This book focuses on non-fictional, visual narratives (including comics, graphic narratives, animated documentaries and online interactive documentaries) that attempt to represent violent experiences, primarily in the Levant. In doing so, it explores, from a philosophical perspective, the problem of representing trauma when language seems inadequate to describe our experiences and how the visual narrative form may help us with this. The book uses the concept of the ineffable to expand the notion of representation beyond the confines of a western, individualist notion of trauma as event based. In so doing, it engages a postcolonial perspective of trauma, which treats violence as ongoing and connected to several incidents of violence across time and space. This book demonstrates how the formal qualities of visual non-fiction may help fill the gap between representation and experience through the process of ‘dark’ writing.

Jeanne-Marie Viljoen is an academic in the field of Cultural & Literary Studies at the University of South Australia. Her abiding interest in exploring how communication about difficult experiences can occur through art in contexts where language cannot capture all we want to say, has led her to focus primarily on non-fictional, visual narratives. Living and working in contested states with violent histories such as Apartheid South Africa, North Cyprus and Australia throughout her life drives her engagement with the postcolonial world.
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This book is dedicated to Daniel Arthur and Isabella Sophia, the bravest people I know; & to my father, for his steadfast confidence in me.
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Glossary

**Graphic narrative**  Graphic narratives are creative, complex, non-fictional (although obviously non-realistic), aesthetic representations in the comics form, often of violence. They are distinct from graphic novels, which are fictional.

**Gutter**  The gutter is the gap often left around the edges of the square frame of each panel/frame in the medium of comics.

**Panel**  Also sometimes called a frame. It is generally the square or rectangular frame which outlines the picture in the medium of comics.
Abbreviations

Footnotes  Footnotes in Gaza (2009) (graphic narrative)
Waltz      Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon war story (2009) (graphic narrative)
Can We Share Painful Experiences?

What if, contrary to what we have learnt in the west,¹ we can share some horrific experiences with and of others. Kafka seems to suggest that this kind of sharing is not only possible but may be tangible, when he bids us share in the tortuous process by gazing at the writing which is being cut into the flesh of the ‘Condemned Man’ in *In the penal colony*. Indeed he invites us to:

… watch the inscription taking form on the body. Wouldn’t you care to come a little nearer and have a look at the needles?... The long needle does the writing and the short needle sprays a jet of water to wash away the blood and keep the inscription clear.

(Kafka 1949, p. 147)

Throughout history, humans have inscribed pain onto other human’s bodies, whether deliberately or accidentally, sometimes in view of others and sometimes in secrecy. Particularly when these experiences constitute trauma or physical pain and occur in the context of the collective assault of war, we tend to view them as unspeakable and therefore unable to be shared. But what if we are able to share them? Perhaps being able to share them with others, being able to express some of them, whether we read them off our own bodies or the bodies of others, may stop us in our tracks.
Furthermore, if we can imagine that this is possible, we need to confront several uncomfortable questions, which may not be immediately obvious: do such traumatic experiences have discrete beginnings and endings or do they continuously bleed into each other as they are lived unremittingly, becoming indistinguishable; do they simply manifest on individual bodies and psyches or should we expect to see them conjoined in complex associations that sometimes make them unrecognisable and may perhaps make boundaries between victims and perpetrators vague; do we need to alter our views of what sharing is so that we can come to understand what kinds of engagement can act as conduits for distributing such experiences. For while there is a sense that traumatic experiences are all encompassing and supremely isolating for the victim, there is also a sense in which some traumas are experienced by many of us (though in different ways). These questions take us to the verge of what it means to share experiences, to the very edge ourselves and others, to the very brink of the known.

One of the aims of this book is to contribute to the decolonisation of trauma studies and to break the stranglehold that psychoanalysis has had on the western understanding of trauma. This is because in seeing trauma (and particularly the trauma of the subaltern) as an event with a definite beginning and end and conceiving of violence as an unable to be disclosed, personal pain has political consequences that mitigate against shared responsibility and collective healing. In the west, the dominant conception of what constitutes trauma is an event-based model according to which trauma results from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event, and recovery takes the form of the ‘talking cure’. Indeed, Christian Jambet (2006) identifies the event as a most basic property of the universe, which sometimes breaks into experience. However, in some ways, this is not a helpful way to think of trauma, especially where it appears to be ongoing, collective and systemic. This is not only in keeping with a shift away from early trauma scholarship but is also in keeping with the need that more recent trauma scholars such as Stef Craps et al. (2015) have identified to actively explore the cultural production of non-western minority groups that bear witness to painful stories.

