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Teaching Graphic Novels:
The Making of History in Jason Lutes' Berlin Books

When the Canadian Jason Lutes published the first installment of Berlin in 1998 (Black Eye Productions), the term 'graphic novel' was not yet a big shibboleth, neither in the marketing departments of the large book stores nor in academic comics discourse. In 2001, issues 1-8 had been compiled in Berlin, Book 1: City of Stones (henceforth B1), and eight years later, issues 9-16 came out as Berlin, Book 2: City of Smoke (henceforth B2), both published by the Canadian company Drawn and Quarterly, which had gained renown as publishers of underground-inspired alternative comics in the 1990s. According to Drawn and Quarterly, Berlin, Book 3: City of Light, is to be published in September 2018. The fact that Berlin was first serialized is nothing unusual: for example, the 'big three' that put the graphic novel on its way as a genre – Art Spiegelman's historical biography of his father during WWII, Maus I and II (1986/91), Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' Watchmen (1986-7), and Frank Miller's The Dark Night Returns (1986, and many others after them) – came out in installments before they were rounded up in book form. On the one hand, the Berlin books resemble classic historical novels in their plot construction, on the other, they come with certain modernist (Kavaloski 2012) and postmodernist twists, owing generally to the narrative make-up and specifically to the pictorial medium, their layout or 'tableau.' – At first, I shall deal with Berlin as an intermedial historical novel before I focus on three parameters of complexity that distinguish it as a graphic novel from traditional comic books: plot and narration, panel design and layout, and references to texts and/or media.

Berlin as an Intermedial Historical Novel

I have already mentioned that Berlin strikes readers as a historical novel to begin with. This impression is fostered by its overall drawing style, the ligne claire or clear line, and the fact that the panels present highly mimetic backdrops drawn with the same line weight as the characters in the foreground (Kent 2013). Oftentimes we find full-page splashes or splash panels of only the cityscape, rendered in great detail.

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1 For underground comics or comix, as they were called, see Hatfield (2005, ch. 1), and Hescher (2016, ch. 2.1). Alternative comics borrowed from underground (e.g. Robert Crumb et al.) in that they were often autobiographical or slice-of-life narratives; apart from that, they were inspired in their styles by punk and grunge. Representative of that period/movement are the Hernandez brothers, Dave Sim, Chris Ware, Daniel Clowes, Peter Bagge, Seth (aka Gregory Gallant), Adrian Tomine, Julie Doucet, or Mary Fleener.

2 See my account of the forerunners to the first graphic novels in Hescher (2016, ch. 2.2, esp. 17).

3 See Hescher (2016, 1-2). Layout is the more technical term, meaning the way the individual panels are spread out on the page; 'tableau' was brought up by Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle (1976) and established as a technical term by Benoît Peeters (1991/93). It refers to the comics page as a holistic space in which the linear sequence of the single images or frames stands in contrast to the non-linear way images relate to each other, across sequences and, possibly, across pages (cf. Hatfield 2005, 48).

4 See Eiter (2013, 233-7), for details about intermedial references of style in Berlin.
Thus, the city seems to be as realistic as the characters.\(^5\) On the other hand, this realism is somewhat artificially enhanced: for a number of his images of cityscapes and characters, Lutes borrows from photographs and paintings of the time: works that depict cityscapes other than Berlin or photographs of historical persons which he uses as 'prototypes' for two of his minor fictional characters.\(^6\) Thus, it has been argued, Lutes blurs the distinction between fact and fiction and foregrounds the representational nature of the comic form (Enns 2010, 50).

The first two Berlin books are about life in the city from the points of view of main and minor characters from virtually all social strata of the Weimar Republic from 1928 to 1930. The characters are more or less bound up with the political forces and events such as the massacre of May 1, 1929 (Blutmali, with which Book 1 ends), the events leading up to the Weltbühne-Prozess (1930–31), the appearance of the paramilitary Sturmbteilung (SA), the rise of the National Socialist German Worker’s Party (NSDAP) and the emergence of Joseph Goebbels, the stock market crash in December 1929, the Horst Wessel murder in February 1930, and the German Federal Election in September of that year (Reichstagswahl), with which Book 2 ends. Similarly to the authors of Watchmen, Lutes uses both cross-cutting (Parallelmontage) and entrelacement\(^7\) to arrange the strands of action of the respective fictional characters. The impression that the narrative strands are interwoven rather than aligned in parallel is brought about by a technique which has minor characters from one strand of action occur as main characters in another or by a sudden shift of the point of view shifts from inside to outside (B1, 92/93) within a single sequence; in addition, Lutes uses graphic matches (e.g. B1, 59.9/60.1)\(^8\) or matches on action\(^9\) (e.g. B1, 43.1+2) to segue into another vignette and to create the impression that readers are engaged in a web rather than in a linear reading. All this alludes to cinematic techniques and conveys the impression that the graphic novel proceeds with “cinematic pacing” (Kent 2013), which is enhanced when episodes or strands of action literally end or begin with a ‘cut,’ for example when a third of an oblong horizontal panel remains entirely black with its right border notched at regular intervals (B1, 142.1). Finally, looking at two splash panels from Book 1, Chapter 1 (B1, 13+14) reminds me of the first four minutes of Walther Ruttmann’s 1927 film Berlin – Die Sinfonie der Großstadt, in which a fast train rolls through landscapes around and cityscapes in Berlin until it stops at Anhalter Bahnhof in the heart of the capital. Also, the daydream of the juvenile character David Schwarz, in which he heroically saves Rosa Luxemburg from drowning, is strikingly similar to a scene from

