Composite Realities: Media, Narrative, and the Imagination of Documentary Comics

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Nicholas Wirtz

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

Title: Composite Realities: Media, Narrative, and the Imagination of Documentary Comics

Composite Realities analyzes documentary and comics through the image's double appearance: as historical record and as narrative event. Documentary images often promise access to real events and real people while simultaneously foregrounding the mediations through which that access is produced. With their visibly drawn images and serial narration, comics accentuate their distance from the realities and experiences they claim to show. This dissertation argues that this distance is a generative condition. Thematizing acts of looking—by artists, represented subjects, and readers—documentary comics address viewers in ways that are at once affective and insistently artificial.

The dissertation argues that documentary comics make the gap between representation and experience central to how meaning is produced. Documentary comics stage encounters among readers, represented subjects, and representational processes themselves. They require readers to interpret how images connect to specific moments, specific sights, and narrative constructions of events. In doing so, these works invite sustained attention to the tension between seeming immediacy and mediated distance.

Across three core case studies, *Composite Realities* analyzes works that draw on photojournalism, observational drawing, and digital composition within the comics form. Each of these practices carries distinct formal and cultural connotations that shape how images are understood to relate to the events they record and depict. The dissertation shows how documentary comics mobilize looking as a collaborative process that unfolds across the page and over time. *Composite Realities* ultimately argues that documentary comics show and teach how looking happens—how experiences are transformed into images and imaginatively reactivated each time a reader encounters that sight on a page.

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Sight to me is about relationships, and I see as I see because of each of you.

For my family.

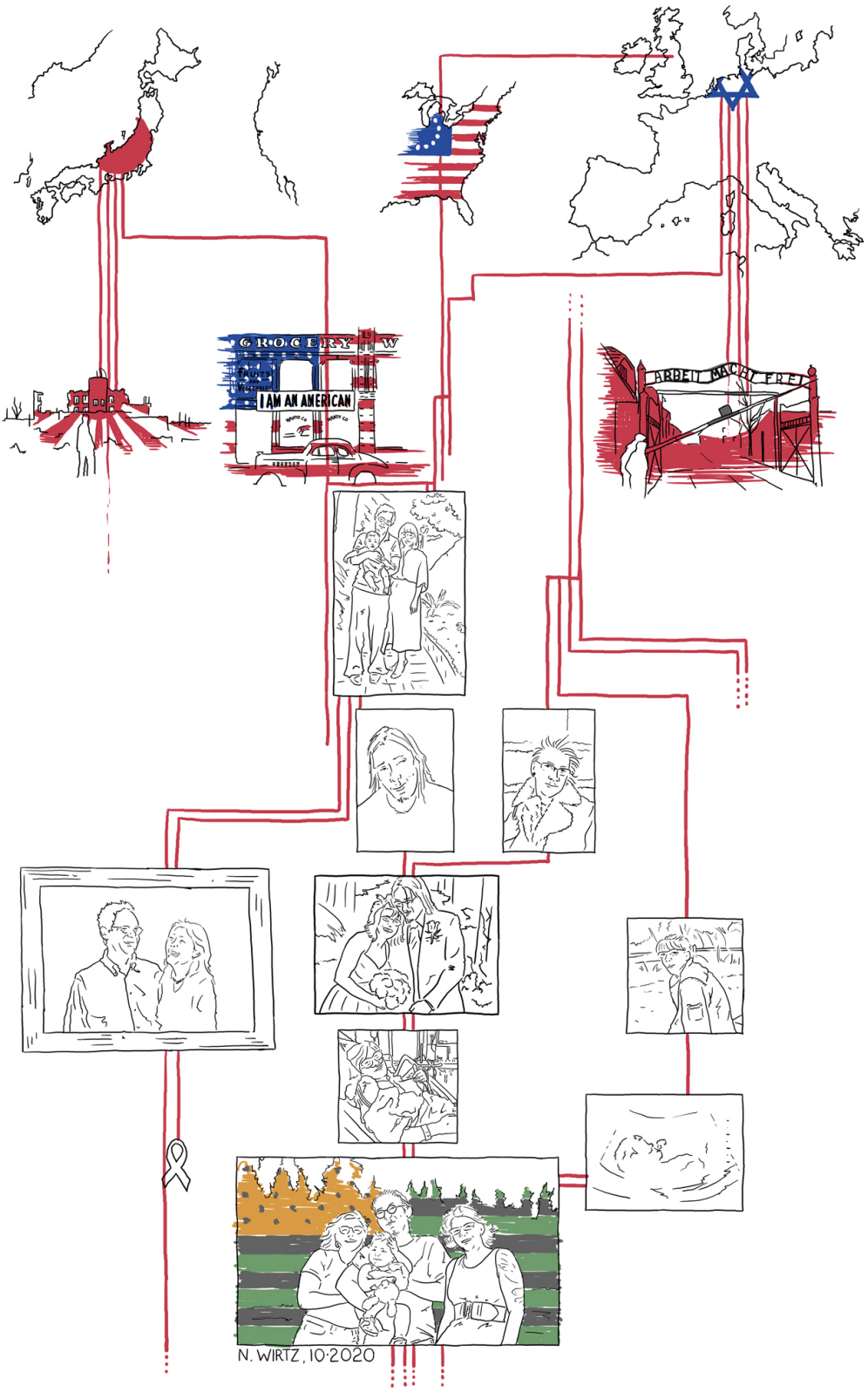


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Introduction.

Outside-Inside, Then-Now

Picturing the Document and the Panel's Imaginable Realities

"...what became so interesting to me was that the photo—the thing that gives you that 'objective correlative'—tells you so [...] little."

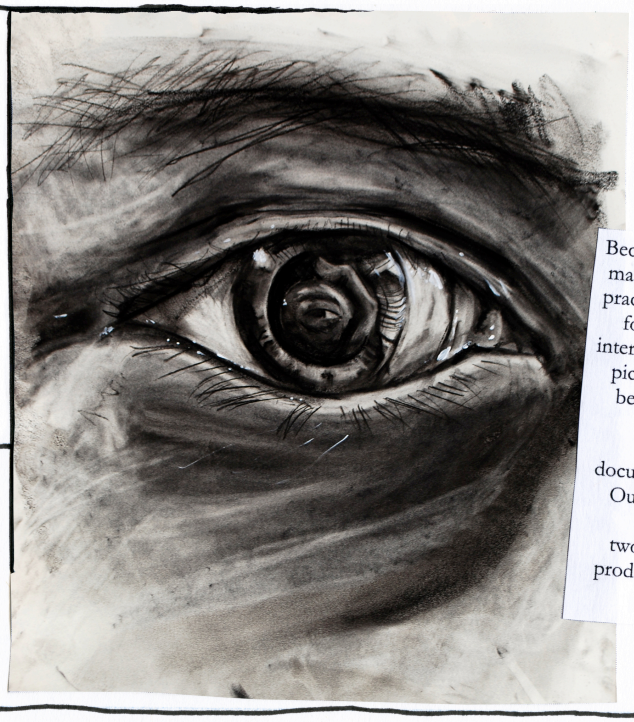
-Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*

"...she looked like this to me."

-Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do*

This dissertation is about pictures, documents, comics, and the perceptual, historical, cultural and imaginative experiences we draw upon, draw together, and constitute when we interpret a document's appearance within a comic. It is about how we might resist the impulse, when we decide what something is, to stop thinking about what else it might be.

When we perceive a picture, we experience it as a representation, and as an object. As an image of something, its form, our prior experiences and cultural training tell us, (re)produces some qualities of an observable or imagined reality.



Because the picture is necessarily material, it depends on material practices partially recorded by its form, so we also imaginatively interpret and experience how the picture traces its own historical being—the physical and social encounters that produce it. We might experience it as documentary, or as a document. Our perceptual address by the picture refers us to at least two imaginable realities—one produced, and one recorded by its production.



Reading a comics panel also conditions such a doubled experience: as we at once recognize it is a discrete picture and representational instance, and we are trained to organizee its appearance within the series into a presumed stable reality and sequence.
When a documentary object appears as a comics panel and enters narrative reality, making sense of this object and event demands we consider it as a record and a representation, a whole and a part. This multiplicative perceptual attention structures the present investigation, its argument, and its formal expression, developed together to affect these concurrent but discrete, and therefore composite, referential experiences.



I begin this dissertation with a self-portrait because the process of making it clarifies the central concerns of my inquiry: how images record encounters, how they address viewers, and how comics negotiate the distance between lived experience and representation. Looking at my own eye in a mirror, drawing my observation of my own returned looking as part of my research, produced a surprising encounter. I saw a second, fainter eye, reflected in my eye's center, observing the first and myself. The first eye, the larger, *represents* what I saw. It visually describes my act of looking, and addresses you, its viewer—more or less my intended image and message. The second one *also* shows what I discovered in that act—an encounter produced by the process of representing an encounter, which also became part of both the encounter and its representation. This representation of my experience, and the experience it produced, converge in the drawn object, despite its difference from both activities. The second encounter, incidentally caught by my self-observation, would not have appeared, were I to have photographed another's eye or simply constructed this address by illustrating an eye looking at you. I practiced here a scene of seeing, translating that sight into marks, and recognizing the gap between the moment observed and the image produced, but also the relationships and encounters produced by this process. The observational image actively structures relationships between viewers, subjects, and past acts of seeing.

This dissertation examines how documentary comics create and sustain such relationships. Documentary images often promise access to real events and real people, yet they also foreground the processes that mediate that access. Comics amplify this tension. Their drawn images, visible construction, and serial layouts emphasize their distance from reality even as they claim to show it. Rather than attempting to close the gap between experience and representation, documentary comics make that gap central to how meaning is produced. In this dissertation, I discuss various forms, literary cultures, and related scholarship around francophone *bande dessinée*, Japanese *manga* and *gekiga*, and anglophone comics, as "comics," in describing general forms, reading practices, and formal debates, which are largely shared across such literary cultures dealing in serial visual narratives, especially in a globalized literary context. Where contextually relevant, I specify literary traditions and cultures. In my analysis of such practices, I make no hard distinction between comics and adjacent image-text formats such as artbooks, picture diaries, or captioned images.

Across the chapters that follow, I argue that documentary comics are especially effective at staging encounters between readers, represented subjects, and representing processes. They do so by combining their connections to specific historical moments, their visual likeness to people and

processes, and to their pages that guide their narrative interpretation by readers. Together, these elements position readers both within and at a remove from the events depicted, and invite them to engage affectively with images while attending to their mediated form.

The dissertation focuses on images of figures who look outward from the page toward the reader. These moments of direct address are common in documentary comics and carry a distinctive emotional weight. Often rendered in stark black-and-white and composed of clearly intentional marks, such images resist immersive illusion and confront readers instead with the presence of another person and with the conditions under which that person has been represented. These encounters can feel intimate, uneasy, or demanding, asking readers to acknowledge both the subject's reality and the limits of their own access to it.

To explore how these encounters are made, this dissertation examines narratives that draw on practices of photojournalism, observational drawing, and digital composition within comics form. Each practice brings different assumptions about documentation, truth, and authorship, and shapes how images relate to the events they depict. Taken together, the three case studies that anchor my core chapters show how documentary comics mobilize looking—by artists, subjects, and readers—as a shared but uneven process that unfolds across the page and over time. This dissertation ultimately argues that documentary comics show how looking happens: how encounters are observed, transformed into images, and reactivated each time a reader meets a gaze on the page.

Composite Forms, Composite References, Composite Realities

I address the narrative realities of pictures, documents, and comics as each *composite*, in its material sense of a complex structure's composition from varied elements, in its mathematical sense as a product of many factors, in its biological description of an aggregate of individual organisms, or its reference to an image's internal combination of photographs—in each case, referring to a whole made from different constituents which retain their original structure and identity. I also respond to W. J. T. Mitchell's "Beyond Comparison" argument against assumed mediatic differences that might lead one to overlook the visuality of writing or reduce writing and drawing to general communication, that composite arts that clearly mix media reminds us that "all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes" (95). Scholars have addressed the heterogeneity and multimodal interpretive demands of comics, and have productively nuanced text and image through analyzing their interactions in comics, including

linguistic or language-like aspects of abstracted conventionalized and communicative cartooned representations, graphic effects of lettering, and the competition, contradiction, and collaboration of such representational systems and instances, on pages and in readers' imaginations.

Composite Realities adopts the visible composite useful for analyzing multimodal mediatic codes, but instead of addressing categories of text and image as abstract representational modes, it addresses the practices and forms these representations rely on, focusing on instances and objects that literalize and visualize their composition into this system as discrete historical objects that visually assert their original structure's material and historical differences from the present comic.

I refer to the forms and connotations of visual elements one might identify as "documentary," in the sense that their forms or context indicate they constitute partial records of their production in actuality. "Documentary," like "nonfiction," reflects aesthetic and social practices, so its naming implies social judgement. I limit my judgement to objects that invite their material identification as such external, often visual, records. In composite media, these objects' external references are remediated through their reproduction and structuration with other enunciations by their fictive context and by our imaginative responses as viewers and readers. I do not equate nonfiction comics to documentary comics—not all comics that make truth claims integrate (reproduced) documents, and many comics that present images of external reality are best approached as fiction. I acknowledge parallels between comics, and more established documentary traditions within television and film, but because documentary comics' production and use of documents differs significantly from these practices, I limit analogies to their media.

Identifying an image as a document requires and produces attention to its external origins and history, and its composition into the comics narrative, presenting a liminal figure and object at once identified with, and alien to, the narrative reality.[1] Attention to the document's existence inside and outside the comics narrative illuminates our synthetic imagination of this composite form's narrative totality, as an *aggregate* produced by encounters with *heterogeneous* enunciations: there is no simple or stable comics storyworld. My close readings and visual idiom focus attention on this essentially heterogeneous reading experience of synthesizing individual elements with their total

[1] In my comics context, I primarily discuss pictorial images. My use of "image" is informed by the capacious discussions of images Mitchell and Lynda Barry respectively advance in *Iconology* and *What it Is*, which include sonic and mental images.

narrative context.[2] Attention to the panel as a document demonstrates the storyworld's heterogeneous composition, and attention to the document as a panel allows the deconstruction of "documentary images" and their concurrent reference to a reality, and representation of a reality. *Composite Realities* addresses our dual impulses to seek the ambiguous document and image's closure with the reality that produced it, and with the representational reality it composes with its neighbors.

Each of my chapters explores how different inscriptive, documentary, and representational media practices, commonly theorized in opposition to each other, interact *within and with* the medium of comics in which they appear. Chapter 1 interprets the collaborative memoir *Le Photographe's* (2003-6, *The Photographer: Into War-Torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders*) integration of photojournalist Didier Lefèvre's documentary photographs with Emmanuel Guibert's roughly illustrative cartooning, mixing these media whose truth claims have been theorized in oppositions between objective and subjective pictorial forms.[3] I consider how readers reconcile the comics narrator with the photojournalist, in their sequential imagination. I read the photographic contact sheet and the comics panel's sequences, as they train attention to their documented and narrated times. I pursue photographs' visual and sequential ambiguities and address how we interpret photographic subjects, behind and in front of the camera.

In chapter 2, I analyze the inscription of the observationally drawing artist, relative to the life-writing subject's theorized self-performance and that subject's fictive production. I address Tsuge Yoshiharu's graphic autofiction, and his production of a multistable observing subject in fictionalizing his own vision, from his early "Chiiko" (1966, "Chirpy") through his book-length *Munō no Hito* (1985-6, *The Man Without Talent*). Exploring Tsuge's visual styles, I address how cartooning, realism, and photorealism each produce multiple sites of mediation and truth claims, affecting confessions, shared sights, self-abnegation, and escapes. I compare these artistic selves with the self produced by Fujiwara Maki's *Watashi no enikki* (1982, *My Picture Diary*), and her efforts to document and record her self-image in cartoons, to address relationships between the self-recording artist, the fictive life-writing subject, and their recorded and characterized realities.

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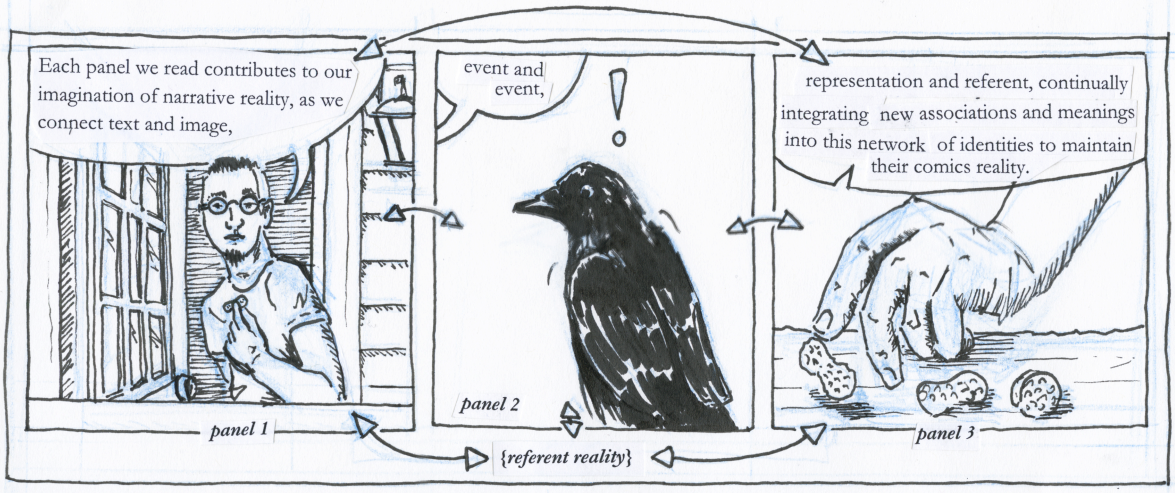
[2] See my prior "No Substitute for the Experience: A Case for Practice-Based Comics Teaching and Research," developed concurrently with this dissertation. Its understanding of temporality and materiality, and its collage practice, inform my present argument.

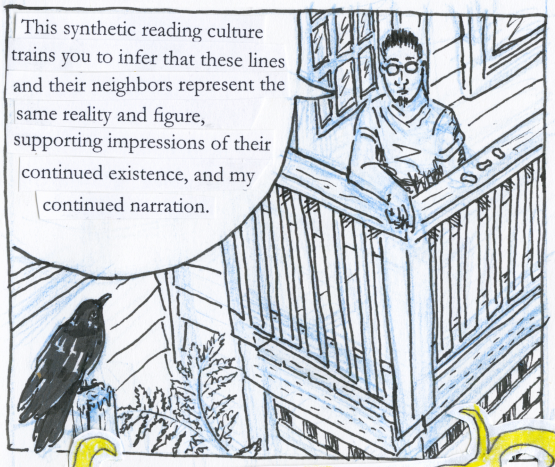
[3] Translation note. When indicating sources in this dissertation, I note their English translations where available. If unavailable, I indicate my title translations with brackets. For convenient reference, I include commonly available English translations' pages accompanying relevant original language or figures. However, all English translations accompanying French and Japanese passages are mine.

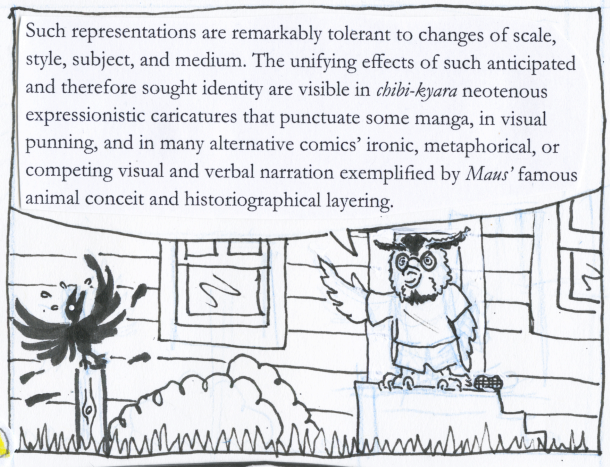
Having focused on the qualitative and historical likenesses of photographs and drawings to the realities they represent, and their likeness to the narrative realities they enter, I invert my attention by focusing on these mediums' context in chapter 3, addressing Mira Jacob's *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations* (2019). Jacob's digital collage, handwriting, and scrapbook-like practice offer a useful site from which to consider comics' many abstractions, including their serial cartooned descriptions, and as a mass medium their remediation of the embodied mark in its reproduction. Jacob presents her self-image's otherness from her and the reader's subjectivity, and in so doing, places readers in contact with the other. In interpreting Jacob's digital reticence, I assess relationships between the specific visual sign that claims and indicates some likeness to the sight or body that produced it, and that sign's abstraction in practice.

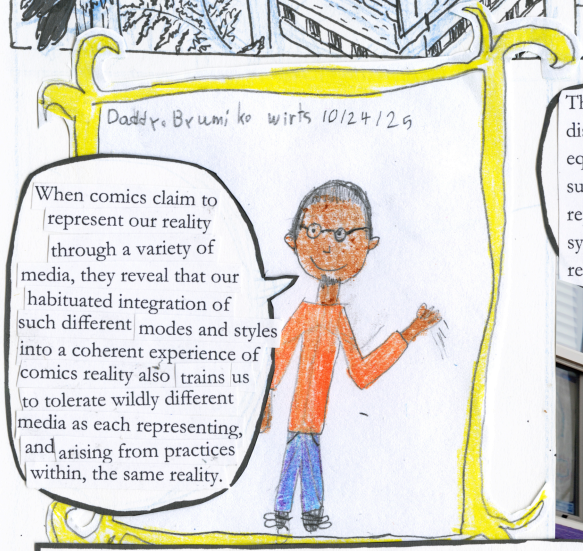
I reassess who and what readers imagine in a pictured encounter, by interpreting its separate but interrelated identification with the history of its production, and its representational message. The sign's visual identification with its history, perceptual address, and message are complicated by its appearance within a comic which demands its identification with each other neighboring sign and with the total narrative. These identifications are concurrent and *co-constitutive*, as readers must consider each new panel's ambiguous material traces of its production, its ambiguous use, and its ambiguous relationship to each other constituent element they have encountered, to interpret and arrive at its basic perceived representation and reference—that "this" shows something about "that." Each of these initially ambiguous relationships and events provokes the pursuit of closure, demanding consideration of these elements in multiple contexts, as one would likewise approach both a collaged object's discrete history and connotations, and that element's semantic relationship to the total composition, to interpret its probable symbolic value.

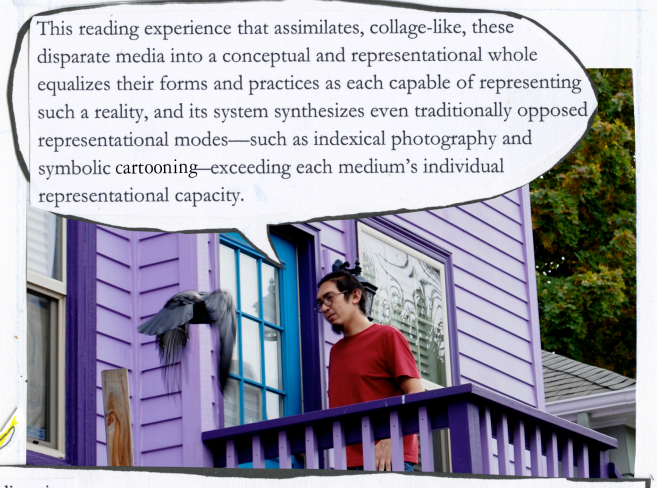
In comics contexts, our habituated recourse to other codes present in the multimodal system we identify with the total narrative typically facilitates our intuitive suppression of ambiguities as we produce visual, causal, or verbal identities to interpret series as sequences, but it is equally necessary to recognize that each new ambiguity demands consideration of all other factors we might notice, until we achieve some satisfying closure between the image, its production, and its storyworld. The comics in this project introduce ambiguous documents whose appearance produces ambiguous narrative events, and vice-versa, which demand we consider the visual document's referential and functional multiplicity:











I gently resist panel contents' visual identity to play with redirecting my imagined readers' attention to this page's physical, structural, and verbal identity, and through those suggestions invite you to integrate each panel's co-presence with its neighbors and with my prose writing—to consider how many forms my self-representation might tolerate, how many forms your imagination of this author can.

Comics practitioners and scholars have long privileged readers' highly participatory, imaginative and combinatory inferences in response to the tensions between comics' representational marks' and frames' many lacunae and their material and structural contexts that imply their semantic and narrative unity— perhaps none so influentially as Scott McCloud with his liberal understanding of "closure."

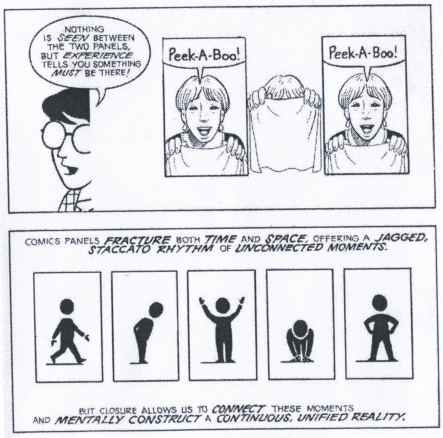


Figure 0.1. Image: Scott McCloud, Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art. First HarperPerennial edition, 1994, 67.

McCloud asserts homologies between the inferences demanded by our incomplete experience of reality and readers' semantic resolution of panels into cohesive sequences: in "an incomplete world, we must depend on closure for our very survival," and in comics reading we likewise complete "that which is incomplete, based on past experience" (63). Andrea Kantrowitz similarly, more recently discusses humans' evolutionary exaptation, that our species' faculties for communication and abstract thought that were advantageous in one environment might be repurposed in a new context—such as comics reading (5). Charles Acheson discusses such an exaptation's effects, that these aesthetic inferences' recursive reliance on individual readers' experiences provokes "memory forging," again articulating how our interaction with media rely on and contribute to the nature of human experience. McCloud's argument seems to conflate the gestalt principle of formal pattern recognition through which we complete an incomplete sensory experience, with our cognitive need for closure which provokes us to suppress ambiguity to anticipate possible outcomes (fig. 0.1). This formally provoked subjective, imaginative response to visual and narrative gaps in perceived whole objects or actions can seem near-automatic in neat examples that allow readers to literally connect the dots or narratively infer steps between even relatively complex actions—as McCloud later describes, comics (can) ask "the mind to work as a sort of *in-betweener*--filling in the gaps between panels as an *animator* might" (88), as in this example.

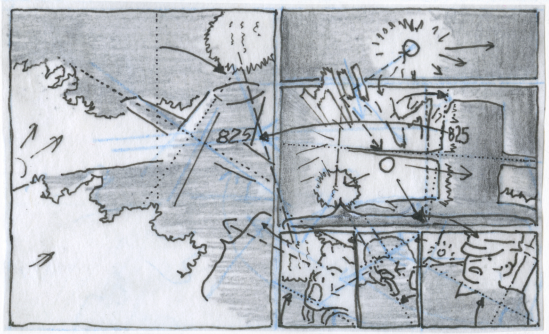
When McCloud tests this imaginative completion on complex inferences in response to a visual "non-sequitur which offers no logical relationship *whatsoever*" (72) by replacing his avatar with disjunct figures and forms but we are able to follow his narrated argument (fig. 0.2), we are encouraged to experientially confirm that our awareness of his page's identity renders it intelligible even as its contents seem to resist such identity, and to concede that, lacking defined content-level relationships, the fact of their shared presence in a comics sequence "inevitably" produces the "alchemy" of the comics page. Except, McCloud, in naming something which *does not follow*,



Figure 0.2. Annotated image: McCloud, Understanding Comics, 73.

already indicates that these pictures' conceptual identity, far from transcending representational logic or sense, depends on conditioned expectations that this series be read as a sequence, following a narrative logic. McCloud's images resist easy visual identity, but his familiar narrative rhythms, common voiceover and intercutting techniques adapted from film, and his written syntax that indicates statements' conceptual identity all maintain the speaker's identity even when his image is interrupted by visual non-sequitur, and even the panels that most resist their integration, in their shared exclusion of the established narrator or voice, constitute a legible, interruptive subseries which the sequence can nonetheless integrate as such.

Although Natsume Fusanosuke's account of readers' drive to unify comics' fragmentary forms superficially resembles McCloud's formal-determinist explanation of readers' imaginative participation, Natsume's description, that "manga has formed a unique code of gaze movement" (49) already historicizes such imagination within a literary culture. When he argues that the

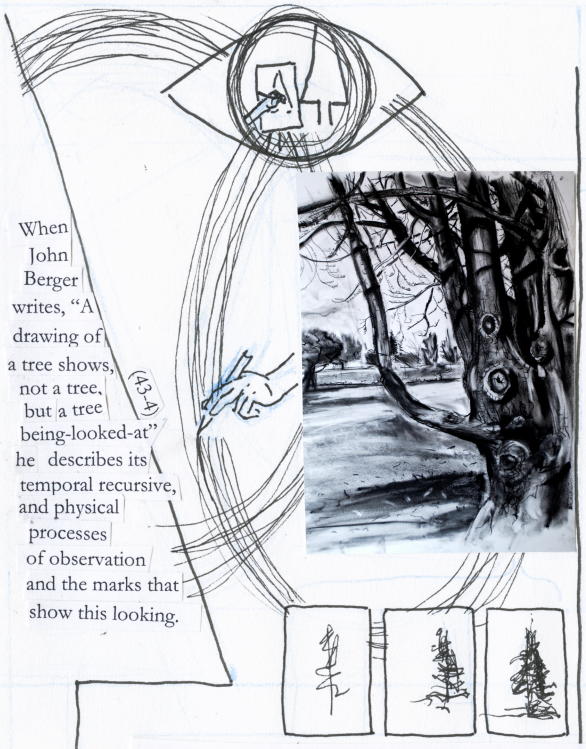


"sometimes efficient, sometimes ambivalent moves of the reader's gaze are determined by the 'reading' direction of the spread, linking and structuring diverse visual elements like script and images"—that this "gaze connects diverse things such as persons and submarines with various levels of language, produces differentials between events, and works them into the time of the large narration" (49) he describes how readers synthesize drawings of a submarine, its crew, and dialogue into a coherent scene, but this conditioned, synthetic reading in response to judging and reconciling levels of similarity and difference more satisfyingly explains readers' tolerance for McCloud's visual interruptions through cultural training rather than mediatic magic.

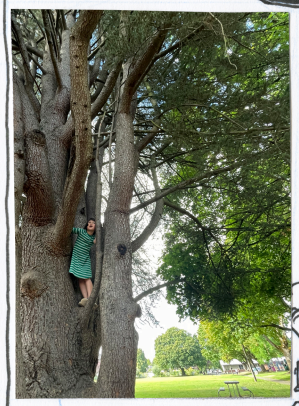
Natsume's mundane, cultural explanation of readers' imaginative responses to comics is more useful than McCloud's in accounting for how readers imagine and maintain disparate signs' conceptual and narrative identity, especially in its generality, of connecting "diverse things" through differential awareness, which can account for how readers can reconcile different media representing the same reality.

As our experience of comics reading integrates differential attention and perceived identity, so, too, do our experiences of representational media, relative to referent reality and to other media representations.





When John Berger writes, "A drawing of a tree shows, not a tree, but a tree being-looked-at" (43-4) he describes its temporal recursive, and physical processes of observation and the marks that show this looking.



He also compares drawing's action and time to that of photography, as materially tracing a different practice, a formal difference we interpret through different material experiences as connoting a different relationship between this aesthetic representation and its referent subjects, objects, and practices.

Such oppositions of manual and mechanical, slow and fast, specific and abstracted, subjectively selective and optically indiscriminate means of producing images and representing reality have marked this rich site of intermedial comparison since William Henry Fox Talbot espoused the machine and chemical agency of emergent nineteenth-century "Photogenic Drawing" as extending and exceeding artists' traced drawing over the paned projection of camera obscurae.

Photography is commonly framed in narratives of Europe's nineteenth-century visual culture as extending Renaissance perspectival organization and mimetic techniques, Enlightenment positivism, realism, verisimilitude, and rationalist faith in objectivity, in contrast with sophisticated creators' rupture with mimetic traditions and innovation of new ways of seeing and representing reality. Art historian and visual theorist Jonathan Crary criticizes the failures of such binary narratives to account for the late nineteenth-century observing subject's production by prior discursive changes, arguing that *both* visual modes are symptoms of the century's earlier philosophical and scientific reconceptualization of the human subject: the "same knowledge that allowed the increasing rationalization and control of the human subject in terms of new institutional and economic requirements was also a condition for new experiments in visual representation" (9). He reconciles the camera's abstraction of visual experiences with artists' experimentation in the same century as both pursuing a "kind of optical neutrality, the reduction of the observer to a supposedly neutral state" (96). The camera mechanically responds to and inscribes optical impressions, irrespective of its operator's signifying intent. The Impressionists who rejected highly codified European pictorial representational traditions to recover "what might be called the innocence of the eye; that is to say, a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of color, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify" (Ruskin, qtd. 95), similarly sought to show their optical experience without relying on technical models too caught up in signifying and seeing conventions.

My cartooned drawings reflect my observations and my self-perception, but they first present their representational and semantic use: as conventional descriptions within my cartooned idiom, they present my subjective style but claim little fidelity to specific sights.[4] By contrast, my photographs and observational drawings, in my attempted fidelity, communicate more data about my observation, external reality, and the encounters that produced them. I cannot prove the difference between the detailed record of my observation and such details' performed, rhetorical signification of their fidelity. Even if I could, my pictures depend on my training and tools so never achieve immediacy or perceptual innocence, nor would that be especially interesting. The observer's optical innocence is impossible, and claims of pure objectivity or pure subjectivity are at best

[4] For a discussion of cartoons or cartooning, see Ivan Brunetti's *Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice*. I likewise indicate highly stylized representational drawings that tend to favor minimalist, communicative, symbolic, and expressive efficiency. I tend to identify this drawing mode with narrative and descriptive illustration, but many exceptions, such as Fujiwara Maki's drawings (chapter 2) indicate why cartooning cannot be equated to such an illustrative function alone.

idealistic and at worst mythologizing lies that produce false understandings of mediated "reality," and consequently the relationships such mediation produces.

Despite commonly asserted oppositions between drawings and photographs, each claims to faithfully record the modern observer's optical encounter with reality and to represent its specific visual likeness, through different material and practical means of inscription. Roland Barthes compares drawing's evident selective resemblance to its sight with the photograph's optical fidelity to its sight which can affect its seeming literal perceptual repetition of the encounter that produced it, as "stupefying evidence of *this is how it was*" (44). Barthes refers to our resolution of the "illogical conjunction" brought about by the "spatial immediacy" (ibid.) of the photograph's present perceptual address ("this") and that form's perception as a documentary record ("it was") by identifying the former with the latter. These two perceptions—that the image represents something by showing it, and that the object records, and therefore shows, something about its making—alone are unproblematic and describe the experience of any picture as such, regardless of medium or intent. We identify the document with its production and the same picture with its representation. The photograph affects impressions that the experience provoked by its visual representation is equivalent to the recorded encounter that produced the object we experience. Its deceptive equivalence is produced by our over-eager identification of the picture's concurrently produced, but distinct, documentary and representational references with each other. That is, viewers too-quickly reconcile the documentary representation's form, perceptual addresses, and experienced references as homogeneous where its effects are more accurately heterogeneous, and therefore we experience its referent reality as *simple*, where would be better approached as *composite*.

My observational charcoal drawing of a tree, produced to complement my earlier photograph and to record my original observations, indicates my creative and representational processes in its descriptive approximation of the scene, its palimpsestic traces of my revisions, its visible but non-illusionistic perspectival construction, its composition and tone culturally informed by my training in drawing and photography, a leftward bias affected by my imbalanced nervous system. My snapshot of the same tree more subtly indicates its production by a factory-standard smartphone lens and light-processing algorithm that abstract and cede my observation's expression to a rules-governed process, circumventing my precise perceptual experience and abstracting its expression, but it likewise records my creative choices in my inclusion of my daughter, and in my low-angle perspective that incidentally records my position. Both images record and represent the

pictured scene, my own vision, my process, and by extent the total encounter, so any given aspect of its making might be intended or incidentally captured by its inscription.

The forms, processes, motivations, and connotations of drawings and photographs vary but, as observational images, both achieve their basic semantic values as pictorial representations, records, and facsimile-reproduced documents through their understood partial formal resemblance to their referent subjects, objects, encounters, and processes, including interrelated but distinct activities of seeing and making. Pictures' perceived transitive representation through visual likeness implicates the artist's subjective sight and the cultural and technical processes necessary to their material enunciation. You, without access to these pictures' unique making, integrate these implications into your imagination of each picture when you identify it as, for instance, a charcoal drawing or a photograph, which in each case names a process that accounts for a form. The experience of a picture likewise draws on past experience—of personally seeing or making, of seeing things made, of what visual cultures condition you to expect of objects and practices—to interpret what these ambiguous forms might intentionally describe or unintentionally trace in interpreting the time, bodily force, and direction of a hand from its marks or inferring an observer's position from a scene's spatial organization.

To experience an image as a representation, already indicates one's pursued closure between the object's form and its imagined referent, which suppresses the image's polysemic ambiguity by relying on and integrating whatever one notices that might affect its message. The photograph's seeming objectivity and the drawing's seeming subjective honesty both address each picture's iconic and indexical resemblance to their sight and to their making. These common documentary interpretive and affective experiences—of the photograph's optical inscription of external reality and the drawing subject's inscription of their personal vision—reflect the *same* underlying logic and perceptual experience as each other: their inscribed marks indicate their origins and content, linking these terms in their simultaneous production. That is, what we believe about the picture's meaning is affected by how we contextually interpret and imagine its physical history, including its semantic intent (these marks are made to show something) or extrasemantic traces of its production (these marks cannot help but show something of their historical making), and here we might recognize pictorial forms' essential polysemy, that they always ambiguously represent things and record things.

When an image offers easy closure with an understood referent through forms or claims that render its representation "obvious"—a certainty often achieved by identifying the image with claims

external to it, such as captions or narrative—this supposed natural conclusion suppresses the image's semantic and material polysemy, that its forms represent or reflect *other* processes. This project, therefore, focuses on the uncertain, hybrid inferences, syntheses, judgements and experienced realities produced by the externally referencing document's appearance within narrative reality.

The interconnection of documentary and representational references is inevitably complicated when these objects appear in comics and other composite media. Historical documentary objects do not appear in them as such, but in facsimile reproduction as part of aesthetic messages, rendering the document's objective reality itself an aesthetic message, which must also be synthesized with the total message. This multiplicative site also provides a remarkable opportunity to analyze and visualize the many relationships between the document and its understood referent realities, because the serial realities of comics visibly deny their referent's stable identity with any one instance, especially when represented by different media that beg their juxtaposition.

This project is formalist, insofar as it focuses on how and what interpretations, associations, material and perceptual experiences, and syntheses are implicated by the perception of some forms' resemblance to their message and history. It is more specifically formalist in the sense literary scholar Caroline Levine advances in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, when she argues that aesthetic form and social form should be understood together in their common arrangement, ordering, and patterning of elements—that forms do the work of making order, that these forms of organization interact with and inform each other, that they are mobile and iterative, and that they generate their own logic. Levine's complex interactions agree with the composite reading I advance, but more specifically address the value of reading and studying these aesthetic configurations' interaction in literary cultures of comics. If aesthetic form both influences and is influenced by social form, we can recognize the imaginative political work aesthetic forms advance: new aesthetic forms can affect new social and political forms of imagination or consciousness.

This relationship between aesthetic form and imaginable social form becomes especially urgent when in addressing inaccessible past events and subjectivities, and in considering our contested judgement of some forms as "realistic." Art historian Nicholas Mirzoeff writes in the shadow of nineteenth-century rationalist exclusionary claims to imagine and represent reality, and specialists claims to competently *visualize* and interpret complex situations and histories beyond the

scope of any one individual experience—to name, classify, and segregate social reality, and make such "separated classification seem right and hence aesthetic. As the decolonial critic Frantz Fanon had it, such repeated experience generates an 'aesthetic of the status quo,' the aesthetics of the proper, of duty, of what is felt to be right and hence pleasing, ultimately even beautiful" (3). This visualization conservatively naturalizes the visualized reality and its visualizer's authority as both self-evident, foreclosing autonomous forms of seeing and imagining goals or possible realities. Mirzoeff names a countervisual challenge to this authority over imagination in his titular *Right to Look*, reclaiming an autonomous vision based on mutual exchange and recognition that is not ordered by its deference to authoritative claims about our world. Mirzoeff challenges readers to consider, if alternative representational strategies "do not seem 'realistic,'" such a judgement "is the measure of the success of visuality" (5). That is, we should question why we exclude some forms or ideas as "unrealistic," less fit to represent an imaginable reality. To reconsider which forms we deem realistic—*fit to express a possible reality*—is to "resituate the terms on which reality is to be understood" (28).[5] In comics' serially narrated, and serially reimagined realities within a reading culture that trains our realist response to, and synthesis of, irrealist and juxtaposed narrative forms, the ambiguous appearance and formal coincidence of a panel identified with its internal, represented reality, *and* an object identified with its external, documented reality, demands and invites our reimagination of both referent realities, and their relationship to each other in their shared image, affecting such a discursive change. This introduction addresses how comics invite this reimagination, by considering an object's appearance within a cartooned reality. What inferences and syntheses must readers make, in order to reconcile the document's presence with its narrative context?

The Serial Portrait and the Subject's Braided Identities

In *Maus* (1978-91), Art Spiegelman self-critically depicts historiographic and interpersonal conflicts arising from expressing his father and Shoah survivor Vladek's testimonial accounts in comics, famously representing real people and documents with rough, expressionistic, abstract and symbolic, decidedly "unrealistic" animal drawings, challenging formal realism. *Maus'* countervisual influence in reshaping how forms are perceived to represent reality or historical truth is visible in how this text,

[5] Repeating one of Mirzoeff's early illustrations, countervisualization is exemplified by American abolition realism's presentation and visualization of the previously unimaginable realities of slavery and its end—representing the present violent reality of slavery instead of its paternalist image, and picturing the equality of enslaved and free people as realistic and therefore affecting which future realities were imaginable (26).

once excluded by the *New York Times* from the aesthetic and discursive category of "nonfiction," has changed such categorization: in this century *Maus* and other comics are commonly read, researched, and taught as history. Comics scholar Hillary Chute introduces her discussion of drawn witness's challenges to rationalist and literalist documentary visual culture—and their ability to "pressure […] classifiability and provoke […] questions about the boundaries of received categories of narrative" (1)—by indicating Spiegelman's influential project as exemplary of the social medium's capacity to challenge the hegemonic truth claims of rationalist forms. Charles Hatfield and Marianne Hirsch each, like Chute, privilege Spiegelman's subjective and reflexive gestures—his direct commentary on his creative choices, and his forms that represent real people and real photographic and tape-recorded documents through symbolic animals—as affecting, in their demonstrated non-transparency, an intermedial argument opposing too-convincing realist documentary representational claims of fidelity or culturally immediate access to inaccessible historical truth or experience. Comparing media from traditions of representational realism's critique, the theorized unrepresentability of trauma, and genocidal states' historical suppression and destruction of evidence of their crimes, Hirsch and Hatfield both describe Spiegelman's bold inclusion, three pages before the end of his narrative, of his father's facsimile photograph (fig. 0.3) as a formally shocking juxtaposition which refuses simple identity between past actuality and its representation—a response worth investigating. Hatfield writes that *Maus'* symbolic and diagrammatic cartooning "defines it 'against the [Nazi] aesthetics of photographic reproduction or realist representation'" and evidence, but that the appearance of Vladek's photograph within the comic conflicts with Spiegelman's "cryptographic" cartooning that displays its encoding even of "documents," for instance when he draws photographed family members with mouse heads (145). The "shockingly real" Vladek photograph "finally overturn[s] Spiegelman's substitution of animal faces for real ones" (146-7) including his drawn photographs that "simulate […] the appearance of an old-fashioned photographic print, right down to its scalloped border, […] rendered with documentary realism" (149). Hirsh similarly argues that, opposed to documents assimilated by Spiegelman's cartooned reality, "the really shocking and disturbing breaks — the points that fail to blend in — are the actual photographs" and his reproduced "Prisoner of Hell Planet" comic (16). Both assert the special place and experience of Vladek's facsimile photograph by indicating its appearance within *Maus'* representational narrative (provoking this juxtaposition), but then argue that this image exceeds Spiegelman's representational order because this document is not cartooned.



Figure 0.3. "Vladek really is," detail. Image: Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale, book 2: And Here My Troubles Began. Pantheon Books*, 1991, 134.

I share these scholars' favor for representations and forms that provoke reflexive attention resistant to authoritative naturalization, and in this context documentary photographs and symbolic drawings offer easy figures for realist/"unrealistic" poles. However, contextualized by all images' understood partial visual likeness to a referent sight (constituting their representation), and by the partially understood likeness of these pictures to their narrative totality, these authors' assertions that the photograph exists within *Maus'* narrative (representational) form but is incompatible with its cartooned (representational) form beg the question, how does one interpret the representational identities of documentary comics?

