

Philip Smith *The Truth of a Madman: The Works of Art Spiegelman*

# The Truth of a Madman: The Works of Art Spiegelman

[The Holocaust was a] watershed of human history, the death-knell of the Enlightenment, the proof that Western Civilization didn't work. It's like the old Looney Tunes cartoons where the character runs past the edge of a cliff and keeps running through midair. It takes a while to notice there is no ground left to run on [...] Western Civilization ended at Auschwitz. And we still haven't noticed  
(Art Spiegelman 1999, 15).

One day you will speak of all this, but your story will fall on deaf ears [...] You will possess the truth, but it will be the truth of a madman  
(Anonymous S.S. officer to a Jewish prisoner in Elie Wiesel 1989, online).

by

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**Abstract:** Art Spiegelman is one of the most important figures in the history of American comics. His work *Maus* (1980 and 1991) is arguably the landmark text in the field of comic book studies. Given the relatively recent reissue of his first collection *Breakdowns* (2008) and the publication of his interview/essay collection/scrapbook *Metamaus* (2011), it is likely that his work will continue to be the subject of critical interest. This thesis concerns the collections *Breakdowns* (1977 and 2008), *Maus* (1980 and 1991) and *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004). It represents the first book-length extended study of Spiegelman's three major works. The central argument put forth in this thesis is that the Spiegelman oeuvre articulates and manifests a madness which its author perceives to underlie supposedly 'rational' society. In support of this thesis I will employ critical models from the following fields: Holocaust studies, trauma theory, the anti-psychiatry movement, theories concerning the representation of madness, formalist analyses of comics, and Genette's narratological taxonomy.

**Keywords:** Art Spiegelman, madness, Shoah, Holocaust, comic books, trauma, 9/11.

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# 1. Introduction

*Comics are enjoying an increased degree of cultural recognition – Spiegelman has been a key figure in enhancing the cultural capital and intellectual respectability of the alternative comics genre – This thesis will bring together (for the first time) close readings of Spiegelman’s three major collections – The centrepiece to this thesis is that Spiegelman’s art dramatises and explores the insanity of post-Enlightenment rationality*

As a cultural form, comics have come a long way in the past half century. At the time of writing alternative comic books (a broad genre which is characterised by emotional and artistic sophistication), whilst not rivalling prose or film in terms of sales or critical recognition, have reached audiences in ways which would have seemed inconceivable sixty years ago. Comic books in North America have gone from being a marginalised and even outlawed medium in the 1950s and 1960s to, in certain instances, a widely recognised and celebrated artistic form. A few instances from the past decade can illustrate the genre’s prodigious rise and current esteem. In 2006, Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2006) was the first comic ever to be shortlisted for a National Book Award. Marjane Satrapi was nominated for an Oscar in 2008 for the film adaptation of her comic book *Persepolis* (2000). In 2009, the *New York Times* launched two categories for ‘graphic books’ on their bestseller list (hardback and paperback) alongside a separate category for Japanese manga. The work of Chris Ware now regularly appears alongside traditional gag cartoons in *The New Yorker* and in 2012, the Modern Art Museum in Paris exhibited a collection of work by the outlaw cartoonist Robert Crumb.

The existence of mature and complex comic book art is not new, but the visibility and legitimacy of the medium in modern popular culture is completely unprecedented. Crumb’s

artwork, for example, has been exhibited since the 1970s, but never in so prestigious a venue as the Modern Art Museum (see Crumb and Peter Poplaski 2005, 334-337). During the last three decades the cohort of comics grouped under the loose appellation 'alternative' has grown dramatically both in terms of volume and in markers of critical recognition such as exhibitions, newspaper reviews and awards.

These images can be found at [RainGeek.com](http://RainGeek.com) (figure 1) and [WilliamLounsbury.wordpress.com](http://WilliamLounsbury.wordpress.com) (figure 2)

**Fig. 1 and 2.** *We've come a long way... Two images that juxtapose the 1954 Comic book burning in Vancouver and the 2012 Robert Crumb exhibition at the Modern Art Museum in Paris. The juxtaposition of these two images is a visual testimony to the explosive proliferation in and increased cultural capital accruing around comics in North America since the mid-1980s.*

Concurrent with and connected to this expansion, the scholarly field of comic book studies has grown exponentially during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Ian Gordon contends that '[t]hose who study comics are slowly being admitted to the academic party' (Gordon 2010, 192). In recent years it has become the norm within comic book scholarship (including, of course, this thesis) to assume that the validity of comic books as an art form worthy of study is no longer in question. In 2008, the *PMLA* published an article on comics by Chicago professor Hillary Chute. Peer reviewed journals such as *ImageText* (2004 – present) and *Studies in Comics* (2010 – present) are devoted entirely to the study of the form. Many university libraries now include holdings on comic book criticism by the likes of Scott McCloud, Roger Sabin, and Charles Hatfield. This is an exciting time for comic book scholars. James Chapman, borrowing the adolescence-to-adulthood metaphor which is often applied to the medium, predicts that '[s]oon comics scholarship will start to experience its growing pains as genuine and important methodological and intellectual debates turn into theoretical and ideological rifts' (Chapman 2013, online).

*So, how did we get here?* In a word: Spiegelman. It is the animating principle of this dissertation that the art of Art Spiegelman is central to the sea change in the commercial and critical fortunes of the alternative comic book.

*And who, then, is Art Spiegelman?* Art Spiegelman is an artist, comic-book author and editor. He was born in 1948 in Sweden to Jewish parents, both of whom were Shoah survivors. His family migrated to Rego Park in New York in the 1950s. He served as Creative Consultant for Topps Gum Inc. between 1966 and 1989. During his time at Topps Spiegelman launched and edited the magazine *Arcade* with Bill Griffith. *Arcade* ran from 1975 to 1976 and was succeeded by *RAW*, which was launched by Spiegelman with his wife Françoise Mouly. *RAW* was published between 1980 to 1986 and 1987 to 1991 (for more on *RAW* see Bill Kartalopoulos (2005) and Joseph Witek (2007)). Concurrent with this work on *RAW*, Spiegelman was Contributor and Consulting Editor for *Playboy Funnies* from 1977 to 1983. He served as Contributing Editor/Staff Artist for the *New Yorker* from 1993 to 2003 during which time he edited (also with Françoise Mouly) some volumes of comics for children entitled *Little Lit*. Spiegelman also lectured on comic books for more than twenty years first at the San Francisco Academy of Art and then at New York's School of Visual Arts.

Most famously, Spiegelman received a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for his ground-breaking work *Maus*: a comic book about the Holocaust. *Maus* revisited an original concept from an earlier comic by Spiegelman and was serialised in *RAW* between 1980 and 1991. This iconic

moment is routinely cited as the tipping point at which comic books gained legitimacy in American culture as a medium capable of tackling complex material (see section 3.1 for an overview of the impact of *Maus*. As an archetypal ‘underground’ comic book creator (underground comics being the self-published counter-cultural precursors to alternative comics to be detailed in section 2.1) Spiegelman’s work is often political and unflinchingly personal.

This thesis will examine the span of Spiegelman’s career, but with a particular focus on his three most important works: *Breakdowns* (originally 1977, reissued 2008), *The Complete Maus* (1996) and *In the Shadow of No Towers* (henceforth *No Towers*) (2004). All three are collections of thematically and, in some cases, narratively connected comics which were originally serialised or otherwise published separately. *Maus*, of course, is regarded as Spiegelman’s *magnum opus*. *Breakdowns*, whilst less well-known, is a pivotal volume for the transition of underground comics from deliberately offensive and at times brazenly juvenile counter-culture magazines to a sophisticated artistic form with aspirations of cultural legitimacy. *No Towers* (originally published between 2002 and 2004 and then collected in 2004) was a provocative dramatisation of and contribution to the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> cultural and political landscape.

Underpinning and connecting the close readings of these three main works, the central argument proposed by this thesis will be that Spiegelman identifies and artistically performs multiple modes of madness. Moreover, madness is not presented in Spiegelman’s work as an ec-centric (literally, outside the circle) aberration but rather as a natural and inevitable



product of rational society. His various protagonists find themselves surrounded and acted upon by insane agents and environments and, as such, they find their own insanity to be a paradoxically rational position. For Spiegelman the primary evidence of the insanity which arises within rational society is the Holocaust, an event which employed the rhetoric of economics, politics, and science as well as the tools of industry to carry out an act of genocide. Essentially, through the two-dimensional medium of the comic book, Spiegelman delivers a three-dimensional critique of what the Jewish German-American critic Herbert Marcuse dubbed 'one-dimensional man': the dominant figure in a civilisation organising itself along increasingly rational lines for increasingly irrational ends. Whilst remaining sensitive, one hopes, to the manifold irony of a rational exploration of a hegemonic irrational rationality, this thesis will draw upon existing Spiegelman criticism, models of trauma from literary studies and clinical psychology, as well as various philosophical and literary conceptualisations of madness. Each of these will be sketched, preliminarily, in the sections which follow.

The comics which will be covered in this critical pursuit of the Spiegelman madman represent their creator's most important and celebrated works, but not, it is important to concede, the entirety of his creative output. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to offer detailed engagement with all of Spiegelman's work to date, but a few examples of its eclecticism will be offered here as partial compensation. Spiegelman departed from the comic book form when he produced an illustrated version of Joseph Moncure March's epic poem *The Wild Party* in 1994 and when he co-created the musical and visual event *Wordless* with composer Phillip Johnston in 2014. Whilst his collections are generally, and *Breakdowns*

specifically, intended for adults, Spiegelman's long career at Topps, his book *Open Me ... I'm a Dog* (1997) and his work as co-editor of *Little Lit* (2000 – 2003) make him as much a children's author as the creator of adult comics. As editor of *Arcade* and *RAW* he has been a guiding hand in the growth of the medium and a mentor to many emerging comic book artists including Chris Ware. Spiegelman has also served as a historian of the comic book form, having written books, essays, anthology introductions, and given talks on various subjects that range from Disney cartoonist Carl Barks, the translated version of *Barefoot Gen Volume 2*, the Tijuana Bibles, and comic book creator Jack Cole. His work as a comic book historian has brought critical recognition to the canon of otherwise uncelebrated early twentieth century practitioners. Spiegelman has also gained notoriety for his work on the *New Yorker* where he produced many (in)famous covers including the black-on-black cover in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and the controversial 1993 Valentine's day cover which showed a Hasidic Jew and an African woman locked in a kiss. This thesis shall include references to Spiegelman's work beyond the central three texts where relevant, but such works will not be subject to detailed analysis. Readers who are interested in Spiegelman's (then) uncollected works may wish to consult Kartalopoulos's extensive summary in *Indy Magazine* (2005). Many of Spiegelman's comics, book and magazine covers, posters, sketches, and other works can be found in *Comix, Essays, Graphics and Scraps* (1999) and *Co-Mix: Art Spiegelman* (2013).

These images can be found at [lareviewofbooks.org](http://lareviewofbooks.org) (figure 3) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) (figure 4)

**Fig. 3 and 4.** *New Yorker cover February 1998 and Open Me I'm a Dog. Spiegelman's work extends beyond adult comics to children's literature and artwork for the New Yorker.*

Before embarking on this analysis, some preparatory work is necessary to chart the contextual critical landscape and methodology which will be employed. To this end, the following sections 1.1 and 1.2 will seek to both provide an overview of Spiegelman scholarship, and to identify the lacunae in that scholarship which makes this thesis necessary. Sections 1.3 to 1.9 will then outline the formal methodology and philosophical position upon which the argument will be built. The sequence which follows (*Maus*, *No Towers* and finally *Breakdowns*) will be based upon critical interest rather than publication date – *Breakdowns* was written and drawn first but did not receive any critical interest until after *Maus*. This introductory chapter will then conclude with an overview of this thesis including a sequential outline of the key arguments.

## **1.1 Spiegelman Studies: *Maus***

*The majority of Spiegelman criticism is centred on Maus – The central concerns of Maus criticism include the animal metaphor, postmemory, the figure of Anja, the tension that exists between narrative and visual components, the creation of the text, and the question of time – This thesis proposes new approaches to each of these subjects – Trauma (a central concern of this thesis) remains a relatively undeveloped theme in Spiegelman criticism.*

Bella Brodzki's essay 'Breakdowns and Breakthroughs: Looking for Art in Young Spiegelman's Graphic Subjects' on the volume *Breakdowns* effectively sums up criticism on Spiegelman (and, indeed, much of the formative stage of modern comics scholarship) in four words (including one contraction): 'it's all about *Maus*' (Brodzki 2011, 51). The overwhelming majority of critical work on Spiegelman has centered upon *Maus*, often to the point where other works have been read as little more than lengthy appendices to his masterpiece. The argument presented in this thesis seeks to correct this imbalance by contextualising *Maus* in a sustained analysis which begins with *Breakdowns* and continues to

*No Towers*. This and the following section will outline the existing critical work on Spiegelman and will seek to detail how in this work is situated in relation to the extant body of criticism. For ease of reference the full name and essay or book title of each Spiegelman scholar has been mentioned in the first instance. Subsequent references use surname and date only.

Spiegelman criticism begins in the late 1980s. The earliest examples of Spiegelman (and, specifically, *Maus*) criticism came from scholars working in disparate fields that included oral testimony (such as Joshua Brown's paper 'Of Mice and Memory' in 1988), and Jewish literary and artistic traditions (Adam Gopnik's 'Comics and Catastrophe' in 1987), and later psychoanalytical branches of literary theory (Dominick LaCapra's *History and Memory after Auschwitz* in 1998). A notable spike in Spiegelman criticism occurred in 2003 following the publication of a dedicated volume of essays on the comic entitled *Art Spiegelman's 'Maus': Approaches to Art Spiegelman's Survivor's Tale of the Holocaust* which was edited by Deborah Geis. *Metamaus* (2011), which features interviews with Spiegelman and his family, Spiegelman's research materials, and analysis as well as a DVD with a panel-by-panel commentary on *Maus*, has already elicited critical responses from Hillary Chute in 'Comics as Archives: Meta*Metamaus*' (2012) and Elizabeth Friedman in 'Spiegelman's magic box: *MetaMaus* and the archive of representation' (2012). *Metamaus* promises to usher in a second renaissance of *Maus* criticism. This large body of academic work has involved more approaches than can be detailed individually in a brief overview. This section will therefore seek to identify the central trends and motifs in *Maus* criticism that are of immediate relevance to this thesis, namely: the animal allegory, the figure of the

second generation survivor, the question of Anja, the historiographical process which has informed *Maus*, verbal-visual tensions within the text, and the question of time. After introducing each of these themes, the relevant original contributions of this work will be underscored.

One of the central concerns of *Maus* criticism is the use of theriomorphism. In *Maus* each racial or national group has its own designated animal identity: Jews are drawn as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, and Americans as dogs. The close detail of Vladek's hands and Mandelbaum's feet not to mention the fact that the characters all stand upright, wear clothes and speak English, make it clear that (aside from the mouse tails on some characters) they are human from the neck down (Spiegelman 2003, 14 and 189). Some early critics such as Hillel Halkin ('Inhuman Comedy' 1992) and Harvey Pekar ('*Maus* and Other Topics' 1986) and later critics such as LaCapra (1998), Frank Cioffi ('Disturbing Comics: The Comics of Mleczko, Katchor, Crumb, and Spiegelman' 2001), Walter Benn Michaels ('Plots against America: Neoliberalism and Antiracism' 2006) and Katalin Orbán ('Trauma and Visuality: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*' 2007) have expressed ethical objections to the propriety of this metaphor. With the exception of Halkin, these criticisms are preoccupied with the details of the execution rather than the approach *per se*. Pekar criticises Spiegelman for presenting an unflattering (or, at best, mixed) portrayal of Poles. He also objects to the use of what is deemed an unnecessarily emotive visual style, for an over-emphasis on Vladek's personality flaws, and for Artie's insensitive treatment of his father. This demonstrates, one might suggest, a lack of sensitivity to the critical distinction between the one who is written and the one who writes, and a lack of awareness as to the

irony at work in the allegory. Michaels accuses Spiegelman of dividing modern America's racial landscape into Jews and non-Jews and concomitantly homogenising all other ethnic groups into the category of 'dog.' Cioffi and Orbán both assert that the allegory becomes too familiar to serve as a useful critique of the ideological regime that it parodies. Only Halkin objects in principle to the choice of cats and mice. He contends that the fantastical nature of the allegory, and the inherent 'limits' of the comic book medium should be grounds for *Maus* to be excluded from any school syllabus.

Halkin is in the minority with his negative assessment of animal allegory in *Maus*. Other critics have applauded Spiegelman's aesthetic choice and sought to explicate its significance. Gopnik (1987) is most frequently cited for his comparison between *Maus* and the use of the bird's head symbol in the Passover Haggadah. This religious parallel is extended by James E. Young (*At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (1988)). Gopnik also compares the animal allegory to Disney comics, Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) and Goya's *The Horrors of War* (1810-1820). Spiegelman, in turn, discusses Gopnik's interpretation of *Maus* with Chute in *Metamaus* (see Spiegelman 2011, 116-117). One commonplace assertion that has emerged was effectively summarised by Andrew Loman in his book chapter 'That Mouse's Shadow: The canonization of Spiegelman's *Maus*': 'one of *Maus*'s cardinal ambitions is to disclose the inadequacy of its governing metaphor' (Loman 2010, 221). According to Brown (1988) and Miles Orvell ('Writing Posthistorically' 1992) Spiegelman performs a key facet of the fascist's racial worldview in order to demonstrate its poverty and perversity. Subsequent critics such as Andrea Liss (*Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography & the Holocaust* 1998),

Lisa Naomi Mulman ('A Tale of Two Mice' 2008), Candida Rifkind ('Drawn from Memory: Comics, Artists and Intergenerational Auto/biography' 2008), Alison Mandaville ('Tailing Violence: Gender, and the Father-Tail in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*' 2009), and Loman (2010) have succeeded mainly, and admirably, in further detailing the audacity and astuteness of Spiegelman's allegory. The conceit of the self-erasing metaphor has given rise to some intriguing and innovative applications. Amy Hungerford ('Surviving Rego Park: Holocaust Theory from Art Spiegelman to Berel Lang' 1999), for example, uses *Maus* to address questions concerning the recruitment of 'new' Jews in American Jewish societies.

A further argument has been made by many critics that the funny animal genre facilitates empathy with the victims. In *Maus*, the mice faces, unlike the cats, are almost featureless. The appearance of the cats in *Maus* is more varied than the mice. Stephen E. Tabachnick asserts that Spiegelman's 'drawings of cats emphasize their sharp teeth and hooded eyes, except when he shows a German prisoner in the camps' (Tabachnick 'Of Mice and Memory: the structure of Art Spiegelman's Graphic Novel of the Holocaust' 1993, 159). As Scott McCloud asserts, in a point which will be discussed at length in section 1.3, the simpler a cartoon, the more people it resembles thus allowing for greater empathy with the character (see McCloud 1994, 28-59). In 'Of Mice and Jews: Cartoons, Metaphors, and Children of the Holocaust Survivors in Recent Jewish Experience', David A. Gerber contends that the mice in *Maus* 'fall in love, have children, suffer pain and anguish, and are generally so human and vulnerable that their victimization by cats appears constantly to be what Nazi anti-Semitism was: pure malice and depravity' (Gerber 1987, 175). In 'Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: Graphic Art and the Holocaust', Timothy Doherty contends that rather than othering

the Jew with grotesquely detailed and animal-like features, the mouse faces are ‘a medium that reverses the process of projection’ (Doherty 1996, 77). To summarise these arguments in a single statement, the reader, in other words, is encouraged to see themselves as a mouse/Jew, thereby heightening the emotional impact of the text and further ridiculing Hitler’s racial vision.

A secondary and certainly not mutually exclusive reading of the animal allegory focuses upon the extent to which Spiegelman’s work has been informed by the use of theriomorphism in Disney cartoons and similar media. In this vein, one could cite the work of Orvell (1992) and Michael E. Staub (‘The Shoah goes on and on: Rememberance and Representation in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*’ 1995). It is worth noting, however, that some of the most ground-breaking work on *Maus* in more recent years, such as Erin McGlothlin (‘No Time like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman’s ‘Maus’” 2003), Victoria A. Elmwood (‘A “Happy, Happy Ever After”: The Transformation of Trauma Between Generations in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*’ 2004), and Chute (‘Literal Forms: Narrative Structures in *Maus*’ 2005) has avoided the issue of theriomorphic characters and gravitated, instead, towards alternate aspects of Spiegelman’s masterpiece.

The argument in this thesis does not seek to propose a radical alternative to the already extensive scholarship concerning defamiliarization in the ruling visual metaphor of *Maus*. Section 3.3 will, however, interrogate and significantly enhance some of the readings described above. Central to this argument will be an attempt to reconcile the opposing positions (positions which have previously not been read as problematic) which maintain, on



one side, that Spiegelman's theriomorphic characters encourage reader empathy and emotional engagement, and on the other, that Spiegelman resists catharsis, closure, and the possibility of understanding the Shoah victim's experience. This reconciliation will be part of a broader sketch of the oscillation between familiarizing and defamiliarizing strategies within *Maus* which are deployed in order to attest to the awesome scale and madness of his subject and his thesis (and, indeed, the thesis of this work) that Auschwitz constitutes irrefutable evidence of the failure of Enlightenment rationality.

The second key aspect of *Maus* criticism examined in this thesis concerns the key figure of the second-generation survivor. One of the seminal works of scholarship on Spiegelman in this regard is Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (1997). Hirsch interrogates the photographs which appear in *Maus* in relation to the concept of *postmemory*: the transmission of the parent's traumatic history to the second-generation survivor. Hirsch submits that '[p]ostmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated' (Hirsch 1997, 22). The Artie of *Maus*, she contends, can be understood as a paradigmatic case history of the subject whose life and very identity is dominated by postmemory. Hirsch's work, it will be noted at this preliminary stage, is primarily based on literary sources rather than psychological studies of Holocaust survivors and their children. It is also open to allegations of presenting a monolithic second-generation survivor experience which fails to capture the varied, and often conflicting ways in which second-generation survivors attempt to engage with questions of inherited trauma and family

history. Whilst the concept of postmemory is compelling and often eminently applicable to *Maus*, it nonetheless offers a partial and in some respects problematic rendition of the second-generation survivor's experience as it appears in Spiegelman's work. As we shall see in detail subsequently, Spiegelman's protagonists relate to their status as second-generation survivors in varied and often dissonant ways which cannot always be accommodated by the theory of postmemory in isolation. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to extend Hirsch's work in conjunction with integrated models from clinical psychology and Michel Foucault's work on madness and recovery (to be detailed later in this chapter) as a basis for understanding the second-generation Holocaust survivor.

A third strand of *Maus* scholarship in which I will seek to intervene concerns the silencing of Anja (the deceased wife and mother, respectively, of the two protagonists). This muting and indeed a general 'banishment of female voices' (Hirsch 1997, 35) in Artie's story has been approached by many critics, most notably Hirsch (1992, 1993), Liss (1998), Hamida Bosmajian ('The Orphaned Voice' 2003), Nancy K. Miller ('Cartoons of the Self: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Murderer, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*' 2003) and Elmwood (2004). The relative silence of female victims of the Shoah is a recurring and disturbing dimension of Holocaust representation but should not necessarily be read as a deliberate strategy. In this regard, Gwyneth Bodger contends that '[t]he separation of women and men on arrival at the camps often meant that men were unaware of what happened to the women, and this separation also meant that women were quite simply not a part of men's Holocaust experiences' (Bodger 2007, 161). Vladek and Anja were afforded some rare opportunities to interact in Auschwitz and, as such, Vladek is able to tell Anja's story of internment albeit

only in so far as it informs his own. Vladek's portrayal of his wife is, however, woefully incomplete. Elmwood contends that '[w]e only see Anja as an effect of Vladek's memory, in which she is painted as weak, frail, and naive, but also as eloquent and charming [...] Seen through Vladek's loving eyes, she is his charge, vaguely helpless, dangerously weak and in constant need of his care and protection' (Elmwood 2004, 709). Bosmajian proposes intriguingly that Anja's absent story offers Artie the hope which Vladek's narrative monopoly threatens to shatter. 'Anja might have been the dialogical partner who, unlike Vladek, would have understood her son' (Bosmajian 2003, 39).

The most damning instance of muzzling, for both Artie and many critics, lies in Vladek's decision to burn his deceased wife's diaries. The act of burning the diaries has been interpreted in a number of ways, most strikingly as a re-enactment of the Nazis burning of books and people. In '*Maus* and the Bleeding of History' Michael Levine describes the burning of Anja's diaries, in Artie's mind, as a 'repetition of the Holocaust' (Levine 2003, 79). Liss, similarly, contends that Artie 'transfers the crimes against humanity from the Nazis to his father' (Liss 1998, 58). Spiegelman does not make this connection explicit and it seems improper to equate the burning of diaries (however cruelly such an act may sever the link between a mother and her son) to the systematic murder of millions of people. Staub, conversely, suggests that Vladek burned the diaries not to forget, but 'to force himself to hold fast to the burdens of his memory, and to imprison himself forever in that nightmare' (Staub 1995, 37). This thesis proposes an alternative to these antithetical readings: in section 3.9 we shall see that by burning Anja's diaries Vladek seeks to maintain a monopoly over his narrative as an instinctive therapeutic strategy. Anja's diaries threaten to expose Vladek to

trauma by challenging his narrative authority and the legitimacy of the romance (and even fairytale) story he has constructed around his relationship with Anja.

A fourth major trend which can be identified in criticism of *Maus* is the status of the text as oral testimony and the construction of the work itself. Critics in this area document how Spiegelman collected the primary materials for *Maus*, and how those materials have shaped the text. The key contributions in this regard are made by Brown (1988), Miller (2003) and, most recently, Rosemary V. Hathaway ('Reading Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as Postmodern Ethnography' 2011). Readers who wish to further explore Spiegelman's relationship with his father, Vladek Spiegelman, and the process of making *Maus* may also be interested in Lawrence Weschler's 'Art's father, Vladek's son' (1988), Witek's 2007 interview collection, and Spiegelman's own collection of interviews and notes in *Metamaus* (Spiegelman 2011). This thesis treats *Maus* primarily as a literary/artistic work and, as such, the process of documenting the relationship between the comic and the source material is not an overriding concern. The question of historiographical research, authenticity, and the distinction between the one who is written and the one who writes *within the text itself* is of central importance in this thesis, however, as the conflict between Vladek (who often plays the role of the madman) and Artie (the sometime agent of reason) is deemed to be decisive. In this regard, several critics have viewed *Maus* as a combative encounter between two narrators: Rick Iadonisi in 'Bleeding History and Owning His [Father's] Story: *Maus* and Collaborative Autobiography', for example, describes the creation of the narrative as a 'wrestling match' (Iadonisi 1994, 52) and Elmwood closes her essay by describing Artie's position as one of 'narrative control and dominance' (Elmwood 2004, 716). The contribution to this debate proposed in this work will

involve an attempt to reframe the interaction between the dual narrators of *Maus* in terms of a dialogic collision between empirical and traumatic truth. In section 3.7 to 3.15 of this thesis the argument will be made that Artie, the historiographer, seeks to establish an objective truth concerning events, and Vladek, the victim of trauma, employs various strategies in order to craft some semblance of a self from the violence to which he was subjected. However, on closer inspection, the apparently tidy binary offered here begins to unravel. Subject positions elide in *Maus* as part of Spiegelman's politico-philosophical project to deconstruct a reductive opposition between sane and insane.

The fifth core concern in *Maus* criticism addresses relations between another fractious and possibly fictitious opposition: words and images. In Chute's terms, '*Maus* often works with the friction of verbal and visual discourse; the cartoonist has both at his disposal, and so he can preserve his father's language while drawing against it' (Chute 2012, online). Artie's role as illustrator of the main narrative allows him a means to comment on the content of Vladek's story as it is being told and thus, Gillian Banner argues 'allude to the alternative version' buried within Vladek's memory. Whilst Vladek's testimony as narrator appears, within the text, to have been transcribed practically *verbatim*, Banner submits that the narrative application of the artwork extends beyond the simple visual realisation of the text offering a form of polymodality unique to the medium of sequential art (Banner 2000, 133). On page 214, for example, the reader is alternately presented with the much commented-upon image of the prisoners marching past an orchestra and, after Vladek's insistence that there was no such orchestra, the same procession is located directly underneath the original panel, otherwise identical, but with the band obscured by the marching prisoners.

This image can be found on page 214 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 5** Maus p.214. *The two images of the orchestra serve as a self-effacing admission that the artist has no explanation for the disparity between conflicting accounts.*

Vladek's insistence that there was no orchestra contradicts some of the most trusted death camp testimony – Elie Wiesel would be the most obvious example here – but it is not unique. Marysia Winogron, a friend of the Spiegelman's parents, stated: 'I don't remember any music when we were marching' (Spiegelman 2011, 285) (N.b. Spiegelman, with a few exceptions, follows the comic book convention of lettering in block capitals. For ease of reading whenever a comic book is quoted in this thesis both upper and lower case lettering will be used). In a similar instance, when, in the diegesis, Artie questions Vladek about the timeline of his internment in Auschwitz and Vladek corrects himself, the conversation is shown in full with an accompanying timeline to the right of the panels (Spiegelman 2003, 228). Françoise's speech bubble covers the ambiguous area of the timeline, making plain the fact that Artie's questions remain unanswered. (An unobscured version of the timeline, complete with notes, can be found in *Metamaus* (Spiegelman 2011, 207)). In another 'alternative' to Vladek's story, Richeau, Artie's brother who died during the Shoah, 'is depicted by Artie as an obnoxious brat' despite being described as a pleasant child by Vladek (Bosmajian 2003, 33). This characterisation appears to be motivated less by Artie's desire to alert the reader to inconsistencies in Vladek's testimony, and more by the desire to reimagine the child with whom he has been compared unfavourably throughout his life. By drawing the main narrative, Artie has a means to respond visually to his 'sibling rivalry with a snapshot' (Spiegelman 2003, 175).

Criticism in this field also hones in on the manner in which Artie controls the pacing of Vladek's narration. The intra-diegetic narrator-illustrator uses panel shapes to direct the reader's attention to specific visual elements of the story (for more on this technique see Iadonisi 1994). When Vladek and Anja are revealed to be Jews and captured by the Gestapo, for example, the borders of the panel are jagged (the only time such framing edges appear in *Maus*), to emphasise the shock of the captives (see Spiegelman 2003, 157). These toothed panel borders are a dramatic device which is, needless to say, entirely Artie's addition. Section 3.7 of this thesis will detail the tension between Vladek's verbal testimony and Artie's visual rendering of that testimony as a means of enabling Spiegelman to avoid some of the distorting effects of non-literal depictions of historical events. The verbal-visual counterpoint will also be, in an original contribution to Spiegelman scholarship, triangulated with the two conceptual pairings signposted above: empirical and traumatic truth as well as sanity and madness.

This triangulation will be framed by consideration of the sixth and final recurring concern in *Maus* scholarship. According to many critics, Spiegelman's text is *about time*. The blurring of time in *Maus* (described elegantly by Iadonisi as 'temporal seepage' (Iadonisi 1994, 45)), has been documented by LaCapra (1998), Witek ('History and Talking Animals: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*' 1989), Orvell (1992), Hungerford (1999), Andreas Huyssen ('Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno' 2000), Cioffi (2001), McGlothlin (2003), John Carlin (*Masters of American Comics* 2005) and Chute (2005, 2009, 2010 and 2012). Spiegelman does not necessarily seek to demolish distinctions between time periods; the Artie who reels off dates in the 'Time Flies' sequence is 'hyper-invested in the issue of

temporality' (McGlothlin 2003, 193). Despite his efforts, however, the narrative levels of *Maus* often intersect thematically with the past informing the present and the present shaping the telling of the past. Typically, this takes place in subtle ways.

[a] careful counterpoint of the frame narrative against the inner one: after Vladek talks about having to clean out stables for the Germans, he orders his son to clean up the cigarette ash on the carpet; talking about the jewels he used while hiding to barter for comestible goods, Vladek leads his son to the Rego Park bank where his safe deposit box holds his papers and valuables (Orvell 1992, 119).

In this sense, the aforementioned critics maintain, Artie chronicles Vladek both verbalising and acting out his past, thereby creating an emotional and symbolic continuum. Approaching this temporal structure, McGlothlin (2003) distinguishes deftly between the narrative layers in *Maus* in relation to Gérard Genette's terms 'story', 'discourse' and 'narration' (or 'inner' 'middle' and 'outer'). McGlothlin places the 'Time Flies' sequence and the scene from Artie's childhood which opens *Maus* on the same narrative level (signalled in both instances by the adoption of lower-case text). McGlothlin's taxonomy allows her to analyse the function of each layer in relation to the others: specifically the way in which the outer layer observes and comments upon the other two. McGlothlin's analysis was not entirely without precedent: Iadonisi, for instance, acknowledges similar aspects of the narrative structure and recognises the existence of multiple 'Arties.' He proposes that '[t]he different representations in *Maus* can be plotted on a graph, with a vertical hierarchy moving from Art the mouse, to Art the person behind the mouse mask, to Spiegelman the producer of the published text' (Iadonisi 1994, 50). Tabachnick (1993), too, asserts that *Maus* has three narrative layers: the *künstlerroman*; the *bildungsroman*; and the epic. One might note here that these map onto generic codes in which the first two refer to separate selves which Artie adopts in the framing



narrative, rather than distinct narrative frames. Other critics have followed this line of inquiry. Rifkind, citing McGlothlin, also asserts that '[t]here are at least three levels of narrative in the *Maus* volumes' (Rifkind 2008, 402). This thesis proposes an understanding of the relationships which differs somewhat from existing models. Section 3.6 segregates the 'Time Flies' sequence on a distinct narrative level with a unique set of spatial and symbolic rules separate from the adjacent animal allegory. Alongside this, the analysis will focus on *Prisoner on the Hell Planet* (henceforth *Prisoner*) as another intra-textual entity with its own distinctive narrative space. Significantly, as we will see, the closer any specific narrative space seems to be to the extradiegetic world (ie. the less embedded the narrative), the more symbolic, nightmarish and irrational it becomes. In other words, the descent into madness in *Maus* increases velocity as we get closer to the surface of the rational world.

Alongside an attempt to revise the existing thematics of *Maus* scholarship, this thesis will seek to break new ground by addressing critical lacunae. The concept of trauma in relation to *Maus* and Spiegelman's other work is crucial in this respect. Although critics such as Alison Landsberg ('America, the Holocaust and the Mass Culture of Memory: Towards a Radical Politics of Empathy' 1997), Young (2000), Huyssen (2000) and Banner (2000) all identify symptoms of trauma (or the absence thereof) in Vladek's testimony, they touch quite lightly on this deep subject and often rely on underdeveloped psychoanalytical models which themselves are vulnerable to allegations of reductive totalisation. The approach taken in this work will seek to develop understandings of trauma in greater depth and in relation to models from clinical psychology. Such an approach aspires to greater flexibility than might be allowed within a classical Freudian paradigm. It employs a multifaceted model of trauma

(detailed in section 1.5) which explains how Vladek might be understood as both acutely traumatised *and* resilient, and how he might both employ strategies to mitigate trauma, and still be consumed by its potent affect (see sections 3.9 to 3.15 below). The argument shall be made that Vladek, perhaps unconsciously, uses his narrative as a means to mitigate the damaging effects of rebuilding his memories, but that the act of narrating his trauma itself has an ultimately damaging effect on his psyche. This model of trauma will be deployed beyond a case study of Vladek to the various ‘Arties’ who appear throughout Spiegelman’s work.

Having established the broad critical context for *Maus*, the following section shall provide an overview of scholarship on the other two volumes considered in this thesis:

*Breakdowns and No Towers*.

## **1.2 Spiegelman Studies: *Breakdowns and No Towers***

*Breakdowns and No Towers have received less critical attention than Maus and have typically been read as adjuncts to Spiegelman’s masterpiece – Criticism of No Towers congregates around the depiction of trauma, resistance to mass media imagery, and the process of digital mediation – The importance of maintaining a lucid distinction between Spiegelman (who writes and draws and experienced the attacks on the World Trade Center first-hand) and Artie (who is written and drawn and ‘experiences’ those events first-hand within the text) – The critical response to Breakdowns tends to address issues of defamiliarization, quotation, and formal experimentation*

The central trends in criticism which concerns *No Towers* detailed below includes the relationship of the text to *Maus*, the relationship between Spiegelman and the protagonist of the text, the depiction of the traumatic moment (something far more well-documented in criticism of *No Towers* compared to that of *Maus*), the process of resisting the act of mass-forgetting, and the role of mediation through ‘vision machines’ (Paul Virilio’s term from his

1994 book of the same name) within the text. Critical work on *Breakdowns* has honed in on the issues of hypertextuality, formal experimentation, and defamiliarization. The analysis below will aim to sketch the position of this thesis in relation to these critical trends.

In comparison to *Maus*, *No Towers* has received little critical attention. The publication of the collected edition of *No Towers* took place in 2004 and coincided with the renaissance of critical interest in Spiegelman's work. At the time of writing there are twenty eight papers on *No Towers* listed in the Bonner Online-Bibliographie Zur Comicsforschung database. This compares favourably with the majority of comic books but this figure is still dwarfed by the 145 papers devoted to *Maus*. Whilst *No Towers* has received some interest in its own right, many critics have read the collection as 'a sequel to *Maus*' or, at the very least a text which sits squarely in the shadow of Spiegelman's *tour de force*. McGlothlin writes of being 'struck by how many critics devote a good deal of their discussion [of *No Towers*] to *Maus*' (McGlothlin 2008, 97). Scholars such as Kristiaan Versluys ('Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*: 9-11 and the Representation of Trauma' 2006), Chute ('Temporality and Seriality in Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*' 2007), Orbán (2007), and McGlothlin ('When Time Stands Still' 2008) herself have devoted part or all of their analysis to considering *No Towers* as a thematic continuation of *Maus*. Even those Spiegelman scholars such as Chute, who do not divide their attention between the two texts, still make extensive use of materials associated with the study of *Maus* (in Chute's case, for example, the question of 'temporal seepage'). Fewer critics, including Peter Sanderson ('Spiegelman's *No Towers* and Herriman's *Krazy Kat*' 2004), and Patrick M. Bray ('Aesthetics in the Shadow of No Towers: Reading Virilio in the Twenty-First Century')

2008), analyse the text purely in relation to its cultural and political contexts without recourse to criticism of Spiegelman's other work.

The fact that much of the critical discourse concerning *No Towers* has been framed by *Maus* is, of course, not a reason to automatically dismiss this work to a position of secondary significance. All of the critics mentioned above highlight the dramatic difference in Spiegelman's artistic approach between the two texts. By reading the two in parallel, however, these critics forgo the possibility of stepping beyond the themes which *No Towers* shares with *Maus*. In terms of the relationship between *No Towers* and Spiegelman's other work, whilst the ideas developed in the chapters of this thesis concerning *Maus* and *Breakdowns* will inform the reading of *No Towers* presented in the fourth chapter of this work, the analysis will also explore the ways in which the text moves beyond the thematic limits of *Maus*. To give one example: section 4.7 will utilise Hayden White's model of the 'Wild Man', a figure largely absent from the other two works, as a means to understand the madness which Artie experiences in relation to socially-sanctioned models of recovery and threat.

Within *No Towers*, Spiegelman's protagonist feels alienated because his own experience of the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks differs dramatically from that of his peers. This has typically been read as a symptom of a trauma narrative, something for which Spiegelman has been applauded by many (see, for example, Versluys (2006), Martha Kuhlman ('The Traumatic Temporality of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*' 2007), Julie Reiser ('Thinking in Cartoons' 2012), and Alan Gibbs ('Against

Collective Trauma: Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* and Pluralistic Responses' (2012). Such readings typically view the text itself as the product of a disturbed mind – that the writing of *No Towers* was a therapeutic exercise. There is some disagreement as to how the transmission of Spiegelman's mental state works exactly within the text; Reiser for example, argues that *No Towers* does not represent the trauma-born *failure* of articulation. Rather, it represents a series of juxtapositions and a self-reflective focus upon form which facilitates direct communication of the author's mental state to the reader. There is a tendency in all such criticism, however, to read *No Towers* as autobiography – that Spiegelman's own trauma has shaped the work and that his sense of being uniquely traumatised within the text reflects, in part, the numerous rejections he experienced when trying to persuade American newspapers to publish *No Towers* in its original format. Kuhlman, for example, submits that 'Spiegelman is forced to enter into a conversation with himself and the reader in order to create a dialogic space for his various reactions to 9/11' (Kuhlman 2007, 853). In such a reading one might submit that Spiegelman seeks out a sympathetic listener to help mitigate his trauma. This approach is problematic, however, as it confuses the one who is written with the one who writes and thus denies the possibility of irony or distance between the author and character. Indeed, Spiegelman has been very clear that he, the author, and Artie, the in-text author who appears in *Maus*, are not one and the same and yet critics have tended to casually conflate his authorial persona in *No Towers* with Spiegelman himself (see Spiegelman 2011, 34-35). Throughout this thesis, the protagonists of Spiegelman's works are referred to as 'Artie' unless otherwise named. When appropriate, different Arties are distinguished by specifying the narrative level on which they operate. The author of the text and metatexts which concern it (such as the introduction, afterword, interviews, etc.) will be designated

‘Spiegelman.’ By observing the distinction between author and character, the analysis presented in sections 4.6 to 4.11 will thus recognise the extent to which the traumatised Artie of *No Towers* serves a purpose within the text (namely to attest to the presence of unhealed and alienated victims) without representing the entirety of that text.

In pursuing the complex inter- and intra-relationships within *No Towers* this thesis will refer to critical work by Orbán (2007), Sven Cvek (2011), and Banner (2000). Orbán contends that *No Towers* articulates the impossibility of escape from the traumatic moment, but underplays the possibility of the text’s resistance to the hegemonic representations of political rhetoric and news media (Orbán 2007). In *Towering Figures: Reading the 9/11 Archive*, Cvek reads *No Towers* in relation to Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of history: ‘[f]or both authors history is not underwritten by notions of progress or casual continuity, but defined by the eruption of the past into the present, following a pattern of cyclic repetition’ (Cvek 2011, 95). Cvek’s analysis echoes both the concept of ‘temporal seepage’ in Spiegelman’s work and Brian Massumi’s (‘The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat’ 2010) contention that despite the apparent exceptionalism of the event, terrorist threats and attacks have a long history. By alluding to the Shoah, figures from early American comics and the 1901 newspaper which lines the inside cover of *No Towers*, Cvek argues that Spiegelman points to the ‘deliberate forgetting of the past’ in the narratives which filled the media at the time (Cvek 2011, 96). Whilst some of Cvek’s arguments rhyme with those put forward here, the reading in this thesis proposes an alternative view of the relationship between the Shoah and the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks through an understanding of mass trauma and the analytical resources available to clinical psychology. The act of wilful

amnesia criticised by Cvek can also be approached as a mode of ‘mass therapy’ (therapy which occurs on a large scale through cultural forms) in response to trauma. *No Towers* in fact employs multiple strategies of resilience and political resistance.

Bray reads the recurring image of the disintegrating North Tower through Virilio’s concept of ‘vision machines’: technology which replaces the human experience of seeing (Bray (2008)). According to this reading, *No Towers* freezes the moment of the ‘voluntary accident’ (to use another term from the Virilio vocabulary) of the attacks and ‘allows us to see causality within the image itself, the time and the accident inherent within the image, outside of an artificial historicising narrative’ (Bray 2008, 16). Spiegelman’s image of the North Tower dissolving is thus a semiotic, affective and political battleground between first-hand and technologically-mediated experience. ‘The fleeting memory of the moment just before the collapse of the North Tower, a memory threatened by the devastating force of media images, can only be represented by an image that exposes the danger of vision machines’ (Bray 2008, 15). The engagement with Cvek and Bray in section 4.4 will supplement their findings with a far stronger focus on the primary import of trauma. Even as Artie attempts to grasp what Laura E. Tanner (‘Holding On to 9/11: The Shifting Grounds of Materiality’ 2012) might call the ‘access to the real’ offered by his own memory, he finds he must resort to the mediated processes of cultural products and rhetoric which attempt to shape the traumatic void of an anti-memory produced by the collapsing World Trade Center.

In 2008 Spiegelman’s 1977 collection *Breakdowns* was reissued. The earlier version of *Breakdowns* had received relatively little critical attention (Young (2000) and Carlin (2005) being noteworthy but somewhat brief exceptions). Until the reissue arguably the most in-

depth analysis of *Breakdowns* was found in Spiegelman's own *Comix, Essays, Graphics, and Scraps* (see Spiegelman 1999). Spiegelman's own writing on the subject offered a practitioner-based approach which concentrated, as might be expected, on matters of artistic process. These essays have framed some of the critical readings which followed. The only two texts in *Breakdowns* to have received significant critical attention are *Prisoner* and the original *Maus*. *Prisoner*, because it was reprinted in the later version of *Maus*, has typically been included in *Maus* criticism, most notably Hirsch's writing on postmemory which is mentioned in section 1.1. Some scholars, for example LaCapra (1998), have, in the course of their analysis, compared the original *Maus*, which was published in *Funny Aministrals* (1972) and included in *Breakdowns*, to the Pulitzer-winning version serialised in *RAW*. The majority of the arguments concerning these two works are included in the sketch of *Maus* scholarship above. Given the relative absence of existing criticism concerning the majority of comics in *Breakdowns*, chapter 2 of this thesis will tread a great deal of new ground for Spiegelman scholarship because it includes readings of comics such as *Skinless Perkins* and *Little Signs of Passion*.

The work of Carlin and Kartalopoulos stands out in the field of criticism of *Breakdowns*. Both of these critics comment upon the 'hypertextuality' of the volume which includes, according to Kartalopoulos, stylistic allusions to Harvey Kurtzman's dark parodies in *MAD* magazine. In section 2.2 the argument will be made that quotations in *Breakdowns* continue the tradition of postmodern hypertextual play practiced by Spiegelman's contemporaries and contribute to the thematics of psychological disturbance by staging the relationship between madness and sanity. In this iteration, the case shall be made, these



themes involve a conflict between underground comic book artists and the anti-comics movement.

Kartalopoulos also analyses the interface between depression and formal experimentation in *Breakdowns*. This will be used as a stepping-stone to a more substantial interrogation of the volume's formal innovation and complexity. The apparently 'playful' collapse of the comic book format in *Breakdowns* is, as will be demonstrated in chapter 2, profoundly integrated with emotional and psychological collapse as well as a critique of the Enlightenment aspiration to create a formal and replicable method for producing art. In section 2.6 the madness of *Breakdowns* will be traced in relation to Jacques Derrida's concept of mad language and the practice of clinical psychology at Spiegelman's time of writing/illustrating.

Further noteworthy criticism of *Breakdowns* includes Brodzki's contribution to *Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels* (2011). Brodzki offers some key insights but her essay is short and focused almost exclusively on *Portrait*. Brodzki draws upon the seminal Russian Formalist essay, 'Art as Device', by Viktor Shklovsky (originally written in 1917, later published in *Theory of Prose* in 1925), which proposed that the role of art is to make everyday objects and the art object itself unfamiliar. In *Breakdowns*, Brodzki argues, Spiegelman defamiliarizes the artistic personae established in *Maus*. In chapter 2, the concept of defamiliarization will be extended both beyond *Portrait* and beyond *Breakdowns* to include Spiegelman's handling of comic book form throughout his work. For Spiegelman, as will be demonstrated, defamiliarization provides an artistic

antidote to the reductive effect of familiarizing forms which seek to contain and reduce the madness of their subject.

The previous two sections have identified some of the underdevelopment and blind spots in existing criticism of Spiegelman's work which will be addressed by this thesis. At the same time it is apparent that the critical models and vocabulary used in this dissertation have only been sketched in cursory form. Sections 1.3 to 1.9 will trace in finer detail the overarching methodological structure and proffer working definitions of key words.

### **1.3 Narrative Terminology**

*Defamiliarization is the process of making a familiar object appear strange whereas familiarization, for the purpose of this work, involves rendering an otherwise disturbing object within a recognisable and unchallenging format – This thesis employs Genette's taxonomy of narrative level and voice to describe techniques of relevance to Spiegelman's work – It also draws upon terms from formalist studies of comic books – McCloud's taxonomy of artistic approaches and types of panel transitions – The Icon is a means to build reader empathy*

This section shall seek to outline the formalist framework employed in this thesis. It will provide a working definition for the terms *familiarization* and *defamiliarization*, a taxonomy to describe the relationship between narrative levels and narrators, and an overview of formalist approaches to comic book studies.

A key concept in this thesis which appears in all of the following chapters is the process of defamiliarization – a concept introduced briefly in the section above. The term was initially coined by Viktor Shklovsky to describe the process of revealing the strangeness buried within the familiar and everyday through art. Familiarization, conversely, involves rendering extreme and exceptional experiences more accessible through art. The latter is

particularly relevant, in this thesis, to literary and artistic depictions of the Holocaust. The case shall be made below that Spiegelman employs a range of defamiliarizing (and in the case of *Maus* familiarizing) strategies in order to demonstrate the problems attendant to representing certain subjects, to incorporate the artistic process into the work, and as an authenticating strategy by calling attention to a text's material form. Broadly, defamiliarization is a process which is used throughout Spiegelman's work to emphasise the madness of his subject/s and to resist the reductive and normalising affect of catharsis.

In tandem with the core concept of defamiliarization, Genette's structuralist narratology will be deployed extensively. Of particular importance here are his distinctions between 'diegetic', 'metadiegetic' and 'extradiegetic' elements in a narrative. Briefly, the *extradiegetic* is that which exists outside of the story, such as the author or, in the case of film, music which can be heard by the viewer but not the characters. The story (told by the author either through a character or in the third person) is the *diegesis*, defined in *Palimpsests* as 'the spatiotemporal world designated by the narrative' (Genette 1997, 295). The diegesis is, in some texts framed by a second (or third, fourth, etc.) narrative in which a character recounts the diegesis. These framing narratives are said to be *metadiegetic*. The distinction between narrative layers will prove crucial for the analysis in section 3.6 of Spiegelman's only ostensibly straight-forward volume, *Maus*.

Genette also draws a useful distinction between narrator (the voice which tells the story) and the character who acts. In the case of first person narratives (as with the main narrative in *Maus*) the separation between the narrator and hero (the term here refers to the

protagonist and does not automatically imply an agent of good) is temporal, with an earlier incarnation of the hero retrospectively describing the events of his or her past. The comic book format, as Charles Hatfield (2005) submits in *Alternative Comics*, offers an additional dimension (one also available in film) to the one who is written through the combination of first person extradiegetic prose with third person visuals. The distinction between words and art allows the creator to generate dramatic irony and to nuance our perception of each character. It will be used to distinguish between madness in characters and madness in narrators, as will be explained in section 1.7 and used throughout this thesis, particularly in section 2.6, 3.7 and 4.7.

The formalist framework for this project will combine Genette's work on verbal discourse with analytical models of visual form in comic books. It is worth noting at the outset that Anglophone comic book studies is a multi-disciplinary field. It includes micro- and macro-economic surveys of the comic book industry as well as works written from scholars with backgrounds in visual art, sociology, gender studies, cultural studies, education, and social history. Comic book studies has multiple branches, including region-specific fields and critical camps which focus on gender or queer readings. The discipline has started to evolve its own distinctive formalist vocabulary, but also continues to lean on work from other subject areas such as film and literary studies. Accordingly, the approach adopted here acknowledges that no study of comics can exist in a disciplinary vacuum. The approach taken will primarily be a literary one with particular reference to comic book autocriticism. McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and *Reinventing Comics* (1994 and 2000) and Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (1994 and

1996) as well as Robert Harvey's *Art of the Comic Book* (1996) provide a productive schema and vocabulary for discussing comic book form. McCloud's work is by far the most precise, but can be somewhat rigid. Many comic book scholars draw upon McCloud's terminology, but often employ a more fluid approach in their analysis. Volumes such as Jeet Heer and Rocco Versaci's *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature* (2008) and Paul Williams and James Lyons' *The Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts* (2010), leading scholars such as Hillary Chute, as well as journals and online magazines such as *Comics Forum*, curated by Ian Hague, have expanded the field in terms of depth and methods of analysis and in recording the history of the medium. The reading of Spiegelman presented here is indebted to all of these critics for providing a critical language and methodology for the analysis of comic books, but McCloud's work will be utilised more than any other source. The comic book terminology used in this project includes McCloud's model of artistic approaches, the concept of visual literacy, a taxonomy of panel transitions, and the concept of the Icon, each of which will now be detailed.

McCloud divides comic book creators into four distinct categories as follows. Firstly, *Classicist* comic book artists focus primarily upon beauty and craft; prioritising visual elegance over sophisticated narrative. Secondly, *Formalist* comic book creators (the group to which McCloud assigns himself) are interested primarily in the mechanics of comic books and in using existing tools to expand the potential of the medium. Thirdly, the *Animist* foregrounds the content so that the artwork serves, rather than detracts from, the narrative. Fourthly, the *Iconoclast* is primarily interested in representing 'the authenticity of human experience and honesty and rawness' (McCloud, 2009, online). The distinctions between

artistic types are used in this thesis to understand the various and contrasting approaches which Spiegelman has taken in (and sometimes within) different works.

McCloud asserts that ‘comics is a kind of call and response in which the artist gives you something to see within the panels and then gives you something to imagine between the panels’ (McCloud 2009, online). It is the relationship between images and the empty spaces on the page which facilitates narrative flow. Comics do not appear in an unbroken line of images, but instead are arranged with one line above the next in accordance with the limitations of the size and dimensions of the page. In order to allow the emergence of narrative from juxtaposed images within such a space, readers must acquire a *visual literacy*. A *visual literacy contract* refers to the assumed mutual understanding between artist and reader which allows comics to be read. McCloud suggests that the sequential flow in American and European comics is ‘[a] protocol imported from the right and down tradition of the printed word’ (McCloud 2000, 220). This tradition, however, is not always an easy fit for the comic book medium and often leads to an ambiguous ordering of images. As a general rule, the more text that appears on a page, the less visual literacy is needed to discern narrative sequence. Concomitantly, comics which use no text, the prerequisite visual literacy required to order the images correctly is proportionately increased (see Eisner 1996, 141). Derrida argues that all structures contain a degree of ‘play’ (in the sense of *give or flexibility*) in order to function (Derrida 2010, 351-370). Spiegelman, however, as shall be shown in the next chapter, seems to utilise ‘play’ in the structures of his comics not to support and maintain but rather to destabilise and even demolish pre-existing frameworks.

Time in comics is communicated through panel dimensions (the panel being a single image in a comic), panel content (where, for example, multiple distinct events occur within the same panel which can be referred to as ‘synchronism’) and the juxtaposition and sequence of panels. McCloud divides the transition between panels into six types. The first four types of transition all indicate a chronological sequence. Moment-to-moment (*type 1*) transitions feature a single subject within the same scene with a minimal temporal gap. In a moment-to-moment transition the two panels are almost identical and so very little visual literacy is required for the reader to connect the two images sequentially. Action-to-action (*type 2*) transitions involve a single subject within the same scene, but with a larger temporal gap or a more significant change in panel content than a type 1 transition. Subject-to-subject (*type 3*) transitions take place within the same scene, but move to a different subject. Type 3 transitions can be of any time duration, but some time must pass between the two panels for the change to qualify as type 3 (juxtaposed panels which occur simultaneously are type 5). Scene-to-scene (*type 4*) transitions involve a significant temporal change between panels whilst still maintaining some narrative continuity. The final two transition types do not involve a chronological sequence. Aspect-to-aspect or ‘wandering eye’ (*type 5*) transitions move between subjects within the same scene without any apparent chronological progression. The final transition type is non-sequitur (*type 6*) in which there is no obvious logical temporal or chronological relationship between panels (see McCloud 1993, 60-93). In the case of type 6 transitions the reader is required to imagine a relationship between the images. This transition type thus functions in a manner similar to certain forms of abstract poetry (see, for example the work of Elizabeth Sitwell) whereby words are chosen according to their aural quality rather than sense meaning, or montage in film wherein, Sergei

Eisenstein argues, the editing together of two images creates a '*tertium quid*' (third thing) (Eisenstein 1969).

This image can be found at [CitizenCEO.deviantart.com](http://CitizenCEO.deviantart.com)

**Fig. 6** McCloud identifies six types of panel transition

McCloud contends that the majority of American and European comics contain mostly type 2, 3 and 4 transitions (Japanese comics contain more instances of type 5 transitions). McCloud's terminology of panel transitions will be referred to throughout this thesis and particularly in section 2.3.

This thesis will also employ McCloud's concept of the Icon. McCloud conceives of the Icon (in this sense, taken to mean a simplified drawing of a human or being with human qualities) as a means to encourage the reader to see themselves in the role of the character. Hatfield disagrees with McCloud's arguments concerning affect and the Icon on the grounds that the meaning of symbols varies depending on the reader in question, and that the first person point of view forces a separation between the one viewing and the one who views (Hatfield 2005, 116-117). These objections are not sufficient grounds to completely reject the concept of the Icon in the instance of *Maus*, however, as the stylised mouse faces undeniably elicit a (complicated) empathetic response from some (if not all) readers. Section 3.3 of this thesis will demonstrate that the Icon creates a problematic empathy between the reader and characters, not least because it threatens to render the category of 'Jew' so broadly inclusive as to be practically meaningless.



The technical vocabulary introduced above will provide the necessary terminology to analyse key aspects of Spiegelman's craft. The following sections will introduce the conceptual apparatus employed in this thesis which integrates work from Holocaust Studies, trauma theory, the anti-psychology movement of the 1960s, literary and mythic forms of madness and transgression. Each section will sketch the existent debates in the relevant field, the rationale for the approach taken, and any limitations. The first of these sections, which now follows, will detail the literary and cultural aftermath of the Holocaust and the central conceptual, historical and ethical problems attendant on the act of giving form to those events.

## 1.4 The Holocaust

*The Holocaust is a central theme in Spiegelman's work – Spiegelman obliquely addresses questions of catharsis raised by the national narrative of Israel – The question of Holocaust literature is ethically fraught because 1. the Holocaust is so terrible as to be beyond depiction 2. exceptionalism is problematic and silence is no option and 3. artistic play is both offensive and risks granting legitimacy to revisionism*

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of a (perhaps *the*) central theme in Spiegelman's work, namely the Holocaust. Holocaust studies covers fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, history, literature, film, oral testimony, music, and visual art. This discipline has its own journal, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (1987-present) and has been the focal point of numerous books and academic conferences. Holocaust studies has, more recently, expanded to include events other than the Holocaust, including the Rwanda genocide of 1994, and has in some quarters adopted the broader nomenclature of 'genocide studies.' The body of theoretical and historiographical work on genocide, the Holocaust, and the Shoah is so great that only the arguments of immediate relevance to this thesis will be touched on below. Whilst all three of the volumes considered in this thesis engage with the

Holocaust thematically, it is only in *Maus* that Spiegelman seeks to depict the death camp explicitly and, as such, this section will focus primarily upon Spiegelman's (auto)biographical survivor's tale in order to anchor this theoretical overview to the arguments which follow.

What follows is a broad overview of arguments which concern the depiction of the Holocaust in literature. An appropriate artistic response, it shall be argued, would be one which negotiates a delicate balance between the familiar and the defamiliarized. It should represent its subject in such a way as to avoid familiar narrative forms whilst simultaneously recognising the continuing relevance of the Holocaust. Such a text should also acknowledge the limits of representation whilst simultaneously resisting the potentially damaging effects which result from the misrepresentation of history. It is this, perhaps unachievable, criteria against which Spiegelman's work shall be measured.

The Holocaust involved the systematic state-sponsored segregation, persecution and murder of Jews, Romani, communists, homosexuals, Soviet prisoners of war, people with disabilities and other groups deemed to be *Gemeinschaftsfremde* ('aliens') and thus enemies of the National Socialist party. The *Gemeinschaftsfremde* were further divided into those who were genetically acceptable but had erred (such as homosexuals or communists) and might be made 'healthy' once more, and those who were irredeemably alien. The largest group deemed to be alien *Gemeinschaftsfremde* were the Jews. The Nazi ideology on racial purity fed upon existing anti-Semitism which had been prevalent in Europe since at least the Middle-Ages. The systematic persecution of Jews began through legal means, most notably the Nuremberg

laws of 1935 which forbade 'Aryan' Germans from marrying or entering into sexual relations with Jews. The latter half of the 1930s saw a rise in anti-Semitic propaganda through newspapers such as *Der Stürmer* and political speeches. After the invasion of Poland in 1939, Jews in Germany and occupied territories were placed in ghettos where many died from disease and starvation. During the early 1940s the Nazi policy toward the Jews changed from segregation and extermination through labour to mass executions. In 1942, fifteen leading members of the Nazi party met at the Wannsee Conference to decide upon a 'final solution to the Jewish question.' This final solution, they decided, would involve the complete annihilation of all Jews through a combination of forced labour and mass-murder. The attempted genocide of Jews which followed is now referred to as the *Shoah* (the almost complete genocide of the Romani who once lived in Nazi-occupied Europe is referred to as *Porajmos* or sometimes *Kali Traš*, *Berša Bibahtale*, or *Holokausto*). The epicenter of this industrialised massacre was the concentration (later, explicitly, death) camps such as, most infamously, Auschwitz and Dachau. In total, approximately six million Jews were killed during the Shoah, many of them in the gas chambers. The horror of the Nazi killing project lies not only in its brutality but in its scale and logistics; from the persecution of Jews through legal means, to the dissemination of anti-Semitic propaganda, to the construction, planning, and maintenance of its infrastructure, the Holocaust represents a carefully planned, efficient, and meticulously-documented (although heavily coded and hidden) industry which aimed to kill people in the most cost- and time-effective manner possible. But for its goals and the involvement of the military, it was indistinguishable from, for example, the automobile industry. It required planning, logistical expertise, legal representation, and the dissemination of media to sway public opinion (unlike the automobile industry, the Holocaust was intended

to be a hidden aspect of the Nazi state, and yet anti-Semitic propaganda was a fundamental component in its justification and perpetuation). It is a fundamental assertion of this thesis, to be stated in more detail in section 1.6, that the Holocaust did not simply arise within an ostensibly rational society but *was structurally dependant upon* the tools of the modern age.

The early works of literature to emerge from the Shoah were first-person testimony, including Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* (1947) and Anne Frank's posthumous *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947, translated into English in 1952). Despite these works and the scale of the event, Spiegelman states that when he was a child '[t]he Holocaust just wasn't part of the public conversation [...] The Eichmann Trial [in 1961] was a watershed in public awareness' (Spiegelman 2011, 44). This coincided with the English-language publication of Wiesel's seminal work *Night* in 1960 which helped to initialize a large-scale public consideration of the Holocaust. The late-arrival of public awareness of the Holocaust in America is important to this thesis given that Spiegelman's own process of understanding what his parents lived through occurred simultaneously with the growing public understanding of the Final Solution. An understanding of the developing public discourse concerning the Holocaust also provides an important context and partial-explanation for the success of *Maus*.

Instrumental in the growing awareness of the Shoah was the independence of the nation of Israel. Israel was established in 1948 and accepted into the United Nations in 1949. Israel's population grew through the immigration of Jews, including Shoah survivors, between 1948 and 1970, creating a community of individuals who shared a national, as well as ethnic and religious, identity. The Shoah plays a central role in Israel's national identity;

she is the home of Yad Vashem, a 45,000 square foot memorial to Jewish victims of the Holocaust and every year Israel observes Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day). In 1967, during the Six-Day War, Israel won control of the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights from Egypt, Jordan, and Syria respectively. Amongst various other political shockwaves, Israel's actions resulted in the retaliatory persecution of Jewish populations in Arab and communist countries. The Six-Day War catapulted Israel into the international spotlight and sparked greater debate concerning the Holocaust abroad. Inevitably, Israel is relevant to Spiegelman's work and specifically to the story which Spiegelman seeks to *avoid* telling. Michael Rothberg reads *Maus* as a means to 'remember genocide without abusing its memory' and suggests that Israel has used the memory of the Shoah to political and cultural ends (Rothberg 2003, 152). If *Maus* does comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, then the allusions are very subtle. Asked how he would portray Israeli Jews, Artie (man in a mouse mask) suggests 'porcupines'; a larger, dangerous relative of the mouse (Spiegelman 2003, 202). He offers this suggestion only after first telling the reporter that he has 'no idea' (ibid). Artie has no obvious desire to comment on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, within *Maus*, Spiegelman declines to voice any potentially controversial opinions he may hold. This assertion will be developed in section 3.1.

