
The Art of Memoir: Using Drawing to Tell Your Story

Francis Ankyiah

University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical article explores the relationship between memoir and visual art, with a particular focus on the use of drawing to enhance the narrative structure and emotional impact of the text. Drawing on theories of visual storytelling and visual thinking, the article argues that drawing can be used to convey information, emotion, and meaning in a memoir in ways that written language cannot. The article also analyzes the interplay between text and image in memoir, including the use of sequential art and the representation of memory. By the end of the article, readers will have a deeper understanding of the theoretical framework behind the use of drawing in memoir and its potential to enhance the reader's experience.

Keywords: Memoir, Drawing, Visual Art, Visual Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Memoir is a literary genre that involves the author's personal recollections and reflections on events, experiences, and people from their own life. The genre has a long history, dating back to ancient times when writers like Julius Caesar and Saint Augustine wrote personal accounts of their lives (Olney, 1998).

In more recent centuries, the memoir has evolved along with changes in society and literary trends. In the 18th and 19th centuries, memoirs were often written by notable figures such as politicians and scientists, as a way to showcase their achievements and contributions to society. These memoirs were often highly structured and focused on specific events or accomplishments.

In the 20th century, memoirs became more diverse in terms of subject matter and style. Memoirs began to focus on personal experiences and emotions, rather than just achievements or historical events. This shift was partly due to the emergence of the modernist movement in literature, which emphasized subjectivity and the inner experiences of the individual (Olney, 1998).

According to the literary scholar Philippe Lejeune, memoirs can be divided into two categories: "autobiography" and "auto fiction" (Philippe, 1989). Autobiography is a factual account of the author's life, while auto fiction blurs the line between fact and fiction, often incorporating fictional elements or altering the chronology of events. This distinction has become increasingly relevant in recent years as more authors experiment with the genre and push the boundaries of what is considered "truth" in memoir (Lejeune, 1989; Smith and Watson, 2001).

• The Relationship between Memoir and Visual Art

The relationship between memoir and visual art is a complex and evolving one. While memoir has traditionally been a genre associated with written language, the use of visual art in memoir has become increasingly common in recent years.

Visual art can take many forms in memoir, including drawings, paintings, photographs, and even comic strips (Barry, 2014; Cohn, 2013).

One of the advantages of using visual art in memoir is that it can convey emotions and experiences in a more immediate and visceral way than written language (Barry, 2014). According to the artist and memoirist Lynda Barry, “Drawing is a way of showing what it feels like to be alive.” Visual art can also be used to supplement written language, providing additional layers of meaning and context to the text (Cohn, 2013).

Another advantage of using visual art in memoir is that it can help to create a more immersive and engaging experience for the reader (Kimmelman, 2014). By incorporating visual elements into the text, memoirists can bring their stories to life and make them more memorable (Spiegelman, 1991; Satrapi, 2003). The use of drawing in memoirs can enhance the narrative structure and emotional impact of the text.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories of visual storytelling have been developed by a number of theorists and practitioners, including Scott McCloud and Will Eisner. These theories explore the ways in which visual elements can be used to convey narrative information and meaning.

In “Understanding Comics,” Scott McCloud presents a comprehensive theory of visual storytelling in the form of a comic book. McCloud argues that comics are a unique form of storytelling that combine words and images in a way that allows for a greater degree of reader engagement and participation. According to McCloud, comics are able to convey complex ideas and emotions through the use of visual metaphors, panel composition (McCloud, 1994), and other techniques.

Will Eisner’s “Comics and Sequential Art” is another influential text in the field of visual storytelling. Eisner argues that comics are a distinct art form that requires a unique set of skills and techniques. He emphasizes the importance of panel composition, pacing (Eisner, 2008), and other visual elements in creating a successful comic.