Moreover, the west’s insistence on pathologising trauma along medical lines, rather than allowing that it often encapsulates appropriate reactions to particularly horrific circumstances, sets it up as a distinctively, negative response that may be identified in a broad class of traumatised individuals. Trauma studies currently suffer from a form of psychological universalism. As another recent trauma scholar, Alan Gibbs (Gibbs cited in Craps et al. 2015), argues, diagnoses based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III (for example, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) are far too readily applied in a neo-colonial way, as universal theoretical models, to explain everybody’s trauma, without cognisance of the context or structure of trauma. Scholars such as Pierre
Nora (1989) and Giorgio Agamben (1998, 1999) have also helped to break the stranglehold of such universalism by depathologising the role of memory in sharing trauma and take it out of the straight-jacket of the medical model, allowing it to include for example, transgenerational memory. They do this by shifting their focus from the mimetic accuracy that memory is supposed to deliver in its representation of the past to the shared value of its organic performances and effects. These scholars thus help us re-imagine the ultimate goal of representation entirely: it needs no longer to achieve mere accurate description. It may instead engage in the accommodation and preservation of the ineffable.

In order to re-imagine the goal of representation, we need to challenge the basis for the lingering pervasiveness of the psychanalytic understanding of trauma in the west as it relates to the way that representation has historically been seen as mimesis, an always lesser copy of an objective reality, something that some people have more access to than others, depending on their proximity to the action, ability and education. Adopting a mimetic view of representation makes us believe that trauma is unshareable.

If we do not accept that we cannot identify and represent trauma as accurately as we expect and as a defined, universal, often personal, negative response, then at first it may seem that we must conclude that trauma can ultimately not be shared. It is this trajectory in western thought that has also led us to believe that, as Griselda Pollock (2013) puts it, trauma is the irreducible other of representation. Indeed, early trauma scholarship has popularised the notion that trauma is unrepresentable. Several founding theorists of trauma in the west, who deal with Holocaust (Shoah) trauma (Caruth 1995; Steiner 1967; Van Alphen 1999), display an epistemological bias that insists that if trauma is not directly represented, it cannot be represented at all. This trajectory of thought broadly responds to the crisis that trauma presents for representational knowledge with the western notion that it is the individual or psychic integrity/memory that is flawed when accuracy and direct representation of trauma do not/cannot occur. This is not only potentially unsound but also politically dangerous, because it constitutes victims as voiceless and undermines or even dismisses their testimony from the outset unless it can be articulated in a certain way that enables it to be known by others and understood as accurate by those outside their circumstances.

In calling for a way for us to move beyond the concept of trauma as pathological and unspeakable, this book is arguing that although trauma may be difficult to articulate in the usual way, we should also admit that holding onto the notion that it cannot be represented too steadfastly reifies a false binary between subject and object, body and mind. This allows us to see horrific political violence as somehow separate from us, and its devastating political consequences as something we can do nothing about, whether these consequences play out on our own bodies
or the bodies of others. The danger is that if we cleave to the notion that horrific violence is somehow unrepresentable we run the risk that it and its opposite (icy indifference) remain unchallenged and hidden.

**Including the Ineffable in Representations of Trauma**

So, if trauma may be represented in some way and it is important to seek this out, then this begs the subsequent question, ‘in what way may trauma be represented so that it is shareable?’ This book aims to provoke a re-imagining of representation as a process that I will call ‘dark’ writing, a process that opens the door to a particular kind of sharing of traumatic experiences. The pursuit of the goal of pathologising and conceiving of trauma as unspeakable in western trauma theory has meant that accuracy and direct representation (often through forms of realism) have come to dominate to the exclusion of imagination, memories and modes of representation which not only accommodate but also preserve the inexplicable. It is thus these forms of indirect representation that will inform the scope of enquiry for this book and it is these forms of indirect representation that constitute ‘dark’ writing.

The violence and trauma of war and conflict are often represented in a non-fictional form in an effort to pursue historical accuracy. As a result, there are many representations of war that show graphic details of experiences of suffering. However, documented cases of traumatic memory loss suggest that some experiences are too traumatic to represent. It thus seems as if something about the experience of violence falls through the cracks of representation, if we understand representation in the usual derivative sense. Many representational forms (such as journalistic accounts of massacres) that strive for historical accuracy do not accommodate ineffability. Insisting on a direct and ‘accurate’ approach to violence that approximates ‘the truth’ restricts us to the realm of representational knowledge. This plunges us into the persistent problem of the inadequacy of language to represent extreme experiences. To address this problem of the deep and often inexplicable interconnection between representation and experience, I argue that ineffability should be included in our representations of experience, and that we need to engage with the ineffable in the process of reading/viewing such representations. This means that at the heart of the book’s argument is a redefinition or expansion of the notion of representation to include the preservation of what seems indescribable or unrepresentable, at least in any direct sense. This expanded view of representation to include the ineffable, I will call ‘dark’ writing.

I propose the method of ‘dark’ writing as a way to reconceptualise representation and respond to the problem that accurate representation of trauma does not seem to fully capture the experience of trauma, ‘Dark’ writing is a way not only to represent violence but also to transfer
some of the ineffable experience of violence itself without merely providing a mimetic copy of it. Inspired by Paul Carter’s (2009) notion of ‘dark’ writing used by him to think through the design of public spaces to facilitate chance meetings between the people who use these spaces, I reinterpret ‘dark’ writing and apply it to the context of sharing violent experiences of war and conflict. I regard ‘dark’ writing as a dynamic way of facilitating the performance of the effects of violent experience and simultaneously triggering the interpretation of these. At the heart of this process is the accommodation and sharing of the ineffable part of the experience of violence. I propose that ‘dark’ writing provides a new way of representing violence and trauma that enables us to come to grips with what is propelling seemingly intractable cycles of systemic violence, especially in situations of ongoing violence. The reason for this is that ‘dark’ writing potentially allows us to transfer or activate some of the experience of violence, whilst still containing it, rather than merely representing it in the ordinary sense.

