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Narration and Postmemory in a graphic novel: the example of *Petit-fils d'Algérie*[1] by Joël Alessandra

Abstract

How do narrative processes serve the post-memorial project of the actorialized narrator? This is what we propose to examine here, based on a study of Joël Alessandra's *Petit-fils d'Algérie*, in which the author, who set out in the footsteps of his ancestors, recounts his trip to Algeria in 2014. This graphic novel has a complex narrative structure, with several narrators, temporal shifts and a great importance attached to the story's setting. Drawing on the definition of post-memory as an indirect memory of the facts (Howell, 2015) and on the narratology of comics (Groensteen 1999, 2011, 2021), this article examines the close links between narrative processes, their visualisation and the construction of a personal memory which thereby becomes transmissible, before leading to a rapprochement with the notion of the "post-memorial subject" (Fevry, 2018).

Keywords: graphic novel, narration, post-memory, post-memorial subject.

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[1] "*Grandson of Algeria*". The illustrations in this article are taken from *Petit-fils d'Algérie*, Joël Alessandra © Casterman 2015. I reproduce them with the kind permission of Editions Casterman. The article, originally written in French, has been translated into English by Wendy H. Gabrielsen.

Narrative prosesser og etterminner ("postmemory") i en grafisk roman: Jöel Allesandras *Petit-fils d'Algérie*

Sammendrag

Hvordan fungerer narrative prosesser i det postmemoriale prosjektet til den autorale fortelleren? Dette spørsmålet diskuteres i denne artikkelen, som er basert på en studie av Joël Alessandras *Petit-fils d'Algérie*. Her forteller forfatteren, som gikk i fotsporene til sine forfedre, om sin reise til Algerie i 2014. Den grafiske romanen har en kompleks narrativ struktur, blant annet med flere fortellere og ulike kronologiske nivåer, og den legger stor vekt på historiens setting. Med utgangspunkt i definisjonen av etterminne ("postmemory"), som et indirekte minne om historiske fakta (Howell, 2015), og på tegneserieromanens narratologiske struktur (Groensteen 1999, 2011, 2021), undersøker artikkelen de tette koplingene mellom narrative prosesser, deres visualisering og konstruksjonen av et personlig minne som får overførbar/eksemplarisk betydning, før det igjen koples til forestillingen om et postmemorialt subjekt ("post-memorial subject") (Fevry, 2018).

Nøkkelord: grafisk roman, fortelling, postminne, etterminne, postmemorialt subjekt.

Introduction

Does the still image have narrative power? Comics research has often attempted to answer this critical question by highlighting either the importance of organising panels in a sequence or the necessity of a relationship with the text (speech bubbles and recitatives) in the emergence of a meaningful narrative. Whether it stresses the importance of interaction with the text (Meyer, 2011, p. 9) or the narrative power of the sequence independently of the text, comics research never fails to direct our attention to the dual nature of all graphic narratives, thus prompting us to pursue our reflection on the links between text and drawing in narrative processes. Given this dual character, critics seeking to describe and analyse comics often borrow theories from narratology. In many respects, narratology can be applied just as well to the graphic narrative as to the filmic narrative, with which comics theorists often make comparisons.

Moreover, critics have often observed the autobiographical nature of graphic novels, acknowledging the significant presence of an actorialized narrator. For example, Violeta Mitrovic (Mitrovic, 2021) shows how these works combine features of the autobiography, such as Philippe Lejeune has described and defined it (Lejeune, 1975) and typical features of the "mémoire graphique" – specifically the visual representation of the "je", the presence of a "je narrant" and a "je narré" – as well as the use of diverse material of documentary value, and "l'imbrication des codes visuel et textuel", all combining to create meaning. It should be noted that here Mitrovic touches on the "récit mémoriel historique en bande dessinée", [2] such as Isabelle Delorme (Delorme, 2019) has defined it without, however, actually citing her works. The studies cited above clearly demonstrate the influence of works by Groensteen, even if they do not mention these works. Following the publication of Groensteen's third volume, it might be helpful to briefly present an overview of this trilogy since the present article will be making frequent references to it. The first part of his research, *The System of Comics* (Groensteen, 1999/2009), is primarily concerned with the "spatio-topical system" of the genre, in other words, everything to do with the layout of the page, from its minimum unit (the panel) to the double page spread. Groensteen also shows how the bubble guides our reading of the panels. In addition, he focuses on "arthrology", meaning all the modes of composition to which the sequence gives rise; and by introducing the notion of "braiding", he demonstrates how the

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[2] "graphic memoir", "I", "narrating I", "narrated I", "the interweaving of visual and textual codes", and "historical graphic memoir".

graphic narrative refers to itself through the recurrence of some elements with precise characteristics.

The second volume, *Comics and Narration* (Groensteen & Miller, 2013), defines the specificities of narration in comics. Here, Groensteen stresses the inextricable link between the text and the image in "monstration":

> There is not, on the one hand, a text that tells (and which would be *diegetic*) and on the other hand, images that show (and would be solely *mimetic*) […] a substantial part of the narration is carried by the images, both within them and through their articulation at different levels. In other words, there is undoubtedly a dissociation between the *told* (with words) and the *shown* (by drawings), but the shown itself is a *told*. (Groensteen, 2013, p. 83.)