Other theorists and practitioners have also contributed to the development of theories of visual storytelling. For example, film theorist Sergei Eisenstein developed the concept of “montage” (Eisenstein, 1949) as a way of conveying meaning through the juxtaposition of images. Storyboard artist and animator Walt Stanchfield emphasized the importance of gesture and movement in communicating narrative information (Stanchfield, 2006).

• The Concept of “Visual Thinking” and Its Relationship to Memoir

Visual thinking is a cognitive process that involves using visual imagery to represent and organize information. This concept has been applied to various fields, including education, design, and psychology. In the context of memoir, visual thinking can be used to enhance the author’s ability to recall and represent memories through visual imagery.

One of the advantages of using visual thinking in memoir is that it can help the author to better understand and process their own experiences. By representing memories and emotions through visual imagery, the author can gain new insights into their own life and experiences. Additionally, visual thinking can help to convey complex emotions and experiences in a more immediate and visceral way than written language.

According to Betty Edwards, author of “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain,” the act of drawing can activate the right hemisphere of the brain, which is associated with visual thinking and creativity. This can help the author to access and represent memories and emotions that are difficult to express in words alone (Edwards, 2012; Oster, 2014).

DRAWING AS A NARRATIVE DEVICE

Drawing is a powerful tool that can be used to convey information, emotion, and meaning in a memoir. By using visual elements, authors can create a more immersive and engaging experience for the reader and provide additional layers of meaning and context to the text.

One of the ways in which drawing can be used in memoir is to convey information about the setting, characters, and events. For example, an author might use drawings to depict the physical environment of a particular memory, or to create visual representations of the people and events involved.

Drawing can also be used to convey emotion in memoir. By using visual metaphors and other techniques, authors can represent complex emotions and experiences in a more immediate and visceral way (Barry, 2014), than written language. This can help to create a more empathetic and emotionally engaging experience for the reader.

Finally, drawing can be used to create meaning in memoir by providing additional layers of symbolism and metaphor. By incorporating visual elements into the text, authors can create a richer and more nuanced narrative that invites the reader to engage with the text on multiple levels.

• The Advantages of Drawing Over Written Language in Certain Contexts

Drawing can offer advantages over written language in certain contexts, particularly in memoir where it can be used to convey complex emotions and experiences. One of the main advantages of drawing in memoir is that it allows for a more immediate and visceral representation of memories and emotions, which can be difficult to express in words alone (Barry, 2014).

Drawing can also help to create a more immersive and engaging experience for the reader, by providing additional layers of meaning and context to the text (Spiegelman, 1991; Satrapi, 2003). For example, a drawing can be used to depict the physical environment of a particular memory, or to create visual representations of the people and events involved.

Another advantage of drawing in memoir is that it can help to bridge cultural and linguistic barriers. Visual elements are more universal than written language, and can be understood by readers of different languages and cultures. This can make memoirs more accessible and relatable to a wider audience (McCloud, 1994; Eisner, 2008; Cohn, 2013).

COMBINING TEXT AND IMAGE

The relationship between text and image is a crucial aspect of memoir. In memoir, text and image work together to create a narrative that is both visual and textual. The use of captioning, word balloons, and other techniques can help to create a cohesive and engaging narrative (Barry, 2014; Spiegelman, 1991; Satrapi, 2003; McCloud, 1994; Eisner, 2008; Cohn, 2013) that combines the strengths of both written language and visual imagery.

Captioning is a technique that involves using text to provide additional information or context to an image. In memoir, captions can be used to provide details about the setting, characters, or events depicted in a drawing. This can help to create a more immersive and engaging experience for the reader, by providing additional layers of meaning and context to the visual elements.

Word balloons are another technique used in memoir to create a relationship between text and image. Word

balloons are used to represent dialogue or thought bubbles, and can be used to convey the spoken or inner thoughts of the characters depicted in the drawing. This can help to create a more dynamic and interactive experience for the reader, by allowing them to engage with the characters on a more personal level.