Slavoj Žižek (2008b) is one scholar who has referred to the experience of violence as having a profoundly incomprehensible aspect and the important role that aesthetics has to play in facilitating our access to this part of experience. This book addresses the role that aesthetics may play in re-imagining representation to include the ineffable by demonstrating a visual and literary analysis of two graphic narratives in the experience of violence and trauma in situations of war and conflict: Footnotes in Gaza (Sacco 2009) and Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon war story (Folman & Polonsky 2009). Through this focus, this book aims to contribute to the case for ineffable violence being accommodated in particular visual aesthetic forms (specifically the graphic narrative and animated documentary forms) that do not try to approach violence directly but rather lend themselves to an understanding of the experience of violence as performative, dynamic, material and with a potential to facilitate a rich encounter or sharing of traumatic experiences. Hillary Chute notes that graphic narratives are a medium that is ‘always already self-conscious as an interpretive, and never purely mimetic, medium. Yet this self-consciousness, crucially, exists together with the medium’s confidence in its ability to traffic in expressing history’ (Chute 2016, p. 198). For this reason, the experience-representation complex is ideally investigated through graphic narratives which blurs the line between interpretation and expression so effectively.

The ineffable aspects of violence in these texts for analysis are investigated by applying ‘dark’ writing to the graphic narrative form. Applying ‘dark’ writing to graphic narratives includes systematically identifying: the structural frames of accuracy; words and images; the logic of panels; the gutter, and violent associations in the texts. In developing this method of identifying and applying ‘dark’ writing, this book not only helps us to re-imagine the concept of representation but also contributes
to scholarship that puts aesthetics forward as a real solution to helping us understand and share experiences in situations of violence and trauma in war and conflict. It suggests that our traditional notion of representation needs to be altered to prompt a transmission of the inexplicable aspects of violent experience without explaining them away. In order to enable this sort of understanding applying the method of ‘dark’ writing will show that we cannot effectively represent violence and trauma merely by transmitting the content of what is represented. Rather, it suggests that we must also pay attention to the form in which the experience is expressed. This book thus calls for an understanding of a representation of violence that is indirect, affects the body, is of necessity fraught with tensions and, above all, preserves the ineffable aspects of the experience of violence.

This book will discuss how the indirect representation of trauma in drawn graphic narratives and animated documentary may constitute ‘dark’ writing and thus an analysis of these may lend impetus to the argument that trauma may be represented, as long as we extend the definition of what representation is so that the ineffable is preserved. At the moment, the ineffable is a hot topic in philosophy; memory and trauma studies currently enjoy significant attention in the fields of cultural and literary studies; and comics study is coming into its own as a legitimate sub-discipline within the academy across the globe. In this book, I wish to acknowledge, combine and extend this line of thought by applying it to content of devastating international significance – situations of ongoing violence in the Levant.

‘Dark’ Writing Violent Experience

The Experience-Representation Complex

The western notion of representation as mimesis has a long history in the west that may lead us to conclude that trauma is unrepresentable. A deep shift in our understanding of representation is thus required to expand our definition of it to include the ineffable. In western philosophy, the person who provides us with the tools to make this shift is Martin Heidegger. It is Heidegger (1962), who helps us to re-imagine the notion of representation into a phenomenologically robust concept that is not so quick to divorce it from experience as we have become. Indeed, Heidegger (1962) places experience at the heart of reality and challenges the traditional boundary between representation and real life. He turns our attention towards concepts inbetween body and mind, presence and being rather than merely representation and reflection and in this way provides us with a way of bridging the body, mind; subject gap. The schism in the western tradition between aspects such as action, presence, being, experience, memory, dynamism and the body, as opposed to distance, representation, reflection, history, what is fixed and the mind, have long
been established. According to this binary, the subject is either separate from the world such that they can reflect upon it and represent mimetic copies of it to themselves or the subject and the world are not separate but mutually co-constructive. Thus, it is through the subject’s presence in the world that he/she becomes aware of it, but equally it is through the subject’s awareness of the world that the world becomes present. According to Heidegger (1962), an understanding of being is only possible by a particular kind of entity that can understand being, thus locking being and entities, experience and representation, into a reciprocally dependent relationship, in which neither can exist on its own.

Furthermore, Heidegger’s (1962) understanding of being indicates that our world is not simply reducible to what is immediately visible or present to us, but always exists rather as the possibility that things can come into presence because of who we are. This is because reflective beings experience the presence of the world as they necessarily reflect on it in comparison how it appeared to them at another moment in time, through memory. It is this dynamic relationship between experience and reflection that our traditional notion of representation is not fully able to capture when it pits subject so neatly against object; indefiniteness against accuracy; representation in such complete opposition to real life. Yet Heidegger (1962) claims, the very being of reflective entities holds within itself this deep relationship between experience and reflection, in its relations with the world context. What I am arguing here is that it is this then that we need representation to be able to apprehend and this too then becomes the job of ‘dark’ writing as ‘dark’ writing extends our understanding of representation beyond mimesis.