\(^5\) Being myself a resident of Berlin, I was startled by several panels and their truth to scale and direction, as when Marthe, Anna, and Margarethe walk near the Reichstag (B2, 195.5), or when Pela and Kid Hogan ambulate near the Bundesrat building in what today is Leipziger Straße 3–4 (B2, 187.1).

\(^6\) For instance, the Hinterhaus into which Marte Müller moves (B1, 28.7), the newspaper boy from chapter two (B1, 44.), or the external view from above the tram Kurt Severing is traveling in (B1, 70.9). To picture the art student Richard Blunck (B1, 31–42), Lutes uses a photograph of the German painter Heinrich Hoerle (for details, see Enns (2010, 49–50)).

\(^7\) Entrelacement is already found in romances and chansons de geste in the middle ages and early modernity, as in Arthurian romance or in Ludovico Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (1516, cf. Stierle 1980, 253–313). It was put to use again in the historical novels of the 19th and 20th century. In the context of Berlin, Schüwer generally speaks of an interweaving technique (Vernetzungsmontage, 2008, 284).

\(^8\) Henceforth, the number after the page number refers to the panel as read in the order of the Z-path, i.e. from the top left panel to the end of the strip and down, then again from left to right.

\(^9\) Similarly, to film editing, the match between two comics images is made between two related actions, e.g. a character throwing a sheet of paper out of a window and another character stepping on the sheet which has fallen on the sidewalk (see B1, 42.11 – 43.1-4).
Buster Keaton’s 1924 movie *The Navigator*. Thus, the graphic novel makes frequent intermedial allusions to the cinematic medium – and often relates to several other media on the plane of action.

The research on *Berlin* is easy to survey, for comparatively little has been published in the last 15 years (see Works Cited). Recent monographs on comics and/or graphic novels use *Berlin* to illustrate major issues like point-of-view construction and cross-cutting (Schüwer 2008) or mise-en-scène, ocularization, and focalization (Hescher 2016). The articles from essay collections focus on issues like *Berlin*’s closeness to anglophone modernism (Kavaloski 2012), its representation of fragmentary human experience (Etter 2013), and of history as a web and a medial construct (Enns 2010) and, as in one case, its metafictional devices (Köhler 2011).

**Berlin as a (Complex) Graphic Novel**

In *Reading Graphic Novels*, I argue that graphic novels are a historical text group (genre) that differs from traditional graphic narratives in terms of complexity, which, in itself, is a complex analytical category (Hescher 2016). In this approach, the following seven features have proven pertinent with regard to graphic novels as a genre, apart from what is commonly called comic books:

![Complexity Gradient](image)

Fig. 1: Hescher (2016, 56): complexity gradient

It must be added that the seven categories are gradable prototypical categories which do not all equally apply to one work (which is theoretically possible, though not realistic). Because of their gradability as single features and their differentiality when considered in sum, their score marks can be added up in terms of range. If a graphic narrative scores high (that is on the right end of one gradient) on several of the seven complexity gradients, it is quite safe to say that I am dealing with a graphic novel rather than a comic book. As a consequence, if none or just one or two complexity features are marked, it is equally safe to say that the work in question is a comic book and – despite its possible lengthiness – that it does not belong in the graphic novel genre.

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10 B1. 90.1-3 + 92.1-3, see also Enns (2010, 49) and Kavaloski (2012, 157).
11 As opposed to a classical category, in which an object is or is not a member, a prototypical category does justice to the ‘fuzziness’ of category boundaries and generally overlaps or intersects with other categories of its kind. Thus, a prototype category allows categorical assignments in terms of ‘both ... and,’ ‘rather ... than,’ as well as ‘is/is not’ relations (for details and context, see Hescher 2016, ch. 3.4).
In *Berlin* as a whole, I hold that all features except 3) and 5) are marked and that the work indubitably is a graphic novel. In a teaching context, I would focus on three representative features of complexity: 1) multilayered plot and narration, 4) meaning-enhancing panel design and layout, and 6) multiple references to texts or media. Applied to the novel, all three categories lead to a substantial number of findings. They can be taught in greater or lesser detail or on a higher or lower level of terminological abstraction, which makes them teachable in the upper grades of high school (*Oberstufe*) as well as in university seminars.