Other techniques used in memoir to create a relationship between text and image include panel composition, juxtaposition, and visual metaphors. Panel composition refers to the arrangement of images on a page, while juxtaposition involves placing images or text side-by-side to create a connection or contrast. Visual metaphors involve using visual elements to represent abstract concepts or emotions.

- **Interplay Between Visual and Verbal Storytelling in Memoir**

The interplay between visual and verbal storytelling is a key aspect of memoir. In memoir, visual and verbal elements work together to create a cohesive narrative that engages the reader (Barry, 2014; Spiegelman, 1991; Satrapi, 2003; McCloud, 1994; Eisner, 2008; Cohn, 2013) on multiple levels. The use of both visual and verbal storytelling can help to create a more immersive and emotionally engaging experience for the reader.

Visual storytelling in memoir can be used to convey emotions and experiences in a more immediate and visceral way than written language. For example, a drawing can be used to depict the physical environment of a particular memory, or to create visual representations of the people and events involved. Visual storytelling can also be used to convey complex emotions and experiences through the use of visual metaphors and other techniques.

Verbal storytelling in memoir, on the other hand, can provide additional context and information to the visual elements. For example, a written description of a memory can provide details about the setting, characters, or events depicted in a drawing. Verbal storytelling can also be used to convey the author's thoughts and emotions in a more direct and explicit way than visual storytelling.

The interplay between visual and verbal storytelling in memoir can create a more nuanced and layered narrative that engages the reader on multiple levels. By combining visual and verbal elements, memoirists can create a more immersive and emotionally engaging experience for the reader.

SEQUENTIAL ART AND MEMOIR

Sequential art is a term coined by artist Will Eisner to describe the art of combining images in a sequence to tell a story (Eisner, 2008). Sequential art is a fundamental concept in comic book art and graphic novels, but it can also be applied to other forms of storytelling, including memoir.

In memoir, sequential art can be used to convey the author's experiences and emotions in a more immediate and engaging way than written language alone. By combining images in a sequence, memoirists can create a visual narrative that invites the reader to engage with the text on multiple levels (McCloud, 1994; Barry, 2014; Spiegelman, 1991; Satrapi, 2003; Cohn, 2013).

One of the advantages of using sequential art in memoir is that it allows for a more immersive and emotionally engaging experience for the reader. By combining visual and verbal elements in a sequence, memoirists can create a more nuanced and layered narrative that conveys complex emotions and experiences (McCloud, 1994).

According to Scott McCloud, author of "Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art," "Comics are a medium where words and pictures dance together." McCloud argues that comics are a unique form of storytelling that allow for a greater degree of reader engagement and participation (McCloud, 1994).

- **Examples of Memoirs that Use Sequential Art, Including “Maus” By Art Spiegelman and “Persepolis” by Marjane Satrapi.**

“Maus” by Art Spiegelman and “Persepolis” (fig. 1 & 2) by Marjane Satrapi are two examples of memoirs that use sequential art to convey complex emotions and experiences (Spiegelman, 1991; Satrapi, 2003; McCloud, 1994; Eisner, 2008; Cohn, 2013).

