympathy and participation in the “rendered fact,” as

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described in Chapter 3. The project of *Persepolis* as a culturally-coherent material object—the book, itself—in the modern world is used as a cognitive tool to accomplish Satrapi’s two-fold goal to understand herself and to help the Western reader understand Iran.

**Conceptual Blend in Identity**

The basic theory of conceptual blending was explained in Chapter 2 in relation to metaphor and the cross-modal blend of the convergent experience. However, conceptual blending theory was designed to cover the entire range of human cognition in the *conceptual integration network*, a vast array of interconnected conceptual blends from simple one-to-one correspondence in basic blends to compounded “megablends.” Fauconnier and Turner claim that conceptual blending is not just “something we do in addition to living in the world; it is our means of living in the world.”2 The whole of knowledge acquisition and creative production in human cognition can be attributed to the constitutive and governing principles of conceptual blending. Fauconnier and Turner call this “the story of human beings”3 who use blending to understand everything “from weaponry to ideology, language to science, art to religion, fantasy to mathematics,”4 and especially identity. Popular psychology places great emphasis on “finding out ‘who you are,’ discovering your real self;”5 autobiography is often an assay to establish a self-understood identity. In a conceptual integration network, this consists of mapping one’s self onto generic spaces for character like the Vain Man, the Social Climber, or the Good Samaritan6—or, for Marjane Satrapi, the Iranian and the Westerner.

The key to the conceptual blend of identity is how the blend relates *frames* to *characters*. A *frame* is a set of features derived from long-term schematic knowledge, such as the frame of *buy-sell* which includes features such as purchasing agent, selling agent, and transaction. A *character*, on the other hand, is less restricted to defined sets of features;
instead, character refers to “a rich knowledge of [the character’s] behavior over many different
scenarios, including [the character’s] personal style and manner of action and the feelings [the
character] had in [given] situations.”7 However, in some cases the frame and character are not
easily distinguished or differentiated. In *Persepolis*, some of the conceptual blends require that
the frames act also as character, or vice versa. For our purposes, I will refer to these as
*character-frames*. Turner and Fauconnier admit that in this “folk theory”8 of the conceptual
blend of identity the distinction is blurred when the blend is removed from the vacuum of the
theoretical world and plunges into reality:

In the folk theory, frames and characters are interlocking aspects of human
reality. You can’t have one without the other, although in some cases the
emphasis falls more on character and in other cases it falls more on the frame.
What makes all this slippery is that character is in principle all the behaviors in
all possible frames, but frames themselves may be just as substantially linked to
characters.⁹

To clarify a single frame, the conceptual blend would be filled with different essential
characters. To clarify an essential character, it would be transported across different frames.
For example, the frame of *buy-sell* remains the same regardless of who participates; the
character Vain Man remains the same regardless of his cultural, geographic, political, or
immediate situation.¹⁰ Turner and Fauconnier summarize the general principle: “...we use
character to converge on an understanding of frames and we use frames to converge on an
understanding of character.” Additionally, character can relate to other character in “If I were
you...” type blends. The details of each of these blends and how they apply to *Persepolis* will be
discussed further below. For now, it is important to be aware of the complexities of the
conceptual blend of identity because these complexities often have far-reaching emotional and
cognitive consequences.
What Fauconnier and Turner fail to adequately address in their treatment of conceptual integration networks is an inherent tension involved in blending. Blends are variable and can be unpredictable. Think of a time you were caught off-guard at the unexpected cognitive consequences of a metaphor; if for example someone says to you, “Go ahead, take the plunge,” and you imagine first jumping from a diving board and then leaping from the Empire State Building, then you might feel the tension from the target and source coming together in the unexpected product of the blend. This inconsistency in conceptual blending is described formally: “Sometimes two counterparts are projected, sometimes only one, sometimes none; sometimes counterparts in the input spaces are fused in the blend, but often not, sometimes an element in one input without a counterpart in the other gets projected to the blend,” and so on.

The tensions involved in conceptual blends of identity are particularly straining because of the fact that identity is a thoroughly lived human experience. The deep existential connection one has to one’s own identity makes the conceptual blend very personal. One has to live the conceptual blend; the tensions are thus aggravated. Marjane Satrapi has been noted to have a particularly difficult time with the tensions in her blend of identity. She is confronted with multiple frames of the inputs Eastern and Western and must sift through them to create the emergent structure of her identity which is neither one input nor the other. She sits somewhere in between in the emergent structure of the blend. In an interview she famously comments,

I always say, for me, when people ask, “How do you feel, more French? More Iranian?” I say, “I’m sitting between two chairs. It’s not very comfortable, it’s true, but when I want to lie down I can because I have two chairs. Everybody else has one chair, they are comfortably seated, but they cannot lie down.”
The discomfort she feels is the tension between the generic character-frames “French” and “Iranian” that are blending into her. These only act as inputs onto which she can map herself and find her self-understood identity in the blend. However, she does understand that it places her in a unique position as a blended figure; in another interview she claims that she “belongs nowhere and... everywhere at the same time.”\textsuperscript{13} She belongs to none of the character-frames exclusively, yet her blend of the character-frames—with elements from each arising in the emergent blend—allow her to belong to both simultaneously.