There exists, however, a "verbal enunciation" and an "iconic monstration" (Groensteen, 2013, p. 88). Groensteen discusses the categories of narrators introduced by Gérard Genette (Genette, 1972) and also calls into question the notion of identity between the author, the character, and the narrator as defined by Philippe Lejeune (Lejeune, 1975). Groensteen introduces the notion of the "fundamental narrator" and compares this instance with the autobiographical "actorialized narrator". The fundamental narrator delegates the depiction of the action through its graphic representation to the "monstrator", the one responsible for "the rendering in drawn form" (Groensteen, 2013, p. 86); the same applies to the characters' speech and their thoughts through the bubbles. The monstrator is a "graphic enunciator" (Groensteen, 2013, p. 92). The reciter responsible for the recitatives is a "verbal enunciator" (Groensteen, 2013, p. 94). Responsible for the articulations between the images, between the bubbles, and between the images and the text, the fundamental narrator opposes the actorialized narrator. If the former delegates to the monstrator the task of "engendering the images", the latter "inhabits the images in which s/he appears as a *shown* element" (Groensteen, 2013, p. 99). The actorialized narrator "appears in the story of which s/he is (or pretends to be) the enunciator" (Groensteen, 2013, p. 97). The narrator is an "explicit narrator" rather than a fundamental narrator (Groensteen, 2013, p. 97).

The last part of this research is devoted to the representation of time. It deals closely with questions concerning narration, particularly the visualisation of the different narrative levels at the heart of the graphic narrative. It also contains an analysis of the speed of the narrative that captured our attention (Groensteen, 2022).

This research thus focuses on the narrative specificities peculiar to comics and not present in either filmic or textual narratives. All these works benefit from the contributions of narratology, which they question in its capacity to account for the narrative processes at work in the comic book. Though they present valuable tools for reading comics, they lack an analyse of the possibilities opened up by the visual aspect of the genre, specifically those of staging the narrative act. The pre-eminence of the visual allows the comics genre to *stage* narrative processes uniquely, something that a purely textual narrative cannot do. This amounts to asking whether the comic can show how it can tell a story while telling it. It is thus necessary to question the meta-discursive capacities of the genre and the modalities of this meta-discourse. Furthermore, despite some relevant contributions to the memorial aspect of the comic book (Howell, 2015; Delorme, 2019),[3] the relationship between narrative processes and the memorial project has yet to be the object of detailed study. Postmemory involves the indirect memory of events and therefore implies the intervention of an intermediary of some sort between the subject on his/her quest and the memory s/he wishes to construct (Howell, 2015, p. xxiv).[4] How do the narrative processes at work in the comic book serve the memorial project of the author?

In order to explore these perspectives, I will refer to *Petit-fils d'Algérie* by Joël Alessandra (Alessandra, 2015). *Petit-fils d'Algérie* is a graphic novel whose author recounts his trip to Algeria in 2014. As the son and grandson of *pieds-noirs* who left Algeria when the country won its independence in 1962, he undertakes this journey to "récupérer [sa] part d'héritage",[5] (Alessandra, 2015, p. 17). This involves seeing where his ancestors lived and what they accomplished and discovering how they interacted with the local population. This decidedly postmemorial project results in a multi-layered narrative: the author tells the tale of his stay there, a visit punctuated by encounters that literally and metaphorically open doors. Literally, there are doors in places built or inhabited by his family. Metaphorically, those encounters open up the history of Algeria from ancient times until the present day, with the colonial period closely coinciding with that of Joël's ancestors. These doors are opened by characters who transmit embedded narratives. Some of these embedded narratives are also conveyed by the

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[3] Isabelle Delorme has, for example, focused on the "modalités de la transmission orale de la mémoire" (the modalities of the oral transmission of memory) in the historical graphic memoir (Delorme, 2019, pp. 95–105).
[4] "Postmemory allows an individual or a generation (in the case of collective postmemory) to constitute his/her own memory of an event not directly experienced or witnessed." (Howell, 2015, p. xxiv.)
[5] "claim [his] share of his inheritance."

main narrator. How are these transitions realised? How do narrative processes and their visualisation in the graphic novel serve the postmemorial enterprise?

Petit-fils d'Algérie has a relatively complex narrative structure, with an overrepresentation of the narrative instance at the visual level. We will first present the narration in this novel and then consider how it visualises the narrative processes. The article will focus on the different narrators and their roles. As for the visualisation of narrative processes, we will concentrate on the transitions from one narrator to the next, changes in the temporal layers, and narrative speed. Finally, we will attempt to demonstrate how these processes favour a postmemorial perspective, prompting the reader to question the notion of character and narrator.

Narrators and levels of narration in *Petit-fils d'Algérie*

J. Alessandra is going to Algeria for four days. The novel gives a detailed account of these days, which all involve several encounters. Some are fleeting, some last a few hours, and one encounter takes the whole day. The people he meets on the first day are as follows: the driver and the police officers in charge of Joël's security, the director of the *Institut français* (who tells him about Lockmane, one of the voices in the novel), and an anonymous passer-by thanks to whom "la réalité rejoint les papiers jaunis"[6] of the author's documents (Alessandra, 2015, p. 26). The next day Joël meets Aïcha, who shows him around the cinema built by his grandfather, and the guard at the cemetery, who takes him to the tomb of his ancestors. On the third day, the narrative focuses on Joël meeting the police officers in charge of his security and the guide in charge of the ancient site of Djémila. The fourth and final day produces the decisive encounter with Zinedine and Nadia, who live in the Alessandra family's old house. As a witness, Nadia can tell Joël the truth about his ancestors. At the end of this last day, Lockmane recounts the legend of the ogre.