Unlike the scared and confused Artie in *Maus*, however, outside of his masterpiece Art Spiegelman has expressed his views on Israel (although he has described such discussion as 'talking a little bit past my pay grade' (Spiegelman 2011, 154)): 'I am not anti-Zionist. I'm an Agnostic [...] maybe Israel was a bum steer, a quick-fix salve for the world's guilt that was

an all-too-inadequate response to the urgent and profound questions Auschwitz should have raised' (Spiegelman 1999, 16). Commenting on the television series *Holocaust* he contends that Israel provides a limited form of resolution to the Shoah. '*Holocaust* [...] gets its obligatory happy teevee-land ending: out of the ashes Israel is born, a more spacious ghetto than Warsaw for World Jewery' (Spiegelman 1999, 15). By declining to comment on Israel in *Maus*, Spiegelman avoids turning the Shoah into a familiar narrative format with Israel as the third, cathartic, act. A key concern in this thesis is the way in which Spiegelman chooses, often problematically, to focus upon those unanswered questions raised by Auschwitz and to resist the consolations of simple catharsis and closure. Whilst he does not engage with the question of Israel directly, as we shall see throughout this thesis, Spiegelman is very much attuned to the danger of the Holocaust being reduced to a narrative with a fixed meaning that can serve political ends.

Having sketched the historical and political context for Holocaust representation, the remainder of this section will attempt to explain the theory of *Holocaust exceptionalism* as it relates to this work. As shall be elaborated below, the position of this thesis is that the Holocaust defies representation within traditional forms and yet it should not be treated as beyond comparison to other events, nor should writers and artists admit defeat in their attempts to give narrative shape to what occurred. Appropriate Holocaust art should both maintain, rather than seek to resolve, the terrible implications of the Holocaust whilst insisting upon their continued relevance.

Certain scholars, represented here mainly through the work of Wiesel (1989), Berel Lang (2000 and 2003), Lawrence Langer (1991), Dori Laub (1992) and Steven Katz (1994) contend, in different ways, that the Holocaust is ultimately beyond representation. Lang argues that ‘traditional forms – the developmental order of the novel, the predictability of prosody, the comforting representations of landscape or portrait in painting – are quite inadequate for the images of a subject with the moral dimensions and impersonal will of the Holocaust’ (Lang 2000, 10). Attempts to capture the genocide of six million people within traditional narrative forms – those which follow a three-act structure with mounting tension, eventual cathartic resolution, and an apprehensible moral – fail because such forms, typically, seek both to provide meaning and to shape the emotional reaction of the reader in such a way as to normalise and resolve the questions which they raise. Such texts thus seek to reduce and normalise the Holocaust, leaving the audience with the sense that the danger has passed.

A notable artistic response in this respect, which represents the Holocaust whilst resisting a sense of closure, is Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah* (1985), a 550 minute documentary on the Holocaust. Lanzmann’s film is a series of interviews with victims, perpetrators, and bystanders of the Nazi killing project interspersed with images of the victims and the sites where the killings took place. The documentary maintains an absolute adherence to *witnessing* the testimony of survivors rather than explaining or dramatizing what occurred; Lanzmann’s questions generally focus upon the details of what took place – the scissors used to cut the hair of the victims, for example – rather than the more fundamental questions of how the perpetrators and bystanders rationalised what went on. Lanzmann’s work also insists upon the unresolved nature of the questions raised by Auschwitz; the

documentary is not presented as a chronology but connected through thematic threads traced between the interviews. The final, enduring image of the film is of a train continuing along a track, suggesting that the Holocaust cannot be presented with a neat beginning, middle, and end, but that its implications are still being felt. Both *Shoah* and *Maus* involve the act of bearing witness to oral testimony but, unlike Lanzmann, Spiegelman was forced to find ways to depict his subject in the second degree. *Maus*, as shall be argued in chapter three, does insist upon the profound implications of the Holocaust, but fails to achieve the same facilitating silence as Lanzmann's act of witnessing because Artie repeatedly, and necessarily, goes beyond his role as witness in an attempt both to depict and direct Vladek's testimony. For Spiegelman, the challenge of depicting the Holocaust through artistic and literary means to a second degree raises considerable and perhaps ultimately insurmountable practical, historical, and ethical challenges other than those encountered by Lanzmann.

One of Spiegelman's primary challenges is not *how* the Holocaust might be represented, but the extent to which the horror of what occurred even *can* be rendered in language or images. This challenge is compounded by the fact that Spiegelman is not a primary witness to what took place. Those who are born after the mass killing ceased can understand, in an academic sense, certain empirical details – chronology, numbers, place names, maps, the industrial processes and bureaucracy which facilitated the killing – but the essential horror of genocide remains beyond understanding. A key observation within Spiegelman scholarship, one which is consolidated and, one hopes, significantly developed in this thesis, is that Spiegelman renders the Holocaust within an apparently familiar sequential



narrative framework and artistic register whilst simultaneously employing defamiliarizing strategies which complicate the process, and question the possibility, of representation.

Whilst the arguments made within this thesis resonate with some voices within the discourse on Holocaust exceptionalism, it does not always reach the same conclusions. One branch of the exceptionalism debate maintains that because the Holocaust is beyond depiction, it defies comparison to any other event: ‘Auschwitz is something else, always something else. It is a universe outside the universe, a creation that exists parallel to creation’ (Wiesel 1989, online). Writers such as Wiesel would thus oppose the Holocaust allusions which appear throughout *No Towers*, for example, on the grounds that any attempt, however oblique, to compare the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks to the Shoah seeks to reduce the enormity of the Nazi killing project. According to Gavriel Rosenfeld (2004), this line of reasoning is a means to protect the Holocaust from revisionist discourses and the appropriation of the language of Holocaust literature by non-Jewish ethnic groups in order to describe their own history. Whilst respecting the ethical, practical and political challenges which the Holocaust poses to the artistic imagination, one implication of the central argument of this thesis is that those who argue that the Holocaust is beyond comparison ultimately serve to exonerate the intellectual and industrial rationality which provided a significant component in the machinery of the death camps. The Shoah has far-reaching implications for history, politics, psychology, ethics, language and art. It calls for a total reassessment of human behaviour and social structures. To suggest that the Holocaust cannot be compared to other historical events is to deny its ongoing relevance in terms of the madness which can emerge and even be facilitated by apparently ‘rational’ analytical and industrial systems. The argument presented

here, therefore, prefers readings such as those (detailed below) of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944), Bruno Bettelheim (1960), and Zygmunt Bauman (1989) all of whom examine the ways in which the Holocaust can be understood as a continuation of other structures within modern rational society rather than as a unique departure from or corruption of normal social function.

This thesis is also opposed to the view that only survivor testimony and purely historiographical work is appropriate in regards to the Holocaust. Even if the final Word cannot be spoken, this work takes the position that the speaking must go on. As Roger Luckhurst succinctly contends, even if the Holocaust lies beyond representation ‘silence is no option’ (Luckhurst, 2008; 5). Rather than using the screams of the Shoah as an alibi to abandon the impossible burden of representation, this thesis is founded on the conviction that those who came after the Shoah have a duty to listen and hear and find a way to respond whilst always respecting the problematic nature of such a response. In October 1943, Himmler said of the Holocaust ‘[t]his is a page of glory in our history which has never to be written and is never to be written’ (Himmler in Martin Gilbert 1987, 614). The architects of the Holocaust (even as they orchestrated the public denigration of the Jewish people) sought to erase history as they wrote it. Not to speak of the Holocaust, or to suggest that the Holocaust should not be spoken of thus risks a fatal complicity with the Final Solution. It is further the case that for certain second-generation survivors such as Spiegelman, silence is simply not an option because the Holocaust constitutes an inescapable part of their personal history. This is certainly the case for *Maus* of which Witek (no doubt influenced by Hirsch) contends that ‘Art [one of Spiegelman’s protagonists] cannot afford a silence about the

Holocaust – respectful or otherwise. He must confront the Holocaust in order to come to terms with the qualities in his father which made his own life so oppressive and guilt-ridden: the miserliness, the domestic tyranny, the personal insensitivity’ (Witek 1989, 101).

The argument to this point thus seems tangled in a double bind: the Holocaust cannot be contained within traditional literary forms and language proves inadequate, and yet to not speak of this epochal event is to ignore its ongoing relevance on both an emotional level for those who survive the survivors, and on an urgent politico-philosophical level for those who subscribe absolutely and unquestioningly to rationality. The artist who wishes to speak of the Holocaust faces the apparently impossible challenge of representing a history which both demands articulation and yet is reduced to silence by the trauma and the psychic and moral enormity of genocide. It would be a mistake to simply state, as has been the tendency in Spiegelman criticism, that the theriomorphic animal metaphor effectively resolves this tension by simultaneously showing and *not showing* the Shoah. Spiegelman’s non-literal approach pushes his work into the realm of *historiographical metafiction*, with its own attendant ethical and philosophical problems. An overview of these problems would seem prudent at this juncture.

Some artists seek to represent that which ‘is simultaneously necessary and impossible’ by adopting a form which self-consciously and deliberately fails to represent historical events accurately (Arlene Fish Wilner 2003, 105). A non-literal and deliberately inadequate approach contains a degree of metafictional self-awareness which allows the artist to speak of the Holocaust whilst simultaneously dramatizing their own inability to do so. Such an approach promises a means to loosen the double bind described above. The tactics of artistic

planned obsolescence, however, risk cheapening the subject and legitimising the fears of those who propose that a sacred silence is the only appropriate aesthetic for the Shoah. Examples of the wilfully and offensively inadequate artistic response would include Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) in which Hitler is killed by American soldiers in a film theatre (rather than in a bunker by his own hand as historical accounts maintain), and Zbigniew Libera's LEGO concentration camp kits (1996) which depict the violent details of the camps using a children's toy.

This image can be found at [godbricks.blogspot.co.uk](http://godbricks.blogspot.co.uk)

**Fig. 7** Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO SYSTEM* (1996) uses a children's toy to depict the Holocaust.

Such texts might be described as hyperbolic forms of *historiographical metafiction*, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon to describe works which show 'fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured' (Hutcheon 1988, 120). By adopting an abstract form and a demonstrably impossible alternative history, these texts point implicitly to the failure of any representation to definitively capture *for all time* the ineffable reality of historical events. Such an approach, of course, is fraught with ethical and political pitfalls. In this context, Robert Eaglestone observes that 'the Holocaust has been invoked as a 'test case' for "postmodern ideas" relating to history' (Eaglestone 2004, 3). By 'postmodern ideas', Eaglestone refers to historiographical metafiction, or rather, texts which profess neither to be wholly works of fiction nor to be wholly historiographical but rather (and often playfully) seek to navigate a space between the two. The Holocaust is the exemplar of an event which must be regarded with the utmost seriousness and responsibility. Irony and hypertextual play should surely have no place in relation to the systematic murder of six million people. Not

only this, but concessions made to the concept of historical accuracy with regards to the Shoah are in danger of offering a degree of legitimacy to more extreme revisionist perspectives. The ‘how’ of the Holocaust, Robert Eaglestone argues, should never be neglected in favour of artistic license. Inaccuracies (of which there is a wide spectrum from allegory to outright lies and denial) are dangerous to understanding (Eaglestone Chester University, 18/09/09). To foreground a fundamental responsibility to historical truth in Shoah art and literature is to echo the final line of Levi’s introduction to *If This Is A Man*: ‘[i]t seems to me unnecessary to add that none of these facts are invented’ (Levi 1979, 16). After the terror inflicted during the Shoah, the Nazi’s attempts to destroy the camps and remove evidence of industrialised genocide and subsequent attempts in some quarters at revisionism and denial, absolute fidelity is imperative.

This argument appears to have no obvious and neat resolution. Traditional narrative approaches which seek to contain the Holocaust are inadequate because they diminish their subject, and texts which engage in postmodern play are deficient because they cheapen their subject. Dismissing all means of articulation, however, takes us towards a problematic silence (other than empirical historiography and the now-endangered genre of first person testimony) and an implicit exoneration of rationality. The case shall be made in this thesis that Spiegelman does indeed successfully deploy a format which represents the Holocaust in a non-literal sense whilst simultaneously respecting the moral weight of his subject. This system of representation functions through a combination of familiar and defamiliarized elements (markers of historiographical metafiction), but this is supported by frequent and respectful references to its originary source. Within the text *Vladek*’s oral testimony is left

carefully untarnished by Artie's visuals and, as such, even if Artie's visuals fail, they function to preserve the authenticity of Vladek's testimony.

This abbreviated sketch of key issues in Holocaust Studies provides an essential context for both the form and content of Spiegelman's work. Once we become engaged with the details of the execution, however, it becomes apparent that the philosophical concerns of Holocaust representation are imbricated with psychological and emotional questions which are either not present or not fully addressed within the debates described above. To understand the psychological processes which shape the testimony of survivors we must turn now to the question of trauma.

## 1.5 Trauma

*This thesis takes an approach based upon clinical psychology (rather than psychoanalysis) as a model to understand trauma – Trauma has a range of symptoms which may or may not manifest in degrees of severity in an individual – A traumatised world view may be transmissible through generations – Trauma can be mitigated by resilience and therapy – Resilience may occur, in the case of certain concentration camp prisoners, through a (perhaps illusory) sense of control – Therapy can involve finding meaning through narrative, but this is not always helpful for every victim – National trauma can be leveraged toward political ends and thus 'affective copyright' must be established – Trauma victims often describe how an event felt rather than seeking out an objectively and empirically 'true' account*

The impact of trauma is a central concern in this work. Both the Shoah and the terrorist attacks which occurred on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 are events which (in Spiegelman's work and elsewhere) are so shattering as to demolish the interpretive framework for both the survivors and those who survive the survivors. There have been various attempts within literary studies to measure and categorise the effects of trauma in their textual manifestations. The

framework preferred here is one which uses clinical psychology as a primary basis for understanding trauma. Clinical psychology has been employed because it offers hitherto unexplored lines of analysis in relation to Spiegelman's work, including the explanations for the treatment (or, in some cases, exacerbation) of trauma. The model used here engages with trauma literature (*intra-textual* trauma), but is also informed by empirical work with, and case studies of trauma victims (*extra-textual* trauma). The goal of the analysis is to understand trauma in such a way as to contain the multitude of means by which it may or may not manifest. The following section will explain the relative merits of a model from clinical psychology in relation to psychoanalytical accounts. The exact model used here shall then be detailed including a working definition of trauma, a sketch of literary and artistic manifestations of trauma, recognition of the potential for the transmission of a traumatised world-view between generations, the role of resilience and therapy, and questions of ownership and traumatic truth.

As mentioned in section 1.1, the standard among scholars has been to employ psychoanalytical criticism as a model for understanding trauma and other forms of psychological disturbance in Spiegelman's work. Such works of criticism deal primarily in analysis of recurring symbols and lexical choices in the text. Critics working in this area include Landsberg (1997), Hungerford (1999), Bosmajian, Robert S. Leventhal ('Art Spiegelman's MAUS: Working-Through The Trauma of the Holocaust') and Levine (all 2003), Elmwood (2004), and Versluys (2006). Without wishing to dismiss psychoanalytical theory as a whole, the recurring flaw in this kind of work is a tendency toward broad generalisations and abstraction resulting in a misleadingly monolithic model of human

experience often based solely upon literary and artistic texts as evidentiary material. Only a small number of academics who have studied *Maus* (Gerber (1987), for example, is noteworthy but now somewhat out of date) have utilised non-psychoanalytical models and drawn directly on psychological case studies.

Having dismissed psychoanalysis as the most appropriate model, this work will build a model for trauma based primarily upon sources from clinical psychology. Multiple sources will be used including Luckhurst's (2008) survey of clinical approaches to trauma, Viktor E. Frankl (1946) and Arthur Frank's (1995) work on 'resistance' and healing through narrative, clinical studies, and transcribed conversations with practitioners working in the field. Daniel Goleman, who is most famous for popularising the concept of 'emotional intelligence', provides many of the explanations for trauma, not because he is necessarily a leader in the field, but because his explanations are more readily accessible than those from researchers who are accustomed to writing for their peers rather than an audience untrained in clinical psychology. This approach will now be detailed.

Within clinical psychology trauma is not understood to have an unyielding and universal set of characteristics (even within an individual patient); it is a term which describes a wide range of attitudes and behaviours. It is thus treated (both in clinical psychology and in this thesis) as a broad analytic category rather than a simple descriptive label. Whilst there is no single definition of trauma or trauma narrative in clinical psychology, a working definition can be attempted. To be regarded as traumatised an individual will generally have 'experienced, witnessed or have been confronted by a threat of physical injury' (Scott 2010, personal communication). This threat is often 'sudden or unexpected' (ibid). Trauma victims



frequently develop a disabling degree of sensitivity in detecting and responding to danger and may adopt seemingly irrational behaviours in response to anticipated rather than real threats. Luckhurst identifies the traumatic moment as an event too shattering to be fully apprehended: '[it] issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge' (Luckhurst 2008, 79). The double bind of the traumatic event is that it simultaneously cannot be fully understood or articulated by the trauma victim and yet the victim often describes a sense of involuntarily and repeatedly reliving the moment. The traumatic event understood in these terms cannot be narrated and yet demands to be narrated.

In some cases the process of attending to trauma involves developing the capacity to capture the traumatic moment indirectly using images and then narrative. These symptoms are often simulated *intra-textually* – in literary representations of trauma. Such narratives communicate the traumatic event through (and these characteristics are by no means exhaustive): temporal disjunction; repetition; substitution; and an approach to its subject which is non-literal. These characteristics, it should be noted, are not exclusive to trauma literature and, indeed, characterise many postmodern works, of which Spiegelman's can be included. The approach taken in this thesis is founded upon a belief that is neither possible nor productive to attempt to distinguish, in the case of Spiegelman's work, trauma narratives from a postmodern approach to form. Spiegelman simultaneously and knowingly makes use of postmodern hypertextuality, experimentation, and temporal distortion in order to portray trauma (which itself may either be fictional or the product of the author's psyche). These themes appear throughout Spiegelman's work, most obviously in *No Towers* as will be

discussed throughout chapter four. Elements of trauma also inflect Vladek's story in *Maus*, to be detailed in sections 3.9 and 3.14.

Whilst, in accordance with Scott's definition, direct exposure is a necessary condition for an individual to be considered traumatised, there exists a further area of study which investigates the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Felice Zilberfein (1995) and Julia Dickson-Gomez (2002) have shown that the behaviour patterns of trauma victims can be transmitted between generations alongside a 'traumatised' world-view. Carol Kidron's work with second- and third-generation survivors in Israel has shown that 'the majority rejected or critiqued the pathologizing construct of PTSD' (Kidron 2012, 272). Many (but certainly not all) did describe the presence of postmemory; 'silent nonpathological presence of the past [...] and fragmentary tales of survival' in their home-lives (ibid). A clinical understanding of the second-generation survivor's experience is still very limited. As with many aspects of trauma, the most that can be said is that a second-generation trauma survivor may show some or none of a range of characteristics to varying degrees of severity. One might postulate that in some cases an inherited traumatised world-view may be a catalyst for personal trauma later in life. The status of the second-generation survivor will be a key issue in sections 2.8 and 2.9 and the question of an inherited traumatised world-view is to be addressed in sections 3.8 on *Maus*, and sections 4.9 and 4.10 on *No Towers*.

The ways in which trauma may or may not manifest are explained to an extent by mitigating strategies which include preventative means (*resilience*) and curative means (*therapy*). These strategies intertwine in that both involve the process of finding meaning.

Resilience refers to a set of characteristics and rationalising frameworks which allow an individual to resist (perhaps only partially) the onset of trauma. A key factor in this regard is a sense of control during the traumatic event. An individual who maintains a sense of being in control (even if that control is illusory) may be able to emerge from an otherwise traumatic event without showing signs of trauma. Goleman illustrates this point using (auspiciously for Spiegelman's work) experiments on rats.

Helplessness as the wild card in triggering PTSD has been shown in dozens of studies on pairs of laboratory rats, each in a different cage, each being given mild – but, to a rat, very stressful, – electric shocks of identical severity. Only one rat has a lever in its cage; when the rat pushes the lever, the shock stops for both cages. Over days and weeks, both the rats get precisely the same amount of shock. But the rat with the power to turn the shocks off comes through without lasting signs of stress (Goleman 1995, 204).

Resilience, Luckhurst submits, 'has to counter the default assumptions of the trauma model' (Luckhurst 2008, 210); it challenges the clear-cut distinction between traumatised and untraumatised subjects. The theory (or, as Luckhurst argues, *anti-theory* as it represents an erasure of trauma theory) of resilience suggests that an individual can live through what would otherwise be a traumatic experience without necessarily experiencing all of the disabling symptoms of trauma.

The question of resilience in this thesis relates to Frankl's argument that certain prisoners within Auschwitz possessed character traits which augmented rather than diminished their moral character. Frankl asserts that in Auschwitz 'the "individual differences" did *not* "blur" but, on the contrary, people became more different' and that 'the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone' (Frankl 2004, 154 and 75). In Frankl's description of the camps, whilst the capacity to

make external choices (where to work or sleep, for example) was extremely limited, each prisoner had the capacity to make an internal decision as to his or her attitude towards his or her situation. Many chose to respond, Frankl contends, with frigid, superstitious passivity: '[t]he camp inmate was frightened of making decisions and of taking any sort of initiative whatsoever. This was the result of a strong feeling that fate was one's master, and that one must not try to influence it in any way, but instead let it take its own course' (Frankl 2004, 66). Such prisoners undertook forced activity, but were hesitant to engage in any self-motivated actions with the purpose of increasing one's chance of survival. Frankl asserts of the other prisoners (the *mensch* – men of integrity – among them) that 'everything can be taken from man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way' (Frankl 2004, 75). These *mensch* engaged in some small acts of compassion and bravery.

Frankl's argument raises certain ethical problems by suggesting an inherent superiority of certain prisoners over others. His work nonetheless provides a means to understand the question of resilience within the setting of the Holocaust which is eminently relevant to this thesis. The case shall be made that within *Maus*, Vladek's memory of himself as a *mensch* allows him access to a (again, perhaps illusory) sense of control which has facilitated his resilience. Not every critic would agree with the assertion that the younger Vladek is a *mensch*. Both Mulman (2008) and Paul Buhle ('Of Mice and Menschen: Jewish comics come of age' 2007) contend that Vladek is unethical and (in Buhle's case) racist, unphilosophical and bourgeois. The position taken in this thesis, however, is that the younger Vladek (within the account given by his older self) is savvy and drives some hard bargains,

but at no point in his story does he commit a morally questionable act in order to live. As such, the elder Vladek remembers his younger self with pride and, most importantly, a sense of control.

Certain critical approaches to testimony posit narrative – either written or consumed individually or collectively – as a form of therapy. Frank, for example, contends that ‘stories have to *repair* the damage that illness has done’ (Frank 1995, 53). Robert N. Kraft, too, sees value in the therapeutic effects of written testimony.

James Pennebaker and his colleagues have presented evidence for the therapeutic value of talking and writing about profoundly traumatic experiences. In particular, the careful act of writing allows people who have been victimized to organize and control the narratives that describe the core memories. Writing allows expression without immediate judgment (Kraft 2009, personal communication).

Narrative offers a means to articulate, in part, a disruptive, shattering event within a familiar framework and thus provide (in many cases) a sense of closure. The healing role of narrative is also detailed by Frankl, who contends that by transforming a series of otherwise meaningless events into a sequence and, by viewing their experiences as a narrative, certain death camp prisoners and survivors were able to create meaning and thus mitigate some of the impact of trauma. ‘Those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfil’ Frankl submits ‘were most apt to survive’ (Frankl 2004, 109). This is the cornerstone of his branch of psychology, ‘logotherapy’, (etymologically ‘word-therapy’) which seeks to establish emotional stability by equipping patients with a clear sense of purpose. For Frankl, meaning promises a future resolution which justifies present suffering. Evidence of strategies to mitigate trauma by seeking out meaning through narrative, as shall be argued in the relevant chapters, are present in both *Maus* (see section 3.10) and in the texts to which

Spiegelman responds in *No Towers* (see sections 4.1 and 4.2). In both cases the process of giving meaning involves encoding a traumatic event within a familiarising framework (indeed, precisely the kind of framework detailed in the previous section which seeks to contain and reduce the implications of the Holocaust). The argument shall be made that in *Maus*, Vladek invokes the fairytale and romance genres as a means to treat his own trauma. In chapter four the case will be made that cultural, media, and political fallout from the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 sought to render what occurred within the therapeutic generic conventions of the American monomyth as a means (among other goals) to mitigate the trauma which simultaneously impacted upon the lives of thousands of individuals.

Whilst narrative represents a possible means by which trauma might be addressed, it would be dangerous to assume that the imposition of meaning is either always helpful or appropriate in the therapeutic process. Kraft defines four broad methods of treatment: (in no particular order) ‘seeking the resonant influence of social support, redefining the event, finding meaning, [and] changing behaviours (Kraft 2009, personal communication). Narrative is one means by which some of these ends might be achieved, but it is not necessarily the best approach for every patient. When asked if those individuals interviewed in the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University benefited from the act of giving testimony, Kraft responded that

[i]n general, the prescribed approaches for treating PTSD are insufficient for victims of prolonged atrocity. In fact, many clinical strategies for effectively alleviating the pain and disturbance of circumscribed traumatic events are not feasible with Holocaust survivors. [...] With writing Holocaust memories [...] it is not likely that the trauma will become, in the words of Kent Harber and James Pennebaker, “more fully integrated within the person’s network of memories and beliefs.” Nor would it be likely to be therapeutic to tell Holocaust survivors to “let go and dig down to your

very deepest emotions and thoughts” (Kraft 2009, personal communication).

The most consistently successful treatment for victims of the Holocaust, rather than giving testimony, is ‘seeking the resonant influence of social support’ (Kraft 2009, personal communication). Kraft’s conclusion on the healing effects of testimony is simply that ‘it depends[...] That really is the most accurate answer. What works for one group may be detrimental to another’ (Kraft 2009, personal communication). Kraft’s conclusions, whilst certainly not excluding the potential healing effects of narrative and the seeking out of meaning, suggest that it would be incorrect to assume that the act of testimony is a universally or automatically therapeutic exercise. As shall be argued in section 3.14, whilst narrative offers the potential to attend to trauma, in some cases it can have a regressive and damaging effect.

It is further the case that the process of treating trauma can occur on a large scale as well as with the individual. In the chapter on *No Towers* the case will be made that much of the political and media rhetoric which followed the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 involved a process of ‘finding meaning’ as a means to mitigate the effects of mass trauma. Those individuals who suffered from forms of trauma (as well as anger, grief, and depression) in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks may have derived some comfort from the national narrative which formed around the events (see Piotr Sztompka (2007)).

There is, however, a further potentially dangerous consequence to the act of giving meaning to a traumatic event if that act takes place on a national scale. Trauma is not a purely psychological question; it has absolute political consequences. The question of the

‘ownership’ of trauma can be a problematic subject. Cvek argues that ‘part of trauma studies is concerned with the political instrumentalization and commodification of trauma’ (Cvek 2011, 105). He proposes that traumatic memory carries with it an ‘affective copyright’ (ibid) and further submits that the one who was subject to trauma should dictate how that trauma can and cannot be used. Nixon’s visit to Bitburg to honour German soldiers (as discussed by Clifford J. Marks in ‘*Maus* and Bitburg’ (2002)), and the Bush administration’s use of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks to justify American military intervention overseas, for example, represent a regressive and aggressive appropriation of personal and collective trauma. These issues are of crucial importance in both *Maus* and *No Towers*. In *Maus*, a figurative wrestling match is staged between a first- and second-generation survivor concerning how the Shoah should (or can) be represented. In *No Towers*, Spiegelman’s protagonist finds himself struggling to maintain his own understanding of trauma when faced with an onslaught of images which seek to define the event through which he lived. As shall be argued in chapter four, the aforementioned national narrative which was built on the rubble of the World Trade Center did not only serve the mass-therapeutic role of ‘finding meaning’; that meaning was turned to political and, Spiegelman proposes, *insane* ends. The question of trauma, meaning, and narrative thus requires further analysis when connected to matters of historiographical record.

The question of ownership is complicated by the opposition between empirical and traumatic truth. Trauma narratives communicate the subjective ‘traumatic truth’ of an event and entail a ‘circling around a shattering event, from which self-knowledge arrives late, if at all’ (Luckhurst 2008, 118 – 119). In many cases the traumatic event must be narrated



obliquely or through allegory. As such, Luckhurst warns that trauma narratives should not be read in terms of ‘truth’ (or even ‘probability’), but as a means to understand the moment of their trauma:

[T]rauma is not necessarily a stable or straight-forwardly evidential or narratable event, but might be mobile, subject to all kinds of transformation and revision. This might well be the defining element of traumatic memory, and what makes it particularly amenable to fictional narrative instead. The new kinds of autofiction that scuff the boundaries of fictional and factual discourse work to confound the legal measure of true and false precisely in order to preserve, in a different way, an ‘alternative jurisdiction’, a traumatic truth. (Luckhurst 2008, 137).

Trauma narratives should be read then as neither factual historical accounts nor pure invention, but as a third category which transcends the conventional categorisation of ‘plausibility’ and ‘truth.’ Edith P., for example, during her oral testimony which is held in the *Fortunoff Video Archive*, describes how in Auschwitz ‘when the sun came up it was not like the sun! I swear to you, it was not bright! It was always red to me, it was always black to me, it never said, never was life to me. It was destruction’ (Edith P. 1996, online). Edith P. does not offer her perceptual experience as poetic, but as empirical truth.

Despite the potential advantages, it is imperative that scholars be sensitive to the limits associated with an approach to cultural artefacts informed by clinical psychology. One site of Spiegelman’s in-text attempts to grapple with the question of psychological disturbance (inclusive of trauma) is the psychiatrist’s office or the asylum, often as a microcosm of the power structures which inform the society in which he lives. A proper understanding of the power dynamics and culture of this environment requires a degree of self-reflexivity which clinical psychology alone is unable to provide. For this, we must step

beyond clinical psychology in its own terms and establish a language necessary to discuss the cultural forms of madness and sanity.

## **1.6 Anti-Psychiatry and the Madness of Reason**

*Psychiatry locates the patient in a system of power-relations – Some philosophers during the mid-twentieth century proposed that society itself is insane – The Enlightenment was a period when philosophers, scientists, and artists sought to better humanity through scientific discovery and improved ways of thinking – The insanity of the post-Enlightenment rational society is most clearly evident in the history of the Holocaust*

This section will present the theoretical models necessary to form a meta-discourse concerning clinical psychology and the synecdochal relationship between clinical psychology and power-relationships within society as a whole. Modern clinical psychology does not employ the terms ‘reason’ and ‘madness’ (these terms, in fact, have the most traction in the field of law (Scott O. Lynn Lilienfeld et al 2010, 226)). The psychologist seeks to attend to a set of distinctive symptoms unique to each patient rather than a broad (and effectively meaningless) category of madness. ‘Borderline personality disorder’ has different symptoms, causes and treatments from ‘trauma’ which is different again from ‘schizophrenia.’ Nor is it even the case that two individuals who suffer from the same disorder necessarily respond in the same way to the same treatments. It appears initially, therefore, that clinical psychology is concerned not with ‘madness’ as a single classifier, but with mapping the specific contours of the individual patient’s internal landscape. The subsequent treatment, however, necessitates a process of locating the individual in a hierarchy of power with roots founded structurally on a tacit division between the sane and the insane. Clinical psychology, like other cognate disciplines, relies upon the relative power of the doctor over the patient, and requires that the patient accept the doctor’s diagnosis and mode of treatment. Whilst mental disorders are

distinct, all are rendered within the taxonomy of clinical psychology which again enforces the relative power of the doctor. An approach which operates wholly from the perspective of clinical psychology, it follows, employs a language which does not belong to the patient. Such language can only permit the doctor to speak on the patient's behalf. This thesis shall make use of clinical psychology as a flexible diagnostic tool whilst remaining attuned to the potentially dangerous power dynamics at work in the doctor/patient relationship. In order to understand the dynamic between the subject (who is powerless) and the agent of reason (who has power), this thesis shall draw upon the works of Ronald David Laing (first published 1960), Marcuse (first published 1964), and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (first published 1944) as well as several literary critics detailed in the following section). The germane arguments of these theorists shall now be introduced briefly.

During the 1960s (shortly before Spiegelman began writing the texts which would be collected in *Breakdowns*), Laing, amongst others, delivered a provocative challenge to the methodology of clinical psychology. This led to the evolution of an anti-psychiatric movement which was informed by Foucault's work (described below). Laing contends that the language of psychiatry 'speaks of psychosis as a social or biological *failure* of adjustment [...] it implies a certain standard way of human being to which the psychotic cannot measure up' (Laing 2010, 27). For Laing, there were crucial flaws in the methodology of psychology which rendered the practice of psychiatry ethically bankrupt and politically dubious.

Psychiatry could be, and some psychiatrists are, on the side of transcendence, or genuine freedom, and of true human growth. But psychiatry can so easily be a technique of brainwashing, of inducing behaviour that is adjusted, by (preferably) non-injurious torture (Laing 2010, 12).

Modern psychiatry, Laing contends, employs a language which ‘keeps the patient at a distance’ (Laing 2010, 18). Accordingly, anti-psychiatry sought to develop a new language which dismantled the distance and hierarchical distinction between ‘doctor’ and ‘patient.’ Laing’s work challenged the power dynamics underpinning the practice of clinical psychology and coincided with, not only other works in the growing academic body of anti- or alternative psychiatric models (Laing was a practicing psychotherapist) but with fiction such as Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1955) and Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962), both of which offered a forceful critique of the asylum. Spiegelman’s critique of the asylum in *Breakdowns*, as we shall see below, echoes and reinforces the work of Beat writers and the anti-psychiatry movement.

Challenges to clinical psychology can be understood in the context of debates which challenge the legitimacy of power and traditional models of rationality during the 1960s. These debates were concurrent with what might broadly be called the counter-culture during which several (often disparate) marginalised groups sought to bring about fundamental social and political change. Several of Laing’s contemporaries proposed a notion of an inherent unreason to prevailing social norms which would further challenge the role of doctors and other agents of reason. One of the leading countercultural intellectuals of the 60s, Marcuse, proclaimed forcefully that ‘society is irrational as a whole’ (Marcuse 2002, xl). According to Marcuse’s Marxist-Freudian critique, society is ordered in such a way that individuals are controlled by largely irrational consumer needs: ‘[t]he people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment’ (Marcuse 2002, 11). In this context, man’s relationship to work operates as a

form of social control that employs rational means toward irrational ends. Marcuse proposed that the working classes had become integrated with the capitalist system which oppressed and alienated them but that an alliance between radical intellectuals and marginalised groups had the potential to instigate revolutionary change. Spiegelman was undoubtedly aware of, if not Marcuse's work specifically, critical commentary and rhetoric from this era on consumerism and the capitalist 'System' which had been influenced by Marcuse; his comic *Cracking Jokes*, for example, makes explicit reference to Bill Griffith's jester character Zippy the Pinhead who is described by Sabin as a 'free-associating idiot savant who can see through America's consumerist obsessions' (Sabin 1996, 119).

The most compelling evidence for proposing that the lunatics had taken over the asylum lie not in the supermarkets, however, but in the death camps. The Holocaust haunts Spiegelman's work both explicitly and implicitly. Marcuse does not mention the Holocaust but other members of the Frankfurt School gave it a central place in their critique of Enlightenment rationality. In order to understand these assertions further, a brief sketch of their subject is necessary. The Enlightenment (sometimes called the Age of Reason) is typically situated in the eighteenth century. It was a period of prodigious expansion in scientific, philosophical, artistic, and political arenas which ushered Europe from the middle ages to the modern era. Whilst the exact nature of the Enlightenment project varies by region, discipline, and thinker, the age has broadly been characterised by the expectation that the natural sciences and philosophy would bring about tangible improvements in both human lives and in clarity of thought. We owe to this era, to name but a few, the factory model, the early stages of the industrial revolution, the wide-scale use of the printing press, the basic

ideal of government founded upon the consent of the governed, the crystallization of the scientific method, and the Cartesian thought experiment. The Enlightenment represented not simply advances in many philosophical, scientific, and industrial arenas, but a greater sophistication in our *ways of thinking*. In 1620 Francis Bacon, for example, proposed a means of understanding the observable world based upon (1) empirical observation and experimentation (2) conclusions achieved through induction and (3) enhanced practical capacities (ie. knowledge brings power). The underlying conceit of such a method, and perhaps the majority of Enlightenment thought, is that it is possible to apprehend, measure, and draw meaningful conclusions about the world.

Just as certain thinkers sought to develop a complete and coherent model for the natural world, some Enlightenment philosophers sought to create a reproducible methodology for the arts. In the four books which made up *L'Art Poétique*, Nicolas Boileau established a set of means to reliably produce what he considered to be stylistically correct and aesthetically pleasant Classical verse. The work is known to have influenced Samuel Johnson and Alexander Pope. Boileau was a champion of Enlightenment ideals such as truth, beauty, decency, moral nobility, and the measurability of the universe. In *L'Art Poétique* he was an unrepentant Classicist (see section 1.3); he typifies an Enlightenment-era belief that, through the perfection of form, art can be the measure of human experience. In this thesis Spiegelman's approach to form shall be measured against that of Boileau, particularly in section 2.3.

If the Enlightenment can truly be said to have ushered-forth a period of intellectual, aesthetic, and industrial sophistication, then what, certain thinkers have asked, should be made of the Holocaust? Bauman argues that ‘[t]he Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture’ (Bauman, 1989, 4). It is not enough to simply state that the Enlightenment failed to prevent the Holocaust; in their execution of the Holocaust, the perpetrators made use of the printing press to spread anti-Semitic propaganda, they used political, economic, and anthropological rhetoric to justify the killing of the Jews and others, and they used the factory model and the railroad network to carry out the killings. Within the death camps Nazi doctors, most famously Dr. Mengele, carried out experiments – all of which followed the principal of the scientific method and a Baconian approach to scientific discovery – using human subjects. The same intellectual and physical tools which built the modern era, tools which can be traced to the Enlightenment, were the very tools which facilitated the Holocaust. Bauman argues that modern society has been unwilling to address this truth: ‘[t]he self-healing of historical memory which occurs in the consciousness of modern society is for this reason more than a neglect offensive to the victims of genocide. It is also a sign of dangerous and potentially suicidal blindness’ (Ibid).

The madness of the ideological machinery of the Holocaust was described in 1944 by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Like Bauman, they proposed that, rather than being an aberration in an otherwise rational society, the anti-Semitism which provided justification for the Shoah in the minds of the perpetrators had

roots in the pervading logic of the societies in which it took place. They also uncovered profound madness in its superficial rationality. Horkheimer and Adorno characterise the Enlightened society, amongst other things, as acutely paranoid:

Just as, since its rise, the human species has manifested itself toward others as developmentally the highest, capable of the most terrible destruction; and just as, within humanity, the more advanced races have confronted the more primitive, the technically superior nations the more backward, so the sick individual confronts the other individual, in megalomania as in persecution mania. In both cases the subject is at the center, the world a mere occasion for its delusion (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 156-157).

The Enlightened society warps the world to conform to its own logic. For this reason, violence is an integral part of the advanced society. If the events of the Shoah are to be integrated into an understanding of human behaviour, rather than treating the Shoah as an exceptional and historically aberrant event, then the inevitable conclusion is that rational societies contain the seeds of its own madness (understood, here, in Adorno and Horkheimer's broad sense as a profoundly deluded world-view). This insight is the cornerstone of Spiegelman's oeuvre and of this study.

The impossibility of preserving rationality whilst reaching a true understanding of genocide is illustrated in Lore Segal's story *The Reverse Bug* in which an academic seminar on genocide is called to a halt when recordings of screams from a concentration camp and the site of the atomic bombs in Japan are projected into the auditorium and surrounding area (Segal 2007, 151-168). Segal describes the text as being about 'our failure to be horrified twenty-four hours a day' (Segal in Mary Tabor 2011, online). Segal's position goes beyond arguments made by proponents of Holocaust exceptionalism (who, at least, maintain that historiographical accounts are permissible) and claims that *any* discourse which attempts to



contain the Holocaust within a rational structure is rendered inarticulate when confronted with the phenomenological materiality of the subject. The identification of the failure of rational models, and indeed, the complicity of rationality in the advent and execution of the Holocaust in Spiegelman's work will be pursued throughout the following arguments. As will be demonstrated, Spiegelman's art constitutes a tragically doomed attempt to channel the screams of suffering in comic book form into the comfortable living spaces of his readers. He presents, in other words, Edvard Munch's *Scream* with a mouse-mask.

The question of madness which arises from rationality can be directly related to the argument made in the section above. In Spiegelman's work the doctor and the patient both serve as a microcosm of the relationship between the empowered and the disempowered in post-Enlightenment society and perpetuate irrational dynamics within social structures: in *Cracking Jokes in Breakdowns*, for example, Spiegelman stages a conflict between a madman and a psychiatrist; in *Ace Hole Midget Detective* and *The Malpractice Suite* he offers a parodic vision of Dr. Fredric Wertham's vision of comics, in *Maus* he includes Dr. Josef Mengele, the ultimate agent of irrational reason, and in *No Towers*, Artie attempts to convince a group of uncaring onlookers that the world is ending whilst elected officials lead the U.S. along a path to self-destruction. Spiegelman's texts typically resist the authority of agents of reason to give shape to their protagonists' felt emotional and mental experience but these comics also offer an essentially tragic recognition of the individual's inability to resist the dominant culture's insistence on hegemonic models of post-Enlightenment rationality.

The work of Marcuse, Laing, and Adorno and Horkheimer will provide a framework for analysis of the agents of ‘reason’ and the significations of ‘madness’ in Spiegelman’s work. A lacuna in the works described above, however is an inclination to consider the meaning of these key terms to be relatively fixed and self-evident when, in fact, they have been subject to reinvention throughout the history of Western civilisation. In order to better understand these critiques of the asylum in terms of the power relations that exist in ‘rational’ society in Spiegelman’s work we must supplement the critiques of rationality from members of the Frankfurt School by drawing upon the language used to describe mythic and literary articulations of madness.

## **1.7 Madness**

*Madness is silence – A mad language is, by definition, broken and beyond (or at least resistant to) rational engagement – Spiegelman’s work often has mad narrators – The treatment of traumatic truth is informed by the opposition between madness and rationality*

‘Madness’ is a term which should not be invoked without some interrogation. The argument presented in this and the following section will draw upon and aim to synthesize strands from multiple definitions of madness, all of which are new to Spiegelman criticism: Foucault’s archaeology of thought with regard to madness since the seventeenth century; Jacques Derrida and Shoshana Felman’s work on madness in language and narrative; and Mikhail Bakhtin on the iconic figure of the Fool and the Carnival. These thinkers provide a nuanced vocabulary which can be used alongside the arguments detailed in the section above as part of an understanding of the mythical, literary and cultural models which inform social hierarchies and marginalise certain forms of discourse on the grounds of ‘madness.’

As a broad definition, madness is thus conceived as that which is strategically positioned outside of and in opposition to ‘reason’ and, thus, understanding. Within this thesis ‘madness’ will appear in multiple and imbricated manifestations including: broken and impenetrable language; wild and antisocial behaviour; and self-deprecating assaults upon the rhetoric of reason. In terms of the relationship between the individual and society, ‘madness’ is all that signifies mental abnormality and, consequently, within the rhetoric of the asylum, the need for treatment. ‘Madness’ is also used to describe certain literary forms which (regardless of the mental state of the creator) communicate chaos and resist interpretation. Underpinning each of these incarnations, ‘madness’ is also the collective self-destructive irrationality which Spiegelman (alongside Horkheimer and Adorno and others) sees in superficially rational social structures and ideologies. Madness must be understood in terms of its antonym: rationality or reason is that which insists upon an inherent orderliness and apprehensibility to the world. Reason tends to act through, and reinforce, dominant institutions and power structures. In its literary manifestation, rationality seeks to resolve, contain, and deny madness through familiar narrative structures with a clearly defined beginning, middle and closure which delivers cathartic resolution. Conversely, ‘mad’ aesthetics seek either to reject rational models and express madness from within or offer a parodic mimicry of rationality. Reason seeks to exorcise madness whereas marginalised figures, acting through agents such as the Fool or the Signifyin(g) Monkey (both of whom will be sketched in section 1.8), seek to show the redundancy of this crude binarism. This section and the one that follows will elucidate these assertions and offer a critical grounding for the model employed in this thesis. We shall begin with an overview of Foucault’s seminal work on madness, followed by an explanation of mad literary forms as identified by Derrida

and Felman. The subsequent section will then concern literary archetypes who, in different ways, articulate the voice of madness in literature.

Broad understandings of sanity and insanity (both colloquial and medical) have developed and in certain ways also regressed over time. Challenges to dominant definitions have come from various quarters. In his ground-breaking work *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Foucault sought to trace a genealogy of madness as it has been defined discursively in different historical eras. He demonstrates that each generation of thinkers has sought to understand and to cure madness. His argument begins with the wisdom which many saw in madness during the Renaissance, to the 'Great Confinement' during the seventeenth century, and, from the eighteenth century onward, the introduction of doctors and institutions which resemble the modern model. This study was published in French in 1961 and an English translation followed in 1964. Foucault does not seek to provide a unified model of madness. Rather, he demonstrates the mutability and at times interchangeability of madness and rationality and the use of these concepts as a means to reinforce hierarchies of power in a given society alongside detailed analysis of specific means of treatment. There are certain dangers attendant to a theoretical model drawn entirely from Foucault. The diffuse and often contradictory models of madness which he describes means that his work, used improperly, can be deployed in service of almost any argument. In order to create a more decisive and structurally unyielding work on madness, in this thesis Foucault will be supplemented by the work of other critics.

Much of the discourse on madness within literary theory has focused, inevitably, upon the question of language. Derrida recognises that there is an immediate challenge in the very premise of writing on madness: the question of whether or not the 'mad' text can exist at all. Foucault asserts that 'where there is a work of art, there is no madness' (Foucault 2001, 274). To knowingly express madness is to observe it more or less objectively, and to do is to occupy the role of an agent of reason. The agent of reason, however, can only speak of observed, rather than experienced, madness. There is an ironic circularity to this argument reminiscent of Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*:

a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr [a fighter pilot] was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to (Heller 1994, 52).

The mad experience but cannot express something which the sane call 'madness'; the sane cannot describe something which they have not experienced. For a madman to talk about madness, therefore, he must first cease to be a madman, at which point he becomes unqualified to express madness. Madness, it follows, cannot be expressed: '[t]he history of madness itself is [...] the archaeology of a silence' (Derrida, 2010, 41). The mad text can never be written since 'when one attempts to convey [the madman's] silence itself, one has already passed over into the side of [...] order' (Derrida 2010, 42). If madness cannot be written then there would be no text of which one could write and thus no subject to discuss. The problem of articulating the subjective experience of madness can be extended to the systemic madness of the Holocaust which, as argued above, appears similarly inarticulable. Derrida contends that in order to, paradoxically, articulate the silence of madness one must

employ ‘a language declining [...] to articulate itself along the lines of the syntax of reason’ (Derrida 2010, 44). The language of madness must be presented in a broken order, out of sync and beyond rational engagement. In this thesis the case will be made that in their disorienting alternation between reason and madness *Breakdowns* and *No Towers* attempt to give voice to, and to speak from, the silence of madness by subverting the linguistic and visual ‘syntax of reason’ (see, specifically, sections 2.6 and 4.4). This aspiration can also be found at work in *Maus* albeit in a dramatically different form (see section 3.6).

Derrida’s solution is not without its own complications (to which he was characteristically attuned). The language he ascribes to madness (echoing the trauma literature described above) could equally be used to describe many modern and postmodern works which, deliberately and knowingly, challenge and experiment with traditional structures of language and narrative. As mentioned previously, ‘broken’ signification has become a staple of post-1960s art, literature, and visual media. Commenting on the postmodern scene, Brad Holland describes the artistic movement surrealism as ‘[a]n archaic term. Formerly an art movement. No longer distinguishable from everyday life’ (Holland 1996, 26). Derrida’s definition, as such, fails to provide a means to distinguish the voice of the socially marginalised patient from certain forms of artistic experimentation and, because the mind of the author is unknowable, there is no method to distinguish the broken language of madness from the deliberate experimentation of (post)modern texts. This deficiency alone, however, does not provide sufficient grounds to dismiss Derrida’s contention. To attempt to distinguish those instances where such a language arises from deliberate experimentation from those instances where the workings of a specific psyche are made manifest is neither

possible nor fruitful. A breakdown, situated in the chiasmus between reason and madness, suggests that such models need not be separate. As Spiegelman demonstrates, the argument will be made, madness does not preclude the ability to consciously experiment with formal structures any more than reason precludes the use of more than one linguistic register. The use of a broken language, then, might be understood as an exploration of alternative means of expression aesthetically and politically aligned with the anti-discourse of unreason.

Felman (specifically in reference to Gérard De Nerval's *Aurélia* (1855)) builds on Derrida's work on the language of madness by examining the critical distinction between 'narrated' and 'experienced' in literary representations of madness: 'the hero is a "madman"; the narrator, a man who has recovered his "reason"' (Felman 2003, 67). In such cases the protagonist-madman experiences madness and yet the narrative voice is able to diagnose his condition as such or, to phrase this more simply, the madman recognises himself as mad. In Foucault's terms admission of insanity entails the abandonment of mad logic. Narrators must be rational because, in Derrida and Felman's terms, a mad narrator would be unintelligible and a narrative (as it is conventionally comprehended) would not exist. Spiegelman, the argument will be made, often resists such models by presenting narratives from the perspective of a hero who persists in his madness.

The question of mad language and mad narrators bears directly on the treatment of traumatic truth. Notions of traumatic as distinct from objective truth, described in the section above, rely upon a clear distinction between mad (specifically, in this case, the traumatised) and rational (or untraumatised) discourse. The trauma victim's broken discourse (or silence)

is subordinate to that of the agent of reason because trauma clouds the patient's ability to correctly perceive and articulate their experience. As one of the languages of madness, trauma is silent. At the point when the trauma victim is able to describe their trauma in rational terms they are considered to have initiated the process of healing as part of a return to the realm of sovereign reason. As argued above, the agent of reason does not consider the madman qualified to diagnose his own madness and the discourse on his condition which is deemed socially valid is performed for the doctor. This same logic informs the treatment of the narrative told by the trauma victim; even if the trauma victim may be able to communicate using a language which is apprehensible to agents of reason, the experiential nature of their account degrades its utility as a historiographical source. Assumptions regarding empirical truth are set aside because the trauma victim cannot be expected to understand their own mind. The trauma narrative, it follows, is treated as a lesser historiographical source. To integrate these two theoretical approaches, trauma can be understood, therefore, as a form of madness in the sense that the trauma victim possesses less authority within a given social order than their non-traumatised counterparts. Within this thesis the classification of traumatic truth as a form of mad discourse is highly relevant to the treatment of Vladek's testimony (and Vladek himself) within *Maus* as shall be detailed in section 3.7.

There is a further question regarding the depiction of madness in literary texts. Two archetypes of madness who will feature prominently in the readings below are Hayden White's 'Wild Man', and the (often polysemous) figure of 'the Fool.' Alongside these figures there exists another non-mad, but marginalised figure who is able to comment upon the



madness of the society he observes: the Signifyin(g) Monkey. It is to these archetypes that we shall now turn.

### **1.8 The Wild Man, The Fool and the Signifyin(g) Mouse**

*Archetypes of the madman include the Wild Man and the Fool – Where the Fool proves an inadequate model to describe the interaction between the marginalised and the powerful, the practice of Signifyin(g) shall be used – The Fool is a key figure in the Carnival, in which normal social hierarchies are turned upside-down – The underground comics movement can be paralleled with aspects of the Carnavalesque tradition*

The archetypes of the agent of reason and the madman rebound throughout the three volumes analysed within this thesis. These figures are almost exclusively found in opposition to one another. The agent of reason exists at the center. He insists upon the ultimate prevalence of order, reason, and the fundamental explainability of the universe. To the agent of reason, the madman's condition can be diagnosed, treatment can be ordered and he can be returned to the realm of reason. The madman exists on the periphery. He insists upon the chaos, irrationality, and fundamental inexplicability of all that he observes. In the agent of reason, the madman sees the irrationality and capacity for self-destruction which springs forth from supposedly rational forms.

A comparison of the various agents of reason who populate Spiegelman's work will be presented in section 5.2. For the analysis which follows, however, a distinction between types of madmen is necessary at this juncture. In the gallery of madmen who appear in the critical drama below, three actors will be especially prominent: the Wild Man who arises in times of social upheaval as a means to give form to national identity; the Fool who is an

impotent figure nonetheless permitted to speak truth to power; and the Signifyin(g) Monkey who is not a mad *per se*, but does deliver a double-voiced mimicry of the madness of reason.

The Wild Man has manifest, White argues, throughout western thought whenever civilization enters a crisis of self-identity.

In times of sociological stress, when the need for positive self-definition asserts itself but no compelling criterion of self-identification appears, it is always possible to say something like: “I may not know the precise content of my own felt humanity, but I am most certainly *not* like that” and simply point to something in the landscape that is manifestly different from oneself (White 1985, 151).

The Wild Man provides a measure of unreason against which reason can be gauged. White asserts that ‘[i]f we do not know what we think "civilization" *is*, we can always find an example of what it is not. If we are not sure what sanity is, we can at least identify madness when we see it’ (White 1985, 152). In terms of the analysis presented thus far, the Wild Man is a strategic trope deployed to externalise madness and police the border between the country of the sane and the insane. If Enlightened society can label and measure deviant and degenerate *Wildness* then it can safely diagnose itself as sane.

For the purposes of this thesis, the Wild Man defined a particular kind of enemy in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. During the early twenty-first century, certain discourses in American culture sought a stark polarisation of Christian/Muslim, insider/outsider, with us/against us, in-group/out-group, and reason/unreason. In their analysis of contemporary news media, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin contend that Muslims are often portrayed as ‘a homogenous, zombie-like body, incapable of independent thought and liable to be whipped into a frenzy at the least disturbance to their unchanging backward worldview’ (Morey and

Yaqin 2011, 1). Islamic cultures are, in certain media, presented not only as dangerous and beyond reason, but as an affront to individualism, freedom and progress. The Wild instability of Islamic culture as it was conceived in certain American media coalesces in the figure of the terrorist, who provided an obvious folk devil to play the role against which American identity, sanity and righteous victimhood could be reaffirmed. On December 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, Bush Jnr. stated that: '[t]he great threat to civilization is that a few evil men will multiply their murders, and gain the means to kill on a scale equal to their hatred. We know they have this *mad* intent, and we're determined to stop them' (Bush Jnr 2001, 93 my italics). Terrorists are hidden amongst the normal populace and operate according to a mad logic which is beyond the understanding of mainstream (and, Bush Jnr. implies, tolerant and freedom-loving) America. The suggestion that they might find the means to enact mass killing conjures the spectre of the Holocaust and with it the assurance that it is *they* and not *us* who inherited the collective madness of Nazi Germany.

When defining the Wild Man, White inadvertently anticipated the contemporary demonology of the terrorist: 'wildness is identified with [...] the desert [...] linguistic confusion [...] sin, and physical aberration in [...] colour (blackness)' (White, 1985, 162). For an American audience the word 'desert' might evoke Operation Desert Storm (the Hollywoodised codename for the Persian Gulf War) or the racial slur 'sand nigger' used to refer to Arabs. The sound of Arabic or English being spoken by a Middle Eastern non-native speaker, too, might be understood by certain segments of the Western world after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 as a linguistic symptom of Wildness. The Wild Man appears throughout this thesis but is most visible in the reading of *No Towers* presented in chapter four, wherein the

argument shall be made that Spiegelman degrades the distinction between madness and rationality by identifying the Wildness in American society, in public figures, and within Artie's own body. He thus turns the accusations of madness back upon the society he inhabits.

The Fool is a second notable figure in the history of cultural constructions of madness in western society. Fools were either licensed comedians or mentally ill individuals who were common in many wealthy households in feudal societies around the world – most recognisably in Europe. Unlike the dangerous Wild Man, the Fool was deemed a source of harmless entertainment. They also, like the Wild Man, served the social function of performing a type of madness which implicitly gave form, by negative example, to norms of reasonable and rational behaviour. The archetype of the Fool can be paralleled with the *schlemiel* figure from Jewish *shtetl* humour (a figure with whom Spiegelman, as a second generation American Jew, may have some familiarity). The *schlemiel* is harmless: '[h]e's a failure. He was born that way. There is nothing he can do to change this, for he was born without the resources necessary to become more than he already is' (Jay Boyer 1993, 5). No one fears the *schlemiel* because he cannot enact change, and so he is, unlike the Wild Man, allowed free reign to haplessly and unwittingly self-destruct before the audience. At the same time, the apparent impotence of the Fool/*schlemiel* allows him, through humour, to mock and criticise power (a literary trope which is familiar in the works of William Shakespeare and executed most clearly in *King Lear*). Spiegelman, as shall be argued below, employs the figure or mask of the Fool/*schlemiel* in various guises and he has also written explicitly on this archetype:

The fool does not accept the intelligence and logic of the grownup world. He is the rebellious child who stubbornly refuses to learn [...]n medieval times the court jester

was seen as an idiot, and made the butt of cruel jokes. His drooping tassels symbolized impotence. Having given this reassurance he is free to express his aggression in the form of wit (Spiegelman 2008, 38).

This comment echoes Foucault's description of 'knowledge, so inaccessible, so formidable [which] the Fool, in his innocent idiocy, already possesses' (Foucault 2001, 19). Rather than being a broken object for the doctor to fix, in Spiegelman's work the Fool despite, or rather, because of his impotence often has permission to openly speak an otherwise censored discourse for as long as his self-effacing and irrational chatter masks the venom of his critique. Spiegelman's Fools include the madman in *Cracking Jokes* and Artie in *No Towers*, but his most unusual and enduring Fool is the elder Vladek of *Maus*. Vladek is a first-generation survivor and thus an authority on the Holocaust and yet he is presented in such a way that the reader is not only led to regard him as a flawed, disturbed and perhaps even amusing figure, but also as an unreliable narrator. As such, his traumatic truth is afforded a lesser status within Artie's historiographical work. He is a Fool because he is simultaneously privileged and marginalised and, in his unwitting impotence, he attests to the continuing relevance of the Holocaust within rational society.

In the case of *Maus*, for reasons which shall be explored in the relevant section below, the archetype of the Fool provides a framework to understand the role of the elder Vladek of the framing narrative but proves inadequate to completely explain the younger Vladek's simultaneous compliance with and subversion of Nazi rhetoric. For this purpose the analysis shall draw upon Gates' work on *Signifyin(g)*; the repurposing of 'white' words within the African-American vernacular in such a way that the context and the disjunction between the denotative and figurative meanings of words work to create sub-culturally-specific meanings

within signifying systems. Gates describes the work of black writers who attempt to engage with hegemonic power on a linguistic level in such a way as to parody and ridicule their subjects. The writers he describes are distinct from the figure of the Fool, but both demonstrate how those in the periphery might effectively overcome the silence that is demanded of them and expose the madness of those who hold power.

Gates defined Signifyin(g) as the practice of African-American authors whose work synthesises both Western and African literary and cultural influences. His theory itself has firm roots in that tradition and is entirely separate, of course, from Jewish cultural forms. At the same time, Gates expresses the hope that ‘critics of other literatures will find this theory useful as they attempt to account for the configuration of the texts in their traditions’ (Gates 1988, xxv). Following Gates’ invitation, this thesis will pursue parallels between Vladek’s actions and the Signifyin(g) Monkey and particularly in relation to trickery and translation. In ‘Underground Comics and Survival Tales’ David Mikics, without specific reference to Gates, has described Vladek as one who adopts the role of the ‘trickster [...] in order to survive the Nazis’ (Mikics 2003, 15). The trickster is a key figure in Gates’ configuration of the Signifyin(g) Monkey. He also ‘speaks all languages’ and thus ‘governs the process of translation of [...] written signs into [...] oral verse’ (Gates 1988, 7 and 13). In certain African mythologies Esu, the trickster, manages the relationship between naming and that which is named. In Yiddish *ganef* or *gonif* (meaning ‘trickster’ or ‘thief’) is not a complimentary term. Traditional Jewish cultures, however, place a high value on linguistic knowledge, translation and interpretation, specifically in relation to classical Hebrew and Rabbinic literature. The use of German and Vladek’s broken English identify *Maus* as a text

which is conscious of the aesthetic and political dynamics of translation. English is a language native to neither the perpetrators nor (most of) the victims of the Holocaust and so Vladek must translate for Artie. Artie, in turn, translates Vladek's Yiddish-inflected English into images. The center of the interplay of languages occurs in the portion of the main narrative, detailed in section 3.11, which takes place in Auschwitz where Vladek's linguistic trickery allows him simultaneously to occupy and subvert the Nazi signs attached to the Jew and thus act as a Signifyin(g) Mouse. The figure of the Signifyin(g) Mouse appears once more in section 5.2 in which the case shall be made that Spiegelman leverages form in order to Signify within rational means of expression.

The Wild Man, the Signifyin(g) Monkey/Mouse, and the Fool all seek to challenge and subvert the existing order even if, in their Wildness or Foolishness, they ultimately give definition to and reinforce normative social practice. They do not exist in isolation but in relation to the society they inhabit. Of the three, it is the Fool who relies on inversion as his mode of resistance. In key respects, this inversion can be paralled with the practice of Carnival (or the 'Carnivaleque' in its literary manifestation). As Bakhtin documents in his seminal study, *Rabelais and His World* (first written as a dissertation in 1940 and later published in 1965). Carnival was a ritual performed primarily by the peasantry in the Middle Ages which can be mapped productively onto some subsequent literary works and social movements. The Carnival is a time when normal social conventions are relaxed and that which is ordinarily hidden, such as sexuality, is made spectacularly visible. Fools were promoted to the role of regent, normal social roles were inverted and all Foolish and marginalised discourse was afforded an unusually privileged position. The Carnival, Bakhtin

contends, served as a pressure-release valve which ultimately consolidated social order whilst allowing a dramatic glimpse of its possible overthrow.

Section 2.7 will examine the ways in which, like the Carnival, creators working in the underground comic genre deliberately explored that which is ordinarily unspoken in society (specifically, sexual content and anti-authoritarian sentiment) and did so through the voice of the socially-excluded Fool. Ironically, however, as will be argued in section 3.1, because *Maus* was so well-received by literary critics, award committees and eventually even museum curators, Spiegelman risked losing his counter-cultural edge and being absorbed into the mainstream. In order to develop an understanding of the relationship between the underground comic book scene and the Carnival, therefore, we need to develop a more precise understanding of the relationship between comics and hegemonic power alongside a working definition of transgression.

## **1.9 Selling Comic Books and Selling Out**

*The modern celebration of comics has been cast as a struggle between recognition and the freedom to provide unchecked social commentary – This thesis draws a less binary definition of transgression than that used in existing scholarship on alternative and underground comics*

As detailed in the introduction of this chapter, comics are currently enjoying an unprecedented degree of success in mainstream culture. As shall be detailed in section 2.1, however, has not always been the case. Sabin (1993) argues that a lack of critical recognition has long been a significant advantage for comic book artists. Because comics have historically been something of an outlaw medium (both before the oppressive Comics Code



Authority (CCA) guidelines, detailed in the next chapter, and in the non-CCA approved genres such as underground comics), comic book creators have been relatively free to explore that which is marginalised in the dominant culture. Spiegelman told Witek that '[o]ne of the reasons [...] I'm attracted to comics is that they are such a fugitive medium. It is such a despised form' (Spiegelman in Witek 2007, 13). Hatfield argues that 'reverse snobbery' is evident in the underground comic scene whereby certain creators went out of their way to make their works unappealing (and sometimes unintelligible) to mainstream audiences and the critical establishment (Hatfield 2005, xii). The use of graphically violent and sexual images serves to present underground comics as a 'low' medium in terms of the CCA and thus grants, in a Carnavalesque manner, permission to voice otherwise restricted discourses. Like the Fool, the underground comic book artist is permitted to speak because he or she does not expect or necessarily want anyone outside of his or her cult audience to take him or her seriously (the relationship between the underground comic book and the Carnival will be detailed in section 2.7). In his early work Spiegelman supports this philosophy, but, because he is now one of the most celebrated figures in American comics, the question of critical recognition must be addressed. To fully understand the relationship between comics and mainstream culture in Spiegelman's work and his use of the medium, it is necessary to engage with some of the central debates within this scholarship.

