Embodied Reading: The Graphic Novel, Perception, and Memory

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Abstract: The article argues that the role touch plays in embodied reading processes is an important aspect of the narrowing experiential gap between analog and digital media in contrast to earlier notions of a revolutionary leap in textuality. Transitional print textuality is often informed by experiential habits and types of attention schooled by electronic media rather than its specific forms and devices. The article presents the success of the graphic novel and the prominence of the subject of memory in this medium as a case of this type of transitional textuality, using the example of "Déogratias," Jean Philippe Stassen's graphic novel on the genocide in Rwanda.

Keywords: Graphic Novel, Haptic, Memory, Remediation, Embodied Reading, Rwanda, Déogratias

Reevaluating Transitional Textuality

Early thinking about electronic textuality, particularly in the area of literature, was characterized by an emphasis on the divide between print and electronic texts. Much like the language of development and marketing, theoretical analyses envisioned a revolutionary leap in textuality in the spirit of network idealism (Heim 1999). One of the influential interventions in this utopian discourse was Jay Bolter's model of remediation, offering a more neutral appraisal of the way successive media mutually reshape each other in the period of their coexistence. While this approach has gained ground as electronic textuality became increasingly common and naturalized, the important role played by the sense of touch in this transition is only becoming apparent now. I suggest not only that this shift to a transitional textuality involves a distinctly tactile visuality, but also that certain intermediary forms of literature and their prominent subjects (such as the print graphic novel and its favored subject of memory) exemplify the importance of haptic visuality in this process.

Even though transitional textuality was at times recognized as a cultural fact before, it was routinely framed by a nearly eschatological language of expectations and standards and often decried as a failure to fulfill the potential of the utterly new. "Although in some distant, or not-so-distant, future *all individual texts* will electronically link to one another, thus creating metatexts and metametatexts of a kind *only partly imaginable at present*, less far-reaching forms of hypertextuality have already appeared," opens George Landow's chapter on "Reconfiguring the Text" in his *Hypertext 3.0* (emphasis added). It follows from the emphasis on the difference and superiority of electronic textuality that the continuities and affinities between print and digital textuality were construed as residual problems or fundamental misconceptions due to understandable, but misguided resistance. If the World Wide Web "has not realized many of the more utopian visions of hypertext," Landow blames primarily "the limitations in our mentalware," since all too many of us "remain so deep inside the culture of the book that we automatically conceive of digital media in terms of the printed book" (Landow 2006, 314). Theodore H. Nelson, who coined the term hypertext in the 1960's, irritably notes in 2008 that most people mistake electronic documents for the imitations of paper documents they typically encounter on the screen. "When I saw the computer, I thought: at last we can escape the prison of paper!" he states in exasperation in a presentation of Xanadu Space—a model of radically new electronic textuality that people inexplicably refuse to adopt—extolling the virtues of the program's complex and flexible rhizomatic paths for freeing thought and offering room for digression (Nelson 2008). Yet, for a number of reasons, it has become increasingly possible to

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acknowledge a less radically different transitional textuality no longer condemned as a prison of thought.

This cultural adjustment has been partly borne out by the actual expansion of digital literature in "intermediary form[s] between print and digital platforms" without radical formal structural experimentation. While Landow, for instance, sees the widespread use of PDF files as "an inappropriate use of the printed page as a basic model in an electronic environment," refusing all the benefits of electronic textuality other than cheap and fast reproduction and transmission (Landow 2006, 316), it is possible to view the augmentation of print as an important phenomenon in its own right rather than a degree of cultural failure. In fact, it is our prolonged exposure to a mixed textuality, including both print and electronic texts, that allows us to experience electronic textuality as less radically new and become more aware of continuities. Ellen McCracken recently commented that

