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Call for Papers

Graphic Journalism: Hybridizations, Margins, Strategies

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Since the 2000s, graphic journalism has enjoyed growing editorial success, internationally. Authors have worked to renew a unique type of graphic narrative rooted in reality, which offers an alternative to the mass media by dealing with the problems of dominated actors (migrants, LGBTQ+ communities, dispossessed farming communities, etc.). Graphic reportage developed significantly in the United States in the 1960s-1970s, and in France between 1969 and the 1980s, in publications affiliated with the counterculture. This development has taken on a variety of formats in extremely different publishing landscapes, from alternative production to that of major publishers or media outlets. In France alone, through the well-known phenomenon of editorial concentration of Média-Participations in particular, *L'Association*, *La Revue Dessinée* or *XXI*, to name a few, or the Gallimard and Dupuis publishing groups, all contributed to the dissemination of the genre. They have published reports on "serious" subjects (wars, genocides, corruption of the elites, trade union struggles, etc.), against the reputation of comics, which had long been associated with fiction and teenage audiences.

The development of graphic reportage is the result of the convergence between the industrial strategies of publishers and the commitment of authors to practicing journalism "differently". In recent history, graphic journalism has continuously contributed to increasing the popularity of comics, characterised by the acquisition of a 'new cultural legitimacy' and to renewing the readership in so-called 'non-fiction' editorial niches (BERTHOU, 2016). Due to the difficult economic context of the written press, and in view of the growing popularity of comics, several media outlets have resorted to graphic reporting as a means for editorial revaluation and have used its appeal to attract new audiences. At the same time, the field of comics has benefited from a process of legitimisation thanks to the repositioning of 'this medium, often discredited in terms of factuality, credibility and verifiability' (BOURDIEU, 2012, our translation).

This editorial offer depends on authors who practice 'alternative' journalism, at the margins of dominant media industries (DABITCH, 2009), through the subjects covered and the type of production - reporting and investigation - what is akin to a certain nobility of the profession

(RUELLAN, 2007). First, graphic reportage lies on the margins of a large-scale production of news, generally published just-in-time in short formats, materialized in single-use consumables (such as free newspapers) and written by “desk professionals”. On the contrary, graphic reportage is generally long format and published on mediums intended to be kept (*mooks* or albums). It is based on in-depth research and immersive investigation (DOZO, 2010), which can last a few weeks up to several years. Second, graphic reportage breaks away from some of the usual conventions of objectivity. It actively participates in deconstructing the myth of the ‘neutral’ journalist, which remain predominant in the profession (LEVEQUE, 2010). Indeed, many reporter-authors (“report-authors”) are featured as characters in the narratives: self-representation is used as a device to represent individual perceptions of the world, inform on the context(s) in which information is gathered, and share personal interpretations and hesitations. Such staging of the narration contributes to practising forms which can be related to “journalism of doubt” (MARION, 2021) and activist journalism (LESAGE, 2017). Finally, many reporters sit on the outskirts of the profession and can sometimes be considered (or consider themselves as) “outsiders” (DABITCH, 2009): many authors (at least when starting out) do not have academic training in journalism nor hold a press card, or seem to worry much about joining the professional community of ‘we, the journalists’.

Embracing the ambitions of narrative journalism, and combined with a subjectivity openly asserted, graphic reportage inscribes itself in the legacy - at times directly claimed by authors – of models such as *new [new] journalism*, gonzo journalism, literary journalism or *slow journalism*, and call upon renown authors as diverse as Hunter S. Thompson, Mark Krame or Albert Londres. In recent years, graphic journalism has developed through processes of importation and transformation of narrative and critical formats, hence creating dynamics of transnationalization of models.

This issue of *Sur le journalisme, About journalism, Sobre jornalismo* aims to examine the alternatives offered by graphic journalism by considering its narrative and editorial singularities, its relationship to the profession, and the industrial strategies on which it depends. To this end, we intend to explore the genre through an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on three distinct axes, which build on approaches ranging from post-classical narratology and discourse analysis to sociology, cultural industry studies and history of media and journalism.