The approach taken in this thesis is to celebrate both the legitimisation of comics as an art form and the subversive potential of the underground. Certain comic book creators and commentators consider these two to be mutually exclusive and, as such, the position of this work requires some clarification. The elevation of the medium to the status of legitimate art

by certain arbiters of ‘culture’ is not regarded as wholly positive by every creator and critic. Robert Crumb, in particular, has expressed cynicism toward the ‘comics as art’ movement: ‘[i]t’s all bullshit [...] the fine-art world, the myth of the creative genius artist’ (Crumb in Ted Widmer 2010, online). In the same interview Crumb explains how he refused to work for the *New Yorker* because doing so would restrict his creative freedom. For Crumb, recognition would come at the cost of the Carnavalesque challenge which certain comics issue to rational culture. Sabin (1993 and 1996), Hatfield (2005) and Williams and Lyons (2010) acknowledge the concern that, by gaining legitimacy in some quarters, comic books, specifically underground comics and the genres which have followed, may risk losing their potentially subversive and counter-cultural edge. Scholarly commentators should not necessarily be thought of as unpartisan in this debate as academic work is one important form of cultural legitimisation. Anyone in the field of comic book studies who contends that comics should remain under the radar is arguing, paradoxically, for his or her own silence.

In earlier decades, by emphasising the craft of comic book creation, underground comic book creators engaged directly with the rhetoric of certain commentators during the 1950s (most famously Wertham) who declared comics to be a ‘low’ form of art. The underground comic creators, and Spiegelman’s *Maus* specifically, changed the way in which the medium is perceived. The hard-won awards and exhibitions serve to fund comic book production, grow the audience for comics, encourage early-career comic book creators, and to build an archive and history of the medium. Comic books have now been absorbed into the mainstream, however, and are at risk of sacrificing what we might term an (aes)eth(et)ic of *edginess* (in terms of subversive content and the genre’s ec-centric socio-political positioning)

in favour of pandering to the tastes of newspaper reviewers and gallery owners. The most celebrated of the alternative comic book creators, such as Chris Ware, tend to be those who prefer (now uncontroversial) innovative form over controversial content. This problem is tied to certain commercial and technological realities including modes of production and distribution. Unlike the marginalised underground of the 1960s which used small presses (or hand-printed) means of production and mail-order for distribution, successful comic book creators are now dependent on the patronage of major publishing houses, gallery owners, and website and magazine editors. These patrons are able to regulate which comics are widely distributed for public consumption. Spiegelman has experienced such regulation at first hand. His initial iterations of *No Towers*, and many of his *New Yorker* cover proposals were refused because he took a politically dissident, or otherwise controversial, stance.

Comic books, the argument goes, must choose either to be declawed and critically petted, or to be outspoken in obscurity. R. Crumb's diegetic incarnation can masturbate out of a window, or Marjane Satrapi can be the darling of the *New York Times*, but the two cannot exist in a single work. David Ball's image of 'an entire generation of graphic novelists who aspire to the status of literature' may be a utopian vision or a nightmare depending on one's beliefs about the relationship between transgressive art, economics and mainstream society (Ball 2010, 120). Both positions, Hatfield argues, are problematic, and both fail to reach a 'middle' audience, but they do provide 'the inescapable setting for any discussion of comic books as literature' (Hatfield 2005, xii). In the nine years which have passed since Hatfield wrote those words, comic book creators appear to have chosen the money with comic book reviews, exhibitions, and awards becoming increasingly commonplace.

Whilst acknowledging the potentially neutering effects of critical acclaim, the argument put forth in this thesis considers the opposition between high and low culture, or creative freedom and critical acclaim, to be a rather reductive and restricting binary. Scholarship on underground comics has suffered somewhat from a limited and ill-defined understanding of the multiple manifestations of *transgression*. As Julian Wolfreys proposes, transgression is polysemic: ‘what is transgression for one is affirmation for another’ (Wolfreys 2008, 9). The early underground had a specific target which creators sought to offend: specifically white, conservative, Hawkish, church-going Americans. As Crumb’s 2012 Paris exhibition demonstrates, however, that which horrifies and upsets one audience may seem tame and mundane to their children.

Shocking images do not necessarily entail political comment or, indeed, serve any purpose other than to titillate (consider, for example, the modern ‘torture porn’ genre of horror films). ‘The transgressive text’, Wolfreys contends ‘is not the one that shocks [...] Nothing is more banal, predictable or quotidian’ (Wolfreys 2008, 12). Sensibilities can harden when the ‘shock of the new’ becomes routine. Certainly, the iconoclastic and grotesque images of the early underground, understood in the context of their time, were a form of transgressive art, but so too were comics which simply treated themselves as art and thus defied the expectations of those who imagined the medium to be purile entertainment. George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat* (1913-1944) was transgressive because it introduced beautiful surreal landscapes and verbal creativity to the form, and because it thus invited its readers to fundamentally revise their expectations of comic books. The direct sales model of the

underground was transgressive *irrespective of the content of the comics*, because it bypassed the distributors who gave the censorship of the CCA its potency. This broader definition of transgression allows one to separate boundary-crossing (the etymological origins of the term ‘transgression’) from shock, and to conceive of forms of transgression which might thrive even within the policed and disciplined world of awards, exhibitions, and reviews.

Transgression which occurs not in the margins but within the center of a given culture articulates the madness of the society with which it interacts *from within*. To draw a parallel, the Fool’s impotence arises from his marginalisation; his transgression does not threaten the core because he has been exiled from reason. Transgression from within a given culture, however, has the potential to be more destabilizing and even revolutionary.

## **1.10 A Breakdown**

Having established the relationship of this thesis to existing Spiegelman criticism and described the theoretical and philosophical framework which will be employed, the remainder of this introductory chapter will consist of an overview of the chapters to follow.

The second chapter concerns the volume *Breakdowns*. It will seek to demonstrate that Spiegelman orchestrates the collapse of reason into madness (in both the individual protagonist and society as a whole) through the comic book form. The collection, the argument will be made, is a series of narratively disconnected and stylistically diverse works which deconstruct the traditional comic book form, specifically: panel transitions, the relationship between words and text, the direction of narrative flow, and the tools used by the creator. The reading will combine two distinct emphases. The first concerns the texts’ formal

playfulness and use of (auto-)citation, detailed in sections 2.2 and 2.3. These formal elements reappear in the fluid movement between narrative levels in *Maus*, and in the alternating artistic registers that appear on each page of *No Towers*, but, as will be demonstrated, *Breakdowns* offers Spiegelman's most sustained exploration of the possibilities of comic book form. Alongside and within this formal play Spiegelman presents themes of suicide, depression, and mental anguish. These themes revolve around the use of humour and play to both dramatize and resist psychological and emotional collapse.

The second, connected, reading of *Breakdowns* from section 2.4 to 2.8 will seek to demonstrate that Spiegelman displays cynicism toward contemporary models of psychiatry and concomitantly suggests a means for the madman to find a voice outside of structures of rational discourse. The term 'mad' is understood here not exclusively or even primarily as a medical condition, but rather as a social position which is affirmed through the practice of psychology. Spiegelman's work can be understood through Bakhtin's concepts of the Carnival in terms of the role of the Fool and the genre of underground comics in section 2.7. In section 2.8 the central argument of this thesis shall be explicitly introduced. The argument shall be made that through the delirious performance of a comic book Carnival, Spiegelman unveils the unreason inherent in post-Enlightened society. This unreason is most evident in the repeated references to the Holocaust which shoot-through the volume. *Breakdowns* examines the relationships of the many protagonists to an event which has shaped their lives and yet remains inaccessible and proposes that the implications of that event extend to all of rational society.

The chapter on *Maus* is, necessarily, the largest in this thesis; at 296 pages, *Maus* is significantly longer than the other two works. It is further the case that, unlike the other two texts, a large body of criticism has been produced on *Maus*. The central argument of this chapter is that in *Maus* Spiegelman seeks to create a text from the Shoah in such a way as to preserve and communicate the madness and scale of the Nazi killing project and to insist upon its continued relevance. In *Maus*, Artie, the protagonist, interviews his father, Vladek, a Shoah survivor, and documents Vladek's life story. *Maus* explores the ongoing impact of the Shoah on the survivors, those who survive the survivors, and the relationship between the two generations. *Maus*, unlike *Breakdowns*, approaches the Shoah directly. It seeks to represent the death camps as they are described by one who was there, and as they are imagined by his son. The chapter on *Maus* will continue to analyse the vexed relationship between the Shoah and art. The case shall be made in sections 3.2 to 3.5, that in *Maus* Spiegelman employs both familiarizing and defamiliarizing strategies in order to simultaneously promise and viscerally deny the possibility that Auschwitz might be articulated, explained, and resolved. The madness of rational society, as will be argued in section 3.6, is also manifest in the narrative structure; the more divorced a narrative layer is from the governing metaphor (and therefore the closer it is to extradiegetic reality), the more warped, drenched in symbolism, and insane it becomes.

In sections 3.7 and 3.9 the argument will be presented that Artie plays the role of the agent of reason opposite Vladek, the victim of trauma. Artie's preoccupation with questions of historiographical truth are constantly frustrated by Vladek's traumatised discourse as well as by the moral enormity of the subject. Artie and Vladek ostensibly have very different goals

for the project and yet, as the analysis shall show, Artie cannot sustain his rationality and Vladek employs familiarizing forms in an attempt to avoid confronting the madness through which he lived. The tension between the two is evident in the contested keyword: survival which will be explored in sections 3.10 to 3.14. Vladek will be analysed as the facilitator of his own survival; as simply fortunate; as one who gives up his dignity in order to survive; and as a Signifyin(g) Mouse, a double-voiced character who simultaneously occupies and subverts the image of the Jew as imagined in Nazi propaganda. The argument shall be made that for both Vladek and Artie the ultimate conclusion is that the Holocaust precludes the possibility of closure or rational engagement.

The fourth chapter of this thesis concerns *No Towers*, a volume which dramatises the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 terrorist attacks and their aftermath from the perspective of a primary witness. The central argument of this chapter is that the Artie of *No Towers* feels he must stay true to his memories of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks because those memories provide a profound glimpse into the madness that underlies rational society. *No Towers* is a collage of images and artistic styles, documenting the protagonist's many preoccupations and emotional states which emerged from the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. The attacks ignite, for this Artie, the intergenerational trauma passed to him from his parents. Sections 4.1 to 4.3 will examine the narratives of resilience and revenge which developed in American culture around the attacks, narratives which, Artie feels, fail to rhyme with his own experience of the events and their ongoing reverberations. Sections 4.4 to 4.7 will detail the strategies which Spiegelman employs to counter the dominant narratives which he observed in the media during his time of writing. These strategies include a mad register (section 4.4),



the editorial cartoon (section 4.5), and alternative depictions of landscape (section 4.6). In the process, Spiegelman not only challenges and subverts the rhetoric and imagery of the dominant restitution narratives, he also gives form, to the madness which Artie observes in the society that surrounds him. In section 4.7, the madman will be considered in terms of Hayden White's characterisation of the 'Wild Man'; a figure who simultaneously represents the terrorist, the President, and the traumatised Artie. In *No Towers*, Spiegelman presents the reader, once more, with a mad protagonist who occupies an even more insane world. For Spiegelman's traumatised protagonist, as will be demonstrated in sections 4.8 to 4.10, these attacks and their aftermath exist on a symbolic continuum which reaches back to the Holocaust and, as such, testifies to the ultimate failure of Enlightenment rationality.

The fifth and final chapter will seek to tie together the themes which run through the preceding chapters. It will draw together arguments made throughout this thesis concerning the second-generation survivor (section 5.1), and the relationship between the madman and the agent of reason (section 5.2). In each case the concluding chapter shall seek to demonstrate that Spiegelman makes manifest the potential for madness to erupt within, and to be supported by the material and ideological infrastructure of rational society.

## 2. Formal Experimentation and Emotional

### *Breakdowns*

Like all popular art, the comics have had to struggle for life in the area between the needs of the creator and those of the marketplace – and between the panels are the scars of that trauma (Spiegelman 1999, 82).

The central argument in this chapter is that in *Breakdowns* the collapse of both the protagonists' mental stability and the apparent reason of the world which surrounds him is mirrored and intricately articulated through the concomitant collapse of the comic book form. The madness of the characters in the texts, the individuals who attempt to diagnose their madness, and the world which these characters inhabit crystallises the rampant insanity of a society which complacently misdiagnoses itself as wholly 'sane.' The epicentre and primary evidence for Spiegelman's alternative diagnosis is, inevitably, the Holocaust. This chapter will begin with an introduction to the history of the American comic book into the mid-twentieth century and culminating in the first edition of the volume *Breakdowns* in 1977. This history will provide a context for many of the overt references to other media and anti-authoritarian impulses which appear in the volume as well as providing a context for the evolution of the form which is observable in Spiegelman's work. The subsequent analysis will hone in on the volume's elegant fusion of form and content, specifically the mechanisms of the comic book medium and the frequent and overt (auto-)citation which occurs throughout the text. The argument shall be made that alongside a (at times) paradigmatically postmodern formalist approach, *Breakdowns* embodies what Fredric Jameson calls (specifically in reference to Munch's 'The Scream') the 'great modernist thematics of

alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation and isolation' (Jameson 2003, 11). The play with form in *Breakdowns* collapses in concert with themes of angst, alienation, suffering and despair. Accordingly, in the second half of this chapter, the analysis will seek to explore the theme of madness in *Breakdowns*. Specifically, the analysis will address the formal literary manifestations of madness such as the figure of the mad narrator and the possibility of a mad language. The historical context of *Breakdowns* will be widened beyond the comic book form to include contemporary discourses on anti-psychiatry, a subject which resonates with Spiegelman's apparent distrust of doctors and other agents of reason. Spiegelman's assault against hegemonic rationality includes a celebration of the Carnavalesque inversion of social roles in underground comics. These anti-authoritarian impulses will be related to the figure of the second-generation Shoah survivor by way of the central concern of this thesis: the apparent insanity endemic within rational society. Spiegelman's *raison d'être* as a comic book artist is to make this madness manifest.

An understanding of Spiegelman's work does not begin with *Breakdowns*, the circumstances of Spiegelman's birth, or with the Holocaust. It properly begins in the 1070s, when, certain historians believe, the Bishop of Odo commissioned the *Bayeux Tapestry*...

## **2.1 A Brief History of the American Comic Book**

*The comic book format came to America from Europe where it flourished – Anti-comics sentiment reached a fever-pitch in the 1950s – The underground comic movement arose in response to the suppression of comics – Breakdowns was a key text in the development of the genre*

The Bayeux Tapestry shows the Norman conquest of England which ended with the Battle of Hastings in 1066. It is thought to have been commissioned by the Bishop of Odo and woven by a group of women. It has been described by McCloud as an early example of the comic book form. Indeed, the Bayeux Tapestry is not the only text which might be described as a proto-comic. Sabin (1996), for example, adds Trajan's Column in Rome (dedicated AD 113) as a possible contender for 'first comic.' McCloud considers the pre-Columbian manuscript 8-Deer 'Tiger's-Claw', which was discovered around 1519, to be an early example of comics, but is hesitant to award any one work the title of the first comic (McCloud 1994, 9-15). At the risk of appearing polemical, one might argue that, whilst clearly very different from the comics sold in book shops and through online retailers today, these texts employ image and text to tell a story and can thus be described as a comic. The basic mechanics remain recognisable in modern comics, but the form has evolved many new conventions and has been adapted for the printed page. Each generation of comic book creators has changed and developed the language of the medium, adding and refining conventions such as the speech bubble, panel divisions and various devices to communicate speed and time. At the same time, each generation of readers has developed a greater *visual literacy* (the ability to identify conventions in the comic book medium) than the last in order to understand and interpret the medium.

Early European comic book creators include Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846), Robert Branston (1778-1827), and Alfred Crowquill (1804-1872) all of whom worked with woodcuts. The comic book medium was brought to America where it flourished. Sabin (1993) considers Richard F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* (1895-1898) to be the first American

Comic (McCloud disagrees on the grounds that Outcault did not employ juxtaposed images).

*The Yellow Kid's* aesthetic included a cartoonish vocabulary and a range of word/image combinations. Following on from Outcault's pioneering work, a generation of 'Sunday Funny' creators such as Windsor McCay (1869-1934), and Frederick Burr Opper (1857-1937) were the trailblazers of a specifically American comic book language.

In the 1920s longer form comics such as *Comics Monthly* (1922) and *Comic Cuts* (1934) began appearing in a larger format. Genres included the detective comic (most famously Chester Gould's *Dick Tracey* (1931-present)), romance comics marketed primarily at housewives, and horror aimed at teenagers. The superhero genre appeared for the first time in the late 1930s and reached its first heyday during World War II. These genres established new readerships, a new business model, and expanded the subject matter for comics.

A key development in the history of the form took was the censure and censorship of the medium during the 1950s. Criticism of comics in North America is almost as old as the form itself (see Heer and Worcester ed. (2004) for an archive of essays on comics written between 1846 and 1972, both in praise of and in opposition to comics). The traditional 'low' classification for comics, Sabin suggests, comes in part from the fact that comics such as *Krazy Kat* (1913-1944) appeared in newspapers as 'Sunday Funnies', generating disapproval from those who felt that the Sabbath should be reserved for more spiritual pursuits (Sabin 1993, 137). In 1943 the Children's Book Committee of the Child Study Association objected to superhero comics on the grounds that such works included depictions of violence, were of low production quality, could cause damage to young eyes, and because comics discouraged children from reading 'proper' books (Sabin 1993, 146). Despite these criticisms, the medium continued to enjoy high levels of readership until the early 1950s

when its growth was stunted by the stringent restrictions imposed by the Comics Code Authority (CCA). In the early 1950s, a series of articles and books, most famously Dr. Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), argued for a connection between comic books and, amongst other things, a retardation of reading ability, and juvenile delinquency. Wertham's book was highly influential, and a catalyst to considerable self-censorship of content amongst the comic book community in accord with the guidelines established by the CCA. The Code ruled against the explicit depiction of crime, the degradation of authority figures, any scenario in which good does not triumph over evil, humorous or positive representations of divorce, unrealistically proportioned female characters and any instance of werewolfism or vampirism (the full Code for the Comics Magazine Association of America can be found in Sabin's *Adult Comics: An Introduction* (1993) 51-253). Many retailers refused to sell comics which did not carry the CCA stamp. The Code clearly had a decisive impact on the medium: creative freedom was severely curtailed and a dramatic decline in sales promptly followed. Many formerly popular titles vanished from shelves and some genres, such as romance, simply could not exist within the regulatory framework of the CCA. The 1960s and early 1970s remained under the long shadow cast by the Code. In 1977, when *Breakdowns* was first published, comic books were largely regarded and in some quarters reviled as an irredeemably lowbrow artform.

This image can be found at [braveblog.wordpress.com](http://braveblog.wordpress.com)

**Fig. 8.** *Comics that adhered to the Comics Code Authority displayed the badge of approval thus assuring potential readers that the comic included no potentially offensive content.*

In the 1960 and 1970s a very small group of artists including Robert Crumb and Justin Green began creating comics which were an intentional affront to the prohibitions of

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the CCA. Crumb's comics such as *Fritz the Cat* (1965-1972) were often scatological, pornographic, and iconoclastic. Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972) is an autobiographical story concerning a man with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder who creates a system of obsessions related to his Catholic upbringing and feelings of sexual guilt. As an archetypal underground comic, *Binky Brown* is semi-autobiographical, explores the tyranny of (in this case religious) social structures, and features a lot of explicit depictions of sexual organs. Spiegelman contends that without Justin Green's '*Binky Brown* there would be no *Maus*' (Spiegelman 1999, 94). Green not only commissioned Spiegelman to write the original *Maus* (sending an encouraging letter and two amphetamine tablets), he also, arguably, wrote the first autobiographical comic. Spiegelman contends that 'before Justin Green, cartoonists were actually expected to keep a lid on their psyches and personal histories' (Spiegelman 1999, 95).

This image can be found on [ebay.com](https://www.ebay.com)

**Fig. 9** Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972) engages with iconoclastic, autobiographical and sexual themes.

Sabin describes the genre as follows:

[The CCA] stipulated 'no sex', so the comix revelled in every kind of sex imaginable; the Code stipulated 'no violence' so the underground took bloodshed to extremes; above all the code stipulated 'no social relevance' yet here were comics that were positively revolutionary (Sabin 1993, 171).

These underground comics imbibed and contributed to the general sense of rebellion against authority, an exploration of marginalised identities, and subcultural dissent which is associated with America in the 1960s and 1970s. They were contemporaneous with student activism, Civil Rights struggles, sexual liberation, and anti-war protests. Spiegelman describes the underground comics movement in the following terms:

After the accusations that comics were the single biggest cause of juvenile delinquency and there were comic-book burnings across America, the generation that was denied grew up to become juvenile delinquents, and then adult delinquents. And made comics and read comics (Spiegelman in Witek 2007, 302).

Lest the underground be thought of as universally positive, it should be noted that the early underground comics included multiple crude instances of misogyny and some very poor quality work (see Sabin 1996). In comparison to the renaissance of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the underground comics scene was modestly proportioned. Artists wrote for an audience which was sometimes scarcely larger than their own ranks. Spiegelman argues that in the early days of underground comics ‘cartoonists were making comics to please themselves more than any audience’ (Spiegelman 1999, 80). Indeed, he goes on to describe the genre as an appealing medium precisely because so few comic book creators existed. ‘That was part of the reason it became such a sanctuary for me; it didn’t feel so overpopulated’ (Spiegelman in Irvine 2012, 89). By the time Spiegelman began writing *Breakdowns* the underground comic book movement had already reached a certain level of post-oppositional (and perhaps post-adolescent) maturity. Bill Griffith, Spiegelman’s co-editor for the magazine *Arcade* asserts that he and Spiegelman were interested in making a ‘conscious effort to move away from the stifling and limiting themes of the early underground – sex, dope, violence etc. The need for that sort of catharsis had passed...we wanted to get on with the business of being artists’ (Griffith in Carlin 2005, 128). The comics which followed, as will be demonstrated in more detail in section 2.2, showed influences from movements which were occurring in other art forms such as literature and high art.



The preceding (admittedly cursory) history of comics culminating in the underground era provides an essential context for the reading of *Breakdowns* that follows in terms of the volume's stylistic experimentation, willingness to engage with themes of psychological disturbance, and its counter-cultural aesthetic. Stylistically, the texts of *Breakdowns* display greater levels of formal introspection and indulge far less in shock tactics than earlier underground works. *Breakdowns* does not contain the same level of explicit political commentary as *No Towers*, but the transgressive black humour and cynicism in the volume reflects the counter-cultural milieu: '[I]ook through the underground comics you'll find lots of stuff that wasn't political but somehow seems vaguely informed by a repulsion with Nixon and the Vietnam War, no matter what else was going on' (Spiegelman quoted in Kartalopoulos 2005, online). The texts also test the boundaries of the comic book form: 'Spiegelman's strips were so densely impacted in terms of narrative and graphic design that they became more about themselves and their medium than the individual characters or situations they represented' (Carlin 2005, 128). *Breakdowns* can be initially identified, then, as a key document in the process of comic books adopting a larger and more sophisticated range of narrative and visual tools. In its methodology and aesthetic the volume seeks to propose that certain comics should be considered a legitimate art form. It further enacts, as shall be discussed in more detail below, a counter-cultural resistance to those agents of reason who sought to marginalise and dismiss the medium by including and ridiculing their images and rhetoric.

The work included in *Breakdowns* was originally published separately during the early- and mid-1970s in various underground comics including *Funny Aimals* (edited by

Terry Zwigoff in 1972) and *Short Order Comix* (co-edited by Spiegelman and Bill Griffith from 1973 to 1974). These works were first collected in 1977 and subsequently reissued in 2008. The 2008 edition of *Breakdowns* (the version used in this thesis) is a 'reconsideration' which included *Portrait* – an autobiographical comic written in 2005 (Spiegelman in Mike Calahan and Nathan Kaspar, 2008, online). The reconsideration also included a substantial afterward and brought the volume into the price range of the non-collector.

For convenience, in bullet point format, the composition of *Breakdowns* can be broken down as follows (n.b. *Breakdowns* is unpaginated and so the page references used here are based on a manual page-count):

- *Portrait*: an introductory autobiographical comic written for the reconsideration (Spiegelman 2008, 1-19).
- *Auto-Destructo*: a dark comic parody of Rube Goldberg comics. (Spiegelman 2008, 25)
- The original version of *Maus* (Spiegelman 2008, 28-30).
- *Skinless Perkins*: a one-page comic in which the means of construction is woven into the text (Spiegelman 2008, 31).
- *Prisoner*: a comic which was first published in *Short Order Comix* in 1973 and later republished in the different editions of *Maus*. It is a description of Artie's mother's suicide and its aftermath (Spiegelman 2008, 32-36).
- A series of *Real Dream* comics which examine, indirectly, the second-generation Shoah survivor through the description of dreams (Spiegelman 2008, 37, 49, and 54).
- *Cracking Jokes*: a comic book 'essay' on humour (Spiegelman 2008, 38-41).

- *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*: an experiment in communicating time through the comic book medium (Spiegelman 2008, 42).
- *Little Signs of Passion*: an experiment in narrative expansion and reduction (Spiegelman 2008, 44-46).
- *Spiegelman Moves to N.Y. "Feels Depressed"*: a serio-comic book meditation on alienation presented as a page from a newspaper (Spiegelman 2008, 47).
- *Day at the Circuits*: a comic with multiple narrative paths (Spiegelman 2008, 48).
- *The Malpractice Suite*: a surreal collage which uses repurposed images from a romance comic (Spiegelman 2008, 55-56).
- *Ace Hole Midget Detective* (henceforth *Ace Hole*): a self-reflexive noir parody (Spiegelman 2008, 57-66).
- And a page from *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army*: an incomplete project which applied the 'cut up technique' to the comic book format (Spiegelman 2008, 73-74).

In order to understand *Breakdowns* as it pertains to the arguments of this thesis as a whole, the following two sections will seek to understand the formal elements of text first in terms of its intertextuality and then in terms of Spiegelman's experimentation with the comic book form.

## **2.2 A Copy of a Copy of a Copy: (Auto-)citation in *Breakdowns***

*Spiegelman's work was produced against a backdrop of the postmodern movement in art and literature – Postmodern practices such as radical defamiliarization, a 'mad' register, the failure of Enlightenment mechanisation, and indefatigable quotation appear in Spiegelman's image of an artist drinking ink – Breakdowns includes Kurtzmanesque transformation of comedy to bleak comedy – Jewish humour often serves as a means to stave-off emotional*

*collapse – The dual ‘zaps’ of Breakdowns are its dramatization of formal and mental collapse – Like an archetypal madman Breakdowns talks to itself*

During the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde American works such as John Barth’s *The Floating Opera* (1967), Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* (1967), and Robert Coover’s *The Public Burning* (1977) employed acutely self-reflexive postmodern aesthetics. A key characteristic of these works was the extravagant use of quotation. At the same time, artists such as Roy Lichtenstein in his work *Drowning Girl* (1963), James Rosenquist with *Marilyn Monroe, I* (1962) and Andy Warhol’s *Eight Elvises* (1963) were appropriating images from American pop culture and creating art which similarly flaunted its status as aesthetic artefact. Postmodernism in the arts is characterised by shameless appropriation, camp humour, recycling of past styles and artistic movements, a breakdown in distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art forms, repetition and temporal confusion. In the same tradition, Spiegelman’s work in *Breakdowns* self-consciously references a variety of visual and literary sources from a range of genres and intersects with the other ‘signatures’ of the postmodern sketched here.

The purpose of this section is to establish the following; that the references in *Breakdowns* serve, as with other postmodern works, to call attention to form, and to introduce themes of madness by way of quotations in the style of *MAD* cartoonist Harvey Kurtzman and archetypically Jewish dark parody. This gallows humour, it shall be argued, appears concurrent with and in response to, the threat of psychological collapse. These strands can be drawn together in the observation (also of relevance to the chapter as a whole) that in *Breakdowns* Spiegelman intertwines thematic and mental dissolution.

The 2008 version of *Breakdowns* includes a series of prints of the cover of the 1977 edition (which is also the first panel of *Portrait*). These panels appear in a range of different colours. In some the dimensions are disoriented and elements are missing. Kartalopoulos reads the image as a mission statement for the volume: ‘Spiegelman is unwilling to allow any of comics’ properties to go unquestioned and un-utilized’ (Kartalopoulos 2005, online). The following analysis shall significantly develop Kartalopoulos’ argument by exploring the purpose of the defamiliarization, madness, and quotation in this image and others that appear in *Breakdowns*.

This image can be found on [pbase.com](http://pbase.com)

**Fig. 10** *Breakdowns’ Warholesque prints reference the act of referencing.*

The collage foregrounds and thus defamiliarizes the mechanisms behind the comic book form, specifically the large colour palettes available to current comic book creators (a huge leap from the four colour printing process utilised in the production of mid-twentieth century comics) and the alignment and colouring process used to create comics. The repetition of the same image alludes to the mass production of print comics. One can imagine the image sliding off a printing press, stacking one above the next. Spiegelman has repeated the image, but in some instances colours are misaligned and shift thus simulating a mechanical error and a failure in the process of mechanisation.

The foregrounding of form in this image coincides significantly with the theme of madness. The wild-eyed artist is in the process of drinking ink, perhaps to drown himself or to vomit onto his drawings. His tools, and his artistic output, are literally internalised and (the reader might infer) regurgitated, offering a visual continuum between the bodily, the affective and the artistic as well as a thematic continuum between the mechanised rational process (of

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printing) and acute psychological disturbance. His bile and his own tormented body have gone into the comics he draws. This theme of mental and physical breakdown also appears in the lettering of 'Breakdowns', which begins clear and upright but then collapses and cracks (*breaks down* in other words) by the final 'S' as his madness, manifest, overwhelms the form. To rephrase this in terms introduced in the previous chapter (section 1.6) which concerns the Holocaust as the madness produced within post-Enlightenment rationality, Spiegelman makes reference to the mechanisation and wide use of the printing press – landmark signs of the march of civilisation and the growth of human knowledge – not in order to emphasize their utility, but to call attention to the constructed nature of his art and to simulate madness within these signs of 'progress.' This image thus serves as a signal of emotional distress and a thematic microcosm of the volume and, indeed, the Spiegelman canon as a whole.

The repeated image of the artist drinking ink also introduces the theme of quotation; the image alludes to Warhol's mixture of the everyday with high art as well as his signature use of distinctive anti-realistic (or psychedelic) colour palates in reproduced images. As Warhol was attempting to bridge the gap between art and the everyday, Spiegelman was attempting to bridge the distance between 'comic book' and 'art' by calling attention to the tools and skills of the comic book creator. By alluding to Warhol, Spiegelman also offers a focus upon *recreation* rather than creation. This allusion acts not only as a parodic reproduction of Warhol, but reproduction to the second degree; a *reference to the act of referencing itself*.

The repeated practise of citation and corruption-through-repetition throughout *Breakdowns* is found in its most completely realised form in *Auto-Destructo* (Spiegelman 2008, 25) with its intricate homage to Rube Goldberg whose cartoons often depicted elaborate devices designed to accomplish a simple task.

This image can be found on [screwballcomics.blogspot.com](http://screwballcomics.blogspot.com)

**Fig. 11** *Rube Goldberg's Automatic Cigar Cutter (1930)*

Unlike a typical Rube Goldberg machine, however, *Auto-Destructo* is circular and designed to make the observer 'depressed by its uselessness' to make them 'realize[...] the futility of all existence [...] and ingest [...] a lethal overdose' of sleeping pills (Spiegelman 2008, 25). Like Rube Goldberg, Spiegelman parodies the Enlightenment aspiration to improve human lives through technological advances. In Spiegelman's version the very purpose of this ornamented device is to call attention to its own impracticality. Since the specific cartoons cited here were intentionally ridiculous and exaggerated, *Auto-Destructo* fails to satisfy Genette's conception of 'hypertextuality' as a form which transforms a serious text or genre into a playful one. *Auto-Destructo* is comedic and, as such, the parodic transformation is intra- rather than trans-generic (from slapstick comedy to dark humour). The comedic text, in this case the Rube Goldberg cartoon, should be, by its nature, unsuitable for parody (a comedic imitation of a single text) because it does not take itself seriously to begin with. Any attempt at derision simply produces another genre of comedy. The comic mechanism in *Auto-Destructo* thus ridicules the ridiculous, but with the ulterior motive of unveiling the inner workings of a decidedly un-funny subject.

The violent comedy of *Auto-Destructo* engages with suicide and depression to explore subversive and disturbing elements found in the familiar (in this case the Rube Goldberg

cartoon). One of Spiegelman's influences in this regard is Harvey Kurtzman, who drew parodies, mainly for *MAD Magazine* and *Playboy* which exposed the violence inherent in slapstick. Spiegelman asserts of Kurtzman's parody of McManus's *Bringing Back Father* that the change in drawing style transforms slapstick comedy into domestic violence (Spiegelman 1999, 80). Spiegelman reproduces Kurtzman's approach, transforming light-hearted slapstick into darkly violent parody. Kartalopoulos contends that 'Spiegelman's status as cultural commentator is more relentlessly associative than Kurtzman's, and his subjects are often less pre-packaged than MAD's targets' (Kartalopoulos 2005, online). Spiegelman's specific brand of quotation, seen in *Auto-Destructo* and the Warholesque images of the artist drinking ink, tends more toward general pastiche (the self-conscious imitation of a genre) than Kurtzman's precisely targeted parody. Nonetheless, much of the intratextual play at work in *Auto-Destructo* can be understood as Spiegelman referencing Kurtzman who in turn is referencing Goldberg with an attendant transformation of what the mainstream defines as innocent humour into a bleak and dissident dark comedy.

To draw together the comments on the two quotations described above, we can assert that this strain of dark humour (manifest, in these cases, through allusions to self-inflicted and slapstick violence) is in certain respects a characteristic of a Jewish comedic tradition (both Spiegelman and Kurtzman are Jewish) in which 'laughing at difficulties' provides a coping mechanism in the face of hardship (Avner Ziv 1993, ix). In this context, Frankl argues that in Auschwitz '[h]umor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation' (Frankl 2004, 54). Humour serves, in *Breakdowns*, as a means to allude to madness, psychological anguish, and suicide in a manner which protects the individual from being



overwhelmed by that which would otherwise be too terrible for comment. To make the point explicitly, the bleak humour in *Breakdowns*, observed in the examples of quotations and parodies mentioned above, serves to introduce themes of violence, depression, suicide and associated mental disturbance into familiar artistic signatures and processes.

A further illustrative example of the role of quotation in the volume can be found in the allusion to Crumb on the cover of the 2008 volume. *Breakdowns* does not only quote Warhol and Goldberg, but earlier generations of comic book creators such as McKay and Gould, and Spiegelman's own contemporaries, specifically Robert Crumb. The latter quotation, as well as reinforcing mad, compulsive, and mechanised repetition described in the images above, serves as a means to signify the counter-cultural edginess of the volume, manifest in the potent 'zap' that the content pledges to deliver. The cover of the 2008 reissue of *Breakdowns* alludes to Robert Crumb's cover of *Zap Comics #0* (a recovered issue published between #3 and #4 which Crumb had previously thought lost). The cover of *Zap Comics #0* shows a man 'zapped' by electricity. He has been thrown into the air and his muscles are contracted by the shock. This charge is channelled through his genitals rather than his head suggesting, perhaps, that the impact of this comic is more corporeal than intellectual. The cover of the 2008 reissue of *Breakdowns* shows a man who has slipped on a page from the comic in an allusion to a slapstick violence typical of a Looney Tunes cartoon (with a comic replacing the traditional banana peel) as well as Crumb's *Zap*. The motion of the character tripping is a recurring symbol in *Portrait*. This 'squiggle [...] viscerally expresses multiple and often contradictory ideas and emotions, such as concentration, contemplation, obsession, frustration, bewilderment, disorientation, creative insight,

inspiration, mystery, ambiguity, incomprehensibility, and the opacity of meaning' (McGlothlin 2011, 47). The threat and promise of the volume, the image suggests, is that it will expose the reader to an onslaught of emotional and formalist chaos, both of which are hallmarks of the underground genre which Crumb led. This onslaught promises to be so severe that, like Crumb's cover for *Zap Comics #0*, the reader's engagement with the comic causes (or is about to cause) not just mental but also actual physiological damage. The repetition and mechanised madness of the volume, it promises, will be irreparably impressed upon the reader.

These images can be found at [sirrealcomix.mrainey.com](http://sirrealcomix.mrainey.com) (figure 12) and [pbase.com](http://pbase.com) (figure 13)

**Fig. 12 and 13** *The cover of Zap Comics #0 and Breakdowns both communicate a sense that the content will have a psychologically and physically damaging effect on the reader.*

This theme of mental disturbance coincides with numerous acts of auto-citation and repetition, both of which, in these texts, also signify formal and emotional near-collapse. The remainder of this section shall, accordingly, concern the subject of auto-citation. Alongside references to extra-textual sources, *Breakdowns* contains many instances of auto-citation. *Portrait* references (or foreshadows, given that the volume begins with the most recently produced text) both the other works within the volume and *Maus*, in single panels, characters and themes. 'Michelle' resembles the face Spiegelman's mother draws on the first page and drawings from other works in the volume are visible on an easel in first panel (Spiegelman 2008, 2). *Portrait* is, in other words, a thematic and visual collage of the other texts from *Breakdowns*. In one sequence of panels, for example, upon deciding on his metaphor for *Maus*, Artie greets an African-American man with a peace sign. The man is clearly unimpressed. In the next panel Artie, followed by a crowd of black mice, comments to

himself: 'I know bupkis [in Yiddish 'nothing' or, literally, 'goat shit'] about being black in America!' (Spiegelman 2008, 13). The use of hand gestures and the insistence on boundaries between the African-American and Jewish-American communities foreshadows *A Real Dream: Hand Job* and the story itself describes the genesis of *Maus*. Other references multiply and overlap. Page 19 reuses a panel from earlier in *Portrait* with alternate dialogue. The original sequence depicts a disturbing scene in which an older boy curses and spits on Artie's mother. In the revised version the young Artie states that '[w]hen same size-panels are the basic units, one can rearrange, replace or reuse parts' to which his mother replies '[s]equences can be edited like film footage!' (Spiegelman 2008, 19). This panel uses, describes, and foreshadows the stylistic device used in *Little Signs of Passion* where portions of the text are apparently unconnected to the images, and also signposts the concept behind *Boxes for the Salvation Army*. *Breakdowns* can thus be regarded as a collage of intratextual auto-citation with multiple texts informing the content of a single panel. Technically, the collection collapses and cascades inwards in a collage of auto-citations which produces a confused, broken and (in Derridian terms) 'mad' register: chronology, timelines, and narrative voice are radically destabilised. In a manner peculiarly reminiscent of the archetypal madman, *Breakdowns* thus incoherently 'talks' to itself.

To summarise the use of (auto)citation described above, Spiegelman's exploration of madness in *Breakdowns* is thus not isolated to a single figure but built into the form of the text itself. The internal formal convolutions of *Breakdowns* resonate in a baroque fashion with the thematics of psychological introversion and the collapse of social and mechanical structures concomitantly evoked in the series. In this context, the following section will

further detail the formal play at work in *Breakdowns* and examine the ways in which this postmodern approach to form contributes to both the tone of the individual texts and the overall theme of psychological disturbance. Initially the following argument will continue to focus on *how* Spiegelman connects form with madness. The remainder of the chapter, from section 2.4 onward, will then seek to answer the question of *to what end* by drawing these concepts together into a coherent model which can be understood using literary and mythic figurations of madness.

### **2.3 On Not Erasing Pencil Lines: Formalism in *Breakdowns***

*The 'breakdown' in comics parlance is the initial sketch of a page – Spiegelman creates defamiliarization through breakdowns – Formal play and bleak humour occur in Skinless Perkins – Narrative reflexivity and play with genre occur in Ace Hole – The Type 5 transitions and word-panel combinations in Don't Get Around Much Anymore create an unsettling tone – Little Signs of Passion employs amplification and a discordant register to disrupt the format of a slapstick tumble – In Day at the Circuits a discordantly playful form is used to address the subject of depression and suicide – All of these texts combine a postmodern form with an earnest preoccupation with the themes of madness and depression*

In his introduction to Spiegelman's *Comix, Essays, Graphics, and Scraps*, Hoberman asserts that '[t]he punning title of [...] *Breakdowns*, suggests a form of auto-analysis – not just personal but aesthetic as well' (Hoberman in Spiegelman 1999, 5). To provide a 'breakdown' is, in one of the most common usages, to give a systematic explanation, or to define something in its most basic of terms. Simultaneously, in comic book parlance, a breakdown is (in some definitions) a rough sketch of the page layout prior to inking lettering or detail. It is 'the panel to panel exposition of a story'; the page in terms of its most basic of elements (Spiegelman 1999, 86). This process is illustrated in *Portrait*, wherein the breakdown used to sketch the characters is left visible thus foregrounding the process which underlies their

construction. The breakdown is representative of a standardised, even mechanical, artistic method to the creation of comics which Spiegelman seeks to test, challenge, and even destroy throughout the volume.

This image can be found on page 2 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 14** Portrait *The sketchy skeleton beneath the figurative skin is intentionally left visible.*

In this sense, one might ask, what is being broken down in *Breakdowns*? One answer might be the mechanics of the comic book medium itself. Brodzki proposes in relation to the first comic in the 2008 version of *Breakdowns* that '[t]he reader feels charged to engage with the panels even more microanalytically than usual' (Brodzki 2011, 52). The presence of the pencil lines, like the use of misaligned colours on pages 20-22, once again defamiliarizes the comic by calling attention to its own artifice. The 'zap' of *Breakdowns* is found, in part, by the way in which the reader is regularly impeded by the visual object made strange and are thus encouraged to approach the volume primarily as a set of drawings rather than as pure story.

McCloud's schema of panel transitions, described in section 1.3, provides a useful model both for approaching the complex, unstable and experimental relationship between image and time in *Breakdowns* and the way in which Spiegelman creates tone in his works. A revealing example can be found in *Skinless Perkins*. In this series of type 1 transitions a character performs a hand-spring action.

This image can be found on page 31 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 15** *Skinless Perkins is made up almost entirely of type 1 transitions. The means of construction (in this case the method of colouring) is made obvious and becomes a self-reflexive component of the narrative.*

The use of type 1 transitions and a simple panel layout invites a granular examination of the

action. At the peak of Skinless Perkins' movement the zipatone lines of the drawing separate from the grey of the character's suit (zipatone is defined by Spiegelman in the afterword as '[t]hose self-adhesive sheets of pre-printed dot-screens that simulate a grey tone' (Spiegelman 2008, 71). The colour remains static for four panels as the character, now black and white, walks out of the panel. The grey of his suit follows his movement in the remaining panels and undergoes a moiré shift (where the intersection of two grids creates a pattern) before also leaving the frame. The text ends with an image of Skinless Perkins in a circle saying 'D-D-Dot's all, folks!' which alludes to the famous Looney Toons slogan – 'D-D-Dat's all, folks!', the use of pointillism in the colouring technique, and, perhaps more obliquely, to television in the CRT era (Spiegelman 2008, 31). In *Skinless Perkins*, Spiegelman, in a vernacular sense, breaks down the method of colouring comic books, separating and thus directing the reader's attention to the way in which colours occupy the spaces marked out by the lines. The colours and the lines of the comic follow the same sequence but at a different pace so that, as the colours separate, two sequences of type 1 transitions take place within the same series of panels.

The theme of mental disturbance and the potential for emotional breakdown is not entirely absent from this text. The reference to Looney Tunes resonates with the theme of gallows humour as a coping mechanism described in the section above: Spiegelman closes his essay on the cultural aftermath of the Holocaust, 'Looney Tunes, Zionism and the Jewish Question' with the words 'Th-th-that's all Volk' (Spiegelman 1999, 16). Similarly, the original recording of Spiegelman's father speaking about his experiences during the Holocaust which provided material for *Maus* ended with the statement '[t]his was all my

story, folks' (Spiegelman 2011, 277). Both the father and son draw upon the same cultural references and the use of the cartoon (mirrored in the governing allegory of *Maus*) serves as a grotesquely tragi-comic means to conclude their commentary on an event so terrible that no useful conclusions can be drawn. Vladek and Art Spiegelman were not the only Jews to use the Looney Tunes tagline in a darkly humorous context: the gravestone of Mel Blanc, who voiced many of the Looney Tunes characters, reads '[t]hat's all folks.' *Skinless Perkins* does not make explicit reference to the Holocaust beyond the idiosyncratic Looney Tunes reference, but within *Breakdowns* it sits alongside many texts which do. The oblique reference to the Holocaust thus employs, once more, a postmodern aesthetic with a modernist moral imperative and dramatises formal breakdown with humour in order to simultaneously depict and stave-off emotional breakdown.

These thematics of formal play and dark comedy also reappear in *Ace Hole*. The first panel of the comic literally displays the tools used to draw each character (the brush for Ace Hole and the background, a fountain pen for Greta and a felt tip pen for Potato-Head). The devices used to draw the characters replace the head shots normally used to introduce characters in noir comics (see Kartopolouos 2005, online).

This image can be found on page 57 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 16** *Ace Hole: the artist's toolbox is drawn on the first page. Spiegelman uses heavy shadow, a low angle and the iconic hat and trench coat to signal that the text will also self-consciously 'shadow' the film noir detective genre.*

Alongside the illustrations of the tools used, the narrative construction playfully references the mechanics of the medium and generic self-consciousness. The text in the final panel of one page reads 'I turned the corner fast, like some clown turning the pages of a good funny-

book' (Spiegelman 2008, 58). Elsewhere, Spiegelman references a dramatic device commonly used in comics where a 'cliffhanger' panel compels the reader to turn the page. Similarly, when Ace Hole uncovers a clue, a text box indicates that this is a 'plot device' (Spiegelman 2008, 59). In each case, the normally hidden formal functions of the medium and genre are made graphically obvious. Spiegelman highlights both the tools of illustration and the narrative codes.

*Ace Hole* makes visible not only its means of construction in terms of the artist's tools and narrative devices employed, but also the thematic elements which inform the genre and conventional lexical choices. The comic exemplifies the use of quotation in *Breakdowns* and openly cites many of the texts and authors it parodies. In this context, Carlin asserts that *Ace Hole* is a 'wonderfully kinetic, crazy-quilt comic that includes examples of every conceivable visual style from big-foot to Picasso to purely abstract [...] It is a detective story that transforms, through its self-conscious use of the form, into a *defective* story in which our attempts to follow the clues are thwarted at every turn' (Carlin 2005, 128-131). The section above detailed the purpose of these quotations. The following analysis shall develop Carlin's observation by demonstrating the range and purpose of pastiche, formal play, and genre in the comic.

The title of the first chapter, *A Short Goodbye* alludes, of course, to Raymond Chandler's seminal hard-boiled detective novel *The Long Goodbye* (1953). In numerous instances hard-boiled stylistics and colloquialisms are literally rendered. The phrases 'full of holes', 'yellow as old newsprint' and 'pieces of the puzzle' are drawn literally (Spiegelman



2008, 61, 63, and 64). In keeping with the genre, the text is narrated by the detective protagonist as thought bubbles – the visual equivalent of a film noir voiceover. The narration of events as they occur is used to comedic effect. Ace Hole’s speech is interrupted by his own narration: “‘Put this in your plastic pipe and smoke it!’ I sneered’ (Spiegelman 2008, 63). Greta (described and drawn as having ‘more sides than a revolving door’) is rendered in a cubist style, specifically pastiching Picasso whose image appears several times in the text. In the final few panels of page 65 the genre switches to the Western as Ace Hole mounts a horse to pursue Greta (Spiegelman 2008, 62). The text is thus a fusion of genres (or, rather, it offers a visual and narrative testimony to the continuities between western and noir) with stylistically distinct and incongruous images. Spiegelman’s textual incarnation ‘Floogleman’ appears as a secondary character in the text. The use of the writer as a character within a detective fiction is a precursor of a narrative device used in, amongst other texts, Auster’s postmodern defective-noir-detective story ‘City of Glass’ in the *New York Trilogy* (1986) (which was later adapted into a graphic novel by Paul Auster, Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli). In an acknowledgement of the comic’s rampant hypertextuality, Floogleman is (of course) guilty of art forgery. This combination of visual and literary self-consciousness underlines Spiegelman’s originality, ambition and achievement as a comic book creator. At a time when postmodern authors were deploying intertextuality to defamiliarize narrative prose and Andy Warhol was practising a similar strategy in visual art, Spiegelman was doing both simultaneously and sometimes in the space of a single panel. Spiegelman’s narrative reflexivity in both *Ace Hole* and *Skinless Perkins* demonstrates the sensitivity to form, and, most importantly, a transformation and corruption of form which occur throughout the volume. The characters within the text do not appear to experience emotional distress, but

they occupy and participate in a fractured and chaotic world. As the text comes to a close Ace Hole and the world he occupies seem to spin in opposite directions. Ace Hole appears to suffer from self-delusion but the world he occupies itself is broken-down to the extent that it offers no rational counterpoint to his madness. Once more the formal play and dark humour of the text coincides with questions of (in)sanity.

Where *Skinless Perkins* and *Ace Hole* serve as a relatively straightforward example of narrative and visual self-reflexivity, *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* offers a more complex variant alongside a subtle subversion of traditional comic book narrative forms. The text is a simple description of a one-room apartment. In a 1978 essay on *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*, Spiegelman stated that '[t]he text afforded me an opportunity to expand on the idea that comics represent time spatially' (Spiegelman 1999, 7). In the exploration of the apartment space, Spiegelman employs some rarely-utilised narrative methods in the American comic book medium, specifically the use of type 5 panel transitions and discordant word and text combinations. Spiegelman describes his efforts here as 'the result of my wrestling match with Cubism [...] It refracted space into panel-sized facets, froze time, and unmoored words from pictures' (Spiegelman 2008, 72).

This image can be found on page 42 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 17** Don't Get Around Much Anymore. *Type 5 panel transitions produce a sense of temporal stasis.*

Stylistically, the images in the text are either abstract and blocky or photographic.

Spiegelman makes effective use of sharp angles and simple geometric shapes rendered in chiaroscuro (sharply contrasted blacks and whites). In contrast to the other objects in the comic '[t]his ball is the ROUNDest object in the strip, one of the most emphatically

represented as alive/in motion' (Spiegelman 1999, 9). The ball is both outside of the apartment and, unlike the objects within, in motion. As Spiegelman's upper-case text in the quote indicates, the title of the comic puns on a lack of round objects in the narrator's life. Everything in the apartment is angular. Even the shading is provided using parallel lines at varying distances (a shading technique called 'crosshatching'). The photographs offer a jarring contrast to the drawn images, particularly in the final panel which shows a woman's mouth with jagged lower teeth (the serrated teeth are actually a toothbrush although the image is clearly intended to be unsettling) (see Spiegelman 1999, 9). The panels are all identically-sized. This provides a steady, unbroken rhythm to the reading and does not afford any particular image greater significance over another. In terms of sequence, the text is made up almost exclusively of type 5 transitions (those which explore different aspects of a scene without any obvious sense of temporal movement). This might be contrasted with, for example, *Spiegelman Moves to N.Y. "Feels Depressed"*, or the later version of *Maus*, where the sequential flow of each is mostly made up of comparatively conservative panel transitions (specifically, type 2, 3 and 4). Only the two panels of a boy bouncing a ball (perhaps a reference to either Niccolo Tucci's short story *The Evolution of Knowledge* (1947) or Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976)) and the changing image on the television offer any hint of temporal progression. McCloud sees comics which use a relatively high instance of type 5 transitions as those which 'emphasize being there over getting there' (McCloud 1994, 81). If comics are, by McCloud's definition, '[a]n artist's map of time' (McCloud 2000, 206) in type 5 transitions time essentially stands still.

In addition to the almost exclusive use of type 5 transitions, the text and images in the central series of panels of *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* are combined in a manner which does not fit McCloud's taxonomy of word-text relationships. The text in these panels refers to objects depicted in other panels so that the words and images are both out of time. The words 'whoever lived here before left a stack of *Life* magazines' accompany the image of a record player whilst 'I own a record' is affixed to an image of the refrigerator (Spiegelman 2008, 42). The linguistic message, according to Barthesian semiotics, normally guides the interpretation of an image: '[t]he denominative function corresponds exactly to an *anchorage* of all possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature' (Barthes 1977, 39 my italics). Here, instead, the text produces a creative dissonance between verbal and visual signification. The words and images are off-beat and the pacing of the narrative is broken. Panel elements which normally indicate a moment in time signal both forwards and backwards chronologically, disrupting the left-to-right sequential flow. In a technique which reached full fruition in *Maus*, the images of *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* subvert the text, drawing the reader's attention elsewhere and suggesting an alternative to the words. The boy bouncing the ball and the dripping of the faucet, both elements of the composition with a rhythmic quality, bring the words and images briefly back into time. Spiegelman is keenly aware of the question of musicality in the piece; there is a symbolic resonance in the rhythm of a bouncing ball as Looney Tunes cartoons shown in theatres once used a bouncing ball which followed the lyrics in order to encourage the audience to sing along (see Tony Cox 2010, online); the text is intended to be read to the sound of a 'dripping faucet' (Spiegelman 2008, 42); and the title of the comic references a song by Duke Ellington and Bob Russell. Spiegelman wrote of the piece: 'I have occasionally regretted that, unlike film, comics have

no soundtrack' (Spiegelman 1999, 8). In *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* he attempts, through word/picture combinations, to give a comic a faltering out-of-step rhythm.

As mentioned above, *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* combines cubist style with photographic realism for surreal effect. Photographs are deployed in conjunction with television and magazines to suggest, perhaps, that the world portrayed in those other media is more compelling, 'real' and 'rounded' than the world occupied by the narrator. The final panel, showing a woman with serrated teeth on a television screen, hints at a repressed undercurrent of horror beneath the glossy surfaces of an increasingly mediated world. The narration focuses on the mundane and simple items in the apartment – signs of technological progress to which the narrator has a Marcusean attachment – without acknowledging the disturbing images which flash up on the screen. It is unclear if the haunting image is authentic or surfaces from the narrator's disturbed imagination. The comic thus suggests, once more through formal play, an undercurrent of individual and perhaps collective insanity bubbling away beneath the everyday. The signs of technological progress (the refrigerator, television etc.) are coupled with both a disturbing undertone and a preoccupation with the mechanisms of the comic book form. Despite the use of unusual panel transitions and friction between text and images, the visual literacy contract of the comic remains broadly intact. Unlike almost every other text in *Breakdowns*, *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* can be reasonably readily apprehended. Where *Cracking Jokes* explores elements in humour which can be altered without disrupting the comic effect, *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* is an exploration of those aspects of the comic book medium which can be emphasised or removed without the terms of the visual literacy contract entirely breaking down. The type 5

transitions, disturbing images, and off-beat word-picture combinations create an agonizingly slow pace with a haunting sense of an underlying terror in the mundane. Spiegelman thus engages with modernist thematics and an approach to form in such a way as to introduce a barely-expressed terror which lies at the edges of such a world. This combination of form and madness can be further observed in *Little Signs of Passion*.

Whilst *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* is an exercise in minimalism, *Little Signs of Passion* aspires aesthetically, in Genette's terminology, to *amplification*, whereby an original text is extended through the insertion of material. Here Spiegelman, once again, uses formal play to disrupt the format of a joke, creating an altogether more challenging text which resists interpretation. In *Little Signs of Passion*, amplification is achieved through (again to use Genette's taxonomy) 'diegetic development' (as opposed to metadiegetic insertions and extradiegetic interventions) (Genette 1997, 264). The images tell the story of Foul Bernie who leaves a pornographic film theatre and, in a display of slapstick humour reminiscent of the 2008 volume's cover, trips over a tin of red paint. This narrative is played out over six panels on page 44 and then over twenty four panels on pages 45-46. The later version of the story is expanded to include the characters of Roxie and Augie, and for Foul Bernie to deliver an anecdote before tripping.

These images can be found on pages 44 and 46 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 18** In *Little Signs of Passion* the same story is told using first 6 and then 24 panels.

The majority of the 18 additional panels in the second, longer story introduce type 5 transitions with each insertion adding more elements to the scene without disrupting the chronology of the events depicted. The addition of these scene-setting or exploratory panels

slows the narrative momentum. The format of *Little Signs of Passion* serves to illustrate that in any comic a deliberate choice has been made by the artist in terms of the pace of temporal sequence and the exploration of physical space. In *Little Signs of Passion*, Spiegelman again breaks down the mechanics of the medium and demonstrates its properties in terms of the relationship between visual space and time; as McCloud contends, ‘the words “short” or “long” can refer either to the first dimension or the fourth’ (McCloud 1994, 102). In contrast to that which Genette terms ‘the humorous potential of amplification’ (Genette 1997, 269), the amplification of *Little Signs of Passion* illustrates Spiegelman’s final observation in *Cracking Jokes*, that by extending a joke the humour is lost: ‘[j]okes are delicate mechanisms; timing is important. Swiftiness and surprise will help you get your laugh’ (Spiegelman 2008, 40). Once again, through the process of transformation Spiegelman disrupts the mechanics of a joke to create a radically different text. In this case the new work involves an act of compulsive repetition which invites, and defies, interpretation. McCloud contends that in a type 5 transition, ‘by definition, nothing “happens” at all’ (McCloud 1994, 77). The panel serves as a pause in the narrative flow: ‘[w]hen the content of a silent panel offers no clues as to its duration, it can [...] produce a sense of timelessness. Because of its unresolved nature, such a panel may linger in the reader’s mind and its presence may be felt in the panels which follow it’ (McCloud 1994, 102).

In addition to the story of Foul Bernie tripping over the tin of paint, *Little Signs of Passion* includes two overlapping commentaries. The first commentary, in red boxes, offers a description of the characters and the second, in blue boxes is a quotation from Jack Woodford on the subject of romantic tension in narrative which serve as another instance of the text’s

rigorous commitment to defamiliarization and wilful rejection of the Boileausque aspiration to create aesthetically and formally ‘correct’ works (see section 5.2). Jack Woodford was a novelist and scriptwriter. He is perhaps most famous for his blunt and practical guides for aspiring authors. Woodford wrote extensively about the central role of sex in romance fiction. He contended that ‘behind every love story there is [...] the thought of sex’ (Woodford 1980, 31). By using a Woodford quote, Spiegelman ironically cites a formulaic approach to creative output in a text which is anything but formulaic. This second commentary is added to those panels which feature in the second, expanded, version of the story. Where *Don’t Get Around Much Anymore* offers an out-of-step relationship between text and image, the text from Jack Woodford’s work and the images of *Little Signs of Passion* appear to be entirely unrelated to the images. The reader is required to perform imaginative work in order to tie together the loose associative mechanisms which Spiegelman offers.

*Little Signs of Passion* offers a surrealist contrast to the cubism of *Don’t Get Around Much Anymore*. The combination of a discussion of romantic and sexual tension with pornographic imagery creates an ironic juxtaposition, where romance is discussed in a world which is bereft of it. The title of the piece, too, alludes to both romantic and sexual urges in a text which is concerned purely with latter. The images of overt and mechanical sexuality are contrasted with the colours and artistic style of the comic; there are no signs of passion in the content, but perhaps a few sprouting buds of passion might be found in the form. *Little Signs of Passion* is an exploration of the ways in which the visual literacy contract encodes emotional content through colour and stylistic approach. The comic uses a four colour palette reminiscent of early twentieth century newspaper and mid-twentieth century superhero



comics. This colour palate is contrasted with black and white images from the pornographic film *Foul Bernie* is watching in the opening panels of the comic. The metadiegetic pornographic film is traced through the generic stencil of photographic realism whilst the diegesis is realised in a blocky, iconic style reminiscent (again, ironically) of romance comics such as *Young Love* (1947-1977). Rather than being alluring, the close shots and level of detail alongside the use of black and white make the pornographic scenes less visually appealing than the world the characters occupy. By contrast, the bright colours and icons of the diegesis, in McCloud's terms 'objectify their subjects. We become more aware of the physical form of objects than in black and white [...] The world takes on the childhood reality of the playground and recalls a time when shape preceded meaning' (McCloud 1994, 189). The incongruous combination of the graphically pornographic and the bright and childish create a confused register that seems to hint at a subversive sexual undercurrent to the simple and childish colour palate of early twentieth century comics. *Little Signs of Passion* is thus scattered with signifiers of different forms and styles which fail to converge in a single tone or mood. The text is preoccupied with questions of romance and lust without providing a cohesive comment. The lingering final image of red paint resembles blood, suggesting a violence which underlies *Foul Bernie's* slapstick tumble. We encounter, once more, the suggestion of something unsettling behind and within what we are shown.

The most experimental use of panel to panel transitions in *Breakdowns* can be found in *Day at the Circuits*. This text employs a series of arrows from each panel to guide the reader through multiple narrative paths within the same comic, making use of a property of the medium which Jason Dittmer terms 'simultaneity' (Dittmer 2010, 223). Rather than

moving from left-to-right and top-to-bottom, like modern comics the narrative moves horizontally, vertically and loops back to previous panels. Depending on the path taken, the narrative can be circular or can reach a panel in the center of the page which instructs the reader that they have reached a '[d]ead end. Start again' (Spiegelman 2008, 48). The 'choose your own story' format of the text is reinforced by a visual pun in one panel where a street sign reads 'no U turn' (ibid). The text imports its concept from the children's book genre 'choose your own adventure' stories which allowed readers (or a dice roll) to decide the narrative path. In *Day at the Circuits*, the narrative paths are distinguished by colour. Only the top right panel employs all of the colours used in the comic. One narrative path uses black, white, and magenta, another uses black, white, and cyan. In the singular panel which (depending on the path taken) is used by multiple narrative paths, both magenta and cyan are used. *Day at the Circuits* realises what Dittmer, courtesy of Walter Benjamin, sees as a unique potential in the medium: 'comic book visualities hold out the possibility of introducing a new 'optical unconscious to' geography, one that holds open opportunities for more plural, flexible narratives to emerge from a singular montage' (Dittmer 2010, 223). The narrative ambiguity which exists in the gap between the information presented by the artist and the visual literacy of the reader can encourage a dialogue between reader and text. In any comic the reader may (knowingly or otherwise) read the panels in an order other than that intended by the author. In *Day at the Circuits*, the capacity for indeterminate sequential ordering in the medium is addressed directly and the reader is free, not only to actively create their own narrative sequence from the images presented, but also to access information outside the narrative sequence even once it has been established. As argued above, in *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*, Spiegelman desynchronizes text and images to manufacture a

synchronic aura of timelessness. Conversely, each panel in *Day at the Circuits* represents a diachronically precise moment in time which might be ordered in multiple ways depending on where the reader's eye falls. This novel use of reading directions is used to tell a story in which two characters discuss a circular problem: one man is depressed because his alcoholism is destroying his liver and his only means to treat his depression is to continue to drink. The only escape from this circular problem, at the center of the page, occurs when the other character suggests suicide as a solution. In a theme which appears throughout Spiegelman's work, there is no means to escape from acute psychological disturbance. In *Day at the Circuits* Spiegelman thus employs (as with all of the texts discussed this far) a discordantly playful format which dramatises violence, depression, and mental anguish. It is important to note that the thematics of emotional and psychological suffering in these texts do not simply coincide with technical innovation but appear *through* formal play.