\textbf{A. Anchoring Complex Blends}

The tensions are fiercely present in her life not only because of the personal attachment to the blend but also because of its complexity. Whenever multiple inputs come together in any conceptual blend—and according to Fauconnier and Turner, they do so in every instant of cognition—the blend is not only variable but can also be unstable. This is called \textit{conceptual instability}, as proffered by cognitive scientist Edwin Hutchins.\textsuperscript{14} He writes,

The complexity of the manipulations of structure can be increased if the stability of the representations can be increased. The stability of the representations is a necessary feature of the reasoning process, but it is often taken for granted.\textsuperscript{15}

Hutchins suggests that human beings solve the problem of conceptual stability by introducing \textit{anchors} to conceptual integration networks.

Conceptual stability can be achieved by employing \textit{cultural or material anchors}. In the 1960s and 70s, cognitive scientists discovered a general cognitive premise: for most people, reasoning—a blending task which requires understanding causal relationships and logical sequences—must be mediated by culturally coherent elements. Hutchins explains, “…unless \(x\) and \(y\) are associated with particular known concepts, our culture has nothing in particular to say about the relationship between \(x\) and \(y\).”\textsuperscript{16} In this study, the use of abstractions \(x\) and \(y\) during...
the reasoning tasks removed all cultural markers, which resulted in subjects having difficulty drawing correct inferences. However, as soon as culturally coherent models were mapped onto the reasoning tasks—“If x, then y” becomes “If this is a garnet, then it is a semi-precious stone”—subjects were able to draw correct inferences. The cultural anchor was the concept of garnet and semi-precious stones. Note that it is not the actual presence of the garnet that anchored the blend, but merely the concept. This is what differentiates cultural anchors from material anchors.

A material anchor provides material structure to a conceptual blend. The key is that the material anchor actually acts as a material representation of the conceptual blend. Hutchins defines the material anchor’s role as a proxy: “If conceptual elements are mapped onto a material pattern in such a way that the perceived relationships among the material elements are taken as proxies (consciously or unconsciously) for relationships among conceptual elements, then the material pattern is acting as a material anchor.”\(^{17}\) For example, writing stands as a material anchor for speech; a watch is a material anchor for time. In fact, anchors can manifest as anything that can be manipulated as a prompt for constructing meaning, including gestures and facial expressions.\(^{18}\) The cultural and material anchors are crucial for constructing the various conceptual blends of identity in *Persepolis*.

**Conceptual Blending of Identity in Persepolis**

*Persepolis* has two explicit conceptual blends of identity based on the two-fold goal of Marjane Satrapi’s project: to understand her own identity and to help the reader understand the Iranian cultural situation. These goals correlate to the character-frame structure described above. There is a distinction between a character transporting across different frames to locate the shared generic (Character-across-Frames blend) and a frame transporting across different
characters to locate the shared generic (Frame-across-Characters blend). The characters involved in the conceptual blends in *Persepolis* include the Modern Iranian, the Western Reader, and Marjane Satrapi as she is self-understood. The frames involved include more standard schematic frames like *coming-of-age*, *tyranny*, and *living through crisis*; additionally, there are some frames which appear to act more like characters but are frames in one context of blending and characters in another—the character-frames, as defined earlier. These are the Persian, the Islamic, the Modern Iranian, the Westerner, and Marjane Satrapi, herself. The Character-across-Frames blend cognizes Satrapi’s self-understood identity, whereas the Frame-across-Characters blend cognizes the Reader’s understanding of the Modern Iranian cultural situation. Each blend manifests itself in a material and/or cultural anchor: the book itself and the aesthetic form the book takes. The second blend acts as an intermediary to a third *implied* blend: the Character-to-Character blend—the “If I were you...” blend. One of the major goals of Satrapi’s project is to get the Western reader to identify and sympathize with the Iranian. Although the Character-to-Character blend is not explicitly presented, the Frame-across-Character blend is physically present in *Persepolis* to act as an intermediary to the final Character-to-Character blend.

**Character-across-Frames**

The Character-across-Frames blend is actually a megablend of identity composed of two interlocking, separate blends of identity. The purpose is to understand the target Character (Marjane Satrapi) by transporting it across different frames, which in this case happen to be character-frames: Modern Iranian, Westerner, and Self. The Modern Iranian blend is a separate, subordinate blend to Marjane Satrapi’s identity. It is a blend relating Ancient Persian character and the Islamic character, which was explicitly present in Iranian culture at the inception of the Islamic state during Ayatollah Khomeini’s reign after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Marjane
Satrapi’s self-understood identity is a blend of the character-frames Modern Iranian (1978-1994), Westerner, and Self. There is a distinction between her Self and her self-understood identity: her Self is the objective set of characteristics that makes up her identity (an input in the blend), whereas her self-understood identity is the result of the conceptual blend of Self with the separate character inputs. *Figure 15* illustrates the conceptual blend of the Modern Iranian and *Figure 16* illustrates the megablend, which includes the subordinate blend of the Modern Iranian.