Spiegelman's animalized drawings of his historical narrative and interview-based dialogue renders the closure of such representations with each other more demanding than literal illustrations or photographs of humans would. But, recognizing these representations share a narrative container, but denied easy literality, audiences can consider the likely symbolic likenesses of these drawings to their historical referents and synthesize the story's central metaphor. Synthetically reading the comics narrative orders and produces its elements' conceptual unity, even across forms and realities which would otherwise seem incompatible, so mice can speak for and be understood as humans (fig. 0.4). Comics semiotician and narratologist Thierry Groensteen describes comics' inter-panel *tressage* (in translation, "braiding") of linear narrative sequences with the nonlinear "iconic solidarity" of visual serial tropes: "once the same motif is represented several times it transports all of its attributes (its predicates) along with it. If we want to provide recognition to the descriptive properties of the drawing, we must therefore admit that it is a description that is infinitely restarted, to which we cannot assign a particular site." (124) Like McCloud's visual non-sequiturs and Natsume's disparate submarine scene, Spiegelman's narrative drives readers' synthesis of its varied forms to maintain the imagined stability of characters or realities, so one's imagination of these referents must tolerate each new descriptive form. As we synthesize image and text, panel and panel, into narrative sequences, we braid references to the external Spiegelmans with their cartooned visualizations, into the characters we experience who can cross between historical, present, and fictionalized metanarrative realities with relative ease.

The content and form of each new panel contributes to the infinitely restarted description and connotations of its referents. This fictive synthesis across times, voices, representational modes, and styles, resists any singular representational instance's easy identity with its subject. This phenomenon is central to how I understand the comics reading experience, as producing and relying on our *composite attention*: encountering the discrete representations of comics, within the context of their understood narrative unity, provokes readers' realist synthetic response to the irrealist perception of these forms' difference from each other and from their referent, therefore inviting readers to seek a stable experience of this narrative totality, which must be admitted as aggregate, a composite whose experienced wholeness is founded on the already-experienced differences between its discrete elements.

All comics provoke this synthetic response to apprehended formal difference. Those I explore here, by presenting readers with representations that resist such easy narrative or visual unity



Figure 0.4. "More human," detail. Image: Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale, book 1: My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon Books, 1986, 23.

as McCloud's *fort-da* and visual closure examples (fig. 0.1) magnify the interpretive demands of their synthetic reading, driving readers to further rely on forms of attention, inference, and belief trained by comics reading cultures. The narrative and representational ambiguities of these texts, that require their audiences' recourse to non-narrative formal interpretation to render their basic reality and story coherently legible, invite attention to the conditions of their production in actuality. Different representational styles connote different motivations, and different media connote different aesthetic, practical and historical relationships to their referent and to actuality.

Each newly encountered panel or documentary instance must be integrated into readers' local and global imagination of the narrative reality of the comic and the infinitely restarted description of its characters. This integration returns to Hatfield and Hirsch's shock at Vladek's photographic appearance. Both rehearse mediatic oppositions between the purported natural visual identity of a photograph with a real subject, and the evident symbolic mediations of its drawn neighbors. They each reconcile the photographed figure and drawings of his account as together

indicating their distance from past actuality—a collaborative telling by an unreliable interviewee and his son's narrating interventions. They interpret Spiegelman's late introduction of the photograph while the interviewed Vladek drifts towards fantastical supposition and a tidy conclusion, as equating *Maus'* narrative fiction with the formal photographic portrait's artifice, arguing against the perceived authentication of visual verisimilitude. Hirsh writes, "this photograph is particularly disturbing in that it *stages, performs* the identity of the camp inmate" (24), and the image is ambivalently "both documentary evidence (Vladek was in Auschwitz) and it isn't (the picture was taken in a souvenir shop). This picture may look like a documentary photograph of the inmate — it may have the appearance of authenticity — but it is merely, and admittedly, a simulation, a dress-up game" which anyone might have participated in (25). Recognizing this self-performance, the effects of such images "lies not in […] the connection they can establish between present and past, but in their status as fragments of a history we cannot take in" (27). Hirsh argues, therefore, their historical value is only found in their indication of a lost reality. Hatfield similarly argues, Vladek's costume reveals the image as a "simulacrum" producing "an idealized past. The photo speaks not to the documentary truth but what we *want* to believe" and "is no more 'real' than Spiegelman's cartoons but it seems to represent Vladek as he would have himself represented," equalizing picturing son and self-picturing father as both only evoking the real Vladek (150). Both scholars rightly indicate readers' necessarily fictive imagination of historical and traumatic narratives' inaccessible referents. But their critical defenses against documentary realism's its too-easy closure between an image and what we are told it describes—against convincing appearances—approaches a dangerous post-truth cynicism when they each argue that, because a souvenir shop photograph records a survivor's performed self-image, its contents offer no meaningful documentary fidelity.

These authors' rejection of photographic fidelity demands investigation, because the photograph does not claim to evidence the reality of a man in a death camp—if the uncaptioned image can be said to describe anything, the smiling man in front of a curtain does not look like someone in Auschwitz—and because both corrective accounts repeat mouse-Vladek's descriptive claims about the photograph with finality. That these scholars identify this photograph of a smiling young man with the series of bespectacled mice besides him, and accept the latter's commentary on the former as fact, indicates this appearance does not purely subvert Spiegelman's representational order. The co-presence of these cartooned and documented figures, within Spiegelman's narrative order, demands readers identify them, and their realities, with each other. One must pursue these

pictures' unlikely identification with the same historical person and narrative, or the photograph introduced without stated relationship to its neighbors (lacking a tediously literal identifying caption, …*and this is that photograph*) would be experienced only as a confusing non-sequitur. *Why is this photograph in this comic?* must be answerable by the reader, *Because it refers to the same person and object within the same narrative reality,* or else its basic significance evaporates.

The photographed Vladek's self-awareness can be understood as intervening between viewers and some imagined unselfconscious, seemingly purer Vladek. But *all* formal photo portraits present this objectified record of a sitter's response to the event of photography. The sitter's mysterious anterior subjective agency does not interrupt, but *constitutes*, the ambiguous documentary identity of the photograph with the historical subject. Art historian Max Kozloff writes of portrait sitters' self-performance, "When sitters formally consented to be the objects of the camera portrait, their bodies became preoccupied with the thought of […] appraisal, and what we view, as our own empathy tells us, is how they coped with the thought" (5). Kozloff posits that without this perceived self-consciousness, the photograph may cease to be a portrait (3). That is, the identity-based genre depends on interpreting the subject's documented bodily response. When we viewers try to interpret a mysterious subject's documented body, we rely on empathetic identification and on our impressions of this body's exterior physical and historical circumstances as clues to read its interior subjectivity, which often leads us to rely on what a photographic caption tells us about who or what we see. The photograph which records some visual data can now "lie" when we are told lies about it which its form seems to corroborate. The fictive representational identity of "documentary evidence" is intermedial and contextual, not inherent to the image object, photographic or otherwise.

Conventional journalistic captions suppress the ambiguities of photographs, and achieve this seeming evidentiary finality through the ambiguous document's easy closure with its descriptive label that produces a *simple* relationship of terms. However, the Vladek portrait, as one image in a series, requires a more *complex* solution. The ambiguous event (the appearance of a photograph) and the ambiguously documented subject require their complementary resolution: *seeking either the narrative or documentary relationship's closure necessitates one do so through its partner's*. Spiegelman describes his strategic late integration of Vladek's photograph, "one already has a very clear picture of who Vladek is, even though one hasn't a clue what he looks like. And so what became so interesting to me was that the photo—the thing that gives you that 'objective correlative'—tells you so insanely little" (*MetaMaus*,

p. 220). "It's so off," he says of his father's "costume version" of his uniform but also that "you get real information from" the image; he similarly notes Vladek's exceptionally "full face" indicates his recently starved body's response to nutrition but hides the starvation itself (ibid.). When one is "left with a photograph that tells you something, but only in relation to the drawn and written telling around it, [this] informs you what you thought you knew by making you re-examine it" (220, 222).

The document's narrative appearance and its subject's mysterious being demand we interpret this visual information about a once-present self-conscious man in the context of who we believe it describes. In considering the documented man's likeness with the man whose history we have been told through his son's visualization of his edited testimony, we identify the photograph simultaneously with the documented Vladek, the interviewed Vladek, and the characterized Vladek. This document produced by an historical event *now also narrates that event*. Documentary in origin and fictive in context, it occupies two discourses. Although Spiegelman positions *Maus* "in the borderland between fiction and nonfiction"—as ontologically hybrid—he also repudiates its classification by the *New York Times* as the former, "I shudder to think how David Duke — if he could read — would respond to seeing a carefully researched work based closely on my father's memories of life in Hitler's Europe and in the death camps classified as fiction" ("Taxonomy"). Spiegelman acknowledges *Maus'* fictive artifice but advocates for critical judgement. Vladek's photograph constitutes its borderland and discursive tangency when the document enters Spiegelman's fictive story and becomes perceived as a representation. It achieves conceptual unity with prior representational instances through which the reader has constituted their experience of the narrated character Vladek, while this picture's presentation as a discrete object directs historical attention its conditions of production prior to its narrative appropriation. That is, documents, in their perceived ontological ambiguity—that they seem to at once indicate and record their historical being, and to make representational claims about reality—would be better approached as multistable figures that make multiple and even contradictory references, without (necessarily) confusing them. The documentary object's appearance within a comics story can be concurrently experienced as a record of the event that produced it, and as producing a narrative event. One can and should, temporally, practically, and ontologically distinguish between its appearance as a record, and its function as a description.

I now address the synthesis of these instances. Comics writer and historian Thierry Smolderen argues nineteenth century pioneers and humorists, prior to the institutional stabilization

of comics, commented on new media technology through surprising juxtapositions: "the familiar and the new mutually illuminated each other, producing meaning [i.e. commentary and punchlines] by means of an image that is all the more memorable for being unexpected — because it is created by *hybridization*," provoked by the especially "durable" experience of encountering the unexpected image (51). Hirsch and Hatfield describe their shock at surprisingly different representations of the same man which for them mutually illuminate these images' non-transparent mediating difference and distance from lost actuality—events, subjects, and their experience. But, again, comics' irrealist formal heterogeneity also conversely provokes realist synthetic responses, in seeking stability. Natsume's encoded identities provoke Groensteen's braiding, and the "shocking" experience reflects not only rupture but the proportional cognitive load of its synthesis—of reconciling the unknown photographed man's image and connotations with the hundreds of cartooned and translated talking mice through which we have constituted our imagination of "Vladek." Groensteen and Natsume discuss, within the centripetal focus of fiction, how the qualities of each representational instance one reads in a comics sequence contribute to the global series of their narrative reality. Within genres which deny narrative autonomy (history, life writing, metafiction, etc.), we might likewise integrate anything we notice about each new panel's aesthetic representation of reality, or its traces of its history, into the infinitely restarted and infinitely expanding series.

As readers interpret two pictures' partial identity and difference within a continuous narrative and thereby synthesize their perceived description of an object or action's continuous existence, to reconcile a surprising juxtaposition into a dramatic event or a joking punchline, when we encounter a photograph and a drawing's conspicuously different descriptions of the same understood reality, we must similarly assimilate attributes of each image into our imagination of their shared referent. Recursively producing characters' and worlds' representational identities by interpreting overt differences between their components, both destabilizes any one instance's identity with the imagined whole, and demands the identification of each representational form—its content and connotations—with that whole. Although imaginatively integrating these different forms into our experience of their pictured reality does not render each encountered panel or appropriated document ontologically equivalent, documentary comics' refusal to segregate mimetic (realist) and nonmimetic ("unrealistic") representations encourages our identification of these disparate media, forms, and aesthetic strategies with their composite whole and, by extension, with

each other, which requires we acknowledge these different forms' *similar capacity to represent the same reality*.

This insistent heterogeneity of comics, that primes critical attention to each representation's difference from their shared referent also asserts these instances' common reference, democratizing realist and "unrealistic" forms—the objective and the subjective, the literal and the metaphorical, the documentary object and the fictive representation—as we synthesize their imagined total referent. In response to these serial encounters that deny stable closure between singular sign and signified referent, we synthesize complex networks of identity with attention to each discrete component form's existence within different discourses and its references to multiple orders of reality, producing the multiplicative experience of documentary comics' *composite realities*.

In serially identifying each of these different pictures with the same character *within* the narrative, and with their production in response to different external encounters with their shared *external* referent, one's total experience of "Vladek" must tolerate both *Maus'* internal heterogeneity, composed of many individual representational instances, and the events in other orders of reality that each instance also indicates. If we visualize Groensteen's *tressage* as the threads of sequential and serial identities we braid into the aggregate reading experiences of comics, we might visualize each new documentary event or reflexive gesture as a join in that braid, splicing other meanings and realities into the imagined whole that cannot be identified with any single representational or documentary instance. The stresses documentary comics place on visual identity by braiding such disparate media with each other compound each instance's heterogeneity, and demands one continually reimagine the many absent subjects these objects individually and collectively reference. The very forms and cultural operations of comics, understood through the document's internal and external identifications, indicate modes of creation and reading favorable to countervisual critique and reimagining history, experience, and perceived reality.

Picturing Documents

I have considered how ambiguous the appearance of a record of an external subject, within a comics narrative, produces a liminal site and threshold experience that affects the narrative totality and imaginative network into which the record enters, and by extent each other integrated component's perceived references and reality. I now reciprocally address how such a liminal element's perception as an externally produced object and record, and as a narrative panel and event, affects its

identification with its recorded and represented subjects. A doubled attention to the documentary object's record of a once-present subject, and its present function as a representational image, affectively reasserts the "illogic" of these referents' experience as "documentary representation," refusing these separate values' deceptive, conjunct experience as a *simple* reference: recorded reality and represented storyworld are non-identical despite their shared terms.

Beyond documentary, any attention to a picture's production can lead to such temporal defamiliarization. This is why photoromanzi or photo-comics—predominantly fiction comics, illustrated by photograph—appear especially artificial or uncanny. In contrast with the recursively marked content of a drawing which cannot be assigned to a single moment and therefore always produces its temporal abstraction (agreeing with any accompanying dialogue's similar abstraction of its panel's pictured time), and with a film or stage actor's synchronous impersonation of their self or another, the photograph's inscription of a specific moment affects a clear mismatch between narrative and documented times. The photoromanzi subject whose dialogue is contained by the speech balloon presents a temporal disjuncture between the speaking character and photographed actor. The actor cannot speak this dialogue in the instant of their recording, so the documented subject cannot be even provisionally experienced as identical with the pictured character, differentiating between the perceived character who *is* and the recorded subject who *was*, despite their identification with the same image. The photoromanzi speaker especially vividly demonstrates this friction between the visual document and coincident pictorial narration's distinct times, but I limit my discussion of them because most narrate fully fictional realities with staged photographs, employing them in a fictional, rather than documentary, capacity.[6] Some documentary comics do effectively employ defamiliarized "speaking" photographs, including Ho Che Anderson's unusual and highly appropriate inclusion of "speaking" documentary images of historical figures in his kaleidoscopic *King: A Comics Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* wherein Anderson explores King through his public images. Eddie Campbell likewise activates this friction between documented external reality and its narrative representation when, in *The Fate of the Artist*, the accomplished cartoonist presents his daughter Haley's performed photographic image with her dialogue in a (tran)script-like format contained within crude digitally drawn balloons that dramatize the non-

[6] Although photo-comics formats' common remediation of film and television stills in retelling narratives also affect their temporal disjuncture when representing one fiction by appropriating fragments of another representing nominally the same subject, which is engaging as adaptation (also see Jan Baetens' *The film photonovel: a cultural history of forgotten adaptations*), such external references are again distinct from documentary ones.

identity of the photographed speaker and the speaking character, in the dialogue's demonstrative later addition that structures the pictures into their narrative (fig. 0.5).[7]



Figure 0.5. "The Rest of us have to play ourselves." Image: Eddie Campbell, *The Fate of the Artist* in *The Second Fake Death of Eddie Campbell (coupled with) The Fate of the Artist*. Top Shelf Productions, 2023, 18.

[7] Also see Craig Fischer's "The Lives of Insects: On Photography and Comics" survey, analysis, and practical exploration of forms of visual narration through photographs, including a discussion of Campbell's abstraction of his photographs from their sources.

Beyond the specific temporal friction affected by speaking photographs, perceiving any documentary object as such within a comic demands we identify it as somehow appropriated, alienating it from the representational narrative it might authenticate. The documents I analyze in this project are often captioned rather than speaking (so to speak), and regardless, when the comics I discuss do introduce such objects to represent the present narrative reality, they appear as objects within, or demonstratively appropriated by, that narrative reality. The documentary image is alienated from the narrative representation it might authenticate by the very objectification that produces its ratifying presence and seeming connection to external actuality. This affects a metapictorial friction between internal and external references, present in fictional *mise en abîme* effects, autobiographical fiction's ambiguities, and historiographical or autobiographical attention to an image's narrated, traced, imagined, and reconstructed contexts.

When we readers fully recognize the pictured subject's mystery, as in contemplating the photographed Vladek, is when we might also confront their absence, becoming affectively aware of our interaction with a surface that offers no depth. Because of the document's collage-like—or physically collaged—entry into print or digital comics compositions indicate its recontextualized mobility, the identification of these objects with both recorded external reality and narrative reality likewise depends on first recognizing their referents' differences. This identification's basis in acknowledging the recorded subject or content's alienation from the represented world it supports, then, invites us to differentiate the form's perceived representation (that produces a narrative event we readers imagine), from the same form's perceived record of the events that produced it (which we might likewise imagine). This multivalent awareness that requires the documentary panel's identification with its different referents but resists these referents' uncomplicated identification with each other, returns to the pictorial document's form and its ambiguous address to our senses that also produces our perception of its history. An observational image shows (describes) something, and shows (materially traces) something about its own making. In showing the artist's sight, it also offers something of the seer *and* the seen. Considered together, the image characterizes and records observer and observed.

Although the documentary image's recorded and pictured realities are different, the record and description *also* come into both physical reality and our visual field together, so *constitute together what the picture shows*. Because these terms produced by pictorial inscription describe subjects' relationships to each other, to the object, and in their perceptual address produce readers' and

viewers' relationships with them, this metapictorial attention should be understood as political, constituting the grounds upon which we might recognize others, our relationships with them, and by extent our own subjective positions.

Meeting Gazes

Thi Bui begins *The Best We Could Do* (2017), her memoir visualizing her family's history, with her son's birth and her new parental responsibilities that encourage her empathy with her parents' efforts to care for her and her siblings during the Vietnam War and their flight as refugees, as she attempts to understand her unpredictable, threatening father and her reticent mother. Bui's efforts to understand and empathize with her parents shape the book, from its early basis in oral interviews through her late adoption of the titular, inclusive "We" for its resultant graphic account. Bui states Spiegelman's influence on her own project, and both autobiographical-historiographic comics mix interviews, cartooning, and redrawn and facsimile documents, shuttling between times, generations, first- and second-hand witness, and ontological orders. I have argued Spiegelman's contrast of deindividuated animal drawings and documents of humans renders the friction between represented characters and documented people hyperbolic, and their synthesis dramatic. I now address Bui's cartooning of her family as specific humans, which allows for a subtler exploration of how documented subjects and illustrated characters invite their worlds' synthesis and reinterpretation.
In her fourth chapter, Bui evocatively cartoons and composes her visualizations of her father Nam's traumatic childhood enduring extreme poverty during World War II and the paranoid violence of French colonialism and Vietnamese decolonial movements. She returns in its final pages to more restrained illustrations of the narrative present—formally and contextually differentiating between these orders of reality. The taciturn Nam, handling his daughter's pages we have just read, affirms, "You know how it was for me" (fig. 0.6). When Mirzoeff claims his and our right to look, he refers to the mutual gazes of friendship, solidarity, or love, which "must be mutual, each person inventing the other, or it fails" (1). Our subjective sense of self and sociopolitical position is constituted through how others might (mis)recognize us, as Louis Althusser articulates our *interpellation* by figures of authority through the policeman's hail ("*Hey, you there!*") that by commanding "*your*" response conditions your self-image when you recognize yourself as the addressee. Mirzoeff indicates an alternative to the authoritative hail, in mutual recognition and invention: "You, or your group, allow another to find you, and, in so doing, you find both the other and yourself. It [this

reciprocal subjective invention] means requiring the recognition of the other in order to have a place from which to claim rights and to determine what is right" (1). In Bui's intersubjective, imaginative attempt to visualize and empathize with her father's situation despite historical, emotional, and experiential distance, knowledge becomes a matter of mutual recognition: he sees her having seen him, in the pages we have seen. The present Nam tells us his experience is like his daughter's visualization, and we might accept this stated recognition and identity—that we too might see *this how it was* for him. But, we should acknowledge this statement is made by a character Bui creates to claim its identity with her father's visualized past. These characters claim the sufficiency of Bui's cartooned visualization of her father's real experiences, but these objects' interaction also affirms Mirzoeff's assertion that the mutual gaze is "unrepresentable" (ibid.): these panels only describe an interaction. Here, there is a key distinction between an *illustration's* perceived description of characters or scenes, and an *observational image's* perceived or claimed concurrent resemblance to a real sight. The illustration can describe characters' encounters but the observational drawing implicates historical subjects and encounters, and produces others.



Figure 0.6. "You know how it was." Image: Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir*. Abrams Comicarts, 2018, 130

After Bui visualizes her father's life, she narrates her mother Hắng's (informally, Má's) more privileged and better-documented one. Among the many redrawn documents through which she introduces her complex "image" of her mother—"too tied up with my opinions of myself" (131)—Bui includes two facsimile reproductions of her childhood dated, observational drawings of Hắng, juxtaposing drawings of photographic objects with photographs of drawn objects (fig. 0.7). The



Figure 0.7. "She looked like this to me." Image: Bui, *The Best We Could Do*, 133.

photographs enter Bui's narrative, as visually described, observed documents, while her childhood drawings enter as objects documenting her prior observation: "she looked like this to me." One might approach these images through their drawn form that generally implicates the drawer's subjective aesthetic interventions and invites our commensurate doubt, but note Bui's consistent

statements on this page, not of such interventions, but of the relationship her sight inscribes. She captions each image by identifying it with both the observing subject (Bui, or her childhood self) and the object of her gaze (her mother, or her image), instantiating both figures within comics reality through their relationship to each other. We are shown Hắng through her daughter's visual impressions of her, and those impressions also depict the observing daughter. In this process, we form our impressions of both referent subjects through their interaction, as mother and daughter come into our experience together.

Bui's drawn portraits and narrative illustrations characterize both their pictured content and picturing artist, and both referents might be performed or impersonated by the artist. However, when Bui temporally separates her drawings' transitive description of her mother and reflexive inscription of her experience as an observing artist from the self-conscious memoirist, the referent terms of the image cannot be isolated from each other. One might always assert the artist's subjective interventions between the picture and its referent(s) in actuality, but because one cannot fully isolate its described vision from its described object (and vice-versa), the document's content and combined referent must be understood as the total encounter that produces it: this encounter and its subjective mediation *is* the documented event. Therefore, the documentary image's referent is always polysemic and relational. It is not enough to ascribe the difficulty assigning any given element of a picture to its transitive description or to its reflexive trace of its production, to the mediating artist's subjective interventions and the image's unreliable or individual representation alone. One should instead recognize its two referent subjects' *co-constitution*.

Cartoonist and teacher Lynda Barry theorizes the image as "the formless thing which gives things form" (*What It Is)*, which I interpret as indicating the image's process of enunciation, that its form and content each produce their complement: one is not possible without the other. Likewise, we readers would do well to heed Bui's invitations to recognize, the observational picture produces experiences of both observing and observed figures, reciprocally and simultaneously circumscribing absent subjects through their relationship to each other.

Bui continues, following her parents' lives affected by escalating violence, and counter-narrates and contextualizes the popular American account's reductive, decontextualized visual vocabulary of good American soldiers; bad Việt Cộng; corrupt, inept, feminized, or needy South Vietnamese by detailing her family's specific experiences of events and responses to their portrayal, placing national and familial histories in conversation. Thi is born, and the Buis flee by sea. They

arrive at the Pulau Besar refugee camp in Malaysia, where they are registered and photographed, and Bui presents their facsimile images among other drawn ones, narrating, "We were now BOAT PEOPLE—five among hundreds of thousands of refugees" (fig. 0.8). Again, documentary and representational discourses enter tangency in the documentary panel, as do abstracted types and specific individuals. When Bui presents her family's photographs surrounded by other drawn documented faces, she doubly invites their intermedial comparison, with her prior drawings of her family and with those others on this page. Her parents' specific appearance—their hairstyles, demeanor, and noses—are at once familiar from their daughter's cartooning and, in their new medium, present their dramatic reality, at the same time as other drawn faces like theirs are introduced. Reconciling these objects with their narrative context again requires we consider them together with other faces we have repeatedly encountered and recursively imagined.

Spiegelman visually collectivizes his figures by abstracting and anonymizing their appearances[8], and the encounter with the photograph of Vladek requires its identification with the series of abstracted mouse drawings, and their braiding or *tressage*. The identification of some dehumanized, deindividuated, and objectified abstract faces with specific real and documented subjects Spiegelman observes also trains the identification of the countless other subjects and events he visualizes with similar, unknown or undocumented subjects and lives. Bui conversely maintains the *visual* specificity of these cartooned faces but *linguistically* collectivizes them by reducing her family to "boat people," abstracting her family at the same time they enter the subgenre of identification photographs that discursively claim—more literally than photo-portraits—their pictured contents' simple identity with their named subjects. On the prior page, Bui illustrates her family's intake in a queue among others from an over-the-shoulder perspective that identifies with and follows her family up to the camera's flash, and then she presents documents produced by this encounter.

In considering the photographed Buis' subjective disposition in the moment of their documentation by interpreting these records of their bodies relative to their narrated context and cartooned likenesses, we synthesize narrated and documented events and realities. In interpreting these new photographs of familiar faces situated among cartooned others whose drawn form matches these documents' biographical pictured context—they are like the Buis we have encountered in drawing, and share their cartooned environs—we might recognize these institutional

[8] See Hatfield, 145.

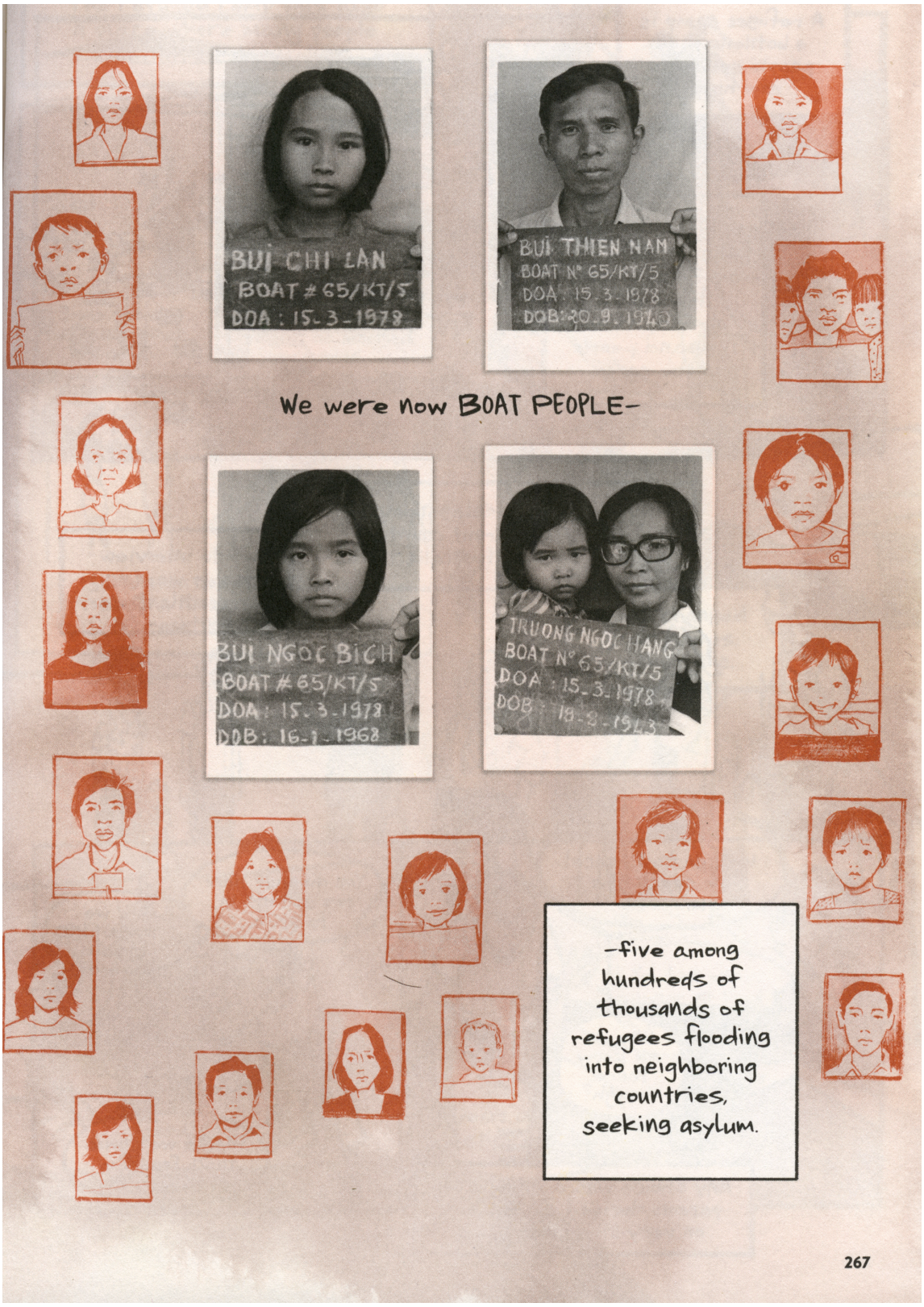


Figure 0.8. "Boat People." Image: Bui, *The Best We Could Do*, 267.

documents as each emerging from similar encounters at this precise intake center or others like it. When the Buis' ID photographs invite their double identification with their serially drawn lives, and with the generic series that surrounds them on this page, they also invite these terms' transitive identification across the photographs and their formal and discursive connotations, producing her family's synecdochical relationship to the category of "boat people." By ironically introducing this reductive identity late in her memoir, this likeness inverts the Buis' abstraction as a category and by extension likewise refutes others' homogenization or equivalence. Bui's selective cartooning of individuated others by remediating their photographed records and excluding the contents of their captioning cards further refutes the blunt identities or closure offered by photographic records and textual registration. Presenting instead only her interpretations of these figures' body language and other tell-tale signs of their emotional dispositions for us to consider in context, these signs only direct us to these others' similarly complex lives and circumstances informing how they, too, coped with their documentation, animating these objects through their likeness to other real, documented, represented, and imagined encounters.

Chapter Plan

Composite Realities studies the multiple sites and multiple addresses of observational images, to consider: how do we respond to our affective experiences—acknowledging their differences—when we encounter a pictured encounter that looks like encounters we have experienced, and in these situations' experiential likeness, the object shares a sight, through which another being appears to address us? Like the autobiographical narrator's reference to nominally the same figure inside and outside the text which therefore bridges its referent realities, the document's appearance within a cartooned narrative presents a liminal, multiple site. *Unlike* the narrow lexical and symbolic bridge of the typewritten "I," *every* aspect of the documentary image presents specific, if ambiguous, information about the events and experiences that produced it, and those of the reality it represents.

This ambiguous information includes the encounters traced by the perspectival arrangement of the image's elements, which places its source in imagined space relative to the encounter, by approximately placing its audience in that imagined spatial relationship. Pictorial perspective orders the observer's relationship to represented reality around its implied origin, translating "psychophysiological space into mathematical space; in other words, [producing] an objectification of the subjective" (Panofsky, 66), or the image's point of view. This conventional, artificial, and

perceptual address implies and characterizes the image's origin and stages and orders our visual experience in imagined space relative to pictured subjects, also *interpellating* us in that organizing address, producing our subjective position and conditioning our relationship to the pictured reality and its picturing subject.[9]

This ordering of imagined space that positions both the audience and the picturing subject relative to the observational image's pictured contents returns to the pictured encounter which produces encounters. Each of my chapters begins and ends with pictorially staged meetings, with another looking back, from images staged on a page with other media, which together situate the image and the reader. Each chapter explores how different inscriptive, documentary, and representational media practices, commonly theorized in opposition to each other, interact within and with the medium of comics in which they appear. These chapters proceed in order, beginning with the most literal documents that most literally share sights of, and encounters with, external reality—namely, appropriated photojournalistic documents that inscribe, in their perspectival and chronological order, the encounters that produce them.

In chapter 1, "From Evidence to Document: *Le Photographe*'s Photographic Encounter," I address the present and former gazes of the photograph, and the times of photographic series, focusing on fictive interpretations of sequences produced by the film roll and by narrative editing. I analyze remediated documentary and institutional photographs in the context of collective the bande dessinée memoir *Le Photographe* (2003-6, *The Photographer: Into War-Torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders*, 2009) that integrates photojournalist Didier Lefèvre's contact sheets with cartoonist Emmanuel Guibert and colorist Frédéric Lemercier's comics panels. I address the interpreted sequence and its identification with documented and narrated realities by comparing what readers

[9] See Berger's and Laura Mulvey's foundational articulations of the male gaze and its constructed relationship between the acting and observing male subject with whose perspective the audience is encouraged to identify, and the passive woman presented as an object of and for that gaze and subject's pleasure (*Ways of Seeing*; "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"); Susan Sontag's similarly famous critique of the photographic audience's voyeuristic gaze (*Regarding the Pain of Others*); and Mitchell's discussions of how perceived form is translated into experienced meaning and descriptive identification ("The Pictorial Turn" in *Picture Theory*). When McCloud also models pictorial identification through analogy to a social encounter, he argues detailed pictures resemble our experiences of external reality and others; in contrast abstracted cartoons, by resembling our abstract self-image, foster projective identification (*Understanding Comics*). Although McCloud's "amplification through simplification" (30) argument reasonably accounts for cartooned faces' focusing minimalist effect, in the context of his frequent talking-heads monologues that stage his conversational address to readers, his insistence that our involvement with cartooned characters (including his own avatar) is essentially projective and narcissistic (30-45) is baffling. I find Rodolphe Töpffer's precedent argument, that the pseudoscience of physiognomy is useful to caricatured representation because it demonstrates our belief that we can interpret others' internal lives from their physical features (or legible body language), a far more convincing account. The encountered eye—including the mirror's or the self-portrait's eye—to me always indicates its otherness from the observer's eye.

might interpret and synthesize in the ambiguous events, times, and subjects present in the sequences of contact sheets and comic strips of *Le Photographe*. Such necessary reconstruction of *both* Lefèvre's documentary actions and his collaborators' interpretive interventions to read the narrative, challenges the perceived material reticence of photographs by inviting consideration of the photojournalist's presence in their photographs. I argue *Le Photographe* trains interpretive attention antithetical to photographs' commonly narrated unauthored immediacy or evidentiary certainty, instead teaching viewers to interpret photographs as ambiguous documents. This conditioned interpretive attention questions the (European, male, specialist) photographer's authority and crucially presents grounds to consider the documented other's mediated subjectivity, outside of the photojournalist's message.

I depart from literal optical records of encounters to next address observational pictures that implicate and synthesize real and fictional sights, subjects, and experiences, in the medium of observational drawing, which demonstrates its wholesale subjective interruption, interpretation, representation, and characterization of the encounters and sights that produced it. In chapter 2, "Drawing Subjects and Objects, Together: Tsuge Yoshiharu and Fujiwara Maki's Constructed Identities," I focus on the observational drawing's interpretation and characterization of reality, which also ambiguously records and produces its observing subjects. Beginning from Tsuge's production of an autofictional observational drawing, I approach life drawings as multistable sites that document and produce observing and observed subjects, concurrently. This site is useful for investigating the multiplicative experience and fictive tensions of life writing's produced subjectivities and their identification with the empirical author. I address how Japanese alternative artists Tsuge and Fujiwara each use ambiguity to affect their identification with the textual subjectivities their drawings produce, by considering two axes of drawings' multiple and ambiguous inscriptions of subjects—observing and observed, recorded and performed. In close reading and comparing Tsuge's *shishōsetsu*-based autofictional confessions, reflections, and escapes with Fujiwara's *Watashi no enikki* (1982, *My Picture Diary*, 2023) documentation of her experience, I argue that despite these authors' shared life writing self-characterization and self-performance, the differences between the sights and encounters these authors show fundamentally affects the nature of their self-images.

In chapter 3, I further depart from documentary comics' pictorial records of observed events that also share their vision, to focus on the author's perceived bodily inscription and emotional trace,

and the communicative and material reproduction and abstraction of these signs in the mass medium of comics. In "Other (Sur)Faces: The Repeated Hand in Mira Jacob's *Good Talk*," I investigate drawn and written marks' formal index of the inscribing author's bodily presence, addressing these marks' signification of access or emotional legibility, together with their semantic and material abstraction in comics. To this end, I analyze Indian American memoirist Jacob's digital lettering, cartooned "paper doll" characters, personal objects, and photographs that each offer the possibility of material intimacy in her scrapbooked aesthetic. Her innovative interruption of such connoted material intimacy through her ostentatious use of digitized marks, digital collage and iterative repetition denies the likeness of the representational description to the author's specific sight or expression, thereby denying visual access to her. I argue Jacob, by strategically employing visual specificity and its abstraction, formally controls the historical and emotional information she makes visually available to readers, presenting her unique presence and experience while refusing to do the emotional work of performing or giving access to her racialized pain. As Jacob narrates her "Memoir in Conversations" in her digitally standardized handwriting and illustrates it with the paper dolls she stages and re-stages in encounters on found photographs, she decontextualizes her written and pictorial forms from any singular indexed time of production or iconic resemblance to their referent encounter or experience. Jacob thereby subverts their connoted emotional and visual fidelity while encouraging alternative forms of interpretive engagement across the multimodal network readers synthesize in reading. This abstraction is essential to understanding Jacob's distinctive compositions of her characters facing the reader, and their insistently artificial but nevertheless affective perspectival address, as literal composites and pictorial compositions that order readers' relationship to pictured subjects in imagined encounters which invite readers to seek, but refuse, their satisfying closure with the author.

Each chapter addresses the documentary panel's identification with narrative reality, identification with the artist's sight, and the production of visual encounters in response to visual encounters, which present the possibility of meeting the artist or others in the compositional arrangement of these materialized sights. It moves from the documentary to the descriptive, from literally and historically shared sights, to symbolically shared ones, exploring different tensions between the material sign's multiple identification with its history, the perceptual experience it produces, and the message into which it is composed. Each new representing and recording instance identified with the comics narrative and with external reality invites the reimagination of each

referent and their relationship to each other. *Composite Realities* addresses our attempts to make sense of these documents and panels, and our syntheses as we, in seeking closure, find no stable whole, but in the process produce composite experiences. It is about our imaginative speculation about encounters that produce images and how our interpretive attention might lead us to reimagine who or what we encounter there. It interprets comics that train this open attention to the image and document's many referent subjects, and realities, and the interpretive approach it advances trains such attention. We might, in encountering others in actuality, fail, refuse, or find recognition, and the present imagetext and those discussed within offer only the recorded, performed, constructed, or hyperreal grounds to reimagine such encounters and sights. To borrow Jacob's challenge and invitation, it is not the text's job to recognize another subject's humanity or your own, but to show you how you might—you see it if you want.

Chapter 1.
From Evidence to Document:
Le Photographe's Photojournalistic Encounter

> "By definition these found objects are records and by implication they are cultural artifacts."
>
> -Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel, Press Release for *Evidence*

> "The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world."
>
> -John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

In 1986, Didier Lefèvre (1957-2007) accompanied the Médecins Sans Frontières team led by Dr. Juliette Fournot, to document their illegal entry into Soviet-controlled Afghanistan and their work at the remote Zaragandara MSF clinic. Six of his photographs accompanied a short article in the center-left newspaper *Libération* summarizing the Soviet–Afghan War, along with its human costs (Philip), but the other four thousand, along with any public account of the young photojournalist's near-fatal return journey, would remain unpublished until the next millennium. In 1998, cartoonist Emmanuel Guibert (b. 1964) approached Lefèvre—with whom he had shared a casual friendship since they met—and proposed a collaboration (*Conversations avec le photographe* [*Conversations with the Photographer*]). Lefèvre and Guibert, with colorist and designer Frédéric Lemercier (b. 1962)—who worked on Lefèvre's *Médecins Sans Frontières: Voyages en Afghanistan. Le pays des citrons doux et des oranges amères* (2002, [*Doctors Without Borders: Voyages in Afghanistan: Land of Sweet Lemons and Bitter Oranges*])—together created the multimedia documentary comic *Le Photographe* (3 volumes, 2003-6, *The Photographer: Into War-Torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders*, 2009).

This collaborative memoir synthesizing drawing, first-person narration, and photographic contact sheets was well-received domestically and internationally, with commercial success and critical honors including the Eisner award for Best U.S. Edition of International Material, 2010. In his introduction to the English edition, translator Alexis Siegel ascribes the "alchemy of this rare

collaboration" to "Guibert's art, which seamlessly completes the narrative around the pictures [photographs] and gives them further depth and meaning" (*The Photographer*, introduction, xi). Literary critics often echo Siegel's language in their own praise of *Le Photographe*'s seamlessness.[10] It requires no deep philological experience to intuit the literal, materially descriptive origins of "seamless" as lacking or apparently lacking seams, nor its figurative generalized unity and connoted ideals of harmony, cohesion, and flawlessness. But the graphic form of this memoir is anything but seamless. *Le Photographe* compounds the multimodality of comics through its distinctive juxtaposition of Lefèvre's contact sheets with Guibert and Lemercier's panels. For two representational and pictorial media depicting the same subjects, *Le Photographe*'s photographs and drawings assert their dramatic formal difference: supple grayscale vs. hard black lines and flat digital coloring; mechanical vs. manual production; photographic fidelity vs. Guibert's thickly inked approximate renderings; the black interstices of the contact sheet vs. the white interstices of the comics grid. Such differences seem starker still when comparing the book's photographs to its captioned narration, before even considering temporal differences implicit in how these media represent their once-present subjects.

Le Photographe's layouts are defined by their juxtapositions, presenting unmasked, unadorned, even jagged *seams* between photographic and handmade images produced decades apart, and yet Siegel and these reviewers describe its seamlessness. This difference between *Le Photographe*'s seams—that seem to formally dramatize Thierry Groensteen's macrosemiotic emphasis on comics' "jointed" character (*The System of Comics*, 21 "arthrology")—and these readers' experiences of the text as continuous does not present contradiction between literal form and figurative experience. Rather, it speaks to the paradoxical demands and experience of rendering heterogeneous comics forms narratively coherent through our trained reading habits. *Le Photographe's* seamlessness is remarkable—and is so remarked upon—because it is surprising: its experienced unity is not produced by easy visual or narrative integrity, by hiding joints or producing illusory wholeness, but by *magnifying* the reading demands of comics and thereby encouraging readers to depend on the forms of attention, inference, and belief already trained by reading comics.

Encouraged by *Le Photographe*'s attention to the photographing subject, in this chapter I explore how the book's integration of first-person narration, cartooning, and documentary photography productively challenges assumed distinctions between subjective human documents

[10]See: Anthony, Baetens, Beaty, Emilia, Hedges, Orbán. Beaty unusually notes the "initially […] jarring" differences between pictorial forms but nonetheless emphasizes that their similarities allow the simple cartooning to draw readers into the photographer's story.

and evidentiary photographs. "From Evidence to Document" situates *Le Photographe* within often critical discussions of documentary photograph and their seeming immediacy or evidentiary value that naturalize their content. Informed by discussions of their biases and Ariella Azoulay's "event of photography," this chapter addresses how viewers can and do interpret the subjectivities and encounters that produce the photographic document. In close reading *Le Photographe*'s opening pages, with attention to how pursued narrative closure interacts with photographic source material, this chapter argues that the introductory sequence invites and trains readers to interpret the processes and presences photographs are said to efface. *Le Photographe* presents distinct sequential orders: the documentary temporal logic of film rolls and contact sheets, and the fictive narrative logic of memoir. This close reading considers the interpretation of these concurrent logics, and how recontextualized documents can suspend their received meaning between aesthetic and evidentiary positions.

The chapter then contextualizes these invitations to imaginatively reconstruct Lefèvre's actions, within often-colonialist travel writing and travel photography and their identificatory privilege of the observing and representing subject. The documentarian or ethnographer, by representing another, hazards interrupting and subordinating that other to the documentarian's message. Guibert and Lemercier's fictive interpretation and integration of Lefèvre's documentary resources into the narrative invites readers pursuing closure to participate in the same process. I argue that *Le Photographe*'s collaborative authors present us with the interpretive grounds to recognize the documentary subject in excess of the photojournalist's representational intent.

Photographic Transparency vs. Drawn Non-Transparency

Le Photographe begins by directing attention to the narrator's presence as the book's enunciating agent, through both textual content—"*Je dis* au revoir à tout le monde" ("*I say* good-bye to everyone," emph. added)—and textual form, in the statement's handwritten[11] medium (fig. 1.1a). The comic's pictorial narration begins, not with strips of abstracted and handmade, cartooned illustrations, but with strips of optically precise documentary photographs. One can surmise the pictured figures are the "everyone" to whom the narrator says his good-byes. When opposed to its handmade narration, framing, and the cartooned picture that ends the page—which employ the same inscriptive media

[11]See chapter 3 regarding handwriting and digital lettering. *Le Photographe* is hand lettered. Its First Second translation is digitally lettered in a font generally imitative of the original lettering.

