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ALWAYS AT HOME IN THE PAST.

EXPLORING NOSTALGIA IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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Ricordo solo che avevo la stessa
faccia […] dei pischelli che ora vedo in giro
da vero duro con problemi seri
ti giuro è l'unica, davvero l'unica
l'unica vera nostalgia che ho.
(I Cani, *Corso Trieste*)

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Introduction

Despite its apparent Greek origin, the word *nostalgia* does not have a very long history. It was instead coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688. Hofer's medical dissertation focused on a disease that was typical of young people forced to expatriate. From the 17th to the 18th century, it notably plagued the Swiss army, whose soldiers frequently fell ill by the sole listening of the melody of a popular song called *ranz-des-vaches*, or *Kühe-Reyhen*.

In the course of the following three centuries, nostalgia evolved together with modernity and the development of medical knowledge, moving from the status of clinical condition to that of psychological inclination. Deprived of its morbid connotation, the concept entered the realm of poets and philosophers, widening its boundaries and acquiring new connotations. Postmodernity signed a new phase of nostalgia's complex history, consolidating its status of disease caused by - and cure for - the accelerated condition of contemporaneity.

A nostalgic discourse seems to be consubstantial to comic culture, where nostalgia lingers both as a motif and as a mode of consumption through which a consistent part of the audience seems to unfold its relation to comics. The action of memory and nostalgia in relation to media products is twofold; on the one hand, the textual content of one specific product may present features that try to trigger a nostalgic response; on the other hand, media products (and their physical supports) themselves may become over time, regardless of their content, the objects of a memorial (nostalgic) action of recollection and identification by their readers.

Comics are the object of both processes. On one side, as Mel Gibson notices, they act as "reminders of past selves, and [are] tied in with a much wider network of personal associations" (2015: 192), recalling key moments in one's youth and helping to place them in their socio-historical context. On the other, comics are memorial objects very effective in capturing, representing and chronicling both individual and collective history. This is also due to the formal properties of the page layout/grid system, which make it an ideal structure to represent the passing of time.

Several contemporary graphic novelists could, to some extent, be labelled as nostalgic. Their stories typically play with (pseudo)autobiography, reconstructing the adolescence of their alter egos (Meags Fitzgerald's *Long Red Hair*) or experiencing the sense of longing and loss linked to a mournful event (Matthieu Berthod's *Cette beauté qui s'en va*, Pietro Scarnera's *Diario di un addio* or Julie Maroh's *Le bleu est une couleur chaude*). Most try to recreate a sense of pastness through pop culture references (Zerocalcare's *La profezia dell'armadillo*, or the very different *Ethel and Ernest* by Raymond Briggs) or creating pastiches of classic comics' characters (Kim Deitch's *Alias the Cat!*) and narratives (Dylan Horrocks' *Sam Zabel and the Magic Pen*). On one level, much of the gaze towards the past that characterizes contemporary comics is due to a generation of authors deeply aware of the history and the implications of the medium (Baetens and Frey 2015: 132).

An extensive analysis of nostalgia in comics, though, is still missing. It is then necessary to build up a critical framework that allows not only to define the methodological tools with which to analyze nostalgia in relation to comics, but also to try to determine which aspects of nostalgia seem to belong specifically to comics and comic culture.

My choice is then to consider the wider possible corpus, in a transnational, comparative perspective; the principal limitation is that of the format (or the medium, according to Baetens and Frey), focusing solely on graphic novels. This is due both to the intention of avoiding broadening the corpus too much, and to the will to test nostalgia where it should in principle be more intensely and originally productive. I am thus examining graphic novels from virtually everywhere, with the sole limitations of the languages I know, that is Italian, English, French, Spanish and a little Portuguese and Dutch; quite luckily, those are the most significant markets for comic publishing, with the significant exception of Japanese works, unfortunately often still not translated in any of those countries.

The first section of this work is a multidisciplinary theoretical survey about the specifics and most prominent features of nostalgia. The concept is defined, confronted with close ideas, and investigated by following some internal dynamics, like that of space vs time, personal vs collective, experienced vs vicarious, object-driven vs free-floating, *nóstos* vs *álgos*, escapist vs engaging. I track an historical evolution of the term (Deciu Ritivoi

2002; Illbruck 2012), then focus on the relation between nostalgia and memory and see nostalgia through the lens of affect theory. I then proceed to analyze nostalgic characteristics from a psychological perspective (Sedikides et al. 2014), isolating phases, reasons and functions of the nostalgic experience. I thus move to a sociological and critical perspective (Davis 1977; Boym 2001; Keightley e Pickering, 2006), following reflections on the ideas of heritage or pastiche (Lowenthal 1985; Jameson 1991; Berliner, 2012) and investigating contemporary media (Tannock 1995; Keightley and Pickering 2006; Niemeyer 2014), trying to explain the recent nostalgic boom in the light of theories of social acceleration (Koselleck 1979; Rosa 2013).

The central section delves into the specifics of the relation between nostalgia and comics in two chapters, the first one focused on nostalgic production and the second on nostalgic reception. I see those two poles not as isolated, but as two phases of a commune process, an idea I draw from Iser's view of the act of reading.

The production chapter is divided into three subchapters; the first one deals with thematic elements, trying to account for the recurring motifs, linked to the themes of space-time, object and senses, that may elicit a nostalgic reaction in the reader. The second subchapter confronts stylistic features, asking whether some elements of style are more likely than others to elicit a nostalgic response. I investigate stylistic specifics, concerning trait, iconicity, colors and page layout. The third and final subchapter deals with structural issues, posing the question of the existence of a structure that, more than others, works towards a nostalgic reception. Here I highlight some constants: the preference for a binary structure (here/there, now/then; and so on) and the fundamental appeal to transtextual mechanisms, both intra- and intermedial.

The reception chapter is symmetrically composed by three sub-chapters: readers, fans and collectors. The first one, which is based on postclassical narratology and affect theory, focuses on the processes of interaction, identification and affective contagion that happens while consuming a graphic novel; this in turn would suggest that those very same characteristics could be one of the reason for the proliferation of the nostalgic discourse in comic culture. The second sketches some of the history and implications of comic fandom, which has been since the early stages of the medium a very important component of comic culture, strongly linked to the nostalgic experience. Finally, the third addresses

the act of collecting, which I try to differentiate from pure fandom. In those two subchapters, I question issues of canon selection and comics consumption, considering matters related to gender differences, then investigate the bond between reconstitution of one's identity, filling the gaps, objects, consumer culture and collectors. Analyses of several primary texts (including Ware, Katchor, Fitzgerald, McGuire, Horrock, Roca, Pedrosa, Sagramola, Scarnera, and so on) are used to prove (or disprove) my critical hypotheses.

Finally, the third section investigates, on the basis of the typology built, a sample of graphic novel along a continuum (following fuzzy theory or Wittgenstein's family resemblance), from the most prototypically nostalgic (that is, *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* by Seth) through Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* to the one with the strongest antinostalgic tensions, namely *Here* by Richard McGuire.

Section one: nostalgia

General overview and outline of this section

This section will be composed by a single chapter, devoted to nostalgia at large. In it, I will explore the specifics and highlight the most significant features of nostalgia from both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective, trying to conjugate its personal and collective dimensions.

I will start my enquiry by reflecting on key definitions of the term, which I will then differentiate from close concepts that partially overlap with it, but that will not be discussed at length in this work. I will move to performing an historical survey, describing the peculiar evolution of the concept from the status of physical, debilitating disease to that of mental pathology, to the modern concept of a bittersweet feeling.

Going deeper through its nature, I will try to unpack the concept following five axes and highlight its links and bonds with memory work; I will further clarify which kind of affect is nostalgia. I will thus proceed by identifying three phases that unfolds progressively during the nostalgic emotional experience.

I will then consider nostalgia from an individual perspective, going through its workings and functions on the psychological level. Finally, I will try to answer to what is nostalgia's dimension in contemporary society, investigating its role in relation to modernity and postmodernity.

1. Nostalgia

Nostalgia is currently a buzzword in academia – and not only: as Baetens and Frey affirm, "it seems that wherever one looks in our contemporary culture, including to the world of graphic narratives, history and nostalgia are a common theme" (2015: 217).

Nostalgia studies are booming, especially in the fields of media studies and psychology, history and memory studies. Particularly significant to this respect is the debut of the IMNN (International Media and Nostalgia Network)[1] that took place during the 2015 IAMHIST (International Association for Media and History) conference held at Indiana University.

Yet, it seems that the concept is following two antithetical paths (and, one could say, facing the danger of two potential misconceptions): in its scholarly use, it is most often reduced to one specific meaning, the one more cogent for the studies in question; and it goes without saying that the notion one is referring to when dealing with heritage films is not necessarily the same of those studying post-colonial diasporas, nor the one of those confronting with trauma studies or the one employed in vintage marketing.

The literature on nostalgia is indeed very rich and heterogeneous, ranging – just to mention a sample of representative names - from historical reconstructions (Bolzinger 2007; Illbruck 2012) to sociological analyses (Davis 1977, 1979; Stauth and Turner 1988; Keightley and Pickering 2006), from psychological readings (Peters 1985; Crowell 1999; Radstone 2007, 2010) to the study of historical representation (Lowenthal 1985, 1989; Chase and Shaw 1989; Boym 2001), also in relation to late modernity or postmodernity (Jameson 1991; Hutcheon 2000). There are semiotic investigations (Greimas 2002), poststructuralist takes (Baudrillard 1981), research regarding several media (Higson 1996, 2003; Grainge 2000 a and b, 2002; Cook 2005; Niemeyer 2014; Lizardi 2014) and countless psychological studies (that will be indexed in a dedicated section).

At the same time, the notion as it is commonly employed by the average person in her daily life has become a blurry concept, often used as an umbrella term for a whole series of experiences and feelings that have to do with thinking about the past and longing for it (as Lowenthal affirms, nostalgia is in this sense a "universal catchword for looking

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[1] Their website is http://medianostalgia.org/.

back": 1985: 4), usually with a painful, melancholic connotation that somehow seems to refuse the present (or at least some aspects of it).

For example, in their recognition on a sample of dictionaries, Sedikides et al. detect that nostalgia is described as

> "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past" (Pearsal, 1998, p. 1266), "a bittersweet longing for the past" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1994), "a yearning for the return of past circumstances, events, etc." (Collins English Dictionary— Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition, 2009), "pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014), and "a wistful desire to return in thought or in fact to a former time in one's life…; a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time" (Random House Dictionary, 2014). (2014: 7)

To clear the situation up, I will therefore start by performing a survey of definitions of nostalgia, that I will then differentiate from some close concepts with which the idea of nostalgia partially overlaps and interferes.

1.1. What is nostalgia? Definitions and differences

1.1.1. Definitions

"Nostalgia", Niemeyer affirms, "is the name we commonly give to a bittersweet longing for former times and spaces" (2014: 1) – a "composite feeling of loss, lack and longing" that can be at the same time "melancholic and utopian" (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 921). Holbrook and Schindler extensively call it "a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable, or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth" (1991: 330). Frank Ankersmit defines it "the strongest form of memory", "always accompanied by an intense and painful awareness of an unbridgeable distance to the object of nostalgic yearning" (2001: 178).

These definitions would be already enough to work on, but the field is vast and it is interesting to get a glimpse of the horizon.

Raymond Williams comments that nostalgia is "universal and persistent" (1973: 12). David Lowenthal agrees on the persistency, but sees nostalgia in a far better light, arguing that "each epoch exhibits and bemoans nostalgia. Nor does nostalgia necessarily connote a despairing rejection of the present" (1989: 30[2]). On the optimist side, Davis defines nostalgia as "a positively toned evocation of a lived past" (1979: 18). Nostalgia is also "a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual 'golden age'" (Grainge 2000b: 27).

According to Grainge, it "need not be seen as a troubled emotion but can, instead, respond strategically to the ambivalence surrounding sociocultural transformation and/or ideologies of progress" (2002: 26).

From the pessimist side, instead, Peters affirm it is a "fleeting sadness and a yearning to an overwhelming craving that persists and profoundly interferes with the individuals attempt to cope with his present circumstances" 1985: 135). Susan Stewart writes of nostalgia as "a sadness without an object", a "desire for desire" (1984: 23). Rosen already described nostalgia as a "psychopathological condition affecting individuals who are uprooted, whose social contacts are fragmented, who are isolated and who feel totally frustrated and alienated" (1975: 340). Belk less dramatically defines it "a wistful mood that may be prompted by an object, a scene, a smell, or a strain of music" (1990: 670).

Those who focus on the act of longing define it "an emotional state in which an individual yearns for an idealized or sanitized version of an earlier time period" (Stern 1992: 11), "a sentimental or bittersweet yearning for an experience, product, or service from the past" (Baker and Kennedy 1994: 169).

In conclusion, nostalgia has come to describe a sense of loss and regret for the impossibility to return to a longed-for object, which stands unattainable "somewhere in the twilight of the past" (Boym 2001: 13; see also: Pickering and Keightley 2006; Duyvendak 2011). It concerns a sense of dissatisfaction towards the present, unfavourably compared with a past perceived as being better (Lowenthal 1989; Boym 2001; Ritivoi 2002) yet irretrievable, thus resulting in a bittersweet feeling (Kaplan 1987; Hertz 1990; Holak and Havlena 1991a; Bassin 1993).

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[2] Svetlana Boym has a less universalistic perspective, defining instead nostalgia as "a symptom of our age, a historical emotion [...] coeval with modernity" (Boym, 2001: xvi).

Nostalgia is thus, as Sedikides et al. define it,

> a self-conscious, bittersweet but predominantly positive and fundamentally social
> emotion. It arises from fond memories mixed with yearning about one's childhood,
> close relationships, or atypically positive events […]. It is triggered by a variety of
> external stimuli or internal states, is prevalent, is universal, and is experienced across
> ages (2014: 2)

1.1.2. Close but different: what nostalgia is not (only)

When discussing nostalgia, similar concept may be summoned.

Most often, this is due to the chronological stratification that this recognition will entail, and to the unclear status the concept of nostalgia long held in the scholarly debate. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary used to define nostalgia as a 'form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one's home or country: a severe homesickness' (in Peters 1985: 135). Today's definition (from the Living, online version) is instead that of "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past".

I will come back to this movement from space to time; for the moment, I want to quickly hint at those similar concepts, trying to explain the main differences they present with nostalgia, which I prefer because of its wideness and general applicability. Most of the terms I will mention here (from saudade to Americana) are instead either geographically or conceptually circumscribed, thus limiting their action to specific fields and domains; some (homesickness and melancholy) share qualities with nostalgia, but do not overlap in such a significant way as the layperson perception suggests; some (heritage, retro or vintage) are a significant part of the critical discourse about nostalgia, but are not the specific focus of this work and will therefore be kept in the background.

One must, finally, be able to distinguish nostalgia from the simple recalling of the past (a modality Frey and Baetens address as "near-nostalgia": 2015: 233); but this difference should somehow come to light when I will discuss the complex relation between nostalgia and memory.

Local nostalgias: from saudade to Americana

The most famous and possibly closest concept to that of nostalgia is the Portuguese *saudade*, a melancholic feeling of incompleteness, caused by reminiscing on something, somewhere or someone whose presence was once deeply pleasurable and which is now

absent. Of all the particular forms of nostalgia that are not translatable to other languages, it is probably the most known; yet it carries strong similarities to the Romanian *dor*, the Ethiopian *tizita*, the Tuareg *assouf* or the Neapolitan *appocundria*.

Similar is also the German idea of *Sehnsucht*, which, according to Scheibe, Freund and Baltes, has six core characteristics: a utopian conception of ideal development; a sense of incompleteness and imperfection of life; a conjoint time focus on past, present, and future; ambivalent (bittersweet) emotions; a reflection and evaluation of one's life; and a sense of symbolic richness (2007: 1). Another concept that clearly shares some characteristics with that of nostalgia is the Japanese *mono no aware* (literally "an empathy toward things", or "a sensitivity to ephemera"), referring to the awareness of impermanence and transience of things, and to the sadness that result from this knowledge.

The most known particular forms of nostalgia are instead *Ostalgie*, longing for the life in the pre-fall of the Berlin Wall East Germany; *Yugo-nostalgia*, which refers to yearning for united communist Yugoslavia; and *Americana*, the nostalgia for small towns in rural America around the turn of the century.

All of these concepts are extensively researched in their pertaining fields, and there is no further reason to discuss them here.

Homesickness

Homesickness is an ancient phenomenon, which can be tracked down both in the Old Testament (significantly, in the *Book of Exodus*) and in Homer's *Odyssey*.

Despite it, and despite its popularity in German (under the word *Heimweh*), the concept had been hardly focused for a long time, during which it was intertwined with that of nostalgia, initially attributed to four fringe populations: immigrants, seamen, soldiers, and first-year boarding or university students (Jackson 1986).

This goes until very recent times, as proved by the fact that towards the end of the 1970s Davis and Werman still had to argue in favour of separate empirical traditions for nostalgia and homesickness. By the advent of the millennium, though, nostalgia and homesickness had gone their separate ways, to the point that Deciu Ritivoi quite bluntly observes that nowadays homesickness, "familiar as the word sounds, is not a theoretical concept" (2002: 3) – a bold statement that seems to be contradicted by much literature on migration.

My position recalls that of Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden, according to whom "nostalgia is yearning for aspects of one's past, a yearning that may include but is not limited to one's homeland" (2004: 202). Homesickness is then one aspect of nostalgia.

Melancholy

The word *melancholia* comes from the ancient Greek μέλας (*mélas*), "dark, black", and χολή (*kholé*), "bile", and refers to Hippocrates' theory of humours, postulating the existence of four basic bodily liquids which influence one's whole physical and emotional state. A person with a preponderance of black bile would be associated with an autumnal spleen and a saturnine temperament.

As Bolzinger states, "former centuries already tried to twin nostalgia and melancholia. The question deals with an ideological option: is nostalgia a special form of melancholia?" (2007: 16). It is the position of Stauth and Turner, that literally affirm that nostalgia is a "particular form of the more general problem of melancholy" (1988: 512). More precisely, Stauth and Turner identify two separate traditions in approaching nostalgia: a medical one "whereby nostalgia was associated with melancholy and the four humours", and one which regarded nostalgia more positively (1988: 510). Yet nostalgia has a pleasurable side which does not have a counterpart in melancholia - not to mention that from a psychoanalytic perspective nostalgia is rather an attempt to alleviate melancholic suffering (Sohn 1983: 203). By quoting Freud's analysis in *Mourning and melancholia* (1957a), Dickinson and Erben affirm that "there is some similarity between the grief/depression reaction and the nostalgic reaction, since both are responses to loss. It would be possible then to see the nostalgic feeling as a stage in the healing process of grief" (2006: 230), but they further explain that the nostalgic loss is of a different kind, for "in most cases the object lost in nostalgia is regretted rather than yearned for in distraught misery, and never has been thus overwhelmingly felt" (2006: 231).

Furthermore, as Deciu Ritivoi observes, despite similarities in behaviour (what she calls *retreatism*), the mechanisms that trigger nostalgia and melancholy are fairly different: the melancholic crave for isolation, while the nostalgic wish to be reattached to the object of her longing: "melancholy sends one away, but nostalgia calls one back. The melancholic begs for change, while the nostalgic deplores it. While melancholy instigates to rebellion, nostalgia fears marginality" (2002: 28). Fortunati similarly affirms that "the melancholic attitude is different from the nostalgic one: the former is essentially individualistic, for it

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is centred on the melancholic individual's mood; the latter can be considered a feeling that joins private with public sphere, personal and collective memory" (2008: 29, my translation[3]).

I will therefore consider melancholy as a different critical concept from nostalgia[4], and their overlapping as not critically productive.

Heritage

Heritage, state Waterton and Watson, is a "version of the past received through objects and display, representations and engagements, spectacular locations and events, memories and commemorations, and the preparation of places for cultural purposes and consumption" (2015: 1). Andrew Higson suggests that the heritage label is "a critical invention of recent years, emerging in a particular cultural context to serve a specific purpose" (2003: 11). The concept, Vidal explains, "has become associated with a powerful undercurrent of nostalgia for the past conveyed by historical dramas, romantic costume films and literary adaptations" (2012: 1), focusing "on a highly circumscribed set of traditions, those of the privileged, white, Anglo-Saxon community who inhabit lavish properties in a semi-rural Southern England" (Higson 2003: 27).

Higson reminds that the same 'heritage' term stands on uncertain bases: does it refer to film depicting "actual figures from history, in their historical context" or is it a costume drama, presenting "fictional characters in historical settings" (2003: 12)?

Be as it may, through heritage films the English cinema has been, since the 1980s, capable "to articulate a nostalgic and conservative celebration of the values and lifestyles of the privileged classes, reinventing, in doing so, an England that no longer - or never - existed, "as something fondly remembered and desirable" (2003: 12[5]).

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[3] "L'atteggiamento melanconico si differenzia da quello nostalgico: il primo è essenzialmente individualistico, perché tutto incentrato sul mood dell'individuo melanconico, il secondo si può configurare come un sentimento che lega la sfera privata con quella pubblica, la memoria personale con quella collettiva".'
[4] For an overview of several theories on melancholy from the ancient times to nowadays, see Radden (2002).
[5] Debates on the ideological function of the heritage cinema are countless; for an introduction, see Waterton and Watson (2015). In this sense, Higson quotes Jameson's view of a depthless pastiche where the referent is not the past but other images (Higson 1993). It is also useful to remind, as Chase and Shaw do, that tradition itself is "selective, with the past actively organised to speak to current anxieties and tensions" (1989: 14).

As for several other terms discussed here, heritage works on nostalgia and thanks to nostalgia, but it does not fulfil all of nostalgia's meanings and potentiality; it is, rather, the specific use of one kind of nostalgia.

Retro/vintage

The term 'retro' has been in use since the 1970s, in its French version of *rétro*, abbreviation for *rétrospectif*, which used to refer to French movies nostalgic of the Second World War period and arrived in the English use in the 1980s through fashion and culture press. 'Vintage', in turn, comes from the French term *vendange*, harvest, to indicate wines that were left to age, thus acquiring value, and only recently moved to the fashion field and from there to a more general discourse. Both terms describe a style that self-consciously refers to particular fashions, modes, motifs, techniques, and materials of the past.

Baudrillard described it as a "demythologization of the past" (1981:43), a half ironic, half longing form of remembrance which has been called an "unsentimental nostalgia" (Guffey 2006: 11). Vintage, Leone affirms, is "better understood as a sort of temporal tourism" (Leone 2015: 10). The idea is explained by quoting Frow's assertion that

> tourism often consists in the nostalgic purchase of a feeling of authenticity that the industry of cultural consumption encourages travelers to find abroad, especially in the implicit comparison between their postmodern lifestyle and the underdeveloped circumstances they pay to come in contact with. (1991, in Leone 2015: 13)

Kaja Silverman, on the contrary, identifies retro as a way of acknowledging that the past exists through textual traces which problematize the binary contrast of 'old' and 'new' in favour of a "a complex network of cultural and historical references" that at the same time manage to avoid "the pitfalls of a naive referentiality; by putting quotation marks around the garments it revitalizes, it makes clear that the past is available to us only in a textual form, and through the mediation of the present" (1986: 150-51).

As Knowles observes, "the vintage or retro phenomenon has developed partly as a response to capitalist practices of consumption, the overabundance of goods, and the emphasis on rapid cycles of production, replacement, and disposal" (2015). She states that

The increasing standardisation of consumer items and their lack of durability (which necessitates subsequent replacement and sustains the cycle of consumption) gives rise to a sort of 'newness fatigue' – a frustration with, in Benjamin's word's, the 'hellish repetition' of the new as 'always-the-same'[Buck-Morss 1989, p. 108.] – and produces a desire to seek out 'authentic' alternatives. (Knowles 2015)

Yet retro and vintage are also, from another perspective, the present-day version of a longing for a golden age that existed since forever in the arts. Nonetheless they are capable, through mass media and the fashion system, of taking over a large amount of the cultural production in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Therefore, the concepts of retro and vintage are representative of an aspect that will be discussed in relation to cultural production, but that does not end the whole concept of nostalgia.

1.2. Is nostalgia what it used to be? The complicated history of the concept

Nostalgia existed already during Odysseus' vicissitudes, despite the lack of a name for the feeling. As Scanlan affirms, "the Romantics were nostalgic. The Victorians were, of course, nostalgic. And even those modernist artists and critics, those make-it-new avant-gardists were nostalgic" (2004: 3)[6]. Yet "nostalgia as a word was not part of social vocabulary. Sick people were merely talked about as being nervous, homesick or 'having the blues'" (Niemeyer 2014: 8). As Fuentenebro and Valiente observe, "it is the convergence of a term, a type of behaviour and a concept that is responsible for the emergence a new medical discourse and epistemology" (2014: 410).

In this sense, Bolzinger writes, "Hippocrates and Galen did not know anything about it. The invention of nostalgia was the result of a humanist effort to modernize the documentation of certain pathologies of the body and the brain" (2007: 13). As Starobinski observes,

The concept of homesickness was not new and there already existed words for it in many European languages; what was new was that the condition was elevated to a disease, not just a state of feeling, and carried the implication that this condition was to be henceforward a subject for scientific investigation (Starobinski, 1966: 84).

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[6] See Lowenthal (2015 43-46) for an historical excursus of nostalgia from Odysseus until the moment the term was coined.

1.2.1. Switzerland, 1688-

Despite its apparent Greek origin, in fact, the word *nostalgia* does not have such a long history; it was coined by the Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer in 1688. Doctor Hofer's dissertation concentrated on a disease that was typical of young people forced to expatriate, especially from mountainous regions. From the 17th up to the 18th century, it notably plagued the Swiss army, whose soldiers – "mercenaries serving in the lowlands of Italy or France and pining for the mountainous landscapes of their native country" (Sedikides et al. 2014: 3) - frequently fell ill by the sole listening of the melody of a popular song called *ranz-des-vaches*, or *Kühe-Reyhen*.

Hofer created the word by juxtaposing the Greek ones νόστος (*nóstos*), "homecoming", and ἄλγος (*álgos*), "pain" or "ache". He and the others who studied this illness tried as well, in a second time, to replace it with more precise but less successful neologisms - such as *pothopatridalgia*, *nostomania*, *philopatridomania*, *pathopatrialgia*, *nostrassia*. All of them were fundamentally attempts to give a proper scientific label to the condition of *desiderium patriae*, already well known by the common sensibility under the names of *Heimweh*, *mal du pays*, *añoranza*: different nuances of the same form of homesickness that, to the physicians of the time, manifested itself in a broad series of painful physical symptoms, including "despondency, bouts of weeping, fainting, indigestion, stomach pain, anorexia, high fever, cardiac palpitations, and suicidal ideation or even death" (Sedikides et al. 2014: 4). "Hallucinations and schizophrenia were also described as symptoms of homesickness", Niemeyer adds (2014: 8). Remedies included "leeches, warm hypnotic emulsions, opium, or a trip to the Alps [that] usually soothed the symptoms, but nothing compared to the return to the motherland, which was believed to be the best" (Boym 2001: 11).

Hofer's thesis was discussed in many medical faculties until finally, in 1710, it was republished by the Swiss doctor and scientist Theodore Zwinger, who replaced the term 'nostalgia' with 'pothopatridalgia', which obtained little success. Singing the *Kühe-Reyhen* was forbidden in the army, as noted in the 1767 *Dictionnaire de musique* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but that alone was not sufficient to cure nor avert nostalgia.

In 1719, the German-Swiss physician Jean-Jacques Scheuchzer, rejecting the implication that the homesickness experienced by Swiss soldiers was due to a deficit of character and appealing instead to his studies of 'iatromechanics', proposed that nostalgia resulted from the atmosphere of the level ground, causing excessive body pressure, which in turn would drive blood from the heart to the brain, hence producing the affliction. This would explain why the illness would haunt the Swiss soldiers, who were used to the Alpine mountains' air pressure, when they descended to plains (Starobinski 1966: 88-89).

During the whole Eighteenth century, scientists kept looking for the causes (a nostalgic bone, which was not found) and best treatments of nostalgia. Several persons diagnosed with nostalgia were found free of bodily diseases. Soldiers of other nations increasingly suffered from it: British, French fighting in the French Revolution and Napoleonic army, American fighting the Civil War. In his book *La santé de Mars, ou moyens de conserver la santé des troupes en temps de paix, d'en fortifier la vigueur et le courage en temps de guerre,* published in 1790, French doctor Jourdan Le Cointe suggested to cure it by inflicting pain or terror on the patient, quoting as evidence the drastic treatment operated by the Russian army in 1733: far away from home while venturing into Germany and stricken by nostalgia, the soldiers were cured by the proposition of a general to bury alive whoever was sick (Starobinski 1966: 96).

1.2.2. Europe, Nineteenth century

According to Bolzinger and Bouillault (1990), between 1820 and 1830 the concept of nostalgia reached its peak. Cases were booming amongst immigrants and soldier. As Starobinski notes, due to the medical theories of the time, when "doctors still had no knowledge of infectious agents - all the inflammatory states of meningitis, all the lesions of gastro-enteritis and of pleurisy discovered during autopsy of victims of nostalgia were interpreted as nostalgia" (1966: 98).

In the revised edition of its medicine section, the *Encyclopédie Méthodique* (1821) defined nostalgia as the imperative desire to return to one's home; a need that, if denied, would leave the patient overwhelmed with sadness, anorexia, and other grave symptoms. To say it directly with the extensor of the article, doctor Pinel's words,

> The principal symptoms lie in a sad, melancholy appearance, a bemused look, eyes
> at times haggard, countenance at times lifeless, a general disgust, an indifference

toward everything; the pulse is slow and weak; at other times, rapid, but scarcely perceptible: a rather constant torpor; while asleep, several phrases are released with sobs and tears; the near impossibility of getting out of bed, a obstinate silence, the rejection of food and drink; emaciation, marasmus and death. The disease is not carried to the last degree in all cases; but if it is not directly mortal, it becomes so indirectly. A few have sufficient strength to overcome it; for a few others, the disease lasts longer and thus extends their stay in the hospital; but this extended stay is almost always mortal, for sooner or later they are stricken by the diseases which permeate, in a frightful way, the military hospitals, such as dysentery, remittent fevers and fevers accompanied with loss of strength and ataxia.' (1821, in Starobinski 1966: 97)

By the 1850s, nostalgia was losing its status of disease, coming to be seen as a symptom or stage of a pathological process; it was mainly considered as a form of melancholia, thus a predisposing condition among suicides. By the 1870s, with the evolution of medical knowledge, nostalgia seemed to be definitely evolving from the status of clinical condition to that of psychological inclination; deprived of its morbid connotation, the concept entered the realm of poets and philosophers, widening its boundaries and acquiring new connotations: nostalgia became, "one might say, not a medical but a social disease" (Stewart 1984: 23).

Boym argues that nostalgia as a disease started off at "the historical point when the conception of time and history were undergoing radical change" (2001: 8). A notion of linear time had taken the place of the previous cyclical time, science was progressing and imposing its ideology of progress, which was substituting the religious view of an immutably ordered cosmos. By the end of the Eighteenth century, nostalgia had lost its disease connotation, and returned to being a feeling – also because tuberculosis, often diagnosed as or together with nostalgia, was now clearly classified as a separate disease (Boym 2001: 11). However, nostalgia did not go back to pre-1688 state; it evolved to become the complex, bittersweet emotion that it is today. The notion underwent several conceptual changes connected with the new perception of 'local' and 'universal' (Boym 2001: 9). I will deal more with the implications of this process in the section dedicated to explaining the reasons of nostalgia.

1.2.3. World, Twentieth century-

Nonetheless, there was now a new field were nostalgia could still be classified as a disease: thanks to psychoanalysis, nostalgia at the beginning of the Twentieth century was growingly regarded as a mental disorder, whose list of symptoms included anxiety, sadness, weakness, pessimism, loss of appetite, insomnia, and fever (Havlena and Holak 1991a).

The illness consisted in a "monomaniacal obsessive mental state causing intense unhappiness" arising from a subconscious yearning to return to one's foetal state in a "mentally repressive compulsive disorder" (Fodor 1950: 25). Nostalgia, said otherwise, was regarded as "an acute yearning for a union with the preoedipal mother, a saddening farewell to childhood, a defense against mourning, or a longing for past forever lost" (Kaplan 1987: 466).

Deciu Ritivoi affirms that "when 'nostalgia' entered American popular discourse in the 1950s, the term had lost completely its pathological connotations" (2002: 29). Yet just a few years before, McCann could still affirm that nostalgia involved several psychological disturbances, including depression and melancholia, and that patients suffering from severe nostalgia could end up in psychotic states sometimes resulting in suicide (1941).

The transition from the Twentieth to the Twenty-first century finally saw the disappearance of nostalgia from psychiatric nosography (Rosen 1975), despite some authors still argued for its pathological status (Peters 1985; Kaplan 1987). In a survey carried out by Fred Davis (1979), nostalgia was identified as a sentimental yearning for an object, event, or place in the past.

With the outbreak of postmodernity, what was once an individual affliction eventually become a generalized, half-pleasant, condition of longing. As Leone sums up,

> the symptoms that were diagnosed as affecting the psychology of individuals were identified as those grieving the sociology of an entire class of people. In the passage from individual to collective pathology, the temporal dimension of nostalgia outdid the spatial one: communities, unless they are in exile, do not yearn for a land they are away from, but for a time they are separated from. (2015: 9)

1.3. What is nostalgia made of? Typologies and definitions

As said, the scholarly literature on nostalgia is vast and heterogeneous. I will dedicate this section to navigate it, trying to account for its complex nature, to sum up most of the typologies that have been identified around the concept and to explain some of its mechanisms.

1.3.1. Axes

First of all, I will try to give shape to nostalgia's complexity by identifying five operational axes[7], which can be very broadly summed up as follows: space versus time, personal versus collective, experienced vs vicarious, *nóstos* versus *álgos*, escapist versus engaging, mood versus mode. It is by walking back and forth these paths that this exploration of the theme will be conducted.

The preliminary axe which we can isolate about nostalgia somehow anticipates its mutation from sickness to emotional state, and was first noted by Immanuel Kant, who in his *Anthropology* remarked that, when the nostalgic-struck finally succeeded in coming home, they found "their anticipation deceived [...]: they think that everything has been wholly transformed, but in fact it is that they cannot bring back their youth with them" (1798, in Illbruck 2012: 131). This idea leads in turn to two considerations: first, wondering whether this lack effectively has the potentiality to be fulfilled or not; second, noticing that, despite the fact that it "operates both temporally *and* spatially" (Marrone 2016: 166), nostalgia has more to do with time than space, as the former is the truly irreversible force (Hutcheon 2000; Boym 2001).

Furthermore, some of the most prominent manifestations of the term in the 20th century (those of the already mentioned *Ostalgie* and all the post-communist nostalgias on one side, the postcolonial sense of *double eradication* and the sibling feelings expressed by the literature of migration on the other side) are, up to now, remarkably less present and productive in the graphic novel. In fact, the medium seems to best fit the scopes of the

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[7] I prefer the concept of axis rather than dichotomy because it better accounts for the idea of a continuum made of intermediate, hybrid positions, rather than giving the impression of a yes/no switch which very hardly exists when analysing social realities.

exploration of past times than to act as an effective socio-political commentary of this kind.

The second axe, somehow already implied by the first notion of the term, is centred on the opposition between personal and collective experience. From the minimal, very intimate recalling of a childhood to the frequent nominalization of brands and pop products, from the very subjective remembering of someone's youth – capable to activate the sympathy of the reader by the very virtue of its uniqueness to remind of the universality of human life – to the epochal nostalgia for periods of time often never lived neither by the author nor by the reader, it will be necessary to constantly ask what each text is doing and why[8]. Boym affirms that "nostalgia remains an intermediary between collective and individual memory. Collective memory can be seen as a playground, not a graveyard of multiple individual recollections" (Boym 2001: 54).

Davis already observed (in a book written in 1979, yet still holding true) that the pervasive aspect of mass media and their continuous capitalistic struggle to market their very substance necessarily imply that every individual memory carries inextricably, in its idiosyncrasy, a huge number of elements homogenous with those of everyone else.

From this point one can also deduce that nostalgia can be felt for moments one has experienced, as much as for events and epochs preceding one's life, but that are part of collective memory: it can thus be, to various degree, experienced (that is, relating to first-person experiences) or vicarious (linked to indirect experiences). Several categories have been proposed on this behalf: Davis adopts a division between 'true' and 'social' nostalgia; some distinguish between personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia (Stern 1992; Holbrook 1993; Batcho 1998, 2007). Vanderbilt calls "displaced nostalgia" the nostalgia for times not experienced first-hand (1994: 131). Baker and Kennedy distinguish three types of nostalgia: real, simulated, and collective. The first one is the "sentimental or bittersweet yearning for the experienced past"; the second one concerns

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[8] Interestingly, Kessous and Roux propose another, completely different, distinction between two types of nostalgia: long-standing nostalgia, that refers to the golden age one lived during childhood or adolescence, and first-time nostalgia for "an initial, significant or unique life event" that marks and changes one's life (Kessous and Roux 2005: 198).

is the "indirectly experienced past and may be remembered through the eyes and stories of a loved one"; the third one represents a feeling shared by a "culture, a generation, or a nation" (1994). Havlena and Holak propose a four-way typology (personal, interpersonal, cultural, and virtual nostalgia) based on (1) whether nostalgia is personal or collective in nature and (2) whether it results from direct or indirect experience (1998).

The fourth axe is more subtly hidden in the concept, and it brings us to a very contemporary expression of the nostalgic feeling. The first question at stake is whether the stress should be put on the *nóstos* side rather than on the *álgos* one, that is, if the *rêverie* implied by the act of remembering is more or less prominent than the pain. Boym opposes in this sense a *restorative* nostalgia to a *reflective* one: the first "proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up memory gaps", while the second "dwells in algia, in longing and loss", and on the imperfections of the process of remembering (2001: 41). Restorative nostalgia presents itself as truth and tradition, while reflective one opens up the space for a deconstruction of the past that highlights its contradictions; in this sense nostalgia "is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future" (2001: 8).

Consequently, no analysis of nostalgia can avoid the debate about its alleged intrinsic tendency to escape the realm of the here and now. To a traditional negative view of the act of dwelling into the past ("let the dead bury their dead", warned Marx), to the idea of nostalgia as a 'social disease' (Stewart 1984), or as an 'abdication of memory' (Lasch 1991), I would like to the possibility of nostalgic manifestations as "side effects of the teleology of progress" (Boym 2001: 10), born from an uneasiness towards the present and aiming to change the future. In this sense, nostalgia has the ability to constantly renegotiate and reshape our past, by rewriting and rehabilitating marginalized and ex-centric experiences, thus being capable of representing a changing force opposed to the status quo. As Atia and Davies write, "recent historians of nostalgia have shown persuasively that nostalgia can become creative or radical by virtue of its object, by its being nostalgic for anything" (2010: 183). Similarly, Hutcheon affirms that

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nostalgia is transideological: the nostalgia for an idealized community in the past has been articulated by the ecology movement as often as by fascism […]. Post-colonial critics have pointed to nostalgic moments in the history of the colonized, too, however. To some, the "négritude" move in African cultural theory, with its focus on the pre-capitalist, pre-imperial past, was the sign of a nostalgic search for a lost coherence. Many oppressed people--Holocaust survivors and North American First Nations peoples among them--have had a strong and understandable nostalgia for what is perceived as their once unified identity. (2000: 199, 201)

In this sense, it must also be remembered that Davis posits three different "levels" of self-consciousness in nostalgic praxis: simple nostalgia, which limits to reminiscing and longing for the past; reflexive nostalgia, critical of the nature of the remembered past, questioning the accuracy and relevance of the reminisced content; and interpreted nostalgia, ambivalent towards the very nature and reasons of the nostalgic momentum, and the implications it has for the nostalgic person as an individual (1979: 17-18).

Finally, Grainge distinguishes between a nostalgia mood (the emotional and affective patterns of nostalgia) and a nostalgia mode (a commodified style and set of practices)[9]. The first involves loss and longing, and acts as a "a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual 'golden age'" (Grainge 2000b: 21). Instead, "as a commodified and aestheticized style, the nostalgia mode has developed, principally within postmodern theory, a theoretical association with amnesia" (2000b: 28; I will return later on this assumed amnesiac character of nostalgia)[10].

1.3.2. Memory, nostalgia, and the senses

Jean Starobinski affirmed that nostalgia is intrinsically "related to the work of memory" (1966: 89-90). The bond between nostalgia and memory is self-evident, yet it seems to

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[9] To explain the difference between the two poles, Grainge suggests that the one envisioned by Davis is nostalgia as a mood, "a way of adapting to social change and responding to the experience of discontinuity", while Jameson deals with nostalgia as a mode, "a form of pastiche symptomatic of the postmodern crisis of historicity" (2000a: 29).

[10] Grainge also warns that "nostalgia modes do not emerge from, or reflect in any simple way, nostalgia moods. If nostalgia has developed as a cultural style in contemporary American life, it cannot be explained through any single master narrative of decline, crisis, longing, or loss" (2000a: 32).

be completely one-sided, for as Batcho comments, "one can remember without being nostalgic, but one cannot be nostalgic without remembering" (Batcho 2007: 362)[11].

Yet this apparently obvious statement needs some tweaking, for two reasons.

In the first place, we stated that one can be nostalgic for something she did not experience in the first person (what I am calling vicarious nostalgia). This means that the concept of remembering we are considering is not that of an isolated process, but a shared, interpersonal one. Pickering and Keightley rightfully affirm that "nostalgia has been closely linked with the notion of collective, social or cultural memory as a way of attempting to explain how memories are generated, altered, shared and legitimated within particular sociocultural environments" (2006: 922[12]).

The second point is a bit more complex, and it need a premise: as it is known, every act of remembering is a selection. As Lowenthal affirms, "memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize, and classify the world around us" (1985: 210). Niemeyer accordingly states that "our ability to remember the past, and to actualise it, includes the imperfections of the human mind and endorses sometimes voluntarily embellished or falsified memories on an individual and collective level" (2014: 3[13]).

Nonetheless, if this confirms, as Wilson affirms, that nostalgia is "intimately connected to selective memory" (2005: 38), it must not be overshadowed that the process of selection enacted by nostalgia is particularly significant. "Memory," writes Johannisson, "can be recollection, remembrance, flashback, or sentimental or therapeutic return. It can be yearning, searching, idealizing, forgetful, build on vague reminiscences, fleeting impressions or a single symbolic detail" (2001: 145, in Salmose 2012: 121-22). Nostalgia, on the other side, "like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative" (Stewart 1993: 23).

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[11] Similarly, Salmose affirms that "nostalgia incorporates an element of memory, whereas memory does not involve nostalgia" (2012: 121).

[12] For the idea of memory as collective, that is, as a social construct depending on a collective framework of interpretation, see Ferrarotti (1990); Halbwachs (1992); Olick (1999); Erll and Nünning (2010).

[13] On this topic, see Ricoeur (2000).

Hutcheon observes that nostalgia operates

> through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an "historical inversion": the ideal that is not being lived now is projected into the past. It is "memorialized" as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations. (2000: 195)

Evocatively, in this sense, Scanlan wonders whether nostalgia, "a supplementary term in the Derridean sense" (2004: 4), is it a replacement for memory or history or, instead, forgetting, since, like forgetting, nostalgia has the capacity of "meandering away from the truthful, historical, or the precise, which is why many late twentieth-century critiques describe it as connoting a mistake or an evasion" (Scanlan 2004: 4[14]).

Less suggestively, Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden state that nostalgia "goes well beyond memory veracity or temporal ordering of past events" (2004: 205). They distinguish memory (understood as reminiscence and autobiographical memory) from nostalgia asserting that the former involves cold processing (cognition) and the latter hot processing (affect) (2004: 205[15]).

In cognitive terms, according to Atkinson and Shriffin's model (1968), memory is a dual system, divided in long-term and short-term memory (elsewhere referred to as "working memory")[16]. Long-term memory, in turn, may be divided into procedural (or implicit) and declarative (or explicit) memory. The first term encompasses the (mostly unconscious) "learning of new, and the control of established, sensori-motor and cognitive 'habits', 'skills', and other procedures" (Ullman 2004: 237). Declarative memory, on the contrary, concerns the conscious "learning, representation, and use of knowledge about facts ('semantic knowledge') and events ('episodic knowledge')" (2004: 235). The distinction between semantic and episodic memory has been first advanced by Endel Tulving in 1972, and since then has been further advanced and is still

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[14] Scanlan nonetheless recognizes that "in current criticism, however, nostalgia as warning, as pejorative marker of certain historical changes, has given way to nostalgia as a more ambivalent, more engaged, critical frame" (2004: 4).

[15] On the division between hot and cold processing, see Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1980); Cavanaugh (1989).

[16] Atkinson-Shriffin's is the most popular model to explain how memory works; on this matter, see Schacter and Tulving (1994); Squire and Knowlton (2000); Eichenbaum and Cohen (2001).

widely used. Semantic memory regards the general knowledge (facts, ideas, concepts) accumulated throughout the years, while episodic memory is the memory of autobiographical events that occurred at a particular time and place, organized in chronological order.

Interestingly, the same dichotomy is mimicked by the one drawn, from a completely different perspective, by Halbwachs (1980, 1992). In his sociologically-driven work on cultural memory, he posits a division between historical memory, relying on media (written records, photographies, and so on), and autobiographical memory, referring to events personally experienced in the past.

Several studies have shown that the most vivid autobiographical memories tend to be those of emotional events (Bradley et al. 1992; Christianson 1992; Conway et al. 1994; Hamann 2001). Furthermore, recent neurological research suggests a stronger link between emotions and memory, with the former playing a pivotal role in consolidating short term memories, providing a stronger retrieval mechanism. Episodic memory is managed by the hippocampus, but emotional memories are 'tagged' by the amygdala, thus strengthening the neuronal connections of such memories with a link to autobiographical experience and personal values (Phelps 2004). This is where nostalgia enters the field: it is one of the most immediate (possibly the most immediate) examples of the workings of memories combined with amygdala's emotional tags, and it is not a case that we have the impression of a particular vividness of nostalgic recollections (regardless of their effective accuracy). If, then, until not so much time ago "emotion was not typically considered in our efforts to understand cognitive behaviors, such as memory", recently "it has become increasingly clear that we can no longer neglect the exploration of emotion" in the act of recollection (2004: 201).

Part of those emotional memories are, in turn, influenced by our sensory memory. Carroll (2003: 221) depicts emotions as "made up of at least two components: a cognitive component, such as a belief or a thought about some person, place, or thing, real or imagined; and a feeling component (a bodily change and/or a phenomenological experience"). From a more physiologically-based perspective, we can say that

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> People not only sense but make sense in dynamic, minded, and emergent sense acts
> that we have generally coined 'somatic work'. […]. Self is necessarily a somatic
> accomplishment: the embodied self is the material basis as well as the reflexive and
> interactional outcome of perceived sensations and active sense-making practices.
> Sensations and sense-making body forth a sensuous self: a performative, reflexive,
> perceptive, intentional, indeterminate, emergent, embodied being-in-the-world.
> (Waskul, Vannini, Wilson 2009: 6)

More than the body, then, the object of our attention should be embodiment. Embodiment is a paradigm much used in anthropology (see for example Csordas 2002), which refers to "patterns of behavior inscribed on the body or enacted by people" (Strathern and Stewart 2011: 389), expressed in bodily form. It is a way of seeing the body "as a source of perception into the realms of agency, practice, feeling, custom, the exercise of skills, performance" (Strathern and Stewart 2011: 389) and what Catherine Bell (1992, 1997) called "ritualization" and "the ritualized body".

Sensations "precede emotions and abstract linguistic symbolization […] and reflexive sensations accumulated over time and place constitute a somatic history and a sense of emplacement" which in turn "bodies forth the sensuous self" (Waskul, Vannini, Wilson 2009: 7[17]). This happens exactly through our "somatic rituals", that are "habits of sensing and sense-making" (2009: 8) and can be divided into ritual sensations and sense-making rituals (2009: 8). Both concur on the one hand to give continuity to our identity and on the other hand to evoke "agreed-upon norms typical of a cultural 'sensory model'" (2009: 8-9)[18].

There is, then, a significant amount of somatic work in the act of shaping our identity and giving continuity over time to our self-image (Waskul, Vannini, Wilson 2009: 17), which in turn shows the relation between sensory perception, memory and nostalgia[19]: "recalling

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[17] For an exhaustive introduction to the blooming field of Sensory Studies, see Classen (2005); Korsmeyer (2005); Drobnick (2006); Edwards and Bhaumik (2008); Sterne (2012); Bull, Back and Howes (2015).

[18] An immediately understandable example provided by Waskul et al. regards "the daily social performances of personal odorizing and deodorizing"; a more formalized cultural one is the burning of incense in religious ceremonies (2009: 9).

[19] See also Seremetakis (1994); Salmose (2012: 113).

is an act which is overwhelmingly sensory and loaded with potent emotional capital (individually or collectively)" (2009: 18). We can therefore conclude that

> Ritual sensations and sense-making rituals situate the self within a particular place and time. Particular sensations – for example, those associated with specific toys, nature sounds, music, foods, beverages, even medicinal treatments such as Vaporub® – can serve as nostalgic reminders of past times, places, people and events. (2009: 9)

Smell and touch are strong evokers of nostalgia due to the processing of these stimuli first passing through the amygdala, the emotional seat of the brain. This is what constitutes most of the vividness that I mentioned before: in the nostalgic recollection, typically, we appeal to sensory memory to the point of re-experiencing that same smell, or taste - and so on – that used to constitute our nostalgic object.

1.3.3. Affect theory

So, nostalgia begins when memory issues are intertwined with emotions. But what exactly is this emotional nature?

The explanation comes from affects theory[20], whose first and most important proponent is the psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963, 1970). Tomkins envisioned nine 'universal' discrete affects, mainly based on inter-cultural facial expressions (which are not identical all over the world, but modulated by cultural specifics)[21]. Affect theory evolved and nowadays "affects" are considered a macro-category, encompassing several types of bodily states, "including emotions, moods, reflex actions, autonomic responses, mirror reflexes, desires, pleasures, etc" (Plantinga 2008: 87). Although all of these elements play a very important role in the affect process, the two that interest us most in this context are emotions and moods. Plantinga sums up efficiently their characteristics:

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[20] For a more detailed insight into affect theory, see for example Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Blackman 2012.

[21] Similar positions are those of Izard (1971; 1977); Ekman, Friesen and Ellsworth (1972); Plutchik (1980); Holbrook and Batra (1987); Ekman (1993). I will not analyse any of these in details, since they are not determinant for the point of this chapter. For an overview, see Russell and Fernandez-Dols (1997); Jenkins, Oatley and Stein (1998); Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins (2006).

A human emotion is […] a mental state accompanied by physiological and autonomic nervous system changes, subjective feelings, action tendencies (that is, tendencies toward certain behaviors in response to emotions), and outward bodily behaviors (facial expressions, body postures, gestures, vocalizations, etc.). Emotions are intentional in the sense that they are directed toward some "object" (which may or may not be real or correctly understood by the person having the emotion) […] Moods, another type of affect, are thought to be longer lasting and more diffuse than emotions proper. (2008: 86, 87)

By "more diffuse", Plantinga means that moods seem not to need a specific object, as in the example of free-floating depression; he says elsewhere that moods "have causes but not reasons" (Plantinga 2012: 460). Carroll's dichotomy similarly assumes that "occurrent emotional states are said to be short-lived and punctuated, whereas moods persist over longer time intervals" and that "whereas emotions are directed toward particular objects or have intentionality, moods do not" (2003: 526). Later Carroll affirms that while an emotion has a "a world-to-self direction of impact", a mood "emanates from the self and engulfs everything it touches", so that its "direction of impact is from the self to the world"[22] (2003: 529). In this sense, moods would be "affective states whose function is to bias cognitive processes such as remembrance, attention direction, sorting, scanning, and so on" (2003: 535).

Nostalgia is almost unanimously identified as a trans-cultural emotion[23] (Frijda 1986; Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989; Kaplan 1987; Kemper 1987; Ortony, Clore and Collins 1988; Holbrook 1993; Batcho 1995, 1998; Havlena & Holak 1998; Sedikides et al. 2004; Sedikides et al. 2006; Wildschut et al. 2006; Sedikides et al. 2014), entailing "entails remembering or reminiscing about fond memories from the past" (Sedikides et al. 2014: 12).

A debate is still partially open whether it should be considered a basic (or primary) or non-basic (or secondary) emotion; the second position is held amongst the others by Sedikides et al. (2004) and Soudry et al. (2010), and is the one I endorse. Secondary

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[22] This means that whenever one is in "a melancholy mood, whatever one encounters carries a patina of sadness" (Carroll 2003: 528)
[23] Some, nonetheless, have read it as a complex feeling, or set of feelings (Holak and Havlena 1998; Dickinson and Erben 2006). About the idea of nostalgia being pancultural, see Hepper, Wildschut, et al. (2014); Sedikides et al. (2014).

emotions are more complex, mixing several primary emotions into one and requiring to be actualised "a pre-set of acquired cultural socialization", that is, "an already existing combination of beliefs and repertoire of experiences" (Dickinson and Erben 2006: 224). The idea of a complex emotion rather than a simple one hence better accounts for the co-existence inside nostalgia of positive emotions – "tenderness and elation" together with negative emotions "related to the feeling of loss. This combination of joy and sadness, of gratitude and desire, of warmth and surgency demonstrates the complexity of the phenomenon" (Holak and Havlena 1998: 222-23).

Nonetheless, nostalgia can also appear in the form of a mood (Belk 1990; Holak and Havlena 1998; Carroll 2003), that is, as a sort of extended, free-floating emotion, functioning according to the same mechanisms but in a wider, unsolicited fashion. I will quickly return to this point and its implications in the following section.

1.4. How does nostalgia work? The nostalgic emotional experience

In his PhD thesis, Niklas Salmose isolates three phases of what he defines "the nostalgic emotional experience", that he dubs motivation (1), nostalgia (2), and reflection (3) (2012: 301). His typology is meant to be applied to literary and cinematic works, but it seems very suitable to be operative for narratives in general. Nevertheless, since Salmose's research concerns the aesthetics of nostalgia in modernist fiction, some tweaking is needed when applying those categories to a different medium and a different historical period.

According to Salmose's division, motivation (1) is the element that causes the experience, which consists of an initial condition of "immediate happiness and great emotional affection", soon followed by (2) a subsequent "reflective state, where […] melancholia is created" (2012: 301), resulting in reflection (3), an overall bittersweet feeling marked by the awareness of the "irreversibility of time" (2012: 95). If this perspective has the merit of recognizing the positive element always present in the nostalgic experience (2012: 318), Salmose's choice to baptize the second phase simply as "nostalgia" – that is, with the same name of what should theoretically be the resulting, bittersweet feeling - is nonetheless confusing.

My suggestion, then, would be to keep Salmose's triple partition, similarly isolating a motivation (1), an *affection* (2) and a reflection (3) phases, all necessary steps of the nostalgic experience. The motivation phase (1) would then consist of a precondition – a

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nostalgic disposition or posture[24] - and a trigger, that is an element (may it be thematic, formal, structural) that for direct or indirect reasons ignites one's nostalgic experience. The affection phase (2) refers to the transient enjoyment connected to our triggered act of remembering, whose object may be more or less closely linked to the trigger (that is, more or less directly related to the original object or connected to it in the light of one's experience and memory, be that personal or collective). The final phase is the reflective one (3), where the subject experiences the bitterness that derives from the irreversibility of the spatio-temporal distance that separates her from the object of her longing[25].

1.4.1. Motivation

The first precondition of nostalgia, for how tautological it may sound, is a nostalgic posture, or disposition, on the behalf of the subject. As I will show, nostalgia requires a cooperation between the object of nostalgia and the nostalgic reader (or viewer, and so on), and this cooperation eventually depends on the reader's actualization of a nostalgic potential in the text. Although this nostalgic outcome may at times appear arbitrary, a nostalgic reading of a text or an event that seems to offer a limited nostalgic appeal per se might be explained in the light of one's personal and/or social situation.

A useful concept on this regard is to go back to the possibility of a nostalgic mood. I want to preliminary state that a nostalgic posture can always influence the reading of a text by making the subject more receptive to potentially nostalgic features. This is because

> affect and cognition are integrally linked within an associative network of cognitive
> representations. […] Thus, material that is associatively linked to the current mood
> is more likely to be activated, preferentially recalled, and used in various
> constructive cognitive tasks, leading to a potential mood congruency in attention,
> learning, memory, associations, evaluations, and judgments. In other words, affect
> is not an incidental, but an inseparable, part of how we see and represent the world
> around us; how we select, store, and retrieve information; and how we use stored

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[24] Davis (1979: 75-81) tries to infer a definition of the nostalgic posture by adopting the six dimensions designated by Schultz (1962) to differentiate reality (or "the realities"), but the result is quite convoluted and not completely convincing.
[25] This reflective phase, Salmose notices, is exactly what distinguishes the nostalgic experience from a simple memory act (2012: 122).

knowledge structures in the performance of cognitive tasks. (Forgas 2000: 11, in Plantinga 2012: 469)

This precondition is nevertheless insufficient to explain how nostalgia acts in a media product, and it is completely useless to account for the way textual elements may be capable to elicit, or at least allow for, a nostalgic response. It is useful then to recur to Carl Plantinga's separation of what he calls 'human moods' from 'art moods', the first being "a discrete mental and bodily state" and the second "an amalgam of affective 'charges' or elicitors that together characterize the overall experience of the work" (Plantinga 2012: 461). In this respect, Salmose acknowledges that despite a nostalgic aesthetics is in the end "dependent on the status of the subject" (Salmose 2012: 164), the strategies of aesthetic nostalgia lie "in luring the receiver into a nostalgic mood that in a secondary effort will trigger internal nostalgic memories, since internal, more private experiences, have a stronger emotional content" (2012: 164).

Nostalgic triggers will be discussed in the section dedicated to motifs, but empirical studies are extensive and worth mentioning. Generally speaking, triggers may be divided in external and internal. External triggers include sensory stimulus appealing to smell (Hirsch 1992; Holak and Havlena 1998; Orth and Bourrain 2008; Mizrahi 2014), taste (Supski 2013) or hearing, particularly music or songs (Batcho 1998, 2007, 2008; Wildschut et al. 2006; Sedikides et al. 2008; Barret, Grimm, and Robins 2010; Routledge et al. 2011; Nash 2012). Other examples of external triggers are song lyrics (Cheung et al. 2013), social events, views, or products (Holak and Havlena 1991, 1992, 1998; Holbrook 1993; Muehling and Sprott 2004), objects (Sedikides et al. 2004; Wildschut et al. 2006) and – quite funnily - cold ambient temperature (Zhou et al. 2012).

Examples of internal triggers are instead discomforting states - that is, negative affect (Wildschut et al. 2006; Barrett et al. 2010), sense of social exclusion (Wildschut et al. 2010; Seehusen et al. 2013), loneliness (Zhou et al. 2008; Wildschut et al. 2010), meaninglessness (Routledge et al. 2011; Routledge et al. 2012), existential terror (Routledge et al. 2008), discontinuity between one's past and present (Sedikides et al. 2008), and boredom (Van Tilburg, Igou, and Sedikides 2013). Nostalgia in those cases serves to "counter these discomforting states and restore psychological equilibrium" (Sedikides 2014: 19).

1.4.2. Affection

Research on the so-called Fading Affect Bias (Skowronski et al. 2013) seems to confirm the role of Salmose's phases while at the same time explaining why nostalgia is a bittersweet, but more positive than negative[26], complex of emotion. Simply put, "the positive affect of an event lasts longer than its negative affect. In the case of nostalgic reminiscing, the resulting positive affect of the event may offset its negative affect—an emotional dynamic felt as ambivalence." (Sedikides et al. 2014: 206).

Salmose tries to operate a complex schematization of this second moment (that, as we said, he ambiguously calls 'nostalgia'[27]). He unpacks nostalgia, from the perspective of the subject experiencing it, into an internal one, connected to personal experience, and an external one, "not related to one's personal past" (2012: 122). He subsequently splits the former into memorial (referring to "the individual's own past, his own lived experience"), spatial ("the longing for personal space") and hypothetical nostalgia ("nostalgia for the present": 2012: 125). Then, drawing from Merleau-Ponty, he subdivides external nostalgia into 'pseudo-memorial' (concerning what he dubs the "world as perceived") and 'immemorial past' ("a past that cannot be remembered"), that in turn may be either 'ontological' or 'metaphysical' (2012: 126; see also 128-43). Though very interesting, this division is not useful for the present analysis, and will not be discussed further.

1.4.3. Reflection

The bittersweet feeling typical of nostalgia is due to what Salmose calls a 'bipolarity' (2012: 144), that is "a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (Boym 2001: xiii-xiv) - that becomes painful due to its impossible fulfillment, "to a partial presence which causes one to experience, with pleasure and pain, the imminence and the impossibility of complete restoration of this

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[26] As it always happens, positions are divergent: some consider nostalgia a positive emotion (Kaplan 1987; Holak and Havlena 1998; Chaplin 2000), some negative (Best and Nelson 1985; Peters 1985; Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989), some ambivalent (Socarides 1977; Werman 1977; Davis 1979).

[27] To be fair, Salmose differentiates the "objects of nostalgia", that he dubs "*the nostalgia* or *nostalgias*" (2012: 118), from the general use of the term, but the terminological overlapping seems unnecessarily convoluted.

universe which emerges fleetingly from oblivion" (Starobinski 1966: 93, in Salmose 2012: 144).

There is, then, a necessary passage from the enjoyment of recollection - provoked, to a varying degree, by an object and experienced by the subject - to the saddening realization of the unbridgeable distance of that recollected experience. This passage works by means of evoking at first a happy memory and later counterposing to it a "melancholic reflection upon this [same] memory" (Salmose 2012: 326).

A final note: despite this seems to me the most convincing model of nostalgia it also, it must be remarked, offers particularly interesting results if crossed with the findings of Wildschut et al. (2006). They first considered McAdams' identification of two kind of narratives: of redemption, namely proceeding from an affectively negative situation towards a positive one ("The bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good": McAdams et al. 2001: 474), or contamination, where the narrative progresses from an uncomplicated or favourable scene to an unfavourable one ("The good is spoiled, ruined, contaminated, or undermined by what follows it": 2001: 474). Then, they applied this classification trying to understand which kind of sequence was more typical of nostalgic accounts, and coming to the conclusion that redemptive sequences outweighed contamination sequences.

This seems to suggest that the kind of nostalgia Salmose and Wildschut deal with is not the same, or does not seem to work in the same way. To definitely understand whether a melancholic moment comes first or last in the nostalgic recollection, further research is then required.

1.5. Why nostalgia? Individual reasons: fantasy, identity, and narcissism

From what I have said until now, it seems evident that nostalgia can be explored on several levels. One very fruitful dichotomy is that between its individual dimension – relating mostly to psychological mechanisms – and it social, collective one, who finds better explanations in sociological theory. Of course, the two components mingle and interact together in a united process, but for the sake of this analysis it is most useful to unpack them, and proceed by considering what I called the individual reasons of nostalgia before moving to the collective ones.

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1.5.1. Nostalgia and fantasy

Nostalgia, Boym writes, appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time – "the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams" (2001: 7). The concept thus configures itself as a "rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" (2001: 7), desiring to transform history "into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition" 2001: 7). It follows that the past of nostalgia "is not even past. It could be merely better time, or slower time—time out of time, not encumbered by appointment books" (2001: 7).

Crowell affirms that the world for which the nostalgic yearns is "an aspect of the memory-frame and not any specific memory-content" (1999: 96). This means that it refers to "a past that was never present" (1999: 96). The clear-cut valuation of nostalgia - "that 'rosy glow' in which the past appears, the sense of bittersweet 'yearning' correlated to something longed-for that appears somehow precious, seducing us with its depth and charm (1999: 95) – thus counterposes the present to an idealized past that never happened.

These considerations call to mind what Freud[28] said about fantasy. He writes that "the relation of a phantasy to time is in general very important" (Freud 1908, in Person, Fonagy and Figueira 1995: 147). Some "provoking occasion in the present", he continues, is sometimes able to arouse our wishes; this starts a mechanism that

> harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which
> this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which
> represents a fulfillment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day-dream or phantasy,
> which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and
> from the memory. Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on
> the thread of the wish that runs through them. (1995: 147)

The artistic production that derives from fantasy is then a compensation of one's desire, allowing the artist to create an intermediate position between the frustration of reality and

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[28] Despite Leslie Sohn's remark that nostalgia's close relationship with instinctual repetition compulsion means that 'nostalgia must inevitably appear in every psychoanalysis' (Sohn 1983: 205), the concept notably does not appear in Freud's writings, although some reflections on melancholy and fantasy can be applied to nostalgia as well.

the gratification of pure fantasy. Nostalgia, in turn, is not 'pure fantasy', yet "its purchase on the real seems to have little to do with insistence on the veracity of its presentational contents" (Crowell 1999: 92). In this sense, it rather seems to work in a remarkably similar way to Freud's description of art, linking a past experience to the present and somehow projecting on a utopian[29], unreal scenario its fulfilment, allowing to cope with an unsatisfying reality.

1.5.2. Continuity of Identity

One of the most evident effect of this projection process is the continuity it gives to identity in times of unsettling changes, allowing, Davis affirms, to cultivate "appreciative stances toward former selves, screening from memory the unpleasant and shameful" (1979: 44), and "rehabilitating marginal, fugitive, and eccentric facets of earlier selves" (1979: 45). As Wilson states, "the acts of remembering, recalling, reminiscing, and the corollary emotional experience of nostalgia may facilitate the kind of coherence, consistency, and sense of identity that each of us so desperately needs" (Wilson 2005: 8). This role in assuring the continuity of personal identity explains why nostalgia boomed in the Eighteenth century, while the self, thanks to Romanticism, was taking a central place in Western culture (Fuentenebro and Valiente 2014: 407-08).

Yet the process is not as straightforward as Davis and Wilson seem to imply. First of all, as Crowell observes, the nostalgic yearn "neither for specific representational contents, nor for the vanished world to which they belonged", nor "for the *person* [she] once was" (1999: 99), for in principle one is the same person. Instead, Crowell remarks, one is haunted by the ego "that 'once' lived", whose spectrality "present[s] to me as though I were once more to taste the sweetness of that life" (1999: 99).
To explain this scission in the self, we can follow Ricoeur and go back to Latin. Latin has two terms for the concept of identity: *idem* indicates identity as something permanent in time, while *ipse* "tolerates change, degrees, and variation, and thus, includes difference and otherness" (Deciu Ritivoi 2002: 44). Ricoeur identifies the selfhood in the *ipse*, commenting that "selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that

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[29] Accordingly, Boym suggests that nostalgia has "a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future" (2001: xiv).

one cannot be thought without the other, that instead, one passes into the other" (1992: 64).

Davis and Wilson, in considering the continuity of personal identity, imply the idea of an "'arch-self' manifesting itself unfailingly under various temporary 'guises'" (Deciu Ritivoi 2002: 48). What we can say in the light of Ricoeur's division is that nostalgia mediates between the utopia of an *idem*-identity and the destructive factor of an *ipse*-identity, relying "on a principle of coherence and compatibility" capable to offer continuity and coherence in the changes identity undertakes from one stage to another. Nostalgia is thus "the idem that provides the ipse with coherence" (Deciu Ritivoi 2002: 68).

1.5.3. Narcissism

As Dickinson and Erben write, "a particular problem of attachment formation outlined by Freud is the narcissistic reaction; and this will be shown to be relevant to some expressions of nostalgia" (2006: 231).