The complexity of the blend is obvious, and Satrapi herself has commented on its conceptual instability, if not in those terms. Thus, it requires a material anchor to stabilize the blend. The material anchor for self-understood identity is the autobiography, itself—the book *Persepolis*. Marjane Satrapi understood this in some manner when she commented on being asked about her identity:

> Well, today I just say “I am Iranian,” and they say “You are Iranian?” and I say “Yes it is a fact, I am Iranian. I was born there, I have black hair. Yes, I am an Iranian person, what can I do?” Since writing the book, nobody can tell me “Give me some explanation.” I think now my explanation is just, “Read the book and you’ll see.”

The reader understands the project of autobiography as a presentation of the author’s self. For us and for her, it is an immediate proxy for the conceptual blend of her identity which, according to Hutchins, meets the criteria for a material anchor. The multi-modal characteristic of the medium—the fact that it is a graphic novel and not any other kind of novel—is a necessary material element for the anchor because it also balances the tension between two material representations of a blend—*writing* or text (the material anchor for speech) and image (the material anchor for a variety of non-verbal experiences). For Satrapi, it mimics her bi-existentiality as both one Character and another Character, a bi-existentiality whose tensions
Figure 15 - The conceptual blend of the Modern Iranian. The target of this blend will become a source for Marjane Satrapi's megablend of identity.

Figure 15 - The megablend of Marjane Satrapi's self-understood identity, with a marker for the material anchor.
often marginalize her just as the tensions of text-image often marginalize the cartoonist. She says,

We [cartoonists] all the time have to justify ourselves. There are people who like to write or like to draw. We are a little bit like the bisexual of the culture. People don’t have any problem if you are a heterosexual or a homosexual, but if you like both men and women, that becomes a problem. We’re like that. We like to write and we like to draw and we cannot choose between the two. So I guess I’m a cultural bisexual!21

The elements of the conceptual blend of identity, then, will manifest themselves in the style of the graphic narrative. The following sections analyze the elements of the blend through the material anchor of the aesthetic style of the graphic narrative. The Target—Marjane Satrapi’s self-understood identity—whose material anchor is the graphic novel Persepolis will then show elements of each of its inputs—the Islamic, the Persian, the Western, the Self—to produce a unique blend. Each of the sources will be discussed individually with the exception of Satrapi’s objective Self character-frame which is the primary source of the conceptual blend. The elements discussed below are to be understood as elements which have cross-mapped onto Satrapi’s Self character-frame, as elements that they share.

A. SOURCE 1A: ISLAMIC CHARACTER-FRAME

The Islamic character-frame is the most at odds with the other character frames both conceptually and materially. With the establishment of the Islamic state and a backlash from the Iranian Revolution, Iran became a country with new strictures on freedoms, all claiming a basis in religion. The political and cultural imposition of an Islamic identity on the Iranian nation usurped also Marjane Satrapi’s own identity. In Persepolis, Marji attempts to make sense of this blend when she was suddenly forced to don the veil, for example. In one panel (Figure 16), she says “I really didn’t know what to think about the veil, deep down I was very religious but as a family we were modern and avant-garde.”22 This one panel is a conglomerate of three major
elements that the Islamic character-frame brings to the material anchor: iconoclasm, reprobation of figural representation, and abstract decoration.

*Figure 16*

Islamic iconoclasm is not based in Qur’anic scripture—a common misconception—but is actually based on various Traditions of the Prophet, the Hadith. The fear is that the image does not only represent its subject, but can actually function as if it were the thing, itself. This is called a fear of *shirk*, “a term that came to mean polytheism and idolatry but originally meant associating other gods with God.” A fear of shirk is closely tied to a fear of “usurping divine creative powers.” An image is a false artifice which can be cognitively misconstrued as reality. Thus, the power artists have is akin to God or Allah as Creator—one who can create form and life from nothing. In fact, Satrapi has admitted that her creations gave her the power of the divine: “I feel like God, you know, God created the man and said, ‘Stand up and walk.’ I drew that.” To protect against this kind of blasphemy, Muslims informally practiced the now infamous Defacement of images—a mutilation of the affective parts of the face, such as the eyes and nose, a substitute for decapitation. It was a way to “deanimate” the images, deprive
them of a soul. Flood takes note of the unique relationship Muslim iconoclasts have with images, then—one in which their material backlash implicitly legitimizes the image:

If we are to believe recent anthropological and art historical scholarship on iconoclasm, the “confusion” of signifier and signified noted here arises from a universal tendency to invest the image with the capacity for animation to varying degrees. Visiting vengeance or shame on the image as if on the body of a living person, iconoclasts engage with the image as if it were animate.27

Additional manifestations of Islamic iconoclasm included the forbiddance of representations with shadows, whose defacement was not only recommended by the good-faith Muslim but, indeed, obligatory.28 This feature is dramatically present in Persepolis. Although Satrapi defies the general Islamic iconoclasm, finding it necessary to give a face to her characters, she does follow this simple premise. Her drawings are simple and one-dimensional, with well-defined lines to restrict herself to the boundaries of artistic representation, to spurn the shades of reality.