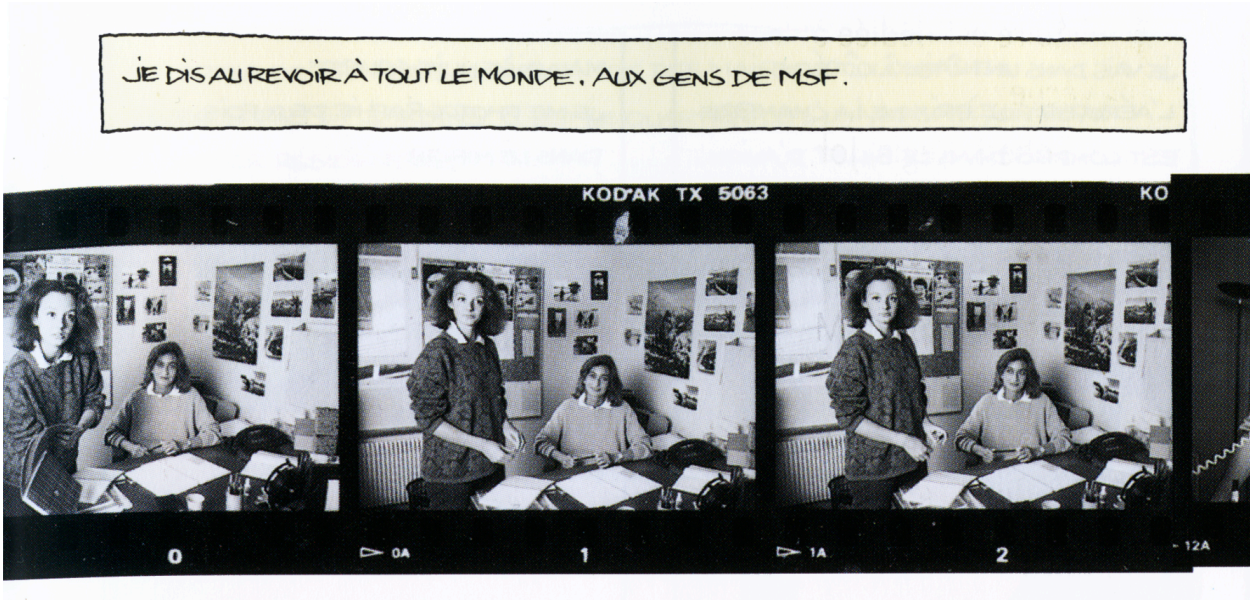


Figure 1.1a. "I say good-bye to everyone," detail. Image: Emmanuel Guibert, Didier Lefèvre, and Frédéric Lemercier, *Le Photographe – tome 1*. Dupuis, 2003, 3.

and operate within a conventional comics representational paradigm—these photographs seem to offer external ratification, documentary confirmation supporting the narrator's account. The shared material and narrative comics format already invites a *composite attention*: readers habituated to multimodal comics reading are trained to recognize different forms' shared narrative identity and to seek their closure—to identify, interpret, and resolve narrative and formal difference in reading comics (across text and image or panel and panel)—and are prepared by this differential reading practice, to resolve less familiar mediatic juxtapositions such as those employed in *Le Photographe*. Should this unusual image-text format not immediately produce a cohesive reality, the first text's conventional yellow box that announces the captioning function of its contents definitively begs the question, *what do these words caption?* Resolving this question allows us to repeat the comics artist's originary encounter with the photojournalist's contact sheets, wherein Guibert likened his friend Lefèvre's format to the panels of his comics and proposed their collaboration. We comics readers' conditioned, synthetic pursuit of closure in response to these disparate elements' understood semantic unity also conditions their speculative synthesis through whatever details and events we might notice. I begin my reading with these good-byes, in the three small, photographed moments with which *Le Photographe* begins. In addressing these photographs' affect, I write in the first person: many debates over photographic meaning, persuasiveness, and history are grounded in their viewers'

theorized *affective* responses to the photograph's address, which are therefore *personal*. What one might notice or overlook in that experience, and what might be found in encountering these affective addresses, is unique to each reader and informed by personal history. I read *Le Photographe*'s organization and context primarily as an academic, but I focus on reading its images as a trained photographer, which shapes the details I personally happen to notice, recorded in these images.

This page's third image always catches my eye. Between the first and third photographs, the standing woman turns to face me. Despite everything I intellectually and theoretically recognize about this encounter's historical and spatial separation from myself and despite (because of?) my own years of photographic practice, when her eyes meet the camera, they also feel like they meet mine. No matter how many times I've scrutinized this thumbnail image of a quotidian meeting, she appears for an instant to address me, a flashing first impression, supplemented and corrected by other observations, but yet it remains. This experience evokes the commonly theorized duplicitous, persuasive force produced by the mobile image and its realist sensuous address. The portable camera produces the mobile photograph, and their standardized and abstracted vision together seem to represent the object of their image immediately and provide access to distant sights. Susan Sontag's analyses in *Regarding the Pain of Others* exemplify this critical understanding of photography, both its value and its limitations. Sontag describes war photojournalism after the camera was "emancipated from the tripod, truly portable, and equipped with a range finder and a variety of lenses that permitted unprecedented feats of close observation from a distant vantage point" (24). This mobile, abstracted perspective is critical to understanding *Le Photographe* as a text that likewise brings readers into perceptual proximity with images of others' suffering. In its initial sequence, *Le Photographe* establishes close observation at a distance, not of an exceptional or dramatic event but of a mundane encounter. The triptych's informal content and the woman's gaze that seems to meet ours, train in responses to mundane encounters, how we might respond to later, more dramatic images of suffering. Responding to early twentieth-century claims that photographs exceeded text's capacity to describe war because such images "seem[ed] utterly real" (qtd. 25), Sontag writes:

> Photographs had the advantage of uniting two contradictory features. Their credentials of objectivity were in-built. Yet they always had, necessarily, a point of view. They were a record of the real—incontrovertible, as no verbal account, however impartial, could be—since it was a machine doing the recording. And they bore witness to the real—since a person had been there to take them. (26)

Sontag's account is valuable for considering the subjective-objective witness of photographic form. Although she, like many scholars critical of photography, dramatizes a falsely conditioned, contradictory ontology of photographic immediacy, she also begins from the photographer's point of view, from a perspective—both figurative and physical—within a visual encounter, recorded by a tool, which I feel accurately represents the basic photographic act (visible in this short series) that mechanically inscribes some impressions from this encounter. Sontag's description of the camera's process offers a model through which one might approach *Le Photographe*'s machine-produced images that also record an event and a perspective. However, it is also necessary to address her claim of viewers' illusory experienced immediacy, affirmed by photographs' technical production that implies an objective form, which can obscure the photographic operator's subjective choices, and falsely neutralize the image's resultant biases. Sontag, like many theorists, considers such misleading pictorial truth claims in contrast with those of drawing—an intermedial comparison central to understanding *Le Photographe*.

Le Photographe's first page already places Lefèvre's photographs with Guibert's drawings, and one might begin with the juxtaposition these neighboring forms invite. The forms and uses of these pictures reflect Sontag's contrast between drawings artists "make" and photographs photographers "take"; between the drawn witnessing assertion that "things *like* this happened" as opposed to photographs' "claims to represent exactly what was before the camera's lens" (47). Sontag distinguishes between two types of witnessing sight: One is dependent on the witness's authenticating caption—Francisco Goya's "Yo lo vi" ("I saw this") that accompanies his *Los desastres de la guerra* (*The Disasters of War*) drawn witness; the other already guaranteed ("Of course the photographer saw it") (46). Guibert's cartooned visualization of Didier's departing plane at the end of this first page, from a perspective inaccessible to either artist, further dramatizes the removal of the image from the event it describes (fig. 1.1b). In contrast with Lefèvre's photographs and the caption that directs us to who the photographer interacted with, and who he saw (fig. 1.1a), Guibert's style, perspective, and depersonalized content indicate his drawn description of Didier's departure as a secondary telling, affirmed only by the narrator's testimony.[12] Common informational-sounding captions encourage the reception of photographs as neutral, the folly of which Sontag illustrates through early war photojournalist Robert Capa's suspect captioning that reveals his

[12] Guibert's drawing is removed from any sense of access to a sight, as an illustration, rather than an observational drawing. See the introduction and chapter 2, regarding specific claims of observational drawings, and their interruption in chapter 3.

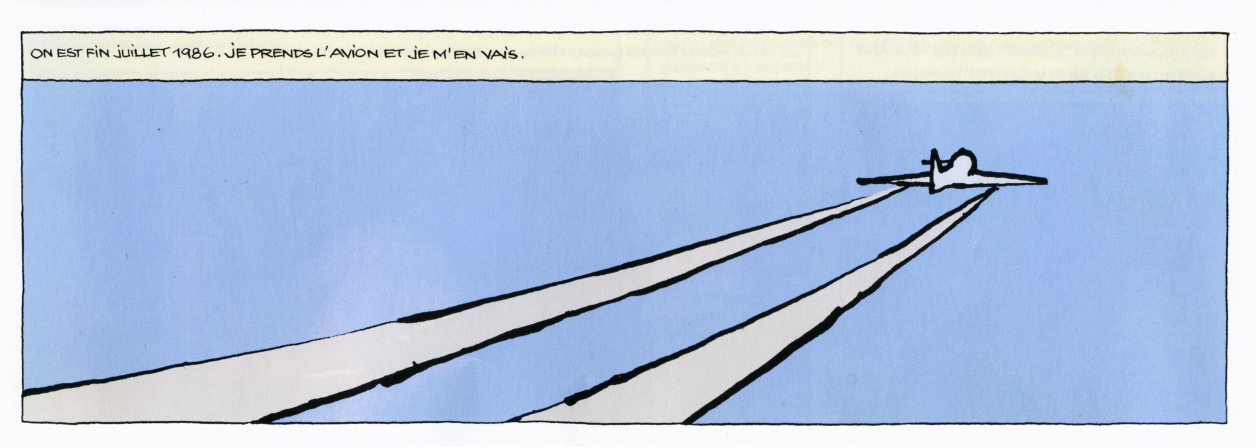


Figure 1.1b. "I take the plane and I'm off," detail. Image: Guibert et al., *Le Photographe 1*, 3.

photograph "may not show what it is said to show" (47), that the technical noninterventionist guarantee is no guarantee at all.

This tension between the camera's false guarantee and the drawer's honest evocation has shaped much of comics studies discourse, on documentary and witness. Marianne Hirsch generalizes such tension as between the documentary and the aesthetic, that the "aesthetic is said to introduce agency, control, structure, and therefore distance from the real, a distance which can leave space for doubt," challenging the former's guarantee (10). As comics scholar Jan Baetens describes, such "distrust of photography as well as doubt directed toward [claimed] unmediated reproduction have cleared the ground for this new form of serious storytelling [comics] on two levels," that their subjectivity can be understood for its productive, "knowledge-enhancing role" as it fosters attention to "the world as we experience and experiment with it" instead of interfering with our access to "the world as a mass of empirical data" (132). Reevaluating drawings such as Guibert's as valid representations of reality offers new aesthetic opportunities to fill documentary lacunae, including those resulting from the suppression or censorship of evidence of trauma and violence. Hillary Chute argues for the value of drawn witness "after the rise and reign of photography" (*Disaster Drawn*, 2). She works against a "predominant" perception of documentary form that grants more evidentiary value to "official" documents over the "human" and handmade ones she studies, which reflects a belief that "The more the human hand can be seen as having worked on an image, the weaker is the image's claim to offer truth" (Latour, qtd. in Chute, 7). This perceptual difference, Chute argues, reflects nineteenth-century values privileging objectivity as "the removal of constraints such as the 'personal'," literalized through perceived material differences between drawn marks' clear

trace of their subjective bodily origins, opposed to photographs' seeming physical exclusion of the artistic subject and their subjective "human agency"(20), which again does not actually exclude such agency, only its perception.

Here, I emphasize the materialist imaginary basis common to such comparisons between how photographs and drawings are perceived to show their making and mediation. Understanding an object's materiality in the sense of describing its material experience, materiality is a phenomenal product of both the object's material and formal qualities *and* the subject's attention to them. It is not photographic *form* that threatens duplicity, but the perceptual experience of its *materiality* that so threatens. The entire danger is that we misinterpret photographic form as *something other than what it is.*

Responding to André Bazin's celebration of photography's rise and its imagined representational transparency, Chute notes a perceptual silver lining: "the mechanical image […eases] a kind of burden of resemblance for [European, realist] painting because in [Bazin's] view, the object photographed and the image itself are ontologically equivalent, 'like a fingerprint'; the image shares in the being with the model" (20). But "painting, a defeated rival, is consequently enabled to 'fully transform itself into an object.' Comics, too, evidently is not a duplicative form; its drawings may refer to reality, but they constitute their own separate functioning model. Comics calls attention to images as material objects and not just as representation" (21). Note that what photography "defeats" here is not painted form (painters may have adapted to photography, but painting as a representational medium survives), but perceptual *inattention* to the *materiality* of painted representations—to the technical and human circumstances traced by their production.

This illustrates one value of intermedial comparison, and I share Chute's appreciation for early media theorist Marshall McLuhan's category of informationally poor "cool" media, such as comics and drawing, that demand greater audience inference and involvement (*Understanding Media*) and consequently foster their active, critical interpretive attention resistant to credulous inattention. But I question McLuhan's binary opposition of "cool" media to informationally rich "hot" media such as film and photography whose easy detailed resemblance to reality, he argues, affects naturalizing audience passivity. In a century saturated with digital media and increasingly characterized by our daily contact with playful or malicious hyperreal simulacra and other fabricated and recontextualized images resembling reality, as the editors of *Critical Terms for Media Studies* write, "Media can no longer be dismissed as neutral or transparent, subordinate or merely supplemental to

the information they convey" (Mitchell & Hansen, vii). Where critics of photography might interpret this claim as an admonishment to an imagined naïve audience, I quote it as a reflection of both scholarly engagement and broader skeptical, often-cynical, attitudes towards mediation in our digital age. For any value critiques of false photographic transparency offer by rejecting surface appearances, their persistent, anxious vigilance towards the authoritative form—as if the form itself rather than its context and our expectations of it convinces us of its truth—now risks falling into Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick's famously described critical trap of a paranoid fixation on revelation ("Paranoid Reading") without offering much insight into how we can and do interpret the formal traces of photographic processes.

From Evidence to Document

Moving past the expository impulse, however, the problem of interpreting these ambiguous images' unknown relationships to their historically documented referents remains far from simple. In this brief section, I address how we might interpret in the photographic image, the document's essential, and *essentially ambiguous*, relationship to the events that caused it in general terms before, in the remaining sections, I apply such interpretation to *Le Photographe*'s unusual visual addresses and temporal organization.

Documentarian Errol Morris' book title, *Believing is Seeing,* summarizes his skeptical approach to famous documentary photographs, that our belief in what we have been told of a representation's evidentiary value leads us to conclude their self-evidencing nature, and that any claim of the "obvious" nature of an image reveals "the absence of a logical argument" to support such a claim (8). Morris illustrates errors art historians, journalists, forensic specialists, and he himself have made by insufficiently scrutinizing received information about photographs' making. He argues that photographic form offers no evidence of the photographer's intent and that any attempt to find it is a "speculative exercise" (20) that risks descending into the pathetic fallacy that projects intent onto form—as we might ascribe a cannonball's "intent" to the inert object's path—but he also notes that this projection is biologically determined, that humans have evolved to imagine represented realities as like ours (37). Morris concludes, similarly to Roland Barthes' *punctum* (*Camera Lucida*) and Ariella Azoulay's "event of photography" (*Civil Imagination*), that any photographic evidence of its connection to past actuality must be found in detail recorded in excess of the photographer's representational intent (Morris, 69).

I agree with Morris' conclusions and much of my subsequent discussion, like his, will focus on temporal inference, but my interest in *Le Photographe*'s documentary images diverges from Morris'. Morris is correct that from an *evidentiary* perspective, imagining Levèfre's process in his photographs is a speculative exercise, but we readers must employ such speculation to make sense of photographic series, and to understand the basic events recorded in a photograph. Curator, filmmaker, and theorist Azoulay describes when we viewers realize that there is no closed, stable relationship between a photograph's content and its claimed message—that the details we notice or overlook in the photograph, even from one viewing to the next, are conditioned by our expectations of what it represents and what it is claimed to—many, disappointed in photography's "failure to fulfill the fantasy of a sovereign source" and stable representational value, ascribe this difference to the photograph's manipulability and unreliability as a source of information ("What is a Photograph?", 10). But this *failure* to achieve the photographic contents' stable identity with a stated meaning, Azoulay argues, also indicates their *value as records,* that what they inscribe is

> always excessive with regard to any sovereign representation that one side or another […] wishes to impose on it. The appearance and disappearance of objects of the gaze in photography do not attest to the essential unreliability of the photograph. They attest, rather, and first and foremost, to the fact that a photograph does not possess a single sovereign, stable point of view, and that what is visible in it – its actual referent – must be grounded no less than its interpretation. (ibid.)

Azoulay argues that focusing on the photograph as the sovereign photographer's denoted message and perspectivally connoted biases (or focusing on the spectator-critic's judgement of these) fails to recognize the true referent of the photograph—what it visibly records and indicates—as the encounter between the various agents involved in producing it (11). Agreeing that the essential reference of the photograph is not constituted by its representational message but the visible record of the encounter among multiple agents involved in the production of this object which exceeds any single agent's intention, my attention turns to our necessarily speculative reconstruction of the document's referent meeting.

Barthes' earlier writing on literary analysis offers a useful parallel to how one might approach a photograph. In "From Work to Text," Barthes in his semiotic attention argues against literary scholars' then-favored approach to a piece of literature as the "work," that scholars seeking to research and authoritatively argue the author's intended message in a singular, determinate

"signified," *closes* meaning. In contrast to this obsolete interpretive mode, attending to the "text," the signifying object, *opens* meaning to its process, its fluidity, and its essentially "*irreducible* […] *stereographic plurality*" (159). We viewers of photographs would likewise do well to approach these objects as interpretable documents—documents we *must* interpret—offering, rather than determinate evidence of a representation, an opportunity for collaboration. Rather than producing a "sleight of hand" (Sontag, 26) of promised objective fidelity and personal witness, one can approach this doubled reference with the same attention Chute applies to drawn witness—to both the representational image and to the image's indications of its subjective, transformative, human process materially traced by its tools.

Single-Lens Reflex

Having considered the initial meetings and media of *Le Photographe*'s first page separately, I now address the collaboration's opening sequence that pivotally sets in motion the book's narrative structure, its media, their interpretation, and their synthesis, as it introduces its titular subject. The first page establishes its general drawn, written, and photographed media, but on closer inspection, it reveals far more about these media and their uses. Each photograph's frames record their sequence below them, and the first triptych begins at the photographic origin, 0 (fig. 1.1a). These first three images are shot in bracketing bursts, as also visible in four other short, numbered sequences of photographs on this page that each record these moments of little journalistic value (fig. 1.1c). They are likely products of Lefèvre's habituated documentary-aesthetic attention, a personal record and a professional calibration of sorts in preparation for his months-long, dangerous task, like they now "calibrate" the reader's relationship to photography, entering this text. These photographs' frames state their specific manufacture, medium, and technical specifications: a common brand, a professional stock with a standard film speed, its crystals photosensitive enough to be adaptable to varied and unpredictable conditions but fine enough that they do not sacrifice detail. The 35mm format, initially reproduced in *Le Photographe* at a nearly 1:1 scale, further indicates Lefèvre's practical intention where a larger art format would be unwieldy for the task before him. Although elsewhere *Le Photographe* integrates larger reproductions of Lefèvre's photographs, they nearly always retain their black frames, reasserting in each instance that they are to be understood as objects and documents. These frames indicate their photographs are neither immediate windows to the past, nor

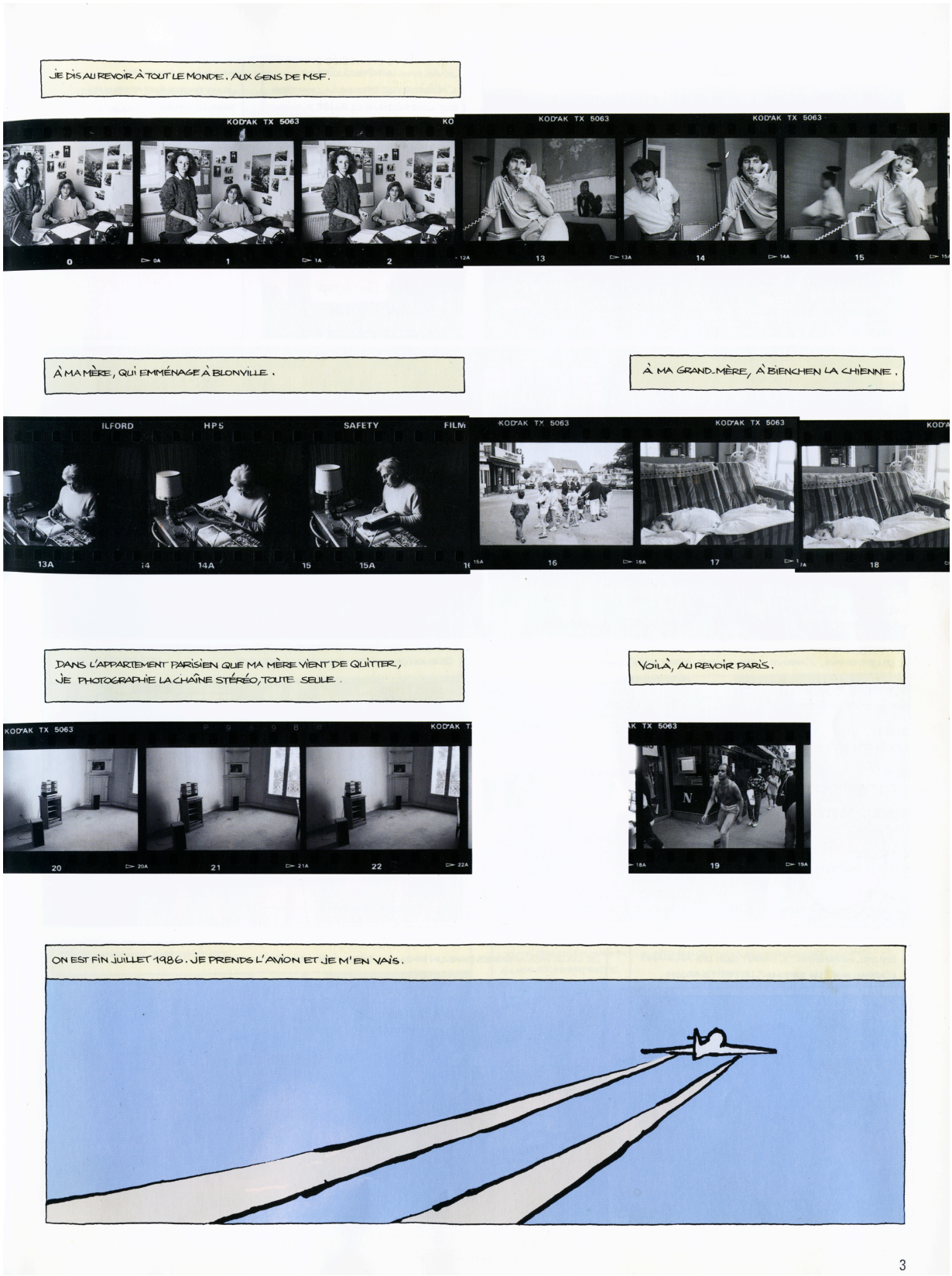


Figure 1.1c. Our scene of arrival and departure. Image: Guibert et al., *Le Photographe 1*, 3.

to be treated as aesthetic products as one might encounter them in a gallery or museum space, but to be considered in context and in mediation. These media are recorded, and with proper attention they can be read, and *Le Photographe* elsewhere reminds us that Lefèvre's media are specific, in the single Fujifilm color photograph he took on the MSF surgeon John's borrowed camera (Tome 2, 11 (trans. 91)), or on this first page when the triptych of his mother indicates its different film stock. These photographic media are *not* here "revealed" as non-transparent: Oz' curtain is not thrown back in the third act, by himself or anyone else. I describe the information made available in our first encounters with Lefèvre's images.

The photographic details of the contact sheet marginally indicate their process and provide some legible information about this making. But Chute is correct that these images do not trace Lefèvre's specific bodily inscriptions—whether any images in the book are burned or dodged, this bodily action is too subtle to read as personal expression. The especially close resemblance of photographs to their referent sights, upon which their representational communication depends, suggests their general fidelity to that communicated reality. But, when approaching *Le Photographe* as a memoir composed from photojournalistic documents, I am drawn to how these images resemble our perspectival experiences and thereby address us. Jonathan Crary argues that the modern photographic observer has been produced not by photographic technology alone, but also by its nineteenth-century scientific and capitalist context, that a growing empirical attention to the norms of human subjective vision offered its rationalization, standardization, exchangeability, and ultimately severed this vision from its referent encountering body (17). It is easy to see the danger that this subjective abstraction might facilitate a false sense of immediacy or unreflective projective identification with Didier the intrepid European journalist traveling to other lands to see the suffering of others. What, then, of the photographer's presence?

Le Photographe's opening line directs readers to the telling subject. Following Phillippe Lejeune's discussion of autobiographical referentiality, the "Je" ("I") is both reflexive and deictic: "The 'I' refers, each time, to the person who is speaking and whom we identify *by the very fact* that he is speaking. […] At the level of reference (speech refers to its own enunciation), identity is immediate; it is instantaneously understood and accepted by the addressee as *a fact"* (9). Lejeune notes that "the enunciation is not the last term of the reference: it poses in its turn a problem of identity, which, in direct oral communication, we resolve instinctively from extralinguistic facts" but in mediated discourse this must be maintained (10). He corrects Émile Benveniste's assertion that

this unique identity must be maintained by a hypothetical "distinct identifying 'signal'" like a radio callsign, by reminding that this specific reference already exists in proper names. Lejeune argues that even the entirely abstracted "I" already maintains the identity of the subject, who "does not lose himself for all that anonymity and is always capable of enunciating what is irreducible in naming himself" (ibid.). Similarly to Michel Foucault's "author function" ("What is an Author?"), Lejeune argues that the "author is not a person. He is a person who writes and publishes. Straddling the world-beyond-the-text and the text, he is the connection between the two" (11), a discursive effect that indicates an external responsible party.

It is of course not I whom these figures first address in their gazes (fig. 1.1a), but Lefèvre the photographer turned memoirist. Nancy Pedri argues that *Le Photographe*'s textual narration anchors, filters, and narrativizes the photographs it contextualizes, drawing attention to details that might be overlooked, and she writes that therefore the text and photograph "work together as equal partners in the creation of meaning" ("When Photographs Aren't Quite Enough")—an argument which my own textually-encouraged attention to Lefèvre's invisible presence affirms. She continues, arguing that "If narration is understood as an enunciative act, then narration cannot be given in or by an image alone. To narrate, photographs must be animated by a narrative voice," and later clarifies this enunciating presence, distinguishing that "photography is unmediated and painting is authored, [a claim that] has been extended to cartooning." For Pedri, narration and authorship seem to save audiences by speaking and thereby breaking the hypnotic spell of photographs' formal reticence. Didier must narrate because his images seem authorless; Guibert must draw because his symbol-like pictures "serve to point to the photograph's visual shortcomings or its inability to live up to what it has been theorized as doing." This disparity, for Pedri, "exposes [the] photographic reference as faulty"—and to be clear, the fault in this account lies not with misleading expectations but with misleading form, as "*photography* cannot fulfill *its* promise" of access (emph. added). In this synthetic account, the storyteller "takes on the task of giving form to the story" compensating for the photographic form, thus, "*When included in a work of literature*, they [photographs] are not meant to stand as neat or transparent renderings of reality," and this inclusion demonstrates that photographs are "full of narrative potential," inviting readers to "share in the telling."

Exploring the synthetic impulse that struck me on the first page and which has fascinated me since, my attention keeps returning to how forcefully I feel the subjective "I" snap my attention to the eye behind the camera, despite the lack of any stated identity between the narrator and

photographing subject. This directed attention contradicts the supposed audience impulse to believe these images' immediate and authorless address to one's senses, which this textual direction seems like it should contradict or unsettle: it is in *reflex*, not surprise, that the narrator leads me to the photographer. This easy synthesis between such seemingly different forms as handwriting—so emphatically asserting its maker's presence—and photographs, said to direct attention away from such a presence, provokes in me none of the destabilizing affect common to multimodal comics' tensions or contradictions between visual and verbal narrational performances and forms, especially common in alternative autobiographical comics.[13] Questions of mediatic difference or even complementary compensation give way to my interest in how these heterogeneous forms might facilitate their experienced "seamless" memoiristic identity. Didier's linguistic assertion of his presence directs readers to the images below it, and this deictic clue and our earlier encounter with the book's title lead us to infer he is not present in the images, but is their source, and here the photographer is already established as an author by intermedial analogy.

The first meaningful act of semantic closure *Le Photographe* asks of readers not only points directly to photographs' material non-transparency that "admits" their character, but does so through provoking intuitive attention to, and semantic and material interpretation of, their supposedly hidden author's actions. Didier presents his clear reflexive act of photographing himself in a hotel mirror on the succeeding page, and elsewhere describes his process, experiences, and tools. But, this first page's inferences rely on little more than the suggestion of a photographing subject and the co-creators' trust that anyone reading comics can imagine identity, interpret perspectival organization, and infer causation. *Le Photographe*'s creators rely on their readers' comics literacy in the first act of closure, which immediately asks us to rely on our photographic literacy. What is crucial about this page is that whatever revelation it offers comes, almost without aid, from how we read the photographs with which we are presented—again, from invitations to interpret their formal references to their originary events.

Le Photographe's opening gambit suturing writing and photographs both depends on and demonstrates how tenuous the photograph's ideologically and/or perceptually produced sense of immediacy is, how easily it can be overturned. This first page requires one see and formally interpret exactly the traces that many theorists say photographic form and documentary photographs hide so

[13]See: Hatfield; Groensteen, *Comics & Narration*.

effectively.[14] Our attention guided to the implied photographing subject Didier, his presence is confirmed by the traces within the first photograph. The closer woman, in frame 0 (fig. 1.1a), seems caught dropping a magazine, and looks past our—Lefèvre's—imagined right shoulder, at something else in the room beyond the lens's cone of vision and the photographic picture plane, to a space and depth that includes the photographer behind the camera. This recalls Azoulay's indispensable distinction between the "photographed event" and the "event of photography"—between the event the photographer intends to represent, and the circumstances and presences necessarily also inscribed by the camera (*Civil Imagination*, 21). Azoulay does not deny photographs' referential gravity nor a skilled photographer's ability to direct attention towards such representation, but argues that "the rendering marginal of the event of photography, displays of indifference toward it or even the attempt to ignore it altogether, can never obliterate its existence or the traces that this event which occurs between the various partners of the act of photography leaves on the photographed frame" (ibid.). This difference between the intended representation of an event, and the record of the event's circumstances—"usually tangential to the goal of the act of the photographer"—is easiest to identify when the camera's limitations visibly interfere with the photographer's intention (227), but *Le Photographe*'s images produce this differentiating attention through its invitation to observe. Individually, each of these photographs trace spatial relationships between the then-present and now-represented figures and the camera's operating photographer with whom viewers approximately share a perspective. But together, as the closer woman, seemingly caught by surprise, turns to the camera, and her compatriot's attention and smile performed for the lens shifts, by the third shot, to a bemused look at the closer woman's attempt to compose her image for the camera, this triptych animates the also-traced "event of photography," not by accident nor artifice, but through the viewer's necessary sequential interpretation of the series.

Katalin Orbán makes a valuable distinction, that the formal similarity that *Le Photographe* presents between contact sheet and comics page does not indicate analogous creative processes, that photographs' seeming "'panelisation' belies the fact that they do not operate by the logic of panel

[14]I have avoided analogies to techniques and forms of fiction film, and to those of photographic witnessing that draw attention to their construction or mediation through overt restaging or fabrication. Both can offer valuable forms of secondary witness, but not primary witness, so they do not sufficiently address the question of the documentarian's gaze. (I discuss the value and limits of directing attention to the photographer-protagonist's subjectivity and artifice in this chapter's final section.) However, it is worth recognizing that contemporary audiences' photographic literacy, including attention to the photographer, is also informed by the contemporary ubiquity of photographs and integrated digital cameras. The vocabulary of camera angles is no longer a hidden domain of specialists, but employed in casual conversation.

sequencing and their multiplicity of moments explodes the logic of panel sequencing" (132). This introductory page integrates three distinct kinds of pictorial sequences—each necessarily dependent on their readers' imaginative speculation, but only two are strictly fictive in their production. *Le Photographe*'s sequences often depart from conventional comics breakdowns to reflect a process closer to film editing, insofar as breakdowns generally precede or are concurrent with producing panels' contents, as opposed to film editing that cuts from available material (Groensteen, *Comics & Narration*, 101-2). But both pictorial sequences reflect an overall fictive narrative structure. The black interstice between the first triptych and the fourth photograph (fig. 1.1c) marks its difference from preceding gaps through content (a different office with different people) and its imperfect simulated cut in the film strip that materially announces its editing through the frames' serial numbering (a jump to frame 13) that confirms the omission of intervening images. The different filmstock of Lefèvre's subsequent photographs of his mother indicates a different roll with its own sequence, before the remaining seven shots return to the original stock and seemingly the same roll (note light bleed, numbering, partial cropping). The last photographic "farewell to Paris" is conspicuously isolated, and its numbering and material context indicate that it was cut from before the immediately preceding triptych in a purely narrative function with no commitment to chronological fidelity—a fictive gesture that immediately precedes Guibert's cartooning that imaginatively fills the first visual gap in Didier's account. This editing, distinct from comics panelization (visualizing, selecting, and producing narrative events), also demonstrates its difference from the preceding unedited sequences, elucidating how the latter function in a space between narrative and non-narrative representation. In contrast with panelization that proactively structures and produces its graphic narrative, and with editing that retroactively constructs its narrative from existing media, the contact sheet's sequences are not produced or organized for any public, insofar as they retain their original structure, from before their present narrative use. Contact sheets generally exist in and for their process, as cheap tests and references to see which negatives might be worth the paper and labor to enlarge—they are an intermediate medium.[15] As contact sheets typically have no intended public and an independent practical function, they exceed implications of narrative, *representational* logic because they typically narrate to no one save perhaps specialists or friends in private. Nevertheless, they possess their own sequential logic—they record encounters adhering to a strictly chronological order—and are legible

[15]My framing and attention here is indebted to Cornelia Vismann's brilliant *Files: Law and Media Technology* that takes intermediary legal drafts as its subject.

under the same realist expectations of identity and causation that inform narrative cohesion. When we seek closure in reading contact sheets' fragmentary sequences, unlike Lev Kuleshov's effect of editorial assembly (montage), or Groensteen's poetic "infranarrative" response to abstract comics narratives (*Comics & Narration*) we readers do not seek to imbue such photographic sequences with logic and meaning by seeking *new* associations and animating their potential narrativity: we seek to reconstruct events from their preexisting organization. Like the deictic "I" that leads us behind the camera, these sequences' narrative contextualization does not add what was not already there, does not activate new *potential*, but guides us to interpret what is already there to see. I prefer the more photographic *latency* with which *Le Photographe*'s title page's backgrounds play (fig. 1.2): these presences have been there since the encounter was recorded by light striking a surface, visible under the right catalytic conditions.

With questions of aesthetic agency, return questions of intervention. Evidencing and—in contrast with the preexisting order of intact sequences—arguably flaunting their editing elisions with the clarity of textual ellipses but the perceptual directness of their iconic address, *Le Photographe*'s cuts demonstrate their narrative integration and their contents' subjection to narrative agency, convenient omissions, clarifying re-orderings, and the fictive uncertainty of memoir. Yet, this aesthetic appropriation, by announcing itself as such, does not wholly supplant the chronological order of contact sheets, so much as it supplements it, encouraging a doubled temporal attention to both photographs' narrative editing and to the original circumstances of their creation. This attention *animates*—rather than effaces—the conceptual space between aesthetic invention and the unselfconscious record.

Le Photographe invites viewers to practice our photographic literacy, when we employ our graphic narrative literacy to interpret the photographer-protagonist's involvement in this sequence. Rather than the authored/unauthored poles in intermedial comparisons, *Le Photographe*'s insistent attention to its eponymous subject returns us to Lejeune's referential pact that indicates the human agent and witness who claims responsibility for their pictured contents, reminding us that for any formal rhetorical persuasiveness, photographic evidence still institutionally depends on human testimony. Chute argues that the formal resemblance of many autobiographical comics to handmade and private diaries contribute to their intimate affect (*Graphic Women*, 11), and Ann Miller argues diaries' temporal intimacy, as undistorted by memory (216). Lefèvre lost his journal after returning to France, so *Le Photographe*'s narration is based on his oral account, but I experience a diaristic intimacy,

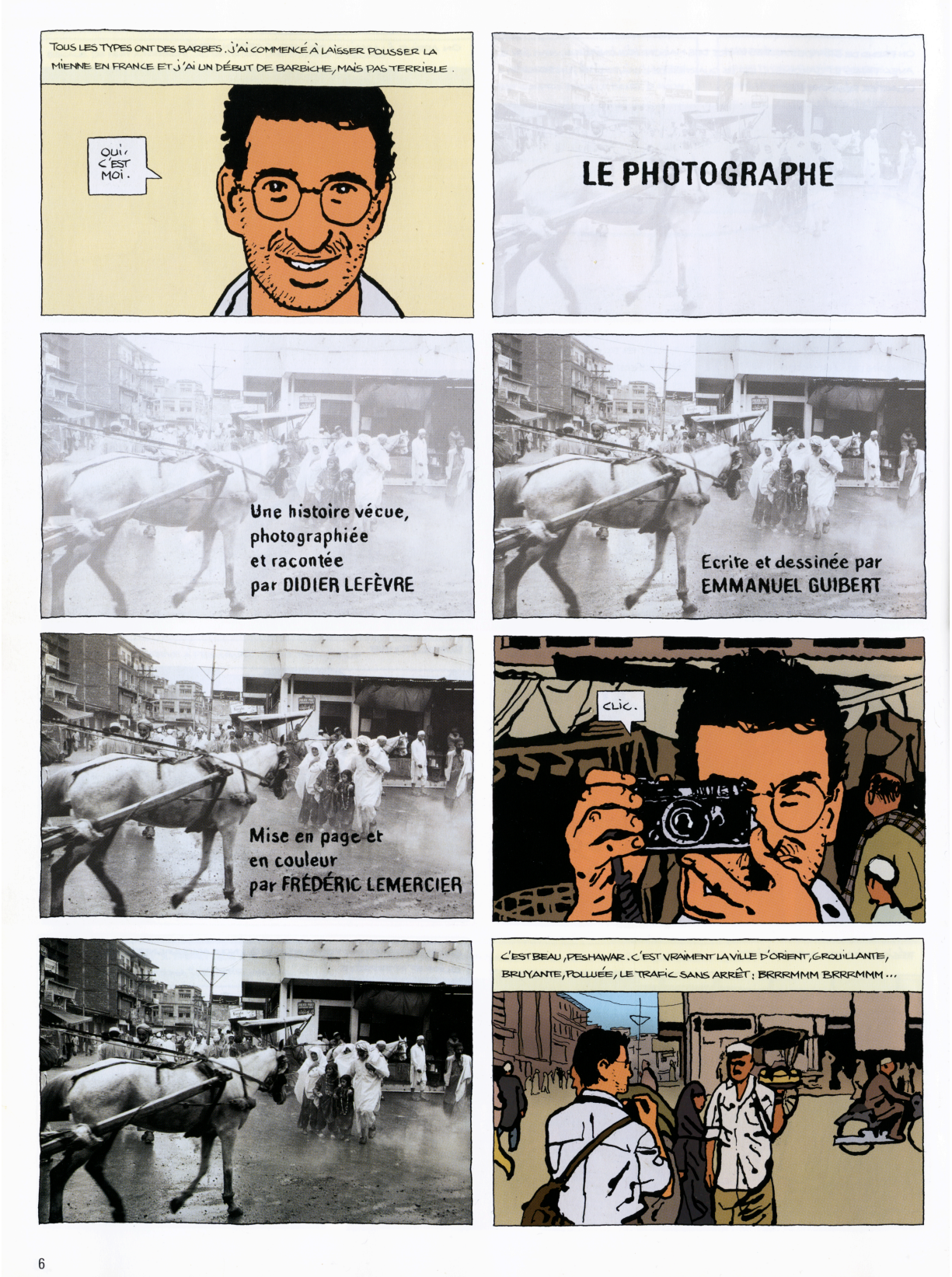


Figure 1.2. Title page. Image: Guibert et al., *Le Photographe 1*, 6.

reading this first page's contact sheets. I don't know how much the narrating text or the scale of these strips communicate this intimacy without the referent experience, but sharing contact sheets is social and personal: I can nearly picture Lefèvre passing me a compact loupe to appreciatively scrutinize his thumbnails as he narrates (and as I imagine he narrated to his co-creators), no doubt formally suggested by the sheets and strips' scale and by most pages' clean white fields that resemble the necessarily well-maintained surfaces of dry photo labs as opposed to the wet darkroom. This effect is also to Guibert's credit as a storyteller already practiced in what Groensteen describes as "allobiographical," or "delegated" autobiographical comics (*Narration*, 100). *Le Photographe* elaborates on Guibert's techniques developed in collaborating with another friend, Alan Cope, an American expatriate, by weaving his friend Cope's side of their recorded conversations with his own visualizations of Cope's experiences (*Alan's War*, also later, *How the World Was*). But this material affect extends past such allusions to social experiences, to the historical structure of contact sheets. Lefèvre does not shoot on a digital camera. There is no instantly available gallery of processed images to edit, select, or respond to. He cannot narrativize, arrange, comment on, or even view the products of his labor for months. Moreover, unlike even the most intact and unedited documentary film shot, there is no narrative presumption by photographer or those photographed that the material recorded will ever be displayed in sequence, as *Le Photographe* regularly demonstrates, from its first page onward, by presenting Lefèvre's many bracketing series.

Le Photographe is best understood as a memoir constructed from the appropriated fragments of a (visual) diary of sorts, a creative retelling that draws on records of an individual's aesthetic responses that necessarily also record his perspective. *Le Photographe*'s initial pages confront readers with pictorial addresses, visual ambiguities, mediatic friction, and temporal and narrative inferences, that invite this multivalent attention—to the photographer's records, their records of the photographer, and separately to their interpretation and structuration. As the collaborative memoir guides us to consider the document's relationship to its event, in what we see within photographs and contact sheets, it conversely and simultaneously guides us to consider the relationship of those objects to their new narrative situation, reflecting those ambiguities across its own documentary-narrative structure. Like the documentary photograph's dual objectivity and subjectivity, the collaborative memoir's dual unselfconscious fidelity and narrative structure, can be identified as essentially interrelated but distinct—composite. This identification offers not an illusory contradiction or misdirection, but an object whose production and interpretation present an

irreducible multiplicity of agencies, motivations, and interactions, between observing and observed bodies.

Documentary Resources and Fictive Structures

As viewers speculatively interpret the perspective we approximately share with the photographing Lefèvre, there is little chance we imagine his photographs as unauthored and neutral, but his photographs' abstracted sights and address to our senses still risk we viewers' projective impressions of vicarious experiential access to exotic places and experience, that we might presume we know. Didier seems to acknowledge this danger, as Ariela Freedman argues, in Lefèvre's mirror portrait that draws attention to the reader's own projective assumptions (135), and in his early self-comparison to the eponymous journalist hero of Hergé's *Tintin* that suggests at very least his acknowledgement of the colonialist adventure comic's ideologically fraught history (Freedman, 132). Directed by such repeated, textual references to *Tintin*, looking past Lefèvre's photographs and Guibert's thick inking, one might further note that Lemercier's contributions—layouts, panel proportions, and flat color—all closely conform to those of the famous fictional cartoonist's adventures. In the context of a book which can be understood as a travel memoir as much as it presents reportage, this reference also evokes the problematic formal disparity between Hergé's stylized seeing subject and observed objects as naturalized through his consistent and seemingly neutral line that has been envisioned as, and critiqued for, producing an implicitly white universal subject of readerly identification.[16] Despite *Le Photographe*'s foundation in one observer's account, the narrative's second and third pages (4-5) quickly refute that its different media might indicate such essential difference between Didier and those he observes: Lefèvre's mirrored portrait includes the observer as also observed object, and Guibert includes Didier in his illustrations (objectifying the photographer) without stylistically privileging or distinguishing his drawings of the protagonist from other figures or contexts.

At the end of the third page, the expedition's guide and interpreter, Mahmad, asks Didier, "Alors, c'est vous, le photographe?" ("So, you're the photographer?") (5), to which Didier on the fourth responds, illustrated for the first time facing the reader, "Oui, c'est moi." ("Yup, that's me.") (fig. 1.2). Rendered in Guibert's accomplished but hardly showy linework and Lemercier's equally

[16]See also the introduction, regarding Scott McCloud's projective identification in comics and chapter 3, regarding White readers' projective identification onto, and perceived experiential access to, minority authors' experiences.

unpretentious coloring, this address seems open, charismatic, direct. But, the fact that this metaleptic address is originally directed to Mahmad belies the complexity of Didier's casual-seeming self-identification.