Shifting our understanding of representation to expressly include what is difficult to describe means that we turn our attention to more shadowy and indirect representations that we may have overlooked in the past. For example, it is memory and the relation of experience/s to the temporal and shifting that needs to be accommodated and shared in a representation of violence and this is what ‘dark’ writing, with its link to the ineffable, is able to address. Moreover, if, as Heidegger (1962) asserts, language carries the traces of being inside itself and is able to capture some of the dynamism of the co-construction of subject and world across time, then it is not just that we may be able to share experiences but that we already do and that our experiences are co-constructed by those of others, and perhaps we just do not yet have a way of capturing this. In fact, it is likely that paradoxically it is the pursuit of accuracy and of representation as mimesis that hides this understanding from our eyes.

When more recent French thinkers built on the Heideggerian tradition of encapsulating an extended view of what representation is, as part of experience, rather than distinct from it, these scholars, such as Jacques Derrida (1997), Michel Foucault (1994) and Gilles Deleuze (2001), formulated an understanding of the necessity of the construction of presence.
in terms of language. According to them, knowledge of the world is not merely *represented* by language, but language carries traces of being and presence inside itself. This implies that our ‘representations’ do not refer to the ‘truth’, but only to a horizon of possible experiences; and so it may be possible to imagine and perform the experiences of others, even if we cannot wholly understand them or access their accuracy. It seems that in terms of this way of conceiving of the experience-representation complex, it is possible to see reality as deeply interpretive and as part of our fundamental relationship to the world which is already mutually constructive, whether we can articulate this or not. And even though what we understand as being or representation may always be limited (or shall we rather say will always contain the ineffable) what we need is an exemplar that accommodates the co-constructive nature of being and subject; experience and representation for this purpose. This is part of what ‘dark’ writing brings to the representation of trauma.

In elucidating the experience-representation complex, Derrida still seems to favour representation and sees the experience of Being a S/subject as entirely dependent on difference, which must be shown up to our consciousness in language (Derrida 1997, pp. 202–3). Although Deleuze is also committed to the merging of representation and experience, he still cannot overcome the allure of placing representation and experience in binary opposition and ends up privileging of experience. For Deleuze (2001), there are immanently present activities that escape representation because immanence does not have to be fettered by self-consciousness. He claims that these kinds of activities also have the additional quality of a kind of pure determination/existence, apart from their representation or apprehension by consciousness. Both Derrida and Deleuze’s positions on the experience-representation complex demonstrate the persistence, even in recent western thought of placing representation and experience in binary opposition in the process of mimesis. The understanding of representation and experience that this gives rise to is inadequate and structurally inaccurate for supporting the sharing of experiences. Yet, the possibility remains that if the gap between representation and experience is bridged, by a reconfiguration of our understanding of their interdependence, then we might be able to share experiences. However, to bridge the gap between representation and experience or to see that there is no gap in the first place, we need to augment our concept of representation and this is what the role of ‘dark’ writing is.

If we use Deleuze’s tendency to privilege experience over representation in his discussion of the experience-representation complex for another purpose, then we may see it as a stimulus for imagining what we are not initially able to see because of the oppositional way in which we view experience and representation. Indeed, in this regard, Deleuze (1994, p. 304) goes even further by asserting that even the distinction between the bodies of individuals is merely formal and ‘not a real distinction’.
He makes the point that in spite of single bodies making us appear as if we are individual entities, we are actually intimately implicated in each other’s outcomes and combinations in ways which are primal, embodied and yet not always visible to us. If we apply this general understanding interdependence to a more specific scenario, then we could hold that imagining one’s own pain or the pain of others affects not only the mind but also the body and experience of the imaginer.

At first glance, Deleuze’s apparent privileging of experience and the body may seem similar to Elaine Scarry’s (1985) decidedly more Cartesian claims in her momentous work *The body in pain: The making and unmaking of the world*. This is because although Scarry does begin to hint at how the imagination may bridge the body-mind gap in this context, she maintains that trauma is primarily in the body, that physical pain cannot be shared and that pain in fact resists representation in language. She contends that ‘[w]hen one hears about another person’s physical pain, the events happening within the interior of that person’s body may seem to have a remote character’ because they are not available to sensory confirmation by the onlooker, which tends to make them invisible and unreal to others (Scarry 1985, p. 3, my emphasis). Yet, if we look more closely at Deleuze’s (1994) contention, we see that Deleuze is in fact offering us a way to get beyond the privileging of the body in relation to experience. It is as if body-mind and individual-collective binaries are no longer set in opposition but become complexes of dynamic and necessarily inter-related concepts that we have not been able to see for what they are before because of our tendency to cast them in opposition to each other. Subjects are thus not only embodied and self-reflexive but also simultaneously intimately related and not clearly distinguishable from each other in the reality of their experience.