Reprobation of figural representations is closely tied to the principles of Islamic iconoclasm, but it also comes through in the general virtue of modesty for the human body, the female human body in particular. Muslims point to the Qur’anic verse in Surah 33:59 which says, “O Prophet [Muhammad]! Tell / Thy wives and daughters / And the believing women, / That they should cast / Their outer garments over / Their persons (when abroad): / That is most convenient, / That they should be known / (As such) and not molested.”29 The veil (hijab) or the full-length chador was then mandated for Iranian women under the Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. This was problematic for Marjane Satrapi not only politically but practically, as well. As an art student in Iran, she was forbidden to learn the human form. She noted of her experience,

You have to be able to know the movement, you have to know the anatomy of the human being. In my first art courses in university our model was covered, so you know we knew very well how to draw the tissue or the nose or the face, but the rest I didn’t know it.30
The simplicity of her figural representations in *Persepolis* thus came out of necessity. Whether or not figural representation was rebuked philosophically in Islamic tradition, Satrapi still faced a practical issue with human form. She was never taught to draw the human body because the human body was always clothed, mediated by modesty and religion.

The Islamic character-frame was not entirely negative and was not a detriment to the blend. Satrapi claims that she “was clever enough to take [her] lack and make a style out of it.”\(^\text{31}\) Thematically, the simple drawings register as childlike, which is perfect for a coming-of-age story told by wide-eyed Marji. We will see later how the simple aesthetic of her cartooning style as an authorial choice—not only as a practical necessity—further affects the conceptual blend for the reader.

The Islamic character-frame does more than just add simplicity to the images; it also takes advantage of the traditional use of abstraction, an alternative form of artistic representation to figural representation. Decorative themes, in fact, became a hallmark of Islamic art due, in part, to the rejection of figural representation. One historian notes that “Europeans coined the term *arabesque* [to describe] when Renaissance artists incorporated Islamic designs in book ornament and decorative bookbindings.”\(^\text{32}\) In the panel mentioned above which visualizes the blend of the Islamic character-frame, arabesque decorates the right side of the panel. The additional detail adds beauty to the negative imposition of the veil on young Marji, emphasizing the benefits and detriments of the Islamic character-frame as an input to her identity.

What is particularly interesting about the Islamic character-frame is not only what elements *are* incorporated into the blend, but which elements are *not*. Islamic art, both traditional (*Figure 17, 18*) and modern (*Figure 19, 20*),\(^\text{33}\) is praised for its vibrant and exuberant use of color in addition to abstraction.\(^\text{34}\) Why then does Marjane Satrapi prefer the stark...
Figure 17 – An illustrated manuscript of the Qu’ran (ca. 1398). 

Figure 18 – A calligraphic drawing from Islamic Turkey (ca. 1890).
Figure 19 – A kasob (ca. 1941) prominently featuring arabesque.

Figure 20 – The Night that is More Perfect than 1,000 Months (ca. 1990s) by Yayasan Serambi Pirous, based on Qur’anic revelation.
contrast of black and white when she could have taken advantage of the rich chromatic options available in the Islamic character-frame? This is where the mapping of Islamic elements onto her self-understood identity stops manifesting itself and where her Persian character-frame begins.

**B. Source 2A: Persian Character-Frame**

The Ancient Persian character-frame provides Marjane Satrapi with a nostalgic element of ancestral pride. For her, her identity cannot be extricated from the generations of Iranians before her. Indeed the focus of all of her graphic narratives to date trace Iranian history from the 70s to the 90s (*Persepolis*), 50s to the 70s (*Chicken with Plums*) and from generation to generation with herself (*Persepolis*), her uncle (*Chicken with Plums*), and her grandmother (*Embroideries*). She has said before that her goal is to trace Iranian history back even further.37 In *Persepolis*, she begins the novel by privileging the reader with a brief history lesson38 to pay homage to the cultural development of her ancestors and the Persian identity. *Persepolis* then concludes with a creative attempt to return to an ancient Persian identity as she and her husband (at the time) collaborated to develop “the equivalent of Disneyland in Tehran”39 (*Figure 21*), a theme park based on Persian mythological heroes. The project was well-received in academic circles, but when Marjane approached the Mayor’s Deputy to implement her plans, she was swiftly denied. The Mayor’s Deputy explained that this project was impossible; for one, many of the mythological characters, like a Gord Afarid—a female warrior—were women without veils. When Marjane suggested they cover them, the Deputy responded, “A Gord Afarid in a chador is no longer a Gord Afraid. You know that as well as I do! I’m going to be frank with you: the government couldn’t care less about mythology. What they want are religious symbols. Your project is certainly interesting, but it’s unachievable!”40 The Islamic regime had stifled that
to which she desperately wanted to return. *Persepolis* as a conceptual and material product, then, actively blends elements of the Persian character-frame to thwart the imposition of the Islamic regime on her cultural heritage. *Persepolis* is Satrapi’s second chance at accomplishing what she could not in the Mayor Deputy’s office: to restore the authority of her Persian identity.