Students should ideally have a solid command of comics analysis terms (the 'comics lexicon'). The fact that many cinematic terms can be used to categorize certain pictorial parameters of graphic novels facilitates their use in the classroom. Students in upper high school grades and at university already know the basic film analysis terms like cut, long shot, or certain camera angles; however, they will have a rather restricted knowledge of editing terms like graphic match or match on action. These can be best learnt by applying them to the material in *Berlin* itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>basic comics analysis terms</th>
<th>film analysis terms applicable to comics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- sequential images</td>
<td>- long/wide/establishing shot/image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- gutter</td>
<td>- point of view (POV) shot/image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- panel</td>
<td>- (extreme) close-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- oblong vertical/horizontal, unframed</td>
<td>- high/low-angle view, bird's eye view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panel (or: nonframe)</td>
<td>- graphic match/match on action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- splash panel(^{12})</td>
<td>- subjective/objective image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- tier</td>
<td>- zero/internal/spectatorial ocularization (advanced learners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- caption or caption box</td>
<td>- internal/external focalization(^{13}) (advanced learners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- speech or word balloon/bubble</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Fig. 2: Basic comics and applicable film analysis terms*

Despite the fact that comics literacy has already been an issue in German TEFL methodology since the 1970s (see Baumgärtner 1965; Burgdorf 1976; Stoll 1974), comics analysis terms – in contrast to literature or film analysis terms – are seldom found in students' productive vocabulary. Therefore, one long or two short classroom sessions should be spent on its acquisition – ideally with material from *Berlin*, to make the students curious and facilitate moments of recognition when the actual reading of the novel has begun.

**Multilayered Plot and Narration**

Plot: *Berlin* is made up of many stories, leading narrative strands and short episodes or vignettes, the latter featuring predominantly minor characters.

\(^{12}\) A 'splash' panel is a large framed panel covering a half up to a whole page, margins excluded; if it is unframed and extends to the borders of the page, it is called 'bleed' – bleeds, however, do not exist in *Berlin*.

\(^{13}\) Ocularization and focalization, that is the optical and the cognitive point of view, should be taught at the master seminar level (for details, see Hescher 2016, ch. 4).
Not only can students state the obvious multiplicity of stories and characters but more specifically, they may analyze the technical and pictorial aspects of the plot, that is 1) how, within one chapter or one image sequence, the individual panels refer to the past and the present in their own original way; 2) the way the narrative strands and vignettes link up with each other and what devices are employed to produce those links, for example through simple cuts, graphic or verbal matches, matches on action, cross-fade, or changes of point of view, internal or external to the storyworld (generally, the beginning or end of a page often is also the beginning or end of a vignette or narrative strand). Another characteristic feature worth analyzing is 3) how Lutes pastes his characters' dreams and imaginations in sequences of real storyworld events or action. They underscore Lutes' point of focusing not on the factual makers of history but on the "(fictionalized notions of) people who were not in the spotlight" (Lorah 2015, see note 23).

As can be seen from fig. 4, the second volume of Berlin is more restrained in terms of comics techniques and devices; yet for the same reason, it is more compelling as a whole than Book 1 since the main narrative strands are less often interrupted (see fig. 3). Book 1 should therefore be the mandatory assignment in both upper high school grades and university seminars; Book 2 may be used by teachers for all kinds of purposes such as specific comparative activities, exams, essays, or term papers, as a whole or in excerpts.

Fig. 3: Narrative strands and vignettes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>major narrative strands</th>
<th>vignettes (selection)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kurt Severing as a Weltbühne writer</td>
<td>- a traffic warden's thoughts 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the Weltbühne editors</td>
<td>- art student Richard Blunck's dream, 41-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pola, dancer in the Underbelly</td>
<td>- Nov. 1918: Kurt and Margarethe's first encounter, 66-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kurt and Marthe Müller</td>
<td>- the WWI veteran's war hallucination, featuring Marthe's brother Theo, 94-97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Marthe/Marthe and Anna</td>
<td>- Prof. Schenck teaching perspective, 101-103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gudrun Braun and her daughters</td>
<td>- WWI veteran found dead by the schupos Lemke and Zucker, 163-164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Otto Braun, her husband, and his son</td>
<td>- David Schwartz, Jewish adolescent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Silvia Braun trying to survive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the Cocoa Kids' career in the Underbelly</td>
<td>- Josephine Baker meets the Cocoa Kids, 57-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- meeting of Weltbühne editors</td>
<td>- Funkturm broadcasting news, 89</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Otto Braun becoming an SA stooge</td>
<td>- lady looking for the May Day scene, 96-97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pola and Kid Hogan, the Cocoa Kids' clarinet player</td>
<td>- Lemke's dream, 98-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Marthe and Kurt/Anna, and Margarethe</td>
<td>- the Horst Wessel murder, 135-142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Silvia Braun trying to survive</td>
<td>- Goebbels's funeral speech in honor of Horst Wessel, 156-158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Otto Schmidt and two other communists trying to steal from a shop owner, 172-173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1) past and present

B1 67.7-8: WWI soldiers leaving for the front through Brandenburg Gate in 1914 – and coming home in 1918 (split panel).14

simple cuts: 139/140 et passim; graphic matches: 40/41; 59/60; 69.3/4; 121/122; 168/169; matches on action: 42/43; 77/78; cross-fade (flashback): 64/65 and 66.3/64; point of view change: 20/21; 46/48; 70/71; 72/73; 92/93; 116/117, 119/120: inside-outside; 141/142; 161/162; 163/164; 183/184.