In light of the way of imagining that Deleuze thus opens up for us, the notion of pain as a discrete, packaged singularity or event with a beginning and end as well as the notion of singular bodies with private interior states become visible as a construct rather than a given reality. It is this bringing into view of what we usually hold in binary opposition – experience and representation – that is the work of ‘dark’ writing in helping us to represent and share traumatic experiences. In the context of pain, especially pain caused by ongoing violence, ‘dark’ writing may thus give us the means to represent pain as a collective experience of a community, across generations, across body and mind as a complex of representation and experience.

Furthermore, it is not only on the point that minds and bodies are not necessarily discretely distinct that one may take issue with Scarry but also on the point of what constitutes language, when she claims that physical pain cannot be shared because it resists representation in language. Robin Collingwood (1938), John Dewey (1980) and Susanne Langer (1942) remind us that representation is more than just accurate
description. In fact, accurate description on its own may damage expression and thus the transmission of experience, instead of enhancing it. Of course, language in the broad sense of representation does not have to be merely descriptive and this is precisely what I would like argue here. For if language allows us to exceed the merely descriptive, then it may allow us to share experiences. It is this excess that ‘dark’ writing captures in its preservation of the ineffable. While we may agree with Scarry (1985) that pain may resist and even destroy accurate description, if we have ‘dark’ writing at our disposal, then we may posit that pain does not necessarily escape language per se but may be darkly written.

Scarry (1985) claims that it is the utter rigidity of pain itself that makes its resistance to language part of what constitutes it (Scarry 1985, p. 5). I would refine this and apply it to the context of violence and trauma and state that it is the quality of violence itself that makes accurate description alone thoroughly inadequate for sharing it. And it is because of this that we need the ineffable. This is because if the ineffable, the chaos, the irrationality, the changeability and the confusion of pain can somehow be preserved in the way we represent pain and trauma, then, in trying to share some of our experience of its opacity, we do indeed have some hope of transferring some of our experience to others. This ineffable part of painful experience may indeed be a crucial aspect of its reality. And while we may not be able to (and it may not be useful to) give an accurate description of pain to convey its reality, the ineffable aspect of the experience of violence may be capable of being captured through ‘dark’ writing. Scarry’s (1985) idea that communicating the reality of physical pain to those themselves not in pain is vital to make an impact on the practices of torture. This helps to drive the point home about how important it is to find a way to share such experiences (Scarry 1985, p. 9). In fact, Scarry (1985) goes so far as to claim that ‘showing the way the compelling reality of the injured bodies is being used at the end of war to lend the aura of material reality to the winning construct (as well as to the concept of winning itself)’ is also often a driver of trying to find a way to share the reality of pain with others (Scarry 1985, p. 21). The only problem is that such attempts to share the reality of pain with others are doomed to fail if they are only pursued through direct and reductively descriptive representations, leaving only winning and the winning construct they support visible.

Indirect Representation of Trauma through Images

So, if ‘dark’ writing is necessary for expressing and sharing painful experience; includes the ineffable and somehow exceeds our ordinary notion of representation to include an experience-representation complex, then the question remains as to whether we can instigate ‘dark’ writing. And if so, in which forms of representation is it more likely to come into
Many of thinkers who believe that trauma may be represented suggest that our notion of what constitutes language in this context needs to be extended to include images as a means of expressing pain. Deleuze’s (1985) contention that the image is utterable, describable and interpretable, even though this may not be enough to restore to the image its semantic richness, is relevant here. This implies that unlike the historical conflation in the certain cultures (including the west) of seeing and knowing, there is in fact a gap between seeing an image and knowing its semantic richness and that there is potential for us to bridge this gap by accommodating the ineffable. If this fissure between seeing and knowing is itself to be represented, yet remain an opening, then the best way to do this is by insisting on the accommodation of the ineffable within the system of representation itself.

In the meantime, since I am planning to explore representations of pain and the ineffable in graphic narratives and animated documentary, a closer consideration of the link between images and the body is necessary. Whereas writing has long been linked to reflexivity and the mind, images are the form of expression that some have linked more closely to the body, especially in the context of representing war. And in this regard, some pain that may be regarded as beyond words may still possibly be shared through images. Nicoletta Vallorani’s (2009) account of how the tradition of war reportage relies on images to carry reliable meaning ‘directly’ to the body of the subject is pertinent here. The more precise and reliable representation claimed on behalf of war that images is ostensibly an avenue for physiologically arousing a response in onlookers so that they can share an embodied experience of the pain inflicted on other bodies in the images viewed. If the physiological response that images sometimes arouse in the reader/viewer may be considered a symptom of a reliable perception of the conditions of war, then images give us access to embodied aspects of war that are not otherwise lie beyond words.