According to Freud, the infant initially has two love objects: himself and the mother figure (1957b: 87). Now, in a normal development the child moves from the early oral phase to the anal and then the genital phase; at the same time, through the mechanism of the Oedipus complex, the nature of these early attachments is modified, mutating the all-consuming love for the self and for the mother figure into adult attachments towards a range of love objects.

It may nonetheless happen that a person remains more or less fixed in the narcissistic phase, stuck into seeking herself – or some equivalent of the self – as a love object. Freud asserts that, according to the type of narcissistic response, a person may seek what herself is, what herself was, what herself would like to be or someone who was once part of herself (1957b: 90, in Dickinson and Erben 2006: 231).

Dickinson and Erben hence affirm that, particularly in the case one is looking for what she was or for someone who was part of herself, "we can see narcissism's connection with children and childhood, and the trope of idealized childhood so often encountered in nostalgia" (Dickinson and Erben 2006: 231). In this sense, Peters observes that "large

quantities of unwillingly suffered nostalgia are a manifestation of problems in the area of oneness/separation and omnipotence/helplessness" (Peters 1985: 144)[30].

1.6. What are the functions of nostalgia?

In the light of the analysis we just conduced, it is useful to ask ourselves what are, then, the functions nostalgia carries out as a psychological process and resource.

Fortunately, several empirical studies have been conducted on nostalgia's psychologic workings and effects, particularly in the last twenty years or so. I will try to sum up the existing literature on the topic, following the typology established by Sedikides et al., who define nostalgia as a "past-oriented, self-conscious (i.e., personally meaningful), keenly social, and bittersweet, albeit predominantly positive, emotion" (2014: 13). In this orientation, they follow among the others Holak and Havlena, who already asserted that nostalgia is characterized primarily by positive emotions (warmth, affection, joy, elation, tenderness, serenity, innocence, gratitude), and secondarily by negative emotions (sadness, irritation, loss, fear) (1991; 1992; 1998).

According to Sedikides et al., nostalgia serves three categories of intrapersonal and interpersonal functions, that they call *self-oriented* ("raising self-positivity and facilitating perceptions of a positive future": Sedikides 2014: 2), *existential* ("increasing perceptions of life as meaningful": 2014: 2), and *social* ("increasing social connectedness, reinforcing socially oriented action tendencies, and promoting prosocial behavior": 2014: 2).

1.6.1. Self-oriented function

Nostalgia has the capacity to improve self-positivity. This is related to its connection to an idealized past (Kaplan 1987; Davis 1979). Furthermore, research shows that nostalgic narratives tend to show the self as the main character in a positive chain of events (Wildschut et al. 2006), or at least stage successful agency issues (Abeyta et al. 2014). Nostalgia proneness seems to have the capacity to improve one's mood, serving as a

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[30] It is also interesting to notice, as Lizardi does, that contemporary mass media, in turn, foster this narcissistic nostalgia "to develop individualized pasts that are defined by idealized versions of beloved lost media texts" (2015: 2). This connection between nostalgia, childhood and media will be better analysed in the chapter dedicated to nostalgic reception.

coping mechanism towards the problems that hinder happiness (Vess et al. 2012; Batcho 2013 a and b) and augmenting self-esteem (Wildschut et al. 2006). As Davis already observed (1977: 420), since it reassures about past happiness and accomplishments, nostalgia is capable of projecting a positive light on present and future (Cheung et al. 2013). Moreover, nostalgia encourages people to engage in growth-oriented behaviours and unfamiliar situations (Baldwin & Landau 2014), integrating new experiences into the self-concept (2014: 163).

Finally, nostalgia is capable to act as a defence mechanism towards past events that one wants to avoid (Hook 2012).

1.6.2. Existential function

Nostalgia, Davis asserted, "quiet[s] our fears of the abyss" (1979: 41) - a view embraced by Sedikides et al. (2014). It does so, for example, by performing what Greenberg, Pyszczynski and Solomon (1986) call 'terror management function', that is, helping to cope with our own mortality by reinforcing the perceived meaning of the culture one lives in, and strengthening ideas of self-worth (Routledge et al. 2008; Juhl, Routledge et al. 2010; Routledge et al. 2010)

Furthermore, according to Davis, nostalgia acts as a defence mechanism, allowing people to reduce discontinuity when faced with major transitions (1979), offering protection "against the feeling that time passes quickly, leaving no trace" (Ritivoi 2002: 9, 132; Bartholeyns 2014: 67). The hypothesis was confirmed by Best and Nelson (1985) but later criticized by Baker and Kennedy (1994), who asserted that it would be more logical to imagine people coping with transition by looking at the future, and at least partially disproven by Godbole, Shehryar and Hunt (2006), according to whom a nostalgic proneness helps facing discontinuities only in people coming from a positive upbringing. Several studies, though, go even beyond this idea, asserting that nostalgia fulfils an existential function, acting as a source of meaning in life (Sedikides et al. 2004; Routledge et al. 2011; Hepper et al. 2012; Routledge et al. 2012; Routledge, Sedikides, et al. 2013; Van Tilburg et al. 2013; Reid et al. 2014); Sedikides et al.'s conclusion is that "as meaning-making animals […] humans are prone to seeking and maintaining a sense of meaningfulness in their lives. They do so, in part, by being prone to nostalgia or by becoming momentarily nostalgic. Nostalgia helps find and sustain meaning" (2014: 30).

1.6.3. Sociality function

Nostalgic narratives are full of suggestions involving the social dimension (Holak & Havlena 1992; Wildschut et al. 2006; Batcho et al. 2008; Hepper et al. 2012; Robertson et al. 2014).

Particularly, nostalgia, according to Sedikides et al., seems to increase social connectedness, promote "socially oriented action tendencies (interpersonal competence, charitable intentions, reduced desire for money, intergroup contact intentions)" and "prosocial behavior (physical proximity, helping, monetary donations)" (2014: 43), and mediate the other two functions of nostalgia (that is, self-oriented and existential) through nostalgia-elicited social connectedness (2014: 31).

First of all, nostalgia typically revolves around memories concerning close others, thus increasing one's sense of social support and connections and counteracting loneliness (Zhou et al. 2008). Nostalgia seems to strengthen the connections to loved ones (Reid et al. 2014), making people feel more loved and protected (Wildschut et al. 2006; Turner et al. 2012; Turner et al. 2013) and trustful of others (Hepper et al. 2012). As a consequence, nostalgia resulted in feeling more empathetic (Zhou et al. 2012), encouraging socially oriented action tendencies and prosocial behaviour (Sedikides et al. 2014) and intergroup contact intentions (Turner et al. 2012). Finally, in turn, the social connectedness caused by nostalgia increases the perception of meaning (Routledge et al. 2011), thus mediating the other two functions and confirming its relevance for homeostasis (Sedikides et al. 2008; Wildschut and Sedikides 2009; Wildschut et al. 2011).

As Sedikides et al. sums up,

> Nostalgia serves a self-oriented function. It raises self-positivity (i.e., positive self-attribute activation, self-esteem) and facilitates perceptions of a positive future (i.e., optimism, psychological growth). Further, nostalgia serves an existential function. It increases perceptions of life as meaningful. Moreover, nostalgia fosters sociality. It strengthens social connectedness (feeling loved, protected, connected to others, and trusting of others; experiencing lower attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance; feeling socially supported; being empathetic to others), reinforces socially oriented action tendencies […] and promotes prosocial behavior […]. (2014: 43)

1.7. Why nostalgia today? Collective reasons: acceleration, (post)modernity, and amnesia

Nostalgia, it should be already clear, is not related to some specific quality of the past. On the contrary, Davis suggests that it occurs "in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties and uncertainties" (1979: 34). This is true both at the individual and collective level: Lowenthal suggests that we conform the past "to our self-images and aspirations. Rendered grand or homely, magnified or tarnished, history is continually altered in our private interests or on behalf of our community or country" (2015: 502).

Chase and Shaw delineate three conditions for nostalgia to happen: a linear sense of time, some sense that the present is deficient, and the availability of objects, buildings, and images from the past (1989: 2-4). Stauth and Turner are more precise, delineating four principal components of what they call the nostalgic paradigm:

> First there is the notion of history as decline and fall, involving a significant departure from a golden epoch of homefulness [*sic*]. Secondly, there is the idea that modern social systems and their cultures are inherently pluralistic, secularized and diverse; this pluralization of life-worlds brings about an intense fragmentation of belief and practice. Thirdly, there is the nostalgic view of the loss of individuality and individual autonomy, since the autonomous self is trapped within the world of bureaucratic regulation under the dominance of a modern state. Finally, there is the sense of the loss of simplicity, authenticity and spontaneity. (Stauth and Turner 1988: 513; see also: Turner 1987)

What underlies both ideas is a bipartition, or a tripartition, of nostalgic moments. Hutcheon defines it the "structural doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past" (2000: 198). Stuart Tannock understands nostalgia both as a 'rhetoric' and a 'structure of feeling'. As a rhetoric, nostalgia, he affirms, has three principal tropes: first, a prelapsarian world or golden age; second a lapse, fall or catastrophe; and third, a postlapsarian world (that is, the present). The three moments form the basis of an orientation, or feeling, that longs for "a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world. The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked or threatened in the present" (1995: 454). All divisions share what Howard calls

"the poverty of the present requirement", that is, the sense that the past is for some reason preferable to the present (2012: 643).

In this sense, it is interesting to understand why particular versions of the past emerge in the moment they do, and why certain modes of representing the past acquire a particular appeal at certain times. This would explain, for example, why nostalgia has been associated with crises of identity and society (Davis 1977, 1979; Jameson 1984, 1991; Powrie 1997; Dames 2001), and why the feeling has known two distinct popularity phases, first as a disease and then as a feeling, that substantially overlaps with the apparition and booming of, respectively, modernity and postmodernity.

Svetlana Boym famously described nostalgia as "a symptom of our age, a historical emotion" (2001: xvi). Similarly, Turner suggested that the "nostalgia paradigm is a persistent and prevalent feature of western culture, in literature, art, medical history and social theory" (1987: 152). He described nostalgia as an "ontological condition" arising from estrangement and alienation, what Fredric Jameson has called the 'damaged existence' of our modem world. Keith Tester, similarly, contrasted Raymond Williams' idea of the universality of nostalgia by affirming that one must notice "the essential modernity of nostalgia" (Tester 1993: 65). In fact, without the linear conception of time and the ideology of the inevitability of the progress there would not probably have been such nostalgic period(s) (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 919).

This perception may not have been always made explicit, but underlies most sociological reflection on modernity. As Chase and Shaw observe, "Weber, Toennies and Durkheim, for example, all found contemporary society culturally or politically deficient" (Chase and Shaw 1989: 6). Weber saw European rationality to have been developing an immensely powerful technology, lacking nonetheless the collective structures to harness it. This "gave a pessimism and regret to his work and made the irrational satisfactions of charisma and tradition very attractive" (Chase and Shaw 1989: 6). Durkheim believed that, while the ascriptive social typing of the feudal system provided a very strong bond between the individual and the community, where one's obligations and privileges were clear-cut, modern industrial society as rootless, incapable of giving its members any sense

of identity and role. Toennies thought his own time was characterised by *Gesellschaft*, "a form of calculative and contractual relationship which typically would govern the interaction between strangers" (Chase and Shaw 1989: 7). In the past, on the contrary, this impersonality was contrasted by *Gemeinschaft*: a force capable to hold together the community at large, now reduced to "intimate relationships of friendship and kin" (Chase and Shaw 1989: 7).

This last reflection is at heart of every nostalgic experience, at least as a perception, substantiated or not by reality, that the present is lacking compared to the past: as Chase and Shaw comment, the nostalgic reconstruction believes that

> If we now have *Gemeinschaft*, there must have been *Gesellschaft*; if our consciousness is fragmented, there must have been a time when it was integrated; if society is now bureaucratised and impersonal, it must previously have been personal and particular. The syntax and structure of these ideas makes them superficially attractive but this appeal is no warrant for their veracity. (1989: 8)

This perception is in turn augmented by the experience of time in terms of 'social acceleration' (Koselleck 1979; Virilio 1989; Rosa 2013). As Andreas Huyssen suggests, "our obsessions with memory function as a reaction formation against the accelerating technical process that is transforming our *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) in quite distinct ways" (1995: 7).

It seems intuitively fitting nostalgia the idea of a feeling that springs when people find "an accelerating rate of change in many things so frustrating and alienating that they tr[y] to capture the fleeting past in their 'ephemeral' culture and goods", since "as we age, our experiences as children and teens seem to be 'timeless' […], while the latest thing today seems merely fleeting and confusing." (Cross 2010: 158).

To better understand this process, though, we must consider the concept of acceleration and the role it has in modernity and postmodernity.

1.7.1. Modernity

As said, nostalgia began to be diagnosed in the late Seventeenth century: at the moment, that is, when conceptions of time and history were undergoing a radical change (Boym

2001: 8) towards the modern conception of an entity unrepeatable and irreversible (2001: 13).

This change became more evident by the end of the Eighteenth century. The transformations of industrial capitalism "caused a shift in cultural emphasis from space to time as concepts of progress and history changed. Time itself became subject to fundamental reconceptualizations that affected how it was perceived, experienced and visualized in everyday and economic life" (Sprengler 2009: 15). Progress incarnated the essence of industrial capitalism, while collective historical past came to be perceived as irretrievable. The belief "in the sameness or repetitiveness of human events" made space for the "full-fledged modern conception of history" (Carr 1987: 200)[31].

This change had an impact on the understanding of nostalgia, because of "the need to accommodate the loss of an historical as well as a personal past" (Sprengler 2009: 15). Faced with this scenario, nostalgia acted as a coping mechanism able to make modernity inhabitable: "it relieved the anxieties generated by progress, the swift loss of a way of life and traditional ways of interacting with the world" (Sprengler 2009: 15).

On the other side, the changed perception of time not only called for nostalgia as a cure, but was what made nostalgia possible in the first place. As Shaw and Chase observe, nostalgia is intertwined to a linear concept of time, thus to a secular, industrial society. In cyclical concepts of time change is not absolute, but part of a repeating circle of events: hence most experiences are retrievable and repeatable, and there is few to long for. On the contrary, "industrial societies, with their continual social change, future orientation, tendency to secularization, and reactive systems of planning, have seen marked increases in linear concepts of time, both generally and individually" (Dickinson and Erben 2006: 224). This means that once gone, an experience is gone forever; it can be longed for, but it can never be reached again. As Salmose notices,

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[31] We must obviously remember that, as Prendergast reminds in his analysis of the concept of 'modernity' and its implications, "where you begin and end depends on the kind of story you want to tell" (2003: 101). The periodization I am referring to is convincing, but there are several other ideas of modernity and its perks that would result equally convincing, and less suitable to reconstruct such an history of nostalgia (see the whole Prendergast article for several alternative readings: 2003).

In order to have a "past" we need to have a present and probably a future; time has to be linear and irreversible […]. Our longing for the past is strong, we are all "boats against the current," desperately trying to reverse time. Irreversibility is essential to nostalgia, it is an incurable phenomenon: the longing for the past is an impossible mission. (2012: 121)

In this sense, we can agree with Huyssen's remark according to which the availability of new media technologies both prompted and enabled modern nostalgia (1995, in Radstone 2007: 131). Nostalgia came to be both a product of and a solution to the problems of modernity. As Higson affirms, "modern nostalgia emerges with the processes of industrialisation and modernisation; modernity and nostalgia thus go hand in hand; they are two distinct ways of responding to the same experience" (2014: 124). Nostalgia is "a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" (Boym 2001: xv).

It was not only a matter of time, though, but an issue of space as well, despite it is true that nostalgia traced a shift "from the primacy of space to the primacy of time" and "from the eighteenth century's loss of the village home to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' irretrievable loss of childhood and the past" (Boym 2001: 13). The increase in travelling and the growing rate of people moving from peripheries to more central towns reinforced the loss of the stable sense of circularity that the previous perception of life could offer. Cross remarks that

Nostalgia in any form was relatively rare [more than] two centuries ago. Until modern times, few people travelled further than a day's walk from their place of birth and most lived much as did their parents or grandparents. Time was experienced mostly as a cycle of seasons and festivals, disrupted only by unwelcomed events like war or natural catastrophe. With little movement or change, there was not much to be nostalgic about. (2015: 2)

As Boym affirms, nostalgia is thus "not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that makes the division into 'local' and 'universal' possible" (2001: 7). Dickinson and Erben observe that "Boym does not mention Durkheim, but the division into 'local' and 'universal' has great similarity to his distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity" (2006: 227). To leave one's place

after the Eighteenth century, they continue, "meant entering a universal, impersonal sphere, not another local place", for the 'local' shrank to the sole family" (2006: 227). If before one could count on the solidarity of a whole village, now it was the family the minimal "educational and particularizing function" (Starobinski 1966: 102).

As Casey comments, "this development signalled the start of the 'underground' stage of nostalgia, its retreat 'inward and downward into the human subject' and the shift in responsibility from the community to the family as the source of longing and sentiment" (1987: 370).

1.7.2. Acceleration

Pickering and Keightley observe that "the temporal emphasis in modernity has always been on relentless supersession and movement beyond existing conditions and circumstances. This modernist emphasis leaves no space, remedial or otherwise, for dealing with the experience of loss" (2006: 920).

Furthermore, modernity created a new sense of time, what Todd Gitlin has called "a new velocity of experience, a new vertigo" (1980: 233), partly due to the "construction and reconstruction of events by the mass media" (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 922).

In this sense, Reinhart Koselleck affirms that the acceleration of historical time shrinks, in the modern age, the space of experience and limits the horizon of expectation. That is to say, because of the increase in the speed of events, that the experience – the past that should be conserved – becomes poorer (Fortunati 2008: 33). People in Koselleck's account are surprised by the extent of change and their complete lack of knowledge about what the future could bring.

A similar but more radical concept is held by Harmut Rosa about contemporary, postmodern times. Rosa believes that the rates of communication, distribution, production, consumption, and circulation have been steadily intensifying for the past two hundred years. "The rhythm, speed, duration and sequence of our activities and practices", he writes, "are almost never determined by us as individuals but rather almost always prescribed by the temporal patterns and synchronization requirements of society" (2013: 9). The phenomenon can be divided in three areas: technical acceleration, acceleration of social change and acceleration of the pace of life. Rosa identifies two

external drives, the 'social motor of competition' and the 'cultural motor of the promise of eternity', and one internal, the 'self-accelerating forces of late-modernity'. Rosa reflects "on the difference between everyday (experiential) time, lifelong (biographical) time and historical (longue-durée) time, and registers the inevitable tensions and incompatibilities that emerge as a result of their interplay" (Vostal 2014: 236). In late modernity, the virtualization of material processes encourages the speeding up of socio-economic systems. This process alters the subjective perception of time in space, which in turn affects social relations (Rosa 2013, esp. 97-107). Subsequently, time seems to shrink and compress while the rate of social and cultural obsolescence increase (Rosa 2013, esp. 74-78).

Individuals are not, nonetheless, passive victims of these processes. They can, instead, retreat to some safe 'zones of time' (Glezos 2012) or 'timescapes' (Keightley 2012), exercising their agency by decelerating. Nostalgia is part of the strategy of decelerating, according to Kalinina, who affirms that "in the desire to return to a better world, a slower pace of development is believed to be achieved through increased nostalgising via the newest media tools." (2016: 13). Huyssen already noticed that memory

> represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution
> of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation
> outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to
> claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening
> heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload. (Huyssen 1995: 7)

Nostalgia is then "a form of reaction to the velocity and vertigo of modern temporality. It rejects its insistently positive valuation of the temporary and transient" (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 922-23). Accordingly, Boym describes nostalgia as a rebellion against the modern idea of time as history and progress (2001: xv) and Lowenthal defines it an attempt to recapture a putative continuity and coherence unavailable in the fragmented modern or late modern environment (1989: 21). Nostalgia consists thus in "seeking a viable alternative to the acceleration of historical time, one that attempts a form of dialogue with the past and recognizes the value of continuities in counterpart to what is fleeting, transitory and contingent" (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 923).

One last note, nonetheless, concerns the sensation that time is speeding up. While scholars agree that the increase in the speed of communication and the pace of life is tangible, not just perceived, one may ask to what extent it is a matter of subjective experience. Simon Glezos, for example, notes that every generation perceives their age as unprecedentedly fast in relation to their predecessors (2012: 3).

Karl Mannheim developed a 'theory of generations' that could come useful to this extent. In his view, 'generation' has to be intended 'as locality' (people to be born around the same time) and 'as actuality'' (people have to perceive themselves as a generation, developing a we-sense). To Mannheim the 'formative years' of youth (between 17 and 25 years) were crucial in forming the generational experiences, since those were the generation's 'fresh contacts' with new phenomena, the experience to which they would bring back all later, similar experiences (Bolin 2016: 4-5).

Bolin notices how this is especially true in contemporary media landscape. Despite the fact that "consumers possess a variety of 'intertextual competences' and may inhabit different 'interpretative communities' (Fish 1980)" (Proctor 2012), as Gumpert and Cathcart noticed, "the early acquisition of a particular media consciousness continues to shape peoples' world view even though later they acquire literacy in new media" (1985: 29).

Similarly, Morewedge (2013) noted that consumers show preferences for products that were popular during their late adolescence and early adulthood (Holbrook and Schindler 1996; Rubin and Schulkind 1997). The phenomenon is in turn analogous to the cognitive preference people show for remembering events happened between their tenth and thirtieth anniversary, known as 'reminiscence bump'. The interpretative hypothesis of the reminiscence bump is, accordingly, that those memories are more easily accessible because they are more strongly linked to self-identity (Conway et al. 2005).

So, another question that remains open to further investigation is: to what extent the pace of life is accelerating and to what extent it is just perceived to be so? Are the generations born out of the accelerated scenario more vulnerable to nostalgia, have the mass media crystalized the idea of a slower time and are they now longing for it, no matter what the feeling of the generation is? More research is due on the subject.

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1.7.3. Postmodernity

Nostalgia initially spread in Europe "at the time of the rise of the great cities when greatly improved means of transportation made movements of the population much easier" (Starobinski 1966: 101-02) – that is, in a period when one could, way more likely than before, experience being away from home and yearning for it, an unprecedented global experience with regards to the world that far.

In the postmodern, multicultural times, 'home' has become a problematic concept. Postmodern nostalgia developed instead from another paradigm shift, that is the moment "when the rise of information technology made us question not only what would count as knowledge, but what would count as 'the past' in relation to the present" (Hutcheon 2000: 196). In this sense – and I will discuss it soon - Higson distinguishes a modernist nostalgia (temporal and melancholic) from a postmodernist one (atemporal and celebratory) (2014: 120-25).

Jameson believes that late capitalism involves the spatialization of time. Themes of time and temporality, models of depth, belong to high modernism. Postmodernity, on the other hand, is marked by flux and discontinuity, mirroring a culture of surface, perpetual presence, simulation, fragmentation and instantaneity.

This leads to a breakdown of the temporal order and a profound waning of our sense of history: our conception of time becomes spatial, the past becomes depthless. A genuine historical consciousness that would recognize distinctions between past and present (that would allow to organize time historically) is replaced by the logic of simulacrum and pastiche, by a fashionable and glossy pastness (Jameson 1991: 19-21), by cultural stereotypes of the past, that vicariously satisfies our craving for history.

For Jameson, historicity has been replaced by a 'nostalgia mode', understood as a form of pastiche in which culture "recycles the 'style' and 'feel' of past times" (Radstone 2007: 135) in a hyperrealization of that past which reinforces its perception as "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (1991: 18).

There are, of course, several criticisms to Jameson's view and its relation to his reading of contemporary nostalgia.

One concerns the fact that he famously does not leave too much space "for the assertion of consumer identity, taste and choice" (Higson 2014: 122):

> The difficulty with this approach is that it makes assumptions about how readers, audiences, surfers and consumers use texts and artefacts, without actually looking in detail at patterns of use, without investigating the sorts of meanings and pleasures that users actually negotiate when engaging with those texts or artefacts. (2014: 128)

Secondly, in an essay titled 'Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia' (1969), Jameson tries a defence of Walter Benjamin's supposed nostalgia[32]. According to Radstone, "like Jameson, Benjamin feared the 'mesmerizing' surface of contemporary representations, mourned the contemporary loss of depth and historicity, and linked these losses to a contemporary change in the experience of temporality" (Radstone 2007: 136). But while Benjamin's writings on the aura and lost modes of storytelling were nostalgic for past ways of life, Jameson's bemoaning of postmodern nostalgia yearns for older modes of nostalgia – for "the pain of a properly modernist nostalgia with a past beyond all but aesthetic retrieval" (Jameson 1984: 66)[33].

Jameson is thus idealizing the more stable, modernist reality (Hutcheon 2000: 203), in a quest for a bygone 'moment of plenitude' that, Hutcheon notices, he shared with Lukács (who identified in realism, rather than modernism, the golden age: Hutcheon 2000: 203). Hutcheon also remarks how paradoxical is in this sense Jameson's preference for science fiction over nostalgia films, "for it simply points to his orientation toward the very common *futuristic* dimension of an equally nostalgic utopian drive" (2000: 204) while confronting an apparently irredeemable present.

More complex criticism to Jameson comes from a psychoanalytic perspective.
Nostalgia as such was not mentioned neither by Freud nor by Jung. Yet Neumann (1949) shortly affirm it is a wish of returning to uroboric incest - namely, a wish to return to the safety of the womb (Peters 1985: 136-37). This confirms that nostalgia presents the

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[32] For a very detailed discussion of Jameson's and Benjamin's nostalgias, see Radstone (2007, chap. 3).
[33] This is a very close feeling to the one denounced by Davis in favour of a 'high culture' nostalgia (1979) or by Lowenthal towards a 'less unreal' one (Lowenthal 1989: 21).

motive of the archetypal home – that is, of the archetypal mother[34]. This "might be read to suggest that nostalgia speaks of and to that earliest infantile time/space, the time before division – and psychoanalysis has hazarded as much (see, for instance, Peters, 1985; Sohn, 1983)" (Radstone 2010: 188). Psychoanalysis, Radstone affirms, "directs us towards an understanding of nostalgic desire as associated with a lost plenitude that is revised, under patriarchy, as the defensive fantasy of the 'phallic woman' and it can remind us, too, that this fetishistic fantasy protects and encrypts an earlier curiosity about the fascinating insides of the mother's body" (Radstone 2010: 188).

In this sense, "Jameson's account of postmodern historicist nostalgia as 'depthless', 'overstimulating' and 'omnipresent, omnivorous and well-nigh libidinal' (Jameson 1984: 66) bears the marks of […] a denigratory association between mass culture and the feminine" (Radstone 2007: 154). In contrast to this, Jameson yearns for a lost culture of depth. Radstone quite elaborately comments that

> If we say that what we find here is the denigration of the castrated mother and the fetishistic, nostalgic idealization of the fantasized phallic mother of the past then we miss the significance, here, of that earlier curiosity about the fascinating inside of the mother's body that is arguably revised, under castration, as the fantasy of the phallic mother. It is this fascination which finds some displaced expression in the longing for depth. (2007: 154-55)

1.7.4. Nostalgia as amnesia?

Speed is intrinsically connected to the reconfiguration of space. This is evident when one considers the speed of contemporary communication and media technology. Several scholars link this phenomenon to an increasing lack of memory. "Amnesia", Grainge writes, "is seen to be the consequential illness of a postmodern climate of rapid change, instant communication and constant consumption. The equation between speed and forgetting defines our contemporaneity" (Grainge 2000b: 49-50). Amnesia does not have

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[34] Peters further deepens his theory that nostalgia has to do with the "mother/infant dyadic experience", that is, with "the first expression of the archetypal potentiality for creator/created, container/contained, provider/provided for to be experienced" (1985: 137), but I am more interested in Radstone's reading here.

to be intended as the lack of history, but as the lack of historicity, the already mentioned depthlessness.

In Jameson's account, memory crisis is the result of a culture of hyperreality and capitalist hyperdevelopment, where changing relations of space and time have produced a culture of surface, "haunted by the explosion of temporality in the expanding synchronicity of our media world" (Grainge 2000b: 7). Similarly, the point for Huyssen is the way historical time and cultural memory have been shaped by the postmodern structure of temporality born from "the quickening pace of material life on the one hand and by the acceleration of media images and information on the other" (1993: 253). Huyssen holds that the reaction to these stimuli is "a contemporary paradox, or dialectic, whereby a waning sense of historical consciousness has been matched simultaneously by a virtual obsession with the past" (Grainge 2000b: 50).

In Baudrillard's view, history itself has become a "lost referential"; and is in response to this that "nostalgia endlessly accumulates: war, fascism, the pageantry of the belle époque, or the revolutionary struggles, everything is equivalent and is mixed indiscriminately in the same morose and funereal exaltation, in the same retro fascination" (1994: 44)[35]. Despite fundamentally agreeing on the idea of a loss of memory or historicity, Huyssen does not believe that this obsession can be dismissed as regressive or escapist, as Jameson partly does; it is, rather, a desire for temporality, a search for the real "in an age of an unlimited proliferation of images, discourses, simulacra" (Wilson 2005: 82). This is why this nostalgia easily falls prey of post-modern nihilism and neo-conservative word views: because it promises a stable reality, a stable history (2005: 82).

As Niemeyer observes, nostalgia is a companion to progress (Boym 2001), so it is not strange to find it blooming in the middle of new communication technologies and the increasing use of social media; it is instead quite obvious how this movement might "activate nostalgia for the real" (Niemeyer 2014: 2). Yet Niemeyer holds that "a re-emergence of nostalgia mainly indicates a crisis of temporality" (Niemeyer 2014: 2). This is coherent with Savage's observation that what he calls 'pop time', that is, the way popular culture unfolds its rhythm, seems to be cyclical, rather than linear. This means

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[35] Similarly, Jameson writes that in postmodernism "what is mourned is the memory of deep memory; what is enacted is nostalgia for nostalgia" (1991: 156).

that "instead of a line drawn from the 1950s to the present, unfolding into the future, it seems that pop history repeats back on itself, apparently endlessly in ever decreasing circles". Savage concludes that a characteristic of fast capitalisms and critical modernity is "that these pop 'cycles' are increasing in speed" (1996: 6). As Erickson remarks, "nothing ever really ends, loses its appeal, or goes out of fashion for very long; things, people, and experiences are quickly recommodified and resold" (1995: 130). While the account seems correct, the label Savage assigns may not be exact: rather than define pop time 'cyclical', which could give the idea of the somehow reassuring return of a pre-modern condition, in fact, it seems more appropriate to consider it "lateral, recursive, spongiform, riddled with wormholes", marked by "a paradoxical combination of instantaneity and permanence, speed and stasis" (Reynolds 2011: 32).

Higson's analysis accordingly postulates that postmodernity is characterized by a new nostalgic experience. He enumerates three reasons why contemporary nostalgia is different from the modern one. First, he affirms, "if modern nostalgia is aligned above all with the middlebrow, post-modern nostalgia has a more populist sensibility, focusing much more resolutely on relatively recent popular culture and on the mass produced and the industrial" (2014: 125). Second, "where modern nostalgia has a strongly temporal dimension to it, post-modern nostalgia is more inclined to the atemporal" (2014: 125). Third, modern nostalgia is evidently characterized by its sense of "wistfulness, of bittersweet remembrance, the sense of a hopeless longing for something lost and irrecoverable" (2014: 125). Atemporal nostalgia, on the other hand, is, in Higson's words, "a nostalgia that is about the past, but where the past is contemporary with the present" (2014: 123); as a result, the post-modern nuance of nostalgia "seems surprisingly sweet and not at all bitter" (2014: 126).

This may be due to the fact that nostalgia has been commodified and structured as a business, "where the past is no longer lost, no longer irrecoverable, but eminently within reach – one simply purchases the motor cars, books, musical instruments, ships, sweets, cigarette cards or brass door furniture in which one is interested" (2014: 126). It is the process that Boym called "souvenirisation of the past" (2001: 38), explaining that "the global entertainment industry of nostalgia is characterised by an excess and complete availability of desirable souvenirs" (2001: 38).

What may have happened, at the same time, is that "we have lost faith in the possibility of changing our public life and have retreated into the private enclaves of family, and the consumption of certain 'retro' styles" (Chase and Shaw 1989: 3). In this sense, Chase and Shaw draw a comparison with what Raymond Williams has called 'mobile privatisation'. Grainge sums it up by affirming that

> As a cultural style, nostalgia has developed in accordance with a series of cultural, demographic, technological, and commercial factors that have made "pastness" an expedient and marketable mode. The aestheticization of nostalgia has emerged in a cultural moment able to access, circulate, and reconfigure the textual traces of the past in new and dynamic ways, that has taken up nostalgia in particular representational and taste regimes, and that has generally disjoined nostalgia from any specific meaning located in the past. (2000a: 33)

Rather than suggesting an amnesiac culture based on an hyperrealized memory, though, Grainge argues that "the proliferation of nostalgic modes, markets, genres, and styles may instead reflect a new kind of engagement with the past, a relationship based fundamentally on its cultural mediation and textual reconfiguration in the present" (Grainge 2000a: 33).

It is arguably an optimistic conclusion, but it is also a quite a fitting account of nostalgia's doings in contemporary mass culture, far from the apocalyptic claims towards which it is easy to lean. More interestingly, it is not dissimilar from the one reached by Hutcheon coming from a wholly different premise, with which I would like to close this investigation.

Hutcheon rightfully notices that postmodernism can somehow be interpreted both as being ironic *and* nostalgic (2000: 191). The two nuances in fact seem to be the main forces characterising contemporary mass media, the only difference being that "in the 1980s, it was irony that captured our attention most; in the 1990s, it appears to be nostalgia that is holding sway" (Hutcheon 2000: 192).

What irony and nostalgia share, according to Hutcheon, is "a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency - or, emotion and politics" (2000: 1999); both are not thing one perceives into something, qualities of objects; rather, "they are responses of

subjects - active, emotionally - and intellectually-engaged subjects" (Hutcheon 2000: 207).

Furthermore, in the postmodern culture, "(and here is the source of the tension) nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, and ironized" (2000: 205). This ironized nostalgia, Hutcheon argues, is the very characteristic of postmodern sensibility, "both an ironizing of nostalgia itself, of the very urge to look backward for authenticity, and, at the same moment, a sometimes shameless invoking of the visceral power that attends the fulfilment of that urge" (2000: 205).

Since our culture is obsessed with remembering and forgetting (Hutcheon quotes the growth of what Huyssen calls "memorial culture" with its "relentless museummania": 1995: 5, in Hutcheon 2000: 206), "then perhaps irony is one (though only one) of the means by which to create the necessary distance and perspective on that anti-amnesiac drive" (Hutcheon 2000: 206).

Section two: nostalgia and comics

General overview

In this section, I will look into the relation between nostalgia and comics. I will do so by considering both textual and non-textual aspects, trying to highlight features that are specific (though not necessarily exclusive) of the comic medium. I will thus examine the ways nostalgic mechanisms may trigger (or at least encourage) a nostalgic response in the reader, which will require an investigation into the specifics of comic narratives; but I will also try to show key elements of the practice of reading comics and the interaction comics require their reader to perform, and aspects peculiar of comics culture *tout court*, linked to the materiality of graphic narratives and the attachment and participation readers show towards them.

A nostalgic discourse seems to be consubstantial to comics culture[36]; it is an observation made, amongst the others, by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, who affirm that "the rise of the graphic novel has reflected and contributed to the wider culture of nostalgia" (2015: 217), and by Thierry Groensteen, who notes that comic books seem to "have a way of giving rise to some strongly nostalgic emotions" (2009: 11). Furthermore, academic criticism follows along the same line, since, as Cremins affirms, "nostalgia has played a significant role in shaping the discourse of comics studies" (2013: 1).

Nostalgia is indeed ubiquitous in comics, both as a motif and as a mode of consumption through which a consistent part of the audience unfolds its relation to comics. This may come as no surprise, though, if one considers the bloom of nostalgia revolving around today mass culture; as Katharina Niemeyer explains in the introduction to her volume *Media and Nostalgia*,

> Media produce contents and narratives not only in the nostalgic style but also as triggers of nostalgia. Media, and new technologies in particular, can function as platforms, projection places and tools to express nostalgia. Furthermore, media are

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[36] Suffice to say, for the moment, that one of the most known magazine devoted comics, the renowned The Comics Journal, was born in 1974 as a comic fandom publication under the name of *The Nostalgia Journal* (a reference that would briefly last after it was acquired in 1976 and renamed *The New Nostalgia Journal*, to then finally become, since 1977, the TCJ that still exists nowadays).

very often nostalgic for themselves, their own past, their structures and contents. Perpetual media changes render media nostalgic for their non-existent end. Nostalgia, in turn, offers a reflection on mediation, media and their related technologies. In this sense, media practice becomes an essential element of nostalgia (2014: 7)

In the previous section of this work, I have tried to sum up the existing research about nostalgia, highlighting its peculiarities and most interesting aspects. Two very basic elements that may be kept in mind are its status of longing, not intrinsically negative nor positive in itself, for an idealized past (that one does not necessarily need to have experienced in the first person), and its essential role in the construction and maintenance of one's identity, being one of the way in which human beings keep the continuity and congruity between their past and present concepts of themselves. It is not surprising, then, that issues regarding the processes of identification[37], empathy and participation of the readers are at the core of the way comics are read, and will be analysed in this section. Furthermore, as seen in the previous section, the mechanisms of nostalgia at their core derive from and share several characteristics with those of memory. Jackie Stacey affirms that memory produces identities by negotiating public discourse and private narrative (1994: 63); identities, that is, are "formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture" (Hall 1987: 44). When describing the implications family photo albums entail with issues of history and memory (among which, clearly, nostalgia), Spence and Holland affirm that pictures give a significant contribution in "blurring the boundaries between personal reminiscence, cultural comment and social history, paying attention to the overlap between history and fantasy, using popular entertainment, reading official histories between the lines and against the grain" (1990: 9, also in Gibson 2015: 35). Photographs thus "take their place amongst the other objects which are part of our personal and collective past, pan of the detailed and concrete existence with which we gain some control over our surroundings

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[37] The term may seem quite intuitive, and for the moment we can take for good Richard Jenkins's definition, according to which 'identity' denotes "the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities", and 'identification' is "the systematic establishment and signification, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference" (2004: 5). In this context, though, the concept of identification may become quite problematic, and it will be discussed in depth in the reader section.

and negotiate with the particularity of our circumstances" (1990: 10, also in Gibson 2015: 35). Similarly, Annette Kuhn affirms that "we use films and other representations to make our selves, how we construct our own history through memory, even how we position ourselves within wider, more public histories" (2002: 46).

The action of memory and nostalgia in relation to media products, then, is twofold; on the one hand, the textual content of one specific product may (more or less directly) present features aimed at triggering a nostalgic response; on the other hand, media products (and their physical supports) themselves may become over time, regardless of their content, the objects of a memorial (nostalgic) action of recollection and identification by their readers. This means, as Shils suggests, that images of the past have a double effect: "they bring the past as an image into the present and they bring a past image of the past into the present" (2006: 52). This is consubstantial to Kuhn's description of memory as

> driven by two sets of concerns. The first has to do with the ways memory shapes the stories we tell, in the present, about the past - especially stories about our own lives. The second has to do with what it is that makes us remember: the prompts, the pretexts of memory: the reminders of the past that remain in the present (2002: 4).

Comics make no exception, being able to do both. First of all, as Mel Gibson observes, they act as "reminders of past selves, and [are] tied in with a much wider network of personal associations", recalling "key moments in [youth] and help[ing] to locate them in time and in socio-historical context" (2015: 192). Secondly, comics are memorial objects very effective in capturing, representing and chronicling both individual and collective history. This is also due to the formal properties of the page layout/grid system, which make it an ideal structure to represent the passing of time:

> As has been often pointed out by several other scholars (Scott McCloud; Thierry Groensteen, Hillary Chute; Jared Gardner et al.), the page and its mapping into panels allows a creator to trace passages of time through linear progression, which is also done by counterpointing images of one period with another, or using words from one time (speaking in the present) and pictures of another period (the remembered past). (Baetens and Frey 2015: 220)

Furthermore, not only "space and time are intricately intertwined in this medium" (Mikkonen 2017: 37), but comics are a particular field for the unfolding of nostalgia,

since they "lend themselves to, and even invite, a kind of global and synchronic look" (Genette 1980: 33–34), allowing for their codes and strategies to overlap and enhance one another.

An extensive analysis of nostalgia in comics, though, is still missing. It is then necessary in the first place to build up a critical framework that allows not only to define the methodological tools with which to analyse nostalgia in relation to comics, but also to try to determine which aspects of nostalgia seem to belong specifically to comics and comics culture.

Comics and graphic novel: a cautionary tale

Although my corpus will be solely composed by graphic novels, I will be most frequently referring to comics at large. The reason for this choice is dual: on the one hand, the textual characteristics I will outline in the chapter devoted to production apply to the whole field of comics, despite their specifics are usually more evident in graphic novel; on the other hand, fandom and collecting practices (which I will discuss in the reception chapter) have been part of the comics culture way before the birth of the graphic novel, whenever one may want to date it[38].

For what concerns the creation of the term, Roger Sabin offers a vivid, down-to-earth account of the very pragmatic reasons, linked to the chase of cultural legitimization, that stood behind the neologism:

> adult comics became more and more a part of fan culture in the 1970s and 1980s. In terms of their development, this was both a strength and a weakness. A strength because without the institutions of fandom - the shops, the marts, conventions and so on - the new material would have had no other outlet; a weakness because the new adult comics were inevitably restricted by being part of a larger comics culture - obsessive, insular and based on collecting adolescent superhero titles. If the new adult comics were ever to find a wider audience outside the specialist shops, the

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[38] The question has been long debated, and it still betrays either a certain *occidentalist* bias (focusing almost exclusively on the comic tradition of the US) or a tendency to stretch the concept of graphic novel until it is no longer critically useful. The best way to deal with it is, in my opinion, to perform an accurate historical reconstruction, which is not my primary intent here; on the matter, see the excellent work by Baetens and Frey (2015) and the historical section in Bramlett, Cook, Meskin (2016).

crucial question was how to escape the 'fanboy' image. The answer was to come in the form of three outstanding titles, and a new name for an old concept: the 'graphic novel'. (Sabin 2013: 86)

The urge to differentiate inside the comic universe has been since both a critical necessity and a practical *aporia*. Categories like 'underground comics' (or comix) or 'adult comics' went from being a bit puzzling to unintentionally misleading. Some scholars[39] tried to counterpose 'alternative' comics to 'mainstream' ones, but those too are controversial labels[40] that, as Pustz notes, may be useful (if ever) when seen as "ends of a spectrum rather than as discrete categories" (1999: 84), depending on how much one work diverges from "the corporate product published by the mainstream companies" (1999: 84):

> The content of the comics is certainly important in determining alternativity, but so is the publisher (with the exception of the Vertigo titles, almost all are published by small companies or individuals), the creator (most creators have positioned themselves in one camp or the other), the presence or kind of advertising (most alternative publications feature only ads for other comics and zines done in the same spirit, but some have begun featuring ads for compact discs from indie rock bands), and the sales figures. (1999: 90)

To distinguish the two, my reference here will be then the very articulate definition of graphic novel given by Baetens and Frey in their *Cambridge Introduction* to the subject (2015: 7-24). The two quite convincingly argue that the graphic novel is not only a different *form* from comics, but a whole different *medium*, on the basis of four parameters: 1) form itself, 2) content, 3) publication format, and 4) production and distribution aspects (2015: 8). First of all, if comics are a storytelling mode "that is based on the sequential decoding of juxtaposed images that are gathered page by page" (2015: 8-9), graphic novels can "explore" and test the limits of the grid and sequential mechanism, those isolated by Smolderen as institutionalized features of a comic, either by experimenting with unusual formats or returning to old, very basic ones. Second, graphic novel's content is usually (though not necessarily) complex, inclined toward realism, often (semi)autobiographical, and/or devoted to historical or journalistic investigations. Third,

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[39] One of the most recent and significant example is in Hatfield (2005).
[40] On the matter, see Dony, Habrand and Meesters (2014).

graphic novels usually adopt the book format, typically embracing the one-shot formula (though there are very important examples of serialized ones[41]). Finally, graphic novels are usually printed and distributed by independent publishing houses that generally leave their authors a higher degree of freedom[42] – although that may not always be true and obviously does not automatically imply any standard of quality of a publication[43].

The first and the second point – the ones regarding the complexity of form and content – may benefit from a little integration. Achim Hescher affirms that "graphic novels are a specific type of a book of comics that can be set apart from traditional comic books, quantitatively and qualitatively, according to a number of concrete parameters" (Hescher 2016: 55), that he lists in a scheme that sums up the gradient of complexity of a comics work:

```
[traditional/lengthy comic book]        COMPLEXITY:              [graphic novel]

        ←         (1) multilayered plot and narration           →
        ←         (2) multifunctional use of color              →
        ←         (3) complex text/image relation               →
        ←         (4) meaning-enhancing panel design/layout     →
        ←         (5) structural performativity                 →
        ←         (6) multiplicity of references to texts/media  →
        ←         (7) self-referential and metafictional devices →

                        'both … and' or
                        'rather … than' or
                           'is/is not'
```
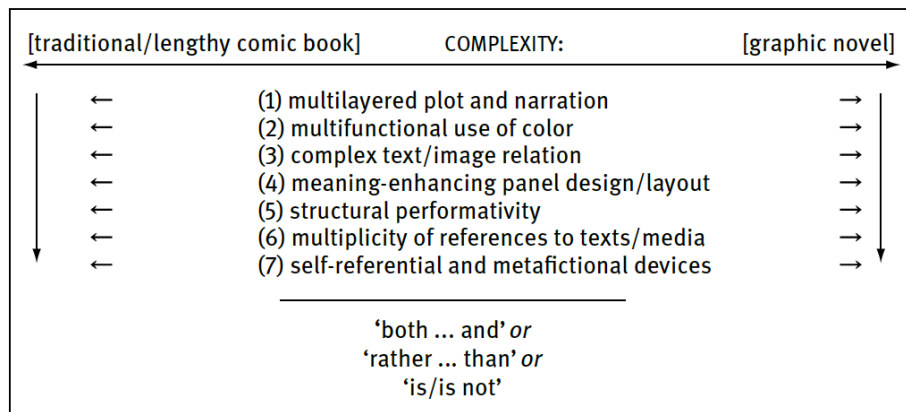
Complexity gradient (Hescher 2016: 56)

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[41] Baetens and Frey mention Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez's *Love and Rockets*, Chris Ware's *ACME Novelty Library*, Daniel Clowes' *Eightball* and Seth's *Palookaville* (2015: 14), and one could add Tomine's *Optic Nerve* to the list. They also cleverly observe how the adoption of a serialized format (to be then recollected in a single book) "makes possible the prepublication (and hence the selling) of parts of a work in progress, while simultaneously offering the graphic novelist better possibilities to interact with the living culture of the day" (2015: 15). For a very insightful reflection on serialization and graphic novels, see Crucifix (2017b, esp. 3-7; 13-14).

[42] Baetens and Frey later return on the creative independence of the graphic novel author, that they call "complete author" to emphasize how the control on her own art differentiates her from the screenwriters/drawers whose work is subordinate to the comics studio system (2015: 135-36).

[43] It must also be noted that the concept has frequently encountered a resistance that made many contemporary criticisms favour the switch to the more transmedial concept of 'graphic narrative', that I consider an umbrella term encompassing both comics and graphic novels.

It follows that graphic novels are textually different from comics books in reason of seven parameters, that may present several gradients, but should in principle tend towards complexity in a graphic novel: the use of a multi-layered plot and narration; a multifunctional use of colour; a complex text/image relation; a meaning-enhancing layout; a tendency towards structural performativity, that is, the reminder of the presence of an "author or narrator who reflects on her/his act of writing and, in so doing, constitutes (or deconstructs) himself as an author" (Häsner et al. 2011: 83–84, in Hescher 2016: 73); a series of references to other texts and media; and the use of self-referential and metafictional devices[44]. Most of these categories will be particularly significant for the sake of nostalgia, and I will deal with them in the chapter regarding production.

It can be preliminarily stated, though, that since graphic novels, accepting Baetens and Frey's and Hescher's definition, try to enhance narrative features belonging to comics at large, they are in theory the most suitable material to work as litmus test of my hypotheses on nostalgia.

Furthermore, graphic novels are not only different from a formal point of view. What is equally important, they occupy a different slice of the market, and are counted as such. Numbers regarding the comics market are a complicated matter, since as Alisa Perren and Laura Felschow sum up, "much of the knowledge that both executives and creatives have about their readership is anecdotal in nature" (2018: 313). As they go on explaining,

> Industry employees are notoriously tight-lipped about the data they collect, and, unsurprisingly, those we spoke with were hesitant to disclose much information regarding the demographics of their readership. Creatives' knowledge, meanwhile, is based primarily on their own experiences engaging with fans through physical and online spaces; they are not privy to the market research conducted by distributors and retailers. What's more, relatively little of publishers' proprietary research is shared with the press or public. (2018: 313)

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[44] Hescher does his best to differentiate point 5 from point 7, but it is evident that the separation is all but clear-cut, to the point that even he has to admit that "text-image-reader appeal bears conceptual overlap
with type 7" (2016: 73). My suggestion is therefore to consider the two as a single category, though this is not excessively important for the sake of this analysis.

Some data are available, though. What we do have are the ones regarding overall sales of comics and graphic novel in recent years, that count as follows:

• Japan (population: 127 millions): 4 billions € (source: Fujimoto 2016)

• USA (population: 323 millions): 1,085 billions € (source: ICv2 2016)

• France (population: 67 millions): 451 millions € (source: GfK 2017)

• Italy (population: 60 millions): 200 millions € (source: Stefanelli 2013)

• Spain (population: 46 millions): 60 millions € (source: Tebéosfera 2017)

Those data alone do not tell much about graphic novel per se (and say nothing about secondary rights, not to mention that it is often difficult to have a picture of the evolution of sales over the years). Yet there is the possibility to unpack at least the North American market, thanks to the data collected every year by ICv2 and Comichron. To date, the most recent edition is 2017, that refers to 2016 sales, and sees graphic novels as the bestselling product with an income of 590 billion dollars, followed by comic books of all sorts (405 billion dollars) and digital comics (whose format is unspecified) with 90 billion. This scenario, which is consistent with the evolution of the market in the last years (ICv2 on its website has data from 2013 on to confirm the trend), betrays the importance (maybe the predominance) of graphic novels in the second most important comics market in the world. Even keeping in mind cultural-specifics differences - of particular significance in the case of the Japanese market and the way mangas are pigeonholed in the few available data – this tells that the field is worth exploring.
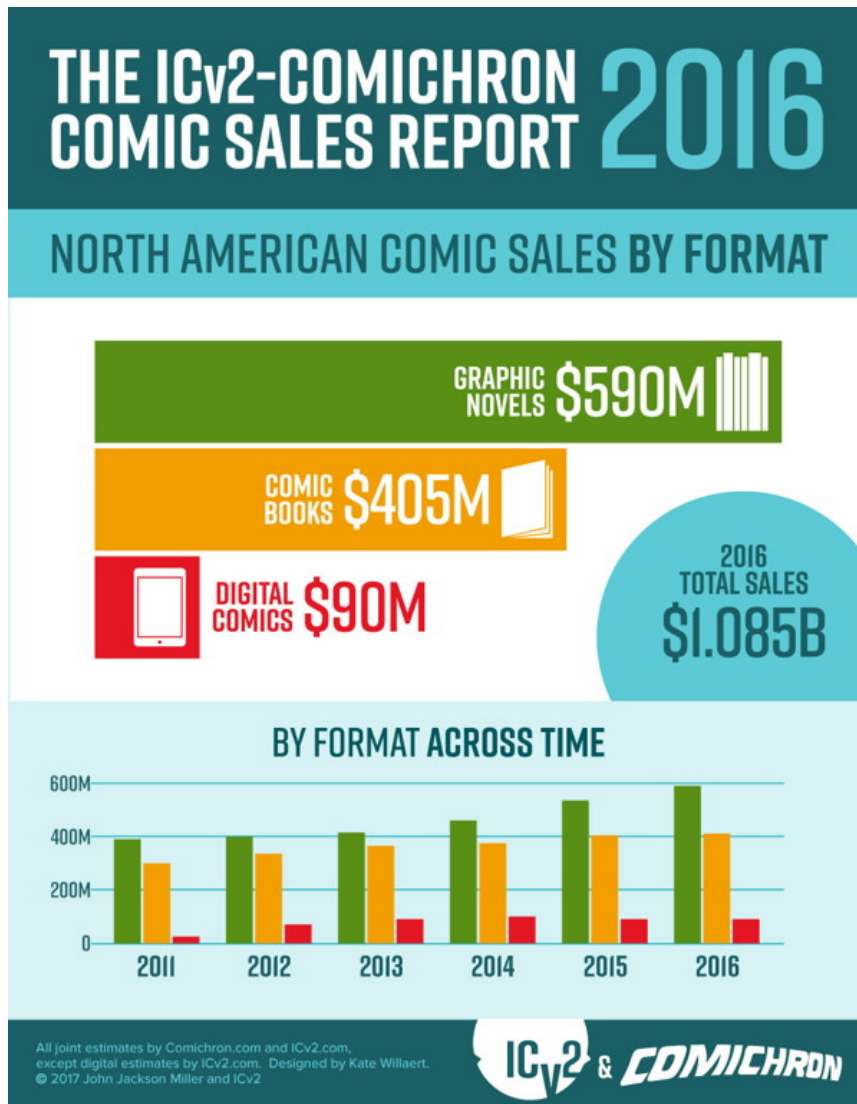
2016 sales report (ICv2-Comichron 2017)

Finally, focusing my attention on graphic novels rather than comics at large will allow to automatically reduce a field of investigation whose vastness would otherwise have been boundless. It would nevertheless be very interesting - and important for the sake of the historicization of comics - to repeat the same research on a different (and wider) corpus as that of comics at large, possibly following historical or geographical limitations rather than the formal (or medial, according to Baetens and Frey) one I chose here.

With that in mind, this section of my work will try to bounce back and forth from graphic novel to comics, to better account for the various manifestation of nostalgia in comics culture.

Production and reception

The structure of this section will be twofold, following a dichotomy that can be roughly summed up as production vs. reception. This division seems more fitting than the textual vs. non-textual one, or the text vs. reader/audience, to explain the specifics of nostalgia especially when coupled with comics.

Nostalgia is, first of all, a matter of cooperation between an element nostalgized about – a text, an object or an event that, directly or indirectly, elicits a nostalgic reaction – and a subject nostalgizing about it. T must be kept in mind that the actual nostalgic outcome is ultimately in the hands of the subject (that Salmose calls the 'nostalgee': 2012: 96) and depends on her personal experience, with all the social, cultural and individual ramifications and implications the term can have. Yet, nostalgizing is nonetheless often (though not always, and not necessarily in a clear and immediately discernible way) linked to a stimulus, or a trigger. It follows that an analysis of this process has to be able to isolate the elements more clearly linked to the triggering part (the production) from those that depend on the reacting part (the reception), never forgetting that those moments are always interrelated and that it is through their interaction, rather than their isolated action, that nostalgia can result. One should not, then, think of two separate actions going on; it is instead a useful critical distinction in order to isolate two interconnected movements and better account for, on the one hand, textual features that try to elicit, or concur in eliciting, a nostalgic response in their reader, and, on the other hand, reception modalities which have been long observed in the field of comics studies.

This is why I believe that a production/reception dichotomy is more apt to display this constant dialogue between the two poles than some that may give, even unwillingly, the idea of two closed, finite and self-exhausting fields, like the textual/non-textual and possibly the text/reader-audience oppositions. Not to mention the fact that the production side, as I will show, is a series of synchronic categories referring to the text's specifics, while the reception one refers to the diachronic evolution of comic consumption, and the form it took over the years.

In his PhD thesis, Niklas Salmose classifies the nostalgic emotions triggered in the subject of experience as either 'diegetic' (meaning, as part of the fictive experience) or 'non-diegetic', despite the fact that elsewhere he employs as synonyms the terms textual and

non-textual (2012: 40; 61-65; 153-60; 379), with the second pole (non-diegetic or non-textual) referring to "personal, autobiographical" emotions (2012: 40). Although Salmose is a bit ambiguous on the matter, it is important to underline that extra-textual nostalgia is (normally) not unmotivated and solely reducible to private matters. It is true that in theory nothing denies the possibility of a free-floating nostalgia, that is, a nostalgic reception of a given text, uncontrolled by any textual, contextual and social factor; nevertheless, such a division would run the risk of reducing every peripheral reading to personal experience, that is, to make it critically unaccountable. Salmose himself has to recognize that "the private nature of these longings is difficult to incorporate in a more general theory of nostalgic experience" (2012: 242).

The problem is that this view runs the risk of being too close to the subject's experience, who ends up being the only one to judge whether something *is* nostalgic or not, and to the sole reception outcome. Moreover, if in principle one might contend that it may be given the case of someone that always feels nostalgic about everything, for no apparent reason except his individual inclination towards the nostalgic mood, that would be a minoritarian instance of a 'heretical' interpretation of stimuli, and my choice is to focus on more paradigmatic examples. This is necessary to further unpack the idea that if "we are nostalgic for the Jazz age before we read a story that deploys this era's specific imagery, then these tropes will satisfy our nostalgic urge. If we are not nostalgic about the Jazz age, then this iconographic imagery will play no part in an eventual nostalgic experience" (2012: 242). True as that may be, stopping ourselves at this conclusion is not particularly useful neither for an analysis of the possible nostalgic strategies of a text nor for a deconstruction of reasons and practices of nostalgic subjects, and I will try to challenge it.

How, then, can we exclude these isolated cases and find a general pattern to explain the work of nostalgia?

The better way to address and account for this cooperative act should be to refer to the vast field of research on reception done in literary studies (especially in what is called reader-oriented criticism) and in the subfield of media studies known as audience studies. Since the 1970's, literary scholars have focused at length on the issue of text interpretation. What most models presuppose is a joint action of the text and its reader

(more often not an actual person but an ideal, general model of how such a person should behave) towards an interpretation that successfully actualizes the former. Along this line we can count Culler's "competent reader" (1975), Riffaterre's "superreader" (1978), Eco's "model reader" (1979), Fish's "informed reader" (1980) and Jauss' model (1970, 1982), which focuses more on the historical progression of responses as performed by actual audiences.

The model that in my view is more satisfactory and the one I will adopt here is Iser's "implied reader" (1974, 1978). While belonging to classical narratology, Iser's model holds intact its usefulness after forty years, and I will use it as the platform to be integrated with more recent contributions coming from cognitive science and concerning the process of emotion elicitation and transmission (affect theory, emotion contagion, colour emotion and so on).

Iser describes the implied reader as a construct "firmly planted in the structure of the text […] and in no way to be identified with any real reader" (1978: 34); it works instead both as a "textual structure" and as "a structured act of comprehension" (1978: 107), that is, as a process of meaning-making done by "selecting and organizing information, relating past and present knowledge, anticipating facts and outcomes, constructing and modifying patterns" (Prince 2011). The interpretation of a text, in Iser's view, is a dialectic process that unifies "the different perspectives represented in the text, the vantage point from which [the reader] joins them together, and the meeting place where they converge" (Iser 1978: 36). This means relying on the reader's "faculties of perceiving and progressing" (1978: 109), and that to interpret all the information correctly she must be aware of the "repertoire" of literary texts, namely the "references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged" (1978: 69). But the structure of the text, though guiding comprehension "allows for different ways of fulfillment" (1978: 37) and "can never exercise complete control" (1978: 107); the textual features on which the reader must be competent are instead to be actualized through the reading experience, ultimately based on "the impenetrability of the reader's subjectivity" (1978: 124). Ultimately, that is, all will depend on the what a more cognitivist take would call 'the reader's schemata'. As Balossi explains, "a schema is a mental representation of part of our knowledge of the world. We have schemata about ourselves, other people, ways of consuming food, lectures at university, and so on. Such schematic knowledge is

stored in the brain and is activated whenever we meet with new situations" (2014: 26). It is ultimately on our schemata – and our encyclopaedia of the real, to borrow a concept from Eco (1984) - to catch the nostalgic hints or not, to actualize them or not, in a movement that ends with ourselves but starts from the text, passing through our social context and our past experiences.

The iconic Fiat 500 (Alfred: 2014)

I believe it is, then, according to such a model that nostalgia works: the nostalgic element can be situated in the textual marks (or anyway more or less implicitly encouraged by the text), but its actualization ultimately depends on the reader's assumptions about a given text, due to the repertoire she is referring to as well as her personal (and social) background. If you have never seen a Fiat 500 in your life, neither during your youth or filtered by some media product, you may never feel nostalgic when looking at these panels of Alfred's *Come Prima*. But if you do consider 500 to be part of the design

patrimony of the 1950s and 1960s, or if some member of your family had this car, you will more likely get the textual hint and feel at least for a moment nostalgic about it.

Many contemporary media studies adopt a perspective on how audience reception works that is highly indebted to Iser and the other scholars of the Constance School[45]. Moving from the ideas of the authors of the Frankfurt School - who posited an inevitable control of the text over the reader[46] - audience studies progressively shifted towards what Abercrombie and Longhurst defined the "incorporation/resistance paradigm" (1998:15), whose key example is Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1973)[47]. This theory, initially conceived to be applied to the analysis of the television discourse[48] but later extended to other media, asserts that an information, in order to be transmitted by a medium and become a communicative event, must first be converted into a story (hence being encoded) to be, in a second moment, decoded by the audience according to some parameters provided by its encoding.

Similar views are De Certeau's dichotomy (1984) between strategies (operating at the level of production) and tactics (of reception), which gives more liberty to the audience's decoding, and the more radical idea of an active audience effectively producing a tertiary text, endorsed by Allen (1985) and Buckingham (1987). In this perspective "the viewer/reader is not expected to uncover a hidden truth but rather interprets and remixes the material she is watching in order to make it meaningful to her in the context of her own life circumstances" (Ross and Nightingale 2003: 130). Despite being quite a polarized view[49], it underlines again the importance of one's past experience when having

[45] For a comparison between reception theory (particularly focused on the Constance School) and audience studies, see Sandvoss (2011b).

[46] This idea is often referred to as the 'hypodermic syringe model', viewing "media as a narcotic where messages are injected" into the audience (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 5).

[47] Abercrombie and Longhurst, in their work, go on to propose an evolution of Hall's model that they call the 'spectacle/performance paradigm' (1998, chap. 6). Nevertheless, I am persuaded that the encoding/decoding is still the better model, taking into account the criticisms and modifications that were advanced: see among the others Wren-Lewis (1983); Pillai (1992); Morley (1993); Nightingale (1996).

[48] Significantly, the original title of the essay, often republished in an edited version with a shortest title, is "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse".

[49] As for the other theories that I listed here, there are, of course, several criticisms on the active audience theory: for example, see Curran (1990); Corner (1991); Miller and Philo (2001); Morley (2006).

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to deal with the interpretation of a text, and the personal investment that such an act demands. My primary reference here, as said, will be Iser, but Hall's model may be a fruitful integration to it (especially when analysing fandom dynamics), and Henry Jenkins' application of De Certeau's theory, in particular, will be discussed in the subchapter dedicated to fandom.

Furthermore, it is not possible to consider readers as individuals without thinking of them, as well, as an audience, which gives "emphasis, first, upon the social, economic, and political context in which reading takes place; and, second, upon the agency of readers as constructors of meaning, images of passivity having been superseded by those that emphasize interpretive agency" (Griswold et al. 2011: 20). In this sense, Woo affirms that "an adequate understanding of the readers of comic books and graphic novels must extend beyond reader-text relationships to comprise contexts of reception" (2011: 1).

This goes along with Baetens' consideration that "comics are not simply an art, a genre or a medium, they are first of all a cultural practice, in the sense of Raymond Williams, where a multitude of aspects and perspectives cross, and whose matters of power and politics are all but absent" (Baetens 2009: 28, my translation[50]). Bart Beaty similarly affirms that "comics are better understood through the collective activities that constitute their production and circulation, not simply as discrete end products defined by the relation of juxtaposed images" (2012: 37). Furthermore, Woo observes that "while actually reading a comic is undoubtedly a cognitive activity that decodes meanings from a text, it is also a material practice […]. Comic books take up physical space, and so storing and disposing of them are activities with which comics audiences must perforce engage" (2012: 194). Brown offers the longest explanation: "due to the fan-based nature of the comic book industry, many of the readers feel, either directly or indirectly, that they are involved in a social practice" (2001: 129). Long's description of reading groups is equally applicable to comic book reading practices:

> Reading in groups not only offers occasions for explicitly collective textual interpretation, but encourages new forms of association, and nurtures new ideas that

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[50] "La bande dessinée n'est pas seulement un art, un genre ou un média, c'est avant tout une pratique culturelle, au sens de Raymond Williams, où se croisent une multitude d'aspects et de perspectives, et dont les questions de pouvoir et les questions politiques sont tout sauf absentes".

are developed in conversation with other people as well as with the books. Reading groups often form because of a subtext of shared values, and the text itself is often a pretext (though an invaluable one) for the conversation through which members engage not only with the authorial ''other'' but with each other as well (Long 1992, 194). (in Brown 2001: 129)

It is not possible, then, to reduce reception to the sole and solitary act of reading, especially for an easily socialized feeling like nostalgia. It will be necessary then to further refine the reception concept, which I will do in the chapter dedicated to the theme.

Outline of this section

This introduction hopefully explains my decision to divide this section into two chapters, the first one focused on nostalgic production and the second on nostalgic reception. The first section will thus deal with graphic novels whose nostalgic features are present in the text, and will be devoted to isolate those specifics and build a poetics of textual nostalgia. The second section will instead confront with the forms and reasons of nostalgic consumption of comics, regardless of the specific content of said comics.

The production chapter will be divided into three subchapters; the first one will deal with (A) thematic elements, trying to account for the recurring motifs that may elicit a nostalgic reaction in the reader. I want to repeat that such features are to no extent a warranty that the actual reader will experience nostalgia while reading a text; rather, those must be understood as nostalgic clues, or guidelines, that would lead the implied reader towards decoding them and experience nostalgia if her reading act concurs with those textual indications. The second subchapter will be devoted to (B) stylistic features, asking whether some elements of style are more likely than others to elicit a nostalgic response. The third and final subchapter will deal with (C) structural issues, posing the question of the existence of a structure that, more than others, works towards a nostalgic reception; it will also take into account the frequent use of transtextual references by comics, and the consequences and implications it entails in the creation of nostalgia.

The second chapter will be symmetrically composed by three subchapters. The first one will be devoted to the most prominent characteristics of (D) the act of reading comics that most scholars regard as medium-specific, and that imply a high level of interaction and identification by the comics reader; this in turn would suggest that those very same characteristics could be one of the reason for the proliferation of the nostalgic discourse

amongst comics culture. The second subchapter will then sketch some of the history and implications of (E) comics fandom, that has been since the early stages of the medium a very important component of comics culture and one strongly linked to the nostalgic experience. Finally, the third subchapter will address (F) the act of collecting, which I will try to differentiate from pure fandom, a division that unfortunately is all but clear-cut, especially (but not solely) in the comics field. In the same sections I will take into consideration issues of gender and reading practices, trying to explain why comics' nostalgia seems to be pre-eminently a male habit.

2. Nostalgic Production

General overview

The following chapter will deal with the textual elements working towards a nostalgic response; it is composed of three subchapters, each devoted to a different category: motifs, style and structure.

The thematic category of *motifs* is the easiest to identify, although, as we will see, there are more overt as well as subtler textual elements that may produce nostalgia; the core, nevertheless, is a spatio-temporal displacement experienced in the story one is reading, or reminded to the reader by some elements of the story.