> Whereas early multiform digital literature excluded much of the reading public with its extensive hyperlinks and sometimes confusing hypertextual pathways, the new transitional texts on small portable e-readers engage in much more moderate adaptations of traditional printed literature. In contrast to "digital born" literature such as blognovels, interactive texts with complex rhizomatic paths and algorithmic sequences, and multi-media digital genres that blur the borders between video, game, and literature, a much more palatable transitional literature is in the forefront of cultural change now— electronic texts that mimic the format and appearance of print books and add a few innovations. (McCracken 2013, 105)

If it was dedicated e-readers and tablets with soaring sales from 2009-2010 that played a crucial part in sustaining this transitional textuality of light adaptation and emulation, it is important to remember that this phenomenon exists both on the electronic and the print sides of the elusive, porous border. This is consistent with Bolter's concept of remediation (1991), the idea that historically successive media mutually re-mediate each other, the new necessarily using and confronting the old as its object of remediation and this use and confrontation being its most fundamental (if incremental) way of being different. "The very fact that electronic writing must confront the tradition of print makes electronic writing different from print." At the same time, the old has to compete with the new to remain attractive: "For this reason print is becoming hypermediated, as it incorporates verbal genres and gestures in self-conscious imitation of and rivalry with electronic media…." (Bolter 2001, 45-46). While the mutual and transitional aspect of remediation is still valid, the "self-conscious imitation of electronic media" seems a far too narrow way to describe the process. I suggest that transitional print textuality is often informed by experiential habits and types of attention schooled by electronic media rather than its specific forms and devices and that touch plays a very important role in recognizing this as a transition.

The Proximate Senses and the Narrowing Analog-digital Gap

Touch was crucial for maintaining the sense of a radical difference between the digital and the analog, and it is equally crucial for a new sense of their continuity. The distinctness of the proximate senses played an important part in maintaining the sense of a gap between the digital and the analog, as it was primarily visual and auditory information that was transmitted in the digital content. At the same time, touch came to dominate proximate senses almost exclusively, because the reader's connection with the interface converged on touch—pressing buttons, manipulating pointing devices—rather than olfaction or taste, even though touch itself largely remained resistant to being recorded and transmitted. Information for the proximate senses could not be or was not digitized (except for the most extreme experiments), widening the gap between the body's "felt sensory field" (Martin 1992, 210) and representational events that register perception in less corporeal terms. This gap can be narrowed by a growing recognition of the

analog prehistory of digital long-distance connectivity[1] and by the experiential reduction of difference. The following examples, while clearly not comprehensive, can hopefully illustrate and elucidate these interconnected processes, each of which deserves a more detailed analysis beyond the scope of the present discussion.

The experiential reduction of difference is partly due to the growing affective reality and materiality of tele-experiences through digital data and the need to recognize embodied responses to them as real and valid. Emphasizing the affinities, the complex dynamic between experience and tele-experience, and the affective reality, materiality, and potentially visceral virtuality of telepresence, various scholars have argued that our extensive exposure to tele-perception has changed its meaning and status for us. Invoking Manuel Castells' "culture of real virtuality," Frank Hartmann espouses an immersive media reality in which "phenomena are no longer the reflection of experiences on a symbolic level, but are themselves experiences." Yet, he immediately links this to the "*electronic* convergence of all forms of communication" (Hartmann 2000, 18) even though it may not be useful to understand this immersive media reality as a displacement or cannibalization of the non-electronic. Indeed, it can equally be understood as the infiltration of the electronic by ordinary senses of intimacy, materiality, and proximity. It is in this spirit that Laura Tanner defends the public from cultural critics who decry its supposedly mistaken reactions to September 11, "unsupported by geographic proximity or material connection." These critics "[h]ighlight the impossibility of penetrating the surface of the image and the hubris of laying claim to a loss neither personal nor proximate" and therefore critique the public's "confusion of the artificial and the real" and claiming an illusory loss as if they had been there and directly affected. "Supposedly insulated from the 9/11 disaster by the mediation of the screen, members of the public struggled to negotiate the sense of disequilibrium generated by their visceral reaction to a distanced event by registering the pressure of images in oddly materialist terms." Instead of *correcting* the public, Tanner suggests we pay attention and rethink "what constitutes a natural response to an image event" (Tanner 2012, 59, 61) Although September 11 is—fortunately—a very special event that rips apart the everyday, and it is extreme both in the derealization of bodies and materiality on the ground and the visceralness of its images, it does crystallize and display how the prevalence of distant perception, the increasingly possible alliance of distance and intimacy, engenders new attitudes it may no longer be useful to call irrational and mistaken.