The accompanying titles and credits state, the titular photographer as we understand him, is a composite figure, an amalgam of three human agents (four, in translation), notably listed—unlike on the cover—in chronological order of involvement, credits which coincide with the street scene's simulated transition from latent image to developed photograph. Didier's smile—first seeming almost guileless in its openness—illustrated by Guibert, now suggests to me a knowing wink in a memoir that avoids the anxiously dramatized self-performances of many earlier autobiographical comics. The sixth and eighth panels further nuance this structure. The camera in its playful "Clic." announces its own presence and voice (note framing and punctuation that excludes this gesture from a purely onomatopoetic effect) and here asserts its own agency among those present. This panel's temporal contradiction, that the shutter's action appears *after* the latent image has begun to develop, implies the world that existed before Lefèvre's actions to record it. The final drawing that imitates the photographic composition but pictures Didier with his camera lowered suggests, too, that life continues beyond this moment and its frame: even the developed image offers no finality. This shifted picture plane overtly states what the initial triptych already implies, that Didier's photographs are records of the observing subject and by extension they also produce and share the observable body of his sights and subjective responses to his experiences.

I find first-person cartooned biographies remarkable in their textual and pictorial division, between another's words which offer subjective access, and their cartooned representation, that so emphatically demonstrates the cartoonist's illustrations are based on a mix of documentary reference and visualization.[17] I experience their form as intimate but uncanny. They seem to offer personal access to another's subjectivity in their language and materiality that evoke their diaristic source, while continually reasserting its mediation through the cartoonist: the pictured narrator is mimetic, and the cartoonist does not *impersonate* another's diegesis, so much as they portray another representing their own story, as affirmed in *Le Photographe*'s oft-noted crediting distinction between the photographer-teller and the writer-drawer. Guibert rejects the historical fidelity of his allobiographical narratives, in favor of the personal account. He describes that his interviews with

[17]Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter* and Ken Krimstein's *When I Grow Up* are exemplary of this division.

Cope did not represent "the work of historians," that "It was mostly the storyteller in him that I [Guibert] was drawn to—his personality, his style, his voice, and his astounding memory" and therefore he "kept Alan's words unchanged, because it was Alan's version of the events that I was trying to convey. I wanted the reader to hear what I heard—to meet the man I had met" (Preface, *Alan's War*, 5-6). Note his fidelity to Cope's experiences even in historical contradiction. In describing his rationale for *Le Photographe*'s title, Guibert similarly writes that the book is "le récit d'un homme de terrain et pas un livre d'histoire" ("the story of a man in the field, not a history book," *Conversations avec le Photographe* 17).[18] When Alan completes his general's mission, they are photographed together, but he receives the wrong photograph which he nonetheless keeps as a souvenir, and Guibert includes this "photo of a corporal who isn't Cope, shaking the hand of a general who isn't Patton" (fig. 1.3), refuting its official evidentiary value, yet the object retains narrative and documentary significance. Later, when Guibert can integrate more documents and includes Cope's photographs of his now-aged friends, he responds to and enacts the narrator's suggestion that "to recreate them the way they looked when I knew them, when they were so much younger, you'd have to erase the years from their faces. Perhaps a drawing could do that" (285). Guibert digitally manipulates the image at the end of the chapter (292), but only after including Cope's original photograph for us to compare, marking the recreation and his authorial-artistic imagination as wholly different from the documentary source. Guibert's investment in personal history suggests little evidentiary photographic verification of history,



Figure 1.3. Shaking hands, detail. Image: Emmanuel Guibert. *Alan's War: The Memories of G.I. Alan Cope*. Translated by Kathryn Pulver, First Second, 2008, 163.

[18] *The Photographer*'s added English subtitle identifies Lefèvre's photojournalistic subject just as the English cover's addition of one of Lefèvre's photographs below Guibert's originally isolated illustration of Didier establishes their relationship. This translation's cover effectively represents the book's internal structuring of visual encounters and their media, but departs from the originally singular visual and textual subject.

while his sporadic pictorial responses to verbal narration clarify the difference between his friends' narration and his own interpretations.

Le Photographe does not repeat Guibert's *Alan's War* ostentatious alterations, but its editing again distinguishes between the documentary-truthful and imaginary-interpretive values of photographs, with the contact sheet suspending images between material fact (their objective existence as recording some reality) and narrative function (the narratively structured traces we interpret and imagine). These photographs operate as both the materials of Lefèvre's original witness, and mark themselves as secondary witness when interpreted by others, for instance when readers interpret their chronological order within a narrative order. This doubling reminds us that we are not looking at what Lefèvre looked at, we are (with Guibert and Lemercier) looking at someone else's objectified gaze and encouraged, through our training to close comics' narrative ambiguities, to identify the character we see (Didier) with the character of his sight (Lefèvre's photographic style traced along with what he records). That is, reading encourages we *seek the human document in the form of the depersonalized record.*

As Hirsch articulates in her framing, the documentary photograph is already subject to aesthetic agency. Such critical awareness challenges evidentiary assurances, but approaching this attention for what we can see—rather than (only) to expose our own contradictory imagination—allows us to approach this critical irrealist response as a symptom of a broader productive attention. It offers, more than epistemological distance, a positive assertion, which we might recognize in Guibert and Lemercier's direction of our attention towards their friend's eye with appreciation of what his photographs reveal of his personality as much as they articulate the story of his life. The contact sheet and the photograph are not records of what was there for the photographer to see, they are records of the photographer's responses (among others') to encounters.

In curating *Evidence* from photographs drawn from "local corporations, government agencies, and research institutions" (*Evidence*, "A History of Evidence"), photographers Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel approach subjective traces in photographs produced for their strictly institutional, documentary use quite differently than Guibert and Lemercier do. Instead of organizing their photographs in a memoiristic narrative, they decontextualized their archival images and in 1977 recontextualized them in the decidedly different institutional space of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, sans any anchoring, captioning, descriptive text. Favoring evidentiary photographs' sometimes surprising compositions and selecting many for their anachronistic format (4x5") or

techniques (illuminating flashes), they approached these documents for their "archaic, deliberate, crafted quality." Sultan and Mandel's early blurring of discursive boundaries between aesthetic and documentary objects invited audiences to interpret the forms and traced contexts of photographs. As they announced, "By definition these found objects are records and by implication they are cultural artifacts" ("Press Release," *Evidence*).

Where *Le Photographe* is often praised for integrating photographic records into literature and thereby offering the former's interpretability, photographer and critic Robert Forth, writing on *Evidence* at its launch, posits a different relationship between these forms, that human experience, like the museum exhibition, is riddled with perceptual and informational lacunae that we close in producing a continual perceptual experience, but that our cognitive literacy in the "compensatory devices"—formal and narrative conventional techniques—through which we arrive at meaning can also divert attention away from perceptible forms ("The Circumstantial and the Evident," *Evidence*). Forth argues it is viewers' literate attention to artistic representation as *a means of communicating information* that trains our focus on meaning and away from perception or observation, away from "the evident: 'The emperor is naked!'" He cites, among other examples, that film-literate audiences might grasp a film's message more easily, but non-literate ones observe and remember content with greater detail (ibid.). Forth exhorts viewers to "Regain your heart by renewing your curiosity about and tolerance of the *nature of things*," reminding us of what we gain from approaching records with open attention to what is there to see. Expatriate Nora Krug, investigating her family's involvement in the Holocaust in *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018), similarly arrives at a surprising attention to the human trace in official evidence. Krug, through her forensic scrutiny towards her uncle Franz-Karl's presence in historical photographs and state records and her attempts to reconstruct his life, arrives at a remarkable compassion—not only towards her deceased relative through the traces she interprets but also, in her careful reconstructions and interpretations of these bureaucratic objects' contexts, towards the human circumstances traced by these relics of a fascist state. As Hirsch argues the aesthetic is already implicated in the documentary, Krug's historical attention is similarly blended.

Mandel and Sultan's curation offer none of Guibert and Lemercier's biographical interpretation—their found photographs are uncaptioned and uncredited—yet their collection offers a portrait of an evidentiary visual culture. These images that in their focus on evidentiary representation and documentation to the exclusion of the traditionally artistic, offer instead a new

aesthetic of fragments and surprising surrealistic incongruities that nonetheless document their content and are identifiable for their specific aesthetic values and perspectives. *Le Photographe* may teach us to read documentary photographs through sustained biographical attention to the photographing subject's involvement, but as Azoulay argues, these traces are always present even when ignored. Furthermore, *Evidence*'s photographs, with seemingly little rhetorical attention to a public that these images were not intended to address, still draw viewers towards questions of the circumstances and motivations of these evidentiary representations. Again, when we are asked to contemplate a photograph with anything other than certainty, our attention easily slides from forms' representational accuracy, and to the attitudes and relationships implicated by the photograph.

Photographic Subjects

It has been valuable to move from naïve or critical attention to the photograph's evidentiary certainty or definite message, to speculative attention to the ambiguous photographic record, in considering the relationship between *Le Photographe*'s memoiristic form and the past photographer. This speculative documentary interpretive attention is even more valuable when considering these images' fraught generic contexts of travel photography and travel writing, the colonialist perspective and history of which so often position the European specialist-observer as intervening and speaking of, or on behalf of, the other.

With *Le Photographe*'s insistent direction to the photographing subject, there is little risk that viewers forget him: we instead risk overattentiveness to this figure whose perspective we approximately share. Freedman, like Sontag, warns against assuming that producing audience empathy is a valuable or achievable end, and she argues that unreflective empathy risks both false projective equivalency and overlooking real structural problems (130). *Le Photographe*, she writes, resists this easy empathy with an observer-hero by presenting Didier's powerlessness and his "ugly feelings" towards Afghanistan, its people, and his own attitudes—especially visible in his increasingly desperate return journey—that resist such facile identification (140-3). Monica Chiu likewise corrects the image of the traveler as innocent in their naiveté. She compares Didier to Guy Delisle's travel comics, characterized by the latter's self-deprecating humor as the cartoonist crassly stumbles through unfamiliar situations: Delisle's humor that offers "intrepid confidence and good will," but which is "grounded in his privilege as a white, Western, middle-class man." Moreover, Guy's confident navigation of foreign environments can offer readers the impression that they, too, now

understand local and colonial politics through the character and experiences they "know" (27-8). Didier's near-fatal misadventures, in contrast, demonstrate his ignorance is "a life-threatening liability" without others' help (34). As a photojournalist, his subject is "the MSF staff, its patients, caravan guides, and those on whom he depends for survival" (ibid.), and the book's collaboration, Chiu argues, formally repeats the caravan members' shared needs and reliance on interdependent knowledge sets and efforts. But she returns to the problem of travel narratives' divided topic, split between the strange—visible in its exotic difference—and the familiar—the observing subject, invisible in his familiarity (39). Chiu offers one response to this false transparent access, with the travel writer's *self*-investigation. When travel authors acknowledge the "stranger within," they challenge readers' preconceptions, as in Guy's belated recognition of his own foreign privilege and ignorance, or in Didier's attention to his humanitarian subject and the beauty he finds in Afghanistan—a crucial correction to our post-9/11 visual imagination (40-1).

Didier's self-questioning and appreciation of the people and landscapes he photographs is, as Chiu indicates, valuable in inviting his readers' similar questioning and appreciation, but such identificatory attention to the photographer's disposition also evokes Sebastião Salgado's spectacular photojournalism. Salgado's photographs present beauty in abjection, but his grand images seem to celebrate *his* brilliant formal attention to others. The photographer's demonstrative appreciation alone is not enough. The viewer's attention to the documentarian's, may resist transparent naturalization or encourage us to imagine their positions and attitudes, but it still privileges their authoritative observation and representation of others. When Guy realizes his ignorant trespasses, Delisle represents his past introspection and encourages us to reevaluate our identification with our confident guide. Didier the charismatic narrator also encourages us to consider the personality and perspective necessarily implicated in documentary photographs. But, both only represent another's past introspection.

Lefèvre's photographs can be approached as representations, in the past tense, because this is how we and his co-authors encounter these images as objectified by their contact sheets, even when imaginatively reconstructing the events they record. But, unlike a conventional memoir, Didier narrates in the present tense, constantly reminding us that these historical records are also records of once-ongoing processes. As Azoulay admonishes, trustingly or even critically identifying the "essence of photography" with photographs' use as representations of the past can direct attention away from their event, and photographs are better approached as each products of "a non-

deterministic encounter between human beings not [all of whom are] circumscribed by the photograph [which] allows us to reinstitute photography as an open encounter in which others may participate" (223). Again, *Le Photographe* may verbally direct viewers to its photographs' anterior present, but this is already presented in Lefèvre's wandering gaze that we can imaginatively attach to his wandering body—for instance when his attention shifts from a surgery to onlookers' sympathy, and suddenly it is clear that to take these photographs Didier must be outside with the latter, not with the surgeons (Tome 2, p. 27 (trans. 107)), and in our surprise, when we encounter someone's reaction to being photographed.

The first Paris triptych demonstrates others' dynamic responses to being photographed, but it ultimately situates the photographer as an agent whose actions catalyze others' reactions. When the MSF caravan is summoned to the recently-bombed the village of Püstük to help those injured, we encounter a different response to Lefèvre's activity. Didier describes a little girl whose hand has been burned, her antiseptic wash, and her treatment, and his contact sheets include three images selected for possible use, as indicated by vermilion grease pencil (fig. 1.4., trans. 129). The first

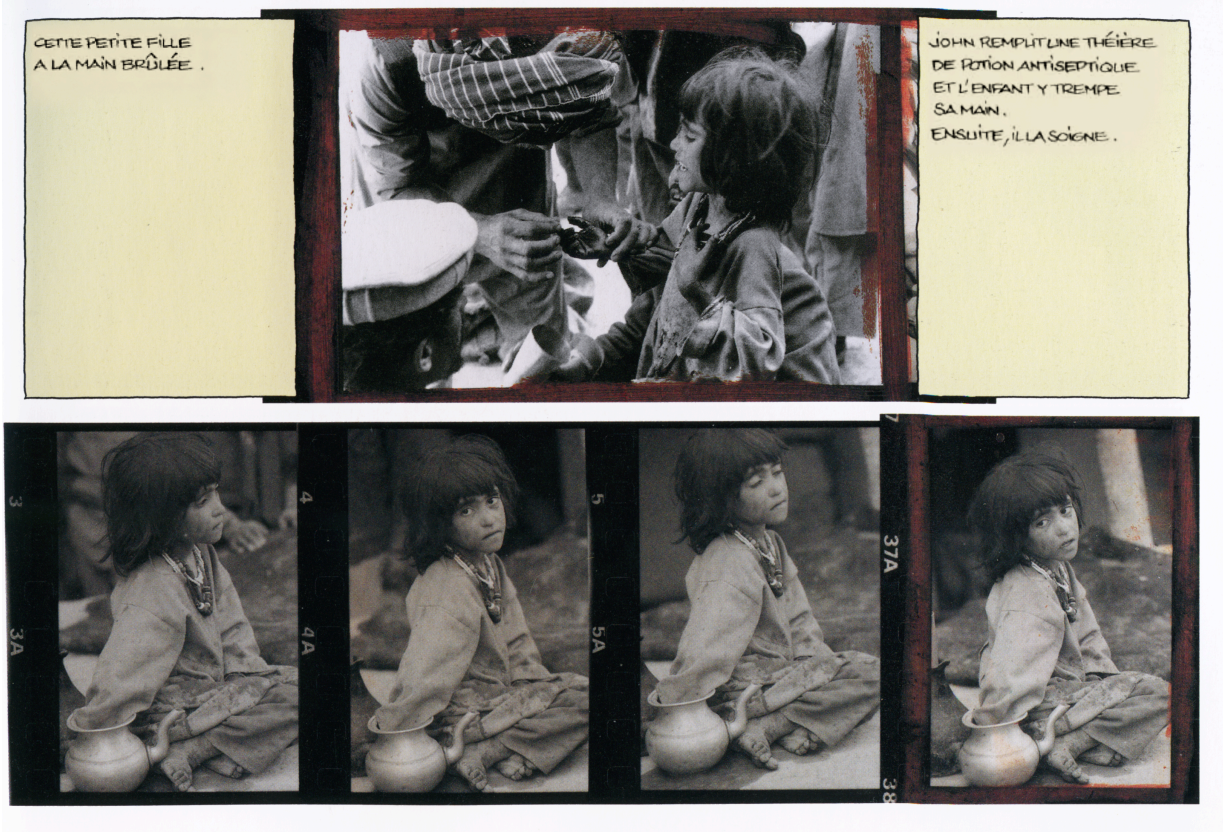


Figure 1.4. Waiting for surgery, detail. Image: Guibert et al., *Le Photographe 2*, 49.

selection emphasizes medical drama in its crisp high-contrast stillness as the girl arrives; the second in the girl's listless gaze, turned away, to me suggests religious allusion and a message of suffering and dignity; the third (unpictured, Tome 2, p. 51 (trans. 131)) in its movement and imperfect focus suggests the action and urgency of her treatment. These images each reflect Lefèvre's photojournalistic skill and attention recording the young girl's suffering and the doctors' labor, but I am drawn to the unselected but shown frame 4, again by the girl's attention to the camera and by her gaze that meets Lefèvre's and ours. Frame 3 offers little of their relationship beyond its perspective that indicates position and observation. Then she turns, presumably responding to Lefèvre's action or the sound of his camera, visually addressing him but also us.

One might compare her gaze to that of Steve McCurry's famous portrait of Sharbat Gula, anonymized as *Afghan Girl* (fig. 1.5), photographed during the same conflict, with her striking eyes and returned gaze that has become fixed as "the First World's Third World *Mona Lisa*—an exoticized 'Other' […] a symbol of Afghans in need of rescue" (Hesford and Kozol, 1), but to me, the effect of *Le Photographe*'s meeting gaze is quite different. Absent are the former's formal portraiture, vivid color, and most importantly its monadic fixity. Gula's gaze, in its isolated unity, seems to remain on the viewer, and for any challenge it makes to our unidirectional, privileged gaze on an objectified other, we are made the object of her attention—her defiance or her plea—and perpetually so. If our gaze is confronted by hers, it feels like it is only to situate us as the protagonist, demanding our appreciation (McCurry's accomplished composition and color undoubtably contribute to this image's memorability) and awareness of the contrast between beauty and crisis in her general plight. The urgency of that crisis (from *kairos*, a "decisive point") paradoxically turns the returned gaze that might challenge our position, into a gaze that tells the observer we are the agent of decision and



Figure 1.5. Image: Steve McCurry, *Afghan Girl. The National Geographic*, June 1985, cover image.

change. Its Cold War-era "Family of Man" message that hypothetically compels our humanitarian response also reduces Gula to a figure who only exists in relation to our gaze.

The child, unnamed in Lefèvre's series (fig. 1.4), turns to him and us with a set jaw and tired expression for one frame, but then away, as she rests with the antiseptic teapot. We might conclude that Lefèvre does not capture her attention (and by extension neither do we). She is waiting for her relief, and her glance up before she returns to waiting suggests only distraction—perhaps welcome, a momentary diversion from pain; perhaps unwelcome, an intrusion—but she makes no self-conscious effort to compose herself for the photographer's gaze or ours, as seen elsewhere. She turns away, her attention, inward. This encounter continues, and its contact sheets show her worry, her treatment, across a sequence of sixteen uninterrupted photographs that record her surgery and Lefèvre's perspective. Her attention never returns to his camera, but mine lingers on it. I am uncomfortably aware of Lefèvre's action, despite my perception of the charismatic and curious photographer and despite my belief in his good intentions in documenting work I also believe is well-intentioned and valuable. Where frame 3 initially suggests neutral documentary observation as this little girl waits, by its near repetition in frame 5 this relationship has been entirely transformed by her indifference to the camera, which is unlike Gula's confronting gaze that is rhetorically reducible to its symbolic address to the observing photographer or audience as the implied protagonist. This girl's disinterest draws my attention to Lefèvre's intrusive presence at the event he records—his presence *because* he is there to record the event—for the *Libération* article that would ultimately only feature his photographs to generally remind its distant audience of the war's human situations and cost. My attention is captured by Lefèvre's hovering, supplementary presence as patient and doctors struggle together before him.

Unlike when I encounter Delisle's retrospective illustrations, or Didier's narration, both of which describe and represent their experiences, I can only guess if here Lefèvre reflects, confronts the "stranger within" himself in this moment: the photographer does not represent his reflection for us, and he is invisible in his photographs. Without commentary and with only photographic traces of this encounter, I know I only speculatively imagine on any reflexive critique by *Le Photographe*'s collective authorship—perhaps Lefèvre's self-recognition, perhaps Guibert or Lemercier's response, perhaps none of theirs. My unsettled attention is brought about by the surprising glance that directs me to Lefèvre's involvement in this once-present event. I don't find easy identification with represented characters, but I do find it with artists through my attention to their processes. Perhaps

this is why I feel so forcefully addressed by these images. Halfway through Didier's story, I have become accustomed to seeing with him. It does not matter if Lefèvre confronts or even considers his presence in this moment, beyond my curiosity. What matters is, *Le Photographe* has trained my identification with Didier's perspective and trained my reliance on it to follow his story. All my secondary intellectual awareness that the image only approximates his decades-removed visual encounter depends on and is preceded by my pre-iconographic sensuous experience that perspectivally positions me relative to this encounter. Provisionally accepting this visual encounter as I moved towards interpreting its content and circumstances, in that moment when my attention was fixed and thereby implicated by this glance. As John Berger writes, "The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world" (9). When I first noticed this child's gaze, I experienced a moment of sinking dread as clearly as if I recognized my own intrusion, before I attended to Lefèvre's undeniable presence, but this moment fundamentally altered my awareness of the photographer.

I don't know if Lefèvre confronts the stranger within himself in this instance or if he, living this experience, needed any reminder, but this is how the combination of historical distance and the abstracted gaze of photography has affected me. In this surprising acknowledgement and rejection, I feel the non-deterministic present of the event of photography before it has been retroactively, photographically represented to us. In this moment, despite still not even knowing this girl's name, my attention shifts from a representation and its abstract condemnation of the suffering of war, a general empathy towards a child who I wish hadn't been hurt, and respect for the MSF team—all messages confirming what I already felt—and instead to her urgently present experience. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes leftist scholars' presumptuous speech on behalf of others, that implicitly differentiates between "those who act and *struggle* [as mute], as opposed to those who act and *speak*[….] The banality of leftist intellectuals' lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent" (275): intervening scholars can interrupt those whose voices they claim to represent. This is how I understand McCurry's photograph of Gula. By representing her returned gaze in this formal portrait, it interrupts her address: her response is subordinated to McCurry's representation of it as it supports his message, as he represents another's agency. We are confronted by photograph's *studium*, the photographer's intended message (Barthes, *Lucida*). We are not confronted by her gaze: McCurry's photograph *tells us* we are confronted by it.

That the formal photo portraitist intervenes even as they document another's subjective expression is by no means unique to McCurry's portraiture. Documentary photographers such as Jim Goldberg in *Raised by Wolves* (1995) and Fazal Sheikh in early work including *A Sense of Common Ground* (1996) directly represent their subjects' voices by interviewing them, asking them to write on or around their portraits, or presenting their subjects' letters with their images. Barthes distinguishes between the linguistic *anchorage* of captions (that reduce images' polysemy by defining their denotation) and the complementary *relay* function common to film and comics wherein words and images are understood as "fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity is realized at a higher level" ("Rhetoric of the Image" 41). Conventional captions can, in their descriptive finality, affect their simple identity with, and thereby claim, the photograph's supposedly singular message and evident contents. Sheikh's and Goldberg's strategies, complementing documents of their subjects (photo portraits) with other subjective documentary expressions (their subjects' words and sometimes handwriting), invite composite attention to their documentary sources and resist an authoritative singular reading, instead offering polyvocal documentary representations. Returning to Barthes' distinction, it is worth recognizing that even the relay function diminishes the autonomous polysemy of individual images' possible meanings. The photograph may not be *defined* by a caption, but the syntagmatic unity of the text-image still implies the textual *completion* of the image's message: like reading the conceptually adjacent imagetexts of comics, it is difficult *not* to interpret text and photograph as essentially interdependent. As Barthes recognizes, relay and anchorage are not discrete functions.

The logical interpretation of paired text and image still forecloses some interpretations, so textual relay still suppresses some pictorial (and therefore documentary) polysemy and autonomy. This textual direction is often valuable to communicating images' meanings (wordless novels and wordless comics are harder to read, and their images' meanings harder to define, than their more lexical counterparts) and can be productive. When Goldberg or Sheikh include others' admittedly staged—in their organization in gallery spaces or books—but otherwise unaltered documents, this synthesis suggests that the meaning of the portraitist's representation of their subject is incomplete without that subject's voice, semantically inviting their recognition.

But *Le Photographe*'s dialogue, derived from Lefèvre's accounts, dependent on his fallible memory of years-removed conversations across languages in an unfamiliar context, illustrated and re-narrated by others, can offer no verbal fidelity to its documented subjects. Unlike the staged

intervention in the portrait's message by the portrait subject's voice, which offers something closer to their direct self-expression, the portrait subject's voice in *Le Photographe* always demonstrates its representational interventions, as drawn characters speak on behalf of people they represent. I do not argue that representational distance is inherently ethically problematic, nor do I demand some imagined photographic purity. I appreciate Lefèvre's conventionally published photojournalism but find it relatively unremarkable compared to the current book and, as already argued, *Le Photographe*'s creators do not efface, but reflexively demonstrate, their interventions. However, the problem remains that Lefèvre's photographic subjects cannot speak for themselves, that Guibert's written and drawn characters based on Lefèvre's account at best speak on the behalf of these real people. For whatever agency and capacity to represent themselves these subjects had during the event of photography, their photographs' synthesis with other media further intervenes in their self-representation.

I return to my contention with those who claim that *Le Photographe*'s multimodal value is found in other media somehow saving photographic form by intervening through narration and literature to refute its purported transparency. The comic does not expose the "*photographic* reference as faulty" (Pedri, emphasis added). Orban goes as far as to claim that "graphic narrative […] revives and mobilizes something that has become lost, inert and inarticulate in the photographic record" (Orban 135). Both authors counterintuitively assert that the photographic document might achieve honesty, mobility, or value only by becoming less photographic. I experience the opposite effect in reading each of these texts. It is precisely when viewers *lose* the safety net of textual guidance—when we are denied direct narrative explanation—that photographs become most present, animate, alive as interpretable documents of once-dynamic encounters, rather than only completing aesthetic messages. Textual relay with images allows more interpretive engagement than stultifying or authoritative anchorage does, but both functions suppress images' polysemy. Agreeing with Morris, Azoulay, and Barthes, that the essence of photography's indexical reference to reality is found in the details and subjectivities viewers believe exceed any intended, sovereign message, to recognize another's subjective autonomy during the event of photography as recorded in the photograph, one *cannot* be told by another what that subjectivity is.

Didier's narration clarifies the significance of his photographs, but also necessarily directs attention away from other unmentioned and implicitly insignificant details, suppressing other meanings. This is the difference between the first Püstük photograph and its flanking captions'

complementary completions of each other's message—the image verifies the commentary that explains the image—and the photographic sequence that follows it, that without further comment deeply affected my experience of both photographing and photographed subjects (fig. 1.4). Barthes describes the personally affective audience experience of the piercing photographic *punctum* that exceeds the photographer's message: "whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*" (*Lucida*, 55). In the interpretable silences when Didier the narrator and Guibert the artist drop away, I am so pierced by what is already in Lefèvre's photographs, when my necessary interpretations to follow the book's narrative lead me away from its retrospective description and speculatively towards the reality of these referent encounters, to recognize their participants' subjective existence.

Approaching comics closure as reliant on and producing two forms of readers' multimodal interpretive attention—juxtaposition that might foster irrealist awareness supports the synthetic realist pursuit of identity and stability—remediation and the interpretive pursuit of ambiguous images' closure must be understood as producing knowledge and awareness, and not only doubt or distance. Just as a given subjective expression may be understood through its knowledge-producing role and not only through its interventions, we should likewise approach the transformed mediatic and material awareness our pursuit of *Le Photographe*'s closure produces, in positive terms. To argue that the entry of photograph into the multimodal literature of comics corrects *the photograph's* seeming transparency implies that such false transparency is essential to the medium or its form, when it is not. Rather, this imagined transparency is a product of intermedial closure, an effect of trained responses to the *multimodal literature of the captioned photograph*, and acceptance of its elements' semantic unity. When Lefèvre's photographs are remediated in comics, viewers' attention to these documents is not revived by narrative: We *already* regularly narrativize photographs, often to our detriment when it seems to offer evidentiary assurances. Our attention is instead affected by the complex but often-intuitive inferences we must make to understand *Le Photographe*'s fictive uses of its polysemic documentary resources. Its introduction does not tell us, but teaches us, how to do this, thereby inviting a richer attention to the historical, subjective, and interpretive collaborations implicated in seeking meaning in the photographic document. I agree with Sontag that it would be folly to assume a universal disposition of the "we" who regard distant suffering others brought into our field through photographs, and with Azoulay that this audience imagination must first try to acknowledge the subjectivities implicated in such images. When I write of the latter Püstük series

and speculate on Lefèvre's and his anonymized collaborator's unpictured motivations and subjectivity, I accept that my response is personal and speculative because it *must* be, in order to *recognize* another's mediated subjectivity, and not just have the documentarian tell me what it is. We must each see it ourselves.

This necessity is also why I necessarily do not seek to elucidate Lefèvre's definite documentary message or intent, the definite history his photographs might evidence, how Guibert or Lemercier might have intended any of these images to narrate their friend's experience. Nor do I propose a specific disposition these images might provoke in other readers, for then they would be little more than pictorial representations—effectively used as affirming evidence or illustration. I write as one reader who took seriously the multimodal, and sometimes silent, invitations presented to we readers since the first page of the book, and write of the small details I happened to notice and experience in the attention those invitations conditioned in me. *Le Photographe* teaches us to see, not by subverting its photographic record or conversely by telling us what we are looking at, but by leading us to interpret and embrace the polysemic signifier of the document.

In this chapter I have argued that comics readers' responses to the perceptual and perspectival addresses of photographs, as we seek these ambiguous documents' representational value in narrative context, rely on our speculative and fictive interpretation of the human and technical processes, subjectivities and encounters that produced them. Writing against the photograph's universal produced attention or inattention, I have grounded my reading of *Le Photographe*'s documents in my own attention, to what their narrative context has trained *me* to consider, and what I personally notice, in these images. Counter to documentary photographs' commonly narrated formal guarantees and effacement of their subjective interventions, outside the relatively narrow genre of the captioned photograph that suppresses their ambiguity, interpreting these perceived records of unknown events encourages the open attention necessary to glimpse, in our address by the documented other's eye, the subject that exceeds their representation.

Having addressed the documented and represented subjects and encounters of the photographic image of reality, in the next chapter, I address the same sites in post-photographic drawings of reality, and their similar fictive identification with both inscribing (and self-documenting) and inscribed (and produced), imaginable subjectivities and realities, as these pictures interact with the life writing author's similarly dubious textual production of their subjective self-image, by attending to Tsuge Yoshiharu and Fujiwara Maki's textual "self"-inscriptive practices.

Chapter 2
Drawing Subjects and Objects, Together:
Tsuge Yoshiharu and Fujiwara Maki's Constructed Identities

> "When I write in a *shishōsetsu* [~autofictional] style, since I say whatever I wish about myself, people often mistake it for truth. But, that itself provides a kind of reality."
>
> -Tsuge Yoshiharu, interview, qtd. in "Where is Yoshiharu Tsuge?"

> "Because shooting 8mm film is expensive and our family is poor, I had the idea of making a picture diary."
>
> -Fujiwara Maki, afterword, *Watashi no enikki* (*My Picture Diary*), my translation.

When alternative cartoonist Tsuge Yoshiharu (1937-2026) and avant-garde performer Fujiwara Maki (b. Makiko, 1941-1999) met in 1969, the rising artists shared their transgressive artistic experimentation and social circles. When, in the 1980s, Tsuge penned his autofictional magnum opus, *Munō no hito* (無能の人, 1985-6, *The Man Without Talent*, 2019) and Fujiwara authored her *Watashi no enikki* (私の絵日記, 1982, *My Picture Diary*, 2023), each adapting modern life writing genres to express their experiences, their graphic life writing shared a strained marriage, a son, some nostalgic taste for junk, and little else. In this chapter, I address how these artists' drawings, especially of external sights and other subjects, interact with their life writing modes, to produce their respective authorial self-images. I consider how their respective graphic accounts' markedly opposed modes, forms, and exigencies reflect and illustrate the complexity and tensions of impulses in life writing and drawing, to record and make, to interpret and characterize, to reference and imagine, to trust and mistrust, to be oneself and be another, to "tell it slant," to construct identity, as creators and readers.

In investigating how expressions of subjective experiences in drawn media interact with generic contexts and claims, the bulk of this chapter addresses Tsuge's liberal adaptations of Taisho-

era modern prose *shishōsetsu* ("I-novel," also personal essays and short narratives) tropes of fiction-mediated confession to his Showa-era autofictional *gekiga* alternative comics. Discussions of life writing, including autofiction and *shishōsetsu*, which were developed in response to linguistic forms, without modification, would often exclude graphic texts and techniques, or be of limited use. This chapter liberally adapts such discussions centered on texts' linguistic construction of selves, to discuss similar, multimodal and graphic constructions.[19] As both Japanese and French scholars have recently established, *shishōsetsu* can be understood as "a specifically Japanese form of autofiction," and can be read "autofictionally" (Justyna Weronika Kasza, 263).[20] This chapter generalizes "autofiction" to refer to modern autobiographical fiction practices of self-fictionalization that overtly thematize the author's questionable likeness with a fictional character or narrator. Autofictions claim to represent or reflect on the subject and/or their experience through fiction—as distinct from fiction that draws on the author's life without comment, and from genres that claim greater responsibility to subjective truths. Often courting escapist fantasy or magical realism, Tsuge's heterogeneous drawing practices and selective representation of objects and people with an array of realist styles, affects ambiguously real and performed sights and subjectivities. Having discussed Tsuge's production of composite sights and subjects, in the final section I address the nature and stakes of such subjective images, by reading Fujiwara's *Watashi no enikki* that adapts World War II-era picture diaries and constructs its own ambiguously recorded and produced subjectivity. These texts share context and content, and in each one can find echoes of the other, but I do not directly compare that representational content in this chapter. I instead focus on these artists' modes of representation, reference, and especially the identification they produce between their fictive forms, and the realities and experiences they express, in both writing and drawing.

In the context of life writing, one might begin from the linguistic *I*'s doubled deixis: that the word indicates at once a figure inside the text (the narrator) and another external to, and responsible for, the text (the empirical writer), which affects a paratextual bridge between the text's internal and external realities, in their perceived likeness. This figure of the author has been recognized, in

[19] My focus on graphic techniques eschews debates on stricter generic definitions rooted in linguistic claims of identity—including unique Francophone or Japanese pronoun use, or autofiction's formal onomastic identity—as beyond its scope. These linguistic contexts are significant, but formal differences between autofiction and *shishōsetsu* are largely defined through "untranslatable" linguistic structures and nuance, differences which recede in this chapter's central attention to graphic constructions.

[20] Karatani Kojin's account of autobiographical literary confession in Japan, as also responding to a specifically Christian understandings of self and self-surveillance (*Origins)*, affirms these forms' historical likeness and theoretical compatibility.

postmodern literary and linguistic analyses, as a social, discursive effect: these figures' perceived unity is now theorized as fictive, constructed, strategically persuaded, and imagined. The autofictional narrator demonstrates this figure's fictive, suspect nature, hyperbolically playing in the space of its referent subjects' difference, and the misrecognition that might emerge from their understood likeness or full conflation: For instance, Tsuge describes of responses to his *shishōsetsu*-styled writing, "since I say whatever I wish about myself, people often mistake it for truth. But, that itself provides a kind of reality" (qtd. in "Where is Yoshiharu Tsuge?" xiii). This misrecognition reflects the generically encouraged "conflation in the Japanese I-novel of the 'I' who confesses and the subject of the confession" (Karatani, 76). Whether one considers Tsuge's ambivalent commentary on the "kind of reality" his life writing affects as his clever postmodern critique of life writing tropes and perceptions, or as acknowledging his more cynical exploitation of such sociocultural affordances[21], it reflects the complexity and manipulability of perceived autobiographical self-expression and its fictive experience: what we believe we know of the author, we only imagine.

Tsuge speaks of what he "says," that leads his readers to misrecognize his expressions' reality. But, I argue this *linguistic* likeness, both in the broader context of graphic life writing and the context of Tsuge's specific techniques, is secondary to the central *visual* likenesses he presents. Michael A. Chaney in *Reading Lessons in Seeing*, asserts the prevalent division in autobiographical comics, between the visual-*narrated* "I" (the drawn character and cartoonist's avatar) and the textual-*narrating* "I" (the captioned narrator, 24). Although such a visual/textual division usefully demonstrate the multimodal friction in comics, and both Tsuge and Fujiwara draw themselves directly at times, in this chapter I resist such a formal-discursive dichotomy between text and image. In this chapter, I instead focus on the meeting of transitive and reflexive descriptions *within* both Tsuge and Fujiwara's less-common graphic life-writing presence as the pictorially narrating "I," by interpreting perspectival configurations and stylized enunciations traced by drawings that indicate the seeing artist who communicates not only their visual *presence*, but critically, their visual *experience* from which their images are derived.

With attention to this reflexive visual likeness, we might recognize that the artist, beyond illustrating and representing themselves, adopts the position of the narrating "eye." In the context of Tsuge's autofiction, this presents the possibility of a *fictionalized observational drawing*. Beyond

[21] See Caroline Levine's *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* discussion of how one works with and against material, aesthetic, and political forms' affordances. Also see W.J.T. Mitchell's "Realism, Irrealism, and Ideology: After Nelson Goodman."

presenting the drawn character's unknown relationship to the "self"-drawing historical artist, this fictionalized observation produces ambiguous sights, at once identified with the fictional reality, and the artist's *visual experience* from which it was derived.

In considering the unknown likeness of an observational drawing to its real and performed sights, it is valuable to heed Arnaud Schmitt's warning, addressing generic debates, against "Panfictionalism" or "conflationism" in the wake of the postmodern theorized "collapse of ontological barriers between fact and fiction in memoirs" which reduces both to "narrative" and can encourage an "'anything-goes' approach" that blurs "sincere" memoirs—not confusing sincerity with veracity—with "fantasizing" autofictions (19). Although perceived honesty is manipulable, irrealist indistinction undermines the integrity of discourses and authors that *do* claim to reflect reality (as per Lejeune's referential pact), and simultaneously fails to recognize the major literary contribution of autofiction, as renewing "the playful inclusion of autobiographical elements in a work paratextually identified as fiction" (20). This inclusion presents an aporia: by denying the responsibilities of the referential pact, autofiction affects impression of ontological crossing and affects "fiction's primary function: to create worlds in which everything is possible, as opposed to our world in which only reality is possible" (21). But, introducing autobiographical elements into fiction also generates readers' metaleptic "suspicion" by seeming to intermingle fictional and factual discourses—"is this within-fiction-author close to the empirical author?" (22). Schmitt argues that the categorical difference he upholds both defends factual discourse and reveals the dynamic tension produced by authorial presence in fiction that is autofiction's "*raison d'être,*" giving "you the unique opportunity to be you without being you" (24), and that "this freedom is granted by fiction, not by any ambiguous ontology or a hybrid discourse" (25). Rather than blurring discursive differences, autofiction depends on recognizing such difference, without which, asks Schmitt, what would be "the point of a genre based on a fictional exploration of a reality-based identity and environment […]?" (25). The cartooned avatar, as narrated and objectified, is evidently not the narrating artist. But, what of the drawn sight's relationship to the seeing artist?

I begin to address this question by considering Tsuge's earliest overt autofiction, "Chiiko" (チーコ, 1966, "Chirpy"). I argue that its fictional life drawings encourage readers' multistable experience of these images, and their real and fictional artistic subjectivities. I pursue Tsuge's shared fictionalized vision, to his distinctive photorealist drawing practices, in reading his nostalgic "Umibe no jokei" (海辺の叙景, 1967, "Scenes of the Seaside") and its titular sights. Reading Tsuge's *Munō*

no hito and its departures from his earlier visual practices as affecting a stylistic shift from connoted observation to visualization and characterization, I argue that this subtle difference changes the nature of the representation's perceived pictured and picturing subjects. Considering Tsuge's differentiation of still and narrative images, I address the formal and political implications of drawing's simultaneous (documentary) interpretation, and (fictive) description and characterization, as affected by how the picture represents others. I explore how such representation produces (or does not produce) images of the observer's and others' subjectivity in fictional, fictive, and documentary contexts. Tsuge's autofiction provides useful grounds for analyzing the fictive, inventive, and documentary qualities of drawings' speculative interpretation and identification with their subjects, while Fujiwara's diary provides a complementary site to explore these terms' synthesis, in her emphatically documentary production of her self-image. In comparing the effects Fujiwara's drawings' private, documentary mode to Tsuge's public, fictional one, I generalize how the drawn ambiguities of both texts foster speculative and imaginative attention to their artistic subjects through concurrent, combinatory experiences of drawings as representing objects and their subjective interpretation. Rather than approaching life writing and drawing as objects of territorial dispute between ontological orders or discursive forms whose holdings are a matter of debate, occupying an indifferent no-man's-land or vaguely located in adjacent border territories, it is more productive to approach such forms' imagination as the border itself, a conceptual form constituted by, and limning, the tangency of subjective interpretive and objectifying representational modes, and the difference such tangency traces.

Picturing the Life of a Bird

Tsuge, at eighteen, was first published in the *kashihon* (cheap postwar rental manga) industry in 1955, and over the course of the next decade, he began to explore darker subjects, within the commercial strictures of the publishing industry and its expected high page output. But, with the decline of the *kashihon* market, the chronically anxious, impoverished artist who aspired to cartooning beyond entertainment became deeply depressed. Others of the emergent alternative *gekiga* (alternative comics; lit. "dramatic pictures") scene, impressed with Tsuge's work and worried for him, reached out to him, as fellow artists and employers, and in 1966, he published the darkly symbolic "Numa," (沼, "The Swamp") which cartoonists and intellectuals lauded as the first "pure" literary *manga*. Characteristic of his increasingly elliptical experiments, Tsuge begins his first overtly autofictional

comic, the 1966 short, "Chiiko" ("Chirpy") with a silent scene, which in its ambiguity, presents mysteries to be resolved—or explored.

The title panel of Tsuge's "Chiiko" introduces the white Java sparrow it names, sitting on a branch and looking left; the second introduces the unnamed protagonist by picturing his hands at work; the third shows the cartoonist concentrating at his desk (fig. 2.1 (trans. 87)). Their shared page asserts their general unity and, after the credit line, the proximity, cartooning style, subject, angle, and action of the second and third panels assert their continuous reality. I now consider the simpler resolution of the second and third panels' more conventional relationship, before addressing their more complex relationship to the first.

Practicing theorists Scott McCloud and Natsume Fusanosuke separately but similarly argue that readers achieve this unity by imagining panel relationships based on prior experience. McCloud argues that, as we perceptually and imaginatively complete our incomplete experience of reality with faith in its continuous existence to "perceive the whole" (62-3), readers likewise perceive comics' realities as implicitly whole, by imagining their stable, if invisible, existence in the many interstices between panels. One imagines how an axe falls (66), and "perceive[s]" a whole location from its fragments (89): one's "mind work[s] as a sort of *in-betweener* -- filling in the gaps between panels as an *animator* might" (88). Where McCloud describes fragmentation and elision, completed through *closure*, Natsume instead argues repetition, comparison, and *synthesis*. Natsume argues that readers contextually rely on "codes of identity" to synthesize discontinuous representations' reality (47): identifying panels' shared actions also *establishes* that they share their narrative reality. Recognizing one drawn character's identity with the next panel's character depends on identifying their partial repetition, which "lets the reader perceive the individual panel as a manifestation of one specific time-space within the same scene, the same drama, the same narrative" ("Pictotexts," 46).[22] Favoring synthesis *into* an imagined whole (rather than McCloud's elisions *in* an imagined whole), Natsume argues that each panel will "always contain characters of a different time and space" (ibid.). He generalizes this habituated reading that "link[s] and structur[es] diverse visual elements like script and images [….] panels and pages become a system that consolidates the movement of the gaze. The gaze connects diverse things […] produces differentials between events, and works them into

[22] Natsume illustrates the latter point in his earlier "Komatopia," by subverting its assumptions, when three panels representing the purportedly singular cartooned narrator in sequence crash down beside each other as in a slot machine's stopping reels, and each irritably responds to their other instances' presence.



Figure 2.1. Title page. Image: Tsuge Yoshiharu, "Chiiko." 1966, *Tsuge Yoshiharu tokushū* [*Monthly Garo Supplement Issue: Tsuge Yoshiharu Feature*], vol. 1, 1991, Seirindo, co., ltd., reprint edition, 1992, 77.

the time of the large narration" (49). Both models account for readers' likely intuitive response to the second and third panels. Readers refer to the panels' many similarities and minor differences and to spatial or filmic experiences, to (in McCloud's account) imagine elided elements, or to (in Natsume's) recognize panels' indicated narrative identity and integrate each into the imagined totality

they generate. Both models explain how readers resolve such differences into an approximate "zoom out" depicting the cartoonist's continual activity in this relatively unambiguous case.