The *stylistic* category refers to all the visual features that may concur to elicit nostalgia. As I will try to show, some stylistic elements may evoke a (potentially) nostalgic effect, both facilitating a certain reading of a text and appealing to historically and culturally determined features to convey a sense of displacement and hint to a specific moment in time.

Lastly, the *structural* category will deal with some narratological feature of comics. After resuming Ann Miller's adaptation of Genette's narratological framework to graphic novel, I will try to investigate whether certain structural specifics are more apt than others to present a nostalgic narrative. Also, I will consider the frequent use by comic narratives of transtextual references, and what this may imply for the nostalgic process.

It is important to underline how no single element of each of these categories works in isolation, but acts instead jointly with the others, with the shared aim of eliciting nostalgia. This means that every single feature I will discuss is important, but not necessary; rather, one should think, for each one, of a continuum of options from the most effective to the least, all put in communication with every other singular choice in order to finally obtain a potentially nostalgic text.

This implies two things. On the one hand, since every singular strategy must be considered only together with the others, a low degree of nostalgic potential in one element will never be enough to endanger the whole structure. On the other hand, it is useful maybe, as it most often happens when working with taxonomies, to remember that categorizations are never to be seen as rigid couples of opposites, but as critically useful tools to encompass a succession of examples, going from the most prototypical to the least (one may quote to support this view Lakoff and Johnson's 'fuzzy sets', or

Wittgenstein's 'family resemblances', or prototype theory at large). The perfect example of one singular strategy, that is, may never appear in a text whose final effect is nevertheless distinctly nostalgic because of the sum and joint action of other features.

2.1. Motifs

General overview

As I have tried to show in the first section of this work, nostalgia's essence lies in the idea of a spatio-temporal distance from something – a place, a moment, a condition, an experience, etc. – now irretrievable. As such, nostalgia at the thematic level can be read as a chronotope, that is, according to Bakhtin, "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981: 84). In the chronotope "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (1981: 84). Nostalgic space and time merge in the representation of a not-here/not-now; in a narrative, this is often embodied by the main character/narrator acting as mediator of the nostalgic instance.

It is not necessary for time and place to have the same weight. On the contrary, one can notice in the historical evolution of the term and its articulations, as I have tried to outline, a movement from a principally spatial core to an eminently temporal one. This entails that, in the Western world, contemporary nostalgia more often has to do with something far in the past than with something far in space. This is the consequence of a series of transformations that took place in the last century or so: first, the intensification and acceleration of the experience of time, primarily due to changes in the working/leisure rhythm[51] and to the contemporary inclination towards (or, one could say, habit to) immediacy; second, contemporary information technology, which made it possible to immediately summon something from other times and places (although reduced to its virtual, *simulacrum* state); third, the capillary traffic web that crosses and connects the modern world, which, together with a huge acceleration of travelling times, circumscribed spatial nostalgia prominently to the places one had to leave because of necessity. Generally speaking, this means spatial nostalgia is linked primarily with the experience of migration, especially from poverty- or war-stricken areas; however, low-intensity spatial nostalgia can be experienced wherever a physical displacement happens,

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[51] See on the matter Crary (2013).

hence virtually whenever someone moved from a place to another for a more or less permanent period of time.

From all I have said it follows logically that this displacement, be it geographical or chronological, is the first and more evident textual mark and trigger of nostalgia.

Nevertheless, there are other, less evident maybe, textual specifics that may be found at the thematic level and act as triggers for nostalgia. Salmose asserts that some tropes - among which he recounts "ruins, seasons, voyages, and childhood" – are capable to activate "our sensations and emotions […] or carry nostalgic weight in their capacity for allusions and symbolism" (2012: 241). More extensively, Holak and Havlena performed a sociological survey on the elements that people associate with their nostalgic experience, concluding that

> Tangible items such as antiques, clothing, jewelry, toys, books, and cars (particularly one's first car) are consistent themes. […] Even more intangible stimuli (e.g., music/songs/ recordings and movies) trigger nostalgic thoughts. […] photographs play an important role in initiating nostalgic experiences. […] Even food and aromas are given considerable attention. (Holak – Havlena 1992[52])

Finally, individual and social recurrences seem to similarly act as nostalgic stimuli as well (Holak and Havlena 1992).

What these elements have in common is the overt or covert enactment of a binary system that Salmose calls 'bipolarity' (2012: 144). Salmose draws his idea from Santesso's analysis of nostalgic poetry written in Eighteenth-century Britain, where the latter remarks the use of dichotomies that follow and strengthen those, already recalled, of then/now and there/here. Santesso lists "rural versus urban, happiness versus misery, simplicity versus sophistication, innocence versus corruption, hospitality versus suspicion, contentment versus ambition, agriculture versus industry, self-sufficiency versus economic reliance […]" (2006: 147) – and several others that can be summed up

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[52] On the same topic, see also Hirsch (1992). Salmose quotes a study by Neff (1956, in Salmose 2012: 117) on what triggered homesickness among East German refugees in West Germany, that enlists roughly the same elements.

as "exotic versus familiar" - and remarks how the temporality of the poems itself "follows the classical dichotomy of pleasure and regret" (Salmose 2012: 245).

Yet there is another bipolarity at work here, one that counterposes the brief, ephemeral finitude of human life to the slow dilatation of cosmic time[53]. Johannisson isolates the core of modern nostalgia in the sensation of a "subjective time kept inside a larger feeling of passing time. Its triumph is that it allows the individual to long for and fantasize about the own self in a stream of images, experiences, bodily reminders, moods, associations and vague reminiscences in order to communicate with one's own life story" (2001: 159, in Salmose 2012: 122). Human lives change and fade away so fast when compared to the persistence of some materials, to the millenary longevity of a canyon, to the hundreds of years of some olive trees, and intangible stimuli and recurrences act as *chronological signposts[54]* of those little existences:

> The crucial element of nostalgia and nostalgic mood is undeniably the time arrow [*sic*]: the irreversibility of time and the fading of all stable molecules around us, whether that is a sand castle, a human life, or the universe. Most of the nostalgic tropes owe something to the teleological aspect of time, a matter which fundamentally causes the pain and melancholia of the nostalgia. (Salmose 2012: 252)

2.2. Motifs in comics

Sprengler asserts that nostalgia narratives involve "a state of being which seems Edenic from the vantage of the present. Through the passage of time, this Edenic state is lost. Such loss initiates mourning, longing and attempts to retrieve or recreate (in memory or reality) the desired prelapsarian condition" (2009: 72-73). Similarly, if we think of the most basic embodiment of that bipolarity and the role of emotional mediator characters assume (more on the subject in the section concerning the act of reading), it follows that the representation of characters living out of their homeplace and/or remembering the past is *the* prototypical thematic example of a nostalgia narrative. This is reinforced by the fact that graphic novels often resort to (pseudo)autobiography, so that the protagonist

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[53] I am not using the term according to Aristotle's notion (reworked by Ricoeur) of an *objective* time; rather, I am referring to the long, inconceivable extension of time the universe has seen, compared to the time that can be physically experienced in the course of one's life.

[54] Drawing on Bakhtin, Purdy similarly defined 'mnemotope' the "chronotopic motif that manifests the presence of the past, the conscious or unconscious memory traces of a more or less distinct period in the life of a culture or an individual" (2002: 447).

is an alter ego of the author and filters through her experience even realities that may be alien for the reader. One may easily think of a Western reader confronting herself with the work of Marjane Satrapi or Zeira Abirached, and their bittersweet memories of the past times respectively in Iran and Lebanon.

Much of the symbolical work in the corpus of poetry analysed by Santesso is carried out by the childhood trope, very common in the Eighteenth century, notably because "children were emblematic of a lost relationship with nature" (Santesso 2006: 70). This connection in contemporary society (and quite clearly in comics culture) finds its counterpart in the association between adolescence and innocence: one may think of Fitzgerald's *Long Red Hair*, Maroh's *Le bleu est une couleur chaude,* Antico's *Le gout du Paradis,* Fraipont and Bailly's *Le muret* and so on. What remains is that everybody has memories of a childhood (or an adolescence), "and thus a personal connection to a child" (Santesso 2006: 71). Nostalgia's implication in stories dealing with youth is then almost automatic, since "youthfulness is contrasted with indications of aging and human decay, either explicitly through the narrative or implicitly through the private awareness of this decay" (Salmose 2012: 278-79). This means that it is not even necessary to state that such a graceful period will end, because everybody knows it already from her personal experience; and both if the childhood or adolescence depicted is smooth and unproblematic, or whether it is tormented and full of discontent, most people will be prone to remember it with a bittersweet sense of longing. A good example of this process may be Mariko and Jill Tamaki's *This One Summer*, which is not set in the past neither resorts to many of the specifics that I will discuss soon, yet nonetheless is able to convey to the reader a nostalgic feeling with the minimal, sweet recount of the kind of summer vacation many had when adolescents. The second pole in this case is our own aging, and it does not have to be explicitly mentioned in order to be perceived by the reader.

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A page from This One Summer (Tamaki 2014)

Besides the exceptional frequency of adolescence-themed story, though, motifs in comics are essentially the same one can find in any other medium. We can nevertheless rearrange them following Holak and Havlena's survey, and isolate some general category to help navigate their variety.

2.2.1. Moments: chronological signposts, exoticism, and polychronic panels

My first category more evidently embodies the very core of nostalgia, directly relating to the passing of time. Nevertheless, it does so by means of an often very subtle action, performed through what I called *chronological signposts*. They can either symbolize and embody the time flow (be it cyclical or continuous) or fragment and stop it by highlighting significant portions of time.

Time flowing signposts are then the motifs deriving, more or less consciously, from the romantic experience of nature: "waves, full moons, sunsets, and the change of seasons" (Salmose 2012: 116; see also 247-49), elements deeply rooted in the agricultural life and the idea of the cycle of nature, hence "connected to a pre-modern, traditional, and secure life style" (Salmose 2012: 116; see also Smith 2000: 517). Individual (birthdays, graduations, weddings, and so on) and social recurrences (historical or sport event, etc.) mentioned by Holak and Havlena (1992) belong to the same category: by referring to our 'life cycle', they remind us of the passing of time (Davis 1979: 52-71) and its *repetition with a difference*. The *fil rouge* of these elements and events is the ability to suggest an "anticipation of death [that] creates in us a desire for the stable values of life, the repetitions that conquer our own life span" (Salmose 2012: 116).

Conversely, *time freezing signposts* are those that halt time to a specific moment, returning it to us as it was despite everything has changed; it is the case of photographs[55], where "an event or subject from the past star[es] into the present"; moving images, "with their realistic depiction of life"; and audio recordings (2012: 115). Drawing from Agacinski (2000: 89), Salmose highlights how in "conserving the traces of people and things" those memorial objects "remind us even more so of the lack of life in their subjects" (Salmose 2012: 115).

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[55] On the same line, let us also recall Sontag's consideration that "photographs promote nostalgia" (1977: 5).
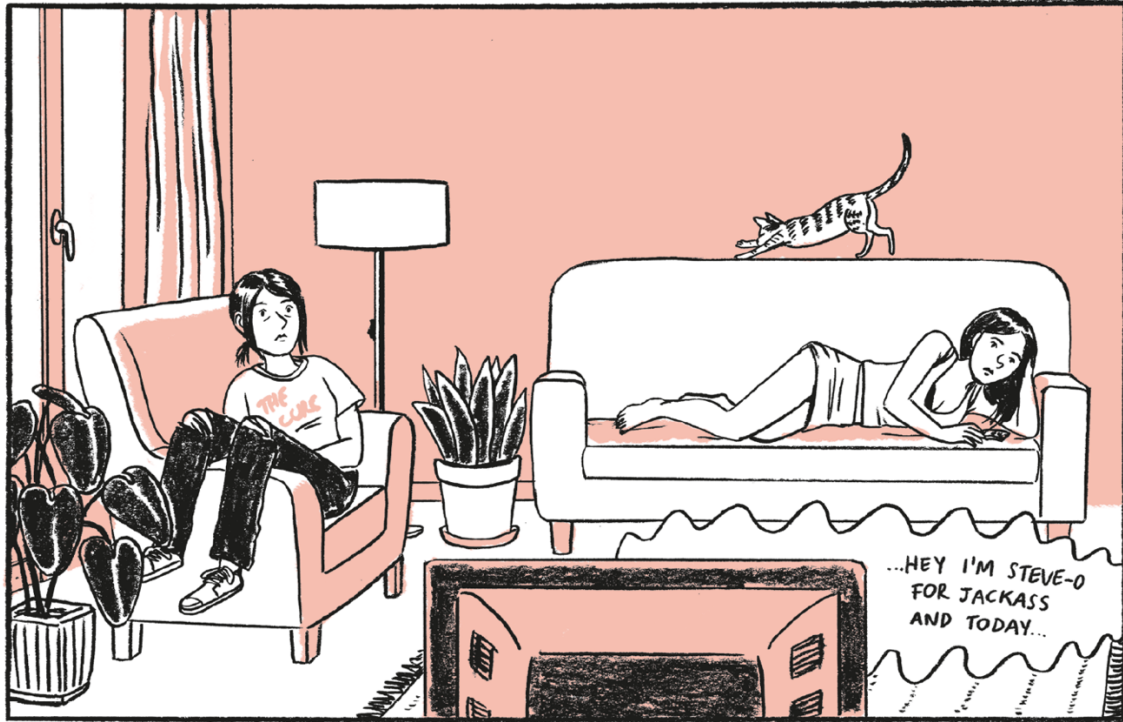
Time flowing (the title of the work is Incendi estivi, Summer Fires) and time stopping signposts (Sagramola 2015)

Comics, as it should be clear, appeal to both resources. They can incorporate in their narrative every kind of time flowing signposts, exhibiting landscapes with flowers in bloom, exploring the slow traffic jam of a city, showing some characters' marriage and so on; but they can as well feature time freezing signposts, reproducing the actual photograph -or a drawn version - of said marriage, re-enacting the author's father death and screening on a drawn television an old quiz show (I will deal again with it in the structure subsection).

Another related feature of comics has to with the effect the passage of time has on motifs. Discussing advertisement, Stern assigned a key role, in order to elicit a nostalgic reaction, to "quasi-mythological characters, exotic settings, and fantastic plots" capable of recreating "the past as a golden age", via the "typological form of classical allegory" that envelops long-gone events in a "redeemingly benign aura" (Stern 1992: 14). But isn't the same effect at work when we read comics from the past?

If we read with contemporary eyes a comic from the past, its objects, its events, its stylistic choices will likely prompt our nostalgic reading, for the past was frozen by the medium

itself even if that was not necessarily the scope of a given work. In thirty years or so, Katchor's or Seth's cityscapes will bear the sign of modifications to the urban landscape, becoming the time freezing signposts of a bygone era.

Everyday, contemporary life depicted in comics becomes thus itself, after due time, archival material at work, hence propellant for nostalgia. What was ephemeral and *evenementiel* inevitably enters, after due time, a nostalgic circle, becoming itself the object of a nostalgic reading.

Read today, those settings – which become "often exotic both geographically and temporally" (Stern 1992: 13) - are a distinctive characteristic of nostalgic comics. Filtered through the sensibility of the contemporary reader, the resort to the past, with its different looks, customs and cultural values, has an immediately perceivable exotic effect.

Watchmen's colour palette, originally reminding of Ditko's style, has a distinct 1980s appeal for the contemporary reader (Moore and Gibbons 1986)

Exoticism, on the other hand, has always been a component of comics fashion and one of their key appeal to the nostalgic eye: Gibson explains as American superhero titles of the past are remembered by her interviewees (British female readership interviewed about their adolescence readings) as 'exotic and adult': "these comics also offered images of men and women in largely professional rather than romantic relationships. The geographical distance of America (along with the age of the protagonists) meant that these comics came to represent a 'symbolic spatial location'" (2015: 185).

A good example of this process comes from a *pastiche*, Dylan Horrocks' *Sam Zabel and the Magic Pen.* The eponymous hero, a comics author in the midst of a creative block, finds himself literally drawn into the story of some 1950s comics by virtue of the magic pen they were conceived with.

The story *in abyme* is an exotic science-fiction oddity set on Mars, and it offers Horrocks the possibility to draw a male fantasy in the fashion of the weird tales so popular in the 1950s – while at the same time ironically distancing from it and prompting a reflection on the gaze of old comics by virtue of the purest postmodernist double coding.
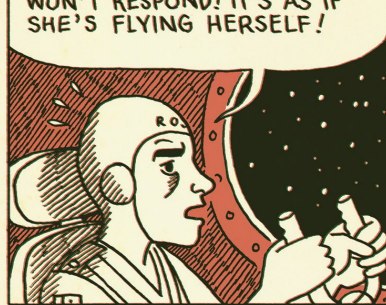
Sam Zabel's pastiche of 1950s comics (Horrocks 2014)

Finally, it must be remarked how comics, as Gardner observes, are able to shift tense both between panels and within a single polychronic panel, thus (according to his sometimes

overenthusiastic account of comics' narrative possibilities) telling "history in ways that aligned more fully with the workings of memory than other narrative forms" (Gardner 2012: 172): comics are an art imbued of time (more significantly, of *spacialized* time) and they chronicle the past and the present which will become past.

This peculiar relation between space and time allows comics to nuance their representation of memory in a way other medium would struggle to do. For example, in *La casa* Paco Roca uses quasi-infographics to put together the objects in the house of the dead father and the moments they were once used; he builds a literal family tree to retrace the evolution of the father's family, and uses more than once polychronic panels to show at the same time a character remembering something and the event remembered itself, enhancing the vividness of the memory and thus its nostalgic potential.
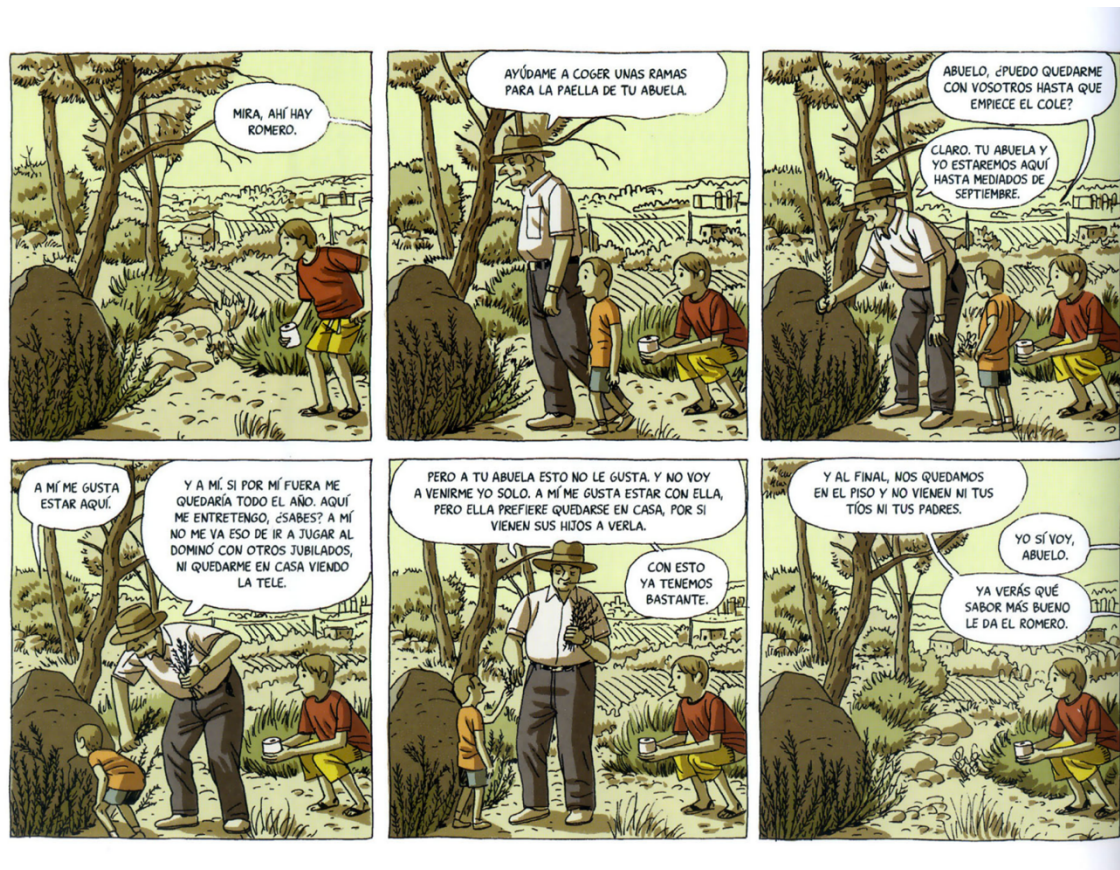
Polychronic panels in a page from La casa (Roca 2015)

Furthermore, characters are not always living in the eternal present Umberto Eco (1964) isolated analysing old Superman stories. They may get old and die, ceasing to be available for the nostalgic fan and her emotional attachment. In a detailed and very interesting interview by Christopher González, Gilbert Hernandez reflected upon the implications

and consequences of his and his brother's choice to make the characters of *Love & Rockets* grow as in normal life, something he brings back to Frank King's *Gasoline Alley* (which started in 1918 and still runs, although of course the author is not King anymore[56]):

> Luba's granddaughter […] wants to go back to the Palomar that we all know, the one we all grew up with. The '80s Palomar. Well, she wants to do that, but everybody's moved on. We've moved on. You can read it in the reprints. You can read the stories. *You can want more, but it's done.* […] So, I have a character going back looking for that Palomar that's not there. And when the story ends, she'll have accepted that she's the new Palomar. She doesn't know that yet. (González 2016: 67, my emphasis)

2.2.2. *Places*: home, landscape and materiality

It is already implied in what I have just said that places are not only the physical elements they are composed by, but also the affective charge we assign to anywhere something significant for our identity happened.

Of course, the most important of those experiences is that of living, or having lived, somewhere. 'Home', as Sharon MacDonald contends, must not be intended in its more restrictive sense, since it may "refer to particular countries, regions or villages; and it may be indexed by particular foods, smells, bodies and practices" (2013: 95-96). The relation we entertain with our home is not only that of belonging to, or longing for, a place; it is first and foremost a matter of experiencing reality, one of the most powerful filter to our lives: "to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in", says Edward Casey (1996: 18).

Duyvendak isolates three key meanings in the concept of "home", that he identifies as follows:

I. Familiarity

'Knowing the place'

II. Haven: secure, safe, comfortable, private and exclusive

Physical/material safety; mentally safe/predictable

Place for retreat, relaxation, intimacy and domesticity

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[56] King was responsible for the strip from 1918 until 1959, to be backed up and later replaced by Bill Perry (who ran the Sunday strips from 1951 to 1975) and Dick Moores (from 1956 to 1986). Since 1986, the strip is written and drawn by Jim Scancarelli.

III. Heaven: public identity and exclusivity

A public place where one can collectively be, express and realize oneself; where one feels publicly free and independent. Home here embodies shared histories; a material (2011: 38).

This is why, then, Salmose affirms that "there is no greater nostalgia than during times of migration and exodus" (2012: 132), echoing Johannisson enumeration of the main reasons for migrating (poverty, wars, political, religious, or ethnical persecution, industrialization and urbanization and so on: 2013: 35, in Salmose 2012: 132); accordingly, Radstone says that "we shouldn't be surprised if, in studies of the tribulation and suffering that is refugeedom and exile, passions about nostalgia run high" (2010: 187). Yet travelling does not have to be traumatic in order to feel nostalgic; it intrinsically "represents change, movement, passing of time, and new spaces" (Salmose 2012: 266), life changings that make us more prone to nostalgia. Changing home, or moving to another city, or going to live in a different country, may be very joyous experiences; still they do not prevent nostalgic memories, and the appeal that familiar traditions, conventions, habits, bygone entities coming back from elsewhere will always have on those who are far away.

Yet the reflection on chronological signposts also entails that those places are as well, in a very significant way, tied to their materiality: "material objects", says Shils, "have a self-maintaining power which is inherent in their material nature. Once they have been created, they can exist as long as human beings leave them alone to move towards their own natural fate; they disintegrate from internal decay and the strain of usage, erosion, and catastrophe" (2006: 63). The durability of some materials (and the object made of those materials) "enables the past to live into the present" (2006: 63): Shils mentions "stone, metal and wood" and "the physical landscape" – but we could add the other elements that form the urban landscape, such as concrete, clay bricks, glass, plastic and (more ephemeral, and less properly pertinent to the category of 'materials') paper and painting.

As an example, one can think of the use of architecture in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*: "The 1893 Chicago World's Fair, for which the people of Chicago built over 200 buildings, serves as the historical backdrop against which Jimmy's grandfather recalls his

childhood", a function coupled with that of "the large glass-and-iron structures were called the 'White City'" and the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building (Mauro 2010: 20)[57].
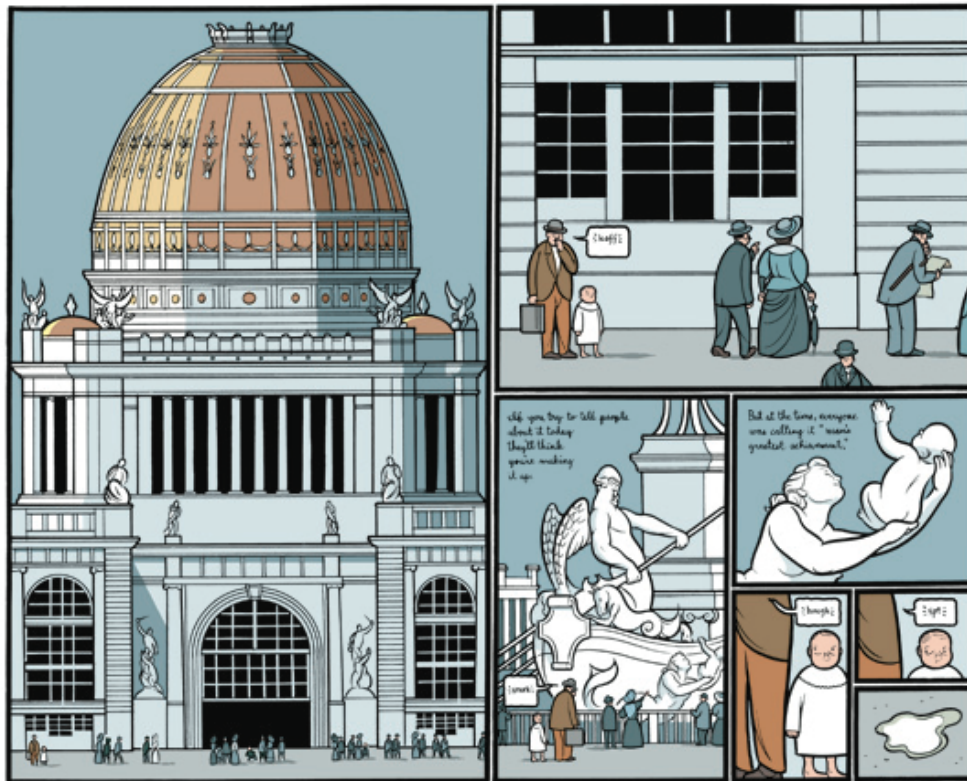
One of the appearances of the Chicago World's Fair entrance building in Jimmy Corrigan (Ware 2010)

Landscape, be it natural or artificial, seems thus to be the key point; its components differ for size, physical properties and decay time from human beings, and its destiny is equally melancholic whether it is marked by human modifications (the demolition of an unstable building, a slice of forest cut down to make room for a highway[58]) or by simple decline:

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[57] Furthermore, the use of architectural elements to enhance the geometry of the panel structure has a pivotal narrative function in Ware, frequently framing the events (an element that returns in fellow authors like Seth or Daniel Clowes): "Ware is most concerned with architectural thresholds or passages. Windows, doors, and hallways become an integral part of his comics grammar" (Mauro 2010: 22), only allowing the reader to experience the events in a mediated form, through these thresholds.

[58] "Human beings affect the natural course of the life-span of objects by deliberately destroying them, by using them, and by deliberately protecting, reinforcing, preserving, and restoring them", writes, with a certain lyrical tone, Shils (2006: 63).

> The topography and spatial pattern of cities endure for even longer periods than most
> of the buildings in them. One reason is that certain old buildings, surviving because
> they are cared for, define the main topographic pattern. […] Features of the natural
> landscape like seashores and rivers are very difficult to change and the patterns of
> streets are likewise difficult to change. (Shils 2006: 65)

This double temporality strikes even more when we think that familiar landscapes are not perceived as detached elements, but as part of one's own identity; Salmose quotes James Beattie to explain the impact mountains have on homesickness: "precipices, rocks, and torrents are durable things; and, being more striking to the fancy than any other natural appearances in the plains, take faster hold of the memory; and may therefore more frequently recur to the absent native" (in Salmose 2012: 100).

And even when decline happens, its manifestations, its marks (dust, rust, creaks in the surface, dirt, oxidation, withering) are different from those of the human body. In this sense, Sharon MacDonald affirms that the past is not only an abstract concept; it is also "materialised in bodies, things, buildings and places. It is felt, experienced and expressed through objects, such as ruined buildings, monuments, flared trousers or the marks of wear on old furniture" (2013: 79). Ruins become "symptomatic for the time arrow", further confirming that everything "inevitably will decay and die" (Salmose 2012: 246[59]). The concept of ruins, it is important to notice, must not be circumscribed to classic architecture; as Andreas Huyssen observes,

> Nostalgia is at stake in the northern transatlantic when one looks at the decaying
> residues of the industrial age and its shrinking cities in the industrial heartlands in
> Europe, the former Soviet Union, the United States, and elsewhere: abandoned auto
> factories in Detroit; the monstrous blast furnaces of former steelworks in the Ruhr,
> now incorporated into public parks; the gigantic coal-steel conglomerates in Eastern
> Europe surrounded by ghost towns, ciphers of the end of socialism; and so on. Such
> ruins and their representation in picture books, films, and exhibits are a sign of the
> nostalgia for the monuments of an industrial architecture of a past age that was tied
> to a public culture of industrial labor and its political organization. (2006: 8)

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[59] Along the same line, see Santesso (2006: 34). Quite significantly, also, Susan Sontag suggests that photographs are a modern counterpart of the artificial ruin create to make a landscape more antique (1977: 79).

Cheap Novelties. The Pleasures of Urban Decay (Katchor 1991)

To sum up, landscape elements have the potential to "provide both change and stability, a set of binaries that can be very useful in creating nostalgic imagery. They convey romantic lyrical spaces as well as symbolize the passage of time and the universality of situations" (Salmose 2012: 256). Either if they stay the same and are passed through the seasons while human beings get old and die, or if they slowly decay or when they are drastically altered by the human hand, they are powerful reminders of the arrow of time and prompters of nostalgia.

2.2.3. *Objects*: representational souvenirs and commodity selves

Objects in general are powerful triggers of nostalgia. Whether for a matter of personal reminiscences about the role of a specific object in one's past or in the more socially-oriented example of branded goods, objects are not reducible to their materiality; they carry with them stories which vicariously provide - from a distance - a "reflection on the meaning of one's own life" (Hoskins 1998: 2, in MacDonald 2013: 148). On her reflection on what she calls 'happy objects', Sara Ahmed comments that objects do not "refer only to physical or material things, but also to anything that we imagine might lead us to [a certain feeling], including objects in the sense of values, practice, and styles, as well as

aspirations" (2010: 41). Furthermore, and I will return to this point in the chapter examining reception, the objects we use(d) in our life are inextricably connected with our habits and the subsequent identity work linked to them.

Commodified nostalgia in a page from Je me souviens: Beyrouth (Abirached 2008)

Salmose (2012: 112) attempts a taxonomy of objects in function of their nostalgic action, by drawing from Stewart's concept of 'souvenirs' - that is, in her words, the objects intended as "traces of authentic experience" (1984: 135). Stewart divides souvenirs into 'homomaterial', actual objects from the past (it is the case of comic magazines being themselves the object of nostalgia) or 'representational' - that would be the case of diegetical objects in a graphic novel (1984: 136). Plus, Stewart divides souvenirs in private (internal), pertaining to the individual experience of the reader), and public (external), a category that encompasses and overlaps that of commodity.

Commodities may be private souvenirs, but at the same time in our consumer society they most often act as public souvenirs as well. Stern affirms that "memory is guided by the self-concept - an individual's totality of cognitive generalizations about the self or 'self-schema'" which direct the memory process in the light of self-related information coming from one's past experience (1992: 18; see also Hong and Zinkhan 1992). Now,

> In [contemporary] culture, products are important signifiers of self-concept, for objects serve as reminders of events in the personal past (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). They are 'personal storehouses of meaning' (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988, p. 533) that contain the raw materials of the self, out of which an individual forges a self-concept (see Belk 1988; Sirgy 1982). This self-concept incorporates bits and pieces of brand images remembered from the personal past (Poulet 1956) that help to locate the sense of who we are today in memories of who we used to be and of what products we used at that time. (Stern 1992: 18)
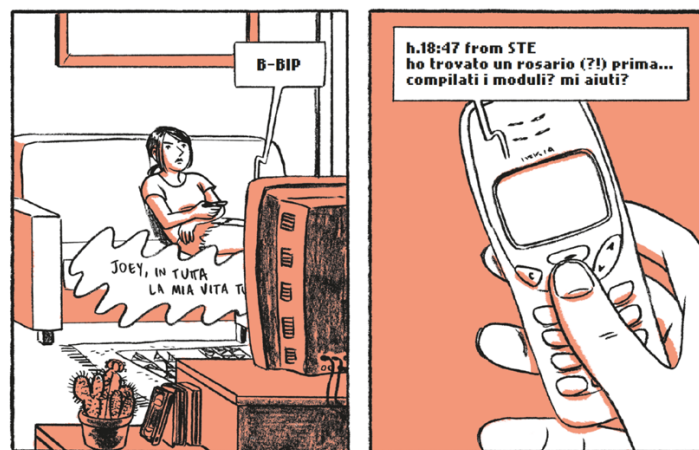
One of Nokia's iconic cell phones from the early 2000s (Sagramola 2014)

By drawing on Allport's concept of 'social self', Stuart Ewen coined to this regard the term 'commodity self' (1976) to refer to how we construct our identities through the products that inhabit our lives. This concept implies an idea of the self as mediated and its construction as dependent from several factors among which commodity signs – that is, the signifiers that goods carry with them when purchased and used. In this sense, Sturken and Cartwright affirms that logos are "the quintessential free-floating signifiers of late modernity" (2001: 230-31); consumers project their identity in a product as status symbol and in the product's experience portrayed by its advertisement, vicariously participating to it (Eisenberg et al. 1989; Boller, Olson and Babakus 1991; Stern 1992).

On this regard, Stern admonishes that the role of nostalgia in the retrieval process encouraged by advertisement is that of selecting and filtering memories, often giving as a result a "desired or ideal self-concept" (1992: 18[60]) very far from a possibly neutral recollection of the past.

The detail of an Adidas shoe (Cattaneo 2015)

For the purpose of my analysis, what this means is that the simple presence of what, following Stewart's taxonomy, we can refer to as a representational, public souvenir – that is, a commodity diegetically represented - is a sufficient precondition for the implied reader to feel nostalgic. A good example of this strategy is the extensive presence in Giulia Sagramola's *Incendi estivi* of early 2000s cell phones (the story is set in the summer of 2001, as we learn when the news on the TV comment on the G8 meeting in Genova), or the choice of Paolo Cattaneo (in his *L'estate scorsa*, 2015) to depict in detail the shoes the adolescent protagonists of his graphic novel wear.

2.2.4. *Senses*: sensory memory, self-engagement and synaesthesia

In the first section of this work, I considered the role of sensory memory in the nostalgic process, and the way self-engagement is propelled by sensual stimuli. But is it also possible that sensations that stay *into* the comic text – that is, synaesthetically rendered inside the diegesis, not physically experienced by the reader – can likewise act as a trigger?

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[60] For more on the same topic, see Davis (1979); Sirgy (1982); Belk (1988); Wallendorf and Arnould (1988).

My answer would be yes. The reference to senses is a device frequently relied on by artistic works - a most evident example, drawn from literature, of how those memory stimuli work is the *petite madeleine* episode in Marcel Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913). As De Sousa notices, "aesthetic experience has, in the classic and etymological sense of the word aesthesis, an essential connection with the sensory" (1997: 182[61]). Hague dedicates several pages (2014, chap. 3) to explain how comic works manage to display sound visually, defining it "imagined rather than perceived" and quoting Don Ihde's concept of 'auditory imagination' to support his thesis (2014: 65).

Domenico Modugno's song "Piove" in Sara Colaone's Ciao ciao bambina (2010)

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[61] On the same topic, see also Currie (1997); both Currie and De Sousa's essays are collected in a very insightful volume edited by Hjort and Laver, aptly titled *Emotion and the Arts* (1997).

The example of sound is very interesting because it encompasses music, whose non-representational nature has often been discussed in relation to emotions. Sound is possibly the quintessential nostalgic trigger, being "among the most evocative and directly emotional of our sense stimuli. Its capacity to command nostalgic pleasure is widely known" (Cook 2011: 43). Also, as we have seen in the first section of this work, sound – more often music, and especially the music of one's home – was at the very core of the early nostalgic experience (Starobinski 1966; Boym 2001).

Four panels from Incendi estivi (Sagramola 2010)

My opinion is that exactly the same process happens when we see sound synaesthetically rendered through visuality - onomatopoeias, musical notations, the lyrics of a song[62]. Naturally the reader must be able to recognize a song by its lyrics or musical notations[63], and it must be a tune linked to a specific moment of her past. Yet the process is all but abstract; on the contrary, it is a device increasingly relied on, for in contemporary culture songs easily have deep emotional and social implications and are therefore very suitable to act as correlatives of characters' mood. A good example in this sense is Giulia Sagramola's 2015 *Incendi estivi*, disseminated of lyrics of the songs characters are listening to, band t-shirts and vinyl covers, not to mention the walls of the main character's bedroom, full of rock-themed posters.

As for the other senses, the mechanism seems to necessarily imply sensations to be vicariously experienced by the character(s), who act as vehicle and translator of that experience. Characters, that is, must be showed smelling or touching something, thus somehow embodying and interpreting (for example through verbal comments on a certain smell) the situation they are in. Only through this mediated experience sensual data may be able to trigger a nostalgic reaction in the reader, through a synaesthetic transmission process akin to that of the affective contagion (which I will discuss in the reception chapter).
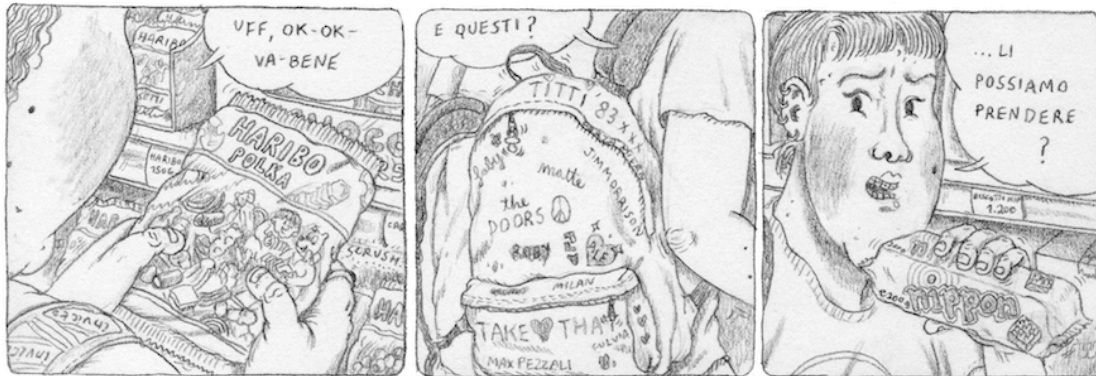
Haribo candies and Nippon puffed rice in chocolate (Cattaneo 2015)

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[62] I must admit I cannot think of a non-musical sound so peculiarly connoted its simple onomatopoeia can remind a person of its past – but I would not say for sure there is none.
[63] In that case, of course, in addition she must be able to read musical notations to process the data, another reminder of the importance of thinking of an implied reader rather than an actual one.

The case of taste appears to be a little more complex; it should be in principle pretty much alike to that of sound, since foods can be displayed in a much more evocative way than scents and smells or textures. Also, several foods are themselves very evidently branded (for example, non-homemade snacks), hence very easy to recognize from their aspect, so that the considerations done for commodities could be extended to this case. Nonetheless, I would provisionally advance the hypothesis that some foods are more likely than others to work in this direction: without the aid of real taste and smell much of the appeal of most dishes is lost, and the ones that are more likely to obtain an emotional reaction of any sort are probably those more pleasing aesthetically (e.g., cakes). Furthermore, for a simple matter of insufficient degrees of visual details of a panel, it is normally very hard, if not impossible, for a reader to recognize different preparations and seasonings. As a consequence, the only way to distinguish, say, a soup from a ratatouille, is to appeal to characters as mediators the same way it happens for smell and touch.

2.3. Motifs, comics, and nostalgia

In this section I identified in a nostalgic character, living out of her homeplace and reminiscing about the past, the prototypical example of motifs in comics. I then proceeded to investigate the more nuanced cases, isolating four categories of motifs: chronological, linked to what I called time flowing signposts, that is, reminders of the inevitable passing of time, and time freezing signposts, capable of remembering forever a determinate moment in time. The second category regarded space, and I discussed the importance of the concept of home and the role of landscape (both natural and artificial) and its materiality in remembering people of the finiteness of their lives.

The third category encompassed all kind of objects, but especially the ones in relation to contemporary consumer society, that is, commodities; I underlined how commodities are a means of construction of contemporary identity (what Even calls 'commodity self').

Finally, I discussed the self-engagement at work in sensory memory and proposed to extend its mechanism to synesthetic representation of a given sense through the work of comics.

2.4. Style

General overview

Style choices do not matter only on the aesthetic level, but on the semantic one as well; to quote David Herman, style in fiction "is not just a device for characterization or a narratorial format but a way of encoding modes of alignment, opposition, and conflict operating at other levels of narrative structure as well" (2004: 194, also in Gardner 2011: 58). Samuel Delany has similarly claimed that the division between form and content, despite being a necessary critical fiction, is only provisional since "at a certain point in the discussion, form begins to function as content—and content often functions as a sign for the implied form with which that content is conventionally dealt" (1999: 259 in Mikkonen 2017: 10).

It follows, as Goodman affirms, that "the discernment of style is an integral aspect of the understanding of works of art and the worlds they present" (1978: 40, in Lefèvre 2016: 68). Similarly, Ackerman (1962: 227) and Schapiro (1994: 51), among others, have underlined the key role of style for the investigation of art forms.

Yet, 'style' is anything but an unproblematic category; on the contrary, it has "different disciplinary identities, different linguistic identities, even different national identities. It is always in passage, in movement, in translation" (Callus, Corby, and Lauri-Lucente 2013: 11). One of the reasons, as Meskin puts it, is that it "plays an important role in a number of disciplines (e.g. anthropology, archaeology, art history and publishing) – the theory of art has no monopoly on the concept" (2013: 442)[64]. Not only the different disciplinary contexts and the wide semantic extension of the term do not help; to make the concept even more volatile, over the course of time, critics have way more often tried to describe a singular (or a collective) style[65] rather than define what style precisely is[66].

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[64] A perfect example of the heterogeneous application of the term is the research for a "stylistics of existence" led by Marielle Macé in her recent *Styles. Critique de nos forms de vies* (2016).

[65] A precious work in this sense is the recent *Le rêve du style parfait* by Gilles Philippe (2013). It is nonetheless interesting to note how the *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* lacked a "style" entry until its third edition.

[66] One notion almost universally accepted, though, is that style seems to necessarily require a subject performing some action: natural objects do not seem to have a style. In this sense "stylistic

Yet some have attempted this task. When describing literary style, Roland Barthes defines it as "a self-sufficient language […] which has its roots only in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology, that subnature [*sic*] of expression where the first coition of words and things takes place, where once and for all the great verbal themes of his existence come to be installed" (1967: 10). According to Sontag, rejecting "the common-sense dualism of language (social property) and style (individual decision)" (1970: xiv), Barthes builds a triadic system in which language and style are opposed to writing[67], which he considers three dimensions of what he calls the 'form':

> By style Barthes means something quite different from the servant of content (as Sartre would have it). Its frame of reference is not historical, like language's, but "biological or biographical." Style is "indifferent to society," a closed "personal process." In its origin "the transmutation of a humour," style "is never anything but metaphor." Therefore, in Barthes' conceptual geography, style resides "outside art" (since it is "outside the pact that binds the writer to society") just as much as language does. If language stands on the "hither side of literature," style is located beyond it. (Sontag 1970: xv)

It is clear how this notion, for how articulate it may be, barely manages to apply outside the realm of the verbal.

Genette begins his essay on style in *Fiction & Diction* by quoting Greimas and Courtes' assertion that accordingly states that "the term style belongs to the realm of literary criticism, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to define it semiotically" (1982: 318, in Genette 1993: 85). He then goes on to refine a description of style, that he first defines as "the expressive function of language, as opposed to its notional, cognitive, or semantic function" (1993: 89) and later, more obscurely, as "the entire set of rhematic properties exemplified by discourse, at the 'formal' (that is, in fact, the physical) level of the phonic or graphic raw material, at the linguistic level of the relation of direct denotation, and at the figurative level of indirect denotation" (1993: 121-22), to finally conclude, quite

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qualities invite our attention, legitimately or otherwise, to the maker's or performer's activity in producing the object or performance" (Harrison 2009: 544; see also Meskin 2013: 448-49).

[67] In her preface to the English edition of *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, Sontag points out how 'writing' is a literally correct, but not fully equivalent translation of the French *écriture* (1970: xvii).

apodictically, that "the 'phenomenon of style' is discourse itself" (1993: 141). Whether or not one agrees with Genette's examination – that cleverly considers the repercussions on the concept of inferences he draws from semiotics and philosophy of language - it is quite evident how his definition fits again only the concept of verbal style.

Similarly centred on verbal style is the very interesting neo-stylistics of Gilles Philippe, though combining a grammatical attention to an analysis of style as a social unconscious (Baetens 2016).

Barry Brummett begins his survey on style exactly by noticing the writing-centric implications etymology of the word (from the Latin *stilus*, the sharp-pointed tool used to write on wax tablets). He refers to the Aristotelian idea of style – essentially linguistic – then moves to consider psychology perspectives on the concept, mentioning, amongst the others, Allport, Gallaher and Stuart Ewen's definition of style as "the most constantly available lexicon from which many of us draw the visual grammar of our lives" (1988: 20, in Brummett 2008: 32). Brummett goes on by citing Robert Hariman's research on political style, which denounces how "for the most part, the canon of style remains identified with cataloguing discursive forms in the artistic text alone rather than understanding the dynamics of our social experience or the relationship between rhetorical appeals and political decisions" (Hariman 1995: 8, in Brummett 2008: 3). Brummett embraces Hariman view and defines style as a series of

> socially held sign systems composed of a wide range of signs beyond only language, systems that are used to accomplish rhetorical purposes across the cultural spectrum […] style not only as a system of signs, as a kind of performance but also as the grounds of signifying upon which more and more of our social, cultural world is organized. (Brummett 2008: 3)

David Bordwell, analysing style in movies, defines it as "the repeated and salient uses of film techniques characteristic of a single film, a filmmaker's work, or a national movement" (1990: 388), and later on as "a system of technical choices instantiated in the total form of the work, itself grasped in its relation to pertinent and proximate stylistic norms" (2008: 378). Technical choices, according to Bordwell, would then be responsible of the denotative function (channelling information), thematic function (conveying

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meanings), expressive function (transmitting emotive qualities) and decorative function (exhibiting stylistics devices or patterns) (2008: 377-78).

Yet the best definitions of style – and the most suitable to be applied transmedially – are in my view those of Goodman, Meyer and Wollheim, the last two taken from a volume aptly titled *The Concept of Style* and edited by Berel Lang. Meyer, writing about music, defines style as "a replication of patterning, whether in human behavior or in the artifacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints" (1987: 21). Goodman affirms that "style consists of those features of the symbolic functioning of a work that are characteristic of author, period, place, or school" (1978: 35)". This is consistent with Mikkonen's remark that "in literary stylistics, the concept of style refers to patterns of linguistic choice and preference that can be attributed to a particular author's personal style, a period style, a generic style, or a given work of literature" (2017: 110).

Wollheim, whose essay regards painting, further expands those considerations. To begin, he subdivides style into the two macro-categories of *general* and *individual* style; according to him, the first one is identified taxonomically, while the second depends on the personal idiosyncrasies of one author. He then identifies three subcategories of the general style, that he calls *universal* (classicism, realism, etc.), *historical* (or period, e.g. Impressionism, Postimpressionism and so on) and *school* (for example, Giotto's) style[68]. He proceeds to identify some variables – that he calls schemata – in the light of which a work of art can be assessed:

> The schemata that come first to mind - so obviously indeed, that it is worth stressing that they form only a subset of schemata – are those which can be formally or formalistically identified: line, hue, tonality, firmness of line, saturation of colour. Next, there are those schemata which - depending on how we understand formalism or formal considerations - cannot be identified formalistically or cannot be identified exclusively by reference to formal considerations because they also involve representational considerations: volume, depth, overlapping, movement, lighting. And then there are the schemata that are exclusively representational: gaze, pose, eyes, drapery. And beyond them are the schemata that not only are representationally

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[68] Meskin rightfully adds the fourth category of national and regional style (2013: 442).

identified but have no isolable material or configurational counterpart in the picture: point of view, the space that surrounds the represented space. And, finally, on a different tack, there are those schemata - a mixed bag - which refer to the original or untouched condition of the support or to the use of the medium: edge, brushstroke, scumbling. (Wollheim 1987: 192)

2.5. Style in comics

Baetens and Frey notice how in the comics studio system "style tends to be controlled as much as possible, in order to enable a smooth functioning of the production line" (2015: 135)[69]; therefore, the artists who make the drawing, usually following a story written by a scriptwriter, "are supposed to do it in the style of the work of the series" (2015: 135). In graphic novel, on the contrary,

> It is part of the graphic novelist self-construction as a serious author to oppose the industrial principles underlying the production of comics. More specifically the graphic novel rejects, once again at least in theory, the two basic principles of style in the comics' industrial production line: the dissociation of storytelling and drawing, and the disconnection of style from the individual artist. In the graphic novel, artists tend to be "complete authors," that is, authors who combine the two functions of scriptwriting and storytelling and drawing. (2015: 135)

But if "drawing style becomes an absolutely central notion in the structure of any graphic novel" and "it is supposed to be one of the signatures or trademarks of the author" (2015: 136), how can we unpack the concept?

First of all, it is important to remember that style is made up of a constellation of elements. Two of the most important and most evident, even to the untrained eye, are the way marks are drawn and colouring; yet several other factors must be taken into account, not last "the way people and objects are represented" (Lefèvre 2016: 73) and the "formal appearance of verbal elements, the mise en scène and framing" (Lefèvre 2012, 2014). Aldama affirms that "visuals like color, black-and-white, lighting, shading, points of

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[69] I am focusing in this section on visual style – which does not encompass comics style overall - and deal with issues of what Baetens and Frey define "narrative style" (2015: 134) in the next section.

view, panel size, and so on all have some emotional effect on the reader-viewer" (2012: 91).

Lefèvre proposes seven parameters to analyse the visual style of a panel (which we may take as the smallest significant unit of a comic: see Groensteen 2007: 3-7): detail, deformation, line, distribution, depth, light, colour (Lefèvre 2016: 75-76[70]). None of those parameters (with the possible exception of depth) is binary; rather, each one constructs a continuum of possibilities which one must be able to recognize to fully get the visual style of one author. To these elements, we must add the page layout, which has great repercussions on the narrative level, implying a reflection on 'the functionality of drawings' (Groensteen 2009: 163, also in Lefèvre 2016: 74) and on the relation each panel establishes with the other[71].

Not every stylistic element seems to be equally significant in relation to nostalgia; as Mikkonen points out, "style often serves a narrative function in comics, but its effects and implications are never exhausted by this function. Narratology may be the best available theory for describing and explaining comics as narratives, but it should not pretend to cover all possible qualities of comics, not even in narrative comics" (2017: 11).

Yet, and this has direct implications for nostalgia, Mikkonen also lists the different devices comics can rely on in order to present a character's subjectivity:

> These include perspectival techniques, narrative voice (manifest as external/internal, explicit, implicit, in legends and balloons), the presentation of dialogue and thought (as speech and thought balloons), the technique of spatial attachment or following (as sentiments and thoughts are revealed through action in a sequence of images), and other means of visual showing such as facial expression, gesture, body language, gaze, and the character's position in the image in relation to other things that are shown. Furthermore, a number of combined visual and verbal signs, such as metaphoric images and pictograms (emanata, symbolia) that mark thought, emotion, reaction and attitude, or onomatopoeia, such as interjections, can offer access to a

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[70] I refer to the whole essay, collected in the very useful *Visual Narrative Reader* edited by Neil Cohn (2016), for a detailed explanation of how those parameters work and a practical analysis, in the light of those elements, of a Popeye strip.
[71] I will come back on the latter issue in the reception chapter, but it is necessary to always remember that individual panels are not meant to be decoded separately, thus intra-panel choices must be also red in the light of the disposition of the inter-panel structure.

simulacrum of the character's mind. Likewise, various aspects of spatial articulation, such as framing, sequencing, breakdown, page layout, and tabulation, can emphasise the attribution of mental functions to particular characters. (Mikkonen 2017: 109-10)[72]

The aspects I will discuss here are, then, those which have a more immediate nostalgic effect on the narrative, namely lines, details, colour and page layout, and their subcategories.

2.5.1. Lines, graphiation, and grammatextuality

First of all, as Melcher and Cavanagh remind, drawing "is essentially a process of selection" (2011: 362, also in Lefèvre 2016: 71). Drawing, that is, always means to operate a simplification, select and exclude details, and highlight some features rather than others. This is especially true for comics' figurative line drawing, which, instead of relying on optical denotation as photographs (and, to a certain extent, painting), "where marks stand for different colors and intensities in the optic array", is based on a denotation system in which "marks stand for permanent features of the scene, like true edges" (Lefèvre 2016: 69; see also Willats 1990). As a consequence, then, "[i]n drawings, lines can represent the edges of objects, the objects themselves, the cracks in the objects, or the texture on the objects" (Lefèvre 2016: 69; see also Cutting and Massironi 1998; Massironi 2002).

We do not usually think of those lines as (indeed) lines, but as contours that give us the shapes of object, since "art perception differs from natural perception" (Lefèvre 2016: 69; see also Augustin et al. 2011), the former being a process that happens unconsciously and that makes us usually accept the image depicted as the most suitable representation of that scene (Lefèvre 2016: 70), possibly also for "a kind of primacy-effect" (Lefèvre 2007). Nonetheless, this process entails a certain degree of approximation on behalf of the reader, also because "inconsistencies in the representation of the diegetic space in comics are quite common" (Lefèvre 2016: 78; see also Lefèvre 2009). This is not surprising if one considers that comics are traditionally "designed to be read quickly",

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[72] To these, one might add the formal aspects of pictorial style of the composition, which encompass "pictorial elements in comics such as line and brushwork, light and shadow (chiaroscuro), texture, mass, order, proportion, balance, and pattern, as well as figures and composition (the ordering of the parts of the image into a whole)" (Mikkonen 2017: 111).

something that also explains the inclination for easily recognizable, stereotypical elements, which often results in characters "dressed in a typical, familiar outfit" and "rendered with typified body and facial features" (Lefèvre 2011: 17).

Now, drawing, like other figurative expressions, is always both a representation and an expression (Lefèvre 2016: 69[73]). Graphic style seems to be "rather a matter of cultural choices and personal idiosyncrasies" in which the artist "has not only the choice of how to render the contour lines", but modulates as well "volume and texture by various devices such as hatchings, screen tones, etc" (Lefèvre 2016: 72). Gardner offers a more lyrical gloss on the same line, when he says that "often handmade, still fundamentally linked to the printed page and the discrete panel, the comic reminds us always of the scene of its physical creation, of the human hand responsible for the lines on the page" (Gardner 2012: 150[74]).

To describe the singularity and the manifestation of the drawing hand – Wollheim's 'individual style' - it is useful to appeal to Marion's concept of *graphiation*, namely "a set of graphic markers evoking the presence of a drawing instance" (Surdiacourt 2012: 174). As Marion puts it, unlike films, the drawing of comics "resists […] figurative transparency; it creates on the contrary a kind of persisting opacity and prevents the act of monstration from being fully transparent and transitive" (in Baetens 2001: 149[75]).

The concept of graphiation, that Baetens and Frey compare to those of 'visual enunciation' or 'graphic expression', allows to account for the way "the hand, the body, in short the whole personality of an artist is visible in the way he or she gives a visual representation of a certain object, character, setting or event" (Baetens and Frey 2015:

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[73] This is, of course, a rough summary of a very complex debate, with the risk of sounding apodictic; to have a more nuanced view on the matter, see Peters (1981); Arnheim (1983); Rawson (1987); Aumont (1990); Massironi (2002); Augustin et al. (2011); Lefèvre (2016).
[74] Elsewhere Gardner similarly insists that graphic narrative "cannot erase the sign of the human hand. [… It] does not offer the possibility of ever forgetting the medium, losing sight of the material text or the physical labor of its production" (Gardner 2011: 65).
[75] For an extended discussion of graphiation, see Marion 1993; for a short but exhaustive introduction to the concept, see Baetens (2001); Marion (2012). An interesting take on the subject is in Gardner (2011b), who also remarks how "for Panter, the line is equally shaped by the technical (nib, ink), the physiological (hand, breath, chemical responses to the impending depletion of ink or dulling of the pen nib), as well as, of course, the story being told and the character of line called for at a given moment" (Gardner 2011: 67).

132). It is important, though, to remember that the line is never 'natural', as Baetens cautions, "not even when the movement of the drawing hand seem spontaneous. Graphic representation is a socialized act involving many codes and constraints. It is therefore not only the mechanical or modified reflection of a personality, a body or an unconscious" (2001: 152)[76]. Taking graphiation into account, nonetheless, allows to think of the possibility of a scale from "the highly subjective style in which the personal expression of the author takes all priority over the representation itself" so that what matters is the "way something is drawn, not the object of the representation", to "the decidedly objective style" where "the object of the representation is the highest priority, at the expense of the personal expression of the author who wants to stay as neutral and invisible as possible" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 132). As Mikkonen sums up, "the focus of the concept of graphiation, then, lies on graphic style and, in particular, a specific stylistic effect or use: the autoreferential function of graphic design, where the graphic trace points to itself and, thus, functions as a marker of subjectivity, in particular, of the cartoonist's subjective style" (Mikkonen 2017: 86).

In addition to that, it must be considered that "almost every artist has evolved his graphic style over a longer period" (2016: 79); this, despite the link "between certain graphic styles and certain genres" (Lefèvre 2016: 79), may also complicate the attempts to relate an individual style to a group style. Baetens and Frey notice that "stylistic ruptures and transformations will pass more or less under the radar in cases where they are narratively or diegetically motivated" (2015: 140), then identify three kinds of variations in one's style:

> The first technique is internal variations within their "own" style […] The second technique is the combination of various styles (within singular volumes) […] The final technique is the most interesting, as many graphic novelists do not see any contradiction between the reuse of an existing style and their own search for new forms of drawing and storytelling (Baetens and Frey 2015: 140-41)

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[76] On this regard, Mikkonen resumes Marion claim that "it is this graphic quality of images […] that always makes the drawings in comics, to some extent, opaque signs, at least in comparison to cinematic and photographic realism. Thus, by letting us see the trace of the graphic act—the signs of the graphic performance—showing in comics never has the same figurative transparency or the same transitivity as in cinema" (Mikkonen 2017: 82; see also: Marion 1993: 36).

The last possibility is very interesting, because it has some direct implication for nostalgia. As Benoît Peeters already suggested, cartooning is based on the 'iterative principle' of redrawing, "from the sketch to the rough, then from inking in to the colouring, but also from panel to panel, page to page, and often from album to album" (2010: 113). What is different in this case is that reusing the style of another author activates a web of transtextual links at the visual level, since "graphic representation is a socialized act involving many codes and constraints" (2001: 152). The result may be more or less parodic and more or less clearly unravelled; it may or may not be counterposed to the narrative style usually adopted, and present a higher or lower number of transtextual elements. Graphic novels, after all, are "especially capable of making meta-commentary and reflexive references to existing titles, creators, and even whole genres" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 100). Drawing in the style of someone else may thus be seen as the resurfacing of the 'second hand' that Crucifix bears in mind when he affirms that in redrawing, "the cartoonist embodies, so to speak, someone else's act of graphiation, re-performing this imagined scene and displacing it into another context" (2017a: 313).

A good example, which will be discussed at large in the last chapter of this work, is the closeness of Seth's trait to those of his inspirations, something particularly evident in its most famous *It's a Good Live, If You Don't Weaken*, where the similarity is redoubled by the invention of Kalo, an alter-ego/pastiche of Seth's favourite 1950s artist Arno. As Baetens and Frey comment,

> Working in a graphic style that borrows much of its features from the culture of the 1950s that plays such a part in his personal and artistic universe, Seth is not looking for a "signature style" in the superficial meaning of this word: rather than inventing his own style, his aspiration is to a style recognizable as "typically Seth," yet simultaneously based on the distinctive illustrations style of the magazines of the 1950s. (2015: 141)
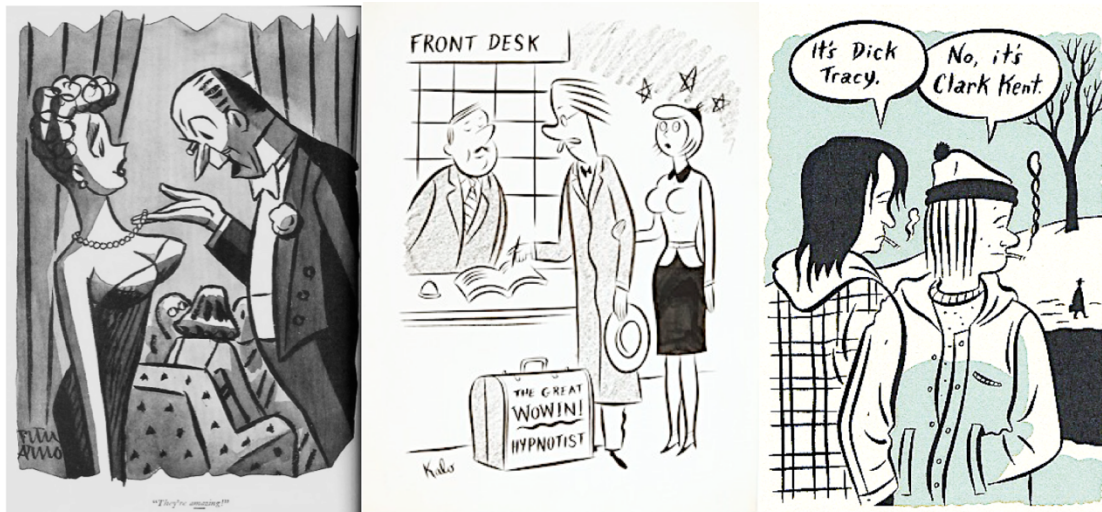
A gag by Peter Arno, one by Seth's forgery "Kalo" and a normal panel by Seth (1996)

One particular category inside this transtextual mechanism is the practice of swiping, that is, "the term used by makers, readers and fans to refer to this practice of 'stealing' or 'borrowing' fragments from other comics to re-use in one's own work (Crucifix 2017a: 310), a mechanism "based on imitation and repetition" and "flirting with plagiarism" (2017a: 312):

> To a large extent, swiping shares characteristics with digital remix culture—fragmentation, re-use, a problematic relationship to copyright—pointing to an analog, "low" practice of remix embedded within the comics industry. Swiping relies more on craft than on technology, as it involves cut-and-paste both literally and metaphorically. Further, it is inseparable from a material act of redrawing, from the fragmented structure of comics and from ephemeral print culture. (2017a: 312)

Swiping, Crucifix concludes, appears precisely "as a memory-making gesture, part of a 'repertoire' of creative acts that constitute the narrative economy of comics-making" (2017a: 329). I argue that Seth's pastiches have exactly the same value, and that pastiche in general is a resource for nostalgia-oriented meaning-making that I will discuss more in detail in the structure section.

All of these considerations may, additionally, also invest the visual style of the verbal components. As Baetens and Surdiacourt remark, "graphic novels contain a considerable number of verbal utterances (authorial or editorial paratexts, narrator's comments or

descriptions, speech balloons reproducing dialogues, written elements within the fictional universe, not to forget the too-wellknown [*sic*] onomatopoeic expressions)" (2011). Some of these are written in a standardized format with the most impersonal lettering, but many (especially in graphic novels) give importance to what Baetens and Frey call 'grammatextuality', a concept coined by Lapacherie to refer to

> The form of the lettering, the configuration of the words in the speech balloons and the insertions of these balloons in the panels, the presence of letters and other written symbols within the fictional world, the presence of the typical onomatopoeias […], the visual dialogue between words and images on the page. (Baetens and Frey 2015: 153)

Indeed, as Hescher remarks, "text can be looked at with regard to size, typeface, color, its position inside or outside of an image, across images, or on a page" (2016: 145), especially in graphic novels, where "words are not only meant to be read, but they must also be looked at, both in themselves and in relation to the place they occupy in the work" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 152).

In all cases, the reuse of an existing style enhances the communication between a text and those surrounding it, thus proving to be a very useful strategy to obtain the kind of nostalgia that, as Niemeyer says, media show "for themselves, their own past, their structures and contents" (2014: 7)[77].

2.5.2. Iconicity, facial expressions, and the scene of empathy

Another key element of style is what several theorists (most notably McCloud 1993: 42-43) call 'iconicity' and that in visual semiotic is often referred to as 'figurative density'; it indicates the level of details and verisimilitude of a comic. The possibilities, as can be imagined, are almost endless, from quasi-photographic impressions to very schematic figures heavily relying on graphic conventions (Miller 2007: 78), like sketched caricatures. The degree of iconicity can vary during the course of the career of an artist, through a single comic or comic series or even in a discrete panel (McCloud 1993: 42-43). The fundamental point is that being "stories told with pictures, comics represent a

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[77] I will return to this point in the subsection analyzing structure.

privileged space for constructing stories about our relationship with stuff. A prose novel can ignore its mise-en-scène in ways a graphic novel cannot" (Jenkins 2013: 302).

Comics are able to act as archives, most notably recording natural and city landscape the same way portraits and photographs may do; photographs can be materially included in the comic narrative, as proved by several hybrid texts, the most famous being probably Emmanuel Guibert's 3 volumes of *Le photographe* (2003, 2004, 2006). Comics, thus, may "offer visual critiques of real places and environments in a very public medium", with the peculiarity of being "able to simultaneously depict subjects and comment upon those subjects" (Fram 2000).

Photographs, and comics quasi-photographic ability, have in turn a twofold quality: as Annette Kuhn stresses, "images are both 'private' (family photographs) and 'public' (films, news photographs, a painting): though, as far as memory at least is concerned, private and public turn out in practice less readily separable than conventional wisdom would have us believe" (Kuhn 2002: 4).

A crystal-clear example of this process comes from Meags Fitzgerald's *Photoboot* (2013), a chronicle of history and disappearance of the machines once so common on public spaces, and a reflection on the power of photographs, the act of collecting and the effect of technical evolution on human habits.

Photobooths were also private, so like my bedroom, they quickly became a haven to escape to.

Around the time I turned 17, I began using a photobooth most days after school.

It didn't matter if it had been a good or bad day, the pictures simply documented and validated my reality.