As opposed to the Islamic character-frame which was iconoclastic, the Persian character-frame displays elements of *iconotropism*—or a hunger for images. Ellen Spolsky defines iconotropism in a cultural group—or in our case, a character-frame—as “the combination of the culturally produced and valued icon with the automatic or reactive notion of tropism (as in phototropism, when a flower turns toward the sun)…” 41 Persian art flourished for centuries not only because of their acknowledgement of artistic representation and image, but truly because they clung to it, collected it, preserved it, and loaded pages, vases, walls, buildings, jewelry with it. Art historian David J. Roxburgh has performed an exhaustive study on Persian albums, bound collections of calligraphy, painting, and drawing assembled in Greater Iran between ca. 1400 and 1600. 42
extraordinary detail with which Persians catalogued and preserved text and image is evidence of Spolsky’s notion of tropism.

Literary critics who compare Satrapi’s style to ancient Persian art usually do so in the context of Persian miniatures, but there is perhaps an even stronger relationship between Satrapi’s work and Persian lithography which has yet to be acknowledged. First, lithography is a process of reproducing hand-drawn images. A Persian lithographer would create the original on a specially prepared paper with “transfer ink” depicting the image. Marzolph notes that this is a process unique to Persian lithographers. He writes, “The paper copy was then used to print a single reverse master copy onto the lithographic stone from which—after specified chemical treatment—the printing of multiple copies on paper was achieved.” Variations on lithographic processes included a direct etching on to the stone, itself. Ink was applied and mass copies were printed. The result was an illustrated narrative with defined panels for images, printed in stark black and white. It is out of this tradition that Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis arises. Indeed, even her style mimics the style of Persian lithographers with their attention to symmetry, collective identities (as explained in Chapter 1), and exclusive alternation between profile and frontal perspectives of the body.

Lithographed books in the Persian tradition are almost exact cultural mirrors of today’s graphic narrative in material form. Though illustration in Persian lithographed books was employed for a variety of purposes—from scientific books and school manuals, to travel accounts, historical studies, and translations of European literature—the narrative illustration acted as a natural counterpart to realistic depiction, just as cartooning does in the modern graphic narrative. Furthermore, lithographed books were mass-produced and a phenomenon of pop culture, which made them “unlike illustrated manuscripts... a little closer to the people,” granting them a “social aspect” which linked them not to the Ideal Persian but the Real Persian
Figure 22 - A lithograph from *Tufaan al-bokaa* (ca. 1855) is characteristic of Persian lithography. Compare to Figure 6 above from *Persepolis* to note the striking similarities of aesthetic. 46
Figure 23 – Artist Mirzaa 'Ali-Qoli khu'i developed a lithographed narrative, structured by panels, about the opposition of beauty (youth) and ugliness (old age).
Figures 24 and 25 - Compare an example from *Hamle-ye Heidariye* (ca. 1847)\(^48\) (below) to Satrapi’s representation of family history and historical identity (far below).
of historical actuality. The success of lithography was due in part to the socio-cultural nature of hand-written text, as well. Just as the author’s material hand is seen in the text of graphic narrative, so too is the Persian lithographer’s. Persians preferred hand-written calligraphy over printing in types, “the characters being necessarily stiff and uncouth and very displeasing to an eye accustomed to the flowing hand.” Marjane Satrapi follows in the Persian lithographer’s lead from material form—a cultural equivalent to the graphic narrative—to aesthetic style.

**C. Source 2B: Westerner Character-Frame**

Modern Western culture is notorious for being iconotropic, being driven by images in every moment of our over-digitized world of hyper-media. Cultural theorist William Nericcio has gone so far as to invoke “war” on the metaphorical matrix of our image-laden world, which leaves language to fall by the wayside. He claims there is a “‘contamination’ of word by image. In this scenario, picture an innocent, isolated, pristine alphabet infected with virulent visual elements born from, borne by infection, digitized image-laden bodies.” It is out of this demand for image that the graphic narrative flourishes. (Spolsky, of course, rejoices and embraces our iconotropic nature, and would do the same for the graphic narrative.) It is—in the form we know it today—a Western cultural product, garnering increasingly more and more respect in the literary community. This is where Satrapi’s material anchor gets its form. Though the blend of the Modern Iranian identity incites tensions between the iconoclastic Islamic character-frame and the iconotropic Persian character-frame, the Western character-frame privileges iconotropism and legitimizes the form of the graphic narrative as a material anchor for a conceptual blend.
The Frame-across-Characters blend transports a frame across characters to find the common elements and better understand the frame. In *Persepolis*, the frames in this type of blend include schematic frames of *coming-of-age*, *tyranny*, and *facing crisis*, for example. Satrapi’s goal is to show that these frames are not limited to Arab countries or—generally speaking—the Eastern Other. She uses this as an intermediary blend which forces the reader to participate in the blend as one of the characters. Thus the characters in each Frame-across-Character blend are Marjane Satrapi (directly), the Modern Iranian (indirectly), and the Western Reader. The Modern Iranian is filtered through Marjane Satrapi’s character as part of her own character blend. In the process of the Frame-across-Characters blend, the reader is thus mapped onto Marjane Satrapi and the Modern Iranian to better understand schematic frames which are naturally a part of the *human*—not just Iranian—condition. The anchor for this type of blend is both material and cultural. Marjane Satrapi’s choice of aesthetic, *Ligna Claire*, elicits reader sympathy and participation in the “rendered fact” described in Chapter 3.