Just as importantly, while prolonged exposure to certain mediated experiences may result in an adjusted sense of materiality or affective realty, those experiences are themselves changing through recent technological advances both in mediated perception, most notably in the communication of touch, and in the conversion between physical objects and digital data. In other words, emulations of analog tactility and the ease of rematerializing data narrow the felt gap between analog and digital media. Tactile feedback (the now familiar buzzes of smartphones) can cover a range of material properties and is increasingly used in telesurgery, maintenance operations in hazardous locations such as nuclear power stations (Kappers and Bergmann Tiest 2013, 369-370). (In fact, *half* of the haptic patents filed in the US Patent Office since 1975 were filed over the past *three* years.)[2] Additionally, the gap between digital data and embodied material objects has also narrowed because of the easy transfer and increasingly common fusion of the two. Nokia has recently patented the technology for a magnetic ink tattoo capable of buzzing to alert one to an incoming call, and sophisticated digitizing and 3D printing technologies are becoming affordable enough to make the data/material transformation ordinary

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[1] Such an emphasis on the continuum of emerging practices characterizes various studies on the archeology of long-distance connectivity, such as a recent study of the opening ceremonies of world's fairs (Plotnick 2013). Attention to these archeologies and gradual adjustments softens the analog/digital border by demonstrating that re-learning what it means for bodies to assert themselves at a distance through touch is not new.

[2] This is an approximate number based on a patent search for "haptic" at http://appft1.uspto.gov/netahtml/PTO/search-adv.html on July 2, 2013. haptic AND PD/19750702->20130702: 11210 applications; haptic AND PD/20100702->20130702: 5902 applications.

practice—in some cases, like gun control, alarmingly so. Granted, the speedy scanning, manipulating and printing of human organs is still in the category of a magician's trick that the Director of the Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine can "wow" audiences with (Atala 2011), and the organs in question are still non-functioning prototypes, but the broad accessibility and affordability of digitizing and 3D printing technologies weaken deep ontological differences between organs and organ scans. The ease and ordinariness of digitizing objects and re-constituting them in physical space makes these states more fluid and volatile than before.

Tactility takes on a new importance, because touch used to be a cornerstone of the pre-digital and it is also where intense technological innovation is erasing important distinctions between analog and digital media, and this is no different in the specific case of the transitional textuality of a print/screen culture. Certain media thrive on this transitional threshold, and recognizing this affinity can help us understand both the transition and these media better. In the following, I would like to suggest that a fresh understanding of this transitional textuality and the role of materiality and tactility within it may provide a line of inquiry into evolving or emerging literary genres and a consideration of reading as an embodied process. I will present the success of graphic novels and its prominent subject of memory (at times in conjunction with disability, illness, or injury) as a rich example of remediation happening at levels that are not purely formal. The example or the specific works analyzed are not meant to stand as representative, but rather as indicative of fruitful approaches to transitional texts.