B2 96/97, last panels on page: street of the May Day Massacre at the actual story time/as remembered by the witnesses.

simple cuts: B2, passim; graphic matches: 142/3; matches on action: 91/2; 205/6; point of view change: 50/51; 97/98; 169/170.

90/92: David Schwartz’s day dream; 94-98: the WWI veteran’s dream: Marthe’s brother Theo is killed in action; 98: Marthe wakes up from dreaming of Theo (she’s bleeding); 109: Marthe’s dream; 182: David Schwartz’s night dream; 208/209: Gudrun Braun’s dying vision.

5-6, 169: Kid Hogan’s snake dream; 37, 84: Kurt ponders politics; 88: Kurt’s imagined sex with Margarethe; 98: Lemke’s nightmare.

In the context of comics and graphic novels, students should keep in mind that a sequential or comics image is not the same as a cinematic shot (the images between two cuts): the latter admits movement within a shot and/or the movement of the camera itself, whereas the former does not: movement in comics images is constructed mentally in passing over to the subsequent images; also, there is no camera in a comics image, only point of view.15

14 “Such ‘split’ panels are often used to emphasize precise sequencing or deliberate rhythms. In contrast, an undivided polyptych (that is, a single, undivided frame that represents an extended span of time synchronically) tends to stress haste, intensity, near simultaneity [...]” (Hatfield 2005, 53).

15 Admittedly, there are similarities between the comics medium and film – yet an off-handed equation of the two media must be avoided (for details, see Hescher 2016, 112-113).

Fig. 4: Technical and pictorial aspects of plot design

Fig. 5: Lutes (2011 [B1], 67.7-8): split panel © Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg 2003
How are aspects 1) to 3) taught in the classroom? As for 1), the first example from B1 can be taught in the context of analepses, or flashbacks, and their realization in graphic novels. Interestingly, the two panels (fig. 5) are part of a three-page analepsis: Kurt's memories of his first encounter with Margarethe in Tiergarten, near Brandenburg Gate, in 1918, which again contain Margarethe's memories of the soldiers, including her cousin and two schoolmates, leaving for the War in 1914 and those coming back four years later. This flashback in a flashback can be explained by the students without much help from the teacher. The split panel representing the two different moments in time is then examined for its technical realization (What is eye-catching in panels 67.8 and 67.9?). After introducing the term 'split panel,' the teacher gives the students a correlated task: What is the effect of splitting a panel instead of having two regular ones showing the complete Brandenburg Gate? The split panel, of course, underscores the temporal distance between the events as well as the emotional keenness of these images in Margarethe's memories.

2) Transition devices can be taught with sheets displaying the last panel/s of an episode and the first panel/s of the following. They can be discussed in activities such as a 'cocktail party' or a 'gallery walk.' Since these activities call upon the individual pictorial memory, students may be allowed to look up the respective episodes in their own copies of Berlin. The episodes referred to on the sheets are then presented to the class by the students currently working on them. The students do not need to use the technical term for the device (unless they happen to know it), which is given by the teacher at an appropriate point during the presentation. The task may be enhanced or followed up by having students think about and/or draw alternative transitions (stick figures will do). Appealing to the students' competitiveness, the teacher then concludes the activity with a show of hands: Who has identified two transitions? Three? More than three? How many?

3) As for dreams and imaginations, students are asked to find episodes or sequences themselves in a longer group or individual activity after one example has been talked about under the guidance of the teacher. The focus of the task should be on how those sequences or episodes are marked off from the rest of the images in the sequence, or on the question if the fact that something is dreamed up or imagined must be constructed from the context. One outstanding sequence in Book 1 is Gudrun Braun's dying vision (208-9), which is marked through the symmetrical and nonlinear panel layout, unframed panels, and the balance between close-ups (details) and long shots (the whole), and which represents Gudrun's unfulfilled wish for love and harmony with her husband Otto.

Narration:16 In monomodal verbal narratives, the narrator is solely responsible for the transmission of the narrative, which readers construct in their minds on the basis of the narrating 'voice' (or simply the narrator's words). Readers thus imagine the complete storyworld, including locales, characters, voices and thoughts, movements, etc. This is not the case in comics and graphic novels, which generally are not narrator-transmitted. Readers do not imagine the drawn images of the graphic narrative, that is they do not imagine the storyworld but take it in as a ready-made given. Readers only imagine what 'happens in the gaps' between the images (gutters) or, to put it more generally, they imagine what is not drawn. This, however, also happens on the basis of the pre-given images. In other words, comics and graphic novels lack the mediating and transmitting communication system of verbal narratives. This is why the drawings, or the pictorial track in general, must be attributed to the external com-

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16 For context, deduction, and details, see Hescher (2016, ch. 4 and, particularly, 4.8).
munication system, that is the author or, as is often the case with graphic novels, the team of creators: the scriptwriter, who invents the story and designs the plot, the artist, who does the drawings, the letterer or colorist, etc. Therefore, I prefer to speak of the 'artist-writer' instead of just the author. In the case of Berlin, Lutes is responsible for both the verbal and the pictorial track.