Satrapi’s use of the European *Ligna Claire* (Clear Line) tradition of cartooning, which “privileges smooth, continuous linework, simplified contours and... solid colors, while avoiding frayed lines, exploded forms, and expressionistic rendering,” functions in a few ways. First, it was a pragmatic choice: “...the story was very complicated so I couldn’t have a very complicated drawing because it would have been too much. I [Satrapi] had to purify the style of the drawing as much as possible.” The simplicity of the image focused less on the details of visual cognition and more on the experience of the pictured image. It was essential that this happen in the visual modality as opposed to the verbal: “...words also are filters. They have to be translated,” Satrapi said. “Even in the original language, there is interpretation and ambiguity. If there’s a cultural difference between the writer and the reader, that might come out in words.
But with pictures, there’s more efficiency.”⁵⁴ This is because of the basic elements given in the Clara Ligne cartoon—the basic face, the basic body, the basic representation of emotion. For Satrapi, this simplification or “abstraction of the drawing” is something “everyone can relate to.”⁵⁵ We are reminded of Hutchins’ claim that a blend must be culturally coherent to be stable. The simplicity of Clara Ligne makes it a suitable cultural anchor, allowing for the cross-spatial mapping from Character to Character. Note, however, that the character mappings are cross-spatial, they are not being mapped from input to target. The target element is the schematic frame. Clara Ligne has facilitated the cross-spatial mapping to better understand schematic frames of the human condition.

In this stage of the conceptual blending of identity, the Characters have not been asked to map themselves onto the other. They can sympathize—or match element to element, emotion to emotion—but they cannot empathize. “…sympathy as an imaginative capacity that can bridge divisions between people of different backgrounds.”⁵⁶ Sympathy may take the form of concern, sorrow, outrage, caring; sympathy allows one character to connect with another character, but not become that character. Empathy is what transfers the power of one character into the other. Marjane Satrapi believes that the biggest problem in our world today is “that there’s no empathy. Nobody puts themselves in the place of others. Everyone thinks they are the only one to suffer.”⁵⁷ The final step in the conceptual blend of identity in Persepolis requires empathy—requires the reader to participate in rendered fact.

**Character-to-Character**

To better understand how character can relate to character in the conceptual blend of identity, I turn to Turner and Fauconnier’s example of the Debate with Kant in which a modern philosopher fuses himself with Kant by asking the question, “If I were Kant...?”:
The modern philosopher uses her knowledge of Kant’s character and identity, and her own intellectual character, tastes, and interests, in order to run the blend—that is, to “become” Kant in some respects as she approaches the problem. Whether her imitation of Kant is objectively accurate is beside the point; what matters is whether the blended character she imagines and “becomes” is intellectually productive. Remarkably, she can get new insight, have a different cast of mind, acquire new capacities to an extent as she inhabits this blend, and thus makes discoveries that were otherwise unavailable to her.58

Marjane Satrapi wants the Western Reader to ask themselves the question, “If I were Marjane Satrapi... If I were Iranian, what would I do?” The characters have been given their cultural anchor of Clara Ligne and have facilitated a cross-spatial mapping between the two characters. Now, it is time for the two to be understood in terms of the other. Clara Ligne, with minimal detail and simple faces, forces the Western Reader to fill in the gaps, so to speak, of the reality left unrendered. He is given a part of a blend which he must complete himself. In the artistically rendered photographs (Figure 14),59 the faces and scenes are minimalistic, asking the reader to cognitively add his own details to the rendered images. He thus blends his Character with the Character of the Modern Iranian. What was once an external documentation of reality—an external imposition of memory and knowledge—transforms into a personal experience. The photographs are no longer semantic memory, offered by the author, but something similar to episodic memory, experienced and completed by the reader. The rendered fact thus allows the Western Reader to map himself onto the Modern Iranian in Persepolis. Through empathy, through the conceptual blend of character-to-character, and finally through the cultural and material anchor of Clara Ligne, the Western Reader can blend himself with the Iranian and “become” a new character. He is the emergent content of the character-to-character blend of identity with a newly cultured “cast of mind... [which] thus makes discoveries that where otherwise unavailable to [him].”
For Marjane Satrapi, the reason for writing *Persepolis* in the graphic narrative medium was clear: “No, it’s not that [I was a cartoonist and was looking for a story to tell or that the graphic storytelling and comic-strip style was an appropriate way to tell my story]. It’s that I have a brain that functions with text and images so this is it.”¹ For Satrapi, each of her experiences equally deserves both visual and verbal narrative trajectories. This is even more significant because it suggests that the author—whose elicit formational experiences are present in each visual and verbal moment of *Persepolis*—must process all of her life experiences as both text and image. The emphasis seems to be on those formational experiences; something in her development seemed to trigger a need for text-image integration. One could posit that thinking in text and image is unique to Marjane Satrapi because of her development as a transnational, living with both Iranian and Western identities compressed inside of her. A dually processed identity would relate to dual-processing cognitive structure (in the verbal and nonverbal modalities) which in turn would relate to a dually coded narrative (in the graphic narrative). But Marjane Satrapi is not unique in this way. The cognitive development of every human being begins and ends in the conceptual integration network. Every human being must process and *live* the blend. It is not limited only to those whose blends are made explicit—those
whose lives were defined by the juncture of disparate sources like the Eastern and Western. Ellen Spolsky, Mark Sadoski, Allan Paivio, and many other literary and cognitive theorists argue that all human beings process the world through blends, all human beings process the world through the verbal and the nonverbal, and many do so specifically through text and image.

