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# FOCALISATION IN COMICS. FROM THE SPECIFICITIES OF THE MEDIUM TO CONCEPTUAL REFORMULATION

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the medium-specific means and effects of focalisation in comics. What interests me specifically in this respect is that different internal and external focalisers can appear simultaneously at different points inside and outside the picture frame. The same observation can also be made about other visual narratives like films, but my main emphasis lies in exploring the specific *graphic* means of focalisation and perspectival simultaneity.

In his groundbreaking narratological treatise *Discours du récit*, Gérard Genette undermined the hierarchy of 'showing' and 'telling', prevalent in earlier theories of narration, by claiming that 'showing' in verbal narrative discourse can be only a way of telling. In mixed media visual narratives like comics, however, the processing of narrative information involves paying attention not just to the distinction between *who perceives?* and *who narrates?* but to the interplay between a narrative voice, a verbal focaliser, a centre of visual perception (the visual focaliser), a centre of attention (the visual focalised), and the picture frame. Some recent discussions on perspective and narrative agency in film narrative, as well as developments in focalisation theory in postclassical narratology, provide the theoretical frame for the article.

As my main examples I will use Guibert, Lefevre and Lemercier's nonfictional travel story in Afghanistan, *Le photographe* (2003–2006), Shaun Tan's wordless story about immigration, *The Arrival* (2007), and Jarmo Mäkilä's portrait of the artist in *Taxi van Gogh in korvaan* (2008). All these narratives draw attention to the functions of perspective, and the uses of juxtaposed or simultaneous perspectives. These stories further pose the question of the specificity of their medium for representing perception, by way of incorporating photographs as part of the narrative.