In comics and graphic novels, showing is the dominating mode of representation. This becomes perfectly clear when we think of graphic narratives which totally dispense with the verbal medium, for example Frans Masereel's Mein Stundenbuch (1920) or Shaun Tan's The Arrival (2006). Graphic narratives do not need words to narrate – their sequential images impeccably assume this task. Word balloons are extradiegetic and do not indicate the existence of a narrator, and neither does caption script, which often consists of only a grammatical connective ('And.../Meanwhile...') or adverbial phrases ("September [sic] 1928," B1, 13). Such caption script cannot possibly be held responsible for the creation of the pictorial components since it does not actually narrate. Even a clearly narrating voice in the caption boxes alone does not constitute a narrator. We should speak of a narrator only when a figure or character is marked as such, verbally and pictorially. This might be the case on an extradiegetic or intradiegetic plane, as in Art Spiegelman's Maus (1986/91), in which Art's father Vladek functions as an intradiegetic narrator and Art as an extradiegetic narrator (and, as in Maus I, as a narrating character). In Berlin, Marthe and Kurt are marked as intradiegetic narrators: Marthe sitting on her bed, writing her journal entries (B1, 16.1-3), and Kurt at his desk, typing his (B1, 19.1-3). What they write appears in caption boxes, Marthe's in neat handwriting, Kurt's in Courier typeface, typical of typewriters of the time. Additionally, their writing and typing is cross-cut with the thoughts and memories of their first encounter on the train in an unusual type of split panels. It is obvious, however, that they do not narrate the other stories and vignettes in which they do not play a part and which are nevertheless narrated – in sequential images with word balloons – but not through a narrator.

All we can say about the narrative situation in Berlin is that we find Marthe and Kurt as two narrators on the same plane of action as the other characters. The focalization or cognitive point of view of Berlin alternates between internal and external, which is an essential feature of the work as a whole. Thus, when we speak of multilayered narration in Berlin, the multiple layers do not consist of multiple narrators (there are only two, on the same diegetic plane) but of multiple points of view, which cannot always be attributed to an entity in the storyworld.

Panel Design and Layout

'Panel' is a technical, comics-specific, term. It represents or contains an image (or images, as in a polyptych) inside a frame, consisting in turn of panel borders (top, bottom, left, and right, in a rectangular panel). Layout is the way panels are positioned on the page, regularly or irregularly. Also, layout refers to the positioning of the

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17 Art appeals to Vladek to tell him about his WWI ordeal, and Vladek decides to follow his son's appeal (see Spiegelman 2003, 14); In Maus II, Art is sitting at his drawing board and is harassed by journalists (ibid., 201).

18 Analogous to an altarpiece, a polyptych in comics lingo signifies two or more framed panels showing one continuous background in front of which one or more characters are shown; characters usually appear in each panel, although the background actually stays the same. Hatfield calls this a split panel (see note 14 and McCloud 1994, 115).

19 Comics critics at times use frame metonymically for a panel.
chunks of text (word balloons and caption script). A regular panel layout is, for example, the classical three-by-three grid, in which every panel has the same size and which is read from top left to bottom right in an order that is called Z-path, the rows in the grid commonly referred to as 'tiers.' This order may not or only partly work in an irregular or partly irregular layout. However, there are various degrees of irregularity in layouts. Although there are instances of a regular four by three grid (see B1, 78, 98), the dominating type in Berlin is what Neil Cohn calls blockage, "in which one oblong vertical panel faces two panels half its size" (Cohn 2013, ch. 5). In practice, however, the oblong panel might face more than just two panels (see B1, 87.1-4), or it might face another block of panels, consisting of yet another oblong panel facing two (or possibly more) panels, as can be seen in the example below (fig. 6):

This is not really an irregular layout, even if it may impinge on reading habits acquired from conventional books of comics. Generally, however, reading order is no great problem in Berlin. In fig. 6, the first rectangular panel contains a long shot of the art students in Romanisches Café; the blocked three panels facing the first panel are two close-ups of the students, positioned underneath an oblong medium shot of the table at which they are sitting. The large panel frames the block of three on the right, the oblong horizontal of which again frames the two close-ups. In Lutes' novel, panels often have a framing function (see B1, 60, 68 et passim), especially oblong horizontals stretching from the left to the right margin of the page (see B1, 92/6, 114/5 et passim). Generally, in blocks of two or more panels, the large panel frames the small ones.
Kid Hogan playing the clarinet in the Underbelly is the most artistically impressive instance of an irregular layout (fig. 7). The sequence stretches over two and a half pages (B2, 25-7) and mostly consists of oblong horizontal and vertical panels. This is an example of an intermedial reference, of visualizing a musical creation in process. The irregular layout underlines features characteristic of jazz music: syncopation, a counterpoint rhythm with stress on the offbeats. A row of equally sized moment-to-moment panels here may connote a theme or lick, whereas a change of point of view, after which we see only the bell of the clarinet in several panels, may indicate a break or a cadence. This sequence, though, is hard to interpret for students, even at master level, unless they are versed in music. This is why it should be discussed in the whole class, or given as one task to several students, for example in a project, and should not be used as exam material.