The Multisensual Graphic Novel as a Transitional Text

The medium of the graphic novel (or the long-form comic) engages with the textual transition outlined above in a unique way, both in its print form and the gradual migration of content to digital formats. (For lack of space, I will only discuss the print version here.) The sequential exploration of graphic narrative has a visuo-haptic character that relies both on the page as it exists in print (a complex stable spatial order sustained by solid material forms) and on the multimodal hyper-reading habits of screen culture, a type of dynamic multitasking akin to and supported by browsing habits. In order to establish the meaning of a unit accessible at any one time (a page or double page), the reader has to survey and negotiate multiple components and potential relationships to establish space, time, causation, etc., integrating analytical and explicit components with liminal and implicit ones at a pace unconstrained by the narrative's own time. (In other words, graphic narrative is heterochronic, unlike film, where the times of projection and reception unfold at the same pace.) The type of distractible browsing normalized by screen culture supports the complexity of this exploration (assuring increasingly complex relationships of finding an audience that is skilled at decoding them). At the same time, this exploration is a multisensual process that relies on a touchable object more than reading a linear text without images, thereby accentuating the multi-sensual character of *all* reading that is normally concealed by the long-standing normativity of cultured, educated silent reading.

In the graphic novel, the fluid relationship of linear sequences and the larger tableau enables a medium-specific representation of time, and its distinct kind of exploration turns the page into a delicate surface for multisensory processing. This is a particularly good match to the subject of memory and its multisensory processes. As the neuroscience of memory is beginning to find, differences in the storing and accessibility of particular memories are often linked to the differences and complex interplay of sensory stimuli, due to the existence of two interconnected memory systems. "[I]nformation processed by a more sensory and perpetual mid-brain system is more likely to register incoming stimuli in iconic form and less likely to be linked to conscious and linguistic memory cues. If such episodic images are not integrated with the autobiographical memory knowledge base and the conceptual self (as mediated by the neo-cortical structures of the brain), they may persist but only in a highly inaccessible form" (Singer and Conway 2008,

281). This match of multisensory affinities means that graphic narrative can create a special kind of resonant interplay between the topography of memory and the visuo-haptic topography of comics and it can engage preverbal connections resistant to conceptualization that are suited to representing implicit memory (Schüwer 2008, 241-244).

To illustrate this potential of graphic narrative, I will comment on an award-winning graphic novel on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and its aftermath by Belgian comic artist Jean Philippe Stassen (Stassen 2006).[3] *Déogratias*, which tells the fictional story of a young Hutu boy who eventually becomes a perpetrator in the events, is exemplary in the *medium-specific* handling of memory that relies on the haptic visuality of the graphic novel. Stassen's narrative literally unfolds through a recurring survey of the dual topographies of page and landscape, a landscape that gradually turns out to be a *memorial* landscape to be deciphered and experienced as such. The four untitled chapters traverse the same limited territory time and time again, recovering more detail and temporal depth in each successive attempt, starting each time soon after the mass killings of the Tutsis, and returning to the period before and during the genocide. The territory of this single unnamed location in Rwanda is both a natural landscape and a cultural one, and its traversal by the protagonist coincides with our explorations of the form and body of the text seeking the meaning of this landscape.[4]

Quite significantly, the past is almost never staged as a recollection, testimony or confession; instead, the unannounced shift to the past has to be recognized independently. This means that the browsing of the landscape always slightly precedes information about it, and this both evokes and instigates the preverbal components of memory. Storing "incoming stimuli in iconic form" before they are "likely to be linked to conscious and linguistic memory cues" (to recall Singer and Conway's reference to the mid-brain limbic circuit) will enrich our experience of coming to understand the narrative, often grasping details intuitively before they are "known" and then making an effort to recall them when a new constellation of words and images demand it.