These characters assume different roles. Some are guides or witnesses, some are both, while others also perform as narrators. The latter applies to both Lockmane and Nadia. Their narratives are important because of the amount of space on the page devoted to their transmission and their portrayal of the narrator himself. There is thus a narrative of the narrative, in which a "monstration" of the narrator preparing to narrate intervenes. Generally speaking,

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[6] "reality catches up with the yellowed paper."

we can say that the character-narrator is overrepresented in *Petit-fils d'Algérie*, and how this is done will be the focus of this study.

Petit-fils d'Algérie is an autobiographical work, a major graphic novel trend (Delorme, 2019; Groensteen, 2013; Mitrovic, 2021). As an instance where the author, narrator, and character meet, the narrator is homodiegetic or autodiegetic, according to Gérard Genette's terminology. He is indeed at the centre of the first narrative, which tells a personal family story. As an actorialized narrator, he "s'exprime à la première personne et [est] représenté graphiquement dans l'album"[7] (Delorme, 2019, p. 58).[8] There are few pages in *Petit-fils d'Algérie* where the reader does not see the actorialized narrator. Indeed, various self-portraits show the author as an adult, reflecting on the past of his ancestors (p. 9), about to listen to an embedded narrative (p. 35), starting an embedded narrative himself (p. 58), or as a child, recalling visits to his grandparents (pp. 11–15). We see him in close-up or full length, at rest, on the move, at work, preparing the book we are holding in our hands.

Isabelle Delorme has demonstrated how the structure of the "récit mémoriel historique en bande dessinée"[9] incorporates the reproduction of various original documents: iconic photographs, newspaper cuttings, and administrative documents (Delorme, 2019). Violeta Mitrovic makes a similar observation concerning what she proposes to call the "mémoire graphique" (Mitrovic, 2021, p. 4), following Nancy Pedri (Pedri, 2015). To this range of documentation, it is necessary to add the various depictions of the author preparing the work that the reader is now enjoying. He is seen, for example, taking photos (p. 24) and sketching in his notebook (p. 98). He also mentions his work in the recitatives: "[Les gens] n'ont pas l'habitude de voir des étrangers se balader dans le coin, prendre des photos des immeubles, encore moins les dessiner" (p. 28).[10]

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[7] "expresses himself in the first person and [is] represented graphically in the album".

[8] However, Joël is also the source of the secondary, embedded narratives from which he is absent (the two narratives about the migration of his ancestors). At such times he is thus an intradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator. I will return to these narratives in due course.

[9] "historical graphic memoir,"

[10] "[People] aren't used to seeing foreigners walking around taking photos of buildings, let alone drawing them".

Furthermore, the finished book shows more than just the author at work. It also reproduces the visual stages of this work by superimposing the reproduction of some of his sketches on the strips or the whole page (Hotel Cirta p. 32, portraits of women p. 47, ruins of Djemila p. 73 and p. 77, the Bey's Palace p. 98). [11] When some panels display the original motif from a different angle than what the final drawing chooses to retain (p. 32), or a different motif (Djemila, p. 77, the Bey's Palace, p. 98), we observe that the sketch may also act as the final choice. Thus the women's portraits on page 47, shown in a frame representing the notebook, are not mirrored by completed portraits that feature directly as part of the page.

The result is, therefore, the sketch, where the colouring still needs to be completed (except for a few veils, the women's clothes are not coloured in). The work in progress then becomes an

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[11]This notion of "incrustations" will be addressed in connection with narrative speed.

integral part of the work in its final version, thanks to the panoptic perception made possible by comics. Textually, such a procedure might be the equivalent of a draft, or rather a palimpsest, as the draft alone could not be interpreted as a definitive choice. If it was possible to say with regard to the *nouveau roman*: "Ainsi un roman est-il pour nous moins *l'écriture d'une aventure que l'aventure d'une écriture*"[12] (Ricardou, 1967, p. 111), it should also be possible to claim that the graphic novel here is not just the writing of an adventure, but the adventure of its development, with the latter being an integral part of the final product.

It is mentioned above that while *Petit-fils d'Algérie* is an account of the author's journey, it is also a tale of his encounters. Some of the characters he meets become intradiegetic narrators that provide Joël with more information about the history of Algeria or his background. Due to the importance of their narratives, we will concentrate on Lockmane and Nadia. Lockmane is an intradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator since he is not a character in the diegesis transmitted by his narratives, which focus on bygone eras in the history of Algeria. He provides an overview of the political construction of the country and the crises it has undergone without dwelling on individual destinies. Nadia, on the other hand, by imparting a personal family story and having witnessed the events she recounts, is an intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator.