Considering the relationship of these panels to the first, without proliferating indications of change over time, differences between these theories become clearer. McCloud discusses "distinct categories" of panels' closure—definitionally found by suppressing ambiguity—and notes that without clear visual continuity, these series' resolution is more demanding (70-1). He does not explain how, when resolving an ambiguous relationship—for instance, Chiiko's detailed image and the cartoonist's pictured labor—readers determine *which* possibilities to suppress and which to pursue to stable closure and its meaning definite. In isolation, it is unclear if or how these panels might share their scene, theme, some causal relationship, or if they constitute a "non-sequitur" (72) only linked by the "overriding identity" of their page (73). Regardless, McCloud's closure, in demanding resolution, excludes alternatives. Admitting that artists' deliberately ambiguous omissions open texts to substantially different interpretations, he argues that readers respond by mentally "constructing *whole images* based on these *fragments*" (87), finding information and stability in their absence.[23]

But Tsuge's comics, by design, resist neat closure. *Manga* editor and researcher Asakawa Mitsuhiro, and translator and art historian Ryan Holmberg, summarize Tsuge's frustration making straightforward narratives, which he experienced as "too tidy, resulting in a loss of realism" compared to open-ended narratives, explaining that he found conventional realism dissatisfying: it "might offer a believable representation of the world, but such reality never became the reader's own. 'I [Tsuge] wanted to avoid that. I wanted my stories to have a reality to them which emotionally sticks with readers as an experience for years,'" ("A New Kind of Literature," 254). Tsuge relies on readers seeking cohesive identity to condition expectations, and provoke our speculative associations in pursuit of his worlds' resolution. Natsume, who often analyzes gag strips and formal play, writes little on definite closure, attending instead to how cartoonists use readers' reliance on such codes to condition and subvert expectations—a useful position from which to approach Tsuge's ambiguities. Furthermore, Natsume's abstracted description of readers' contextual reliance on encountered "codes" of identity or difference to consolidate "diverse things," is

[23] McCloud makes little distinction between closure as a perceptual effect of *Gestalt* pattern recognition in response to *sensory* gaps such as a partial view, and narrative closure responding to *semantic* uncertainty, such as the pictureless comics page through which he narrates his latter claim, so he overstates readers' abilities to imaginatively infer definite scenarios. I fail to visualize McCloud's intended scene beyond a general slapstick soundscape.

applicable to Tsuge's heterogeneous representational styles and media, and how each might differently refer to a story's referent reality or to the reality in which it was produced.

In the absence of a clear narrative sequence, one might pursue these panels' unity and closure by comparing visual styles. Chiiko's initial portrait is more "realistic"—in a general, almost instinctual sense—than its more abstracted and economically cartooned neighbors, insofar as its fine detail and shading formally approach our sensuous experiences of external reality in the bird's concrete specificity that ideologically conforms to realist representational accuracy. Roland Barthes argues that drawings' selective depiction of only *some* details "necessitates a certain division [by the artist] between the significant and the insignificant," to the degree that this encoding constitutes both the "nature" and "operation of drawing" (43). Unlike photographic records' optical indistinction between significant and insignificant detail (see chapter 1), Tsuge's emphatically different degrees of drawn detail demonstrate unequal standards of significance: some pictures demand more detail than others. When judging Chiiko's detail more "realistic" than that of its also-drawn neighbors, this does not assert that such objectifying detail *exceeds* Tsuge's representational intention, but that the detail is intentionally constituted by, and therefore *asserts* his subjective attention.

Tsuge's realist drawing matches contemporaneous alternative cartoonists' differentiation of new *gekiga* ("dramatic pictures") from the kiddie fare of *manga* ("whimsical pictures") through content and form[24]. *Gekiga* artists favored social realist narratives over *manga*'s prevalent adventure and fantasy. They invested theirs with greater detail than those of *manga*, rendering their historical and contemporary stories and sociopolitical stakes more concrete in their visual specificity, as Chiiko's mundane existence, modern context, and objectifying detail do. But the contents of this first panel do not offer conventional establishing shot cues—for instance a shared location or subject that invites readers to impart its detailed reality on its neighbors—so readers must rely on indirect associations. Despite the vital shine to Chiiko's eye, his rigid vertically hatched background, flightless sitting pose, and closed mouth affect a stillness that to me evokes the patient observational attention of formal portraiture or life drawing, especially in contrast with the subsequent panels' gestural indications of the cartoonist's movements.

[24] See: Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, for her extensive historical and political discussion of the *gekiga* context. See also, Tatsumi Yoshihiro's roman à clef, *Gekiga Hyōryū* (*A Drifting Life*), which narrates historical debates over the emergent form.

My attention to stylistic difference is conditioned by the second panel's isolation of the artist's drawing action from any represented subject. Seeking closure between the bird that offers little but its representation and the drawing that offers little but its production, I imagine these panels' syntagmatic completion of each other's message. The bird becomes the object of the cartoonist's gaze and representation, and he becomes Chiiko's observing and representing subject. This speculation is only possible and necessary because the panels offer few other clues to reconcile drawn bird with drawing man. My speculative attention to the cartoonist's action also leads me to his left hand's index finger. It rests on the empty panels of his page's upper tier which, reversed for our benefit, coincides with its own, indicating the drawing artist as drawn himself. He creates a reality like his own and its production stands in for the contained blank panels' contents, an implicit *mise en abîme*. Thematizing their own mode of production, these panels become what W. J. T. Mitchell describes as "metapictures," which in producing attention to their own representational practices (material production, and production of meaning), question, self-analyze, and theorize those practices ("Metapictures"). The page's metapictorial gestures also direct attention to the young, poor protagonist's likeness to the artists published in the *gekiga* magazine *Garo* where "Chiiko" first appeared.

Seeking closure between Chiiko and the cartoonist challenges the autonomy of the storyworld and thematizes its likeness to Tsuge's reality and ours through the artists' likeness. Whether approaching the cartoonists' similarities as Tsuge's liberal adaptation of *shishōsetsu* tropes to his alternative comics, or generally as autobiographical fiction[25], the syntheses necessary to make sense of the fictional reality implicate the third party of Tsuge to the relationship between detailed drawing and diegetic artist. Notably, the gutter that unifies and invites closure between title drawing and cartoonist's action is not empty, but indicates their author. The bird's image suspended between two possible fictional orders of reality (the image that establishes narrative reality, or the second-order product of a character's observation of his reality that precedes and exists within it), the artist's parity with Tsuge indicates that, regardless of our interpretation, it is Tsuge who actually produces

[25] Holmberg writes or co-writes on Tsuge's interest in *shishōsetsu* across historical essays accompanying, at the time of writing, all his translations of Tsuge's work. Holmberg details Tsuge's appreciation for *shishōsetsu* authors, noting Tsuge's interpretation of the genre as fictive and fiction, opposed to their traditionally privileged aesthetic sincerity ("Where is Yoshiharu Tsuge?" in *The Man Without Talent*). Asakawa differentiates "Chiiko" from its predecessors' less-overt autobiographical suggestions, and notes parallels between the story and *shishōsetsu* without asserting their direct lineage ("Gekiga's New Frontier").

the bird's detailed image from close observation of a real bird.[26] Paraphrasing John Berger, the detailed bird shows, not (only) a bird, but a bird "being-looked-at" ("Drawn," 43-4).

Mitchell extends his "Metapictures" discussion to multistable images such as the "duck-rabbit" figure (fig. 2.2). He describes these images' "'peek-a-boo' effect" as activating "'liminal' or threshold experiences in which time and space, figure and ground, subject and object play an endless game of 'see-saw'" (46). This renders reference ambiguous (48) and challenges representational fixity (seeing a duck or a rabbit does not preclude experiencing the other), so is "at odds with the stabilization of an image to be 'taken in at a glance and easily held in the mind'" (50).



Figure 2.2. "Which animals are most like each other?" detail. Image: "Kaninchen und Ente." ***Fliegende Blätter*****, 23 Oct. 1892.**

Multistable images "reveal the presence of a 'mind's eye' roving around the storeroom, interpreting the pictures, seeing different aspects of them" even though "the image on the retina does not change" (51). Natsume also approaches comics' inter-panel visual punning as contextual and fluid: a single cartooned squiggle can represent a rope in agreement with its prior panel, *and* a snake in agreement with its next (see: Wilde). Mitchell rejects claims that one cannot simultaneously experience multiple interpretations, arguing that viewers perceive the duck-rabbit (as its name states) as a "composite, synthetic figure" (52). Whereas these examples describe our imagination of the same lines representing different referent objects, the image of Chiiko, contextualized by its ambiguous existence and its cartoonists' similarity, presents a different effect. The drawing of the bird shows a bird being-looked-at by two artists, referring to two subjects.

Tsuge's *shishōsetsu*-like imbricated references to historical and fictional realities and their suspected likeness produce his alter-egoes. Tsuge's vivid autofictional "kind of reality" is animated

[26] This claim might be challenged by Tsuge's context of Japanese publishing industries, wherein uncredited artists might assist others—for instance, fellow cartoonist Kitagawa Yoshikazu illustrates some of Tsuge's panels and backgrounds. As Jan Baetens argues ("Autobiographie et bandes dessinées"), introducing other creative parties might challenge autobiographical authenticity, but retains the collaborative validity of the narrator's testimony. In this autofictional context, the image's reference to Tsuge the creating figure (constituting an "observer-function" parallel to Foucault's "author-function"— see "What is an author?") is most significant.

by narrative ambiguity that provokes the roving mind's eye to seek closure, consider, and imagine stylistic, practical, historical, and biographical similarities. This encourages the conflation of his component referents, but also demonstrates their difference. The Chiiko image establishes Tsuge's autofictional multiplicity. It aesthetically integrates factual and fictional discourses, without collapsing their distinction, when uniting two artistic subjectivities—one decidedly real and another just as fictional—through their perfect formal identity. The observational drawing of Chiiko represents the fictional cartoonist's subjective drawing and presents the real cartoonist Tsuge's observation-derived drawing in the same lines, asserting its *composite subjectivity*, referentially discrete and formally indivisible. Like the duck-rabbit conceptually synthesizes two animals in their material unity, Chiiko's lines synthesize two subjectivities through their material unity, establishing the story's multistable expression that encourages readers' roving attention to its discrete realities. As the duck-rabbit figure unifies its referents without undermining our ability to conceptually distinguish either referent animal, Tsuge's autofiction maintains differences between simultaneously inscribed subjects.

Chiiko's multistable drawing that invites this metapictorial, composite, and autofictional imagination next appears at the story's climax. The artist and his girlfriend acquire the titular Java sparrow, and the couple's fraught relationship—they squabble over money and labor—is revitalized by raising Chiiko. The couple cheerfully comment on Java sparrows' characteristic imprinting, that, 「ヒナのうちから飼えばずごくなついて絶対逃げたりしない」 ("if we raise it from when it's a chick, it will become very attached and never fly away" 79 (89)), confirmed when, offered an open window, he remains. Contextualized by Tsuge's now well-known emotional devastation when his girlfriend left him before he penned "Chiiko," and by the cartooned girlfriend's suffering at her job, the story indicates Tsuge's fiction-mediated confession to his responsibility for this conflict and his experienced loss.

One evening, the cartoonist shows Chiiko his own image in a mirror, 「バーァ　おどろいたか」 ("Boo! Were you startled?" (fig. 2.3, trans. 98)). We do not see Chiiko's response but, given Java sparrows' experience of their mirror images as conspecific entities (Watanabe), one can assume he is startled by the "other" bird in the mirror. The cartoonist decides to draw Chiiko (he blithely comments, 「俺　絵描くの商売なんだぞ」 ("I draw for a living, you know." ibid.)) but, frustrated by his attempt to represent his active pet, he pins the sparrow in a Peace cigarette box—its dove branding repeats the story's themes—to draw his face. Having completed the drawing that loosely matches the title's, in celebration, he tosses the bird, who flies free. He playfully repeats the

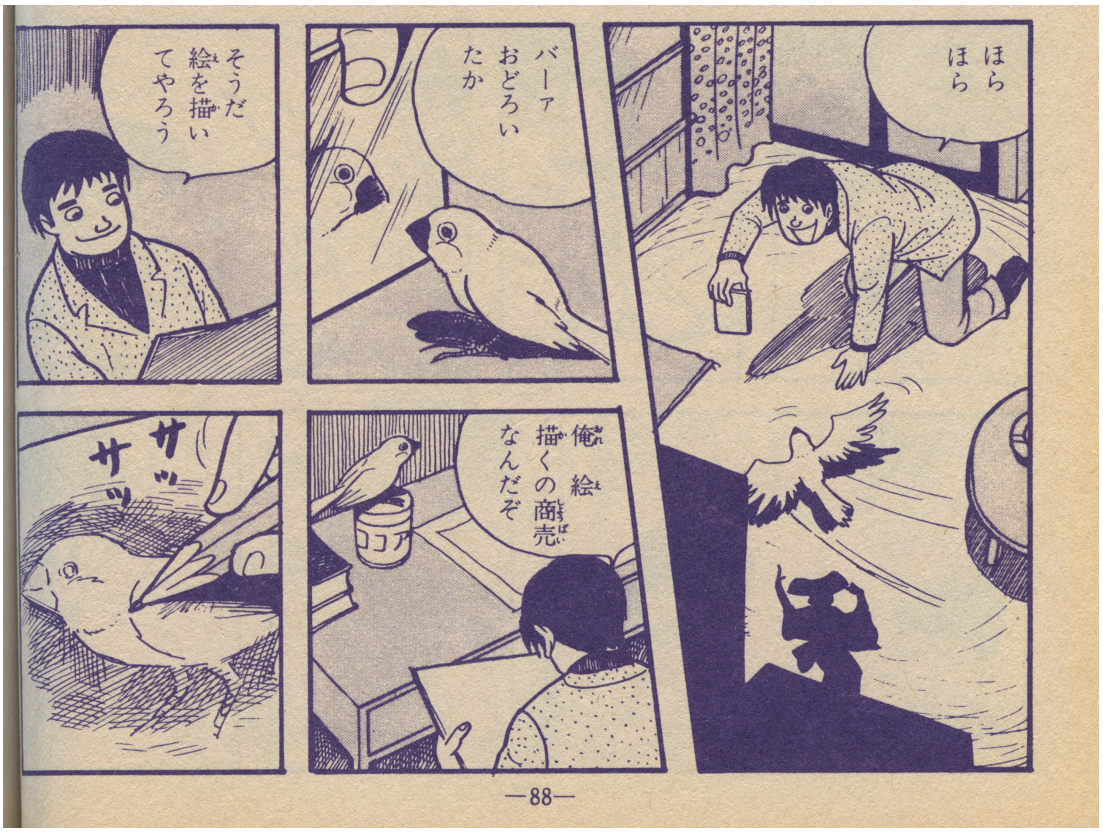


Figure 2.3. "Boo!" detail. Image: Tsuge, "Chiiko," 88.

escape act, but Chiiko only falls; the artist watches in horror as his subject pathetically flops from his prison.

He buries the sparrow and lies to his girlfriend, who mourns Chiiko and rightly suspects him. She places the drawing in their bushes, and shocks the artist who momentarily believes his own illusion. The drawing, caught by a gust, flies away and seems to merge with their reality, to which the couple respond with apprehension or at best solemnity (fig. 2.4, trans. 104).

"Chiiko" presents two kinds of images. The optical phenomenon's effect is momentary, non-transformative. The aesthetic effect, animated by imagination, produces a magical return. The dead bird returns to movement: his image contradicts even certain historical guilt and exceeds the physical confines of his living existence. This suggests Berger's attention to images' referential function, that they "were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked" (*Ways*, 9-10). The metapictorial title panel now

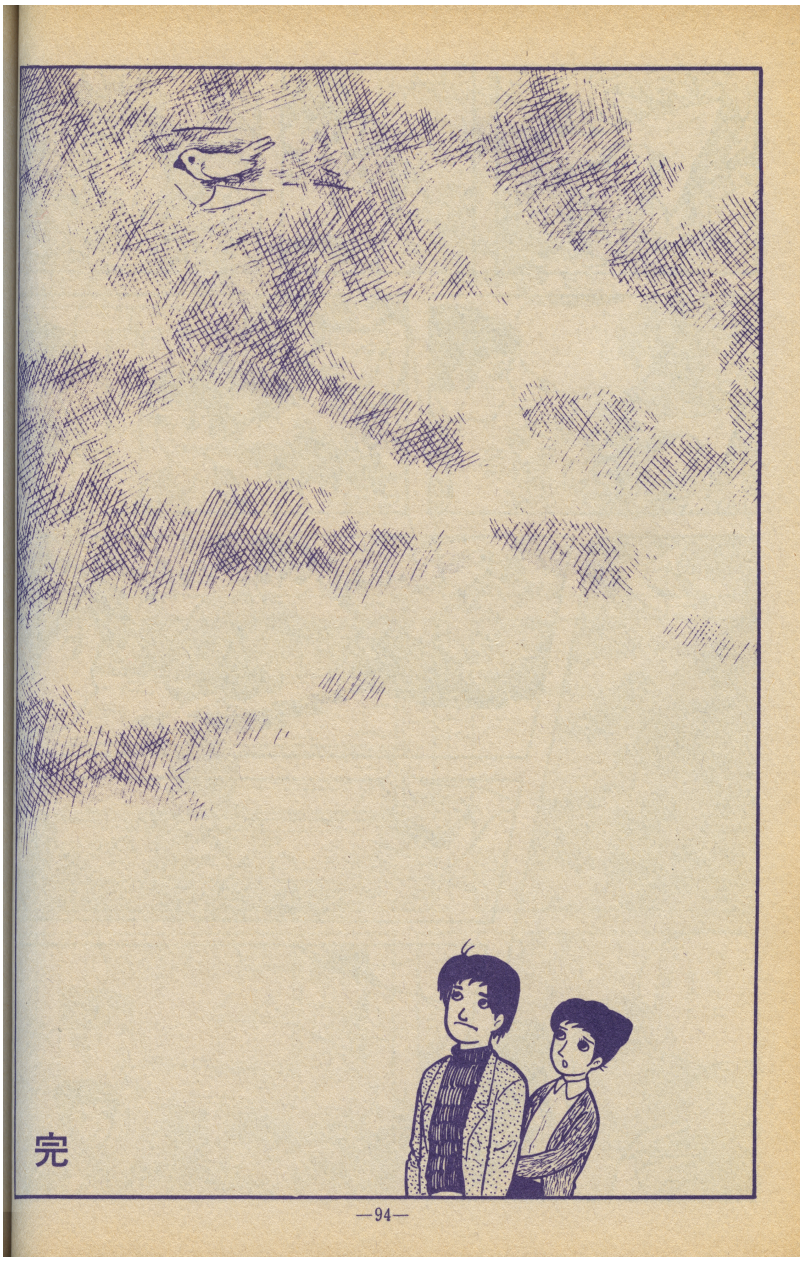


Figure 2.4. End. Image: Tsuge, "Chiiko," 94.

anachronistically conjures what has not yet been lost: the bird's image preemptively memorializes the death its own creation will catalyze and (as the picture already exists) the death it already catalyzed.

The representation, first experienced as play, capriciously and irreversibly alters something real. A bird in posthumous flight evokes metaphors of freedom or release, its animation suggesting a transcendent, liberatory (or reparative) power of imagination. But the couple's reaction indicates disappointing illusion, the transformation of something real into something *other*: any suggestion of

transcendent freedom or rebirth[27] is tempered by unlife. The sitting bird that is an object of illusion in stillness (the bird drawing, obscured by foliage almost repeats the title's sight), in flight becomes *uncanny*; where it should be suspended by its vital action, its folded wings are unmistakably inert.

This conflicted experience of the bird's objective stillness and seeming vitality might be broadened, to the experiences all images produce. In *What It Is,* Lynda Barry likewise adopts the still image of animal life to illustrate images' perceptual animation. Relating her vivid childhood memory of watching a cat print blink, the artist explains that she only later understood that there are "different kinds of aliveness" and that the image "had no life of its own" (11-12). She theorizes the nature of this vitality, that

> At the center of everything we call 'the arts' and children call 'play,' is something which seems somehow alive. It's not alive in the way you and I are alive, but it's certainly not dead. It's alive in the way our memory is alive. Alive in the way the ocean is alive and able to transport us and contain us. Alive in the way thinking is not, but experiencing is, made of both memory and imagination, this is the thing we mean by 'an image.' (14)

Barry illustrates her account of images as affectively, imaginatively animated media through her own drawing of a bird, living and non-living (fig. 2.5), without ultimately presenting these figures' ambiguity: the question of whether the image's referent bird was once real or it is entirely fabricated is irrelevant, because factually we already know that the image itself has no life beyond its imagined life we nevertheless experience. The still Chiiko's drawn flight synecdochically reflects Tsuge's comics page, representing something that once was, reanimated—even liberated—by the viewer's imaginative experience of its fiction, but any return to its referent life is interrupted by the processes that animates its new life. The cartoonist knows that he killed the bird, and his girlfriend that she planted his



Figure 2.5. "Certainly not dead," detail. Image: Lynda Barry. *What It Is,* Drawn & Quarterly, 2008, 14.

[27] I first understood Chiiko's new life as resurrection, but considering Tsuge's later public Buddhist commitments, Shimizu Tadashi's reading of this final scene as a ritual of death and rebirth (Tsuge Yoshiharu to ieba, "Chiiko," ["When you say Tsuge Yoshiharu, you think 'Chiiko'"] 19) is convincing.

drawing. The image produces affective tangency between an experienced life and the knowledge of its absence, presenting, rather than the deceptiveness of images, their grief—a knowing loss. The story's final panel clarifies the first's multiple reference to external-factual and internal-fictional subjectivities, that their formal unity that provokes their imagined likeness—like the experience of the duck-rabbit and the snake-rope— does not render these referents indistinct, but belies their difference. The image of Chiiko and the experience of its unity is not ontologically *indifferent*, but *composite* in its hybridity.

Images of (Images of) the Real

In the same year that Tsuge penned "Chiiko," he joined *kashihon* veteran and *gekiga* artist Mizuki Shigeru's new Mizuki Pro[ductions] studio. The two artists worked closely together, informing each other's techniques and interests. Tsuge's interest in folklore encouraged Mizuki's passion for the same (visible in his *yōkai* narratives that popularized the figures for modern audiences), and Mizuki Pro's extensive photo reference archive influenced Tsuge's practice, as he describes:

> I wanted to get away from conventional storytelling in manga. My drawing style hadn't really changed since my kashihon years. Once I joined Mizuki Pro, I began using greater detail and a greater sense of spatial depth, reflecting the influence of Mizuki's work on my own…. The practice of using photographs and other materials to draw detailed backgrounds was also something I picked up from him. (Qtd. in Asakawa and Holmberg, 276-7.)

During this time, Tsuge created his 1967 "Umibe no jokei" ("Scenes of the Seaside") which, like "Chiiko," produces stylistic friction between cartooning and more realistic drawing. "Umibe" begins on a crowded beach, rendered in Tsuge's stark shadows and bold cartooned lines that delineate figures and setting in the harsh sunlight. The sunglasses-wearing protagonist smokes alone, separated physically and visually from the crowd before, shades lifted, he shares a glance with a sunbathing woman. He leaves the crowded beach for the natural grandeur of the nearby cape. He and the woman meet by chance, discuss their surroundings, and find connection. Whereas the two cartooned characters remain minimally shaded, the forms and volume of their darker environs—although still outlined—are increasingly defined by hatched shading. She marvels, 「ここすごいところね」 ("This place is amazing." fig. 2.6, trans. 66) and he agrees, as the two share cigarettes and

view of the sea and Hachiman Cape, now drawn in photorealist detail. The protagonist describes local particulars from his upbringing in the area to his Tokyoite partner, the isolate pair walk and eventually swim along the somber coast, and "Umibe" ends as she, observing his swimming in the dark sea from the shore, remarks, 「あなたすてきよ」 ("You're marvelous" 161 (81)).



Figure 2.6. "This place." Image: Tsuge Yoshiharu, "Umibe no jokei." 1967, *Tsuge Yoshiharu tokushū, vol. 1*, 146.

The "Umibe" cape's visual detail might first suggest Tsuge's photographic reference only supports general realism—as, for instance, McCloud positions photorealism as an extreme example of realism (28), asserting a difference of degree and not kind. However, contextualized by Tsuge's reflexive attention to mediating practice in "Chiiko" and by his above description of his new practice as a *narrative* departure and not only a technical development, his photo-referencing suggests more than a technical aid. Unlike Tsuge's usual bold cartooning that produces legibly distinct objects and silhouettes such as those in this panel's cartooned foreground, his chiaroscuro environmental shading softens the land above the cliffs to indistinct dark masses lost in shadow and at its tonal opposite the white sea mist unusually refuses to delineate sea from cliff. Tsuge's Hachiman drawing foregoes his usual description of discrete forms, instead attending to light values that stylistically adopt a photographic register.

I do not suggest in my interpretation that Tsuge has a singular photorealist style or revealing "tell," but that he indicates his process. His photo-referencing practices across his career are multifarious and he often mixes photo-referencing and cartooning, supporting conventionally cartooned realist detail or traced as silhouettes.[28] One familiar with his oeuvre might identify such photo-referenced panels, but they do not so forcefully indicate or repeat their source forms. His obscuration of some drawings' underlying techniques suggest that when he does reproduce his source material's form, it is to demonstrate his method. Tsuge describes his photo-referencing techniques for travel *manga*, "Not that I'm consciously following any rule, but I'm never satisfied with pictures drawn according to my personal preferences alone. I could draw hot springs the way I like, I could draw trees that I like in places that I like... I could draw my idea of an ideal landscape if I really wanted to, but I suspect it would bore me. There has to be restrictions of some sort" (qtd. Asakawa & Holmberg). Tsuge contrasts his technique's restrictive fidelity with inventive drawing, rejects his use of photography as a technical aid, and denies strictly rules-based fidelity, distinguishing between photographs' necessary optical fidelity and drawings' selective fidelity.

As Chiiko's image presents its observation by real and fictional cartoonists (synthetically provoking their imbrication and synthesis) the Hachiman picture's fastidious imitation of its source form (the photograph's content and medium) encourages its referent content and processes' multistable imagination. Tsuge's Hachiman photorealism asserts its formal fidelity to, and mediatic

[28] See appendices and essays accompanying his comics in Japanese and in translation for source material and commentary.

difference from, its source. The drawing evidences its non-transparent mediation (there is no mistaking it for a photograph), in immediate contrast with both cartooning and realist drawing. By representing photographs' optical fidelity through drawings' subjective, selective reproduction, he seems to indicate that his drawings, as the products of both selection and encoding, are structurally fictive. We're made aware that here he *chooses to suppress* such fabrication—that he restricts his fiction to his cartooned, seeing characters, without extending such fictionalization to (all of) the story's eponymous sights. The cape's remediated image claims to accurately repeat a real sight *and* to represent the sight one character shares with another, a double metonymic gesture through which Tsuge's fictional protagonist shares with us a real sight, whose form both synthetically employs and metapictorially admits its aggregate nature.

Tsuge's photorealist detail and spatial construction suggest the scene's enterable depth. The small figures in its foreground both indicate its scale and their poses, with their backs to us, invite impressions of a roughly shared perspective of this experience. But this image's marked difference asserts a threshold between one reference to actuality and another to fictional reality. To experience the Hachiman image as *photorealist* demands (even subconscious) awareness of differences between its referent and expressed forms, without which photorealism as a category would be irrelevant, to be experienced only as realist or as photographic. Tsuge's *non-illusionistic* photorealism resists either of these experiences that might affect such ontological or mediatic indistinction.

This effect matches Asakawa and Holmberg's argument, that "As concrete images of the real, derived directly from the real, [for Tsuge] photographs were objective enough to keep personal whim and fantasy under control, while also malleable enough for recontextualization. They were in other words, the ideal visual substrates for making believable fictions." The substrate, understood materially as an underlying layer, evokes a palimpsestic process and vision, but understood biologically—as the substance on which an organism lives and from which it derives nourishment—and contextualized by Barry's assertion that our imaginative animation of these inert media can transport us to other realities, the substrate offers an eminently appropriate metaphor for these pictures' multistable reception.

Asakawa and Holmberg note the protagonist's history, solitude, and environs match Tsuge's present loneliness and his childhood in Ōhara. They also emphasize, counter to biographical correspondence, that the encounter is fiction and likewise "some of the beach scenery is sourced from photos in issues of *Asahi Camera* and other photography magazines, most likely from the

scrapbooks housed at Mizuki Pro—none of which depict Ōhara" (ibid.). That is, Tsuge arbitrarily uses these sources, which accords with their assertion that his realist techniques and references makes his fiction more "believable." But "Umibe" never names or verbally alludes to the Hachiman Cape—just south of Ōhara and confirming the story's implied setting. The cape is only identifiable because it is recognizable by its accurate rendition, and the Ōhara of "Umibe" is only indirectly identifiable by its description. Asakawa and Holmberg interpret these details as Tsuge's "foregrounding […] the concrete and the personal to subsume the found and invented" (ibid.) and this is certainly part of their effect, but the photorealist image of the cape and the verbal image of Ōhara, considered together, suggest none of the arbitrary function of his other realistically detailed images, but Schmitt's intermingling of discourses.

Approached as autofiction, the woman's final words to the distant swimming protagonist who cannot not hear her admits its fantastic basis in Tsuge's desire for connection, a fictional expression exceeding Tsuge's historical experience. Contextualized by Tsuge's multistable cape and autofictional discursive imbrication, her earlier remark, "This place is amazing," about the photorealist cape, is polysemic. The scene's observers and observed reality are each multiple figures whose references we encounter concurrently in the picture's address to our senses, imagination, and imagined history. Her comment does not affirm the referent scene's simple beauty or reality: in this story introduced by physical and visual isolation, resolved by finding connection in shared sights and experiences, she directs us to Tsuge's external reality, to a sight the artist shares with us.

The Hachiman Cape's conspicuous detail, in its contrast with neighboring panels' discrete intelligible cartooned marks, directs attention to its visual fidelity and the external origins and photographing and drawing processes that account for this picture that supports the fiction's reality. Referencing two realities, the picture's detailed form does not claim its identity with its singular referent as one might expect of an authenticating document, or with its autonomous fictional reality, but in its multivalent reference brings these two realities into conceptual, affective tangency. The external reality might share its reality with the fiction, and the fiction might reciprocally share some of Tsuge's reality. Like the Chiiko drawing's new life, Tsuge's multistable "Umibe" and its melancholy, nostalgic tone, offers no return through fiction or representation, but its fiction more hopefully pursues the possibility of contact with the Real, the autofictional whole bringing the story and its viewers each closer to *other* realities.

Chaney argues tropes of mirrors or masks are used in autobiographical comics to thematize "the premise underlying and undermining every image: that it be itself as well as the sign of something else, its counterpart in the real," defamiliarizing and questioning "the text's capacity to convey reality" (23). In their autofictional context, Tsuge's photorealist drawings likewise metapictorially thematize their ambiguous non-identity and partial likeness with external reality. Such ambiguity encourages us to speculatively employ the differential awareness and synthetic impulses necessary to render a comic legible and coherent, to navigate images' complex formal relationships with their making and the sights they reproduce, which together affect pictures' intimate tangency to their subject's sight. This tangency to Tsuge's sight returns to the relationship between subjects, objects, and worlds implicated and constituted by the drawing's objectification of his sights.

Seeing Subjects

Having pursued other professions but still suffering from anxiety, now married to Fujiwara Maki with their young son Shōsuke, in 1984 Tsuge returned to autofiction, in his last and longest, *Munō no Hito* (*The Man Without Talent*). There he created Sukegawa Sukezō, a neurotic ex-cartoonist dreamer whose physiognomy passes for a self-critical likeness of Tsuge (with a thick moustache, affecting an ineffectual disguise), with his nervous son Sansuke and his frustrated and disdainful, unnamed wife who live near the Tamagawa (Tama River) in Chōfu outside of Tokyo, as Tsuge mostly had since his time at Mizuki Pro. *Munō no Hito* is mostly quietly, drearily mundane. Sukezō collects interesting but unremarkable stones which no one buys, repairs cameras (as Tsuge had); they go on family outings; money is tight; he shares nostalgic appreciation for what is lost or fading from late twentieth-century Japan with other like-minded failures. *Munō*'s narrator begins, 「おれはとうとう石屋になってしまった」 ("Alas! I've finally ended up as a stone seller."), over Sukezō, reclining in his shanty stall displaying stones by the river where he found them (4 (2)). When another vendor advises him of his "stone-selling" business, 「いくらでも拾えるものを金出す人はいねえやな」("Well, no one pays for something he can pick up anywhere."), Sukezō's head emerges from behind his wares, sans the line that would attach its round form to a neck, to ask, 「その石とこの石と同じに見えますか」 ("Does that stone and this stone look the same to you?") (fig. 2.7, trans. 24), and his comparative invitation constitutes the central autofictional one.



Figure 2.7. "That stone," detail. Image: Tsuge Yoshiharu, *Munō no hito*, Nihon Bungeisha, 1992, 26.

Munō's stories are animated by pervasive irony, and tension between the fantastic, idealized, or aspirational, and the grounding, pragmatic or historical demands of reality, money, and family. The Sukegawas visit a rural inn on a "stone hunting trip" that evokes Tsuge's rural travels researching for his fiction, also reminding us that any detail might be mined from experience. There they encounter a *komuso* (mendicant Buddhist) monk. Sukezō, bathing with his family, comments on this anachronism, idealizing such monks' 「高度資本主義社会に機能しない無用の存在」 ("unnecessary [*muyō*] existence, without function in advanced capitalist society") but his wife, pragmatically washing clothes even now, likens him to Sukezō as 「役立たずの無能の人」 (an "unhelpful, incapable [*munō*] person" 140 (138)) which seems to strike him as equally true, noting also the line's titular repetition. Literary critic Kawamoto Saburo lauds Sukezō's religious aspirations and Tsuge's literary ones, reading family figures as the pull of "real life" in burdensome opposition to Tsuge's idealized (and, to Kawamoto, ideal) literary mode, that "Tsuge is torn between a desire to abandon the world and the knowledge that it is impossible," which Holmberg criticizes as a patriarchal reading, and insufficient: "son and wife are clearly more than that"—they are "ballast and refuge for Tsuge" (xviii-xix). Holmberg, citing Sukezō's expressed appreciation for his family and their lives together despite their tensions and Tsuge's greater presence as a father than others of his milieu, argues his responsibility and domestic refuge.

Holmberg, in correcting Kawamoto and arguing the positive draw of Tsuge's family and responsibilities to them, still repeats Kawamoto's interpretation of the nuclear family as symbolizing reality, opposite fantasy. Others in Sukezō's world, including like-minded contemporaries, criticize his perpetually failing enterprises as socially and materially negligent, but Sukezō's family present the clearest opposing pole to his aesthetic, spiritual, and physical departures. In all five *Munō* stories that feature Sukezō's family, one or both call him back from his schemes, fantasies or misadventures. His son Sansuke repeats in variations, 「ぼく迎えに来た」 ("Let's go home." Lit. "I came to take you home."), a line which ends *Munō*'s third chapter, "Torishi" (鳥師, "The Bird Master"), that overtly courts magical realism. In "Torishi," Sukezō talks with his friend Kurahara, whose traditionalist bird shop quietly fails. Sukezō and Kurahara gripe about others' flashy use of foreign script, and Kurahara points out Sukezō's sign written in foreignizing katakana and proclaiming its newness—a hypocritical tactic, pathetic in its ineffectuality. Such hypocrisy is loaded: suggestions of Tsuge's confessional self-knowledge and self-criticism are refuted by the business's fictionality. Karatani argues that the modern Japanese subjective, interior, or confessing "I" as we know it is alien to premodern Japan,

> that the self or interiority which the novelistic "I" was supposed to express did not exist a priori but was constituted through the mediation of a material form, through the establishment of *genbun itchi*.[29] The same can be said of modern Japanese literary confession. It was the literary form of the confession—confession as a system—that produced the interiority that confessed, the "true self." (77)

As he admonishes, "Literary confession […] should not be confused with actual confession" (76). Karatani illustrates his argument with Tayama Katai's foundational 1907 short prose *shishōsetsu*, *Futon*. Tayama confesses obliquely through his fiction, depicting his "ugly feelings rather than ugly matters" in fiction-mediated confession, but as Karatani clarifies, Tayama as a result continued to conceal those real things while he confessed "hidden things" that "did not even exist" (78). The confessional genre compels and produces the confessional act, its confessing subject, and its confessed contents (ibid.). The "'I' of the *shishōsetsu* was no longer a subject—on the contrary, for

[29] *Genbun itchi* (unified spoken and written language) refers to the Meiji-era movement to rationalize and unify literary and spoken Japanese registers. See "The Discovery of Interiority" chapter in *Origins*.

that 'I,' subjectivity was a fabrication" (172).[30] Tsuge's alter-ego's absurd embarrassment by proxy for an action taken by proxy simultaneously fabricates, and satirizes the failures of, his fiction-mediated confession. Sukezō nevertheless waxes philosophical on exactly that self-abnegation, stating the value of crushing one's ego (「自我をへし折って」) over the starry field Tsuge often employs in *Munō* to denote deep contemplation (87 (85)). In an autofictional context this pairing ironically presents both the philosophical value and mock profundity of *Tsuge's* literary abandonment that produces the alter-ego character *Sukezō's* pretentious commentary. Kurahara's ogre-like wife retorts with a fart that startles both men out of their reverie.

This frame narrative introduces Kurahara's story of the man whom he first mistakes for a great bird: the perching man's tattered cloak resembles folded wings and his drooping hat, a beak (fig. 2.8, trans. 91), before Kurahara realizes his misrecognition and by the third panel his vision is corrected. In *Munō*'s mundane reality, this misrecognition becomes magical realist. Momentarily, Kurahara's confusion is Sukezō's and ours, interrupting prosaic reality. Kurahara verbally narrates this story within a story, but it is unclear who is the panel's pictorial narrator: the panel does not repeat the Hachiman sight's easy over-the-shoulder perspectival identification, but renders Kurahara peering comically from the background. This picture may represent Kurahara's subjective memory or telling, Sukezō's imagination of the telling he hears, Tsuge's visual objectification of that telling or, remembering his predilection to draw details from his life, Tsuge's mediation of a story through his alter-ego's imagination, or his omniscient graphic enunciation objectifying his imaginative visualization of a story he once heard. In its more complex multiplicity than Chiiko's life drawing, the bird master's unassignable graphic narration is simultaneously legible as impossible magic and as describing mundane reality the author may have encountered: Potential objective fictional reality and real subjective misrecognition lend each other their reality in their shared representation.

[30] I do not suggest Tsuge's autofictional subjectivities are the same as those of conventional *shishōsetsu*. Tsuge's narratives are more emplotted than the Taisho writers'. Their writing can be understood as rejecting contemporary tropes for premodern literature (as commonly understood), or as deconstructing (in Karatani's assessment of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's writing at the time) the Western import of modern literary realism and depth as produced—following Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form*—by specific perspectival conventions, configurations, and techniques that homogenize space and thereby produce the impression of subjective surface and depth, visual and literary. Karatani's discussion of Taisho author Shiga Naoya's unusual questioning of the unified self, and specifically his assertion that Shiga's confessions "constitute a world of plural selves" (93) is most relevant to my discussion of Tsuge's autofiction. As Karatani writes of Shiga, "How ironic that his writings, which have nothing in common with the concept of a unitary self or subjectivity, have been labeled the products of an I-novelist!" (93). Likewise, Tsuge's appreciation of, and liberal practice of, *shishōsetsu* has more in common with Karatani's postmodern reading and Shiga's disputed *shishōsetsu* practice than with the prevailing Taisho understood subjective continuity between authoring and narrating selves.

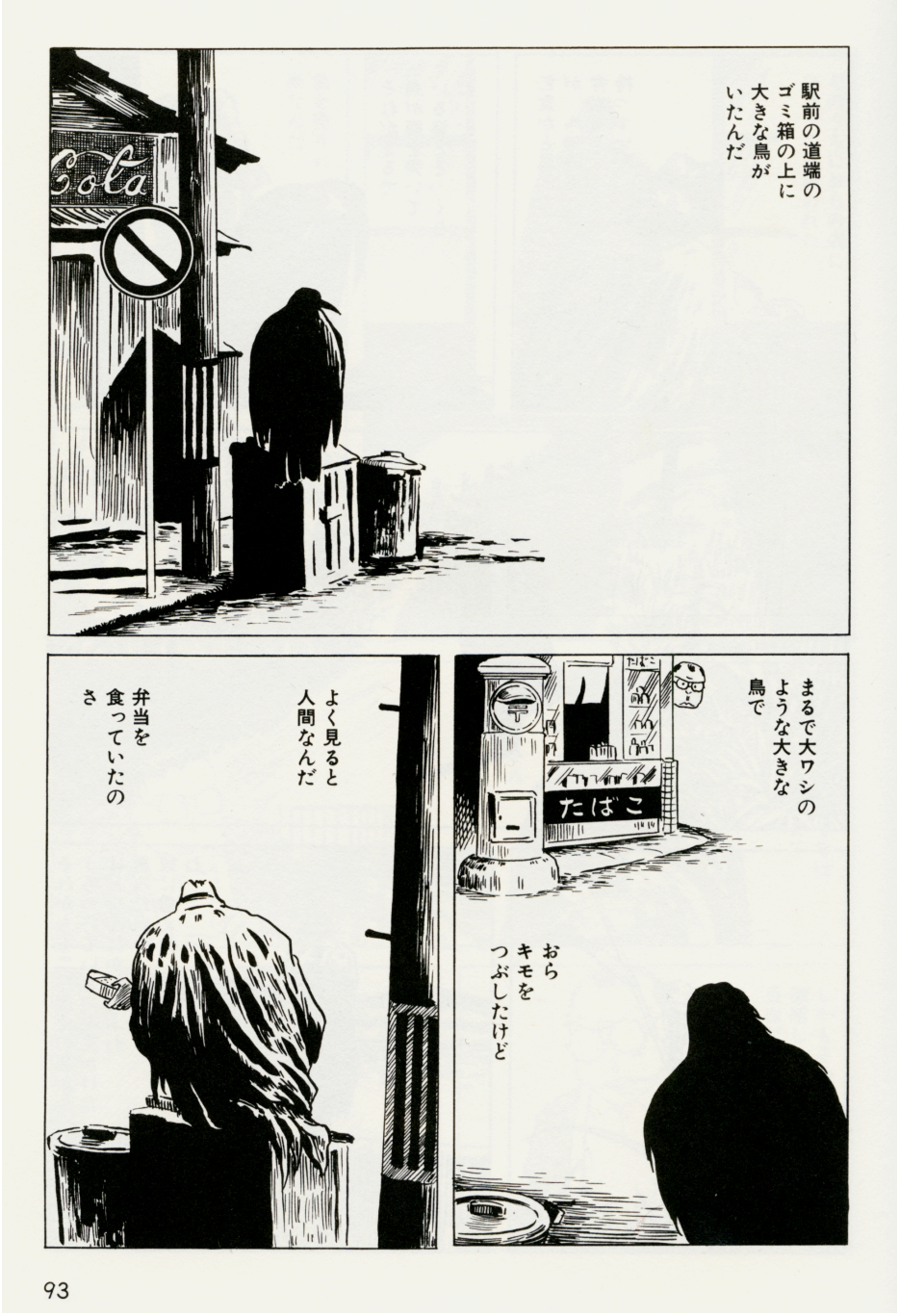


Figure 2.8. We meet the bird/master. Image: Tsuge, *Munō no hito*, 93.

Kurahara meets the man, a genius bird catcher who attracts birds by imitating calls and wards off snakes by imitating talons with his hand. One day the bird master, sick and desperate, comes to sell a crane to Kurahara, but Kurahara doesn't buy such large birds. Days later, he sees the bird master above a sluice along the Tamagawa in silhouette, again looking "just like a bird" (「鳥の

ように見えた」, (108 (106)). Kurahara cries, 「とべとべ飛ぶんだあ」 (“Tobe Tobe Tobundaa”, “Fly! Fly! Flying awaaay!” ibid.), and he does (fig. 2.9, trans. 107). His starry, cloaked form rises from the sluice, and his avian shadow dwarfs the rapturous Kurahara below. In a rare full-page panel, employing what Natsume theorizes as *manga* compositional compression and release (“The Functions of Panels”), from the low wide panel that ends the verso page under the weight of those above, the bird master’s recto panel opens out and its vertical objects and hatching guide the reader up past his shadow and the witnessing Kurahara and to the man’s transcendent flight.



Figure 2.9. The bird master’s flight. Image: Tsuge, *Munō no hito*, 109.

Kurahara's wife returns the chapter to its frame by completing his account, complaining that the master fell to his death in the grass below, 「身元も判らずおかげであんた三日も続けて警察によばれたりしたんじゃないアホらしい […]　やれ奥が深いの浅いだの　あんたたちのやっていることは一体何の役に立っているの！」 ("Because they didn't know his identity, you were called in by the police for three days straight—how foolish. […] Oh, it's so profound, is it, shallow, is it? What's the use of what you [men] do?" 110-111 (108-9)), inverting transcendent witness, in the police report's bureaucratic witness. Confusion that affects sublime experience (and autofiction) is countered by leaden literalism. The illustrated flight, though, encompasses all these realities. The man, his removed image, the world's historical reality, Kurahara's experience are unified in their singular graphic enunciation by their multiple but singular, composite narrator, and the wife's correction of this multistable image does not supplant its other meanings but supplements them. This scene is produced by double misrecognitions, first Kurahara's visual misrecognition, then the bird master's auditory one, whose death reveals *tobu*'s tragic homophony (noting its initially phonetic expression), to fly—also, to leap, to vanish.