I can see now that they captured the very awkward essence of being a teenager.

My mother's snapshots reminded me of my teenage self-portraits.

The photobooth serves as an intergenerational time machine, connecting kin through a shared activity. Each photo acts as its own time capsule.

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A page from Meags Fitzgerald's Photoboot (2013)

On a more general level, most of the thematic triggers I have isolated would make little sense without the right amount of details; it is evident that the choice between an anonymous pair of shoes and *that* pair of Adidas shoes that people use to wear in the 90s makes the difference in eliciting nostalgia. "Vivid imagery that attracts the senses

captures the reader's totality of senses and thus transports him into experiencing the situation or atmosphere with great emotion", observes Salmose, making it "more probable that the reader will associate the literary emotion with an event or mood of his own life and this will perhaps bear nostalgic connotations" (2012: 249).

Alongside the same position, Davis (1979: 88-89) in observing how twentieth-century representational painting used to convey nostalgia by means of "devices as a highly filtered quality of light, a photograph-like freezing of movement […] and ironically—since we often associate nostalgia with vagueness and murkiness—a tendency to outline objects sharply so that they stand out 'in memory' perhaps even more clearly than they did in 'real life'" (Davis 1979: 83; see also 88-89). Havlena and Holak accordingly affirm that

> The key that unlocks the imagination is verisimilitude - the illusion of reality conveyed by faithfully depicted details. These comprise the setting cues such as scenery and props (including costume, architecture, interior decor, and so forth) chosen to convey time, place, character, and culture. Consumption artifacts figure importantly as cues, for products associated with a particular era concretize whatever version of the past is displayed. (Havlena and Holak 1991, in Stern 1992: 16)

Most importantly, though, it must be remembered that if in principle disproportion and a low level of iconicity add up interpretation layers between objects and their representation, making it harder to decipher and thus reducing its nostalgic potential, it is not possible to simply equate a high level of details with a higher nostalgia-enhancing potential. Mikkonen rightfully observes that there is

> a great stylistic range of options available in comics on a scale between diverse realist styles on the one hand and cartoonish styles and caricature on the other. This can be highly relevant, for example, in relation to characterisation and world-building. It is conventional to mix different degrees of realistic detail and caricature (2017: 114).

Two extracts may better clarify the complexity and the importance of the role of iconicity in comics.

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A panel from Cattaneo's L'estate scorsa (2015)

The first one is taken from Paolo Cattaneo's *L'estate scorsa* (*Last Summer*). It is not a generic liquor that those people are drinking, but a bottle of Amaro Montenegro, which for the reader in possess of the right encyclopaedic knowledge (any Italian reader, in this case) equates with some inferences about the social class of the people depicted in the panel; the big wine bottle in the background strengthen the impression of a not so rich, possibly rural belonging. Cattaneo's *crumbesque* style, combined with the extreme amount of details of his trait (in this panel the veins on the hand of the elderly character and the untidiness of his haircut), concur in obtaining a paradoxical estrangement effect, that enhances the materiality and the animality of his characters in a way that ultimately interferes with the possibility of a nostalgic recollection.

Two t-shirts in a panel from Incendi Estivi (Sagramola 2014)

The second extract, from Giulia Sagramola's *Incendi estivi*, shows two adolescents wearing two clearly distinguishable t-shirts: the one on the left reproduces the cover of Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*, the one on the right carries the acronym of the Mexican left-wing revolutionary political group EZLN. Both are quite common amongst left-wing adolescents in Italy, as indeed the two characters depicted in the panel are. Yet the amount of details overall rather tends towards cartoonicity (namely, the reduction of a complex whole to single stylized details: Packard 2009: 41, in Hescher 2016: 37), encouraging a simple and quick reading of the panel and the story in its entirety, narrative immersion and a speedy rhythm rather than the necessity of slowing down (furthermore, to focus on very mundane details) of the overdetailed pages of Cattaneo. The result is a simpler conversion of the images shown to personal experience and memory and, if the textual clues are actualized, a more immediate nostalgic tension.

Furthermore, there is another implication of the role of details.

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Drawing mainly from Carroll (1988, 1996, 2003, 2006) and Bordwell (1996, 1997, 2013), Carl Plantinga (1999, 2015) elaborated a theory of visual emotion mimicry in movie spectatorship centred on the idea of the 'scene of empathy': "we see a character's face, typically in close-up, either for a single shot of long duration or as an element of a point-of-view structure alternating between shots of the character's face and shots of what she or he sees" (Plantinga 1999: 239). The close-up, Plantinga explains,

> is a peculiar and powerful convention because it displays the face in a way that is uncommon in everyday life. It renders the face large on the screen, such that the viewer's experience of it is often longer, more detailed, and more intense than our typical experiences of faces outside the movie theater (Plantinga 2015: 297)

The result of such technique is what Plantinga calls 'sustained attention': the narrative slows down and the character's interior emotional experience becomes the locus of attention (Coplan 2006: 29)[78]. There are other techniques filmmakers can combine in order to influence the spectator: variations of the point-of-view, composition, lighting, and so on (Plantinga 2015: 300; Coplan 2006: 29).

Most notably, the scene of empathy has to be played in accord with the unfolding of the affective reading performed by the viewer; hence, allegiance and narrative context play a key role (Plantinga 1999: 253; Plantinga 2015: 299). Spectators are "more likely to respond to the faces of characters with whom they have developed strong allegiances, and for this reason, scenes of empathy most often occur toward the end of a film narrative, after viewers have become thoroughly acquainted with favored characters" (Plantinga 2015: 299); it follows that "insufficient or inappropriate narrative development will counteract or even contradict our tendency toward emotional contagion and mimicry" (Plantinga 1999: 251[79]). To obtain a clear spectator's response, then, the mood of the scene has to be elicited by a synergy of elements, since according to the weak version of the efference hypothesis (that is, the theory of facial feedback Plantinga refers to), "facial mimicry would occur, and would affect spectator response, only when used in tandem

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[78] Significantly, the same combination of details, proximity and descriptive pause in the narration is reported by Salmose (2012: 187, 189, 204) as a strategy to enhance the nostalgic contagion in literary texts.
[79] One may think of the combined role, in this process, of the Kuleshov effect, but I will not discuss here the implications it entails.

with other congruent and mutually reinforcing factors" (1999: 255). The scene of empathy requires the clearest possible reading of characters' facial expressions, thus the situation must be non-ambiguous; a useful device is then "to put the emoting character in a situation where she or he believes no one is observing. In such situations, social display rules are irrelevant and the face becomes an accurate sign of emotion" (1999: 251).

Despite Plantinga's hypothesis is built upon film theory, I believe it fits comics, and especially graphic novels' attention to the interiority of their most salient characters. In the first place, Thierry Groensteen defines the laws of narrative drawing in comics as those of

> anthropocentrism (the privileging of the character as an agent of action), synecdochic simplification (the leaving out of everything that is not necessary for intelligibility), typification, expressivity (maximal expressivity in the characters' faces and bodies), and rhetorical convergence, i.e. the narrative image, by all means of composition, colour, and framing, obeys the imperative of optimal legibility (1999, 190–191; 2007, 162). (Mikkonen 2017: 88)

Secondly, "panels that show characters moving towards the reader allow us to concentrate on their facial expressions, eyeline, and dialogue" (Mikkonen 2017: 94)[80]. Thirdly, as Mikkonen observes,

> In general, comics, cartoons, and animation privilege maximally narrative drawings that feature expressive physical gestures and easily identifiable features of physiognomy, action, and situation. The drawn quality of the image modifies the way in which something, such as a character's body, expression, or engagement in situation or world, can be shown. (2017: 87)

Furthermore, as discussed before, comic reader may as well modulate the speed of their reading, a process that goes accordingly to the features of page layout and the amount of details of each panel. Namely, comics are, exactly as cinema, "a hybrid art, mixing compositional elements such as line, mass, and color […] together with apparent movement, rhythms, and cadences, and in addition perceptually realistic representations

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[80] Obviously, though, one has to remember that characters' facial expression and body language are "highly dependent on the degree of iconicity of their design" (Hescher 2016: 183).

of persons and environments" and synaesthetic renditions of "sounds such as music, patterns of speech, and noise" (Plantinga 1999: 254).

Nevertheless, there are three hesitations one may have when applying Plantinga's description to comics. The first one concerns the capacity of comic characters' faces to sufficiently express emotions in the first place. Yet, comics scholarship concurs in affirming that characters' faces in comics "give you textual clues as dense as any speech bubble", both for what concerns facial features and expressions and gaze patterns (Kukkonen 2013: 15). To quote extensively what David Kunzle said describing what Gombrich called the 'Töpffer's law':

> Broken lines are sufficient to render expression and character, and have the advantage of inviting what Gombrich called "the beholder's share." We supply character or feeling, be the face never so crude, for merely by existing in lines on paper, a face must have an expression; it cannot indeed not speak to us, if only we listen. […] In a series of demonstration drawings Töpffer shows and explains how doodled faces can be systematically varied to suggest an infinite range of moods and characters, how changing proportions of different parts of the face relate to each other, and to a part of the face kept constant, which thereby itself changes; proving that we react to a gestalt, a pattern. (Kunzle 2010: 21)

The second hesitation concerns the different extension of close ups in films and comics: expressions are extremely readable when seen on a huge theatre screen, while are arguably less decipherable on a comics panel – not to mention the fact that the appeal to splash pages for close ups is largely uncommon.

One must set apart, finally, comics from graphic novel according to "the degree to which they facilitate recognition by as many different people as possible" (Hescher 2016: 37). The more complex graphic novels rely "less, or not at all, on representing character emotion using universally recognisable facial expressions" (2016: 37); neither they normally recur to 'emanata', the term coined by Mort Walker "to designate the dashes, droplets, spirals, stars, and other graphic signs placed near a character's face in order to convey an emotion or physical state" (Groensteen 2013: 124) , thus reinforcing facial expressions. Graphic novels have different, more complex ways to transmit a more refined set of emotions.

A good example of potential applicability of Plantinga's scene of empathy to graphic novel: a melancholic close-up from La terra dei figli (Gipi 2016)

In conclusion, the application of Plantinga's 'scene of empathy' to graphic novel would lead to very interesting findings on emotion transmission and comics; in the case of nostalgia, if applicable, it would be an important resource to use, in synergy with other procedures, to orient the reader towards a nostalgic reception of a text. Nonetheless, more research is due in this (very promising) direction before coming to a satisfactory position.

2.5.3. Colour, emotions, and pastness

Similarly, the link between colours and emotions has been long studied but, to our days, no satisfactory conclusion has been drawn. If it is commonsensical that "color has effects on people" (Plantinga 2012: 464), how standardized and controllable such effect may be remains much of a mystery.

Early studies (one of the first and most important is Osgood 1960) were pretty confident on synesthetic associations "between color and emotion, color and music, line drawings and emotions […] based on the premise that specific aspects of certain stimuli elicit distinct, innate, unconditioned responses" (Andrade and Egan 1974: 49), but more recent research usually attributes these links to the way "each culture contains a large fund of verbal metaphors and ritual occasions which link colors to different feeling states" (1971: 49). Terwogt and Hoeksma explain that colour-emotion combination is affected by several factors, and those factors seem to differ from childhood to adulthood, but only in the former case some of them have been partially identified (2010: 16). In a study moving

from the existing research of Boyatzis and Verghese (1994) and Hemphill (1996), Kaya and Epps agree with the idea of society-related conventions, also remarking that "a color-related emotion is highly dependent on personal preference and one's past experience with that particular color" (2004: 402).

Summing up, colour emotion "may be influenced by age and sex of subjects, as well as their national and cultural backgrounds" (Gao et al. 2007: 223). This is confirmed by the extensive survey performed by Manav (2006) on this field of research, in which he comes to the conclusions that colour-emotion associations seem to be subjective and related to "personal like-dislikes" due to "individuals' previous knowledge and experience" (2006: 149[81]), but he further explains that

> one may argue that such reports can be attributed to cognitive reactions (e.g., learned conceptual associations to color names) rather than to physiological or visceral responses. [...] Cross-cultural studies reveal that geographical and cultural proximity can be considered as a possible factor affecting one's preference for colors. [...] Age, gender, and background can be influential on the responses to color. (2006: 144[82])

Yet, there seem to be some elements that influence the way emotions are associated with colour; first of all, hue does not seem to play a pivotal role, while saturation and brightness (or lightness and chroma, if one prefers the terms) appear to be the key variables (Valdez and Mehrabian 1994: 406; Manav 2006: 149). This means, maybe surprisingly, that "if some 'yellow' object seems to have a cheerful color, it is not because of the yellow hue of the object, but because the color of the object is light and saturated" (Andrade and Egan 1974: 62).

What is certain is the power that colour, especially in the artistic field, holds in relation to emotion; Holl enthusiastically affirms that

> colors have, in psychology as in art history, been related to a form of automatism or
> an unconscious in human thinking, operating halfway between the wishful and the

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[81] On the same line, see also Boyatzis and Verghese 1994; Hemphill 1996; Kaya and Epps 1997; Kaya and Crosby 2006.
[82] Similar positions can be found in Ou et al. 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Xin et al. 2004a, 2004b; Gao et al. 2007.

compulsive. No wonder, then, that uncontrollable phenomena of sudden and involuntary memories should be associated with indistinct yet striking sensuous perceptions, not only taste and smell, as in Marcel Proust, but also with light, lighting and, eventually, color […] personal and biographical memories are triggered by film color. (2014: 161, 162)

Applied to a specific medium, this line of research acquires even more complexity in the light of the medium's history and stylistic conventions; the case of comics, in particular, poses several problems. First of all, colour has traditionally been subject to "a clash between the genius [that is, the *auteur*] and the industry: comic authors have often complained about the ways their 'intended' colors were 'destroyed' by the carelessness of their editors and publisher" (Baetens 2011: 113). Second, if the link between colour and emotion is influenced by historical and cultural reason, it means that one should take into consideration the specifics of each colour in the history of the medium. Unfortunately, colour "is undoubtedly one of the most underdiscussed and undertheorized features of comics and graphic novel scholarship" (Baetens 2011: 111). Every comic scholar will concur in affirming its stylistic and semantic importance, but critical takes that attempt a systematization on the matter are scarce, if not completely absent.

I will try, then, to borrow some considerations about the role of colour in eliciting nostalgia in cinema, and apply them to my case study.

Holl rightfully points out how the role of colour in cinema is in principle arbitrary: in its early years, it was used to indicate fantasy and illusion, and only later consolidated its role as the unstressed, 'referential' mode to represent reality. Unstressed, that is, for someone that has grown up with those conventions; what happens, clearly, is that arbitrary choices over the years solidify until they become conventional. This also means that a certain colour palette characteristic of, let's say, Eighties cinema, is perceived as unstressed by an Eighties viewer, but may be used as a strategy to create an overtone of pastness if mimicked twenty years after, "acting as parasites on color-memory" (Holl 2014: 161). Significantly, it is more important that the colour is reproduced as remembered by the audience than as it actually was. Holl insightfully notices on this behalf: "color perception is relational, linked to temporal and spatial environments, even if these are imaginary or virtual" (2014: 160-61). He continues highlighting how memory

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"as triggered by color is linked to a historical and culturally molded spectrum on the one hand, and on personal reminiscences on the other" (2014: 161). The example he gives is the reaction of the audience of the 2012 digitally restored version of Méliès's *Le voyage dans la lune* (1902), where people seemed disappointed by the neon colouring, as it did not fit with the way they expected colours to look like at the beginning of the century. Whether they refer to the actual colours of a certain epoch – or genre, for especially certain genres, as those related "to the utopian or to the lost" (Holl 2014: 164) like musical, western, melodrama and noir have always been relating on strict colour schemes – or to the reconstructed, virtual image people hold in their memory, transtextual references on the level of colour seem, again, the key strategy to elicit nostalgia. Vera Dika observes that

> while the period objects in the mise-en-scene create the "look and feel" of pastness, this quality is also emitting from the sensual surface of the images themselves. […] the lighting, the choice of colors, and the grain of the film, as well as its composition and framing, may all be manipulated to refer to past images. […] what is significant is not just that the nostalgia films return to old stories, but also that they return to old film genres, and to those genres' imagistic and narrative signifying systems. (2003: 10)

This is very consistent with Jameson's idea that nostalgia in postmodern film "is not so much a re-presentation of a particular historical period as it is a re-creation of its cultural artefacts. The past is metonymically re-experienced, not only through the represented clothing styles and music, but also through the stylistic elements" (Dika 2003: 10). Davis mentions the same strategy when signalling how "film cleverly plays on the audience's subliminal sense of what old photographs and early cinematography looked like" (Davis 1979: 84), that is, relying to 'grainy black-and-white' or sepia. Incidentally, Baetens and Lefèvre point out that the use of black and white in bande dessinée has come to connote an album presented as a work of art rather than a commercial product (1993: 41), and the same could be said for sepia, especially in photography. The sense of pastness and 'authenticity' would then be the common element to this prêt-à-porter *artmanship* and to nostalgia.

Turning back to comics and trying to wrap up, it seems that nostalgia-oriented strategies regarding colours may be of two kinds: on one side, the text could try to replicate a specific aesthetics, deeply linked, in the collective imaginary, to a certain age (or genre). In doing so, the comic author has the option to both try replicate the style of that era (say, making use of fluorescent colours to remind of the Eighties) or appeal to the memory of the medium and mimic the colour palettes distinctive of a certain period.

A good example of this first strategy comes from Sara Colaone's *Ciao ciao bambina*, which adopts pastel colours and tenuous hues to remember the reader of both her memory of the fifties and the memory of the way the fifties were portrayed across medias.

A 1950s color palette in Sara Colaone's Ciao ciao bambina (2010)

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On the other side, an author may choose to resort to black and white or sepia colouring to convey a more generic sense of pastness. Furthermore, uniform colour palettes, especially if based on paled and crude colours, seem to have a similar inherently nostalgic quality, and may therefore be a fruitful tool to encourage nostalgia.

There are several examples of this process – the haunting blue shadows of Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World* or the light one of Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken*, the trichrome palette of Giulia Sagramola's *Incendi estivi* which only variates the hue of the third colour (from a more orange nuance to a pinkish one), and so on.

Extract from Daniel Clowes' Ghost World (1997)

2.5.4. Page layout and the narrative-composition balance

Page layout has a fundamental function in orienting the reader's attention. "In that sense", according to Baetens and Frey, "its role is radically rhetorical: all page layouts make a crucial contribution to the building of story world as well as to the managing of the reading process which is always also a reading for the plot" (2015: 132). They do so by performing three actions: "foregrounding versus backgrounding, distinguishing primary and secondary information" (2015: 132), or blurring the two; establishing functional

relationships to link non-contiguous panels or elements; and speeding up or slowing down the reading, helping balance between "interest in the story" and "interest in the images and the tableau" (2015: 132).

The most influential model to analyse page layout is Benoît Peeters' (1998; English translation: 2007)[83], a taxonomy of the relation between the narrative element of a story (that is, its storytelling) and its composition (visual and spatial patterns). Peeters affirms that the interaction of these two factors always implies that one form is dominant on the other, and that their connection may entail either autonomy or interdependence (2007; see also Baetens and Frey 2015: 107-08); this results in four non-mutually exclusive categories:

	NARRATIVE-COMPOSITION AUTONOMY	NARRATIVE-COMPOSITION INTERDEPENDENCE
NARRATIVE DOMINANT	Conventional Use	Rhetorical Use
COMPOSITION DOMINANT	Decorative Use	Productive Use

Peeters' model (Peeters 2007: 41)[84]

In principle, nostalgic narratives are plot-driven, having to highlight certain thematic and structural feature in order to enact the binary system that Salmose called 'bipolarity'; this may lead to suppose that the dominant mode for page layout in nostalgic stories might be narrative, either in the conventional use or in the rhetorical one. To understand what is at stake here, though, we need first to unpack Peeters scheme, which I will do by making frequent references to Baetens and Frey's revision of his model (2015: esp. 108-113).

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[83] It must also be noted that "Peeters has not ceased repeating that his method, although universal for all works that have clearly marked panel structures, does not cover the whole field of possible relationships between narrative and composition" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 120).
[84] For some interesting updates and corrections on Peeters' model, see Groensteen (2013: 97-102). For a more divergent but equally noteworthy proposal, see Hatfield (2005: 48-52). Baetens and Frey attempt to merge the most significant aspects of those positions in a model of their own (2015: 130-31).

Let's start with the composition dominant. The decorative use of the page "emphasizes the visual properties of the layout, independent of any given content" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 110): the page is organized in a prearranged way and contents only come after. The author "treats the page as a painterly canvas" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 110), with a clear stress on the visual composition, a trend most common "primarily among the European cartoonists of the post-'68 period and in the comics of the Eighties" (Peeters 2007: 12). The decorative mode "is certainly not the most frequently used format in the graphic novel, given precisely the dominant position of narrative in this form of drawn literature" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 110).

Similarly, the productive use of panel structure and page layout entails that the organization of the page itself "seems to dictate the narrative. A particular arrangement generates a piece of narration" (Peeters 2007: 30). This means that the structure of the page strongly conditions the narrative, which "appears to be the consequence of a preexistent formal structure" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 112-13). Peeters discuss this mode in relation to McCay's *Little Nemo*, and it is not surprising to think of it as an early stage of comic art finding its balance between visual and narrative elements (which does not mean at all to discard it as an 'unfit' use of the page for recent comics).

The other pole is that of narrative dominant. The conventional mode is based on "the systematic repetition of the same structure and form of tiers and panels, independent of any content, style, or author" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 108). It's a fixed system that leaves little to experimentation, giving much attention to the narrative; nevertheless, since the grid is a given element and remains consistent in spite of the content, "the relationship between the two dimensions is one of independence" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 108-09). A recurring layout gives steadiness to the rhythm of the action unfolding, encouraging repetition of scenes (often, if not always, with variations) and enhancing the involvement in the storyworld of a reader who "feels that there is 'room' for him or for her in the development of the story" and that she "is really invited to join the fictional universe of the characters" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 110).

Finally, the rhetorical use of the page structure is, according to Baetens and Frey, the most common in graphic novels. Here panel and page "are no longer autonomous elements; they are subordinated to a narrative which their primary function is to serve. The size of

the images, their distribution, the general pace of the page, all must come to support the narration" (Peeters 2007: 19). The story here is pre-existing and panels must only "best convey the narrative meaning of the work" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 112); this does not only influence the size and shape of each panel, but also its distribution on the page, the position of cliff-hangers and so on[85].

Two things stand out in this analysis; first, that graphic novels incline toward the narrative dominant, an element they have in common, as mentioned, with nostalgic narratives; as Mikkonen observes, "the page layout can be used to give a sense of a character's perspective, the frames and the type of panelling can support a theme, and the dynamic between the narrating 'I' and the 'I' shown in the images can have various consequences for identity and self-image in autobiographical comics" (2017: 10). This seems also to confirm the hypothesis that graphic novels are a very interesting field to investigate nostalgia features.

Secondly, the attention that narrative mode gives to a steady rhythm may concur in eliciting nostalgia, since it easily suits to perform successions and juxtapositions of different times. Furthermore, in his work on modernist novels, Salmose observes that "nostalgia might flow from the text itself in its stylistic qualities: repeated alliterations, rhythmical flow, the use of words […] that allude to elusiveness, temporal directions" (2012: 15) and so on. A page layout capable of fitting and mirroring those features at the visual level would then be the comics counterpart of that textual stylistics that Salmose isolates in his corpus; this, again, confirms the hypothesis that nostalgia stories should in principle present a narrative dominant in their page layout.

2.6. Style, comics, and nostalgia

I tried, since the beginning of this section, to define a general concept of style, rather than just adopting the description of a specific style. I settled for Wollheim's division into a general and an individual style, enumerated the criteria through which he identifies style

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[85] Baetens and Frey cleverly observe how nevertheless the importance of these compositional elements "indicates how relative the dominant position of the narrative always remains, even in works where storytelling is definitely the leading dimension" (2015: 112).

in paintings and found an equivalent in comics theory in the positions of Mikkonen and Lefèvre.

I subsequently examined the most significant elements in the perspective of considering their nostalgic potential. Starting with lines, graphiation, and grammatextuality, I evidenced the dialectic between individual style and the references to other people's work, and how the latter strategy easily prompts nostalgia.

I then moved to considering the degree of iconicity of a work and its implication for the recognition of facial expression in what Plantinga calls "the scene of empathy", arguing that in principle stories should have a high level of details but that specific strategies must be taken into account.

I discussed the role of colour in conveying emotion, finding out that no association subsists out of an historical and cultural context, and finding nostalgic palettes to be either bi- or trichromatic or mimicking the colours of the period they are referring.

Finally, I remarked how the use of a narrative-driven page layout seems to be the choice of preference of nostalgic works.

2.7. Structure

General overview

Under the label of 'structure', I encompass several other characteristics of nostalgia-driven stories that can be identified by recurring to some key notions of narratology. Before discussing nostalgia specifics in relation to narratological features, then, it will be necessary to clear the critical framework I will refer to.

The core reference will be Ann Miller's (2007: 103-124) reworking of Gérard Genette, conceived in order to adapt his model, which was devised for literary analysis, to graphic narratives. Genette is a pivotal figure of Structuralism, and his work deals with all the fundamental issue of classical narratology, building clear-cut typologies that, after several years, still succeed to be useful in providing a critical dictionary for the analysis of complex narrative structures. Furthermore, his taxonomies are very suitable to be enhanced and implemented[86], being able to offer key operational definition rather than enclosing texts into rigid categorizations[87]. Genette's work is widely known in the field of narratology, but perhaps not so famous in English-speaking contexts; therefore, a short summary might be of use.

Two works by the French literary theorist will be particularly concerned here. The first one is *Figures III* (1972; republished in English as *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 1980), where Genette famously develops three analytical macro-categories proposed some time before by Tzvetan Todorov (1966) to describe narrative features: those concerning *time* (split into the three categories of order, duration and frequency), *mood* (distance and perspective) and *voice* (time of the narrating, narrative levels, functions of the narrator and person)[88].

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[86] To quote Jonathan Culler's paraphrase of Genette's own words in the foreword to the English edition of *Narrative Discourse*, "the very nature of a poetics as a progressive, cumulative enterprise ensures that his formulations will one day be relegated to the rubbish heap […] because they have inspired improvements" (1980:11).

[87] As David Herman affirms in his review of *Palimpsests*, "the search for structure does not neutralize the text by reducing its semantic potential; instead, ongoing inquiry into textual structures makes it possible to attach literary works to ever-new contexts of interpretation, thereby multiplying their transtextual riches" (1998: 1047-48).

[88] Todorov's division distinguished among tense, aspect and mood; an explanation for the reasons of this deviation is given by Genette himself in the preface to his *Narrative Discourse* (1980, esp. 29-32).

Considering time, the category of *order* has to do with the way events are emplotted, and highlights the possible presence of anachronies, a label that encompasses concepts widely popular in the critical discourse such as flashbacks and flash-forwards ('analexis' and 'prolexis', in Genette's words). *Frequency* has to do with the interaction between how many times an event occur and how many times it is narrated; it can thus be singular, iterative (occurring several times, but being conflated in one narrative instance), repetitive (occurring once, but being narrated several times) or multiple (both occurring and being narrated several times). *Duration* isolates the possible discrepancies between discourse time and story time.

Regarding mood, the category of *distance* differentiates narratives of words from narratives of events in a continuum going from narrated to transposed to reported speech (the most direct). *Perspective* covers the highly influential concept of focalization (which concerns the amount of information we have about the story and through which we are seeing it), distinguishing into zero (what is widely known as the omniscient narrator), internal (adopting the perspective of one or more characters, of whom we share the thoughts[89]) or external focalization (being close to one or more characters, but with no access to their minds).

For what concerns voice, Genette isolates four types of *time of narrating*: subsequent (past-tense narratives), prior (mostly in the future tense), simultaneous (with a stress either on the story or on narrative discourse) and interpolated (where the narration alternates to the moments of action). The narration can happen at different *levels*, either extradiegetic (the highest level a narrator can be, that is, outside the storyworld) or diegetic (inside the storyworld); a violation of the boundaries between levels is called metalepsis. The person narrating it may be either a character in the story (homodiegetic narrator, who may be labelled as autodiegetic when she is the heroine of the story she recounts) or not (heterodiegetic narrator)[90]. Finally, the narrator may serve five different functions: narrative, directing, communication, testimonial, ideological.

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[89] In turn, internal focalization can be fixed (sticking to one character), variable (moving from character to character) or multiple (recounting the same event from different perspectives).

[90] This produces, of course, the possibility of second-degree narrators which are inside the first-level narration but either inside or outside the framed one, thus being, in Genette's word, intradiegetic but still either homo- or heterodiegetic to the story the recount. If abstract typologies may sound a bit stiff, Genette's examples are clear-cut: examples of extradiegetic narrators are

The second work that I will most frequently refer to in this section is *Palimpsestes* (1982; English edition *Palimpsests*, 1997a). Here Genette deals with 'textual transcendence', that is, the links a text holds to all the others that exists (keeping in mind, as Gerald Prince says in the foreword of the English edition, that "any writing is rewriting, and literature is always at the second degree", but that nevertheless "though all literary texts are hypertextual, some are more hypertextual than others, more massively and explicitly palimpsestuous" 1997a: ix). He identifies five types of transtextual relationships between a literary work and another (or others): intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality[91].

Intertextuality (a term he derives from Kristeva: 1969) refers to the overt presence of a text within another, which can happen in different ways: quoting, that is, making a literal and explicit reference to another text; plagiarizing, hence making a literal but implicit reference to another text; and alluding, namely making a reference which is neither literal nor explicit, thus requiring a competent reader to be picked up. *Paratextuality* regards every kind of published work that surrounds the primary text: the author's name(s), cover, title, subtitle, front and back matter, preface, blurb, and everything else that concurs in influencing the reception of the book by the reader[92]. *Metatextuality* indicates every commentary operated by a text on another, which is not literally quoted, both overtly citing it by critically reflecting on it, or more covertly evoking it. *Architextuality* refers to the relation the text holds with several others that came before it (that is, mostly, the genre to which the text belongs). *Hypertextuality* is the category to which Genette dedicates more attention in his book; it encompasses every other kind of transformation or imitation (indirect transformation) of a source text (hypotext) into a target one (hypertext), adopting three possible modalities (playful, satirical, serious).

Homer (heterodiegetic) or Proust (homodiegetic); examples of intradiegetic narrators are Scheherazade (heterodiegetic) or Ulysses in the *Odyssey* (homodiegetic) (1980: 248).

[91] As Genette himself remarks, the five categories must not be seen as closed, as in literary practice their overlapping is quite common (1997a: 7-8).

[92] Genette will further develops his pragmatics of paratextuality in his equally influential *Seuils* (1987; English edition *Paratexts. Thresholds of interpretation*, 1997b), isolating a *peritext*, that encompasses everything that surrounds from within the book as a physical object, and an *epitext*, that comprises everything that revolves around the book from the outside (advertisement, interviews, book presentations and so on). It is a very rich and interesting work, but being not the primary focus of this work, I will not discuss it more in depth here.

We thus have six combinations: playful transformations (*parody*), that traditionally take the style (if not whole textual chunks) of a high-brow work and apply it to very mundane subjects; satirical transformations (*travesty*), that keep the original subject but modify the style, usually adopting a very low linguistic register; serious transformations (*transposition*), which extends a pre-existing work usually limiting the changes to the spatio-temporal coordinates of the original story[93]. Indirect transformations are instead playful imitations (*pastiche*), namely the imitation of a style without any mocking intent; satirical imitation of a given style (*caricatures*); and serious imitations (*forgery*), a more radical transformation than simple transposition, modifying not only the diegesis but the whole skeleton of a story[94].

2.8. Structure in comics

If most parameters proposed in *Narrative Discourse* hold when applied to comics (notably those regarding time), others must be revisited to remain applicable[95]. It is the case of mood, particularly for what concerns focalization, and voice, regarding in particular the narrative perspective. On the one hand, both who is narrating and what the reader knows need to be distinguished from what the scene is showing, thus resulting in a treble system; on the other hand, one must distinguish the general narratorial instance from the narrator's comments via captions.

The need for these distinctions is not unprecedented, as Miller quotes Gaudreault's application of Genette's categories to cinema. In that case, Gaudreault proposed to use

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[93] Genette provides several sub-types of transpositions: see 1997a: 212ff for his very exhaustive list.

[94] A clear example of forgery, according to Genette, would be continuations. If the difference between forgery and transposition might not always appear crystal clear, it may be helpful to remember how, according to his criteria, a direct kind of transformation of the *Odyssey* would be Joyce's *Ulysses*, while an indirect kind (an imitation) would be Virgil's *Aeneid*.

[95] It can be useful – but it is not pertinent to the aim of my research, and I will therefore not consider the issue further unless when needed to quote a specific work– to enhance this view with the various contributes leaning towards post-classical narratology: see Lefèvre (2000) on narratological issues; Cohn (2013) and its proposal of a new theoretical framework focusing on the cognitive implication of the act of reading comics; Cohn (2016), collecting various, multi-authored essays which deal with the different aspects of visual narrative. Another perspective is the very famous, often cited work of McCloud (1993), which works wonderfully as an introduction to comic narratology. I will more specifically deal with McCloud's idea of closure in the chapter examining the act of reading; for a critical survey of McCloud's view of the comic reader's act and some of its implications, see also Pustz (1999: 115-124).

the term 'localization' to refer to knowledge and 'ocularization' to describe the visual perspective adopted by the diegesis (Gaudreault and Jost 1990: 129)[96]; plus, he proposed to call 'meganarrator' the narrating instance responsible for the emplotment, words and sounds of a movie (Gaudreault 1988: 113, 159). As Mikkonen (2017: 157) points out, Jost analogously distinguishes perceptual focalisation (that he calls "ocularisation"), that is, the "relation between what the camera shows and what the characters are presumed to be seeing", from cognitive focalisation, designating "the cognitive point of view adopted by the narrative" (2004: 74).

Miller adopts Gaudreault and Jost's terms, although I will prefer here the similar (but possibly simpler) perspective offered by Kukkonen's tripartite division between narration, focalization and point of view/observation (2013: 44-45[97]).

The internal mechanisms of focalization would then be pretty much the same than in literature: it can be zero, internal and external (Miller 2007: 110). Observation is usually described by adopting the visual vocabulary established by cinematic theory, borrowing terms used in film analysis to identify camera shots (such as close-up, long shot, and so on). Miller notes that a peculiarity in comics is the very rare occurrence of the adoption of the ocular viewpoint of a character (2007: 109), which marks a difference not only with the fairly frequent use of point-of-view (subjective) shots in cinema, but also with much first person literary narratives. Mikkonen more precisely affirms that "at the visual level of the story, the impersonal perspective is the predominant mode of showing and the (purely) subjective point of view remains a localised instance of intervention. Impersonal points of view, however, despite revealing things that the character could not see, are often more or less related to, or encompass or are synchronised with, the character's point of view" (2017: 147).

It must obviously be kept in mind that "in comics storytelling, as in film, the point of view may always remain impersonal or ambiguous in terms of its possible subjectivity,

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[96] An important attempt to rework Genette's treble organization was already carried out by Bal, who envisioned two sets of binary options labeled 'focalizor' and 'focalized object' (2009: 145-64).

[97] For a more systematic and complex view of narrative categories in comics, see Stein and Thon 2013; Surdiacourt 2015; in particular, for an in-depth analysis of focalization and ocularization, see Mikkonen 2013. Concepts analogous to that of "meganarrator" are employed by Marion (1993: 193-94) and Groensteen (2007: 95; 2011: 105).

but the image necessarily reveals a spatial point from which something (the focalised) is perceived" (Mikkonen 2017: 156).

As for voice, a medium-specific feature of enunciation is that it "can take the form of dissonance between visual and verbal narrating instances, transitions which upset the impression of seamless continuity across the inter-frame space, and evidence that the narration is taking up a judgmental stance towards characters or events within the diegesis" (2007: 120); that is, the more verbal and visual seem to diverge, the more the narrative is commenting on itself. This "tension between the verbal and visual narrating instance" is modulated by the meganarrator and serves as a "marker of enunciation" (2007: 120)[98].

Of course, a dissonance between the events narrated and the way the narrator recounts them is not new at all, for literature, especially since modern times, presents countless cases of reticent narrators and applications of what Shklovsky called 'defamiliarization' (also known as estrangement). Nevertheless, it is equally clear that the presence of an additional code (the visual one) adds possible layers to comment over what is narrated.

Furthermore, as for the visual part of narration, it is important to keep in mind that in comics panels do "not occur in isolation. Meaning is produced out of the relationships, both linear and non-linear, between [them]" (Miller 2007: 82). The single panel "works through monstration", but it is the panel sequence that provides the spine for narration (2007: 108). We will see in the section dealing with reception what this means for the reading act; here I will focus, however, on some other structural characteristics.

First of all, panels are usually disposed in chronological sequences, with each panel limited to a very brief moment of time; chronological order leads the reader to infer cause-effect relations between successive events and panels (Lefèvre 2000); nevertheless, a single panel can encompass a longer temporal stretch and "even combine multiple distinct moments" (Lefèvre 2011: 23). As Ann Miller puts it, the narrative in comics "is segmented into discontinuous units which are aligned sequentially, articulated by syntagmatic links. Narrative progression depends, therefore, on the conservation of

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[98] A more complex case is also possible, that of a complete disjunction between images and text focalization (Miller 2007: 120), but going into details is not pertinent to this work.

certain elements and the modification of others: *bande dessinée* is an art of both iteration and transformation" (2007: 88).

Thierry Groensteen dubs with the term 'arthrology' the narrative articulation of comics, identifying three codes: the 'spatio-topical' one, which concerns the layout of panels on a single page (the *mise en page*), which I have already discussed in the style section; the 'restricted arthrology', which refers to the sequential relation between panels and the linear way of reading them; and the 'general arthrology', governed by the principle of braiding (*tressage*), according to which continuous or discontinuous panels may refer to each other, no matter the spatial distance, by means of formal, iconic or semantic resemblances (Groensteen 1999: 25-27; Miller 2007: 82, 95-97).

This principle is peculiar of comic storytelling: comics create a web of signifiers that the reader must reconstitute, requiring a significant amount of work on her behalf. Furthermore, it implies that whenever the same event is recounted more than once, its visual impact is amplified by braiding effects (Miller 2007: 109); this in turn also means that, as Baetens and Lefèvre argue, a general principle of narrative economy demands that the text should not repeat information already given visually without complementing it (1993: 20), albeit clearly the very same absence of transformation may be used as a narrative device (Miller 2007: 121). Likewise, the ellipsis and modifications that lead the narrative must be not too sharp, unless the author intends to mark the enunciation, for example through the use of "salient transitions in relation to framing" or "abrupt changes in angle of vision" (Miller 2007: 121-22).

2.8.1. Bipolarity, dichotomies, and the analeptic structure

First of all, as a general rule, nostalgic narratives seem to need a simple structure; their effect is at its most when they have the binary structure Salmose dubbed 'bipolarity' and Boym "superimposition of two images" (2001: xiii), namely a chronological (now/then), structural (embedding/embedded) and possibly spatial (here/there)[99] dichotomy, whose

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[99] Along the same line, Salmose proposes also a curiously asymmetrical bipartition between what he dubs 'presence, that is, "descriptive narration", and what he calls 'distance', namely "the notion of past events" (2012: 224, 232).

second pole is perceived as irretrievable. Salmose specifically stresses a need for gravity[100] and simplicity, a requisite that, according to him,

> has to do with the basic romantic quality of nostalgia: its seriousness and immensely private character. Nostalgia is much like a dream and the bubble of the dream explodes when sharp things like irony, sarcasm, or graphic eroticism enter it. The same could be said of texts that are too self-reflective or experimental. (2012: 176)

Additionally, nostalgic narratives seem to work best when they are focalized on the past as experienced through the mediation of one character (rather than many), something Fred Davis already noticed when, talking about literature, he remarked "the preference for the first person [and] the past continuous tense" (1979: 85).

All these elements form what Salmose dubs 'the analeptic structure', according to him "by far the most common narrative technique used to evoke nostalgia in literature" (2012: 288). In his view, the analeptic structure is based on a frame structure narrated in the first person by someone remembering and longing for some real or imagined past event, clearly distinguished from the present moment. In Salmose's view, the use of a first-person narrator is important since it enhances "the private nature of the recollection and aids the seductive qualities of the narration" (2012: 287) while at the same time granting the narrator "a greater freedom in rearranging the temporal order of events" (2012: 288). To rephrase it more rigorously,

> the analeptic structure needs a frame story, a dominant point of narration which we call the first narrative, from which a subsequent narration of usually chronological past events (analeptic narrative) commences through multiple nostalgic homodiegetic external analepses. The first-person narrator, an extradiegetic homodiegetic narrator, then constantly infuses the past with his present position through either his comments and his narrating style or a direct return to the dominant first narrative. (Salmose 2012: 297)

This mention of the fundamental role of the frame structure to keep unaltered the "intimacy of one narrator" (2012: 294) returns in Salmose's admonishment to never omit

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[100] Salmose himself downsizes the need for seriousness, though, explaining that "[n]ostalgic literature does not need to be humourless, but the narration's attitude towards the past has to be sincere and elegiac in order to emphasize the specific relationships between a disorderly present and an idealized past" (2012: 179).

the frame story if one does not want to endanger the nostalgic potential of the narrative (2012: 295). Nevertheless, it is debatable whether that is actually a necessary feature to arise nostalgia in literature, and even more so when dealing with comics: the comics author has several options to nostalgically connote her narrative through way more nuanced strategies than simple framing. For example, through the meganarrator, she can indeed show two temporal plans, with the first one projecting the second; she can make use of captions from a subsequent temporal plan without ever visually presenting it, and by means of either a first- or third-person narrator comment on the narrative[101]. Furthermore, the author can resort to hypertextual features, especially at the visual level, to convey a deep sense of pastness and/or pay her admiration to some author, without ever having to verbally comment on it (I discussed this feature in the style section, and I will go back on the matter when talking about Seth). Finally, she can choose to leave implicit the first of the two poles (the here/now) and simply rely on the editorial destination of her product. It is the case of *This One Summer* by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, where the moments recounted belong to a childhood summer vacation, but whose implied reader is by all means older than the 12-year old protagonists, hence likely to counterpose her current age to the youth of the characters, projecting the embedding temporal plan and her personal feelings about it on the basis of inferences drawn from her own life.

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[101] Evidently, though, the prototypical example of such a structure would be an older homodiegetic narrator reminiscing her youth.
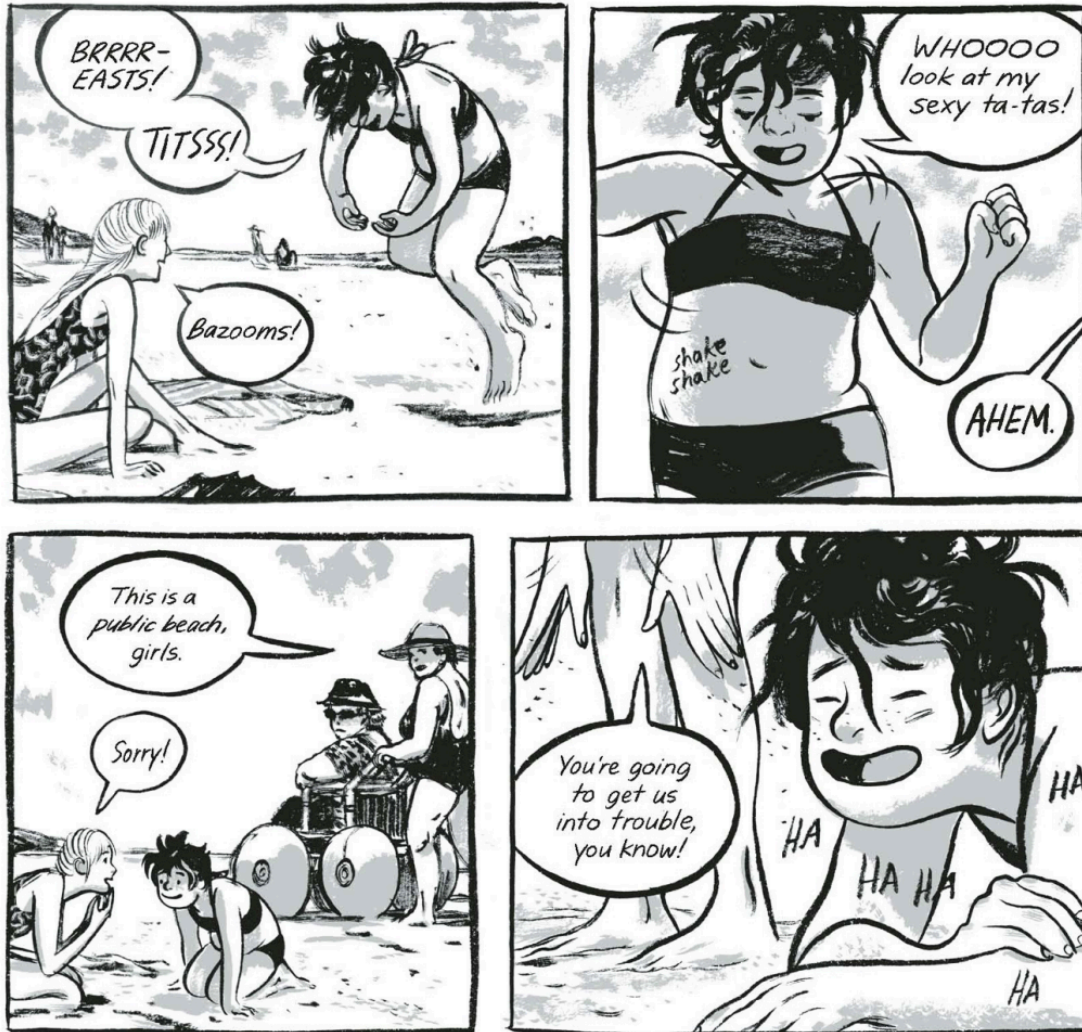
The two adolescent protagonists of This One Summer (Tamaki 2014)

Likewise, while one can agree on the importance of a simple structure, this does not mean that the narrative must necessarily be stripped to its essentials to encourage nostalgia; after all, the 21st century reader should be able to decodify and unpack some level of narrative complexity. It is helpful, however, that at the experiential level the story operates a clear dichotomy between two moments, or two series of moments. The ideal nostalgic structure would be made up of two distinct temporal meta-plans, one of which may be left to some extent implicit, that encompass no matter how many singular events giving them continuity and split as clearly as possible the narrative in two halves.

2.8.2. Comic storytelling: iterations and transformations

Salmose nevertheless makes a very interesting remark in underlying how iterative frequency, the use of repetitions and the (possible) combination of analepses and prolepses enhance nostalgia.

Iterative frequency, he observes, significantly reinforces the evocation of "rituals and recurring events", regarding the kind of reminiscence that "lacks the specificity of memory and embraces the vagueness of nostalgi[a]" (2012: 207); he cleverly states on this regard that "[a] phrase such as 'I remember the day in June 1942 when dad caught that big fish' is in principle less nostalgic than 'I remember that dad and I used to fish in the summers'" (2012: 207).

Repetitions concur in prompting nostalgia by creating a reverberation of the motifs of the narrative. Salmose of course deals with literature and therefore refers to the sole verbal level, highlighting the role of repetitions as "rhythmical time markers" (2012: 201) and as "means of forcing the reader back into textual time in order to either re-evaluate or remind of a past textual event" (2012: 202). Furthermore, he addresses recollections[102] as being "often charged with the frames of a character's or narrator's memory", thus becoming "sad and melancholic in the way that they cannot reproduce the truth or reality in an exact degree" (Salmose 2012: 202). This is consistent with Mikkonen's identification of repetition as a strategy that can be used by comics to create several effects:

> Repetition may suggest, for instance, a range of temporal impressions, such as a sense of circular time, underline the interrelatedness between different events, situations, or experiences, or undermine the idea of an authentic single event. Repetition is also a means of emphasis and narrative salience: it may help to signal the importance of something, be that an idea, emotion, phrase, word, experience, behaviour, memory, action, or an event. (Mikkonen 2017: 63)

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[102] Salmose draws a difference between repetitions and recollections from Kierkegaard's statement according to which "repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition, if it is possible, is recollected forwards. Therefore repetition, if it is possible, makes a man happy – whereas recollection makes him unhappy […]" (1941: 3-4; in Salmose 2012: 201). In practice, he refers to repetitions as blank reiterations, and to recollections as more connoted ones, already oriented by the narrator towards nostalgia. Adopting this distinction may be tempting, but it does not seem unproblematic and I will discard it here.

The same reverberation is created by the use of prolepses and analepses: prolepses, in Salmose's words, concur in creating "a temporal flux, a notion of already remembering the event that is described" (2012: 196), an idea he draws from Santesso's notion of a 'proleptic nostalgia' (2006: 62) proper of romantic poetry, consisting in the anticipation of a future event that has the effect of making the reader look at the present moment with a nostalgic gaze[103]. Analepses, especially homodiegetic, encourage the reader to return to previous moment in the story and "revalue [her] past narrative experience" (Salmose 2012: 287), thus significantly stressing what Salmose calls 'textual memory' (namely, the "reader's memory of the past narrative", which in turn encourages 'textual nostalgia': 2012: 382; see also 298-326) and increasing the nostalgic potential of the text.

Those two last considerations are particularly interesting when applied to comics, because they are extremely reminiscent of the possible action of Groensteen's general arthrology, that is, the creation of a web of signifiers pushing the reader back and forth along the story by means of repetitions and alterations of visual elements. The visual components of comic narratives thus are *naturally* prone to operate the same reverberation effect and may benefit, in turn, from the same strategies happening at the verbal level; this seem to confirm, again, the role of comics (and graphic novels in particular) as an ideal support to deal with memory and nostalgia. As Mikkonen comments, "what is specifically challenging to the analysis of narrative frequency in this medium is that we need to take into consideration repetition at various levels of representation: the images, the layout, visual style, the words, and their interaction" (2017: 61).

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[103] In this sense, it would be complementary to the teleological 'salvation narrative' proper of many classical and religious literature; on the matter, see Trilling (2009, esp. 133-43).
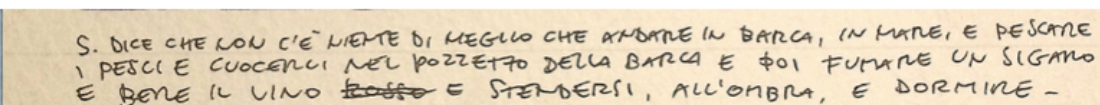
Four panels from four separate pages in Gipi's S (2006)

One of the best examples of the possibilities of the comic medium comes from Gipi's S. S is the story of the death of the author's father, Sergio, interpolated with several anecdotes that he used to tell repeatedly during his life, mostly set during World War II. In the course of the book, the anecdotes overlap and repeat, contradicting themselves and denouncing their uncertain epistemological status, reinforcing instead the strict bond they have with Sergio himself and his agency on memory and testimony. The inter-panel and inter-page relations, the switches in the points of view and perspectives, the fact that several words are crossed out as if the story was unfolding directly, with all the uncertainties and second thoughts of tell tales, all work together to recompose through scattered fragments, in a way that only comics could achieve, a figure larger than life and yet made of flesh and bones and most humanly fallible like that of Sergio, and the aching nostalgia Gipi feels for his death.

2.8.3. Transtextuality: intramediality, intermediality, interdiscursivity

The last reflection on structural issues refers to Genette's other work that I quoted before, that is, *Palimpsests.*

Comics production has shown, increasingly since the beginning of its more mature phase (around and partly thanks to the birth of the graphic novel), a spontaneous inclination towards transtextuality. This is due to some key reasons: the fact that comics are traditionally serialized, hence inextricably linked in a sequence of texts; the way comics history matured its canon and system of authors; and the extreme suitability of the medium (in reason of the compresence of visual and verbal codes and its flexible structure) to act as a transtextual platform, which unfolds both in regards of intermedial and intramedial reflexivity[104] and concerns the role of comics as chronicles of everyday reality. And this is not to mention the role of paratextuality in eliciting nostalgia: using the traditional space of the peritext, authors can add layers of (perceived) historical time by framing the narrative with a series of photographs and documents, both original and recreated by the graphic sign, both real and fictional. Some goes on as to build a whole "photo album" at the margin of the original text (it is the case of Seth, that I will discuss

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[104] I am referring to the third sense of 'intermediality' isolated by Irina O. Rajewsky, the narrow one, concerning intermedial references, those that "imply a crossing of media borders", that she opposes to intramedial references, which "by definition remain within a single medium" (2005: 54).

in the dedicated section), or an extended archive of (forged) documents like that at the end of each of the twelve episodes (minus the last one) that form *Watchmen*.

Transtextual mechanisms at large are particularly evident in a medium that is historically based on serialization; while hypertextuality develops, the shield of continuity allows creators to forge multiple, mutually excluding storyworlds that is up to the reader to reconstitute. This in turn becomes the reason for the nostalgic chase that seeks to perfectly recreate unity - by collecting all the issues of a given comic, or by knowing by heart what is canonic and what not - and is so peculiar of comics fandom (I will return on this issue in the chapter devoted to reception). Transtextuality, in this sense, "links stories in the minds of both creators and readers [and] also helps to define and limit the audience" (Pustz 1999: 129[105]): to provide a clear example, one may consider how

> Marvel created a serial "world" in which their characters overlapped, collided, and competed. […] If the story-arcs still directed themselves toward a younger audience, many readers did not take their pleasures in the individual plots. Instead, they took them in the mixed characters of the Marvel Universe, in the complexity of intersecting narratives and storylines, and in the sense of readerly privilege that came from inhabiting this "universe" and learning to read its secret language, to expound upon its "philosophy". (Gardner 2012: 113)

As far as the history of the medium is concerned, Jenkins observes, "comics creators, like all other artists, seek instruction and inspiration from their own tradition" (2013: 306), after having "educate[d] themselves in the history of comics by scrounging through used book stores" (Heer 2010: 4, also in Jenkins 2013: 306). This has two implications; the first one goes in the direction of Genette's architextuality, and works accordingly with Jauss' idea of 'horizons of expectation' (1970), famously stating that

> [a] literary work, even if it seems new, does not appear as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of the familiar, stirs particular emotions in the reader and with its 'beginning' arouses expectations for the 'middle and end',

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[105] Pustz further reflects on continuity: see 1999, chap. 4, esp. 129-34.

which can then be continued intact, changed, re-oriented or even ironically fulfilled in the course of reading according to certain rules of the genre or type of text. (Jauss 1970: 12)

No text on any medium – and particularly comics, that often display a high degree of self-reflexivity – exists alone; instead, it is more or less overtly and consciously installed on a system of other similar texts. Stylistic conventions evolve over time, authors are compared to others (and to their own earlier production), and the genre system influences both the production and the reception of a given work, significantly affecting its editorial destination.

Furthermore, this process also implies a certain degree of awareness of the possibilities and conventions of the medium, as Baetens and Frey note when they affirm that "artists are historically conscious of the tropes of their famous predecessors and enjoy playing with established modes, including page layout/content relationships" (2015: 132). Along the same line, Crucifix comments that "graphic novelists often express their indebtedness to the history of comics and rely on or tease out their readers' knowledge of that past in their graphic strategies" (2017a: 316). This aspect connects to the aspects of the strict relation comics entertain with transtextuality which are also more deeply linked with matters of nostalgia.

Let us recall again Niemeyer's consideration according to which "media are very often nostalgic for themselves, their own past, their structures and contents" (2014: 7). Now, in a medium which already regarded parody as one of its most common forms (Pustz 1999: 139), the last thirty years or so have seen a bloom of the use of pastiche, which in Jameson's view (as John Storey sums it) "recaptures and represents the atmosphere and stylistic features of the past; and/or it recaptures and represents certain styles of viewing of the past" (Storey 2015: 204). In Jameson's perspective, pastiche always works towards nostalgia, limiting itself to a sterile blank imitation of the surface appearance of past works (1991: 279-96). In this sense, Jameson calls 'nostalgia film' a certain number of movies from the Eighties and the early Nineties that set their stories and purportedly recreate the aesthetics of past eras, and notably of the Fifties, seen as a golden age of stability and prosperity. This is also consistent with Elizabeth Guffey's view of

'generative retro' as an 'unsentimental nostalgia' towards the past (2006: 11). In Camper's word,

> Retro is delineated from the more classical form of revivalism, which while taking great pleasure in the past nonetheless considered it from a detached perspective, as a "completed" protocol rather than as a still viable branch of evolution. This retro strategy is to mix up recognizable components of past aesthetic styles and genres, reassembling them into previously unseen forms. (2009: 187)

Storey quite convincingly opposes to Jameson's bleak view the more optimistic takes of Jim Collins (2009: 470) and especially of Brooker, who sees in the postmodern use of pastiche "the shared pleasure of intertextual recognition, the critical effect of play with narrative conventions, character and cultural stereotypes, and the power rather than passivity of nostalgia"[106] (1997: 7).

Be it a reactionary practice or not, the use of intertextual and hypertextual references, especially through pastiches, is an inherently nostalgic feature both at the stylistic level (as we've seen when discussing colours and lines) and at the structural level.

More in depth, one can see that there are two tensions at work here. The first one, as Pustz observes, concerns the chase for a more powerful medium than comics possibilities seemed to allow, in the light of which "since at least the 1970s, mainstream comic books have been filled with allusions and sly references to the work of famous creators, classic comics, and a variety of prominent and obscure characters". (Pustz 1999: 143). As Pustz remarks, "putting comic books into a larger context can alleviate the problem of their lacking in power and depth, and patterns of allusions in mainstream comics help to provide this larger framework" (1999: 143).

He goes on by saying that

> Allusions can allow writers to tap into established continuity or to use classic archetypes while still creating original stories; allusions can allow artists to create a

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[106] They go so far as to define it (while discussing Tarantino's *Kill Bill*) "a more active nostalgia and intertextual exploration than a term such as 'pastiche', which has nowhere to go but deeper into the recycling factory, implies. Instead of 'pastiche', we might think of 'rewriting' or 'reviewing' and, in terms of the spectator's experience, of the 'reactivation' and 'reconfiguration' of a given generational 'structure of feeling' within 'a more dynamic and varied set of histories'" (1997: 7).

sense of tradition by imitating or echoing industry giants. For readers who recognize these allusions, comic books become filled with a greater importance, a larger web of significances, a longer tradition, a more developed history. The practice of reading comics can thus become more challenging and rewarding." (1999: 143)

The second tension regards Baetens and Frey's consideration according to which "adult comics and graphic novels are a form that are especially capable of making meta-commentary and reflexive references to existing titles, creators, and even whole genres" (2015: 99). This entails also that the older, naiver phases of the history of a medium tend to be later remediated from more complex and recent forms to play with the layers of the narration and stratify the intended meanings. This is what Brett Camper calls 'retro-reflexivity', that is, a case of 'local' remediation that takes place during the evolution of a medium, when

> its earlier stages begin to be remediated within it. The emphasis on legitimization or realism fades, and remediation drifts from a fallback to a conscious stylistic choice, a tactic for evoking and re-interpreting the medium's past, an expert vehicle for the homage, the parody, or the genre revival. This is where remediation meets retro. (Camper 2009: 186)
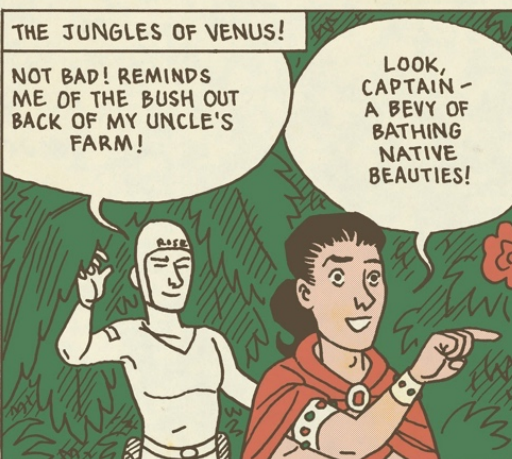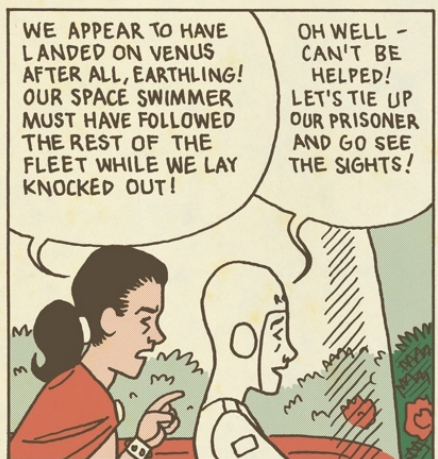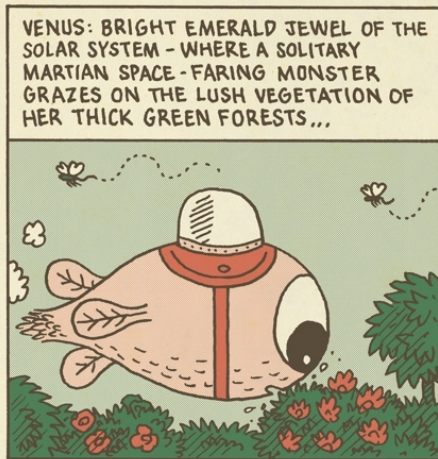
A page from Sam Zabel and the Magic Pen (Horrocks 2014)

A clear-cut example of this strategy is given, again, by Dylan Horrocks' *Sam Zabel and the Magic Pen*. When the eponymous protagonist enters the first old comic of many he will find himself travelling through, he automatically immerses in a world of simpler reactions and flatter psychology – that is, in the meta- logic of Horrocks' pastiche, the world governed by the fictional rules of the genre he is appealing to.

On the structural level, then, thanks to pastiche a graphic novel may appeal to the naïve, unproblematic genre plot of some early comics, without adhering to its ideological assumption, as a means of carrying out a critique of the present, or to reflect upon some medium conventions, or simply to enhance the reflexivity of the text one is reading. Be as it may, the very presence of the past in the guise of transtextuality maximizes the nostalgic potential of a given text.

Furthermore, as I mentioned already, comics (and graphic novels) are very often inclined to be, in their relation towards earlier comics, what Ed Folsom called an 'archival narrative', that is "a narrative that is much more conscious of, attached to, and interactive with the mass of fragments out of which it comes and into which it dissolves" (Folsom 2016: 27, in Crucifix 2017b: 16). As Jenkins puts it, "[s]tuff of the past—in this case, early comics—surfaces […] as a form of aesthetic validation (the archival), as a symbol of the fragility of cultural memory (the ephemeral), and as an embodiment of the ways that old ideologies tend to reassert themselves in new forms (the residual)" (2013: 319). The archival potential of comics and graphic novel, though, is not limited to intramedial history, nor simply to intermedial transfer; rather, it is often a matter of interdiscursivity, as Segre conceived the concept (1982: 15-28), that is, to indicate the relation of a text with the wider set of assumptions pertaining a certain culture[107]; as Gardner affirms, "comics chronicle the twilight world, the liminal space between past and present, text and image, creator and reader. The comic frame is necessarily a space where these binaries overlap, collaborate, and compete for attention and meaning" (2012: 176).

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[107] In this sense – and quite significantly for our purposes -, interdiscursivity would encompass media memory, that is "the systematic exploration of collective pasts that are narrated by the media, through the use of the media, and about the media" (Neigen, Meyers, and Zandberg 2011: 1). Concepts similar to Segre's interdiscursivity – with a stronger appeal to the notion of discourse - are those elaborated by Angenot (1983: 101-112) and Foucault (1969: 88-90).

The ability of the medium to chronicle present and past, with a proclivity for the ephemeral, multiplies its nostalgic potential both synchronically (if a work is set in the past) and diachronically (when looking back at a comic created some years before): "to be an ephemeralist is to accept history (including the history of the self) as ephemeral. The comics historian turns to the history of ephemera, of precisely that which is designed to burn up in the harsh light of everyday life, leaving behind the deep tracks of what will later be traced as history" (Gardner 2012: 175).

Gardner underlines "the structural affinities of the comics form with the 'database aesthetic' that has contributed to the increasing visibility and relevance of the comics form in the twenty-first century[108] (2012: 149), and asserts that the fact that" the contemporary graphic novel came of age in the late 1980s and 1990s in America, at precisely the same time as the rise of the personal computer, is no coincidence" (2012: 177). Comics allow to navigate sequential text/image in the most compatible way with contemporary media technology; furthermore, they are an example of what Marsha Kinder defines 'database narratives'[109], that is, those

> narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and that are crucial to language: the selection of particular data (characters, objects, settings, sounds, events) from a series of databases or paradigms, which are then combined to generate specific tales. Such narratives reveal the possibility of making other combinations, which would create alternative stories, and they encourage us to question the choice of categories and of what is included and omitted (2003: 135).

Comic series, in particular, are a matter of transtextual links and storyworld building way more than a collection of single stories; and the possibility to encourage alternative storylines was one of the characteristics and causes of the bloom of comics since their origins; this in turn, as I will discuss in the following chapter, encouraged a more

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[108] On the same topic, see Baetens and Frey 2015: 185.
[109] There is an impressive corpus of scholarship on databases and archives; here, I will extremely simplify the matter and consider their difference in that an archive is narrativized, while "the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list" (Manovich 2001: 225).

interactive reception of comics and contributes to obtain a nostalgic response from the readers.

2.9. Structure, comics, and nostalgia

I dealt in this section with structural issues that concur in prompting nostalgia.

I isolated, first of all, a bipolar structure built upon chronological (now/then), structural (embedding/embedded) and spatial (here/there)[110] dichotomies. The most evident of these directions is the temporal one, embodying what Salmose calls the analeptic structure, a framing of the nostalgized experience in which, I argued, one of the pole may be as well left implicit if textual and contextual indexes are sufficient to deduce it.

I then analysed the effect of a structure made of iterations and transformations, which I identified as a well suitable skeleton for a nostalgic narrative due to its reinforcing of the narrated events.

Finally, I discussed at length the possibilities offered by transtextuality, mentioning peritextuality and the use of comics as an archival – or database – narrative, and focusing on the structural implications of the use of pastiches reminiscent of the *more innocent* comics of years ago (I will elaborate on the matter of innocence and authenticity in the fans section).

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[110] Along the same line, Salmose proposes also a curiously asymmetrical bipartition between what he dubs 'presence, that is, "descriptive narration", and what he calls 'distance', namely "the notion of past events" (2012: 224, 232).

3. Nostalgic Reception

General overview

The following chapter will deal with the contextual element that concur to obtain a nostalgic response; as the preceding one, it is composed by three subchapters, each analysing a different aspect of reception: readers, fans and collectors.

The *readers* category encompasses everything that concerns the act of reading comics, from examining the peculiarly interactive gesture of gaps-filling to following how nostalgia flows from the text to the reader. It will finally consider the way readers can stay close to characters and what this entails for nostalgia.

The category of *fans* confronts a key element of comics history (that is, fandom itself), investigating the implications of participatory culture and how the quest for (and defence of) the perceived innocence and authenticity of older comics shapes comics fandom in an inherently nostalgic way. The section will also start considering the role of gender inequalities in shaping comics culture and its perception.

Finally, the category of *collectors* will focus on the materiality of comics and graphic novels, considering the role of digital culture and reprints on comics consumption, and better isolating the need for closure that identifies comics collectors. Lastly, it will return on gender issues, analysing the implications they have on nostalgia.

