

## CHAPTER ELEVEN



# Technologies of Memory, Identity, and Oblivion in *Persepolis* (2007) and *Waltz with Bashir* (2008)

William Anselmi and Sheena Wilson

In an age of instantaneity, memory can appear within the array of technological options as a gratuitous act, unnecessary to the creation of an individual presence in the world. We use the terms *age of communicative instancy* and *age of immediacy gratification* to refer to the socio-cultural conditions created by current technologies of communication. Even as these technologies enable us to be present simultaneously in multiple spaces, the grand narrative of postmodernism has transformed history into a plethora of diluted and deluded narcissistic performances or stories for commercial use that lack the narrative coherence necessary for meaning making both in the present and in relationship to the past. Given the ubiquity of opportunities for technologically mediated self-assertion, memory's primal role in forming a sense of social belonging and identity is slowly but surely disappearing from the cognitive map. Although this frees us from our attachment to the grand narratives of the past, it also risks constricting existence to a present that is not anchored within any social-temporal construct other than that provided by the plethora of techno-communicative devices that surround us.

As a result, participation in everyday life is not only mediated but also conditioned and thus in fact limited by whatever informs the viewer or reader. Memory making is not simply a question of soliciting the mnemonic device as a cognitive agent; memory and the individual and collective identities it produces are fundamentally linked to how memory is preserved, stored, recuperated, and used in our everyday interactions. For any society, the particular mnemonic coherence that exists within specific cultural and linguistic groups situated in a given place and time is dependent on a sense of belonging that ties one individual to another in terms of social responsibility.

What happens when those ties that bind a common memory are substituted by technological representations that make claims to be able to encompass our existential selves? This question remains pertinent with regard to the epistemological sedimentation resulting from the transformations that have occurred throughout historical periods, shaping present social conditions in terms of identity paradigms. Can the experience of living be an eternal present, a mindset, in which everything is all-consumable in the moment and consumed by the moment? Does it suffice for us to be gratified by the instantaneity and immediacy of images that delimit the sphere of a shared social memory? Can social memory even exist in a contemporary narcissistic, monadic world where information is targeted to consumer profiles and segmented into commodification grids? Two animated films stand out as recent destabilizers within this general framework.

*Persepolis* (2007), by Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi, and *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), by Ari Folman, both reclaim different social memories with a similar intention to disrupt and reformulate individual identity paradigms in relationship to conceptions of national histories and the impacts of those histories on the ways that national narratives are consumed and interpreted globally. These two animated films challenge official narratives, not only because they propose political engagement but also because they confront head on what can only be called the restructuring of memory within the mediatic circle, that is, the interpretive constellation formed by the economic, social, and political forces that circulate in media spheres and through which experience is configured (Anselmi and Wilson, "Performative" 46).

#### SELF-REFLEXIVITY, AGAINST THE MEDIUM

*Persepolis* and *Waltz with Bashir* resist and subvert the history that is visually offered to us today via the media circuit. Folman's film contextualizes the discussion of the protagonist's search for personal—and, by extension, national and

historical—identity within a criticism of the cinematic medium itself. This film makes blatant Folman’s awareness of the role of technology and the media in, at best, creating a false community and, at worst, effacing history and any sense of participation in the world. He, like Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi, subverts the media’s obliviation of history-as-it-happens by indicating that everyone belongs to a global community—beyond borders and passports and beyond the reduction of history to an eternal present. In other words, these directors use cinematic narrative techniques to reassert that history is a process of individual and collective meaning making that exists in contrast to image-history, that is, history as constituted by a staccato series of alluring images and sound bites that appear on the screen, are consumed by viewers, and then vanish before becoming integrated into a cohesive and meaningful cultural narrative. *Persepolis* uses segmented narration to recuperate personal identity into an organic whole. History, in contemporary reality, has been transformed from a chronological sequence of events into consumable, fragmentary images of events that detach us from a sense of living within a continuous historical process. The kaleidoscope of images that has become our naturalized habitat can easily disenfranchise us, depriving us of the opportunity to participate in and share responsibility for the social actions of individuals and groups.

Both *Persepolis* and *Waltz with Bashir* challenge the viewer to question the media-kaleidoscope of direct images that has become the norm in contemporary life. Both films illustrate that aesthetic avenues still exist whereby we can resist the loss of history that leaves us individually and collectively unmoored from the past or the present, reduced, in our consumptive quest for immediacy gratification, to accepting false but ready-made identity kits that soothe us, if only fleetingly. Satrapi and Folman illustrate, literally, how we can either exist only at the synthetic level, responding like programmed automatons to the images and information flashed onto the screen in the age of communicative instancy, or instead ground ourselves as spectators and reassume the responsibility of historical participation. The latter option provides opportunities to engage in social cultural transformation—to provide new form to the malleability of an entity, whether it be the self or the collective—and to resist accepting prefabricated, media-ready identities available for immediate consumption.

### PERSEPOLIS (2007)

The film credits for *Persepolis* begin with white on black animation composed of a series of vignettes linked together by a floating flower, a symbol of genealogical

continuity, which ties all of the events together and functions as a parallel for the life of Marjane, the film's central character.<sup>1</sup> The continuity achieved through the floating flower that binds the different vignettes together (and that reappears in the final moments of the film) reflects on an existential fragmentation and dispersal that is given unity by the story.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, what the film provides is a graphic representation of displacement that highlights the events of Marjane's life as the *fabula* framing a continuous *mise en abîme* wherein the telling of Marjane's personal story is also a recounting of the Iranian cultural revolution—a story within a story, a plot sequencing that reflects a strategy already successfully employed in *The Thousand and One Nights*. This technique of telling stories creates social cohesion, so as to avoid obliviation as a mechanism of social control deployed by oppressive systems. Storytelling, in this case through animated film, thus resists the centrifugal power of the entropic event: the downfall of the Shah of Iran. Paronnaud and Satrapi's movie is a depiction of resistance through artistic means; as such, it produces political resonance through time.

Oblivion, from the perspective of any individual, is a negative concept: it is associated with a loss of personal and communal history. However, from the perspective of sociopolitical systems looking to exert absolute control, the use of obliviation is a productive method of dissolving social ties. The fragmentation that occurs at the social level both atomizes and automatizes individuals. This process renders us insular, bereft of co-constructed definitions of self and community relations in the past or present, responding in automatized ways to the stimuli of a system that can (perpetually) start anew. Reinventing the future based on neo-histories, it can shape and reshape any chronotope—any time-space perception, world view, and/or narrative frame—as it deems beneficial to its own perpetuation and credibility. In *Persepolis*, this reinvention is particularly significant, since central to the movie is the idea of a revolution—the overthrow of the Shah—which was seen as the beginning of a progressive egalitarian society. The hijacking of this process by religious forces ended up transforming the hopes and dreams of a liberated society into an authoritarian structure that forcibly gendered power relations through populist means. In telling her story, Marjane, like Shahrzad, threads together the stories of many people and restores unity to the social community that has been disappeared—silenced either individually, through imprisonment, torture, and ultimately death, or on a mass scale, through fear tactics and discourses that oblivate history and enforce an anti-historical present.