Agamben (2000) considers the notion that perhaps it is through images that we can begin to accommodate the ineffable and so approach the pain of others. Agamben (2000) particularly favours silent images as an effective form of expression to accommodate the ineffable. According to Agamben and De la Durantaye (2012), images are a way of preserving access to mystery and augmenting the range of what may be represented. Agamben (2000) claims that such images (and especially moving ones) are an exemplary medium for evoking the gestures that lie beyond words and are so crucial for expression. Such gestures form the interface between the ineffable and the body of the representing subject.

‘Dark’ Writing

It is the dynamism, performativity and embodiment of the experience – and the fact of the pain, in combination with the conscious and rational
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reflection on it that specifically needs to be imagined and captured to close the gap that we perceive between representation and experience. This is where Carter’s notion of ‘dark’ writing (2009) becomes a useful construct when applied to the field of aesthetics and specifically to images. ‘Dark’ writing is used by Carter (2009) to design and communicate the intricacies of the ineffable yet determinable, participatory space between subject and world. In doing so, it alters and augments our notion of representation so that it becomes more akin to performing or enacting experience than to merely ‘representing’ it.

An important effect of accommodating the ineffable is that, as Carter (2010) remarks, when the subject embraces the excessive, the ambiguous, the ineffable, the subject gives up the insistence on being autonomous. What was indistinct can then become sensible as a medium of exchanges between the subject and the world. This is significant for it implies that sharing our painful experiences (by accommodating the ineffable) makes us less independent, less distinct. Carter (2010, pp. 4, 5) borrows Joseph Hillis Miller’s term ‘anastomotic’ to describe what ‘dark’ writing can do. It connects two distinct vessels in a way that preserves ambiguity and mixing, so that both the mixing and the distinct vessels remain inherent in their constitution. This makes ‘dark’ writing a salient way of working across binaries such as experience, representation; text, context; body, mind; subject, object and perpetrator, bystander.

In this book, I speculate that the process of ‘dark’ writing in graphic narratives of violence and trauma both accommodates the ineffable and allows more to be represented than could have been represented otherwise. One of the ways in which this is done is by involving the reader/viewer in the text both physically and cognitively. The graphic narrative does so by combining the viscerally intense and abstract elements of the representation of experience, and by visually attempting to frame the chaos without forgetting that some aspects of the representation of violence must remain outside of the panel.

Forensic Aesthetics

This book establishes that an adequate representation of violence is not really a representation of violence in the ordinary sense at all, but a ‘dark’ writing that instigates or transmits some of the experience of violence to the reader/viewer. It is in discussing the experience-representation complex in relation to weighing up what specific representational forms might best capture as much of someone’s subjectivity that Eyal Weizman’s notion of forensic aesthetics (2011) is useful. Weizman explores the still images of photography as the language that he feels is best able to represent or trace the subjectivity that is left in exhumed human remains, often after the trauma of war. Instead of claiming that such photographs represent subjects or help us to share the experience of
subjects, Thomas Keenan and Weizman (2012) describe these images as ‘instigating’ the presence of subjects after their death in a most authentic way, a way that he argues can only be done through aesthetic language. They consider this ‘instigation’ process the most adequate and effective way of ‘representing’ what is left of the embodied yet dead victim of violence and trauma. This portrayal is intimately tied to the body of the subject, yet it is also necessarily composed of the subjectivity of the interpreter. It is thus supported by a process of distanced, yet very personal, engagement between the ‘original’ subject/object and a witness. Instigating is also the process or portal through which the ‘original’ subject/object and the witness/interpreter may meet, suspended between subject and object. ‘Instigating’ is a useful word to describe this process needed to help us share experiences of violence and trauma, because it links up to the Heideggerian tradition and emphasises that the subject and the world are not separate but mutually co-constructive. Instigation also underlines the fact that it is the presence or experience of reality itself in the images, rather than the process of trying to copy or reflect upon the experience, that helps to express the subject in the image. Instigation is opposed to the mimetic tradition of representation which suggests a one-to-one relationship between the world and its expression, in which we start with the world and try to share our experiences of it as if it is something external to us. Instigation instead implies a dynamic practice of participatory ‘representing’ from which the ineffable emerges during a dynamic and interdependent interplay between the subject and his/her context. Weizman’s notion of forensic aesthetics also helps us to see that aesthetics and specifically images and the body may have a special connection which might be explored to help us get closer to representing or sharing experiences of trauma. In this book, I will argue that the ‘truthfulness’ that Keenan and Weizman (2012) identify in the process of exhuming human remains in order to ‘represent’ someone may be approached in other representational processes too which accommodate the ineffable and that this may be approached though ‘dark’ writing.

Conclusion: Towards an Ethical Representation of Violence

However, the instigation of the ineffable also has another role: to address the sometimes exploitative relationship between those who express pain and those who heed that expression. For if one assumes that pain is inexpressible, then it can easily be ignored or co-opted by corrupted forms of power. Instigating the ineffable in this context thus helps to work against the apparent inexpressibility of pain and closes the door to such exploitation. Thus, instigating the ineffable in representations of war and conflict becomes a way to represent violence ethically. Such an ethical position is one that facilitates the profound and impossible
connection between a witness and a victim through the ineffable. Such ethical representations of a massacre should provide a code from which we may decipher the witness, or may exhume the bones of the victim, so to speak. In other words, ethical representations of violence and trauma require both the witness and the victim to be witnessed, as they mutually constitute each other.