1. Hybridizations, narration and aesthetic creation

This area of focus is an invitation to question the modalities and specificities of narrative processes in graphic reportage, and situate it in the historical landscape of media narratives.

Graphic reportage finds its contemporary roots in American graphic journalism from the 1960's and 1970's (S. Silverstein, W. Eisner) and the French alternative press that developed during the same period and until the 1980's (with authors such as G  b  , Cabu, Teul  , etc.). However, the genealogy of the genre, which suggests first appearances in French, English or American illustrated periodicals in the 19th century, remains widely unknown (SMOLDEREN, 2012; LEVRIER & PINSON, 2021) and requires further study. What narrative models do graphic reportages resort to, in particular the first epigones of the genre from the 19th-20th centuries? What are the current mechanisms of differentiation, and graphic and discursive strategies used by graphic reportage to stage the witnessing and the investigating conducted to capture “reality” (cf. P.-A. DELANNOY, 2007)? How is “competition” established between fictional (or self-fictional) regimes, media regimes (intermedia dialogues or transmedia narration¹) and factual writing in narratives where information is often perceived as antagonistic to storytelling? When reporting on physical and psychological violence, what resources do they use to produce testimonial evidence, in order to

¹ With borrowings from photography, graphic arts, animated reporting, webdocumentary, television...

write the unspeakable, to depict the ‘un-showable’, and to respect the victims when depicting the tragic events? How is graphic journalism perceived in terms of the informative discourse it produces and the aesthetic judgment of the procedures it uses?

2. Margins, identities, domination

This area of focus is an invitation to examine the professional challenges and definitions inherent to the authors’ approaches to graphic journalism, as well as the choices of themes and the representations of marginal (or dominated) actors and discourses (also in terms of gender, diversity, etc.).

Graphic reportage lies on the margins of a dominant production of information, offering alternatives that need further studying (such as what the role of the “outsider” in the journalistic field is, for instance). What alternatives does it actually offer from predominant and hegemonic discourses? Does graphic journalism allow marginalized topics and voices to emerge, does it showcase individuals or groups usually un(der)-represented, or does it recycle topics already investigated by other long-form productions (online, on television, or in books written by journalists)? Do the authors participate in the hierarchization of the different forms of journalism, claiming on one hand to hold the ‘outsider’ position and, on an other hand, to embody some of the noblest traits of the profession?

As it stands, the sociology of author-reporters, their positioning in or *vis-à-vis* the rest of the profession (status, identity, income), and their working conditions, is still very incomplete. Knowledge would be gained through the elaboration of social biographies of authors, an examination of their curricula and trajectories, a study of specific professionalization dynamics, as well as the characteristics of the division of labor between the different stakeholders of graphic reportage, such as publishers, scriptwriters, reporters, graphic artists, and “complete authors” (B. PEETERS, 2017).

3. Industrial and editorial strategies

This area of focus is an invitation to analyse the development of graphic journalism through the prism of the strategies implemented by newspapers and comic books publishers in graphic journalism. How do editorial strategies and investments made by press editors and graphic narrative publishers – which have grown massively in recent years - impact the marginality of the genre? What are the economic models (alternative publishing vs. mass publishing) of graphic reportage production, which has experienced, since the 1990s-2000s, an increasing editorial concentration and consolidation of niche products, illustrated by the case of graphic novels? What are the strategies of differentiation, valorisation and legitimisation in the field of graphic reportage publishing which can be observed amongst alternative publishers and major publishing companies? What role does the *aestheticization*, or even the *artialisation*, of information play in these strategies? How is commercial competition between publishers impacted? What is the share of self-published narratives within the overall production of graphic reportages? Which audiences are now targeted, given the inclusion of non-fiction to the genre?

Faced with narratives written “on a human scale” (BOURDIEU, 2012), this issue will aim at identifying how graphic reportage, considered as a field of hybridization and mediation of the real, impacts graphic narration and how graphic narration impacts journalism.

The deadline for submitting the full manuscripts (30 to 50,000 characters, including notes and bibliography) is May 15, 2022, at : editors.surlejournalisme@gmail.com

Manuscripts may be written in English, French, Portuguese or Spanish. Double blind review.

You can contact the editors in charge for any information request:

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