The variety of methods for experimenting with the comic book form sketched above can be understood in relation to the aforementioned postmodern literary and artistic forms which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Postmodern forms are typically constructed from copious quotation, stylistic diversity, acute fragmentation, radical discontinuity and other experimental devices to explore, amongst other things, the various ways in which time can be experienced and articulated. In *Breakdowns*, Spiegelman extravagantly slows down and speeds up time. He points simultaneously forwards, backwards and to alternative chronological paths. *Breakdowns* can thus be understood to employ a broadly postmodern approach to form. Even as Spiegelman draws formally from postmodern works, however, the content of *Breakdowns* remains firmly rooted in a modernist emotional and philosophical

register. To return to the collage of wild-eyed artists drinking ink, in *Breakdowns* images may be distorted, reproduced, and coloured with irony, but the madman remains a palpable and insistent presence. Various forms of psychological illness are associated with temporal instability. This occurs, most obviously, for the trauma victim who cannot escape the past, but also from those who suffer from memory loss and, as Jameson (2003) submits, of the postmodern schizophrenic subject confined to a perpetual present.

To this point the central argument of this chapter has been that themes of psychological anguish shoot-through and are created within the formal experimentation of *Breakdowns*. These themes correspond broadly with a Boileau- or Woodfordesque conception of artistic production as a mechanised operation. In Spiegelman's hands this Enlightenment-era desire to completely capture human experience through the perfection of form demonstrably and deliberately fails to fully address an ever-present terror, distress, and madness of the artist's subject and consequently in each text the protagonist, the world of the comic, and the medium collapse. Until this point, however, the nature of this madness, including depression, delusion, and an unacknowledged but palpably discordant register, has lacked taxonomical unity. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to build a coherent model which explains the type and purpose of the various themes of madness which appear in *Breakdowns*. In the sections that follow the case shall also be made that in *Breakdowns* Spiegelman stages a conflict between the madman and hegemonic reason.

## **2.4 I'm not sick but I'm not well: Madness in *Breakdowns***

*The emotional breakdown is a moment when normal social function collapses – An overview of the argument to follow*

This brief section will provide a broad definition of the ‘breakdown’ in terms of the theoretical framework introduced in the previous chapter as well as a brief map of the analysis to follow. Madness and form (or Iconoclastic and Formalistic artistic sensibilities) should not be viewed as separate, unrelated strands in *Breakdowns*, but instead read as engaged in a dialogue with one another. If the mad narrative voices and protagonists in the volume present a state of unwilling collapse, then the quotations and experiments in form, described in sections 2.2 and 2.3, act as a series of controlled demolitions, whereby successive structural components are carefully and deliberately removed from the comic book format until it becomes practically illegible.

In this section the point of reference for the term ‘breakdown’ will shift from a Formalist to a predominantly psychological understanding. The phrase ‘emotional’ or ‘mental breakdown’ is a non-medical term generally used to refer to a period where the individual can no longer maintain normal social functions due to overwhelming anxiety, depression, or other extreme negative emotions. The title *Breakdowns* suggests, not a single traumatic or otherwise emotionally damaging event, but multiple occasions and manifestations of what might be colloquially grouped under the umbrella term of ‘madness’ (‘madness’, in this loose sense, being any form of mental disorder which causes the individual to be marginalised by rational society). The title of the volume, in conjunction with the thematic contents of the texts, suggests recognition of the point where rationality and that which is outside rationality (madness in its various distinct manifestations) intersect. A breakdown is the point where the excessive or dogmatic reason which might be detected as the animating principle within conventional Formalism spills over into madness. *Breakdowns* is neither uniformly chaotic

nor uniformly intelligible. It oscillates unpredictably between moments of lucidity and indecipherability. A breakdown speaks, at times, in the voice of the madman with enough articulation to engage in dialogue with reason.

The argument which will be presented in sections 2.5 to 2.10 can be summarised as follows: Spiegelman expresses a certain degree of cynicism toward the institutional practice of psychology. His proposed means to resist the doctor's power includes a parodic performance of logic and art as self-treatment. He employs (in Derridian terms) 'mad' language and narrative forms in order to explore madness without relying on the discourses of hegemonic rationality deployed in a disciplinary mode by institutional psychiatry. Spiegelman draws, alternatively, upon the trope of the Carnival as a means to challenge and disrupt social hierarchies. His challenges to the authority of the doctor in relation to the patient are specifically targeted at Dr. Wertham who declared comics to be a source of juvenile delinquency. Spiegelman's portrayal of madness is rooted in a belief that a systemic irrationality is an inevitable by-product of post-Enlightenment societies.

## **2.5 Lunatics taking over the Asylum: Healing Art**

*The performance of sanity is an act of submission to power – In Cracking Jokes Spiegelman proposes that the doctor's power might be resisted through the parodic performance of logic  
– The creation of art may serve as a form of self-medication*

Spiegelman's view of the doctor/patient dynamic in *Breakdowns* aligns with the anti-psychiatric discourses as described in the introductory chapter. Spiegelman's cynical disdain for the practice of psychiatry is dramatised in *Prisoner* where Artie appears *after* his release from a mental hospital. Artie thus doubles as both patient and prisoner whilst illustrating

Laing's contention that modern hospitals 'place the bars of Bedlam and the locked doors inside the patient' (Laing 2010, 12). Artie's mother's suicide is not the cause of his emotional distress. He was already a mental patient and prisoner before he heard of her death. He has been branded as a madman and emerged from literal captivity, unhealed, only to find himself in symbolic emotional captivity. The image of the unhealed/un-rehabilitated mental patient/prisoner closely mirrors aspects of Spiegelman's own experiences. Relating the story of his stay in a mental hospital to an interviewer, Spiegelman described how an orderly advised him to 'blame it all on LSD, which was a category [the doctors] could understand [...] and within a month [he] was released' (Spiegelman in Witek 2007, 76). In Foucault's terms, as a madman, Spiegelman lacked the vocabulary to enter into a dialogue with the doctor, but by learning the correct script, he was able to speak in a language (founded on simple models of causality) which mimicked that of the institution in which he was incarcerated. Such an incident appears initially to portray a madman with sufficient self-awareness to manipulate the bureaucratic procedures concerning his treatment, but there is a more subtle mechanism at work in this act of rationality by rote. The mimicry of language is not a mocking act of Signification, but an act of passive acceptance. The incident resonates with Foucault's analysis of the performativity of sanity, whereby the madman is required to adopt the outward appearance and behaviour of the man of reason. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century at the York Retreat, Foucault reports, William Tuke hosted tea parties for his patients (Foucault 2001, 236). These patients were required to dress formally and conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the occasion. The madman's inner logic, the specificities of his affliction and his own character were not addressed. Patients were simply asked to relate to their peers and surroundings *as if* they were not mad. When the patient

complied, he was rewarded. Foucault writes of this practice that '[m]adness is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible. All the rest is reduced to silence' (Foucault 2001, 237). The patient who performs sanity may think of himself as the victor and yet the performance of sanity, given that madness (if understood as a social condition) only exists in relation to others, is practically indistinguishable from sanity.

The madman who leaves the asylum in *Prisoner* has defied medical culture only insofar as he has become 'sane' by outward conformity to a restrictive definition. *Cracking Jokes*, conversely, engages with psychiatry using a discourse which resists rather than yields. The comic dramatises the attempted resolution of madness through discourse. McCloud describes *Cracking Jokes* as belonging to the genre of 'nonfiction comics – those that examine a subject directly without the pretence of a story' although it might be better described as a comedic story with excessive annotation (McCloud 2000; 41). The text centers on a joke in which a doctor attempts to convince a man that he is not dead by asking him to repeat the line 'dead men don't bleed' for three hours (Spiegelman 2008, 38). Once the three hours have passed, the doctor pricks the man's finger and asks what this proves. The doctor's expectation is that this education in recognising unreason will cause the madman to become sane as '[i]t is [...] the exactitude of a social order, imposed from without and, if necessary, by force, that can gradually restore the mind of maniacs to the light of truth' (Foucault 2001, 176). In this case the unveiling of unreason is attempted through the technique of 'theatrical representation', in which the patient is invited to reconcile two mutually contradictory facts (Foucault 2001, 177). This approach is based upon the theory that the madman will experience the revelation that order for one premise to be, the other must be false. The patient



will thereby recognise the error in his logic and ‘become’ sane. However, in Spiegelman’s subversive scenario, when the doctor pricks the man’s finger and asks what this proves the man responds: ‘[d]ead men do bleed’ (Spiegelman 2008, 38). The acerbic humour arises because the madman satisfies the apparent contradiction by offering an alternative premise, maintaining his mad logic whilst accepting some of the objective evidence presented by the doctor. Foucault ascribes to the madman an ‘irrefutable logic [and] perfectly organised discourse’ in that his madness, whilst founded upon an unreasonable assumption, contains its own internal system of reasonable inferences (Foucault 2001, 91). Madness, in this incarnation, employs similar cognitive mechanisms as its nominal antonym of reason. The madman’s premises may be false, but this in no way renders the internal logic of his argument invalid.

Foucault’s argument regarding madness and formal logic is not entirely satisfactory. Of the three examples of mad logic which he provides, only the first (‘[t]he dead do not eat; I am dead; hence I do not eat’) satisfies the condition of validity that no example exists where the premises might be true and the conclusion false (the second premise, of course, is false but establishing truth and falsity is not the purpose of logic – only the validity of arguments) (Foucault 2001, 89). The latter two (‘A, B and C are my enemies; all of them are men; therefore all men are my enemies’ and ‘[m]ost of those who have lived in this house are dead, hence I, who have lived in this house, am dead’) commits the logical fallacy of faulty generalisation whereby a rule is drawn from a sample which is not representative of the whole (ibid). As such their logic is most certainly refutable. These false examples do not, however, necessarily mean that Foucault’s argument should not be taken seriously. Many of

those with a great understanding of logic such as Georg Cantor, Gottlob Frege, Kurt Gödel and David Hilbert spent time, and in some cases died, in asylums. Logic and reason, it seems, are not always synonymous. It is upon this distinction that the argument of *Cracking Jokes* rests.

In *Cracking Jokes*, humour is generated when the madman resists the doctor's logic and insists upon his own which, despite containing a flawed premise, is completely valid. The madman transforms the ridiculous premise of the joke into a dark conclusion in a manner analogous to Spiegelman's transformation of the Rube Goldberg machine into a suicide device. He thus once more combines formal playfulness with a poignant thematic of mental anguish. In this case, however, Spiegelman's thesis on the doctor-patient dynamic proposes a means of resistance. Rather than precisely mimicking sanity as a means to yield to the doctor's power, this performance of sanity serves to parody the doctor's logic. By adopting the tone and manner of the doctor's argument, the Fool in *Cracking Jokes* parodies (or even Signifies within) the language of rationality without being required to abandon his mad beliefs.

Were *Breakdowns* simply to resist the imposition of reason by medical culture without proposing an alternative model, Spiegelman's argument would ultimately be an unsatisfying one. Further to challenging the social role of the doctor, *Breakdowns* suggests a means for addressing one's mental and emotional state outside the realm of psychiatry. This means of interaction continues to resist the language imposed by reason and, instead, uses art as a means to explore the internal mental landscape. This strategy is visible in *Spiegelman*

*Moves to N.Y. "Feels Depressed"* where the text, which is presented as if created by the

protagonist, serves as a means to communicate Artie's acute sense of alienation in a new city. Almost every panel is a close or medium range image of a person and the buildings behind crowd the sky claustrophobically. In contrast to the skyscrapers and iconic buildings which typically symbolise New York, the landscape conveys the impression of a crowded and ugly city which crystallises the estrangement experienced by Artie. The title of the text is drawn as the front cover of a newspaper and is presented with the ironic assumption that news of Artie's depression would be noteworthy to others. The presentation of art within the standardised newspaper format suggests that the art itself is mechanised, disposable, and without purpose, thereby contributing to the protagonists' sense of his own unimportance. In an approach Spiegelman would return to in *No Towers*, the comic is presented as a means through which an artist/protagonist might communicate, albeit in a self-effacing manner, a sense of isolation, and the reader becomes a sympathetic audience. The text functions not only as a self-diagnosis of madness but as a (perhaps limited) means to mitigate depression. This follows the trend of many other autobiographical and semi-autobiographical comics from the underground genre such as the works of Harvey Pekar. Rather than submit to the doctor's power in the mental hospital, creating art is presented as a means to address the symptoms of madness within the individual's own terms and logic. Spiegelman, (alluding, perhaps, to the image of the artist drinking ink), describes art and therapy in the following (revolting) terms '[t]herapy is finding stuff and vomiting it up [...] making art is like taking the chunks of vomit and eating them' (Spiegelman in Calahan and Kaspar, 2008, online). By turning his experiences into art, Artie uses the medium as a means to express and externalise those experiences and communicate them to an implied reader.

The central assertion of this section is that *Breakdowns* does not simply portray madness through its form. The performance of logic in an overtly mad context serves as a means to resist medical authority. Spiegelman further suggests that self-treatment through art may present a (perhaps limited) alternative to doctor-led therapy. The following section will consider the means by which Spiegelman seeks to resist reason and explore questions of madness on its own terms, namely through certain literary forms and language.

## 2.6 On the Precipice: Drawing Madness

*The madman speaks from the abyss in a broken language – In Some Boxes from the Salvation Army Spiegelman presents panels in a broken order – Type 6 transitions prompt readers to draw a symbolic connection between disparate panels – In Portrait Spiegelman declines to separate the narrated madman from the rational narrator and, instead, renders the two on a continuum*

According to the alternate understanding of madness proposed by Foucault and explored by Derrida, *Spiegelman Moves to N.Y. "Feels Depressed"* might be approached not as a wholly mad text because it utilises, in part, the structure and language of reason. An analogy might be drawn to the figure of the Fool in the Rider-Waite Tarot deck. This iconic figure teeters on the brink between madness and reason (symbolised by the Sun); close enough to madness to look into the abyss without descending into its darkness completely. Such a figure might use the rhetorical tools and analytical methodology of reason (albeit with an unreasonable premise) without entering into the void of unintelligibility. In an alternate philosophy of insanity, madness is not that which exists on the edge of the abyss but that inarticulate wail which issues from within. The purpose of this section is to explore the use of wholly mad registers in Spiegelman's work. The case shall be made that Spiegelman's

resistance to the doctor's logic includes attempts to explore madness through means which are utterly alien to rational forms.

This image can be found on [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

**Fig. 19** *The Fool in the Rider-Waite Tarot deck stands on a precipice; the point where reason breaks down into madness.*

Many texts in *Breakdowns* utilise a conspicuously broken order and syntax.

Spiegelman's afterword to *Breakdowns* includes an excerpt from an incomplete text entitled *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army* (Spiegelman 2001, 71-72). He describes the project in the following terms:

Jealous (sic) of my independent filmmaker pals who could shoot footage and edit it after, I wanted to do the same in comics. I reasoned that I could shuffle panels and sequences around after drawing them so long as I used same-size panels on a grid. I could interweave memories, story fragments and ideas in different styles to mimic the non-chronological way the mind works (Spiegelman 2008, 71).

Notably, Spiegelman does not speak of 'the non-chronological way *my* mind works.' He is not communicating one individual's thought processes, but rather exploring a non-linear system which underlies memory and the creative process unencumbered by mechanical adherence to form; it is not Spiegelman who is irrational, but human beings as a whole. *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army* contains a small minority of type 2 or 3 transitions. One panel, for example, shows, in a type 2 transition, a man strapped to a bed demanding '[s]end my girlfriend in here!... Send my mother in here!' The next panel is a closer shot further along the picture plane. Artie calls 'Send a woman in here!' (Spiegelman 2001, 72). The remainder of the work is a series of almost entirely unrelated (type 6) panel transitions. The majority of panels have no obvious temporal or physical connection to one another. One such transition first shows an ambulance in traffic with the caption 'an ambulance rushed me to the hospital'

followed by a panel in which a dog wearing glasses holds a smaller dog. He addresses a group of clothed dogs ‘dog?’ Another, clothed, dog replies ‘No’ (Spiegelman 2001, 72). Some images recur between panels, such as ‘the dwarf’, the mental hospital and dogs, but panel transitions (in terms of subject, chronology, and in artistic style) seem to lack any coherent order. Spiegelman drew a similar strip for *RAW* magazine titled *Drawn Over Two Weeks Whilst on the Phone*. Hatfield describes the images as ‘a series of disconnected panels with recurrent character types and situations but no narrative per se [...] the sought-for unity of the piece, finally, rests on the reader’s recognition of the author’s formal playfulness rather than on any coherent narrative. It takes much knowledge and careful attention to read Spiegelman’s series as a sequence’ (Hatfield 2009, 137). Both texts thus satisfy Derrida’s description of a mad language which abandons rational forms (see section 1.7). The forms become meaningful only through the reader’s own mental leaps, the assumptions made on the author’s behalf, or rather, the structure which the reader brings to the text.

The problem of such a text ceases to be that of giving a voice to madness, but instead becomes to whom can such a discourse possibly be addressed? Can anything be meaningfully distilled from such a text? McCloud offers a potential answer when he suggests that type 6 transitions may not be truly possible:

No matter how dissimilar one image may be to another, there is a kind of [...] alchemy at work in the space between panels which can help us find meaning or resonance in even the most jarring of combinations. Such transitions may not make “sense” in any traditional way, but still a relationship of some sort will inevitably develop. [...] By creating a sequence with two or more images, we are endowing them with a single [...] overriding identity, and forcing the viewer to consider them as a whole (McCloud, 1994, 73).

If a series of panels were truly unrelated they would be non-sequential and non-juxtaposed, making them, by McCloud's definition, cartoons and, thus, not a comic. As established in section 1.3, the act of reading comics requires visual literacy: a logical leap on the part of a reader in constructing a narrative from a series of images. To resist endowing a series of thematically unconnected images with narrative would require the deliberate practice of antilogic. As Nassim Nicholas Taleb suggests: 'counter to what everyone believes *not theorizing* is an act [...] theorizing can correspond to the absence of willed activity, the default option' (Taleb 2007, 64). The act of reading the apparently nonsensical sequence of images in *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army* is an initially confusing process. The rules of visual literacy are not obeyed and, as such, the contract between author and reader (which rests upon a Baconian assumption that order always exists if only it can be uncovered) threatens to break down. The fact that one is required to connect the content of apparently unconnected panels does not render *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army* completely unreadable. Once the reader abandons pursuit of a narratively and chronologically coherent meaning from the texts, a symbolic and affective meaning emerges, one which articulates distress and confusion in a manner outside of conventional rational narrative and linguistic structures. To explicitly tie this point to the red thread which runs through this thesis, in *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army*, Spiegelman rejects both the Boileau-esque aspiration to create a standardised artistic methodology and the Baconian pursuit of coherent meaning and, instead, gives form to the cacophonous silence produced in the margins of the rational world. The articulation of madness in *Breakdowns* can be further developed by an understanding of the question of the mad narrator, as shall now be considered.

A formative tension between narrator and protagonist can be detected in certain comics within *Breakdowns*. In *Portrait* for example, Artie experiences a ‘full-fledged anxiety attack’ when revisiting *Prisoner* (Spiegelman 2008, 5). Given that one cannot both act and write simultaneously, or, more precisely, experience an anxiety attack whilst relating the experience of that attack, there exists a disjunction between the narrated present and the experiences of the protagonist. The narrating rational voice identifies the manifestation of the attack as it occurs for the protagonist, thus enabling the distinction, in narratological terms, between ‘experiencing self’ and ‘narrating self.’ Elsewhere, however, this distinction between narrating and narrated selves breaks down. *Portrait* seems initially to serve as an introduction which might provide a context for the subsequent texts. The characteristics of an ‘introduction’, however, collapse as the narrator asks ‘[h]ow can I make a memoir? I can’t even remember what happened last week’ (Spiegelman 2008, 5). The narrator has no more authority than the mad protagonist he purports to describe. The madness of the narration is evident in the confused point of entry to the text. Rather than acting as a paratext to illuminate the rest of the volume, *Portrait* is itself chaotic, chronically introverted and broken-down (the volume closes with a much more direct afterword by Spiegelman which serves the function typically performed by an introduction). The narrative voice is never directly or conclusively identified. The introduction begins with a quote which is attributed to ‘art spiegelman (1948 –)’ separating the diegetic narrator and his extradiegetic author without identifying a single rational voice (Spiegelman 2008, 1). The blank ‘year of death’ alludes to the final page of *Maus* in which Spiegelman’s name is followed with ‘1978-1991’: the years which Spiegelman spent working on *Maus* (Spiegelman 2003, 296) ‘as if buried’ (Chute 2013, online). Derrida considers the name as that which continues of the individual



after death and thus entails an awareness of that death. '[T]he name begins during his life to get along without him speaking and bearing his death each time it is inscribed in a list, or a civil registry, or a signature' (Derrida quoted in Smith 1995, 72). By quoting himself within *Portrait* as if he is another, or as if he is dead, Spiegelman disrupts this mechanism of autobiography. The place for the year of death is left blank, as if with the expectation that it can be filled in later. Spiegelman thus locates himself as both the speaker, the author of the text, that which survives the author, and the ear which hears the author's name spoken.

In another series of panels in *Portrait*, the character of Ace Hole takes over the narration. Observing a young Artie from around a corner, Ace comments: '[h]e kept ducking from one memory to another trying to locate moments that shaped and misshaped him' (Spiegelman 2008, 10). Another comment is addressed, apparently, from the imagined reader to the author, demanding that he 'stop explaining, Spiegelman... And stop complaining! Just shut up and divert us, damn it!' (Spiegelman 2008, 19). Elsewhere in the text, not only does the voice who speaks communicate in a shifting register, it is similarly unclear who is being addressed in the commentary boxes. Initially a reader might presume that they are being addressed until a later box begins 'Dear Diary' (Spiegelman 2008, 4). The act of both experiencing and narrating highlights the apparent irony of autobiography in comics where, as Hatfield asserts, frankness is a 'matter of both subjective vision and graphic artifice, a shotgun wedding of the untrustworthy and the unreal' (Hatfield 2005, 118). All autobiography (including but by no means limited to those in comics) separates the narrating from the narrated self and, as such, requires a degree of performance (for other critical work on autobiography in comics see Hatfield (2005), Bart Beaty (2009), and Michael Chaney ed.

(2011)). Spiegelman renders this contradiction visually by drawing Artie in various guises throughout the comics. This slippery self-definition of the artist speaks at once to the impossibility of absolutely objective self-depiction and to the unstable psyche which appears to wheel uncontrollably from one emotional state to the next. It employs a mad narrative format, therefore, in order to articulate madness from within.

In addition to the constantly changing voice who speaks, *Portrait* leaps temporally between Artie's childhood, the 1970s when the individual texts were being written, and the time of writing *Portrait* (the then-present in 2005) which, itself, is diegetic. These temporal locations bleed into one another. Recurring imagery, such as Artie being held by his mother's hand, connects each timeframe. The three panels at the top of page 5 jump between all three time periods in rapid succession: they juxtapose a photo of a young Spiegelman with his mother; Artie in 2005 wailing with grief having recalled that memory; and the prisoner from *Prisoner from the Hell Planet* returned to the state of anguish he experienced at the time of his mother's death. This conjunction deftly crystalises the thematics and affective core of the text.

This image can be found on page 5 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 20** *Portrait shows a series of Arties in different time periods.*

The 'bleeding' of time periods through a series of type 4 transitions suggests that there is no 'Artie the child', 'Artie the prisoner' or 'Artie the adult' protagonist to provide a retrospective commentary. Each narrated self is essentially inseparable from the others.

Similarly, in later sequences, the narrative voice runs into the speech bubble of characters to blur the boundaries between protagonist and narrator. The text shows a series of Arties, like

an individual who suffers from multiple personality disorder, with no single identifiable present from which the narrative voice might describe these past selves. Rather than emerging from a narrative of unreason to one of reason, charting a linear path of mad character to sane narrator (and, as such, from sickness to health), the text circles anxiously around a montage of mad moments. A neat binary separation of narrator from protagonist fails to fully recognise the narrative dynamics at work in *Breakdowns* where the distinction between narrator and protagonist persistently breaks down.

This section has detailed the use of mad panel layouts in *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army* and the use of an unhealed mad narrator in *Portrait*. These forms, concurrent with the recurring tone of psychological anguish, anti-psychological rhetoric, and the role of art in self-treatment detailed above, coalesce in a graphic anti-meditation on madness in its own terms, divorced from the Enlightenment-era expectation of, and aspiration to create, coherence. The fundamental assertion of this section is that some of the comics in *Breakdowns* resist the doctor's logic by refusing to engage in familiar literary structures – specifically those which involve chronology and a distinction between the one who writes, the one who narrates, and the one who acts. The texts in *Breakdowns* can thus be understood on a scale which begins with largely intelligible comics at one end and, by way of a series of progressively inarticulate breakdowns, to comics which defy rational engagement. The following section will offer further exploration of the use of mad language. In order to do so we shall first return to the question of the relationship between the marginalised subject and hegemonic power (characterised, thus far, by the relationship between the madman and the doctor) in conjunction with the relationship between underground comics and the anti-comics

movement. In service of this analysis, the following section shall employ not only Derrida's theory of mad language, but also Bakhtin's concept of the Carnival.

## 2.7 Playing the Fool: Underground Comics and the Carnival

*Spiegelman parodies those who seek to classify comics as a 'low' medium – Underground comics, and Breakdowns specifically, contain elements of the Carnavalesque – In Breakdowns Spiegelman speaks truth to power by ridiculing CCA-era anti-comics rhetoric – In The Malpractice Suite Spiegelman exposes the madness of the everyday*

This image can be found on Wikipedia.org

**Fig. 21** *The Fool in the Visconti-Sforza Tarot deck wears rags and a crown of feathers as a parody of a monarch.*

As we have seen thus far, in *Breakdowns* Spiegelman uses (auto)citation to dramatise extreme psychological experience. In other texts throughout the volume the madman resists the power of the doctor because he does not use the doctor's language, either because he is incapable or unwilling. To this point the analysis has first asked how the marginalised subject (the patient) might parody or otherwise resist the rhetoric of the agent of reason (the doctor), and, second, how he might speak with his own voice. The argument that follows will focus more decisively on how, through *Breakdowns*, Spiegelman speaks back to power. To understand the potentially revolutionary work in *Breakdowns*, one must view the volume within the context of the underground comics movement as detailed in section 2.1 of this chapter. The texts of *Breakdowns* (*Portrait* aside) were written at a time when comics were regarded by many as at least artistically unrefined and possibly even malevolent (see section 2.1). Spiegelman is clearly aware of discourses which sought to classify comics as a 'low' and socially reprehensible medium and in his role as Fool, seeks to challenge this hegemonic devalorisation and demonisation.

In his reading of *Breakdowns*, Young contends that Spiegelman quotes 'mercilessly and mockingly from mainstream comics like *Rex Morgan. M.D.*, and *Dick Tracy*, even while paying reverently parodic homage to comic's pioneers like Winsor McKay' (Young 2000, 19). Whilst it is unclear why Young considers the references to *Dick Tracy* to be 'mocking' whilst references to McKay's work are a 'homage' (in his essay 'Comix: An Idiosyncratic Historical and Aesthetic Overview' Spiegelman praises Chester Gould and Winsor McKay with equal enthusiasm (Spiegelman 1999, 74-81)), he authoritatively identifies some of the references to the history of the medium (to which we can add a stylistic homage to Harvey Kurtzman) which appear in the text. The explicit references to the comic book creators who developed the formal language of the medium serve to historicise the formal experimentation which Spiegelman undertakes. Spiegelman not only breaks down the tools of the comic book medium but also provides a visual archaeology of those tools – he may be suspicious of the capacity of art-by-rote to reflect the full range of human experience, but he nonetheless acknowledges the work of those creators who developed the comic book form.

The range of quotations in *Breakdowns* does not end with the comic book: in addition to those listed in section 2.2, Spiegelman also alludes to Pablo Picasso, Walt Disney, and iconic Holocaust photography in a dizzying collage of references. Spiegelman does not necessarily propose, as is the case with many postmodern artists, that a distinction between 'high' and 'low' art is unnecessary, rather, he posits that certain comics should be granted the status of 'high' art. By simultaneously referencing key figures from the history of comics alongside other media and modernist icons, Spiegelman seeks to elevate Gould and McKay to the same status as other celebrated artists. The celebration of certain figures within the

American comic book tradition represents a further struggle between the marginalised individual and the agent of reason who seeks to diagnose him, or, more specifically, his medium as puerile and dangerous.

A further means by which Spiegelman seeks to occupy and subvert the voice of reason can be found in his parody of the anti-comics movement. It is no coincidence that the main champions of this crusade against the comic book medium, such as Wertham, were also doctors and academics, or more broadly, agents of reason who spoke with the authority of the academy. Many early underground comic book creators sought to embrace their Wild status (ie. as demonised figures who serve as a negative example for 'rational' society) and to draw the very horrors they were accused of encouraging. Tropes of the early underground which appear in *Breakdowns* include recurring grotesque imagery involving sex and violence. In his early career Spiegelman experimented with drawing Carnavalesque 'exercises in taboo' but such experiments were already beginning to decline in *Breakdowns* (Spiegelman 2008, 69). The pornographic images which appear in *Little Signs of Passion* (alongside the sexual puns 'Hand Job' and 'Ace Hole') can be understood as a badge of identity for the genre.

The later underground comic book movement, and *Breakdowns* specifically, indulged in fewer Wild exercises in taboo but, instead, sought to use the tools of the Carnival to attack the rhetoric of hegemonic power concerning the automatic classification of comics as 'low' art. By mocking the anti-comics movement, and ennobling marginalised figures such as Gould, Spiegelman enacts a Carnavalesque inversion of power. Play with distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art was not only characteristic of the postmodern art and literary

movements, but of late underground comics specifically. Further examples of Spiegelman's Carnavalesque mockery of the CCA can be found in *Ace Hole* where, in a *reductio ad absurdum*, the killing of Potato-Head is replaced by an image from Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) alongside a quote from the CCA and its badge of approval. The panel points out the disparity of attitudes toward violence in different media. The substitution of a low art image of violence for a high art equivalent points to the hypocrisy of a Code which declares art 'offensive' or 'great' based solely upon its medium of delivery.

The exploration of transgression, the Carnival and a commentary on the social perception of comics is further explored in *The Malpractice Suite*. This text is a collage constructed using a series of panels from a romance comic. These images are repeated and repositioned. Around the borrowed images Spiegelman has filled the empty space with his own drawings. The text employs, once more, a broken language and incoherent narrative.

This image can be found on page 55 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 22** The Malpractice Suite *parodies* Wertham's demonization of the comic book medium.

By repositioning the borrowed images in each panel and filling the gaps normally rendered invisible by panel borders, Spiegelman has altered the relationships between those images. The drawings which fill the gaps are ridiculous and bizarre, rendering characters with Carnavalesque bodies, for example, naked from the waist down, wearing paper hats and with disproportionately-sized limbs. Within this mad (in Derrida's sense of an inarticulate language) form is a dissident message. Each panel is a work of comedic amplification which makes explicit a subversive undercurrent between the panels of apparently 'innocent' comics.

*The Malpractice Suite* can be read as a satirical comment on the practices enforced by the CCA which restricted, amongst other things, sexual content from comics and targeted specific genres such as the romance. *The Malpractice Suite* parodies Dr. Wertham's fears, expressed in *Seduction of the Innocent* that just beneath the surface, or just beyond the panel borders of every romance comic is a barely repressed undercurrent of sexual perversion.

*The Malpractice Suite* suggests and in a Carnavalesque manner exposes madness as not so much an aberration as an ever-present threat which emerges in the margins (or, in this case, the gutters) as a byproduct of reason. The text parodies Wertham's contention by taking his argument to its extreme conclusion, and yet Spiegelman does not necessarily contradict the central thesis of *Seduction of the Innocent*. In the spirit of the early underground, he brought madness to the surface. The Carnavalesque creatures who populate *The Malpractice Suite* speak in a language which resembles that of reason, but the questions do not correspond with the answers and images do not flow sequentially. Unlike the protagonists who appear elsewhere in the volume, they appear to be oblivious to the madness which surrounds them. To summarise, by parodying the rhetoric and language of CCA-era anti-comics hysteria, Spiegelman shows it to be irrational and by offering a hyperbolic performance of the madness which Wertham ascribed to the comic book Spiegelman extends that madness to envelop the entirety of reason. The madness, which is found in the very structure of the asylum, is not only repeated in the relationship between comic book artists and the academy, it is repeated throughout the everyday.



As detailed in section 1.6 above, as *Breakdowns* was being created philosophical and literary writers were examining the ways in which rational society might be diagnosed as insane. This section has sought to demonstrate that Spiegelman's work, in a manner typical of both the early and late underground, belongs alongside this emergent cultural critique. The remainder of this chapter will develop this argument by showing that the Holocaust is a key theme in *Breakdowns* and that the volume centers on the Shoah as a paradigm of collective unreason. Spiegelman demonstrates that in relation to the Shoah, reason and madness cannot be separated into a neat binary opposition and that, in fact, madness is effectively produced by reason. Just as the formal elements of the texts break down into unintelligibility as structural elements are removed, Spiegelman demonstrates that rational society, through rational means, can also break down into madness. The exposure of the madness contained by the rational world is the second viscerally destructive 'zap' of *Breakdowns*.

## 2.8 Surviving the Survivors

*In Prisoner Spiegelman engages with themes of guilt and melancholia – Artie's shame extends to society as a whole – Artie is imprisoned for his failure to be healed of madness – As a second-generation survivor Artie, alone, appears awake to the insane implications of Auschwitz*

*Prisoner* is a black and white comic detailing the immediate aftermath of Artie's mother's suicide. It is the first in a series of texts analysed here which directly examine the second-generation survivor's relationship to the Shoah, and the extent to which the shame and insanity of the Shoah extends to society as a whole. As mentioned in section 1.1 above, it has been the tendency of earlier Spiegelman scholars to understand the engagement with questions that concern the second-generation Holocaust survivor as explored in *Prisoner* through the conceptual lens of 'postmemory.' Whilst some of the work of these writers will

inform the reading that follows, the subsequent analysis will continue to employ a theoretical apparatus drawn from Foucault's work on madness. The following argument shall begin with a close reading of the ways in which Spiegelman makes the madness of the Shoah palpable in *Prisoner*, specifically in terms of melancholia and shame. The argument shall then be made that this shame extends beyond Artie's subjective sense of complicity with his mother's suicide and includes a shame and horror which should be felt by all of us who live after Auschwitz. Artie's failure to be healed is symptomatic of a cultural refusal to be ethically implicated in the Holocaust. Artie is thus cast as the single individual within the comic who is awake to the madness of society after Auschwitz.

*Prisoner* is doubly profane in that it both unflinchingly exposes the shame, guilt and anger of the one who has suffered a loss through suicide, and it examines the details of a Jew's death. Wiesel asserts that '[i]n the Jewish tradition, death is a private, intimate matter, and we are forbidden to transform it into a spectacle' (Wiesel 1989, online). The text is also Iconoclastic both in McCloud's sense that the artist seeks to represent a subjective emotional truth, and in the sense that it defies religious tradition. Throughout *Prisoner* the background and characters' faces visibly warp to reflect the emotional content. The text thus bears out one of Foucault's key metaphors for madness as 'the mirror which, without reflecting anything real, will secretly offer the man who observes himself in it the dream of his own presumption' (Foucault 2001, 23). The visual component of the text is focalised through the protagonist's subjective vision. The walls of the doctor's office, for example, lean in claustrophobically as the doctor delivers the news of the death (Spiegelman 2008, 33). This motif returns as Artie flees the funeral home (Spiegelman 2008, 34). In one panel a dejected

Artie sits in the lower corner whilst images of his mother's corpse, dead bodies, Shoah iconography, and the words 'menopausal depression, Hitler did it! Mommy! Bitch' float in the background (Spiegelman 2008, 35). The psychological distress experienced by this Artie is not the hysterical trauma which another Artie experiences in *No Towers*, but a profound melancholia, or 'madness at the limits of its powerlessness' (Foucault 2001, 115).

Melancholia, unlike other categories of mental illness, is chiefly characterised by 'immobility and silence' and is made manifest in Artie's body language (Foucault 2001, 118). The Artie of *Prisoner* is never found in dynamic poses, instead he remains in the same position as the background changes. He appears to be on the brink of melting into the floor.

This image can be found on page 32 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 23** Prisoner on the Hell Planet *manifests melancholia and depression using an expressionist and symbolic visual language*

Elsbeth Probyn, in her essay on shame, writing and affect, contends that 'shame is a painful thing to write about' (Probyn 2010, 72). Shame is not just a mental condition. It effects the body. Artie matches the physical description of the melancholic given by Robert James in *Dictionnaire universel de medicine*: 'their eyes are dry, hollow [...] their faces dark, and expressing only horror and sadness' (James in Foucault 2001, 119). The construction of this comic coincided with Spiegelman's interest in expressionism and in one panel the crowd of faces staring at Artie resemble Munch's iconic *The Scream* (1893) (Spiegelman 2008, 33).

Foucault describes the madman's vision in the following terms:

To say that madness is dazzlement is to say that the madman sees the daylight, the same daylight as the man of reason (both live in the same brightness); but seeing this same daylight, and nothing but this daylight and nothing in it, he sees it as void, as night, as nothing; for him the shadows are the way to perceive daylight. Which means that, seeing the night and the nothingness of the night, he does not see at all (Foucault 2001, 102)

The madman sees the same objects as the man of reason but derives from them an entirely different meaning (or absence of meaning). Foucault's conceit is played out literally in Spiegelman's text. Events which would normally happen by day such as Artie emerging onto a busy street from the train station, or the funeral, often take place at night. Characters' faces are picked out by chiaroscuro heavy shadow. Further images from the scene are distorted by Artie's subjective vision. Faces become darkened and he imagines, in his paranoia, that they are whispering about him. The internal world expressionistically warps the external environment and the protagonist cannot distinguish between the two.

Whilst Artie's shame appears subjective, one might argue that he is, in fact, attuned to a shame which ought to belong to society as a whole. Probyn argues that '[s]hame is subjective in the strong sense of bringing into being an entity or an idea through the specific explosion of mind, body, place, and history' (Probyn 2010, 81). The debilitating shame of *Prisoner* is that of an individual who feels complicit in his mother's suicide. It is also the shame 'inherent to us as human beings' after Auschwitz (Probyn 2010, 84). Probyn asks, if the shame and emotionally invested process of writing prompted Primo Levi to take his own life then 'surely we, the bystanders of history, are more fully implicated in their anguish and death' (Probyn 2010, 85). Artie's shame is that of one who knows, in a manner which thematically mirrors Segal's comment in *The Reverse Bug* (see section 1.6), that he should be horrified 'twenty-four hours a day' (Segal in Tabor 2011, online). The shame of all humans after Auschwitz is apparent for Artie because, as a second-generation survivor, his identity is intimately tied to the Shoah and to memories he can neither clearly remember nor entirely forget. The crucial observation made here of *Prisoner*, therefore, is that Artie's subjective

mad vision does not warp the truth, but that he alone within the text *sees the world as it is*.

There is no rational world into which he can awaken. Artie is not positioned on the brink of the abyss, but over it and with sufficient awareness to see the madness beneath all of our feet.

Throughout *Prisoner*, Artie appears in a striped prisoner outfit reminiscent of a concentration camp uniform. This image has drawn attention from many critics, most notably Hirsch and Huyssen. Huyssen contends that *Prisoner* explores ‘a kind of survivor guilt of the second degree, once removed from the original trauma of his parents. The memories of Auschwitz do not only claim Anja; they also envelop the son born years after the war’ (Huyssen 2000, 73). As a second generation survivor, Artie has been excluded from the defining event of his parent’s lives – an event which has become, in turn, the defining event of his own life. He was born, Weschler asserts ‘after the war was over, after everything was over, including the possibility of any sort of normal upbringing’ (Weschler 1988, 54). The recurring Shoah imagery in *Prisoner* reflects a sense of exclusion. Artie is both an inmate of the camps and outside of them. He was born to a Shoah survivor and has inherited the trauma of the camps. His parent’s experience in the camps defines his identity and yet he cannot access those experiences. He cannot separate himself from the meanings of Auschwitz and yet he cannot be fully present there either. This double bind recurs throughout the text. His mother is both a physical survivor of the camps and yet Hitler (long after his own suicide) has murdered her. She is both the victim of the Nazi concentration camps and responsible for Artie’s internment in a figurative prison. Artie’s declaration that his mother has ‘murdered’ him offers a further tortuous blurring of roles (Spiegelman 2008, 35). She gave Artie his life and yet she also takes his life (psychically and emotionally speaking).

Foucault argued that from the nineteenth century onwards madness and guilt, at least in the eyes of the doctor, became inextricably linked (Foucault 2001, 172). There is in the dominant culture's definition of madness an implicit moral failing and, as a logical extension, '[p]sychology, as a means of curing, is [...] organized around punishment' (Foucault 2001, 173). Madness is often responded to with social ostracism, exclusion from rational discourses, silence and confinement. Artie's madness confirms this practice. Just as the prisoner is stripped of his social rights, the madman is removed from society. Madmen and prisoners were housed together during the nineteenth century (Foucault 2001, 210). Both the prisoner and the madman are in a position where they are deprived of social power. Like many victims of the concentration camp, the imprisonment of the madman has included forced labour and being viewed as an animal (Foucault 2001, 47 and 69). *Prisoner*, accordingly, closes with Artie in a symbolic prison being punished for his mother's (and his own) madness. He is being punished, in effect, for his failure to adjust, or rather, his failure to undergo the healing process which transforms the babbling madman to the sane narrator. His failure to be healed is symptomatic of one who refuses, or is unable, to view the Holocaust as exceptional. Healing, for Artie, would involve rejecting the terrible implications of genocide.

The final words of the text come from another prisoner outside of the panel who tells him: 'pipe down, Mac! Some of us are trying to sleep!' (Spiegelman 2008, 35). In contrast to Artie, the second-generation survivor, the voice of the other prisoner represents, Alan Berger suggests 'the historical innocence of non-witnessing Americans (who are asleep)' (Berger 1995, 38). In an allegory Spiegelman returns to in *No Towers*, the other prisoner can remain

asleep in the illusory safety of those who subscribe to dogmatic rationality. The demand that Artie be quiet aligns sleep with the torment of insanity, thus inverting Foucault's analogy described above which equates sanity with awakening and madness with sleep (Foucault 2001, 175). Artie, the Fool, impotently declares a truth which only he can see. The final (and easily overlooked) page of the text, which does not feature in *Maus*, is completely black (Spiegelman 2008, 36). The attentive reader, here, can imagine Artie silently sitting in his cell in pitch blackness. In a stylistic device similar to the black-on-black cover Spiegelman created for the *New Yorker* after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, the black page represents the impossibility of expression: a canvass on which nothing *can* be painted. The blackness of silence is perpetually present in the comic: the black gutters, Bosmajian contends, suggest 'that the whole structure is superimposed on a black void' (Bosmajian 2003, 40). The comic thus offers no reassuring closure or hope of healing. There is no safe, rational world to which to return. Artie remains in his purgatorial prison of shame, guilt, abandonment and madness. In *Prisoner*, Artie's guilt is fourfold: he is able to enjoy the life his parents were never afforded; he is culpable in his mother's suicide; he is making public the details of her death; and, crucially, he carries the shame of every bystander of history after Auschwitz.

The key observations of this section are as follows: in *Prisoner* Spiegelman positions Artie as a madman who has emerged, unhealed from the asylum; he is unhealed because he is awake to his own symbolic complicity in the violence of Auschwitz; the form of the text reflects Artie's terrible awareness of the madness which emerges from rational society. The following section will further develop the analysis of the second generation survivor,

collective insanity and sleep through a reading of the three *Real Dream* comics of *Breakdowns*.

## 2.9 The Sleep of Reason

*In Breakdowns sleep serves as an attempt to escape emotional distress – In the second Real Dream comic sleep represents an attempt to avoid engagement with the Shoah – In Real Dream: Hand Job the madman awakens from sleep only to find himself in a world which is just as insane as his dream – In the final Real Dream episode considered here Spiegelman parodies the aspirations of rational rhetoric to contain and explain madness*

In *Prisoner*, Artie is an insomniac surrounded by those wrapt blissfully in amnesiac slumber. The opposition is a metaphor for his awareness of the shame of those living after Auschwitz. Artie's insomnia is not chronic, however, and elsewhere in *Breakdowns* he sleeps and dreams. Bosmajian proposes that sleep as a means to achieve silence is a recurring theme in Spiegelman's work: '[i]n *Funny Aimals* [the original *Maus*], in *Maus*, and in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet", the desire or need to go to sleep terminates communication' (Bosmajian 2003, 41). In this section the case shall be made that in Spiegelman's work sleep does not represent the end of communication, but rather serves either to provide brief and problematic denial or to continue emotional distress in another form. The dream-life of the second-generation survivor, in which sleep fails to provide complete or uncomplicated escape from the shame of those living after Auschwitz, is explored in the three *Real Dream* episodes of *Breakdowns*.

The opening panel of the first *Real Dream* comic alludes to Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes's etching *El Sueño de la Razón Produce Monstrous* (1797-1799). In Spiegelman's



adaptation, flying shoes replace the owls and bats of the original and the image is rendered in bright, camp, day-glo colourings.

Figure 24 can be found on page 37 of *Breakdowns*. Figure 25 can be found on [Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org)

**Fig. 24 and 25** *The first panel of Real Dream parodies El Sueño de la Razón Produce Monstrous.*

Foucault writes of the original painting as follows: ‘in that night, man communicates with what is deepest in himself, and with what is most solitary’ (Foucault 2001, 266). The oxymoronic title *Real Dream* given to this (and the other two *Real Dream* comics) suggests that the text might be based upon the author’s actual dreams. The title secondarily suggests a paradoxical breakdown of the epistemological boundaries between reality and the dream world. In the *Real Dream* episode in question, Artie enters a ‘homosexual shoestore’ with a girl. He tries to rent a room for eight hours, but instead rents eight rooms for an hour each. These rooms transpire to be bathroom stalls. The shoestore is then raided by the police. Artie avoids being beaten by presenting a copy of *Playboy* thus demonstrating that he is heterosexual whereupon the police lead him to safety.

The scene itself may reference a specific event in Los Angeles’ Black Cat Tavern when, in 1967, plain-clothed police physically assaulted several gay patrons, or, indeed, any one of the many instances of raids on homosexual establishments during the 1960s (see Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons 2006, 156). The image may also have been inspired by the front cover of the second issue of *Motor City Comics* (1970), an underground comic which showed police raiding a party.

Figure 26 can be found on page 37 of *Breakdowns*. Figure 27 can be found on [retronaut.com](http://retronaut.com)

**Fig. 26 and 27** Real Dream and the cover of Motor City Comics #2. Police raids were not an uncommon theme in underground comics.

Kartalopoulos reads the sexual politics of this Real Dream episode as follows: ‘Spiegelman has ironically depicted himself as a cultural "hero" who has appeased violent, male enforcers of the social order by pursuing women (and consuming pornography)’ (Kartalopoulos 2005, online). Alternatively, the reading below will propose that Spiegelman’s protagonist is not a ‘hero’ but instead a tragically flawed second-generation survivor who seeks to escape his terrible revelations concerning the Holocaust.

Here the concentration camp uniform worn in *Prisoner* is replaced by a red pyjama suit, but the Shoah connotations are, if anything, more pronounced. The falling shoes (a metaphor which reappears in *No Towers*) reference the iconic piles of shoes taken from dead prisoners. These shoes provided the inspiration for, amongst others, the Danube promenade memorial. Shoes signify the Shoah specifically for Spiegelman because his parents hid in a bunker beneath a shoe shop to evade capture in Poland and his father, Vladek Spiegelman, repaired shoes in Auschwitz. The shoes which fall in the comic are ornate. The most prominent is a man’s shoe with a high heel: a camp imagining of the kind of footwear a homosexual shoestore might sell. The shoe reference (as well as the dual meaning of ‘camp’) is significant not simply because it references the Shoah, but because it references the Shoah as it is understood by one who was not there. The piles of shoes collected by the Nazis from Jewish prisoners are a symbol which has far more relevance to those hearing the screams of the Shoah victims after the fact, as opposed to the violence, hunger and cold which characterises the memories of those who were there. The shoe also represents the anxious

panic of one, to use a metaphor from *No Towers*, waiting for the other shoe to drop, or rather, waiting for destruction to befall him. The dream acts then as a symbolic version of the childhood dreams and fantasies described by Artie in *Maus* of ‘S.S. men coming into my class and dragging all us Jewish kids away’ and of ‘zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water’ (Spiegelman 2003, 176). The bathroom stalls in this case offer a near equivalent to the showers (complete with instructions that demand cleanliness), and the S.S. men (the monsters which emerge, not from sleep but from history) are replaced by police with the astrological sign for male in place of the swastika. Like the cats in *Maus*, the police all look identical and membership or non-membership of a group is physically obvious.

The presence of gay men in the text alludes not only to another group who were subjected to systematic persecution by the Nazis, but to madness; homosexuality was considered a form of psychological illness in the United States until 1973. Spiegelman is clearly conscious of the homosexual-as-Jew analogy in relation to the Holocaust; he describes *Maus* as his act of ‘coming out of the closet as a Jew’ which of course borrows a euphemism from the gay community (Spiegelman 2011, 39). The homosexuals in the text are characterised by exaggerated features reminiscent of the Jew in Nazi propaganda rather than more restrained and realistic markers of the gay and transgender community of New York in the 1960s and 1970s. Spiegelman was familiar with the racist cartoon image of the Jew. ‘I remember looking at old cartooning books when I was a kid and learning that a Jew had a hooked line for a nose and large animated hands’ (Spiegelman 1999, 17).

Figure 28 can be found on [germanpropaganda.blogspot.co.uk](http://germanpropaganda.blogspot.co.uk). Figure 29 can be found on page 37 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 28 and 29** Der Sturmer *and* Real Dream. *The homosexual shoe store owner resembles the Jew in anti-Semitic cartoons.*

In *Maus*, Vladek wears a pig mask in order to pass as Polish. Artie, conversely, shows that he owns a copy of *Playboy* (a magazine from which Spiegelman received commissions), metaphorically pulling back the homosexual/mouse mask and saving himself. If, as in *Portrait*, the Shoah is a terrible ‘gift’ passed on from generation to generation, this text enacts this Artie’s desire to refuse that gift. As a second-generation survivor this act alleviates – albeit only through the fleeting escapism and comic implausibility of the dream world – the burden of having to understand what his parents lived through, of having to match their rite of passage in having survived, and of passing the terrible legacy to his own children. Spiegelman wrote that, growing up in the 1960s, ‘from what fairly little I knew of what had happened to my parents and their family, their friends and their world, all I could figure was that being Jewish wasn’t an especially good idea’ (Spiegelman 1999, 14). This *Real Dream* episode plays out Artie’s resistance to coming of age as a second-generation survivor. It thereby uses a form of engagement with the second-generation survivor experience which sits outside the theory of postmemory. It represents not the presence of the Shoah upon Artie’s life, but an unwillingness to be implicated in the shame and madness of the Nazi killing project.

Despite the weight of its subject matter, this *Real Dream* episode is essentially humorous. As mentioned in section 2.2 above, Ziv argues that the combination of dark humour with terrible circumstances is an ethnic marker of Jewish humour. Humour allows one to side-step that which is otherwise unspeakably terrible. The cultural function of such humour is summarised by Nietzsche: ‘[p]erhaps I know best why man alone laughs: he alone

suffers so deeply that he had to invent laughter' (Nietzsche 1968, 56). In this case, however, the escape from suffering is no more yielding than a dream; whilst the protagonist of the text can evade the S.S., avoid dealing with horror through dark humour, and be released from his family history, the dreamer cannot enjoy the delusionary sanctuary of sleep forever; he must, eventually, awaken to the nightmarish 'reality' we have seen in *Prisoner*.

This sense of wilful disconnection from one's ethnic identity is continued in another *Real Dream* episode, *Hand Job*, wherein sleep not only provides fleeting relief for the second-generation survivor, but translates the horror of the world after Auschwitz into another form. In this text, the tip of each of Artie's fingers have their own tiny upper body and personality. These individuated beings are obnoxious and act against the character's wishes. Artie goes for a walk in a 'rough Afro-American neighbourhood' (Spiegelman 2008, 37). When asked for a light by an African American man, he produces one of his middle fingers which shouts 'Jew!' angering those around him. Artie stares at his finger, which itself has a finger, which itself has a finger in an endless recursive cycle. In the final panel Artie awakens to discover he is a giant hand.

This *Real Dream: Hand Job* episode might be read as a displaced articulation of one Jewish man's anxiety about the Civil Rights movement and notions of membership to a racial group. Artie's finger, a manifestation of his own propensity for impropriety, directs a racial curse at an African-American man. He feels that he must censor himself with regards to race. This scene may be obliquely autobiographical; Spiegelman recalls, with regret, cursing an African-American orderly with the word 'nigger' during his stay in Binghamton's State

Mental Hospital (Spiegelman 1999, 20). Discussing the inception of *Maus*, Spiegelman told Lawrence Weschler that:

[I]n early animated cartoons, blacks and mice were often represented similarly. Early animated cartoon mice had “darkie” rhythms and body language [he refers here to ‘rubber hose animation’] and vice versa. So for a while I thought about doing an animal strip about the black experience in America – for about forty minutes. Because what did I know about the black experience in America? (Spiegelman in Witek 2007, 81).

The sense of being unable, or not permitted, to represent this history mirrors Spiegelman’s contention that it is not ‘possible to make [the Shoah] palatable or even understandable’ (Spiegelman in Witek 2007, 9). In both cases, Spiegelman encounters not only a lack of authority and an inability to articulate his perspective on the subjects of race and ethnicity, but also a fear that, if he does speak, he has no control over what he might say.

The publication of the original *Breakdowns* came less than ten years after the Civil Rights act of 1968. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg describes Jewish-American and African-American relations in the following terms:

[B]lack and Jews have historically had an identity of interest and experience which brought them together in the twentieth century [...] enhanced by Jew’s enduring commitment to social justice. This cooperation was marked by a shared recognition of bigotry and discrimination, and a shared liberal vision of the post-civil-rights-struggle world. The alliance, which produced dramatic victories in court, in state legislatures, in Congress, and in public opinion, collapsed in the late 1960s, felled by militant black nationalists who expelled white people, allied themselves with third-world anti-Zionism, and spouted anti-Semitic rhetoric (Greenberg 2006, 2).

Needless to say, Greenberg’s reading of this split is partisan. Conversely, one might cite the fact that The Nation of Islam (1991) contends that Jews financed the slave trade (although Saul Friedman (1999) for one disputes this claim). If we are to assume that Greenberg’s argument is representative of the experience of certain Jewish Americans, one might further

argue that under such circumstances Spiegelman's work can be understood in terms of a breakdown in what was, historically, a strong allegiance between Jewish and African-American groups. Spiegelman's Valentine's Day cover for the *New Yorker* (15 February 1993) showed an African woman kissing a Hasidic Jew. Rothberg contends that '[t]his "Valentine Card" succeeded only in enraging black and Jewish communities' thus demonstrating that the rift between the two cultures is still strongly-felt in some quarters (Rothberg 2003, 157). Spiegelman had first-hand experience of Jewish/African American collaboration, having worked as 'a hip black cartoonist ("Artie X")' on a Cuban exile paper sold in Harlem (Weschler 1988, 60). Artie, a Jew, is excluded from black nationalist movements such as the Black Panthers and Nation of Islam. As a member of the out-group, like the madman, anything he has to say is automatically void. Such a reading, however, is not straightforward. The racist outburst which Artie is trying to suppress is nonsensical given that the insult 'Jew' is directed at an African-American man. Spiegelman argues (paraphrasing a comment from Jean-Paul Sartre's essay *Anti-Semite and Jew*) that 'the people sent to their slaughter as Jews didn't necessarily identify themselves as/with Jews [...] a Jew is someone whom others call a Jew' (Spiegelman 1999, 15). The African-American man must bear the name 'Jew' because that is the name which Artie gives him. Adorno and Horkheimer separate 'Jew' as a word used to describe an individual in terms of their ethnic background or religious beliefs and 'Jew' as an ethnic slur. They contend that 'the mere word "Jew" appears like the bloody grimace whose image – skull and mangled cross in one – is unfurled on the swastika flag; the fact that someone is called a Jew acts as a provocation to set about him until he resembles that image' (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 153). Artie is not afraid of being excluded from the Civil Rights Movement, but of being *included* amongst

other Jews. He seeks to avoid being confronted by his own ethnic heritage by directing the curse outward even as the four fingers which do not point at the African-American man point back at Artie. Rather than a desire to have been in Auschwitz with his parents ‘so I could really know what they lived through’ this Artie, like the Artie described in the comic above, seeks to externalise and reject the shame of being human in the wake of Auschwitz (Spiegelman 2003, 176). In *A Real Dream: Hand Job*, each generation of fingers has received its terrible legacy and contains within it a capacity for profanity, anxiety and horror.

The lack of self-control in terms of artistic and verbal expression corresponds with the subtitle of the comic: ‘*Hand Job*.’ Onanism (masturbation) was linked to madness in Victorian psychology and, indeed, compulsive masturbation is still a recognised symptom and psychological disorder. The title further suggests a form of self-disparagement; Artie characterises his artistic output – his primary means to express his psychological and ethnic angst – as masturbatory. The sub-title thus suggests that not only is Artie engaging in self-censorship within the text, but that he compels the reader to dismiss the work itself, in a return to early underground profanity and self-disparagement, as a low discourse of little importance (see section 2.7). The character’s fingers, the instrument through which he pleasures himself and, as an artist, communicates, are beyond his control. In an affective condensation and symptomology familiar from *Prisoner*, in *Real Dream: Hand Job* madness is thus connected with debilitating shame, a shame which manifests directly in the body. In this case it is not the shame of a man who lives after Auschwitz, nor is it the shame of a man who has done something terrible, but the shame of a man who is afraid that he *might* do or



say something terrible. The madman does not simply hear voices. He must watch himself perpetually for fear that he might repeat what those voices tell him.

In the final panel the comic employs the formula of Winsor McKay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905-1914 and 1924-1926). In each episode the eponymous hero would typically encounter some kind of danger in a dream. In the final panel Nemo would awaken, often having fallen out of bed to be scolded by an angry adult. A twist Spiegelman adds to this imitation (repeated in *No Towers*) is an apparent awakening from danger only for the dreamer to find himself still imperilled. Awakening from the sleep of reason does not cause the monsters to dissipate. If, as Foucault argues, 'delirium is the dream of waking persons', the madman emerges from delirium into reason only to discover that his madness was, in fact, eminently reasonable (Foucault 2001, 175). In a re-enactment of Spiegelman's 'recovery' in the mental hospital, the conditions for release are met whilst the symptoms remain. As with all of the texts described above (and, indeed, the entirety of Spiegelman's canon) Auschwitz has removed any possibility of escape from madness.

Spiegelman's work may invite dream analysis but the author remains sceptical of any conclusions which might be drawn. The third *Real Dream* episode concludes with 'Doctor Shpiegelmann's (sic) Dream Interpretation' which renders the dream in terms of Shoah imagery and specifically the occupation of Poland (as Peter Gay (2006) contends Freud himself fled Vienna in 1938 as a result of escalating anti-Semitism) (Spiegelman 2008, 54). The dream interpretation presents a series of tenuous connections described as 'obvious' (ibid) that cumulatively ridicule the Freudian aspiration to create a science of the mind (founded,

once more, upon a Baconian assumption that the world can be comprehensively measured and understood). Freud famously used his form of dream analysis as a means of diagnosis. He presented his theory and method of analysis in his seminal work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (German edition 1899, English 1913). Spiegelman is resistant to the method-driven and ostensibly rational conclusions produced by such a method as the Shoah negates the possibility of rational discourse and potential for healing. The final line ‘we must never forget the 6 million’ can thus be understood as a pastiche of an uncomplicated and sentimental response to the Shoah (Spiegelman 2008, 54). In a deliberately transgressive volume where the protagonist both wears the uniform of the Nazi concentration camps and uses the word ‘Jew’ as a curse, the statement that ‘we must never forget’ appears incongruously platitudinous and woefully inadequate alongside those screams which threaten to shake the foundations of rational society. To an individual for whom the Shoah served as a constant and terrible presence in his childhood, the suggestion that it should not be forgotten (and, as such, to imply that it *could be* forgotten) is beyond contemplation. Rather than taking the position of the rational narrator in relation to the mad protagonist, the ‘analysis’ parodies such a discourse, offering it as no more rational than the madness it pretends to explain. The parody of dream analysis ironically attempts to ‘explain’ the events of the Shoah. Crucially, the Arties of the *Real Dream* episodes seek to awaken from the madness which they see in the world after Auschwitz. Their attempts to do so are fruitless, however, as is the Freudian dream analysis which seeks to explain and rationalise the madness they observe. Each of these comics therefore attest to the assertion made in the previous section, that society itself (inclusive of doctors, academics and other agents of reason) produces madness and that Artie,

the second-generation survivor, despite occasional respite through sleep, finds himself deliriously awake to this madness.

## **2.10 In That Sleep of Death What Dreams May Come**

In this chapter it has been argued that *Breakdowns* employs (auto)citation and formal play to simultaneously experiment with the comic book medium whilst exploring the psychology and politics of madness. Throughout the text Spiegelman demonstrates the failure of a formulaic approach to the creation of art and implicitly ridicules Boileau and Woodford's attempts to prescribe a system to reflect human experience. His rejection of such a system extends to an overarching criticism of the Enlightenment-era aspiration to create the means by which the world might be wholly and rationally understood. Spiegelman's depiction of madness is characterised by clashes between the marginalised subject and the agent of reason, be it the doctor and the patient or the underground comic book creator and the anti-comics movement. Spiegelman proposes several means by which the marginalised subject might resist the authority of the agent of reason. In *Cracking Jokes* the patient resists the doctor's authority by reproducing his logic; in *Spiegelman Moves to N.Y. "Feels Depressed"* Spiegelman proposes that art might be a means toward self-treatment beyond the doctor's authority; in *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army* and *Portrait* he utilises a mad language and narrative form which refuses rational and familiarizing models of literary and artistic expression; and in *Ace Hole* and *The Malpractice Suite* he offers a Carnavalesque parody of the rhetoric of the anti-comics movement which coincides with Spiegelman's elevation of certain figures from the history of American comics.

In *The Malpractice Suite* the mad logic of the anti-comics movement extends to an exploration of endemic madness. The epicentre of this insane epidemic is the Holocaust and this is entered in the comic *Prisoner* as well as the three *Real Dream* episodes. In *Prisoner*, Artie alone is awake to the madness, shame, and terrible implications of the Holocaust because he is a second-generation Holocaust survivor. The three *Real Dream* episodes thus represent an attempt to go back to sleep. In the first of the three *Real Dream* comics analysed above Artie successfully fends off the need to engage with the horror of the Shoah by dreaming that he is not a second-generation survivor. In *Real Dream: Hand Job* he dreams of directing accusations of Jewishness toward an African American man and yet this time he awakens from the dream to find himself in an equally mad world. In the final *Real Dream* episode considered above Spiegelman challenges the aspirations of rational discourse to explain the Holocaust.

The relationship between madness and rationality in light of the Holocaust is, as shall be argued in the following chapter, a key theme in Spiegelman's most celebrated work, *Maus*. In *Maus*, the case will be made, Spiegelman issues a further challenge to Enlightenment rationality by demonstrating the failure of formal analytical and traditional literary modes to represent the Holocaust. He does so not through a mad language or the figure of the Fool, but through an artful and strategic oscillation between familiarizing and defamiliarizing techniques.

### 3. Historiography and Survival in *Maus*

We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative (Paul Ricoeur 1990, 75).

What is being portrayed is, specifically *his* [Vladek's] story, based on *his* memories. This kind of memory is fraught with dangers. My father could only remember/understand a *part* of what he lived through. He could only tell a *part* of that. I, in turn, could only understand a part of what he was able to tell, and could only communicate a part of that (from the Israeli edition of *Maus*, quoted in Spiegelman 2011, 154-155).