Later, Sukezō passes the sluice from which the bird master leaps, near where Sukezō and Tsuge live, and he spreads his arms to the night sky, speckled with light as his contemplative scene and the bird master's suspended form were (fig. 2.10, trans. 111). He leans into the cosmic abyss, the prospect of his ego's annihilation at once liberatory, suicidal, exhilarating, despairing. Like Chiiko's drawing and the bird master's flight, Tsuge's alter ego is suspended in motion. The story cuts to Sansuke who again calls him home, from the ground. Sukezō's reaction to his son as he scrambles back onto the sluice makes it unclear if, during the "countershot," he was startled so stumbled, or he was recalled from his flight. They go home together.

"Torishi" epitomizes Tsuge's polysemic weave of fantasy and reality through formal likeness and thematized misrecognition that at once betrays its artifice and imitations and, abnegating the ego, seeks its transcendence to be denied in its contradiction by figures symbolizing reality. The reality-crossing fantasy finds at its pole at the figures of, in Kawamoto's interpretation, Kurahara's killjoy wife and Sukezō's pathetic son, and in Holmberg's, likely the same with critical attention to its misogynistic undertones and optimism about the real Tsuge's family dynamics, which leads Holmberg to the likeness of expressed and historical realities. Holmberg writes and theorizes about Tsuge's manipulations of *shishōsetsu* tropes and effacement of his identity in his alter-egos and authorial persona. He self-describes, "we fans and researchers are obsessed with looking for



Figure 2.10. "*Haa*-" Image: Tsuge, *Munō no hito*, 113.

Tsuge in *The Man Without Talent*, and for *The Man Without Talent* in Chōfu" ("Where is Yoshiharu," vi). This obsession is demonstrated by Holmberg's monumental translation and art-historical project, which also engages in the games of contradictory personae that Tsuge plays. Holmberg, emphasizing *Munō*'s increased biographical correspondence to Tsuge's life, argues that instead of

looking for Tsuge in "his artwork's hall of mirrors […] we might do better to look for Tsuge, as a person and a persona both, in the comforts of his own home" (xix), optimistically pursuing the alter-ego, author function, and historical person's likeness.

Sansuke repeatedly calls Sukezō back across episodes, but this repetition reduces Sansuke to a trope, as the critical-but-pragmatic wife, sharing her category with the unimaginatively literal ogress, becomes part of the trope Kawamoto identifies. Like Sukezō's ironic confession to hypocrisy, Sansuke can't call Tsuge home. Sansuke with his fixed droopy expression and repetitive dialogue is a caricature, a fiction and fabrication, as is Sukezō. But where the Sukezō figure can draw on its suspect autofictional likeness and tangency to its subjective substrate, laminating real and fictional self-images, Sansuke has no recourse to reality through such subjective proximity. Further, unlike Tsuge's realist drawings such as the Hachiman Cape (fig. 2.6) or *Munō*'s Chōfu setting that reinforces the likeness of experienced and represented realities, Sansuke's caricature claims no visual fidelity to Shōsuke. Tsuge most clearly asserts this visual distance in his reluctance to show Mrs. Sukegawa's face, which he draws turned away or obscured by artificial shadows, until in the fourth and fifth chapters where she becomes a more central character, but these exceptions also prove the rule when she is shown photographed. When Tsuge depicts Sukezō's affinity for camera repair and photography that matches his own in chapter 5, "Kamera o uru" (カメラを売る, "Selling Cameras"), Sukezō's wife hides her face in the comics reality (fig. 2.11, trans. 159), and although background detail and harsh shadows nearly evoke a camera's flash, her shadow's angle *towards* the camera and Tsuge denies this.

Neither the wife in the comics reality nor her second-order nude photographs suggest photographic reference or divergence from her character's cartooned existence. Tsuge's represented photographs might suggest his representational fidelity and transgression through the alibi of fiction, that he implicitly shows "Fujiwara" anyway, akin to Art Spiegelman's exposure of his father's early romance in *Maus* after promising not to (fig. 0.4). But in a curious reversal, by avoiding photorealist stylization, these objects deny his fiction's coincidence with his own observation of real sights, or even the bird master's cartooned sight that asserts its subjective visualization of a possible (misrecognized) reality. Mrs. Sukegawa's cartooned image refuses its identity with Tsuge's external sight: hers is of a cartooned order, a symbol that asserts no formal tangency with historical reality, matching the character's disinterest in other possible realities. Her photographs represent a second-order reality, but unlike Chiiko's image, their unshaded cartooning and dull gray fill stably resist

interpretation as first-order reality. Their spilling white frames, contained within Tsuge's insistently regular orthogonal panels, also resist parity, fluidity, and questioning, unusually fixing the photographs as products of a consensual encounter between two fictional characters. Represented bodies, gazes, and material objects resist their misrecognition or hybridity, and surprisingly—given Tsuge's history with polysemic images and frequent misogynistic representations—offer easy closure as nude portraits and portraits of the characters' relationship, without suggesting exposed private or external realities.



Figure 2.11. The cartooned photo-shoot. Image: Tsuge, *Munō no hito*, 161.

Such homogeneous stability visually suggests Tsuge's insulation of his family from his alter ego's, resisting their conflation. But Tsuge's autofiction deals in and draws on not just realist, but *speculative* likeness. Postmodernists, comics scholars, and cartoonists have demonstrated that close

visual resemblance is neither the guarantee nor sole basis of pictorial representations' fictive identity with their referents. Tsuge's realist drawings and cartoons are (at least intellectually) equalized in their unreality and their capacity to nonetheless stand in for reality. Furthermore, as Thierry Groensteen argues of French Iranian cartoonist Marjane Satrapi's cartooning of a photograph in a style consistent with its neighbors in *Persepolis* (2000-3), comics readers can reconcile documents' description as such with their cartooned form: recognizing that the "monstrator" or graphic narrator represents the object rather than its form, the drawing still claims its origin and nature (100).

The cartooned consistency of the "Kamera" photographs hardly precludes their drawn- and fiction-mediated likeness with external reality. How, then, do Tsuge's photorealist and cartooned pictures differ, beyond their means of connoting likeness? Helen Chazan's critique of Tsuge's period of especially misogynistic mysteries, horror, and fantasies shortly following "Chiiko" and "Umibe" offers a lucid interpretation from which to address these objects' reference to, and description of sights and people. Chazan charges Tsuge's self-abnegating autofiction with literary excuses of fiction's oblivion and folkloric euphemism, reading his *shishōsetsu*-styled autofictional confessions as, rather than those of a rapist, those of a fantasist who seeks "rape without consequence," as his alter-ego wanderers take from immobile women and places—both objectified through Tsuge's photo-referenced naturalism ("Yoshiharu Tsuge's Vagabond Rapists"). Addressing the first scene of Tsuge's "Yanagiya shujin" (やなぎ屋主人, 1970, "Master of the Willow Inn"), wherein a sex worker at a "nude studio" (which circumvented prohibitions against brothels through the excuse of artistic study) traces a map of Tokyo on her shadowed body in front of Tsuge's alter-ego (fig. 2.12, trans. 97-8), Chazan argues that the photorealist woman is objectified like her environs and her interiority alienated from protagonist and reader. She develops a novel reading of Tsuge's women, that their objectification also renders them "undefined people, full of possibility." Attention to their absent subjectivity reveals a "vortex of uncertainty," and Chazan challenges and reinterprets his violent fantasies picturing depersonalized women by reading their particularity and circumstances. This first "Yanagiya" scene in its photorealist remediation formally establishes its storyworld and asserts this world's tangency with a real sight, their palimpsestic convergence confirmed by the third panel's reverse shot of the protagonist who pointedly resembles Tsuge.[31] Chazan's interpretation of Tsuge's and his alter-ego's alienation from the objectified woman's ambiguous subjectivity draws the

[31] This drawing closely resembles Tsuge's contemporary self-portraits, and photographs of the author. Given the purportedly autobiographical origins of this scene, it is difficult to read it as anything other than one of his most literal self-portraits in his comics fiction.

scholar into the story and animates her reading. Complementing Chazan's insightful interpretation of this unknown and unexplained subject, the initially silent and impassive protagonist's own unknown subjectivity can be approached similarly, but these mysterious lacunae are not equivalent.

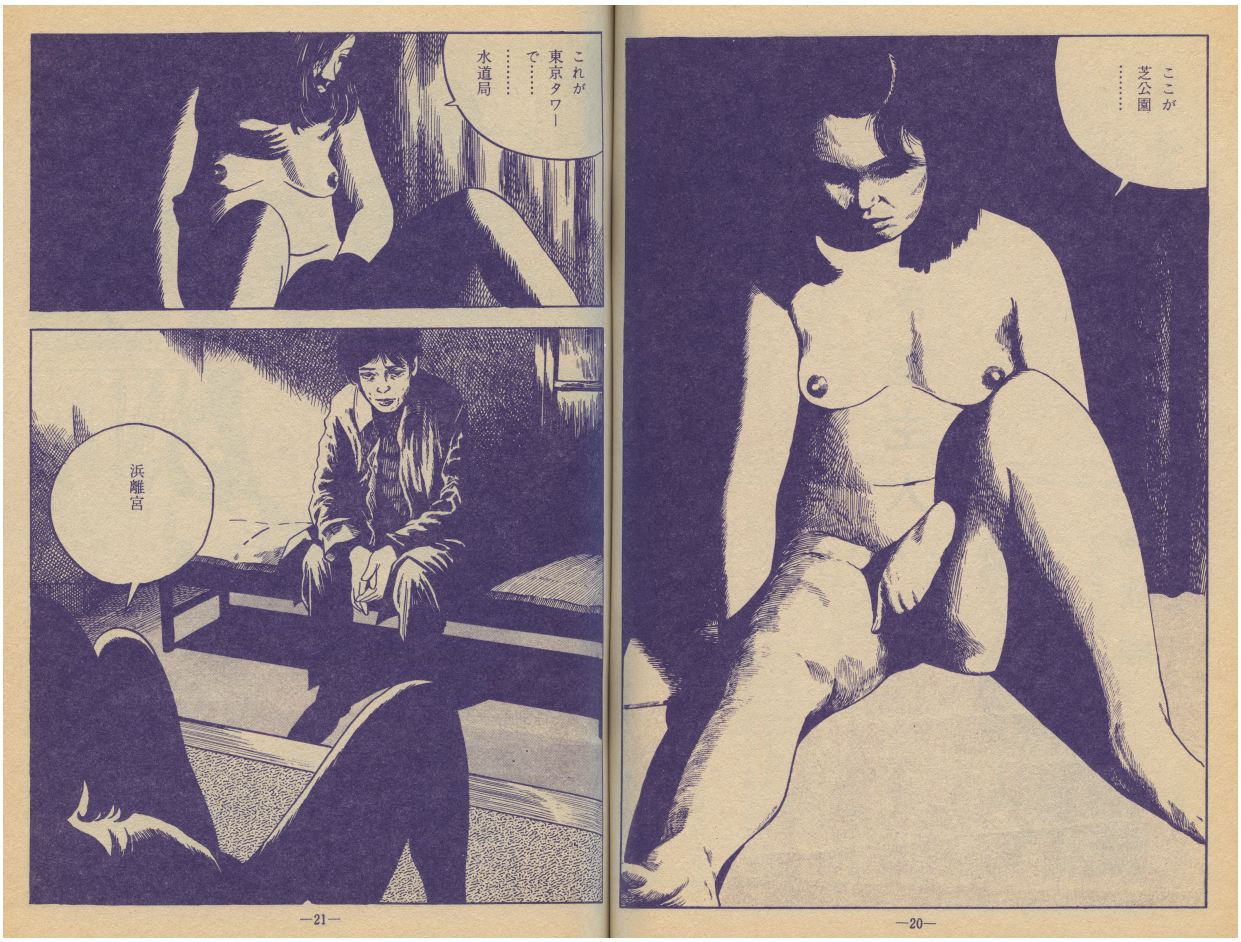


Figure 2.12. The "nude studio." Image: Tsuge Yoshiharu "Yanagiya Shujin." 1970, *Tsuge Yoshiharu tokushū*, vol. 2, 20-1.

Reflecting Tsuge's strong understanding of grayscale photographic, and black and white graphic, tone and form, these images at once claim their fidelity to photographed reality and, in their selective obscuration, assert their mediatic difference and alienation from that referent. Attention to Tsuge's subjective fidelity invites concurrent experiences of the image as both tracing the artist's *observation* of real—and *production* of fictional—sights. Together, as I read of Tsuge's "Umibe" scenery (fig. 2.6) these concurrent references to different realities affect the image's nostalgic propinquity to its substrate, and loss of historical reality and the Real. However, when picturing

people, such intense and concurrent attention to his images' imitation of and alienation from observed reality, produces uncanny simulacra that disturb their categorization and identity, blurring boundaries between the virtual and real, subjects and objects, already observable in Chiiko's uncertain life and clearer still in the "Yanagiya" drawings. These drawn subjects' uncanny[32] subjectless objectification is no doubt affected by Tsuge's tendency to draw photo-referenced figures with obscured or missing eyes and threatening or neutral mouths that dramatize their inaccessible subjective opacity, and by his vacuous shadows and blown-out highlights that often circumscribe forms without describing them.[33] Even in inscrutably vague or demonstratively performed photo-portraits, we viewers encounter visual traces we interpret as legible signs of the subject's disposition that exceed intention, but drawing's evident selective encoding demonstrably filters such clues through the artist's interpretive sight and representational drawing. Hints of the depicted subject's self-expression become legible as, and subordinated to, the artist's representation of another's imagined interiority. Documentary interpretation is entwined with fictional characterization. The unexpressive "Yanagiya" figures, in Tsuge's reserved naturalistic hand at once claim their formal fidelity and render their subjectivity unknowable: any subtle mark that suggests subjective disposition is remediated. Trying to imagine who they might be demands either that one admit their lost subjectivity, or that one speculatively identify with the Tsuge's performed vision or self-image, returning to autofictional games, aspirations, and misdirection.

This tension between Tsuge's interpretive images and fictional characters also evokes his early articulation of his integrated "stilled pictures," as

> more properly gekiga. What most people call gekiga doesn't feel like gekiga to me. […] I believe that gekiga puts more weight on the pictures themselves, as independent images. In

[32] I acknowledge the rich history of this complex of phenomena discussed in psychology and psychoanalysis since Sigmund Freud's famous essay on "The Uncanny." I am most concerned in the context of Tsuge's use of photorealism as a visual and literary trope to defamiliarize subjects, realities, and their virtual or artificial equivalents. My understanding of this use of the uncanny is most informed by Steven Brown's "Machinic Desires: Hans Bellmer's Dolls and the Technological Uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*" (*Tokyo Cyberpunk*). Brown's discussions of illusions, ventriloquism, pretenses of life and death, and especially the commonality of traditional *ningyō jōruri* (puppet performance) and modern animation as simulating life through inanimate performers' anthropomorphization, informs my attention to Tsuge's images' animation by readerly imagination, into characters.

[33] Tsuge's famously oneiric and elliptical 1968 "Nejishiki" (ねじ式, lit. "Screw Ceremony" or "Screw-type," most recently appearing in translation as "Nejishiki"), which also marks Tsuge's first extensive integration of photo-referenced images of people, notably objectifies such images (for instance isolating, collage-like, figure from ground through stylistic or compositional friction) and thematizes failures of communication, contact, and meaning through opaque or empty physical signs, symbolic and formal disjunct meetings, and characters' incomprehension of one another.

> story manga, backgrounds are just description in support of the narrative. If instead we went further and thought of the images as (at first glance) unconnected to the story, then maybe it would be possible to open up a new trend, and we would call that gekiga. (Qtd. in Holmberg, "Dreams and Wanderings," xiii.)

Tsuge's differentiation between independent images and story-supporting descriptive illustration clarifies the effects of this stylistic difference, between photorealist drawing and cartooned photographs. Whereas the representationally and referentially multiple "Yanagiya" images simultaneously present first-order fictional reality and subjects, and represent second-order simulacra that evidence these same figures' alienation from that real subjectivity, Sukezō's cartooned and demonstrative wife and child maintain easy ontological distinction: their alienation from reality and subjectivity is a given, their objectification as fiction grounds their autonomous existence. Tsuge's "independent" and "descriptive" images map to the differences between autofictional and fictional images, observational and purely illustrative drawings, ambiguous and stable realities, unknowable and knowable subjects, with broader implications about graphic life writing and documentary images' use.

By the time he draws *Munō*, Tsuge shows more visual restraint, eschewing this disturbing photorealist mix of demonstrably interpreted and demonstrably characterized subjects, which offers a useful point of comparison. In the years between these texts, Tsuge shifted away from photorealism, especially in depicting people: he intersperses photographs of people and places, and photorealist scenic drawings, in his prose travel writing but eschews these in his comics, returning to simpler, expressive characters. This shift coincided with his more memoiristic and less fantasizing stories about his youth and youthful naiveté, seeming to practically differentiate between subjective interpretation, and visual description or characterization. Such contrast between photorealist and realist detail is subtle in his environments, still derived from his real observations and travels, with less (performed) precision, for instance, when comparing the Hachiman Cape or "Yanagiya" nude studio (figs. 2.6, 2.12) with Chōfu's locales (figs. 2.8, 2.11). One might overlook their difference and consider both modes' similar connotation of these pictured contexts' concrete reality, especially because Tsuge often uses photo reference even when not dramatizing his fidelity to his sources.

When representing people, these styles' differences become clearer, in the contrast between alienating naturalism (fig. 2.12), and later expressionistic drama when visualizing the bird master's unnaturally elongated talon-like fingers, or depicting Sukezō's anguish about his career and family in "Kamera" (fig. 2.13, trans. 167). Tsuge's alter-egos becomes more knowable in their expressionistic



Figure 2.13. The tortured artist, detail. Image: Tsuge, *Munō no hito*, 169.

angst than their reticent alienation. The mystery of the real Tsuge as traced by his image's proximity to his unknowable subjectivity becomes the fictionalized self-representation of a man, who wears his guilt on his sleeve. The picture as an image that states its referent observed subject's absence is supplanted by the absent referent's descriptive illustration.[34]

Visual interpretation and fictive representation are coextensive in pictorial form, and comics readers' syntheses compound this interpretive and representational imbrication in realist pursuit of these forms' constantly renegotiated collective reality. Tsuge's stylistic and formal differentiation between connoted interpretive-documentary-indexical-iconic, and connoted representational-demonstrative-iconic-symbolic, modes of drawing—between restrained-but-stylized photorealist claimed subjective drawn fidelity, and stylized-but-restrained realist claimed faithful drawn subjectivity—respond to and rely on internal tensions and affordances of their drawn media. Both call on images' ability to formally assimilate their photographic sources' perceptual and perspectival

[34] One might compare Tsuge's stylistic shift to Alison Bechdel's strategic differentiation between realistically detailed drawings and "photorealist" drawings of specific documents in her graphic memoir *Fun Home*, wherein she stylistically distinguishes between images she scrutinizes and repeats (documents and photographs—especially her chapter title images), and the characters she descriptively draws in narrative scenes, despite their general shared realism and common derivation from photographic source material.

addresses, abstractions, and technical-optical fidelity, *and* their post-photographic drawn connotations of non-transparent representation, subjective and embodied specific perspective and non-instantaneous interpretation and fabrication. Tsuge employs this formal indeterminacy, stylistically encouraging his images' interpretation in one mode without denying other connotations or speculation, provoking his images' internal interpretive tensions, and producing further tensions through his images' likeness with and difference from their illustrative neighbors' interpretation by readers along the same spectrum as predominantly fictive. This difference must be attributed to, and admitted as, an effect of the weak, discursive and contextual, subjectively judged threshold of drawn rhetorical style which itself becomes an image of unknown artistic intention. This threshold's porousness is compounded by these externally sourced images' formal and conceptual unity with the narratives they support. Tsuge asserts and questions these images' identity with their storyworlds, negotiating their complex claims about their autofictional subjects.

Making Subjects

In considering relationships between the empirical life writing and drawing author-artist's subjective interpretation of actuality, and their concurrent production of narrative reality, I have focused on Tsuge's graphic autofiction as a useful site from which to analyze observational drawings' many references. His pictures' simultaneous claimed reality and fiction allows such contemplation of their discrete but concurrent actions transitively interpreting experiences of reality, and producing them, which also reflexively indicate the real interpreting artist, and produces one. In each case, the autofictional observational drawing's reference to two figures and realities trace all such pictures' structurally significant but materially and phenomenologically porous threshold between documentation and representation.

This threshold, approached uncritically, risks metonymic misrecognition of one referent subject and reality as another, but with reflection it can offer the artist's remarkably intimate, or alienating, subjective self-portrait in these referents' subjective tangency produced by their shared form and history. Although their fictional context facilitates analyzing the component referents of these composite expressions, as this chapter began, autofictional and sincere life writing's expressive context, claims, and functions differ, which affects the subjective identities they produce. This coda section addresses Fujiwara's diaristic practices in her *Watashi no enikki* (*My Picture Diary*), to compare

her and Tsuge's claims to represent their experiences of other subjects, and argues why these differences matter to the representing subject's produced self-image.

Holmberg describes *Munō* as Tsuge's return to fiction, after crossing "the line between autobiographical fiction and artistically shaped confession" (207) in a series of diaries intended for publication. He compares them to Fujiwara's preceding *Enikki*:

> though both were published as "diaries" (*nikki*), neither was written purely for private consumption. Maki began hers for her son when he got older, but rethought her audience after an excerpt was published midway. On a psychiatrist's advice, Tsuge began his as a form of therapy, with a public readership in mind from the start [….] Which is to say, though presumably both Tsuge and Maki hem close to the facts of daily life, both texts are also works of art, with an indiscernible share of exaggeration and elision for dramatic effect and privacy. (199-200)

Holmberg repeatedly frames Fujiwara's diary through doubt, and Tsuge's fictions as emotional truths with which he sympathizes—for instance, "The narrative" of Tsuge's diaries written for public consumption "is filled with so much pain that a reader can't help but feel some sympathy for the many tortured and incapacitated men of Tsuge's manga […] despite their obvious and sometimes offensive flaws" (ibid., 200). Holmberg's disproportionate discussion of Tsuge is difficult to avoid: Fujiwara's diaries are largely defined by her frustrated domestic role while her husband, whose more prolific career she supports, smooths these frustrations into tropes and foils for his alter-ego's escapes. One can discuss Tsuge's fiction without Fujiwara, but her diary and its contents more directly reflect the misogynistic conditions of their production that Holmberg euphemistically describes as "Tsuge's dominance" (204).

Framing their texts through life writing's indiscernible subjective authenticity or persuasive performance, and introduced first through a dozen pages discussing Tsuge's public diaries and autofiction (188, 193-203), Holmberg addresses Fujiwara's first entry (fig. 2.14. trans. 2-3).

> (January 4, Cloudy with rain after
> After dinner, *fought* with *Dad*.
> *Dad* sulked to bed with his clothes on.
> Shōsuke's sleeping face is so cute.)

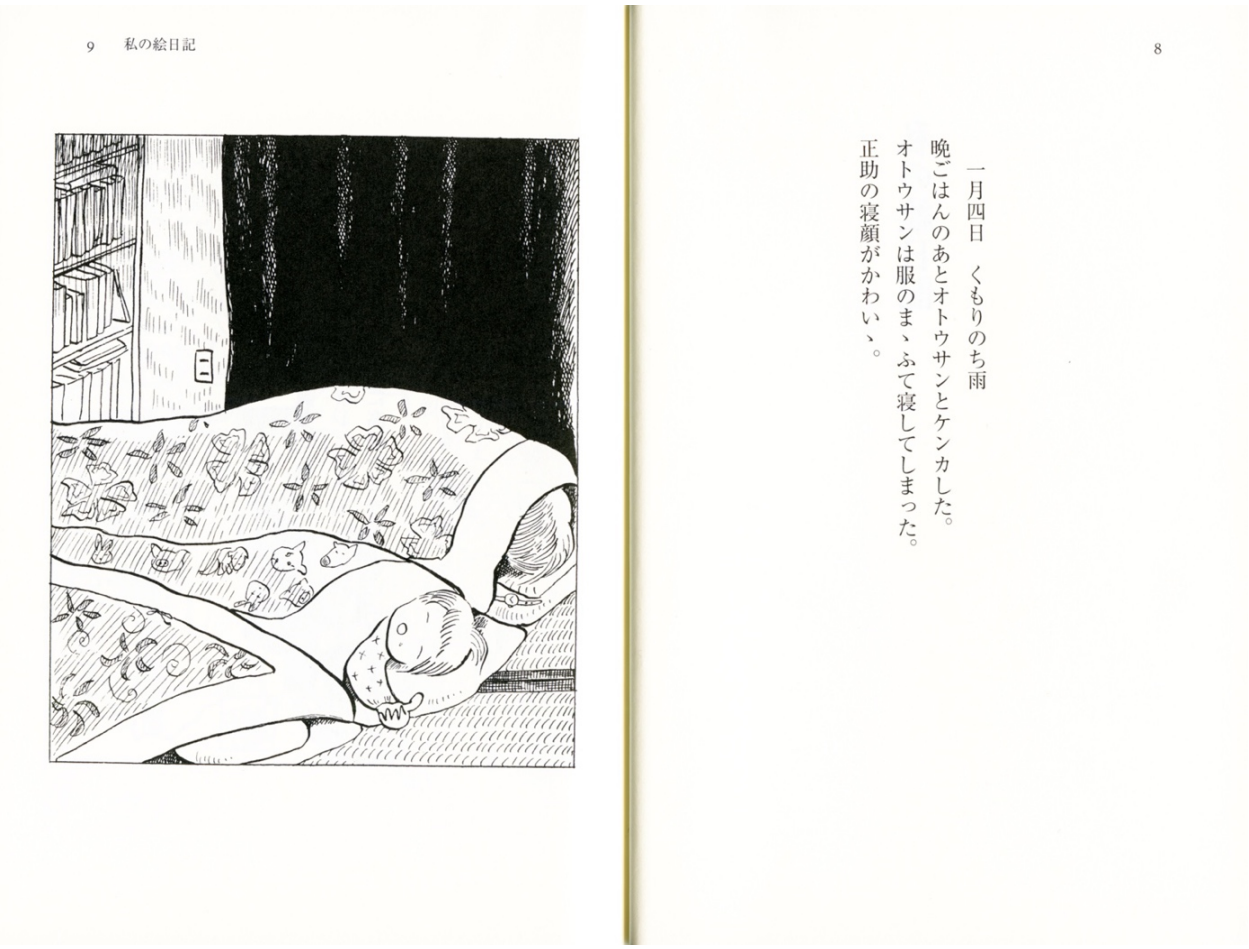


Figure 2.14. "Cloudy with rain after." Image: Fujiwara Maki, *Watashi no enikki*. 1982, Chikuma Shobō, Ltd, 2014, 8-9.

He interprets it as "letting the reader know that, despite the naïve tone of the language and pictures, this is no children's story" (204). It is unclear if Holmberg here indicates that her form affects a child-like writing style (as in a child's picture diary), an address to a child (as in a children's picture book), or its real or performed aesthetic innocence (a naïve artist, or faux-naïve performance), but his corrective comparison of its serious content "despite" its unserious form seems a backhanded compliment at best. Holmberg does not clarify his claim or apply it to Fujiwara's work, but because he twice repeats, unchallenged, Tsuge ungenerous descriptions of Fujiwara's art as "crude" (202-3, 207) in his only other discussions of her form and because, compared with his extensive analyses of her husband's art, he attends exclusively to her diaristic content's historical value (as "meaty fodder for the historian" (207)), it seems Fujiwara's translator and essayist considers her "naïve" forms of negligible significance. In his attention to the subjective historical account's description of Tsuge,

Holmberg, focusing on the diarist's transitive description of her husband, seems to treat Fujiwara's history as an avant-garde artist as irrelevant to her present aesthetic practice, and neglects the diary's complex temporal, structural, and visual identification with the artistic subject herself, in her self-description and reflexive self-inscription.

Where Tsuge's autofictional self-expressions have facilitated analyzing life writing and drawing's various referents, Fujiwara's diaristic ones offer a complementary site to address their synthesis, and to consider how the different discursive contexts of these images affect their artistic subjects' self-inscription. Holmberg's problematic inattention is encapsulated by his title, alone. "Fujiwara Maki: The Art of Life with Tsuge Yoshiharu" implies her life writing matters most as it shows her *husband's*. Addressing this lacuna, how might one approach Fujiwara as the subject of her text? Rather than such a literal problematic content comparison of the content of these authors' life writing, I compare how her and Tsuge's specific graphic life writing forms, exigencies, and discursive claims affect our fictive identification of these self-expressive forms with the expressing "selves."

Holmberg, translating both Tsuge's and Fujiwara's life writing, makes little structural distinction between recorded entries or narrative episodes, but these terms' differences offer the grounds for considering their relationships to their expressing artists' experiences. Comics creator and researcher Isaac Cates argues the temporality of diaries defines their "alternative model for constructing the experience of living, not as a 'story'" indebted to fiction but instead "as a series of moments or events" (215). The "meaning of the events a diarist records lies in their momentary capacity to move the diarist or the reader […] or else their proleptic capacity to create potential meaning beyond the moment of the diary strip, to be revealed in a future unknown to the cartoonist" (ibid.). As I already discuss in chapter 1 regarding the interpretation of photographs as documents and narrative images, temporality distinguishes between documentary and narrative structures. Ann Miller similarly argues, that because the diary "is not a detached product of the lived life, like autobiography, but [temporally] continuous with it, it may give the impression of direct access to self, 'a glimpse of undistorted life not subject to the fallibility of memory'" (216). She notes their function, as "a means of preserving memories" and—drawing on Lejeune and Bogaert—"an attempt to master experience by giving narrative identity to the flux of lived experience, and fixity to the passing of time" (217), asserting that time orders their practice and interpretation.

Fujiwara similarly introduces her *Enikki*'s origins, 「きっかけは、正助の幼い時の家族の生活記録を残したいと思い、8ミリで撮るとなると高価についてしまうので、うちは

貧乏だし、ということで絵日記を思いついたのです。」(“The inspiration came from wanting to leave a record of family life from when Shōsuke was a child. Because shooting 8mm film is expensive and our family is poor, I had the idea of making a picture diary.” 190 (184)). Interpreting Fujiwara’s first entry (fig. 2.14) alongside her assertions of the project’s documentary function, in her specific verbiage that anticipates her absence and her evocation of the intimate visual record of home movies, I note the pivotal absence in her drawing. The empty bedding in the foreground, next to her sleeping family, combined with the perspectival organization of the image, as clearly as Chiiko’s observation or a home movie’s shaky trace of its operator, places her as its observing subject, producing her first entry late that night, observing her son and reflecting on the day’s small conflict she writes of. Holmberg vaguely attends to her lines as tonally unsophisticated (naïve) or performed (faux-naïve) relative to their content (as if it is separable from its formal expression), but interpreting them as an artist and parent, and the son of an artistic parent, in them I read the more direct late-night urgency of an artist who somehow found time to express *something*, even after the long day that ended in a fight, through the subjective, descriptive efficiency of cartooning.

Cohering to the picture diary genre, Fujiwara’s entry begins with the day’s date and weather, the latter serving as an account, an aesthetic conceit, and emotional projection, as the breaking rain reflects the late conflict. Likewise, the room’s gloom is both literal and figurative, and the picture of her family being-looked-at is recognizable as an image of subject and object, characterizing and documenting each. As Hillary Chute argues of comics memoir, these forms also render “the work of (self-) interpretation […] literally visualized” and manifest their “interpretation as a process of visualization” (4). Understood within an “*idiom of witness,*” comics memoirs’ multimodal, embodied and visual testimony puts “contingent histories and selves into form” (3): aesthetic form can recuperate the invisible and the private, and interpreting across forms can remind us that “the spectator is a necessarily generative ‘guest’ (to borrow [Laura] Mulvey’s term), constructing meaning over and through the space of the gutter” (9). Chute argues this participatory and witnessing mode’s affinity with what Frederic Jameson describes as “an aesthetic of cognitive mapping” through which “we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle” (qtd. 26). She reminds that such reflexive interpretation, more than producing critical attention alone, allows readers to witness, negotiate, and produce meaning. That is, our self-consciously speculative, imaginative reconstruction of Fujiwara’s subjectivity as traced by

cross-discursive and selective representations of her attention expressed by her hand, allow us to imagine and participate in her witness.

Unlike Tsuge's visual ambiguity that affects his sights' polysemic subjective likeness, the ambiguities of Fujiwara's laconic reflections on the past day and similarly restrained cartooned description of her present sight, in their shared limited, incomplete descriptions—as a brief account and drawing of an intimate but largely undefined scene—invite their closure through their shared terms to understand the entry, and these complementary forms each contextually characterize the other. Narrated past and drawn present together characterize their author's experience, directing the complex identification with seer, sight, interpretation, and expression back into the composite subjective claim, *this was how I saw them*. In context, each of Fujiwara's descriptive details enter dialogue with their complement's, and with Fujiwara's subjective circumstances, including the audience she imagines, constituting their total message, not *this is how I saw them*, but *this is how I saw you*.

Fujiwara in subsequent entries notes her fear of her cancer, and that during her ongoing treatments she is unusually reminded of and prays to her father who died in her own youth (30-33 (24-7)). This reflection evokes Berger's account of the image that might outlast what it represented (how it "looked"), and in Fujiwara's awareness that her image would likely outlast and show her subjective looking, I see reflected the urgency of my own mother's attempts to plan for her absence as she underwent her cancer treatment. The grief of Fujiwara's sight must be understood through different terms than Tsuge's. His nostalgia for a lost relationship or distant experience is not her anticipated loss of her self. Hagai Palevsky pessimistically speculates on Fujiwara's imagination of her *Enikki* audience, noting that her present son is not her audience, that her represented son seems to be affected by Tsuge's views of her, and she must therefore be aware that her future audience may not be receptive. In this context, Palevsky argues, "she is the hypothetical mother of this reader—embodied, disembodied, specific, abstract—who is, in turn, expected to bear witness, to understand her. But there is an only partial catharsis in being witnessed when you don't know who, or whether, your witness actually *is*" (n.p.). Chute's theorized and Fujiwara's practiced witness are each reciprocally speculative, a meeting hypothesized by different subjects.

Fujiwara most commonly frames her drawing with over-the-shoulder shots or, as in her first entry, omits her figure, in both cases inviting our identification with her perspective—to share in her witness. When she does draw her face, she usually represents herself facing this audience, with a

relatively impassive expression or a slight frown, and these pictures' perspectival organization, combined with her facing and expression, commonly combine to affect something like formal portraiture's slow meeting. In February, she writes (fig. 2.15. trans. 88-9),

> (February 24, clear
> The sunshine is warm, little birds are chirping, and the boys seem like they're having fun playing something together, on the balcony. There are always chores, so I'm not connected to the metaphysical, but…
> For a moment, I felt "high" [on life].)



Figure 2.15. "For a moment." Image: Fujiwara, *Watashi no enikki,* 94-5.

More emphatically than her first entry, this one is framed through weather and repetition—her comment on the sunlight is literalized in her picture's rays, and her present-tense writing, like her first entry's past-tense writing, places the diarist, this time in the moment. Although Fujiwara never

literally shows herself drawing, like the first "Chiiko" page, the comics on Maki's newspaper in this entry already evokes her action, and she subtly indicates her drawn and written scenes' near-coincidence, in their shared present sunshine but, in switching tenses, also the difference between her present entry and the moment to which her entry responds. One might imagine Fujiwara drawing this entry in the same sunlight in which the drawn Maki, with her newspaper and cigarette, looks up from her reading to address the reader's gaze with her neutral expression.

Fujiwara's general drawn composition, details, and pose in this self-portrait and others resemble formal photo portraits of her at the time in most respects, sans her toothier, photographed smile, which ranges from seemingly genuine to conventionally posed, as one might expect in any mix of any such images' indeterminate records of the sitter's self-conscious responses to the camera. Whereas Tsuge's "Yanagiya" photorealist images, in their ambiguous fiction, present an unknown subject (*does the drawing show the interpretation of a real subject, or does it simply characterize and produce one?*), Fujiwara's cartooned, diaristic self-representation, contextualized by her written entry, states her self-description. The mystery of Maki's expression is not that of fictional and real referents' possible misrecognition, but of the fictive sign's relationship to its real subjective counterpart and producer: not, *is this fiction?* but, reflecting Barry's bird (fig. 2.5), *what is the relationship between the imagined life we experience in this image, and its once-living referent?* Palevsky reads irony in her drawn gaze, a cold, distant stare that undermines her written high. I read her relaxed wrist and the barest upward quirk to the right side of her mouth's line as genuine—far from exuberant but Fujiwara's family life is fraught and her obligations, many. Perhaps this *is* a good day, a genuinely welcome respite. Is this difference a Kuleschov-like effect, the rich emotional subtlety Palevsky and I imagine in a face, a product of juxtaposition as we attempt to suppress ambiguity and contextually seek the image's closure with its subject when there is no closure to be found? Fujiwara's expressionless expression employs the cartooned line's representational indeterminacy, suggestive of both her observing stare, and her patience facing and waiting for her observer. Fujiwara sometimes draws others with such impassive faces, but as a representation of her own, the gesture becomes expressive in its self-expressing mystery, tracing its unknown subject.

Tsuge also deals in unknown subjects in his fictions and his ostensible self-expression, but as Palevsky argues, "he collects as he recollects, an active curator, a cartographer of a map that actively rejects its own territory." In *Munō*, saturated with a man's self-loathing, hypocrisy, narcissism, shame at his escapist fantasies and infidelity and his "talentless" failures to support his family in a modern

capitalist social context, populated by characters who see the same, implied auto(fictional)critique runs rampant. Yet, in insulating *Munō*'s world from his historical family except for vague equivalences that maintain the protagonist's likeness to the author, Tsuge presents others' fictionalization rather than complete fabrication—Shōsuke's sinus issues are replaced by Sansuke's wheezing cough, and Tsuge and Sukezō's shared tinkering with cameras presents the possibility that Mrs. Sukegawa's photographs reflect some truth. In that fictionalization, Tsuge retains the figure of Mrs. Sukegawa, but omits Fujiwara's own avant-garde performances curtailed by his expectation of her domestic labor and by his jealousy about her visibility (a suppression financially justified by his expectation that her art wouldn't pay the bills, inverted in Mrs. Sukegawa's demands); her ongoing cancer treatment. Tsuge's fiction avoids the author's responses to the pressures of their lives together beyond Sukezō's escapism and hand-wringing—「僕が神経症になって弱くなると、かえってからんでくるようになったのは、強さを求めていたのでしょう。理屈で応戦するより、めったにないことですけれど、腕力を振るうと、翌日は案外さっぱりしているんです。」("Once I became weak because of my neuroses [exacerbated by their medical stress], [Fujiwara] came to quarreling with me more, probably because she wanted strength. When I didn't answer with logic but by using violence—which was rare—she was surprisingly calm the next day." "Tsuma Fujiwara no Koto," 269). Tsuge indicates Mrs. Sukegawa's fictionalization in interviews and through her form, but his autofictional games of suspicion returns to Karatani's criticism of Tayama. Speculating on Tsuge's self-expression, one might imagine his fiction-mediated confession; his postmodern play with misrecognition and fiction; his cynical manipulation of his public persona or his more genuine attempt to transcend his historical ego—most likely a mix, as reflects any complex motivations. But regardless of one's interpretation, Tsuge's inclusion of his fictionalized wife for his biographical analogy transforms inter-character tensions that obliquely refer to real conflicts. Tsuge renders Sukezō the victim of his own aestheticized failures and external pressures, embodied foremost by the frustrated and pragmatic, sometimes desperately supportive, Mrs. Sukegawa's concerns over material comfort and labor. Whether Tsuge, like Tayama, too-artfully avoids the real substance of his guilt, he manipulatively wields suspicion, or, as his above quote after his wife's death suggests, he simply felt little shame to confess for his abuses, Fujiwara's absence and Mrs. Sukegawa's caustic presence allow Sukezō to play the tortured artist in self-knowing self-excoriating agreement with his wife's biting truths, resentment, and appeals to his productivity that reflect little more than Tsuge's projected patriarchal obligation—a foil illustrating his titular uselessness in

modern society, as repeated by each of the book's failing men's wives. Tsuge therefore confesses an ultimately social guilt that disturbingly absolves him of any specific or personal guilt, as one failure among many. As Kurahara the bird seller explains after relating the conflict that ends in his being held by police because he tracked down and beat his wife, their personalities are not the real issue: 「ズロースの一枚も買ってくれぬ亭主に愛想が尽きたんだろ　働きのねえ男は女からみればゴミか虫けらみたいなものだからな」 ("She must have lost patience with her husband who wouldn't even buy her one pair of bloomers. A man who doesn't work is like trash or a bug to a woman." 91 (89)). Tsuge shows the diminutive Kurahara comically thrashed by his embarrassed wife, but not Kurahara's assault; Sukezō laughs off the story but takes seriously Kurahara's warning. The presence of the scene at all can suggest some self-judgement, but as compared to Tsuge's aptitude with polysemy and suspicion, even drawing on biography as I have, it is difficult to assert any autobiographical hint in this story of other things that other people have done.

Tsuge and Fujiwara's ambiguous images that implicate the empirical artist's subjective position and vision and their objectified self-images encourage speculative, metapictorial recourse to such images' discursive and especially mediatic contexts and practices. Concurrent with the experience of these images' representational content, attention to their making affects a subjective tangency of the artist's traced and documented interpretation and enunciation, and that intervention's fictive and performed characterization. These images' referential multiplicity and formal identity is inherent to the subjectively encoded form of drawings and, as reflected by Tsuge's stylistic differentiation between his drawing attitudes, such multiplicity produces these factual-documentary and fictive-representational modes' indeterminacy. Such referential indeterminacy in turn produces the conditions life writing and drawing's experienced subjective and referential tangency that affectively animates this dual experience of documentation and artifice, the basis of both Tsuge's baroque ontological play, mirror-glimpsed truths, and subjective escapes, and Fujiwara's record and production of her subjective likeness necessary to outlast herself. That the same forms can show truths, half-truths, and lies trains our suspicion of the seductive nature of truth claims and a seemingly inexhaustible attention (including my own) to persuasive strategies, but that suspicion is itself manipulable, and suspicion alone does not facilitate judgement.

Generic indistinction hazards post-truth ontological negligence to factual and fictional discursive difference, while pursuing the picture's stable closure as document or fiction denies the tangency and identities that life writing and drawing—and intermedial documentary interpretation—

construct. We should understand representational drawings and especially the subjective vision and self-images that constitute the documentary work of comics, through this multivalent awareness of such drawings as documenting aesthetic responses to reality. The picture's inscription formally and conceptually combines one's experience of representationally described and thereby objectified images of reality, with that of the necessary material and practical trace images of the observing, experiencing, and describing once-present subject.

Both "Evidence to Document" and "Drawing Subjects and Objects, Together" address photographic and drawn pictures' fictive iconic and indexical identification with the specific sights, visual experiences, agents, and presences implicated by their production, which affects their expressed storyworld's likeness to those external referent events and figures. In the next chapter, I focus on the historical and semantic abstraction of these signs in comics representation. "Other (Sur)Faces" attends to Mira Jacob's digital collage format, which exemplifies comics' communicative and mass-medium removal of the sign's representational use from the specific origins and process its form can be said to document. In this context, I argue that Jacob's digital repetitions allow her to disidentify the sign's references to external reality and its author, and to its referent storyworld, from each other while maintaining its reference to both separately, affecting her memoir's reticent intimacy.

Chapter 3
Other (Sur)Faces:
The Repeated Hand in Mira Jacob's *Good Talk*

> "I'm not going to make sense of my humanity for you. Because, on some level, you don't want my humanity to make sense to you, and I can't argue against that, so I'm just going to show it to you. You see it if you want."
>
> – Mira Jacob, Interview ("Non-fiction")

In *Good Talk. A Memoir in Conversation* (2019), Mira Jacob (b. 1973) articulates her experiences as an Indian American woman in the twentieth and twenty-first century United States through dialogues between vector-drawn "paper doll" figures layered with personal or cultural objects and stock photographs.[35] She accentuates this digitally scrapbooked aesthetic's objectification of its representational elements through characters' abstracted forms and static expressions and by insistently reusing illustrations. These repeating faces also visually structure readers' relationship to Jacob and her material. Jacob eschews shot/countershot and naturalistic compositions which might allow her reader to participate as an unseen observer, instead illustrating her interlocutors as making eye contact with their audience. Jacob details her personal and professional life including her parents' marriage and immigration, her upbringing in New Mexico, her marriage with documentary director Jed Rothstein, and her successful 2014 novel *The Sleepwalker's Guide to Dancing*. Responding to the divisive 2016 election, Jacob nuances American racial politics through personal accounts, insight, and wit, while underscoring the specificity of her memoir, as expressing only one among many heterogeneous non-White American experiences.

[35] The present argument is substantially revised from its earlier article form, originally published in *Punctum.* vol. 7, no. 2 as "The Repeatable Hand and the Mediated Self in Mira Jacob's *Good Talk.*" Thanks again, to special issue editors Stephan Packard and Lukas R.A. Wilde, and to my anonymous readers, for their guidance and suggestions.