It is difficult to describe Lockmane as a secondary character, unless the adjective is taken to mean "a second", a person who assists someone in a fight. Indeed, he is presented right from the beginning as an adjutant, to borrow the terminology used by Greimas (Greimas, 1966) and Propp (Propp, 1970):

> Bon, va falloir qu'on vous donne un coup de main, sinon, vous allez être paumé. Je connais un gars, un type bien. Il s'appelle Lockmane Benchick Lehocine. Il vous aidera, vous pouvez lui faire confiance.[13] (Alessandra, 2015, p. 23).

Lockmane is an old man, as indicated by his grey hair and his face. We can in fact establish his exact age. He is actually a real person (as are presumably all the characters in *Petit-fils d'Algérie*), born in 1940 (Araja Editions). He is therefore 74 when he meets Joël. Introduced with his full (and thus verifiable) name in the body of the narrative, he is also mentioned by the

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[12] "For us, a novel is less the writing of an adventure than the adventure of a writing process."
[13] "Right, we're going to need to give you a hand, otherwise you won't find your way. I know a chap, a decent fellow. He's called Lockmane Benchick Lehocine. He'll help you, you can trust him".

author in the paratext: "Un immense merci à Lokmane Benchikh-Lehocine pour avoir bien voulu me prêter son personnage et ses beaux poèmes. Il est un des piliers de cette histoire"[14] (Alessandra, 2015, p. 2). Participating in approximately a third of the main narrative, Lockmane acts as Joël's guide throughout his visit. Beyond being a guide in the town, his function is very clearly that of a "passeur d'histoire",[15] whose appearance and discourse evoke the chorus in ancient tragedies or the figure of Tiresias in Greek mythology. The function of the chorus in ancient tragedies was to comment on events, increase the awareness of the other characters, and "représente la collectivité engagée dans un drame"[16] (Mihut, 2019). The character of Lockmane has clear links to the history of the country, which he relates on his very first appearance: from Algeria prior to France's involvement until the civil war of the 1990s, by way of the colonial period, the rise of Algerian nationalism, the Algerian War and independence. Another of Lockmane's narratives is the conquest of Constantine, which recounts a particular episode from the early colonisation of Algeria, presented as a separate narrative. Lockman is not personally involved in the stories he relates; his discourse describes foregone histories that cannot be shown. His role is similar to the role of the chorus or messenger on stage in the theatre. Furthermore, he transmits a collective memory, on top of which lies the memorial project of the actorialized narrator.

In addition to being a tourist guide and historian, Lockmane also fulfils a more symbolic role. As narrator at the end of the novel, he recounts a legend whose connection with the rest of the diegesis seems unclear. Joël's stay appears to end with a sightseeing tour during which Lockmane tells him about the city's bridges (one of its tourist attractions). These places have given rise to "sombres histoires"[17] (Alessandra, 2015, p. 109), and Lockmane tells Joël one of these: a legend called *The Ogre of the Gorges*. The entrenchment of this macabre legend in the first narrative seems to affect our reading of the book. This legend is part of the cultural legacy transmitted by Lockmane or other characters, just like the music, poetry and cinema. However, this horrific story brings to mind traditional fairy tales from around the world: *Hop-o'-My-*

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[14] "A huge thank you goes to Lokmane Benchikh-Lehocine for kindly lending me his character and his beautiful poems. He is one of the pillars of this story".
[15] "transmitter of history". At the end of this graphic novel, the author-narrator concludes: "De génération en génération, nous sommes tous des passeurs de vie, d'histoire et d'identité" (Alessandra, 2015, p.118). "From generation to generation, we are all transmitters of life, history and identity."
[16] "represent the community engaged in a drama".
[17] "gloomy tales".

Thumb, *Bluebeard*, *Hansel and Gretel*, among others. Visually, the author has chosen to depict terrifying details: the deformed face of the ogre, the bodies of the children he has killed, and his ultimate suicide. Chromatically, these pages comprise a clearly defined narrative: the only tones are ochre and brown, the earth and mineral colours representing a world without culture. Finally, although Lockmane is unable to say if this "étrange histoire"[18] has a moral, he refers to a surah from the Qur'an which says: "Quiconque est dans le bon chemin ne l'est que pour lui-même, et quiconque s'égare, ne s'égare qu'à son propre detriment".[19] A detailed discussion of this moral exceeds the scope of the present study. However, we may ask ourselves what light this surprising legend sheds on the entire novel in retrospect, coming at the end of a story where the main character seems reconciled with his past and prepared to transmit this.

Lockmane always wears the same clothes and sunglasses; we seldom see his eyes. In some respects, he evokes Tiresias, the old blind prophet appearing in several Greek tragedies. In *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, he reveals the real evil threatening the city of Thebes in a roundabout way. Does this provide us with a clue to a possible interpretation of the legend of the ogre?

As for Nadia, she also becomes a secondary narrator yet fulfils a different function from Lockmane. She is, in fact, directly connected to Joël's personal story, and she has witnessed the events that she relates (the way Joël's grandfather saved her father). She is closer than Lockmane: in time, space, and her relationship with Joël. Whereas we may verify Lockmane's story in historical sources, hers is part of a family history shared by her relations and Joël's. Here, the spotlight is on individuals. For example, Nadia recounts how Joël's family saved her father's life in 1955,[20] thereby answering Joel's questions about his ancestors: "Est-ce qu'ils étaient racistes ? Et pendant la guerre, ils étaient violents ? Comment étaient-ils avec vous, les Arabes?"[21] (Alessandra, 2015, p. 88). Nadia relays a more intimate story, allowing Joël to construct a "postmemory" of the (hi)story of his ancestors.