This project endeavored to destigmatize both cognitive literary studies and graphic narrative studies by analyzing the two discourses discursively. Through the lens of cognitive literary theory, one can explore the ways in which text and image interact in the graphic narrative as a medium. What was once thought of as a crude plebian form of entertainment, the graphic narrative can now be understood as an expression of the basic human hunger for images. It illuminates the viability of graphic novels as rich sources for further scholarship. The cognitive implications of language’s silent partner—the image—on a narrative are far-reaching.

In an autobio-graphic novel, the dual narrative lines created a productive friction and bolstered the authenticity of the nonfiction genre. In Persepolis, itself, the text-image presentation acted as material anchor for the conceptual blend of the author’s identity. It materialized the unseen conceptual processes of existential angst. Beyond all that, it offered the reader the opportunity to enter into the narrative and into Marjane Satrapi’s own identity in a unique way. The reader could touch the pages, see the images, hear the words, and ask himself, “If I were her…” Persepolis is a project in multimodal processing and conceptual blending that fundamentally unites people. The cognitive juncture of text and image invites her story to become our story, her culture to become our culture. “There is no frontier,” Satrapi says, “Your Edgar Allan Poe belongs as much to me as much as my poet in Iran, Hafiz, belongs to you. That is the heritage of all human beings.”2
Chapter 1 Notes

1 Crane and Richardson (123).

2 Ibid.

3 Hogan.

4 Turner.

5 Lakoff and Johnson.

6 Crane.

7 Crane (15).

8 Woolf (31).

9 McCloud (9). As quoted in Chute, “Comics as Literature” (454).

10 Harvey, “Comedy” (75-76). As quoted in Chute, “Comics as Literature” (454).

11 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (452).

12 Groensteen, “Why are Comics.”

13 Groensteen, “Why are Comics” (3).

14 As quoted in Harvey, “How Comics” (38).

15 Spolsky, “Iconotropism” (26).

16 Deacon (216-220).

17 As quoted in Paivio, Mind and Its Evolution (3). (Emphasis added.)

18 Paivio, Mind and Its Evolution (3).

19 Sadoski and Paivio (44).

20 Sadoski and Paivio (ix).

21 Spolsky, “Introduction” (16).

22 Sadoski and Paivio (11).
23 Spolsky, “Iconotropism” (27).

CHAPTER 2 NOTES

24 Chute, “Texture” (96).

1 Spolsky, Gaps (29).

2 “Vin Scully Quotes.”

3 Harvey, “How Comics” (28).

4 Harvey, “How Comics” (30).

5 Satrapi (210-211).

6 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (455).

7 Many theorists do the opposite and process the text as image, focusing on the graphic nature of the written word.

8 Satrapi (3).

9 Satrapi (150).

10 Satrapi (194).

11 Satrapi (150).

12 Satrapi (11).

13 Satrapi (209).

14 Satrapi (3).

15 Satrapi (18).

16 Turner and Fauconnier.

17 These cognitive spaces do not necessarily correspond to specific neuroanatomical spaces.

18 For more information on the modularity of the mind, see Spolsky, Gaps (19-41).

19 Grady, Oakley, and Coulson.
20 Turner (57-84).

21 Grady, Oakley, and Coulson (2).

22 Grady, Oakley, and Coulson (3).

23 Grady, Oakley, and Coulson (4).

24 Hutchins.

25 Hutchins (1561).

26 Satrapi (114-116).

27 Lafhoff and Johnson (14).

28 Lakhoff and Johnson (17).

29 Satrapi (115).

30 Axmaker.

31 Spolsky, Satisfying Skepticism (29).

32 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (452).

33 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (455).

34 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (457).

35 Weich.

36 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (459).

37 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (457).