The central argument of this chapter is that Spiegelman, in *Maus*, seeks to create a text about the Shoah in such a way as to preserve and communicate the underlying madness of this seismic historical event and to insist upon its ongoing relevance. In *Maus*, Spiegelman forgoes the 'zap' of shocking and mad content in favour of more subtle processes of alternate reassurance and alienation. As shall be argued below, the madness found in *Maus* does not exist in binary opposition to rationality but within rational forms. *Maus* oscillates between articulation and silence, reason and unreason. Spiegelman utilises a combination of familiarizing strategies which threaten to mitigate and resolve some of the horror of the Holocaust whilst simultaneously undercutting and problematizing those strategies. *Maus* invites the reader to enter Auschwitz whilst simultaneously barring entry. It thereby insists upon the untenability of Enlightenment rationality after Auschwitz and the capacity of reason to facilitate and even support madness.

As shall be argued in detail below, the process of defamiliarization includes ironic references to Walt Disney, the self-destruction of the funny animal genre, overt references to Holocaust iconography, and jarring changes in artistic approach between narrative layers.

Spiegelman also dramatizes the opposition between empirical and traumatic truth (reason and madness) through the struggle between Vladek and Artie. Within this struggle he demonstrates that neither Artie's insistence upon rational models nor Vladek's attempts at self-healing are sufficient to contain the terrible implications of their subject. Indeed, neither Artie's visuals nor Vladek's verbal testimony are either wholly mad or wholly rational. *Maus*, instead, presents a traumatised (and thus mad) narrator who attempts to create a rational narrative structure, and yet this structure does not provide the therapeutic effect he seeks. It also includes a rational historiographer and witness who ultimately seeks to expose the inability of his form to explain or fully realise his subject. To begin this argument in detail, the following section shall set the stage by addressing the critical reception of *Maus* and the problematic elevation of Spiegelman from the underground into 'high' culture.

### **3.1 The Day Spiegelman Sold Out**

*The critical success of Maus raises questions concerning Spiegelman's ability to maintain the counter-cultural status visible in Breakdowns – Maus has been celebrated by the majority of Spiegelman's peers – Trondheim sees in Maus a tragic recognition of the low regard with which comics have traditionally been held*

*Maus* was written between 1980 and 1991 and serialised in *RAW*. The taxing nature of the project was tempered somewhat by serialisation, allowing Spiegelman to generate a readership and see the response to his work (including a Guggenheim fellowship) even as he produced it. The comic is closely based on transcripts of interviews between Spiegelman and his father, Vladek Spiegelman, a Shoah survivor. In *Maus*, infamously, the Jewish characters are drawn as mice, the Germans as cats and the Americans as dogs. *Maus* was later published in two volumes (in 1986 and 1991). Many of the pages were redrawn or retouched between

their publication in *RAW* and the publication of the collected *Maus I* (for details, see Kartalopoulos 2005, online). A CD-ROM version was released in 1994 and a collected edition followed in 1996 (references in this thesis are to the 2003 reprint of this version). *Maus* was digitized once more in 2011, this time onto DVD. The DVD version was included with the book *Metamaus* (2011) (a somewhat ironic title given that *Maus* itself is, in part, a metacomic – that is, a comic which takes the making of comics as one of its subjects), a collection of interviews and supplementary material. *Maus* has been translated into many languages including French, German, Polish, Japanese and Hebrew.

*Maus* is the single most recognised work to have emerged from the underground comic scene. It has been celebrated through exhibitions, awards, and acclaim from arbiters of culture outside of the world of comics. Two exhibitions were built around *Maus*, both in New York: one at Galerie St. Etienne, NY and the other at the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibitions featured earlier drafts of each panel from *Maus* as well as recordings of Vladek Spiegelman's testimony. *Maus* earned Spiegelman the Pulitzer prize in 1992 as well as the *Present Tense*/Joel H. Caviar Book Award for Fiction (1987); Foreign Comic Award at the Angoulême International Comics Festival Awards (1988 and 1993); The Foreign Album award at the Urhunden Prize (1988 and 1993; Special Prize Max & Moritz Prizes (1990)); the Eisner Award for Best Graphic Novel (1992); The Harvey Award for Best Graphic Album of Previously Published Work (1992); and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Fiction (1992). *Metamaus* also won the Eisner award for Best Comics-related Book (2012).

Unlike his contemporary comic book success stories (for example, Alan Moore and Frank Miller), Spiegelman's work had a transformative impact beyond his peers and existing

comic book readers. Mandaville argues that '[m]any reading *Maus* have been, and likely will continue to be, those who do not as a matter of course read comics (anymore)' (Mandaville 2009, 224). Mandaville refers here to general readership; for those readers unfamiliar with the medium, a comic book which skilfully deals with adult themes was practically without precedent. *Maus* was not the first comic to transcend simple comedy and escapist fantasy, but at the time of its publication for many it may have seemed that way. In 1991 Rebecca Zurier reflected on the limited frame of reference of the majority of critics in regard to comics when she wrote that '[t]he subtle profundities achieved in *Maus* seem worlds apart from the modern funny pages' (Zurier 1991, 103). Despite the success of *Maus* very few other comics were championed by the critics during the late 1980s and 1990s. The work of artists writing for *RAW* and other underground/alternative comics were available at the time, as were the works of Will Eisner and earlier comic book artists championed in *Breakdowns* such as Winsor McCay and Chester Gould, but for many years Spiegelman seemed to be the only comic book artist who was afforded any artistic credibility.

Hirsch argues that *Maus* had a similar impact upon academic scholarship as it did on a general readership: 'people writing about *Maus* who, like me, come from literature, have mostly gone outside comics to find ways to analyse those qualities [which are unique to the medium]. But there are a few articles by people who come out of a comics background' (Hirsch in Kuhlman 2005, online). Hoberman proposes that 'Spiegelman taught intellectuals to read comic books without embarrassment' (Hoberman in Spiegelman 1999, 5) and Loman that '*Maus* casts its shadow far [...] the book's success has precipitated a broad reassessment of the artistic potential of the comic book' (Loman 2010, 210). Spiegelman himself has



testified to the shaping influence of this seminal work: ‘*Maus* changed the face of the way the medium I work in is perceived. It demonstrated for many that comics could be a serious art form’ (Spiegelman, 2011; 74). It is no exaggeration to say that *Maus* almost single-handedly introduced the possibility of a serious academic discourse on the subject of comics as a literary/artistic form.

It is certainly not the case that *Maus* attracted no negative attention, but one might argue that critics who address the propriety of the project (Wilner describes the choice as ‘daring’ (Wilner 2003, 108), Rothberg as potentially ‘obscene’ (Rothberg 2003, 141) and LaCapra as a ‘risky, even foolhardy attempt to bring Auschwitz to comics’ (LaCapra 1998, 139-140) ) are largely speaking of the *potential* for *Maus* to offend, rather than any actual offense caused. Objections to *Maus* have, considering the size of the readership, been few and far between. In addition to the academic critiques listed in section 1.1, the majority of negative feedback has come from certain Polish readers who object to the choice of pigs (a far more offensive curse in Polish than English) in the animal metaphor. Young contends that the pigs ‘come to symbolise what is *treif*, or non-kosher’ (Young 2000, 33). A pig, according to *halakha* (Jewish law), is unclean and unfit for consumption (mice and cats would also be considered unfit for consumption, but for different reasons). The book’s publication in Poland was met with some protests (see Spiegelman 2011, 122–124). *Maus* was also challenged as inappropriate by one reader in Pasadena Public Library. The complainant was a ‘Polish-American who is very proud of his heritage’ (Betsy Gomez 2012, online). In addition to the negative reaction from some Polish readers, the Israeli edition sparked some controversy regarding the portrayal of Pesach Spiegelman as a Jewish policeman. Spiegelman edited the

Israeli edition of the volume after protests from family members (Spiegelman 2011, 154-155). Hirsch reports that prior to the publication of the Israeli edition some Israeli students felt uncomfortable reading *Maus*: ‘in Israel, picking up a book that has a swastika on the cover, no matter what the book is about, is really searing... the cover was painful and offensive to some’ (Hirsch quoted in Kuhlman 2005, online). Spiegelman has borne this criticism well; when asked by a German reporter if a comic book about Auschwitz was in bad taste he replied that he felt that ‘Auschwitz was in bad taste’ (Spiegelman 2011, 155). Considering the huge number of readers who have come into contact with *Maus*, however, the incidents above are far from representative of the reaction of the typical reader. *Maus* has largely elicited praise from lay readers, the cultural literati, and the academy. It also received a largely positive reaction from other comic book creators, although some, as shall be noted below, took *Maus* as a tragic indicator of the poor regard with which their medium is typically held.

One of the reasons why *Maus* has caused relatively little offense is that, in comparison to the other two volumes considered in this work it is both stylistically and politically palatable to a broad audience. The transition from *Breakdowns* to *Maus* represents a marked shift from intergenerational conflict to attempts at intergenerational understanding. Gordon argues that the blend of biography and autobiography in *Maus* ‘offered the possibility for those of the generation who participated in a youthful rebellion of the 1960s to reconcile themselves with the world of their parents’ (Gordon 2010, 183). Such reconciliation would problematise the counter-cultural ethic, characterised by thinkers such as Marcuse and Foucault as well as Spiegelman’s contemporaries in the

underground comics scene, which runs throughout *Breakdowns*. Given the arguments considered in sections 1.9, 2.1, and 2.7 concerning the relationship between the underground comic book artist and the academy, it is noteworthy that Spiegelman's most celebrated work is also his least politically controversial. Where *Breakdowns* offers a barbed critique of the asylum and Wertham's anti-comic book campaign, and *No Towers* is an assault upon Bush-era Hawkish rhetoric, few would disagree with what, superficially, appears to be the core assertion of *Maus*: that the Holocaust was a terrible event which damaged both the survivors and those who survive the survivors. Indeed, as mentioned in section 1.4 above, within *Maus*, Spiegelman declines to enter into an overt and potentially controversial discourse concerning the contemporary politics of the Shoah such as the emergence of Israel.

*Maus* is not only politically benign, it is also significantly less radical than *Breakdowns* in terms of its use of the comic book form. Scott McCloud contends that whilst the texts in *Breakdowns* contain a wide range of panel-to-panel pacing, *Maus* follows the same trend as most mainstream western comics. In *Maus*, Spiegelman mainly employs type 2, 3 and 4 transitions (McCloud 1994, 181). Compared to *Breakdowns* and *No Towers*, *Maus* is relatively conservative in its pacing, its cuts from scene to scene and it offers a lucid delineation between panels (described, for want of a better term as its 'griddedness' (Spiegelman 2011, 182)). If, as argued in the previous chapter, the deliberate destabilisation of the comic book form represents cynicism toward the aspiration of certain Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers to create a template for artistic work, then we must conclude that in *Maus*, conversely, Spiegelman embraces the concept of replicable and stable conventions for his medium. Spiegelman described the transition from *Breakdowns* to *Maus*

in the following terms: ‘all of the things I had been exploring [...] to obstruct and slow down narrative comprehension now had to be spun in reverse, since *Maus*’s primary obligation was to its story’ (Spiegelman 2011, 187). In terms of its form, *Maus* offers a level of immediate accessibility more typical of Animist approaches to comic book storytelling. *Maus* is far from stylistically uninteresting, but the story is laid out in a manner which is designed to facilitate, rather than complicate, the reader’s narrative journey.

By adopting a politically and stylistically uncontroversial stance in *Maus*, Spiegelman risked losing his countercultural edge and being drawn into the very systems which, in *Breakdowns*, he sought to oppose. The arc of Spiegelman’s work from *Breakdowns* to *Maus* thus appears to follow Bakhtin’s concept of the Carnival as a pressure-release valve; once the politically dissonant energy of *Breakdowns* was exhausted, in *Maus*, Spiegelman appears to submit to the power of the arbiters of culture. Indeed, some have suggested that the success of *Maus* might have led to Spiegelman being expelled from the underground. Clive Philpot contends that ‘[t]he comic books that have achieved a presence in the art world, such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, do not stand out as prominently in the world of comic books’ (Philpot 1998, 47). Philpot’s assertion does not prove to be true, however. Spiegelman’s Eisner Award (the highest achievement offered within the world of comics) offers evidence that *Maus* was celebrated as much by comic book creators as it was by literary culture as a whole. Indeed, Beaty contends that the influence of *Maus* on comic book creators is crucial and international: ‘[t]he success of translated editions of *Maus* in Europe in the 1980s and the 1990s was suggestive of the possibilities afforded to both autobiographical and non-conventional comic books’ (Beaty 2007, 144-145) and Stephen Weiner writes of *Maus* that

‘[a]t last there was a book that graphic novel supporters could hold up proudly’ (Weiner 2004, 35).

Some early commentators did, however, view the success of *Maus* as a commendation of Spiegelman himself rather than a comment on the potential for prestige and cultural capital to be accrued by the medium as a whole. In 1991 French cartoonist Lewis Trondheim produced a parody of *Maus* titled *Emmaüs* in which Artie reluctantly decides to tell his father’s story as a comic book only when he learns that the rights to the story in all other media have already been sold. Beaty submits that ‘[t]he humour is largely derived from the reader’s awareness that *Maus* is frequently cited as the greatest comic book of all time, and Spiegelman’s grudging agreement to undertake such a project seems to suggest that achieving greatness in this field is no real accomplishment’ (Beaty 2007, 206). For Trondheim, such was the perception of comics among critics in the early 1990s that a comic which skilfully deals with adult themes was viewed rather like a dog (or, more appropriately, a mouse) that could talk: critics were not impressed that it spoke well, but rather that it spoke at all.

To summarise the argument to this point, should one chose to regard success and creative freedom to be mutually exclusive one might be forced to conclude that *Maus* represents the sacrifice of underground countercultural (aesth)et(h)ics in favour of wide-scale appeal. As detailed in section 1.9, however, such a distinction requires a rather reductive binary opposition. This chapter shall proceed to examine the ways in which *Maus*, within the censored and regulated world of the literary and artistic academy, retained a transgressive insistence upon the irrationality of existing social practice. In order to explore this assertion

the following section shall compare *Maus* to some of its literary forebears and shall introduce the opposing stratagems of familiarization and defamiliarization which appear throughout the text.

### 3.2 Talking in Screams

*Maus had some precedents within the comic book medium, both in terms of its subject matter and governing metaphor – Spiegelman's originality lies in his resistance to catharsis and closure*

This image can be found on [boingboing.net](http://boingboing.net)

**Fig. 30** *Horst Rosenthal's Mickey in Gurs placed Disney's iconic mouse in the concentration camp before Spiegelman's.*

Much of the celebration of *Maus* is related to that fact of Spiegelman's seemingly audacious decision to present the Shoah in a comic. He may have appeared, to the majority of critics, to be the first to attempt this, but the subject, and even the stylistic gimmick of the funny animals genre within a Shoah narrative, were entirely preceded. Bernard Krigstein's 'Master Race' (published in *Impact* in 1955) was a Holocaust comic which pre-empted even Wiesel by five years. As a college student in 1967 Spiegelman wrote a paper on 'Master Race' in which he described it as 'one of the greatest achievements in comics' (Spiegelman 1999, 80). He stated that 'Krigstein's most sophisticated (and his own favourite) graphic story, "Master Race," has not yet been equalled in its imaginative and advanced understanding of the medium' (Spiegelman 1999, 86). It is possible that without *Master Race* there would have been no *Maus*: '[w]hen I first saw "Master Race" as a teenager in the mid-sixties, it was like being struck by lightning [perhaps a self-conscious reference to the insignia of SS uniforms]. Here was a singular demonstration that the Nazi death camps could seriously be contemplated in comic books' (Spiegelman 1999, 90). 'Master Race' was not the

only pre-*Maus* comic book which engaged with the Holocaust. Mikics cites Patrick Cothias and Paul Gillon's work based on Martin Grey's *Au nom de tous les miens (For Those I Loved)* (1972) as a Holocaust comic. And before even these texts there existed other drawings, paintings and cartoons which documented the Holocaust. Chute contends:

[D]uring the widely televised Adolf Eichmann trial in 1961, when he was 13, Spiegelman went searching through his parents' private bookshelf [...] Spiegelman discovered, on his mother's bookshelf, mostly Polish and Yiddish small-press pamphlets published right after the war, some of them picturing everyday life in the camps [...] His first real encounter with what to him was "the war" was visual—and *drawn* – hand-made images of witness. Some of these, as he points out, were what we would think of as quite cartoony (Chute 2012, online).

Even the key visual trope of *Maus*, the quirky anthropomorphism of the 'funny animals' genre, was not without precedent. Chute (2012) and Mulman (2008) both note that *Maus* was preceded by Holocaust victim Horst Rosenthal's *Mickey in Gurs* (1942), a satirical comic that shows the iconic Disney character in a French internment camp which offers a 'striking example of cartoon drawing of the camps' (Chute 2012, online). Given that the concept of *Maus* is entirely precedented, one might ask why Spiegelman was afforded such widespread critical acclaim when Rosenthal, Krigstein, and Cothias and Gillon were not? One answer, which shall be the subject of this section and sections 3.3 to 3.5 below, is that unlike his artistic forebears, Spiegelman addressed the Holocaust with an unprecedented sense of narrative sophistication, propriety, and a lack of closure which (despite the accessible form) runs directly counter to traditional narrative formats. This is achieved, as shall be detailed in the following sections, through a systematic and artful defamiliarization of form. The reading of *Maus* developed below seeks to focus on the absence of conventional catharsis and closure and to foreground concomitantly Spiegelman's staunch resistance to the reassurance of

characters achieving moral development, maturation, or otherwise benefiting from the narrativisation of the Shoah.

Section 1.4 of the introductory chapter included an overview of the challenges which the Holocaust issues to literary forms in terms of the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of silence as well as the danger of artistic license. To recap this complex subject, attempts to capture the genocide of six million people within traditional narrative and artistic forms (specifically those which build and resolve tension through a three act structure and an apprehensible moral) fail because such forms, typically, seek to provide lucid meaning and catharsis, neither of which are appropriate to the events depicted. Geis submits that when a text such as Spielberg's *Schindler's List* attempts to speak the unspeakable it tends to

[S]anitize and codify the Shoah in Hollywood terms so that a kind of catharsis results from the closing reunion, where (as in *Jurassic Park*) the ultimate sense is that the audience members have vicariously been "saved" and can go home safely without having to worry about the threat, whether of Nazis or Velociraptors (Geis 2003, 4).

For a key example of such catharsis at work one might point to the 'emotional terrorism' of Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997) which depicts an implausibly saintly father and child in Auschwitz within a traditional story arc with building tension and eventual emotional release (Maurizio Viano 1999, 30). Neither silence nor hyperbolic historiographical metafiction are appropriate means to avoid the damaging effect of rendering the Holocaust familiar.

Spiegelman is very much attuned to the threat posed in this context by traditional storytelling. The publication of the first volume of the collected *Maus* was prompted by the announcement of Spielberg's *American Tale* (1986) which similarly uses mice to represent European immigrants. The fear of being compared to the Spielberg film was distressing for Spiegelman.



He told Weschler ‘if Samuel Beckett had stolen the idea, I’d be depressed, but I’d be *impressed* as well. But Steven Spielberg! Oy!’ (Spiegelman in Weschler 1988, 58). The absence of catharsis in *Maus* has been celebrated by Lang (2000) Geis (2003), and Chute (2009). The question of the lack of catharsis is complicated by several factors such as the iconic and accessible animal allegory, the absence of polarising violence in the text, and by the use of familiar Holocaust iconography. The following analysis seeks to detail the manner, and the extent, to which Spiegelman resists the potentially dangerous familiarizing effect of these strategies. This argument shall, at certain points, tread some familiar ground for Spiegelman scholarship. Its originality lies, one hopes, in the central assertion of this thesis; that by resisting familiar forms, catharsis, and closure, Spiegelman refuses to allow the terror of the Holocaust to be resolved and, as such, continues to insist upon the endemic madness of everyday life.

### 3.3 ‘Funny Animals’

*The animal metaphor has been analysed in relation to Jewish religious literature, Disney-style funny animals, and Nazi-era anti-Semitic propaganda – Spiegelman offers the potential of the Everymouse through the Icon – The animal allegory threatens to reduce the unspeakable to the speakable and thus bring it within the scope of traditional literary forms – Spiegelman defamiliarizes the governing metaphor through Disney allusions, through the problematic question of how racial identity is conferred, by calling attention to the allegory within the text and by maintaining a clear distinction between Vladek’s prose and Artie’s visuals – By separating the art and prose of Maus, Spiegelman preserves the authenticity of Vladek’s testimony – Spiegelman combines familiarizing and defamiliarizing strategies to simultaneously promise and deny an accessible account of the Holocaust.*

The simultaneous impossibility and necessity of Shoah art and literature is captured in the centerpiece of *Maus*: its provocative utilisation of anthropomorphic animals.

Anthropomorphic animals have appeared in storytelling so often – from *Aesop’s Fables*, Native American, African, and Australian aboriginal folk tales and on to Kafka and Orwell –

that it would be impossible to point to a single source. The three points of reference noted most often by critics in relation to *Maus* are Passover Haggadah, American cartoons such as Herriman's *Krazy Kat* and Disney's Mickey Mouse, and the depiction of Jews in Nazi propaganda. The following analysis will consider the many implications which emerge from these three touchstones and the ways in which the animal metaphor both invites and denies the possibility of engagement with the Holocaust. The case shall be made, by consolidating and developing existing arguments from Spiegelman criticism, that whilst animal allegory threatens to reduce the Holocaust to a familiar form (not least through the potentially dangerous reader identification offered by the Icon), Spiegelman simultaneously makes use of four defamiliarization strategies throughout the text, namely: self-consciously problematic allusions to Disney; the contradictory manner in which racial identity is conferred; metatextual comments upon the allegory; and by maintaining a clear delineation between Vladek's story and Artie's visuals. Spiegelman thus simultaneously invites and denies familiarity with the Holocaust.

In section 1.1 the argument was made that, in the majority, critics have applauded the use of funny animals in *Maus* because the invocation of imagery that depicts the Jews-as-vermin visually dismantles Nazi propaganda. As was noted, many critics have also asserted that the mice offer a mechanism for building empathy with the victims; against the Wagnerian operatic excesses of Nazi aesthetics, *Maus* employs a muted minimalism which encourages readerly introjection and identification with the Everymouse. The problematic nature of these two assertions has, so far, been overlooked in Spiegelman scholarship and,

accordingly, this section shall now interrogate Spiegelman's potentially dangerous use of the Icon.

Spiegelman has asserted, in reference to a statement made by Elie Wiesel in a televised discussion of *The Day After*, a TV movie aired in 1983 which concerned nuclear war, that '[a]fter the Holocaust, we are all Jews... all of us... including George Bush, Dan Quayle, Yassar Arafat, and even Yitzhak Shamir. Now our job is to convince *them* of that' (Spiegelman 1999, 16). Banner, in a similar vein, contends that 'as [Vladek and Anja] see the [Nazi] flag a great change is wrought as Vladek has to amend his own words [...] as 'Everybody' becomes 'every Jew' (Banner 2000, 137). Banner unwittingly alludes to the problematic nature of the allegory which has been overlooked in the literature to date. The white mouse face is a blank space onto which another face can be painted: each reader is offered the possibility of becoming 'every Jew.' The recognition of a shared humanity (particularly when that shared humanity reverses the process of dehumanizing propaganda) is laudable in itself, but the process entails an erasure of crucial markers of ethnic difference and singularity. If everyone is now a 'Jew' then to be a 'Jew' risks becoming meaningless. Not only is it potentially offensive to suggest that *any* individual can be made to truly empathise with the experience of the Shoah victim, but there is a further danger of non-Jews appropriating or 'Christianising' the Shoah by removing its uniquely Jewish elements. Pope John-Paul II once stated in an 'Address to the Jewish Community' '[t]hat which threatened you also threatened us' (Pope John-Paul II in Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki eds 1995, 151). Such a sentiment threatens to hijack the Shoah – to mobilise its emotional capital for the political goals of any group.

Despite Spiegelman's claims that he 'didn't want to make the mice too cute, too sweet' as part of an 'unnecessary plea for sympathy for the victim', the mice of *Maus* are unmistakably Iconic (Spiegelman quoted in Brown 1988, 108). If, as has been argued by many critics, Spiegelman seeks to defamiliarize his allegory then the comforting process invoked by the Icon must be addressed as invitations of empathy through emotive cartoon language offers a form of bonding and catharsis for which Spiegelman has been applauded by many other critics (such as Geis (2003)) for *avoiding*. The two positions can be reconciled by proposing that Spiegelman offers the possibility of the Everymouse whilst simultaneously denying it. He prevents complete and uncomplicated empathy through his allegory's constant insistence on its own artificiality. The concord offered by the cartoon language is denied and undercut. Spiegelman's theriomorphic characters allow reader-identification through the Icon and the familiar framework of Disneyesque theriomorphism whilst simultaneously problematizing the Icon as a means of representation. With the cartoon mouse head, Spiegelman beckons from beyond the barbed wire of the death camps, and yet the reader finds their entry barred at every turn. It is to the process of defamiliarization in *Maus* that we shall now turn.

This image can be found on <http://blogs.forward.com/forward-thinking/196275/-coolest-haggadahs-for-your-passover-seder/>

**Fig. 31.** *In the Passover Haggadah humans are depicted with bird heads. This artistic approach resonates with Maus.*

The artistic precedent set by the Passover Haggadah was first identified by Gopnik (1987) and developed by Young (2000). Young contends that '[a]s ancient Passover Haggadoth used to put bird's heads on human forms in order not to show humans and to show them at the same time [...]. By using mice masks, the artist also asks us not to believe

what we see' (Young 2000, 32). The second commandment of the *Aseret haDibrot* forbids the depiction of celestial beings. The use of characters with bird heads allowed the artist to comply with this rule whilst circumventing the effective ban on religious art. Gopnik points out that this source differs from *Maus* in that the medieval artist used a visual allegory because his subject was too holy to be represented whereas Spiegelman's strategy is shaped by a subject too terrible to be depicted (Gopnik 1987, 33). Spiegelman's animal allegory, however, clearly lacks the theologically-motivated sensitivity of Passover Haggadah. Vladek and Artie, as will be argued below, are depicted in an unflatteringly and resolutely secular mode on many occasions in *Maus*. Rough edges and bawdiness make the allusions to Passover Haggadah more of an aesthetic/ethnic coincidence than a decisive and comparable influence. There is a further danger in the Passover Haggadah analogy in that the transformation from the unspeakable to the speakable represents a reduction in the horror of the subject matter in order to make it more palatable. In the argument which follows the case shall be made that Spiegelman avoids this potential reduction by undermining and challenging the possibility of straightforward engagement. To reach this conclusion however, the argument must first move beyond the Passover Haggadah to consider the funny animals genre.

To a gentile American and European audience children's cartoons are perhaps the most immediate point of reference for anthropomorphism and the triad of mouse/cat/dog. Spiegelman asserts that '[c]ats and mice just came as a set, part of all of the *Tom and Jerry* comics and cartoons that I grew up with' (Spiegelman, 2011, 118). It is almost redundant to state that as a child Spiegelman was a fan of Disney films and comic books (a fact which is

true of almost every American child born since those who, in 1927, attended screenings of *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*). The formative influence of Disney is evident in Spiegelman's adult life. He wrote a foreword for *The Unexpurgated Carl Barks* (1997) which enthusiastically documented the work of Disney cartoonist (reprinted in Spiegelman 1999, 85).

The Disney mouse looms large in the original *Maus*; Artie's avatar is (not unintentionally) named 'Mickey.'

This image can be found on [pseudocuasipensamientos.blogspot.co.uk](http://pseudocuasipensamientos.blogspot.co.uk)

**Fig. 32** 'Art Spiegelman' the author of *Maus*, exists at a mid-point between photographic realism and Mickey Mouse

Spiegelman explicitly acknowledges the connection to Disney in *Maus* and the tension this entails on the inside back cover of *The Complete Maus* in which 'Art Spiegelman' appears as a *Maus*-style mouse. In his (human) hands he delicately holds a more realistically-drawn rodent whilst in the background a fragment of a Mickey Mouse head is clearly discernible. Thematically, Mickey literally looms large over the illustrator whose aesthetic in *Maus* is delicately positioned at a mid-point between the photo-realistic and the stylised icons of American cartooning.

The appropriation of Disney's signature convention is not a simple homage, however, and can be seen in part as an intentional provocation of one of the world's most infamously litigious corporations. In 1973 Disney brought the underground comic *Air Pirate Funnies* (1971) to court for producing a profane likeness of Mickey Mouse. The case was one of the major events towards the end of the underground era of American comic books (other factors included 1973 obscenity laws, anti-paraphernalia laws which forced 'head' shops to

close, and lawsuits against other underground titles) (Sabin 1993, 174). Perhaps even more recognisably for the majority of readers, the invocation of Disney raises problematic questions concerning possible anti-Semitism on the part of the most iconic figure from American cartoon history.

The invocation of Disney's hierarchy of funny animals in the context of the Shoah raises questions (to which Spiegelman is clearly attuned) concerning propriety and allegory. Biographer Mark Eliot claimed that Walt Disney was a Nazi sympathiser (or, at least, an anti-Semite) which, whether or not such a claim has any legitimacy, has significantly coloured the reputation of the animator (see Eliot 1994). Esther Leslie reports that Goebbels recorded in his diary that Hitler was pleased with a gift of Disney films and that '[s]ome Nazi film historians tried to prove that Disney's lineage was German' (Leslie 2002, 153). Affection for Disney, however, was not universal in Nazi Germany. In 1931 the Nazi newspaper *Die Diktatur*, for example, stated that 'Mickey Mouse is the most shabby, miserable ideal ever conceived' (quoted in Staub 1995, 44). One can speculate that any fandom which did exist among the Third Reich lasted approximately until 1940 when 'Donald Duck went on, famously, to fight the Nazis' (Leslie 2002, 154). Despite this connection between Disney and German Fascism, within *Maus*, Vladek expresses the hope that Artie can be a 'big-shot cartoonist [...] Walt Disney', complicating the irony which Orvell reads in the juxtaposition of victimised Jews and the Mickey Mouse success story (Spiegelman 2003, 135). Spiegelman thus knowingly renders his metaphor ethically fraught; his stylistic quotation from Disney has superficial appeal to Vladek, the Holocaust victim, and yet by speaking in praise of Disney's success, Vladek unwittingly pays tribute to a possible anti-Semite and Nazi sympathiser.

The Disney allusion not only inflects the allegory in terms of Walt Disney's racial world-view, but in terms of the global influence of American culture and the consequent expectations of the manner in which racial identity is conferred. The allusion to Disney and Mickey Mouse, and Vladek's hope that Artie will 'make it big' as a cartoonist, serves in part as a commentary by Spiegelman on American cultural imperialism. The Disney comic, Gopnik asserts, is 'an American invention of the same vintage as contract bridge or the NFL' (Gopnik 1987, 30). It is an American cultural export which is recognised worldwide. The animal allegory, in this context, represents the vision of an individual who spent his childhood watching American cartoons and believes (perhaps ironically) in the transformative potential of American citizenship. Even Vladek, whose world-view has been shaped by the camps, believes in, and wants to see his son fulfil, the American Dream. The insidious soft-power appeal of Mickey Mouse alluded to in *Maus* has been captured in Australian artist Will Coles' *Mickey Gun Part II* (2012), a bright blue revolver mounted with a Mickey Mouse head. The piece alludes to the high amount of gun violence in America, the destruction wrought by the American military, the Disneyfication of violence, and the forceful global impact of the soft-power metastasis of American culture. It graphically signifies the extent to which U.S. imperialism is underpinned by both soft and hard power.

This image can be found on [brendamaygallery.com.au](http://brendamaygallery.com.au)

**Fig. 33** Will Coles' *Mickey Gun Part II* signifies the synergy between U.S. soft and hard power.

Artie, one might suggest, has been shot with the Mickey Mouse head. When he tries to imagine Europe under the Nazis he (albeit self-consciously) filters the events through the dominant iconography of a global American media machinery. He chooses cats to represent the Germans because he has been taught by American World War II comics that Japanese



(and sometimes German) soldiers have fangs. Both Artie and the reader are attuned to the impropriety of the allegory and yet Artie has no means to see beyond the filter through which he understands the world. The influence of the American culture industry and the possibility of conversion to Judaism in an American context represents an additional problem within the animal allegory, as shall now be detailed.

The cultural imagery whereby America signifies a place in which ‘magic’ can happen appears when Françoise, through Artie’s pen and jokes, a spell cast by a Rabbi, transforms a French frog into a Jewish mouse (Françoise Mouly’s conversion to Judaism, the circumstances of her marriage to Art Spiegelman, and the story of her American visa is a much more complicated and dramatic story than this magical one-page transformation from French to Jewish-American in *Maus* allows (see Mouly and Kartalopoulos (2005)). In addition to appearing as a mouse, François’ clothes resemble the stripes of the prisoner’s uniform (Hirsch 1997, 39). The stripes are horizontal rather than vertical, however and the fact that they are mis-aligned suggests perhaps that, through Artie’s failing allegory, she is a clumsy approximation of a World War II-era Jew. Mulman contends that ‘Françoise is [...] a Jew more than she is American, as is Art, since neither are represented as dogs. Paradoxically, it is only because they *are* American that they *can* choose to be mice’ (Mulman 2008, 90). Mulman’s belief that Artie is capable of choosing his identity is problematic, however; one might argue that as a second-generation survivor Artie has inherited his parent’s traumatised world-view, which is something he cannot simply ‘draw’ away. Unlike Artie, Vladek, and the other ethnically Jewish characters, Françoise, as an American citizen, possesses a degree of self-determination. She has the freedom to playfully

and creatively choose her identity. The rules of the allegory, it seems, are different in America, and are far more problematic than the rigid boundaries of the animal classification might initially suggest. There is a self-consciousness to this scene which recognises the problems and dangers of such easy identity-switching. Françoise is a mouse because Artie draws her that way. For Vladek, Artie and other characters, Judaism and the terrible history of the Shoah, has been stamped indelibly onto their identities. The problematic question of choosing or being forced to adopt one's animal classification represents a second knowingly problematic aspect of the metaphor. American citizenship, despite the transformative promise of Disney and the American Dream, cannot erase one's family history.

Wolk has proposed that the 'linework of *Maus* is deliberately unlike the smooth, clean lines of most funny animal comics. Instead, it's rough and utilitarian, mostly drawn with a ragged felt-tip pen' (Wolk 2007, 343). The ragged lines undercut the iconic cuteness of the animal heads. Disney-like funny animals cannot suppress the violence of the past. Indeed, the majority of critics have read *Maus* not as the vision of a child who grew up on a diet of American media but as a commentary on the racial vision of the Nazis. *Maus* opens with a quote from Hitler '[t]he Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human' (Hitler in Spiegelman 2003, 10). Nazi propaganda sought systematically to *other* the Jew: to imagine the Jew as fundamentally unlike the German people and other humans at a genetic level. This othering did not correspond with the characteristics of the Wild Man, but served, in part, a similar purpose – to give definition, by negative example, to Germany's *Volksgenossen* ('national comrades'). Like the Wild Man, the Jewish people were presented as a threat to the German people and, thus, their absolute destruction was considered necessary. Accordingly,

the animal groups in *Maus* are not assigned randomly. LaCapra invites readers to imagine how the meaning of *Maus* might change ‘if Spiegelman had [... represented] Nazis as mice and Jews as pigs or vicious cats, or [if] had he offered the cat image for Israelis?’ (LaCapra 1998, 160). The classifications hold symbolic weight and legitimise the natural order of the cartoon hierarchy. Cats kill mice and dogs chase cats because that is their nature. Mandaville argues that ‘[t]o write and to read [*Maus*] requires recognition of, and so a symbolic participation in, stereotypes that are inextricable from the shifting cultural and social narrative systems that permitted the Holocaust’ (Mandaville 2009, 224). In many Nazi propaganda posters and newspapers, Jews were depicted as having a far from perfect, and far from human, form, with large hooked noses and, in more abstract depictions, the physical features of a worm, snake or rat. By forging a link between Jews and rodents the Nazis sought to legitimise the violence, including human experiments carried out by Nazi soldiers, doctors, and, in some cases, civilians (see Vivien Spitz (2005)). In one editorial cartoon which appeared in 1944 in the Nazi publication *Der Stürmer*, the Jew appears as a large multi-limbed worm-like creature with a bulbous nose. This ‘parasitic’ being crawls across the surface of the earth. If the Jews are insects/vermin then it follows, in the Nazi worldview, that the Germans have been appointed with the messy but essential task of extermination.

This image can be found on [filipspagnoli.wordpress.com](http://filipspagnoli.wordpress.com)

**Fig. 34** ‘Vermin’ from the Nazi publication *Der Stürmer* (28 September 1944). The caption reads: ‘Life is not worth living/When one does not resist the parasite,/Never satisfied as it creeps about./We must and will win.’ Spiegelman asserts that ‘[t]he idea of Jews as toxic, as disease carriers, as dangerous subhuman creatures, was a necessary prerequisite for killing my family’ (Spiegelman 2011, 115).

The appropriation and inversion of Hitler’s racial vision is a problematic exercise. In 2006, Spiegelman contended (in reference to the Israeli Anti-Semitic Cartoon Contest, but no

doubt conscious of his own work) that '[i]t's really hard to reach those giddy heights of irony that force irony to transcend itself and say something actually worth saying... or drawing' (Spiegelman 2006, 784). Two strategies by which he achieves this irony are through defamiliarization and by keeping Vladek's testimony free of inflections from the visual metaphor. The anthropomorphic animal genre is spliced with Shoah testimony, but such a classification is complicated by the fact that an original text (Vladek's testimony) is accompanied by a visual translation. A clear distinction is maintained between the oral testimony given by the father and its visual reimagining by his son. The visuals of the text are, to use Genette's taxonomy of intertextuality, a transformation (and a transtylistiaion) of the prose (Genette 1997). At no point in the text does Vladek refer to the individuals involved as anything other than human (this is not the case in the original *Maus*, in which the metaphor is reinforced with numerous puns). One character volunteers to fight on the front because he wants to be treated 'like a human being' (Spiegelman 2003, 56). The animals are entirely Artie's conceit and the mice themselves refuse their animal classification. Spiegelman embeds the metaphor in many elements of the story. He uses pig masks to represent the times when Vladek and Anja passed themselves off as Poles and enforces the metaphor through chapter titles including 'mouse holes' (Spiegelman 2003, 97), 'mouse trap' (Spiegelman 2003, 131) and 'Mauschwitz' (Spiegelman 2003, 169). These touches are metadiegetic and are never referred to by the characters. The animal metaphor thus dramatizes a jarring collision between historically informed autobiography and visual invention. By preserving Vladek's testimony and allowing it to remain untarnished by the failings of the artistic approach, Spiegelman suggests that, even as Artie fails to represent the Holocaust realistically, there nonetheless exists a kernel of authenticity within the text. Spiegelman thereby resists the

imposition of simple narrative forms and the promise of the Everymouse without falling into the potentially dangerous play of historiographical metafiction.

Spiegelman further defamiliarizes the format of *Maus* through self-referential elements within the animal metaphor. The layering of the animal allegory over Vladek's story follows rules which are sometimes subtly enforced. Richeau's photograph (which appears on page 165) later appears in the background of a panel with Richeau redrawn as a mouse (Spiegelman 2003, 294) (the same transformation occurs with the cascade of photographs on page 275). The photograph has passed from the metadiegetic world into the text 'signalling its momentary assimilation into the world of the living' (Liss 1998, 65). In doing so, the photograph has become subject to that world's governing metaphor. The presence of the image and its transformation, like Vladek's prose and its transformation, makes explicit the fact that the images accompanying the account should not be read as an exact reproduction of events, but rather as the artist's imagining of those events based upon his own research and informed conjecture thus effectively offering a formal admission of the artist's struggle to represent the Shoah. This is manifest in the numerous occasions in the text when the problems with the limitations of the ruling metaphor to represent Vladek's story become apparent. Loman contends that 'the artifice and the inadequacy of the allegory [...] reaches a level of patent absurdity' and yet even from the opening pages the metaphor is palpably problematic in its incongruity (Loman 2010, 220). Rudolph Valentino, whom Vladek reports he resembled as a young man, is drawn as a mouse (Spiegelman 2003, 15). This depiction of Valentino is 'nonsensical according to the terms of the allegory, since he was not Jewish' and yet in order for the young Vladek to resemble Valentino the two must appear as mice (Loman

2010, 225). When one prisoner claims to be a German who has been placed in Auschwitz by mistake he appears in one panel as a mouse and, in the next as a cat (Spiegelman 2003, 210). When Artie visits his therapist, Pavel, the narration informs the reader that Pavel's 'place is overrun with stray dogs and cats' and then asks 'can I mention this or does it completely louse up my metaphor?' (Spiegelman 2003, 203). Spiegelman thus defamiliarizes the animal allegory not only by making knowing reference to Disney and Nazi propaganda, and by complicating the question of how ethnic identity is inferred, but by maintaining the distinction between Vladek's testimony and Artie's visuals and, as has been documented exhaustively by many critics, by continually calling attention to problematic details in the execution of the metaphor.

The questions raised by Spiegelman's allegory are numerous and complex and, as such, this section has, necessarily, summarised, developed, and engaged with multiple lines of argument. The fundamental assertion of this section is that Spiegelman's key metaphor provides the promise of familiarization, not least because of the accessible empathy offered by the Icon, and yet he simultaneously and deliberately problematizes the metaphor in such a way as to call attention to its artifice. The reader's complex and conflicted response to the human/animal characters in *Maus* can be further examined in relation to the ways in which Spiegelman makes use of quotations in the text. It is to this subject that we shall now turn.

### **3.4 A Writing Table on a Mountain of Corpses**

*Spiegelman both employs and has given shape to the iconography of Holocaust art and literature – The reference to Fleischmann and Barefoot Gen indicates a visual strategy which prioritises simplicity – Quotations are a defamiliarizing strategy which, in concert with the deliberately problematic animal metaphor, make clear the artifice of Maus*

Spiegelman's complex attempt to speak the unspeakability of the Holocaust does not, of course, exist in isolation. Elsewhere I have contended alongside Victoria Nesfield that '[t]he testimonies published by the first generation of survivors set the scene and provided the details of the event in an effective "blueprint" for replication' (Nesfield and Smith 2013, 16). *Maus* deploys stylistic references and adopts generic conventions conspicuous in other Holocaust art and literature. Elmwood detects a decisive degree of authorial self-consciousness to the act of referencing in *Maus*: '[i]n his depiction of smokestacks, barbed wire, wooden bunks, and trains, Spiegelman often calls attention to their iconicity through graphic means, by blatantly repeating the exact same image over and over' (Elmwood 2004, 715). The cultural codification of responses to the Holocaust means that, after a certain point for many who were not there, the primary referent threatened to become other artistic responses rather the events themselves. Artie tells Pavel (in a statement which also explains the heavy Disney influences in the text): 'I can't visualise [Auschwitz] clearly' (Spiegelman 2003, 206). Spiegelman, unlike his protagonist, did visit the site of Auschwitz and drew upon many primary sources when writing *Maus*. Brown contends that '[t]he absence of footnotes and bibliography [in *Maus*] should not be mistaken for indifference to the importance of research' (Brown, 1988; 93). Despite this, Artie's understanding of the Shoah (and perhaps Spiegelman's too) is unavoidably mediated through photographs and other Holocaust art and literature. Rather than imagining the Shoah anew, his work has been informed by others who have similarly struggled to render Auschwitz in word and image. This media has provided a large part of the visual language for Spiegelman's response to the Shoah. In this section the argument shall be made that in *Maus* quotation serves to further defamiliarize Artie's visual strategy.

The quotations in *Maus* proliferate. As noted above, *Mickey in Gurs*, Polish pamphlets on the Shoah and 'Master Race' all informed Spiegelman's work. The withered mouse bodies are reminiscent of Olère's *Gassing* (1989) and the use of heavy black and white lines imitate artwork actually produced within death camps (see Eisner 1996, 156). On the *Metamaus* DVD Spiegelman describes drawings made in the death camps as 'art before photography' (Spiegelman 2011, DVD). There were no options for prisoners to record their experience using photography and in this sense realising the Shoah through artwork consciously approximates the process (and thus the output) of the concentration camp prisoner.

Figure 35 can be found on page 203 of *The Complete Maus*. Figure 36 can be found at [english.illinois.edu](http://english.illinois.edu)

**Fig. 35 and 36** *Maus and Olère's Gassing (1989). Olère's artistic influence is evident in the emaciated corpses.*

Spiegelman has deliberately preferred the style of certain artistic forebears over others. Where some artists, such as Ester Lurie or Irène Awret, drew portraits of prisoners, many others attempted to capture the sheer volume of individuals involved. Such artists drew crowd scenes without any distinguishing features to separate one prisoner from another. The sea of identical mouse faces mimics, for example, Karel Fleischmann's *Deportation from Terezin to Auschwitz* (1942-1944) which depicts a large crowd scene with many of the figures captured in just a few pencil strokes.

This image can be found at [ohdelaholocaustproject.pbworks.com](http://ohdelaholocaustproject.pbworks.com)

**Fig. 37** *Fleischmann's Deportation from Terezin to Auschwitz (1942-1944). The simply-drawn figures allow the artist to offer a glimpse of the unthinkable logistics of genocide.*

Within *Maus* the reference to Fleischmann serves to avoid obfuscation of subject through



arresting images. In his interview with Brown, Spiegelman described drawing the mouse heads repeatedly, trying to reduce them to their most basic elements: 'I didn't want people to get too interested in the drawings [...] you're forced back into your role as reader rather than looker' (Spiegelman in Brown 1988, 103-104). The mice faces are an oblique reference to Fleischmann's visual strategy to make the individual as unarresting as possible. By deliberately avoiding the Classicist approach and, instead, drawing simple images, Spiegelman simultaneously overtly cites parts of the tradition of Holocaust art and avoids excessive ornamentation of the Shoah.

Having responded to other Holocaust representations, *Maus* has gone on to shape some of the generic conventions in this field. For example, the sea of bodies on page 201 seems to ghost the image of the burning of bodies in *Schindler's List* (1993) and Croci's *Auschwitz* (2004). Continuing the precedent set by early photographs of the camps, aside from the cover, *Maus* is drawn entirely in black and white, and, indeed, for an audience whose understanding of the Shoah has developed primarily through film and literature (as Geoff Dyer asserts of the First World War) it is hard to imagine the Shoah as having taken place in colour (Dyer 2001, 36). Early breakdowns of *Maus* experimented with colour for the framing narrative and black and white for the Shoah narrative (Spiegelman 2011, 144), but this design was abandoned in favour of pacing, panel shapes, verbal parallels, and scene setting to communicate a change in narrative level (see Chute 2009). *Time* reviewer Lance Morrow argued in a different context that black and white is, in fact, an entirely appropriate colour scheme for the Holocaust:

If any world needed to be filmed in black and white, it was what French writer David Rousset called *l'univers concentrationnaire*. All that obscenity transpired in an

absence of color: ashes and smoke were grey, the SS uniforms black, the skin ash white, the bones white. Franz Stangl, the commandant of Sobibor, used to greet the trains wearing a white riding costume (Morrow 1987, online).

Many texts after *Maus*, such as Erich Hartmann's photography of the empty camps (1995), the cover of the Abacus edition of *If This is a Man* (1979), *Schindler's List* (1993), and *Auschwitz* (2004) use black and white as the generic hallmark of Shoah art. The use of black and white signifies memory, history, heritage, and identity as well historical authenticity but is entirely alien to the events depicted. The connections to other texts which center on the Holocaust (in concert with the anthropomorphic characters and marginalisation of violence) thus serve to demonstrate the limits of the text to represent the events of the Shoah fully and the consequent reliance on borrowed visual strategies to fill in the blanks of the artist's imagination. The intertextuality of *Maus* thereby serves as a further defamiliarizing strategy which seeks to avoid the imposition of meaning and catharsis whilst respecting the limits of art to fully represent this traumatic subject.

To this point in the chapter the argument has been made that in *Maus* Spiegelman faces the challenge of preserving his insistence upon the madness of rational society whilst simultaneously being absorbed into mainstream artistic culture. This danger is doubly apparent given that the act of rendering the Holocaust within traditional narrative structures – structures which Spiegelman, uncharacteristically, makes use of in *Maus* – risks normalising the event, thereby resisting the possibility of a full understanding of its terrible implications (these implications were detailed in section 1.6 and, as was argued in section 2.8, haunt Spiegelman's protagonist in *Prisoner*). In order to manage the interplay between a familiar form and mad content, Spiegelman deploys defamiliarizing strategies throughout his work

which seek to undercut and deny the process of familiarization. This strategy serves to preserve the grotesque madness of the Holocaust. The following analysis will continue to catalogue the ways in which Spiegelman simultaneously familiarizes and defamiliarizes his subject, and will begin to develop a critical understanding of the cumulative effect of this aesthetico-political oscillation.

### **3.5 Drawing blood: Violence in *Maus***

*A distinction can be drawn between empirical and affective understanding of the Holocaust – Violence is relatively underplayed in Maus – The absence of violence is potentially ethically problematic because it is unrepresentative of the Holocaust, risks complicity with the perpetrators, and foregoes the counter-cultural edginess which is characteristic of underground comics – The absence of explicit acts of violence serves to avoid catharsis and, instead, to focus upon the sheer scale of the event*

This section shall propose an argument original to *Maus* criticism, that Spiegelman resists the reductive affect of images of atrocity and the potential catharsis which might result from the punishment of agents of violence. By doing so he simultaneously draws his reader's attention, instead, to the sheer scale of the event. Spiegelman (paraphrasing Gopnik) described *Maus* as 'showing something too profane for depiction' (Spiegelman 2011, 117). This paradoxical description refers both to the Shoah on the macro-scale, in terms of the sheer and appalling logistics of industrialised genocide, and on the micro-scale, in terms of innumerable individual acts of brutality. The question of scale features prominently in the Holocaust exceptionalism debate and is crucial to the questions of artistic representation considered thus far. One proponent of Holocaust exceptionalism on the grounds of scale is Steven Katz, who argues that the Holocaust is the single event in human history which can accurately be described as 'genocide' (see Katz 1994). The question of scale can be broken down into empirical and affective issues. One can recognise quite casually, for example, that

six million Jewish people were killed without even beginning to comprehend death on such a scale. Quite simply, the human intellect is incapable of fully imagining death and suffering of this magnitude. One can move a little closer when confronted by certain images, such as the mountains of shoes discovered in (amongst other places) the death camp at Majdanek, but a full articulation of the scale of such mass killing, Wiesel and Lang would argue, is beyond the means of verbal or visual representation (for an overview of this argument see section 1.4).

*Maus* engages with the Holocaust primarily at the individual level in terms of its narrative scope (it details the life of just one survivor), but Spiegelman's stylistic choices, particularly in relation to his depiction of violence, allow glimpses of the sheer scale of collective suffering and loss. *Maus* contains very few individual acts of brutality and, in the small number of instances where bloodshed does appear, Spiegelman's visuals make the depiction of violence problematic. This decision, one might infer, is rooted in ethical and epistemological convictions that have dramatic aesthetic consequences.

Vladek's testimony includes reference to several violent incidents to which the images allude without being explicit. Instances of violence in *Maus* are relatively infrequent compared to other Holocaust narratives and Spiegelman often avoids depicting specific acts. Mandelbaum, for example, dies in the 'gutter' between two panels on page 195. Violent acts, however, are not wholly absent. *Maus* contains an image of a German soldier being shot, a mass beating of Jews, Vladek being beaten and made to count the blows, a prisoner being hit, Anja being kicked, and prisoners being burned alive (Spiegelman 2003, 50, 35, 82, 58, 217, 190, 213, 223, and 232). The question of exactly how much violence *Maus* contains depends

of course on one's definition of this complex term: there are many images of corpses, such as hanged Jews and the bodies of those who have died from Typhus, as well as verbal threats of violence, and prisoners being threatened with dogs (Spiegelman 2003, 86, 255, 225, 266, and 227). Further to these explicit instances, the violence of the subject haunts the text. To borrow a resonant phrase from Pierre Macherey, *Maus* 'says what it does not say' (Macherey 2006, 95). For example, *Maus* includes a panel in which a child's head is being smashed against a wall, but the impact, significantly, occurs outside of the frame (Spiegelman 2003, 110). (LaCapra contends that this moment is the 'one instance where there is a marked departure from the animal figure' although, because the child's head is obscured, there is little reason to assume that this panel represents a deliberate intrusion of a human head into the animal allegory (LaCapra 1998, 161)). Spiegelman describes the image as showing 'the *action* of swinging, rather than the result' (Spiegelman 2011, 215). Similarly, the killing of the prisoner who claimed to be German occurs outside of the panel with only the guard in frame and the raised hand and part of the face of the victim visible (Spiegelman 2003, 210).

This image can be found on page 210 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 38** *Maus p.210. The positioning of the victim outside of the panel borders implies the act of violence.*

One needs only read survivor testimonies (Vladek Spiegelman's being no exception) to know that in the camps and the ghettos, acts of violence were routine. To omit or downplay violence from a representation of the Shoah requires a purposeful erasure on the part of the teller and risks offering a sanitised and unrepresentative perspective. At its worse, such omissions are dangerously complicit with both revisionism and Hitler's racial vision of Europe (a failure to see individuals and a focus upon collectives was, of course, central to the Nazi ideology). The removal of individuality, and the separation of people by race, is (ironically and intentionally, but none the less, palpably) echoed by Spiegelman's aesthetic

choices. Whilst the failure of the allegory is explicitly addressed in *Maus*, however, the more subtle artifice of the marginalisation of violence remains largely unacknowledged.

Spiegelman's decision to downplay the violence of his subject is even more striking when one considers that the absence of violence in *Maus* is uncharacteristic not only of Holocaust testimony but of the underground comics genre. Mikics notes that Spiegelman's approach to violence contrasts not just with many other examples of Holocaust art, but with the stylistic norms of underground comics (see Mikics 2007, 20). As argued in section 2.7, early underground comics displayed and indulged in Carnavalesque forms of overt and grotesque artistic transgression as a badge of authenticity and to both alienate and ridicule a Hawkish, church-going, middle-class, conservative audience. This artistic strategy relates directly to the mass-appeal of *Maus* detailed above, whereby the accessibility of the text facilitated its wide appeal. Extremes of ultra-violence, across many art forms, tend to create a cult following and alienate a 'non-underground' readership. Spiegelman writes of his pre-*Breakdowns* work:

I tried to absorb what Crumb and the other underground cartoonists I admired were up to by badly imitating them all. It made for some very embarrassing work: standard stabs at erotica and transgressive humour, as well as grotesque exercises in taboo [...] I wanted to draw the most disturbing images I could think up (Spiegelman 2008, 71).

Crumb's contribution to *Funny Aministrals* (in which the first *Maus* appeared) used theriomorphic characters performing violent acts. Whilst the majority of comics which feature in *Breakdowns* already represented a movement away from an overtly transgressive aesthetic, the first version of *Maus* retains some of that violence. For example, it includes the image of a cartoon cat forcing the barrel of a pistol into the mouth of a trembling and terrified

mouse (Spiegelman 2008, 28). The cat is sadistically relishing this act of torture, and the image dominates the page.

This image can be found on page 28 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 39** *The original Maus differs stylistically from the later version, particularly in terms of the violence of the images*

The second iteration of *Maus* constituted a decisive shift in Spiegelman's stylistic strategy away from the typical use of violence in underground comics at precisely the moment when he was tackling the most violent episode in the history of the twentieth century. The change in style from the original *Maus* to the second version takes the reader away from low-stakes cartoon violence to high-stakes violence involving graphic depictions of the human form. The mice are an unavoidable graphic metonym for the unimaginable and unavoidable numbers of human bodies destroyed during the Holocaust and so, in comparison to a potentially slapstick violence which typifies the funny animals genre, the consequences of the violent act are far greater.

To better understand Spiegelman's stylistic choice, *Maus* might be contrasted with Croci's graphic narrative *Auschwitz* (2004), which includes several scenes of explicit violence within the death camp.

This image can be found in *Auschwitz*

**Fig. 40** *Croci's Auschwitz contains far more explicit violence than Maus*

In *Auschwitz* the violence is depicted in such horrific detail that it becomes the centerpiece of the story and threatens to eclipse other elements. Although a case might be made for placing violence at the heart of any Holocaust narrative, in *Auschwitz* it serves primarily to demonise the perpetrators as part of a dramatic curve which then takes the reader toward a cathartic

resolution in which the instigators are finally overcome. By shaping the narrative around critical lacunae, Spiegelman precisely precludes against the possibility of such cathartic closure or base visual engagement.

The low instance of explicitly violent imagery in the second version of *Maus* serves to preserve the reader's ability to process some of the scale of the Holocaust without being drawn into dramas concerning individual villains. The contrary effect of reading a violent comic like Croci's *Auschwitz* might be equated to that of a violent photograph. Luckhurst asserts that '[t]he shock of the content of the atrocity photograph strips the viewer of all interpretive sophistication [...] all the symbolic, aesthetic or ideological connotations of the image fall away: you drop the book in horror at what you have just been shown' (Luckhurst 2008, 166). The violent act is separated from any larger historical or social process, or, at least, mitigates against the possibility of recovering a wider interpretative context. It calls attention purely to itself. Sontag contends that when one views an atrocity photograph 'the case against war does not rely on information about who when and where; the arbitrariness of the relentless slaughter is evidence enough' (Sontag 2003, 5-6). Incidents of violence alone can serve as evidence of crimes committed by specific sadistic individuals rather than highlighting the larger historical, political and cultural machinery which informed the violent act. Tim Cole argues, in this context, that a granular exploration of the violence of the Shoah is unnecessary to communicate its horror and can, in fact, prove counter-productive. As an illustrative example Cole describes his experience whilst viewing *Schindler's List*: 'I wanted to stand up in the cinema as the credits were rolling and say to all these people: "It was much worse."' But of course I didn't. It had been bad enough for many of these people who now sat



in silence or wept quietly' (Cole 1999, 92). Cole suggests that a sanitised Shoah narrative can serve to educate an audience without inciting anger and revulsion through grotesquely violent images.

This image can be found on page 210 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 41** *In Maus the volume of victims is more than can be shown.*

In place of individual acts of violence, Spiegelman's work repeatedly returns to images such as shoes which function as discrete but eloquent metonymic signifiers of the corpses left behind by the Final Solution. Alternately, Spiegelman deploys Fleischmannesque images such as the panel which opens page 210 where successive rows of inmates become indistinguishable and the precise number of individuals becomes impossible to depict. These individuals, crucially, stand in neat rows as they are counted. They are being forced to participate in the act of record keeping whereby, once again, the tools of rationality are employed to insane ends on so great a scale as to be beyond rational engagement. Such images cannot capture the true horrific scale of the Nazi killing project, but invite the viewer to consider, to a limited extent, the sheer volume of individuals killed, imprisoned and psychologically tortured in a project that employed the familiar factory model, industrialisation, transport technology, chemicals, and the account book – the tools, in other words, of instrumental and utilitarian rationality. By gaining some appreciation of the scale of the event in real terms, whilst simultaneously avoiding the arresting shock of individual acts of violence, Spiegelman aims to give the semblance of shape to the wide-scale collective madness of the Holocaust.

### **3.6 Putting Things in Boxes: *Maus*' Narrative Structure**

*Artie actively shapes the main narrative of Maus – Vladek and Artie are distinct from the extradiegetic historical personages Vladek and Art Spiegelman – Maus has five distinct narrative levels; the main and framing narratives, and three additional distinct narrative layers – The further removed a narrative layer is from the animal metaphor, the more insane it becomes – The narrative layers infect one another, so that the madness of Prisoner and ‘Time Flies’ constantly threatens to erupt into the world of the familiar*

The stylistic strategies in *Maus* documented in the previous three sections serve to address the challenges of representing the Shoah. They strike a deliberate balance between familiar signs and overt artifice, and metonymic signs of the scale of the Nazi genocide rather than the details of its brutality. These strategies cumulatively provide the backdrop for the volume and but do not, of course, exist in isolation from its story. Despite Spiegelman’s attempt to signify the sheer number of victims, *Maus* does not pretend to offer a comprehensive history of the Shoah. Instead, it tells the story of one survivor. *Maus* chronicles Vladek’s experiences before, during, and after his internment in Auschwitz. In a separate narrative frame, *Maus* also documents the creation of the main narrative and the relationship of Artie, the second generation survivor and biographer, to the main narrative and to its teller. Both narratives combine to tell the story of the father and son both processing the father’s past and remembering Artie’s mother/Vladek’s wife, Anja. In this context, the following section has a dual purpose. It serves primarily to define the narrative layers which are at work in *Maus*. Within this explanation it will be proposed that Spiegelman makes use of this narrative structure to allude to the madness which underlies rational society whilst simultaneously resisting the dangers of a historiographical metafictional approach.

Artie’s role in the text is not simply that of a witness or scribe. Indeed, *Maus* is arguably as much a text about Artie as it is about Vladek. The son asks the father to begin his story not with Vladek’s own childhood, but with the circumstances under which he met

Artie's mother, with, as Young observes, 'his [Artie's] *own* origins' (Young 2000, 26). The main narrative of *Maus* performs an act of narrative recovery whereby Artie aims to access and understand both his memories and postmemories. Crucially, Artie asks the questions, prompts the responses, guides the telling and shapes the narrative at each turn.

*Maus*, then, is an autobiography disguised as a biography but with an additional fold or wrinkle produced by the distance between the semi-fictional character Artie and the author Spiegelman. There also exists, perhaps more subtly, the additional distance between Vladek as a character who, despite Art Spiegelman's fidelity to his father's story, straddles history and fiction. As discussed above, Spiegelman is clearly conscious of the *constructedness* of his work. It would be entirely incorrect to suggest that *Maus* is purely a work of fiction, and yet it is epistemologically naïve and perhaps both ethically and politically dangerous to read the characters of Artie and Vladek as transparent and complete representations of historical personages. It has been the convention amongst scholars writing on *Maus* to distinguish between Spiegelman the extradiegetic narrator and 'Artie', Vladek's cartoonist son, although few have gone further. A further distinction can be made between the metadiegetic younger Vladek of the main story and the diegetic narrating Vladek of the framing narrative. There also exists a distinction between either of these characters and Art Spiegelman's father, Vladek Spiegelman.

The characters within *Maus* belong to distinct narrative levels. Whilst critics to date have recognised the distinction between Artie as 'narrative-protagonist' and Spiegelman as 'author-artist', only McGlothlin has offered a thorough and sustained taxonomical breakdown

of the deftly differentiated narrative levels which divide character iterations in *Maus*.

McGlothlin reads *Maus* not as a text with a linear chronology of before, during, and after so much as a series of temporal layers which surround and permeate one another. As has been asserted in section 1.1, this analysis shall offer an alternative understanding of these narrative levels which differs significantly from McGlothlin's model. The text has a 'Chinese-box' format, with levels of narrative contained within other levels. In *Maus*, five characters (and one author outside the text) are involved in the story-telling process: Vladek (younger) is the hero of the main narrative and exists at a metadiegetic level; Vladek (narrator) and Artie (narrator) jointly provide the main narrative (their voices are distinguished by lower case for Artie and upper case for Vladek); Vladek (elder) and Artie (middle-aged, referred to, henceforth, simply as 'Artie') are diegetic characters in the framing narrative. The framing layer is narrated by Artie (narrator) who retrospectively explains the circumstances of Artie's visits to Vladek (elder). In addition the reader has to contend with the figure of Art Spiegelman as an extradiegetic narrator and son of Vladek Spiegelman. In tabular form, the text is thus structured as follows:

Narrative	Textual relationship	Narrator	Characters	Illustrator
Rego Park (framing)	diegesis	Artie (narrator)	Artie, Vladek (elder)	Artie (narrator)
Poland (main)	Metadiegesis	Vladek (narrator)	Vladek (younger), Anja	Artie (narrator)

**Table 1.** *The narrative structure of Maus (simplified)*

These images can be found on page 7 of *Maus* volume 2

**Fig. 42 and 43** *Artie and Vladek (elder)*

This image can be found on page 138 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 44** *Vladek (younger) and Anja*

This narrative structure is further complicated by the appearance of three additional narratives within *Maus* in which three additional Artie ‘heroes’ and two additional Vladek ‘heroes’ are introduced. The text also includes photographs which are not narratives in themselves but serve to imply another narrative level of photographic realism behind the mask of the animal allegory. These photographs disrupt the flow between narrative layers (see Hirsch 1997). Given the proliferation of identities, epistemological spheres and narrative levels it is noteworthy that, such is the clarity of signposting in *Maus* and Spiegelman’s skill as a storyteller, even during the most abrupt transitions, the reader is at no point unclear about who is speaking and when. These additional narratives expand our original table as follows:

Narrative	Textual relationship	Narrator (Prose)	Characters	Illustrator
Time Flies	Diegesis	Artie (man in mouse mask narrator )	Artie (man in mouse mask)	Artie (man in mouse mask narrator )
Prisoner on the Hell Planet	Metadiegesis	Artie (man in mouse mask narrator )	Artie (prisoner), Vladek (prisoner), Anna	Artie (narrator )
Rego Park 1950s (prologue)	Metadiegesis	Artie (man in mouse mask narrator )	Artie (younger), Vladek (middle-aged)	Artie (man in mouse mask narrator )/Artie (narrator)
Rego Park 1980s and 1990s (framing narrative)	Metadiegesis	Artie (man in mouse mask narrator )	Artie, Vladek (elder)	Artie (man in mouse mask narrator )
Poland (main narrative)	Metadiegesis	Vladek (narrator)	Vladek (younger), Anja	Artie (narrator)

**Table 2.** *The narrative structure of Maus (full)*

This image can be found on page 3 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 45** *Artie (younger) and Vladek (middle-aged)*

This image can be found on page 202 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 46** *Artie (man in mouse mask)*

This image can be found on page 33 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 47** *Vladek (prisoner) and Artie (prisoner)*

The first additional narrative level appears at the very beginning of the text. It describes a scene from the Artie's childhood and presents an interaction between a middle-aged Vladek and a youthful Artie. This is a prologue for the rest of the work and establishes key components in the relationship between Artie and Vladek (elder). This narrative layer is temporally separate from the framing and main narratives but does not depart from the governing metaphor of the volume.