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[18] "strange story".

[19] "He that follows guidance follows it for his own good, and he that goes astray does so at his own risk".
Qur'an. Surah 17, Verse 11.

[20] Similar episodes are recounted in Vétillard, R. (2017). *Français d'Algérie et Algériens avant 1962*. Hémisphères. (The French of Algeria and Algerians prior to 1962.)

[21] "Were they racist? And during the war, were they violent? How were they with you Arabs?"

Visualising the narrative processes

We have so far seen who the narrators are in this multi-layered novel. We have also shown how the work of the actorialized narrator is represented and which narratives the secondary narrators transmit. Let us now consider the staging of the narrative processes and how those are visualised in this graphic novel.

Petit-fils d'Algérie contains embedded narratives mediated by narrators who are all – at first glance, and this is something we will return to – characters in the diegesis. A representation of the pair narrator-narratee always frames these narratives. This staging of the promise of a narrative, on the one hand, the expectation of this narrative, on the other, is either manifested in the portraits of the narrator and narratee in different panels or a simultaneous representation of the two instances within the same panel. Let us take a closer look at this.

When Lockmane is about to narrate the history of Algeria, the page opens with two portraits: one of the narratee Joël, full of concentration, his eyes on Lockmane, who is only represented in this panel by his discourse, and one of Lockmane, the narrator (Alessandra, 2015, p. 35). Then, at the end of his narrative, two panels show close-ups of the narrator.

A similar process occurs when Nadia tells Joël how his family saved her father's life during the Franco-Algerian conflict. Two close-ups show Joël, the narratee and Nadia, the narrator. At the end of this narrative, the pair are superimposed, in colour, on a sepia panel portraying General de Gaulle shaking hands with some Algerians. Joël and Nadia also extend outside the panel's frame, and Nadia's narrative thus recedes into the background. At the same time, the position of Joël, seen from the waist up with his hands behind his back, seems to echo the posture of the two men in the last sepia panel on page 90.

Indeed, in this final panel of Nadia's narrative, Joël's grandfather and great-uncle are portrayed identically, with their hands behind their backs, negotiating the release of Nadia's father with a French soldier. By superposing a drawing of the narrator and narratee – who again become characters – on one drawing and by echoing the same posture from one panel to the next, the arrangement of the panels ensures a visual continuity that also marks a memorial continuity, linking the political history of the country to the destiny of individuals. A superposition of this nature is impossible in a purely textual narrative. Not only does the panel possess a narrative power, but this narrative power is accentuated by the, if not synchronous, then at least panoptic perception of two distinct temporal layers.

In contrast to close-up portraits that focus on facial expressions, we may also notice the use of silhouettes in the visualisation of narrative processes. In the narrative about Joël's childhood memories, he and his grandfather appear as two silhouettes. After a conversation with an Arab grocer, young Joël asks: "…Et pourquoi il t'a appelé Pied-noir, le monsieur, ça veut dire quoi ?" "Rien, ça ne veut plus rien dire"[22] (Alessandra, 2015, p. 12). At the novel's end, we see Joël with his son, their shadows perpetuating the two silhouettes of the grandfather and child. This echo confirms the continuity of the family history from generation to generation.

There are also silhouettes in the narrative about the author's stay in Algeria, such as when Joël meets an anonymous passer-by who tells him about the buildings constructed by his grandfather. Later, just before Nadia's narrative begins, she and Joël are also shown as silhouettes. These two scenes have points in common that clearly distinguish them from the other panels. First, the emphasis is on the characters, not their surroundings. However, they are dark silhouettes that we can only identify because we can recognise them. They seem to be placed on an ochre or brown surface resembling a puddle or cloud, and the panel frame has disappeared. Nor are their shadows clearly defined. In the case of Nadia and Joël, this image is duplicated. We see them talking together on page 88. They are standing opposite each other, their faces still visible. On page 89, when Nadia begins her narrative, they both turn their backs on the reader and face a horizon we do not yet see. This horizon is the ensuing narrative. In one of the speech bubbles accompanying the panel, we find the same signs of surprise and

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[22] "Why did that man call you *pied-noir*? What does it mean?" "Nothing, it doesn't mean anything anymore".