The nine vignettes that can be extrapolated from the dynamic framing sequence back-dropping the credits at the outset of the film through white-on-black (negative space) animation present several topoi that constitute the narrative: voyage, birth, guidance (of angel figures), the idea of centrality, overcoming barriers, and ultimately finding a home (symbolic of personal identity). The strategy of opening the movie with very brief sequences that are traces or clues of what is to come in the film provides a determined mode of self-reflection. The movie is constructed in such a way that the introductory strategy reflects the subsequent plot developments that explain the complex identity formation process that the character undergoes. This animated Bildungsroman does not follow in a linear fashion but is diffused, like light through a prism, into various storylines that the viewer can reconstitute only at the end of the film, when all the narrative sequences have been provided. Through the film, viewers are detached from their own condition and identify instead with Marjane and her process of self-discovery, with the stories becoming instruments by means of which it is possible to make sense of the world at large. Iranian history can stand as a model for the struggle and affirmation of identity in communities where oppressive forces operate, and this is consistent with world history—whether East or West. Marjane’s quest for integrity and sense of social responsibility requires her to understand her place in her genealogical and sociopolitical reality. By the end of the film, even though the viewers know that Marjane will never return to Iran, it has become evident that Paris is not the ultimate destination. Given that the beginning and final sequence of the film foreground Orly airport, this liminal space fulfills the ultimate mandate of the animated movie—what we would term a *critical imagination*, as deployed by Paronnaud and Satrapi.

Seen in the context of critical imagination, the beginning sequence of the film, which is in black and white, juxtaposed with the first of the four Orly sequences, all of which are in colour, cues us to the use of colour (or the lack thereof) to codify the temporal disjunctures and to maintain cohesion: the animation-narrative strategy creates a juncture that encompasses the existential present, as well as the past and potential future(s), providing, ironically, a neo-Aristotelian unity of sorts. By “neo-Aristotelian unity,” we are referring to the recuperation of classic notions of time and space that have been dispersed by postmodern communicative strategies, reinforcing a nihilistic tangential dispersal.

In the introductory airport scene, Marjane is wearing a bright-red coat and her hair is exposed. In that same scene, she reads the arrival-departure board:

Cincinnati, Tehran, and Singapore. Tehran is squarely situated between East and West in this geophysical and cultural configuration. Viewers do not yet know, however, who is travelling and whether they are arriving, nor do they know whether Marjane is departing. We soon come to understand that the in-colour airport scenes represent the temporal-spatial present—from which she is telling the story—and the recuperation of history is presented through sophisticated usages of black, white, and grey. Only by the end of the film do we fully understand that Marjane is neither arriving nor departing from Orly International; instead, the airport serves as a Bakhtinian chronotope, a space that designates a specific narrative spatial-temporal matrix, linking story to place. Marjane goes to the airport to find herself by taking time to detach, to reflect, and to reassess her identity.

Each of the four colour airport sequences in the film is a mnemonic device that links the present with an earlier memory of significance usually associated with displacement, change, transformation, and an airport. These airport scenes anchor the viewer in the present by demystifying the present as we have experienced it in the postmodern condition through the narrative strategy of colluding a different previous airport memory with Marjane's current moment of detachment and reflection as she orients herself in her present—Paris. The first colour sequence takes Marjane back to an early childhood memory of the Tehran airport in 1978 when her family greeted a female relative who had arrived home from exile in Paris. From there, we follow the protagonist through the narrated highlights of her younger life. When a second colour airport scene is introduced mid-film, it allows Marjane to introduce the viewer to the next most important stage in her identity formation: when she originally left Iran for Austria, sent away by her parents because her teenage rebellions were attracting dangerous attention from the regime. In the third colour scene, she returns home to Iran after losing her identity and thus, temporarily, her way in Vienna. In the fourth and final colour scenes, the recent past, the present, and the future collude when the viewer is presented with her final departure from Tehran airport, shown in black and white, juxtaposed with her arrival at Orly airport, also in black and white (which indicates a past arrival). This scene morphs into the colour scene outside Orly, as Marjane leaves the airport in a taxi. The narration reveals, at that final moment, that her arrival in Paris is a thing of the past. The various airports throughout the movie are symbolic of defining moments and liminal experiences in her life.

Orly airport, in this film, illustrates the material aspect of the dispersal process present in the age of immediacy gratification. At the same time, the film shows

how this process can be subverted through reflection, which, in essence, allows Marjane to gather together multiple times and selves in order to reconstitute and reposition herself in relationship to her history and to orient herself—and thereby, viewers—in relationship to a complex representation of Iranian history.

To choose an airport as a departing point for the narrative is then to introduce the viewer to a form of resistance that deals with the depersonalization of people in particular geographical spaces. An airport, according to Marc Augé, is a non-place, in comparison to what Victor Turner, in *From Ritual to Theatre*, would characterize as a liminal space. Given these two paradigms, Orly International functions in the film as a way to introduce the viewer to the protagonist's displacement and her reflections on transience that resist a formulation of completion, of being at home, of finality. Both the non-place and the liminal space reinstate a nomadic reading of power relations. As such, the airport becomes a location out of time—where time is mechanized and reduced to arrivals and departures, where travellers mill about carrying with them their different time zones that bump up against one another. Each traveller manifests his or her own time-aura as a permeable and relative construct so that the sense of being disjointed is foregrounded by this non-place that contains all possible times and no time at all. Where there could be correspondence, the airport effaces any potential stories because everyone is in a transitional process. If time comes to a stop in a non-place, such as the airport, and each departure and arrival is the beginning and ending sequence of micro-history, the airport is then incapable of containing macro-history. This spatial-temporal relationship points to the fact that this form of modernity has produced the absence of time-history: the airport, therefore, becomes symbolic of oblivion within Paronnaud and Satrapi's narrative construction—an oblivion that they resist by transforming the airport into a critical chronotope.

While the other travellers in the airport are transient—awaiting arrivals or departures and therefore suspended from time, a form of temporal absentia—Marjane fully immerses herself in the space and uses her time there to re-collect her self/selves, her memories: who she was and who she has become. As she reassesses her life as an Iranian expatriate, she takes on an Odyssean vestige, familiarized in *The Odyssey*. The link between Shahrzad's storytelling strategy and that of Odysseus erupts in a repositioning of one's self in the world through a narrative that encompasses a multiplication of identities, including the Other and her listener, who is now a participant.

