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Book review of

Johannes C.P. Schmid: *Frames and Framing in Documentary Comics*.

Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels, 2021.

Johannes Schmid's *Frames and Framing* revisits and combines ongoing discussions on the contextualisation of comics narratives, on composition of the narrative and steering the reader's attention in the documentary genre:

it looks at conceptual contexts, medial conditions of the art-form, their cultural contexts, as well as the construction of the narrative in selected examples - all with aspects of framing or frames as the point of entry for his considerations. He describes his approach as:

'discussing documentary as the *genre frame* and comics as the *medial frame*, both of which constitute fundamental categories for the reception of the selected works.' (32)

Central to his endeavour is to show how specific contextualisations are effective in the reading of documentary comics. To achieve this, various factors and influences on journalistic methods of approaching and telling a story in the interweaving of images and texts are used to guide the development of the book's argument. The author's solid knowledge of his field is used to reflect on cognitive frames and visual frames in the genre of documentary comics, and one of the strengths of his work is that it is not leaving behind the reality of journalistic work that is at the bottom of documentary comics-production: The need for subjective choices in researching and again in representing a topic in documentary manner appears as a kind of leit-motif and gives grounding to theoretical considerations that lead into many different areas.

On first sight, this look at documentary comics as application of frames and framing seems to offer no massively new insights apart from re-labelling existing approaches. But the argument develops profoundly in interweaving different categories of frames. Slowly, new insights become apparent as diverse details of contextualisation are discussed, from visual quotations via connotations and referencing to transmedial representation. The text introduces or re-visits the core areas of visual narrative analysis, but it sets the academic perspective on the matter on framing in regards to concepts as well as terminology. For the slightly older reader with a background in media culture, these are familiar matters, the focus on framing allows for a fruitful re-visit and it invites to interweave aspects of reading differently in the analysis of documentary comics. Schmid's is not directed at beginners in comics studies, obviously, and while it is demanding reading, it is very rewarding if readers give it the time to let the argument develop.

As in earlier texts, Schmid offers concepts and approaches to analysing comics that only show their full potential as one tries to apply them: his earlier concept of *creolisation*¹ to describe the amalgamation of visual elements taken from different cultural traditions turns out to be very helpful in the analysis of graphiation while I work with it. It also turns out to demand in-depth-analysis that can accommodate concepts from all kinds of neighbouring fields: e.g. science of arts as well as semiotics as well as cultural studies.

¹ see Johannes C P Schmid (2019): 'Framing and Translation in Birgit Weyhe's Madgermanes' In: Michaela Ott and Thomas Weber, eds, *Situated in Translation: Cultural Communities and Media Practices*. Bielefeld: Transcript; 107-18.

After pointing at the obvious importance of the visual frame in the introduction, the consideration of cognitive frames takes about 120 pages before these visual frames get finally into focus. After all, they constitute the boundaries of images on the page and their reading has been carefully prepared by then. In this context, Schmid takes up the importance of drawing styles as personal expression of the artist and reflects on their importance in the context of the drawn documentary: journalistic filtering of possible material is needed to safeguard that the drawn documentary pays justice to its medium and its production particulars as well as the subjectivity of the author's *voice*. As comics researchers know, general approaches and considerations sound easy enough, but as soon as individual examples are scrutinised, things get complex: Knowing this problem, Schmid's text continues to discuss individual examples in detail to show the strengths of his *frames and framing*-perspective. The argument goes on to include aspects of individuality in artistic expression, the *graphiation* of individual perspective and style that are crucial for each documentary comic. And - this being the only point of irritation for the reviewer - while this work is thorough and strong on detail, it is surprising that graphiation as a concept is not integrated more into its considerations on theory.

It is generally agreed that interpretations of literature do differ and change according to reading conditions (cultural contexts), and that the reading matter remains unchanged by these changes in interpretation. In the case of comics literature, our conceptual frames change too, of course, and individual sequences of juxtaposed images narrating in whatever genre over a given amount of pages will be looked at differently again and again, too. Therefore it is instrumental to describe the visual material that actually provides the narrative in its sequence of images and their graphic frames to explain how they are

understood at the time of writing - and this is what Schmid is exemplifying: his chapter 4 is describing in careful detail how individual moments in documentary material are shown from distinct points of view and how they are used to emphasize and pace these narratives. The focus on actual drawn lines and forms, on graphic frames emphasizing content and indicating choices of what is depicted leads Schmid back to detailed reflections on journalistic methods, the constant difficulty of source-validation and how these and related issues are brought to the attention of documentary comics readers.

All in all, Johannes C.P. Schmid's *Frames and Framing in Documentary Comics* provides an important contribution to comics research in its interrelating of different academic approaches. Because of its careful and concise introductions it even is very much recommendable for researchers who are new to the approaches Schmid is negotiating.

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