Jacob developed *Good Talk*'s prototypical format in "37 Difficult Questions from My Mixed-Race Son," wherein she depicts their conversations by improvisationally arranging her two cut-out pen drawings over album covers and then photographing these compositions, whose varying shadows emphasize their component elements' physical arrangement and announce her manual creative practice, physically organizing these objects (fig. 3.1). Jacob recreates this short comic, as *Good Talk*'s first chapter, digitally transmediating her practice or, as Paul Reyes describes, "translat[ing] her skills in ink and watercolor to drawing in software, with a stylus instead of a pen, on a tablet instead of paper, in vectors instead of lines" for the project ("Notes to Self"). Jacob's turn from pen drawing and writing and improvisational collaging to more refined tablet drawing, lettering in a font she developed for the project ("Awkward Conversations"), and her digital composition might be understood first as technically rationalizing and imitating her earlier handmade expressive forms as Reyes emphasizes. One might aesthetically read her new form through this imitation alone, that it digitally copies and streamlines her earlier, rougher style's aesthetic connotations of the artistic subject's immediacy to the material she physically works. But Jacob describes her digital practice's efficiency, the emotional affect of its material difference, and its effects on her expression, as an author:



Figure 3.1. Z's questions. Image: Mira Jacob, "37 Difficult Questions from My Mixed-Race Son." BuzzFeed News, 8 July 2015, panel 11.

> Paper has a personality, and you rub up against it and there's an emotion that comes out of that. It took a long time to find the emotion of drawing on a screen. But it's also true that it would take me seven years to draw this book on paper, partly because I've had to learn how to stop. As a writer […] you learn when to stop. I do not know this with drawing at all. (qtd. in Reyes.)

Jacob's discussion of her expressive techniques' relationships with time, efficiency, and material affect are notable. Her contrast between paper's physical personality and the emotion of her

embodied interaction with that surface, with her difficulty finding such emotion in her digital practice, easily conforms to conventionally theorized mediatic differences between manual specificity as opposed to its mechanical and especially digital abstraction, suggesting this form and practice's dematerialization of the embodied artistic subject and their connoted subjective trace, despite its surface imitation of her earlier experiment. However, I am especially drawn to what her digital practice taught her—namely, to *stop*. Jacob's new digital restraint that, I argue, formally defines her memoir, emerges from *adapting*—rather than imitating—her analog collage, writing, and drawing practices, *and thereby complements* their expressive forms and connotations with new digital ones. Reyes' analogy of Jacob's "translated" material practices is appropriate, as not only indicating their distance from her original aesthetic practice and form they imitate, but as productively transforming and transvaluing her expressive forms.

Jacob, by employing analog and digital practices and forms together, and combining her material, aesthetic, and rhetorical resources, synthesizes these modes commonly theorized in opposition. Jacob's resultant aesthetic complements manual specificity and digital abstraction to produce *Good Talk*'s intimate, subjective distance. In prior chapters, I have discussed such perceived proximity and distance with attention to observational images—photographs and life drawings—which each produce mobile and objectified *sights*, at once identified with the experiences and stories they produce, and with their specific production. These images' concurrently experienced references affect their experienced fidelity to the observable world or the observing artist, and as a result seem to provide informational or experiential access to past sights. Collage and handwriting, unlike the above *pictorial* practices, claim no strict fidelity to a past *sight* they might share. The object appropriated to signify something in a composition, and the written word that conventionally signifies its referent meaning, each depend on their predominantly symbolic and descriptive, rather than iconic, communication of their referent. The visual forms that constitute these signs' formal fidelity to their history, then, do not primarily indicate their fidelity to the producer's *vision*, but to the artist-archivist and expressing author's *body*; similarly, the historical or emotional information one might glean from these forms indicate their maker's physical activity—their gluing, arranging, and physical self-inscription. In this context, Jacob's paper dolls, in their cartooned visual descriptiveness, their collaged composition, and their semantic mobility, can sensuously address their viewers as pictures, at the same time they claim their predominantly symbolic use in her narratives (as in fig. 3.1). In this way, Jacob's collaged format that draws attention to its visual elements as

arranged objects composed into scenes, provides a useful way of literalizing and visualizing how *all* comics compose representational signs and objects into scenes and narratives, so hyperbolizes the irrealist heterogeneity of comics. I argue Jacob, by digitally remediating her representational forms and practices for *Good Talk*, further demonstrates the descriptive mobility of her expressions, and focuses interpretive attention on her memoir's formal fidelity to the self-inscribing author's activity and conversely, on the repeated sign's visual and historical abstraction from its referent creating artist's body or memoirist's experience.

Once one recognizes *Good Talk* as composite rather than merely imitative in its remediation, Jacob's adaptation of her manually composed and digitally published "37 Questions" to her *Good Talk* fully digital compositions serve to remind that, as mass media objects, ostensibly handmade comics are likewise already formally hybrid, in their mechanical or digital reproduction. The forms of comics always reflect their reproductive conditions, be they digital raster resolution, xerographic contrast thresholds, or lithographic line fidelity. Jacob's practices present a valuable opportunity to investigate techniques often overlooked in non-fiction and documentary comics scholarship and to reconsider more commonly discussed analog materiality. Jacob's digital handwriting, cartooning, and collage aesthetics invite a broader reinterpretation of materialist discourses on marks' visually connoted information and intimacy, and an opportunity to consider other subjective traces in the discretized sign, the vectorized mark, and their representational composition.

The theorized visual communicative nature of comics and their component imagetexts has led to productive and at times problematic comparisons of their visual, pictorial communication to language. Foundational theorists Thierry Groensteen and Scott McCloud underrecognize these marks' affect in their attention to semantic stability. Groensteen dismisses marks as an "inferior standard" of semantic value (*The System of Comics*, 3), while McCloud —in his McLuhanesque aspirations to universal visual communication—emphasizes how conventionalized marks approach symbolic writing. However, Hillary Chute's materialist interpretation of alternative comics' constituent handmade marks, Aaron Kashtan's criticism of scholars' narrow attention to the material connotations of comics, and Hannah Miodrag's comparison of comics' visual and textual communication each offer useful points from which to consider digital lettering—an increasingly common practice which Jacob uses to particular effect, and which offers insight into her other digital repetitions.

Contextualized by the connoted physical and expressive intimacy of handmade letters and pictures, Jacob's insistent visual repetitions challenge the indexical identification of her signs' component marks, with the marking subject, and likewise question the total sign and figure's iconic resemblance to a specific sight, through which she politicizes relationships between the cartooned sign and its referent memoirist's experience. Jacob's strategies offer insights into alternative memoiristic modes suited to minority communications of experience, and more generally to considering the materiality of memoir in our century's digital media environments. Jacob's abstraction of her specific marks allows her to address readers from a position of alterity: her expressly mediated and withheld, even alienating, public subjective forms allow her to represent experiences while refusing to perform for her audience's easy, projective identification. Shifting much of the intersubjective emotional work from the autobiographer to readers, Jacob's alternative digital mode presents a risky but productive formal invitation to encounter the other's experience without the illusion of subjective equivalence.

Textu(r)al Rhythms

In chapter 6, "American Revolution," Jacob introduces her stiff, authoritarian, Mormon fifth-grade teacher and avid student of the American Revolution, Ms. Morrell who "looked like E.T., only mean," and relates that she made her students nervous "because she could get mad about anything" (49). Departing from her usual lettering, Jacob illustrates Ms. Morrell's dialogue in a 1.5-spaced, slab-serif faux-typewritten font that lends her voice conservative rigidity and authority, echoing her role and her stiff, grimacing illustration that is juxtaposed by young Mira's unselfconscious smile and "naturally" articulated (lettered) voice (fig. 3.2). Characteristic of *Good Talk*'s unusual illustrations, both characters' faces remain unchanged throughout this chapter. Mira's half-open mouth, as with most of Jacob's drawings, presents a figure who might be speaking in one panel and watching with attention in the next. Morrell's consistent scowl (rather than one specific to a given moment) characterizes her expression as essential to the character, symbolically presenting how Jacob sees her strict teacher. Likewise, despite the shared visual regularity of both characters' dialogue, Ms. Morrell's typewritten form dramatizes her voice's unexpressive flatness.



Figure 3.2. "Ms. Morrell had rules." Image: Mira Jacob, *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations.* Random House, 2019, 50-51.

Alongside Morrell's threatening expression and introduced by the pervasive threat of her unpredictable anger, her rigid "voice" also affects a latent threat in its inexpressive, emotionally illegible typed texture. When Ms. Morrell informs Mira that she wan a history essay contest and the teacher, illustrated with the same grimace and lettering, delivers her award-winning student's photo and personally drives her to present the essay to the Daughters of the American Revolution, in context, Morrell's regular form achieves surprising nuance, now suggesting the same character's pride and formality. Jacob illustrates her strange childhood experience riding with her teacher, who discovers in anger at a dry cleaner's parking lot that they were given the wrong address, persists on getting them to the event, defends to the official her student's right to deliver her winning speech to the Daughters. In the parking lot afterwards, Mira experiences another strange interaction, as her teacher mysteriously emphasizes, "YOU ARE AN AMERICAN. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?" ("It seemed like a trick question, so I did not answer.") (fig. 3.3). Jacob's response indicates the childhood

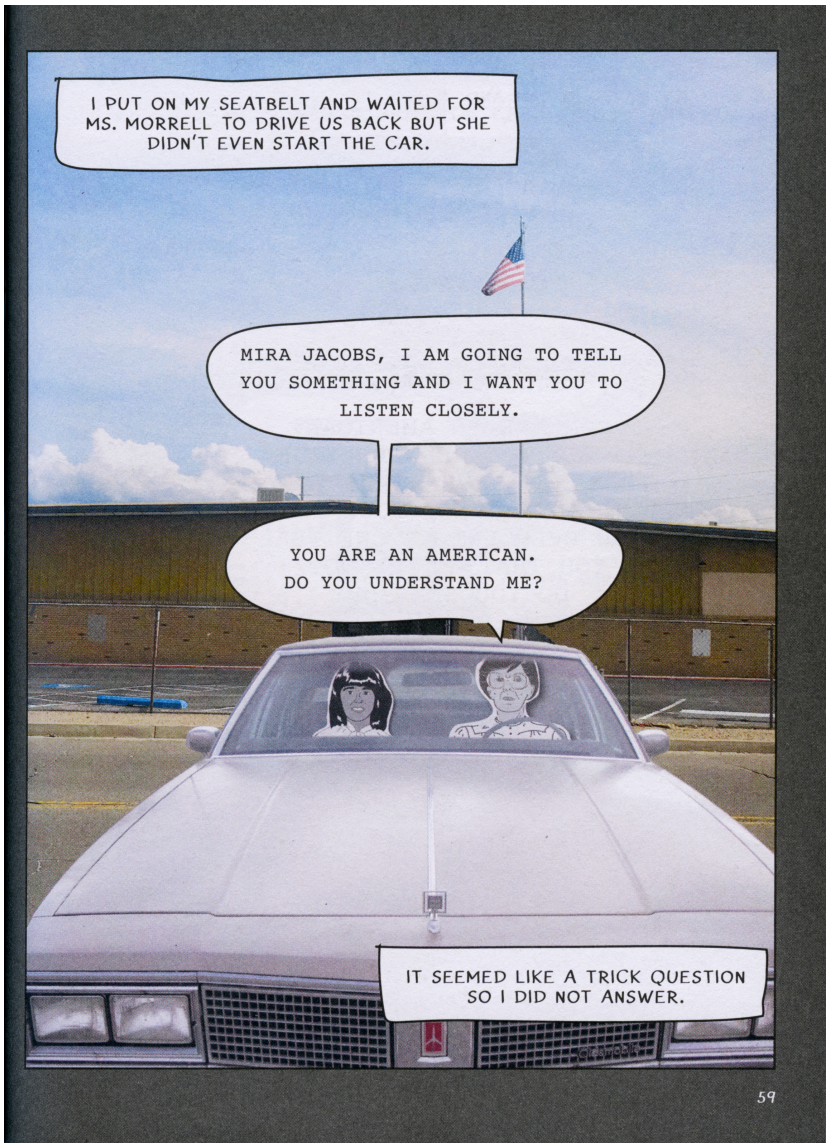


Figure 3.3. "It seemed like a trick question." Image: Jacob, *Good Talk*, 59.

mystery of her teacher's comment, doubled in its visual expression, that likewise offers no suggestion how we are to read her teacher's tone, for us to piece together through context and fragmentary dialogue, Ms. Morrell's defense against the Daughters' racist exclusion of her student's —and the future memoirist's—award-winning writing.

In this short chapter, Ms. Morrell's face and "voice" remain unchanging since her first appearance, impressing us with a static caricature that is by all accounts visually alienating, yet as Mira's and our encounters build, her teacher's visual personality acquires nuance from its serial reading. Readers are invited to infer from these illustrations of what young Mira experiences but

does not understand, and what Jacob understands but does not state, and the grimacing caricature we encounter now speaks not only to the teacher Mira thought she knew, but to her principled injury on behalf of her uncomprehending student. Jacob the cartoonist might have demonstratively illustrated this memory and shown Morrell's subtle changes for us to see, and Jacob the prose author might have narrated such dialogue without visual aid, but Jacob the digital memoirist does neither. As a result, the reader's impressions of Morrell must change with new information, without her image changing. Beginning from Ms. Morrell's typed fixity, this chapter explores the affect of the repeating visual sign, in contrast with the visual sign's anticipated expressive specificity.

Creators and scholars of autobiographical and journalistic comics often emphasize their conspicuously hand-drawn forms that affect the embodied author's intimate trace. Aaron Kashtan perhaps overstates the effects of comics studies' emergent canon in claiming that such North American scholarship on alternative auteurs has "distorted views of the field, causing scholars to identify comics as a whole with one particular genre of comics. Almost all the works in the academic canon are graphic memoirs or works of graphic journalism" (12-13). Kashtan that this overemphasis has produced "an incomplete account of materiality that is frequently biased by a focus on non-fiction genres. For example, Hillary Chute's work on Alison Bechdel and Lynda Barry is based on a naive assumption that printed comics are literal replications of the author's handwriting" (14). Kashtan, drawing on Emma Tinker's writing on production methods and publication formats, juxtaposes the alternative comics community's "fetishiz[ation]" of handcrafted books' perceived value as "strong enough to create the impression that comics produced or distributed by other means are somehow *devoid* of materiality, or materially impoverished" (27). Here it is worth recalling that an object's "materiality" does not imply a spectrum of material and immaterial objects, but describes one's perception of (and perceptual *attention to*) a given physical object's material qualities (see chapter 1). Despite Kashtan's nearly polemical tone, his sketch of Chute as exemplifying comics scholars' emphasis on the handmade as responding to—and therefore best suited to interpreting—only certain expressive modes is valuable, as it frames my investigation that similarly works to reinterpret digital, remediated, and iterative expressions' material connotations.

Chute, responding to Art Spiegelman's observation that "James Joyce and Jacqueline Susann can both be set in Times New Roman" (qtd. 11), argues that "what feels so intimate about comics is that *it looks like what it is*; handwriting is an irreducible part of its instantiation. The subjective mark of the body is not retranslated through type, but, rather, the bodily mark of handwriting both provides

a visual quality and texture and is also extrasemantic [; … it] cannot be 'reflowed' (*Graphic Women*, 11). Here, she opposes comics' extrasemantic and materially specific immediacy and (seeming) fixity, to typeset expressions' material and semantic mobility and translation as interrupting the subject's trace. Although she is right to state the latter's remediation that compounds its distance from the subject's body, her comparison elides these printed marks' necessary mediation (now typically by optical scans and digital reproduction), their often-effaced digital corrections and the difference between the author's handmade mark and its mass media digital and print reproduction readers encounter. As Kashtan corrects, the copy is already materially and ontologically non-identical with the original artist's mark. (One might likewise recognize in Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," and his discussion of art's perception when the reproduced image has been removed from the object's unique historical existence, that the artist's trace has long been subject to its mobile abstraction, even before that sign was fully digitized.)

Mechanical or digital signs' repeatable equivalence, modularity, and abstraction oppose the embodied, uniquely instantiated handwritten mark's intimate trace of the author, in the latter's similar mobile dependency on reproduction in publication. Digital lettering similarly challenges such perceived binaries, provoking reconsideration of type's medium-specific aesthetic, expressive potentials. N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman indicate writing's materiality when they argue that our postprint, multimodal, and often no-longer-discrete media production methods underscore that print (writing with non-connecting letters) is itself a medium: when writing media were only "quill pen, ink pot, and paper, it was possible to fantasize that writing was simple and straightforward, a means by which the writer's thoughts could be transferred […] into the reader's mind. With the proliferation of technical media in the latter half of the nineteenth century, that illusion became more difficult to maintain" (ix).

Jacob's methods and influences refute any similar expectation that typed lettering conforms, in its discrete regularity and modularity, to this fantasy of a neutral, immediate channel, instead evidencing its affective and expressive qualities. Jacob conveys her admiration of multimedia artist (notably including collage and comics memoir) Lynda Barry's work, and describes her creative process's affinity with Barry's. Jacob further specifies that she discovered Barry's artistic exploration and guide *What It Is* when first exploring graphic narrative, and that its writing exercises and conceptual inquiries encouraged her own project ("Non-Fiction," "5 Inspiring Books"). Of Barry's idiosyncratic lettering that seemingly arbitrarily alternates between uppercase print handwriting and

lowercase script, Chute argues that denotative interpretations are insufficient and that this "ruffling of the visual surface of the book – this inscription of irregularity – slows one down and also works to establish an extrasemantic visual rhythm through the presentation of words" (*Graphic*, 111). Without overstating Barry's influence, *Good Talk*'s consistent lettering is best contextualized by Jacob's awareness of Barry's material practices, and by Jacob's prior experience with both type (supporting her prose) and handwriting (in her private scrapbooking practice and public comics) from which she departs in her memoir. Jacob's digital lettering should be understood, rather than as a neutral form or one driven by efficiency alone, as an aesthetic strategy in its own right. If irregularity may be expressive, so, too, may regularity.

One might recognize an opposite effect to Barry's ruffling in *Good Talk*'s lexical consistency and easy legibility that matches Jacob's dialogic wit and speed, and might further identify such regularity's accentuation of her textual departures. Ms. Morrell's voice acquires its stiff tone through visual contrast, and likewise when Mira's father, dying of cancer, smokes to relieve his discomfort, his stoned voice similarly achieves its visual gag due to its wandering difference from Jacob's regular lettering (fig. 3.4). Jacob also sometimes adjusts her font size, suggesting dialogic volume. Speed and sometimes-underscored dissonance do not account for Jacob's insistent regularity; neither effect is so dramatic as to demand consistency and her short comics are not so typographically

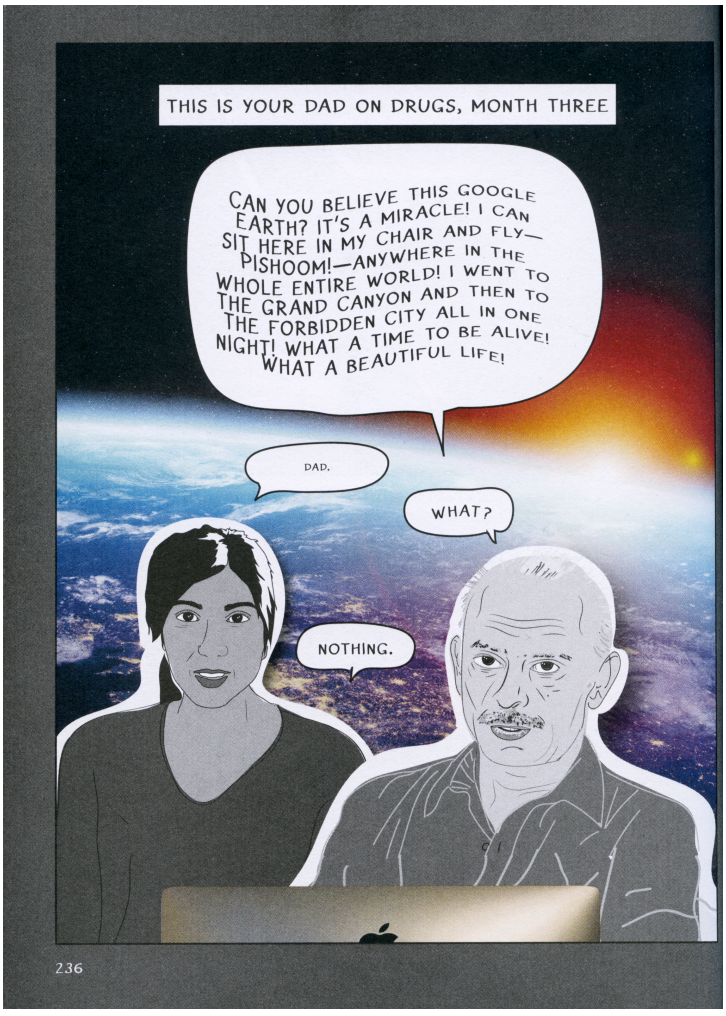


Figure 3.4. "A beautiful life." Image: Jacob, *Good Talk*, 236.

restricted.[36] Furthermore, while letterers often rely on visual texture (e.g. bold denotes the speaker or narrator's emphasis), in *Good Talk* Jacob implements no such word-level lettering variations. In accord with her unchanging paper-doll faces that similarly visually deny emotive context, Jacob offers few typographical tonal aids to facilitate readers' easy interpretation of characters' emotive tones. Where Barry's text presents an extrasemantic rhythmic irregularity in her comics, Jacob's *lack* of textural variation or emphasis performs an equivalent role by denying her reader recourse to such demonstrative cues.

Langue, Parole, and Signs' Specificity

These constituent, materially affective marks acquire particular significance in autobiographical and journalistic comics' distinctly subjective modes of visual witness. Chute compares the evident artifice of comics with the connoted technical fidelity and imagined immediacy of photographs: comics form "rejects the verisimilitude of mechanical objectivity and presents in turn a succession of little drawn boxes, reveals its own process of making," and thereby formally indicates its mediation, but it is "also forcefully invested in detailed documentation – of place, of duration, of perspective, of material specificity, of embodiment" (*Disaster Drawn*, 18). Once we readers acknowledge that our perception of photographs' persuasive representational objectivity is not essential to their form—but a product of external claims, connotations, and our identification of the photographic document with its represented content, overturning claims of their objective immediacy—we might interpret photographs' and other subjectively produced documents' perceived representational and historical fidelity to observable reality on similar semiotic grounds.

Along with how the form of Jacob's writing affects the perceived visual expressivity and emotional legibility of *characters'* dialogue, in an autobiographical context, its visual character also affects perceptions of its relationship to the memoirist, her experience, and its expression. These signs' visual specificity or abstraction, that affect the scenes they represent, also affect how they communicate their inscription by Jacob. Approaching Chute's discussion of alternative cartoonists' renunciation of optical fidelity and reflexive materialization of their own subjectivity, one might recognize that what remains is a faith in these optically or bodily inscribed marks' formal and

[36] Jacob's 2017 "From His Corner, A Bodega Owner Watches Brooklyn Change" and 2018 "Whereby I Tell My Past Self Future Things," published in the same period as *Good Talk* and stylistically similar to it, both show more typographical variety.

historical proximity to the truth of their making. The photograph's necessary trace of real light conditions, and the drawn or written mark's necessary trace of the authoring subject's body (even when these marks' optical reproduction for print or digital display interrupts their immediate historical or material to their source), affirm their pictures' resemblance to the specific sight each reproduces. One might generalize these mechanical and manual pictorial modes in terms of their subjective and objective truth claims' cultural contingency, that all such perceived fidelity is the fictive product of one's imagination, and arrive at their shared indexical and iconic, persuasive *authentication* of their understood messages in their visual verisimilitude. Along with photographs and drawings, handwriting in its perceived trace of the authorial subject also seems to show something about its own referents, both the performed figure of the narrator, and that writing's implicit historical trace of the empirical author. As with the photograph or the drawing's visual communication of their sight and history, one's imagination of the author's handwriting produces impressions that this representational form "looks like what it is," or, rather, *looks like the activities and subjectivities that produced it*.

Comics scholars often generalize their medium's visual signs or *imagetexts*, asserting the communicative and language-like properties of cartooning and the graphic effects of lettering. However, Hannah Miodrag resists these forms' reduction to equivalent visual communicative systems. Miodrag indicates drawn representation as necessarily instantiated as *parole*—the specific utterance—as drawings' component marks that individually lack stable semantic value (adopting Umberto Eco's example of two dots and a curve that might signify a face or a bowl of fruit, depending on context), in contrast with written signs' basis in "a preexistent *langue*– the abstract differential system of language" (9). Miodrag here deftly refutes any simple homology between drawings' motivated marks and writing's arbitrary morphemes, and resists these communicative forms' conflation. She later inverts her contrast between words' and pictures' visual instantiation and their arbitrary or motivated communication of their contents. She clarifies that although graphic lettering techniques formally affect their contents' reception, these specific forms "do not operate as signs standing in for an identifiable signified. These devices [written letters] cannot be considered in isolation from the signifiers [symbolic words] they materialize. They constitute the *material* contextual effects that distinguish *parole* from the repeatable conceptual signifiers that constitute the *langue"* (79). Beyond her general indication of the dependency of all expressions on their material forms—and by consequence these forms' influence on their expressed contents—when Miodrag analyzes

relationships between lettering's graphic form the semantic values they support, she clarifies the text's material form that implies its making also demonstrates its representational instance's *specific* material and historical difference from the *abstract*, iterative, symbolic, and conventional system of the *langue*.

Jacob's digital lettering presents both its specific instantiation by, and documentation of, its author's hand, *and* its abstraction in its iterative use. Her digital practice allows our disidentification of her writing's authorial trace, from her semantic use of these signs to communicate specific events or experiences. Ms. Morrell's typed voice in its inexpressive standardization that represents Mira's difficulty interpreting her teacher's disposition, also doubly affects its own illegibility, by resisting its possible reading as either characterizing Morrell's emphasis, or connoting Jacob's inflection of her teacher's remembered voice with her own emotions, representing it. Jacob's digitized hand more broadly achieves a similar effect, by presenting some trace of the author, but denying its specific instantiation's legibility.

Jacob's digitized lettering manipulates such specificity and connoted presence, and digital abstraction, but a digression to consider her use of photographs, as images derived from past actuality, present easier cases to consider how *Good Talk*'s digital format manipulates opposed visual connotations of presence and distance. The camera's necessary and indiscriminate documentation of objects and their organization before the lens, and their excess of the photographer-agent's representational intentions, affects these objects' perceived documentary value and indexicality, "authenticating" their perceived, usually external message. Similarly, interpreting these ambiguous documents without unreflectively accepting their immediate identity with the sight can lead us as viewers to recognize the photographing subject's presence in the event they partially document, and to how the picture's perspectival address to viewers, as it approximately repeats the subject's point of view, and to consider the subject even in their visual absence. Jacob, beginning chapter 19 relating her family's early overbearing efforts to set her up in relationships, captions a photograph framing one such call, "I was living in Williamsburg, where the rents were still low and you could see all of glittering Manhattan if you walked down to the East River" (fig. 3.5). Juxtaposed by the precedent page's technically proficient and unobtrusively "neutral," pre-9/11 New York City stock photo of that glittering skyline, this photograph's grainy reciprocity failure and unassuming content, combined with Jacob's evocative and specific caption, might invite speculation on the present image's origins.

One might speculate that the narrator and the photographer share their perspective and description of the memoirist's former alley apartment, and consider the present authenticating image's possible origins, as perhaps Jacob repurposes a memento or physically revisits the location, in either case suggesting she offers her audience a chance to see this anonymous alley *with* her and its significance to her—a visual connection to a former reality which grounds the private conversation. This noisy specificity might be extended to the traces of the individual photographer's effort as well, its deviation from technical standards stylistically indicating the specific photographer pushing her film. Jacob, however, attributes this photograph, "Adobe Stock/Bruno Passigatti" (354). Although Jacob sometimes integrates documentary photographs, her photographic backgrounds typically refuse their identification with her specific vision: her above attribution is one of over 250 times she indicates her use of others' photographs, which together represent the bulk of her graphic memoir's settings.

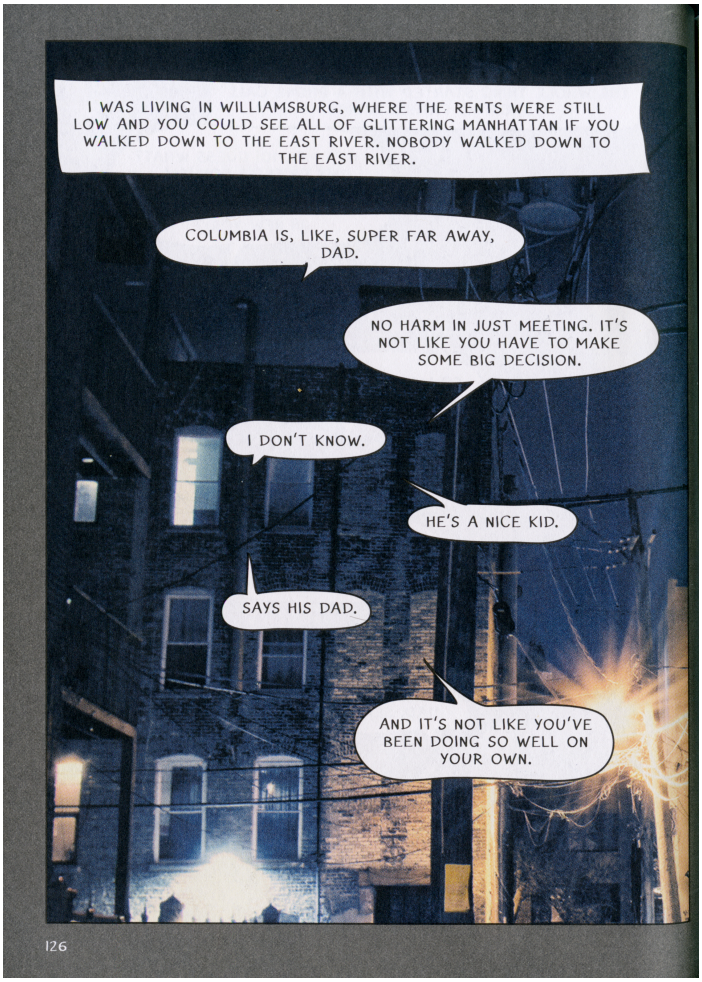


Figure 3.5. Reciprocity failure.
Image: Jacob, *Good Talk*, 126.

Responding to an interviewer's comment on "world-building" techniques, Jacob states that she "enjoyed placing a character in a certain setting, looking for the right photograph until it said exactly what I needed it to. And I got the same relief doing it that I get writing a good scene in fiction" ("Non-Fiction"). Underscoring world-building narrative use over verification of, or fidelity to, an event's appearance, Jacob renders the latter suspect through her image-crediting index. She undermines even her own photographic record, presenting the possibility of a shared visual experience but then denying it. While her parents' oak kitchen cabinetry elsewhere bears no external

photo credit and therefore one might conclude these photographs are Jacob's, in context any fidelity to Jacob's external reality cannot be assumed. Through hyperreal play, the visual contexts of her often-intimate conversations and revelations, and by extension the dialogues themselves, remain foreign, presenting their function as only symbolic, mediating relays for her experience. Whatever Jacob shows of her domestic world is a product of world-building, assembled and staged for the reader's benefit: her reality remains private.

I have considered Jacob's rendering of photographic representation agnostic to any encounter and its challenges to any perceived historical information the document offers, and to our subjective identification with its source (her photograph presents the possibility of her shared former perspective and sight, to be denied), and I now return to her repeatable font that removes her hand from its unique embodiment and, like the photograph, renders the experience of her hand independent to the specific embodied event.

The Personality of the Hand

As Jacob subverts photographic reference, one might similarly explore her manipulation of handmade marks' specificity and abstraction. The emotive trace of the drawing hand, and the optical trace of the photograph, that both visually authenticate their messages, implicate their perception as documents and representations: we believe they show us legible information about past events and subjects. By extent, it is worth considering, what might Jacob's digitized hand connote or disclose about its author?

Literature and media theorist Friedrich Kittler quotes German nineteenth century journal *Vom Fels zum Meer*'s expressed anxiety over the lost "intimacy of handwritten expressions" (qt. 186) due to the recent popularization of the typewriter. Kittler remarks that, "after the engineer had deprived woman's tender hand of the actual symbol of female industriousness [weaving], one of his colleagues hit upon replacing the quill, the actual symbol of male intellectual activity, with a machine" (186). Eschewing the gender dualism of Kittler's description, I draw attention to his philological emphasis, that the "literal meaning of text is tissue" (186)[37]: the mark comes to signify the body itself. Kittler later references Martin Heidegger's *Parmenides* comments rejecting the typewriter. Heidegger's similar unease with type's remediation of the human hand is most

[37] Referencing the Latin *textus*, tissue or literary style, from "to weave."

illuminating in his assertion that, without the hand, the "signless cloud" (qtd. in Kittler, 199) of the typewritten word is withdrawn from the physical *evidence* of the writing hand that exists "only where there is [both] disclosure and concealment" (qtd. 198). Heidegger, like Barthes, deems type's standardized noiselessness—that seems to only hide its embodied production—lacking. Chute more forcefully defends this originary mark: instead of Heidegger's suspicions that typing is changing writing, she implies that there is some more-authentic *manu*script when she positions handwriting as closer to the author than "retranslated" type. Preceding her and Spiegelman's comments on Times New Roman (above), Chute types,

> That the same hand is both writing and drawing in the narrative in comics leads to a sense of the form as diaristic; there is an intimacy to reading handwritten marks on the printed page, an intimacy that works in tandem with the sometimes visceral effects of presenting "private" images.
> Handwriting underscores the subjective positionality of the author. Emphasizing the handmade aspect of comics, Spiegelman explains that comics is "as close to getting a clear copy of one's diary or journal as one could have. It's more intimate than a book of prose that's set in type [….] The quirks of penmanship that make up comics have a much more immediate bridge to somebody […]. You're getting an incredible amount of information about the maker" (*Graphic Women*, 10-11).

Good Talk pressures binaries of standardized type and grainy handwriting. Having created a repeatable but also unique font from her handwriting, Jacob types in her own hand's discretized image. Although it traces her (vectorized) embodied gesture, and it is through these inscribed marks that her characters speak, the source of the voice is also abstracted from its specific enunciations, the material "bridge" to the making subject is restricted to the standardized mark.

Kashtan challenges binaries between the seeming immediate visibility of handwriting, and its "concealing" remediation by type, noting that Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home*—often diaristic in tone despite its elaborate structure, and painstakingly attentive to handwriting—is (like *Good Talk*) typed by the author in her own hand, when Bechdel does not draw documents. Kashtan asserts that the perceived material concealment or visibility of the writer's identity responds to graphological optimism, that the hand's gesture could unconsciously reveal a stable self rather than socially fluid personae: the "ostensible purpose of graphology was to give its subject an insight into his or her innermost self, but its deeper effect was to reassure the subject that he or she *had* a singular, stable core of selfhood" (34). He argues that handwriting only connotes "personality and intimacy which typewriting lacks" (35), and that both graphologists' methods and Chute's diaristic

"sense" reveal their medium bias, a "preference for manual over mechanical labor" in their views of material authenticity (40). Kashtan describes Bechdel's typed hand as "personal and distinctive, but also reserved and reticent. It exposes itself to a limited degree [: …] Bechdel embraces and partially rejects the graphological myth [….] Alison's depiction of her self is to some extent a façade" (41). Kashtan might nearly be writing on Jacob's textual practices.

Contextualized by Jacob's photographic hyperreal subversion of any disclosed presence, the urgency of materially persuading truth recedes, however, revealing the limits of Kashtan's critique of handwriting's perceived subjective trace. For all his attentive critique of graphological *connotations* of immediacy, Kashtan hazards reducing *formal* mediatic differences to rhetorical performances. His account nearly reduces each textual medium's aesthetic specificity to culturally informed material signification, which comes at the expense of recognizing media as formally distinct informational resources one *can* interpret. The expressive and affective connotational differences between Barry's idiosyncratic handwriting and Jacob's almost Comic Sans conspicuousness as a non-connecting script font cannot be reduced to socially predetermined conceptualizations of selfhood, but must acknowledge the actual visual legibility of such textual forms as presenting (admittedly ambiguous) information about their enunciation. Jacob's font eschews the "incredible amount of information" Spiegelman ascribes to the hand, not only its general identification with the authorial subject we imagine, but its specific indication of that mark's unique bodily inscription by the authoring body. In Jacob's font's typed regularity, she literally denies access to interpretable visual information that her expressing hand might unselfconsciously physically trace, or that the author might self-consciously emote or perform. If Bechdel's lettering speaks to her narrative's partially withheld authenticity, Jacob's, in its photographic context that already denies assurances of reality or experiential access, confirms its distance through its visual informational paucity that forecloses a notable expressive resource in comics. In Jacob's chirographic flatness, contextualized by comics lettering's conventional and anticipated expressivity, presents her subjectivity through neither materially unreflective myths of textual transparency nor intimate expressive opposition to mobile type, but in her digital hand that in its non-expressivity indicates the mediating distance between her lived experience and its representation to readers.

Good Talk's intimate content but materially signified and affectively produced distance speaks to the intimate visual texture of such comics, and to how it affects their addresses to their audiences. Susan Kirtley describes the tension activated by such texture, which "blurs lines between public and

private, the diary implying a hidden, secret tale, while the direct address breaks the frame and argues for an implied, decidedly public audience. This […] *metalepsis* positions the reader as witness, confidante, and friend" (89-90). It is this material intimacy found in Chute's embodied hand and Kirtley's diaristic address that *Good Talk* denies. Jacob's drawn figures are texturally incongruous with their photographed backgrounds, while their repeating vector-drawn caption frames and word balloons in their regulated curves standardize Jacob's unique hand. Within grey-bordered chapters recalling more distant moments, Jacob's captions situate encounters in time and place and describe intervening events retrospectively and externally. Jacob's verbal pithiness announces its performance for her public audience: Mira's suspended verbal interjection, "Dad. […] Nothing." suggests her honest discomfort at her father's uncharacteristic behavior, but Jacob's caption, "This is Your Dad on Drugs" (fig. 3.4), resists intimacy in its pop cultural, jokingly citational tone. In her faster-paced, white-bordered chapters set during 2016 around Donald Trump's election, Jacob's interventions are sparser. Typically limited to initial contextualization when present at all, her captions further avoid emotional revelation, placing more explanatory onus on the depicted encounters than her commentary. Jacob underscores her captions' descriptive rather than emotionally revealing quality, forgoing even her restrained text scaling. She deploys her embodied hand to similar ends as her photographic backgrounds which present the possibility of, but deny, intimate formal-experiential likeness. By articulating her personal account through her digital hand but denying each expression's unique visual iconic or indexical likeness to its referent experience or the author's expression of it, Jacob produces her expressions' private-public tension by indicating the former's existence but denying its formal legibility in its abstracted use. Despite its public telling, much of Jacob's experience remains secret: *Good Talk* formally indicates, the publicly addressed reader is not Jacob's confidante.

Showing and Telling

The specific mark, and its abstraction, each imply the sign's history, the imagination of which affects the perceived relationship between its production and use. Broadening this attention to lexical and photographic signs' abstracting effects, what of Jacob's paper dolls? Although these figures are descriptively cartooned and serially employed, as her drawings of herself (that resemble the photographed author) indicate, they derive in part from her observations. This returns to the general visual encounter which has guided this dissertation, in John Berger's argument that "A drawing of a

tree shows, not a tree, but a tree being-looked-at" (43-4), which with enviable concision indicates the image's historical reference as, rather than its understood transitively described object, the encounter, interpretation, and process in time that accounts for the picture. He continues, contrasting one's near-instantaneous experience of the "sight of a tree," with the drawer's slow "examination of the [perceptual experience of their] sight of a tree (a tree being-looked-at)," observable in the drawing its activity produces, and that object therefore "consists of the evidence of many glances which can be seen together" (44). This produces the drawing's resultant temporal tension between nature's flux and the static image: "there is no sight in nature as unchanging as that of a drawing or a painting. On the other hand, what is unchanging in the drawing consists of so many moments that they constitute a totality rather than a fragment. The static image of the drawing or painting is the result of the opposition of two dynamic processes. Disappearances opposed by assemblage" (ibid.). Any given documentary image might be considered in such operation in and against time, as Berger clarifies in comparing drawn, photographic, and fossilized images' different preservations of their lost referents. When these static images also appear in comics and readers must interpret these fragments' constitution of their representational totality, their narrative context demands their temporal interpretation, and the perception of the image's *past* documented time and *present* narrating time demands each time's identification with the image, and disidentification from each other, affecting in these non-identical terms' formal coincidence in the observed and narrating panel, documentary comics' multiple temporality.

Jacob's figures and panels that claim their digital composition, considered individually, affect a general tension between their specificity and abstraction, but appropriately to the serial expression and synthetic experience of comics, this abstracting effect builds in its repetition. Each new instance of a drawn element in comics demands its consideration with all others, as we typically intuitively synthesize, for instance, two drawings of mostly similar figures read in sequence, into the same character at two different moments in time. However, Jacob's unusual repetitions both compound and subvert this serial identification, when these figures reappear with rarely more than minor changes, and commonly an entire figure—encapsulated as an object by its surrounding "cuts"—is for all intents and purposes, transposed from one panel to the next. This effect is further compounded in Jacob's shift from analog to digital collage: rather than physically moving from one panel to the next, the metaphorical transfer of digital "cut-and-paste," these repetitions involve no literal transfer: in their technological, vector-guaranteed, precise digital reproducibility, each copy of

the same "base" image affects their identification with each other (fig. 3.6), including the character(s) they represent, and Jacob's (often literally identical) drawing actions that produced them. The shifting meanings of Ms. Morrell's static scowl across her short chapter model in microcosm how readers are invited to experience Jacob's own relatively static self-images across the memoir.



Figure 3.6 One of Mira's faces in series (details, various pages). Image: Jacob, *Good Talk*.

Retained from her original "37 questions" analog format, Jacob extensively reuses her small cast of digital "paper dolls" in *Good Talk*, often transplanting complete figures, including their simulated cuts, between panels. Even when their hair or clothing changes, their poses and

expressions—staring at the reader, mouth slightly ajar—typically remain. Although Mira and her family's expressions subtly change over time, each remains consistent within its period and sometimes even as their faces age. Outside of Mira's immediate family and closest friends, this decontextualizing repetition is more pronounced. She uses these dolls as iterable categories and types—for instance, her paper doll representing her teenage boyfriend returns as a teenage witness alongside adult Mira and a decade later reappears as a fellow passenger. As Jacob eschews her handwriting's unique temporal embodiment through its repetition and as she undermines the photograph's relationship to its documented encounter, she likewise denies the possibility that her drawings might reveal in their resemblance to a specific observation, memory, or subjective expression, the unique experience they describe. The formal repetition, abstraction, and mobility of her expressions severs the relationship between her representational dolls, and her experiences of individual events or people. By demonstrating their historical and representational abstraction, Jacob reduces her representations to descriptive types that indicate their conventional and symbolic mediation and function as fictive and arbitrary signs that do not iconically reflect or indexically record her specific subjective experience or their telling, and thereby resists impressions of her readers' subjective access or our projective identification with her knowable experience.