The first such temporal shift occurs only three pages into the narrative, inserted into the protagonist's opening encounter with a French sergeant at the hotel bar (Stassen 2006, 3). The time shift is not announced explicitly, but it can be reconstructed on multiple levels in retrospect. Its status as a recollection is faintly implied by the extreme close-up style panel showing the protagonist's face, confirmed by a verbal reference two pages later ("do you remember…?") and from the recognition of the two systematic time markers (probably after a number of pages). Once the two visual time markers of the narrative emerge from the landscape of the page as signs, they will attain further layers of meaning in the course of the narrative. The unframed panels are marked not only as the past, but also as an unfinished, incomplete and uncontrollable past. The protagonist's white T-shirt (the other such time marker) becomes the attire of an irreversibly damaged innocence. The full meaning of the association that triggers the recollection in the opening scene does not emerge until much later, when we understand the connections between Tutsi women as unavailable objects of desire and the image of the cockroach as a symbolic means of objectification and dehumanization in the service of large-scale extermination. The image of the cockroach accompanying the question "do you remember…?" and its immediate crushing on the table may or may not be recalled when the RTLM radio station would announce it as a "linguistic memory cue" in the context of incitement thirty pages later (Stassen 2006, 34). (The role of RTLM in laying the ideological groundwork for the killings— including the propagation of using "cockroach" and "work" as coded references to Tutsi and killing—and organizing its daily logistics is well-established.) It is also revealed in later chapters how the French sergeant returning as a tourist in the opening scene had been involved in the

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[3] In 2000, Stassen was awarded the René Goscinny award (for the most promising comics writer of the year) at the Angouleme International Comics Festival. He also published a follow-up volume, the documentary comics *Pawa* (in reference to the official ideology of Hutu Power).
[4] For an analysis of the deeply contested memorial landscape of post-genocide Rwanda, see Meierhenrich 2011.

events of the genocide, supporting Hutu perpetrators and their eventual evacuation in Operation Turqoise (Stassen 2006, 69, 72). In this sense, even in a graphic novel that seems to rely on the uncomplicated conventional Western reading order (left to right, top to bottom), the linear sequence is a trap, and a different kind of exploration is required for experiencing and interpreting the text.

The few key locations of a narrow delimited space (the village school, the church, the hotel and its bar) recur as the sites of multiple events. The protagonist and the slightly disoriented reader pass them multiple times in typically narrow frames and close-ups—while the protagonist descends deeper into madness as the sites trigger recollections (imagining himself to be one of the scavenging, corpse-eating dogs in the streets after the killings), the reader gradually understands the layers of this memorial topography. For example, it is near the end of the book that the hotel, the only named location in the book, turns out to have been a checkpoint where the protagonist was assigned to "work" (work being euphemism for killing one's neighbors in the regular work hours of the day). The precise degree of his active participation is never clarified.

The process of partial disorientation that results from time being "undercoded" decreases with each successive round of traversing the memorial topography of the landscape. By the time the narrative reaches the most horrific events and their direct representation, bloody bodies, piles of corpses, we are at home in the memorial landscape, and we can interpret the links between its different times. This is how the larger units of the book are structured by repeated unintentional returns to the "present" of the past. The retroactive addition of information to previously seen tableaus, delayed interpretation as a narrative principle, and the recursive structure permit a fluid sense of time within the temporarily accessible units of the text (between page turns) that can change through the dynamic relationship between the page and various possible panel sequences in the reading. This is successively reordered by delayed information requiring recall and reinterpretation, while the repetitions and variations gradually delineate the narrative's spatio-temporal centers of gravity, around which the given memorial landscape and its network of mnemonic paths arrange themselves. It is the sensing and interpreting of this landscape that is repeated in the distinctive multimodal acts of reading required by the book.

This reliance on the survey of an always insufficiently understood memorial landscape raises the specter of anti-intentionalism.[5] Although the use of the human-dog metamorphosis as the visual representation of trauma and its mental effects seems to confirm this problematic possibility, the reliance on haptic visuality does not need to dehistoricize what it emphatically materializes. This is a particularly relevant issue in the case of a European representation of a historical event in an African country, where the stakes of being represented as "nature" are exceptionally high. The dog with which the protagonist identifies is an animal, but not only a domesticated animal (thereby a mixture of the natural and the social) but also a specific element of historical reality: the dogs in Rwanda in 1994. Therefore, the dog in this narrative is not only a metaphor in the way *Maus* uses the culturally determined signs of cat and mouse in reference to human relations, to dehumanization as a tool of genocide and to the effects of genocide on perpetrators, regardless the role historical mice played in the historical holocaust (none). The presence of corpse-eating scavenging dogs was a fact despite all their metaphorical "potential" that allows the expansion of this small detail to a vision of the human as a biological, social and moral being (Dallaire 2003, 300, 461; Hatzfeld 2009, 105). This is a metaphor that cannot be used "innocently" in a general moral context precisely as a result of the history of European representations of Africa. The complex problem of representation that is immediately present in the image of the human-dog metamorphosis—how historical memory is positioned between the universal and the historically specific, between nature and society, between foreign and local