incomprehension as in the scene with the anonymous passer-by (p. 24), where the punctuation marks are placed in the panel preceding the one with the silhouettes.[23]
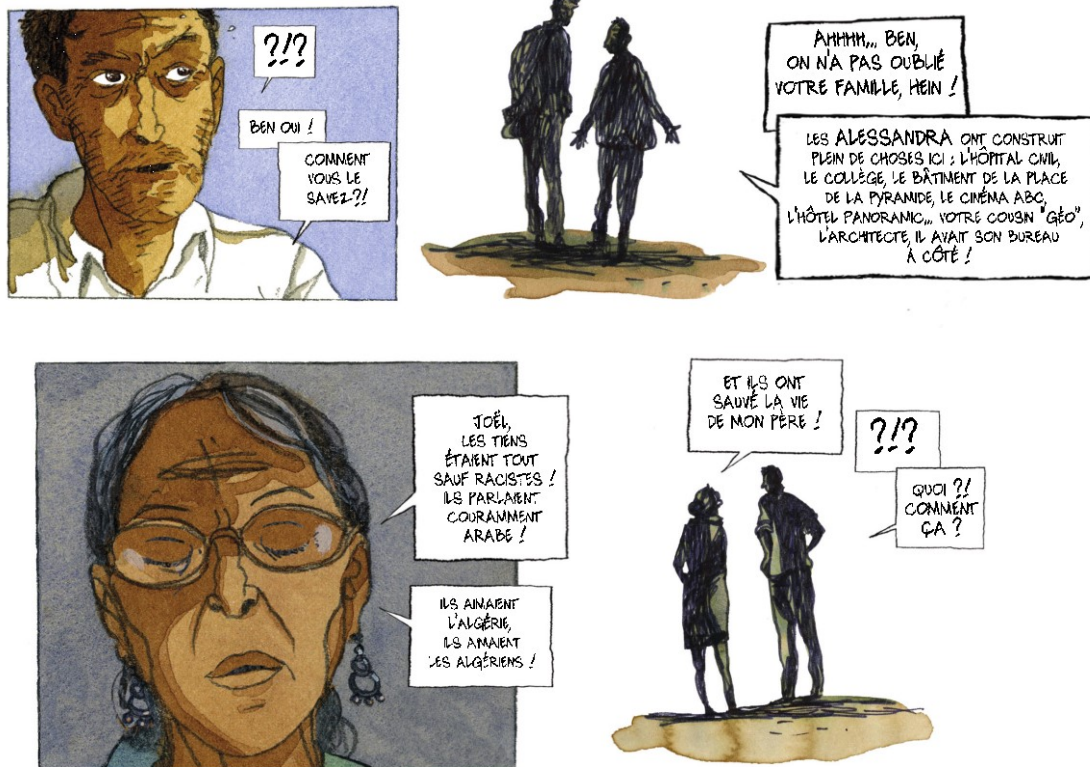
These silhouettes visualise a change in the level of narration. At the same time, this transition occurs by almost erasing the characters, who only retain their silhouettes and become a visible instance of the narration. This process, which is difficult to transpose to a purely textual medium, raises the question of the character's and narrator's identity: Am I still someone when I tell my story?

We have just seen how the transition from one narrator to the next is visualised in *Petit-fils d'Algérie*. The transition from one temporal layer to another, with or without a change of narrator, is also visualised. This transition occurs in a purely textual narrative using various time markers, either verb tenses or adverbial phrases. We also find these markers in the recitatives accompanying the comic book narrative: "Paris, 1976", "Des années plus tard", "Il

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[23] In this connection, it is possible to evoke the notion of braiding, but we cannot go into any detail in this article. See Groensteen, 2007, pp.122-132, and 2021, http://www.editionsdelan2.com/groensteen/spip.php?article1.

y a quelques jours"[24] (Alessandra, 2015, pp. 10, 16, 17). How are the differences between the temporal layers visualised?

The actorialized narrator transmits two migration narratives that do not involve him personally but recount the story of his ancestors (Celdran, 2022). Both are independent embedded narratives that relate experiences transcended by cultural references and the construction of sequences. Following the chronological order of the main narrative, this primarily concerns the arrival of *pieds-noirs* in Marseille in 1962 during the mass exodus that followed the Évian Accords (peace treaties signed on 18 March of that year). The second narrative concerns the arrival of Joël's Sicilian ancestors in Algeria at the turn of the twentieth century. All seven pages are in sepia tones, as is almost every page dealing with historical episodes in *Petit-fils d'Algérie*. Sepia and black and white are often associated with representations of the past. According to Isabelle Delorme, this is because the authors born before 1975 grew up with a black-and-white vision of the world, as black and white was predominant in photography and film back then. (Delorme, 2019, p. 155). As far as the narration is concerned, however, this chromatic choice also seems to address the desire to mark the analepses.[25]

Sepia or black and white are not reserved exclusively to depict the distant past. Hence, while the narrative about visiting the former ABC cinema starts in colour, it gradually turns black and white, introducing two period photographs superimposed on a full-colour page (p. 54). We then witness a staging of the narrative in which the narrator becomes a character in the story that he is telling. Via a black and white panel portraying the cinema, we find him on the following page sitting inside it, ready to watch the films that were shown back then. This resembles the process of metalepsis, such as it is described by Françoise Lavocat:

> On passe en effet naturellement et de façon vraisemblable d'un monde à l'autre quand un personnage raconte ou écoute, lit ou écrit, rêve ou se souvient, regarde un tableau, etc.[26] (Lavocat, 2020).

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[24] "Some years later," "A few days ago".

[25] Comparing how different authors use black and white or sepia would be interesting. In the case of Manu Larcenet, for example, sepia (or a certain "bichromatism" resembling it) is not linked to different temporal levels but always coincides with pauses in the narrative dealing with philosophical and existential issues (to put it simply), such as panic attacks, mourning, relationships with other people. Larcenet, M. (2010). *Le combat ordinaire : intégrale*. Dargaud. (The English translation is called *Ordinary Victories.*)

[26] "We move naturally and plausibly from one world to the next when a character talks or listens, reads or writes, dreams or remembers, looks at a picture, etc."