This tripartite division (interaction, fandom, collection) is to various extent followed in all the works on the matter (see Pustz 1999, esp. p. xii-xiii; Gardner 2011), yet the differences are not that clear. On one side, Woo maintains that "*reader* and *collector* have become distinct categories with very different understandings of what comics are (Woo 2012: 182) and "when people talk about comics fans, they often speak as though collecting and fandom are synonyms" (2012: 185), and Pustz argues that

> many readers openly call themselves fans and are devoted to particular titles, companies, genres, or creators. Other readers are best characterized as collectors or speculators, with many of the latter derisively called fanboys. The presence of these different reading communities and the relatively impermeable boundaries between them begs the question of whether there is something that can actually be seen as comic book culture. (Pustz 1999: 204)

On the other, though, Woo himself recognize that "things are the sine qua non of fandom, that without which it remains only potentiality and not a realized capability" (2014: 1.3), and Beaty affirms that "the deep personal relationship that the fan develops with his or her obsession almost inevitably seems to manifest itself in the form of a collection, and the collector/fan relationship is so close as to sometimes seem inseparable" (2012: 155) or that 'true fandom' requires a 'strong involvement', and "one of the most rudimentary levels of participation is by engaging in collecting" (2012: 155).

It must then be remembered that those categories exist in a continuum and often overlap, so that much of what I will say about readers can be applied as well to fans or collectors, and vice versa.

3.1. Readers

General overview

When we have to do with narratives, be they fictional, non-fictional or exploring the margin between the two (autofiction, pseudo-autobiography, creative non-fiction and so on), there are several cognitive processes at stake.

Narrative is a way to model reality, vicariously providing lifelike experiences that one has not (necessarily) lived, making us learn new things or experience emotions, and even shaping and modifying our present and future perception of real life events (Plantinga 2012: 471; on the same topic, see Zunshine 2006; Boyd 2009). If not much has been written on this aspect of comics reading, Plantinga observes how "Oliver Sacks, Hugo Münsterberg, William James, and Henri Bergson, among others, liken the cinematic experience to the phenomenology of human consciousness as experienced by the self" (2012: 471). More systematically, Margolin observes,

> there are at least half a dozen areas where such a spillover from fictional to actual
> may occur. First is the reader's self concept, including sense of self and self
> understanding, and the construction, formation and transformation of the self and of
> one's sense of identity. Another area is the affective one, covering the whole range
> of emotions and attitudes. Next comes the cognitive sphere, where the engagement
> with the fictional characters may impact one's models of reality, its perception and
> understanding, especially as regards one's beliefs about the (actual) human psyche,
> its nature and modes of functioning. (2010: 413)

Margolin (2010) identifies several stages of this process:

- the first one is imagining oneself "as a participant in the game world" and "reading such a report or observing such individuals and events" (2010: 411)

- the second concerns responding emotionally to what happens, on the basis of "emotive and evaluative attitudes" comparable to those one feels in real life (2010: 411)

- the third stage, "traditionally referred to as identification, but better designated as mental simulation", consists in "adopting or reenacting for the duration of the game of make believe a mental state or activity of the character: emotion, attitude, disposition, belief, intention, wish, goal, etc" (2010: 411)

- the fourth stage "consists of those occasions when events concerning a character in a

story and their associated emotions act as cues to recall similar fragments of one's own autobiographical memory of events and emotions, bringing about a reliving of these experiences and emotions" (2010: 412)

- the fifth stage concerns "the impact of the engagement with a fictional character on the reader in his actual life world, once the reading act is concluded" (2010: 413).

Despite being extremely interesting – especially the last point, which echoes the finding of Miall and Kuiken (2002) and Strange (2002) about the modification that the action of identifying with characters may lead to in real life - the idea of 'stages' following one another seems somehow misleading on the functioning of said process. Are we supposed to "respond emotionally" but wait two stages to see if that response reminds us of an emotion we previously experienced? A horizontal model seems therefore more fitting, and I will propose one with which redistribute Margolin's findings.

In his survey on literature, emotions and identification, Oatley starts by identifying two kinds of literary emotional responses: external, concerning the reader's confrontation with the text, and internal, with the reader metaphorically entering the diegetic world. In the first case, emotions will result either from assimilation to previous mental schemata (what Oatley ironically refers to as "The Grisham effect or 'What will happen next?': 1994: 57) or to the necessity of accommodation of said schemata, mostly due to estrangement ("The Amis effect or 'Making things strange': 1994: 58). In the second case, emotions may be directed towards the characters (sympathy or lack thereof, Margolin's second stage); they may be the resurfacing of emotions already felt (prompted by a particular text: that would be Margolin's fourth stage), or they may depend on the identification with a certain character or set of characters (Margolin's third stage).

Emotions of Literary Response

EXTERNAL: READER CONFRONTING THE TEXT	Resulting from assimilation to schema, e.g., curiosity about what will happen next	Resulting from accommodation of schema, from dishabituation, new connection, insights
INTERNAL: READER ENTERING THE WORLD OF THE TEXT	Sympathy	Emotion memories	Emotions of identification
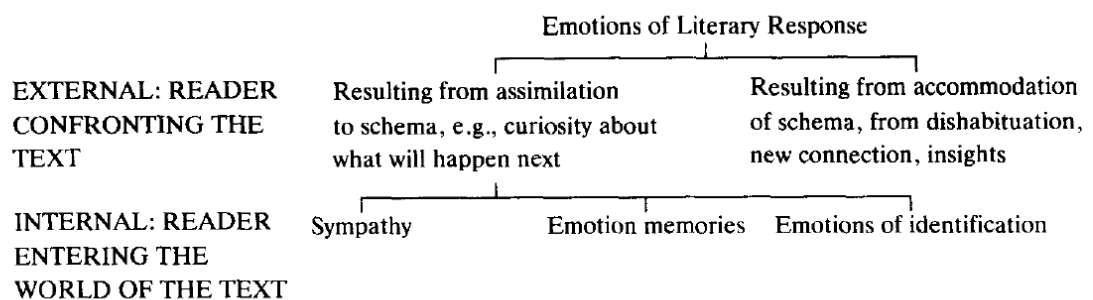
Emotions in response to literature according to Oatley (1994: 57)

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In the light of the last twenty years of research on cognitive response to narrative, and concentrating on the reactions that Oatley defines internal to the text, I would keep the triadic division, reformulating the three voices as follows: rather than 'emotion memories', I would like to think about the reader *involvement* – that is to say, all the textual strategy that may bring the reader closer and leave her more space to fill in the narrative with information coming from her personal background; rather than 'sympathy', I would prefer to talk about *affect transmission*, and rather than identification, I believe it is better to think of *closeness* to characters.

3.2. Readers and comics

Nostalgia builds a web connecting the objects that we charge with personal and affective investment. I have already pointed out the role of images in creating

> an extended network of meanings that bring together the personal with the familial, the cultural, the economic, the social, and the historical. Memory work makes it possible to explore connections between 'public' historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and 'personal' memory. (Kuhn 2002: 5)

But how and why does this process intersect with narrative works, especially fictional ones?

According to Gerrig (1993), the key in narrative is 'participatory responses'– that is, a response of the same kind of those the reader would give had she participated in the narrative world. This means that "responses depend on reader's intentional involvement in the story world" (Bortolussi and Dixon 2003: 87).

Margolin similarly points out that "the higher the reader's identification with a character or narrator, the greater the likelihood he will adopt as valid in his life world textual claims made by them even when they conflict with his prior world knowledge" (2010: 412).

Comics have a long history of worries about their potential to prompt readers' identification. The reference goes to the infamous case of Wertham's 1954 *Seduction of the innocents* and its sincere "crusade for the mental health of a generation facing a threat of truly monumental proportions" (Gardner 2012: 86). Wertham's alert in favour of some censorship led to the creation of the Comics Code, an auto-regulation of what could be

shown by comics that would last until the years 2000s[111]. In Wertham's (and his contemporaries') view, "comics were dangerous because the fundamental nature of the medium—the use of powerful iconic images, sequential patterns, and suggestive, elliptical narration—was a key to inner recesses of the mind meant to be carefully guarded" (Gardner 2012: 86). At the same time, those defending comic books[112] advocated for the power the form had to unleash children's imagination through "play and creative identification" (Gardner 2012: 79).

What stand still is comics' intertextual and interactive potential and their incompleteness, that always requires the reader "to insert his feelings and interpretations actively into the text itself" (Gardner 2012: 81). In this sense, Philippe Marion defines the reader as "a graphiateur who ignores himself, or a *virtual graphiateur* who, thanks to an empathic process of identification, makes his old move of reliving life through the artist's fictive object" (Baetens 2001: 153[113]).

This is something which is in turn augmented by hybrid forms (like the graphic memoir) which "best allows for this simultaneous claim of autobiography and fiction", where "fiction is an ideal form for identification and affective attachment and autobiography is an ideal form for auratic distance and contemplation" (Gardner 2012: 147). Not casually, it is often graphic memoirs that stand for their nostalgic content. Baetens and Frey also notice that "it is arguably the ability of the graphic novel to work on the borderlines of first person narrative, history-from-below, and oral history, as well as to introduce fiction with historical meaning (and vice versa) that makes it so fascinating and important a body of work" (2015: 13).

Having affirmed that comics provide a great deal of interaction to their readers – and that they seemed to have long-lasting, possibly highly dangerous effects – I will, in this section, try to pinpoint how they do so, by following the three categories that I previously

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[111] For more on the matter, see Beaty (2005); Hajdu (2008); Tilley (2012); Pizzino (2015). For two analyses showing the connection between Wertham's idea of the innocence of childhood and nostalgia itself, see Murray (2016); O'Malley (2017).

[112] The most important are possibly the neuropsychiatrist Lauretta Bender and the psychologist William Moulton Marston, who later became known also as the creator of *Wonder Woman*.

[113] For an acute critique of this concept of identification – which is "both semiotic and primary" and possibly undermines secondary identification and psychoanalytical implications, see Baetens (2001: 153-55). On a similar matter, see also Currie (1997).

isolated: that of the reader involvement, that of affect transmission, and that of closeness between the reader and characters.

3.2.1. *De te fabula narratur*: blanks, gaps, and the reader involvement

The act of filling the gaps between panels is possibly the most peculiar of comic reading – though not exclusive, as "segmented sequences and fragmentation function as a provocation to meaning-making and problem-solving *across the arts*, inviting the audience to make a connection and fill the gap" (Mikkonen 2017: 18, my emphasis).

To effectively appoint comics of the sequentiality that characterize them, readers must take an active role and fill in with their own projections the inter-panel gaps ("in more technical terms, the 'intericonic space' between panels": Baetens and Frey 2015: 121) that would otherwise fragment the narrative, because it is mostly there that comics feature temporal ellipses and changes of scenes[114]. This space between panels is commonly called 'gutter'; as Kukkonen describes their functioning, "just as you step across a gutter, your mind creates connections between the individual panels, by drawing inferences about how the action in the one can relate to the other, and thereby trying to integrate them into a single, meaningful narrative" (2013: 10).

The most famous model of this process is McCloud's (1993), that assigns primary importance to the gutter itself (1993: 66-67). McCloud draws from Gestalt's principle of 'closure' – that is, "the phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (1993: 63) - affirming that the reader must similarly work to bring 'closure' to the space between frames, "mentally construct[ing] a continuous, unified reality" (1993: 67)[115].

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[114] Marion's category of connectivity reflects this act of giving continuity between panels during the reading process (1993: 220–226). As Mikkonen sums it up, "the reader has an active role in negotiating and neutralising the inherent fragmentation of the narrative breakdown in comics, stringing the disparate elements together" (Mikkonen 2017: 48).

[115] Other scholars prefer to focus on the 'breakdown' of the narrative, but as Hatfield notes "'breakdown' and 'closure' are complementary terms, both describing the relationship between sequence and series: the author's task is to evoke an imagined sequence by breaking a visual series (a breakdown), whereas the reader's task is to translate the given series into a narrative sequence by achieving closure" (2005: 41).

Mikkonen observes nevertheless that McCloud's choice of the term is not ideal, overlapping with the established meaning it has in narrative theory, where it identifies "the satisfaction of expectations and the answering of questions raised over the course of any narrative" (Abbott 2005: 65–66, in Mikkonen 2017: 39).

"Even in the most simplistic narratives," Gardner elaborates, "the reader imaginatively fills in this space with the 'missing' action" (2012: xi).

Closure in comics is "far from continuous and anything but involuntary" (McCloud 1993: 68), as opposed to the one that happens when watching a movie or to the process of *pareidolia*; it follows that "all comics are necessarily collaborative texts between the imagination of the author/artist and that of the reader who must 'complete' the narrative" (Gardner 2012: 173).

Gardner's reading of McCloud is closer to a phenomenological approach, affirming that "comics must negotiate at every panel with the reader" for "there is in fact no 'narrative' between the images in the two frames save what the reader chooses to agree to assign to it" (Gardner 2012: xii) and defining McCloud's gutter model as "not dissimilar from Deleuze's celebration of a new cinema as the 'time-image'", in which "what counts is the interstice between images, between two images: a spacing which means that each image is plucked from the void and falls back into it" (Deleuze 1989: 179, in Gardner 2012: 5).

There are also evident similarities between this model and Iser's (literary) one. In Iser's view, gaps in a text are "elements of indeterminacy" where we can "use our imagination", "points at which the reader can enter the text" to "create the configurative meaning of what he is reading" (Iser 1978: 283, 40; see also: 280). Blanks therefore intensify "the acts of ideation on the reader's part" (1978: 189), asking to be filled "with mental images" (1978: 220). Thus, they don't diminish, but instead "increase the density of fictional texts" (1978: 225), which is translated "through the reader's mind as an ever-expanding network of connections" (1978: 116).

What differentiates blanks in literature from gaps in comics, in fact, is not their function, but the option a literary author has to employ or not employ blanks as a leverage to hint to a different reading, while the comic author is unavoidably forced to confront himself with them, as they are one of the constraints of comic narrative: "no comic book story can fill-in all the blanks of character, setting, and event" (Aldama 2010: 321). The same is true when confronting comics with films, for, as Gardner observes,

> comics creators—while faced with an array of choices at every turn—have never had the possibility of developing tools and techniques that would allow them (as Hollywood cinema would do after 1920) to efface the gaps (the structural 'gutters'),

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to suture the cuts and obscure the apparatus. Such acts of 'suture' have never been available to comics. (2012: xi)[116]

Nonetheless, McCloud's work is possibly as influential as much as it is controversial, since not all critical reception has been equally enthusiastic about it, especially outside of the United States. First of all, McCloud goes as far as identifying six types of panel transitions: moment to moment (1), that is, a series of moments of the same action; action to action (2), meaning a series of action of the same subjects; subject to subject (3), namely, a series of subjects in the same scene; scene to scene (4); aspect to aspect (5), concerning different but simultaneous point of views of the same scene; and non-sequitur (6), panels that are not linked by any logical relationship. Yet Hatfield notices how "the process of transitioning, or closure, depends not only on the interplay between successive images but also on the interplay of different codes of signification: the verbal as well as the visual" (Hatfield 2005: 44). Thus, this interplay "often muddies the pristine categories of transition that McCloud tries to establish" (2005: 44). This is consonant with Mikkonen's critique according to which "McCloud's understanding of the function of panel transitions does not capture the full flexibility, instability, and heterogeneity of their functions" (2017: 41) and with Gardner's remark about how "comics bring together different semantic systems (figural, textual, symbolic) into a crowded field where meaning is both collaborative and competitive—between images, between frames, and between reader and writer" (Gardner 2012: xi).

Second, Neil Cohn convincingly affirms that closure cannot be attributed to the gutter, but to the "indexical quality" of the content of the panel, processed and interpreted by the reader (Cohn 2010: 136). In Hescher's account,

> Cohn takes his argument one step further away from essentialist sequentiality when he elaborates on the conceptuality of comics space: rather than representing time-space, as in McCloud, panels seem to functionally divide up a conceptual space –

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[116] The consideration refers to the illusion of cinematic editing, "what Celia Lury has termed 'prosthetic culture,' in which photograph and cinema, paradoxically, 'restore perceptibility,' restoring the illusion of transparent and indexical relation between image and 'reality'" (Gardner 2012: 3-4).

that is additively built throughout sequence – into units of attention. (Hescher 2016: 97)

Finally, Mikkonen correctly points out how in McCloud's model "the space between the panels, the gutter, is reified as a kind of essence of the medium" (2017: 40) – and the same criticism had already been moved by Groensteen (1999: 132-33). Similarly, Baetens and Frey caution against the lack of necessity "that an essential event always takes place within two panels or that the space of the gutter is actively exploited as the virtual off-space of what is shown in the panels themselves" (2015: 122). The gutter, they stress, may be "utterly unremarkable" (2015: 121) as much as paramount in narrative terms.

What seems to count, according to Mikkonen, is instead the role of "panel relation, not the space in between" (2017: 40), as Groensteen would say the "semantic relations" between panels (1999: 132) – by which he means both the linear, panel-to-panel succession (Groensteen's restricted arthrology) and the translinear (Baetens and Frey 2015: 106), distant organization (Groensteen's braiding or general arthrology[117]). Mikkonen sees Groensteen's model as a way to "integrate the general notion of panel transition" mending the problems of closure theory (Mikkonen 2017: 42), and it must be noticed that Baetens and Frey pointed out already that panels are organized simultaneously on three different levels (the strip or tier, the page and the book) and that they are deeply influenced by their layout choices (2015: 104-05).

Labio goes a step forward in analysing the role of page layout, suggesting that

> there is an architectural unconscious of the comics page, an extradiegetic mirroring of domestic architecture that gives the page its basic structure and accounts in significant measure for the readability, emotional power, and popularity of the genre. The classic page configurations of Franco-Belgian bande dessinée, American comics, and Japanese manga correspond to the basic shapes and façade structures of residential buildings in their places of origin. As a result the page, no matter what the subject or style of the comic, automatically evokes the meme of home; it is always already familiar. This architectural precedence enhances the legibility of comics. It turns the page into an identifiable and measurable space and helps the

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[117] The first one to oppose to a "linear" a "tabular" organization was Fresnault-Deruelle (1972). For a detailed overview of the linear vs. tabular organization, see Morgan (2003); Groensteen (2013, chap. 3).

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reader master a highly complex and hybrid genre, a phenomenon that offsets the heterogeneity that recent scholarship on comics and the city has tended to privilege. Additionally the architectural disposition of the page intensifies the emotive charge of comics by triggering individual and collective memories—of home, childhood, and earlier examples of narrative art. (2015: 317)[118].

Gardner himself, anyway, recognizes that "the space between the panels is not the only place where readers are summoned to take on an active role in filling in gaps" (Gardner 2012: xi). Another strategy that comics can employ is 'decompression' (2012: 91), that is, slowing down the narrative by means of page layout and/or by modulating the degree of iconicity (see section 2.6) and "opening up space for the reader's imaginative attention to both notice and fill in details" (89).

Said otherwise, on the one hand comics can prompt the reader to "a combination of reading and looking that might best be described as 'browsing'" (Marrone 2016: 123), navigating the pages and focusing on the details rather than simply following narrative progression in a linear manner. On the other hand, comics encourage rereading, something "central to the fan's aesthetic pleasure" since "much of fan culture facilitates repeated encounters with favored text" (Jenkins 1992a: 70). As Gardner affirms, in comics "the excess data—the remains of the everyday—is always left behind (even as the narrative progresses forward in time), a visual archive for the reader's necessary work of rereading, resorting, and reframing" (2012: 176-77)[119].

In this sense, comics seem to be particularly suitable to endure more than one reading. Roland Barthes asserts that rereading is normally against "commercial and ideological habits of our society" since books are made in order to sustain our interests only for a first reading - "so that we can then move on to another story, buy another book" (1975: 15–16), and that it alters our experience of a narrative, since "rereading draws the text out of

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[118] The home one seeks, she affirms, is "the emblematic childhood home"; it is "necessarily past" (possibly, it has never existed), and recovering it "involves an art of memory to which comics are uniquely suited, a feature that accounts for the rise in autobiographical works that has been one of the most noteworthy developments in the global comics production of recent decades" (2015: 318).

[119] The idea is far from being revolutionary: in a 1979 interview to the Comics Journal, science fiction author Samuel R. Delany already remarked that "viewers can control the speed their gazes travel through the medium, they can control how far away or close they hold the page, whether they go backwards and regaze" (1979: 40, in Scott 2013: 4.10).

its internal chronology ('this happens before or after that') and recaptures a mythic time (without before or after)" (1975: 16). Those who re-read or re-view then "play with the rough spots of the text—its narrative gaps, its excess details, its loose ends and contradictions—in order to find openings for [their] elaborations of its world and speculations about characters" (Jenkins 1992a: 76)[120].

On one side, then, the reader is encouraged to notice all the details, and the details themselves are powerful enough to trigger the nostalgic feeling; on the other side, it is precisely the lack of some of those details, the vagueness of a face, the uncertainty of a landscape, the gaps between two panels, the waiting time between a new issue of a series, that allow the reader to project her specific background into the text, to see her own life mirrored and, by that, to maximize her own nostalgic feeling, or perceive more clearly the one present in the text:

> Iconically-drawn [that is, stylized] comics characters enhance the reader's identification with the characters and immersion in the narrative. McCloud argues that a comics reader perceives more-realistically represented characters as "another" and more-iconically represented characters as "yourself" [9], identifying with iconically-drawn characters and being drawn into the narrative more deeply. (Williams 2008: 4)

What those strategies have in common, then, is an enhancement of the reader involvement that should result in a closer, more personal experience of the narrative she is reading; and a more personal experience should in turn enhance the nostalgic aspect that other features may prompt. Salmose himself listed amongst the precondition for a nostalgic reception of a text the necessity to "include the reader in the textual experience, draw him in emotionally into the narrative, and eliminate the distance between narrative and reader in order to seduce him", for "the narrative has to have a strong presence on the reader" (2012: 307).

As Jenkins said when discussing his influential reading of fandom as textual poaching,

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[120] Of course, there are several kind of re-reading that have nothing to do with filling the gaps, but they are not relevant for this analysis and I will not discuss the matter here.

This degree of closeness, however, can only be sustained as long as the imagined world maintains both credibility and coherence, and hence the importance the fans place on even the most seemingly trivial detail. As Flynn (1986) suggests, this relationship works only if the reader may also maintain some degree of critical distance, recognizing the text as imperfectly designed to facilitate their pleasures and as requiring active rewriting in order to accommodate their interests (1992a: 118)

3.2.2. Transmission: emotion contagion, identification and empathy

One of the pivotal examples that may occur when thinking about a nostalgic text, and one I already mentioned in the chapter concerning motifs, is that either one or both the main character(s) and the narrator(s) – who may or may not be the same person – could be nostalgic. He or she may keep commenting on fond memories of the past, longing for the bygone days or crying the end of a golden age and so on. This is a device adopted by several media, frequently combined with autobiographical narratives (an immediate example is again Proust's *Recherche*), and the result it obtains is a transfer of that nostalgic mood from the story to the reader's realm. Clearly, this is somehow due to the character/narrator shaping the story and nostalgically connoting its ties; but how does that transfer exactly work?

I have already mentioned affect theory when discussing nostalgia specifics in the first section of this chapter. Now, it is unanimously accepted (and pretty much anyone can empirically confirm) that in real life affects are passible of what several scholars label 'affective contagion' (Sedgwick 2003; Brennan 2004; Probyn 2005; Gibbs 2011) and others 'emotional contagion' (Hatfield, Cacioppo, Rapson 1992, 1993; Coplan 2006)[121]. According to Gibbs, seeing individuals perform an affect creates a feedback in the spectator, more or less intense and more or less resonating to the original one according

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[121] The concept is also very close to Massumi's "creative contagion" (2002). It must be noted, although this is not the place to scrutiny the issue in deep, that there are several important questions still open concerning the degree of cognitive involvement, intentionality and both personal and environmental factors in experiencing (and especially transmitting) affects (see Ahmed 2010; Leys 2011). There are also several perspectives on the emotional contagion that do not draw from cognitivism and instead use a psychoanalytical (examples are Metz 1980 or Mulvey 1985) or anthropological (the most notable case being René Girard 1961) framework - but I will not consider them here. Another perspective yet is that of Carroll (2003), according to which moods may as well be subject to the same contagion process.

to the attitude, or "ideo-affective posture" (2011: 257) one holds while interpreting said affect. The view changes slightly when we talk about theories of emotional contagion; in that case the spectator is, to a variable extent, led to experience the same emotion she is witnessing, by virtue of a "tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person, and, consequently, to converge emotionally" (Hatfield, Cacioppo, Rapson 1993: 5). This implies that the contagion is "relatively automatic, unintentional, uncontrollable, and largely inaccessible to conversant awareness" (1993: 5). The very same idea of a 'contagion', besides, entails the idea of "an involuntary spread of feelings without any conscious awareness of where the feelings began in the first place" (Wispé 1991: 7). This would also mean that emotional contagion requires a different, possibly less significant, cognitive involvement than empathy (Preston and de Waal 2002; on the same topic, see also Goldie 2002).

Now, in a similar way to real life, when we read or watch a narrative, we experience a range of emotions that can either be direct or sympathetic/antipathetic (Plantinga 2008: 89). Direct emotions are anticipation, curiosity, surprise, suspense, fascination and so on, and their object is the unfolding narrative itself, while the object of sympathetic or antipathetic emotions is a fictional character, behaviour, or situation (2008: 89)[122]. Nostalgia would fall into this second category, a situation where, as Amy Coplan affirms while discussing the case of *Saving Private Ryan*[123], "[a]s we watch and listen to what is happening on screen, we immediately begin to experience feelings that mirror those of the characters" (2006: 26).

This happens both with non-fictional and fictional narratives, because despite the fact that fictional characters, "literally speaking, have no actual minds" (Plantinga 2015: 293), we react as if they did[124]. This reaction entails a mechanism called by philosopher Colin

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[122] The division is akin to the external/internal proposed by Oatley (1994) and discussed in the previous subsection, but it's possibly a bit simpler and more effective, so I will stick to it.

[123] Despite several studies have been carried on emotional contagion and film spectatorship, to the best of my knowledge none exists yet on comics and graphic novels, but there is no significant difference except for some considerations on the amount of details comics provide, which I discussed in the section concerning style.

[124] Obviously, there are several hybrid cases among the fictional/non-fictional border, yet this is not particularly relevant to my focus and will not be considered here. A possible solution to this problem, anyway, is that given by Neill (1993), according to which certain beliefs are held despite the openness of the ontological status of the entities involved.

Radford the 'paradox of fiction' (1975, esp. 75-78): as a general rule, emotions depend on existence belief of their object. This means that, in principle, if we cease to believe in the existence of the object of an emotion, that emotion cease to be as well (for example, if we are told that our cat died, but we immediately discover that the cat is alive and that its death did not occur). Yet this does not seem to happen when people are confronted with fiction.

Several solution have been proposed: the Counterpart Theory (Weston 1975; Paskins 1977), which explains our feelings on the basis of the similarity of the fictional experience to real people and situations we know; the Illusion Theory, which appeals to 'weak' or 'partial' concepts of belief, like Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" (1817) or Metz's (1980) use of Freud's notion of "disavowal"; the Pretense Theory (Walton 1978, 1990)[125], which postulates that the emotions one feels because of fiction are only pretended and make-believedly experienced (being therefore not real emotions, but surrogate "quasi-emotions"[126]). The perspective that seems more convincing is that of Thought Theory, which affirms that the cause of our emotions, rather than a belief, is merely a thought, and that thus our emotional response to fiction is the same we would have when facing real people and events[127]. What we do while confronting fictional narratives is 'mentally representing' (Lamarque 1981), 'entertaining in thought' (Carroll 2003), or 'imaginatively proposing' (Smith 1995)[128] those entities or events as true.

Embracing the Thought Theory does not mean denying the work of self-engagement and memory recollection towards an emotional participation to fiction; on the contrary, it can

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[125] A revised version of the same theory is proposed by Currie (1990, 2006).

[126] Despite recent studies in neuropsychology seem to confirm a weaker emotional response towards fiction, at the same time they do not support claims of its incompleteness, confirming instead their status as proper emotions (Sperduti et al., 2016); also, they seem to prove, very interestingly, that "self-engagement through personal memory recollection" (2016: 58) is able to augment the degree of those emotion (Goldstein, 2009; Sperduti et al., 2016).

[127] Carroll refers to theories asserting the need of the belief requirement as "stronger cognitive theories of emotion" to which he opposes "weaker versions" like his own (2003: 522). Similarly, Friend divides the opinions about the belief requirement into 'narrow cognitivism' (listing Lyons 1980; Oakley 1992; Solomon 2003; Nussbaum 2001), 'broad cognitivism' (including Stocker 1987; Greenspan 1980, 1988; Lamarque 1981; Matravers 1998; Carroll 2003) and 'non-cognitivism' (LeDoux 1996; Robinson 2005 and Prinz 2004) (Friend 2016: 218-19).

[128] Along the same lines are the works of Scruton (1974), Novitz (1980), Yanal (1994), Matravers (1998), Robinson (2005), Gaut (2007), Gendler (2008).

be a premise to re-examine how this self-engagement works. The first concept that may come to mind is that of 'identification'.

Laplanche and Pontalis (1980) point out two everyday meanings of identification, as recognition and as imitation (Oatley 1994: 64). Cupchik (1997) distinguishes "spontaneous identification", that occurs when there are similarities between the what happens to the character and real-life events having happened to the reader, from "instructed identification", that ensues when readers are educated to be sympathetic toward a character.

Bortolussi and Dixon likewise identify two general themes in the research on identification. The first is the idea of *similarity*[129], for which "a reader may identify with a character in a story to the extent that the character is perceived to be similar" (2003: 86). The second is related to "the strategy or processing mode adopted by the reader" if instructed to be sympathetic or antipathetic towards characters (2003: 87).

More extensively, working with literature and drama in mind, Oatley proposes a "theory of identification as simulation" in which "mediation is by four kinds of cognitive elements, without which the reader will not be able to run the simulation successfully" (1994: 69): adopting the goals of a protagonist (that is, mostly, accepting the plot at least at the mimetic level, what Barthes defines action-related: see 1975); creating a mental model of the imaginary world one is facing; building a relation between author and reader, "recognizable for instance as speech acts which intersect the narrative stream"; and integrating "different stream of information", that is, merging multimodal communication into one cognitive element (Oatley 1994: 70).

Several theorists, though, prefer not to use the concept of identification, mostly because of the vagueness of the term, capable, as Coplan notes, to include a (way too) large series of psychological processes, such as empathy, simulation, absorption, sympathy, and mirroring processes (2008: 101; also, Murray 1995). Some, as Keen, believe identification is only a part in the largest action of narrative empathy (Keen 2007, 2013); some propose to reject the term overall due to its ambiguity (Allen, in Coplan 2008);

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[129] Larsen and Seilman (1988, 1989) propose instead the term "personal resonance" to refer to the relevance a literary work has for a reader (that is, the way it appeals to her self-knowledge) (Bortolussi and Dixon 2003: 86).

some assert that identification does not play a major role in character engagement or spectatorial response (Carroll 2007, 2008). In this regard, Coplan differentiates empathizing as commonly understood - that is, taking up the character's emotional state and her "psychological perspective, which includes the character's cognitive sense of reality" to the extent that the spectator "believes what the character believes" (2006: 31) - from the simple emotional contagion, "a much less sophisticated process", largely involuntary and based "on automatic processes that are activated by direct sensory perception", thus involving "no thoughts, beliefs, or judgments" and not being "an imaginative process" (2006: 32).

Nevertheless, Coplan herself admits that "it is unusual for a spectator to experience emotional contagion alone, without some kind of empathy or sympathy also occurring" (2006: 32); so, I will stick here to the subtler definition Coplan elaborated of empathizing with a character as

> a complex imaginative process through which a spectator simulates the character's situated psychological states, including the character's beliefs, emotions, and desires, by imaginatively experiencing the character's experiences from the character's point of view, while simultaneously maintaining clear self/other differentiation (2008: 103).

Nostalgically empathizing in Coplan's term could therefore lead us to feel for the mother of the protagonist in Colaone's *Ciao ciao bambina* (2010) despite having no previous link to the experience of a relative emigrating abroad (in the case of the graphic novel in question, to Switzerland in search of a better job), or move us to tears for the death of the father in Scarnera's *Diario di un addio* (2009) without having lived the experience of our parents being sick and eventually passing away.

The author's father's illness in a page from Diario di un addio (Scarnera 2009)

3.2.3. Sympathy for the nostalgic: characters and closeness

What said before accounts for the way we may choose to align with some of the character's feelings. But what should happen on a textual level to make the reader empathize? Does it work when the feeling is so distant from our own that we are unable or unwilling to mirror it? Is there a way to prompt and encourage this transmission process?

Much of the answer depends on the way one conceives engaging with a character; but to explain it, it is necessary to make some steps back.

Phelan (1989) asserts that the reader may indulge in three major kinds of engagement with a character: mimetic (character as a person), thematic (character as an idea) and synthetic (character as an artificial construct). Eder (2010) similarly proposes four types (diegetic, thematic, aesthetic, and pragmatic), that Margolin effectively resumes as follows:

> In the diegetic mode the character is conceived of as a fictive being, a component of
> a represented world. In the thematic it functions as a symbol, an individual who

stands for or embodies some general concept, abstract theme or idea. In the aesthetic mode the character is an artifact, a constructed object and the main issue involves the 'how' aspect, the ways and means by which this character is portrayed or represented. The pragmatic dimension involves the communicative contexts of character creation on the one hand and its reception and use by readers on the other. (Margolin 2010: 400)

First of all, the engagement that seems more important in the case of nostalgia is Phelan's mimetic one (which loosely corresponds to Eder's diegetic). In this sense, as Murray Smith claims, our 'entry into' the narrative structure of fiction films is mediated by characters (1995: 17–18).

We are then dealing with "the establishing of a person-like character, or a character as a possible person" (Mikkonen 2017: 180), which require what Jannidis (2013) calls 'the basis type', that is, presupposing that a character has an inside (invisible, source of cognition, wishes, emotions) and an outside (perceivable) on the basis of which we draw our assumptions about the inside[130]. This is not dissimilar from Bortolussi and Dixon's idea of the narrator as a conversational participant, uttering information about the characters that we decode on the basis of real-life pragmatic (cooperation principle, implicatures and so on) (2003: 84-95).

The first criterion to engage with a character should then be the transparency of said character. According to Bortolussi and Dixon, a character is transparent when readers believe they understand her feelings, thoughts or behaviors (2003: 89); or, from another perspective, "transparency is produced when readers use their own knowledge and experience to construct narratorial implicatures"[131] (2003: 94).

A very close idea is the notion of mind style, coined by Roger Fowler to designate "any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self" (1975: 103). Mind style, according to Leech and Short, is "a particular cognitive view of things" (2007: 28[132]) belonging to the implied author, the narrator, or a character. Mikkonen observes that "the

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[130] For further discussions of aspects of the characterization/personalization dialectics that fall outside the scope of this work, see Jannidis (2013); Herman (2013: 193-215).
[131] Bortolussi and Dixon move from the hypothesis that "the reader treats the narrator as a conversational partner" (2003: 84), thus employing the framework of pragmatics.
[132] On the same topic, see also Semino (2007).

basic premise of mind style is that all systematic linguistic choices or patterns, such as lexical choices and patterns, figurative language, or conversational behaviour, may reflect style and, subsequently, the workings of individual minds in narratives" (2017: 119). The concept is also akin, he notices, to those of 'cognitive focalization' and 'aspectuality' in Alan Palmer's sense (Mikkonen 2017: 120).

Mikkonen further observes that

> All of these notions—mind style, cognitive focalisation, and aspectuality—allow us to focus on certain textual and visual markers in comics as cues of a character's mental set or world view and, moreover, to interpret these markers in relation to an evolving frame of consciousness. (2017: 120)

The second criterion should be a sense of continuity between panels – like the one provided by the consistency of the graphic trace and style (2017: 47). Characters in comics are usually continuing themselves, meaning they physically have a place in most panels of a narrative. This is, as Mikkonen points out, "not a requirement for narrative comics" but rather "a central convention that increases narrativity" (2017: 90). Continuing characters create a visual bridge between images (92) and allow for a relatively stable focalization while prompting "the reader to gradually construct a person-like entity engaged in some action or situation" (2017: 91). They also give a sense to the story content, so that

> the narrative is about a particular character or group of characters. Narrative events, and the experiences that stories highlight, usually revolve around people, or human-like characters, and their actions, perceptions, and experiences. Furthermore, the presentation of the mental states, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of sentient beings […] suggests the presence of some agent who acts, feels, and thinks and whose actions or thoughts and perceptions can be followed. Therefore, characters are simultaneously salient features of narrative comics at various levels, as person-like agents, as a means of narrative transmission, and as units of attention that move the story forward and allow readers to follow it. (Mikkonen 2017: 90-91)

Another important parameter is indeed salience, both narrative and visual. The former refers to "how something is shown, and how certain elements, in particular relating to characters and their actions, are significant for an understanding of the narrative as a coherent whole" (Mikkonen 2017: 25). For example, it helps if the nostalgic character is

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the main character, the main focalizer or the main narrator (or a combination of the three possibilities). Visual salience, instead, is one of the most important means of composition in images. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen's model, it depends on formal features like foregrounding or backgrounding, size, colour, repetition and so on (2006: 212–14). Teresa Bridgeman applies the concept to comics, listing drawing styles, colour, degree of iconicity (iconic or cartoony vs. a realist style), depth of field and framing, composition inside and across page, page layout, and panel size (Bridgeman 2013, in Mikkonen 2017: 101)[133].

Sometimes the two principles clearly merge, for example in single-focus narration[134] - namely, the one that follows closely what happens to one character rather than the others. The adoption of a subjective point of view, in that case, goes together with a more constant presence of one character throughout the story.

In the less prototypical cases, a non-salient character may more easily result in the reader rejecting her nostalgic assumption. It is the case of *Watchmen's* Ozymandias, whose fascination for Alexander the Great is unlikely to be embraced by the audience not only in the name of ethical assumptions (Ozymandias' dream of world peace is actually quite regressive), but also for reasons of narrative progression and framing, despite the plot has, with length and patience, led us all the way to sympathize with the not less questionable actions of its main hero/narrator Rorschach.

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[133] As it is evident, those are the same features we focused on in the style section.
[134] I am here adopting Altman's division between single-focus, dual-focus and multiple-focus narration (Altman 2008: 26–27).

Ozymandias' delusion of saving the world as a regressive nostalgia fantasy (Moore and Gibbons 1986)

An important caveat regards the division between flat and round characters. It is a concept that goes up to E. M. Forster, who affirmed that the formers were constructed around a single quality and could be summed up by a single phrase, while the latter were "capable of surprising", having "the incalculability of life about it" (1927: 78). The most famous update to Forster model is probably Fishelov's (1990), identifying two different levels (textuality and reader's construction) on which the flat/round dichotomy unfolds, thus resulting, as Cashman sums up, in four categories:

1) pure type, a character that receives both flat textual treatment and flat reception,

2) individual-like type, a character that receives round textual treatment but flat reception,

3) type-like individual, a character that receives flat textual treatment and round reception,   and

4) pure individual, a character that receives both round textual treatment and reception. (2008: 166)

In the light of Fishelov's more nuanced model, we can say that it is not necessary to have a 'pure individual' character in order to have nostalgia; if, in fact, a too much dull character (embodying a stereotype or a simple idea) wouldn't work possibly work too good as a nostalgic mediator, it is proved by Seth's alter ego in *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* that a very effective nostalgic mediator could be resumed by some very

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simple sentence as "he wanders around the city and longs for the past". Yet, as I will show in the final chapter, he is absolutely functional to a nostalgic reception of the text.

Once that some preconditions are clear – the will to establish a mimetic engagement with a person-like character, that is transparent, continuing and salient (both narratively and visually), there is still one thing to clarify, though – for, if what happens is not, or not necessarily, an act of identification, what constitutes our link with a character?

An answer could come from Smith's more refined idea of 'emotional simulation' (1995), which proposes that, when we observe a fictional character, we hypothesize her emotions by projecting ourselves into the same situation. Smith adopts Wollheim's distinction between central and acentral imagining: central imagining means thinking of a situation from a particular point of view, acentral is imagining (from the outside) that some situation is occurring. According to Smith, the key operations in what he calls the 'structure of sympathy' happen in acentral imagination, a process that he further divides in recognition, alignment, and allegiance:

> Recognition is Smith's term for spectators' construction of characters as individuated and continuous human agents. Alignment refers to the way a film narrative gives viewers access to characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions; it is primarily about the communication of information. Allegiance describes the process by which film creates sympathies for and against characters. (Plantinga 2008: 102)

Possibly the most important concept in Smith's view is that of alignment. By it, Smith means "the process by which spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know and feel" (1995: 83) - that is to say, the way viewer's perspective is channelled through character knowledge (75) both in terms of the 'spatio-temporal attachment' to a character and the 'subjective access' to her mind.

A more complex, but more exhaustive model is that of Jens Eder, according to whom there are at list five ways of being close to a character:

1. Perceived relations in space and time: spatiotemporal proximity (2006: 71)

Four aspects are at stake here: geographical and temporal proximity (that is, "the relationship between the real environment of the viewer and the fictional environment of the character" and paraproxemics), spatiotemporal attachment ("the extent to which a

film lets the viewer accompany a character through space and time and witness his externally visible experiences", because "according to the mere exposure hypothesis in social psychology, we tend to react more positively to people we see repeatedly"), sharing of a mutual semantic-perceptual space ("with certain constraints and capabilities to see, hear, judge, feel, and act"), and a physical closeness in space (framing) that may lead to feel a closeness in subjective time (or synchronicity) (2006: 72-73).

2. Cognitive relations to fictional minds and bodies

This encompasses understanding and perspective taking, knowing the character's personality and general traits (primacy and halo effect) and what Eder calls 'mental perspective', that is, "the relation of actual or fictional minds to intentional objects", that he further subdivides in perceptual and imaginative (seeing, hearing, hallucinating, and dreaming); epistemic and doxastic (knowing, believing); evaluative and conative (judging, evaluating, having interests, concerns, wishes, goals, and plans); and affective (having emotions, moods, and feelings) (2006: 73-74).

3. Perceived social relations: similarity and familiarity

This is the case in which the viewer experiences social identity or distance in "age, gender, class, ethnic background, and other properties" (2006: 74) or perceived similarity (that is, wish identification) (2006: 75).

4. Imagined interaction: parasocial interaction (PSI) and parasocial relationships (PSR)

Parasocial interaction and relationship are the (illusionary) experiences of interacting with personas (talk show host, celebrities, characters) as if engaged in a reciprocal relationship[135]. The term was coined by Horton and Wohl in 1956 to refer to the "psychological relationship experienced by members of an audience in their mediated encounters with certain performers in the mass media" (in Chandler and Munday 2011).

5. Emotional responses: affective closeness (Eder 2006: 75).

Eder sums up his theory by asserting that

> Similarity identification and in-group categorization, matching perspectives and goal
> sharing, synchronicity, joint semantic-perceptual space, mere exposure effect, and

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[135] For recent research on the concept, see Hoffner 1996;; Giles 2002; Cohen 2004; Eyal and Cohen 2006; Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm 2006; Preiss et al. 2007; Cohen 2014.

other parameters often contribute to an appraisal that is positive rather than negative. Therefore, the moral evaluation of characters, which is often seen as the essential requirement of affective engagement, is important, but only part of the whole picture. (2006: 75-76)

For how tautological it may sound, then, eventually the simple presence of a nostalgic character could make us feel nostalgic simply *because he is there*. If not an affect transmission, closeness in Eder's sense seems to be enough to build an effective engagement between a nostalgic character and the reader.

3.3. Readers, comics, and nostalgia

I posited in the introduction to this section that there are three kinds of emotive responses to a graphic novel: one has to do with the reader involvement, one has to do with affect transmission, and the third one has to do with closeness to a character.

I tried to show how a high level of interaction by the reader is a prominent feature of the act of reading comics, in reason of the blanks proper of comic narratives and their interaction with the modulation of the degree of iconicity, that allows the reader to browse the details of the page and project herself on the missing ones.

I have then analysed several models of affect transmission, ranging from emotion contagion to identification to empathy, and settled for a revised idea of empathy proposed by Coplan - that is, a simulation of the character's psychological states that can lead to experiencing events from the character point of view.

Finally, I have revised several pre-requisites to engage with person-like characters, like transparency, mind-style, continuity, and salience. I therefore presented Eder's model of closeness to characters, that accounts for five variables: spatiotemporal proximity, cognitive relations, perceived social relations, imagined interaction and emotional responses.

From each of these variables (and their combined action) may come a closeness to characters that could make the reader feel (to various degrees) nostalgic.

3.4. Fans

General overview

Fan culture, despite constituting an essential field of investigation of contemporary media studies, is not at all recent. In fact, it was already a well-known phenomenon since the emergence of mass culture: "When readers wrote to Dickens in the 1840s or to Smith in the 1920s expressing their opinions as to what should happen to the characters in their stories, they did so not because they thought the characters were real but because they understood themselves to have a role to play in the characters' development" (Gardner 2012: 58).

Two things have nevertheless changed notably in the last twenty years: on one side, "there has been a clear shift in the way entertainment industries address fans, that can be characterized as a movement from derisive dismissal to active cultivation" (Santo 2018: 332). Santo attributes this change in attitude

> Partly in response to industrial and cultural convergence, which has led on the one hand to a privileging of intellectual property (IP) as the entertainment industry's core asset and, on the other hand, to a recognition that the boundaries separating producers and consumers have dissolved granting fans a "contested utility" (Murray 2004) as brand evangelists and grassroots marketers. (2018: 332)

On the other side, equally new is the quantity and quality of studies on the phenomenon aiming to deconstruct "traditional (oppressive) stereotypes" on fans (Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 121) and trying to avoid too rigorous, unproductive definitions of fan and cult that became over the years "part of a cultural struggle over meaning and affect" (Hills 2002: xi).

This may also be true when considering the most cited identification by Fiske (1992) of three kinds of "fan productivity": semiotic (reading and creating meaning), enunciative (interacting with other fans) and textual (creating user-generated texts such as fan fiction, music remixes or fanzines). Pustz tries to apply it to obtain a division among comic fans, but he recognizes that the boundaries are unclear, something he tries to solve with the slightly tautological assertion that "in most cases, being a comic book fan is central to fans' identity" (1999: 68). Another, more complex path is Sandvoss' attempt to correlate Fiske's typology to Abercrombie and Longhurst's division of fandom into "fan, cultist

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(or subcultist) and enthusiast" (1998: 138) - a repartition possibly too problematic to unpack, supposedly seeing enthusiasts engaging in all three types of productivity, cultists enunciatively and semiotically productive, and *proper* fans limited to semiotic productivity.

A good starting point could then be Jenkins' formulation, according to which "fans produce meanings and interpretations; fans produce artworks; fans produce communities; fans produce alternative identities. In each case, fans are drawing on materials from the dominant media and employing them in ways that serve their own interests and facilitate their own pleasures" (1992b: 214)[136]. If slightly too simplistic, this open definition of what fans *do* (rather than *what* or *who* they supposedly *are*) allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the fandom phenomenon over the years – especially in the light of the effects the world wide web had on "practices and peculiarities of media fandom and other forms of fandom" (Coppa 2006: 55) ("comics, celebrity, music, anime": 56) which "eventually collided since the Internet emerged" (2006: 57).

Although fandom is normally equated with a "communal spirit, what [it] often refers to as its collective 'hive mind'" (Busse and Hellekson, 2006: 8)"[137], it is not a completely homogenous, non-hierarchical space (Chin 2010)[138]. Acknowledging this fragmentation of the fannish space, Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005) were among the first to shift the emphasis in their object of study from fan communities to fans as individuals, from social interaction to psychological motivation, and from a focus on resistance to one on affect and individual engagements with texts.

Hills defines fan cultures as "formed around any given text [that works] as a *pto* [primary transitional object] in the biography of a number of individuals who remain attached to

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[136] More briefly but along the same line, Fiske argues that fans are "active producers and users" of their chosen cultural texts (1992: 33).

[137] Busse and Hellekson acknowledge nonetheless that fandom is "fragmented and fragmentary" (2006: 8).

[138] It should be evident to the reader familiar with comics that these categories do not fit perfectly graphic novels readers, who are, or at least self-perceive as, a more educated, less 'childish' market niche. Nonetheless, they exhibit their own fannish rituals, from collecting to autograph-seeking and so on, and my opinion is that they should simply be considered as closer to literary fans than standard comic ones. Unfortunately, though, the literature on graphic novel fandom is almost non-existent, and I will apply more general considerations to the subject.

this text by virtue of the fact that it continues to exist as an element of their cultural experience" (2002: 108). The fan's appropriation of a text is an act of 'final consumption' which removes the text away from "(intersubjective and public) exchange-value" and towards "(private, personal) use-value", yet "without ever cleanly or clearly being able to separate out the two" (2002: 10).

Sandvoss, likewise, affirms that the focus on communities "fails to conceptualize important aspects of the relationship between the modern self, identity and popular culture", choosing to focus instead on individual fandom "as the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text" (2005: 5–6, 8)

The object of fandom, Sandvoss affirms, is experienced not just "in relation to the self, but *as part of the self*" (2005: 96); as Jenkins puts it, "fandom provides repertoires of identification" (2004: 7), for "today nostalgia binds together not community or families but scattered individuals around seemingly ephemeral things that are meaningful to them personally" (Cross 2015: 2-3). More extensively, we can say that "beyond identificatory fantasies of resembling or imitating (Stacey 1994), the key indication of fans' self-reflective reading of their object of fandom then lies in the way in which they superimpose attributes of the self, their beliefs and values systems and, ultimately, their sense of self on the object of fandom" (Sandvoss 2005: 104).

This is more significant than simply affirming that "situated media experiences" are "symbolic engagements that act as an encounter with a 'generalized other' and, from a hermeneutic perspective, enable forms of self-understanding" (Bailey 2005: 50[139]), and fully accounts for the way in which, in fan culture, "personal investment is crucial to any reading process" (Busse and Gray 2011: 435). If memories, as Landsberg asserts, "are central to a person's identity – to one's sense of who one is and who one might become", if they are "the building blocks from which to construct narratives of the present and visions of the future" (2004: 41), the object of fandom and the practices tied to it become the material incarnation (the 'transitional object', as Hills remarked) of that memories; in this sense, Gibson speaks of 'treasured memories' of the comics read as a child (2015:

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[139] For more on this perspective, see Bailey 2005, chap. 1.

189), "particularly significant in conserving a past self and thereby guarding against the experience of loss" (Stacey 1994: 64).

Fandom becomes thus "a symbolic resource in the formation of identity and in the positioning of one's self in the modern world" (Sandvoss 2005: 165), which must be also understood as "the integration of the self into the dominant economic, social and cultural conditions of industrial modernity", that is, as "a mirror of consumption" (165).

This does not mean to deny the communal forms of fannish activity; it is rather to acknowledge that fandom has to do with a space for 'affective play' (that is, with the emotional attachment of the fan towards her treasured object) which is "not always caught up in a pre-established 'boundedness' or set of cultural boundaries, but may instead imaginatively create its own set of boundaries and its own auto-'context'" (Hills 2002: 112): as Sandvoss and Kearns notice, "to a large, albeit generally less visible, number of fans, community membership and interaction with fellow fans are not a *conditio sine qua non* of their fandom, which instead is expressed near exclusively through their affective bond and regular engagement with their chosen fan object" (2014: 102). Not to mention that, as Pustz puts it, "for some, identifying with the medium as a whole is most important" while "others find themselves identifying more with a particular title, character, creator, or even period of comic book history" (1999: 68-69).

There are more nuanced positions, like that of Brown, who sees fandom as "a means of expressing one's sense of self and one's communal relation with others within our complex society" in which "individual fans and entire fan communities develop intimate attachments to certain forms of mass-produced entertainment that, for whatever reason, satisfy personal needs" (Brown 1997: 13). Similarly, Busse and Gray argue that fandom functions along the "two central lines of involvement and investment" (2011: 434), that is, of 'community interaction' and 'affect', a conceptualization that according to them permits to encompass any case of fans refusing or negotiating their fannish identity or their involvement in the community. This allows to fully account for the idea of an audience as a collective (yet not homogenous) entity.

This personal/collective dynamic is reverberated, as I've already discussed, in the one concerning nostalgia.

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Geraghty quotes Kümmerling-Meibauer's analysis of the Romantic nostalgia for childhood as "a time of fullness of being, in which there was not yet a gap between subject and object, man and nature, sign and meaning"[140] (Geraghty 2016: 204), that is, as "the spring which should nourish the whole life" (Cunningham 2005: 68, in Geraghty 2016: 204).

Yet again Geraghty warns that contemporary nostalgia has more to do with "longing for a past that can be re-presented through remediation. This nostalgia is specific to our multimedia, convergent world" (2016: 205): the commodities of childhood "can always be re-collected in the literal sense of the word, re-presented and remediated" (2016: 206), giving fans "a collective feeling of remembrance for a toy and cartoon that served them well in the past and that they continue to embrace in the present" (2016: 214). The common component of generational experiences related to media is thus the relationship developed with "media technologies and content from one's formative youth period", something that especially applies to "musical genres and stars, as well as reproduction technologies such as the vinyl record", but also "music cassette tapes, comics and other now dead or near-dead media forms" (Bolin 2016: 1-2).

This way, as Geraghty remarks, fandom "becomes a connector to one's past, a reinvestment in what once made an individual feel comfortable and secure" since "nostalgia for childhood play and the media texts and physical consumer objects that symbolize personal memories of being a child is articulated through fandom (Geraghty 2016: 211). Similarly, drawing on Hills, Busse and Gray more poetically affirm that "much as a child turns to a favorite blanket for security and as a substitute for the mother […] fans imbue their beloved texts with feelings of warmth and ontological security" (2011: 429).

3.5. Fans and comics

Comic fan culture is a very interesting subject where matters of identity, the seek for cultural capital, issues of canonicity and authenticity and, since the beginning of the 1980s, the question of the *auteur* (and its implication in the "creator vs. corporate

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[140] An image which was idealized and detached from reality already at the time of its elaboration, since Kümmerling-Meibauer addresses this concept of childhood as a "sentimental myth without any reference to the social reality of a child's life" (2008: 188).

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ownership" dichotomy), all concur and overlap (Brown 1997, esp. 22-25), with significant consequences for an investigation of nostalgia. Several studies have been collected in the field, and as Perren and Felschow sum up

> dominant areas of emphasis include analysis of fan activity in physical spaces such as conventions (Hanna 2014; Kohnen 2014; Swafford 2012) and retail stores (Woo 2011) as well as in diverse online spaces; and the cultural politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality of comic book fandoms (Brown 2000; Putsz, 2000; Healey 2009). (Perren and Felschow 2018: 310)

Furthermore, comic books have historically attracted "one of the most dedicated, active fandoms" (Perren and Felschow 2018: 309[141]), so that "nowhere are the traits of fandom more clear [sic] than within the culture of comic book enthusiasts" (Brown 1997: 13). And that applies directly to nostalgia, if we follow, for example, Pustz conclusion that already in the 1990s, many fanzines were "clearly nostalgic" (Pustz 1999: 185[142]).

Comics, as described in the previous section, seem to be able to give their audience a great sense of emotional proximity and to stand several re-readings without losing their pleasurability (Gibson 2015: 127-28). Another source of pleasure "was often the reader's knowledge of comics. As this knowledge increased, it became possible to become an expert, expressing a competency that was a source of pride. […] A final feature of most comics that encouraged a sense of pleasure was writing to the editors" (Gibson 2015: 127, 130)[143].

This also relates to the search for a closure that was described as essential of the act of reading comics in the previous section: "those attachments, that sense of collaboration and shared ownership, that made readers want to own it, to revisit and share the stories beyond their initial newspaper publication" (Gardner 2012: 66).

In this section I will analyse the relationship between fandom, comics and nostalgia by considering three aspects: the productive role of fans, which invests them of a great deal of emotional proximity; their defence of canonicity and authenticity, which is both typical

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[141] On the subject, see Duncan and Smith (2009); Steirer (2011); Beaty (2012).
[142] See Pustz (1999, chap. 6), for a history of comics fanzines and their transition to Internet-based sites and communities.
[143] Letters to the editor continued until the fairly recently advent of the Internet.

of fandom's gatekeeping and strictly connected with nostalgia; and a first consideration of the relationship between fandom and gender, which has direct correlations with the way nostalgia unfolds among fannish audiences.

3.5.1. Participating: producers, poachers, and publishing practices

In S/Z, Roland Barthes distinguishes between writerly and readerly texts according to the role of the reader: she would be essentially passive while confronting readerly texts, and become instead herself "a producer of the text" (1970: 4) if facing writerly texts. Fiske further elaborates Barthes' idea by applying it to popular literature and postulating the existence of a third type, a "producerly text" (1989: 103), characterized both by the 'openness' of the writerly and the 'accessibility' of the readerly, which allows it to "be read in that easy way by those of its readers who are comfortably accommodated within the dominant ideology":

> The difference is that it does not require this writerly activity, nor does it set the rules to control it. Rather, it offers itself up to popular production; it exposes, however reluctantly, the vulnerabilities, limitations, and weaknesses of its preferred meanings; it contains, while attempting to repress them, voices that contradict the ones it prefers; it has loose ends that escape its control, its meanings exceed its own power to discipline them, its gaps are wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them—it is, in a very real sense, beyond its own control. (Fiske 1989: 104)

This idea is extremely compatible with Jenkins' reading of fandom as an application of De Certeau's 'textual poaching', associated in his example with popular reading (Jenkins 1992a: 23). The poaching analogy "characterizes the relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings" (1992a: 24), against a 'scriptural economy' which tries to restrain the multiple voices of popular orality to institutionally sanctioned textual producers and interpreters (1992a: 25). Popular reading would therefore be characterized by a series of "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text" (De Certeau 1984: 175), in which "every reading modifies its objects", possibly detaching the texts from their original intention (1984: 169). Every reading constitutes, then, a 'cultural bricolage' through which "readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own

blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience" (Jenkins 2006: 39). And when fans confront with popular texts they "claim those works as their own, remaking them in their own image, forcing them to respond to their needs and gratify their desires" (2006: 59). Fiske affirms along the same line that "everyday life is constituted by the practices of popular culture, and is characterized by the creativity of the weak in using the resources provided by a disempowering system while refusing finally to submit to that power" (1989: 47).

There are, nonetheless, more sceptical perspectives on fans' ability to manipulate the meanings of the texts they consume. As Philo affirms, "it would be quite wrong to see audiences as simply absorbing all media messages, and certainly as being unable to distinguish between fact and fiction. But it is also wrong to see viewers and readers as effortlessly active, creating their own meanings in each encounter with the text" (1999: 287). The oppositional perspective, furthermore, has been criticized by some scholars; Perren and Felschow, for example, notice how "often the comic book industry, when discussed in such work, is either marginalized or presented oppositionally—as something fans have been reacting against" (Perren and Felschow 2018: 310).

They invoke instead a more nuanced view of the "complex power dynamics at work within and across the comic book industry" (2018: 311), an approach informed by work in the field of cultural studies (Jenkins and Green 2013) and participatory culture (Scott 2013; Burke 2015), and by research on cultural production (Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009) and cultural intermediaries (Johnson, Kompare, and Santo 2014). Their aim is to provide a framework able to show "how key stakeholders—executives, creatives, and fans—exercise varying levels of agency and control" (Perren and Felschow 2018: 311), which is especially true when related to comics, one of those forms of "polysemic popular culture that are open to easy negotiation and appropriation" (Sandvoss 2011b: 232). Furthermore, for long comics culture had a particularly benevolent eye on swiping, which can be intended as a peculiar form of textual poaching. As Crucifix comments,

> In this sense, comics culture rehearsed the "repertoire of gestures of archivalness and cutting and pasting" typical of nineteenth-century scrapbooks, foreshadowing contemporary remix culture. Writing at a point where organized fandom was at full steam, with soaring prices for vintage comic books, Feiffer nostalgically identifies

early traces of this participatory culture in the "graphic poaching" of swipers. The acts of swiping, stapling and recirculating that Feiffer describes are perhaps just as much those of the fanzine makers of the sixties, who often engaged in "reproductions, imitations, copying, redrawing, tracing" (2017a: 314)

A more complex vision than the one of fans as poachers, that nevertheless does not neutralize the possibility of oppositional reading, is seeing fans as 'textual gifters' (De Kosnik 2009; Hellekson 2009; Scott 2009) "contributing to the fan meta-text they build for their fandom" in a continuous process of refinements and rewritings that leads Chin to compares fanfic to "the equivalent of retelling a myth" (Chin 2010: 13).

In this sense, the case of the comic book industry is particularly significant, for it is a context where fans play a more evidently active role "in steering aesthetic decisions" in a "dialectical struggle for hegemony between the forces of creation and consumption, art and commerce" (Proctor 2012). It is so much the case that, as Brown asserts,

> One of the most unusual aspects of comic book fandom is the degree of integration that exists between the fans and the small industry of professionals, or perhaps, more importantly, that this is always perceived by the fans to exist and thus directly influences their reading of the comics. […] For comic book fans, interpretation of meaning does not necessitate a counter-hegemonic stance against monolithic ideologies but often a form of negotiated understanding. The exact meanings that the readers make from the texts are as diverse as the readers themselves but are also informed by the specific properties of comic book consumption. (2001: 91-92)

What stands still in these different positions is the core idea of fandom as an inherently active practice, a characteristic that goes along with the highly interactive act of reading I described in the previous section, shaping comics reception on its different levels as an inherently participative act. Following Perren and Felschow, we can enumerate some of the multiple ways in which fans interact more or less directly with the production of meaning in the comics domain:

> fans produced buyers' guides and collectors' guides that subsequently were taken up by publishers and retailers (Light 1971–2013; Overstreet 1970–present). Meanwhile, comic book industry writers, artists, and executives produced a range of books targeted to fans wishing to break into comics (Lee and Buscema 1984; McCloud 2006; Rhoades 2007). […] Importantly, regardless of whom they are working for,

creatives often are explicit about their own identities as comic book fans (Woo 2015). […] Their own history as well as their ongoing positionality as comic fans shapes the ways they interact with their own fans. (Perren and Felschow 2018: 310, 315)

To this explicitly partial list of forms of readers/producers interaction, we should add the letters pages, which occupy a pivotal place in comic book culture[144], "at the boundary between fans and creators, readers and content" (Pustz 1999: 177). Importantly – and this is something peculiar of comics fandom (though not exclusive, as it is shared, for example, by music fandom as well: see Varriale 2016) – they do so in a space that is both official and public: "fans interact in the publications themselves. […] Fans gain an identity and have it strengthened through awareness of others involved in similar activities. This awareness and the feeling of fellowship it creates begins in the letters pages"[145] (Pustz 1999: 177). Pustz describes more extensively the way this process shapes comics fandom:

> Participation in comic book culture begins early, as even the youngest readers find themselves playing superheroes, imagining themselves as the Hulk, Batman, or Wonder Woman. Young fans read with a sense of identification, seeing themselves as the heroes. Eventually, as comics fans age, they put these fantasies down on paper as short stories, role-playing game scenarios, or actual comics. Some fans satisfy their impulse to participate in comic book culture through fanzines, which might publish amateur comics or reviews. Other fans write letters to their favorite titles; if published, the letters become part of the comic book itself. Some fans take participation so far that they begin publishing their own comics, often as minicomics." (1999: 211)

This constant interaction enhances the possibility of a nostalgic reception by involving a personal investment on the object of fandom and the self-investment of fans as defenders

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[144] On the role of letter pages in comics fandom, see also Pustz (1999, chap. 5, esp. 166-180); Brooker (2001); Gardner (2012, chap. 2 and 3).
[145] Pustz correctly warns that "it is important to remember that the letters pages offer readers a site for mediated (if not manipulated) interaction. Editors decide which letters to publish and which to ignore; some editors create their own letters to serve their own purposes." (1999: 177). Yet we can agree with Dittmer's observation that "while it must always be remembered that these letters were selected by editors for publication, they nevertheless provide a useful window into how comics were understood by their readers at the time of publication" (2014: 72).

of the canon. But before delving into it, we must better consider the role of editorial intermediation and publishing practices in shaping (or trying to shape) fans' reception.

To this aim, it is first necessary to conceptualize the otherwise vague entity we are dealing with. The best way to do so is possibly to resort to Souchier's concept of 'editorial enunciation', that he identifies as follows:

> author, editor, publisher, collection director, copy editor, proof-reader, illustrator, model maker, graphic designer, typographer, secretary, printer, official partners or patrons... to whom one should add the paper manufacturer, the shaper, the bookbinder, not to mention the bookseller or distributor who sometimes intervene upstream of the production line. Each of these partners leaves a trace of his intervention; which is duly coded, contracted or responds more simply to practices or uses. To varying degrees, these traces or 'marks of editorial enunciation' shape and constitute the identity of the text. They therefore determine the conditions of its reception. (Souchier 1998: 142, my translation[146])

The last passage about determining the condition of the reception of a given text is probably best understood if we make reference, as Gilbert does, to Althusser's concept of interpellation (1971), according to which "social institutions shape individual identity by 'hailing' participants; when those participants respond, they implicitly take on the characteristics those institutions embed within the call" (Gilbert 2018: 320). Said otherwise, "industry presence is designed to reward fan consumption, reinforce it as essential to the fan identity, and guide consumer behaviors toward particular practices and value systems" (2018: 321). Gilbert also quotes Bird's reflection on how "marketers have simply found creative ways to harness the enthusiasm of active media audiences in order to sell to them more effectively" (2011: 507) and Jenkins' conclusion that "to be desired by the networks is to have your tastes commodified" (2006: 62).

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[146] "Auteur, editor, éditeur, directeur de collection, secrétaire d'édition, correcteur, illustrateur, maquettiste, graphiste, typographe, claviste, imprimeur, partenaires officiels ou mécènes… auxquels il conviendrait d'ajouter le fabricant de papier, le façonneur, le relieur, sans parler du libraire ou du diffuseur qui interviennent parfois en amont de la chaîne de production. Chacun de ces partenaires laisse une trace de son intervention ; laquelle est dûment codée, contractualisée ou répond plus simplement à des pratiques ou des usages. À des degrés divers, ces traces ou « marques d'énonciation éditoriale » façonnent et constituent l'identité du texte. Elles déterminent donc les conditions de sa réception".

Yet it would be unfair towards the idea of fans as textual gifters that I discussed earlier to imagine their only agency in accepting (or opposing to) industry's ideology. In this sense, one can agree with Perren and Felschow conclusion, advocating for more studies to "move beyond top-down political economic/bottom-up cultural studies approaches that tend to reify fandom as oppositional to industry" (2018: 317)

What can be already done is considering this interaction as a two-sided process, like the one Norcliffe and Rendace draw out from their analysis of the dynamics between publishing houses and fans at comic book conventions, that sees the actor of editorial enunciation interacting with fans at the shared convention setting. Conventions offer a particularly useful model of the dynamics comics fandom takes on overall, since "in addition to the local comic specialty store, the comic book convention, or 'con,' is the major focal point of modem fan culture" (Brown 1997: 17), a physical space where "cultural and economic capital come together" (Fiske 1992: 43)[147]. And if the arrival of the Internet has strongly re-dimensioned the importance of comic book shops via retail giants like Amazon, the same cannot be said for conventions, that hold still their importance in contemporary fandom practices and dynamics.

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[147] There are of course several different perspectives that may be applied: some studies (Aden 1999) compared conventions to religious pilgrimages, "where fans travel to meet other fans, discuss their mutual love for a particular cult film or series and analyse their 'sacred' text within complex debates over authenticity and subcultural capital" (Geraghty 2014: 7). The convention setting may also easily be seen as a "a fan heterotopia, containing real objects from real places, in which and through which fans can access new worlds, meet new people and travel through different physical spaces" (Geraghty 2014: 7). For more on conventions, see also Pustz (1999, esp. 161-64).