In the Homeric tale, Odysseus does not have a compass but nevertheless finds his way home—Ithaca was the guiding point for his return. In Paronnaud and Satrapi's film, the shifts between colour and black and white posit for the viewer a compass of sorts that segments the overall story into identity paradigms within precise moments of reassertion and re-dressing. It is not only a matter of a chronological rendition of identity but rather a segmentation of the experience of memory into meaningful parts that end up constituting precise identity-formation moments. Each of the moments of the compass—in other words, each of the four colour airport scenes at Orly—are linked to previous memories associated with other airport events that are transformative moments in Marjane's life. Through the process of recollection, the viewer is prompted to focus on these narrative partitions, which both subvert the flow of a continuous chronological narrative and disrupt the typical airport experience and the airport as a non-space, all the while reaffirming the character's inexplicable essence of existence that transcends the dynamics of displacement.

Marjane, by grounding her narrative in the airport, chooses the most uncharacteristic of places—a place that reduces the complexity of human interactions into an amorphous flow of continuous displacement-passages. The airport thus becomes an apt synecdoche for the role that media, especially television, play in effecting identity. The airport stands for the dispersal that occurs through fluidity and that dissolves our responsibility to actively engage with the world, while at the same time providing the illusion of permanence by allowing us to be in all places at once: the gratification of the desire for immediacy. This film employs a cinematic practice that allows for self-reflexivity and the use of representative images to procure meaning and social criticism, exposing the magic casement of television's environments. Television projects onto the passive viewer a steady flow of images that ultimately produces no direction, no sense of where the information is coming from or going to, thus creating the conditions for identity dispersal. What is apparently a very dynamic medium is comparable to an event horizon, the edge of a black hole, beyond which light cannot escape. Displacement-detachment—as a critical tool that allows for a vantage point on events, so that participants can engage in them and observe them at the same time (participatory duality)—is best rendered by the trope of irony: simultaneous detachment from and participation in the event at hand.

The introductory scene in Orly is juxtaposed with a black and white reminiscence from childhood in which Marjane's family greets the woman arriving from



Paris in the Tehran airport in 1978. Before this memory is shown, we are introduced to Marjane via her feet, which solidly base her in a material reality and which foreshadow her past-punk life in Vienna that we learn about later. Wearing bulky, black, thick-soled, asexual shoes, representing the leaden weight of transience and shipwrecks, she moves through the crowded airport toward the arrival-departure board.<sup>3</sup> The international airport immediately presents the viewer with cultural juxtapositions signalled by dress codes, behaviours, and lifestyles: a shopping mall window onto fleeting and fleeing identities embedded in an ever-vanishing temporality.

In the various colour scenes, Marjane's identity transformations are narrated through the visual language and code-switching metaphor of the scarf that she puts on in the opening colour scene. She has loosened the scarf to reveal her hair a bit before she intentionally removes it in the second colour scene. It remains off in the third and the fourth and final closing colour scenes. As Marjane moves from the arrival-departure board to the washroom, the artificial cultural contrast implicit in the binary of East-West (them-us) is further reinforced when she dons the headscarf and becomes representative of a politico-religious tradition, whereas the other woman in the washroom scene, her Western counterpart, who applies lipstick, becomes a symbol of Western sexual opulence: Felliniesque figure, short red hair, bright-red lipstick, choker-style neck scarf, chain belt, black dress with shoulders cut out, and low-cut neckline (front and back). The scene sets up the two women as reflections in the mirrors over the public sinks, and we see Marjane looking first at herself in the mirror. She looks frightened and pulls her headscarf further down around her face to be sure it is covering her hair—almost as a defensive measure to hide herself. Once she has adjusted her scarf, the shot shifts to a wider perspective, and we see Marjane, through her reflection in the mirror, peeking at the woman next to her, who liberally applies more lipstick and shoots Marjane a nasty look as she walks away: a look of distaste for the Other that the woman recognizes in Marjane.

While the red-headed woman sees nothing of herself in Marjane, the protagonist recognizes herself in the Western woman. (Viewers are able to understand Marjane's expression in the washroom only in retrospect, once they have reintegrated the segments of plot within the chronology of the *fabula* by the end of the film.) Marjane, we later discover, was once perceived as a Western tart (à la woman in the washroom) when, upon her return to Iran from Vienna, her friends discovered that she was no longer a virgin. Later in the film, scenes when Marjane was earlier in Iran reveal that the images of sexy femininity adopted by her girlfriends

in Tehran, which had to be cloaked publicly by the materiality of religious-normative discourse, simply disguised another layer of ideology—that of Western feminism, which the Iranian girls equated with a disproportionate amount of freedom. While adopting the tropes of Western sexual freedom via their fashion choices, these practices are merely epidermic, demonstrated by the fact that the girls are shocked by Marjane's practices of sexual choice and freedom. While their own clothing suggests resistance, it is actually only a mask for their conformity to the praxis of sexual reproduction, because they exercise no governance over their own bodies. These girls refuse the liberation of their own bodies and sexuality, as they will still produce children for the Revolution. As Marjane understands—given the trajectory of identity tropes she has tried on over time and in different social and national contexts—Western liberalism is merely another code that allows for the sexual objectification of women. Marjane does not conform to the dictates of Western fashion. To do so would mirror the process whereby women within specific politico-religious ideologies are constructed as sexual objects only to then be cloaked and repressed, thereby reproducing the regime.

In fact, in the washroom scene, Marjane perceives that, in both East and West, women risk succumbing to roles that are merely the extension of men's desires. She is able to recognize her commonalities with the woman next to her, whereas that woman's gaze keeps Marjane at her periphery, betraying a lack of solidarity or genealogical correspondence. The Western woman renders herself an object of desire and, by opting to fashion herself according to a prescribed dress code, reveals her own oppression within a limited system of identity tropes. Her absence from history is exposed through a lack of awareness: merely adopting a predefined social role does not equate with sexual freedom, or with the pleasure of the body *per se*, but simply entails obedience to different modes of governing the female body that are as oppressive as Marjane's scarf. In this, the role is merely an embodiment of the superficiality of the non-place of the airport in the age of immediacy gratification. The red-headed woman, like many others, is unable to reflect critically on her identity and instead chooses to fulfill one of a limited number of roles dictated to her by the male gaze: a codified performance for the voyeur.<sup>4</sup> The Western woman prepares herself in front of the mirror—as if on camera—again highlighting the film's criticism of camera-performative identities trapped by the event horizon of television environments.