The second additional level of narrative is provided by the reprint of *Prisoner* from *Breakdowns* (which has been resized to fit the dimensions of *Maus* and includes the addition of Artie's hand holding the first page). In *Maus*, *Prisoner* is presented as having been authored by Artie. It is thus diegetic in relation to the metadiegetic framing narrative. Its protagonist is a secondary hero Artie (prisoner) stylistically and visually different from his other incarnations. Within *Maus*, *Prisoner* has an additional effect which, in concert with the photographs and the defamiliarizing strategies described in the sections above, serve to illustrate the artifice of the animal metaphor. The reader is pulled, jarringly, into a world populated by human analogues of the animal characters with which they have become familiar. Crucially, the absence of the animal metaphor means that this nightmarish expressionist world is ostensibly *closer* to extradiegetic reality. With the inclusion of *Prisoner*, Spiegelman introduces the idea that the further a narrative layer departs from the familiar artifice of the funny animal genre (and thus, the closer it comes to extradiegetic

reality), the more disconcerting, expressionistic and *mad* it becomes. This visual strategy reaches full fruition in the fifth narrative level, to which we now turn.

The final additional stand-alone narrative frame is entitled 'Time Flies.' The title of this sequence refers ostensibly to the rapid passage of time and, accordingly, Artie reels off a non-chronological list of events from his own life, World War II, and, specifically, Vladek's time in Auschwitz. The title is also rendered in a visual pun as Artie is surrounded by flies (before alighting upon the concept which appears in the published version, Spiegelman experimented by drawing two pages of panels filled with flies (see Spiegelman 2011, 160-162)). These flies, later panels reveal, are buzzing around a mound of Jewish corpses depicted as mice-human hybrids. Artie features as a man wearing a mouse mask. He slumps (in a pose reminiscent of his melancholic and guilt-ridden incarnation in *Prisoner*) at an artist's desk mounted precariously on this pile of corpses. He reports that Vladek, his father, is dead. Artie, the second son, is now responsible for the inherited memories of Vladek, his father, Richeau, the first son and Anja, their mother. Artie discusses the success of the first volume of *Maus*, and the resulting emotional turmoil this has created in his own life. A film crew, also wearing animal masks, enter the scene. They film Artie whilst barraging him with offers to develop the *Maus* 'brand' and questions about his project. Artie is terrified at the prospect of being nominated as a spokesperson for Holocaust survivors. He shrinks to child-like proportions and calls for his mother. This sequence thus offers a devastating visual metaphor for this Artie's sense of his own unsuitability as a spokesperson for Shoah survivors.

The 'Time Flies' sequence is metadiegetic in relation to the other narrative levels. It also adds an additional layer of narrative distance between the author Spiegelman and the Artie of the framing narrative, making the latter more visibly a 'character' in a story rather than a transparent self-representation of the author. Artie (man in a mouse mask) is the in-text illustrator and narrator for the prologue, main, and framing narratives. It is at this writing desk, as Artie (man in a mouse mask narrator), that he composes the work we have been reading. The distinction between the Rego Park and Poland strands in *Maus* and 'Time Flies' is made not through the use of animals as in the main and framing narratives, but rather by the visual conceit of humans wearing animal masks. The image of someone wearing an image over their face resonates with the status of this section as an intermediary stage between the main narrative and a nominal extradiegetic reality.

The 'Time Flies' sequence makes the madness of the everyday unambiguously manifest. This narrative level, which, to reiterate, is ostensibly closer to the extradiegetic than other narrative levels, exists in a place 'outside the movement of life' seen in the framing narrative (McGlothlin 2003, 186). In a manner similar to the 'reality' into which Artie 'awakens' in *Real Dream: Hand Job* (see section 2.9), it is more nightmarishly expressionist than the dream world (in this case the suburbs of Rego Park) from which it departs. The unreality of 'Time Flies' is punctuated by the presence of the film crew, as if the entire scene has been composed for deliberate artistic effect (which, of course, it has). The 'Time Flies' sequence sharply contrasts with the framing and main narratives which are largely organised in a chronological manner and the objects within them (if not the people) are rendered in a relatively realistic style. 'Time Flies' is a world filled with mouse corpses which no one



acknowledges; a symbolic rendering of Spiegelman's statement (quoted on the title page of this thesis) that 'Western Civilization ended at Auschwitz. And we still haven't noticed' (Spiegelman 1999, 15). 'Time Flies' is the world after Auschwitz with the madness produced by rationality made visible. It explores the underlying madness upon which the other, seemingly rational, narratives of *Maus* are insecurely founded. 'Time Flies', the most iconic of Spiegelman's images, and a summation of his artistic, affective and political agenda is what remains when rational narrative structures fall away and the madness which they rest upon becomes visible. It is what civilisation sees when it runs off the edge of the cliff and finally looks down.

The different incarnations of each character are further complicated by the way in which the past and present routinely collapse into each other throughout *Maus* in a process of, to use Iadonisi's term, 'temporal seepage.' Sentences which are started by Vladek (narrator) are often finished by Vladek (elder), or vice versa (see Spiegelman 2003, 195 for example). Young contends that Vladek's story is 'constantly interrupted by Art's questions and neurotic preoccupations, his father's pill-taking, the rancorous father-son relationship [and] his father's new and sour marriage' (Young 2000, 18). The framing narrative, too, is haunted by the main narrative. Images and events from Poland during World War II suddenly erupt into the present of the framing narrative. When Vladek (elder) re-enacts the *selektion* process, for example, in the final panel he appears as Vladek (younger) standing before, not Artie, but Dr. Mengele – the ultimate personification of madness in an agent of reason. In terms of McCloud's taxonomy, the transition between the two panels represents a dramatic change in time and space (a type 4 transition) and yet, by doubling the characters and continuing the

story from one panel to the next, Spiegelman signals smooth transitions between narrative levels. Seepage also occurs between the additional narrative layers and the two main narratives. The shame expressed in *Prisoner* is inflected differently and compounded through its embedded presence within the framing narrative. If, as Probyn argues, '[s]hame forces us to reflect continually on the implications of our writing', this constant reflection is dramatised in *Maus* beyond the act of writing and the shame it transfers to others (Probyn 2010, 73). The original *Prisoner* was published in 'an obscure underground comic book [which Artie] never thought Vladek would see' (Spiegelman 2003, 101). When Vladek does see it he is infected by the shame expressed within the text and confronted by his own relationship to his wife's suicide. He reports that reading the story brought him to tears. As he recollects the experience of reading the story his body slumps with the sheer weight of shame and he looks away from Artie to the floor in a recreation of the image of Artie (prisoner)'s melting body (Spiegelman 2003, 106). Whilst *Prisoner* itself remains in its own distinct narrative level, it can thus be said to inform and even infect the framing narrative.

This image can be found on page 101 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 48** *Vladek's depression after reading Prisoner on the Hell Planet*

In this sense the madness of *Prisoner* and 'Time Flies', which illuminates the madness produced by Enlightened society that Auschwitz laid bare, constantly sits beneath the surface of the framing and main narratives. At any point this madness may burst forth into the ostensibly ordered, rational, and artificial world above.

To summarise, in this section the case has been made that Spiegelman uses the multiple narrative layers of *Maus* not only to further defamiliarize the animal metaphor, but

also to make manifest the madness upon which the ostensibly rational framework of *Maus* rests. This madness, which appears first in *Prisoner* and later in 'Time Flies' threatens constantly to erupt into the familiar world of the main and framing narratives. This assertion corresponds with the broader thesis proposed to this point, namely that Spiegelman renders the Holocaust within a familiar framework whilst simultaneously undermining and challenging that framework in order to make clear the madness of Enlightenment rationality.

Whilst these additional levels of narrative distance are important to recognise, an exact distinction between the multiple Vladeks and Arties would burden the remainder of this analysis. For simplicity of writing, any reference to 'Artie' in the following text, unless stated otherwise, refers to the hero Artie of the framing narrative and the narrator Artie of the main narrative. Any reference to Vladek will distinguish which Vladek is being referred to only when this is not contextually implicit. The following sections shall continue to explore the relationship between madness and reason in *Maus* by considering the relationship between the dual storytellers.

### **3.7 Mediated Space: Vladek**

*The relationship between the narrators of Maus can be characterised as one of uneasy collaboration – Neither Artie nor Vladek remain entirely within their respective roles – Artie actively works to undermine Vladek's authority as storyteller by drawing against Vladek's testimony and through the inclusion of the Lucia story – In some respects Artie adopts the role of an agent of reason in respect to Vladek – Vladek is further marginalised by being depicted as psychologically unstable and as the ultimate survivor – Maus encourages reader empathy with Artie, the agent of reason, whilst othering Vladek, the madman*

This section will explore in more detail the manner in which *Maus* dramatizes the struggle between empirical and traumatic truth and thereby demonstrates the irreducibly

problematic nature of this subject and the impossibility of either concept to articulate definitively the madness of the Shoah. The case shall also be made that within the framing narrative Vladek is presented as a psychologically unstable individual – a mad narrator. In order to reach this conclusion the argument shall be presented that Artie undermines Vladek’s authority as a storyteller. His central strategies in doing so are to draw against the content of Vladek’s testimony and to include material which Vladek specifically requests to be omitted. These strategies ultimately serve to cast Artie in the role of the agent of reason and Vladek as the madman. Vladek’s madness is further reinforced within the framing narrative both through the reports of others and through other/ing strategies. *Maus* thus represents, ostensibly, a struggle between empirical and traumatic truth, or, in the language used thus far, between rationality and madness.

The importance of the distinction between the separate narrators and characters becomes evident in an examination of the peculiar and productive narrative tensions which structure *Maus*. Lydia Kokkola reads *Maus* as ‘not only the Vladek story and Art story, but also the process of their construction ... [as] mediated space between father and son’ (Kokkola 2003, 123). The term ‘mediated’ is appropriate here in the sense that the story is developed through an uneasy collaboration. The main narrative of *Maus* is the story of Vladek (younger)’s experiences as they are recounted through Vladek (narrator)’s retrospective commentary. This commentary occurs concurrently with Artie’s illustrations. Even this concise description, however, is not entirely accurate. Whilst Vladek provides the information from which the main narrative is drawn, not every scene which is depicted is derived from incidents which he personally witnessed. The main narrative includes moments

of what Genette would term ‘polymodality’: passages in which the first-person focalizer conveys information to which he or she could not possibly have had access (see Genette 1980, 198-211). There are several scenes in the main narrative of *Maus* which Vladek did not experience first-hand. These include Richeau’s death, the hypothesised fate of Mandelbaum, the seamstress’s time in prison, and the aerial view of Auschwitz drawn, not from Vladek’s memory (for how could he have possibly viewed the camp from above?) but from Spiegelman’s research based upon the information provided by his father (Spiegelman 2003, 111, 195, 30, and 211). Neither is it the case that the authors remain tied to their respective roles. Vladek, on two occasions, takes the pen and draws a diagram to aid his explanation and thus figuratively supplants Artie as the artist/narrator of the text (Spiegelman 2003, 112 and 114). The diagram which appears in *Maus* is not the original drawn by Vladek Spiegelman during the interviews upon which *Maus* is based. It has been ‘approximated’ by Spiegelman and is based upon his father’s original sketch (Spiegelman 2011, 186). Within the diegesis, however, it is Vladek (narrator), not Artie who draws the image. Similarly, whilst Vladek is the narrator of his wartime experience, Artie directs the telling. This is dramatised in an exaggerated manner on page 207 when Artie (as the man in a mouse mask) listens to a tape recording and hears his own voice repeatedly and aggressively insist that Vladek stick to the story: ‘please Pop. The tape’s on. Let’s continue [...] Let’s go back to Auschwitz [...] Enough! Tell me about Auschwitz!’ (Spiegelman 2003, 207). Artie pushes Vladek to provide more details and discourages deviation from ‘the story.’ The important observation to draw from these examples is that, whilst the two narrators are largely able to remain in their respective roles, their collaboration is defined by significant tension.

Section 1.1 of this thesis includes a summary of the recurring theme within *Maus*, the criticism of visual commentary upon verbal content. The case has been made by many scholars that the illustrations provided by Artie do not offer a transparent visual analogue to Vladek's prose. The second voice of the art (and of Artie) alerts the reader to Vladek's potential unreliability as a narrator within Vladek's own testimony. Spiegelman provides an important context for this subversion in *Metamaus*: 'it was obvious to me, doing my homework, that Vladek's memory didn't jibe with everything I read' (Spiegelman 2011, 29). The dual narratives provide a means to simultaneously present and comment upon the story and identify, but not directly challenge, inconsistencies. This dual narrative or split-screen structure would, perhaps, be impossible to achieve in prose (or at least with precisely the same immediacy). This structure is founded less on a process of creative collaboration than an uneasy alliance which foregrounds questions of historical knowledge, authority and artifice. Further evidence of the tension between the dual narrative voices is noticeable in the inclusion of the Lucia Greenberg episode in Vladek's story. Lucia was Vladek's girlfriend before he met Anja. Vladek's narrative breaks from the main story, returning to the framing narrative in Rego Park, where Vladek (elder) tells Artie: 'I don't want you should write this in your book [...] such private things I don't want you should mention' (Spiegelman 2003, 25). Artie protests that the inclusion of these details serves to humanise the story. Vladek is uncomfortable with this diegetic expansion and insists that the story be omitted. In the final panel of the page Artie raises his hand as if swearing an oath and says 'okay, okay- I promise' (Spiegelman 2003, 25). The promise is presented ironically. Both Artie and the reader are fully aware that it has already been broken. The moment is described by Wolk as a 'bright neon sign indicating that the reader should bear in mind that although we may be reading

Vladek's words about Vladek's experiences, Art is the one telling this story' (Wolk 2007, 344).

The Lucia episode thus serves to dramatise the relative degree of authority which each of the two authors have over the text. Vladek provides the raw materials, but Artie has decided how that they will be crafted. Mikics asserts, in reference to the Lucia story, that 'Spiegelman announces from the start that this narrative is the seizing, as well as the honouring, of an inheritance: Artie takes Vladek's story from him' (Mikics 2003, 16). Whilst Spiegelman drew and redrew the panels of *Maus* repeatedly, Vladek Spiegelman's ordinary narrative (and the narrative of his in-text incarnation) is the *first take*, complete with authenticating poor grammar and contradictions. By including the Lucia story, Spiegelman makes explicit the fact that Vladek has not been allowed the luxury of retrospective self-editing.

Artie's ultimate authority over the material of the text can be understood in terms of the core dynamic tension which occurs between agents of rationality and madmen throughout Spiegelman's work. Artie is cast in the role of the agent of reason (in this case the judge) and Vladek is both cast as a victim of psychological disturbance and, through visual and linguistic techniques, othered within the text. In the afterword to *Breakdowns*, Spiegelman describes *Maus* as a 'deposition' (Spiegelman 2008, 69). The choice of terminology here is indicative of the implied reader which Spiegelman wishes to construct. Young contends that testimony is 'tied into the legal process of establishing evidence in order to achieve justice' (Young 1988, 18). Iadonisi takes the courtroom analogy further, imagining Artie as 'the cross-

examiner, with Vladek in the role of the witness' (Iadonisi 1994, 53). The tension between Vladek and Artie's perspectives has a precedent in Jewish culture which has been overlooked in Spiegelman criticism to date. There is a tradition of accepting and exploring contradiction in Talmudic rabbinical commentary. Emil L. Fackenheim contends that 'Midrash does not shrink from paradox' (Fackenheim 1978, 263). There is a further resonance to the idea of interrogation as it relates to Jewish scripture. The *Mishna* states that '[t]he more exhaustive the cross-examination, [*Bedikoth*] the more praiseworthy the judge' (*Sanhedrin* 40a). The trappings of both a Jewish context and legal deliberation echo the 1945-1946 Nuremberg Trials, where several prominent members of the Nazi party were tried and sentenced (least legal process be considered an unimpeachable branch of rationality, we should also recall that the Nazis used the law – beginning with the Nuremberg laws of 1935 – as a tool to segregate, control, and justify the murder of Jewish people). With a sense of thorough bureaucratic deliberation and the use of legal discourse, Vladek is made to tell the whole truth and not simply those aspects of it which he wishes to be included. The inclusion of embarrassing material in Vladek's story is a narrative device designed to alert the reader to the likelihood that the information presented is complete (or at least, to create the appearance of a thorough exposé). Artie's narrative strategy, as he aspires to the role of a 'praiseworthy judge', is to ensure that Vladek gives a full report and that every word of his testimony is formally recorded. With the conduct befitting of legal process, Artie insists upon the collection and assessment of evidence (including Anja's story) and attempts to establish a thorough and objective chronology. Artie's approach to the process of telling *Maus* is thus founded upon the tacit superiority of rationality over irrationality and the use of legal processes which both rely upon and reinforce the authority of agents of reason.



The question of traumatic truth is eminently relevant to the dynamic relationship between the dual storytellers. Section 1.7 of this thesis includes context for the treatment of traumatic truth within the framework of the binarism between rationality and madness. Within *Maus*, Vladek's story is not silenced, but it is presented in such a manner as to suggest that, within the rational framework of legal process, issues of plausibility should be largely set aside. His narrative voice belongs to a marginalised discourse because it is presented as being outside of traditional rational historiographical models. Identifying Vladek's narrative in these terms implies the existence of an untraumatised alternative, delivered from a rational source which can be held accountable in terms of plausibility and truth. The second narrative voice of the main narrative, Artie's, occupies an approximation of this role. In what is now a familiar trope within this thesis, through the elevation of Artie's power as agent of reason, Vladek is thus cast as a relatively marginalised and powerless figure. Spiegelman further recycles the oppositional dynamic between rationality and madness and reinforces Vladek's position as madman in relation to Artie's empiricism through the son's depiction of his father.

Within the framing narrative Vladek's reliability as a narrator is called into question. Doherty identifies, perhaps unwittingly, the implication of the superiority of Artie's rationality by arguing that Artie defies his father's wishes and includes the Lucia story 'in service to a greater truth' (Doherty 1996, 81). Vladek's story, as Vladek wishes it to be recorded, is, to extend Doherty's phrasing, a 'lesser' truth. Vladek's failure as a historiographer is further explored in the depiction of the elder Vladek's emotional well-being in the framing narrative. In *Metamaus*, Spiegelman explains that *Maus* involved the

process of ‘trying to understand how damaged Vladek was, and whether he had been damaged before the war or not, and what the implications of those psychological issues might be’ (Spiegelman 2011, 73). As well as presenting the conversations which constitute the main narrative, the framing narrative of *Maus* documents the interactions between Artie and Vladek. Artie’s own view of his father and the opinions of several witnesses for the ‘deposition’ are included. The framing narrative presents Vladek as largely devoid of self-awareness. He routinely alienates those with whom he interacts. Amongst other traits, he hoards money and other items, picks up discarded objects in the street, throws away his son’s coat without permission, and barges into Artie’s room to wake him early in the morning (Spiegelman 2003, 118, 70 and 178). Vladek’s neighbours ‘can’t stand him’ (Spiegelman 2003, 182). He appears to be either oblivious to (or unaffected by) the effect his antisocial behaviour has on others. Artie is not infrequently left to apologise on his father’s behalf. For example, at one point Vladek insists that he be taken to a local store whereupon he proceeds to argue loudly with the manager, proclaiming his ill health and status as a Holocaust survivor, and demanding to be allowed to return previously purchased products. The manager permits the transaction for six dollars. When Vladek leaves the store victorious, Artie comments that ‘we can’t ever show our faces here again’ (Spiegelman 2003, 250). These incidents thus present Vladek as an emotionally unstable and irrational individual. It further leads the reader to speculate as to whether a degree of self-delusion has inflected Vladek (narrator)’s self-portrait within the main narrative.

Artie is certainly not blind to the possible effect of his depiction of his father within the broad category of madman. He tells Mala ‘it’s something that worries me about the book

I am doing about [Vladek] ... in some ways he is just like the racist caricature of the miserly old Jew [...] I mean, I am just trying to portray my father **accurately**' (Spiegelman 2003, 133-4). The dynamics of censure and accuracy are distinctly felt, particularly given that the right to speak about the Shoah is something which, had the Final Solution come to fruition, would have been denied to its victims. Exactly how 'accurate' this representation is can be evaluated by considering the elder Vladek in the same terms as another figure from the Shoah canon: Anne Frank. As has been well documented, Anne Frank's diary was edited to remove references to her emerging sexual awareness. Cole, for example, highlights how 'the result of the editing of her father and the first publishers of the diary was to create a girl who was in many ways a perfect "victim". Not only was she young and female, but also "innocent"' (Cole, 1999, 29). Anne Frank has been canonised as perhaps the model martyr of the Shoah. By contrast, the elder hero Vladek is old, male, savvy and, in some sense, the perfect 'survivor.'

In addition to undermining Vladek as a narrator, the unflattering portrayal of Vladek (elder) further encourages the reader's empathy with his son and thereby commends Artie's rationality. Artie, as the focaliser of the framing narrative, appears relatively calm and reasonable in contrast with his father. Artie, in Huyssen's terms, 'becomes the medium in the text through which we ourselves become witnesses to his father's autobiographic narration' (Huyssen 2000, 78). This is achieved, in part, through the iconic artistic style used to portray Artie and through Vladek's spoken English. The Iconic artistic style encourages the reader to see themselves in Artie's role because the Iconic mouse face facilitates easy reader identification (even if, as argued in section 3.3, that empathy is frequently made problematic).

By comparison, the elder Vladek is subjected to detailed physical studies (on pages 14 and 276 for example) which foreground his otherness. As Wilner remarks, Vladek is simply not 'most people' (Wilner 2003, 115). The same effect is achieved through the different registers in which each character speaks. The older Vladek speaks in broken English coloured with Polish and Yiddish grammar whereas Artie's speech conforms to the syntax and vocabulary of standard American English. Artie's language is shared, one can assume, by most of his readership. Mala, Pavel and Anja, who are all 'candidates for an accent more or less equal to that of Vladek', also speak in clear English (Alan Rosen 2003, 129). Vladek's relative incomprehensibility helps to enforce Artie's authority as an interpreter, narrator, and agent of reason. Berger argues that 'by virtue of commanding a language never fully mastered by [his] parents, [Artie is] testifying on behalf of the survivors' (Berger 1995, 29).

An analogy might be drawn here between Vladek's English and the use of 'common language' in the English Comic Novel. Bakhtin contends of such a register that, wherever it is employed, 'the author distances himself from this common language, he steps back and objectifies it, forcing his own intentions to refract and diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embodied in language (a view that is always superficial and frequently hypocritical)' (Bakhtin 1981, 302). Common language serves both to highlight a character's lack of formal education and their blinkered view of the world, and to imply relative intelligence on the part of the author and other characters. Vladek's broken English, in concert with the panels which focus upon parts of his body, serves to further emphasise his otherness. This otherness naturalises the respective roles of the characters, with Vladek playing the role of the marginalised and unreliable madman, and Artie as the

comparatively articulate and rational agent of reason. To return to the terminology introduced in the introductory chapter, Vladek (elder) can thus be understood as a mad character narrated by a rational narrator (Artie) and Vladek (narrator) is a mad (albeit articulate) narrator whose authority is called into question.

To summarise, the dual narrators of *Maus* can be understood in terms of the dynamic tension between madness and rationality. Artie uses several visual and linguistic strategies to undermine Vladek's authority as a narrator including the act of framing Vladek's story in the context of legal proceedings. The ultimate goal of this process is to establish Artie as a man of reason and Vladek as a madman, thereby asserting Artie's allegiance to dogmatic reason. The portrayal of Vladek ostensibly works against Spiegelman's governing thesis that madness inevitably arises in the margins (and sometimes in the very center) of rational society and, therefore, that a dogmatic faith in reason is dangerous. The following section shall demonstrate that even as Spiegelman is partially complicit in the portrayal of Vladek as an unreliable narrator, however, he does not allow Artie's rationality to go unchallenged.

### **3.8 Mediated Space: Artie**

*Spiegelman undermines Artie's insistence upon rational forms – Artie cannot communicate the madness of the Holocaust because his rational models prove inadequate and Vladek cannot communicate the madness of the because he is an unreliable narrator*

In this section the argument shall be made that Spiegelman demonstrates, through comments on the inadequacy of books as well as the defamiliarizing strategies detailed in the sections above, that Artie's rationalism is also ultimately ineffective in communicating Vladek's story. Neither Artie nor Vladek succeed in adequately communicating their subject.

Vladek fails because, as Artie seeks to demonstrate, he misremembers or misinterprets what happened to him due to psychological damage. Artie fails because the rational legal and historiographical structures upon which he insists fail to adequately depict the story of the Shoah.

Whilst Artie's approach to the text is founded upon the tacit superiority of rationality over madness, Spiegelman is keenly aware of the problems inherent in an uncomplicated division between the two. Calling attention to the inconsistencies in Vladek's story through the visual narrative, including censored materials in the story, and portraying the elder Vladek as a socially and linguistically flawed character flagrantly challenges the traditional hierarchy of voices in Holocaust literature. *Maus* dramatises the recurring question in Holocaust literature of who has the right to speak? Frankl, representing a position shared by Wiesel amongst others, asserts that '[o]nly the man inside knows' (Frankl 2004, 20). One must have been there, Frankl suggests, to understand the Shoah. Vladek concurs with Frankl. He tells Artie: 'you heard about the gas, but I'm telling you not rumours, but only what really I saw. For this I was an eyewitness' (Spiegelman 2003, 229). No amount of learned knowledge on Artie's part can replace Vladek's first-hand experience. Vladek is not only capable of attesting to the horrors of Auschwitz, he has a duty to do so; according to the Torah, the witness *must* attest to what he has seen (Lev 5.1). Vladek, as a primary witness, has a divinely-mandated responsibility which he alone can fulfil. The act of witnessing involves his physical being: 'Vladek insists on the distinction between what he has seen and what he has heard [...] an insistence that not only supports the credibility of the teller but makes the "incredible" real. As eyewitness he establishes the link between the event and his

own body' (Bosmajian 2003, 36). From this perspective the commentary of one who was not present is not necessarily without merit, but it can be afforded, at best, a second-class status. Landsberg dramatises this hierarchy between the first- and second-generation survivor in *Maus* by using Vladek's glass eye as a metaphor for Artie: Vladek's prosthetic eye sheds tears for the events it did not witness (see Landsberg 1997, 69). The limits of Artie's ability to reduce the madness of the Holocaust into a rational structure are played out within the text.

The treatment of rationality is far more complex in *Maus* than in *Breakdowns*. Spiegelman does not offer an outright rejection of Artie's attempt to recreate a secure legal, or historiographical, framework. Indeed, he clearly recognises that questions of truth are of crucial importance in relation to the Holocaust, particularly when considered in relation to revisionist discourse. If trauma precludes awareness then Frankl and Wiesel's assertion that only survivors are capable of understanding the Holocaust becomes problematic. For Wiesel, first person testimony is the only viable form of Holocaust literature, and yet, the only 'truth' of the Holocaust which is available through such forms is traumatic (and thus subjective and non-empirical). Spiegelman is keenly aware that by suggesting Vladek may be an unreliable narrator, he risks granting legitimacy to revisionist discourses: '[I]urking on one Holo-hoax site I saw a thread citing the Auschwitz orchestra page as proof that I'm subconsciously acknowledging that my father's a liar' (Spiegelman 2011, 102).

Despite his sympathy for Artie's desire to create a rational structure, however, Spiegelman makes clear that such a structure is inadequate to explain or mitigate the horror of his subject. This manifests not only in the deliberately problematic allegory, the heavy use

of quotation, and the deliberate omission of violence, but in the self-referential assertions as to the inadequacy of written historiographical accounts within the text. When the younger Vladek is in hiding and another Jew, sent to find food, returns with books, Vladek cries out: ‘[b]ooks!? What’s the matter with you? We can’t eat books’ (Spiegelman 2003, 114). The inadequacy of historiography and testimony in the face of the Holocaust is reiterated when Pavel, Artie’s therapist (a figure who is far more empathetic than the doctor who appears in *Breakdowns*, but nonetheless appears to have an irrational relationship with his pets), says ‘look how many books have already been written about the Holocaust. What’s the point? People haven’t changed (Spiegelman 2003, 205). Similarly, Artie discusses the project with Françoise: ‘I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. And trying to do it as a *comic strip!* I guess I bit off more than I can chew. Maybe I ought to forget the whole thing’ (Spiegelman 2003, 176). A key drama within *Maus* then is the ongoing possibility of its own impossibility. The comments upon the inadequacy of written accounts reflects, as suggested in the sections above, the conscious inadequacy of the allegory and the recognised limits of visual and written media to represent the Shoah (see section 1.4). These elements, coupled with Artie’s own introspection serve to demonstrate that despite his rational legal and historiographical approach, he, too, is ill-equipped to tell a survivor’s tale. He holds (somewhat chimerical) authority over a story which, despite his authority and rationality, cannot be told.

Spiegelman further demonstrates the inadequacy of rational models to adequately depict the Holocaust by acknowledging that Vladek and Artie are far more similar than the latter wishes to admit. In a testament to both the insidious transmissibility of a traumatised



world-view and the madness which lies at the heart of rationality, Vladek compulsively hoards anything of practical value whilst Artie compulsively hoards anything of relevance to Vladek's story. Despite the deliberation with which Vladek's story is interrogated, Artie is happy to permit fairytale imagery in the framing narrative. He suggests to François that her transformation from French to Jewish within the animal metaphor could be performed by a rabbi so that '[b]y the end of the page the frog has turned into a beautiful mouse' (Spiegelman 2003, 172). Artie, it seems, is no more capable of presenting objective truth than his father. It is further the case, as shall be argued in sections 3.9 to 3.14, that a clear delineation between Artie's rationality and Vladek's madness becomes less stable than the above analysis might suggest.

*Maus* thus encodes a tragic recognition of the cost of Vladek and Artie's failure as narrators. Anja's memory is at stake in *Maus* (see section 1.1), but, through her absence, Spiegelman recognises the lost stories of every individual who entered and never left Auschwitz or who lived the rest of their life in silence. Vladek has silenced Anja, but Artie similarly, fails to include all available survivor stories. Even as he bemoans the absence of Anja's voice he shows no interest in recording the stories of Mala and Pavel, both of whom are also survivors. (Artie differs from Spiegelman in this respect. *Metamaus* features transcripts of interviews between Spiegelman and other Shoah survivors. In *Maus*, however, Artie is only ever seen interviewing his father). Both Artie and Vladek's unreliability as narrators reinforces the 'unspeakability' thesis considered in section 1.4. If Artie cannot comment upon the Shoah because the rational legal and historiographical models upon which he insists prove inadequate, and Vladek cannot comment upon it because he is a mad (and

thus unreliable) narrator then *Maus* is ultimately not a book about the Shoah. It is, therefore, a book about two storytellers finally failing to communicate the story of the Shoah.

At this juncture in the chapter the following has been established: Spiegelman resists the resolution of the Holocaust and uncomplicated empathy with the victims by employing defamiliarizing strategies throughout the text. He avoids the potential dangers of historiographical metafiction by preserving an (albeit undermined) authentic survivor testimony within the text. Further to this, by avoiding the depiction of gratuitous violence he attempts to describe the Holocaust as an event which occurred on an international scale and employed the tools of industrial and scientific rationality to insane ends. This theme is supported by the structure of *Maus* wherein those narrative levels which are most divorced from the animal metaphor are also those which are the most expressionistic, chaotic, and insane. The tension between madness and rationality is dramatised within the text; Artie insists upon the superiority of rational forms (namely legal and historiographical models) and, in order to elevate his own status as a narrator, calls Vladek's reliability as a narrator into question. Spiegelman does not support Artie's faith in rationality however and, as such, the inadequacy of rational forms to communicate the horror of the Holocaust is acknowledged within the text. The argument to this point can be further simplified to the assertion that within *Maus* Spiegelman demonstrates the irrationality and horrific scale of the Holocaust by dramatizing the failure of rational forms.

### **3.9 Trauma: in the *Maus* of Madness**

*Vladek displays some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, most notably an unwillingness to part with objects – In order to attempt to heal his trauma Vladek seeks out a familiar narrative framework and apprehensible meaning which Spiegelman seeks to avoid*

Until this point Vladek's apparent madness within *Maus* has been acknowledged but has gone largely undiagnosed. The following sections will seek to explain the nature and effect of his psychological disturbance and thus, as in the previous chapter, attempt to build an understanding of his madness from within. If Artie's reliance upon rational forms proves to be flawed then, in this context, Vladek's madness allows *Maus* to attest to the failure of those forms. Vladek may fail to provide testimony in such a way as to satisfy the criteria proposed by Artie, but he is able to attest to a truth which exists beyond such discourse. He thus appears as an unwittingly Foolish character who, through his apparent failure to function within rational forms, calls attention to a truth which rationality cannot address.

Such a reading, however, is not straightforward. Unlike the madness articulated in *Breakdowns* Vladek's testimony, as noted in section 3.1, is delivered with a sometimes awkward syntax but does not involve the complete rejection of rational structures. This poses a problem for, and necessitates a revision of, the framework concerning the writing of madness from within presented in the previous chapter. We need to begin by asking whether Vladek, in fact, is disqualified from serving as a Fool? Or, does he employ strategies which allow him to mimic rationality? In order to develop answers to these questions the framework in which Vladek's madness is understood will need to be refined from a broad classifier of madness – a non-medical classifier of psychological ill-health with consequent marginalisation – to a more precise understanding of trauma within the field of clinical psychology. The case shall be made that the nature of Vladek's madness is far less distinct

than the analysis to this point might suggest; within his mad testimony Vladek, in fact and perversely, at times communicates a desire for rational order, whereas Artie, even as he demands that the story be told within a rational structure, resists Vladek's desire to draw meaning from the Holocaust.

To revisit an assertion made in section 1.1, Vladek is somewhat dismissive of Artie's attempts to establish an authoritative chronology for the main narrative. For Vladek an objective measurement of days is irrelevant. What matters is how the passage of time *felt*. Despite offering a traumatic truth which does not measure up to Artie's standards of empirical historiography, Vladek's testimony does employ many familiarizing literary strategies which are significantly less radical than the mad comics of *Breakdowns*. The characteristics which make Vladek an unreliable narrator can be understood in relation to the symptomology of post-traumatic stress disorder. The act of telling his story allows Vladek not necessarily to exorcise trauma, but at least to approach parts of his personal history and to partially integrate the traumatic events he lived through into his understanding of the world. Vladek is an individual who underwent an irreparable traumatic change at Auschwitz. His own narrative, the main one in the text, is thus presented through the lens of traumatic truth: the subjective truth of the event as it exists in the individual's emotional and mnemonic awareness. In order to derive treatment from the act of testimony, Vladek uses both the familiar framework of the fairytale ending, and the independent creation of meaning. Further to this, both Vladek's older and younger incarnations take actions to facilitate their emotional survival and thus manufacture a sense of control. This control has allowed him to partially resist trauma.

Critics have identified the presence of trauma in Vladek's behaviour (a broad overview of these arguments appears in section 1.1). Some of the key assertions regarding the symptomology of post-traumatic stress disorder, specifically hoarding, which Vladek displays shall now be briefly detailed. Young argues that when Vladek addresses Artie as 'Richeau' at the end of the book, '[t]he still apparently unassimilated trauma of his first son's death remains inarticulable [...] and so is represented here only indirectly as a kind of manifest behaviour' (Young 2000, 14). Vladek displays a great deal of 'manifest behaviour' – an unwillingness to part with objects, paranoia, and a pathological reluctance to spend money – which can be read as evidence of otherwise unexpressed (and perhaps inexpressible) trauma. Landsberg contends of Vladek's hoarding and obsessive pill counting that 'the relationship to objects that the Holocaust forced upon Vladek is part of a mimetics of absence: it bespeaks the loss of people, of bodies, of familial connections' (Landsberg 1997, 71). Unable to attend to the losses he has encountered in his life, Vladek clings to those few things which he is able to control and, by saving everything, seeks to prepare himself for another catastrophe. He continues to act out certain behaviours not only as a means to legitimate his belief that he facilitated his own survival, but because he believes in their continued necessity. Spiegelman's father, upon whom the character of Vladek is based, did not want his son to visit Poland on the grounds that '[t]hey kill Jews there' (Spiegelman 2011, 60). The Shoah, for him, was not a lesson from history on the banality of evil or the dangers of dogmatic faith in rationality. *It was literally still taking place.*

Vladek also shows the absence of symptoms of healthy readjustment. Goleman has attempted to identify signs of recovery for those who have experienced trauma: ‘rebuilding a new life, with strong, trusting relationships and a belief system that finds meaning even in a world where such injustice can happen. All of these together are markers in success at reeducating the emotional brain’ (Goleman 1995, 212-3). It is clear in the framing narrative that Vladek displays none of those signifiers of rehabilitation. He has difficulty establishing trusting relationships as is manifest in his quarrels with Mala. Vladek is an emotionally unstable individual who is very much capable of errors in judgement and excessively stubborn behaviour. The reader is invited to read these idiosyncrasies (justifiably or otherwise) as rooted in his experience of trauma. Huysen, for example, diagnoses Vladek as a subject ‘permeated by his past experiences of persecution during the Nazi period’ (Huysen 2000, 71). In one conversation, Françoise remarks that it is ‘a miracle that [Vladek] survived’ (Spiegelman 2003, 250). Artie replies that ‘in some ways he didn’t survive’ (ibid). In other words, although Vladek has physically survived Auschwitz, he remains an emotional revenant.

One can reasonably assert, then, that Vladek (elder) shows certain symptoms of trauma. The question now becomes what role this trauma plays in his act of narration. Despite the symptoms described above Vladek’s testimony is not always an easy fit for the genre of trauma testimony. The telling itself contains little of the conventional symptomology of PTSD such as repetition, substitution or an inability to articulate experience. It is important here to acknowledge, once more, the distinction between Vladek Spiegelman and Vladek (narrator). When he edited his father’s words after their original transmission, Spiegelman

organised the story into a coherent narrative and the performance (if not the actuality) of rational forms. Within *Maus*, however, Vladek appears to tell his story chronologically. The remainder of this section shall detail the ways in which Vladek's presentation of his story not only eschews the broken language of madness which appears in *Breakdowns*, but makes use of familiar narrative devices and the generation of meaning.

The use of traditional literary forms and the creation of meaning serve to mitigate the trauma of Vladek's testimony. Vladek's attempt to communicate the traumatic truth of his story is by no means unusual for a Shoah survivor. First-person Shoah testimony as a genre is often characterised (to the extent that such a genre can be characterised) by the seeking-out of similar narratives as contact-points. Intertextuality in Shoah literature is common not only in texts which were created by those who were not present (as detailed in section 3.4), but also in the narratives of those who witnessed the events first-hand. Robert N. Kraft contends that 'survivors draw analogies to well-known people. [...] They make contact with Holocaust stories that have already been told – in particular, *Schindler's List*' (Kraft Chester University, 18/09/09). Anna Richardson, similarly, argues that 'despite the apparent incongruity between the horror of the Holocaust and the comforting childhood world of the fairytale, it is perhaps not surprising that in searching for a narrative frame of reference for the Holocaust we alight on fairytales' (Richardson Chester University, 18/09/09). Many survivors rely upon such traditional narrative structures as a framework for their experiences.

This longing for the comforts of a fantasy world leads Vladek to describe his life with Anja after they were reunited in America with the words 'happy ever after' (Spiegelman 2003,

296). (In his testimony, Spiegelman's father described his life after his reunion with his wife as 'very happy' rather than 'happy ever after' (see Bosmajian 2003, 41). Vladek, it seems, is more inclined to use clichés than Vladek Spiegelman, upon whom he is based). Whilst Spiegelman's approach to the Shoah avoids sentimentalism and catharsis, Vladek seeks precisely these consolations through conventional narrative forms. When Vladek tells his story he is not simply repeating what happened to him, he is consciously attempting to recognise and order these events within the context of the familiar and thus to create a coherent narrative. When Artie presses him for saved letters, Vladek responds 'all such things from the war, I tried to put out from my mind once and for all... until you rebuild me all this from your questions' (Spiegelman 2003, 258). The act of telling allows him, for the first time, the opportunity to consider his own behaviour and attitudes and construct a consistent identity ('you rebuild me'). His telling creates the event alongside the individual who experienced it and, as such, he is able to order the events in such a way as to facilitate the healing process.

Vladek's desire for a happy ending can be further understood in terms of the independent creation of meaning as an assertion of agency. The meaning which Vladek provides for his story is that his love for his wife sustained him through Auschwitz and that their reunion was his reward, making the story, in essence, a romance (attendant to which is the familiar three act structure which can be casually described as 'want-lose-get'). When Vladek remembers his story, he identifies his drive to be reunited with Anja as his purpose. He recalls thinking 'only how happy it would be to have Anja so near to me' (Spiegelman 2003, 224). One of his strong memories is the (unsuccessful) plan he formulated to have Anja



moved so that she could be closer to him. The Lucia story is distasteful and incongruous with the love story he is crafting and so he asks Artie to remove it. By arranging his narrative in such a way, the reunion with Anja offers the promise of a final cathartic conclusion. Vladek's intuitive understanding of the role which narrative can play in relation to trauma and identity might call for a new examination of the act of burning Anja's diaries (see section 1.1) which runs counter to those proposed by Staub (1995) (to force Vladek to remember his wife), Liss (1998), and Levine (2003) (as a repetition of the Nazis burning books); those diaries represented a threat to Vladek's own interpretation of the events. He chose to destroy them rather than allow them to destroy the fairytale version of his experience.

Despite his apparent madness then, we find that Vladek's insistence upon a familiar narrative format told in a chronological order with a cathartic reunion and a sense of meaning at its close, creates exactly the kind of story which, as has been argued in the sections above, Spiegelman seeks to avoid. A familiar narrative framework threatens to distort, reduce and cathartically resolve the questions raised by the Shoah. Such actions run directly counter to Spiegelman's desire to make manifest the terrible implications of the Holocaust for Enlightenment rationality, but for the victim of trauma this may not be undesirable. Indeed, the cathartic resolution of the horror of the Holocaust may be *exactly what they want* and Vladek may be a prime example of such a process. Bosmajian asserts that 'Vladek's insistence on the happy end denies the content of *Maus*, but it is appropriate in relation to his consistent refusal to come to self-knowledge' (Bosmajian 2003, 42). Vladek does not seek the absolute accuracy of a deposition, nor is he conscious of the offensive ramifications of a Holocaust story in which the audience are provided with an uplifting sense of having been

‘saved’ or, indeed, of the dangerous ramifications in accepting alternative ‘truths’ of the Shoah, nor is he concerned with the dangers of exonerating Enlightenment rationality. Despite the problematic nature of such an act, it would be wholly inappropriate to condemn Vladek or any other trauma victim for making use of familiar literary forms in their testimony; as a first-generation survivor he holds complete ownership of the violence he experienced.

In this section the following has been established: that Vladek displays some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and yet his trauma does not shape his narrative in a manner which is consistent with the typical signifiers of trauma narratives. It has been argued that one possible explanation for the mitigation of trauma within his testimony is that he makes use of familiar narrative formulae in order to generate consolatory meaning. This therapeutic process offers the potential for healing, even as it serves to both distort the story of the Holocaust and resolve, rather than maintain, the terrible implications of a genocide built upon rational scientific and industrial models. In order to further explore the ways in which Vladek’s testimony shows evidence of the mitigation of trauma through the seeking out of rationally apprehensible meaning, the analysis shall now turn to the question of resilience.

### **3.10 A Good Place What I Made: Survival and Resilience**

*Unlike many victims of the Holocaust, Vladek takes pride in having survived – Both Vladek’s younger and older selves are remarkably resourceful – Vladek views himself as a man of resourcefulness and integrity (a mensch)*

Vladek’s relationship with the trauma of his earlier life can be understood in relation to the single photograph of Vladek Spiegelman which appears in the text. On an initial

viewing this image appears to be a moment which further defamiliarizes the governing metaphor by offering a direct insight into Auschwitz and the characters who inspired *Maus*. Even this photograph, however, offers a level of remove from an unmediated experience of Auschwitz. The photograph of Vladek Spiegelman in his camp uniform is a ‘*carefully constructed*’ evocation of the Nazi camps. It’s a souvenir, after all, paid for and posed’ (Hatfield 2005, 147 *my italics*). As several critics have noted, Vladek is remarkably healthy and good-looking (although he seems to have over-stated his similarity to Rudolph Valentino). Although the photograph does not inform the reader directly about the camps, it contains a great deal of information about the image which Spiegelman wishes to present of his father, the man upon whom the character of Vladek is based. Hirsch submits that:

In Anja’s eyes the uniform would not call into question the picture’s message: "I am alive, I have survived." She last saw Vladek in Auschwitz and would certainly have noticed the difference between this clean uniform and the one he actually must have worn. The uniform would signal to her their common past, their survival, perhaps their hope for a future (Hirsch 1997, 39).

The image tells the story of a man who was willing to take ownership of, and even a certain level of pride in his ability to survive as a concentration camp prisoner. Banner contends that ‘Vladek should not be taken as a representative survivor... [t]he kind of self Vladek recalls is at odds with the survivor selves Langer identifies in Holocaust Testimonies. Vladek never seems to remember a shamed or humiliated self’ (Banner 2000, 143-4). This section will seek to consolidate and significantly develop these assertions made by Hatfield, Hirsch, and Banner. It will be asserted that the younger Vladek (as remembered by his older self) is a man who staved off some of the effects of trauma by cultivating a sense of control. The purpose of this section is to further demonstrate that, for Vladek, the act of giving testimony involves the imposition of meaning. It shall be argued that by formulating and following a rubric for

survival, Vladek was able to simultaneously mitigate private trauma and, within his narrative, to further reduce the personal psychological fallout from the madness of the Holocaust.

Section 1.5 above includes an overview of the importance of control in relation to trauma. The argument was presented that those who have a sense of control during a traumatic event are less likely to develop trauma or, if they do, to show the same severity of symptoms as those who believe that they have no agency. Within his story Vladek recalls with some pride a sense of self-determination during his time in the death camps. He views himself not as the *kvetch* which Artie and the reader encounter in the framing narrative, but in terms of the Jewish figure of the '*mensch*' – a Yiddish term (a cognate of the German for 'man') meaning a man of resourcefulness and integrity (Andrew Gordon 2004, online). He theorises that his presence of mind where others (such as his friend Mandelbaum) experience helplessness facilitates his ability to survive trauma. At times, Vladek adheres to his moral code in the face of extreme adversity. When a young couple offer him all of their remaining jewellery in exchange for advice he accepts a watch, but leaves the other items as the young couple 'needed these to live' (Spiegelman 2003, 126). In Auschwitz he bargains with the Kapo to acquire items for his friend Mandelbaum. Vladek is also highly resourceful. He works effectively with the Kapos and trades within the camp. These activities afford Vladek a relative degree of security. The relationship which emerges from these interactions provides Vladek access not only to food and clothes, but also to inside knowledge on the prisoner selection process. Because of these actions, Spiegelman's father described himself as being 'fortunately happy' in Auschwitz although this word-choice may be the result of his limited English rather than an accurate expression of his emotional state (Spiegelman 2011, 252)).

Frankl's description of the *mensch* he saw in Auschwitz (see section 1.5) provides a framework through which one might understand Vladek's description of his younger self; he remembers himself, unlike those around him, as having a degree of self-determining agency within Auschwitz. In *Maus*, the Kapo demands that a prisoner come forward who can speak English and Polish. Vladek explains 'it was very few hands, so I approached' (Spiegelman 2003, 191). By taking such actions Vladek believed he was facilitating his own survival. His conviction that he still had some control, even if that control was largely illusory, subsequently afforded him some protection from the impact of trauma. Indeed, the younger Vladek engages in a great deal of activity of his own choosing when in dire circumstances: he exercises to keep himself healthy and bathes during his time as a prisoner of war; he uses his connections to save himself; keeps valuables to trade; disguises himself as a Pole; does favours for the Kapo to keep himself safe; works his 'muscles away' to avoid punishment; and fashions himself a hammock ('this saved me' he claims) (Spiegelman 2003, 55, 82, 116, 138, 191, 227, and 245). Not only does he work to save himself, he bargains for the lives of Mandelbaum and others. Like the *mensch* described by Frankl, he comforts and provides food for other prisoners. As he tells the story of his younger self, Vladek's choice of pronouns are indicative of his sense of agency: 'we made a brick wall' becomes, on the next page, 'a good place like what *I* made' (Spiegelman 2003, 112 and 113 my italics). Artie admits to Pavel that Vladek 'was amazingly present-minded and resourceful' (Spiegelman 2003, 205). In each case Vladek presents himself as being engaged in actively furthering his survival. The, perhaps fallacious, notion that one's behaviour can facilitate (or even secure)

survival may be an automatic and unconscious mechanism for Vladek. As a *mensch*, he believes that his actions and attitude can influence his circumstances.

In a manner which mirrors his younger incarnation, the elder Vladek *actively* survives. Young submits that ‘as a survivor par excellence, Vladek is not above bartering the story itself to get what he wants: first, as leverage to keep his son nearby, and then later as part of an exchange for food at the local market’ (Young 2000, 35). Vladek is also determined to demonstrate his self-reliance within the framing narrative; he makes a performance of counting out the pills he has to take and tells Artie ‘for my condition I must fight to save myself. Doctors they only give me “junk food”’ (Spiegelman 2003, 28). Later, when Artie offers to help him sort nails, he refuses help, insisting ‘[s]uch jobs I can do easy by myself’ (Spiegelman 2003, 100). His self-worth is founded on the degree of control he apparently exercises over day-to-day tasks and to legitimate the meaning which he reads into his survival he repeatedly performs acts of symbolic self-sufficiency. Robert Twigger makes clear the therapeutic connection between survival and control:

The popularity of survival training is due, in part, to its promise of increasing the control one has over one’s own life. Control is returned to the individual without the need for complicated machines or large amounts of money. He can become self-reliant rather than dependent[...] the liberation may only be symbolic, but it is a symbol one can carry around in one’s heart, a psychological fall-back position for when the going gets tough (Twigger 2001, 53-54).

Survival, in terms of resilience, is thus related to self-sufficiency. To actively survive (as opposed to passive survival) is to exercise a degree of control. Vladek, unlike the other mice, had a (perhaps illusory) pain-stopping lever in his cage.

This section has examined a second level of meaning which Vladek creates within his testimony. In addition to the cathartic reunion which brings Vladek's testimony to a close, he mitigates trauma by insisting that he had (and continues to have) agency in relation to his time in Auschwitz. He both enacts this control in his older incarnation and constructs a sense of control from an account of his younger self. This apparent agency assists in the mitigation of trauma but, as is the case with the cathartic ending which brings his autobiography to a close, the imposition of meaning threatens to distract from and diminish the essential madness of the Holocaust. By insisting that his own agency facilitated his survival, Vladek proposes a heuristic or formula which delivers a rational explanation for his own survival and, implicitly, the failure of others (we shall return to this question in section 3.12 and 3.13). The previous two sections can thus be succinctly summarised as follows: the character of Vladek (elder) is presented as a madman (or, more specifically, an individual suffering from PTSD whose traumatic truth can only be submitted to the historical record with due scepticism), and yet his narrating self tells a story which makes use of a familiarizing literary structure and draws apparently rational conclusions which are the result of a (albeit not fully verbalised) continued insistence that aspects of Auschwitz can be subjected to logical explanation. The next section will add a further complication to the issue of Vladek's apparent rationality-within-madness. The case shall be made that it would be a mistake simply to declare Vladek a madman who, having partially recognised his condition, seeks the therapeutic embrace of narrative and rationalisation. Instead, the argument will be presented that within Vladek's apparent agency is the capacity to Signify within Nazi rhetoric.

### **3.11 The Signifyin(g) Mouse**

*The racist archetype of the Jew was perpetuated by both self-fulfilling rhetoric and by the silence of alternative discourse – By acting as a mensch Vladek counters the portrayal of the Jew in Nazi propaganda – Vladek ‘Signifies’ by speaking German like a German – Vladek offers a parodic testament to the madness of Nazi rhetoric*

The analysis below shall venture into new territory for *Maus* criticism by seeking an understanding of Vladek as one who defies the prescriptive role given to him in the camp whilst practicing apparent complicity with hegemonic power. Therefore, even whilst engaged in the imposition of meaning and resolution, Vladek occupies a playful, corrupting, and partly Foolish, role in relation to Nazi images of the Jew. This section shall therefore seek to further detail the madness-from-reason within Vladek’s testimony by identifying this figure as a Signifyin(g) Mouse.

The Nazi depiction of Jews relied upon certain racist archetypes which included a lack of morals, poor hygiene, laziness, and deceitfulness. These characteristics, whilst not Wild *per se*, served to establish the Jew as both an absolute threat and a negative example against which the ideal German *Volksgenossen* could be defined. Frankl describes a disagreement with a foreman who accuses him of ‘never [having] done a stroke of work in [his] life’ before going on to ask if he was a businessman before coming to the camps (Frankl 2004, 37). When Frankl explains that he worked as a doctor, often ‘for no money at all’, the man becomes angry and begins beating him (Frankl 2004, 37). Frankl’s failure to conform to the racist caricature of the Jew produces an acute cognitive dissonance (the result of attempting to sustain as true two conflicting beliefs) which is the catalyst to violence. The possibility of a philanthropic Jew undermined the foreman’s beliefs (beliefs which have been used to justify the genocide in which he has played a part) that he resorts, irrationally, to violence.



The preservation of the Nazi image of the Jews necessitated the silencing of alternative discourse. Levi describes the disgust with which the guards regarded the prisoners: ‘they hear us speak in many different languages, which they do not understand and which sound to them as grotesque as animal noises; they see us reduced to ignoble slavery, without hair, without honour and without names[...] For them we are ‘*Kazett*’, a singular neuter word’ (Levi 1979, 127). The prisoners could not communicate with the guards and, thus silenced, were robbed of a means to determine their own identities. Their clothes and hair was taken from them; they had no control over their appearance. The ideological machinery of the camps was designed to manufacture a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby in order to survive, the prisoners must paradoxically satisfy the justification for their murder. This process is evidenced in the simultaneous demand for cleanliness with the complete lack of provision of the means to comply with this demand.

[In the washroom there is a picture of] the good Häftling, portrayed stripped to the waist, about to diligently soap his sheared and rosy cranium, and the bad Häftling, with a strong Semitic nose and a greenish colour, bundled up in his ostentatiously stained clothes with a beret on his head, who cautiously dips a finger in the water of the washbasin. Under the first is written: “*So bist du rein*” (like this you are clean), and under the second: “*So gehst du ein*” (like this you come to a bad end). [And yet] [i]n this place it is practically pointless to wash every day in the turbid water of the filthy washbasins for purposes of cleanliness and health (Levi 1979, 45-6).

Even for those who manage to keep themselves clean, the diagrams in the washrooms suggest that instruction is required in order for the prisoners, specifically Jewish prisoners, to grasp the concept of personal hygiene.

The simultaneous necessity and impossibility of cleanliness is part of a larger discursive apparatus designed to support the image of the Jew as ‘impure.’ Mak Geert writes that ‘[i]t is almost impossible to find a cultural essay from the 1930s in which terms such as “pure” and “healthy” do not appear. For the Nazis, this notion of purity meant they had to make their empire “healthy” by, among other things, cleansing it of “non-national” traits’ (Geert 2004, 390). Like the Wild Man, the Jew represented all that the healthy nation was not; as noted in section 3.3, close to the ideological and affective epicenter of the Nazi imaginary was the rhetorical depiction of Jews as vermin. The prisoners were made dirty seemingly of their own volition. By being made dirty they were forced to act in accordance with the larger racial doctrine of the Nazis. It seems almost redundant to state that this self-justifying rhetoric was symptomatic of a systemic madness which utilised, without apparent paradox, scientific, political, and ideological modes of discourse.

Within these conditions, Vladek (younger), remarkably, manages to operate in a manner outside of the prescribed role dictated by the Nazi machinery whilst often seeming to comply with the rules imposed on him within the camp. For example, the prisoners were given soup only if their shirt had no lice. Vladek reports that ‘[t]his was impossible. Everywhere was lice!’ (Spiegelman 2003, 251). To avoid being refused soup, Vladek trades food for a second shirt which he washes and wears only when lining up for rations. He thus manages to satisfy the impossible demand for cleanliness through an act of apparent compliance whilst simultaneously defying the implication that, as a Jew, he is inherently unclean. It is not the case that, like the Fool, he has the opportunity to verbalize truth to power. Instead, the younger Vladek’s subversion of the total system which seeks to deny him

self-determination is carried out through apparently unquestioning compliance with irrational requests. He thus lays bare the madness of Nazi rhetoric through straight-faced parody.

If, in order to survive in the camps, the prisoners were required to submit to and act in accordance with the racial doctrine of the Nazis, then by staying clean and taking a pride in his appearance, Vladek's existence as a prisoner becomes, to borrow a term from Henry Louis Gates, Jr, 'double-voiced' (Gates 1988, 7). Vladek should not, as will be submitted, be understood as simply a Fool, but as a Signifyin(g) Mouse. The Fool is permitted (and even celebrated) by the hegemonic order but is granted no power. The Signifyin(g) Mouse, conversely, exists in a system designed to facilitate his absolute silence and extermination. In the remainder of this section the case shall be made that, by playing the apparently rational figure of the *mensch*, Vladek occupies and subverts the Nazi archetype of the Jew.

In the quote which opened this section, Levi contends that the German officers were repulsed by the incomprehensible language of the Jewish prisoners. Vladek, unlike other prisoners, is able to speak to the Germans using their own language. Vladek is (to varying degrees) fluent in Yiddish, English, Polish and scriptural Hebrew. He speaks German (or possibly Polish) to a guard in Auschwitz with whom he shares memories (either real or invented) of visiting Nuremberg (Spiegelman 2003, 214). Whilst no critic to date has described Vladek's actions specifically as a mode of Signifyin(g), many have addressed the role of language in *Maus*. Levine notes the close relationship between the German words *maus* and *mauschel*, which means to speak German 'like a Jew' (Levine 2003, 69). Hirsch contends that 'Maus sounds like the English word 'mouse'', but its German spelling echoes

visually the recurring Nazi command "*Juden raus*" ("Jews out" – come out or get out) as well as the first three letters of Auschwitz' (Hirsch 1997, 25). The case can therefore be made that Vladek's skill is that he is able to speak to Germans *like a German*. He is able to imitate the language of those who hold power. Vladek does not simply defy the Nazi stereotype of the Jew or operate in spite of it; he occupies the Nazi's image of the Jew. As he does so, he subverts that language in a similar manner to the linguistic strategies of certain African American writers identified by Gates.

It is not sufficient merely to reveal that black people colonized a white sign. A level of meta-discourse is at work in the process. If the signifier stands disrupted by the shift in concepts denoted and connoted, then we are engaged at the level of meaning itself (Gates 1988, 47).

To Signify, in Gates' model, is to speak a term using both its original *and* its reinvented meaning. This form of transgression is not the same rebellious self-marginalisation seen in the figure of the Fool and in the work of underground comic creators in section 2.7. Vladek (younger) transgresses by displaying an apparent compliance with, adoption, and subversion from within, of an existing discourse. He Signifies in a Gatesian sense when he complies with the law that his shirt must be lice-free whilst simultaneously defying the implication that, as a Jew, he is automatically unclean.

This image can be found at [ww2shots.com](http://ww2shots.com)

**Fig. 49** *'The Decent Jew'* Der Stürmer July 1936 (Issue #28) shows a Jew feigning politeness and then shoving a man off a bench. Jews were portrayed as unclean, duplicitous, self-serving and greedy.

Nazi propaganda depicted Jews showing apparent kindness in order to serve their own goals. When Vladek asks for a belt on behalf of Mandelbaum, the Kapo (in a manner familiar from Frankl's testimony) becomes angry: 'You Jew! You've only been here a few days and you're ready to do business?!' (Spiegelman 2003, 193). The Kapo reads Vladek's actions through the racist stencil of the duplicitous Jew who wishes to take advantage of others. Vladek does

not seek to subvert such crude cultural stereotyping outright and, indeed, does proceed to make numerous deals. Gerber contends, in fact, that ‘Vladek may be seen as the anti-Semite’s prototypical Shylock’ (Gerber 1987, 162). He trades his language skills and work as a cobbler for food, clothing and favours in the camp and in order for Anja to be moved closer to him. He displays a keen business sense and has a sharp eye for opportunities. He drives a hard bargain: the man who trades a shirt for food protests that without his shirt he will freeze (Spiegelman 2003, 254). Rather than being self-serving, however, Vladek acts as a mediator, satisfying not only his own needs, but on occasion the needs of those around him (he gives the man bread as well as chocolate as a trade). In Auschwitz, Vladek survives by trying to ensure that his arrangements satisfy multiple constituencies: himself, the Kapo, and the people he cares about.

It is important to note that Vladek’s canny business sense is employed, partly, to philanthropic purposes. Frankl asserts that ‘[w]e who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread’ (Frankl 2004, 74-75). As noted in the previous section, in *Maus*, Vladek performs precisely the act Frankl describes, comforting Felix, a hysterical prisoner, with kind words and bread (Spiegelman 2003, 219 and 194). Due to Vladek’s ability to build mutually beneficial relationships and make deals, Mandelbaum, for a time, is kept safe. Within an act of apparent conformity to the ethnic demonology of the Nazis, Vladek puts himself at risk for the sake of the other prisoners. Vladek is thus double-voiced in that he simultaneously offers both absolute compliance with Nazi signs and orders and constant resistance to the

expectations which are imposed on him: he defines himself 'both within and against [his] concept of received order' (Gates 1988, xxiii).

In this section the case has been made that the younger Vladek plays the role of the Signifyin(g) Mouse by occupying and subverting the Nazi image of the Jew. This assertion shall now be integrated into the argument thus far. In the sections above the case has been made that *Maus* dramatizes the interplay between madness and reason. Vladek is presented within *Maus* as a madman in contrast with Artie, the agent of reason. Whilst the elder Vladek does show symptoms of trauma, on closer inspection a stable duality of madness and rationality breaks down; the ordering of his narrative follows a rational structure and seeks to generate meaning from the madness of the Shoah. One of the moral lessons seems to be that Vladek survived because he is a *mensch* and thus has control. The passages analysed in this section represents a further oscillation between the acceptance and rejection of rational and familiarizing forms. Vladek's role as *mensch* within a total institution that denies him self-definition is an act of Signifyin(g). It does imbue him with a sense of control and partially formalises a rubric – or explanation – for survival, but it also allows him to deliver an ironic commentary upon the ideology which seeks to contain and define him. The practice of signification is not itself mad, but Vladek as Signifyin(g) Mouse, offers a parodic mimicry of the systemic madness that he observes. Put simply, he performs rationality in order to expose its madness.