I do not suggest that Jacob renders her experiences or emotions visually unknowable (or renders their visual representation wholly arbitrary), but that she resists showing more than their description. By eschewing her expressions' specific indexical or iconic fidelity to her unique experiences in their insistent mobility, Jacob presents her images as symbolic and schematic, as clarified by her rarer compositions that feature no photographic elements. In her digital collages, Jacob liberally uses photographs as literal documents, for cultural or personal objects and references, and most commonly in "world building" as stages for her conversations (and as I discuss shortly, stages for their addresses), but occasionally she eschews these elements, most commonly presenting her figures, instead, on graph paper. Jacob initially uses this alternative graph paper setting when, on a childhood trip, she first becomes conscious of her skin color and its social implications, as her grandmother imposes racist ideas and products—ideologies and their material culture—on her, literally talking over the mostly hidden young Mira, who appears in the next panel in a series among other Miras (fig. 3.7). These paired panels stage a scene of interpellation: as Mira's external address by her grandmother affects her self-image, the single image of the stable subject is rendered multiple. As Jacob visualizes her childhood imagination, and as her image lightens, it uniquely changes

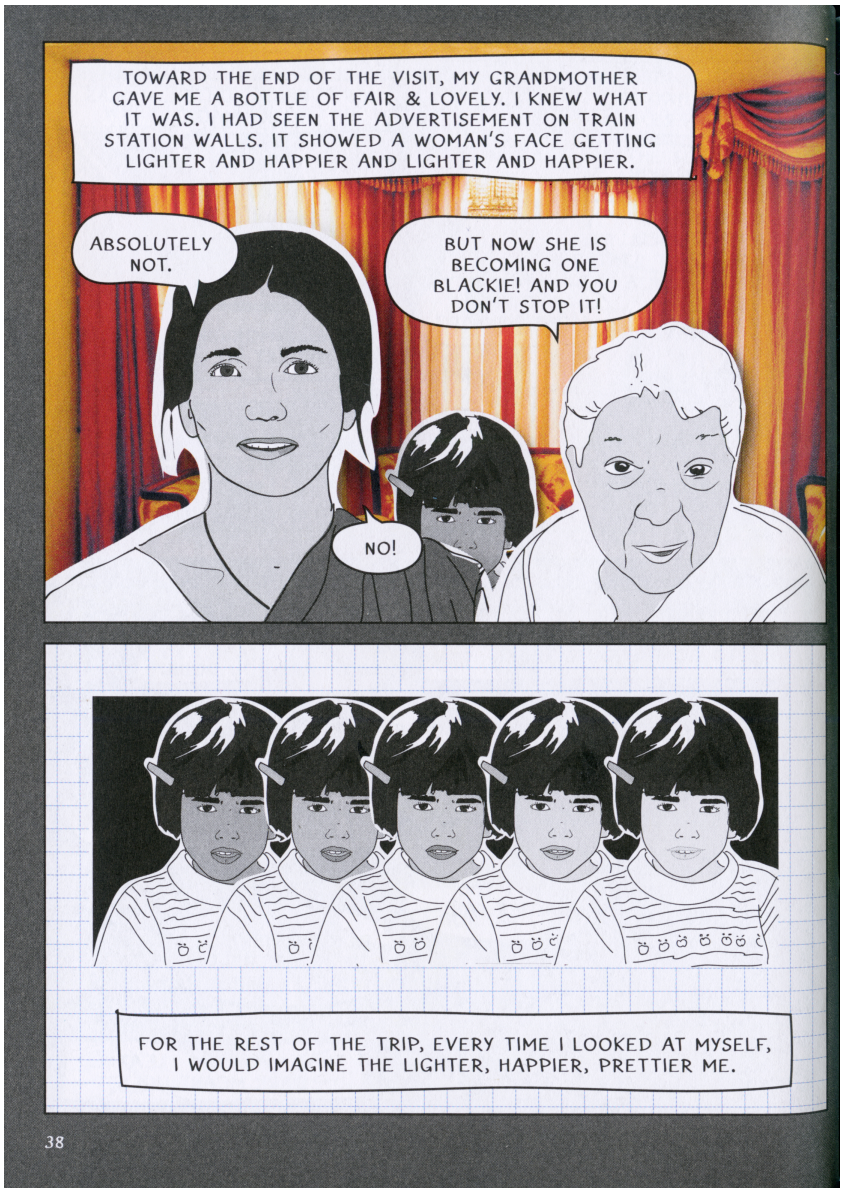


Figure 3.7. "Fair & Lovely." Image: Jacob, *Good Talk*, 38.

expressions, which presents other subjective identities. The "happier, prettier me" challenges the subject's stable visual identity, at the same time Jacob indicates that the doll signifies her subjective identity; its smiling alternatives become disturbing and uncanny in their difference. This image's setting on graph paper substitutes *Good Talk*'s more common staging on images of external reality, with a gridded space evocative of cartesian abstraction and an interiority separate from such enterable spaces and settings, which suggests Jacob shows something about the internal landscape of her experience. But, at the same time, this diagrammatic space that denies seeming depth and

presents only its surface—simulated paper dolls on simulated paper—also indicates her project's expressive conceit, that Jacob tells us of her experience only by manipulating and composing descriptive symbols on surfaces, that their communication is largely limited to their conventional identification with their referents.

Jacob's "paper doll" description indicates the influence of her prototypical collages, and suggests the formal significance of these arranged objects to her memoir's affect. In their challenge to any natural, historical, or expressive likeness to their referents, Jacob's paper dolls, rather than denying the complex depth of their referents, focus attention to their own limits as objects, drawings on surfaces, that do little more than signify absent subjects. Jacob says, "I imagine that my mother is much more complicated than she appears on the panels in the book, and so are my in-laws and my husband and my child – and so am I. This is a portion of us, and it's never going to be all of us" ("Illustrating"). One might read Jacob's digitally collaged style as only indicating her project's general fictive representational ethos, but it more specifically alienates her expressions from the Real: as her interviewed invocation of imagination as speculative supposition affirms, her symbolic and objectified paper doll signs present their difference from complex subjects, and in context her signs' interrupted resemblance renders their referents ambiguous absences, denying their simple identification with knowable signifiers.

Jacob states the "urgency" she realized she could affect when she "let the paper dolls speak and if I couldn't rely on expressions but I also couldn't rely on action. Right. Nobody ever moves. […] They're just holding the space of basically a brain or a psyche on the page" ("The Vulnerability of Memoir Writing," transcript amended). In practice, her refusal to represent a moment through unique visual description—for instance a particular expression or a stranger's individuated face—resists the perceived visual verisimilitude of her memoir, resists impressions that in her images' real or performed proximity to her experienced reality and that readers might truly "know" something about the complex individuals and experiences her compositions only describe. As Jacob's digital lettering affects a material reticence that might be overlooked in typed prose because comics readers are trained to anticipate her hand's expressivity, her drawings' description of the same characters while offering little new visual information likewise indicate what Jacob *could* show, but doesn't.[38]

[38] See Groensteen's discussion of images' serial visual description of characters as "infinite," opposed to textual nominative designations and deictic references that return us to a given character after they have been described (*System of Comics*, 124). Jacob's frequent repetition of identical figures in new contexts challenges Groensteen's assertion of these textual and pictorial effects' differences, but also agrees with his hypothesis that comics readers' trained maintenance of enunciations' cohesion informs which pictorial details or mannerisms we deem "significant" to the narrative totality and

Denied their unique instantiation in the embodied gesture or experienced moment, Jacob's paper dolls claim their abstracted role as serially employed relays and symbolic substitutes which achieve meaning in their repetitive identification with the character and narrative.

Positioned Subjects

Jacob's repeated, networked forms are not geometric abstractions but representations of humans that address readers through gazes. In persistently situating her paper dolls' dialogues and gazes within photographs which perspectivally place readers with the camera-eye (if not a unique subject), Jacob socially charges the experience of sight and space. In writing on the cultural development of the vanishing point, Erwin Panofsky argues that linear perspective has rationalized the "subjective visual impression" to the degree that "this very impression could itself become the foundation for a solidly grounded […] experiential world" and produces the "subjective standpoint of a beholder" (66) in this imagined and experienced space. When Panofsky cites Albrecht Dürer's commentary that "'Perspectiva' is a Latin word which means 'seeing through,'" (Panofsky, 27) he evokes the doubled experience of the picture plane as both material surface and illusionistic window. In both photographs and observational drawings' perspectival organization that indicates their source, one might extend this claim to "seeing through" the implied artist-subject's inscribed perspective and experience, as I do when interpreting images in other chapters. But, if viewing the standpoint of the beholder might position the art-beholding audience's experience with the event-beholding artist's, Jacob's rejection of her expressions' iconic and indexical resemblance also refutes her audience's identification with her observing perspective: she denies the fantasy of a shared visual position and experience.

Jacob does not eschew perspectival positioning but instead situates and addresses readers through it–often uncomfortably. As her paper dolls' placement and scale accords with their photographic perspectival environments, the dolls' persistently returned gazes are necessarily directed towards readers' position relative to the picture plane. As figures talk to one another while facing us in these encounters, Jacob metaleptically positions us as addressees as much as she positions her characters. She describes her emotional exhaustion in conversations during Trump's

retain in our reading (124-5). One might read Jacob's repetitive images' details as individually insignificant, quickly affecting a text-like assertion of identity alone once the description is established. But, their enunciative form—each repeated image communicates through visual resemblance, not only deixis—affects *Good Talk*'s unusual reticence in presenting the possibility of *new* visual information about the represented character or representing author but then typically denying it.

rise, throughout which Jacob and other non-White Americans' "White liberal friends were saying, 'This identity politics is really what's the problem.' In the moment that we're feeling the anxiety for real things that are happening, our friends are saying 'Part of the problem is that you're feeling the anxiety'" ("Awkward Conversations"). Jacob's subsequent question, "How the fuck do you *look* at someone and say that?" (ibid., emphasis added) in her anger and disbelief also implies her hope that the encounter with another *should* affect solidarity. Responding to this emotionally unreceptive White denial, Jacob describes that her paper dolls

> helped me skip […] the step where I felt all the disbelief. [… It] became a question of eavesdropping. People can listen or they can not. I just kept moving our unchanging expressions from album cover to album cover [. … It] felt like such a relief to do that. […] To not engage with those voices of doubt, to give them nothing – no part of my emotion, no part of my pain beyond the conversation itself. ("Writing for Us").

Jacob indicates the emotional labor at stake, since her first versions of her conversations. One might recognize her reticence in, for instance, her "American Revolution" chapter that presents her memories of complex social interactions, racist misdirection and exclusion, and her defense by Ms. Morrell but avoids commenting on her present or past emotions, or hypothesizing about anyone else's. Jacob describes her memories through images, dialogue, and sensory information, but the chapter offers sparse emotional characterization, effectively presenting the memory as a scenario for her readers to interpret, rather than as an emotive account facilitating readerly identification or presenting the event's pathos. She continues her interview, describing her process, its effects, and its alternatives:

> My first editor commented […] "It's jarring when you're having these emotional passages and nobody's face moves, do you think you want to make one or two expressions? A consternation face, or when something's really sad, a little hint of a tear?" And I said, No. I'm not performing this. And that thing that you're feeling when you're uncomfortable because you have to hold the emotion that my face won't? I want that. Because when you stop looking to the characters to emote, the feelings land on you, and you have to make sense of it. The whole reason I wrote this book is because I think America has this kind of insatiable hunger for witnessing racial pain, and then denying it. Demanding the details from bodies of color and then using them to deny all the ways in which those experiences could possibly be true (ibid.).

By denying these visually descriptive, specific "details from bodies of color" Jacob politicizes comics' frequently described informational paucity and resultant participatory demands and inferences by readers, relative to both pictured subjects and her picturing subjectivity. In abstracting both her paper-doll characters and her digitized handwriting from their specific description of given experiences, and concurrently abstracting these descriptions from their specific instantiation by the describing artist and any connotation of her physically legible subjectivity, Jacob refuses to emotionally perform, or let her characters perform, the embodied mark. Instead of engaging in the emotional labor of providing representational and implied historical information about the memoirist or subjects she has encountered and easing readers' access to her life by performing under our gaze, Jacob subjects us to these formally ambiguous others' visually unemotive language and stares.[39]

It is also through Jacob's dolls' repeated stares that address us but offer no subjective access, that she situates readers' possible contact with their other referent people. I argue that the reader's discomfort over these simulated gazes—including the discomfort her editor balks at, and mine I pursue—is not provoked by our unknowable *distance* from the other but by our *contact* with the other and the emotional work that it demands. Sarah Ahmed's understanding of the intersubjective social encounter as the event through which the subject itself is constituted (23) is particularly relevant to Jacob's explicitly social aesthetic that doubly stages her conversations and their participants' address to their audience. Ahmed argues that "there is no body as such that is given in the world" (40), but instead "bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including bodies that are recognized as familiar […] and those that are considered strange" (40). Through Elizabeth Grosz' physically, disciplinarily inscribed body, Jacques Lacan's misrecognizing identification, and Frantz Fanon's racially specific reworking of Lacan's theories, Ahmed argues the contingency of the embodied subject and its contingency on identifying itself relative to specific, rather than abstract, others (42-44). She theorizes this contact through the subject's skin. Along with its perceived visual differences, Ahmed describes skin as,

> a border or boundary, supposedly holding or containing the subject within a certain contour, keeping the subject inside, and the other outside; or in Frantz Fanon's terms, the skin becomes *a seal*[. … But] Jean-Luc Nancy discusses the skin as an *exposure* to the other, as

[39] Also see my prior chapters' discussions of the historically ambiguous portrait subject's legibility, as it bespeaks the sitter's performed and real self-conscious presence and the portraitist's interpretation and characterization of them, both of which Jacob's practice renders largely historically illegible.

> always passing from one to the other[. … If] the skin is a border, then it is *a border that feels*. [… While] the skin appears to be the matter which separates the body, it rather allows us to think of how the materialization of our bodies involves, not containment, but an affective opening out of bodies to other bodies, in the sense that the skin registers how bodies are touched by others. Sue Cataldi's concern with skin as an 'ambiguous, shifting border' centres on the question of how our skin 'paradoxically protects us from others and exposes us to them.' (44-5)

Ahmed's description of this intersubjective barrier and contact might be visualized in the limning cuts of Jacob's paper dolls. These borders, which cast their digital shadows and obscure other forms behind them, more clearly define their contained figures through the same space that isolates their contents. But it is also only through these mediating spaces that their contained subjects have any contact with their reality. Occasionally—most often between family—these distinctions dissolve as their white trim space exists contiguously with their neighbors'. These spaces, neither static, iconic, nor impenetrable, are best understood through Ahmed and Cataldi's paradoxical border.

Scrapbooked Conversations

As much as they isolate figures, these white spaces perform a more literal role, clarified by Jacob's digital simulation of her original physical paper-doll dialogues: these elements visually identify and differentiate themselves as objects within their compositions. Jacob's compositional practices might be understood generally as collage-like, but her text's memoiristic content, and her influences, distinguish its more specific affinity with scrapbooking. Jacob invites her work's gendered reading in describing *Good Talk*'s influences, that Barry creates "stories that are both domestic and feral, and that's the space that I was living in with this [book]" ("Writing for Us"). Jacob's digital compositions of simulated, reproduced personal objects to tell her experience without uniquely showing it, similarly to Ahmed's inside-outside border that both contains and exposes as well as Barry's conjoined domestic-feral narrative structures, are better interpreted, not only in terms of their material, historical and semantic, interruptive abstraction of the memoirist's private experiences and expression, but in terms of the tension they produce between seeming contact and otherness, between materially connoted familiarity and unfamiliarity. As Barry's idiosyncratic expressive lettering illuminates Jacob's digitally reticent lettering, Barry's collages aid in interpreting Jacob's digital compositions.

Despite their materially distinct practices and styles (Jacob's digitally proliferating objects bear little resemblance to Barry's handmade pages), these artists share underlying compositional practices. Kirtley, describing Barry's cartooned and collaged "autobifictionalography" *One! Hundred! Demons!* writes that "Barry fashions a scrapbook of sorts, employing this gendered, domestic form"—insofar as scrapbooking is associated with traditionally feminine activities concerned with family and the preservation of nostalgic items— "to frame her life stories with ephemera from childhood and artistic collages [….] These shaped and constructed images of Barry's life focus on girlhood as mediated through her memory and her skills […] suggesting a vision that stresses an archival record of personal history through interposing lenses of time and technology. (148) Kirtley likens Barry's mix of personal narrative and collaged forms to the autobiographical work of scrapbooking, that as the scrapbooker "envisions himself or herself through the images positioned on the page […] yet remain[s] free, elusive, hidden" (Tucker et al., qtd. 153), Barry, too, blends "an inner vision of character with historical documentation. Through this method the creator herself remains essentially obscure, revealing her soul while retaining some measure of privacy" (Kirtley, 153). Contextualized by Barry's influence on Jacob and by my emphasis on Jacob's abstracting digitization of her manual and materially specific practices as transformatively *combining*, rather than *supplanting*, the latter's connotations with the former's, Barry's manual composition of a physical archive becomes less relevant, and Kirtley's account of the archivist's revelation and obscurity is similarly applicable to *Good Talk*. Reading in Jacob's digital practices only her memoir's physical and signified abstraction from the author would be reductive. Rather, I find Jacob's digital construction compelling because this arrangement *also* exposes her subjective archive: her "scrapbooking" also offers intimacy.

Jacob's protective reticence functions together with such archival and subjective exposure. Z's Michael Jackson album covers compose three quarters of Jacob's "37 Questions" backgrounds (fig. 3.1), which *Good Talk*'s first chapter retains. Z and Mira address Z's biracial identity, his favorite singer's appearance over time, and tensions around racist police violence and the growing Black Lives Matter movement. These dialogues between mother and son, written and drawn in her hand, and staged on his media, that materially double the interactions they represent and objectify in these handmade and pop cultural objects of both parties' identification return in *Good Talk*. Although one might note the material and connotative differences between Z's photographic album covers and Jacob's paper dolls or cut-out word balloons—and their formal differences do affect these elements'

compositional friction—Jacob's compositions foremost treat both as objects connected with her family's life, or archive. From this earlier practice, one might recognize, beneath *Good Talk*'s abstracted digitality, its intimate archival practice akin to those discussed above. Kirtley compares Barry's compositional memoiristic practices to scrapbookers', that both forms of autobiography "cut and paste" memories and objects of identification, materially and practically reflecting the seams, ruptures, and assemblage of identity (154), and both materialize memories in these artifacts as personal signs that, in their fragmentary and enigmatic use, resist simple interpretations (174). Recalling Jacob's comment that her paper dolls substitute for "a brain or a psyche on the page," it is valuable to recognize that her abstracted, digitized, and unemotive use of personal marks and found objects, instead of refusing their identification with the memoirist's experience and wholly interrupting such contact, as fiction or type might generically or materially affect, Jacob's abstracting practice renders this likeness and mediated contact enigmatic.

Jacob indicates her book and consciousness's shared terms, "I think we all have those conversations that just live in our brains forever, because they have informed some part of us so deeply. […] I gave the book to my family and in-laws before I published it. I said, 'This is what's in there and let's talk' ("Non-Fiction"). Jacob's paired deictics are ambiguous, but in context "this" indicates the present memoir's contents, and "there," her consciousness, which might seem obvious in a memoir but, contextualized by Jacob's emphatic refusal to perform or show her pain, in the face of White American denial of such pain—both the general experiences she describes in interviews, and her in-laws' specific and depicted failures to recognize her experience—her identification of her memoir's contents with those that she lives with is significant. Reconsidered, her graph paper's connoted interiority (fig. 3.7) cannot be limited to the internal subseries which interrupts the memoir's representation of external reality, but extends to her memoir's many other material settings. In their common scrapbook-like organization, each image maps and stages, not her prior encounters, but the internal landscape their presence has shaped. Far from presenting an alternative material or mnemonic environment to her photographic ones, her graph paper diagrams indicate the memoir's fundamental space in which its signs are manipulated and arranged. In this reinterpreted environment, her characters' objectification as paper dolls indicates, rather than these signs' mediation of real subjects, their signification of Jacob's mediating consciousness.

When she refuses to perform, Jacob neither denies her vulnerability nor subjective archival/mnemonic exposure, she only resists facile or projective identification. Barry, in her overt

generic challenge to "autobiography" reminds readers of all textual narrators' fictive artifice and only perceived subjective and historical likeness to their source, and implicitly claims to only evoke her subjective truths. But autofictional claims also generically deny the author's responsibility to sincere, if subjective, truth, and because our impressions of observed and observer are produced together, altering any term of a representation challenges this likeness: the *fictive* subject and the *fictional* subject's likeness to the experiencing or expressing artist are not the same, despite the tangency and partial identification both figures affect between represented reality and the reality of their inscription (see chapter 2). In Jacob's memoiristic mapping of the encounters that shape her consciousness, without demonstratively performing her emotional responses, her claim to mnemonic fidelity, even in its descriptive artifice, becomes the basis for presenting her subjective truth and by extension her autobiographical expression.

Jacob's emotional reticence but presentation of sensory information, in effect, invites her readers to act as secondary witnesses to the encounters she describes. Christine Hong, introducing a new edition of Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13360*, composed of the Japanese American author, artist, and inmate's testimonial and drawn witness from American concentration camps, addresses the memoir's fraught initial reception as witness. White critics lauded the account "by an evacuee, some one who actually saw, felt, and was part of this amazing adventure" (qtd. xii) which, some claimed, offered a chance "to learn the supposed inside stories of people of color" and feel they "knew for the first time what camp looked like, smelled like, and felt like to the evacuated people" (qtd. xv). Acknowledging *Citizen 13660*'s historical value as witness, Okubo's detailed account—written in the first person, framed since its title as at once specific and universal in its appeal to common citizenry, and illustrated in direct, emotive line drawings that describe sensory experiences and position the reader roughly with the artist-witness (for instance in Okubo's frequent over-the-shoulder framing)—also demonstrates the risks of appealing to multiculturalist identification and secondary witness. Her appeal to see and understand her experience of extrajudicial racist incarceration was reduced by some to comfortable vicarious informational, sensory, and emotional knowledge that offered the pleasurable adventure of seeing through the racial other's eyes. Akin to Susan Sontag's fears, this reduction evinces the mutual hunger for and denial of specifically minority pain that Jacob writes and draws against.[40] *Good Talk*'s composition of paper-doll objects facing the reader instead

[40] I do not suggest that Okubo was unreflective on this possibility or purely invites such projective interpretation. Okubo's account subtly and sometimes overtly addresses questions of voyeurism, surveillance, and privilege thematically and through positioning readers with and against various gazes. An attentive reader would note the difference between

formally asserts its essential otherness from Jacob and the reader. These figures describe her experiences but deny such seeming access, and from their visual difference address readers as interlocutors, presenting an alternative appeal to secondary witness that avoids both the difference constituted by fictionalization, and the double-edged appeal to put oneself in another's skin that risks false equivalence. Through this exclusion, and through structuring her memoir "in Conversations" in which depicted subjects perpetually address us, readers are implicated and asked to interpret these encounters that compose her memoir. We are involved, if not enveloped, as "eavesdroppers."

In this understanding, the page's surface itself repeats the skin's paradoxical border. Jacob's emotional reticence and placement of the intersubjective onus on her readers is also her invitation to participate in the interpretive labor of meeting another. Unlike the intimate embodied materiality and insistent subjective expressions of graphic memoirs such as Okubo's, *Good Talk*'s digital materiality is better understood through the arranged, archival scrapbook. Recalling the typewriter's severing of the word from the noisy and embodied tissue of the hand, Jacob's memoir materially and formally resists impressions that we might know the mediated experience by denying its uniquely embodied perspective or expression, while these abstracted representations' indirect derivation from her vision and inscription maintain their visual identification with the author. It is also through navigating her expressions' layers of mediation that announce their difference, that *Good Talk* does sometimes, more intimately address and include us. When Jacob relents from her mediating density, she allows our limited inclusion in her conversations. She most often signals her address by forgoing the visual framing that divides her narrating persona (denoted by caption boxes) from the character Mira's conversations (contained by word balloons), and presenting instead her free-floating and unframed text. In this infrequent, unbounded format, Jacob most personally and directly addresses readers, for instance when she types over pages presented like albums with family photos that play in spaces between the historical document, and her retrospective characterization (31). Jacob's word balloon-contained dialogues added over her photographs—which unusually for her memoir *do* connote their documentary value and connection to her past reality—in their additions nonetheless

conventional observational drawings (which would position the viewer with the implied witness) and Okubo's frequent inclusion of her own avatar which tends to position her audience *alongside* and separate from her, indicating her pictures' non-identity with her perspective, and Okubo would later state that one would have to live such an experience to know it. I cite *Citizen 13660*'s fraught reception as indicating the dangers of this minority empathetic appeal. Likewise, Jacob's strategies do not preclude an unreflective reader's projective illusion of experiential access, but constitute one response to this problem.

demonstrate her characterization, artifice, interventions, and the temporal difference between these elements' origins and use, as much as her photographic backgrounds do. But her unframed narration over album pages, negative space, and sometimes drawings or photographs—themselves often unframed—encourages the narration's identification with the containing and ordering page, rather than elements contained and connoting their status as composed objects by captions' frames, dolls' cuts, or pictorial representation. That is, this unbounded narrative register encourages its identification with the *mediating* and organizing author, over the *mediated* representations, connoting her unbounded words' (inevitably *relative*) immediacy or intimacy by placing readers "outside" the represented past and memory, and "with" the memoirist who considers these images of her past.[41]

It is also in this unframed mode that Jacob shows discrepancies between the textual personalities of her (enclosed) spoken dialogue and her (unframed) internal monologue. In this register, Jacob shares her hope listening to Barack Obama's campaign speech; addresses readers, too, in her aspirational letter to Z that her son has not yet read; admits to morally failing the mother whose grief she did not recognize (fig. 3.8). The form of this latter admission is especially significant, as Jacob presents her most dramatic visual abstraction and extreme case of her language-like reduction of images to communicative symbols, entirely substituting her affluent employer's face with text through which she catalogues legible social signs through which she formed assumptions about the woman, and in her imagined knowledge failed utterly to recognize or imagine this woman's experience. Inverting the autobiographical "I" with the hypothetical and general "you" that also addresses we readers, Jacob presents a remarkable substitution, at once reminding us to consider what is unimagined, beneath the skin of her book and those others we encounter, and in this substitution, invites us to see what she "saw," only at the apex of its visual abstraction, literalizing her failure to see anything other than the surface she encountered and thought she knew.

[41] See Groensteen's "The Question of the Narrator" cinema-studies–informed analysis of comics' various perceived narrating and enunciating instances and implied personalities. I visually identify Jacob's unbounded textual narration with the personality and enunciative mode of Groensteen's highest-order "fundamental narrator" of the comics layout which organizes the composite text's component enunciations (95-6).

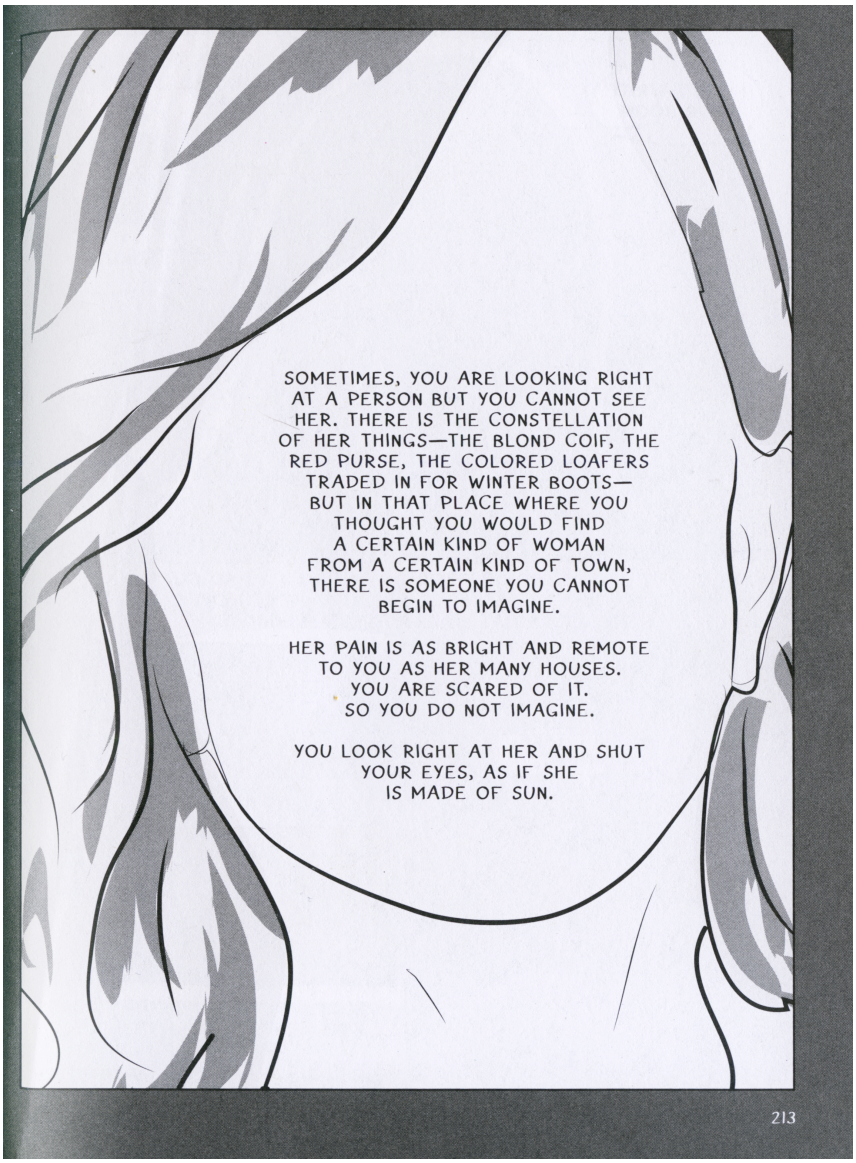


Figure 3.8. "You do not imagine." Image: Jacob, *Good Talk*, 213.

Stripped of the dense network of filial expectations, comics conventions, quick repartee, and protective paper-doll limning, it is in this unbounded form that Jacob illustrates her and her father's shared recognition of his impending death (fig. 4.6). No longer contained by discrete cuts or protective skins, it is irrelevant that Mira and her father's marks are not unique, that they neither depend upon nor express their likeness to that moment. They are still *Jacob's* marks, and they address us as seeing and seen in their drawing as much as they, in their depicted gazes, mirrored and meeting across the book gutter, address and see each other.

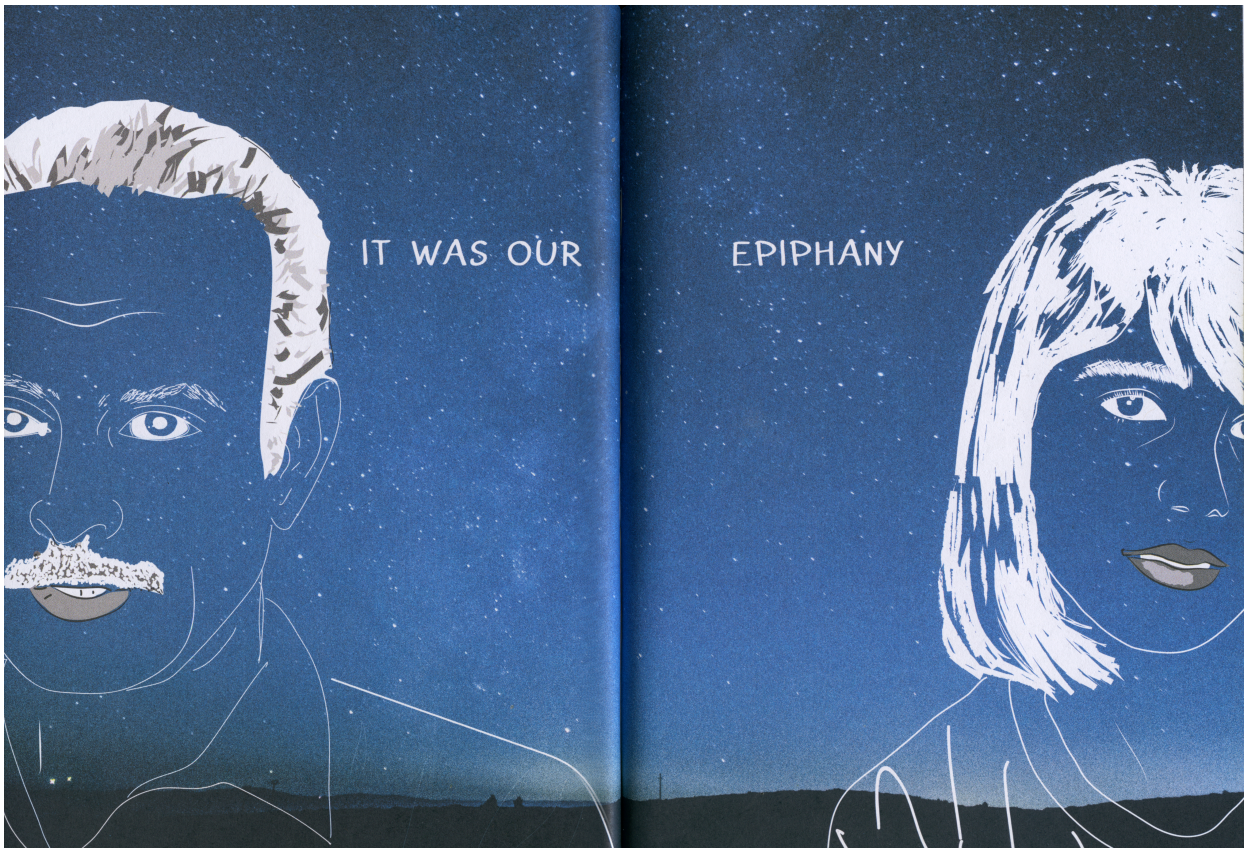


Figure 4.6. "Our epiphany." Image: Jacob, *Good Talk*, 240-241.

By manipulating and subverting signs' visual and material likeness to their referent sights and sites of inscription, *Good Talk* presents alternative symbolic, interrupted, reticent, and hyperreal strategies and ethics of representing subjects and experiences situated through communicative and intersubjective limits, our experience of which invites the possibility of recognizing another, or at least that we try. Jacob's gazes, her invitations—not to embody another's gesture or experience but to see another's subjectivity and to be seen—evoke this chapter's epigraph, in which Jacob so succinctly offers her humanity while refusing to implore her audience to accept it: "You see it if you want" ("Non-Fiction"). These invitations are also recognizable in her speculative closing letter to the future Z, the title of which—"The Talk We Haven't Had" (345)—presents an inclusive "us." She writes of the answers and protection she can't provide and of the people who may never understand or change, but also of her aspiration, "I hope that you will remember that your heart is a good one, and that your capacity to feel love, in all its complexity, is a gift" (346). Between these two addresses, one confrontational and the other crucially sharing a letter that, despite its publicity, undeniably addresses her son, one might recognize Jacob's aspiration that, despite her doubt, such a love that

she wishes for, is one made richer, not by knowledge or certainty, but by encountering others' complexity and meeting them in the complexity of that encounter. As manually embodied cartooning risks reader narcissism and seeing oneself in the same lines that invite empathetic recognition, so, too, do Jacob's paper dolls risk depthless legibility as dimensionless signs of others through the same structures that invite meaningful conversation, but this is a worthy risk.

In *Composite Realities*, I have addressed how interpreting the appearance of signs that reference external sights, encounters, and their production, within comics' narrative realities—which conditions their various referents' synthesis in response to these terms and representations' non-identity—demands we speculatively interpret each of the likenesses from which we constitute these ambiguous elements' documentary value, representational value, their experience, and their relationships. Beyond questions of these referents' simple objective or subjective authentication of their represented and fictive realities, in studying comics' use of subtly or overtly ambiguous images that direct our interpretive recourse to other codes, messages, identities, and contexts, I have argued comics' production of fundamentally heterogeneous experienced realities. In each of these represented storyworlds' repeated identification with, and alienation from, the encounters, practices, and subjectivities that produced them, they present grounds upon which to meet and consider others in their alterity and in the complexity of that meeting, in our equal certainty that these objects evidence their derivation from real subjectivities and experiences, and produce virtual ones. As each panel we read contributes to our imagination of narrative reality, as we connect image and text, event and event, representation and referent, each newly encountered picture and document presents invitations to reimagine its possible realities.

Conclusion

"Of all that I could see, only the drawing would remain."

-John Berger

Reading a comics panel requires interpreting its contents and attributes, and synthesizing them with other panels and the larger narrative to maintain a coherent, imaginable reality. This impulse and ability to sustain a coherent reality despite, and even *because of*, dramatic visual differences between components shows the remarkable flexibility of the sort of synthetic reading trained by comics. When a panel, in its stylized formal fidelity or narrative context, is understood as a record of a real visual encounter, its referent making must also be assimilated into this reading experience. The perceived likeness of panels to a produced storyworld and to the events that produce them, poses this dissertation's central question: What is the relationship between the experience of a picture, and the realities it mediates? When a figure looks from the page and this inert facsimile object produces its experienced address, do we viewers meet the gaze of a fictional character in marks we anthropomorphize, or do we meet, in this object, the record of the visual encounter that produced it—marks we imaginatively historicize?

Addressing the uncertain experience of a panel, one can state with certainty that the story it supports is a descriptive fiction even when describing real subjects and events, and with equal certainty, that its form traces something of its real making—its social, visual, and material processes—even when that making is self-consciously performed. Documents in comics—especially photographs—are commonly approached in terms of their persuasive rhetorical authentication and seeming evidentiary insistence that "this really happened!" but their evident appropriation by their narrative context also renders the documented "this" alien to the cartooned narrative it might authenticate. The experience of a documentary panel, then, is essentially composite. It records the fact of its making, and produces a fictional storyworld, paratextually bridging these realities, while

the document's marked entry into a narrative fiction as a panel also indicates the non-identity of these referent realities, experiences, and events. These panels are factual and fictional, occupying distinct discourses. Considered through their dual references to the imaginable realities they produce, and the imaginable realities of their production, this dissertation has deconstructed the experience of pictures as documentary representations by analyzing images that each visually claim their documentary fidelity to their process, and their fictive narration.

Across three core chapters, I have analyzed practices and products of photography, observational drawing, and their narrative appropriation or collaged entry into a message as sites to address the status of a picture as both a document and a representation. The dissertation first considers the documentary panel as it operates in clearly distinct discourses, attending to the allobiographical memoir *Le Photographe* which reconstructs Didier Lefevre's dangerous journey into Cold War Afghanistan with an early MSF team, by combining the photojournalist's contact sheets with his collaborators' illustrative narration. Beginning from verbal that "I" directs attention to the eye behind the camera, the first chapter addresses the memoirist Didier as a composite figure who combines photographically documented and descriptively represented perspectives. Reading *Le Photographe*'s mixed narration teaches readers to separately interpret its component series and perspectives through the representational logic of narrative illustration and sequential panelization that produce the present character and story, and the documentary logic of photographic contact sheets through which one can interpret the character of Lefèvre's past vision and encounters, as they unfold over time. Interpreting the comics narrative and its component documentary sequences together trains formal attention to the complex relationships between photographs, explanatory text, and the dynamic encounters that produced these images. One can differentiate the interpretable record of the encounter, from the representational message, and might find traces of documented subjects that exceed photographic or textual representation. The representational crisis of photographic evidence gives way to the speculative question, how is the form of the representation related to the historical encounters that produced the image?

In the second chapter, I shift my analysis of differences between pictorial representation and documentation, from the photographer's eye to the drawer's eye, which renders the differentiation of these terms more complex. Drawing wholly mediates observable reality, and drawings only record the artist's aesthetic responses to visual experiences. Furthermore, as demonstrated by visually descriptive cartooning, drawn form offers little difference between the artist's interpretation of real

sights in their attempted fidelity to their vision, and their representational characterization or even production of sights. Therefore, this chapter analyzes the referent realities of drawings through the self-inscription of the artist, in opposed genres of narratively structured autofiction and temporally structured picture diaries. When Tsuge Yoshiharu represents observations by fictional characters through detailed life drawing, instead of addressing the artist's unknown self-performance, one can address the multistable character of drawings, which produce real and fictional sights concurrently. This presents ontology-crossing opportunities, to fictionalize one's own vision, or to share a real experience through a character's observation, which reveals the composite nature of all such images: the pictured fiction and the recorded trace of its production are formally identical but referentially discrete. These records of observed worlds that produce observable worlds include the subjectivities experiencing them, to which Tsuge's nostalgic fictions and Fujiwara Maki's diaristic effort to record her sight of her family as she faced her terminal illness, both attest. It is no wonder Tsuge's alter egos and Fujiwara's diaries grapple with the transcendence and loss of the historical ego.

In the third chapter, I address the legible subjective trace of the memoirist, and the memoir's visual abstraction from her, as the condition of Mira Jacob's self-expressions, in their digitally composed, collaged, and repeated, distance from the empirical author. Jacob's artificial compositions of digitally simulated, digitally repeated objects resist their experience as an immersive storyworld or their likeness to her specific experienced sight or to its unique description by the artist's emotive hand. These staring objects provocatively address and implicate readers under their affective and unchanging gazes. At the same time, their collaged form hyperbolically demonstrates that these representing images and inscribed marks of which all comics are made, are only signs composed into aesthetic messages. These composed objects resist illusions of perspectival neutrality and, conversely, projective impressions that one's experience of the book object is equivalent to the encounters these elements visually describe. Jacob's digitized handmade signs narrowly control the connoted emotional trace, and real interpretable information, her images offer, *articulating*[42] their identification with, but visible difference from, its production, its represented sight, the message into which it is composed, and the experience it produces.

[42] Also in the sense of Groensteen's attention to comics' jointed semiosis and their study as "arthrology," *System of Comics*. Despite my criticism, that Groensteen overlooks the materiality of marks and images in his overemphasis on larger semantic units (chapter 3), this "macrosemiotic" interpretation remains valuable to analyzing how representational codes, and individual representational instances, interact in multimodal systems.

I have structured my analysis of documents and comics around how photographs, observational drawings, and other images are composed into narratives. Each panel calls upon its readers to interpret and synthesize these referent realities. I have analyzed how the documentary panel must be identified in reading and viewing, with these different worlds, as the basis for the composite experiences of comics worlds and of documentary representation. Each of these chapters exploring how media interact and produce meaning in comics has argued how interpreting these multimodal images in context allows readers to navigate the document, the representation, and the mediating distance between each referent and the present experience of the object. Each chapter has also dealt in family and death, intimacy and loss.

In the arc of the dissertation, I have been guided by John Berger's claim that a picture shows its process of looking. Here, in closing, it is worth recognizing the context of this claim. The art historian writes as an autobiographer of his own drawing's history. He states his surety, posthumously drawing his father, that, "Of all that I could see, only the drawing would remain […] Objectivity is what is left when something is finished" (42). I have worked to understand this relationship between the dynamic process and the inert object, through its reanimation in readers' imagination of cartooned stories and documented histories. Each of these images grieves a life it recorded and produces a life one can imagine.

I return to *Le Photographe* and its demonstrative narrative appropriation of Didier Lefèvre's documents. After two months of hard travel photographing his compatriots' medical efforts in the ongoing Soviet-Afghan War, Didier, low on film, decides to return to France without the MSF team. He is abandoned by his guides and tries to brave the 16,000-foot Kalotac pass on his own. The photojournalist's collaborators illustrate his increasingly desperate climb, and show him eventually slow to a halt. Didier methodically selects his lens for his last photographs, "Qu'on sache où je suis mort" ("So it be known where I died," 57, trans. 219)). His collaborators drop away, presenting only the recorded product of the photographer's action (fig. 4.1, trans. 222-3). Stripped of its cartooned and composed context, encountering the document in that silence, we witness the photojournalist's witness to his own death, confronted with his view from the surface of the mountain that he is sure has brought about his doom. This is what the image records.



Figure 4.1. "Where I died." Image: Emmanuel Guibert, Didier Lefèvre, and Frédéric Lemercier, *Le Photographe – tome 3*. Dupuis, 2006, 60-1.

But the figure who compels this witness, who tells of his own death and directs the reader to the significance of this image, is merely a character produced by Lefèvre's conversations with his friends in the comfort of metropolitan France. The singular image remains a composite. The frightful intimacy of this *documented* death is met with the equally frightful recognition the same image's *represented* death is only that of a character. Didier is rescued and survives to lie to his mother, in telling her that nothing bad happened. His collaborators note in the postscript, "Avec le temps, ce pieux mensonge a pris force de vérité" ("With time, this white lie took on the force of truth," 99), suggesting their admission and defense of the historical reconstruction as fiction. These documents that record, these pictures that represent, these panels that narrate, and these compositions that synthesize each reshape our perceptions of reality and its experience. Understanding these dynamic interactions is crucial to better understanding the truths these images seem to show.

As I began this project, politics, history, and visual experience were already filtered through mobile and increasingly digital images. These images exist in multimodal contexts that demand

experiential, speculative, and semantic syntheses. The uncertainty of pictorial truth claims has been compounded with the rapid spread and adoption of algorithms that analyze documentary and aesthetic forms and synthesize these data into representations. These often-convincing imitations of sights, implicitly imitate the processes, encounters, and subjectivities that produced them. In this age of algorithmic simulation, Sontag's earlier warning that the photograph "*may* not show what it is *said* to show" (47, emphasis added)—that the affective image's stated representational message may be non-identical with the encounters and processes its form records—evokes a now-common experience of realistic images and purported institutional, historical, aesthetic, or personal documents, especially in their digital remediation and recontextualized appearance. However, Sontag's precedent commentary also reminds that algorithmic generation is only one of many new technologies, techniques, and media that have provoked crises regarding images' representational truth, convincing affective address, authorship, or mediation of the past. I have considered these seeming truths and their doubts across studies of photographs, post-photographic drawings, cartoons, and their remediation in comics, collage, and digital environments. Credulously believing the truth claims of images risks a naïve disregard for the fictions inherent in *any* aesthetic message and its staging. Conversely, a paranoid fixation or cynical conviction as to only the fictive communication of images risks abandoning our critical judgements to post-truth indistinction between truths and persuasive falsehoods. Moreover, such representational attention to images' formal, rhetorical production of meaning insufficiently considers how these objects *do* record their production, and how this legible (if ambiguous) documentary reference contributes to our always-mediated understanding of past reality and others' lives, in the traces we encounter and imagine, of how these objects were produced. Neither representation nor documentation alone account for the experience of these images. The figure of the documentary panel, which this dissertation has adopted as its central site of study across different media and discourses, clarifies documentary representation as a formal and perceptual hybrid. Pursuing the formal ambiguity of these images demonstrates that the document *does not show* what the representation says it shows, but the image formally shows its likeness to both worlds of its making, producing its referents' likeness to each other, while denying their closure.

The graphic narratives and art books I study, in their multimedia narratives and documentary claims, formally dramatize and invite interpretive attention to differences between media; inside and outside; part and whole; present experience and past production. Viewing and reading these

imagetexts trains the affective, speculative, and synthetic interpretive approach I develop here. This approach is useful for understanding how we perceive historical, experiential, and possible realities in our richly mediated, multimodal world. I intend to apply the interpretive mode I have developed here to genres of historical fiction and biography, and other compositional frameworks including the layouts of textbooks and websites. I intend to further apply the understanding of these objects' referent making and use, which I have developed through interpretive reading, to my own documentary comics practice. In *Composite Realities*, my goal has been to strengthen the multimodal and reflective reading skills that people already use instinctively, when they interpret the sensory, representational, and historical meanings of panels, and when they reconcile them in reading documents and comics narratives. I have prioritized this attention to teach, as reading each of these comics likewise teaches us, how to see and read the historical information and historical ambiguities that these images present. Each image, document, and narrative event presents an opportunity to reimagine these realities and histories, and our complex relationship to our own.

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