EDITOR

WRITER PENCILER INKER COLORIST LETTERER

PRINTER

DISTRIBUTOR

COLOR GUIDE RENDERER

LAYOUT

COMIC SPECIALTY SHOP

COMIC BOOK CONVENTION
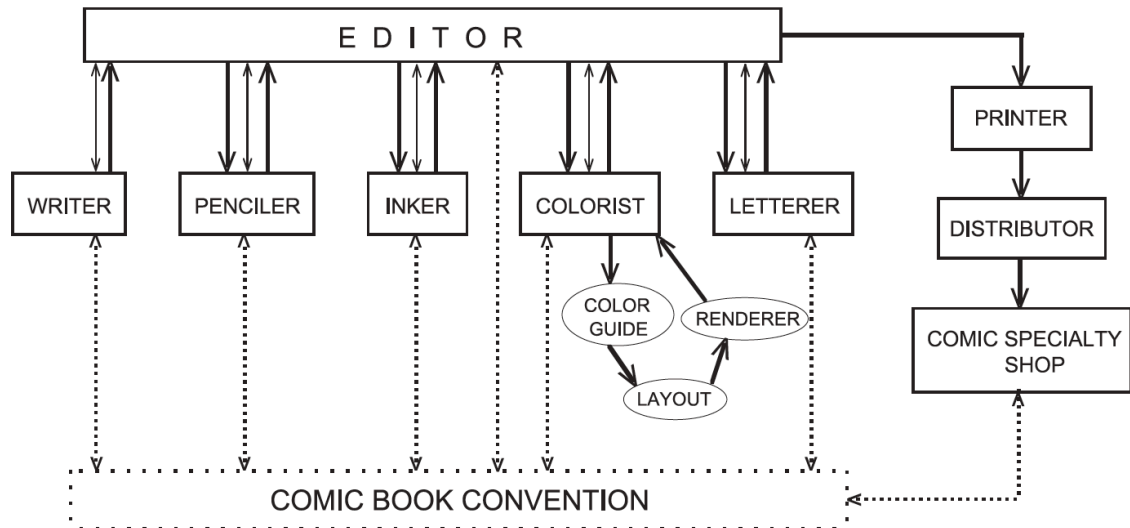
Legend

.... Space of socialization

☐ Corporate entity

→ Production sequence

↔ Reflexive production relationship

◄···► Social relationship

Comic book production (Norcliffe and Rendace 2003: 25)

One could even go further than Norcliffe and Rendace's model, and imagine a 'reflexive production' relationship, rather than a merely social one, taking place between fans and the actors of editorial enunciation. This would complicate Gilbert's reading of the San Diego Comic-Con (and, by extension, of the whole convention process) as invoking "the rhetoric of participatory culture, but in fact legitimat[ing] a fan identity that reinforces industrial dominance and traditional audience behavior [thus creating] a culture of fandom in which participation is structured as consumption" (2018: 320).

Of course, the big issue of Norcliffe and Rendace's model is that it overshadows the role of the "constraints imposed by the publication and editorial context" (Ahmed 2017: 3), that is, the mediation of publishers in reasons of the requests and trends of the market (on the matter, see the whole Ahmed article: 2017).

What is nonetheless true is that people tend to be nostalgic and to aim their consumption towards nostalgia, a trend that the industry has well understood and turned as a way to maximize profits:

> Nostalgia is perhaps the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of comic book companies, because nostalgia strikes a chord within the child inside of us. We long for the past because our memories are fuzzy and we believe the things we loved when we were younger are somehow more authentic than what is being produced currently. Publishers are more than willing to accommodate this aspect of its readers with stories that look back to the past and this results in projects that retell stories from the past. (Walker 2011[148])

3.5.2. Retromania: innocence, authenticity, and the canon's defense

Today's nostalgia, affirms Cross, "is less about preserving an 'unchanging golden era,' than it is about capturing the fleeting and the particular in its 'authenticity'" (Cross 2015: 2-3).

> Authenticity and innocence are recurring terms that come out when talking about fandom and nostalgia; yet unfortunately they are also very subjective, vague and problematic to define. As Huyssen affirms,

> authenticity is analogous to Benjamin's aura. Originality and uniqueness, which characterize the auratic work of art in Benjamin, were made into privileged categories in the romantic age that was already flooded by reproductions, translations, and copies of all kinds. Analogously, the ideological value of authenticity rose in proportion to print culture's inherent tendency to reproduction and repetition. […] The desire for the auratic and the authentic has always reflected the fear of inauthenticity, the lack of existential meaning, and the absence of individual originality. […] The mode of that desire is nostalgia. (Huyssen 2006: 11)

What can be done is unpacking the occasions in which those terms are used in comics culture, which are basically three: praising the greater simplicity of old material, which was (or is perceived to be) lighter and arguably less mature than contemporary comics; longing for the (consequent) greater space of freedom that allowed readers of comics to

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[148] Walker's argument is drawn about superhero comics; several see contemporary superhero comic book industry as founded on nostalgia and based on an unusually old readership (around forty years old): see Marz (2011); Puaca (2015).

fill in the missing details and tie in the issues with their personal experience and fantasy (a process that I described in the previous section); and enabling a self-recognition of fans as members of a subculture, when the group widened and has been extended until nowadays it is not anymore the exclusive field it once was, and results insufficient in providing to the members of the community an identification solid enough to stand in contrast to other cultural domains.

The idea of comics as 'innocent' and 'more authentic' lies in the first place on a perspective that sees them "as a synonym for all that is ephemeral and disposable" (Gardner 2012: 2), the kind that Spiegelman, while discussing his *In the Shadow Of No Tower*, addressed as "old comic strips; vital, unpretentious ephemera from the optimistic dawn of the 20th century" (2004)[149].

If this is an undeniable simplification of a much more complex picture, one must recognize that there *is* a difference between old comics and more recent ones. As Baetens and Frey hypothesize, the contemporary longing for old comics may depend on the very fact that "they are disappearing and being replaced with new graphic novels that are more original and arguably far better (adult content, complex design, synthetic graphics drawing on multiple art traditions)" (2015: 224). Those naiver stories celebrated instead "the modern body's resilience […], its ability to bounce back, to recover, and to find humor and humanity in the midst of these inhuman conditions, offering a counterweight to the narrative of modernity's traumas" (Gardner 2012: 11). The strip format in particular offered to their readers "the perpetual return of the same, not despite the chaos of modern life, but because of it" (2012: 15). Nostalgia, Cross observes, emerges exactly "when people found an accelerating rate of change in many things so frustrating and alienating that they tried to capture the fleeting past in their 'ephemeral' culture and goods" (2008: 158). Cross notices that, while it may seem strange that people seek stability in thing that briefly lasted when we were young, it is because, as we age, our experiences as children

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[149] Beaty aligns to this view, seeing "comic books as ephemera rather than fine art" (Beaty 2012: 177) – yet keeping in mind that "not all comics are, in point of fact, comic books. Neither is the art form itself solely defined by these pulpish ephemera" (2012: 180). It must be noted that in a 1978 review Spiegelman spoke of the need to rescue early comics from "the uncritical and self-congratulatory nostalgia that surrounds the subject," refusing "the kind of intellectual slumming that condescendingly celebrates them because they are vulgar" (1978: 82, in Jenkins 2013: 308).

and teens seem to acquire a timeless quality, while our contemporary life "seems merely fleeting and confusing" (2008: 158).

Maybe the best example of this process comes from a pastiche of classic comic strips, namely Cole Closser's *Little Tommy Lost* (2016). If the most evident and overt allusion is *Little Orphan Annie*, Closser nonetheless adds in his work a vast range of references to comic strips from the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, as Crucifix remarks, a great share of pleasure consists in an encyclopedic reading that indexes and classifies the different allusions to the history of comics (2018, forthcoming):

> One will find the autumnal strolls of the Sunday pages of *Gasoline Alley*, the infamous villains of *Dick Tracy*, the waking ups falling out of the bed of *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, the uppercuts and fighting scenes of *Thimble Theatre*, the childish amusements of rascals like *Little Jimmy* or *Naughty Pete*. All these references are uniformed by the trait of Closser that remains homogenous, maybe even a bit clumsy considering that the young artist does not properly master the trait of the originals that he copies. (Crucifix 2018, forthcoming, my translation[150])

Closser also mimics the weekly distribution by segmenting the narration in a pseudo-serial format made of six consecutive dailies followed by a half-page in full colour. Crucifix observes that "the daily strips feed on the double effect of repetition and development able to prompt a sensation of continuity and suspence, 'as if' one must actually entertain the attention of the reader day by day" (2018, forthcoming, my translation[151]).

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[150] "On y retrouvera les déambulations automnales des pages dominicales de *Gasoline Alley* , les fameux vilains de *Dick Tracy* , le réveil au tombé du lit de *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, les uppercuts et scènes de bagarre du *Thimble Theatre*, les distractions enfantines de garnements comme *Little Jimmy* ou *Naughty Pete*. Toutes ces références sont elles uniformisées par le trait de Closser qui reste homogène, et parfois un peu maladroit dans la mesure où le jeune artiste n'a pas la maîtrise du trait des « maîtres » qu'il copie".

[151] "Les daily strips se nourrissent du double effet de répétition et de développement propre à établir une sensation de continuité et de suspense, « comme si » il fallait entretenir l'attention du lecteur de jour en jour".

One of the 'weekly' strip and the dominical in full colour (Closser 2014)

Furthermore, Closser "equally incorporates several traces of degradation, wear and tear, yellowing, to remember the bad quality of the paper on which comic strips were printed" (Crucifix 2018, forthcoming, my translation[152]). To this regard, Crucifix makes reference to Camper's concept of 'retro-reflexivity' that I discussed in the structure section, suggesting that this process of artificial ageing may be read an example of contemporary digital cultures' "analogue nostalgia" (Schrey 2014, or "analog nostalgia", Marks 2002) – and we can refer to Bolin's similar concept of 'technostalgia' (2016: 7) as

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[152] "Closser y inclut également de nombreuses traces de dégradation, d'usure, de jaunissement, afin de bien rappeler la mauvaise qualité du papier sur lequel les comic strips étaient imprimés".

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a yearning for […] media technologies such as comics, cassette tapes and vinyl records, some of which have been replaced by digital alternatives. It is partly a mourning of dead media technologies in themselves, but it is also about the gradual disappearing tangible materiality of the media that produces nostalgic remembrance, an emotional attachment to the 'rustly' sounds when reading the print newspaper, the memories triggered by LP album covers, the mix tapes. (Bolin 2016: 7)

Crucifix concludes that "presenting itself like a forgotten and rediscovered scrapbook, whose strips bear the marks of time, *Little Tommy Lost* expresses a nostalgia for the ephemeral format of newspapers" (2018, forthcoming, my translation[153]). To this, we may add that Closser plays at length with the dialectic between innocence and maturity (or authenticity and complexity) and reflects on contemporary reprints culture, foregrounding the different effect that the collection in the book format has on this imaginary series of strips.

The second reason behind nostalgia for more innocent material is that the simpler works of a bygone era allowed for a greater palimpsestuous freedom. As Gardner asserts, "it is often the flattest of characters in serial literature that produced the greatest emotional response on the part of readers: after all, flat characters require an active readership to 'bring to life,' and serial publication provides the space in which such a readership has (enforced) time to collaborate" (2012: 57).

Furthermore, as Hague points out, not only were the stories told different, but also "the experiences of reading comics, the performances they engendered, were substantively different as well" (2014: 129). This material, for how naive it could be – and it was not necessarily the case -, was able to provide a functioning storyworld whose gaps the reader could fill in in the time passing between an issue and the other". This is consistent with the requirement Eco identifies to make of a media product a cult objet: it must be able to "provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world […] one must be able to break,

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[153] "En se présentant comme un scrapbook oublié et redécouvert, dont les strips sont marqués par le passage du temps, *Little Tommy Lost* exprime une nostalgie pour ce support éphémère du journal".

dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole. (1986: 197–98, also cited in Jenkins 1992: 50).

Besides, as Reynolds affirms (in his influential discussion of *retromania* in popular music), there's usually "another dimension to the fanaticism: an antagonism to the present day, the belief that something's been lost. Modern music lacks some vital intangible: purity, innocence, a primal rawness and rowdiness. […] it's simply been 'castrated', its rebellion converted to mere showbiz" (2011: 205-06).

One may judge as paradoxical the fans who claim that their niche should not 'sell out', only seeing the contradiction of this "small (yet highly visible and divisive) segment of contemporary fanboys" who "reclaim or retain their own 'minority' or subcultural status". Yet, far to be illogical, this "strain of 'populism' within fan culture is predicated on nostalgia for a state of disempowerment", in turn due to "a perceived loss of fan culture's unpopularity and, thus, its exclusivity"[154] (Scott 2018: 449).

Said otherwise, the gatekeepers are longing what they believe to be the innocence and marginality of old comics because it was a patent sign of their fan's distinction, in a sense close to that attributed to the term by Bourdieu (1984)[155]: "fans either produce a sense of distinction between themselves and the mainstream (non-fans), defining the fan community in opposition to how they are constructed by other groups and the media, or they distinguish levels of fandom amongst the group" (Geraghty 2018: 214). Fiske argued that "those who have accumulated the most knowledge gain prestige within the group and act as opinion leaders" (1992: 43)[156], and are thus the most threatened by changes to the canon: "behind each vitriolic outburst that follows any progressive alteration", affirms Cicci in his analysis of the superhero genre, there are fans "watching their fan object mutating into something new and beyond their control. To them, this rewrites the

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[154] On subcultures positively playing on the concepts of 'nerd' or 'geek' see also Geraghty (2014, chap. 1).
[155] Mark Jancovich very interestingly applies Bourdieu to fandom theorizing the existence of a specific 'cult distinction' (2002: 306-07).
[156] It is the kind of fans that Hills defines 'cult aficionados', that is, fans who may have higher status within a given fan community due to their particular engagement with the fannish object" (2002: ix–x).

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knowledge of superheroes, and thus devalues its accumulation" (2018: 199). Furthermore,

> these flare-ups are increasingly common as the discourse expands from comic shops and conventions onto Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other digital forums. Without physical borders, new and old fans collide with each other and with comic creators. […] These superhero fans enter not only by comic book reading and collecting, but also via engaging with multimodal adaptations, narratives retold across multiple media platforms that share similar narratives but not intertwining plots. Diverse entry points mean fans have ever more new ways of reading superheroes. (Cicci 2018: 199)

Organized fandom, Jenkins argue, is in any case, "first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it" (1992a: 88), a function that Hills calls "boundary-maintenance"[157] (2012: 115). As Geraghty notes fandom has always involved "a high level of policing in the community", for fans "create their own boundaries, internally contesting who is the better fan, greater fan, most knowledgeable and worthy fan" (2018: 214).

We can think in this sense of fans communities as what Stanley Fish has called 'interpretive communities', that is, groups g "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (1980: 171).

The quest to patrol the borders and assign to text the *right* intention is thus a considerable preoccupation of fandom, well exemplified by the imperative to maintain and defend continuity (Levitz 2009: 190). Pustz writes that "information based on continuity becomes the source of discussion, jokes and arguments, making it the raw material for the interactive glue that holds comic book culture together" (1999: 134). Similarly, Kaveney points out that "understanding continuity is one of the pleasures of serial works of art" (2008: 26, in Proctor 2012); not to mention that "crossover narrative threads, which

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[157] In this sense, Tulloch defined fans a 'powerless elite' who "claim a privileged relationship to the series by virtue of their mastery over its materials and yet who have little or no influence on 'the conditions of production or reception of their show'" (in Jenkins 1992a: 89).

start in one of a house's titles and continue over the months in several others, are an effective way of compelling readers to spend more money" (2008: 30).

As Jenkins notes, "fans particularly dislike major shifts […] not adequately explained or justified within its narrative logic" (1992a: 108), and despite they accept some deviations from the norm they crave for "not simply internal consistency" (1992a: 109). In his famous analysis of soap opera audiences, Ang dealt with this problem theorizing the notion of 'emotional realism' (1985), the principle according to which

> what counts as 'plausible' […] is a general conformity to the ideological norms by which the viewer makes sense of everyday life. Such a conception of the series allows fans to draw upon their own personal backgrounds as one means of extrapolating beyond the information explicitly found within the aired episodes. […] This self-conscious interpolation of the personal and the experiential into the realm of the fictional helps to cement the close identification many fans feel with series characters and their world. (Jenkins 1992a: 109-10)

Emotional realism, that is, allows fans to develop or simulate a parasocial interaction or relationship (which I discussed in the previous section) with the characters. Furthermore, the idea of emotional realism "insures that transgressions of 'common sense' assumptions about social reality will be harshly criticized not simply as ideologically motivated but as violating the integrity of the represented world" (Jenkins 1992a: 119).

There is, then, a permanent dialectics in fandom between devotion to the source and freedom of reusing and remixing the original material: if on one side being a fan is about a "lack of deference to the object of attention and her belief in her right to appropriate and subvert the text and the object for her own pleasure" (Ross and Nightingale 2003: 125), on the other for fans "the text really *matters*, it is invested with a definitional importance through which the fan gains a sense of personal identity and of community (with other fans)" (2003: 126).

3.5.3. The second time around: reboots' nostalgia and nostalgia against reboots

A good example of the dynamics I just described may come from considering reboots. A reboot is a complete rewriting of an original story, usually by updating it and keeping only the skeleton of what that story was before. It is "a process of regeneration, of resurrection and rebirth" which "allows tired brands, exhausted properties, the luxury of

rebirth and the chance to remain vital and relevant whilst providing a relatively stable source of material that does not rely on original untested sources" (Proctor 2012). As Proctor quite enthusiastically affirms, reboots provide the "opportunity to resuscitate, recycle and regenerate 'damaged' franchises by returning to recognizable and iconic product range rather than original, untested material. A reboot is a brand-new product; yet it is already old. All texts oscillate. All are palimpsestuous. All texts are adaptations" (Proctor 2012).

In this light, reboots are an inherently nostalgic format, choosing to play with old material instead of creating it anew, and offering fans the possibility of having back a storyworld they liked, updated and enhanced, usually furnished with a more mature plot and more adult themes[158]. In fact, they may be one of the greatest proof of contemporary shift of attention, from the editorial point of view, from plots to storyworld, more suitable to enhance their viewers' immersion and, on a practical side, to prompt the audience to buy derived issues (spin-offs, prequels, sequels and so on) and product-related merchandise. Undoubtedly, then, "recycling from a back catalogue of owned materials to create new spin-offs is an important aspect of cross-media firms today" (Gibson 2015: 179) – an approach, she notes, nonetheless rarely adopted for girls' comics "because the stories often tied in with activities for girls that were subject to fashion" and they may fail "to focus on a newly fashionable activity" (Gibson 2015: 180).

This is a double-edged sword, though, because the same capacity of renovation of the original material that Proctor and Gibson praise may go against fans' idea of what is the intangible core of their cherished object. Playing with memories and updating them (*changing* them) means walking on a thin line between loyalty and infidelity to the original source, that fans may praise for reviving a childhood treasure, but to which they may equally react for altering something long kept inside their sancta sanctorum.

A particularly significant example of this renewal process is provided by the two relaunches DC Comics underwent in the last ten years and involving its entire line of monthly superhero stories. The first one was the *New 52* revamp (a 'soft reboot', as they called it at time), realized in 2011: after the end of the *Flashpoint* crossover storyline, DC

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[158] Possibly too mature and adult, or rather too sombre, according to a Washington post article about the *Planes of the Apes* reboot aptly titled "Why so serious?" (Hornaday 2014).

stopped all of its titles and restarted 52 new series from issue number 1. The relaunch comported changes in the publishing format, new titles and of course various modification to continuity and characters system, despite the fact that most of the DC Universe remained intact. The *New 52* took place until January 2016, when DC underwent a second relaunch aptly called *Rebirth* in 2016, which partially restored (to popular acclaim) characters and storylines from the previous DC Universe merging them with some of the *New 52*.

Since a reboot is often accompanied by a remediation as well, it may be useful to pass over the boundaries of comics and extend the reflection to other media. After all, comic book-to-film adaptations are nowadays "Hollywood's leading genre" (Burke 2015), especially (but not solely) for what concerns superhero movies, which constitute an ideal surface to describe the implications of the reboot process, extending without solution of continuity (pun intended) from comics to TV series to movies, to videogames and so on, in a series of narrative universes that only partially overlap, yet are part of the same single essence to the eye of the loving fan. Proctor aptly describes the Batman franchise as being made up of different versions of the same myth,

> part and parcel of an intertextual 'matrix' that includes film, television, comic books
> and other, multifarious retellings, recreations and re-visions grafted onto one another
> in a palimpsestuous fashion, "a phantasmal spiderweb" (Miller 1990: 139) of
> heteroglossia and remediation. None of the cinematic Batman texts can be described
> as adapting a particular comic book; rather, they are "free interpretations built around
> a basic framework, rather than adaptation as we currently understand the term"
> (Brooker 1999: 186). (Proctor 2012)

Unsurprisingly, complaints regarding the canon often appear, and they seem to resurface with more strength when issues of race or gender are drawn in the field: applied to films, it is the case of the all-female Ghostbusters reboot (2016), of the first female Dr Who (2018, forthcoming) or of the discussion regarding the possibility of having a black Spiderman. Along the same line, Loock observes that 'intergenerational differences' are expressed more aggressively, "as a deep dislike of the new version combined with nostalgia for an older pop-cultural reference point" (2016).

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As Proctor explains quoting Hills (2012: 115), "'fans' sense of self-identity is so firmly enmeshed' with the fan-object of choice, that they may lionize the primary text to such an extent that 'potential threats to textual authenticity' can become sites of intense negotiation and defensive bulwarking" (Proctor 2017: 1116).

Moving from fans' comments claiming the Ghostbusters reboot (2016) was "ruining their childhood"[159], Proctor elaborates his theory of totemic nostalgia (the totem being the object of said nostalgia) "as a form of 'risk management' and a source of self-narrative, self-continuity and ontological security (Hills, 2002, 2012)". (Proctor 2017: 1113). Proctor quotes Vess' conclusion that nostalgia is associated with "affectively warm concepts" such as childhood (2012: 274) as a precondition to understand how "fans' affective relationship with a totemic object can function as an ontological buffer against perceived threats and external incursions" (Proctor 2017: 1115), and goes on by saying that

> Totemic nostalgia refers then "to a type of fan protectionism […] centred on an affective relationship with a fan-object, usually forged in childhood. As a result, a totemic text becomes profoundly enmeshed as a resource of meaning-making, of self-identity, self-narrative and self-continuity. Symbolic threats may emerge that threaten the sanctity of the totemic relationship between self and object, and can induce nostalgic narratives as a method of meaning preservation as a regulatory and restorative balm (Sedikides et al., 2015). […] Totemic nostalgia is thus "a mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility" (Proctor 2017: 1122)

Connected to this process is the case where the very owner of the original Intellectual Property of some material choose to act against reboots. It has been recently the case of the Buck Rodgers reboot, first announced then blocked by the heirs of the copyrights; and it was the case behind one of the first and most famous graphic novel. It not a mystery, indeed, that *Watchmen*'s characters were meant to be taken from a set of old superheroes of Charlton comics, after Charlton was acquired by DC comics in 1983.

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons were to use several characters, mainly created by Steve Ditko, in their upcoming work, but DC realized the superheroes would then not be usable anymore, and denied Moore the permission to use them. Moore and Gibbons then realized

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[159] For more on *Ghostbusters* and *fantagonism*, see also Johnson (2018).

their protagonists as loosely based on Charlton comics superheroes, which is evident both from their superheroistic qualities and from the strong visual influence of Ditko's work on Gibbons and Higgins, who was the equally influential colourist of the work. The lost opportunity to use a set of already existing superheroes further turned Moore's subplot into a reflection on the role of superhero and superhomism in contemporary culture, with a strong antinostalgic intent, significantly based on a genre which is possibly one of the most evidently traversed by several kinds of nostalgic tensions[160].

The negative value *Watchmen* attributes to nostalgia – in its most reactionary reading – is evident from the character of Adrian Veidt/Ozymandias, whose decadent longing for classical culture is accompanied by a taste for exclusiveness and by the quintessential exceptionalist plan to save the world from itself.

The advertisement for Adrian Veidt's perfume is a not so subtle declaration of intent (Moore and Gibbons 1986)

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[160] See Brown (2016, chap. 4) for an overview of (film) superheroes and the way they are related to individual childhood nostalgias and to the collective ideology of American exceptionalism, in turn linked for a nostalgia towards "more innocent", simpler times of US history.

3.5.1. Print it again, Sam: republished comics and reprints' pastiches

Another consideration should be done on one of the most effective way industry has to encourage a nostalgic consumption among its audience – that is, reprints.

First of all, we should ask ourselves what the roots and the reasons are, especially economic, of such a frequent practice of today's comics press. In fact, "even if one does not reduce the discussion to matters of cost-effectiveness", Baetens argue, "it is always dangerous to forget about economical considerations when discussing popular culture, whose basic domain is less art in the old-fashioned sense of the word than the culture industries, where the cultural aspects of the production are inevitably intertwined with industrial and commercial aspect" (2011: 112).

Anderson (2004, 2007) postulates in his 'long tail' hypothesis that a large number of low sales products may be more productive on the market than the small number of bestsellers, provided that the distribution channel is efficient and large enough (geographically and/or chronologically) so that its costs are kept as low as possible. At the same time, "fans are always reassessing and re-evaluating media texts from the past; they bring them in to the present and reconstitute them as part of contemporary fan culture" (Geraghty 2014: 2-3).

Making those two forces meet and interact, the Internet has proven to be the most efficient way to directly connect niche consumers to whatever product they may desire, which in the comics market translates into a demand for reprints unknown (or better, less perceived) in the past, that publishing houses may meet with smaller costs than the ones they should sustain to widen their catalogue with new titles.

Furthermore, there is a cultural reason besides reprints: moving from his large sample of Franco-Belgian publishing houses, Aquatias affirms that "comics reprints are often seen as an element of the legitimization process of comics" (forthcoming, my translation[161]), either republishing titles that have sold high numbers (thus reaffirming the importance of the title and of the publishing house itself) or re-proposing important works that had been forgotten[162].

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[161] "Les rééditions de bande dessinée sont souvent considérées comme un élément du processus de légitimation de la bande dessinée".

[162] See Aquatias (2018) for the whole, way more nuanced sketch of the politics of reprints in the Franco-Belgian comics market.

Contemporary graphic novelists, in turn, "have legitimated and contributed to the reprinting process and played their role in stimulating the fashion for nostalgia by becoming editors and informed historical commentators", according to Baetens and Frey (2015: 222). The two paths often conflate, as proved by the consideration that "the second career of major graphic novelists has been to act as historians of the field, charting out its temporal boundaries and inventing their own definition of aesthetic traditions for readers to follow up on through the anthologies they have created or recommend" (2015: 222). The two scholars quote Ware's role as a bridge to the renewed attention towards Frank King's *Gasoline Alley* or Spiegelman's on, among the others, Jack Cole, and the role of both on Jerry Moriarty's *Jack Survives* reprint.

More in detail, according to the analysis carried out by Hurren (2009), the US market saw two waves of reprints: a first one, launched in the 1970s and 1980s by publishers like Kitchen Sink Press, which reprinted amongst the other Will Eisner's *The Spirit*, George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon*, Al Capp's *L'il Abner*, and Milton Caniff's *Steven Canyon* (Hurren 2009: 8). Yet most of the reprints of the first wave, even when collected in the book format, lacked in quality, consistency and design:

> Confined by the technology of the day, these reprints were little more than photocopies of the original strips placed between monochromatic covers (Devlin, interview). In some cases, when the photostats were not available, the reprints were derived from traced versions of the originals (Devlin). In other cases, in an attempt to make the strips conform to standard comic book format, publishers would reformat the content in various sizes within the same book, creating a jarring experience for the reader. (Hurren 2009: 8)

There were some notable exceptions, though. One of the most important was probably Fantagraphics' reprint catalogue, which counted the magazine *Nemo*, the *Classic Comics Library* (edited by comics historian Rick Marschall), and the imprint *Nemo Bookshelf*, whose reprints included Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie*, Walt Kelly's *Pogo*, Will Gould's *Red Barry*, Milton Caniff's *Dickie Dare*, E. C. Segar's *Popeye* and Harold Foster's *Prince Valiant* (Hurren 2009: 9). At the same time, DC Comics started its own reprint series in 1989, with the DC Archive Editions, republishing *Batman*, *Superman*, *Wonder Woman*, *The Flash*, *Green Lantern*, *The Justice League of America* and so on.

Notwithstanding the quality, DC reprints had the unprecedented value of dealing with complete collections republished in hardcover editions.

The reprint industry withered in the mid-1990s until the second wave of modern reprints (which Hurren calls "the Golden Age of reprints": 2009: 11) began in 2002 with Fantagraphics' reprint series of George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, designed by Chris Ware, and continued most notably since 2004 with the issuing of *The complete Peanuts*, designed by Seth. Here the pivotal role of contemporary graphic novelists mentioned by Frey and Baetens is more evident: although thousands of Peanuts strips had already been reprinted, "no publisher had attempted a complete collection" (Douresseau 2004, in Hurren 2009: 12) rather than focusing on "selections from treasuries" (2009: 12), and no one had intended their collection to be aimed so clearly at the adult market:

> Seth saw the melancholy, depressed nature of Peanuts (perhaps from reading it himself as a child) and designed the series using dark, melancholy colors to highlight this aspect of the comic. Previous collections of Peanuts were generally designed using very poppy and kid-oriented palettes. Seth intentionally avoided such colours, in part to make the series more attractive to adult readers (Seth, interview). (Hurren 2009: 12)

Other notable reprints, usually designed by some influent contemporary graphic novelist and correlated with a rich introductory paratext by industry expects and comics scholars, are IDW Publishing's *The Complete Chester Gould's Dick Tracy* (designed by Ashley Wood), *Little Orphan Annie*, *Archie*, *Family Circus* and *Blondie*; Fantagraphics' hardcover versions of *Popeye* and *Prince Valiant*; Drawn&Quarterly counting Doug Wright, John Stanley, Frank King's *Gasoline Alley*, and Tove Jansson's *Moomin*; and Abrams's series *Art out of Time* by Dan Nadel, which collects the work of forgotten cartoonist from comics history.

This is also coherent with Baetens and Frey's remark about the "growth in reprinted collections of previously forgotten comic-strips and their repackaging as complete graphic novels or art history style illustrated catalogues" as a strategy to demonstrate "that the origins and traditions that preceded the graphic novel are relevant for the new adult readers" (2015: 220-221). As Julia Round affirms, if on the one hand the reprint process "maintained the status quo of the comics audience by feeding the collectors' market", on

the other "repackaging and reissuing also altered perceptions of comics by allowing for large, book-format bindings that brought them closer to the notion of a literary text" (2010: 17). Through reframing and repackaging, thus, "the comic from the past is reimagined as a more impressive and powerful medium than the original material conditions could realistically achieve" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 221)[163].

In this scenario, contemporary graphic novelists act as bridges towards comics history, by virtue of their role of mediators (that is, as archivist of comics history) and their status of (comics) collectors, a category which counts among the others Seth, Ditch, Ware, Clowes, Brunetti and Matt[164]. As Beaty affirms, "many of Ware's contemporaries and friends are similarly interested in the aesthetics of the past, including Robert Crumb, Dan Clowes, Ivan Brunetti, Seth, and Charles Burns, each of whom has demonstrated a tendency not only to evince a nostalgic tone, but to actually make nostalgia the subject of their art" (Beaty 2012: 215).

Furthermore, as Hurren affirms, "comics history is intricately woven into the contemporary medium. Classic comics [have a] vital role in the progression of the medium" (2009: 16). More recent comics that are reminiscent of older ones "help to re-create the (perceived) innocence of the comics" that readers used to consume as children (Pustz 1999: 89), a point I already discussed at length in this section. Pustz concludes that "visually, many of these independent comics also create a sense of nostalgia" (Pustz 1999: 90) – and we can think again at the use of pastiche that I repeatedly highlighted in the course of these two chapters.

3.5.2. Of mice, men, and women: fandom and gender issues

Unfortunately, most of the interactions between fans and the comic book industry described in this chapter must merely be reconstructed *in vitro*, because, although Dittmer

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[163] Nonetheless, this is not an exclusive reprinting strategy. On the contrary, one can observe how on the opposite side "exact replica editions that directly mimic an earlier print run […] gain plausibility by seeming authentic" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 221).

[164] In this sense, Barthes describes the historian as "not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series" (in Gardner 2012: 174).

correctly stresses the importance "place-based context in readers' interpretive processes" (2014: 72), empirical data on comics audiences are still thoroughly insufficient to draw an accurate picture:

> Fan behaviors such as the purchasing, reading, collecting, and trading of comic books, as well as fan-production practices, are not widely catalogued or quantified. As is the case with other industry measurement systems […] data collection is a fraught process that involves a delicate dance between retailers, distributors, and publishers. Executives often profess to making production, distribution, and marketing decisions by relying on their instincts and tastes, or by turning to qualitatively oriented data gained through interactions on social media and at conventions. Surveys undertaken by comics retailers are limited in number and also based largely on anecdotal evidence from store owners. (Perren and Felschow 2018: 314)

This situation, unfortunately, indirectly reinforces the stereotype of the comic book fan as a male twentysomething, white of course, who wallows in his puddle of geek culture[165]. Orme affirms to this regards that "popular culture is resplendent with tropes about nerdy guys fawning over the elusive woman who shares their geeky interests. Comic book stores are portrayed as a male space where female patrons are an anomaly – a rare breed of comic book enthusiast" (2016: 1). Yet she notes how this narrative "seems at odds with reality. Survey data from comic book stores report that women may comprise somewhere between 40 and 50% of their consumers, with women between the ages of 17 and 30 being the fastest-growing group of comic book purchasers" (1; see also O'Leary 2015). Accordingly, Pustz described a scenario pretty different from the received stereotype, noting already, twenty years ago, that "while most mainstream readers are male (most estimates put the number between 90 and 95 percent), alternative comics' audience is substantially female, with the actual numbers varying according to title" (1999: 84). And it must also be underlined that, as noted by Robbins (2002) among the others, "female readers frequently gravitate toward indie titles in part because this is where the vast majority of female comic book writers and artists are working" (Scott 2013: 2.5). The same "90 to 95" percentile, while accepted by some (Parsons 1991; Lopes 2009), has

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[165] Jones describes him as "overwhelmingly male, mostly middle class, mostly Anglo or Germanic or Jewish, and mostly isolated" except for fellow fans (2004: 33).

been fiercely rejected by Scott (2013) that denounces how, if data on comics readership relies on 'imperfect indicators' such as "market studies and reader surveys" (Gabilliet 2010: 191, in Scott 2013: 2.1), accepting them without further investigation means accepting a "patriarchal attitude" with the deliberate aim of talking of the "paternalistic attitude" (2.2) towards the supposed eternal immaturity of fanboys. This echoes McRobbie and Garber's concern that "girls subcultures may have become invisible because the very term 'subculture' has acquired such strong masculine overtones" (1993: 211, in Scott 2013: 3.3), so that "the issue is not simply that popular and academic literature generally renders female comic book readers invisible", affirms Scott; "it is also that the moments in which they are visible, they are too frequently compartmentalized and contained" (2013: 2.4).

Stereotypical representations of what comic fans look and act like, gendered language and "marketing campaigns that continue to alienate female fans" contribute to marginalize the role of females inside fandom[166]. Adding up to the situation is the "general stigma of comic books as 'low culture' (Brown 1997)", that may lead female comics fan to "feel a 'double stigma' as their fandom violates norms of both gender and cultural hierarchies" (Orme 2016: 2). There is actually a third stigma ongoing for the female audience, and it is the fear "of being 'too old' for comics. While being an adult reader is not specific to being a woman, by any means, the stigma of engaging in a 'juvenile' activity is a burden that is arguably greater for women who bear it than for men, making it an intersectional issue" (Orme 2016: 6).

All this concurs to make of today's comic book culture "a site of performing masculinity, albeit a certain type of masculinity", that is, 'geek' masculinity. (Orme 2016: 3). "The comic book industry", Orme observes, "has a history of underrepresenting women and portraying them as hypersexualised and in gender-stereotyped roles. Scholars have drawn on feminist and queer theories to highlight these problematic portrayals of gender and sexuality"[167] (Orme 2016: 2).

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[166] It would be certainly important to consider also cases of non-binary gender, but to my knowledge no study has yet been carried out on the matter.
[167] See among the others the study Orme mentions: Nyberg (1997); McGrath (2007); Murray (2011); Whaley (2011); Cocca (2014).

Yet the state of art, as Cicci notes, is that not only female readers are overlooked, but female characters as well are still relegated to secondary roles or filtered through the male gaze[168]:

> Gloria Steinem argued this practice deterred female readers' engagement and contributed to the perception of the fandom as male. Steinem sees the problem as one of identification, "The only option for a girl reader is to identify with the male characters … if she can't do that, she faces limited prospects … and saying things like "Oh Superman, I'll always be grateful to you" (2013: 204). (Cicci 2018: 195)

Precisely to address this issue, comics creator Gail Simone created and circulated a list of the astonishingly high number of "superheroines who have been either depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator" (1999).

There are, of course, some positives notes: the very existence of a debate over the subject, the awareness of contemporary scholars and the diffusion of less gendered comic reading among adolescents (gender-conscious issues of DC and Marvel superheroes comics and mangas play a very important role on the matter[169]).

Anyway, what is at stake is "the reader's sense of self in relation to media texts and dominant media discourses around gender" (Gibson 2015: 173). This status quo is the reason why Jenkins (1992a) quotes Fetterley (1986) and Bleich (1986) to back up his claim that reading practices are themselves gendered, and the feminine one reflects "ways women have found to circumvent male-centred narratives and to rewrite them in a fashion that serves feminine interests" (Jenkins 1992a: 115). Girls, "whose earliest reading", Jenkins affirms, "focuses on romance and character relationships, learn to read for different things than boys, whose earliest books centre on the actions of autonomous and heroic protagonists" (1992a: 116). They learn, Jenkins insists,

> from an early age how to find their own pleasures in stories that reflect the tastes and interests of others, how to shift attention away from the narrative center and onto the

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[168] On the matter, see the whole contribution by Scott (2013) and her analysis of several DC comics' choices in terms of gender representativity.
[169] On manga and gender (and queerness as well), see Buruma (1984); Martinez (1998); Robertson (1998); Henshall (1999); Ueno (2006); Welker (2006); Wood (2013).

periphery, how to reclaim their own interests from the margin and thus how to engage more freely in speculations that push aside the author's voice in favor of their own. (1992a: 117)

Some are critics of this position, asserting that seeing women as adapted cross-readers (capable of both a feminine and a masculine way of reading) does not pay justice to "non-institutionalized reading strategies", for which "we should consider that both men and women are capable of reading from a variety of subject positions, with a variety of intents, and in ways that satisfy a variety of pleasures and needs" (Brown 2001: 130). Yet Jenkins recognizes that

Not all women will feel compelled to adopt such strategies; some will simply accept the limited range of women's fiction as a cultural space comfortably matched to their reading interests while others will more fully assimilate masculine reading interests and accept fictions on those terms. For many, however, there will continue to be a tension between their socialized reading interests and the commercial texts they encounter. (1992a: 117)

A very significant example of this trend is, sadly, McSweeney's Quarterly Concern Number Thirteen (2004), an anthology edited by Chris Ware (who also realized the cover) and fully focused on graphic narratives. It was an occasion to sketch out a history of the medium filtered by the perspective of one of its most significant contemporary artist. Yet instead of succeeding in developing a history of comics art at large, "McSweeney's Quarterly Concern Number Thirteen finds a common tradition in comics that centres on intimacy, shame, and masculine melancholia" (Worden 2006: 893), whose pivotal theme is "male characters' failures to succeed at heterosexual romance" (2006: 902).

Not only, though, the popularity of female authors in the graphic novel world is growing in number and importance. Male cartoonists as well are every day more aware than before of this bias of comics culture, and are trying to at least problematize the situation. A good example of this process is given again by *Sam Zabel*, where Horrocks tries to foreground the issue of the male gaze, especially related to old comics, through a progressive empowerment of its female characters in the course of the graphic novel (Venusian women will get equal right than their violent Martian male counterparts, Miki will defeat her perverted hentai creator). Despite presenting two encouraging female characters,

though (the manga girl Miki and the young female cartoonist Alice Brown), *Sam Zabel* is ultimately very centred on the creative crisis of its male protagonist and the way his fantasy voyage will heal his writer's block. The passing of the magic pen from Sam to Alice in the last pages could be read in this sense as a positive sign, but it can equally be accused of being a paternalistic allowance to create more than a symbolic passing of the baton.

Three pages from Sam Zabel (Horrocks 2014)

More significant in this view, then, is the growing production of female-crafted memoirs that intersect nostalgia for some reason. Most of the works I mention here, then - from Meags Fitzgerald's *Photoboot* to Nine Antico's *Le gout du paradis*, from Bailly and Fraipont's *Le muret* to Julie Maroh's *Le bleue est une couleur chaude*, from Jillian and Mariko Tamaki's *This One Summer* to Sara Colaone's *Ciao ciao bambina* – are more apt to make for this disproportion, refocusing their gaze on the feminine side and hopefully contributing, amongst with several works of the most recent generation, to build a new comic *herstory*.

3.6. Fans, comics, and nostalgia

In this section, I have tried to show the connection between fandom and nostalgia. I did so by analysing the links between comics' participative culture and personal investment, on behalf of the fans, in the totemic object of their adoration.

My investigation developed on three main directions: an account of the interactive, inherently productive role of fans; their longing for a (purported) lost, innocent

authenticity and the consequent role of fans as defenders of the canon, and the implication this process has for reboots, which are theoretically a nostalgic rewriting of their original source, but risk of being rejected exactly in function of their incapability to act as substitutes for the totemic role of said source.

Finally, I have tried to foreground issues of gender representation, concerning both the importance of female characters in comics culture and the composition of comic fan audiences, where females have to undergo three different stigmas: having to deal with 'low culture', going against gender expectations and being 'too old' for comics (something that does not apply to their male counterpart). This implies different ways of experiencing nostalgia that I will more clearly analyse in the following section.

3.7. Collectors

General overview

Collecting is a multifaceted activity: strictly connected to nostalgia, it is a 'creative act' (Hills 2009) which is at the same time "an attempt to acquire more economic capital (the rarer the item, the more money it costs to purchase)" and "the display of a hierarchical status" (Geraghty 2018: 213) built in "hierarchies of taste defined by cultural capital" (2018: 218)[170]: as Geraghty remarks elsewhere, "collecting objects, keeping them, organising them and displaying them is then by its very nature about the process of distinction and accruing cultural capital"[171] (2014: 181).

Collectibles are objects "of preservation, trade, social ritual, exhibition - perhaps even generators of profit. Such objects are accompanied by projects. And though they remain interrelated, their interplay involves the social world outside, and embraces human relationships" (Geraghty 2005: 111). Collected objects "are often anthropomorphized, fetishized, and personified until they define and occupy the little world of an intimate family in which the collector reigns as an absolute sovereign" (Belk et al 1991[172]). Collectibles, said otherwise, are 'semiotic signifiers of self' to which collectors give "an inherently private and personal nature that removes their object of consumption from the logic of capitalist exchange" (Geraghty 2005: 116) – or at least, do so in their eyes, since "objects and ephemera from popular culture have proven for a long time to be quite lucrative money spinners at auctions, fan conventions and online" (Geraghty 2018: 212). According to collectors' logic, anyway, collecting memorabilia and souvenirs "dislocates both the collector and the collection from the present" (Mauro 2010: 13) enacting "a

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[170] Geraghty rightfully observes that, on the contrary, "in terms of class it crosses social boundaries because all collectors value the importance of the physical object (no matter what it is)" (2018: 219).

[171] The reference here is again Bourdieu (1984). This idea has been widely discussed in relation to fan communities, among others by Fiske (1992), who derived from it his idea of fan's 'popular cultural capital' – in contraposition to the official cultural capital (high culture) – and Thornton's similar notion of 'subcultural capital' (1995). Also, it must be noticed that Bourdieu's model (as well as Fiske's and Thornton's) presupposes quite a rigid social organization, that has been lately problematized; on this account, Hills underlines how "[s]uch a fixed model also neglects the possibility that struggles over legitimacy of 'cultural capital' may occur both between and within class fractions, communities and subcultures" (2002: 48-49).

[172] See the whole essay for an extensive definition of collecting. On the same topic, see also Pearce (1995a; 1995b).

strictly personal and emotional history in which objects become imbued with an aura that removes both the object and the collector from the steady progress of time" (Mauro 2010: 3). Jenkins adds, with a touch of lyricism, that

> Things break down, and, in the process, they become indistinct and meaningless. This is where the anxiety of collecting lies: the desire to arrest or reverse this process, to preserve objects from normal wear and tear, and to place them in a meaningful context where they can be appreciated and protected by generations to come. Without collectors, what survives seems random (2017: 236).

At the same time, we can agree with Geraghty's remark that the memories inscribed in every object of a collection are defined by relative experiences in the collector's life: "that is why the importance of childhood memories and nostalgia felt for such times is a fundamental aspect of cult collecting - it informs the processes of building a collection, provides personal meaning and situates each and every object in relation to others and to the collector" (2014: 181). Collections are in this sense "markers of personal history", contributing to shape the collector's perception of past and present with what Belk defines "sense of extended self" (1994: 321)[173]. They are "psychic ordering, of individuality, of public and private relationships, and of time and space", which act as "material autobiographies" of their owners, "chronicling the cycle of a life, from the first moment an object strikes a particular personal chord" (Pearce 1995b: 279) – and, one can add, "forging new narratives" (Marrone 2016: 99). Danet and Katriel define collections as "objects of affection" as well as "of domination and control" (1994: 228), and collecting as "an expression of late capitalism, bureaucracy, and the consumer society […] Of surplus income, fragmentation, isolation, and powerlessness of the individual in an overly rationalized world […] a continuation of the Western drive […] to explore, classify, make order in the physical world, to appropriate and domesticate the alien "other" (1994: 235). As Santo sums up,

> the acts of acquiring and collecting media-oriented objects are also an integral part of how individuals express their identity and individuality within a consumer society. Merchandise can materially encapsulate their acquirer's memories of a

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[173] As Belk already posited, "knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves" (1988: 139).

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particular event or experience, bits of their biography, or elicit affect tied to nostalgia or a sense of place that is only tangentially related to the text upon which an item is based. (Santo 2018: 330-31)

Collectors are hence led towards what Daniel Boorstin called 'consumption communities' (1973), shaped by the market around the ephemeral things that are meaningful for otherwise scattered individuals (Cross 2015: 3)[174]. Despite Jenkins' assertion that fan culture is "produced by fans and other amateurs for circulation through an underground economy" (2006: 325), in fact, Geraghty rightfully notices that acts of consumption as the purchase of merchandise seem to reduce fans to passive consumers rather than producers: "the collecting of merchandise represents a long-term financial and emotional investment […] but it does not necessarily transform or change the text in ways that fandom is usually depicted as doing" (2014: 180). Yet, there seems to be room for more nuanced positions, for Geraghty himself describes nostalgia, shortly after, as a clearly *producerly* act, that is, as a "transformative process rather than an inhibiting and conservative emotion", which "allows fans to breathe new life into old collectibles, giving them value through second-hand fandom, and creates new meanings for old texts that are remediated and brought back from childhood into adulthood" (Geraghty 2014: 181).

3.8. Collectors and comics

Comic-book culture, despite being strictly tied to collecting issues, presents some very peculiar characteristics in terms of the act of collecting itself, to the point that Gregory Steirer asserts that "the existing scholarship on collecting lacks general applicability to the collecting of comics (both physical and digital)" (2014: 456).

Steirer presents comic-book culture as "organised around the imperatives of collecting" (Steirer 2014: 456), and Brown goes so far as to note that the emphasis on ownership distinguish comics from other forms of fandom, which are rather organised according to the logic of 'experience' or 'participation' (1997: 22). Charles Hatfield attributes the difference to the role of direct market (that is, to comic specialty stores), which work

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[174] Furthermore, as Cross observes, "given the fact that this form of nostalgia is based on ephemeral commodities, this nostalgia creates distinctly narrow age cohorts of identity" (2015: 3).

towards an institutionalization of 'getting and keeping' rather than 'reading or sharing' (2005: 24).

In this sense, one of the most significant passages comics underwent, according to Jenkins, is the shift from disposables (stuff designed to be discarded) toward collectibles (stuff intended to be archived) (2017: 232). The comic book collector, then, "should be described as a *curatorial consumer*, a curator, an archivist, and a preservationist for artifacts that have meaning for their cultural lives" (Tankel and Murphy 1998: 66). A small but significant example of this centrality of collecting in comics culture is "the guide", that is, Robert M. Overstreet's *Comic Book Price Guide*, the comics fan bible which has been reprinted and updated every year since 1970.

Still, first of all, "as for what collecting entails, scholars and fan-authors have shown little interest in explicitly theorising it as a practice, despite its importance as an operative concept in historical, sociological and political economic accounts of the medium" (Steirer 2014: 457). The attempts most research has done are rather aimed to distinguish amongst comics collectors themselves, applying general collecting theory and envisaging, for example, a difference between *completists*, *hobbyists*, and *speculators*, in which "completists collect as a means to an end (namely, their enjoyment of comic art); hobbyists interpret collecting as the substance of fandom; and speculators collect as a straightforward monetary investment" (Woo 2012: 186).

Secondly, there may be serious doubts about whether comics book collecting is a proper form of collection after all. On the light of what we said, it may seem commonsensical to affirm that it is. Yet if we follow Pearce – possibly the most influential theorist in the field of collecting – quoting Durost, we should agree that

> A collection is basically determined by the nature of the value assigned to the objects, or ideas possessed. If the predominant value of an object or idea for the person possessing it is intrinsic, i.e., if it is valued primarily for use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality, or other value inherent in the object or accruing to it by whatever circumstances of custom, training, or habit, it is not a collection. (1932: 10, in Pearce 1998: 2)

To have a collection, then, the predominant value of collectibles must be representative or representational, that is, they must be principally regarded in the light of the relation

they have to other objects or ideas (Pearce 1998: 2). Accordingly, Russell Belk defines collecting as "the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences" (1995: 66), and Benjamin already affirmed that "what is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness" (1999: 204).

Yet as Steirer notes, despite being "a foundational principle in many studies of collecting, this structuring binary applies very poorly to media texts, such as comics", because "scholars, fans and presumably most comics consumers tend to view comics as aesthetic objects as well. To use a comic would thus already entail experiencing it aesthetically." (2014: 458). Comics consumption would then intrinsically be connected to the *proper* use of comics, and their collection would not at all remove them from their purpose - that is, aesthetical pleasure itself – possibly even in those cases in which the collected comic is encapsulated in a sealed plastic bag and is supposed never to be touched.

Possibly a first solution to this problem is to mitigate the idea that the use of collectibles may be purely representational with the indication of the necessity of a reframing (rather than a change of use) of the object. Danet and Katriel, for example, propose four rules at the base of the prototypical collecting activity: the Reframing rule, the Classification rule, Procedural rules, and the Discrimination rule. Of these rules, reframing, that is, recontextualizing the object collected as to serve a new purpose, constitutes the preliminary and necessary condition: as Stewart confirms, "the collection is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context" (1984: 151).

Steirer's solution is more complex and involves approaching "collecting as neither a psychology nor a process of de-utilisation, but rather as the multimodal production of value qua ownership-based consumption" (2014: 459). As he explains,

> collecting describes a panoply of forms of consumption associated with ownership, any of which may serve as a source of value for an individual consumer. […] the proper mode of consumption, what I have elsewhere called 'use in the narrow sense',

is just one of many ways a consumer might act to derive value from a good. (2014: 459)

Seeing collecting this way, that is, "not as a non-normative form of behaviour but rather as a natural corollary to material consumption" allows to consider a collecting potential as "inherent to the material object itself and not just a quirk of particular consumers' psychic make-ups" (Steirer 2014: 459) – and, most importantly, let us indeed consider comics collecting as a proper, though peculiar, form of collection.

Now, Susan Pearce envisions three modes of collecting, that she calls souvenir, fetishistic and systematic (1995b). In the first case, "the individual creates a romantic life-history by selecting and arranging personal memorial material to create […] an object autobiography" (1995b: 32). Souvenirs are part of "our attempt to make sense of our personal histories", and collecting them responds to our need to forge our personal and social self (1995b: 196). In fetishistic collecting, instead, "the objects are dominant and the collector responds to his obsessive need by gathering as many items as possible" (1995b: 32); in systematic collecting, "an ostensibly intellectual rationale is followed, and the intention is to collect complete sets which will demonstrate understanding achieved" (1995b: 32).

The three modes may happen at the same time - they are maybe even more problematic to consider as separate processes rather than common parts and reasons of the same drive to collect: the first one has to do with the emotional involvement those objects imply for the collector, namely with what they mean, or meant, for her self; the second one has to do with the object in its materiality and the attachment one has towards it; the third one has to do with the chase of closure, which I discussed already in the first two sections of this chapter. Those three directions are the aspect that I will discuss in the unfolding of this chapter.

3.8.1. I'll be your mirror: the growing-up self and the nostalgic object

Objects represent for the collectors 'shared memories', often "associated with a cluster of events and relationships linked to the appearance of these consumer goods; they may somehow have captured the aura of that brief moment" (Cross 2015: 2). As Philipp Blom writes, "every collection is a theatre of memories, a dramatization and *a mise en scène* of

personal and collective parts, of a remembered childhood and of remembrance after death. It guarantees the presence of those memories through the objects evoking them" (2002: 191, in Jenkins 2017: 232). Benjamin affirms in this sense that

> for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia for all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where, as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone [...] Collecting is a form of practical memory […]. (1999: 204-05)

The things we select and display are means to signal "how we see ourselves, our place in the world, our connections with others, and our relations to the past" (Jenkins 2017: 232). In a collection "we see personalised depictions of history - mirrors to the self", affirms Geraghty (2014: 4), echoing Baudrillard's idea that "what you really collect is always yourself (2005: 97). As Jenkins notes, "we come to regard our stuff as 'belongings,' a term that implies both ownership and emotional connection" (2017: 232).

Most of those goods "were not built to last, yet they are things we refuse to let go of" (2017: 232). As Cross observes when talking about collecting toys and dolls, "at its base, nostalgic collectibles are junk that once was ephemeral novelty that has become treasured nostalgia" (2015: 1) – and of course, symbolically, the attempts to preserve the durability of such perishable objects are "concerns for the ephemerality of one's own existence" (Danet and Katriel 1989: 258). This is consistent with what Gary Cross calls 'consumed nostalgia', that is

> a longing for the goods of the past that came from a personal experience of growing up in the stressful world of "fast capitalism," a particularly intensive form of commodity culture, entailing the increasingly rapid pace of production and purchase […]. Stress resulted from this distinctly modern phenomenon – people found identity and meaning in specific goods, but, as a result, felt that their selfhoods were threatened when those things disappeared. This longing was often rooted in the formative years of consumers – that of childhood and youth. (2015: 2)

The goal of consumed nostalgia, concludes Cross, "is to collect personal remembrances and to bond with those who share those memories" (2015: 3). In the physical objects that is collected, salvaged and reclaimed from the past, affirms Geraghty, memory and

nostalgia are bound up in the creation of the collector's (personal and social) identity (2014: 3-4), "embodied in the very objects they collect "(2014: 180). Beaty notices in this sense how nostalgia for old comics transforms an 'affective (Freudian) fetish' into a 'more strictly economic (Marxian)' one (2012: 153-54). In both senses, the object of the fetish "overcompensates for a missing wholeness that the purchaser is unable to attain" (2012: 157) and that should rather be identified with her childhood: those objects "are the consumer goods of our 'wondrous innocence,' memories of childhood and youth, of purchases, gifts, and play" (Cross 2015: 3). It follows that childhood memories and nostalgia are "a fundamental aspect of cult collecting - it informs the processes of building a collection, provides personal meaning and situates each and every object in relation to others and to the collector" (Geraghty 2014: 181).

Both Baetens and Frey (2015: 220) and Thierry Groensteen (2009: 11) confirm the link between comics and youth or childhood, the moment when readers first developed a relation with them. As Pustz describes with a touch of lyricism,

> Many fans fondly remember their first comic book or the first comic that they purchased for themselves. Many remember their first trip to a comic book store and their sense of awe at the vast selection of comics […]. These early comics were read or purchased for a variety of reasons, often depending on the fan's age at the time. Parents often purchased the books to keep children occupied during long car trips or while waiting at an airport or train station. Other children got comics when they were home sick from school. Some parents would purchase comic books for educational reasons, consciously or unconsciously using the publications to encourage reading, especially for children who had difficulty with text-only books. (Pustz 1999: 101-02)

Now, as Geraghty notices, the "convergence of popular fandom, new media, nostalgia and contemporary toy culture suggests that the lines between past and present, technology and culture, childhood and adulthood are increasingly porous." (2014: 9). This drive to keep playing into adulthood, as Cross suggests, may suggest a modification of the nostalgic impulse, and provide "further evidence of how cohort-specific the collectible culture has become in an era of fast capitalism. These patterns of collecting reflect the abiding impact of early consumption experiences" (2015: 6).

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Another perspective comes from appealing to Grant McCracken's theory of 'ideal displacement' (1988), which postulates that ideal values incompatible with modern life are projected onto objects of consumption. According to McCracken, the evocative power of objects allows to form bridges between the real world and an ideal "cultural meaning that has deliberately been removed from the daily life of a community and relocated in a distant cultural domain" (1988: 104). Collecting, then, is "a strategy of keeping our imagined but impossible hopes of a fulfilled life barely out of reach" (Belk 1995:153). As Belk sums up, according to McCracken

> we "displace" cultural values we hold dear to other times and other places because the gap between the real and the ideal is otherwise too large to sustain belief in these values. In displacing such meanings to a past golden age or an exotic other, we keep our belief in these values intact; they exist somewhere, if safely just out of reach. (Belk 1995: 153)

Sokolow (1997) first applied this theory to comics culture, affirming that "collecting functions to defer endlessly the disappointment that inevitably accompanies the acquisition and/or consumption of desired objects" (Steirer 2014: 457).

Be as it may, nostalgia, Beaty argues, "is among the primary drivers of value in the comics world", and Ware suggested that contemporary cartoonists themselves are "endemically nostalgic people who turn our lives over and over and over again trying to figure out how we went wrong and fix things or control them, make sense of things" (in Beaty 2012: 215). This involves a great deal of reflexivity of the medium, as proven by the fact that "in many contemporary graphic novels, the adventures of superheroes and their villainous counterparts have been replaced with the seemingly more mundane tales of collectors, the compulsive combers of archives, warehouses, and dumpsters" (Gardner 2012: 172). Seth's *Wimbledon Green* and his alter ego in *It's a Good Life*, Ware's *Rusty Brown* and Clowes' *MCMLXVI* (a story from Eightball#18 regarding a collector of memorabilia from 1966), among the others, prove the popularity of the theme and its frequent use as a metaphor to talk about the medium itself.

A panel from MCMLXVI (Clowes 1995)

3.8.2. Minding the gaps: closure and the struggle towards fulfillment

According to Bal, collecting is a narrative, in the sense, as she explains, that it is "a process consisting of the confrontation between objects and subjective agency informed by an attitude" (Bal 1994: 100[175]). Less broadly, Gardner defines collection as "fundamentally an autobiographical narrative" made of "the arrangement of texts and images from the past to tell a story to the present" (2012: 176).

As with every other narrative, collecting aims to fulfil itself, tending towards its own closure. Completion, in fact, is "central to every form of collection and narration" (Arrasvuori, Boberg, and Korhonen 2010: 6, in Heljakka 2017: 93). Benjamin talked about `completeness' as "a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new expressly devised historical system: the collection" (Benjamin 1999: 204). Danet and Katriel accordingly affirm that collecting "is a sheltered way of confronting chaos and the ephemerality of human existence" (1989: 271), capable of giving "a sense of closure, completion of perfection" (1989: 264).

According to the two scholars, there is, in collecting, a sense of play and aesthetics which provide the initial motivation for collecting. Play stands in the provisional balance between passion (falling in love with some object) and rationality (assessing and

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[175] This is possibly better explained by a comment from Pearce, which uses Iser's and Ingarden's concept of *Konkretisation* to affirm that the meaning of a collectible comes both from the object in itself and its realization through the act of collecting (Pearce 1995b: 26).

classifying the objects collected), and in the fantasy elements that allow collectors to go back to their childhood (1989: 256). The aesthetics arise from reframing the original object (which is usually, in itself, mundane and ephemeral), and from the sense of repetition with a difference which comes from having so many diverse exemplars of the same item, 'rhyming' and referring one another (1989: 262). After a first phase linked to those drives, though, collection assumes a 'self-imposed tension' to relieve which collectors must achieve a sense of closure, completing a set of objects (Danet and Katriel 1989: 256).

Similarly, Woo affirms that comics-oriented practices cultivate "particular dispositions and affects alongside those generated by the texts themselves. The 'thrill of the hunt' and the joy of uncovering something valuable – whether economically, in terms of subcultural canons of taste, or only as the last item from an incomplete set – is key to [those] collecting practices" (Woo 2012: 195). As Gardner observes, "the desire to possess comics—to hunt down every stray work by a favorite creator, to contain and reassemble the scattered pieces of a fragmentary comics universe—is a familiar one for many readers (and one that has little, if anything, to do with fantasies about market value)" (2012: 173):

> It is the compulsive need to fill in the gaps, to make connections between issues (the serial gap inherent to comic production, mirroring and complicating the gaps between the frames themselves) that drives the collector in search of missing issues. Indeed, the archival drive that has been a vital aspect of comic book culture since the 1980 s can be read as a metaphor for the (always uneasy) collaboration between reader and writer that is central to the comics form. (2012: 173)

It is in fact from a blend of both capitalistic accumulation and personal autobiography that derives the 'compulsive need to fill in the gaps', the quest for a "sense of closure" (Pustz 1999: 80) shared by comic readers and collectors at large. This is, according to Marrone, the similarity between the three "media" of collection, memory and comics (2016: 119, 181) – an idea echoed by Jenkins' remark that "both collections and stories are ways of managing memory" (2017: 232).

If the analysis immediately calls to mind mainstream comics (for example, superhero comics and their multiverses), one must not believe that graphic novel readers are immune

to this kind of tension. In fact, many graphic novels are intrinsically serialized as well, either for having been thought as part of a series (the clearest example being *Love and Rockets* by the Hernandez bros) or for being the recollection of volumes previously edited in serial form (one may think of Seth's *Palookaville*, Daniel Clowes' *Eightball*, Chris Ware's *Acme Novelty Library* and so on).

Gardner observes to this purpose that "comics by and about collectors and archivists of popular-culture history, such as the work of Seth, Deitch, and Ware, all seems explicitly designed in different ways to both encourage and frustrate the collector response in their readers" (Gardner 2012: 173-74). As David M. Ball writes, "Ware's publications simultaneously seek to fascinate and infuriate collectors with their variable sizes, editions, serialized iterations, and cut-out dioramas that encourage readers to alternately destroy and preserve […] the text and subsequently show them in their own personal floor display" (in Gardner 2012: 174).

The complete setup of Ware's Building Stories (2012)

If *Building Stories* immediately comes to mind, another example of this antithetical tension is provided by *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth.* As Mauro remarks (2010: 19), early in the comic Ware provides a zoetrope on a single double-sided page; but because the zoetrope is printed on a single sheet, it is impossible to realize it without

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first memorizing the instructions before "waking up the pieces on the other side" (Ware 2003)[176].

Accordingly, in the *Acme Novelty Library*, with the typical self-reflexivity that characterizes his production, Chris Ware meditates on the very nature of collecting, suggesting a clear conclusion: "fetishized consumerism is absurd and results in a lack of fulfillment. This frustrated sense of fulfillment found in consumerism finds its corollary in collecting. Indeed, purchasing or collecting comics enacts this search for fulfillment" (Mauro 2010: 6). The frustration of collecting fulfilment is echoed and mirrored in Ware's stories by the constant "frustration of the desire for the complete fulfillment of meaning" (Mauro 2010: 17).

This struggle towards fulfilment and closure is the very propellant of the drive towards the completeness of a collection, at the same time a nostalgic quest to reform the unity lost in one's (and one object's) past and a meaning-making strategy that keeps the collector closer to the objects she treasures.

3.8.3. In the flesh: comics materiality, distribution, and the digital age

As Benjamin observed, "collectors are beings with tactile instincts" (1999: 206). Readers "never confront abstract, idealized texts detached from any materiality" (Chartier 2002, in Griswold et al. 2011: 21): "books are objects. On a table, on bookshelves, in store windows, they wait for someone to come and deliver them from their materiality, from their immobility" (Poulet 1969: 53). Considering the material properties of book, Lenaghan and Naffziger note, "means considering how the physical act of reading is directly tied to the physicality of books themselves" (2011: 21, 22). The text, Hague observes, "is only one part of a larger field of enquiry that also takes account of the physicality of the comic as object (physical interface), the surroundings in which the act of reading takes place (space, habitat) and the physical capabilities of the reader (human body)" (2014: 22). Furthermore, "when we find ourselves turning a book over and over in our hands, feeling it and gazing at it, remarking its tactile and visual feel—in other

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[176] Interestingly, for Bredehoft the zoetrope signals Ware's "literalization of reader-character identification: the reader who cuts out and assembles the zoetrope is literally engaged in the same activity as Jimmy" (2006: 870).

words, when our reading becomes re-embodied—then we consider the opacity of the material medium" (2014: 22).

Reading comics is then a constant interplay between optic and haptic, between a visual and a tactile experience: "while the optic view embraces the aesthetic whole of the comic page's composition, the haptic grasps the texture of the text and the closeness of seeing each panel. Each view, whether distant or near, frustrates the apprehension of the complete meaning of the image and text" (Mauro 2010: 18). In this sense, Hague (2014) suggests that materiality in comics is a resistance to convergence (as envisioned by Jenkins 2006; Green and Jenkins 2011; Jenkins et al. 2013), and Geraghty affirms that "in an age where digital culture threatens to replace older forms and formats of entertainment, the material objects that fans collect remain solid signifiers of the historical significance of previous media texts" (2014: 2). Furthermore, as Sabin remarks, reading comics is a three-dimensioned, very physical act, that can (up to now) only be provided by paper:

> They can be bent, rolled-up, roughly opened or whatever. They can be held in different ways: cradled in your hand or gripped at the edges. We know how far into a comic we've read because we can feel how many pages are left. There are also smells: of dust, glue and paper. Compared to this very sensual experience, clicking a mouse just isn't the same. (Sabin 2000: 52, qt. in Hague 2014: 23)

Another good example of the same process is provided by Mel Gibson's excellent study on nostalgia for girls' comics in the UK (2015). Gibson recounts:

> Memories took several forms in the research. The comic as object, or even at the level of a title, acted as a trigger. […] there were often comments about how the paper felt, or the scent of the ink. Where comics were actually present, they were touched, smelt and only after that actually opened, flicked through, often with exclamations about stories or images. Memory incorporated the materiality of the comic, the tactile aspects of the object, as well as narratives and images. (Gibson 2015: 176-77)[177]

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[177] Several of Gibson informants even "associated shiny paper with coldness and fuzzy paper with warmth" (2015: 121), confirming the strict interaction between nostalgia and the senses.