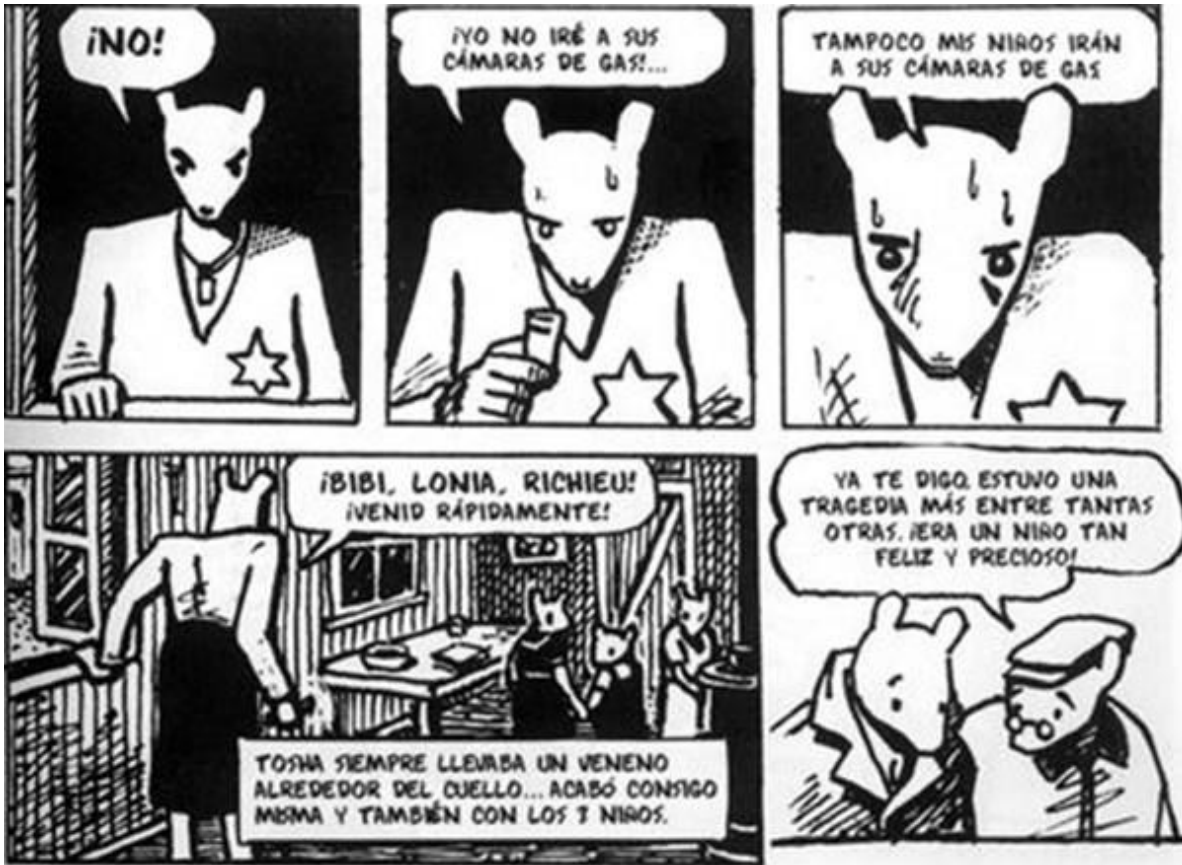


FIG: 1. Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel, ‘Maus. ‘ART SPIEGELMAN

“Maus” is a graphic novel that tells the story of Spiegelman’s father, a Polish Jew who survived the Holocaust (Spiegelman, 1991). The book uses anthropomorphic animals to represent different groups of people, with Jews depicted as mice and Germans as cats. The use of sequential art in “Maus” allows for a more nuanced and emotionally engaging portrayal of the Holocaust, conveying the horror and tragedy of the events in a way that written language alone cannot.

“Persepolis” is a graphic novel that tells the story of Satrapi’s childhood in Iran during and after the Islamic Revolution (Satrapi, 2003). The book uses simple black-and-white drawings to convey the author’s experiences and emotions, with text and images working together to create a powerful and engaging narrative. The use of sequential art in “Persepolis” allows for a more immediate and visceral representation of the author’s childhood experiences, conveying the fear, confusion, and frustration of growing up in a turbulent and changing society.

Both “Maus” and “Persepolis” demonstrate the power of sequential art in memoir, allowing for a more nuanced and emotionally engaging portrayal of complex experiences and emotions.



FIG: 2. "Persepolis"

• **Drawing and Memory**

Drawing can be used as a mnemonic device to help improve memory and recall (Andrade, 2009; Guéguen, 2015; Meade et al., 2009). By representing memories and experiences through visual imagery, drawing can help to create a more vivid and concrete representation of the information, making it easier to remember and recall later.