This introduction and preface sketches the need for opening up a way of sharing experiences of trauma and violence if we are to reach a postcolonial and ethical understanding of violence within the western tradition. It also begins to suggest the possibility of doing this through a modified understanding of what ‘representation’ means that includes the ineffable, traced particularly in the language of images.

Rok Benčin’s (2019) recent assertion that the western notion of representation as mimesis can best be challenged not by opposing representation to ‘the pure presentation of what it fails to take into account’ but rather by an augmented understanding of representation as something that undermines our understanding of a regime of representation as simply mimetic (Benčin 2019, p. 96). As Benčin notes, ‘[t]here is nothing to express beyond representation, and this nothing can itself only be represented’ (Benčin 2019, p. 110). I argue that the way to express this nothing is by accommodating the ineffable in our expanded conception of representation. Extending our understanding of representation into what I have called the experience-representation complex, where this complex now includes an understanding of the ineffable as being part of what is represented, helps to achieve an expanded conception of representation, such that more experiences may be shared, rather than merely being explained away. This notion is also in keeping with Alain Badiou (2005) and Jacques Rancière’s (2004) most recent expansion of the concept of representation where they build on the Heideggerian tradition of exploring the relationship between ontology and representation, but primarily in the realm of aesthetics. For both Badiou (2005) and Derrida (1997), aesthetics is an expanded understanding of the representation of experience that may give rise to its own truths in the moment/process of representation. However, Badiou (2005) rejects an interpretation of aesthetics as either merely referential or merely expressive and locates representation through aesthetics firmly between the referential and the expressive, representation and experience. Similarly, Rancière’s location of aesthetics between making and thinking (Rancière 2004, p. 10) also helps to amplify our understanding of representation as part of an experience-representation complex. Furthermore, he argues strongly that an ethical approach to representation necessarily requires aesthetics, something that is critical in the establishment of a postcolonial understanding of the representation of violence.

*Chapter 1* of this book will expand upon the broad process of what this ‘representation’ entails by discussing the details and benefits of the
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‘dark’ writing process more closely. It will especially set out how ‘dark’ writing accommodates the ineffable and how this enables the communication of what may have been hitherto inexpressible. A key element of ‘dark’ writing is its application in the field of aesthetics. Thus, this chapter will also set up the argument that a postcolonial understanding of violence and trauma requires attention to the aesthetic. Within the field of aesthetics, visual expressions in particular will be put forward as a means to expand the ambit of what violent and traumatic experiences may be expressed. This chapter will end by suggesting that the graphic narrative form is a good example of such an image-rich, aesthetic representation of violence.

Following the first chapter, in Chapter 2, I delve into the history of the graphic narrative form in some detail and state why this form is particularly adept at representing the ineffable aspects of violence. I do this in order to show that aesthetic forms such as graphic narratives have a vital role to play in helping us to find avenues to express what seems to be too horrific for words, particularly in situations of ongoing violence, involving subaltern subjects. I start the chapter with a discussion of imagistic forms that have historically been responsible for documenting war to show how graphic narratives have developed from this tradition of war drawing, a subjective form of representation that leaves traces of the artist’s hand in the representation of war. I also point out how graphic narratives have historically been used to depict contested political events from multiple perspectives. I then relate this to the unique way in which graphic narratives go about representing war: performatively, dynamically, with careful attention to detailed material traces of both the war and the hand of the artist doing the depicting. This is accompanied by describing the rich potential for connection between artist, reader/viewer and subject, always accommodating what are often considered to be ineffable aspects of the experience of war. I also explain how the method of ‘dark’ writing is perfectly suited to highlight each of these specific aspects of representation in the graphic narrative and helps us to reframe them in a way that allows us to transmit or instigate experiences of violence in this way, rather than merely representing them. In this regard, I briefly identify my model of the five-frame approach to how the graphic narrative form may use ‘dark’ writing to interpret violence.