Sensations play a clear role in the process of physically remembering and nostalgiazing about an object, and the smell of old comics is often recalled when talking to comic fans (Hague 2014: 126). In fact, while talking about smell and taste, Hague affirms that "senses generate strong memories for readers, and they evoke particular contexts of consumption, tying the act of reading to moments in time, moments of performance" (2014: 146[178]). Furthermore, Hague notably defines comics as "a multisensory experience" (2014: 25), as opposed to McCloud's idea of it as a "mono-sensory" – visual – medium (1993: 89), and he does so in describing several ways comics are physically experienced by their audience.

This strict relation with the material object also implies the fact that comics fandom is "rather unique in relation to other popular culture fan communities because it is almost exclusively centered around a physical, possessable text" (Brown 1997: 22). Comics books indeed "need to be purchased and collected to have any impact on fans" (Pustz 1999: 19).

It is most evident, then, that the relationship between consumers and comic books has been heavily influenced by the type of distribution available. A useful example will come again from the American and British market.

Woo notices on this purpose that "there was a time when collecting was prerequisite to reading comics with any commitment because fans simply could not rely on newsstand distribution", for "distribution channels were unpredictable prior to the creation of the direct market of specialty retailers" (2012: 186). In Beerbohm's analysis (1999), the comic industry's transition to the direct market is seen in this sense as the 'institutionalisation' (or, in other words, the 'rationalisation': Gabilliet 2010: 86; Woo 2011: 127) "of the hitherto informal collecting practices of sometimes highly entrepreneurial fans" (Steirer 2014: 457).

As Dittmer sums up,

> Collecting these comics had long been a pastime for fans, but direct marketing
> changed the basis for this market. […] comic book stores emerged as the primary

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[178] Hague even affirms that "smell and taste subvert duration and linearity. They deny us the possibility for a clear, logical path forward by pulling us backwards into our memories and personal experience" (2014: 124).

site for purchasing comics, and comics at newsstands evaporated. Comic book stores bought comics from the publishers at a discount but forfeited their opportunity to return unsold merchandise, meaning that supply could better reflect actual demand. The remaining unsold comic books then were fed into the market for "back issues," where they either went up in value as collectibles or stagnated if deemed unimportant by collectors. (2014: 76)

Now, if newsstand and other forms of retail distribution had led to a "modernist generic homogeneity, which forced companies to produce for a mass market" and shaped "the kinds of stories that could be told" (Dittmer 2014: 77), the shift to direct marketing and the contemporary implementation of graphic design software enabled publishers to print collector's editions, often differing only for their cover, "that helped to inflate the collector's market, with fans purchasing multiple copies of the same comic with no intention of reading them, but instead sealing them up in plastic collectors' bags to maintain value" (2014: 76).

The comic book had been reworked "from a disposable object to a collectible, and also from a modern Fordist product to a plural, niche-marketed one" (2014: 77), and was now framed as collectible "via advertising, limited distribution arrangements and actual changes to the material form of the comic" (Steirer 2014: 457). The transition from mass market to direct market hence created since the 1970s a culture "organised around ownership and exchange":

Polyethylene bags, acid-free boards and other products for storage and display became essential for serious fans, while price guides helped institutionalise a burgeoning secondary market. Initially in response to these trends, but later contributing to their development, publishers such as DC and Marvel sought to reframe their comics as collectibles through the introduction of speciality covers, poly-bagged inserts, limited print runs and variant editions. Even after the implosion of the comic-book industry in the late 1990s – usually blamed on 'collecting fever'— these and other cultural markers of collecting have persisted as important features of comic-book culture. (Steirer 2014: 455)

It was exactly when the market started to crash, in the late 1980s, that "just about every new comics series was commissioned on the basis that it would eventually be collected into a graphic novel, while at the same time there was a rush to repackage runs of four,

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six or eight comics into album form even if they had no thematic unity (thus perverting the meaning of 'graphic novel' into a marketing tool)" (Sabin 1996: 167).

However, graphic novels and more adult comics continued to gain importance in terms of sales, while declining sales in serial comic books suggest that "a chapter in the history of the form might be coming to an end, and the turn to book form—the trade comic or the graphic novel—must contend with the decline of print sales because of electronic books and digital distribution" (Gardner 2012: 191-92). As a consequence, "since the Second Hype of the graphic novel from 2000 on, many of these works have not been repackaged or remarketed comic books but were immediately published in book format" (Hescher 2016: 32).

Now, the issue of the 'materiality of the book' is "a crucial element in the analysis of the graphic novel that sets it apart from the world of comics". (Baetens and Frey 2015: 129). Pustz underlines how the "quality bindings and paper" of Sandman's publications made them *proper* books,

> meant to be shelved with other works of fiction found in more traditional text forms. This format is also more durable than standard comics, thereby encouraging loaning, sharing, and multiple reading, all of which were common among Sandman fans. That this audience was quite literate was demonstrated by the fact that introductions to the trade paperbacks were written by prominent, well-respected writers. (1999: 86)

The graphic novel "enabled major comics publishers to expand out of the direct market of comics speciality stores and target new kinds of consumers through mass-market bookstores" (Steirer 2014: 456), reaching outside of "the implicitly subcultural space of the comic-bookstore" and aiming at "new and returning readers that previous generations of collector–fans simply did not have" (Woo 2012: 192). Yet, as Beaty notices, "from the point of view of investment potential, the turn towards graphic novels that was so critical in terms of legitimating comics as cultural material for adults" was at the same time "derided by *Overstreet* as 'a real dilemma for the collector in our hobby' because graphic novels, like prose novels, 'generally do not appreciate in value'" (Beaty 2012: 162).

Yet this aspect too is getting more nuanced in the more mature phase of graphic novel. Reprints and limited editions are growing in frequency, and their nature is getting more often complex in relation to issues of collecting. If we consider Chris Ware's first issue of the *Acme Novelty Library*, we can see, on the grey band which binds the cover, a note

to the potential buyers, saying: "COLLECTORS: This is copy number XXX of a total press run of 875,000. Please store in a clean, dry place, away from light, preferably in an acid-free 4m or greater mylar, with backing board" (2008). As Mauro remarks,

> It is with the accidental removal of the grey band, entitled "The World's Smallest Comic Strip," that the collecting motif becomes manifest. The removal of the strip is the only means of discovering the "Apology and Souvenir Comic Strip," yet this act also devalues the comic. The Acme Novelty Library is no longer "O.C.", or original condition. (Mauro 2010: 5)

In this reflection on the act of collecting and the fetishization of the collected object, Ware exposes how, on the one hand, "the loss of the monetary value of an object is necessary for one to take pleasure and fulfillment from it. On the other hand, pleasure is taken from maintaining the object's monetary value" (Mauro 2010: 5).

Besides, the very recent development of the digital-comic marketplace has further complicated the scenario.

As Steirer remarks, "whereas collecting has historically been premised upon the material qualities of physical objects published in limited supply, digital comics are functionally immaterial and lack natural supply constraints" (Steirer 2014: 455).

The first electronic sell-through (EST) for digital comics began in late 2007 with the launch of Marvel Digital Comics Unlimited (Steirer 2014: 459-60). Between 2008 and 2012, several similar services debuted:

> These included both subscription-based, unlimited-access services such as Archie Unlimited, and transactional EST services, such as iVerse, Panelfly, ComiXology, Graphic.ly, the Class Comics Digital Store and Dark Horse Digital. […] By the end of 2012, pre-existing digital book stores, including iTunes, Barnes & Noble's Nook and Amazon's Kindle store, had entered the market as well, offering via EST single issues from select publishers and a wide array of graphic novels. (Steirer 2014: 460)

The market began to change form around 2012, with a single EST service, ComiXology, growing in proportion until managing to account for approximately 76 per cent of sales (Steirer 2014: 460).

EST represent, according to Steirer, "a challenge to comics' collecting-based culture, particularly as the translation of comics into digital form has disabled many of the activities that constitute collecting, including hunting for particular books, organising one's collection and exchanging pieces of one's collection" (Steirer 2014: 456). The greatest change with digital distribution, though, is given by the impossibility to sell second-hand comics:

> Without the option to sell, and without the secondary market, comic consumers thus lose both a specific means of interacting at the individual level with their collection and a broader, trans-personal framework through which their collections take on social meaning. […] The result is a very different social field, wherein the dynamic, synthesising system of the secondary market has been replaced by the additive, rhizomatic system(s) of social media with its reliance on 'likes', links and recommendations. (Steirer 2014: 464)

Web-based communities are a new paradigm which has only begun to be taken into account[179]; but what we can say already is that although the Internet essentially reflects "the range of activities in which popular audiences already engaged before the diffusion of online media" (Sandvoss 2011a: 71), it surely increased the speed of communication[180], "making it easier to access media, engage with others, and create one's own content" (Busse and Gray 2011: 430). Furthermore, Busse and Gray warn that

> the similarity in terms of behavior and textual productions obscures the clear differences between traditional fan communities and new industry-driven fans: fandoms as specific social and cultural formations – as communities – have a history, a continuity, and a sense of identity that are at times profoundly distinct from contemporary convergence culture. (2011: 431)

Fans' main use of the digital media, assert Sandvoss and Kearns, is thus "not as a place of association but one in which they could select particular texts (clips, virals and other information) as both an archive (Sandvoss 2011a) and a fair" (Sandvoss and Kearns 2014: 101)[181].

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[179] Among the most interesting contributions on the matter, there are Hellekson and Busse (2006); Booth (2010); Booth (2015).
[180] To this extent, Jenkins reworked his idea of fans as textual poachers by tweaking it via Pierre Levy's idea of "collective intelligence" (see Jenkins 2006, chap. 6).
[181] On collecting, fandom and the internet, see also Geraghty (2014, chap. 7).

The result is "a form of nostalgia for childhood that incorporates the past but does not mourn its passing, as it remains very much alive in the present" (Geraghty 2016: 218), and that unfolds through a double nostalgic appeal. On the one hand, through its remediation it keeps "alive in the electronic ether" old media forms and images of the past (Geraghty 2016: 218): the Internet thus "becomes an archive, a virtual space that fans can enter whenever they like to access memories and images that contribute to meta-narratives of their favourite franchise" (Geraghty 2014: 4).

On the other hand, it makes possible to more easily rediscover and collect physical objects belonging to the realm of childhood or adolescence that might otherwise "have been thrown out, lost or just forgotten" (2016: 218). Paradoxically, not only "collecting toys, merchandise and other collectibles drawn from the popular entertainment industries enables fans to have a corporeal connection with a culture that is now almost all online, digital and inherently ephemeral" (Geraghty 2014: 180-81), but it is possible mainly, if not exclusively, *thanks to* that same digital culture: "it is not simply that the Internet, as a new medium, refashions the past within the languages of the present, so that vestiges of the past may be kept alive. Like most new media, in fact, the Internet has strengthened the cultural weight of the past, increasing its intelligibility and accessibility" (Straw 2007: 4).

3.8.4. Lads stay lads: nostalgia and the eternal (male) youth

As I already discussed previously, comic book culture is perceived as male defined, something that "has permeated both the collective consumer consciousness and the spaces in which those exchanges take place" (Scott 2013: 3.7). "The story of media fandom", Busse argues, "is one steeped in economic and gender concerns, from the beginning, when women began creating the narratives commercial media wouldn't offer - dominated as it is by male producers" (2009: 105). Fan culture, and comics culture notably, is then an environment whose habits and traditions "embody and express manliness and provide common fonts of symbols, images, and practices from which to derive and shape meaning. Even if not 'performed,' such traditions provide metaphors to think with, and sometimes to live by" (Bronner 2005: xii[182]). One consequence, as Sabin remarks, is the

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[182] For similar reflections on gendered nostalgia, see Wall's very interesting analysis of fandom regarding Conan the Barbarian (Wall 2013).

"sad fact that titles for girls rarely feature in histories of modern comics: the 1990s collectors' market is essentially uninterested in them, and therefore they remain a forgotten story" (1996: 81, also in Gibson 2015: 22).

It is not only a matter of finding sociality spaces nor of reconstructing the history of the medium, though; rather, it is also an issue of how fan consumption, collecting and nostalgia are experienced by most of the girl audience.

In this sense, Geraghty remarks that "those who relive their childhood through consumption and nostalgia for a previous generation are predominantly men" (2014: 61). Accordingly, one of Mel Gibson's findings, obtained through direct interviews, is that a nostalgic interest in comics for girls is (seen as) "an exceptional occurrence" (Gibson 2015: 22). In an interview with a second-hand book shop owner, the situation he outlined is that in the case of collectors "lads stay lads you know, and they get nostalgic. They've got more money now, see, so they start collecting the things that they either didn't have, or that their mothers threw away" (Gibson 2015: 22).

The idea that "lads stay lads" is not exclusive of Gibson's interviewee; according to Gary Cross, on the contrary, there has been a change in male maturity strictly connected to yearning things from the past, that has given birth to a generation of 'boy-men' who are "frustrated and confused about what maturity is and whether they can or want to achieve it" (2008: 1) and consequently continue to act "as if they were teenagers: playing video games, collecting toys, driving fast cars, not settling down to have a family". What Cross calls 'boy-man', then, is a mirror "of contemporary nostalgia in that he does not want to grow old and therefore surrounds himself with things that signify the past" (Geraghty 2014: 61).

As Santo similarly affirms,

> there can be little doubt that entertainment franchises repeatedly position children as fans and increasingly seek to use lifestyle merchandise categories to extend that relationship into adulthood, especially for men. Where male fans had previously been ridiculed for their childlike obsessions with toys, comic books, and other worthless ephemera, there is now a distinct market-driven celebration of male fan refusals to abandon youthful pursuits as a form of rebelliousness against the status quo (see Kimmel 2009, Cross 2010). (Santo 2018: 332)

What is different, then, for woman? It is true that studies on nostalgia (Holbrook and Schindler 1989) suggested "the possibility that each gender may experience and/or express nostalgia in different ways" (Stern 1992: 20), but that seems a consequence rather than a cause. Rather than being, that is, an unlikely *natural* inclination towards a different type of nostalgia, it seems the result of a series of social choices towards a gendered experience of nostalgia. But what are those choices?

In her enlightening study on girls' nostalgia for girls' comics from the past, Gibson identifies several reasons for this occurrence. In the first place, parental perspectives on comics reading during adolescence were "wide ranging, running from approval to complete disgust", expressing their views "through what they allowed their children to read. Comics had to be gender appropriate in many homes, with girls often being directed to girls' comics" (Gibson 2015: 119). Furthermore, expectations were also directed towards class issue, with comics being perceived as a 'lower class' form: "parental disapproval and intervention in girlhood reading was largely based around issues of class and 'proper' femininity" (2015: 126). Analogously, responses to humour titles were negative when raising concerns of "gender-appropriateness, revealing a tendency to consider humour comics as for boys or as 'unladylike' entertainment" (2015: 150). Finally, "being considered too old for comics altogether was another important marker": if it is true that many male collectors equally reported their parents disposing of comics, "whilst female respondents might have thought about the material but had usually never gone back to them, men had gone back either to buy the issues that they had lost or to find new titles" (2015: 134). The difference is in the fact that "childhood, boyhood and comics are intertwined in a more straightforward way than childhood, girlhood and comics", because despite the fact that comics are meant for children, not specifically for either girls or boys, girls are required to "grow out of them", and grow out of their childhood, sooner. (2015: 148-50). Santo notices that

> "geek" is assuredly less bound by actual age ranges than "tween,"[183] whose very
> label implies a physiological endpoint. Boys can choose to remain "geeks" forever,

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[183] *The Urban Dictionary* significantly defines 'tween' as "a girl ages about 9-14...too old for toys, but too young for boys" (2005).

but hormones will eventually age girls out of products directed at "tweens" (Santo 2018: 333)

We can witness here the re-composition of the same stigma I highlighted when talking about women fandom: of gender (being women in a predominantly male culture), class (having to do with low brow material as comics) and age (having to grow up faster than their male counterpart). This also translates in differences in production, with an absence of titles meant to be read by more adult girls (as opposed to more mature 'male' comics), which explains the penchant for graphic novels the female audience seems to have, as the only niche capable to meet a different type of sensibility and present more than occasionally compelling female protagonist, while at the same time offering a more mature content. Gibson speculates in this sense that

> the girls' comic died because there was no real progression for girl readers to an adult equivalent or into nostalgic collecting (there was little fandom or a collectors market for girls' comics until recently). The experience of girl readers is very different to that of boy readers, for whom, as the twentieth century ended, comics were increasingly a medium to grow up with and read as an adult, rather than just a phase in reading. (2015: 180)

As a consequence of these stigmas, girls seem to more commonly see, across generations, "comics as part of a resistance to authority" (2015: 136): "interviewees' association of the girls' comic with pressures about gender roles was also tied up with their relationship with their parents […] Self-determination, then, (in the face of age and gender), was a common thread in accounts of the rejection of the girls' comic" (2015: 144, 145)[184]. Reading comics, Gibson asserts, could be characterized as being at the same time about resisting becoming older and as a rebellion against 'proper' girlhood, stimulated "by the connotations of maleness and working-class-ness associated with the comic form" (2015: 184). The lack of approval of the adult gatekeepers (usually the girls' parents) meant that comics were usually not intended as "cross-generational bonding" (2015: 184). On the

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[184] Elsewhere, Gibson remarks that "in choosing to ally themselves to American products, the girl reader, whilst not necessarily aware of the debates about how comics reflected societal concerns about reading, was rejecting not only perspectives on gender and class, but 'Britishness'" (2015: 160).

contrary, "being forbidden comics, or specific titles, gave the whole medium connotations of rebellion in relation to parents or school" (2015: 184).

In addition, many women relied on swapping comics with both their female and male friends, "as a clandestine arrangement of which parents were often unaware" (2015: 147), which means that "all comic readers were much more flexible" than what was officially perceived (2015: 147) and that "the pattern of readership that emerges in looking at swapping suggests that girlhood, and indeed boyhood, can be seen as unstable categories that continually shift and may be shored up by various texts and practices" (Gibson 2015: 148).

Furthermore, readers rejecting the girls' comic and consuming instead male ones

> saw themselves, in reading 'otherwise', as overtly oppositional, rebelling against the models of girlhood and femininity they perceived in school, peer and family groups. One could characterize their intention as to use reading as a site of resistance, to be subversive. For those rejecting the girls' comic, identity was formed around being `not-girl', an attempted escape from gender assumptions. (2015: 185)

If, then, on one side the nostalgic relation towards girls comics is the same as for every other kind of comics – that is, they act "as physical reminders of key moments in girlhood and helped to locate them in time and in socio-historical context" (Gibson 2015: 192), Gibson's interviews "ranged much more widely than that, with many reporting memories pound up with tensions, trauma and often anger", especially related to issues of "education and class" (2015: 193).

It should be logical to believe, then, that an increasing change in the perception and evaluation of appropriateness of reading comics for girls should take place, and that a consequence of this change should be a change in collecting habits, with more and more women taking up collecting in the next future.

As for many other hypothesis, though, only time (and further research) will provide an answer to the matter.

3.9. Collectors, comics and nostalgia

In this section, I have tried to show the links between collecting and nostalgia, by following three main paths.

In the first place, I investigated the emotional involvement collectors develop towards their possession, and how this is in turn linked to the embodiment, on the behalf of the collected object, of qualities related to the stability their owner possessed during (or projected to) their youth.

In the second place, I signalled the analogies between the chase for closure that characterises the act of reading and its equivalent in the collecting drive, and the enhancement of the nostalgic drive this process has on collectors.

In the third place, I discussed issues related to the objects' materiality, and the implications they have in the evolution of comics collecting and nostalgia, especially on the light of the recent digital turn.

Finally, I further considered issues of gender and nostalgia, trying to answer why collecting comics seems to be an almost exclusively male habit.

Section three: close readings

General overview and outline of this section

This section will be dedicated to close readings. I will try to apply the critical framework aiming towards a poetics of nostalgia, that I built in the previous two sections, to a small sample of primary sources.

Since I mentioned already several examples (and countless more could be quoted), I will consider here three very peculiar cases, that can be put along a continuum from the most prototypically nostalgic to the less.

My first close reading will then be dedicated to Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* (1996), that I consider to be the closest to *the* prototypical nostalgic work (and without a doubt *a* prototypically nostalgic one). I will try to show how stylistic, thematic and structural features reinforce the protagonist's nostalgia and concur in eliciting a nostalgic reaction in the reader.

The second close reading will be devoted to Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006), that combines heavily nostalgic features (the sepia tones, the migration theme, and so on) to others that should in principle be perceived as anti-nostalgic (the absence of a narrator, the surrealistic setting, etc.).

The third and final close reading will concern Richard McGuire's *Here* (2014). It is the case in which anti-nostalgic tensions are stronger, yet it betrays several nostalgic features as well, beginning with the general sense of loss and impermanence that pervades the whole book. I will try to isolate those features and show the ambivalent momentum of McGuire's work.

4. Close Readings

4.1. Portrait of the Artist as a Nostalgic: Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken*

General overview

Seth's own comic series, *Palookaville*, debuted in 1991 with Drawn and Quarterly. It consisted of pseudo-autobiographical sketches drawn in a *passé* style, often featuring the author's friends and colleagues Chester Brown and Joe Matt. *GL* first appeared in serialized form in issues 4-9 of *Palookaville*, later being collected as a book (a graphic novel - or a 'picture-novella', as stated on the cover) in 1996, again by Drawn and Quarterly. Its narrative follows the quest of the author's alter ego (from now on, 'Seth') for the work and persona of Kalo, a forgotten 1950s cartoonist.

Alternative comics, since their early times, have often revolved around a more or less fictionalized version of their author's life, as is the case for Robert Crumb, Harvey Pekar, Art Spiegelman, Phoebe Gloeckner and Lynda Barry – all of whom have been influential for Seth's artistic choices, together with Matt and Brown (with whom Seth formed what Beaty defined "the Toronto School of autobiographical cartooning": Beaty 2011: 248). Following in their footsteps, Seth merges "fictive and historical heterocosms" (Marrone 2016: 150) in an autofiction where the "promise to elevate the legitimacy of both the medium and the artist" (Beaty 2007: 144), typical of autobiography, is interrogated by a story whose regime of liminal truth "points to the deliberate manipulation of material that even the most apparently neutral history entails" (Marrone 2016: 165).

The story of *GL* begins during Christmas 1986 and follows 'Seth' as he wanders around his homeplace of London, Ontario, thinking about a Schultz' sketch on snow. Reminiscing about a bygone past, treasuring old comics and being obsessively self-involved will be the three most remarkable habits of 'Seth' in the course of the book. He will stroll around Toronto while complaining about the present age and random people with his close friend 'Chet' Brown, date and break up with a witty woman named Ruthie, return twice to his mother's house and once to his birthplace, Strathroy, which he will discover is also the place where the (fictional) cartoonist Jack 'Kalo' Kalloway died. After

finding out about this obscure 1950s author in an old issue of *The New Yorker*, 'Seth' will spend most of the book trying to track him down and obsessing about him. He will seek out Kalo's only surviving relatives (his mother and daughter) and line up eleven Kalo sketches before the back cover, as the only remains of his artistic production and 'proof' of his existence.

Nostalgia's unclear status emerges when considering criticisms concerning Seth, whose nostalgic nature, Grace affirms, "has become a truism, a largely unexamined assertion about how his work privileges the past over the present" (2017: 150). Grace opposes instead Heer's assertion that Seth "is acutely aware of the dangers of escapism", and Marrone's, who considers Seth "too self-aware" to be nostalgic, since he is "constantly undercutting the credibility of nostalgic impulses" (2016: 22) and second-guessing his own attitude. Grace believes that 'Seth' is an unreliable narrator whose nostalgic tirades should not be taken at face value; the most significant proofs he appeals to are Seth's ambivalent impulses towards longing for the past and the fact that Kalo is "a fictional construct, a representation of a nonexistent past rather than a historically situated figure" (2017: 151).

The reader familiar with Seth's production should already infer how, reading the above description in the light of my critical framework, Seth is to be read as an ultimate nostalgic. It is a concern that recurs in several of his statements: "Am I nostalgic? Can you feel nostalgic for an era you never lived in?", he asks rhetorically (in Miller 2015: 70) - but from the perspective taken here it should be obvious that one can. Significantly, he continues by saying

> I don't think much of this present time. Certainly, here in North America, things
> couldn't be cheaper, uglier, or more vulgar than they currently are (well, they could,
> and probably will be - in the near future) (in Miller 2015: 70).

Of course, *GL* contains several self-critical passages as well, but they only serve to indicate the level of reflexivity of 'Seth''s feeling, without deadening it. The book is instead infused with 'Seth''s "everything-was-better-in-the-past speech[es]" (16): "why do people always have to wreck everything?" (13); "I'm immersed in my past – wallowing in it. I look at my childhood like it's some sort of golden key" (41); "As awful

as things are right now, I'd be more than happy if the world would just stay relatively like this until I die" (64); "Often, when you return to a place you knew only as a child, you discover how empty and unfamiliar that place has become" (89). This last one is almost literally Kant's definition of nostalgia, who observed that, when the nostalgic-struck finally succeeded in coming home, they found "their anticipation deceived [...]: they think that everything has been wholly transformed, but in fact it is that they cannot bring back their youth with them" (in Illbruck 2012: 131).

Although these textual elements alone would be sufficient to label *GL* as a nostalgic work, the book makes use of a series of elements on different levels (structural, thematic and stylistic) that reinforce and enhance the nostalgic drive. In the following sections, I will analyse these different levels at work in the graphic novel in order to work towards a general poetics of nostalgia in comics.

4.1.1. Structure 1: mediators and gaps

As said, the prototypical thematic example of a nostalgia narrative is the representation of a main character living far from their homeplace and longing for the past, acting as a mediator and a bridge towards the reader's potential nostalgia. Usually, they are the main focalizers and most often the narrators of the story as well (needless to say, this is fully the case for 'Seth'). This entails establishing a sense of closeness or relatability with the character, which in turn can make the reader both aware of the nostalgic feeling and eventually moved by it. We saw that, according to Eder, when characters comply with certain pre-conditions (having a prominent role in the main narrative, being multi-faceted, living in a well-defined fictional world that clearly resembles ours), the audience will most likely feel close to them, in five different ways: spatiotemporal proximity; knowing the character's personality and general traits; perceiving similarity and familiarity in terms of "age, gender, class, ethnic background" and "wish identification"; imagined interaction; affective closeness (Eder 2006: 70-75).

This reflects the importance of having a narrative that follows so strictly its protagonist through a "natural storytelling, where you follow someone walking around and you see it as if you're a ghost walking with them" (Seth, in Marrone 2016: 124). On one hand, this allows for depicting ephemeral details of the urban landscape that lend themselves to

be browsed by the reader; on the other, the protagonist's nostalgia is clearly perceived by the reader, regardless of his adhesion to it, by simple virtue of the repeated exposure to 'Seth' (2016: 125-27).

The reader's emotional investment in the story is not only favoured by her closeness to the narrator/protagonist, but strengthened by her involvement in the story as well, which increases with her enjoyment of a text.

Comics' multimodality involves the multiplication and combination of narrative strategies; as Gardner affirms, this brings together "different semantic systems (figural, textual, symbolic) into a crowded field where meaning is both collaborative and competitive—between images, between frames, and between reader and writer" (2012: xi). As a result, there are several kinds of gaps in comics: texts and their elisions, images and their ellipses, and the divergence between the codes, all concurring in demanding active participation from the reader. Of course, the most evident gap is the one between panels – for, in Gardner's words, "even in the most simplistic narratives, the reader imaginatively fills in this space with the 'missing' action. All comics are necessarily collaborative texts between the imagination of the author/artist and that of the reader" (2012: 173). Although Gardner builds on McCloud's theories (1993), Groensteen (1999) and Mikkonen (2017) make similar claims, which are nonetheless more centred on the relationships established between the panels and less on the physical gutter.

Two other elements in *GL* concur to create a gappy structure. The first is the juxtaposition of shorter narrative arcs (vestiges of the episodic nature of the original serial publication) that needs the reader's participation to weave together a unified story from the "variety of discrete moments, images, and ministories" Seth provides "without making explicit the connection between them" (Marrone 2016: 121). The second is the incorporation of blank panels, "operating as pauses", or Seth's "distinctive text plates, black panels with white block text, which appear with increasing regularity over the course of his career" (2016: 138). Both require a high level of interaction and projection of the reader's experience into the narrative, which in turn can result in a strengthened and more involved experience of the nostalgia permeating the graphic novel.

4.1.2. Structure 2: simplicity, iterations and intertextual references

As a general rule, nostalgic narratives need simple configurations; ideally, they assume the binary format of a chronological (now/then), structural (embedding/embedded) and possibly spatial (here/there) dichotomy. The prototypical nostalgic structure is made up of two distinct temporal spheres (one of which may be, to a certain extent, implicit). They would encompass an indefinite number of singular events, and split the narrative in two halves, one of which is perceived to be irretrievable. Apparently, Seth only marginally uses this technique, when performing some rare flashbacks (*GL* 90, 98-99, 126-27). Nonetheless, his visual grammar and historical referents are so firmly based in the 1950s that they submerge the narrative without the need of a proper storyline set in that period.

Furthermore, according to Salmose, the use of repetitions, often as a combination of analepses and prolepses enhances nostalgia. Iterative frequency, he observes, reinforces the evocation of "rituals and recurring events", in the kind of reminiscence that "lacks the specificity of memory and embraces the vagueness of nostalgi[a]" (2012: 207);

Now, not only are comics an art of showing and reading through iteration, but the whole narrative arc of *GL* is analogously "structured around several returns to several different homes" (Marrone 2016: 41). The rest of the times 'Seth' spends in Toronto, he mostly has conversations with his friend Chester Brown about comics, begins and ends a relationship and comments over passing strangers, a repetition compulsion caused by "a Freudian-inflected failure to resolve inner conflicts, which often shows itself in fixed patterns of behavior" (2016: 94-95). This is underlined by a narrative-dominant page layout which reinforces the regular rhythm of the story, encouraging what Marrone, as we will see, calls *browsing*.

Pastiche, to sum up Jameson's observations, always works towards nostalgia, aiming to recapture the atmosphere and stylistic features of the past, limiting itself to a simple imitation of the surface appearance of past works (Jameson 1991: 279-296): in his own words, "pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs" (1991: 17). *GL* is indeed a double pastiche: a narrative pastiche (due to the extended use of noir tropes) and a stylistic one (the forgery of a comic author of *The New Yorker*, with eleven gags

completely made up by Seth in the manner of Peter Arno, a real 1950s *New Yorker* cartoonist, massively influential for Seth's own style).

The whole search for a semi-unknown 1950s author, in fact, is essentially a detective story, because of its structure and the stylistic elements that contour and reinforce it: the protagonist's ubiquitous long coat and cigarettes, the chromatic palette, the recurrent use of voice overs and the frequent cliff-hangers. The combination of those elements turns *GL* into a noir pastiche whose quest is led by one author's alter ego to the other author's alter ego, both different embodiments of 'Seth's' nostalgic drive. At the same time, since the beginning of *GL* 'Seth' declares his (other) game, affirming "It seems like I'm always relating things that happen to me back to some mouldy old comic gag" (2). The (in)famous eleven Kalo gags, set in the peritext before the back cover, are then Seth's game of reproducing "the *mise-en-page* of magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *New Yorker*" (Marrone 2016: 134).

Kalo/Arno is nonetheless far from being the only comic author or character mentioned in the course of the book; on the contrary, there are Schultz (*GL*, 2), Darrow (3), Steig, Hoff, Addams, Hokinson (18), Hatlo (31), Nancy, Andy Capp, Little Nipper (42), Ward (52), Wenzel, DeCarlo (53), Tintin (76-77), Dick Tracy, Clark Kent (94), Key (95), the swiping of an entire Turok vignette, lettering included (108), Webster, Frise, Point, Gray, Hokinson (109), Wright (119), Burke, Ripley, Kraus (157). This impressive list comes with a two-page glossary at the end of the book, indexing the archive out of which the book seems to be assembled. Truly, then, a comic book collector as Seth "should be described as a *curatorial consumer*, a curator, an archivist, and a preservationist for artifacts that have meaning for their cultural lives" (Tankel and Murphy 1998: 66).

4.1.3. Motifs 1: times and places

The crucial element of nostalgia, as I said, is the "irreversibility of time and the fading of all stable molecules around us, whether that is a sand castle, a human life, or the universe". The "teleological aspect of time", the impermanence, are the matters most evidently causing "the pain and melancholia" of nostalgia (Salmose 2012: 252).

Everything that foregrounds this process acts therefore as *chronological signpost*, triggering nostalgia.

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Season changing (Seth 1996)

Chronological signposts constitute the most evident category to isolate in *GL*. They range from passing weathers and seasons (*GL*, 1-3, 29-32, 113-118 – the last five pages make up for two years going on with few panels of changing weathers) to celebrations (the story starts during the Christmas of '86); from some statues (74) to countless drawn photographs (the whole 'Kalo' album surrounding the story [146-50] as well as the picture of Seth himself addressed as Kalo, a gentle nod to his game of *doppelgängers*). There are sentences such as "My mother's apartment is sealed in amber", "Nothing changes here" (11), and "I retreat to [childhood] memories often when I'm depressed", (12). There are even three metaphors for the inevitability of transience: the sequence where 'Seth' and Chet go see *Harvey* (51), a 1950 movie about an invisible rabbit capable of stopping time; the entire kite dream (66-68), with its handover implications, from the

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old generation to the new one; and the sickness of Boris, 'Seth''s cat, a direct reminder of mortality (70).
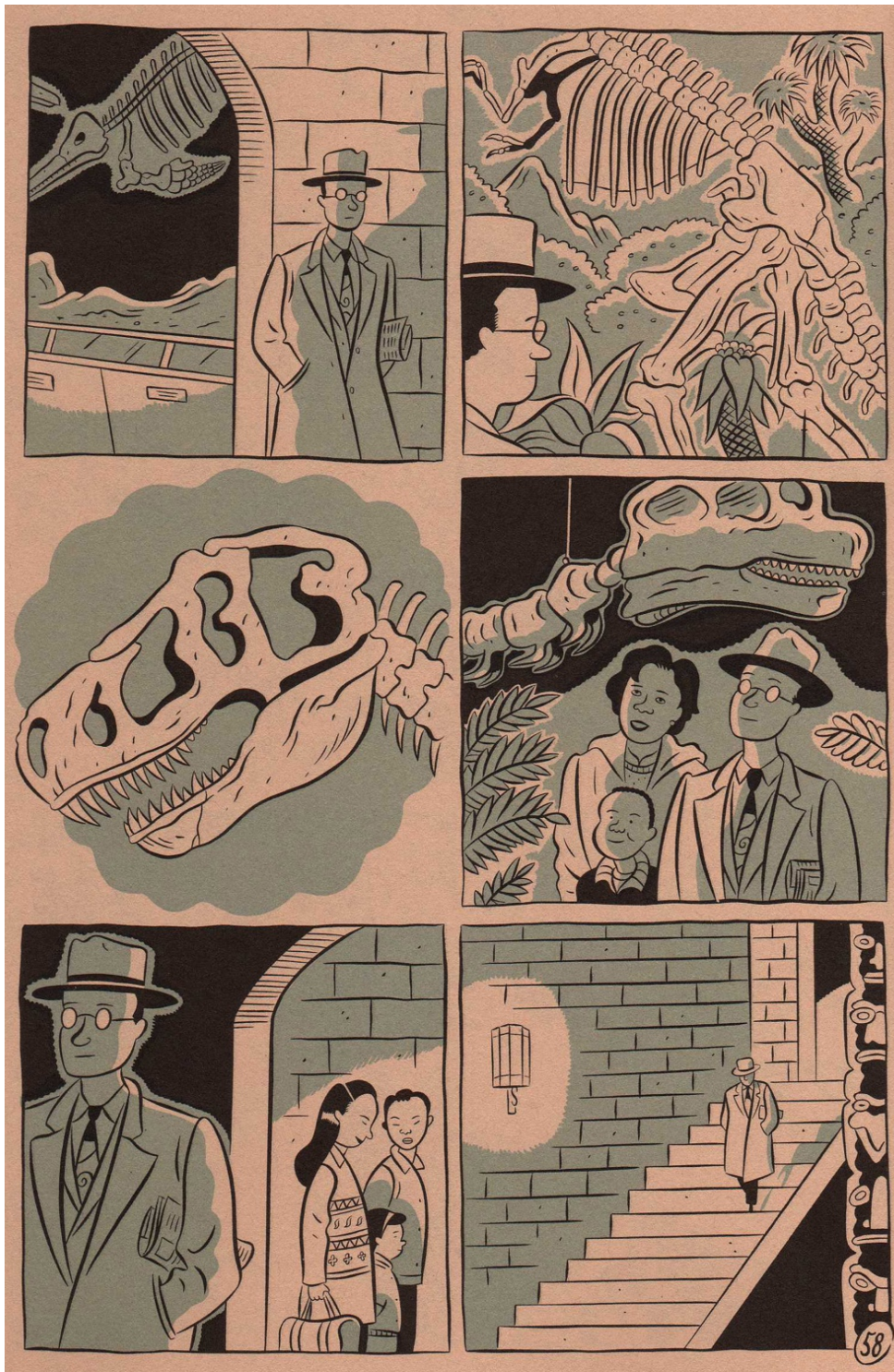
'Seth' at the Natural History Museum (Seth 1996)

The most pristine example is probably the whole, very significant sequence at the Natural History Museum (57-59), which stands, among other things, as a metaphor for the past (the skeletons of dinosaurs are a clear reminder of the process of time and its action, and museums are embodiments of the archival drive). This is reinforced because the museum collection is reported to have been organized in the 1950s, so that thirty years after, when 'Seth' goes to see it, it exhibits the kind of "primitive, native beauty" (61) that 'Seth' identifies with the period, bemoaning the possibility of one day finding it "all renovated and hi-tech" (61), with an enlarged audience, transforming what was a "quiet, wonderful place" (61) into another, anonymous slice of contemporaneity.

There is another implication in the image of this old, antiquated museum dedicated to a past that is old in a different way. As MacDonald affirms, the past is not just an abstract concept, it is also "materialised in bodies, things, buildings and places. It is felt, experienced and expressed through objects, such as ruined buildings, monuments, flared trousers or the marks of wear on old furniture" (2013: 79). Ruins become "symptomatic for the time arrow," further confirming that everything "inevitably will decay and die" (Salmose 2012: 246).

Not unsurprisingly, the idea of decay is a key concern in *GL*, mirrored in the elegant but anachronistic buildings that occupy most of the long shots of the work, which are underlined by Seth's own reflections: "I wonder, what is it about these sort [*sic*] of industrial areas that makes me feel so comfortable?" "It's true that they're very beautiful and humble in their decay" (92) or "There's something in the decay of old things that provokes an evocative sadness for the vanished past […] If those buildings were perfectly preserved it wouldn't be the same" (124).

Possibly, though, the most important experience related to place is that of living somewhere. The relation we entertain with our home is not only that of belonging to, or longing for, a place; it is first and foremost a matter of deciphering reality, one of the most powerful filter to our lives. As mentioned above, in the course of the book 'Seth' is repeatedly taking trains towards his home(s) (*GL* 11-12, 76-79), sometimes wallowing there for some time (4-10). Otherwise, in his adoptive home of Toronto, 'Seth' wanders like a *flâneur* through a city frequently rendered with long shots of urban landscapes,

encouraging the reader to mimic his footsteps and browse those static, quasi-photographic panels that often reduce human beings to silent silhouettes in the dark. Facing urban landscapes, the style changes accordingly, further inclining towards "depth and dimension" (Marrone 2016: 155). Grace also notices how "'Seth', even when he is surrounded by people, is cut off— meaning his turn to the past is also a turn away from the present and life" (2017: 158).

*Modern flânerie in Toronto (Seth 1996)*

4.1.4. Motifs 2: objects and collectors

Collections are "markers of personal history", contributing to the collector's sense of past and present with what Belk defines a "sense of extended self" (1994: 321). They are

"psychic ordering, of individuality, of public and private relationships, and of time and space", which act as "material autobiographies" of their owners, "chronicling the cycle of a life, from the first moment an object strikes a particular personal chord" (Pearce: 1995b: 279) – and, one can add, "forging new narratives" (Marrone 2016: 99) as well.

At the same time, we can agree with Geraghty's remark that the memories "inscribed onto each object in the collection are defined by certain experiences in the collector's life. That is why the importance of childhood memories and nostalgia felt for such times is a fundamental aspect of cult collecting - it informs the processes of building a collection, provides personal meaning and situates each and every object in relation to others and to the collector" (2014: 181).

It is in fact from a blend of both capitalistic accumulation and personal autobiography that derives the "compulsive need to fill in the gaps, to make connections between issues" (Gardner 2012: 173), the quest for a "sense of closure" (Pustz 1999: 80) shared by comic readers and collectors at large. This is, according to Marrone, the similarity between the three "media" of collection, memory and comics (2016: 119, 181) – an idea echoed by Jenkins' remark that "both collections and stories are ways of managing memory" (2017: 232).
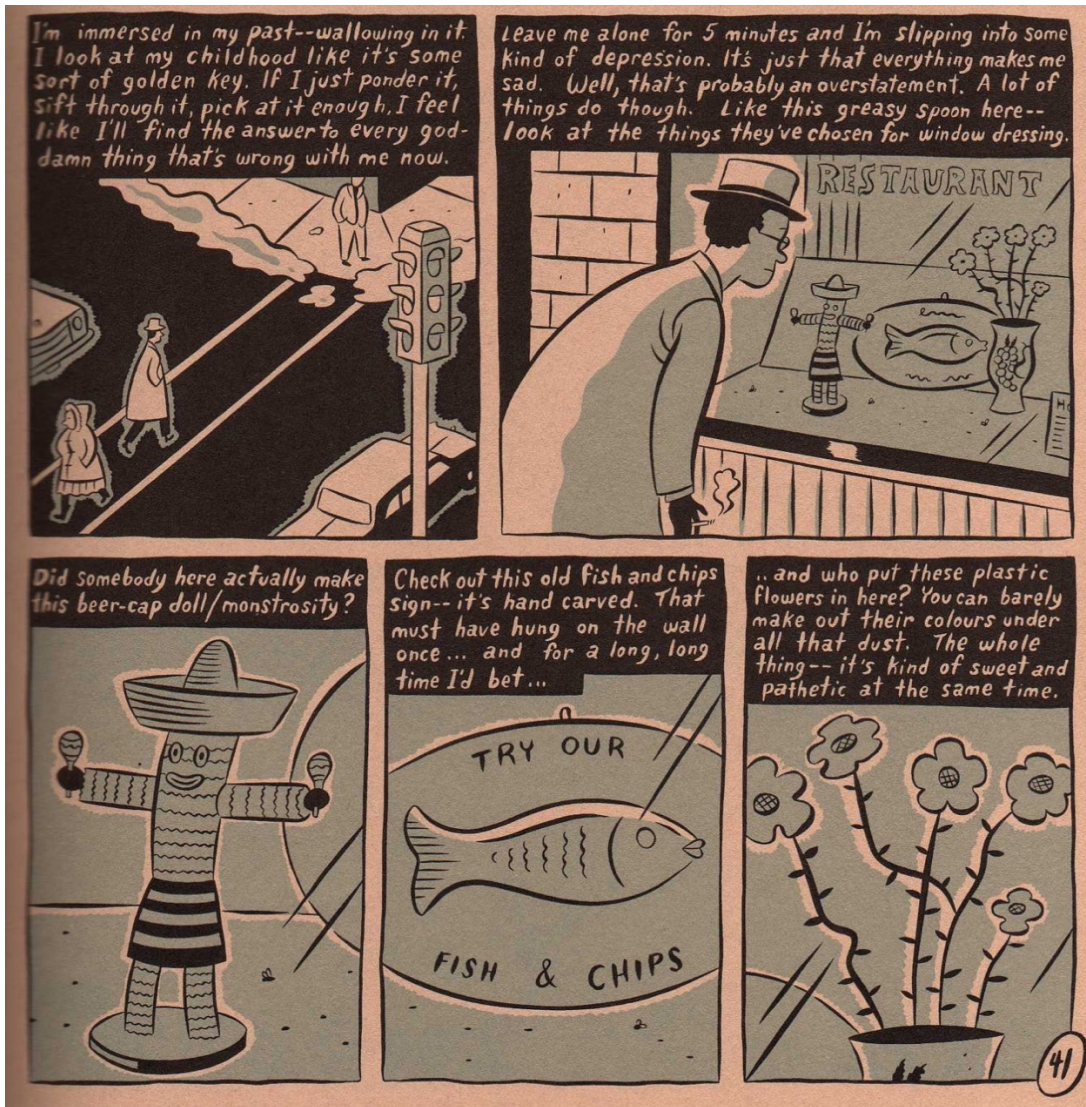
'Seth' watching shop windows (Seth 1996)

'Seth''s status as a collector overlaps with Seth's - who, as stated on the backflap, "divides his time between two passions – working on *Palookaville* and seeking out the work of old-time cartoonists". And although most of his collecting concerns memorabilia from the 1950s, the whole Kalo quest, continuously intersecting with his own youth, is a transparent metaphor of his attempt "to 'recapture the feelings of childhood' by recovering some 'totem' that once slipped through his fingers" (Jenkins 2017: 235).

This merging of collections, youth and the transformative power of comics is summed up by the small poetics manifesto that sees 'Seth' in his childhood room (*GL*, 8-9) full of posters on the walls, immersed on swiping a Darrow illustration from Corey Ford's book

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from the 1950s, *Office Party* – most likely, part of his parents' library which he had explored as a child.
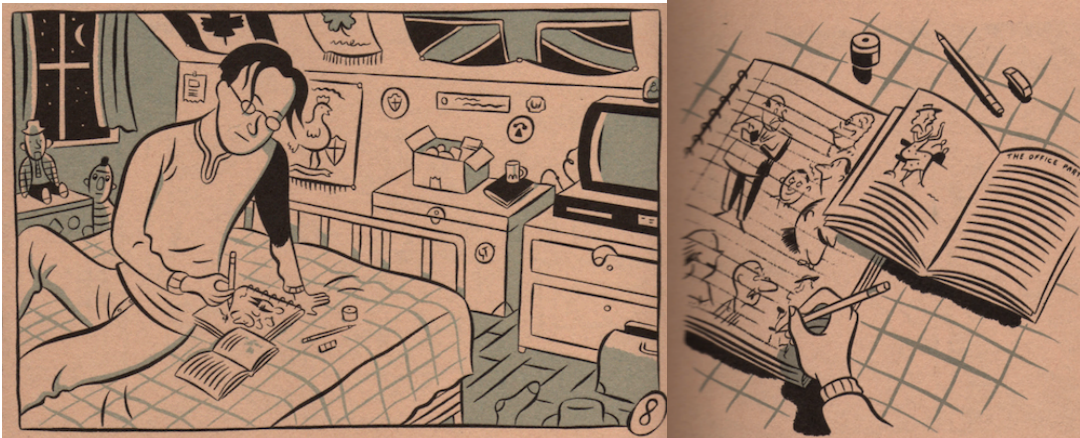
'Seth' swiping in his childhood room (Seth 1996)

Every element of Seth's nostalgia is present in this small space: his fascination for the times he was younger (vicariously expressed by his fascination for the 1950s), the close relationship Seth entertains with those he considers his maestros, the use of objects as proxies of this kind of longing for the past. Showing 'Seth' swiping is both a declaration of the creative, transformative power of comics and a reminiscent *mise en abyme* of the pastiche technique Seth uses so often in this book.

It must be observed, though, that objects in general are powerful triggers of nostalgia. Not reducible to their materiality, they carry with them stories that vicariously provide a "reflection on the meaning of one's own life" (Hoskins, in MacDonald 2013: 148):

> In [contemporary] culture, products are important signifiers of self-concept, for objects serve as reminders of events in the personal past […] 'personal storehouses of meaning' […] that contain the raw materials of the self, out of which an individual forges a self-concept […]. This self-concept incorporates bits and pieces of brand images remembered from the personal past […] that help to locate the sense of who we are today in memories of who we used to be and of what products we used at that time. (Stern 1992: 18)

This renders the strictly retro dress code 'Seth' adheres to (including his frequently featured Zippo lighter), the presence of only vintage movies and music (a VHS with an episode of *The Jack Benny Program*, *Harvey* showing at a theatre), 'Seth''s quest for old magazines, as on the page set at an antique bookstore (43). In this sense, Grennan wittily

reads Seth's work as the continuous application of a constraint that can be summarized as "nothing un–North American, nothing post-1959" (2012: 296).

A particular case is the appeal to music, which occurs twice in *GL*, when 'Seth' is listening to *Swanee Bluebird* (21) and later on when two elderly people in the same rest home of Kalo's mother are singing *Let's Call the Whole Thing Off* (160).
The reader who knows Armstrong's tune should then be reminded of it simply by reading its lyrics, with their evocative power potentially being even stronger because of their immediate appeal to emotions and memory.

4.1.5. Style: lines, details, colors

Drawing, like others forms of figurative expression, is always both a representation and an expression (Lefèvre 2016: 69), depiction and comment, denotation and connotation. In the unfolding of the unique characteristics of their singular trait (most convincingly discussed as "graphiation" by Marion 1993), many graphic novelists do not see any contradiction between the reuse of an existing style and their own search for new forms of drawing and storytelling (Baetens and Frey 2015: 140-41). This possibility is very interesting, because it has some direct implications for nostalgia: reusing the style of another author activates a web of transtextual links at the visual level.
Seth walks both paths: if on one side his style is highly indebted to Arno's, on the other he uses his trait at large "as a historicizing discourse, deploying a range of historically inflected points of reference to form a version of the past" (Marrone 2016: 182). This goes hand in hand, as Marrone highlights, with Seth's recurring appeal to a "handmade quality or autobiographical narrative register—which evoke a sense of authenticity that seems rooted in the past" (2016: 182) and enhances the nostalgic strains of *GL*.

Another key element of style is what several theorists call 'iconicity', which in visual semiotics is often referred to as 'figurative density'; it refers to the level of details and verisimilitude of a comic (Mikkonen 2017: 101). The possibilities are almost endless, from quasi-photographic impression to very schematic figures, like sketched caricatures. Now, "vivid imagery that attracts the senses captures the reader's totality of senses and thus transports him into experiencing the situation or atmosphere with great emotion" -

observes Salmose - makes it "more probable that the reader will associate the literary emotion with an event or mood of his own life and this will perhaps bear nostalgic connotations" (2012: 249).

Seth's trait, though evidently stylized, retains a vivid attention for the details of objects: the title of a vinyl, the shape of an alarm clock, the silhouette of a building.

Moreover, as already remarked, *GL* continuously features 'Seth' in an urban or suburban landscape, running into or commenting on strangers that will quickly disappear from the story. Marrone observes how "these passing encounters are not exactly ephemeral for the reader, who can linger and return to them in a way the protagonist cannot" (2016: 122), and in this way "almost automatically enlivens them with even a brief look" (2016: 123).

What the reader is allowed to do, according to Marrone, is *browsing*, that is, choosing to wander around the page like a *flâneur* or focus her attention on small details of the mise-en-scene. This interactive feature of comics allows the reader to project her behaviour schemata over secondary characters and 'enliven' them, which is in turn guided by the visual configuration:

> in such urban scenes, the composition of space within the panel […] is often defined by the ambivalent tension between foreground and background. Seth uses shading and compositional conventions to draw the reader's eye to the protagonist in most panels; nevertheless, his work consistently emphasizes moments of meandering and lingering (2016: 123-24).

This entails, Marrone concludes, that the "visual density of the comics page offers a great deal of nonverbal narrative information and affords the reader greater freedom in processing this information and filling narrative gaps" (2016: 124).

Another means to achieve the same end in a visual narrative is evidently the resort to colours.

Unfortunately, colour is "one of the most underdiscussed and undertheorized features of comics and graphic novel scholarship" (Baetens 2011: 111). However, we can appeal to film theory, and conclude that transtextual references on the level of colour seem the key strategy to elicit nostalgia: discussing nostalgia films Dika observes that "while the period objects in the mise-en-scene create the 'look and feel' of pastness, this quality is also

emitting from the sensual surface of the images themselves […] the lighting, the choice of colors, and the grain" (2003: 10). This is highly consistent with Jameson's idea that nostalgia in postmodern film "is not so much a re-presentation of a particular historical period as it is a re-creation of its cultural artifacts. The past is metonymically re-experienced, not only through the represented clothing styles and music, but also through the stylistic elements" (Dika 2003: 10).

Returning to comics, it seems that nostalgia-oriented strategies using colours may be of two kinds: on one side, the text could try to replicate a specific aesthetics, linked, in the collective imaginary, to a certain age or genre. In doing so, the cartoonist has the option of both trying to replicate the visual style of that era or appealing to the memory of the medium and mimicking the colour palettes distinctive of a certain period. On the other side, she may choose to resort to black and white or sepia colouring, to convey a more generic sense of pastness: uniform colour palettes, especially if based on paled and crude colours, seem to have an inherently nostalgic quality.

Seth somehow chooses both paths, opting for a two-tone palette "shaded with a single color—a delicate blue—that unifies the pages, offering the reader a reassuring, consistent surface" (Marrone 2016: 31) that stands out against the dark yellow background of the page. At the same time, his colour choice is reminiscent of the cartoonists mentions throughout the book, working to combine the allure of old black and white strips with the visual grammar of old movies. In fact, Seth's panels conspire both to mimic the naïve ingenuity of 1950s gags and to adopt a mature choice of perspectives and image constructions that betrays a strong cinematic quality, which owes probably more to classical movies than to the history of comics.

Conclusion

GL is a multifaceted text whose nostalgic drive does not end in the continuous nostalgic laments of its protagonist. Some scholars suggest we should apply some distance between Seth and 'Seth', and of course we do. Yet, as I outlined, three different categories of nostalgic strategies are discernible in Seth's work. On a structural level, I underlined the action of the character as a mediator in the work of a gappy narrative reminiscent of the *noir* genre, based on a simple temporal structure which features several iterations. On the

level of motif, my attempt was to highlight the constant appeal to chronological signposts, that is, to symbols of a different time or a different rhythm of life, and to objects as reminders of past moments. On the stylistic level, I drew attention to how the use of lines, shading, colours and details could participate in enhancing the nostalgic potential of this work.

In doing so, I tried to isolate a poetics of nostalgia that could be applied to other works as well. I postulated for the possibility of a self-reflexive nostalgia (that Davis calls 'interpreted'), that extends to periods one has not experienced in the first person and does not necessarily have negative implications. Seth is a wonderful example of this apparently ambiguous type of nostalgia, proving instead, through several textual strategies, to represent a prototypical example of a nostalgic work.

4.2. Immigrant song: *The arrival* by Shaun Tan

General overview

The Arrival (2006, Hodder & Stoughton, from now on referred as *TA*) begins with a man parting from his wife and daughter, leaving his homeland - haunted by an obscure menace – in order to emigrate to a foreign place, where his family will eventually join him. After a journey by train and by ship, he will get there, struggling at first to communicate, but ultimately finding a job and adjusting to his new reality. After having managed to settle in, he will at last reunite with his family that will reach him in their new homeplace. The story ends with the man's daughter having grown so accustomed to her new reality to be able to give information to a newly arrived young woman, as disoriented as the man was at the beginning of the book.

Shaun Tan purportedly wanted to tell "a universal tale that is both real and abstract" (Tan 2010: 6) about migration, and to do so he wrote a wordless narrative entirely drawn in pencils, whose surrealist world is adorned with an unintelligible written language that put its protagonist and reader at the same level, that is, being incapable to fully grasp the new and strange reality they are facing. The story is set in an unidentified place and time, and none of the characters has a name (that we know of).

As Banerjee remarks,

> Tan chooses to delineate his protagonist in generic terms and clothed in western attire from the very first page. By not marking him in very obvious ways as an Other, Tan shifts the locus of difference from the immigrant figure himself to his surroundings instead […] from the perspective of the insider or the native in the new country, to that of the immigrant himself, to whom often the everyday objects of life in the new country can appear 'different' and alienating. (2016a: 55)

The tale of the protagonist is mirrored in several micronarratives of other migrants he meets in the new land, told in flashbacks interwoven in the main story; everybody seems sad to have left their own homeland, but everybody was escaping from some sort of

miserable or dangerous situation[185]. Nabizadeh observes that "these anecdotes fracture the linear movement of the migrant's story, and by installing vertical temporalities within the diegesis, the storyline attests to the complications of narrating loss as stories collide and produce new meanings through their differences and similarities" (2014a: 368).

Despite the absence of a verbal narrator and dialogues should in theory weaken the nostalgic potential of the story, the book manages nonetheless to prompt a bittersweet longing in the reader in reason of its other features. There are several stylistic choices, mainly linked to colours, which work towards a nostalgic reception of this text; I will discuss those further on, together with thematic remarks on *TA*'s recurring motifs and structural considerations on the prominent role of intertextuality and the reader's projections. Before, though, it is interesting to ask ourselves what kind of book is *TA*.

4.2.1. Style 1: a surrealist family photo album

Tan's hybrid narrative is in fact not exactly a graphic novel nor a picture book, not clearly aimed at young people nor at adults; rather, it lays at the intersection of those poles, quite far from the prototypical core of my sample. This makes it a very interesting subject for my analysis.

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[185] This follows Tannock's idea of nostalgia as a 'rhetoric' divided in three tropes: a prelapsarian world or golden age; a lapse, fall or catastrophe; and a postlapsarian world (that is, the present) (19995: 454).
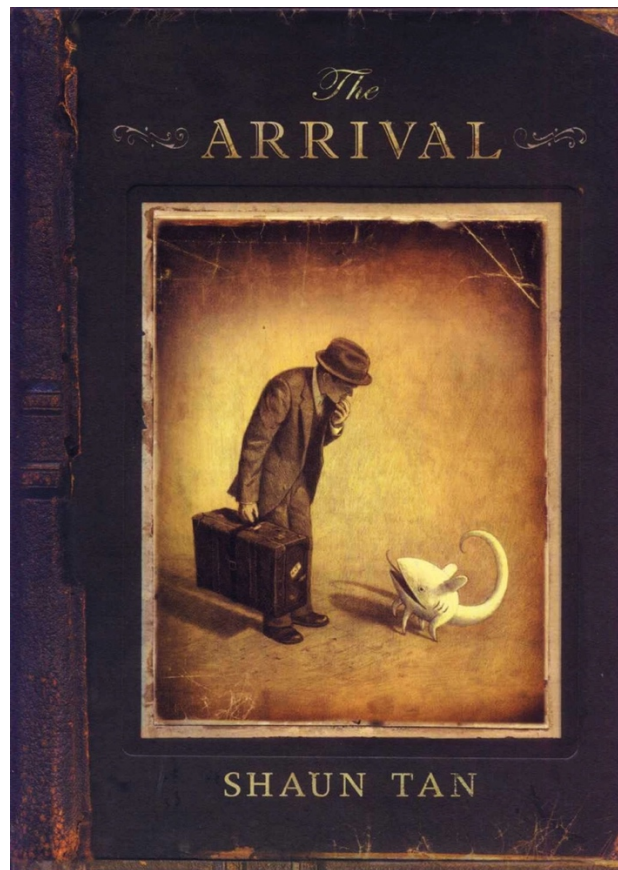
The Arrival's front cover (Tan 2006)

TA has a very distinctive design, reminding of a worn leather cover of a photo album "documenting the immigrant's journey" (Banerjee 2016b: 402). The 'photograph' on the cover depicts the protagonist with his most distinguishing features: he wears his hat, carries his suitcase (I will return on these objects in the course of this analysis) and has a puzzled look. He is looking at what will become his companion animal, one of the weird surrealistic figure that populate the new world he is going to live in. The perspective of the image, though, is far different from the one a picture would have if it was taken by somebody; on the contrary, it declares the fictional status of the story we are about to read by staging a ubiquitous observer on a supposedly intimate moment of the immigrant's life.

The fifty "photographs" in the inside cover (Tan 2006)

The inside front and back covers depict instead the same series of sixty different faces, looking straight to the viewer (one is tempted to say, 'to the camera') in what strongly reminds of a passport photo. The people portrayed have different age, gender and ethnicity; some of the 'photos' look more worn out than others. All the drawings are based on photographs of migrants on arrival at Ellis Island (Tan 2010: 12), except one, which is a sketch of a passport photo of Tan's father when he was younger and moved to Australia (Nabizadeh 2014a: 369). This way (and all throughout the graphic novel), Tan "transplants themes and images from post-World War I narratives of migration to the United States, as well as early imaginative accounts of migration to Australia, to re-historicise those narratives into new and de-familiarising relations with one another" (Nabizadeh 2014a: 370).

Dony holds that through this double page "the author affirms the importance of the personal and the familial into the collective. He brings different histories into relief, proposes different kinds of narratives, mixes the personal with the historical, and intersperses his (post)memory with that of other people" (2012b: 253). This strategy, then, introduces both the theme of multiculturalism and that of immigration. Bradford also observes that the subject of the pictures

look out of the page seriously, tentatively, even fearfully. None of them smiles; the very formality of the page's arrangement emphasizes the ways in which individuals' narratives, emotions and sufferings are afforded no space in bureaucratic systems where migrants and refugees must pass the tests of documentation and scrutiny before they are admitted into the ranks of citizens. (2011: 29)

The stained, yellowed "documents" with stamps and seals (Tan 2006)

This sense of the importance of the bureaucracy is reinforced by the title page, which looks like a yellowed, stained document, showing some kinds of stamp and seal, written in the same obscure language that will return in the course of the book. Nabizadeh observes that "the pages bear the imprints of time, through faux defects, foxing, stains, rips, creases and partial erasure, and in some places the image has crumbled away entirely" (2014a: 369). Furthermore, "the book carries a stamp on its title page, alongside an image of an 'inspection card'. The card is dated 23 March 1912, and marks the book's journey as a travelling object, one that bears its own traces of impossible time" (2014a: 369). This is also, very significantly, the only chronological indication in the whole book, subtly hidden in the very first pages.

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As Bradford notices, "these stained fragments of paper, so significant to the future of individuals, are all that stand between individuals and the oblivion and despair of refugee camps or prisons" (2011: 29). The theme of unfamiliarity and estrangement and that of the passing of time are very evident as well, establishing a dialectic between past/present and familiar/unfamiliar that reminds of what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer call 'points of memory' that link "past and present, memory and postmemory, individual remembrance and collective recall" (2006: 237). If the documents suggest the pole of unfamiliarity, the family album format may be read as a 'trope of familiality' (Dony 2012a: 90), which "anchors, individualizes, and reembodies the free-floating disconnected and disorganized feelings of loss and nostalgia" (Hirsch 2008: 120). Susan Sontag similarly sees the anchoring action of family albums as twofold; she writes that the 'ghostly traces' of photographs supply people with an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, while at the same time they help people take possession of spaces in which they are unsure (1992: 283).

4.2.2. Style 2: lines, colours, and framings

On the stylistic level, what strikes most of *TA*'s pages is the use of soft graphite pencil – chosen "because it allows for such editing, erasure and re-drawing" (Tan 2010: 42) – and the colour scheme that derives, combining "photo-realism and surrealistic pictures in sepia in a layout that borrows from both film and photographic albums" (Nabizadeh 2014a: 368).

"The use of sepia", observes Nabizadeh, "evokes a nostalgic register that complicates the relation between past and present" (2014a: 368), for "the world of the migrant is forever painted in sepia, and in this way displays the influence of the melancholic recognition of difference, belonging and memory through the persistence of a particular temporality" (2014a: 370). It must be observed that the colour palette is not as stable as it may seem, though, acquiring darker tones in the secondary storylines and opting for warmer or colder hues according to the distress of the protagonist (the last pages are both warmer and lighter than those preceding them).

For what concerns the choices of framing and perspective, the generally high level of iconicity (almost photo-realistic) is modulated by the surrealistic elements that populate

the world of *TA*. This dialectic between lack of referents and abundance of details is one of the key that bring the reader to re-read *TA*, enacting the same time of browsing reading that I discussed in Seth's work.

This goes together with the fact that "the sequencing techniques of the narrative mimic the cinematic mode, including the use of establishing shots, zooms and wide-focus pans" (Nabizadeh 2014a: 368). The clearest example of this strategy happens twice, during the ship sequence and just after the man has settled in his new house, and it's a gradual zoom out from him to the larger picture. The meaning of course is that the man is part of a bigger network of people in a similar situation, and that works together with the invitation to browse and the work of narrative gaps to enhance the reader's involvement and, as a consequence, her projection of her personal experience in the story, including her nostalgic drive.

4.2.3. Structure 1: estrangement, focalization, adjustment

The story starts with the departure of the protagonist from his family home towards the new country he goes to live in. There, both him and the reader will experience a strong sense of estrangement that Tan realizes through a particular form of what Shklovsky called defamiliarization, having to confront with an imaginary language that is alien and undecipherable. Nabizadeh observes in this sense that "the pictographic language engenders a point of narrative frisson between the text and reader, as the reader's encounter with this unknown alphabet rehearses dilemmas that migrants face in negotiating a new system of signification" (2014a: 367). One should notices nonetheless how "The Arrival's fictive reality is, perhaps paradoxically, quite noisy", for there are "many signs, advertisements and notes pervading the landscapes of the Nameless Land", so that one "might argue that The Arrival functions as only a 'semi-silent' narrative" (Dony 2012a: 97), however managing, through the absence of dialogues, to distil "the themes of melancholic loss, ontological disorientation and effect" (Nabizadeh 2014a: 366).

Not only the language, though, but the animals, the food, the objects of the new land are strange and unfamiliar. As Banerjee observes, "inverting the paradigms of familiarity and difference, Tan's illustrations provide the reader with the perspective of the immigrant

to whom the new city appears strange, alienating and even fantastical" (2016a: 53). If, then, "in many picture book narratives readers understand what a protagonist does not; in this book, readers are positioned to share the protagonist's confusion" (Bradford 2011: 30). The narrative is (cognitively) focalized on the main character so that we ignore what he ignores, and only at a second reading we can orient ourselves in advance. In this way, as Tan affirms, "*we* are the new arrival, only able to decipher meaning and value from visual images, object relationships and human gestures, and then only by making creative associations. Imagination here is more useful than any knowledge" (Tan 2010: 31).

Tan purportedly intended this interactive function to take place thanks to the gaps that characterize comics narrative. As he affirms,

> The last part of drawing often involves simplifying an image, so that such feelings are quite clear and uncomplicated. This usually involves erasing extraneous details, allowing more 'gaps' and 'gutters', reinstating a certain mystery, and that will allow another reader to conjure and invest some personal memories of their own. The absent spaces in a work allow it to be more adaptable that way. The reader has many opportunities to breathe their own life back into it. (Tan in Nabizadeh 2014b: 363-64)

In an interview with the author, Nabizadeh observes that this kind of structure reproduces the gappy workings of the process of remembering and forgetting, and Tan comments that "a lot of fiction seems to me an attempt to combat the fading of memory, or at least it tries to identify and strengthen those remembered experiences that seem important" (in Nabizadeh 2014b: 363).

This is probably one of the reasons the book is so effective in depicting a "universal tale that is both real and abstract", and why so many immigrants have shown a high level of identification with the events depicted. The shadows of a monstrous tentacle, some giants drawing in people from the streets[186], child labour and war are abstract but universal

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[186] He comments on that scene as eliciting "a feeling of weird horror, not unlike a 1950s science fiction story" (Tan 2010: 40). AS for the realization, he started taking a picture of himself over a cardboard city, then "edited my photographs digitally, replaced the cardboard city with images of Florentine architecture, printed this out and began drawing over the top of it. After several redrafts, and in spite of its initial absurdity, the image developed some semblance of a 'real' event, reminiscent of Nazi book burning and industrialised genocide" (2010: 40).

metaphors of a condition of misery and sufferance, maybe easier to identify with than a most specific and detailed story.