20 The term was coined by McCloud in the context of panel transitions (1994, 70).
Panels are most interesting when their layout is rhetorical, that is when they do not just refer to the preceding or the next panel in the reading order but to the arrangement as a whole or to other panels or panel sequences elsewhere in the novel.

In fig. 8, it is impossible to establish any reading order, and it is obvious that the single panels build meaning together. This sequence is part of an episode in which Kurt is picnicking with Marthe in a park near Leipziger Platz. After Marthe whispers "I love you" in Kurt's ear, Kurt's imagination becomes romantic. The top oblong horizontal showing the sky refers to a smaller and a larger horizontal panel at the bottom left of the page, establishing a natural order (the sky above, the grass and stones below). The two oblong verticals left and right of the center vertical show the crown and the trunk of a tree. Despite the absence of a reading order, there is a point-symmetrical harmony among the center vertical and the surrounding panels in which each long shot is counterbalanced by a close-up, the parts and wholes completing each other. Of course, there is no single subjective point of view. Subjectivity, that is the knowledge that this sequence represents Kurt's thoughts, is built through the way this sequence is embedded in the episode.21

Fig. 9 displays another point-symmetrical layout which is interesting for its rhetoricity.22 In contrast to fig. 8, however, this is a set of action images which, together,

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21 Interestingly, the image of the central vertical reappears in a similar episode near the end of Book 2, after Marthe and Kurt have broken up. As they are sitting together on a bench near the Spree, Kurt — who is a melancholy type — recalls that moment from the past. The panel shows a close-up of Kurt's face and a miniature image of him and Marthe naked as they are shown in the central vertical in Book 1 (at almost exactly the same page number). This is an example of intratextuality and of how panels or images cross-reference to each other across panels and pages and, in this specific case, across books.

22 See Schüwer (2008, 229-232), for details on figs. 8 and 9. Borrowing from Peeters (1991 and 1993), he refers to layout as 'tableau.'
indicate historical change: the rise of national socialism and the end of the Weimar Republic. The outer panels of the rhetorical layout suggest a swastika, an originally ancient and religious symbol, abused by the Nazis for their ends. The close-up of the Nazi flag in the center panel shows an empty circle as Lutes generally refuses to draw concrete swastikas in Berlin.  

The vertical panels on the left and right display a close-up of the marching and singing Nazis and a long high-angle shot over Kurt and Marthe's shoulders. The horizontals below and above the center display a shot over Kurt and Marthe's backs in the shade and a long shot from an external point of view, although not far removed from Kurt and Marthe, who are observing the Nazis marching by. In all the panels except the center and the left vertical, Kurt and Marthe are positioned in the image as observers of the march, and, except for the top horizontal, the images are shot over their shoulders; also, the left vertical and the center panel are point-of-view close-ups displaying their subjective vision (the marchers and the flag). As a whole, the sequence is made up of subjective images so that the swastika layout suggests Kurt and Marthe's apprehension of the future as they witness the rise of national socialism.

The axisymmetric two-page spread of the masquerade party, to which Marthe and Anna have been invited, presents an orgy of drug-infused sexual debauchery among Berlin's wealthy (B2, 74-75, fig. 10). The layout is framed by one oblong vertical panel next to each binding margin and one oblong horizontal at the top. Inside these 'engineer's squares,' we find another such angle, which in turn frames a block (one oblong panel facing two panels half its size). With the binding fold as a mirror axis, each panel has its counterpart on the opposite page, showing similar events (gazes or intake of drugs) – so that observers of this arrangement literally find themselves in a fun house. Caption boxes with Marthe's journal entries are inserted in the panels, one of which describes the whole: "[...] a stream of bodies poised in strange relationships, flowing from no discernable source" (B2, 74). This layout juxtaposes the pictorial semantics, that is the removal of orders and restraints, with the symmetrical form of its rhetorical arrangement.

In the classroom, students can work on split panels, regular and irregular layout, and on rhetorical panel arrangements. As for split panels, they may work out the difference in effect between the one showing the WWI soldiers leaving and coming home through the Brandenburg Gate (B1, 67) to the one near the end of Book 2, where Otto Braun stabs the communist Otto Schmidt (B2, 189). In both specimens, the effects are cinematic, imitating time lapse in the former and slow motion in the latter (Braun running up to Schmidt and stabbing him between the ribs). The split panel thus emphasizes the way time passes.