Vladek's depiction of himself as a *mensch* serves, in concert with his reliance upon chronological sequence and familiar literary forms, to partially rationalise his survival. It is

through his self-portrait as a *mensch* that he is able to offer a double-voiced mimicry of the madness he observes, and yet it simultaneously allows him to benefit from the therapeutic effects of having *found an explanation*. It would be entirely inappropriate to confront Vladek with the fallacious nature of his explanatory apparatus, and yet, in service of his thesis, Spiegelman cannot allow Vladek's assertions to go unquestioned. Within *Maus*, Vladek (who has suffered enough) is permitted the comforts of rationalisation but we, who survive the survivors, must confront the possibility that the Holocaust was an event which cannot be properly rationalised. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to examining the strategies which Spiegelman employs in order to undermine the rationalising and familiar framework which undergirds Vladek's self-writing. The purpose of these concluding sections is thus to demonstrate that within *Maus* Spiegelman entertains, but ultimately refuses to accept any discursive strategies which seek to explain the madness of the Holocaust.

### 3.12 Looking up to Father

*Vladek's perception of himself as a mensch has had an impact on his relationship with his son – Artie and Pavel challenge Vladek's unspoken assertion that there exists an explanation or a simple formula for survival and argue, instead, that death in Auschwitz was entirely arbitrary – This revelation relieves Artie of the need to live up to Vladek's standards of masculinity – Artie simultaneously deconstructs Vladek's attempt to rationalise Auschwitz and thereby develops the thesis that Auschwitz attests to the madness of reason*

The figures of the active survivor and the Signifyin(g) mouse are not the subject of an unequivocal valorisation in *Maus*. In order to survive Auschwitz, the young Vladek had to take on certain traits which continue inexorably in his older incarnation. This manifests in his need to be recognised as having actively facilitated his survival and, as such, as more able than his son. In the opening pages of the comic the young Artie runs to Vladek to report that he (Artie) has been abandoned by his friends. Vladek responds with '[f]riends? Your

friends? . . . If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week. . . Then you could see what it is, friends!’ (Spiegelman 2003, 6). This scene has attracted attention from several critics. Vladek is, in Gordon’s words ‘completely unaware that his extreme experiences in wartime Poland are inapplicable to the life of a ten-year-old boy living in New York City in 1958’ (Gordon 2004, online). Vladek feels that stoicism, emotional fortitude and practicality are valuable attributes to cultivate and wishes to impart these to his son, but the father’s values and sense of self-worth have an alienating effect upon Artie. Bosmajian argues that ‘Artie [...] avoids the direct articulation of his own pain because he must, from the epigraphic episode on, consider his pain and deprivations insignificant in relation to the disastrous history of Auschwitz. As a result, his own maturation is necessarily thwarted’ (Bosmajian 2003, 27). Bosmajian reads Artie as an ‘orphaned voice’: literally abandoned by his mother and emotionally abandoned by his father (Bosmajian 2003, 26). In this section the argument will be made that, as a means to achieve symbolic adulthood, Artie seeks to challenge the younger Vladek’s apparent agency and, as a consequence, attests to the impossibility of explaining Auschwitz.

Artie has undeniably been shaped by his father’s trauma. Speaking about his childhood, Artie recalls ‘arguing with [Vladek] ... and being told I couldn’t do anything as well as he could [...] No matter what I accomplish, it doesn’t seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz’ (Spiegelman 2003, 204). This sense of inferiority is reflected in Artie’s relationship to Vladek’s testimony. In contrast to the other speakers in the text, Artie (narrator)’s commentary is presented in lower case lettering. Bosmajian contends that ‘Artie [...] frequently strikes childlike listener poses that depreciate authority, [he] cannot “do justice”



to his father's narrative, cannot incorporate the testimony in the public record' (Bosmajian 2007, 28). By comparison, Vladek's physical presence is sometimes inflated. Another incarnation of Vladek appears in *Breakdowns* as a towering figure administering punishment to his son (Spiegelman 2008, 12). This Vladek is drawn with a high level of detail and is viewed from below (reflected in the image's title 'Looking up to Dad') thus positioning the reader as a child in relation to this monstrous authority figure.

This image can be found on page 12 of *Breakdowns*

**Fig. 50** *Breakdowns: the contrast between Vladek and Artie as symbols of authority is made explicit in the angle from which the two are depicted.*

Artie appears to the left of Vladek's image from a low angle, explaining his indecisiveness about how best to be a father. Artie clearly does not possess his father's toughness or authority. In all of his incarnations, Vladek creates the criteria by which masculinity will be measured. Both the elder and younger Vladeks wear hats, an object described in an excerpt from Spiegelman's notebooks as a symbol of 'manhood' (Spiegelman 2009, 4). This icon of masculinity reverberates within Spiegelman's work; men who wear hats include the German soldiers in *Maus*, the square-jawed and sexually confident Foul Bernie in *Little Signs of Passion*, the well-built African American man who is insulted by Artie's finger in *Real Dream: Hand Job*, and Ace Hole, the noir detective (Spiegelman 2008, 44-46, 37, and 57-66). In *No Towers*, George Bush frequently appears wearing a hat, symbolising authority and power (not to mention its abuse). Artie, carrying Vladek's unachievable standards of masculinity with him, is always bare-headed.

This image can be found on page 4 of *Be a Nose*

**Fig. 51** *Vladek's hat, part of the wardrobe of iconic male heroes in gangster movies and film noir, serves as a signifier of masculinity.*

As has been argued in sections 3.10 and 3.11, Vladek's agency provides an explanation for his survival. For Artie this explanation proves inadequate. In the 'Time Flies' section of *Maus*, Artie (man in a mouse mask) engages in a series of conversations with Pavel, his therapist. They discuss Vladek's construction of his younger self as an active survivor and consider an alternative interpretation of what it is to survive. Pavel proposes that, rather than physical survival being something which the individual facilitates, death in the concentration camps was in fact entirely arbitrary: 'it wasn't the best people who survived, nor did the best ones die. It was random' (Spiegelman 2003, 205). The conclusion at which Artie and Pavel arrive is that, as an inmate, Vladek was virtually powerless and that, as such, his self-worth is founded upon a flawed premise. In this regard Mikics' analysis of the role of luck in Vladek's story provides corroboration. Mikics argues that the role of good fortune in Vladek's life is illustrated by '[t]he nomination of Vladek for survival, first by his rabbi grandfather, who comes to him in a dream, and then by the priest of Auschwitz. [These moments signify] a design that would make Vladek's history make sense' (Mikics 2003, 21). Vladek's survival owes less to ingenuity or emotional rigour, Artie suggests, than to pure chance and contingency. At the beginning of his conversation with Pavel, Artie is child-sized. Over the course of the conversation, as Vladek's logic is deconstructed, Artie returns to adult proportions (Spiegelman 2003, 206).

It is only by exploring the fallacy of Vladek's apparent means for active survival that Artie can become an adult. Artie's role in the storytelling process thus becomes a vehicle for rebelling against Vladek's assertion of his distinctiveness from the other victims ('everyone they called by number' he notes 'but me, [the Kapo] called by name' (Spiegelman 2003,

192)). This is achieved in part by drawing Vladek in a manner which makes him indistinguishable from the other Jewish characters. The mice are interchangeable and the younger Vladek (in contrast to the elder Vladek's visual otherness detailed in section 3.7) becomes one of a sea of iconic mouse faces. Vladek is thus symbolically robbed of the individual characteristics (including his grey felt hat) to which he attributes his survival. Healing comes, for Artie, through the visual and verbal deconstruction of Vladek's logic and the revelation that the madness which Vladek observed in Auschwitz overwhelms even Vladek's own rationalisation.

The notion that one could autonomously facilitate their survival in the death camps carries the implication that those who died were somehow less strong and less capable – an implication which is partially complicit with fascist ideology. An apposite analogy might be drawn here to the gas attacks inflicted on soldiers during World War I. Dyer argues that 'since it could not be evaded, resisted or fled from, [gas] eliminated the possibility not only of bravery but of cowardice' (Dyer 2001, 48). Deborah Geis, similarly, asserts that the victims 'did not "choose" their suffering, nor were they ennobled by it' (Geis 2003, 4). Cole emphasises the inherent impossibility of Jewish heroism during the Shoah in an analysis of Kolbe – the Catholic priest who chose to die in place of another man at Auschwitz. After the war, Kolbe was celebrated as a martyr. Cole writes: '[t]he Jews taken to Auschwitz II did not have an option to choose a path of self-sacrifice [...] Principled self-sacrifice was not an option for those designated to die' (Cole 1999, 102). This theme of resistance to ennoblement is evident in the telling of the story of Mandelbaum in *Maus*.

Mandelbaum is given a poorly-fitting uniform upon arriving in Auschwitz. Vladek offers him as much help as he can. Mandelbaum is later moved to a work detail and dies. Vladek is unsure how Mandelbaum died, but offers some possible scenarios. Wilner contends that '[t]he horror of Mandelbaum's story [...] is that it is devoid of meaning; that is, it does not conform to any prior notions of cause and effect, the rules of war, justice and injustice or even ironic reversal' (Wilner 2003, 111). Wilner's work touches upon the arbitrary nature of death in the Nazi camps although some clarification is necessary regarding her assertion that Mandelbaum's story is 'plotless' (Wilner 2003, 112). This statement is untrue since Mandelbaum's presence in *Maus* patently involves a sequence of events. By declining to poeticise the death of an individual in Auschwitz, Spiegelman is still making a comment implicitly on the arbitrary and jarringly defamiliarized nature of death in the concentration camps. However desirable it might be to consider the Shoah survivor as possessed of agency, it is also potentially offensive to suggest that every one those who did not survive somehow made a conscious decision with regards to their fate. Some may have chosen to smoke their own cigarettes, but many more were marched into gas chambers, shot, beaten to death, and burned alive without 'choosing' to die. Mandelbaum actively struggled to survive and then was killed. He had no choice in the matter.

This section provides a further complication to Vladek's depiction of life in Auschwitz. The question of how Vladek survived, or if it is at all possible to draw any explanation from the Holocaust, is a site of narrative tension within the text and further demonstrates the oscillation between apparent explicability and absolute madness which, as has been asserted throughout this chapter, is the central aesthetic and ethical driving force

behind *Maus*. Vladek's depiction of himself as a *mensch* has a dual purpose; it allows him to offer a double-voiced assertion of the madness of Auschwitz, but it also allows him to rationalise his own survival. The latter serves to (potentially) alleviate his trauma, but it simultaneously demands that he revert, in part, to rationality and thus cling to the myth that from the chaos through which he lived some rational framework might still prevail. Artie does not necessarily wish to deny Vladek this lesser vehicle, but for him, the insistence upon a formula for survival, with the attendant assumption that Auschwitz can somehow be contained by an overarching explanatory apparatus, is untenable. Thus, Artie, along with Pavel (another emeritus agent of reason), develops Vladek's argument concerning the madness of Auschwitz. Their ultimate conclusion is that the only conclusive meaning which can be drawn from Auschwitz is that the concentration camp was a site in which meaning was systematically exterminated.

### **3.13 The Best did not Survive**

*Twigger and Frankl both argue that those who survived the Holocaust were required to accept Nazi rhetoric – Wilner asserts that those mensch in Auschwitz did not survive as mensch – Artie visually implies that Vladek amputated an aspect of his Jewish self in order to survive the Holocaust*

Artie's questions concerning Vladek's role as *mensch* calls for a further reassessment of what it means to be a Signifyin(g) Mouse. In this section the argument concerning the meaning of survival shall be further developed by considering a further challenge, voiced by many commentators on Holocaust literature, that those who complied with the collective madness of the Holocaust were, to a certain degree, complicit in that madness. Whilst the following argument does not support this view, it nonetheless identifies a degree of complicity with such rhetoric on the part of Artie. It shall be asserted that, like the madmen at

Tuke's tea parties (see section 2.5), the performance of Nazi rationality was indistinguishable from that rationality. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that, even as he accepts that Auschwitz renders moot questions as to why certain prisoners survived and others did not, Artie nonetheless engages in a degree of counter-rationalisation concerning Vladek's survival.

In his codification of the survivor, Twigger goes further than the arguments made so far. He casts the survivor not as a resourceful hero, but as one who relinquishes their dignity in exchange for their life, an assertion which might be cause to re-examine Vladek's role as the Signifyin(g) Mouse:

The archetypal survivor is the inmate of the concentration camp. He is someone who has no control over his life in any normal sense and yet he somehow survives[...] The survivor "gets by", "keeps his nose clean", doesn't attempt to fight the system. Instead, he uses knowledge of the system to his advantage. But he cannot hope to confront or change the system; in his heart he knows that his is the life of a cockroach, dodging the heavily aimed boot of the house-owner.

The survivor cannot really afford to enjoy life. Enjoyment suggests a surplus of opportunity the survivor just doesn't have. In order to survive he has to wear blinkers. So in his survival lurks a kind of death, a giving up of what is vital and human, the joy and connectedness of life ground down by the grey demands of the day-to-day.

And very many survivors of the Holocaust, when prompted reply: "The best did not survive" (Twigger 2001, 52-53).

Twigger was presumably referring to Frankl's contention that '[w]e who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles – whatever one may choose to call them – we know: the best of us did not return' (Frankl 2004, 19). Twigger's definition of survival does not abandon the binary distinction between inherently 'good' or 'bad' victims, but reverses it, casting the victim as morally superior to the survivor. In Twigger's terms, the younger Vladek's survival is not grounded in self-sufficiency, but a product of systematic submission

to Kapos and others in positions of power. In this context, Geert submits that every Jew who survived ‘had an Aryan angel somewhere’ (Geert 2008, 416).

There is some evidence of genuine, rather than feigned, compliance within Vladek’s testimony. The elder Vladek tells Artie that ‘[i]f you want to live, it’s good to be friendly’ (Spiegelman 2003 222). Vladek takes pride in his ability to form a network of ‘friends’, but this act carries connotations not of subtle resistance but of compliance. Certainly, when Vladek’s survival is contrasted with those of Levi and Frankl, some problematic disjunctions become visible. For Levi, survival in Auschwitz necessitated submission. He witnesses the execution of a prisoner for an act of deliberate disobedience and writes:

Alberto and I went back to the hut, and we could not look each other in the face. That man must have been tough, he must have been made of another metal than us if this condition of ours, which has broken us, could not bend him

Because we also are broken, conquered: even if we know how to adapt ourselves, even if we have finally learnt how to find our food and to resist the fatigue and cold, even if we return home (Levi 1979, 156).

In this sense, survival and pride are mutually exclusive. Levi suggests that to survive Auschwitz, one must surrender both nobility and morality (inherent here again is a proto-fascist hierarchy amongst inmates in the death camps which identifies an inherent emotional or mental superiority of some over others). The conditions were such that what was understood as ‘moral’ behaviour outside of the camps, refraining from theft, for example, or otherwise conducting oneself in an honest manner, would not provide the minimum amount of sustenance to survive. Although he does not arrive at the same conclusions, Vladek tells Artie ‘they wanted only to finish everyone out’ (Spiegelman 2003, 195). The food provided ‘was just enough to die more slowly’ (Spiegelman 2003, 209). Levi simply writes ‘[t]he law

of the Lager [death camp] said: “eat your own bread, and if you can, that of your neighbour” (Levi 1979, 166).

Wilner rejects the possibility of the *mensch* or Signifyin(g) Mouse existing within Auschwitz. She submits that in Auschwitz ‘an ethically valid life lived willingly in accordance with the sacred rhythms and rituals codified historically in the commandments’ became impossible (Wilner 2003, 115). The *mensch* who arrived in Auschwitz, in other words, did not survive as a *mensch*. Frankl writes of life in a concentration camp that ‘[a]ll that mattered was that one’s own name and that of one’s friend were crossed off the list of victims, though everyone knew that for each man saved another victim had to be found’ (Frankl 2004, 18). Survival thus necessitated a certain level of complicity in the death of another. This position is partially supported through Artie’s artwork in *Maus*, wherein Vladek’s refusal to comply with the racial doctrine of the Nazis requires him to cast off not simply those signs attached to his racial identity which are complicit with the Nazi depiction of the Jew, but to effectively cease to be Jewish. When Anja and Vladek are hiding from the Nazis in Poland, Vladek worries that, whilst he could pass as a Pole ‘Anja – her appearance – you could see more easy she was Jewish’ (Spiegelman 2003, 138). Artie reinforces the point in a drawing of the two walking side by side: Vladek’s mouse tail (his ‘survivor’s tail’ perhaps exists as an allegorical signifier for his masculinity/circumcised penis) is tucked into his trousers, hidden from sight, whilst Anja’s tail is still visible. By surviving, Artie’s second narrating voice implies, Vladek has sacrificed some integral part of his self. Anja, in contrast to Vladek, has not survived. She left Auschwitz but it did not leave her and she later committed suicide. Her story, too, has not survived since Vladek destroyed her memoirs.



Vladek has thus survived in another sense. He has continued to live after the death of his wife. Artie and Vladek are both survivors: Anja was survived by her husband and son. Anja's death also robbed Artie of his heritage (Judaism is transmitted through the maternal line). If Vladek has given up his Jewish identity in order to live, and Anja has taken hers to her grave, then Artie survives as an incomplete Jew. Artie's anger toward his father thus forces him to submit to his own rationalising strategy. He accepts Pavel's assertion that death within Auschwitz was random and without meaning and he continues to engage in his own discursive practice in order to figuratively knock off Vladek's hat.

Artie's implicit assertion that those who died were ethically superior to those who survived is highly problematic. It is offensive because it seeks to pass judgement on those who lived through the largest act of genocide in human history, and it is misguided because it implies that within the madness of Auschwitz some vestige of self-determinism prevailed. It is nonetheless eminently relevant to the thesis presented in this chapter both because it connects the arguments made in the previous three sections with those that follow concerning the question of survival within Holocaust literature, and because it demonstrates the insidious nature of rationalisation; even Artie, who has eschewed rationalisation concerning Auschwitz and recognised the limits of empirical models, cannot help but seek to propose a counter-explanation for his father's survival.

The argument in the sections above has shuttled between what may appear to be inconsistent if not contradictory positions and, as such, some consolidation is necessary. The overarching theme so far has been that within *Maus*, Spiegelman presents the Holocaust

within an ostensibly apprehensible format whilst simultaneously insisting upon genocide's fundamental defiance of all familiarizing or explanatory structure. This has been demonstrated in the execution of the animal metaphor, the use of Holocaust iconography, the multiple narrative layerings, and in the ultimate failure of the empirical modes within which Artie seeks to present his father's story. It has been asserted that Vladek, who is presented as a mad narrator within the framing narrative, shows some evidence of trauma and yet attempts to organise his narrative in such a way as to partially explain and resolve the horrors through which he lived. His assertion that he survived because he is a *mensch* allows him, in part, to testify to the madness of the Holocaust, but it simultaneously raises questions concerning whether any explanatory mode is appropriate with regard to this subject. Artie and Pavel conclude that death within Auschwitz was ultimately beyond explanation and yet Artie, despite himself, also seeks to answer the question of survival. Artie and Vladek each attempt to provide some rationalisation as to how some individuals were able to survive Auschwitz, but ultimately *Maus* seems to suggest that the Holocaust demolishes all discursive forms and explanatory frameworks. The following section shall consolidate this position by returning to the elder Vladek and considering the psychological dimension of the explanatory strategies described above. The argument shall be made that the act of narration and the meanings which Vladek seeks to draw from his story may, in fact, have a far greater destructive effect which overcomes both the therapeutic role of narration (detailed in section 3.9) and the protection afforded by a sense of control (detailed in section 3.10).

### **3.14 The Fractured Storyteller**

*Vladek is reluctant to tell his story – Despite his apparent resilience and the creation of meaning through narrative Vladek appears to be damaged by the process of giving testimony*

– *By the end of the story Vladek is emotionally and physically overwhelmed by the full implications of the terrible wide-scale madness to which he attests*

Vladek strives toward meaning and closure in the telling of his story but it is not necessarily the case that the experience of addressing his past is a wholly therapeutic exercise. Indeed, the practice of narration and giving meaning may provide an insight into one of Vladek's strategies to mitigate the effects of trauma, but is an inadequate means to explain his trauma in its entirety. If the act of telling stories is wholly beneficial for Vladek, then evidence of a 'healing' effect over the course of the framing narrative should be visible. Instead the opposite effect occurs.

Vladek's primary strategy for dealing with trauma is not to transform it into a narrative, but to avoid speaking of his past. It is clear from the opening of *Maus* that Vladek feels no pressing need to narrate his experiences. He uses his story, primarily, as a form of leverage rather than as a means to address trauma. As the narrative progresses he gives information only with some reluctance. Rather than tell his story, Chute contends, 'throughout much of the book, Vladek would clearly prefer, we see, to complain about his rocky second marriage' (Chute 2009, 343). In every case it is Vladek, not Artie, who calls each storytelling session to a close. Vladek, it seems, is significantly less interested in telling his story than Artie is in hearing it. The act of transforming his story into a narrative and, through that process, the imposition of meaning can thus be understood as a secondary strategy to fend off trauma. Vladek's first recourse is avoidance.

Neither of these strategies prove effective, however. Toward the end of the book, Vladek presents Artie with a box of photographs. Unlike other photographs in *Maus*, these images are diegetic and have been redrawn with the characters as mice. Vladek begins by showing each picture and telling the story of the individual in the photo, but the pictures eventually become a cascade, spilling out from the frame. The tumbling photographs resemble the mound of mouse corpses which appear in the 'Time Flies' section of *Maus* and the madness of the world at and after Auschwitz thus invades the framing narrative. Vladek is overwhelmed by the deluge of lost stories captured by the 'absent generations of Spiegelman bodies' (Chute 2012, online). The pictures bleed from the bottom of the page and bury Artie and Vladek in the final panel. Just visible amongst the photographs is Vladek, slumped, like the Artie of *Prisoner*, with depression. He tells Artie: 'Anja's parents, the grandparents, her big sister Tosha, little Bibi and our Richieu ... All what is left, it's the photos' (Spiegelman 2003, 275). The photographs offer an immediate window into his past, cutting through the story he has constructed from his memories. The words were an attempt to fill an emotional void which the images have now re-opened. The terrible and immense toll of the Holocaust has become apparent. On the next page Vladek appears in a state of emotional collapse. His body sags and he stares at the photographs on the floor in front of him. His body occupies the majority of the page and is split across several panels. The image here mirrors the representation of Vladek at the very beginning of the text (Spiegelman 2003, 14). In this first instance, Vladek is riding his exercise bike. He is active, talks of practical things and seems reasonably content. By the end of the narrative, with the box of photographs emptied before him, he appears physically exhausted as if the act of telling has drained him of all energy and purpose. The image of Vladek on page 14 mirrors his emotionally fractured state, or failure to

‘reconvene the self’ (Luckhurst 2008, 119). On page 275 he has been reassembled, but this attempt at healing has had the opposite effect; it has forced Vladek to confront the implications of the horror through which he lived.

The relationship between Vladek’s body and the narration of his experiences is described by the title of the first volume of *Maus*: ‘my father bleeds history’ (Spiegelman 2003, 3). As well as the obvious reference to arguably the most famous words given to a Jewish character in the history of English literature ‘[i]f you prick us, do we not bleed?’, it is notable that the cascade of photographs is the second of two uses of a ‘bleed’ in *Maus* (where, in comics parlance, the edges of a panel extend beyond the limits of the page) (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* 3.1.61). The first, auspiciously, occurs at Vladek’s first sight of the gates of Auschwitz (Spiegelman 2003, 159). Artie has forced Vladek to relive his damaging experiences. Miller puns that ‘[if] his father, as Art puts it, "bleeds history," the son draws blood’ (Miller 2003, 47).

These images can be found on pages 12 and 275 of *The Complete Maus*

**Fig. 52 and 53** *Maus* pages 14 (left) and 275 (right) mirror one another. The act of testimony appears to have a largely detrimental physical and emotional effect on Vladek.

Ultimately, then, Vladek’s strategies to mitigate trauma prove insufficient to contain his subject. His moment of emotional and then physical collapse occurs when he is confronted with the photographs that signify the sheer volume of lives lost, including the murder of (almost) everyone he once knew. He makes fragmentary attempts to piece together a complete story and his speech falters. As he attempts to say more he becomes physically overwhelmed and cannot discuss the subject further. The horror of the event goes beyond articulation. He makes no further attempt to rationalise or explain why he lived and his family

died. The screams of the Holocaust, and all that those screams entail, preclude any such possibility. The terrible madness of the event reduces all to silence.

### 3.15 Writing Silence

*Maus* is, in many respects, the exception of the three works explored in this thesis. It is the only text considered which takes an Animist approach. In comparison to the formal experimentation and psychological realism of *Breakdowns* and *No Towers*, every element in *Maus* is designed to support its narrative centerpiece. *Breakdowns* and *No Towers* speak from within a deliberately discordant register whereas in *Maus* each iteration of mad discourse is filtered through a complex but nonetheless coherent narrative structure and a rational voice. The narrative clarity of *Maus* is appropriate in relation to its subject matter, where too formally experimental an approach might threaten to obscure or devalue the historical and political enormity of the Shoah. At the same time, the theriomorphic characters, the omission of specific acts of violence, and the use of generic conventions of Shoah art and literature all serve, not to satisfy the demands of a response to the Shoah, but to formally indicate both Vladek and Artie's failure (and within that, the failure of the book itself) to meet those demands.

The drama between Artie and Vladek plays out the ethical challenges of addressing the fundamental questions raised by traumatic experience in general and the Holocaust in particular. A full response requires both compassion for the victims and an absolute adherence to historical accuracy, two goals which, as *Maus* eloquently demonstrates, are sometimes mutually exclusive. To demand empirical accuracy from the victims is potentially

to deny them the possibility of coming to terms with their trauma, and yet to accept the limitations of traumatic truth is potentially to grant legitimacy to revisionist discourse and to deny the insanely systematic and structural violence underpinned by Enlightenment rationality. Spiegelman does not explicitly reject the possibility that art might adequately communicate the horrors of the Holocaust and, indeed, Artie never abandons his quest for an empirically and historiographically 'true' account. Neither Vladek nor Artie, however, are able to definitively represent the Holocaust, and it remains, in *Maus*, ultimately beyond the auspices of the rational mind.

The difficulty, and consequences, of navigating a course between objective historical truth (such as it exists) and a respect for traumatic truth is also of crucial import for the final Spiegelman work considered in this thesis. *No Towers* comments on the destructive and contradictory consequences of addressing individual and national trauma.

## 4. The Story of a Story: *In the Shadow of No Towers*

Oh, justice will be served and the battle will rage:  
This big dog will fight when you rattle his cage.  
An' you'll be sorry that you messed with the U.S. of A.  
'Cos we'll put a boot in your ass, it's the American way.  
(Toby Keith, "Courtesy of the Red White and Blue", 2002).

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this and all is mended:  
That you have but slumb'ed here,  
While these visions did appear.  
(Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.425-429).

The central thesis proposed in this chapter is that the Artie of *No Towers* feels he must stay true to his memories of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 because they provide a profound glimpse into the powerful irrational forces that underpin a superficially rational society. The Artie who appears in *No Towers* remains unhealed from his trauma despite the collective act of healing which appears to occur around him and, as such, is cast as a marginalised mad (and even Wild) man. It is from this peripheral position that he launches visual and verbal attacks upon the rhetoric of the center and seeks to expose the madness which mainstream media sought to rationalise. Artie's apparent insanity is an appropriate response to his circumstances because he detects a fundamental continuity between contemporary and historical atrocities: a line is drawn between the attacks and their aftermath back to the Holocaust and on toward the systemic madness latent at the core of Enlightenment rationality.

On the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, two planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. A third plane hit the Pentagon and a fourth crashed near Shanksville,



Pennsylvania. The fourth plane's intended target was likely to have been somewhere in Washington D.C. These acts of terrorism were a coordinated operation conducted by members of the Al-Qaeda Islamic militant group. The majority of the 2,977 direct casualties were in the planes, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, or on the New York streets below. The number of casualties increases significantly when one considers those who took their own lives due to the psychological repercussions of the attacks, or died in road accidents because they no longer felt safe travelling by plane. Amongst those on those streets to witness this horrific spectacle was Art Spiegelman.

The cultural aftershock of the Towers' collapse was immense and almost immediate: America saw an outpouring of responses in news media as well as visual art, fiction, music, and literature. Western culture was dominated in the initial weeks and months by narratives of vengeance alongside an ideological insistence on the necessity of a return to 'normality' and paradoxical warnings that America was now under constant threat. During this epochal period in U.S. public life Spiegelman's *No Towers* offered a powerful dissenting voice.

In the previous chapter it was noted that the success of *Maus* among arbiters of culture was driven, in part, by Spiegelman's relatively uncontroversial message and accessible form. Even within *Maus* the assault upon hegemonic reason is tempered by an alternation between mad and rational forms within the text and its characters. This was absolutely not the case with *No Towers*, which employs a chaotic register and neither shies away from political comment nor offers partial sympathy with self-declared agents of reason. The overtly political dissent of *No Towers* risked reception in some quarters as anti-patriotic.

Several American publications, including the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, were unwilling to carry the series. Not every objection was on the grounds of propriety; Wolk describes the text as a ‘God-awful mess’ which ‘somehow became a book’ (Wolk 2007, 346). *No Towers* appeared initially in European newspapers and magazines. In 2003, as the political climate changed in anticipation of the 2004 election, images from the volume made their way into parts of the American press. A collected edition of all 10 pages was published in 2004. The hardback collected edition also featured a series of early-twentieth century comics which Spiegelman selected for their poignantly innocent foreshadowing of events.

Where *Maus* grappled with the challenge of representing that which defies representation, *No Towers* depicts an artist who finds himself navigating multiple systems of representation in order to find one which appropriately captures his lived experience of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Spiegelman provides an alternative commentary on the attacks and their aftermath which addresses a country in crisis. The text features densely politicised images which challenge the rhetoric of news and political media. Artie appears as an eyewitness and thus an authority on the affective aftershock of the attacks. His trauma has been acutely accentuated by his family and ethnic history. He finds himself unable to return to normal and is socially excluded due to his inability to be healed.

The curve of the analysis below will move from outside to inside: from the historical and political stage to the interior psychodrama with which it is intricately imbricated. This chapter will begin with a consideration of mainstream media responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the recurring rhetorical tropes and iconography and, specifically, the

irrationality which Spiegelman identifies in such responses, and then proceed to a close consideration of Spiegelman's reaction to those responses and his construction of Artie as a madman who stands somewhat forlornly against the dominant narratives of his time.

#### **4.1 The Story of the Story of the September 11<sup>th</sup> Terrorist Attacks**

*The September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks were a mass traumatic event – The process of recovery from mass trauma can involve a collective act of finding meaning – The process of finding meaning can be leveraged to political ends – The process of giving meaning to the attacks involved, primarily, the rendering of events within the familiarizing format of the American monomyth – Dan Rather's use of a Lincoln quotation in the immediate aftermath of the attacks evoked the American monomyth – The rhetoric of the American monomyth reverberated throughout the response in many forms of media*

This section will analyse the media and political environment to which *No Towers* responds. These images and rhetoric were by no means the only responses to the attacks, but they were prominent enough that within Artie's traumatised and terrified world-view they appeared to dominate America's cultural and political landscape. The news media and political discourse involved a recurring reliance upon iconic figures and moments from American history in order to encode into the attacks rhetoric and imagery drawn from the *American monomyth*. This discourse facilitated the collective therapeutic process of giving meaning, but it also appropriated the affective copyright of those events.

The acts of terrorism which took place on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 are conventionally classified as a 'mass traumatic event.' The aftermath was experienced by each affected individual first as a personal and then as a collective grief (Sztompka 2007, online). Much like individual trauma, mass trauma can assume multiple guises. The traumatic event causes shock-waves which extend beyond the demographic who were individually and directly

affected. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, a significant number of individuals (both American citizens and those visitors or permanent residents from 90 different countries who also died in the attacks (Carolee Walker 2001, online)) suffered not only trauma, but bereavement, anxiety, and a crisis of cultural identity. These disparate individual responses often coalesced around certain therapeutic meanings ascribed to what took place.

The violence of that day represented a terrible loss of life, but also issued a fundamental(ist) challenge to prevailing assumptions about the safety and security of American (and Western) citizens. Whilst the impact of trauma silenced many voices entirely, some, such as those discussed below, presented a means to assist victims of trauma in understanding the event through the manufacture of a collective narrative. In a manner comparable to Vladek's reliance upon aspects of the romance and fairytale genres to provide meaning for his experience of Auschwitz, many narratives which came after September 11<sup>th</sup> utilised conventional generic forms and structures to provide a means to understand the violence which occurred. These statements served a therapeutic purpose, but they also presented a grossly simplified and Hawkish world-view and, in some cases, made use of the emotional capital of collective grief for specific political ends. Unlike the victim of a personal trauma, the one who suffers from collective trauma, in this case, had the meaning of their traumatic moment *told to them*. The therapeutic work necessary for the subject to realise their trauma in narrative form was largely performed on their behalf for as long as they were prepared to accept the hegemonic narratives which articulated the traumatic event. The following analysis shall seek to document the process of giving meaning within the context of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

Unlike the Holocaust, the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 were not intended to be hidden or silent. Quite the opposite: they were designed to maximise the spectacle of disaster. The images of the crashing planes appeared continuously throughout the days and weeks which followed on television, in newspapers, and later in comic books, novels, and visual art. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks the media possessed, to separate the two terms, a great deal of information and relatively little substantial knowledge. Those in America and elsewhere around the world were aware of certain factual details (many of which were emblazoned on their consciousness by the secondary assault of 24/7 imagery), but the deep history of the events was as yet unwritten and unknown. The attempt to endow this event with meaning, however, began almost immediately. Brian Monahan asserts that ‘September 11 was fashioned as an emotional story that, like so many popular television dramas, was stocked with stirring accounts, heart-felt moments, captivating images, harrowing encounters and compelling characters’ (Monahan 2010, xii-xiii). The narrative infrastructure which provided, in part, a framework for the story of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and its aftermath is the ‘American monomyth.’ John Shelton Lewis and Robert Jewett describe this as follows:

A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community (Lewis and Jewett 1988, xii).

The American monomyth, of course, is integral to and intersects with other discourses of American exceptionalism, national identity and destiny. This narrative structure functions as a template for the majority of texts in the superhero genre, many detective stories and westerns, and has also spilled over into history including popular versions of America’s

involvement in World War II (see Lewis and Jewett (2003)). It promises the protection of established power structures within American society and underscores the key role of autonomous heroic individuals in America's national imaginary. The following analysis will examine the deployment of the American monomyth after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, first in contemporary political rhetoric and then (in the next section) in popular culture as a prelude to consideration of Spiegelman's wilful departure from this grand narrative.

On the day of September 11<sup>th</sup>, alongside an explosive proliferation of reports on the available factual information, Dan Rather, a news anchor on CBS, quoted from a speech by Abraham Lincoln: 'let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself' (Rather in Internet Archive 2001, online). The mythological framework supporting this quote positions the victims as members of a community who have created a safe and stable environment through hard work. This community is threatened by an external evil, the primary motivation of which is envy. The terrorists, Rather suggests, are incapable of building their own utopia and so chose instead to strike out at others. Rather, at the time he spoke those words, did not know exactly who those 'houseless' aggressors were. His statement presents a highly simplified model of world politics that ignores America's role in keeping certain groups 'houseless' in order to protect her own economic and political interests. Rather's quotation further sought to position the violence of that day as part of the mythologised national identity of the United States. The quotation is from Lincoln's famous 1858 'a house divided' speech which preceded the American Civil War. Through the evocation of Lincoln, Rather's intended message is endowed with an authoritative weight; the 16<sup>th</sup> incumbent at the White House is considered,

according to one survey, the second greatest president of all time by Americans (Frank Newport 2011, online). The attackers were, Rather suggests, committing an act which not only damaged an iconic U.S. landmark and brutally murdered U.S. citizens, but also constituted an assault on long-standing and fundamental American values. The quotation implies that there is no need for introspection with regard to American cultural attitudes, power structures, or foreign policy. Rather's speech, and others like it, had a considerable impact on the many viewers watching CBS that day. Versluys contends that:

[M]illions of people saw the events on television, while only a few thousand were there to live through them on the spot. Hence it is obvious that the voice of the direct witness is no match for the Dan Rathers of this world. The media stars appropriated the event even while it happened (Versluys 2009, 75).

The meaning given to the event as it took place shaped the response that followed, including an explosive proliferation of patriotic imagery. On September 12<sup>th</sup> 2001 the *New York Times* reported that '[o]n the Internet, talk of patriotism ran high, with many chat rooms urging Americans to wear red, white and blue today as a show of unity and to honour the victims' (Dave Saltonstall 2001, online).

The process of enframing the events within the American monomyth continued in political discourse in the weeks that followed. On September 20<sup>th</sup> President Bush Jnr. described his country's response in the following terms:

We've seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers in English, Hebrew and Arabic. We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own. My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has seen for itself the state of union, and it is strong.

(APPLAUSE)

Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done (Bush Jnr. 2001, online).

The use of the collusive (and arguably coercive) plural pronoun here introduces a key ideal: a united American community. This civilised community provides an ‘us’ which can be defined in opposition to an external and Wild, ‘them.’ Bush Jnr.’s statement suggests, in a somewhat implausible gesture towards multiculturalism, that ‘we’ (the American people) possess a wealth of empathy for different cultural groups, emotional strength and courage in the face of tragedy. Bush Jnr.’s insistence upon a united multicultural America was problematic when one considers that America was and still is divided on racial and religious grounds. Many American Muslims and others (such as Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh Indian immigrant who was murdered on September 15<sup>th</sup> 2001) were attacked and, in some cases, killed in ‘retaliatory’ acts. In Bush Jnr.’s speech the actions of ‘them’ (the terrorists) threaten not only lives but the founding principle of American individualism: ‘freedom.’ The ‘justice’ which will follow the attacks, he contends, would not be delivered by the federal government, but by the bravery of individuals acting in concert. The healing process, Bush Jnr. suggested, was already underway.

Despite the assault, according to Bush Jnr., America and its values have remained ‘strong’, and the community has been, or will soon be, restored. The use of the term ‘justice’ invokes that archetypal western hero of the Sheriff and promises the imminence of a specifically American style of retribution. The term ‘justice’ also resonates, for many U.S. citizens, with the iconic statues the Spirit of Justice and the Majesty of Justice which stand in the Headquarters of the Department of Justice. The reasons for the attack (as with Rather’s



quotation from Lincoln) are completely erased from Bush Jnr.'s speech. He suggests (in spite of the thousands of traumatised individuals, potentially toxic air in New York and huge changes in security measures in American schools, airports and cities) that no change in American life or attitudes has occurred or, indeed, is necessary.

Bush Jnr.'s assured affirmation of a 'justified war' was repeatedly echoed elsewhere. On September 12<sup>th</sup> 2001, Rear Adm. Craig Quigley alluded to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour which he described as 'a full assault on the United States of America' (Quigley in Saltonstall 2001, online). Both Bush Jnr. and Quigley's statements have a thematic resonance with Franklyn D Roosevelt's 'Infamy Speech' in which he declared that 'the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan' only to be met by the 'unbounding determination of our people' (Roosevelt 1941, online). The reference to World War II imbues the response to the acts of terrorism with a sense of, in this case unearned, triumphalism. The allusion to Pearl Harbour implies a continuation of the World War II narrative and thus the disruption of a community by an evil foreign force and, by way of many acts of individual heroism, the eventual rebuilding of that community. Of course, many soldiers (and, indeed civilians as documented in the previous chapter) came home to lives shaped by trauma, depression, disability, and alienation, but the narrative arc of World War II in American historical and fictional accounts nonetheless sustains a drive toward heroism and catharsis. The invocation of World War II also, importantly for this study, casts America in opposition to the madness of genocide, thereby associating the irrationality of the Holocaust with a Wild (and now ill-defined) 'them' who

seek to do harm. Crucially, the sentiment of justice and invocation of World War II legitimated the subsequent intervention of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This section has used two sources – a news broadcast of Dan Rather and a speech from George Bush Jnr. – as representative of the journalistic and political rhetoric which followed in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. The case has been made that both sources make allusions to iconic moments and figures from American history. These references cumulatively emplot the events within a specifically American cultural code with attendant familiarizing expectations of U.S. exceptionalism, external evil, retribution through violent heroism, and the restoration of community. In the case of Bush Jnr.’s speech, these events were also described using allusions to World War II and, accordingly, a narrative format which stages an unequivocal battle between good and evil.

## **4.2 The Revenger’s Tragedy**

*The encoding of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks within the American monomyth extended to music and prose, as well as fiction and non-fiction comic books – These texts included imagery and forms such as icons of American architecture and popular culture which were often entirely divorced from the events themselves*

This section shall seek to explain the ways in which the process of giving meaning by way of the invocation of the American monomyth was echoed in diverse artistic forms. The subsequent argument, presented in section 4.3, shall then demonstrate that the realisation of the attacks within the American monomyth represented only a partial means to heal mass trauma. This scene-setting will provide the background against which *No Towers* will then be measured in subsequent sections.

Political rhetoric, media sound bites, pop cultural and artistic statements were an integral part of the initial fallout from the collapse of the World Trade Center. Many works in music, art, fiction, poetry, film, and comic books (specifically those to which Spiegelman responds in *No Towers*) tended toward the use of rather unsubtle icons of American values and reinforced the rhetoric of a 'just war' and a 'return to normality.' In contrast to the political and news media responses, the model of 'justice' which appeared in fiction, film, and music was often less restrained in its execution. These narratives typically communicated a desire crystallised by Peter Carey's (an Australian New York resident) injunction 'to strike back, pulverize, kill, obliterate anyone who has caused this harm to my city' (Carey 2002, 56). Songwriter Toby Keith expressed a desire (expressed in full in the quote that opens this chapter) to 'put a boot in [the] ass' of those who perpetrated the acts of terrorism (Keith 2002). Keith's song, in the space of just four verses, makes reference to 'Old Glory', 'the Land of the Free', 'the 4<sup>th</sup> of July', 'Uncle Sam', 'the Statue of Liberty', 'the Eagle', and 'the Red White and Blue' as well as a promise of revenge against the attackers. In Keith's song, America is cast as a resilient and militarily powerful community.

Further icons of American culture appeared in the form of recurring images of buildings and monuments within texts after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Dittmer asserts that '[w]hile the attacks of 9/11 clearly violated Americans' sense of territorial differentiation, they were particularly potent because they disrupted the process of American territorial bonding by attacking those specific sites' (Dittmer 2005, 634). The acts of terrorism did not simply endanger lives; they specifically struck at key spatial symbols of American national identity. Such iconographic sites embody a set of signs beyond their physical functionality

and are imbricated in the narrative of American history. An attack on a landmark is a symbolic assault on the values and identity of a culture. Brian Jarvis proposes that '[i]f terrorism can be read as a narrative then it is clear from 9/11 in New York that this narrative is predominantly visual' (Jarvis 2006, 60). Terrorism (and many comic book genres) rely upon a rhetoric of icons, spectacle and exaggeration. Many of the narratives which followed September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 symbolically rebuilt and reinforced the meaning of, those monuments. Such responses frequently included not only images of the Twin Towers, but also the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. In *There Were Tears in her Eyes*, Sam Glanzman comments that September 11<sup>th</sup> felt, for him, 'as if they raped the Statue of Liberty' drawing a (somewhat inappropriate) analogy between territorial and physical violation (Glanzman 2002, 207). These texts sought to reclaim and symbolically rebuild the icons of American architecture.

Symbols of American culture also extended to popular American mythology. Neil Adams' single page contribution to the comic book collection *9-11 Vol. 2* corresponds with certain discourses active during this early phase (Adams 2002, 176). Under the banner of the Red Cross, Adams depicts Superman and Uncle Sam (an icon of the American military who is also mentioned by Keith) standing in the rubble of the Twin Towers. Superman holds an American Flag and Uncle Sam is sombrely rolling up his sleeves (a motif borrowed from World War I recruitment posters). Beneath them a plaque reads '[f]irst things first. Then we come for you' (Adams 2002, 176). The image calls for appropriate grief, rescue, rebuilding, and healing followed by violent retribution. This deployment of cultural icons enforces the continuation of specific core American values. Superman, the archetypal American superhero,

holds a damaged American flag. The flag, of course, is a highly emotive device, presenting a symbolic crystallisation of a nation's character and ideals. (Katherine Gelber asserts that burning or otherwise damaging a flag 'tends to invite passionate and even vicious responses from those who wish to preserve the flag as a sacrosanct, inviolable and powerful symbol of the nation' (Gelber 2012, 165)). Whilst slightly singed, the American flag in Superman's hands remains mostly intact, implying that, whilst the attacks caused damage, the nation, its fundamental values, and existing institutions remain firmly in place.

This image can be found at [comicvine.com](http://comicvine.com)

**Fig. 54** Neil Adams image of Superman and Uncle Sam in the rubble of the Towers.

The choice of Superman is indicative of the narrative which Adams sought to evoke. In World War II comic books, superheroes would frequently do battle with cartoon-like (and uncomplicatedly 'evil') German and Japanese soldiers. In a 1940 issue of *Look* magazine, for example, Superman flies to Germany and then Russia. He captures Hitler and Stalin and brings them before the League of Nations (Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster 1940, online). Sabin describes superhero comics from this era as 'unashamed morale-boosters' (Sabin 1993, 146). As a genre, superhero comics traditionally (and particularly during World War II and the CCA-era) promoted social cohesion and upheld the dominant ideology. The CCA guidelines insisted, for example, that comics should not encourage crime or detail how crimes are carried out (see section 2.1). Superheroes generally glamorised the role of the law enforcer. Dittmer argues (paraphrasing Matthew Wolf-Meyer) that superhero comics have historically been an inherently conservative medium: 'superheroes are about the protection of life and property and almost never seek to fundamentally revolutionize the system. Any character that seeks to achieve political or economic praxis is, by comic book convention, characterized as a

villain' (Dittmer 2005, 642). Whilst it would be incorrect to state that all modern superhero stories deal exclusively in uncomplicated heroism and morality, or indeed to attempt to make any statement which encompasses the entirety of the many superhero sub-genres which now exist, what can be said is that by transferring the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> into the superhero genre they are endowed with the qualities which have historically indicated fantasy, conflict, the triumph of 'good' over not only absolute, but morally alien and incomprehensible 'evil' and a narrative structure with clear and (often) unambiguously positive endings: a structure, in other words, consistent with the American monomyth.

The encoding of the attacks on the World Trade Center within the superhero iteration of the American monomyth extends even to purportedly non-fictional accounts of the events. The attacks have also been represented in a non-fiction comic book form which renders them in a visual style that closely resembles that of the Superhero genre. *The 9-11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (2006) was drawn by Ernie Colón Viking, whose previous work, most notably, included three years from 1982 to 1985 as an editor at DC where he oversaw superhero series such as *The Green Lantern*. The back cover of *The 9-11 Report* promises to 'turn the complicated and confusing mass of information [...] into an *accessible, straightforward and clear story*' (Colón Viking and Jacobsen 2006, back cover, my italics). Stylistically, the text employs the conventions traditionally associated with the superhero comic.

This image can be found on page 63 of *The 9-11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*

**Fig. 55** *The 9-11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation renders the history of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the comic book format within the stylistics of the superhero genre.*

In the image above, Osama Bin Laden along with other members of Al Qaeda, is depicted with a higher level of detail than, for example, the wholesome American naval officers in the panel above thus emphasising his role as a villain. Cvek argues that the report ‘teaches its readers the simplicity of recognizing a terrorist. The graphic adaptation of the Report [...] relies on Orientalist stereotypes in order to depict the 9/11 terrorists’ (Cvek 2011, 86). In the background a wall-mounted rug signifies in cartoon language that the scene is taking place in the Middle East. Osama Bin Laden spreads his hand across a map as he communicates (one might imagine) his military strategy. There is a greater level of shadow in this panel than others on the page and the foremost figure in the image glances sideways, making clear to the reader that the conversation taking place is secretive and untoward. The use of vividly rendered onomatopoeia (BLAM!) and simple colour palette is characteristic of the Superhero genre of the 1960s and 70s. In addition, the pause between panels which reads ‘then came ... The Attack on the USS Cole’ endows the events with a degree of dramatic pacing common to the superhero genre and in no way intrinsic to the historical events being dramatised (Colón Viking and Jacobsen 2006, 63).

The imagery found in the texts detailed in this section relate closely to the texts discussed in the section above. Author, columnist and Republican speech-writer Peggy Noonan, felt it would have been fitting for President Bush Jnr. to unbutton his shirt in order to reveal ‘the big ‘S’ on his chest’ (Noonan 2003, online). Noonan’s fantasy was being covertly acted out by comic book artists who were offering a lycra-clad incarnation of Bush administration policy. All of the texts considered thus far undertook the task of ‘giving meaning’ in a therapeutic response to the mass-trauma and grief inflicted upon their viewers

and readership. They also reinforced the political rhetoric of the Bush Jnr. administration which, Spiegelman asserts, took America's grief and 'reduced it all to a war recruitment poster' (Spiegelman 2004, ii).

The crucial observation of this section and the chapter up until this point is that the encoding of the events of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks within the American monomyth (and, in the cases above, the typical superhero story) involved a process of abstraction, transformation, and overwriting of the traumatic moment to ends which may have been therapeutic on a mass-cultural level but nonetheless sought to give meaning to the events and to legitimate subsequent neocolonialist action on the part of the American military complex. Broadly, the act of giving meaning to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 involves wilful misremembering, obliviousness to the realities of global geopolitics and a fundamental refusal to come to terms with the madness of what took place.

### **4.3 Threats of Future Past**

*Rhetoric of justice and revenge sought to overwrite the haunting images of individuals falling to their deaths – The spirit of triumphalism described in the texts above coexisted with a paradoxical sense of paranoia within political discourse*

The discourses of justice and retaliation did not exist in isolation. In fact, they were strangely conjoined with a vibrant counter-discourse of ongoing danger. The 'end' of the terrorist threat required a never-ending war which emphasised the still-present horror and threat in American society. Images of the victims (both the dead and the traumatised) reinforced a sense of danger but undercut the idea of an inherent resilience at the core of the American national character. The victims served as a reminder of the body's fragility and the



threat of further attacks. Videos of ‘jumpers’ and photographs of individuals falling from the Towers, such as Richard Drew’s photograph of ‘The Falling Man’ (2001), were ‘rendered taboo’ not long after the attacks and largely disappeared from the media in favour of, in most cases, images of rescue workers (Susie Linfield 2011, online). Melissa Whitworth proposed that: ‘[n]ews organisations decided not to use footage of the people falling to their deaths. No one wanted to talk about the jumpers’ (Whitworth 2011, online). The images of those who fell or jumped from the Towers (some holding hands or with makeshift parachutes) were a painful and even obscene reminder of the violence of September 11<sup>th</sup>. In this context, Superman (who can fly) offered a fantasy displacement for the images of people *falling* from the Towers. The images of death attested to the existence of those Wild Men who sought, through the spectacle of terrorism, to make some chaotic, unintelligible, and terrifying comment upon American society.

The present and palpable fear of similar attacks frequently threatened to erupt in the days, weeks, months and years that followed. In his essay on threat Massumi contends that

September 11 was an actual event that killed thousands and put more thousands of lives in immediate danger. People were agape in shock at the enormity of it. The immediate shock gave way to lingering fear, relaying the danger into a remainder of surplus threat (Massumi 2010, 60).

Massumi persuasively proposes that beneath the rhetoric and imagery of community and swift vengeance America and her allies were haunted by ‘threat-events’: scares and false-alarms which resulted in evacuations and a prevailing atmosphere of fear (Massumi 2010, 61). Even as they spoke of resilience and justice, the Bush Jnr. administration encouraged and made use of this prevailing unease.

September 11 was an excess-threat-generating actual event that that has perhaps done more than any other threat-o-genic source to legitimate pre-emptive politics. It was continually cited by the Bush administration to reinvoke potential threat for use in legitimating policy. Candidates from both parties in the race to succeed Bush invoked it regularly in order to also establish their own national security credentials (Massumi 2010, 60).

Massumi contends, in an ironic comment upon the madly circular paranoia of Bush Jnr.-era politics, that to feel threatened one does not need to *be* threatened. The feeling of threat is indistinguishable from real threat and thus serves as sufficient justification for pre-emptive military action. In relation to the coalition invasion of Iraq, Bush Jnr. described America as facing ‘an enemy that has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality’ (Bush Jnr. 2003, online). Bush Jnr. warns that the American military must be deployed to eradicate future threats. ‘The invasion was right’ Massumi submits ‘because *in the past there was a future threat*. You cannot erase a “fact” like that [...] The threat *will have* been real for all eternity’ (Massumi 2010, 53). The American people were made to feel simultaneously and *illogically* that their community was secure thanks to their uniquely resilient national character and the actions of community-restoring superheroes, and also that they were still profoundly insecure. The feeling of being unsafe legitimised the further deployment of military hardware and personnel overseas (metaphorically incarnated in the comic book images above in the dynamic duo of Uncle Sam and Superman).

The terrorist attacks which took place on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 represented not simply a physical attack upon America, but sought to issue a disrupting challenge to the American people concerning their relative wealth, as well as their economic and cultural imperialism. The attackers were madmen both in the sense that they were marginalised figures on the

world stage and *Wild Men* within the cultural framework in which they were realised. Just as the Bush Jnr. administration sought to present the perpetrators of the attacks as insane, the terrorists saw Western culture – specifically secularism and globalisation – as an absolute threat to their own way of life. These individuals succeeded in sending traumatic shockwaves and a terrifying sense of vulnerability throughout the Western world. Figures within the American media and politics sought immediately to encode those events within, and thus overwrite with, the familiarizing format of the American monomyth. Images of violence and death, most notably the images of ‘jumpers’ were replaced by messages of soon-to-be savoured justice and triumphalism but nonetheless maintained an absent presence. This madness rebounded within Bush Jnr.-era rhetoric to include a simultaneous culture of fear. It is within this context of widespread paranoia, and sophisticated acts of collective denial that this chapter shall now turn to Spiegelman’s *No Towers*.

#### **4.4 In Superman’s Shadow**

*No Towers can be understood as a stylistic and thematic sequel to Breakdowns – The material form of No Towers is an ‘authenticating strategy’ in that the materiality of the form seeks to represent the actuality of the author’s experience – A central question in No Towers is how Artie might preserve his own experience of the attack on the World Trade Center – The visual strategy employed in No Towers has certain formal characteristics which are consistent with both Derrida’s description of mad language and of trauma testimony*

*No Towers* explores the cracks and limitations in the narratives of heroism, unity, a return to ‘normality’ and (contradictorily) continued threat. In this section and the following three sections the case shall be made that Spiegelman applies a series of connected strategies in his counter-discourse: he uses the materiality of the book to authenticate his own role as eyewitness; he uses a mad and traumatised visual register; he employs editorial cartoons as a means to highlight the madness of Bush Jnr. administration rhetoric; and he presents Artie as

a citizen who remains unhealed, unconnected with his community, and paralyzed by the fear of future threat.

As noted in section 1.2, many critics have read *No Towers* as a sequel to *Maus*. The case shall be made here that thematically and stylistically it shares the Formalist experimental aesthetic and mad register found in *Breakdowns*. Stylistically, the text recycles the frequent and overt citations and mad language which appears in certain texts within Spiegelman's first collection. Each page includes multiple sequences of panels often with a different colour palette and genre code. The series of panels are often connected to one another thematically and spatially rather than sequentially. Spiegelman, once again, overtly references the artistic style and characters of various newspaper comics such as *Krazy Kat* and *Little Nemo in Slumberland* alongside occasional *Breakdownsesque* auto-citations to the stylistics of *Maus* (Spiegelman 2004, 8, 6 and 3). *No Towers* does not only repeat the experimental approach and mad preoccupations of *Breakdowns*, it also represents a return to Spiegelman's overt counter-cultural politico-aesthetic strategy. *No Towers*, like *Breakdowns*, overtly seeks to 'zap' the reader; to explicitly expose and ridicule the mad rhetoric of the establishment. This section shall examine Spiegelman's engagement with hegemonic narratives through authenticating strategies and a challenging, mad, register.

This image can be found on page 1 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 56** *No Towers p.1. The narrative is characterised by an unstable register and an unclear narrative flow.*

The eccentricity of *No Towers* begins with the defamiliarization produced by its material form. At broadsheet dimensions (29.5 x 23.5 inches) in hardback (at the time of writing no paperback version has been published) it is too large to hold comfortably. The

sequences of images are positioned vertically, horizontally and upside-down and so must be turned in order to be read. To follow the multiple narrative sequences the reader must twist and turn this hefty tome in a manner that simulates, albeit in slow motion, the tumbling descent of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cartoon figures on the cover and on many plates within the volume.

The volume's size means that it cannot be housed on a conventional bookshelf and thus literally cannot be placed alongside other texts on the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The text's dimensions call attention to its materiality, underline the momentousness of the subject matter, and provide a physical approximation of an event that itself is too unwieldy to be easily accommodated by narrative means. The cover of the volume is textured which offers a preliminary marker of the extent to which the subsequent reading experience will be tactile as well as the visual. By calling attention to itself as an object, the text alludes to what Tanner calls the 'authenticating status of the object world' (Tanner 2012, 60). For individuals who, in the majority, witnessed the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 on television screens and in photographs there is an allure in the possibility of an 'unmediated access to the real' provided by objects from the attacks (Tanner 2012, 60). Tanner contends that the distinction between the digital and the material is far from straightforward. Even as the attacks took place '[s]urvivors in the South Tower describe racing for television screens, computer terminals, cell phones and security monitors after the first plane hit to perceive what was happening in the physical space they occupied' (Tanner 2012, 61). The attacks were mediated by technology even for the primary witnesses. She argues that following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 one can observe a fetishisation of material objects connected with the attacks. The

tactile elements of the cover of *No Towers* offer an alternative, perhaps more authentic, sense through which the acts of terrorism and their aftermath might be contemplated; the book offers a weight and substance which contrasts with the ephemeral televised images. Just as Vladek cites his own body as grounds for his legitimacy as a commentator on the Shoah, Spiegelman, unlike many political and cultural commentators, can attest to the horror of September 11<sup>th</sup> because he was *there*. The weight and shape of the text serves to reinforce its materiality and status as quasi-found object and postmodern first person testimony from the attacks and thus stake Spiegelman's claim to his own story.

Alongside the authenticating materiality of the volume, *No Towers* engages directly with the process of giving meaning to mass trauma detailed in the sections above. Artie feels that his eyewitness testimony is in danger of being de-authenticated by the dominant narratives which pervade the mainstream media. He is 'haunted now by the images he *didn't* witness' (Spiegelman 2003, 6). The sight of the World Trade Center as it collapsed is burned into his consciousness and yet on television the events he witnessed are dwarfed by media figures; the Towers 'aren't much bigger than [...] Dan Rather's head' (Spiegelman 2003, 1). Artie's vision, he knows, is distorted by his emotional and physical proximity to the event; there is no measured and impartial Baconian method by which he can make the collapse of the World Trade Center objectively apprehensible, but nor is he convinced that any such method might be available to political and media commentators. Orbán submits that the central concern of *No Towers* is 'how *not to be overwritten* by [another visual archive]' of one's experiences (Orbán 2007, 60). The stories and images which served to treat mass trauma threaten to erase and confuse Artie's first-hand memories. One page opens with the

following plea (presumably directed at those calling for a ‘just war’): ‘[I]leave me alone, damn it! I’m just trying to comfortably relive my September 11 trauma but you keep interrupting’ (Spiegelman 2004, 5). The request to be left alone (against the backdrop of compulsory insistence on ‘community’, ‘collective suffering’, ‘coming together in our hour of need’) is also an act of resistance toward the appropriation of his post-traumatic experience into the larger cultural narratives, not only the drive for ‘justice’, but also a self-pitying trauma culture to which he grudgingly and self-consciously assigns himself. Spiegelman’s mad drawings thus serve as a means, even if (as shall be argued later, his attempts to depict what he saw fall short of their goal) to shield Artie’s image of the traumatic moment against the onslaught of images of redemptive heroes, swift revenge, the re-establishment of community and unequivocal return to normalcy.

In order to preserve a traumatic truth concerning his memory of what occurred in the face of the onslaught of images Spiegelman adopts a deliberately mad – in the Derridian sense – register. The form of *No Towers* thus offers an alternative way to view the attacks from the accessible and familiar forms of media reportage, political speech and comic book superheroes. In its physical dimensions, subject-matter and narrative devices the text is not designed to be read *easily*. The images and narratives in *No Towers* can (and, in fact, must) be apprehended slowly. There is no one familiar narrative line or consistent meaning to be drawn from Spiegelman’s depictions of the attacks. Where Colón Viking and Jacobsen sought to reduce the story of September 11<sup>th</sup> into an ‘accessible’ and ‘clear’ narrative consistent with rational forms of expression, Spiegelman seeks to make the story of Artie’s relationship to the events difficult and incoherent. This unwieldiness is consistent not only

with Derrida's vision of mad language, but with the formal characteristics of the trauma testimony as identified by Luckhurst. The trauma testimony 'bear[s] witness to the unrepresentable [...] refusing the consolations of beautiful form, and [is] suspicious of familiar representational and narrative conventions' (Luckhurst 2008, 81). *No Towers* employs this mad and traumatised artistic register in order to imagine the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and, in direct opposition to the familiarizing strategies listed in the sections above, maintain the strangeness, confusion and madness both of that day and its aftermath.

This section includes several key observations and, as such, some consolidation is required. The argument has been made that Spiegelman defamiliarizes *No Towers* through its material form so as to provide authenticating access to the real. The materiality and weight of the volume is an authenticating strategy which relates to the central purpose of the text: to resist the power of mass media to tell him his own story. In further service of this goal Spiegelman employs a deliberately difficult and mad stylistic approach and thus defamiliarizes his subject, thereby opposing the reductive and familiarizing strategies which Artie perceives in the media that surrounds him. The section that follows will demonstrate that Spiegelman not only authenticates the text and proposes a stylistic counter-discourse, but also directly attacks Bush Jnr. era political rhetoric through the use of editorial cartoons.

#### **4.5 Gassing Iraknids: Editorial Cartoons in *No Towers***

*Within No Towers editorial cartoons allow Spiegelman to both directly comment upon world events and to depict Bush Jnr. and his followers as madmen – The political cartoons in No Towers make use of devices which also appear in Breakdowns, namely, quotation, dark parody, and the Carnavalesque – Spiegelman directly addresses subjects such as the Patriot Act and American military involvement overseas*



Despite Spiegelman's insistence (in reference to post-September 11<sup>th</sup> politics) that he works 'too slowly to respond to transient events while they're happening', political cartoons on contemporary topics number amongst the genres upon which he draws (Spiegelman 2004, ii). These overtly politicized cartoon images allow a form of satire not conspicuous in *Breakdowns* or *Maus* (aside from, perhaps, the oblique references to Wertham and the CCA detailed in section 2.7). The Artie of *No Towers* may not have a clear sense of his own relationship to the traumatic moment, but Spiegelman's authorial voice has very clear opinions about his President. A series of politically-charged images in the text express anger and frustration at the actions and rhetoric of the Bush Jnr. administration. This section shall briefly describe the genre of the editorial cartoon and offer a close reading of Spiegelman's use of the genre within *No Towers*. The analysis shall demonstrate that Spiegelman recycles stylistic features from *Breakdowns* including hypertextual references and Carnavalesque dark parody in order to comment upon the Patriot Act and American military action overseas. His ultimate goal in doing so is to make visible the viral and virulent madness of such political rhetoric.

The editorial cartoon has roots that stretch back at least as far as Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Passional Christi und Antichristi* (1521) woodcuts which satirized the Catholic Church. This became a popular medium for political commentary in America beginning with Thomas Nast's work in the publication *Harpers Weekly* in the 1850s and 60s (see Donald Dewey 2007) and Joseph Ferdinand Keppler's magazine *Puck* which ran from 1871 to 1918. As mentioned in the previous chapter the editorial cartoon was also one of many propaganda tools employed by all countries involved in World War II. The editorial cartoon uses

caricature and allusion to convey an (generally recent and political) opinion and lampoon a political figure. The political cartoon might also be said to contain traces of the Carnival in that it entails an inversion of normal hierarchies of power through the unflattering depiction of powerful figures, the legitimization of dissident discourses, and dark humour. These elements make it an ideal vehicle for Spiegelman's mission to expose the madness of Bush Jnr. era political rhetoric.