38 Satrapi (30, 39, 86, 90, 91, 103, 139, 140, 151, 152, 257, 262).

39 Satrapi (160, 164, 231).

40 The outstanding exceptions occur once in Persepolis I, when Marji purchases American music on the black market (132), and once in Persepolis II, while plucking facial hair when she gives herself a makeover after severe depression (274). The presence of these two examples alone does not undermine the original use of verbal censorship in relating traumatic events.
This is particularly true of those artists who choose to do graphic narrative adaptations of literature, such as R. Crumb’s rendition of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and other stories (*Introducing Kafka*. Duxford, Cambridge: Icon Books UK, 1993).

More often, “partial” occlusion occurs, which is actually just a variation on the illustrative experience. To clarify, what might be considered “partial” visual occlusion provides an image which conceals some element of the verbal narrative line; however, the image can be predicted if the reader-viewer chooses to “close the gaps” of the gutter. For example, an execution might be described in the verbal narrative line, but only the moment immediately preceding the call to “Fire!” is given in the visual narrative line (Satrapi 117). The reader-viewer will close the gap with the assumption that the execution did in fact take place. This is more clearly understood as a *limited illustrative experience*.

Chute, “Comics as Literature” (459).
CHAPTER 3 NOTES

1 Howarth (364).

2 Beaty (228).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.


6 Sadoski and Paivio (101).

7 Sadoski and Paivio (74).

8 Hatfield (132).

9 Ibid.

10 Sadoski and Paivio (46).

11 Sadoski and Paivio (57).

12 Wolk (118).

13 Hatfield.

14 Spolsky, “Introduction” (16).

15 Spolsky, “Iconotropism” (26).

16 Spolsky, “Darwin.”

17 Spolsky, Gaps (16).

18 Sadoski and Paivio (59).

19 Sadoski and Paivio (48).

20 Spolsky, “Iconotropism” (23).

21 Fraik and Tulving.

22 Roediger (254).
23 Roediger (255).

24 Sadoski and Paivio (97).

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Root (152).

28 Schank and Abelson.

29 Darlene DeMarie-Dreblow’s research reminds us that while knowledge may be tied to memory, knowledge does not necessarily imply faster recall, or better memory. One must not draw illogical conclusions from the converse. See DeMarie-Dreblow.

30 Schank and Abelson.

31 Unless, of course, one has reason to doubt one’s own mental or physical capacity to perceive truth—if, for example, one has lost his hearing (physical capacity) or if one recently suffered a concussion and can no longer remember whether or not events took place (mental capacity).


33 Some types of digital imaging to recreate events—ranging from car crashes, to soil erosion, or fetal development—are based on certain documented conditions and are more examples of objective documentation.

34 Zemel (38).

35 With the widespread use of digital technology and the prevalence of altered photographs in journalism, however, a shift is coming in contemporary society when the photograph is challenged as evidence and its truth value diminished. For the most part, however, the truth value of photographs today is taken without hesitation.

36 With the exception of those appearing in already questionable sources like tabloid magazines. Technology does exist to alter photographs—sometimes virtually seamlessly—but it is still a
cultural and legal standard to trust photographic images unless credibility of the source is doubted or alteration of the image is noticeable.

37 Wolk (118).

38 Wolk (125).

39 Zemel (38).

40 Satrapi (29).

41 Chute, “Comics as Literature” (457).

42 Schank and Abelson.

43 Satrapi (60).

**Chapter 4 Notes**

1 Tully.

2 Fauconnier and Turner (390).

3 Fauconnier and Turner (396).

4 Ibid.

5 Fauconnier and Turner (252).

6 Ibid.

7 Fauconnier and Turner (254).

8 Fauconnier and Turner (252).

9 Fauconnier and Turner (252-253).

10 Fauconnier and Turner (252).

11 Ibid.

12 Axmaker.

13 Sélavy.
14 Hutchins.

15 Hutchins (1557).

16 Hutchins (1558).

17 Hutchins (1562).

18 Fauconnier and Turner (44).

19 Martin.

20 Tully.

21 Axmaker.

22 Satrapi (6).

23 Which can be strategically used in accessing the authenticity of autobiography, as explained in Chapter 3.

24 Flood (643).

25 Ibid..

26 Root (155).

27 Flood (648).

28 Flood (643).

29 Zahedi (78).

30 Root (154).

31 Leith.

32 Blair and Bloom.

33 George.

34 Blair and Bloom.

35 Persian and Islamic Art (11).

36 Persian and Islamic Art (29).
37 Russell.
38 Satrapi (11).
39 Satrapi (329).
40 Satrapi (331).
41 Spolsky, “Introduction” (12).
42 Roxburgh.
43 Chute, “Texture.”
44 Marzolph (16).
45 Marzolph (VII).
46 Marzolph (Fig. 11).
47 Marzolph (Fig. 55).
48 Marzolph (Fig. 112).
49 Marzolph (VIII).
50 Marzolph (15).
51 Nericcio (79).
52 Hatfield (144).
53 Sélavy.
54 Bearman.
55 Axmaker.
56 Sklar (481).
57 Bearman.
58 Fauconnier and Turner (254).
59 Satrapi (29).
CHAPTER 5 NOTES

1 Axmaker.

2 NPR.


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