Also, students can work on regular and irregular layouts, for example on the framing effect of blocked arrangements, of which there are countless examples in both books of Berlin. Regular grids may be examined for what they show and for their meaning effects. Mostly, the panels depict similar actions or states like writers typing, characters sleeping, or editors discussing (B1, 78, 183; B2, 123); the moment-to-moment panels displaying Marthe's waking up and her finding out that she is bleeding emphasize the slowness of the process and the importance of the last event: the discovery of the blood, which links this short episode to the preceding one, in which her

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23 "One original goal of the book was to focus on the day-to-day lives of (fictionalized notions of) people who were not in the spotlight, and I've tried to retain that focus. [...] It's [...] my choice to leave out swastikas – the symbol and [Hitler] are so heavily loaded now, that it's impossible for the reader to experience them the way people living at the time did" (Lorah 2015).
brother Theo is killed in action during WWI (B1, 98). However, it should not be concluded that a regular grid is generally action-oriented: it may also emphasize stasis, of which, however, there is no example in Berlin. 24

As for rhetorical layouts (figs. 8, 9, and 10), students may work out that they suspend the conventional reading order and underscore the way panels cross-refer to

24 A renowned example expressing stasis can be found in Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir Fun Home (2006, 220-221).
each other; further, students may explain the additional meaning effects produced by the eye-catching arrangements in terms of the subjective perceptions of harmony and apprehension.

The Making of History/-ies through Media

History in Lutes is presented as a medial construct made of a plurality of stories or 'histories,' as the older English usage would have it. The "medial construct" of Berlin implies above all the combination of the verbal and the pictorial medium, of which Kurt and Marthe are metafictional allegories (see Köhler 2011). Together, they start a project in which Kurt interviews people from the lower social classes while Marthe draws their portrait (B2, 31-32, 39-40, 47-48). Their social documentary project constitutes a meta-allegory of comics as a medium of history, or history narrated in the medium of comics, in which neither the verbal nor the pictorial mode is subordinate to the other. The fact that the narrative consists of factual and fictional settings and characters and that it literally reads as a graphic lesson in history is an exploitable resource in both the foreign language and the history classroom, in the sense of cross-disciplinary teaching and cross-curricular instruction.

Besides its appealing mix of fictional and historical characters, which certainly recalls the classic historical novel, it is one of Berlin's assets that it shows many historical spots which Lutes thoroughly researched and drew after authentic photographs of the time. Through the novel, students may research the history of the Weimar Republic and the city of Berlin as it looked in the late 1920s and 30s. Photographs and maps of Berlin at that time are easily available on the internet and motivate students to hunt up locales shown in the respective panels. This is probably best carried out in the form of an independent research project accompanying classroom work on the novel.

### fictional characters

- Anna ?, Marthe's girlfriend
- the Braun family
- the Cocoa Kids
- Margarethe ?, Kurt's ex-girlfriend
- Marthe Müller
- Kurt Severing
- Pola, the Underbelly dancer
- the Schwartz family
- and minor characters from the vignettes, such as the art students and the Zeppelin manufacturer Otto Faber

### historical characters

- Josephine Baker, jazz singer
- Hugo Eckener, airship engineer
- Joseph Goebbels, propaganda minister-to-be
- Kurt Hiller, writer and pacifist
- Paul v. Hindenburg, 2nd President of Germany
- Walter Kreiser, engineer and journalist
- Carl von Ossietzky, editor of *Die Weltbühne*
- Joachim Ringelnatz, writer and journalist
- Kurt Rosenfeld, Ossietzky's lawyer
- Helene Stöcker, writer, pedagogue, and pacifist
- Ernst Thälmann, communist candidate
- Kurt Tucholsky, writer and journalist
- Bernhard Weiss, police commissioner
- Horst Wessel, nazi murdered by communists

### historical sites and places

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fictional Locations</th>
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<td>Café Bauer, Unter den Linden/Friedrichstraße (B2, 51)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potsdamer/Leipziger Platz (B1, 18)</td>
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<td>Brandenburg Gate (B1, 60/7)</td>
<td>river Spree near Reichstag (B2, 175/7 et passim)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Romanisches Café (B1, 69)</td>
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Speaking of media, a distinction should be made between diegetic and nondiegetic media, media that are and are not part of the storyworld. As mentioned above, Kurt and Marthe represent (meta-)allegories of the comics medium (words and images) in that they complement each other in their social documentary project.\(^{25}\) As a book of comics, *Berlin* thus seems to underscore that it does not just thematize a plurality of media but that the media themselves are not neutral conduits since they always fashion the message they convey. As Marshall McLuhan has it, "it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (1964, 9). And such media are thematized on the diegetic plane:

- Kurt and Marthe get to know each other through her drawings, which Kurt wants to look at on the train (B1, 7-9); also, the other art students share the passion for drawing;
- one of the first things Kurt tells Marthe about Berlin is that "[t]here are something like [...] 3000 newspapers and magazines published right in the city [...]" (B1, 11);
- the art student Richard Blunck dislikes *Neue Sachlichkeit* and reads a prototype of the graphic novel: Frans Masereel's *Mein Stundenbuch* (1920), a wordless and expressionistic graphic narrative;
- the radio news makes guests draw close and listen at a reception of the Zeppelin manufacturer Otto Faber (B1, 72-73);
- Gudrun Braun’s desire to join the communists and her subsequent distancing herself from her husband is triggered by a communist flyer she brings home (B1, 76-77);
- at times, Kurt and Marthe communicate through media: picnicking in a park near Leipziger Platz, Marthe makes Kurt read from a newspaper (B1, 177-178);
- a newspaper article about Germany’s secret rebuilding of its air force from March 1929 will get Carl von Ossietzky and Walter Kreiser behind bars after the *Weltbühne-Prozess* (B1, 168 and B2, 124-125);
- the May Day Massacre is brought about through speakers of the Berlin police and the national socialists, who function as media when they rally their staff and adherents before the demonstrations (B1, 194-195);
- Kurt and Marthe fall out over jazz music, which represents a counter-culture and symbolizes novelty, the overthrow of old orders, and a new kind of freedom (B2, 37.9-38);
- Pola and Kid Hogan come together through the medium of jazz music he plays with his band in the Underbelly night club (B2, 63-64).

Students can be made to find out about these points (How do the different media bring characters together or drive them apart in Berlin? What and how are actions triggered by the media? Remember that people or characters can also serve as media). In a more ambitious approach, university students might think about to what extent McLuhan’s terms of hot and cold media, of high or low definition, apply to the thematized media (see McLuhan 1964, ch. 2).

It has been mentioned above that Kurt and Marthe can be read as allegories of the verbal and the pictorial and thus as allegories of comics proper. Equally, this is a

\(^{25}\) See also Köhler (2011) and Etter (2013, 230).
nondiegetic and metafictional reference or device. Self-referential and metafictional devices in turn constitute the seventh complexity feature of graphic novels (see above, fig. 1). Finding out about metafictional devices, however, presupposes reflexion on a high abstraction level and should therefore be taught preferably at university level (upper master seminars). There are more such devices, for example in Pola's Vaudeville act at the Underbelly, when the dancers sing a song thematizing the media of the time: "What has come over the air these days? / [...] / Through the air are swiftly blown, / pictures, / radio, / telephone!" (B1, 52). Their main prop is an empty picture frame, which the fellow dancers hold in front of Pola's face while they sing these lines. At the end of the act, the empty frame is held up in the air, and the following lines occur in a word balloon: "There's the air, just hear it humming, / [...] / in the gaps that are left a picture's coming..." (ibid.). The picture frame is easily understood as a metaphor of a comics panel and "the gaps" as the gutters between the panels. Read as an allegory, the Vaudeville act praises comics as a medium that requires the participation of the recipients who create mental pictures when passing over from one panel to the next (see also Köhler 2011, 52). There is another allegorical and metafictional device in the vignette in which Professor Schenck teaches a lesson on perspectival representation: on the board, he demonstrates items like the vanishing point and central perspective (B1, 101-103). At the end of this image sequence, Schenck points to a world-famous woodcut by Albrecht Dürer, *Der Zeichner der Laute* (Man drawing a lute, 1525), which is rendered as a highly mimetic point of view image, partly covered by the word balloons containing Schenck's explanations (B1, 103.5). The allegorical meaning of this passage later is summed up by Kurt, who has dropped in to see Marthe: "Scientific principles of art? / Isn't it all just a matter of perspective?" (B1, 105.10/11). McLuhan would have probably said, '... just a matter of media,' for no medium is objective or neutral, although a fixed point of view as in historiographic writing or Renaissance art might suggest neutrality (Kavaloski 2012, 145). Every image is shown from a certain point of view: internal or external/anonymous, which is the point of view of an entity not involved in the action of the storyworld.

**Conclusion**

The graphic historical novel is an attractive medium for the presentation of history because of its variety of points of view, inherent, by definition, in the sequential images, paired with a complex narrative structure. In the past thirty years, authors of graphic novels have been distinctly more experimental with plot, narration, and layout than authors of mainstream comics, and this is a reason why graphic novels have become a valuable resource in the foreign language and literature classroom. By working on plot design, panels, and references to media, students touch upon three core features of the genre and realize that *Berlin* presents an overtly medial approach to history that questions fixed or one-sided views because, in the end, all is "just a matter of perspective" (B1, 105.10/11).

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26 As McLuhan has it, cold media require recipient participation. Accordingly, comics are a cold medium of low definition (1964, 24-25).
27 A point of view image (or shot) is the only completely subjective image in which the observer sees exactly what the character/s see/s.
28 More precisely, an anonymous or external point of view is implied in the term zero ocularization (see Hescher 2016, ch. 4.3.1.2).
Works Cited