After the scene in the washroom, Marjane proceeds to the Iran Air ticket gate, only to bow her head in defeat when asked for passport and ticket. The shot then

cuts abruptly, substantiating uncertainty as to cause-and-effect trajectories, to her sitting on a bench in the airport, at which point there is a convergence of selves: the young childish Marjane runs through the frame and leads us back to a black and white reminiscence, set in Tehran in 1978, linked to Orly airport, where the young woman who returns from exile in Paris to Tehran becomes, culturally and politically, a synecdoche for the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini. By the end of the film, the viewer is able to understand that when Marjane approached the ticket gate, there could be no return to Iran. Of course, the irony is that the return is denied in Marjane's case but is historically substituted by the Ayatollah's own return in 1978. This, however, is not clear until the viewer has pieced together segments of plot to reconstruct the *fabula* and then situated Marjane's life story in the context of Iran's recent history.

The black and white flashback leads us into Marjane's childhood, where we learn of several significant formative experiences, such as Marjane's love of Bruce Lee, her desire to become a prophet, and the ambition to shave her legs, eventually. These identity tropes are an attempt to claim the active fighter steeped in the wisdom of belief paired with the mature woman and her own individuation. Through Marjane's memories of childhood and young adulthood, the viewer is exposed to the trajectory of the Iranian Revolution that leads up to the second colour scene in the film, where Marjane's departure from Iran to Vienna and the associated airport scene again land the viewer momentarily in Orly.

Here, Marjane, dejectedly sitting in the airport, takes off her headscarf and lights up a cigarette: these acts represent her current reality, far removed from the constraints of either childhood or Iranian social codes under the regime of the Ayatollah. In this scene, smoking aggravates another woman in her proximity, but Marjane is unaffected by the woman's attitude, a visual echo of the woman primping herself in the washroom. Marjane smokes her cigarette impudently, to the woman's disdain, while contemplating the past, the cigarette acting as a stimulant for recollections. The smoke, a symbol of the hazy and ephemeral memories that she is recollecting, is also a parody of the speech bubble in cartoons, establishing a direct connection between print animation and moving animation. Of course, the cigarette also contains an element of transgression, both in the here and now in Paris and in the then and there of Tehran, where friends and family partied in secret as a form of resistance risking imprisonment and/or death.

The black and white airport sequence that is linked to this colour scene is of Marjane's departure for Vienna from Tehran when her father tells her never to

forget who she is and where she comes from. As she walks away, she glances back over her shoulder only to see through the glass partition that her mother, having fainted, must now be carried away by her father. The glass division is an irreparable caesura from innocence: Marjane will never again be the same person that she is when she departs from Tehran for the first time. This is the moment of the original displacement. Linked to her mother's fainting, this symbolic death foregrounds the sacrifice of all of Iranian youth that have, over time, resisted oppression and/or that were sacrificed in the name of religious nationalism in the war with Iraq.

The next scene switches to colour. The removal of the scarf at Orly airport that had been so meticulously donned in order to approach the ticket gate symbolizes Marjane's resituating herself in the present space: Paris. This act also acknowledges the impossibility of a return to the comfort of childhood. If the scarf is a symbol of who she once was or might have been, it is also the false umbilical cord embedded in oppression and domestication. At the same time, removing the scarf and freeing her hair—a marker of Western freedom—is now a freedom relative to time and place that comes with a price. The time in the flashback is 1982: the knowledgeable viewer will know that, by this historical moment, Khomeini had consolidated his hold on power while regaining most of the territories lost during the beginning of the war with Iraq.

In the third colour scene, Marjane is having coffee in the airport café. There, she reminisces about her return from Vienna to Tehran, rediscovering a transformed Iran through the narrations provided by her parents, which constituted her new horizon. This brief interlude in Orly is paralleled with her airport experience in Tehran upon her return. That airport sets up a repressive encounter: the male agent sitting at a table, a guard of the Revolution, asks for her passport and reprimands her for her scarf being askew. Her feminine identity is checked by the figure of male oppression both through his exercise of power over her physicality and through the language he uses to recuperate her through a revolutionary-familial language, calling her "sister." In retrospect, the viewer can recognize that this was the moment upon which Marjane was reflecting when she originally donned the scarf in the introductory washroom scene before approaching the Iran Air ticket counter. As the viewer also understands in the final moments of the film, her actions in the present Orly airport are the re-enactment of an oppressive process that traumatizes her return and that she is working through via the process of the narrative.

When she originally went home to Tehran from Vienna, it was with her parents' understanding that they would not ask her any questions upon her return.

Consequently, the necessity for oblivion was acknowledged, in order for the return to occur. Instead of expecting Marjane to recount her experiences, her parents report the transformative events that have taken place in Iran during her absence. Her possibility to reflect critically on Iranian society via her displacement, perhaps as her Uncle Anoush had done, is truncated both by the guard and by the expectations of her family. Failing to oblivate her past leads to incessant sleep, TV watching (another reflection on the medium as entrapment), and the consumption of alcohol and pills, all of which allow her to spiral temporarily in an ever-present denial of past events, a condition that cannot be responsibly sustained. This depressive behaviour is part of her response to the sense of guilt for having missed out on the experiences of her generation—experiences (such as the war) that had maimed some friends of substance and robbed others of their identity through cultural oppression. Through the illustrative power of representation, the viewer is shown how her girlfriends focus on the vaporous aspects of hedonistic Western society by dressing the part of Western beauty, veiled under the black scarves and coats dictated by the religious Revolution. Her rise out of this depressive process illustrates a way out of the television environment that *Persepolis* is eager to illustrate. The way that Marjane recuperates the plot of her life indicates that both at the time she excised herself from her depression in Iran and in the present in Paris, no degree of oblivion can be curative.

Near the end of the movie, just preceding the final colour scene, Marjane is in Orly; she has just arrived from Tehran and said goodbye to her family, with her mother forbidding her ever to return to Iran for the sake of Marjane's own freedom and safety. While the movie plot tricks the viewer into thinking of this as the present, the colour code allows the viewer to unravel the yarn: the sequence is in black and white, which, according to the narrative strategy, indicates the past. In the final moments of the film, the past and the present intertwine. It is only when the black and white incarnation of Marjane exits Orly and morphs into the present version of herself—the colour version wearing a red coat and driving off in the backseat of a taxi—that the viewer is able to understand that she has not just arrived from Tehran but has actually spent the day in Orly Airport. No destination other than the airport itself is revealed: it is the point of aggregation for all memories and identities. In the end, the day at the airport became part of an exercise in liminality and impossible returns. The taxi driver asks her, "Where are you coming from?" and she replies, "Iran," despite the fact that viewers know that she has not been anywhere but the airport itself. Her response indicates that she

has not forgotten who she is or where she comes from—following from the advice of her father and grandmother. Marjane has been able to reconstitute her full identity, which was segmented by various displacements, so that the person and the *fabula* become one. Reconstituted, she is her-story.