In Chapter 3, I analyse the ineffable violence in Joe Sacco’s (2009) graphic narrative Footnotes in Gaza in order to demonstrate what this method of analysis can reveal about sharing the experience of violence that we may not have known before. Indeed, in this chapter, I go some way towards taking up the task that James Hodapp (2015) voices when he challenges postcolonial literary studies to apply itself to Sacco’s work, which in many ways may be seen as a study in representing the voice of the subaltern. In Footnotes in Gaza, I concentrate on the depiction of the Khan Younis massacre in 1956, widely held to have sown the
seeds of the intractable violence that still goes on in Gaza today. In order to identify and explore the ineffable aspects of violence in this graphic narrative, I demonstrate how one may utilise the five frames approach, which I have developed to operationalise the method of ‘dark’ writing in application to graphic narrative texts. Accordingly, I identify the way in which accuracy, words and images, the logic of panels, the gutter and further violent associations are framed within Footnotes in Gaza. In both this chapter and the next, I use these frames to guide my analysis of particular aspects of ineffable violence. I discuss the frame of accuracy and the frame of further associations of violence on their own in relation to Footnotes in Gaza, whereas for the frames that grapple with the structural mechanics of the graphic narrative form – words and images, the gutters and logic of panels, I discuss these in combination. I argue that the two graphic narratives that I will analyse are specifically constructed to foreground the violence of the representational process itself in the narrative form. This makes these texts effective vehicles of process knowledge, a part of knowledge that is often less visible than the discernible content of what knowledge conveys. Through this focus on process knowledge, this form allows up to make out that the violence of the representational process mirrors the violence of the content and we are able to differentiate further instances of violence in ways that we might not have been able to before. Examples of these aspects of ineffable violence that I discuss in this book are the contributions of the imperfect witness – both in terms of the witness who has lived through the violence; the case of protagonists in the text who has experienced violence themselves and in the case of the ‘uninvolved’ bystander such as Sacco in Footnotes in Gaza (2009). I also consider the ineffable aspects of violence that are involved in inaccurate accounts of contested events. I discuss how haptic visuality (Laura Marks 2000) and a particular version of affect theory may help to preserve the ineffable in Sacco’s text, without explaining it away, thus offering us a demonstration of how ‘dark’ writing might work as a performative, dynamic and embodied form of representation. As far as factual accuracy of the wartime violence depicted is concerned, I discuss whether the representation of certain content measures up to the demand to see (and show) what is objectively there in ‘reality’.

With regard to words and images, I consider the particular combination of words and images in the process of transmitting or instigating the experience of violence employed in the graphic narratives in my illustrative examples as a meta-frame for constructing further understanding. This is done by actively including the reader’s/viewer’s body and mind in this process of representation. As far as the logic of the panels is concerned, I argue that graphic narratives differ from other media in which only one frame is available at a time for the viewer’s consumption. This gives graphic narratives an immediacy absent from these other media (except multi-screen gallery works or some experimental films that make
more than one frame available to the viewer at once). I apply the notion of the gutter in the graphic narrative as an example of ‘a visual depiction of the ineffable’. Graphic narratives clearly depict the absence through the ineffabilities of the gutter, to the point of almost being jarring. This implies a visual depiction of the ineffable at the heart of the way they construct meaning. Finally, in this chapter, I claim that multiple associations of violence are often instigated in what initially seems like one single instance of violence.

Chapter 4 contains my analysis of the ineffable violence in Ari Folman and David Polonsky’s (2009) graphic narrative *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon war story* in order to demonstrate what ‘dark’ writing as method of analysis can reveal about violence that we may not have known before. This graphic narrative depicts the Sabra and Shatila massacre of 1982. It is very closely based upon a striking animated documentary film, *Waltz with Bashir* (Folman 2008) to be discussed in Chapter 5. The genesis of the film affects the different style of the graphic narrative that is the focus of this chapter. In order to identify and explore the ineffable violence in this graphic narrative, I again apply the five-frame approach which I identified in the second chapter and began to apply in the third. I identify the way in which accuracy words and images, the logic of panels, the gutter and further violent associations are framed within *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon war story*. After discussing how accuracy is framed in the graphic narrative under analysis in this chapter, I pick up where I left off in the last chapter with a discussion of the ineffable aspects of violence embedded in memories of violent and traumatic historical events. I then proceed to discuss what it might mean to have knowledge of an experience one has lived through but forgotten, as Folman, the main protagonist in the graphic narrative under discussion in this chapter has. I end the chapter with a discussion of how my approach to accuracy and contested events might be melded into an ethical approach to the instigation of the violence and trauma of war through ‘dark’ writing, especially in cases where the violence is ongoing.

The sixth chapter is the concluding one. In it, I summarised my findings and made further suggestions for how this five-frames approach of identifying and representing the ineffable aspects of violence – especially in situations of ongoing violence – may be more widely applied across other non-fictional visual aesthetic forms, such as animated documentary and online interactive documentaries. I will briefly discuss how the animated documentary film form preserves the ineffable and is thus able to help us share aspects of the experience of violence that live-action footage cannot. I will also mention how in preserving the ineffable, the *Waltz* (film) is able to help to destabilise the binaries between perpetrator and victim; personal and collective; experience and representation and thus facilitate an ethical approach, despite having been previously criticised for its ethical bankruptcy. I then also discuss
how the interactive online documentary form, which in some ways builds on and extends the animated documentary form, is part of a continuum of non-fictional visual texts which support interactivity. I explain how such texts support the ineffable and affective knowing in different ways, making them effective avenues to explore the sharing of violent and traumatic experiences. Finally, I affirm that this book matters because we need to re-orientate our epistemological stance on the representation of violence and trauma in war and conflict to enable us to approach the instigation and sharing of such experiences. I reiterate that this may be done through the method of ‘dark’ writing which expressly includes the ineffable in the way it transmits experiences of violence and trauma and thus may help us to do this in a more complex way.

Note

1 I deliberately do not capitalise north, south, east or west in this book as part of a textual strategy to dismantle the reification of these constructs when they refer to people in parts of the world.
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