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[5] For a critique of this position as shared by cultural critics and neuroscientists in their treatment of affect as "independent of signification and meaning," see Ruth Leys 2011.

perspectives, particularly in a European graphic narrative on an African subject—also shows that such problems are not settled but rather re-presented by the medium and the features of its transitional textuality.

Analyzing local and foreign works on the extermination of the Tutsis after 15 years, Madelaine Hron finds that "Western, African or Francophone cultural assumptions often obfuscate the specificity of *itsembabwoko* [genocide], its genealogy and aftermaths. Authors therefore face the dilemma of demystifying Rwanda's history and culture, while keeping the text comprehensible to readers. Many opted, for example, to deal with this difficulty by adopting a child's perspective" (Hron 2009, 165). While Stassen's book makes an effort, within its narrow scope, to present specific social precursors to the event and to problematize foreign perspectives and influences, its chief strategy, too, is to use the child perpetrator's perspective to deal with the real cultural and information gap resulting from insufficient knowledge of political history, cultural context, and languages without invoking an image of Africa burdened by cultural prejudices and clichés.

Two types of images—one more optical, the other more haptic—exemplify this balancing act in the work. Panels of sequences that carry the plot forward (the overwhelming majority of the panels) are typically fragmented: close-ups and extreme close-ups extricate the person, object or location relevant to the plot from its environment, ripping it from the reality represented. Rarely do we get to see complete human figures, as the frame often cuts off a body part, limb or part of the head. In a sense, the panels chop people up in advance, before the plot would make it available to historical interpretation. (While a stick appears on the first page, when the protagonist is denied entry to the hotel, the reader is well into the second half of the book before the machete that has become emblematic of the genocide appears, and even then it is an agricultural tool in a woman's hand. [Stassen 2006, 39]). This strategy is a visual disclaimer, an acknowledgment of the constraints and limits of the simple story being told. The socio-historical representation of detail-oriented close-ups that constrict their subjects into narrow frames invariably flow into concluding landscape images at the end of the chapter (Stassen 2006, 27, 49, 78). These counterpoints to fragmented socio-historical detail are dominated by the night sky and dissolve memory into a contemplative haptic vision. Nothing happens in these images except the passing of time, as the intricate details of a surface are on the verge of transforming the image into pure texture.

In his discussion of the representation of time in comics in *Wie Comics erzählen,* Martin Schüwer adapts Deleuze's concepts of time-image and movement-image to the medium of comics, building on Benoît Peeters' typology of page types based on the independence and relative dominance of narrative and composition (resulting in the four possibilities of *expressivité, engendrement, neutralité,* and *émancipation* of composition in its relation to narrative) (Peeters 1998, 36). Schüwer develops Peeters' idea of the medium-specific dual temporality of graphic narrative, linking Deleuze's concept of the movement-image (senso-motoric image) to sequences and his analysis of the time-image to the independence of composition from the plot operating in a given sequence (Peeters 1998, 34; Schüwer 2008, 236-38). What appears in the time-image is not time grasped indirectly though chronological relationships and movement, but temporality itself, its double flow of passing and appearing (Deleuze 2005, 39-41). This is how the recurring landscapes of *Déogratias* work, arresting movement (not any real movement as in Deleuze's original analysis of film, but the virtual movement created in the reader's dynamic experience). It is a key element of Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson that duration (*durée*) is not subjective time, but time as the only possible subjectivity; in other words, it is not (subjective) time that is within us, but rather we are in time. Stassen's contemplative closing images, formally coded as present, detach themselves from the narrative and its chronological order. The local character of the landscape keeps them from floating to complete abstraction or transcendence, let alone universal morality (for lack of an *I*, "the starry sky above me" could hardly be connected to the moral law within me) even