We have seen the narrator with his eyes closed, imagining he travels back in time. Then, moving from the other side of the narration, he becomes a member of the audience. Thus, we experience a *mise en abyme* of the narrator/narratee, actor/viewer relationship.

We see that the diegetic content of the analepses, whether a second narrator narrates these or not, is always distinguished from the main diegesis by its chromatic choices.[27] In the novel, the combination of tones is dominated by blue and ochre. Those colours correspond to the contemporary setting of the narrative, which begins and ends with these colours. Blue is also the dominant colour of the pages where the autodiegetic narrator reminisces about 1976. These pages, which focus on Joël's grandparents and his grandfather's bitterness towards General de Gaulle, tell a story that precedes the main period related in the novel; it is also personal. Without embarking on a detailed study of the values associated with this colour, it may be interesting to remember that blue generally has positive connotations. In an interview, Enki Bilal said that blue denotes a kind of "respiration" in his work, compensating for the anguish created by his universe (France Culture, 2017).

Transitions from one narrator to the next, from one temporal layer to the following, various narrative processes are visualised.[28] Let us now consider how *Petit-fils d'Algérie* visualises another narrative process: the narrative speed. In narratology, one measures narrative speed by the relation between the story's duration and the narrative's duration. It is usual to differentiate between the scene, summary, pause and ellipsis. In the scene, narrative time is equal to story time; it is what characterizes the dialogue between characters, for example:

> Dans les scènes de dialogues, on peut généralement émettre l'hypothèse que le temps de l'action et le temps de la lecture sont à peu près isochrones.[29] (Groensteen, 2022, p. 28).

In summary, on the other hand, story time is longer than narrative time because it is summarised by the latter, which may also disregard several sections of the story (Jouve, 1997). Let us have

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[27] For more about the use of colour in comics Groensteen, 2013.

[28] Here it is worth mentioning another visualisation of the levels of narration and changes in temporal layers: the recitatives are in capital letters in all the historical narratives and the legend of *The Ogre of the Gorges*.

[29] "In dialogue scenes, we may generally venture the hypothesis that the action time and reading time are more or less isochronic".

a closer look at the pause and the summary,[30] which appear to constitute the conditions of "l'élasticité du récit" (Groensteen, 2022, pp. 13–66). [31]

An absence of a story characterises pauses. In a textual narrative, they correspond to the descriptions or make room for the narrator's comments. If the pause exists in the graphic narrative, it occurs in *Petit-fils d'Algérie* at the expense of the text. The pages in question depict street scenes and landscapes. These pauses in the narrative imitate pauses in the diegesis: Joël walks the streets alone; he admires the view of ancient ruins. More than a static pause, it resembles an intake of breath, allowing the narrative to respire. We observe that these pauses disrupt the page's traditional framework. In *Petit-fils d'Algérie*, these pauses often cover a double page. Some of them, such as the double page depicting Hotel Cirta, show a building partially overlaid with incrustations or insets, smaller panels printed over the main drawing. The first insert contains a sketch of the hotel, and the last portrays Joël concentrating on his camera; thus, once again, we are witnessing a work in progress. Two other insets depict architectural details that prompt the reader to examine the view of the entire façade more closely. Do we find these details here or not? With these two insets, this double page becomes a descriptive pause in which the minutiae of the drawing, performing the function of description, prompt the reader to examine the whole page: "Une vignette incrustée peut relever d'une simple superposition ou d'une interaction dialogique. Phénomène local, l'incrustation ne peut être interprétée qu'au regard de la planche entière"[32] (Groensteen, 2021).

The historical narratives in *Petit-fils d'Algérie* commented on above relate past events of varying duration over a few pages. For example, the narrative about the Alessandra family's arrival in Algeria occupies five pages, covering a period that presumably lasted several weeks or months. The most striking example, however, remains the narrative in which Lockmane covers a period lasting almost a century, which the graphic novel renders in about five pages. It is a rapid narrative, in other words, one that covers almost a hundred years in just a few pages.

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[30] I will mention the discussion among comics theorists concerning ellipsis, particularly the equivalence of the gutter and the non-said. However, any detailed discussion of this discussion exceeds the scope of this article. Groensteen presents its main arguments in *La bande dessinée et le temps* (2002) – *Comics and Time*.
[31]"the elasticity of the narrative".
[32] "An inset panel may involve a simple superposition or a dialogic interaction. Being a local phenomenon, the inset can only be interpreted in light of the entire page".

Thus, we are dealing with a summary, as in all the historical narratives in sepia or black and white in *Petit-fils d'Algérie*.

We might assume that the speed of the graphic narrative imitates the speed of Lockmane's oral narrative since it is unlikely that he would go into detail in the time he is allowed (the meal with Joël and the director of the *Institut français* in Constantine). Thus, we may suppose that the narrative transmitted to the reader results from the author's choices and eliminations. The account of the conquest of Constantine is also an example of narrative speed, as the representation of this year-long historical episode occupies only half a page in the graphic rendition of Lockmane's oral narrative. However, the reader is left to speculate since the only available point of reference is the time of day when Lockmane narrates these events; their duration is unknown.