The closing sequence of the film is again white on black animation, as with the beginning nine vignettes, and the images are again linked by floating jasmine flowers, which are reminiscent of Marjane's grandmother, thus drawing a connection to her genealogical line. As such, the device metonymically encompasses Marcel Proust's madeleine: if what guided Proust back to his life in *À la recherche du temps perdu* is the sense of taste, for Marjane it is the sense of smell. Her olfactory and mnemonic device connect to her relationship with her grandmother, which grounds her own identity but also hints at the fallibility of the visual as the one and only sense in the contemporary age of the image.<sup>5</sup>

#### WALTZ WITH BASHIR (2008)

Ari Folman, in *Waltz with Bashir*, calls the viewer to reflect on the image by consistently weaving into the film's animated narrative technological apparatuses, mirrors, and lenses. This style opens up to a critical understanding of how the various technologies that surround the image create and manipulate identities that are fully removed from history. In one of the defining moments of the film (whence the title is derived), the Christian Phalangists in Beirut respond to their leader, Bashir, only as a constructed image. In this sense, the Phalangists are not individuals but rather extensions of an image environment that is void of individual responsibility. Finally, the film illustrates that such image environments have no ethical purpose despite often being constructed around narratives of moral and ethical obligation or action.

In the opening sequence of the film, a vicious pack of dogs—twenty-six of them, we later learn—is raging through the streets. At one point, we, as spectators, are watching the dogs rampage through the city via a reflection in a convex street-corner mirror. The director uses the mirror symbolically to connect to the notion of memory and surveillance. This introduction to the convex lens in the street at the outset of the movie resonates with the concluding moments of the film, in which “real” television footage of the Sabra and Shatila massacre is used to illustrate the limitations of the anti-historical media representations provided to viewers about history-as-it-happens. As viewers, we continue to follow the trajectory of the dogs

running wildly through the urban landscape, eventually stampeding through a puddle that covers the painted image of an adult and child holding hands: a horizontal street-sign that indicates pedestrian traffic to oncoming drivers. Then, from the flat dimension of the street, we move from the horizontal to the vertical: from memory to reality. A mother stands, hugging her toddler to shield him from the pack of dogs that represent the eruption of chaos and the wild into the cityscape. All traffic flow is disrupted: cars stop and people flee and are separated from one another as the dogs race through their existence, creating social fragmentation. The link between recalled images and repressed traumatic memories becomes apparent during the course of the film. Because memories have a disruptive effect that threatens civilized society, they must be repressed by regimes exercising control. However, this film asserts that through the ability of art and/or narrative to provide context and origins, trauma can possibly be reintegrated into a healthier whole.

As the introductory sequence continues, further reflections on screen media are revealed. Suddenly, the focus shifts to a character looking down at us, the spectators, from the upper-storey window of an art-deco-style building. Despite the fact that the viewer will soon become aware of the fact that the film is set in contemporary time, the style of the building is reminiscent of a time before the Holocaust, again drawing the parallel between the two genocides: the Jewish Shoah and the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The bespectacled figure in the upper-storey window represents the alienation of truncated memories and the separation of the social body into inchoate shards. The window through which the figure is gazing becomes a frame onto the world, reminiscent of a television or film screen. Then suddenly, our perspective as viewers shifts, and we assume the position of the twenty-six dogs; we become a part of the dynamic chaos that the man in the window is observing. Outside the window from which he gazes is a spotlight or camera that the viewer presumes is pointed at the entrance to the building. Then, perspective shifts again, and we see the dogs in the street, barking up toward our viewing I/eye (the man in the window). This shift in perspective creates a striking tension: the man awaits an answer, the dogs await an answer, and we, viewers imbricated in this scene, await an answer. The foreboding associated with the anticipated answer is due, in part, to the animation choices in the introductory sequence: it is predominantly black, white, and grey, but it is mitigated by splashes of colour—the dogs' yellow eyes, the yellow backlight, and the yellow lettering of the credits playing at the outset of the film. The black and yellow colouring,



combined with the dogs' foaming at the mouth, invokes a suggestion of madness, morbidity, and the uncanny.

As a framing device, this prenarrative sets up the negative displacement of the narrator, Ari, from his own memory and history and presents society's political dissociation or amnesia as a form of occultation. The interplay between image and word is where meaning is created through visual-textual punning, an ironic mode that illustrates the viewer's potential for critical participation. At this point in the film, no dialogue or narration has yet been introduced. The long scene following the wild dogs galloping through the city is meant to pique the viewers' curiosity and incite a connection between the unconscious as the prenarrative of dreams and the memory recollections that follow. The prenarrative scene, then, is filled with a strong beat of adrenaline-evoking music that backdrops the barking of the dogs and the multiple sounds of chaos erupting: chairs being overturned, tables falling, cars stopping. This soundscape provides an ominous threat that agitates the viewer into a fight-or-flight survival mode. It anticipates the narrative of military experience. The barking segues into the human voice but remains as a background soundtrack to the narrative, creating a doubling effect that allows for a contrast between civilization and savagery, the domesticated and the wild.

The first phrase of dialogue in the film, provided by the character of Boaz Rein, the man in the window, iterates the haunting horror he feels about the dogs: "I see them standing there: all twenty-six dogs, barking. Through the window, I see the hunger in their eyes. They are here to take a life. They threatened the life of my boss, Bertold: either give them Boaz Rein's head or we'll eat your customers."<sup>6</sup> The passage suggests that the dogs speak, which is a transition from animal to human, and ultimately the message is that the dogs want justice. The fact that the dogs request the head of the boss or threaten to eat the customers evokes the biblical story of Salome and John the Baptist (the horrific fickleness of power) and the cannibalism of the Other (the unmediated power of the Phalangists), since the twenty-six dogs each have a precise identity, paradoxically becoming human by naming and therefore reconstituting and exposing the synecdoche of beast-terrorist for what it is.

The visual scene contextualizing the narrative voice then shifts from its perspective in the window above the dogs in the street, hierarchical in showing tension, to a dialogue taking place in a pub between two characters (Ari and Boaz), a horizontal engagement that suggests reciprocity, working through fragmentation to form a conscious responsibility critical of history. In this free-flowing social



setting, alcohol consumption allows for the trauma to start unfolding. Fragments of memory come through, and drugs bring about the de-automatization of recall through the dulling of pain. (Similarly, in *Persepolis*, cigarettes stimulate recollection, and pills and alcohol provide the necessary respite from trauma.) However, meaning is achieved through the dialogical interaction that, from this scene on, ironically moves closer to the ground zero of what has been cut off and left suspended from the Israeli social body: the responsibility for the massacre. In this sense, then, the dialogical is not only a Bakhtinian communicative strategy but also a Buberian resolution, a taking of individual responsibility. Interaction between the unconscious (what is obliterated) and the conscious (what is known) is an ongoing dialogue. As the individual becomes known to himself or herself, personal and social histories can be re-established (reintegrating the shadow) so as to claim back individuality and identity. As far as the film confirms this, war is a denial of identity that subverts the dialogical, that fossilizes the Other into a picture of barbarism that, in turn, renders the “I” a rigid construct. Within the narrative paradigm, war can only be a polarization that ultimately indicates genocide: the extermination of the Other. War is the struggle of a monologue to re-place another monologue. As such, it is the caesura with life and ourselves. As Tzvetan Todorov has demonstrated in his analysis of the European conquistador’s encounter with the Other in *The Conquest of America*, it is possible to identify with the Other, especially when doing so serves the purposes of domination and exploitation of the world at large.