According to research, drawing can be particularly effective in improving memory and recall when used in combination with other memory techniques, such as repetition and elaboration. For example, drawing a picture of a concept or idea while also repeating and elaborating (Andrade, 2009) on the information can help to solidify the memory and improve recall (Andrade, 2009).

Drawing can also be used to enhance the recall of specific details or events. One study found that drawing pictures of objects or scenes helped participants to remember more details about those objects or scenes than simply writing a description (Guéguen, 2015).

Additionally, drawing can be used as a therapeutic tool to help individuals process and remember traumatic experiences (Kaimal et al., 2016; Malchiodi, 2018). By representing traumatic memories through visual imagery, individuals can gain new insights into their own experiences and emotions, and begin to move towards healing and recovery (Malchiodi, 2018).

- **How Drawing can be Used to Represent Memory in Memoir, Including the Depiction of Time, Space, and Perception**

Drawing can be a powerful tool for representing memory in memoir, allowing authors to convey complex emotions and experiences through visual imagery (Barry, 2014; Spiegelman, 1991; Satrapi, 2003; McCloud, 1994; Eisner, 2008; Cohn, 2013). Drawing can be particularly effective in representing memory in memoir because it allows for a more immediate and visceral representation of experiences and emotions than written language alone (Barry, 2014).

One of the ways in which drawing can be used to represent memory in memoir is through the depiction of time. By using visual elements such as panels and gutters, memoirists can create a visual timeline of events (McCloud, 1994), allowing the reader to experience the memory in a more immediate and immersive way.

Drawing can also be used to represent memory in memoir through the depiction of space. By using visual elements such as perspective and composition, memoirists can create a visual representation of the physical environment of a particular memory (McCloud, 1994), enhancing the reader's understanding and engagement with the text.

Finally, drawing can be used to represent memory in memoir through the depiction of perception. By using visual metaphors and other techniques, memoirists can represent complex emotions and experiences (Eisner, 2008) in a more immediate and visceral way than written language. This can help to create a more empathetic and emotionally engaging experience for the reader.

CONCLUSION

This discussion focused on the use of drawing and sequential art in memoir, and the ways in which these visual elements can be used to convey complex emotions and experiences. The theoretical framework provided by the article includes the concepts of sequential art and visual language, as well as the use of drawing as a mnemonic device. The article also discussed the interplay between visual and verbal storytelling in memoir, and the use of captioning, word balloons, and other techniques to create a cohesive and engaging narrative.

The analysis presented in the article included examples of memoirs that use sequential art, such as "Maus" by Art Spiegelman and "Persepolis" by Marjane Satrapi, and the ways in which these works use visual elements to convey complex emotions and experiences. The discussion also highlighted the ways in which drawing can be used to represent memory in memoir, including the depiction of time, space, and perception.

Overall, the article demonstrates the value of visual elements in memoir, and the ways in which these elements can be used to create a more immersive and emotionally engaging experience for the reader.

Drawing can be a powerful tool for enhancing the narrative structure and emotional impact of memoir. By using visual elements such as sequential art, panel composition, and visual metaphors, memoirists can create a more immersive and emotionally engaging experience for the reader. Drawing can also be used as a mnemonic device to help improve memory and recall, allowing memoirists to more effectively represent their own experiences and emotions.

The use of drawing in memoir can also help to create a more inclusive and accessible reading experience. By combining visual and verbal elements, memoirists can reach a broader audience, including those who may struggle with traditional written language. The use of visual elements can also help to create a more immediate and visceral representation of experiences and emotions, allowing readers to engage with the text on a more personal and emotional level.

Lastly, the use of drawing in memoir has the potential to enhance the narrative structure and emotional impact of the text, creating a more immersive and inclusive reading experience for the audience.

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