Tan comments in this sense that

> I know from emails, letters and comments that readers who are migrants often see their own story as very present within the pages of the book […] [T]hat might be due to the fact that my images of a fictional world are quite non-specific, both strange and a little metaphorical. […] So, for instance, when my character encounters a strange object, the main feeling is the strangeness, the object itself is not important […] similar feelings from other contexts, and memories are triggered […] my book is very much a kind of empty vessel, without much story or detail, so it invites the readers to fill a lot of empty spaces with their own thoughts and memories. [It] adds a sense of narrative coherence to memories of real experience (in Bjartveit and Panayotidis 2014: 249-50)

In the course of the graphic novel, the protagonist manages to adjust to his new reality, and we do the same. In fact, if the disorienting effect of the text "reminds the reader of their dependence on the written word for security and authority when it comes to meaning" (Tan 2010: 10), the multimodality functioning of comics gradually naturalizes the obstacle, encouraging a re-reading that true the visual features will cast a different, more familiar light on the same events and contexts, while allowing the reader to better appreciate the rich details of the image. This healing function of images over words is staged *en abyme* in a self-reflexive move by the two times when the protagonist lacks the words to make himself understood, and resorts instead to drawing his needs (food and a bed), embodying the transformative, remedial power of art. Tan observes on this behalf that

> When other communications fail, my character resorts to sketching objects in a notebook that he carries everywhere: drawings of a room, a loaf of bread, even an abbreviation of his homeland in simple outlines. It's no coincidence that the main character in *The Arrival* looks like me: I used myself as a reference model out of convenience, but there's also a self-reflexive comment here on the role of an illustrator as storyteller, where some ideas can only be expressed through a silent language of images." (2010: 31)

Braiding: the first page of (respectively) the first and the sixth chapter of the story (Tan 2006)

The adjustment of the protagonist to his new reality is shown by making resort to braiding and iconic solidarity. The book opens to a series of domestics images connoting "safety and security" (Banerjee 2016a: 55): a bird origami (the figure will return throughout all the book, and I will discuss it soon); a clock, symbolizing the passing of time; a hung hat as a referent for the protagonist; a pot, a teapot and a cup, as metaphors for domesticity; a child drawing and a family portrait; and an open suitcase, full of stuff, to signify the impending leaving.

These objects will be "contrasted in the rest of the novel with images of the unfamiliar, the mechanistic and the fantastical" (Banerjee 2016a: 53). Nonetheless, towards the end of the book, we will find another page with nine panels, occupied by the new world's version of the first scene's objects, "now been naturalised and made familiar" (Banerjee 2016a: 53-54). Duyvendak observes that

> When they establish homes away from home, immigrants often recreate places that look and smell, at least to a certain extent, like the places they left behind. One might say that while their native neighbors often become nostalgic for times when they were among their 'own', immigrants often become homesick for more familiar places. (2011: 31)

This disposition signifies the acquired familiarity of the protagonist and his relatives to the new reality, and is reinforced with the following page, that reproduces the same

operation of repetition with a difference on the scene of the main character at the dining table.

Here, the different lighting of the panel, the presence of the whole family joint together (in the first image the daughter was absent) and the house animal, the smiling faces, all stands to prove that the new reality is not hostile anymore.

Braiding: family scene at the table (Tan 2006)

4.2.4. Structure 2: inspirations and intertextual references

Being a second-generation immigrant (his father, who is of Chinese ancestry, arrived in Australia from the native Malaysia), Tan stands "at a 'point of juncture or maybe disjuncture' between the cultural heritage of his parents, their double consciousness and his own interstitial space for identity reinvention beyond national definitions" (Dony 2012a: 88).

He infuses *TA* with this feeling, and it is not a case that most of his research was done on migration: in several occasions, included an "Artist's Note" at the end of *TA*, Tan mentioned his inspirations and sources, that range from "old museum photographs of migrants stepping from ships" pinned to his wall (Tan, in Earle 2016: 11) to documents of immigrants arriving to New York from 1892 to 1954, many of which pertain to the

collection of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum; from "anecdotal stories told by migrants of many different countries and historical periods" (Tan 2006) to the books *The Immigrants* by Wendy Lowenstein and Morag Loh (1977) and *Tales from a Suitcase* by Will Davies and Andrea Dal Bosco (2001); from T.A.G. Hungerford's (1997) short story *Wong Chu and the Queen's Letterbox* to the wordless picture book classic *The Snowman* by Raymond Briggs (1978).

As I repeatedly stated in the course of this work, quoting other works, especially in the form of pastiche, is one of the main ways to prompt a nostalgic feeling in the reader. It works especially well, of course, when the reader is aware of the work that is being mentioned, but it manages nonetheless to more subtly infuse a sense of pastness into the way an image is built.

Tan continuously resorts to this kind of strategy in the course of the book. He mentions as inspirations for the mood Vittorio De Sica's film *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) (but one is also reminded of Chaplin's *Modern Times*, 1936) and on the visual level *Los Caprichos* by *Goya* (1799) (Tan 2010: 16), "the surrealist collages of Max Ernst" (Tan 2010: 5), Gustave Dore's engraving *Over London by Rail* (circa 1870) (Tan 2006), "a 1912 photograph of a newsboy announcing the Titanic sinking, picture postcards of New York from the turn of the century, photographs of-street scenes from post-war Europe" (Tan 2006) - and we may add for example Alfred Stieglitz' iconic photo *The Steerage* (1907). As for the composition of the image, he affirms of having borrowed "some stylistic elements found in religious paintings of the Italia Renaissance: certain kinds of lighting, character gestures and fixed-point perspective. My own drawings also observe something of the symbolism found in these paintings, as they are often full of allegorical objects" (Tan 2010: 42).

Most of all, thought, this visual strategy is evident in two quotes-via-pastiche. The first one refers to Tom Roberts' *Coming South* (1886, erroneously quoted in *TA* as *Going South*), which is reverted from its original depiction of "middle-class passengers travel[ling] from Europe to Australia" (Bradford 2011: 29) to a typical picture of the uneasiness of migration travels, where "the protagonist sits on the deck next to his

luggage, and his position in this crowded space discloses his isolation. Most of the other passengers are seated in groups. The space next to the protagonist speaks of the absence of those he loves, his wife and daughter" (Bradford 2011: 29-30).
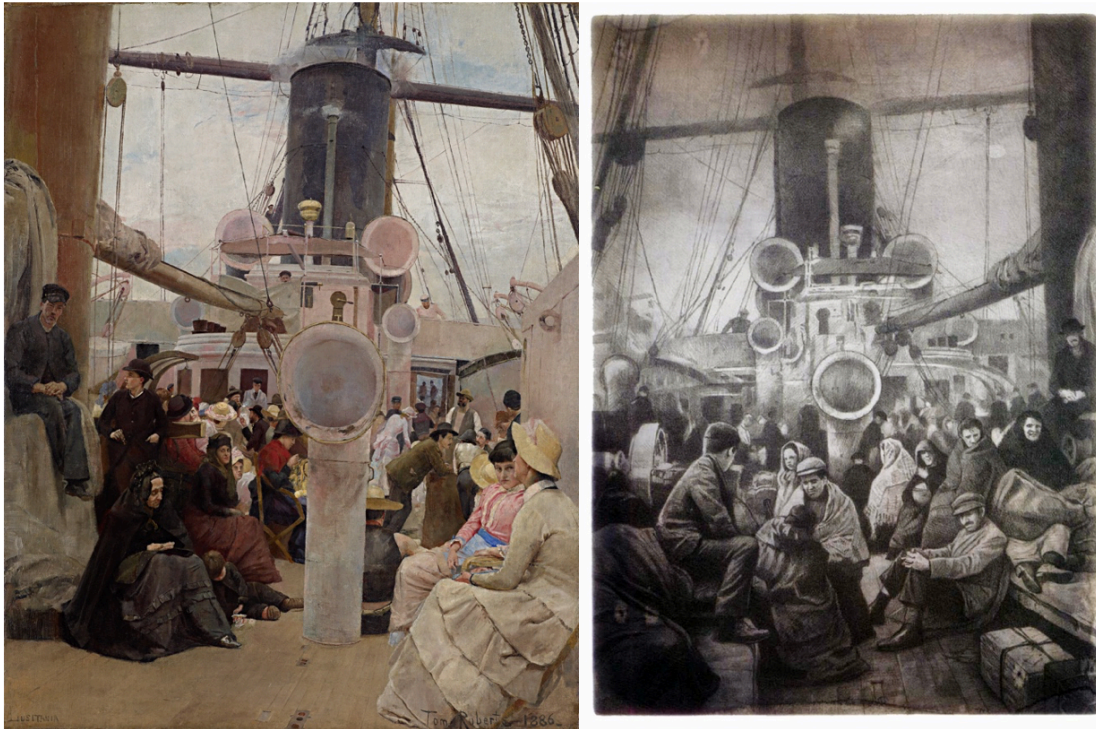
Pastiche: Tom Roberts' Coming South (1886) and Tan's panel (2006)

The second comes from the repository of photographs held at Ellis Island in New York. Preceded in the book by the image of a harbour with two gigantic statues greeting each other (clearly reminiscing of the Statue of Liberty), it shows the Registry Room (or 'Great Hall') of Ellis Island transfigured in the new, surrealist setting.
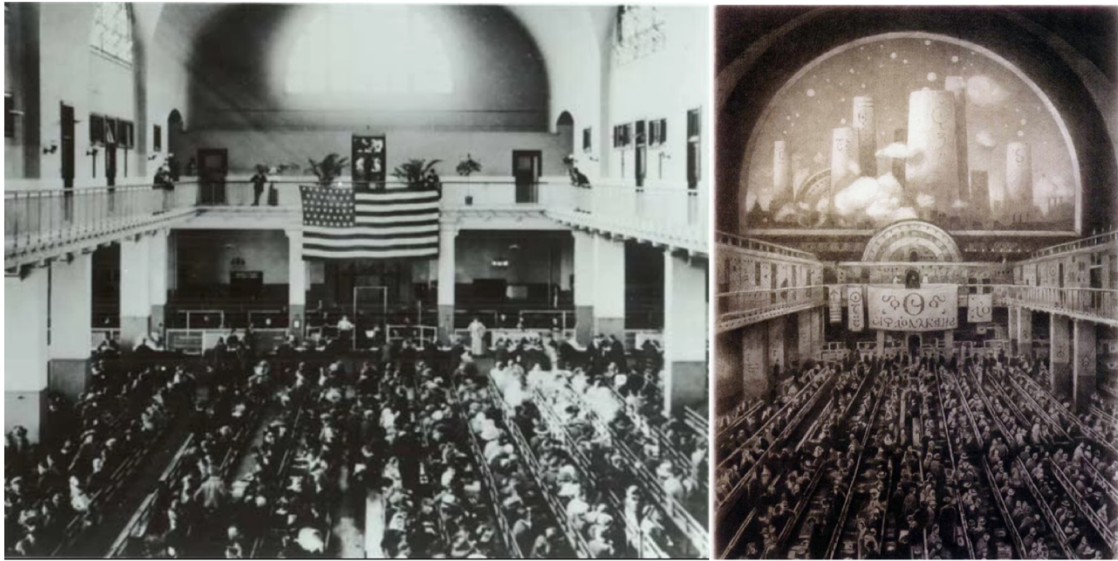
Pastiche: Ellis Island's Great Hall and Tan's panel (2006)

Bradford comments on the whole sequence of the arrival in the new land that such "montage of images has a powerfully transnational effect in that it reminds readers of what refugees and immigrants have in common – fears, hopes and loss – but also the particularities of their experience, signaled through the diversity of images and references" (Bradford 2011: 30).

4.2.5. Motifs: birds, boats, photos, suitcases

As Dony observes, "thematically, Tan's silent graphic narrative develops a whole vocabulary of spatial and temporal displacement through which instances of 'crossing over' are reminiscent of how diasporic and postcolonial authors have engaged with the idea of dislocation" (2012a: 86).

This is realized on the one hand by making the protagonist meet people who were themselves migrants to that land and who consequently share his sense of loss[187], and on the other by staging a world which has no exact time referent, but whose absence of technology from the second half of the 20th century gives a clear nostalgic allure. All the vehicles in the story, every technological tool, share a steampunk imaginary which make them both timeless (for none of them ever existed) and retro:

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[187] Nabizadeh affirms that this shows how "communities can be alternatively constituted through discourses of social vulnerability": 2014a: 367.

the past cannot be simply taken as a recognisable, fully coded past, but rather invokes a spatio-temporal realm that is not 'over', or indeed may never have happened. This generates a double movement wherein the investigation of the past contains a look towards the future through the surrealistic imagery of the city. (Nabizadeh 2014a: 369)

Visual nostalgia: the retro visual imaginary of TA (Tan 2006)

This is consubstantial to Svetlana Boym's idea of the 'future-past' of nostalgia, where nostalgia aims to "the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that became obsolete" (2001: xvi).

Several motifs reinforce the theme of time passing, bonding it with that of migration and the collective experience it entails.

Nabizadeh underlines the role of birds as "product of the migrant' s melancholic grip on the past", exploring "the social, familial and political losses of the migrant's journey" (2014a: 371, 370). If on one side "the bird as a figure of migration is well established"[188]

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[188] The recurrent use of the boat imagery has the analogous function of "bearing witness to the pasts of other migrants", functioning "as a fluid spatio-temporal signifier engaging with a variety of dislocated people from different historical periods" (Dony 2012a: 93). Tan also considers that

(2014a: 374), on the other the sequence that sees the bird making its nest in a pot in the bedroom of the protagonist and later feeding its baby birds is juxtaposed with the whole sequence of the man adjusting to his new reality and finally reuniting with his family, underlining the familial motif of the narrative (Banerjee 2016b: 411). Furthermore, the bird is an established symbol of hope, and this resonates in the role of the origami bird the man makes for his daughter, later on folding the letter he writes them as to get the same shape and receiving a response in a similar form.
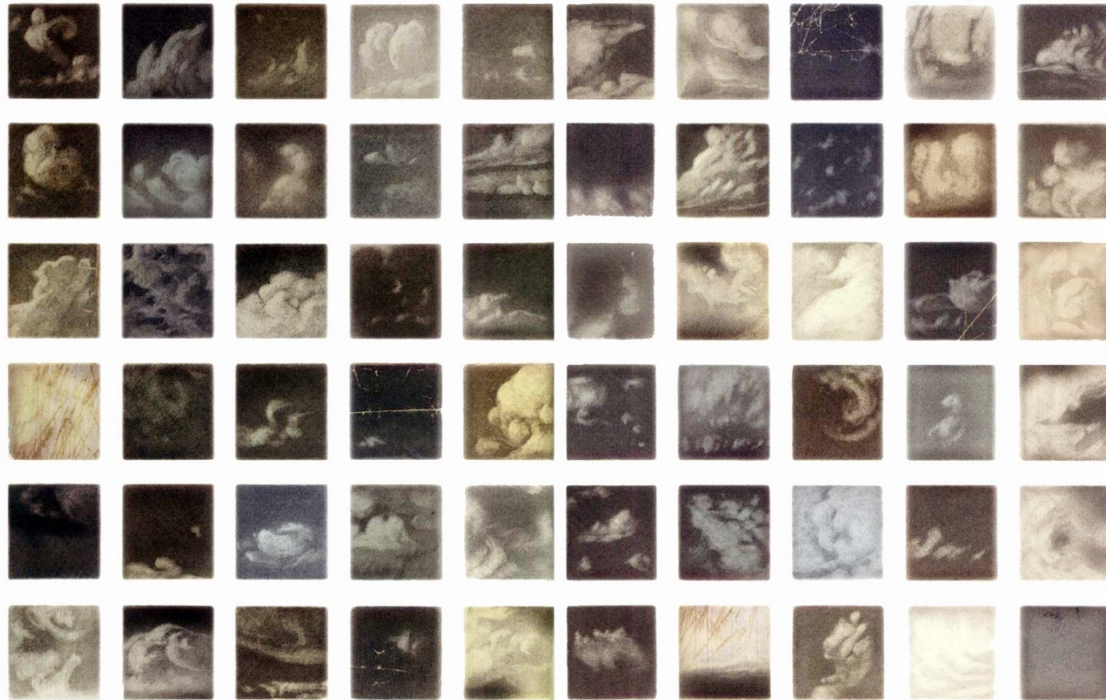
Double page with clouds' perspectives (Tan 2006)

Tan also frequently moves from the personal to the collective dimension (a dialectic which is structurally consubstantial to nostalgia), as when the journey of the ship to the new land is taken on symbolically by the splash page of a cloud that is re-proposed, in the following double page, in sixty different panels depicting (in an intentionally cryptic way) sixty different perspectives of the same cloud, or sixty different clouds, or sixty different forms assumed by the same cloud. Be as it may, this layout is also most significantly consonant with that of the sixty portraits of migrants in the cover-flaps; this suggests that braiding here "works towards a polyphonic understanding of diasporic

the avian theme explains the "drawing egg-like objects (including the white balloon), and other suggestions of flight and fertility" (2010: 24).

fiction and conveys a chorus of migrants' memories. This braiding engages with references to other migrants' histories, pasts, and (re)locations" (Dony 2012b: 252-53). This is underlined by the absence of the focalizer in the panels, whereas usually Tan includes his characters in the scenes they are perceiving.
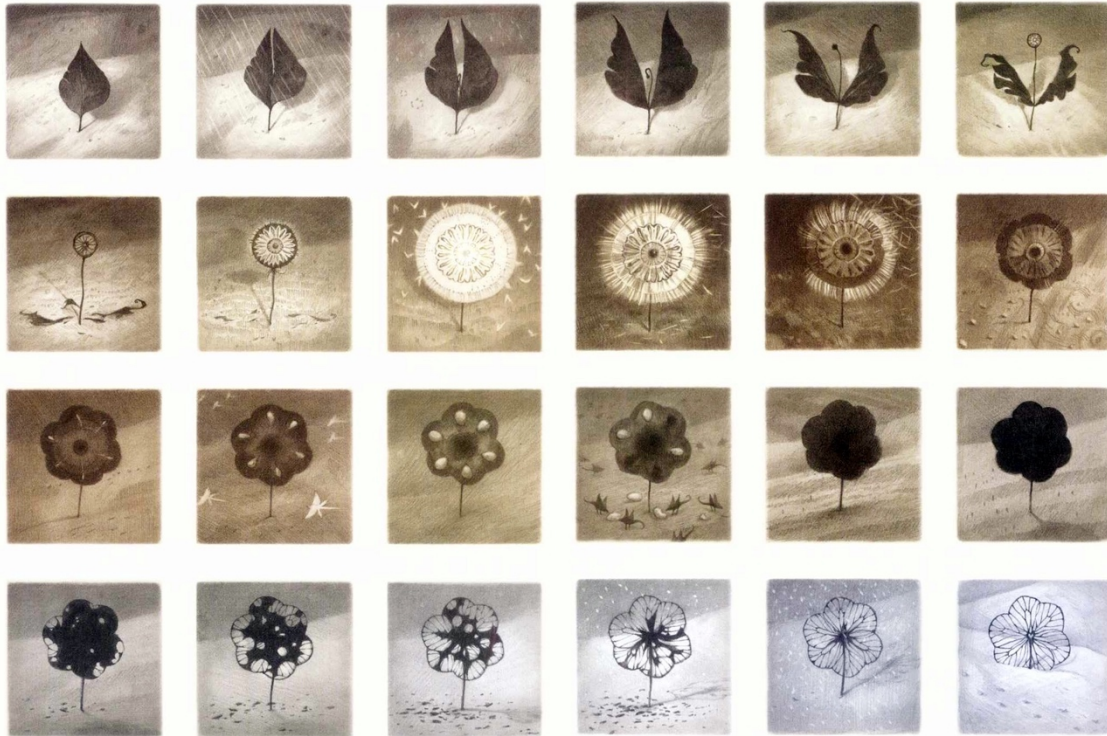
Season passing (Tan 2006)

Furthermore, in the book the motif of time passing is embodied again through the life cycle of a weird, unknown plant in the new land, and by a braiding action that connects two splash pages with the same subject but a very different weather (what we imagine being a blossoming spring in the first image, and a snowy winter in the second).

Two objects, though, carry on most of the symbolical weight of the motifs in the story: the recurring photos and the ubiquitous suitcases.

Tan's protagonist carries with him the family portrait we saw in the first page, after having packed it with care. It shows the three of them looking directly at the camera. Banerjee describes it by saying that "it is not a candid photo capturing a fleeting moment of interaction between them. Instead it is a very formal, contrived and posed photograph, probably taken in a studio; but also a typical family photograph" (Banerjee 2016a: 57).

Mikkonen observes that

> First of all, it is significant that this image draws our attention to the characters, who gaze directly at us, and furthermore that this exchange of gazes is seen through the father's eyes. The subjective aspect of the viewpoint is revealed by the father's hand, which we see taking the picture from the shelf and packing it in his luggage. Besides the subjectivity of the gaze, the introduction of the portrait reveals the emotional intensity that accompanies all the later viewings of the image. (Mikkonen 2017: 162)

Hirsch affirms that photography is the election medium of postmemory, connecting individual to collective memory through a vocabulary of 'affiliation' (2008: 115). In *TA*, this portrait "functions as a stand-in for the family during the protagonist's immigrant experience" (Banerjee 2016a: 57). When the man finds a place, one of the first things he does is to hang the picture on the wall "and look at it longingly as he remembers his wife and daughter" (2016a: 59).

Photographs and drawings are also used as thresholds for the embedded stories of the secondary characters, that start zooming in or out into a picture and are characterized by a darker tone than the sepia of the rest of the story. They thus act "as a connecting device to [their] memory-story, which is depicted in a series of distinct meta-panels" (Nabizadeh 2014a: 374). They also underline and highlight "the sense in which all the panel images in Tan's book more or less resemble old black-and-white photographs" (Mikkonen 2017: 162), further drawing our attention to the pastness of the pages we are looking at and their affinity with a photo album.

Another key object in the story is the suitcase the man brings with him. Banerjee signals that for some time *TA* has been available in a "deluxe limited collector's edition in the form of a suitcase, complete with leather handle and luggage tag" (2016a: 59). She further comments that

> Much has been written about suitcases as both material and metaphorical objects and their connection to trajectories of migration. Suitcases […] have a cartographic function of connecting places – where the migrant is from and where he is headed or has arrived. As suggested by Schlör, it signifies a lost home but also carries objects laden with the possibility of new homemaking. (2016a: 59).

The opening pages of *TA* see their protagonist packing his suitcase and parting from his wife and child. Schlör notices that this act "can be seen as a dealing with one' s own past and future – another in-between-ness – and as a moment of considering experiences and expectations" (2014: 78, in Banerjee 2016a: 59).

Banerjee remarks that the suitcase here "with it all the connotations of migration, intimacy, in-betweenness, portability, loss of home and rootlessness" (2016a: 59) and that it works "as a memory container" (2016a: 59). This is evident when the man unpacks his suitcase and we see his mental projection of his family having dinner without him: here the suitcase most evidently embodies home and the nostalgia the man feels for his relatives.

Towards the end of the novel, after having reunited, the family's suitcases finally disappears, implying that their journey is over and their condition is finally stable. However, in another move from the singular to the collective, the novel closes on the image of the child giving indications to a new immigrant with her own suitcase, indicating the continuity and universality of the migration process.

Conclusion

Since its beginning, *TA* stages a double nostalgia. The first one is a thematic, diegetic one, felt by his protagonist towards his wife and child, that he had to leave momentarily in the place he escaped, and that he is waiting to reunite to. At the same time, *TA* operates at several levels (structural, thematic and stylistic) in order to prompt and enhance a nostalgic reaction on the behalf of its reader. The purported universality of his story, the weary look of the pages, the sepia colouring and the retro visual imagination concur in eliciting a nostalgic response from the reader.

Of course, that same universality may be questioned. First of all, because Tan occupies an unusual position in the cultural production about (post)memory and migration, as he stages the healing process together with the more traumatic side. This may be read an example of the changing potential implicit in nostalgia, despite distancing from many real-life accounts of migration. Banerjee nonetheless notices how this could also be interpreted as a weak spot of Tan's narrative, for

all the suffering is rooted firmly in the pasts of these characters and in another time and space. The space of the adopted country is a welcoming and safe space, albeit full of the unfamiliar. Thus, it is possible to interpret Tan's novel as a naive representation of an idealised multicultural society in which people of vastly different races, experiences and backgrounds live harmoniously together united by what they all have in common – deep and painful suffering in the past. (Banerjee 2016a: 54)

The second point concerns in fact the universal character of the story, which Tan emphasises whenever he has the occasion. If true to a certain extent, it is evident how this is also a strategy that aims to counterbalance the aspects of Tan's story which are not universal at all: migrant stories do not always have happy endings, and many children of migrants never succeed in finding their place in their new homes.

The question that remains open, then, is if in the rosy glow of nostalgia the consolatory, escapist appeal wins over the healing, projecting potential. Tan's work stands in a delicate balance between the two forces, and this ambiguity is maybe part of its large appeal.

4.3. Antithesis: *Here*, by Richard McGuire

General overview

'Here' first appeared as a six-pages comic in 1989, in the second volume of *RAW* magazine.

Hugely influential, this short story portrayed a room, seen from a fixed angle, in different moments between the years 500957406073 BCE and 2033 AD. The groundbreaking yet simple technique it applied consisted in opening internal panels into the 36, regular, "main" panels, sharing the same visual perspective but depicting different temporalities. "The year each image is taken from", Chaney writes, "is dutifully reported in accompanying captions. The year comes to figure as a reading anchor, stabilizing our navigation through vastly disconnected images. (2017: 177).

The first page of 'Here' (McGuire 1989)

The two main inspirations were Art Spiegelman's 1976 *The Malpractice Suite*, with its multilayered panels, and Robert Crumb's 1979 *A Short History of America*, a 15-panels (originally 12) single page depicting the same corner of America facing industrialization over the years.

McGuire's came with the idea for a class assignment in an Art Spiegelman's cartooning course he was following. His original intention was to have panels split in two halves: history would move backward on the left side of each frame and forward on the right. Then, a friend of his told McGuire about the new Windows operating system. Fascinated by the account, he dropped the split screen for a more complex approach in which inter-panel inserts would open inside the main panel. McGuire worked eight months on his idea, "furnishing it with props and figures derived from his family's photographs and the picture collection of the New York Public Library" (Smith 2015: 54), until it was finally featured in 1989 on *Raw*.

During the years, McGuire repeatedly thought about making a book out of the comics. He first proposed a nearly square volume, with two frames facing each other on each spread (Smith 2015: 55). The book project was put on hold for some time, during which his parents and sister passed away. In 2009, McGuire reconceived *Here* anew, drawing inspiration from his childhood home in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. He switched to full colours obtained through different techniques, and expanded the room perspective so to fill a double spread and place the reader in the middle of action. As a consequence of these choices, issues of style and structure are strictly intertwined in *Here*, and will be discussed together in the next sections.

4.3.1. Structure and style 1: plot

It is impossible to talk about *Here* without first discussing its plot.

According to Thierry Groensteen, "*Here* tells the story of a place – an indifferent corner of America – and those of the beings who inhabited it through the centuries. […] It is a vast historical fresco in which existences cross and follows one another, echoing each

other before precipitating into the oblivion" (2015, my translation[189]). Smith holds (while discussing the short comic version) that "'Here' orbits loosely around the life of a man who is born in 1957 and grows up in the house" (Smith 2015: 55). It may seem counterintuitive, but both descriptions are fitting.

As said, *Here* is set in the corner of a living room based on McGuire's childhood home in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. "Neither unity of time nor action is the governing logic of *Here*: rather, it is unity of space", affirms Moncion, and continues: "in both the 1989 comic and 2014 book, the temporal palimpsest of panels is anchored in space—specifically, in the corner of an American living room" (2017: 204).

Nothing memorable happens in the course of *Here*. The storylines are frayed over the years and often reduced to small, insignificant events; several of them start but are never ended, as the arrow that is shot in 1402 and that, similarly to the Zeno paradox, never hits its aim. Groensteen, commenting the short story version, affirmed that "surely, none of this is worth telling" (1991: 98, my translation[190]). The action of the book goes nonetheless from 3000500000 years BCE to 22175 AD, and the house in question only occupies a small section of that chronology: it is built in 1906-07; inhabited and refurbished several times; it undergoes a fire (1996), a burglary (1997), a collapse (2015) and is finally destroyed by a flood (2111).

Still, in this absence of a consistent plot, where the internal coherence is maintained and patrolled by the braiding effects (I will discuss it more in detail in the following subsection), some periods and some storylines are more important than others.

First of all, if we count how many times every year appears in the course of the story and we sum the appearances, we can immediately observe the concentration and thickening of events in the course of the 20th and first years of the 21st centuries:

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[189] "Ici raconte l'histoire d'un lieu – un coin indifférent de l'Amérique profonde – et celle des êtres qui l'ont habité à travers les siècles. […] C'est une vaste fresque historique dans laquelle les existences se croisent et souvent, se font écho, avant d'être précipitées dans l'oubli".
[190] "Certainement, tout cela ne valait pas la peine d'être conté".
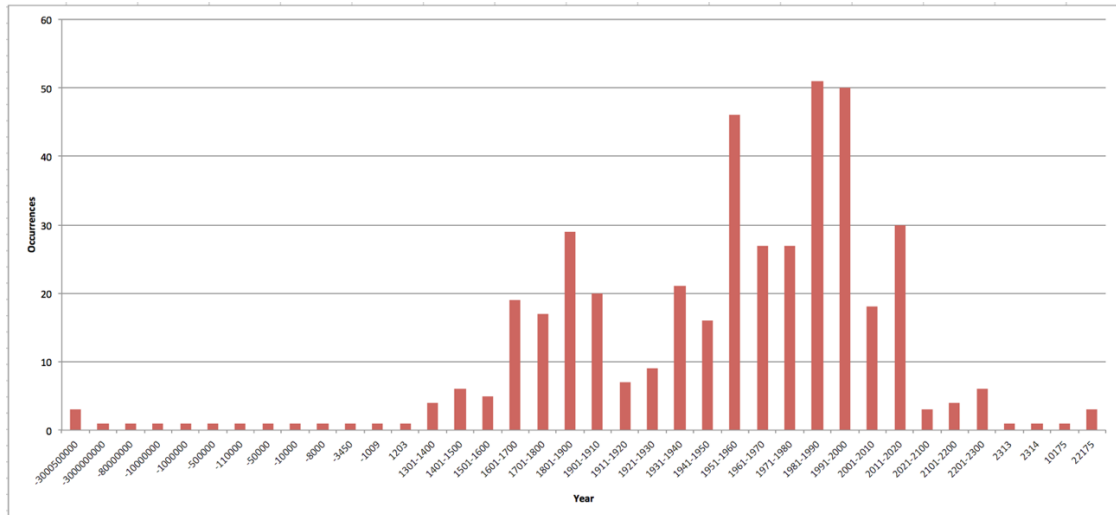
Distribution of Here's storylines over the centuries

From this follows the confirmation that *Here* is indeed the story of a place, but this place is mainly showed as the corner of a room, mostly in a period ranging from 1951 to 2020. It is also interesting to see the superposition, conscious and unconscious, between McGuire's life and the most significant span of events in *Here*. The action of the book begins (following the *syuzhet*) in 1957, the year McGuire was born. And despite no character about to give birth features in *Here* (as opposed to the six-pages version, where the action began with a woman having labour), the first panel set in 1957 features a crib, letting the reader understand that there must be a newborn. Chaney affirms in this sense that "what seems to be the autobiography of a place turns out to be a mask for autographic business as usual" (2017: 178): "*Here* is thus ideal for identifying how autobiography operates when it is not a generic paradigm but a mode. What I mean to say is that although *Here* is not an autobiography in the strictest sense, it is autobiographical" (Chaney 2017: 183).

It could be useful to remind that several key inspirations for both 'Here' and *Here* were autobiographic. The first came to McGuire when he was moving into a new apartment, and he wondered who had inhabited that place before him; and it also derived from his family's habit to take a collective portrait every Christmas, something remindful of the cyclical nature of human things and the irreparability of time passing (most significantly, a *time freezing signpost* – the photo – deriving from a *time flowing signpost* – a recurrence).

Preparatory page for Here (McGuire 2015).

Similarly, while working at the book version, his parents and sister died, and he had the occasion to go back to his parents' house and look into the various "old souvenirs, the family pictures, the videos, all these things that we had to move and archive elsewhere" (McGuire, in Groensteen 2015, my translation[191]). This manages to translate in a constant feeling of subjectivity and loss that pervades the work and somehow compensate for the dilution of time into a span hugely superior to the length of human life, a point I will better discuss later.

The other consideration that we can do on the chronological diffusion of the story starts from retracing every year's appearances and identifying the more consistent storylines. The method is not completely sound, as for example there are several occurrences during

[191] "Tous ces vieux souvenirs, les photos de famille, les vidéos, toutes ces choses qu'il a fallu déménager et archiver ailleurs".

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the year 1990, but all are unrelated, uninfluential events[192]. Nonetheless, it gives a significant clue of *when* things happen in *Here*:
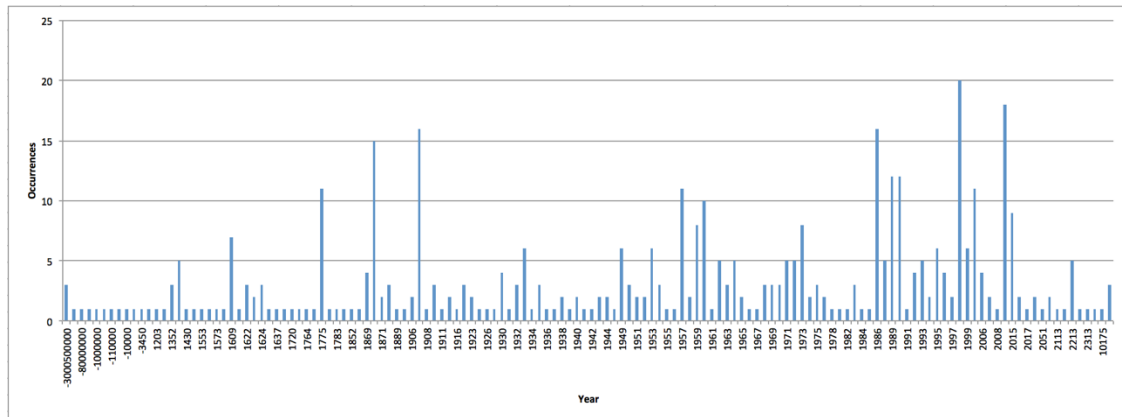
Distribution of Here's storylines per year

Twenty years have at least five occurrences each, which makes their storylines a bit more consistent than the others; out of these, around half are clearly longer. Let's try, then, to retrace *Here*'s events by following its most prominent storylines, partially reconstituting its *fabula*.

The action that unfolds from the beginning until the 15th century goes from a primordial mélange of gasses and liquids (painted with impressionist brushstrokes) to some prehistoric animals wandering around; similarly, the only windows we have on the far future concern two imaginary animals and a flower. No human is present since the 2313 AD, when the radiation level is detected to be too high to consent human life.

In 1402, a native is shooting an arrow; in 1609, a (non-consensual?) sex act is interrupted by a noise; in 1624, Dutch traders misunderstand a peace offer (a sack of local soil) from the Lenni-Lenape Indians for a joke. In 1775, in a house nearby, Benjamin Franklin has a fight with his loyalist son, William. In 1870, a painter (according to Smith, a figure that joins the painters William Dunlap and George Inness: 2015: 55) is sketching Franklin's house, in what will become a painting hold in 'our' house in the 1930s.

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[192] This proves nonetheless the plasticity that the sole indication of the year offers to the structure of the work, allowing the author to modulate the amount of indefiniteness so that an event may be totally unrelated to another happening the same year, or they may be immediately successive in time. McGuire uses twice this resource to play with polychronicity, as in the double page with nine inserts that depicts the construction of the house in 1907 (same day or days) or in the analogous one where a bird enters the house in 1998 (consecutive moments).

In 1907, as said, the house that fills the scene is built, and our view is finally occupied by the corner of a room (a passage that seems natural since that was the image with which the graphic novel began: an inversion that further underlines the impermanence of things). In 1973, people are reunited to watch a family movie; in 1986, the members of a local archaeological society want to look in the backyard for remains of native Americans; in 1989, a joke about death is interrupted by what seems a stroke of one of the people listening; in 1998, a bird enters the house and assault a girl; in 2005, an elderly man is sleeping in his son's living room; in 2015, a couple is moving in the apartment.

In 2111 the house is destroyed by a flood, turning the place into a water mass inhabited by large sea animals; in 2213, the place seems to have become a swamp, and a tour guide (either a robot or a hologram herself) leads around tourists and tells them about the house that once stood there.

The book closes circularly, as it opens, on three concentric levels: in the backflap, the room is empty and dark, except for the light coming out of the window, and no time indication is given. In the first and last page, set in 2014, the room is empty, except for a bookcase and a box, once open and once closed. In one of the first pages and the second to last, a woman is looking for something that she eventually finds.

The 1957 finds what she was looking for, the novel's frame closes (McGuire 2014)

The woman who entered the room in 1957 without remembering why she came there finally reminds herself or the reason. She was there to pick up a yellow book, whose salience is highlighted by its sharp contrast with the purple dominant of the page, possibly suggesting a *mise en abyme* of the whole narrative structure – that is, that the book portrayed is indeed a copy of *Here*, hence, at least on the symbolic level, that the story is over.

A second closure seems to come from the second level: the empty room of 2014, whose bookcase was barely filled by some books taken out of a cardboard box, is emptier in the second to last image, where the box is closed and the bookcase void. This suggest that the inhabitants of the house are leaving it, and that we are accompanying and mimicking their movement away from it. Yet, if we compare the disposition of the books in the first 2014 image to that of the young couple's bookcase in 2015, we understand that what seemed a closure image of the previous inhabitants moving out is actually a circular link, suggesting that somebody or something will occupy the place again. Since the books that

we see in the 2014 page in the beginning of the graphic novel are the same that we will see in 2015, what we are shown is not a relocation *from* that house, but *in* that house; it is not a closing metaphor, but a re-opening one. This is a small but significant example of the pivotal function of braiding in the book, that I will discuss soon.
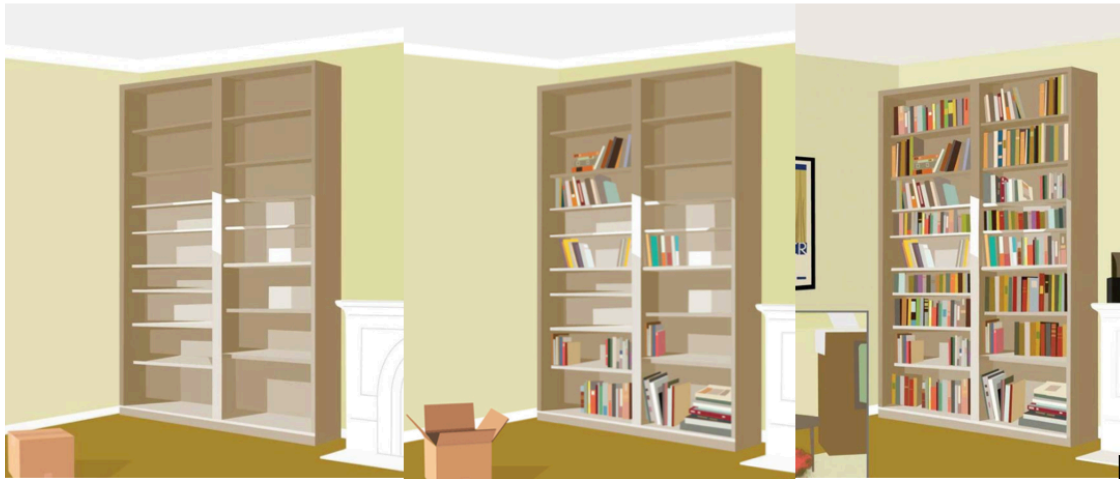
From left to right, the same detail in the last page of the graphic novel, in one of the first (in both cases dated 2014) and in the middle of the book (dated 2015) (McGuire 2014)

4.3.2. Structure and style 2: braiding

If the plot, then, is so heavily episodic, made up of short storylines often left without a conclusion, what keeps *Here* together?

It is certainly not its stylistic affinity. On the contrary, the book resorts on a stylistic heterogeneity (that, it must be underlined, is not less coherent than stylistic homogeneity): the drawings are a collage of styles, and what we know is that it will change accordingly to the historical moment they are depicting: some pages are made with vector art, other with watercolours; some drawings are coloured by hand, others with Photoshop; some pictures have sharp lines, others are raw sketches. The Earth of 3000500000 years ago is a series of blurred, brushed traits, while the room in 2015 contains very recognizable furniture: we can distinguish a design seat (the Egg Chair by Arne Jacobsen), two IKEA bookcases, an IKEA lamp, a Vermeer exhibition poster.

Here's room in 2015 (McGuire 2014)

As Groensteen observes,

> there is a whole staging of time through furniture and decorations of the room –
> another passage of time that sediments its multiple signs (together with the haircuts,
> the attitudes, the habits of the characters that appear and disappear) […] the changes
> in the decoration of the room give the reader an observation field so rich that they
> […] offer a wide subject for reflecting over the impermanence of things"
> (Groensteen 2015, my translation[193]).

Now, clearly the fixed visual perspective is the main semantic unifier of the book. Yet
there is something more at work that gives the idea that this galaxy of narrative fragments
combines together as a whole.

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[193] "Il y a aussi toute une mise en scène du temps à travers le mobilier et la décoration de la pièce
— autre passage du temps qui dépose ses signes multiples (de même pour les coiffures, les
attitudes, les habits des personnages qui apparaissent et disparaissent). […] Les changements dans
la décoration de la pièce fournissent au lecteur un champ d'observation si riche qu'ils peuvent
[…] offrir une ample matière à réflexion sur l'impermanence des choses".

It is, indeed, the ecology of braiding that keeps together the narrative, establishing a series of micro-dialogues on the visual level (Groensteen 1991: 100; Moncion 2017: 205). *Here* thus requires an active reader "to pay attention to small details, to construct and modify hypotheses and generally engage in the interpretation game" (Moncion 2017: 205). This enhanced interactivity is due to the fact that, if the content is often banal,

> the form, however, upends our expectations of comics panels arranged in a linear chronology, and thus complicates our ideas of how the text should be read. *Here* presents itself as non-narrative in order to get the reader involved and reflecting on their own process of reading. It is not just about what happens on the page; it is about how that page expects to be read and how that expectation works on the reader. (2017: 207)

This will in turn enhance the reader's interaction and augment the possibility of personal projections into the narrative, maximizing the effect of nostalgic triggers present in the narrative.

Nonetheless, the game the reader has to play is not crystal clear from the beginning; on the contrary, in the first place she may believe that the point is cracking the code of the book, stocking the fragments in order to reconstitute a unified narrative that will make sense of what is happening (Kaplan 2015). She will soon realize, though, that the fragmentation of the narrative into seemingly drifting blocks will impede its ultimate reconstitution, and that even when one reconstitutes the chronology, there will always be gaps all over, following their "own logic of spatial connectivity"[194] (Mikkonen 2017: 46): "in McGuire's hands, windows organize another sort of inhuman vastness: the incomprehensible vastness of time" (Konstantinou 2015), what Chaney defines a "non-human ontic timelessness" (2017: 178).

As Caracciolo observes, then, "the use of inset panels and the constant movement between different temporal plans scatter the linearity of restricted arthrology; keeping together the panels' series is not a temporal or casual sequentiality anymore, but stylistic

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[194] In this sense, truly reading *Here* means "to engage, at least on the level of the page, with tenseless time", a surface where "past, present, and future are simultaneously real, and time is mappable, like space" (Gardner 2016: 168).

suggestions or thematic resonances" (2016: 187-88, my translation[195]). Those elements 'rhyme' with each other thanks to their iconic solidarity, an effect which is made ever more perceivable by the continuous use of analepses and prolepses iterating the same fragments all over the book (I discussed already how iterations enhances the nostalgic effect of a given text). This creates a whole that holds according to a network logic rather than a linear one, where singular assonances join together in a rhizomatic structure. Caracciolo comments that "the material work of constantly turning the pages back and forth to recognize a character or a situation, becomes an equivalent of the cognitive work of building a narrativity network where the linearity of the sequence only reflects thematic and stylistic criteria" (2016: 189-90, my translation[196]).

As Konstantinou affirms, this has important repercussions on the book's materiality. Generally speaking, comics invite

> flipping, folding, pointing, fondling, stroking, even ripping. The reader's capacity to touch pictures, the physical weight of the book in our hands—that is, the haptic dimension of comics—is part of what has historically distinguished the medium from other representational art forms and is one reason comics can so successfully combine the visual urgency of film with the emotional intimacy of the novel. It is only slightly an exaggeration to say that comics is an art of touching. And the best comics have often sought to activate our awareness of their haptic materiality. (Konstantinou 2015)

This is exactly what *Here* manages to do, increasing the interactivity of the reader and requiring a significant amount of work to accept and play its game. The rewards, of course, is a closer involvement that should enhance the emotional experience of the reading act, maximizing the effects of the nostalgic potential already present in the narrative.

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[195] "L'uso degli inserti, e il movimento costante tra piani temporali diversi, scardinano la linearità dell'artrologia ristretta: a tenere insieme la serie delle vignette non è più una sequenzialità temporale o causale, ma suggestioni stilistiche o risonanze tematiche".
[196] "Il lavoro fisico di sfogliare costantemente le pagine avanti e indietro, per riconoscere un personaggio o una situazione, diventa così un equivalente del lavoro cognitivo di costruire una rete di narratività là dove la linearità della sequenza riflette solo criteri tematici e stilistici".

### 4.3.3. Motifs 1: time, space, and everyday routine

Throughout all the graphic novel, "we are solicited to see place as timely, perishable" (Chaney 2017: 186). It is indeed from this peculiar twine of space and time that *Here* draws much of its force. This includes its value of cautionary tale on the finitude of the Anthropocene, well exemplified by the animals that contour the human slice of narrative. Chaney notices that "*Here* creates uncertainty about an impending danger" that several characters "sense but cannot confront or name" (2017: 185): "at times, the text suggests it may be an animal in the forest drawing near; at others, as mentioned, the panel arrangements encourage us to locate that danger in the archeologists who knock at the house now marking their remains"(2017: 185). In this sort of philosophical nostalgia, though, the ultimate danger seems to be what everybody fears: death, individual or collective.

To achieve that, very often *Here* makes use of a comparison between the human time and the vaster, natural time, resorting to chronological signposts to convey a sense of worried melancholy. As Moncion affirms, this opens up to various interpretations:

> Are […] human tragedies small and insignificant against the backdrop of geological time? Are they the stubborn and unconscious efforts of humans to make a mark on the hugeness of existence? Are the minutiae of human history being celebrated, mocked, or both? […] the smallness of human accidents and accomplishments is sandwiched between a vast, unknowable past and a precarious, environmentally catastrophic future. (Moncion 2017: 207

Konstantinou comments that "more so than the original Raw six-pager, the book version of *Here* dwells on the radical (because intrinsic) destructibility of life" (2015). Death and loss are the main themes of *Here* micro-narratives, as proven by the four double pages where every character laments the metaphorical or literal loss of something. By making reference to the concept of autoimmunity, Konstantinou affirms that,

> one might argue that the very possibility of caring about the future, of being invested in one outcome over another, depends on a prior condition of destructibility, the necessary truth that we can lose everything. On this view, our awareness of our inability to inhabit these larger temporalities or histories—our awareness of our own destructibility, the necessary destructibility of everything —is the very basis of mourning. (Konstantinou 2015)
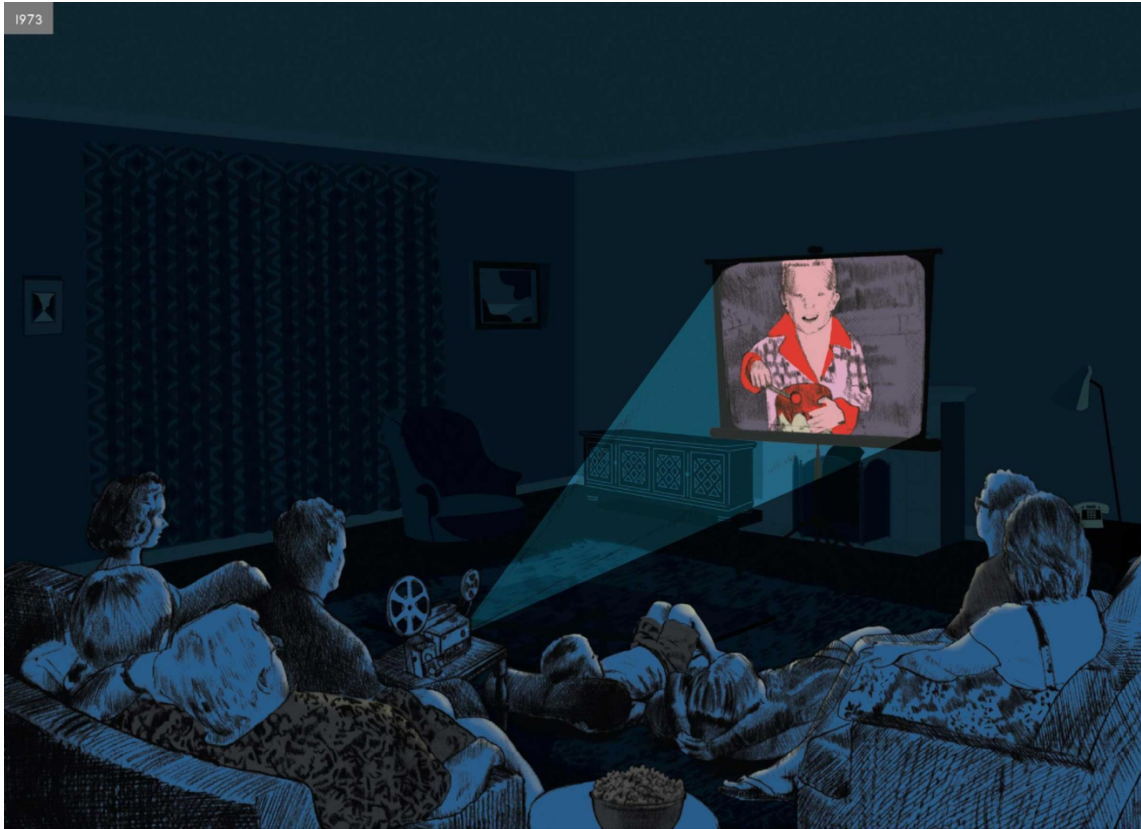
A family video is shown in 1973 (McGuire 2014)

The other side of the same coin is represented in the book by the frequent motif of childhood and adolescence, that includes the frequent games played in the course of the graphic novel and the recurrent Christmas pictures the family reunited use to take every year; a ritual that bears, Smith observes, "both the cyclical nature of human affairs and the irretrievability of the past" (Smith 2015: 55)[197]. In this sense, the family reunion, in 1973, to see a Super8 about the childhood of one of the family members, conjuring again two different chronological signposts, represents a perfect example of one of the most eminently nostalgic themes of the book: enjoying the moments of life while they happen, before they end and disappear forever.

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[197] Similarly, Chaney observed that the "the many scenes of childhood glee depicted in the graphic novel" almost always are "riven with loss" (2017: 180).

Loss and water in the same panel (McGuire 2014)

This time-passing consideration reverberates also in the water metaphor. Water is ubiquitous in *Here*, a true *fil rouge* that embodies both the theme of the flowing of time and that of life passing and changing, perishing and reinventing itself in a continuity that regards cosmic time and the concept of life in itself, more abstract than human existences and their continuous attempts to hold on to impermanent, transient things.

This consideration extends to the very idea of the home, which we soon understand being not necessarily about the physical house, but rather about its symbol. Normally, from a phenomenological point of view, "home is perceived as a safe and familiar space, be it a haven or shelter, where people can relax, retreat and care" (Duyvendak 2011: 27), a feeling that we develop over time when living in a given place (2011:37). One of the themes of *Here*, underlined by the continuous vicissitudes that the home and that slice of land more in general undergo, is exactly that nothing, not even that idea of home, lasts, "whatever it is or however permanent it seems" (McGuire, in Smith 2015: 55).

In this sense, and notwithstanding the difference between comic and graphic novel, I strongly disagree with Groensteen's consideration that 'Here' would represent the

denounce "of the mediocrity of a lot of human existences […] an existence that one could always define vegetative, as much as it shows the symptoms of an alienated condition" (1991: 99, my translation[198]). In the apparently insignificance and routine of the fragments of life that *Here* isolates, we can find instead the very ephemeral essence of being, with its collection of small, trivial moments that eventually constitute our lives, and that one must be able to treasure before they will be gone forever. The mundane episodes of *Here* are in this sense the nostalgic incarnation of the author's empathy towards the impermanence of things way rather than they are the sarcastic criticism of postmodern alienation, as in Groensteen's view.

Moncion aptly comments that

> The iteration of unremarkable human activity is definitely a main theme of *Here*. There are several two-page panels that show characters in smaller panels engaged in similar activities across time—mothers holding babies, girls dancing with youthful abandon, parties, hugs, and a sequence in which a woman makes sure her husband has got "watch, wallet, keys" before he leaves for work (61, 77, 78). For the North American middle-class reader, many of the activities depicted will seem comfortingly familiar, even nostalgic. (2017: 207)

4.3.4. Motifs 2: history, memory, and nostalgia

To realize *Here*, McGuire started researching extensively, a process that went from "collecting images of mothers and children to stockpiling phrases in the language of the local natives, the Lenni-Lenape Indians, who inhabited New Jersey for over 10,000 years" (Smith 2015: 55). He put in the book William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's estranged son, and an exchange between Dutch traders and the already mentioned Lenni-Lenape Indians.

This leads Moncion to affirm the book significance "not only for graphic narrative studies, but also for the study of history. Not only does it complicate linear time, it also demonstrates the historian's impulse to narrativize, to clean up and organize a messy and sometimes overdetermined reality" (Moncion 2017: 200).

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[198] "Rarement pareille violence fut atteinte dans la dénonciation, en quelques pages, de la médiocrité de tant d'existences humaines. […] un mode d'existence qu'on pourrait presque qualifier de végétatif, tant il concentre les symptômes d'une condition aliénée".

The reader would be the one embodying the historian's drive to perform what Hayden White called 'emplotment', that is, "the narrativizing of history", giving shape and causality to "the various forms that non-narrative history can take" (2017: 200). *Here* would be in this sense a database that the reader can choose to narrativize, actualizing its archival potential and linking events near in time as much as events far in time but near on the page, so to form the network of meanings that I mentioned before.

It is in this act of narrativization that the reader should put that supplementary meaning that comes from her subjective experience, adding to the story she is reading a little layer of what happened to her own parents, to her own relatives, to her own house. It is in this projecting act that lays much nostalgic potential of comics, originating from the balance between the amount of details that are given to the reader (and that allow to directly trigger remembrance by portraying elements of the past) and the amount that are denied, and that the reader should fill in with her experience.

"Experience" is also the key to understand the temporal working of *Here.*

In discussing *Here*, Caracciolo quotes Monica Fludernik's concept of 'experentiality', affirming that it is inseparable from human interests and parameters, since it "presupposes, to various extents, the temporal scale of human life and its corporeal, as well as cognitive, characteristics" (Caracciolo 2016: 178, my translation[199]). As a result, staging wide temporalities (as that of *Here*) endangers "not only the chronological endurance of the plot, but its very causal and teleological nature" (2016: 178, my translation[200]). This process is nonetheless contrasted by the various nostalgic moments that the graphic novel shows. Chase and Shaw remark that "the closer societies have comprehended the biological finality of death - or that the hereafter happens, if at all, outside of historical time - the greater their capacity for nostalgia" (1989: 5-6). As Salmose affirms,

> Nostalgia dwells in the grey zone between Husserl's internal time consciousness and
> an external temporal measurement. The subjectivity of time, the Bergsonian durée,

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[199] "Essa presuppone, a vari livelli, la scala temporale della vita umana e le sue caratteristiche corporee oltre che cognitive".
[200] "Non solo la tenuta cronologica dell'intreccio, ma la sua stessa natura causale e teleologica".

subverts the irreversibility of time and permits a subject to relive past, and future, events in individual consciousness. (2012: 121).

As Sedikides et al. observes, then, if mental time travel, especially to such vast extensions of time, "renders humans cognizant of their inescapable demise, which can constitute a potent threat to meaning", the mental time travel backwards that constitutes the nostalgic reverie counteracts this effect and "may serve to preserve or restore meaning" (2014: 49).

Furthermore, Moncion observes that "*Here* is peppered with memory, memorialization, and lapses in memory: characters ask each other questions such as 'what do you want to be remembered for?' (39) and make statements such as 'you're going to remember this day for the rest of your life' (38)" (2017: 205). In fact, memory processes are continuously metaphorized in the work. Ware affirms that "in *Here*, space and time work in the mind of the reader in a way that's closer to real memory and experience than anything that had come before in comics" (2006: 6). A perfect example is the double page whose inserts show on the left a man in 1960 scraping off two layers of wallpaper (one purple and one green, almost perfectly complementary), and on the right a man in 1949 covering the green wallpaper with the purple one. As Moncion observes,

> Individually, these panels show three banal activities; put together, however, they suggest a certain fundamental futility to human action, or at least a deep impermanence. Wallpaper can be chipped off as easily as it is put up; knowledge can be lost as easily as it is gained. However, there is another way of reading this image: while the left-hand page shows that loss over time is inevitable or likely, emphasizing decay or removal, the right-hand page, with the man affixing the new wallpaper, emphasizes repair, novelty, construction, and perhaps some optimism. (2017: 207)

Scraping off old wallpaper, putting on new wallpaper, and wondering on memory workings
(McGuire 2014)

More can be said about this image, though, as the two inserts stand on the foreground of a 1986 spread, where the dominant colour is a similar kind of green. This allows to think that what we are seeing is one of the various embodiments of a memory process, that recalls the preceding moments in that walls' life by mental association rather than following an exact chronology. This mirrors the fact that "human memory does not select recollections in reason of a purported 'objective' importance, but on the base of intimate resonances" (Groensteen 2015, my translation[201]). It would be interesting to ask ourselves who we think is the subject of this memorial act: if the meganarrator shows it on the behalf of the owner of the house, or if it is us who are supposed to have an omniscient (though messy) perspective on the vicissitudes that the house has seen during the years.

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[201] "La mémoire humaine ne sélectionne pas les souvenirs en fonction d'une quelconque importance « objective » mais sur la base de résonances intimes".

Conclusion

As Groensteen affirms, "on the scale of cosmos and nature, compared to the long times of the history of the world, of matter and life, human actions, whatever they are, appear equally insignificant" (Groensteen 2015, my translation[202]). The consideration of that smallness and impermanence is strongly connected to a kind of plural, almost philosophical nostalgia.

Here stages this dialectic between collective and individual where "collectivity is certainly implied, if not produced", since "by eschewing the individual-centered narrative (punctuated by protagonists and narrators) in favor of multiplicity" the text gives us "no single entity with which to identify. Rather, we are assumed to become in the process of reading more like places than people ourselves" (Chaney 2017: 17).

In this highly interactive narrative, we are the one reconstituting the memory act that supersedes the whole narration; we infuse with our lives and our experience the story we are reading.

Despite its fractured narrative, its high level of complexity and its negation of human experientiality, *Here* can thus be read without effort as an inherently nostalgic work.

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[202] "À l'échelle du cosmos et de la nature, par rapport au temps long de l'histoire du monde, de la matière et de la vie, les agissements humains, quels qu'ils soient, apparaissent tous également insignifiants".

Conclusion

Is nostalgia a (post)modern disease?

In the first chapter of this work, I tried to extensively answer this question.

First of all, is nostalgia a disease? The history of the concept proves that, after a long period as a physical sickness and a shorter one as a mental illness, nostalgia has taken over the contemporary sensibility with what seems to be its true nature, that of a complex emotion (or, in rare cases, of a free-floating mood). As an emotion, remarkably, it is not negative, but rather bittersweet (or even positive, according to some scholars). The longing for an irretrievable past is always accompanied by some consolatory, mellow side that makes us somehow feel at home, if only for an instant.

This bittersweet nature, in turn, is indeed responsible for the sometimes-escapist nature of the nostalgic feeling, but is also at the heart of its potentially changing force towards the present and the future. In the end, most of nostalgia's use depends on the person, or persons, that make use of it, and it is always necessary to unpack the specifics of any single occurrence and see what is happening in detail.

Secondly, is nostalgia modern, or postmodern? The fact that the word did not exist until the modern era is only partially significant, because the feeling was already known, if only intertwined with similar concepts (above all, that of homesickness). For sure, nostalgic experience knew two moments of growth in history, with the passage to modernity and with that to postmodernity. The constant acceleration of the last two centuries was the main reason that propelled the counteracting, slowing-down effect of nostalgia; an uncertain present and fear of the future will always carry a nostalgic reaction against it. In this sense, it is not surprising that nostalgia bound so well with popular culture, moving from being only a mood to a mode of cultural production that is, together with irony, one of the true essence of contemporary sensibility. As Hutcheon observed, both, in the end, are a way to reclaim some agency over things, to hide under a layer of distance a desperate search for something perceived as more authentic and innocent.

With these premises, I tried to investigate the role of nostalgia in comics, basing my analysis on graphic novels, as the field where comics' potentialities are better expressed. I resorted mostly to theory coming from classical and postclassical narratology and cognitive science (regarding emotion contagion, affect theory and so on), but I tried to

always keep in mind the diachronic aspect regarding the socio-cultural evolution of the medium.

I divided my investigation in two branches, production and reception, each in turn divided in three sections (motifs, style and structure on the production side, readers, fans and collectors on the reception side), constantly interacting the one with the other.

In the motif section I identified in a nostalgic character, living out of her homeplace and reminiscing about the past, the prototypical example of motifs in comics. I then proceeded to isolate four supplementary categories of motifs: chronological, linked to what I called time flowing signposts, that is, reminders of the inevitable passing of time, and time freezing signposts, capable of remembering forever a determinate moment in time; spatial, remarking the importance of the concept of home and the role of landscape and its materiality in remembering people of the finiteness of their lives; objects-related, especially in relation to contemporary consumer society, and as a means of construction of one's identity; finally, connected to senses and sensory memory.

In the style section I tried to define the concept in general and in the field of comics' analysis. I examined the most significant stylistic elements considering their nostalgic potential. Starting with lines, graphiation, and grammatextuality, I evidenced the dialectic between individual style and the references to other people's work, and how the latter strategy easily prompts nostalgia. I then moved to considering the degree of iconicity of a work and its implication for the recognition of facial expression in what Plantinga calls "the scene of empathy". I discussed the role of colour in conveying emotion, finding nostalgic palettes to be either bi- or trichromatic or mimicking the colours of the period they are referring. Finally, I remarked how the use of a narrative-driven page layout seems to be the choice of preference of nostalgic works.

In the structure section, I isolated a bipolar disposition, built upon chronological (now/then), structural (embedding/embedded) and spatial (here/there) dichotomies. I found the temporal dichotomy, in particular, to embody what Salmose calls the analeptic structure, a framing of the nostalgized experience in which, I argued, one of the pole may be as well left implicit. I then analysed the effect of a structure made of iterations and transformations, which I identified as a well suitable skeleton for a nostalgic narrative due to its reinforcing of the narrated events. Finally, I discussed at length the possibilities

offered by transtextuality, focusing on the structural implications of the use of pastiches reminiscent of the (perceived) innocence of older comics.

In the readers section I posited that there are three kinds of emotive responses to a graphic novel: one has to do with the reader involvement, one has to do with affect transmission, and the third one has to do with closeness to a character.

I tried to show how a high level of interaction by the reader is a prominent feature of the act of reading comics, in reason of the blanks of comic narratives and their interaction with the degree of iconicity, that allows the reader to browse the details of the page and project herself on the missing ones. I then analysed several models of affect transmission, ranging from emotion contagion to identification to empathy, and settled for a revised idea of empathy proposed by Coplan. Finally, I revised several pre-requisites to engage with person-like characters, like transparency, mind-style, continuity, and salience. I therefore presented Eder's model of closeness to characters, that accounts for five variables: spatiotemporal proximity, cognitive relations, perceived social relations, imagined interaction and emotional responses. I conclude that from the combined action of these variables comes a closeness to characters that could make the reader feel nostalgic.

In the fans section, I focused on the connection between comics fandom and nostalgia. I did so by analysing the links between comics' participative culture and the fans' personal investment in the totemic object of their adoration. My investigation developed on three directions: an account of the interactive, inherently productive role of fans; the reconstruction of their longing for a (purported) lost, innocent authenticity and the consequent role of fans as defenders of the canon, and the implication this process has for reboots. Finally, I tried to foreground issues of gender representation, concerning both the importance of female characters in comics culture and the composition of comic fan audiences, where females have to undergo three different stigmas: having to deal with 'low culture', going against gender expectations and being 'too old' for comics (something that does not apply to their male counterpart).

In the collectors section, finally, I tried to show the links between collecting and nostalgia, by following three main paths. In the first place, I investigated the emotional involvement collectors develop towards their possession, and how this is in turn linked to collectibles embodying qualities related to the owner's youth. In the second place, I signalled the

analogies between the chase for closure that characterises the act of reading and its equivalent in the collecting drive. In the third place, I discussed issues related to the objects' materiality, and the implications they have in the evolution of comics collecting and nostalgia, especially on the light of the recent digital turn. Finally, I further considered issues of gender and nostalgia, trying to answer why collecting comics seems to be an almost exclusively male habit.

With this framework in mind, I proceeded to analyse closely three graphic novels that in my perspective were particularly significant for a study of nostalgia: Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken*, that I considered the prototype of a nostalgic narrative, presenting almost every characteristics that I isolated in the previous sections; Tan's *The Arrival*, that I chose because it represented the theme of spatial nostalgia, often neglected in this study, in a way that heavily relied on stylistic and structural specifics; and McGuire's *Here*, the most complex and, at a first glance, antinostalgic work of my selection, that nevertheless, as I tried to show, exhibits several nostalgic qualities and tensions.

In the course of this analysis, some questions remained open, and are worth of a future study of their own.

First of all, once established the critical framework, a similar investigation could be performed on a wider sample, from a geographical, historical and mediological perspective, extending the analysis to a more transnational sample and ideally to comics at large. It is an enterprise that would require a considerable amount of time, but nonetheless one worth trying.

Similarly, the motif of migration has been a little overshadowed in my analysis. Is there a reason why some motifs, like the adolescence one, seem to be more frequent in the medium, and other seem to be less prominent? Is the medium perceived to be more or less suitable to tell this or that kind of story? A wider investigation in this sense could be useful to discover other specifics of the working of nostalgia in comics, and offer a more complete perspective on the nostalgic phenomenon.

When dealing with fandom and collectors, I had to confront the fact that not too much critical literature on graphic novels (as opposed to the one regarding comics) is available.

Further empirical, sociological studies could be of great help for the sake of this and similar analyses.

Other answer could come in the next future from a wider appeal to cognitive literature applied to comics. Are most of the finding on cinema applicable to graphic narratives, and if so, how do they relate to medium-specific issues of visual style? My provisional answer was to postulate a relation, but more investigation could be done in this direction.

Several questions remain open also for what concerns the nature of nostalgia itself: is its narrative mechanism a redeeming one or a contaminated one? To which extent its escapist drive could be channelled towards a critical, changing stance against an unsatisfactory present or future? Is the constant acceleration of life pace that began with modernity real or perceived?

The answers to these questions could only come with future research. My hope is to have provided, for the moment, a small but useful contribution to existing scholarship.

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