Once the dialogue between Ari and Boaz begins, another layer is visually introduced to the viewer: in the top left corner of the screen, there are names written in both roman and Hebrew lettering. This cinematic strategy reaffirms the constitution of the film as a narrative reconstruction based on interviews with actual participants. Through this visual layer, the movie is self-reflexive about being a medium to capture, still, and distill life-memories that have transpired before the movie was created. The names are a reminder and a remainder of something that has already taken place.

At least three memory lines intertwine in the film: the memory contained within the movie, the memories of those outside the movie that were gathered through interviews, and our memories as spectators who know something about Sabra and Shatila. What is introduced in the beginning sequence, after the dream is discussed, is the function of the narrative. Ari asks Boaz:

Have you tried anything?  
Like what?  
Therapy? A shrink? Shiatsu? Anything?  
No. Nothing, I'm reaching out to you.  
I'm just a filmmaker.  
Can't filmmaking be therapeutic?

One of the functions of this dialogue is to bring into focus the scope of the film itself. Through interlocution, the viewer is brought to reflect on one possible role that the film can have and its therapeutic potential. At the same time, however, this role is but one aspect of this complex film; the film is able to reach the viewer on many levels. The therapeutic process first targets the Israelis themselves. As well, the narrative is constructed and based upon *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*—the two texts upon which all of Western literature is based, according to Italian critic Franco Ferrucci, who argued this point in *L'assedio e il ritorno*. Notions of return target a much wider international public. Also, the film touches on the way in which history and the media are at odds: the reintegration of history touches the world in general, since in the film, history is absented by media mechanisms.

#### QUANTIFIABLE PROXIMITY: OBLIVION AND THE ANGEL OF HISTORY

As the dialogue between the two characters of Boaz and Ari unfolds, it becomes evident that Ari has distanced himself from the memories of his military experiences as a youth—memories that include the Sabra and Shatila massacre. However, Ari's metaphoric distance from and uncertainty about the past is questioned by Boaz, who quantifies Ari's participation in the event: Boaz cannot understand how Ari cannot remember, given that he was only a hundred yards away. Proximity to the event, from Boaz's perspective, seems to suggest a measurable relationship to history. Boaz remembers various events quite well and quantifies many aspects of his experiences, such as the twenty-six dogs in the opening scene of the film. Nevertheless, this does not equate with being able to integrate his experiences into a coherent existential narrative. For Boaz, the war remains a series of quantifiable fragments, much as it would be for a viewer watching a war as a series of news clips. The empirical objectification of the events that we typically receive as spectators via news media—ten bombs dropped, one hundred civilians killed, three soldiers dead, and so on—serves the purpose of allowing viewers to embrace

the image-reality of events with a false conception of understanding: titillating with the horrors of reality from a safe distance while inhibiting or prohibiting any empathy with victims or sense of responsibility for events. Ari, however, contradicts Boaz's claim that Ari was a hundred yards from the event. Ari says it was "more like two hundred, three hundred yards—the truth is, nothing like that stays in my brain." While Ari has no memory of the massacre, he claims less physical proximity than Boaz's estimate, which seems to imply that for him, the physical distance of a few hundred yards means the difference between memory and oblivion. As a signification of what is to come in the film, when the two characters separate after the bar scene, it appears that one is a shadow separating from the other. As Boaz walks away from Ari and stands looking at the tempestuous sea, Ari looks over his shoulder (à la Benjamin's Angel of History) as though to look back on his past, which will allow him to move forward by retrieving memories that are integral to a sense of identity.

This visual representation of the men as dividing from one another is indicative of the film's dynamic, whereby Israel must reclaim itself (and reintegrate its multiple identities) through the recuperation of memory: this happens in the film through Ari's reintegration of his past, which is linked to the recuperation of national history. Through interviewing former members of his military unit in order to reconstitute a lost generation that is part of the body and identity of Israel, Ari becomes the material thread that weaves together the different fragments of a dispersed and displaced community. The conversation in the bar with Boaz is the moment that begins Ari's own quest back into his past: he suddenly becomes aware of his lack of memories about his own experiences in Lebanon as a young military man. The film then travels back through memory and time to uncover what happened. This mimics *The Odyssey* insofar as it records Odysseus's voyage back from the Greek war on the Trojans and the siege of Troy. Odysseus's journey home takes twenty years, which corresponds to the time it takes for Ari, a synecdoche for Israel, to bring to life the historical context: it has taken twenty years for Boaz to begin dreaming—in other words, to begin the process of remembering—and to incite Ari's own journey.

*Waltz with Bashir* and the combined narratives of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* intersect at several levels. First, both narratives revolve around a siege and a war. Second, in both narratives, the protagonists undergo transformations of identity that result from the traumas of war. War wounds the protagonists by displacing them from their identification with the Other, which prevents their identification

with humanity and, ultimately, with themselves. Third, the reintegration of both Odysseus's and Ari's war-fragmented identities are realized and made possible through the creation of a narrative that reconfigures their histories and memories.

One of Ari's first encounters with the city of Beirut—once popularly considered the Paris of the Middle East—is through the airport, which, for a moment, he imagines as a hub of cosmopolitan life, only to be shocked out of the reverie to realize that it is an abandoned war-devastated location. As we follow his discovery, the broken carcasses of planes are foregrounded, much as in the scene of the slaughtered horses in Beirut's hippodrome, which produces a moment of negative epiphany for one soldier/patient. This trauma, the absurd death of the horses, collapses the ex-soldier's grasp of sanity because the distance he had created between himself and the horrors of war, by using the camera, is dissolved when he sees the dead animals. Whereas Paronnaud and Satrapi use the airport as a symbol of oblivion, Ari Folman uses it to illustrate a confrontation with oblivion.