though they clearly invoke all of these. The lack of human presence does not make them simply empty and a mark of absence (presumably the absence of civilization and culture). What they show is not a void, but a material landscape ambivalently positioned between concrete and universal. The relationship between the dynamic topology of the ground and vibrant sky above produces a landscape where temporal planes coexist and the passing of time, its constant differentiation and reconstruction is transpiring.

The protagonist's chief problem is that a direct experience of time and its constant recreation is unlivable unless consciousness can sort it into elements of chronological time and a certain logic of plot. This unlivable experience of time appears both visually and verbally as a spilling out, connecting the uncontrollable spilling of the disintegrating mind and the violated body („They devour the bellies, and the bellies spill open"; „my head that's evaporating and spilling into the night") to the landscape. The haptic visuality of these images is where the "mad" question of continuity and self-identity can be posed in an open and non-didactic way. Whether the times and identities before, during and after the genocide can be connected and whether living with what happened is possible are special questions here, because it was typically the members of small communities that killed each other (for months, in the entire territory of the country, with only minor local variations in the degree of violence). Unlike spontaneous local pogroms or modern centralized (concentrationary) industrial genocide, this killing of neighbors was integrated into the work schedule of everyday life. The hundred-day period that came to be known as the Rwandan genocide (preceded and followed by several waves and alternating directions of forced migration and ethnic cleansing) was characterized by the site of months of killing being identical with the site of home domesticated by everyday life and work. In fact, one of the explanations for the puzzling speed with which a small elite of extremist politicians could mobilize previously non-violent ordinary people in the rural areas to commit such a degree of violent acts was the almost complete inhabiting of the landscape: "a vast, undulating green garden of worked and *inhabited* land," a lived-in home to a highly concentrated population (Straus 2006, 215). For this reason, the memorial landscape with its vegetation, terrain, buildings, everyday objects and sensations is the site of both the tight interconnection and the complete incongruity of past and present. Déogratias' traversal of paths is a limit case of remembering as a re-experiencing of places and one that can no longer distinguish itself from what is remembered. The contemplative position offered to the reader is not this limit case of madness, but an external yet proximate empathetic view (close to the ground, we see the rolling landscape from a nearby hill). Once the protagonist is removed (arrested for murder in the last scene), the reticent memorial landscape inscribed with acts is bequeathed to the reader.

It has been pointed out that comics is "above all, a haptic form" that has a "multivalent and complex relation to embodiment" in the context of its production: the artist materially touches its subject in a largely hand-drawn form (Chute 2011, 112). What I wanted to emphasize here was the importance of this haptic form for reception. While the "subjective bodily mark[s]" of the reader may not be permanently visible on the page, the embodied nature of her transient reading process—how this haptic form marks *her*—is just as worthy of attention.

The example of this particular text or even the peculiar attraction of the graphic novel to the subject of historical memory and life stories was not meant to be representative of the medium, but rather to indicate how the popularity of the graphic novel could be interpreted not only in the context of literariness, a changing canon, new priorities in the publishing industry, or changes in literacy, but also in the context of a transitional textuality in which practices of analog and digital culture coexist and mutually inform each other. I hoped to indicate, if only briefly, why it is a medium that thrives in this media historical moment. (How various types of digital or digitized graphic narrative work in this respect merits a separate discussion that is beyond the scope of this short paper.) If the embodied reading practices and haptic visuality of the graphic novel may explain its treatment of certain topics such as memory, such insights can be even more useful if

they sensitize us to embodied reading practices and quiet alterations of perception and experience in our encounters with a broader variety of cultural texts.

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