This image can be found on [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

**Fig. 57** *Thomas Nast's The "Brains" uses caricature and allusion to criticize "Boss" Tweed of Tammany Hall. Nast's editorial cartoons helped to turn public opinion against the Tweed Ring.*

Editorial cartoons appear throughout *No Towers*, including a caricatured (and far from Supermanesque) President Bush Jnr. and Dick Cheney riding an American Eagle which wears an Uncle Sam hat (Spiegelman 2004, 4). Bush Jnr. is depicted with a gormless expression and beady eyes. He is issuing the command 'let's roll' whilst Dick Cheney cuts the Eagle's throat (Spiegelman 2004, 4).

This image can be found on page 4 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 58** *No Towers plate 4. Bush Jnr. and Cheney kill an eagle they are riding as part of a political commentary on the Patriot Act.*

The Eagle asks with its final breath 'why do they hate us?' The question echoes and inverts the rhetorical question Bush Jnr. asked in relation to foreign terrorists at a joint session of Congress on September 20<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Bush Jnr. 2001, online). The image suggests (in the exaggerated and abstract terms characteristic of the editorial cartoon) that the policy of the administration is hijacking patriotic American ideals to fight America's enemies whilst simultaneously inciting terror in American citizens. The murder of an American eagle (perhaps the most readily identifiable symbol of U.S. freedom) can be read specifically in

terms of the Patriot Act which was made effective in February 2002. The Act was legitimised through the rhetoric of future threat and pre-emption and designed to strengthen national security in response to September 11<sup>th</sup> and the 2001 anthrax attacks. The Act authorised the prolonged detention of immigrants and allowed law enforcement agencies to search a home or business without the owner's permission or knowledge. It was heavily criticized (perhaps most famously by documentary film-maker Michael Moore) for putting the individual's constitutional rights to privacy in jeopardy. The image of Bush Jnr. and Cheney killing an eagle can also be read as a reference to Spiegelman's anticipation of the (at the time of writing) 8,260 deaths of coalition (including American) personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq (1,827 more than the total casualty count on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001) (icasualties.org 2014, online). Bush Jnr., Spiegelman's image suggests, will be directly responsible for those deaths.

The irony of Bush Jnr. simultaneously speaking of the need to 'defend freedom' and actively restricting the freedom of U.S. citizens is also captured in the image of the President leading a group of red/Republican monsters who wield American flags and speak in patriotic and religious clichés (Bush Jnr. 2001, online). In a metaphor which appears elsewhere in the book, red represents both the Republicans (rather than Communists) and a threat-event, a 'red alert' and a 'severe risk of terrorist attack' (Spiegelman 2004, 7). Bush Jnr., dressed as a cowboy (an archetype from the American monomyth) gives the order 'Backward, march!', simultaneously ordering his followers to move in two opposing directions (toward freedom and away from it) (ibid). The series of panels is titled 'An Upside Down World' and, in keeping with the title, Bush Jnr. and his followers march along the top of the panel. When they jump (from a cliff, rather than from the collapsing World Trade Center) they 'fall' like

Superman, upwards (from their perspective) calling ‘Hallelujah!’ and ‘God bless America,’ (ibid). Inversion, both along a horizontal axis and in relation to hierarchies of power, as well as the ridiculing of authority connects these images once more to the tradition of the Carnival. The humour of the images of Bush Jnr’s bizarre retinue of creatures also evokes the Carnival’s tradition of dark grotesque. Some of these Republican monsters might reference the ‘reptoid hypothesis’ of David Icke and similar conspiracy theorists. Icke contends that certain world leaders belong to a secret society of shape-shifting lizard people (see Icke, 1990). By invoking the theory Spiegelman suggests a self-deprecatory madness to Artie’s worldview. Artie can no longer distinguish the madness of political monsters from those born of paranoid science-fiction fantasies. In this inversion, rather than a Fool being elected to the position of regent, the regent is a Fool. These images serve not only as hyperbolic and highly emotive political comment, but also to call attention to the mad goals – specifically the apparent desire to incite further attacks through a misguided pseudo-religious crusade, refusal to engage in any national introspection, and misplaced aggression – served by apparently rational political discourse.

Echoes of the Carnival can be heard in other political cartoons within *No Towers*. In another series of panels, Spiegelman hijacks an icon of Hawkish rhetoric, Uncle Sam, who appears in the guise of ‘Uncle Screwloose’ in a sequence drawn in the style of the early twentieth century Sunday funny *The Katzenjammer Kids* (Spiegelman, 2004, 5).

This image can be found on page 5 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 59** *No Towers plate 5. Spiegelman’s Uncle Sam burns, poisons and unleashes hornets on the Towers in an allegory for American military action overseas.*

Spiegelman's Uncle Sam (like many characters in *The Katzenjammer Kids*) speaks in German-cadenced English which upsets the notion of a unified American culture upon which a distinction between 'us' and 'them' is founded. This character serves as both victim and aggressor. He is thus an embodiment of a government which simultaneously seeks to protect and terrify its citizens. In keeping with the Carnival, roles are inverted: the first generation immigrant (a group whose freedom was compromised by the Patriot Act) enacts America's revenge. In the comic, Uncle Sam first douses the burning 'Tower Twins' in oil in an allusion to the economic motivations behind the subsequent invasion of Iraq. He then proceeds to spray the Twins with bug poison in an attempt to kill hornets. Uncle Screwloose attacks an 'Iraknid' despite the Tower Twins' insistence that it is the 'wrong bug' (Spiegelman, 2004, 5). The sequence serves as an unsubtle allegory for the American occupation of Iraq on the grounds of future threat. The insect imagery is an allusion both to the unclean air in New York after the attacks and an invocation of cold war insect imagery in science fiction films such as *Them!* (1954). By depicting America's enemies as insects, Spiegelman references the demagogic assaults on individuals under McCarthyism which he sees resurrected in the Patriot Act. The metaphor also repeats the moment in *Maus* where Artie discusses the horrors of Auschwitz whilst spraying bugs with an aerosol, thereby connecting the killing of Jews with, according to Nazi propaganda, the extermination of pests (Spiegelman 2003, 234). By forging a metaphoric circuit between the killing of Jews in Nazi death camps and American military action in Iraq, Spiegelman expresses horror at what is perceived to be the necessary killing of those whom America perceives as a threat and the eruption of collective madness from an ostensibly rational society. Having incited the bug's wrath, Uncle Screwloose hides indoors and watches the Tower Twins being chased and stung, thus disrupting the

familiarizing appearance of icons of American cartoon history and creating a dark parody from within the original text. The sequence serves as an allegory for the War on Terror where American military action, driven by misguided patriotism and religious fervour, incites further acts of terrorist retaliation. This overtly political commentary, in concert with the form of *No Towers* and its mad register, serves as a counter-discourse to destabilise the apparent rationality which underlies the rhetoric of justice, community, and threat detailed in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

#### **4.6 This Land is My Land**

*Artie witnesses, but does not participate in, the collective act of recovery from trauma which takes place around him – Artie’s relationship to landscape differs dramatically from other, more jingoistic, narratives after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 – Artie’s environment includes cartoonish cityscapes and detritus as representative of his own idiosyncratic psychogeographical cartography*

The case shall now be made that within *No Towers* the commentary on America’s response to September 11<sup>th</sup> occurs in the private stories depicted as well as those from the political arena. These stories serve as a means to articulate Artie’s trauma and fear. Spiegelman’s third strategy (the first involves formal experimentation (see section 4.4) and the second (as detailed in the previous section) centres on the deployment of the editorial cartoon) in his counter-discourse is to present Artie as an individual who remains profoundly unhealed and unrehabilitated. This section will introduce the figure of Artie into the analysis by examining the way in which he responds to the mass treatment of trauma and relates to landscape. The following series of close readings shall seek to demonstrate that Artie’s response to the attacks on the World Trade Center differs dramatically from those around him. In opposition to the uncomplicated symbolism offered by the Statue of Liberty, Artie prefers

urban detritus and cartoonish cityscapes as representative of that which evokes (for him) a sense of personal connection to his city and to his country.

Artie's response to the collective narratives of restoration and revenge is most clearly illustrated in a series of panels featuring a woman at a party who relates the details of a mugging incident. She finishes the story with the words: 'I was, like, sooo relieved!... Things are finally getting back to normal!' (Spiegelman 2004, 9).

This image can be found on page 9 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 60** *The 'return to normal' anecdote is told, to Artie's horror, with impeccable comedic timing*

Spiegelman's reaction to the scene does not correspond entirely with Artie's; there is a degree of complicity between Spiegelman and the storyteller. The anecdote is presented in the familiar format of a joke (specifically a four-panel newspaper gag strip), with a build-up of tension and a punch-line which counters the audience's expectations. The series of panels 'zoom in' on the subject. The audience (both the characters in the scene and the reader) draw toward the speaker and scatter at the closing line. For Artie there is no such complicity. Within the context of *No Towers* the anecdote is used to illustrate the fact that for Artie, an individual who is still reliving the moment of the attacks, the notion of a 'return to normal' is utterly alien. Artie finds no relief in the humorous tale. It serves, for him, as a cynical commentary on the speed with which the trauma of September 11<sup>th</sup> has (or appears to have) 'healed' for the majority of those with whom he interacts. He sees this as evidence of a lack of introspection amongst other New Yorkers, and a terrifying insight into the madness which others consider to be 'normal.' The anecdote is used to throw Artie – unhealed, terrified, and preoccupied with introspection – into sharp relief. The 'return to normal' which healing

promises is a return to a world filled with threat, a threat which the other party attendees, inexplicably, seem to be find humorous .

The dramatic difference between Artie's way of seeing and the optic encoded in dominant restitution narratives is further manifest in his relationship to landscape. In contrast to the texts described in section 4.2, Artie's environment does not include many American monuments. His sense of isolation is articulated through the representation of the urban landscape. The sudden alteration to the New York skyline prompts Artie to re-examine his own relationship to the physical space in which he lives. In the introduction to *No Towers*, Spiegelman describes how '[o]ne of my near-death realizations as the dust first settled on Canal Street was the depth of my affection for the chaotic neighbourhood that I can honestly call home' (Spiegelman 2004, i). Whilst his relationship to American soil does correspond, to a degree, with the sentimentalism found in depictions of iconic American monuments and architecture described above, the landscape of *No Towers* contains few affectionate depictions of the iconic American touristscape. (The Statue of Liberty, appears but only as backdrop to an unflattering depiction of Bush Jnr engaged in an act of hypocritical patriotism). *No Towers* presents landscape in a manner which does little to evoke a sense of conventional collective identity. The Twin Towers and the Statue of Liberty never appear as an icon of American values, but instead as a nightmarish frame around Artie's traumatic moment and the ongoing madness of the political and military response.

In addition to a mad and chaotic rendering of icons of American architecture, Spiegelman includes in *No Towers* panels which occur in a localised and personal space



specific to Artie and his family. Cvek reads this landscape as ‘an attempt to critically distance [Spiegelman] from the media-supported, nationalist government policies’ (Cvek 2011, 101). These backdrops include jaunty, cartoonish cityscapes on plates 7 and 9 and piles of litter lining the streets in almost every panel on plate 6. When Artie tumbles down the disintegrating World Trade Center on plate 6, he lands (in the guise of Happy Hooligan) in a pile of refuse.

This image can be found on page 6 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 61** *No Towers p. 6 New York's landscape is characterised by urban waste.*

The inclusion of detritus resonates with Dittmer’s observation that ‘the World Trade Center and Pentagon are [...] iconic for the American imagination, in comparison to [...] a landfill’ (Dittmer 2005, 634). The Pentagon is tied to American self-identity whereas a landfill (which, by percentage surface area of the country, is far more representative of the American landscape than the Pentagon) is not. Spiegelman thus proposes an alternative form of memorialisation which celebrates the capacity of the mundane to evoke memory.

#### **4.7 A Man Who Eats French Fries**

*Artie's failure to conform to dominant narratives causes him to be marginalised and alienated – Artie cannot separate his own madness from that which he observes in political and popular discourse – Artie is not insensitive to the recurring themes found in popular discourse, rather, he is hyper-attuned to threat – Artie is cast as a Wild Man who is not only alienated from but cast in opposition to mainstream American culture*

We have seen in the previous three sections that Spiegelman’s alternative way of understanding the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 involves technical innovation, editorial cartoons, and an unconventional depiction of the American landscape. In this section the case

shall be made that Spiegelman further interrogates dominant narratives through his mad protagonist. Artie's relationship to his environment and the individuals who populate it is a reciprocal one; as Artie sees madness in the world which surrounds him, that world looks upon Artie and sees a madman. Artie's refusal to participate in dominant narratives places him outside of the collective reassertion of community and nationhood. In the tradition of both the self-mythologising artist and the Fool who speaks the truth which others cannot utter Artie appears (to himself if not to others) as the lone individual who, he believes, understands the true implications of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Artie does not simply observe and comment upon the collective act of healing which takes place around him; he experiences marginalisation through his inability to be healed. In one sequence of panels Artie's failure to deliver appropriately patriotic responses to a series of questions causes him to be ejected from an interview with CBS. When asked to identify the American food which he enjoys the most he replies 'shrimp pad thai' (Spiegelman 2004, 10). The reference to Thai food may be taken as a further allusion to American multiculturalism and implicit critique of the monolithic 'we' which appears in Bush Jnr.'s political rhetoric. When asked where he feels most American he replies 'Paris, France' and thereby not only refuses to participate in the glorification of icons of the American landscape but also calls attention to the fact that America's military response to the attacks did not receive universal international support (Spiegelman 2004, 10). France was (and continues to be) one of the nations on the international stage who offers the most vocal opposition to the 'War on Terror' (Jeremy Shapiro 2002, online). French criticism of Coalition military action prompted some American restaurants to rename the french fries on their menus as 'freedom

fries' (Sean Loughlin 2003, online). Upon realising that Artie will only offer politically dissonant and ironic responses to their questions the film team call the interview to a close. Artie's refusal to participate in a collective celebration of American patriotism thereby causes him to be excluded from public discourse.

The sense of being affected by trauma in a manner inconsistent with the ruling narratives of the time is captured in the image of Artie with an eagle around his neck. The tethered eagle (which represents the restrictions placed upon American freedom), like the 'jumpers', runs counter to the images of Superman which appear in the Hawkish discourses described in section 4.2. Artie carries the corpse of the eagle which Cheney and Bush Jnr. have killed; he is the victim of their fear-mongering. The series of panels turn progressively, obscuring and silencing Artie as he proceeds with his mad rant and become the two burning towers which 'spell' the date of their own demise.

This image can be found on page 2 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 62** *No Towers plate 2. Spiegelman's social status as a 'madman' who hears voices is rendered visually.*

In the final panel Artie's eyes swirl in a manner which indicates, in iconic cartoon shorthand, that he has gone insane. He stands before a cartooned audience who watch him with detached interest. His voice is that of the babbling Fool/*schlemiel* of Jewish *shtetl* humour whose mad ramblings are indulged only because his idiocy and social status render him incapable of doing harm. The albatross (or in this case eagle) is a reference to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* – a ship captain who was made to wear the bird he killed as a punishment by the crew and thus represents exclusion from the group. The eagle parrots nonsensical sound bites from the Bush Jnr. administration's rhetoric. Artie announces to onlookers: 'I insist the sky is

falling, they roll their eyes and tell me it's only my Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (Spiegelman 2004, 2). In the climate of future threat he is a caricatured version of the type of a citizen the dominant culture sought to produce. He continues to anticipate disaster (rendered in imagery borrowed from Coleridge, Chicken Little and early twentieth century comics) when everyone around him appears to prefer the political and cultural discourses which promised a return to normality. Because he represents a marginalised and unhealed figure, Artie attests both to the inadequacy of dominant discourse to heal the trauma of all subjects and to the terrible alienation experienced by those who find themselves unable to be healed.

Artie's alienation is further communicated through his changing physiology and transformation into a Wild Man. In a time where sharp demarcations were sought between victim and aggressor, Artie's body becomes a site of disruption and instability. Following the attacks, the 'you' which Uncle Sam and Superman are 'coming for' in Adam's cartoon had to be given an identity and that identity became a model against which a uniform American character could be defined. In such a climate Artie finds himself staring into the mirror and unable to classify the face that looks back within the framework of 'us' and 'them.' He is depicted both figuratively and literally as losing his head (Spiegelman 2004, 9) and with it 'any stable frame of reference in the political atmosphere that prevailed in the months and years after September 11<sup>th</sup>' (McGlothlin 2008, 102). Artie reports that he 'grew a beard whilst Afghans were shaving off theirs' in flagrant disregard of the urgent contemporary policing of racial and ethnic distinctions (Spiegelman 2004, 2). He appears with a beard, without, and as a mouse (the Wild Man is 'a man with the soul of an animal, a man so degraded that he could not be saved even by God's grace itself' (White 1985, 164)). Artie is

alternately visually positioned as victim and aggressor. Whilst some mainstream sources were fixated on demonising the Wild Man Terrorist/Other, Artie looks at himself and sees Wildness.

Artie's status as Wild Man is further reflected through the mad language previously identified within the text. His sense of being accused of Wildness has been internalised within both his body and the form of the work itself. Artie's shifting identity is reflected in the inconsistencies in the narrative voice which, in an effect reminiscent of that which appears in *Portrait*, uses a mad and broken language and alternates between the first and third person. The instability of this narrator is captured by the ironic statement: '[t]ime passes, he can think about himself in the first person again' (Spiegelman 2004, 104). His Wild nature is evident in his changing appearance between (and sometimes within) each panel sequence. During one series of panels Artie's different body parts switch places with other objects. Eventually he breaks the frame by hurling his cat 'outside' of the strip (Spiegelman 2004, 9). This instability of identity (both in terms of Artie's physical body and the narrating voice) is a recurring theme (Wildness, like the mad language described by Derrida, is identified with 'linguistic confusion' (White 1985, 162)). Using a device which is familiar from *Breakdowns*, there is not a single diegetic authorial 'I' in the text. Instead, there are many Arties and each is specific to an individual narrative thread. The Wild Man serves to create something against which the normative identity can be measured. Artie, by comparison, embodies the spirit of instability. He wheels recklessly between different subjects and self-definitions. Artie's body, like Vladek's body when divided across different panels in *Maus* (as detailed in section 3.14), undergoes an Orphic dismemberment, re-working and redefinition. The depiction of Artie as

a Wild Man attests not only to his status as madman, but also as a specific archetype of madman who exists *in opposition to* a society in crisis. Artie's inability to be healed thus not only causes him to be alienated from those who surround him, but to be counted alongside the dangerous and mad 'them' who seek to do America harm.

To this point the question of madness within this chapter has appeared within an argument concerning Spiegelman's resistance to the process of wide-scale reimagining and working-through of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. The case has been made that Spiegelman uses a mad comic book language within *No Towers*, he draws attention to the madness of political figures through editorial cartoons, and that Artie appears as a marginalised mad (and even Wild) man who is nonetheless convinced that the society which surrounds him has embarked upon an irrational and self-destructive course. The following section shall seek to continue the analysis of Artie's madness by reading *No Towers* as an internal psychodrama. Specifically, the reading which follows will examine the depiction of collective madness within the text in a manner which has hitherto gone unexplored in any depth within Spiegelman scholarship; namely the metaphor of sleep.

#### **4.8 If We Shadows Have Offended**

*In No Towers participation in the dominant cultural act of healing appears in the recurring symbolism of sleep – Artie, who sees the madness which surrounds him, is frozen in an act of perpetual awakening – When Artie does sleep in his dream state he is unable to distinguish his own madness from that which surrounds him – Artie awakens from madness only to find himself in an equally mad world*

Artie's marginalisation manifests at one point as he appears sitting wide-awake in bed, surrounded by other New York residents all of whom are slumbering peacefully. He reiterates

the shock he experienced at the cocktail party by asking: ‘How can they be so complacent? How can they *sleep*??!’ (Spiegelman 2004, 9). In sections 4.1 and 4.2 it was argued that, unlike the outsider, many of those living in New York found relief (or, in Artie’s traumatised worldview, appear to have found relief) from their anxiety in the familiar narratives of restoration, justice, and pre-emption which pervaded the media at the time. Artie, conversely, does not believe that his government’s actions are making him any safer and is in fact convinced they will lead to further acts of terrorism, loss of life, and insanity. As well as recycling and developing the thematics covered above this image also makes use of the recurring symbol of sleep which appears throughout the text and Spiegelman’s work as a whole. In this case sleep represents the state of those who are unattuned to imminent threat. Artie is thus presented, within his own mad vision, as the sole individual who realises what is happening. He is, to use Foucault’s terms, a man driven mad by knowledge: ‘[k]nowledge [...] forms around feeling a milieu of abstract relationships where man risks losing the physical happiness in which his relation to the world is usually established. Knowledge multiplies, no doubt, but its cost increases too’ (Foucault 2001, 207). The attacks have endowed Artie with a sudden and terrible understanding of his own vulnerability.

The metaphor within *No Towers* of sleep as escape can be further illustrated by way of Massumi’s arguments concerning threat (see section 4.3). Massumi equates the experience of threat to an alarm which sounds an alert for no reason and awakens the individual from sleep. In the transition from the dream to reality the individual under threat is ‘a body in a perpetual innervated reawakening’ (Massumi 2010, 65). In *No Towers* Artie repeatedly finds himself awoken to new dangers. His own hallucinations from sleep deprivation become

inseparable from the hallucinatory dangers imagined by his government. Unlike the other residents of New York (who, it seems, are less outwardly affected by threat) Artie's sense of fear fills his life to the point that he can no longer function. The imminent threat which is about to be visited upon him extends beyond the possibility of another terrorist attack, to include his own government's irrational actions and the toxic air which fills New York.

During his continuous alternation between sleep and wakefulness Artie is found slumped over his writing desk. In his dreamscape he appears 'equally terrorised by Al-Qaeda and his own government' (Spiegelman 2010, 2). Even in his sleeping state Artie is awake to the madness which surrounds him. This image merges the horror of the attacks with the present ideological assault of the War on Terror. In *No Towers* the sleep of reason has been sublimated into a cartoon Bush Jnr. and Bin Laden. These figures are united in their madness; the blood on Bin Laden's sword matches the red on the American Flag which Bush Jnr. carries. Bin Laden's nose is borrowed from Mickey Mouse, an iconic image of 'soft' American cultural imperialism (see section 3.3 above). The flag Bush Jnr. carries has no stars, implying disunity and disappearance. The symbolic merging of Bush and Bin Laden suggests that boundaries between victim and aggressor have become blurred to the point that both appear equally insane.

Artie may be awake to the threat which surrounds him, but he is certainly not unaffected by its madness. A poster in Democratic blue declares Artie to be missing a brain, informing the public (in a self-deprecating mechanism typical of both underground comics and Jewish humour) that his own opinion should not necessarily be trusted. The image thus



suggests that, in his madness, Artie cannot distinguish between those charged with his protection and those who seek to do him harm. In his continuous moment of awakening he recognises that he is delusional, but he is unable to separate the madness which has emerged from within his own traumatised mind and the madness of external agents who act upon him.

This image can be found on page 2 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 63** *No Towers plate 2. A slumbering Artie is tormented by a cartoon Bush Jnr. and Bin Laden.*

Artie awakens again in the final panel of page 6 where he is pictured in the style of *Little Nemo In Slumberland* (1911-1914 and 1924-1926) having fallen out of bed. The scene would suggest an awakening from a nightmare were it not for the fact that the mother figure who stands over him wears a gas mask. Her apparel is a condensed allusion to contemporary threats of biological/chemical warfare, the toxic air of New York, as well as to the Great War, the gas chambers, and the unspecific future threat which follows Artie everywhere he goes. The collapse of the Towers was, Versluys proposes, ‘a moment when the instability of nightmare takes over from the solidity of steel, the normal order collapses, the mind is faced with the incomprehensible, and the whole city is submerged by the uncanny and the surreal’ (Versluys 2006, 94).

Within *No Towers*, Spiegelman proposes that *there is no sane or rational world to which one can escape*. The collapse of one iteration of madness simply leads to another. Artie may feel that he is more aware than those around him but his heightened awareness does not deliver him from madness. *No Towers* thus both recycles the McKay parody which appears in *Real Dream: Hand Job* and represents a return to the narrative framework of *Maus* in which movement away from the surreal world of the animal metaphor entails entrance into an even more nightmarish and stylistically mad visual frame. The ultimate conclusion to be drawn

from these images is that Spiegelman does not consider the personal and collective madness which, for Artie, arises from the rubble of the Twin Towers to be an aberration from a normally rational world but evidence of the continuation of the madness which underlies all of Enlightenment rationality. At the heart of this madness, as the next section will show, Artie sees the death camps which imprisoned his parents.

#### **4.9 In the Shadow of That Mouse**

*No Towers contains visual symbolism from the Shoah – The most important resonance between the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the Holocaust within No Towers is the arresting affect of trauma*

Benjamin Bird argues of September 11<sup>th</sup> literature as a whole that ‘the 9/11 attacks have catalysed the release of repressed material, both in the individual psyche and in the wider culture’ (Bird 2007, 565). In Spiegelman’s case this repressed material is his own family history from the Shoah. In the introduction to *No Towers* Spiegelman asserts that

out-running the toxic cloud that had moments before been the north tower of the World Trade Center left me reeling on that faultline where World History and Personal History collide – the intersection my parents, Auschwitz survivors, had warned me about when they taught me to always keep my bags packed (Spiegelman 2004, i).

The ghosts of the Holocaust haunt the plates of *No Towers*. A homeless woman attacks Artie with anti-Semitic insults (Spiegelman 2004, 6). The ‘other shoe’ on plate 1 is a Doc Marten, footwear which ‘used to be more exclusively associated with aggressive urban male rebels and rightest groupings held together by ideologies of white supremacy’ (Christina Meyer 2012, 484). Shoes appear again in plate 10 where they rain down upon a crowd of people and *Maus*-style mice. Shoes (used both here and in *Breakdowns*) invoke the iconic piles of shoes taken from dead prisoners in the death camps as well as referencing Vladek’s work as a shoe-

maker in Auschwitz (see section 2.9). Artie's ethnic self-consciousness overtakes him and he appears on several occasions as a *Maus*-style mouse. In the context of *Maus*, mouse/Jew is a status, as noted in the previous chapter, which is (with the exception of Françoise) never voluntary (see section 3.3).

Further allusions to the Shoah within *No Towers* include maps within Artie's personal landscape. In addition to the personal and idiosyncratic depiction of Artie's neighbourhood the text features maps of New York streets which are typically a tool that prioritises information over aesthetics (Spiegelman 2004, 6). Commenting on the maps and diagrams in *Maus* Nigel Adams suggests that 'diagrammatic inserts [...] gave guidance on [...] situations when life literally depended on practical adaptation' (Adams 2003, 142). The map does not invoke familiarity so much as necessity. Mandaville proposes that when Vladek draws maps and diagrams for Artie in *Maus* he 'seeks to ensure his son's future' (Mandaville 2009, 236). When Artie looks for a way to relate to his environment, his first point of reference is the diagrams his father drew when teaching him how to evade the Nazis.

It is no coincidence, too, that the recurring image from September 11<sup>th</sup> in *No Towers* is the burning 'bones' of the Towers as they disintegrated (Spiegelman 2004, i). The image resonates with the burning bodies in Auschwitz and other death camps. Spiegelman merges the two events in a figurative continuum. In a later series of panels Artie addresses the reader: 'I remember my father trying to describe what the smoke in Auschwitz smelled like... The closest he got was telling me it was "indescribable"... That's exactly what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept. 11' (Spiegelman 2004, 3). Several critics have commented

upon this statement. Hajdu asserts that ‘Spiegelman [Hajdu, like many critics, confuses Spiegelman with his protagonist] clearly sees Sept. 11 as his Holocaust (or the nearest thing his generation will have to personal experience with anything remotely correlative)’ (Hajdu 2004, online). McGlothlin disagrees with the simplicity of Hajdu’s statement but agrees that ‘it is obvious that Spiegelman utilizes many of the skills and much of the knowledge he acquired in writing *Maus* for expressing his traumatized state after the terrorist attack’ (McGlothlin 2008, 104). No one, Hajdu or Spiegelman included, would contend that the events of a single day, however tragic, are equivalent to the sustained industrial programme of segregation, torture, humiliation, and eventually genocide enacted by the Nazis. The smell of Lower Manhattan and Auschwitz are not literally the same (in a practical sense, one was from burning bodies, the other predominantly from burning buildings), but both elicit from Artie a symbolic language which attests to wide-scale insanity from which there is no escape or recourse. The following section shall develop the connection made by Hajdu and McGlothlin by arguing that the immediate realisation of this insanity before Artie’s own eyes awakens within him a trauma which connects with and legitimises the traumatised world-view which he inherited from his parents.

#### **4.10 Surviving Survival: *No Towers* and Trauma**

*Both Spiegelman’s famous New Yorker cover and No Towers give substance to the arresting affect of trauma – Spiegelman’s attempts to depict the collapsing World Trade Center fail to capture the event literally but the visual dramatization of this failure attests to the traumatic truth of Artie’s experience – Trauma is one of the strongest thematic threads throughout the three main works considered in this thesis – Trauma, as expressed within Spiegelman’s work, affirms his assertion that after Auschwitz there is no state of ‘normal’ psychological health to which humanity can return*

September 11<sup>th</sup> has provided Artie with a momentary window into the events which killed his brother and extended family, damaged his parents, almost killed his father, and directly contributed to his mother's suicide. His experience resonates with the half-felt desire expressed by the Artie of *Maus* to have been in Auschwitz so that he could understand what his parents lived through (Spiegelman 2003, 176). It is to Spiegelman's depiction of the ongoing traumatic moment that we shall now turn.

The inability to name or otherwise communicate trauma is encapsulated in Spiegelman's description within the introduction of *No Towers* of his attempt to visually reproduce one particularly haunting sight.

The pivotal image from my 9-11 morning – one that didn't get photographed or videotaped into public memory but still remains burned onto the inside of my eyelids – was the image of the looming north tower's glowing bones just before it vaporised. I repeatedly tried to paint this with humiliating results but eventually came close to capturing the visions of disintegration digitally on my computer (Spiegelman 2004, ii).

The sentence moves from the organic 'bones', via the physical 'paint' to the purely digital, finally resting upon the medium most physically divorced from what he witnessed at the moment of trauma.

This image can be found on page 4 of *No Towers*

**Fig. 64** *No Towers*. For Spiegelman, the image of the glowing 'bones' of the Towers lie at the center of his inability to articulate what he saw. It is an approximation: a cryptic cynosure for what cannot be seen.

Within the text Artie's narrative voice describes the scene as follows: '[w]e turn to see the bones of the tower glow and shimmy in the sky. Ever-so-slowly it cascades into itself, awesome... sublime [a quality of greatness that transcends calculation or measurement)]' (Spiegelman 2004, 4). The desire to depict the traumatic moment accurately suggests an

opposing impulse to the artistic strategy of *Maus* which has been described by Orbán as follows:

[i]n *Maus* the ahistorical sublimity of the Holocaust is at work as an *antivisual* impulse (that of unsighted contemplation) and resisted through visual representation in the images of the embodied hybrid creatures. In *No Towers*, however, the allure of the ahistorical sublime is concentrated in the repeated *image* of the “awesome” near collapse of the north tower, and it is resisted through an alternative, haptic visuality at work here (Orbán 2007, 81).

As argued in chapter 3, in *Maus* the various defamiliarizing strategies (perhaps most obviously the animal allegory) allow Spiegelman to express the impossibility of representing the Shoah through a visual medium and to decline further attempts at a naïve and impossible realism. In *No Towers*, by comparison, Spiegelman pushes further toward a complex phenomenological and multi-sensory model of visual realism (see section 4.4). Indeed, he feels a responsibility to present an authentic counter-narrative to the televised images which threaten to overrun Artie’s memory of the events. The attempts to recreate the real event within both *No Towers* and *Maus* are conjoined however, in that they ultimately, and dramatically, fail. Kuhlman, for example, comments that Spiegelman’s ‘digital image of the Towers is pixelated to such a degree that an attentive viewer cannot fail to notice the artificiality and constructed nature’ (Kuhlman 2007, 851). It is only through repeated reworkings in different media and means of representation that Spiegelman eventually arrived upon an image which he feels approximates his traumatic truth of the event. These digitised panels represent a failure to realistically capture the sensations of the shattering moment (a moment which, in the text, appeared to Artie alone) and suggests, as has been argued above, the need for a non-literal and mad representation of traumatic truth.

Between each of the failed attempts to accurately reproduce the moment of the North Tower's disintegration and in the battle between remembered and received images, the tone which emerges cumulatively is one of frustration and self-doubt. Artie at one point muses '[m]aybe it's just **my** little world that ended' (Spiegelman 2004, 9). Even if Artie feels that he has failed, others have read Spiegelman's work as an authentic and salutary portrayal of trauma. Versluys describes the effect of reading *No Towers* as follows: '[t]he details bring home what it was like to be in the middle of a cataclysm, how from one moment to the next one is thrown into a new realm of experience for which there is no preparation or training and for which there is no fitting name' (Versluys 2009, 55). In a manner which replicates the sense of temporal confusion brought about by the continual return to the traumatic moment Artie's response to the attacks is disrupted and complicated as he is forced to participate in the other reactions to the collective trauma taking place around him whilst simultaneously being unable to leave his own psychodrama. This need to participate continuously drags him away from his memories into the present. Temporally, the text moves between an artistic rendition of Artie's experiences on the day of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, to a commentary on the fleeting present in which he lives.

In another attempt to communicate his experience of the event Spiegelman created a cover for the September 24<sup>th</sup> 2001 *New Yorker* (the first issue to be published following the attacks). This image was partially reproduced for the cover of the collected edition of *No Towers*.

This image can be found on [mausgraphicmemoir.blogspot.co.uk](http://mausgraphicmemoir.blogspot.co.uk)

**Fig. 65** *New Yorker* Sept. 24 2001 *The black cover represents the impossibility of representing the experience of living through trauma. A double bind captured in the anti-image of the twin towers.*

Rather than showing any images or text the cover displayed the silhouette shadow of the now-absent towers on a black background. Spiegelman wrote: '[t]he overwhelming response to the "black" cover [...] indicated that I had succeeded in somehow channelling the toxic air around me into an image of the towers that helped people come to terms with their loss' (Spiegelman in Baer 2002, 286). The use of shades of black (a visual call-back to the black void which surrounds *Prisoner* – see section 2.8) is the visual equivalent of not an empty page so much as a page with so many words or images printed on it that none are visible. It represents the extreme realisation of the cluttered aesthetic of *No Towers* where, for example, on plate 4, different levels of narrative overlay one another. The fractured strands of narrative crowd and overlap, offering little visual space. Where a blank page represents possibility and a new beginning the black page represents the impossibility of expression. The black cover is a canvas onto which nothing can be painted. It communicates a trauma of which nothing can be said or drawn. Synaesthetically the colour scheme echoes the silence of trauma. It communicates a palpable absence or, as Wallace Stevens might have put it, one shade of black depicts the '[n]othing that is not there' and the other shade 'the nothing that is' (Stevens 1997, 8). The black cover represents an extreme realisation of the formal technique which runs throughout *No Towers*. The blackness represents, not silence but the white noise (if one will excuse the pun) of everything being said at once.

Spiegelman's inability to recreate the traumatic moment in a literal sense gives rise to a greater traumatic truth, one which connects *No Towers* with the previous two volumes considered in this thesis. 'The children of Holocaust survivors', Versluys contends, 'often refer to themselves as living *in the shadow* of the tragedy their parents were part of' (Versluys



2009, 52). This metaphor is visually rendered in *Breakdowns* in which Artie appears trying to outrun the shadow, not of the now absent World Trade Center, but of a giant stone mouse. He tells the reader: ‘no matter how much I run I can’t seem to get out of that mouse’s shadow’ (Spiegelman, 2008, 11). In terms of Spiegelman’s stylistic progression, considered alongside *Breakdowns* and *Maus*, *No Towers* is not his moment of collapse. Rather, *Maus* was the single volume which employed an ostensibly ‘rational’ stability (even if that stability is haunted by the nightmarish stylistic frames of *Prisoner* and ‘Time Flies’). The madness which characterises *No Towers* represents a relapse to that which is found throughout Spiegelman’s canon. Spiegelman writes in his introduction to *No Towers* that ‘disaster is my muse!’ (Spiegelman 2004, i). Trauma is the motor which has driven his creativity since long before the World Trade Center collapsed. *Maus*, *Breakdowns* and *No Towers* might be read as a continued narrative of the inheritance of a legacy of trauma, a rehearsal of the trauma to come, and finally the activation of that trauma. To use Maurice Blanchot’s eloquent description of disaster, ‘[i]t comes before it comes and lasts after it has happened’ (Blanchot 1995, 54).

#### **4.11 We are but Dust and Shadow**

In this chapter the case has been made that in *No Towers* Spiegelman seeks to expose the madness of the dominant rhetoric in the political and cultural aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Artie perceives the U.S. as a country dominated by media cant and political rhetoric which sought to familiarize, give meaning to, and exploit the devastating affective impact of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. This rhetoric was supported by a simultaneous warning that America had been thrust into a state of war. Spiegelman makes

use of a series of strategies in order to counter and problematize these arguments. His strategies include authenticating assertions of his survivor status, the use of a mad register which seeks to defamiliarize the attacks, editorial cartoons which ridicule political figures, and an alternative depiction of landscape which replaces monuments with urban waste.

Artie sits at the epicenter of Spiegelman's assault upon a hijacked public culture. His status as a traumatised, unhealed, marginalised, and even Wild figure represents the failure of collective acts of therapy to reach all citizens. His madness has forced him to the periphery. It is from this marginalised position that he attests and bears witness to the collective sleep of reason. The ultimate revelation of the text is that the collective madness which Artie observes is a continuation, rather than an aberration, of the all-consuming insanity to which his parents, who were Shoah survivors, first bore witness. The madness of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks and irrationality which emerged during World War II-era Europe both attest to the collective unreason which underlies all of Enlightenment rationality.

*No Towers* sought to serve two important functions in the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> milieu. Primarily it countered the rhetoric of dominant narratives concerning the attacks. At a time when young men and women were travelling to Afghanistan and Iraq to kill and to die, or to come home broken, driven by the rhetoric of a 'justified war' and the American monomyth, Spiegelman provided a compelling counter-discourse. *No Towers* also offered the potential to serve a more personal and therapeutic purpose for some readers. For an individual still traumatised by the events of the September 11<sup>th</sup> who finds no solace in messages which report that America has returned to 'normal', *No Towers* offered an alternative understanding.

In the aftermath of the attacks many Americans undoubtedly felt, like Artie, that they were being alienated and even made to feel that they were somehow complicit with the perpetrators of the attacks. For such a reader *No Towers* may have offered reassurance that they were not alone.

One of the many tragedies of *No Towers* was that it took so long to reach an American audience. By the time the first plates appeared in European newspapers, coalition forces had already invaded Afghanistan, the Patriot Act had been passed and many individuals were dealing with the aftermath of their loss and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. A further two years passed before the comics became available through the American press. During that time an American-led invasion force entered Iraq and many individuals continued to live lives scarred by grief and trauma. Spiegelman's *No Towers*, had it been published sooner, could have joined other politically dissident voices and perhaps helped to inform public opinion. It could also have given a voice to the grief-stricken, traumatised, and marginalised survivors (and those who survive the victims) of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks far sooner than it did. *No Towers* did not reach American audiences until 2004 because the editors of major American newspapers were afraid to publish politically dissident work. It would be easy to read the story of *No Towers* as a cautionary tale on the dangers of cultural legitimisation in comics (and thus dependence upon mainstream distribution channels as mentioned in section 1.9). One should remember however, that Spiegelman's weight as a public figure was the very reason that *No Towers* eventually did reach a large audience. If there were no *Maus* *No Towers* would likely have been published by a small comic book press and distributed in San Francisco head shops (or, more likely, published online), and

reached an audience of, at most, thousands in 2002, rather than millions in 2004.

Spiegelman's message may have arrived late but when it did arrive it reached an audience who, were it not for *Maus*, would never have looked to a comic for political commentary or to help them in their grief.

## 5. Conclusion: Divinest Sense

MUCH madness is divinest sense  
To a discerning eye;  
Much sense the starkest madness.  
'T is the majority  
In this, as all, prevails.  
Assent, and you are sane;  
Demur,—you 're straightway dangerous,  
And handled with a chain.  
(Emily Dickinson 'XI' 1890).

This concluding chapter will identify and draw together specific themes which run throughout this thesis. It will focus upon two recurring figures whom we have encountered throughout this study, namely the second generation survivor and the man of reason. Throughout this chapter the argument shall be reiterated that in his work, through his use of the comic book medium, through his characters, and in his subject matter Spiegelman relentlessly foregrounds the Holocaust as testament to the bankruptcy of Enlightenment rationality.

### 5.1 The Second-Generation Survivor

*The Arties of Prisoner and No Towers both manifest a second-hand awareness of the ease with which violence can erupt within ostensibly rational society – Some of Spiegelman's protagonists seek to escape their Jewish identities, but such attempts prove, ultimately, to be futile – When, in 'Time Flies', Artie is given the opportunity to communicate his revelation concerning the bankruptcy of Enlightenment rationality he is unable either to speak with authority or to articulate his traumatic revelation to a rational audience – Maus engages in a sustained attempt to convince rational society of its own madness – In Metamaus Spiegelman offers apparent resolution and closure to his sense of being a 'fake' Jew, but we should not necessarily read this state as permanent*

This section shall seek to draw together a recurring theme in this work; namely that the trauma of the parents bleeds through to the generation which follows. As asserted in

section 1.1, the question of the second-generation survivor has been a key topic in Spiegelman criticism. A central contribution of this thesis in this regard has been to identify different types of second-generation survivor experience within Spiegelman's work and to understand this figure within a critical framework concerning trauma and madness. In service of the analysis to follow this section shall make use of a potent image which appears in Spiegelman's 1979 notebook. In the sketch Spiegelman describes a dream in which everywhere Artie looks he sees a noose made from his father's flesh (Spiegelman 2009, 42). In this image the violence done to the father has been shaped into a machine designed to kill the son. The various Arties of Spiegelman's three major collections sometimes rail against their status as a second-generation survivor, sometimes embody it unconsciously, and sometimes feel that they have no right to it, but in every case their behaviour occurs in response to the ghostly touch of this grotesque noose around their necks. This noose, within the context of this section, shall be understood as symbolic of the potential for the tools of rationality – specifically a tool employed within certain systems of legal process including the Nazi state – to once again be turned toward genocidal ends.

Spiegelman's protagonists are frequently found in the margins; they are madmen who declare to an uncaring crowd that the end of the world is upon us. In section 2.8 we encountered the Artie of *Prisoner*. In the comic he appears wearing a prisoner uniform from the camps. The uniform suggests that although he was born after Auschwitz was liberated his traumatic family history has left him serving a symbolic life-sentence. Auschwitz is an inescapable part of his identity. It is a trauma that has been tattooed indelibly on his consciousness. The Artie of *Prisoner* feels the noose not because it falls around his neck

alone but because, as a second-generation survivor, the traumatised world-view of his parents has sensitized him to the violence which can erupt within a seemingly orderly and safe society.

This theme is expanded in *No Towers*, in which the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 make the traumatised world-view of Artie's parents suddenly and terribly relevant. The melancholy found in *Prisoner* transforms to hysterical declarations that the world is ending. Section 4.9 demonstrated that Shoah iconography shoots-through the text. This Artie, with a new sense of urgency, feels the noose tightening around not just his but around everyone's necks. Once again, as the second-generation Holocaust survivor he feels that he alone is awake to the capacity of Enlightened society to, without apparent contradiction, facilitate wide-scale violence. The September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, the madness he identifies in his government's actions in response, and the ongoing culture of threat all legitimise the paranoia and fear which were impressed upon him throughout his childhood. The collapse of the World Trade Center is a disaster which connects him with his parent's trauma and legitimises the fear with which they lived.

It would be inaccurate, however, to state that Spiegelman's protagonists relate to their status as second-generation Shoah survivors in a uniform manner. Indeed, a key contribution of this thesis to Spiegelman scholarship is the revelation that his work contains many, often contradictory, types of second generation survivor. The Arties of *Prisoner* and *No Towers* can be contrasted with the moments in Spiegelman's work when Artie seeks to refuse the trauma passed to him by his parents. In section 2.9 the argument was presented that the *Real*

*Dream* comics play out Artie's fantasy of being able to escape his Jewish identity, reject his family history, slip the noose, and join those around him in the comfortable ignorance of sleep. This fantasy, however, proves untenable; in *Real Dream: Hand Job* Artie's desire to project his Jewish identity onto another becomes a nightmare and he finds himself forcefully jolted from his dream world into another mad 'reality.'

There are occasions within Spiegelman's works when these second-generation survivors are not madmen who have been pushed to the margins of rational society but instead are granted an attentive audience. When such occasions occur, however, these Arties find themselves unable to articulate the madness they perceive. In section 3.6 the argument was advanced that the *Real Dream* episode is thematically mirrored in the 'Time Flies' sequence of *Maus* in that both comics center upon protagonists who feel that they should not be counted amongst the Jews who entered, and in most cases never left, Auschwitz. Unlike the Artie of *Real Dream: The Sleep of Reason* and *Real Dream: Hand Job*, however, the Artie of 'Time Flies' feels that he has been counted, incorrectly, as a Jew. Journalists and entrepreneurs have nominated him as a spokesperson for Shoah survivors. Artie's fear of being asked to comment upon the Holocaust occurs, in part, because the full horror of his subject remains unknown even to Artie himself. Chute asserts of the Artie who appears in *Prisoner* that '[h]e earned his stripes at birth' but the Artie of the 'Time Flies' sequence did not *earn* his stripes, rather he inherited them, and as such he feels he is an imposter (Chute 2009, 347). By drawing Artie wearing a mask, as opposed to a real mouse head, the character's self-image resonates with Frankl's statement that in Auschwitz 'people unmasked themselves' (Frankl 2004, 154). This Artie was never in Auschwitz and as such his mask



remains in place. Rather than holding his copy of *Playboy* up proudly and declaring himself a non- or unrepresentative Jew, the Artie of 'Time Flies' furtively attempts, as it were, to stuff disauthenticating evidence under the mattress and out of sight.

The Artie of 'Time Flies' fails to communicate to his audience. He is overwhelmed and shrinks to child-like proportions. By contrast, the Artie who appears in the framing narrative of *Maus* is symbolically located both within and outside of Auschwitz, where, like Vladek and the other characters from the camps he is not drawn as an American dog, but as a Jewish mouse (see section 3.3). Unlike the Artie of *Prisoner* (who is *locked in* prison), this Artie has been *locked out* of Auschwitz. He cannot picture the camps or fully comprehend their horrors. This barrier does not, however, result in complete linguistic collapse and recourse to mad language. In his attempt to lead rational society to recognise its own madness he makes strategic use of rational models drawn from legal and historiographical forms, he attempts to identify and thus contain the limitations of his father's testimony, and he combines familiarizing and defamiliarizing strategies in such a way as to present Auschwitz as at once within the scope of familiar narrative forms and (even if Artie may only be partially awake to this revelation) ultimately, irreparably, beyond rational engagement.

The narrative of the various Arties' relationships to their Jewish heritage approaches a degree of closure in the introduction to *Metamaus*, in which Artie finishes his talk by removing his mouse face to reveal a skull (Spiegelman, 2011, 9). Unlike the Artie of the 'Time Flies' section in *Maus* there is no disparity between the mouse he is and the mouse he pretends to be. By appearing as a dead mouse he symbolically joins the burying victims who

appear on page 199 of *Maus*. It is tempting to read this moment as cathartic self-acceptance wherein Artie has finally come to terms with his role as an authority on the Holocaust and considers himself to have a degree of ownership over what took place. Such a reading would be wildly at odds with the moments we have observed elsewhere in Spiegelman's work. (Consider, for example, the blurring of time periods in *Portrait* documented in section 2.6 or the disauthenticating strategies detailed throughout chapter 3). The Artie who appears in *Metamaus* may see no disparity between his felt and perceived selves but there is no reason for us to assume that this state of acceptance is anything more than fleeting. If there is any conclusive statement to be made concerning the various Arties of Spiegelman's works it is that they sometimes rail against their status as a second-generation survivor, sometimes embody it unconsciously, and sometimes feel that they have no right to it. These ways of relating to their family history do not occur on a continuum from sickness to health, but in an orbit, inescapably circling the Shoah.

Spiegelman's protagonists are not alone. They interact and come into conflict with crowds, doctors, and politicians who collectively represent the forces of reason. If the second-generation survivor is, on occasion, fully awake to the failure of civilisation then these men of reason remain comfortably, and dangerously, asleep. It is to this figure that we now turn.

## **5.2 The Scholar and the Madman**

*In his comic Words, Worth a Thousand Spiegelman presents the man of reason as one who lives in ignorance of the chaos and violence which surrounds him – Artie and Pavel realise that Auschwitz is beyond depiction but nonetheless cling to rational forms – Agents of reason within Spiegelman's work include doctors and politicians who are blind to their own madness – Spiegelman's resistance to these figures involves both visual and linguistic*

*denigration – Spiegelman does not necessarily reject Wertham's arguments concerning comics but sees comics as a symptom rather than a cause of societal madness*

This section shall seek to consolidate the arguments made in the previous chapters concerning Spiegelman's depiction of the agent of reason throughout his works. Whilst this figure often appears in opposition to the Fools, Wild Men, and Signifyin(g) Mice who populate the three major volumes which appear in this thesis, Spiegelman ultimately seeks to show that the madman can operate within rational forms and that the agent of reason is capable of, and perhaps prone to, acts of madness. In this section the argument will be made that Spiegelman does not present a monolithic man of reason (just as he does not present a single madman) but figures who are, to varying degrees, awake to the madness which surrounds them. We shall begin with an illustrative example from elsewhere in Spiegelman's canon.

In *Words, Worth a Thousand*, which was written for the *New Yorker* in 1995 and reprinted in both *Comix, Essays, Graphics, and Scraps* (1999) and *Co-Mix* (2013), Spiegelman documents a visit to the New York Library Picture Collection. In the comic Artie interviews senior librarian Arthur Williams about the process of cataloguing the almost five million pictures by theme. It is clear from the interview that whilst the indexing system aspires to create rational order the process is highly dependent upon the idiosyncratic symbolic connections made by the generations of librarians who have managed the collection. Williams explains 'we give you two or three headings. Let's say you want sunshine coming through a window... You might look in windows... and sunlight... and you might look in cats... because cats like to sit on windowsills in the sunshine' (Spiegelman

2013, 84). In addition to the official index, Spiegelman reports that there exists a secondary log of unusual requests; ‘Albania! A burnt toothpick! Women harvesting spinach in 1942! A dog who grew up in Russia! [and] World War Eleven’ (Spiegelman 2013, 85). Several images appear in the comic which underscore the impossibility of creating an empirical system to catalogue the range of human experiences documented within the collection. One picture shows a machine gun mounted to a four-wheel frame, indexed under ‘inventions’ (Spiegelman 2013, 82). Another shows a group of clowns (professional Fools) holding a coffin, indexed under ‘funerals’ (Spiegelman 2013, 83). Spiegelman invites his reader to contemplate the comical incongruence between the content of the picture and the librarian’s attempt to capture that content within a single descriptor.

Spiegelman’s portrait of Williams is affectionate. He appears as a man who takes pleasure from his work and has an honest desire to help people. The comic implies, however, that Williams’ attempts to create order occur in spite (and perhaps in ignorance) of the chaos and violence of his materials. The comic ends with a caption for one image: ‘Casanova lived to a great age. In the end he became a librarian and small boys threw stones at him because he looked so strange’ (Spiegelman 2013, 85). The librarian, here, is a man of reason – the cataloguing system which he employs is predicated upon the assumption that the world can be made subject to rational order – and yet the readers he serves, and the world in which he exists, reverts constantly to violence. To reinforce the point Williams explains that the most popular pictures are of electrocutions, closely followed by Hitler. To draw an explicit meaning from this comic one might say that the man of reason is ignorant of the chaos which surrounds him.

The depiction of Williams encapsulates the nuanced portrait of the agent of reason which Spiegelman paints; he is a man who partially recognises the madness of his subject but nonetheless believes that some form of order can be distilled. The three central works considered in this thesis contain several Williamsesque agents of reason. The most obvious figure is Artie of *Maus* who, as we have seen in section 3.7 and 3.8, attempts to render Auschwitz using a legal and historiographical framework even as his subject patently resists any such models. Artie is aware of the madness of his subject but his process of documenting his subject – like Williams – seeks to find order through rational models. A similarly (ir)rational figure to appear in *Maus* is Pavel who is ostensibly an agent of reason and yet he, with Artie, identifies the impossibility of deriving any meaning from Auschwitz. In a further testament to the mad behaviour of agents of reason Pavel appears to have an irrational relationship with his pets. Both Artie and Pavel are thus, like Williams, figures who partially recognise the impossibility of applying order to madness. Like Williams, too, they nonetheless insist that society must aspire to some form of order (specifically, for Artie and Pavel, order found in legal process, historical research, and doctor-led therapy).

Not every agent of reason in Spiegelman's work, however, is as agreeable as Artie, Pavel and Williams. The three volumes considered in this thesis also feature the doctor in *Cracking Jokes* (see section 2.5), Dr. Mengele in *Maus* (see section 3.6), and George Bush Jnr. in *No Towers* (see sections 4.1 and 4.5). Each of these men are, in different ways, so utterly absorbed by their own world-view that they cannot recognise the madness and violence of their actions. Each of these agents of reason remain distinct but all not only

possess power but also make use of signifiers of rationality including a formal style of dress, titles such as doctor and President, and the language of political and scientific discourse. In each case Spiegelman's means to resist these figures involves occupying and corrupting the signifiers of authority through both visual denigration and a serio-comic attack upon the rhetoric of reason. He mimics the logic of the doctor, the badge of the CCA, and language taken directly from the mouths of political figures in order to demonstrate the fundamental irrationality of these agents of reason. He thus, as a Signifyin(g) Mouse, occupies their language in order to subvert it.

A similarly powerful and deluded figure who appears within *Breakdowns* is one Dr.

Wertham, who wrote the following condemnation of the comic book form:

Badly drawn, badly written, and badly printed – a strain on the young eyes and young nervous systems – the effects of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant. Their crude blacks and reds spoils [sic] a child's natural sense of colour; their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the 'comic' magazine (Wertham in Coville nd. online).

As has been argued in section 2.7 *Breakdowns* includes examples of sex and violence as well as a visual argument concerning the hypocrisy of the CCA. The ghost of Wertham retreats somewhat during *Maus* and *No Towers* and yet we see in these texts, too, resistance to Wertham's claims. In their subject matter both texts reject Wertham's thesis that comics are, without exception, badly drawn and badly written in that each, in different ways, make sophisticated use of the comic book form in service of mature subject matter (see sections 3.6 and 4.4).

Whilst Spiegelman both mocks the rhetoric of the anti-comics movement he has, elsewhere, identified Wertham as a man who was partially awake to the madness of consumer-driven society. In the comic *Remember Childhood?*, which was published in *McSweeney's* in 2009 and reproduced in *Comix* (2013), Spiegelman explains Wertham's thesis and then extends it: 'not only did the content [of comics] corrupt the innocent, and the form threaten literacy but, a decade before Rock'n Roll, comic books – the first mass culture targeted squarely at kids – trained us all to become consumers' (Spiegelman 2013, 90). Spiegelman's argument – that being an adult 'just means having brand preferences' rephrases Marcuse's thesis, explained in section 1.6, that modern society encourages individuals to have an irrational relationship to objects (ibid). Within this framework Spiegelman presents Wertham as a man who, like Williams, Pavel, and Artie, was partially awake to the madness of consumer society, but did not fully recognise its pervasiveness. To revisit the Carnavalesque explorations of taboo which appear in *Breakdowns* (see section 2.7) in light of this assertion, one might argue that Spiegelman accepts and even plays out Wertham's warnings concerning the mad and dangerous nature of comics. Unlike Wertham, however, he realises that comics are a symptom, rather than a cause, of the madness which is produced by rational society.

### **5.3 The Future of Spiegelman Scholarship**

*Spiegelman scholarship is alive and well – This thesis makes several contributions to Spiegelman scholarship*

During the writing of this thesis two works by Spiegelman have been published: *Metamaus* in 2011 and *Co-Mix* in 2013. Comic scholars have also seen new works of Spiegelman scholarship such as those by Friedman (2012), Gibbs (2012), Meyer (2012), and

Chute (2013). Spiegelman continues to be the most-discussed figure in comic book studies (although Alan Moore is rapidly gaining ground). Even as auteur-style readings are becoming unfashionable and the field is turning toward industry-based studies Spiegelman scholarship, it seems, is in no danger of dying out.

An overview of existing Spiegelman scholarship can be found in sections 1.1 and 1.2. To briefly recap, this scholarship has suffered from a reliance upon limited psychoanalytical models of trauma, a monolithic understanding of the second-generation survivor drawn purely from the concept of postmemory, an inability to recognise or resolve the conflict between the empathy offered by the Icon and the defamiliarization of the deliberately problematic animal allegory, a tendency to read Spiegelman's other works purely in terms of *Maus*, a failure to distinguish between Spiegelman and his protagonist in *No Towers*, and a lack of engagement with the majority of texts in *Breakdowns*. This thesis has sought to contribute to this field by addressing the lacunae in existing academic work on Spiegelman, specifically the following areas: 'The Truth of a Madman' represents the first book-length study of Spiegelman's three major collections; it brings new theoretical models to bear upon Spiegelman's work such as the Signifyin(g) Mouse and mad – in a Derridian sense – register; it offers a full consideration and synthesis of the familiarizing and defamiliarizing strategies found in *Maus*; it expands and develops our understanding of trauma in Spiegelman's work with regard to subjects such as the failure of narrative as a form of therapy in Vladek's testimony; it brings critical analysis to bear on otherwise-ignored comics such as *Some Boxes for the Salvation Army* and *Skinless Perkins*; it yields new readings of *No Towers* by distinguishing Spiegelman from his Wild protagonist; and, most importantly, it brings to light



the recurring core thematic of the systemic madness in post-Enlightenment society at the heart of Spiegelman's work.

## 5.4 Final Words

During one panel discussion at the Holocaust Representations Since 1975 conference held at Chester University on 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 a point was raised (unfortunately, I was unable to ascertain by whom) that if the entirety of the conference were to be transported and translated to Nazi Germany the majority, if not all, of the decorated academics and postgraduates there assembled would be on the side of the Nazis. Indeed, the room would most likely have contained many members of the Nazi party. It would have been broadly understood by all there present that the Jewish people were genetically unclean and even dangerous. Not all of those assembled – if any – would have been aware of the genocide being enacted in Germany occupied Europe but many would be familiar with the sight of Jews being beaten in the street, all would be aware of the fact that Jewish people had been forcefully relocated to ghettos, and all would have been exposed to anti-Semitic propaganda.

One cannot help but try to resist such an assertion. We somehow feel safely distanced from such a world. I, one thinks, could never be made to believe that my neighbours – that fellow human beings – should be herded into ghettos and subject to violence for the good of the German people. I would have hidden Jews in my basement. I would have refused to join the Nazi party. I would have been different. It is hard, however, to maintain this argument against the evidence. Evidence suggests that German civilians, in the majority, passively accepted the violence to which Jewish people were subjected. The Nazi party, including the very architects of the genocide, included numerous highly-educated individuals. We agents of

reason – however much we wish it were otherwise – should not consider ourselves exempt from the madness of the Holocaust.

It is difficult to reconcile Spiegelman's assault upon reason with the fact that this very work depends upon the practices of the academy. It was formulated through meetings with an academic advisor, shaped through conversations with colleagues, informed by books and journals, and assessed according to well-established procedures. It is a work, in other words, which depends upon the established and unyielding processes and products of hegemonic reason. There are two ways in which one might respond to such a problem; in one sense we might accept that, yes, civilisation, having failed to learn from World War II, may be about to collapse into madness once more but in the meantime there are bills to be paid, careers to be built, dog food to be bought, restaurants at which to dine, places at which to holiday, and lives to be lived. Spiegelman is in no way an exception to this; he lives comfortably in New York, he enjoys the patronage of galleries periodicals and publishers, and his children attend school where they learn a (broadly) Baconian approach to the world. If he eschews reason on the page he does not appear to do so in practice.

In another sense, however, one might argue that there is not necessarily a contradiction between a belief that madness can emerge from reason and a continued reliance upon rational models. Reason, patently, is not always destructive; doctors may enforce social hierarchies but they also, in the majority of cases, make people better. If Spiegelman has a message for us it is not that we should abandon rationality entirely (for would the alternative be better?) but that we should not trust it blindly. One should not automatically assume that

doctors, politicians, or business leaders have our best interests at heart or a firmer grasp of reality than ourselves. We should not trust an expert simply because of his title and manner of dress. Rationality has its purpose but dogmatic faith in rationality makes us vulnerable. If Spiegelman would bid us do anything it would be this; to question authority as a matter of habit, and to always keep our bags packed.

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## 6.7 Figure Sources

Fig 1 *Vancouver Comic Book Burning* RainGeek.com

Fig 2 *Robert Crumb Exhibition* WilliamLounsbury.wordpress.com

Fig 3 New Yorker Cover lareviewofbooks.org

Fig 4 *Open Me... I'm a Dog* amazon.com

Fig 5 *Maus* scanned from original

Fig 6 McClouds panel transition types CitizenCEO.deviantart.com

Fig 7 *Lego System* godbricks.blogspot.co.uk

Fig 8 The CCA stamp braveblog.wordpress.com

Fig 9 *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* ebay.com

Fig 10 *Breakdowns* 1977 cover pbase.com

Fig 11 *Zap #0* cover sirrealcomix.mrainey.com

Fig 12 *Breakdowns* 2008 cover pbase.com

Fig 13 Rube Goldberg's *Automatic Cigar Cutter* screwballcomics.blogspot.com

Fig 14 Portrait scanned from original

Fig 15 *Skinless Perkins* scanned from original

Fig 16 *Ace Hole* scanned from original

Fig 17 *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* scanned from original

Fig 18 *Little Signs of Passion* scanned from original

Fig 19 The Fool in the Rider-Waite Tarot deck wikipedia.org

Fig 20 *Portrait* scanned from original

Fig 21 The Fool in the Visconti-Sforza tarot deck wikipedia.org

Fig 22 *The Malpractice Suite* scanned from original

Fig 23 *Prisoner on the Hell Planet* scanned from original

Fig 24 *Real Dream: The Sleep of Reason* scanned from original

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Fig 30 *Mickey in Gurs* boingboing.net

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Fig 34 *Vermin* filipsagnoli.wordpress.com

Fig 35 *Maus* scanned from original

Fig 36 *Gassing* english.illinois.edu

Fig 37 *Deportation from Terezin to Auschwitz* [ohdelaholocaustproject.pbworks.com](http://ohdelaholocaustproject.pbworks.com)

Fig 38 *Maus* scanned from original

Fig 39 *Breakdowns* scanned from original

Fig 40 *Auschwitz* scanned from original

Fig 41 *Maus* scanned from original

Fig 42, 43 Vladek and Artie headshots [periwork.com](http://periwork.com)

Fig 44, 45, 46, 47, and 48 *Maus* scanned from original

Fig 49 *The Decent Jew* [ww2shots.com](http://ww2shots.com)

Fig 50 *Breakdowns* scanned from original

Fig 51, 52 and 53 *Maus* scanned from original

Fig 54 *Support Your Read Cross* [comicvine.com](http://comicvine.com)

Fig 55 *The 9-11 Report* [librarything.com](http://librarything.com)

Fig 56 *In the Shadow of No Towers* scanned from original

Fig 57 *The "Brains"* [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

Fig 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, and 64 *In the Shadow of No Towers* scanned from original

Fig 65 *New Yorker* [mausgraphicmemoir.blogspot.co.uk](http://mausgraphicmemoir.blogspot.co.uk)