What *Waltz with Bashir* suggests, and herein lies the contradiction, is that oblivion—Ari's oblivion, the oblivion of Israel, and the oblivion of the international world of spectators—has been rendered possible by the image-based media environments that saturate contemporary culture. In other words, as a result of mainstream media's focus on satiating their consumers' thirst for immediacy, memory is not a collection of dynamic images strung together into an ideological narrative. Rather, the memory of strife must constitute a critical recounting that encompasses the participants in the strife and that can bring back a sense of responsibility to everyone (at every level of participation or inaction) for the dehumanizing process of that strife. To extend Martin Buber's premise, it is only when "I" recognize the Other's dead as my dead as well that "I" find my humanity and "I" am again, possibly, able to recover the person that "I" was before the trauma. By naturalizing scenes of terror and despair, whereby suffering becomes spectacle, the world of images has succeeded in eliminating the sense of social responsibility that is, in large part, the basis of engagement with others in a democratic society. Such a process is able to convey the illusion that we have acknowledged the strife and trauma of Others. More than words, images have the power to suspend death in time and render it available for immediate consumption via worldwide networks of communication, which at the time of Sabra and Shatila would have been largely televisual but which are now available in perpetuity via the Internet. Folman is now using animated feature-length film to recuperate the meaningless spectacularization of history. The ironic aspect to the movie's

intentionality—what could be called “critical humanism”—is its ability to establish a parallel with the Holocaust.

In the case of the Holocaust, pictures were the testimonials of the dead: pictures became necessary to narrate the Shoah. The denunciation of today’s power of the image throughout *Waltz with Bashir* is a denunciation of the passage from the role of the image before the end of the Second World War to the role that the image has acquired in the contemporary world: that of removing the sense of responsibility of human beings in the world while granting them the power of oblivion because of the transitory nature of life. In other words, what contemporary static and dynamic images through media environments have accomplished is to create a false sense of catharsis while releasing the emotions of their historical context and development in order to gratify the desire for immediacy as the lowest common denominator of any formulation of identity.

#### THE REFRAINS OF MEMORY: ONE IN THREE

The anthropological device used by Ari Folman—the actual interview with participants—retrieves the individual voices that had no authority and were silenced by the magnitude of the event and the official reports that erased history. This is not to say that these formerly young military men were not responsible for the massacre in which they were voyeuristic participants; rather, they were secondary characters in the staging of the event, and the narrative ultimately exposes the chain of command and responsibility that orchestrated the event.

In the process of recollection, Folman resorts also to other narrative techniques and strategies, one of which is the use of the visual refrain of the tragedy that acts as a silent chorus. In this refrain, which occurs three times, the naked young male bodies rise out of the water; the viewer eventually comes to realize through the repetition of the scene that this flashback is of Ari and two members of his military unit who walk out of the water onto the beach of war-torn Beirut. These scenes, with the young men first seen floating and then slowly standing and walking out of the water, completely naked except for the automatic weapons that they are carrying, represent the birthing of these youth into war by the sea. Although no word is spoken, their sense of purpose is the military mission that awaits them. As they dress on the beach, the viewing “I” anticipates their encounter with an enemy, only to be displaced from anticipation by the fact that when these youth enter into the streets of Beirut, they do not find “the enemy” but are instead encountered with

fleeing civilians. The young Ari finds himself moving against the flow of people: silent, open-mouthed women and children running away from what we will later come to understand is the location of the massacre. This cinematic commemoration, a compassionate rendition piecing together the massacre, occurs three times during the movie, and in each instance, the viewer moves one step closer to the ground zero of the event, as though moving one hundred yards closer in a series of concentric circles that focuses and refocuses the viewer on the disappearance of the event through television images.

Given that Ori Sivan, Ari's therapist friend, in another moment in the film, addresses the notion of water as representing fear, the rising of the three young male bodies naked and armed from the night waters of Beirut has several functions apart from embodying the militarization of life through the male body: it provides a sense of importance and anticipation for an ominous moment; it sets up the space of the event; it gives the viewer the culpability of innocence; it brings out a sense of resurrection and/or mortality; it sets the origin of the oblivion as fear; it recuperates the fear as an instrument that can lead to knowledge; it sets up the metaphor for liquid reality (the flow of people but also the flow of media images); and it denounces the fact that if a person (or a nation or the world community) denies a trauma, the trauma will reoccur unmitigated, over and over again. In other words, these concentric circles of the repeated silent chorus of the three men rising out of the water and revealing a bit more of the actual sequence of events each time brings us closer and closer to Sabra and Shatila (and all television-mediated events). In the third and final repetition and elaboration of this cinematic syntagm, the viewer arrives at the climax and final scene of the film, which segues into live television footage of the massacre. Epistemologically, the event is dissolved by the act of zooming in on the women who lament the carnage of their dear husbands and children in such a narrow way as to obliterate the perspective of the viewer and the larger context of the event, turning a political massacre into a television drama of select women and children similar to the spectacle of reality television. The process illustrated is Folman's attempt to renegotiate Israeli identity as a responsible and critical identity, given Israel's background (the Shoah). The unstated denunciation is that those who have undergone a trauma and have not come to terms with it are condemned to repeat the cycle of violence.

During the anti-climactic finale, Folman intentionally conveys both his criticism of television and the public's misplaced faith in its power to render "real" lived events that form and inform identity. The use of "real" footage in the final moment

of the film, rather than providing credibility to history and the viewer's acknowledgement of past events, dissolves the horror of the event into a recyclable amalgam of hate and violence. Those moments of footage cannot convey the context of the 1982 war in Lebanon. Instead, the images reduce it to a moment of spectacularized pornography of grief that ironically conveys a less complex understanding of reality than does the preceding animation, with its highly charged process of self-reflexivity. Ultimately, the footage is unveiled as both a parody of itself and the sublimation of the trauma.

#### SUBVERTING THE PARADIGM

Both *Persepolis* and *Waltz with Bashir* use narrative strategies to recuperate lost personal and national identities by subverting mainstream representations of history-as-it-happens through free-floating images on mainstream television (and new media). Both films subvert “real” images by using the media of animation and feature film narration, drawing on techniques inherent to grand narratives of culture and history to illustrate the caesura that postmodernity has imposed on individuals when it alienates them from themselves and from their context. In *Waltz with Bashir*, Folman is specifically critical of television's potential to erase active participation in the world. In *Persepolis*, Paronnaud and Satrapi criticize the fragmentary image-constructions of either individuals or nations provided by television and associated new media technologies that make people and nations ever-present consumable commodities. By reverting to narrative strategies grounded in history, both film narratives redirect the active gaze back onto constructions of history itself and call the viewer to question the contemporary notions of history-as-it-happens that is being offered to us, the orphans of critical humanism.