At the risk of digression, it seems necessary to make the following points. In both of Lockmane's narratives (Algeria from the 1920s to 2014 and the fall of Constantine), as in all the historical narratives of the novel, the graphic narrative is, in fact, the transposition of an oral narrative whose actual duration is unknown to us. If the organisation of the textual narrative remains the responsibility of an actorialized narrator inspired by a secondary narrator (Lockmane), and if we also accept the idea of a monstrator responsible for organising the page, the visual rendition of Lockmane's narrative is entirely the result of the author's research and his final choices. In the pages concerning Algerian history from the 1920s onwards, the panels are visibly inspired by different photo reportages that appeared in the press at the time, as is the narrative of the exodus of *pieds-noirs* in 1962. The narrative illustrates the conquest of Constantine by reproductions of etchings from the period, which already consist of an interpretation of the French victory by a French artist. Without edges, all the panels reproduce period prints that illustrate the story contained in the recitatives. It is thus possible to identify in order the following prints, all originally in black and white: a portrait of the Bey of Constantine (unknown artist) and two lithographs by Raffet, a French artist.[33] The penultimate

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[33] "Épisode de la retraite de Constantine en novembre 1836, le carré du Maréchal Changarnier attaqué par les Arabes", "Combat dans la grande rue de Constantine le 13 octobre 1837". For an analysis of these lithographs, see (Doumerc, 2008).

panel seems to be a free reproduction from a picture by Théodore Jung.[34] The first panel of the strip shows a detail from another picture depicting a war scene.

Thus, it may be necessary to modify the previous claim concluding that all narrators in *Petit-fils d'Algérie* are characters in the diegesis. Suppose we accept that a photograph has narrative power (especially the iconic photos used by Joël Alessandra, but also by other authors of graphic novels), that a picture does too, and that a kind of narrator, therefore, hides behind them both. In that case, neither the photographers nor the artists who created these reused documents can be considered intradiegetic narrators. Not only is the presence of reproductions of their works the result of research and the manifestation of a choice (thus also an elimination), but the graphic enunciation in these embedded narratives transmits a narration and memory that already exist.

Conclusion

As this study reaches an end, we note the existence of conclusive links between the processes used in *Petit-fils d'Algérie* and the memorial approach of its author. All the narrators take part in this approach, and we have seen that the secondary narrators are secondary in name only. One of them, Lockmane, acknowledged as a pillar of the narrative by the author, transmits his country's (hi)story. Beyond this informative function, however, he enjoys a symbolic role that deserves investigation. Nadia is the character that best serves the postmemorial project of *Petit-fils d'Algérie* because she gives Joël, who is not a direct witness, the opportunity to not only access the truth about his ancestors but also to disseminate this family history. Like Lockmane and Nadia, he becomes a "passeur d'histoire" [35]. Moreover, by emphasising the transmission processes of narratives about personal destinies through their visualisation, *Petit-fils d'Algérie* underlines the importance of the oral transmission of these legacies that are not present in the history books.

The actorialized narrator is represented as a character, narrator, narratee and author at work. The multiplicity of these instances is manifested visually through various techniques (close-up portraits, full-length portraits, silhouettes), some of which illustrate the transition from one

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[34] "Attaque de Constantine, 23 novembre 1836."
[35] "transmitter of history"

position to the next. When a character becomes a narrator, some of the techniques used lead us to question their identity on the same page. The chromatic choices signal the anachronies of the narrative (the analepses), the different levels of narration, and the use of original documents (photographs, newspaper clippings, pictures). These elements testify to the memorial endeavour by visualising the temporal layers or including research in the finished work.

Our study of narrative speed confirms the notion of the elasticity of the narrative (Groensteen, 2022) due to the presence of summaries and pauses in *Petit-fils d'Algérie*. Furthermore, it shows that some of those summaries have a prominent link to the author's memorial quest; these are narratives directly mediated by the actorialized narrator. In the summaries narrated by Lockmane, only the oral narrative is the subject of reliable retransmission. The visual rendition results from a choice made in selecting iconographic materials (photographs, pictures) that already possess narrative power, transmit other people's memories and thus do not depend on text to make sense. Nevertheless, these references demonstrate that the graphic novel is also an intertextual or intericonic enterprise. This intericonicity pertains to the culture and preferences of the author.

In 2018, Sébastien Fevry presented the "contours d'un sujet post-mémoriel"[36] (Fevry, 2018), based on the works of Marianne Hirsch, inter alia. Noting the disappearance of direct witnesses, as well as an abundance of documents due to digital technology, Fevry identifies the existence of a "sujet d'énonciation" that is neither a "témoin" nor an "archiviste".[37] This postmemorial subject leads an investigation far away from "mémoires officielles", collects documents and information in a compelling quest for identity where images play an essential role, contributing to the "reconnaissance" that allows the subject to be part of a continuity.[38] It would therefore seem pertinent to associate the actorialized narrator of *Petit-fils d'Algérie* with the figure of the postmemorial subject. This should open up some fruitful perspectives insofar as the postmemorial subject is not only confined to comics and concerns other forms of expression, such as novels or films.

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[36] "outline of a postmemorial subject".
[37] "subject of enunciation", "witness", "archivist", "official memories", "recognition".
[38] There is a clear overlap here with the research conducted by Isabelle Delorme (Delorme, 2019).

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