The animation in these two films works to take back the “image-” prefix of image-history in order to deliver us to history. In a sense, these films are cultural antibodies. By freeing the image-history, these films provide us with a vocabulary that redelivers our presence in time. Perhaps the penned image—the drawings and animation—is somehow able to represent reality more accurately in the contemporary world than “real” pictures, since everything around us reminds us of our presence in the image-based media environments and associated pathos, with neither a link to critical distancing nor the ability to process beyond sensorial gratification. However divergent the styles and representational strategies instrumental to the narratives in these two films, the self-reflexivity, intentionality, and



repositioning of image-making processes (film, graphic novels, television, media reportage, animated movies) produce similar communicative goals.

*Persepolis* is focused on informing the world at large of the repression that has shaped recent Iranian history and the subsequent displacement of various classes. The communicative strategy is one that foregrounds the concatenation of different voices so as to show that Iran is not just one homogeneous system—the oppressive system—and that an array of voices are linked together by their individual identities that do not conform to the imposed norm. At the same time, the reacquisition of voice through the many characters that arise in the process of *mise en abîme* points to the destruction of the Western stereotypes that qualify all Iranians as homologous to the oppressive religious and political system presently in power.

As a case in point, in the uprising in Iran after the elections in June 2009, Satrapi granted permission to two Iranian students who requested access to her graphic novel so that they could update it to include the actual events of the protest that ensued after the elections. Overall, it is clearly the intention of these artists to demystify the constructions that have made of Iran a prototype of a medieval tangent, taking Iran completely out of the trajectory of modernity. In the film *Persepolis*, the voices that are embodied by the animation represent a dynamic, enlightened, and cultured society that has been decimated by torture, imprisonment, and systematic elimination. This foregrounding, we think, is very important in Paronnaud and Satrapi's work. We have already hinted at Satrapi's efforts to deconstruct the stereotype that has gained common currency in the Western media: Iran as an Islamo-fascist regime run amok with the power of nuclear devices.

*Waltz with Bashir*, until the final scene, scrutinizes the unhealed wound of the Sabra and Shatila massacre with an Israeli audience in mind. Faced with an event that denies narration, just as the Holocaust is beyond narration, Folman's film proposes that it is our social responsibility to recuperate that traumatic event from oblivion, from those individuals who have been co-responsible for both the historical occurrence and its subsequent erasure. The proliferation of images projected internationally at the time of the event functioned as a reductive mechanism; the media coverage projected horror and trauma but failed to encompass the context, the meaning, or the viewer's implication in the event of the "real." Television—another medium in which Folman works—is re-viewed under Folman's scrutiny and is found incapable of offering perspective. According to the representation of television and media images offered throughout *Waltz with Bashir*, which



culminates with the incorporation of “real” (not animated) media footage at the end of the film, television makes available only flat images that provide the viewer no context. And in the absence of context, television images projected to viewers are merely free-floating signifiers that allow spectators to abdicate their responsibility.

Both films strive to engage the viewer with history-as-it-happens in order to illustrate and resist the process of oblivion that has been naturalized by contemporary media practices. This process is characteristic of a world that insists on instant gratification, that aims for forgetfulness of the present and erasure of history, and that prefers what we term *post-political participation*, in which potential political agency is transformed through televised images into a spectator sport and thereby rendered inert.<sup>7</sup> Although both movies refer to specific geopolitical realities, the reverberating messages comment on the underlying conditions of present societies where the fulcrum is oblivion. Yosef Hayim Yarushalmi asks, “Est-il possible que l’antonyme de « l’oubli » ne soit pas « la mémoire », mais *la justice*?” (20; “Is it possible that the antonym of ‘oblivion’ is not ‘memory,’ but *justice*?”). If the answer is yes, then the project of these two films in recuperating national histories is to ground identities in the dynamics of interlocking narratives, embedding the protagonists and the viewers in history through an ethic of responsible presence. *Persepolis* does so by illustrating how to maintain a sense of self and personal dignity by avoiding the traps of oblivion. *Waltz with Bashir* is a complex warning about what happens to nations and ultimately to the individuals of whom these geopolitical spaces are composed when the lure of the sirens of oblivion shipwrecks them in Time, by capturing them within their media environments.

#### NOTES

- 1 “Marjane” is also the first name of Marjane Satrapi, the author of the graphic novel *Persepolis* on which the film is based. In what follows, we will use “Marjane” to refer to the character in the animated film and “Satrapi” to refer to the author and filmmaker herself. Similarly, in discussing *Waltz with Bashir*, we will use “Ari” for the character and “Folman” for the filmmaker.
- 2 Dispersal refers to both Marjane’s centrifugal exile and the actual historical dispersal of community memory that is bound to particular participants who envisioned a different revolution with the fall of the Shah—communists, progressives, anyone who did not support a religious revolution—and also to people who were eliminated from the Iranian future through torture and death.

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- 3 “Shipwrecks” here references her near identity-shipwreck in Vienna, where there was temporary caesura from her genealogical line because she forgot what her grandmother told her before her departure: “In your lifetime, you are going to meet a lot of jerks. If someone hurts you, just say that it was because of their lack of intelligence. [. . .] never get bitter. Don’t lose your sense of dignity. Don’t lose sight of yourself.”
- 4 Within the framework established by the film’s critical reflections on female identity, including sexuality and a sexually liberated female body capable of giving and receiving pleasure, becomes impossible to represent within the confines of Western historical conceptions of sex and power relations. As with Roland Barthes’s *Le plaisir du texte* (1973), the pleasure of the actual, physical body is forever postponed within the mediated textualization of the body, a conceptualization that is possible within a post-structuralist world’s riposte that has been embraced as a naturalized state.
- 5 Folman, too, engages with smell as a guiding sense both through darkness (of space, of the soul) and as a link to personal past events, as our absolute and dangerous reliance on image and visuality is finally revealed. In *Waltz with Bashir*, Ari suddenly remembers why patchouli oil makes him feel sick: it is connected to his memories of his wartime roommate Frenkel, for whom patchouli was not just a fragrance but a way of life, just as Frenkel’s present life as a martial arts instructor is guided by a specific philosophy and regime: hierarchy, discipline, and order. These three elements correspond to the way he used patchouli to guide his men on the battlefield, and these elements, combined, are also one of the ways by which history is recuperated.
- 6 We have chosen to quote directly from the narrative voice-over, given that the subtitles abbreviate the words spoken.
- 7 The term *post-political participaction* makes reference to the Canadian ParticipACTION campaign, established in 1971 with the goal of motivating Canadians to get physically active. In December 2011, Kelly Murumets, president and CEO of ParticipACTION, told the House Standing Committee on Health: “We’re a pioneer in social marketing; we have become internationally recognized for our compelling communications to promote physical activity” (<http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=5326379>). The irony, of course, is that to see the ParticipACTION campaign TV commercials, one has to be sitting in front of the television.

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